Characteristics of the Studies of Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta

TAMURA Kōya

1 Introduction The study of Śaiva Siddhānta has traditionally taken two routes. The first is that of the Sanskrit Śaiva Siddhānta, which developed in Sanskrit texts written by the Śaiva theorists such as Sadyojyotis, Rāmakanṭha and Aghoraśiva. The second is that of the Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta (abbreviated as TŚ hereafter), which developed in Tamil texts as represented by Cittānta Cāttiram, a series of texts dating from the 12th to 14th centuries. The latter also includes the studies of Tirumurai, which date from the 7th to 12th centuries.

As the two routes have different historical backgrounds, scholars have tended to consider Sanskrit Śaiva Siddhānta and TŚ to be separate schools of thought. Tokunaga, however, observed that “because Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta has a theory of divine grace that supplements the religious rites, it is probable that these two schools of Śaiva Siddhānta have a mutually supporting relationship.” Therefore, one of the goals of recent studies of Śaiva Siddhānta is to elucidate the relationship between Sanskrit Śaiva Siddhānta and TŚ.

2 A Problematic Assumption in the Studies of TŚ Although a number of studies of TŚ have been undertaken since the 19th century, they are not particularly helpful for the comparative study because they tend to regard TŚ as a single fixed system. This assumption that the texts of TŚ form a single fixed system is not expressly stated, but it is observed by the fact that the studies are all synthetic and quite hesitant to compare various different theories in the development of the system of TŚ. The words of Piet strongly imply its existence: “Meykanṭha-deva, the author of the Śiva-jñāna-bodha, summarizes the entire philosophy within the compass of forty lines of Tamil poetry. He wants to show that, logically, the Siddhānta is all of one piece, woven from the finest fabric of the human mind.”

—1073—
Characteristics of the Studies of Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta (K. Tamura)

Early TŚ, represented by Cittānta Cāttiram, spans 100 years, and we cannot deny its theoretical developments. The understanding on “the letter ōṁ” is a good example. The Tiruvarutpayan written by Umāpati7, whom the present author is now studying, contains a chapter on “five letters”. The following two stanzas are the beginning of this chapter:

The books which have [Śiva’s] grace, the Āranyaka8 and other [texts] are all concerning the nature of the five things9, if one understands and goes into them.

God, sākṣi, pāśa, strong māyā and life (ātman)

exist in “the letter ōṁ”. (Tiruvarutpayan 81, 8210)

“The letter ōṁ” (ōṅkāram) is typically analysed as comprising five elements, namely “a”, “u”, “ma”, “vintu (Skt. bindu)” and “nātam (Skt. nāda)”. It can therefore be said that the five things beginning with God correspond to these five elements. In TŚ theory, however, the five things correspond to “five letters” consisting of “ci”, “vā”, “ya”, “na” and “ma”. The stanzas quoted above are in fact followed by detailed explanations of the “five letters”, and “the letter ōṁ” is not referred to again in Tiruvarutpayan. We can therefore conclude that “the letter ōṁ” and the “five letters” became unified in Tiruvarutpayan.

This unification is not found, however, in the texts of Meykantar and his disciple Arunanti.11 The five elements of “the letter ōṁ” are assigned to akaṅkāram (Skt. ahaṅkāra), putti (Skt. buddhi), magam (Skt. manas), cittam (Skt. citta) and ullam, and to five atiteyvam (Skt. adhideva), respectively. This explanation of “the letter ōṁ” takes a position distinct from that of the “five letters”.

Conversely, Maṅvācakaṅkaṭaṇṭār, another disciple of Meykaṇṭār, mentions only the name of “the letter ōṁ” without reference to its five elements and atiteyvam.12 Approximately 50 years later, Umāpati wrote Civappirakācam, which does not mention “the letter ōṁ” at all.

It is probable that the concept of “the letter ōṁ” underwent changes early in the history of TŚ. The assumption held by the scholars, however, prevented them from paying attention to such theoretical developments of TŚ. When we read the texts more carefully, they in fact set forth a number of different theories, and the theorists sometimes even dispute with each other. We can therefore conclude that the assumption is incorrect.
3 Characteristics of the Studies of TŚ A review of the history of the study of TŚ clarifies how this assumption has been formed. There are three types in the aims of studies of TŚ, and the studies can be classified accordingly. Although the types were quite different from each other, all of them resulted in the same assumption.

3.1 Studies Comparing TŚ with Christianity The study of TŚ began with the need for Christian missionaries to understand the religion and philosophy of South India for the sake of their mission. As a result, understanding the outline of TŚ as a theoretical system was more important than elucidating the history of its development and examining the different perspectives of the theorists. Therefore, early studies of TŚ tended to synthesise various theories. The studies of Hoisington, Pope and Schomerus are considered to be this type.\(^{13}\) Schomerus' studies, which are based on his vast philological reading, completed the first and most elaborate description of the whole system of TŚ theories, and became the most important source of information for the later studies.

3.2 Studies under the Influence of the Tamil Renaissance The first Indian scholar to study TŚ in modern way was Nallaswami Pillai.\(^{14}\) He aimed to develop an academic standard by which Tamil teachers themselves, rather than Europeans, could teach Tamil and Indian subjects\(^{15}\) and regain their just pride by removing the stereotype of “the noble Aryans” against the “savage Tamilians”.\(^{16}\)

Nallaswami Pillai began publishing a journal, Siddhanta Deepika,\(^{17}\) in English and Tamil, and encouraged Tamil scholars to study Tamil and Indian subjects.\(^{18}\) These studies, undertaken by Tamilian scholars who sympathized with his views, were mainly engaged in comparing TŚ with western thoughts or applying TŚ to the contemporary society.\(^{19}\) For the basis of their studies and as a symbol of their pride, the scholars needed the fixed system of TŚ and paid no attention to its development.\(^{20}\)

3.3 Philological Studies Philological studies began to be undertaken in the mid-20th century. The studies of Paranjoti, Matthews, Piet, Devasenapathi and Dhavamony belong to this type.\(^{21}\)

This type of study cannot be satisfactorily defined as philological, however, because these scholars were very eager to deeply expound one text or one concept, but quite reluctant to elucidate the differences among the texts.\(^{22}\) As a result, they per-
petuated the view of TŚ as a fixed system.

4 Issues in the Study of TŚ and Conclusion  The above analyses of the history of the study of TŚ show that the studies have tended to regard TŚ as a single fixed system. In other words, the scholars always focused their interest on the static aspect of TŚ and have been quite hesitant to consider the dynamics of theoretical development of TŚ in the texts. It is therefore necessary to re-examine the texts of TŚ for more exact understanding, compare them with each other and reveal their roles in the development of TŚ. Only after this re-consideration of TŚ will the comparative study of Sanskrit Śaiva Siddhānta and TŚ be possible and meaningful.

1) Cittānta Cāttirām consists of the following 14 texts which date from the 12th to 14th centuries: Tiruvuntiyār, Tirukkalirruppaṭīyār, Civaṅgāgapotam, Civaṅgacittiyār, Irupa-virupatu, Unmaivilakkam, Civappirakācam, Tiruvaruppayan, Viṅāvenpā, Pṛṛippakṛtai, Koṭikkavi, Nečiçu vítūtū, Unmainerivillakkam, Cāṅkārpirākaṇān.


3) For example, in Japan, the following statements were made: “Sanskrit Śaiva Siddhānta is distinguished from Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta of advaita theory, by using only Sanskrit and its viśiṣṭādvaita theory” (Tetsuzan Ihara, Indo-kyō, 3rd edition, Daitō Shuppansha, 1981, p. 259; first published in 1943); “Southern Śaivism tends to be treated as a single school of Śaiva Siddhānta, but it seems to be right to think that this Śaiva Siddhānta is divided into Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta discussed in this article and Sanskrit Śaiva Siddhānta represented by Aghorāsīva.”(Muneko Tokunaga, “Minami-indo no Shūkyō Shisō”, footnote 8, p. 190).

5) This article does not comment on Sanskrit Śaiva Siddhānta. The latest studies of Sanskrit Śaiva Siddhānta are: Dominic Goodall ed. and tr., Bhāṭṭa Rāmakāntaḥ's Commentary on the Kīrānantātra, volume I, Institut Français de Pondichéry, Pondichéry, 1998; do., The Parākhyaṇātra - A Scripture of the Śaiva Siddhānta, Institut Français de Pondichéry & École Française d'Extrême-Orient, Pondichéry, 2004.


7) When comparing TŚ with Sanskrit Śaiva Siddhānta, the most notable theorist of TŚ is Umāpati, who lived in the 13th and 14th centuries. He is said to be the author of Civappirākācam, Tiruvarutpayāṇ, Viṅgāvenpā, Pṛṇippakōṭai, Koṭikkavi, Neṅcuvitiṭūṭū, Unmainerivilakkam, Caṅkarpanirākaranaṃ, Tiruṭṭatarpurāṇacarāṃ, Cēkkilārṇāyaṇārpurāṇaṃ, Tirumaṅkataparupāṇaṃ, Kōyirurāṇaṃ, Arunmurāittirāṭṭu, Civattalacivanāmacattināmakkalivenpā, Pauṣkarabhāṣya, Śataratnasangraha (the texts underlined are in Sanskrit, others in Tamil). Attributions to him of some of the texts above, such as Unmainerivilakkam, are doubted.

8) “The books which have Śiva's grace” are the texts of Śaivism, and “the Āranyaka” here means the four Veda.

9) These are in this context the five things given in the next verse.

10) arul nūlum arānanum allātum aintin, porul nūl teriyap pukiŋ. (81) irai catti pācam eḻil māyai āvi, ńuṇ nirkum ōṅkārattu ul. (82)

11) Meykantār, a theorist of the 13th century, is regarded as the first systematiser of TŚ theories by his writing of Civāņṇāpōṭam. Arunanti wrote an elaborate commentary on Civahāṇapōṭam, Civāņṇācittiyār, in the 13th century.

12) “The ōṅkāram touches the good auspicious “va” and “ci”, does not separate from them and is the prevailing light.”(Unmainerivilakkam 34)


14) J. M. Nallaswami Pillai published various studies, such as English translations (Sivagnana Botham of Meykanda Deva, 2nd ed., Dharmapuram, 1945; Siva-ṅāga-siddhar of Arunandi Sivacharya, Meykandan Press, Madras, 1913; Siva-ṅāga-siddhar Supakkam of Arulanandhi Sivam, Dharmapuram, 1948). His various studies were edited in Studies in Śaiva Siddhānta, The South India Śaiva Siddhānta Works Publishing Society, Madras, 1984 (1st ed., 1911).

15) See J. M. Nallaswami Pillai, “Our Aims”, in Siddhanta Deepika, Vol. 1, No.1, 1897,
Characteristics of the Studies of Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta (K. TAMURA)


18) “Our Journal will devote itself to bring out translation of rare works in Sanscrit and Tamil, both literary and philosophical and religious, will devote its pages to a more critical and historical study of Indian Religious systems, to develop a taste for and to induce a proper and more appreciative cultivation of our Indian Classical and Vernacular Languages and Literature, to bring into the Tamil all that is best and noblest in the literature and philosophy of the west, to supply to it its deficiency in the field of science and history, ancient and modern.” (Nallaswami Pillai, “Our Aims”, pp. 14–15.)

19) Translations of the Tamil and Sanskrit texts into English are not a few, but they are, in the same way as explained in the next section, far from satisfactory.

20) Nallaswami Pillai’s movement has continued, and many universities and institutions are engaged in the studies of TŚ. There are a number of studies in the journals such as Siddhanta Deepika and Saiva Siddhanta, Journal devoted to the Exposition of Siddhanta Philosophy, Religion, Literature and Comparative Understanding, Vols. 1–26, Saiva Siddhanta Maha Samajam, Madras, 1966–1993.


22) There are also some difficult problems in Tamil texts as explained by Takanobu Takahashi in “Before Grammar: Issues on Reading Some Classical Tamil Texts”, in Electric Journal of the Institute of Indology and Tamil Studies, Vol. 9 & 10, University of Cologne, Köln, 2003 (http://www.fas.nus.edu.sg/journal/kolam/VOLUMES/ kolam9&10/takahashi.htm); do., “Bunpō Izen – Koten Text Kaishaku no Shomondai –”, in Studies in Indian Philosophy and Buddhism, Vol. 13, Department of Indian Philosophy and Buddhist Studies of the University of Tokyo, Tokyo, 2006.

(Key Words) Tamil, Śaivism, Śaiva Siddhānta, Umāpati

(Graduate Student, University of Tokyo)