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OBJECT OF COGNITION IN DIGNĀGA'S *ĀLAMBANAPARĪKṢĀVṚTTI*:  
ON THE CONTROVERSIAL PASSAGES IN PARAMĀRTHA'S  
AND XUANZANG'S TRANSLATIONS\*

CHEN-KUO LIN

## 1. Introduction

There are four Chinese translations of Dignāga's *Ālambanaparīkṣāvṛtti*. The earliest translation, *Wuxiang sichen lun*, by Paramārtha, is dated between 557 and 569 C.E. The second one, *Guan suoyuan lun*, by Xuanzang, was done in 657. The third one, completed in 710, was included in Yijing's translation of Dharmapāla's *Commentary, Guan suoyuan lunshi*. The last version, by Lü Cheng, was translated from the Tibetan in 1928.<sup>1</sup> In Lü's work, all four versions are arranged in parallel form for convenience of comparison. Lü concluded that, as far as the original text was concerned, Paramārtha's version and the Tibetan version were very similar, while Xuanzang's version was rather close to Yijing's.<sup>2</sup> A similar comparison by Ui Hakuju was conducted in 1958 partially on the basis of Lü's contribution.<sup>3</sup>

\* Acknowledgements: This article is indebted to Professor Shoryu Katsura's invaluable instruction in several occasions of discussion. It is also benefited from Professor Chien-hsing Ho's comments and Carlo Harris' editorial assistance.

<sup>1</sup> Lü & Yincang 1928.

<sup>2</sup> Lü 1928: 34.

<sup>3</sup> Ui 1958: 13–14. Yamaguchi Susumu also acknowledged his indebtedness to Lü's exegetical reading of Dharmapāla's text. See Yamaguchi & Nozawa 1965: 413–414.

Regarding the content, however, it is quite obvious that Xuanzang followed Dharmapāla's *Commentary*, claiming that the object of cognition in Dignāga's critique of realism referred to the *five* kinds of sensory objects. By contrast, in Paramārtha's translation the object of cognition is said to consist in the *six* kinds of objects, including the object of mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*).<sup>4</sup> Although Dignāga's original Sanskrit text was no longer extant, we are quite sure that, as agreed in both the Tibetan and Yijing's translations, Dignāga did not specify the scope of the cognitive objects in his critique of realism.

Here arises the question: Is the textual discrepancy between the two translations a minor issue? Or is it rather a critical sign of an interpretative difference in Paramārtha's and Xuanzang's conception of Dignāga's epistemology? I shall argue in this article that the discrepancy cannot be overlooked, for both Paramārtha's and Xuanzang's translations are quite consistent in themselves with regard to whether five kinds or six kinds of the object of cognition should be subject to investigation. It is obvious that these differences were deliberately maintained in both translations. Now, how do we explain this interpretative difference? The key to answer this question is to explain how the ontological status of the object of mental consciousness was conceived differently in Buddhist epistemology during the fifth and sixth centuries, especially in the debate between the Sarvāstivāda and Sautrāntika schools. If the object of mental consciousness is regarded as externally real, it should be subject to the same criticism that Dignāga had launched against realists. On the other hand, if it is not externally real, there is no need to include it as the target of investigation. In other words, we should

<sup>4</sup> In Paramārtha's translation, the treatise is directed to "those who claim that the *six* kinds of consciousness, such as visual consciousness, etc., are caused by the external objects" (若有人執眼等六識緣外境起), while in Xuanzang's translation the treatise is rather directed to "those who would regard external matter (*rūpa*) as the known object (*ālambana*) and the cause (*pratyaya*) of the *five* kinds of consciousness, such as visual consciousness, etc." (若有諸欲令眼等五識以外色作所緣緣者). See T.31.1619.882c; 888b.

be more concerned with the epistemological arguments about the ontological status of the object of mental consciousness than with the differences between the various translations of Dignāga's text.

There are two approaches that may be employed to solve the foregoing problem. The first is to look into Dignāga's other works, especially *Nyāyamukha* and *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, with the hope that we may find an explanation in some doctrinal clues. The second approach is to contextualize the whole issue within the Indian Buddhist scholastic debate, mainly between Sarvāstivāda and Sautrāntika, about the ontological status of the cognitive object. Hypothetically, I believe that Dignāga, just like his Yogācāra predecessors, conducted his epistemological analysis by engaging with both contemporary Buddhist and non-Buddhist philosophers. That this approach is a better choice can be confirmed through Dignāga's *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, where he vigorously responded to the challenges from Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṅkhya, and Mīmāṃsā.<sup>5</sup> In the *Ālambanaparīkṣāvṛtti*, however, Dignāga took Buddhist realists as the main antagonists, arguing that the Buddhist realist atomic theory fails to explain the object of cognition. This way of reading is also confirmed in Chinese Yogācāra literature, especially in Kuiji's *Weishi ershilun shuji* and Chengweishilun shujii, Taixian's *Chengweishilun xueji* (and Huizhao's *Chengweishilun liaoyideng*).<sup>6</sup>

The elaboration of these issues in the discussion that follows is divided into three parts: (1) Firstly, I provide a brief account of the main thesis in Dignāga's *Ālambanaparīkṣāvṛtti*. (2) Then I use Dharmapāla's *Commentary* to explain the rationale for Xuanzang's exclusion of the cognitive object of mental consciousness in Dignāga's argument. (3) Thirdly, I explore the doctrinal debate about the ontological status of the cognitive object in Buddhist direct realism (Sarvāstivāda), indirect realism (Sautrāntika) and epistemological idealism (Yogācāra). In the last section I look for some

<sup>5</sup> For a comprehensive view of Dignāga's philosophical enterprise within the Indian philosophical and religious context, see Dan Arnold, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> See Lü 1928: 39.

doctrinal clues to explain the *raison d'être* for Paramārtha's inclusion of the cognitive object of mental consciousness.

## 2. Main theses in Dignāga's *Ālambanaparīkṣāvṛtti*

What is the object of cognition (*ālambana*)? This is the question addressed in Dignāga's *Ālambanaparīkṣāvṛtti*, a small treatise that contains 900 words in Xuanzang's translation. Before giving Dignāga's answer, let us check the Abhidharma literature first. According to Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa*, the object of cognition (*ālambana*) is differentiated from the object of senses (*viśaya*). The latter refers to that which is acted upon (i.e., perceived) by the senses, whereas the former refers to the object of consciousness, i.e., the object of mind (*citta*) and mental associates (*caittas*). This definition is clearly stated in *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* I.19:

What is the distinction between the 'object-realm' (*viśaya*) and the 'object of cognition' (*ālambana*)? *Viśaya* refers to that which is acted upon by the senses, whereas *ālambana* refers to that which is grasped (*grhyate*) by the mind and its mental associates for their arising.<sup>7</sup>

As to the relationship between the object-realm and the object of cognition, however, Sarvāstivāda contended that they are not ontologically differentiated. What is directly perceived by the six senses must be the same as what is known in cognition. According to the Sarvāstivāda theory of simultaneous causation, an object is said to be cognized in the mind/consciousness when this object is directly perceived by a sense faculty. A *cognized* object must be an object *perceived* by a sense faculty too. As for the Sautrāntika, who held the theory of successive causation, only if the object of sense has been perceived by the sense faculty first is it possible for the perception of the same object to arise at the next moment. In

<sup>7</sup> Vasubandhu, AKBh, T.29.1558.7a: 境界, 所緣, 復有何別? 若於彼法, 此有功能, 即說彼為此法境界。心, 心所法執彼而起, 彼於心等, 名為所緣。For the Sanskrit text, see Ejima 1989: 30: *kaḥ punar viśayālanamayor viśeṣaḥ / yasmin yasya kāritram sa tasya viśayaḥ / yac cittacaittair grhyate tad ālambanam* /. Cf. also Dhammajoti 2004: 5–6.



each successive moment of perception, the object of sense during the first moment first ceases to be, and then there arises the object of cognition of the following moment. The object one *knows* is no longer the object *perceived* by the six sense faculties. They occur at different moments in the same process of perception.<sup>8</sup>

As for the Sarvāstivāda, the object of mind must be the same *real* object of the sense faculties. It is not possible for one to perceive something not existent. On the contrary, the Sautrāntika claimed that one is able to perceive both existence (*bhāva*) and non-existence (*abhāva*), including objects in both the past and the future.<sup>9</sup> Confronted with the distinction between the object of the sense faculties and the object of cognition, Dignāga did not agree with the ontology of either direct realism or indirect realism, both of which assumed the existence of the external object as the condition of cognition to begin with. However, Dignāga did not question the Buddhist causal theory of knowledge. That is, knowledge should be explained in terms of causality. Only when the sense and the object are given as the causal conditions, there arises perception, no matter simultaneously or successively. Conversely, if the object of sense is absent, at least for the Sarvāstivādins, there arises no perception.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, since we all experience perception, we are thus able to infer that there must *exist* an object of sense. As for Dignāga, however, to prove that the object of sense *exists* is not the same as to prove that the object of sense exists *externally*.

Dignāga's argument starts from redefining the premises that the object of cognition needs to fulfill. The two conditions are (1) the object of cognition must be a substance (*ti* 體 / *shiti* 實體, *dravya*/

<sup>8</sup> For Buddhist causal theories of knowledge in the Sarvāstivāda and the Sautrāntika, see Dhammajoti 2004: 69, 81.

<sup>9</sup> Vasubandhu, AKBh, T.29.1558.05c: 識通緣有非有境。

<sup>10</sup> Vasubandhu, AKBh, T.29.1558.104b: 以識起時, 必有境故。謂必有境, 識乃得生。無則不生。

*svabhāva*)<sup>11</sup> as the support for the arising of cognition and (2) cognition arises with the mental representation (*ākāra*) of the object.<sup>12</sup> The first premise excludes the realist metaphysical assumption of the existence of external world in the epistemological analysis. For Dignāga, whether or not the external world exists is precisely the subject matter an epistemologist needs to investigate. It can be determined only after the investigation has been soundly conducted. Like Descartes, we are justified only in starting from the investigation of cognition.<sup>13</sup> Due to the fact that cognition is not able to arise without any “support,” no matter what kind of “support” that may be, internal or external, there must be “substance” to serve as the substratum which grounds the properties or attributes of the object. Here we see that although Dignāga avoids the metaphysical assumption of *external* world, he inevitably employs another metaphysical distinction between substance and attribute in the definition of the object of cognition. Only after the first premise is granted are we able to explain why it was necessary for Dignāga to adopt the standpoint of *sākāravijñānavāda*, claiming that all we know are nothing but the representations of object that appear in consciousness. This theoretic stance follows as a direct result of the substance/attribute distinction made in the first premise along with

<sup>11</sup> The Sanskrit equivalent of *ti* 體 / *shiti* 實體 could be *dravya* or *svabhāva*, which is confirmed by Tibetan rendering *ran gi ño bo*. See Tola & Dragonetti 1982: 108, 129, note 3. This reading is also confirmed in Yijing’s translation of Dharmapāla’s *Commentary*: “As to ‘self-nature’ (*svabhāva*), it refers to the ‘particular’ (*svalakṣaṇa*) and the ‘universal’ (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*). As to ‘making known’ (*vijñāpyate*), it means ‘determination.’ How is it characterized as ‘making known’? It is because [cognition] arises in accord with that form.” Cf. T.31.1625.889c: 言自性者，謂自共相。了者，定也。如何此復名為了耶？如彼相生故。

<sup>12</sup> See Xuanzang’s translation, T.31.1624.888b: 所緣緣者，謂能緣識帶彼相起，及有實體令能緣識託彼而生。

<sup>13</sup> In this respect, the first condition of the cognitive object reminds us of the Husserlian method of *epoché* employed to suspend our natural attitude towards the external world. See Zahavi 2003: 46.

the use of the notion of *ākāra* to explain that what one perceives is only an attribute (since the substance itself cannot be known directly). This is the second premise, which is also shared by indirect realism, i.e., Sautrāntika.

The above exegetical analysis is based on our reading of Xuanzang's text. When we come to Paramārtha's translation, some slight differences should be noted. The same passage on the definition of *ālambana* is translated by Paramārtha as follows:

What are the characteristics of the object of cognition? The object of cognition is thus named insofar as its form of substance is made known in the consciousness, and the consciousness arises in accord with the form of substance.<sup>14</sup>

Unlike Xuanzang's interpretation, substance and form are not separately treated in Paramārtha's definition. According to the latter, the form of substance serves as the condition of the object of cognition. According to Xuanzang, however, there are clearly two aspects of cognition: form as the object of cognition and substance as the support (substratum) of cognition, each of which must be analyzed separately.

After the definition has been given, Dignāga proceeds to argue that the realist theories of external object are not justifiable, for they are not able to meet both conditions of cognition. The four realist theories are stated as follows: (1) Perception can only be caused by single atoms (*paramāṇu*) because nothing else is real except for atoms. (2) The synthesis (*\*sañcitākāra*) of atoms can serve as the

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Paramārtha's translation, T.31.1619.882c: 塵者何相, 若識能了別其體相, 如其體相識起, 是故說此名塵. Here I follow Ui Hakuju's Japanese translation, see Ui 1958: 30, 31, 36. In the beginning, I tried to render 體相 as *dvandva*, meaning "substance and form". Thanks to the comments by Chien-hsing Ho and an anonymous reviewer, I agree that Ui's interpretation is more acceptable. However, this rendering does change the difference between Paramārtha's and Xuanzang's interpretations. Cf. also Frauwallner 1930: 180: "Objekt (*viṣaya*) sein heißt, das eigene Wesen (*svarūpa*) wird durch die Erkenntnis (*jñāna*) erfaßt (*avadhāryate*), indem sie in seiner Gestalt (*ākāra*) entsteht."

object of perception too. (3) Some maintain that the conglomeration (*\*sañcita*) of atoms, such as solidness and wetness, is qualified as the object of perception because it is capable of creating its own image in consciousness.<sup>15</sup> (4) The various forms of object determined by the conglomeration of atoms are objective real, because they are evident in perception.

Responding to the above realist theories, Dignāga argues that (1) even if a single atom could be recognized as a substance, it still does not have a perceivable form (visual, tactile, etc.). As a substance, an atom is said to be able to serve as the cause of cognition. However, since it lacks form, it is not able to be represented in cognition. Hence, an atom cannot be the object of cognition because it fails to meet the second condition. (2) As for the synthesis of atoms, although it has a form to be represented in cognition, it is not qualified to be the object of cognition because, just like the double-moon illusion caused by the disease of the eye, there is no substance which acts as the cause of the cognition. In other words, it does not meet the requirement of the first condition. (3) Regarding the theory of conglomeration, Dignāga argues that although the conglomeration of atoms is able to meet the first condition, it does not fulfill the second requirement, i.e., producing the representation in cognition. For example, solidity in the conglomeration of atoms cannot be perceived in the visual consciousness. (4) As to the last theory, Dignāga argues that the form of a thing, e.g., a jar, is not an ultimate existence (*paramārthasat*), but a conventional existence (*saṃvrtisat*). Why? Consider that there are two same-size jars with

<sup>15</sup> In addition to reconstructing the Sanskrit origin of 和集 by *\*sañcita* (or *\*sañghāta*) and 和合 by *\*sañcitākāra* (or *\*sañghātākāra*), Katō Junshō also proposed to reconstruct these two terms by *\*sañcita* and *\*sañcaya* respectively. See Katō 1989: 176–180. According to Saṅghabhadra, the conglomeration (*sañcita*) of atoms can serve as the object of five sensations, because it is the collection of real atoms, whereas the synthetic form (*\*sañcitākāra*) cannot be taken as the object of sensations, because it is the object of conceptual discrimination (T.29.1562.350c). For analysis in detail, see Dhammajoti 2004: 75–78.

different shapes. The different shape of a jar cannot be explained by the same amount of atoms in two jars of the same size.

When all alternatives of realist theory have been refuted, Dignāga continues to argue for his own thesis, namely that the external object does not exist at all, whereas what truly exists as the object of cognition is nothing but the internal object *appearing like* an external object.<sup>16</sup> For Dignāga, there is only one theoretic alternative left when the existence of external world has been refuted. That is, what truly exists is the internal object that arises as a part of cognition itself. Within the domain of cognition, there arises *simultaneously* something as an “object” dualistically standing opposite to cognition itself as “subject.”

At this point, the ontological problem of the internal object needs to be pressed further. What *is* this internal object? How *does* it arise? Dignāga answers as follows:

The external objects do not exist at all. Due to the mental construction of the sentient being’s deluded mind, the construction of the six [external] objects arises in the consciousness. The mental construction [of external object] appears in such way that it looks external [to the consciousness]. Thus it is named *ālambanapratyaya* (Paramārtha’s translation).<sup>17</sup>

For Dignāga, the object of cognition is mental construction only, which serves as the cause of cognition. Between the object and

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Paramārtha’s translation, T.31.1619.883a: 外塵非識境界。若爾，何法名塵？於內塵相，如外顯現，是名識塵；Xuanzang’s translation, T.31.1624.888c: 外境雖無，而有內色似外境現，為所緣緣。The thesis (1) that the object of cognition is merely an internal object does not necessarily imply another thesis (2) that external object does not exist. Although Dignāga explicitly argues for thesis (2), his argument for such an ontological claim needs further explication. This ambiguity is also the reason why Dignāga has been identified as a Yogācāra idealist by some and as a Sautrāntika by others.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Paramārtha’s translation, T.31.1619.883a: 外塵實無所有。於內識中眾生亂心分別故，起六塵分別。此分別如在於外。如此顯現，是四緣中名識緣。

cognition, there is simultaneous mutual causation. As to the subjective aspect of cognition, Dignāga employs a Yogācāra notion of “potential force” (*śakti*),<sup>18</sup> the synonym of “seed” (*bīja*), to re-interpret the meaning of “sense faculty.” The so-called “sense faculty” is thus nothing but the potential force (to cause the arising of cognition) embedded in the consciousness. Even though he appealed to the Yogācāra interpretation, it must be noted that Dignāga did not mention the *ālayavijñāna* as the matrix of consciousness where “potential force” is supposed to reside. On the contrary, Xuanzang deliberately inserts the notion of *ālayavijñāna* (root-consciousness) into the text to make Dignāga’s theory fall in line with Yogācāra position, even if it might not be faithful to Dignāga’s original intent.<sup>19</sup>

Dignāga concludes that it is the internal object which meets both conditions of the object of cognition. First, the internal object *appears as* the object of cognition. The appearance of the internal object meets the premise that cognition arises with the representation of the object. Second, the mutual causation between the internal object and its respective perception, for instance, visual object and visual perception, meets the premise that the object of cognition must be a substance to act as the support/cause for cognition to arise. Although the internal object is the result of mental construction, it does not mean that mental construction does not have causal force. A well-known example is that of the “wet dream.” For Yogācāra, the object of cognition is defined in terms of causal efficacy, but not by the exteriority or physicality of object.

<sup>18</sup> For the Sanskrit restoration, cf. Yamaguchi 1938: 11 (Verse 7b). Cf. also Sastri 1942: 51.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Xuanzang’s translation, T.31.1624.889a: 以能發識比知有根, 此但功能, 非外所造故。本識上五色功能, 名眼等根, 亦不違理。 English translation: “The existence of sense faculty is inferentially justified by the potential force (功能 *śakti*) for producing perception. However, the potential force is not derived from outside. It is not unjustifiable to claim that five senses, including eye, etc., are named after the various kinds of potential force in the root-consciousness (本識) by which five sensory objects are perceived.”

### 3. Tracing Xuanzang's interpretation in Dharmapāla's *Commentary*

It is also worthy of note that, according to Paramārtha, the internal objects of the *six* cognitions are merely mental constructions. According to Xuanzang, however, only the *five* internal sensory objects are included in Dignāga's critique of realism, whereas the object of mental consciousness is left unexamined. The difference between the two translations is mainly marked by their different interpretations of the ontological status of the object of mental consciousness. In order to solve this problem, we will focus on Dharmapāla's *Commentary* first and take it as our primary clue in exploring the rationale and assumptions underlying Xuanzang's translation.

Dharmapāla's interpretation can be summarized as follows:

(1) The Buddhist realist holds that, according to the theory of existence, ultimate existence (*paramārthasat*) consists of the objects of five sensory perceptions, whereas conventional existence (*saṃvṛtisat*), such as the existence of a "cart," is the object of mental consciousness only. Ultimate existence is truly real (*dravyataḥ sat*) in the sense of existing independently from conditions other than itself. It exists in itself (*svo bhāvaḥ*). On the contrary, conventional existence, which is also called "verbal-conceptual existence" (*prajñaptisat*), depends upon other conditions, which can be reduced to more fundamental factors.<sup>20</sup> Strategically speaking, as far as the realist theory is concerned, there is no need to refute conventional existence (which serves as the object of mental consciousness), because conventional existence is ontologically based on ultimate existence. And to the extent that ultimate existence is refuted, conventional existence likewise becomes untenable.

(2) Here arises another question: In addition to taking the conventional existence for its object, does the mental conscious-

<sup>20</sup> For a brief Abhidharma distinction of *paramārthasat* and *saṃvṛtisat*, cf. Hirakawa 1990: 143–144.

ness also take five sensorial objects for its direct object? The Sarvāstivāda's answer is that it doesn't. They argue that the mental consciousness and the five sensory perceptions are not directed at the same object at the same moment. Historically, this question has been subject to dispute among Abhidharma schools. Some held that mental consciousness is able to perceive both the sensory object and its concept. If the mental consciousness is capable of perceiving the sensory object, that is tantamount to saying that the mental consciousness has the function of perception (*pratyakṣa*). If that is the case, Paramārtha's translation is justifiable, because the mental consciousness is said to be capable of perceiving the external object. This is the problem of mental perception (*mānasapratyakṣa*) which will be discussed below.

According to Buddhist realism, whenever there is sensory perception, there must be a sensory object. Sensory perception and its object are not separated from each other in the experience of cognition. This is the fundamental principle upon which the Sarvāstivādins argue for the existence of external objects. However, this principle does not fully apply to the mental consciousness which also perceives non-sensory objects, such as the objects in dream, the past or the future. Therefore, according to Dharmapāla, even if mental perception is granted, it occurs only on the basis of the five sensory perceptions. Thus, this argument is sufficient for Dignāga's critique of realism insofar as the existence of the five sensory objects have been refuted.

(3) For some Buddhist realists, who contend that the physical object perceived by the mental consciousness in the state of meditation is not the object of reasoning (*tarka*), but an object which has to be based on the real factors of existence,<sup>21</sup> Dharmapāla replies that in his treatise Dignāga does not deal with extraordinary experiences such as the state of concentration. The experience of cognition Dignāga attempts to analyze in that treatise belongs to

<sup>21</sup> For Sarvāstivāda's view on the object of meditation, see \**Abhidharmānyāyānusāraśāstra*, T.29.1562.622a–623b.



the ordinary spheres of learning and thinking only, but not of meditation. Even if in the state of deep concentration a practitioner is able to perceive the object *as* real through yogi-perception (*yogi-pratyakṣa*), which is accepted as one of the four perceptions in the *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, such direct perception is still different from ordinary sensory perception. Precisely for these reasons, there is no need for Dignāga to include the object of mental consciousness in examination.<sup>22</sup>

(4) Some argue that the mental consciousness is able to directly perceive the external object. Therefore, the object of mental consciousness should be included in Dignāga's anti-realist analysis. Dharmapāla replies that if so, then deaf and blind people would not exist, for they are supposed to be capable of perceiving the external object through the mental consciousness only. And this contradicts our everyday experience.

The issue that whether or not the mental consciousness directly perceives the external object was widely contested among Abhidharma schools. The Sarvāstivāda contends that the mental consciousness does not arise with sensory perception simultaneously and that it perceives objects in the past and the future, but not the object in the present. The object of the present is perceived by sensory perception. For example, the green color of a table is perceived by visual perception first. At the next moment it is perceived as "square" or "round" by the mental consciousness, which needs to be based on the visual perception of the preceding moment. While sensory perception is primary in the process of cognition, the mental consciousness is derivative and secondary only.

(5) Some argue that the mental consciousness is capable of perceiving "unmanifested matter" (*avijñaptirūpa*), the physical aspect of "unmanifested karma" (*avijñaptikarman*), which is character-

<sup>22</sup> Dharmapāla, T.31.1625.889a–b: 又復於慣修果智所了色誠非但迦所行境故，及如所見而安立故。今此但觀聞思生得智之境也。如斯意識所緣之境自成非有，此於自聚不能緣故。

ized by the Sarvāstivāda as a sort of physical existence.<sup>23</sup> The fact that *avijñaptirūpa* exists indicates that the mental consciousness is capable of perceiving the physical object (*rūpa*). As to this objection, Dharmapāla replies that since *avijñaptikarma* exists in itself as substance only without appearance, it cannot be taken as the object of the mental consciousness, for any object of cognition needs to have two aspects: substance and attribute.<sup>24</sup>

To sum up Dharmapāla's commentary, the central argument of Dignāga's *Ālambanaparīkṣāvṛtti* is said to be a refutation of the realist thesis that all sensory objects of cognition are external objects. The thesis is theoretically involved with Buddhist scholastic debates on other issues such as *yogipratyakṣa* and *avijñaptirūpa*. Dharmapāla concludes that, as the main target of Dignāga's critique, the Sarvāstivāda's direct realism denies mental perception (*mānasapratyakṣa*), claiming that there is no way for the mental consciousness to perceive the external object directly. Hence there is no need to examine the problem of the object of mental consciousness in Dignāga's treatise.

#### 4. Reconstructing the reasons for Paramārtha's translation

What would be Paramārtha's response to the same problem? By reference to his translation only, we cannot find any textual evidence to explain why he deliberately includes the object of mental consciousness as the target of Dignāga's criticism. A possible alternative explanation is to contextualize the complexity of the issue within the Buddhist scholastic debate. For Paramārtha, Dignāga clearly stands for Yogācāra idealism in the *Ālambanaparīkṣāvṛtti* by claiming that "the external object does not exist" though whether or not this ontological claim can be necessarily deduced from the epistemological proposition, i.e., "cognition takes the internal ob-

<sup>23</sup> Hirakawa 1990: 144–145.

<sup>24</sup> Dharmapāla, T.31.1625.889b: 眼等諸識色為依緣而方有故, 無表但是不作性, 故自許是無, 本意如此。

ject as its object,” is subject to further investigation. If so, according to Paramārtha, what would be Dignāga’s response to Sarvāstivāda and Sautrāntika with regard to the object of mental consciousness? Did both Sarvāstivāda and Sautrāntika contend that the mental consciousness is capable of cognizing the external object?

Let us take a look at Dignāga’s answer in PS I.6ab first where he claims that in addition to sensory perception, there is mental perception (*mānasapratyakṣa*) which non-conceptually apprehends the external object, such as *rūpa*, for its object.<sup>25</sup> Most of *pramāṇa* scholars take this statement as evidence to label Dignāga as belonging to the lineage of Sautrāntika, for he claims that *external* objects can be perceived by the mental consciousness. However, as Nagatomi argues, such a way of reading would be incompatible with Dignāga’s theory of self-cognition (*svasaṃvedana*) which posits that cognition occurs within a twofold structure: the appearance of the object (*arthābhāsa*) and the appearance of cognition itself (*svābhāsa*). Mental perception is no exception as it takes the appearance of the object as the object of cognition, which can only be interpreted as an *internal* object.<sup>26</sup> And in regards to the *Ālambanaparīkṣāvṛtti*, the external object is clearly not accessible to mental perception. That is, Dignāga does not take the Sautrāntika position in that treatise.

<sup>25</sup> Hattori 1968: 27: “There is also mental [perception, which is of two kinds:] awareness of an [external] object and self-awareness of [such subordinate mental activities as] desire and the like, [both of which are] free from conceptual construction. The mental [perception] which takes a thing of color, etc., for its object, occurs in the form of immediate experience (*anubhava*) is also free from conceptual construction. The self-awareness (*svasaṃvedana*) of desire, anger, ignorance, pleasure, pain, etc., is [also recognized as] mental perception because it is not dependent on any sense-organ.” For the reconstruction of the Sanskrit text, see Steinkellner 2005: *mānasam cārtharāgādisvasaṃvittir akalpikā / mānasam api rūpādiviṣayālambanam avikalpakam anubhavākārapravṛttaṃ rāgādiṣu ca svasaṃvedanam indriyānapekṣatvān mānasam pratyakṣam*.

<sup>26</sup> Nagatomi 1979: 254–255.

According to the Sautrāntika, cognition needs to be explained under two theoretic premises: (1) the theory of successive causation and (2) the theory of momentariness. As seen in the record of the debate between the Sautrāntika (Śrīlāta) and the Sarvāstivāda (Saṅghabhadra) in the \**Abhidharmanyāyānusāraśāstra*, the Sautrāntika holds the doctrine that all six kinds of perception arise in the following successive process. (1) At the first moment, the external object and the sense faculty arise simultaneously. However, what is perceived is not the external object itself, but the representation (*ākāra*) of it, which we name “object x.” (2) At the second moment, the “object x” serves as the object of cognition for the sensory perception. (3) The same “object x” preserved and passed down through *anudhātu*, the field of object-continuum, becomes “object x-2,” which in turn becomes the object of cognition for mental perception at the third moment. (4) The “object x-3” of the third moment becomes the object of cognition for mental construction which occurs at the fourth moment.<sup>27</sup> In this successive process of cognition, both objects of cognition for sensory perception and mental perception are not the external object itself which appeared only at the first moment.

The above theory held by the Sautrāntika is inherited in the *Ālambanaparīkṣāvṛtti* except that Dignāga does not assume the existence of external objects. For Dignāga and Sautrāntika, all objects of cognition for six kinds of perception are not external objects. They are the *representation* of objects appearing to be the objective pole of cognition. Since the Sautrāntika holds that the object of cognition for the mental consciousness (mental perception and mental construction) is *not* the external object, this theory could not be the reason why Paramārtha argues that the object of cognition for the mental consciousness must be included in the list of Dignāga’s refutations.

There is one final alternative explanation for Paramārtha’s translation which we find in Sarvāstivāda’s ontology, which claims

<sup>27</sup> Nagatomi 1979: 256; Dhammajoti 2004: 59, 92.

that all existents in the three time-periods are real. According to this realist ontology, the five sensory perceptions take the external object of the present as the object of cognition, whereas the mental consciousness is capable of taking all objects of the three time-periods as its object of cognition. This theory is seen in the *\*Abhidharmanyañusāraśāstra*:

The group of five [sensory] perceptions grasps the object of the present moment only. There are no perceptions of two moments sharing the same object of cognition. There is also no object of cognition for the preceding moment of perception, which has already vanished, to be grasped again by the perception of the second moment as the cause for its arising. Mental consciousness is capable of cognizing the object of the three time-periods. [That is,] even if the existents [in the past] have ceased, they are still taken as the object [of the mental consciousness].<sup>28</sup>

According to Sarvāstivādin ontology, mental consciousness is not merely capable of perceiving conventional existence, i.e., verbal-conceptual existence, it is also capable of perceiving the real existent of all three time-periods, including those in the past and the future. The only difference between the existence of the present and the existence of the past and the future is that the former is capable of function, whereas the latter are not.<sup>29</sup> However, since the objects of all three time-periods exist in the form of substance (*svabhāva*), they are considered real existents, including those in the past and the future which are the objects for the mental consciousness.

Another critical question also arises in this context: Is the mental consciousness capable of directly perceiving the external object, if, as the Sarvāstivāda claims, it is capable of cognizing all objects of the three time-periods? There is no problem for the five sen-

<sup>28</sup> *\*Abhidharmanyañusāraśāstra*, T.29.1562.349a: 五識身, 唯取現境, 無二念識, 同一所緣, 無一所緣, 前念滅已, 第二念識復取生故。意識能緣三世境界, 法雖已滅, 猶是所行。 Cf. also Dhammajoti 2004: 63.

<sup>29</sup> *\*Abhidharmanyañusāraśāstra*, T.29.1562.409b: 此諸有為復有二種, 謂有作用, 及唯有體。前是現在, 後是去來。

sory perceptions to cognize the external object. However, the same epistemic function cannot be ascribed to the mental consciousness as it is commonly assumed that mental perception was accepted in the systems of the Sautrāntika, Dignāga, and Dharmakīrti, but not the Sarvāstivāda.<sup>30</sup>

Here I shall argue that this assumption might need to be modified. As Dhammajoti points out, the Sarvāstivāda distinguishes three types of immediate perception (*pratyakṣa*): (1) sensory perception (*\*indriyāśritapratyakṣa* 依根現量), i.e., that which is dependent on the five sense faculties, (2) perception of [mental] experience (*\*anubhavapratyakṣa* 領納現量), i.e., the immediate experience of mental activities, such as feeling (*\*vedanā*) and conception (*\*saññā*) and (3) perception of understanding (*\*buddhipratyakṣa* 覺慧現量), i.e., the sensory comprehension of the particular (*\*svalakṣaṇa*) and the intellectual comprehension of the universal (*\*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*).<sup>31</sup> Although the terminologies are different, Dhammajoti considers the third type of perception to be the same as mental perception because “it is a clear, vivid perception directly induced by the immediately preceding sensory perception.”<sup>32</sup> In other words, the Sarvāstivāda holds the same view that the mental consciousness is also capable of perceiving two aspects of the external object: its particular and universal character. If this view is accepted, it seems reasonable for Paramārtha to list all objects of the six consciousnesses as the target of Dignāga’s criticism.

Here I would like to add one more consideration for the possible acceptance of mental perception in the Sarvāstivāda. As generally

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Nagatomi 1979, Yao 2004, Nagatomo 1993.

<sup>31</sup> *\*Abhidharmanyaṅyānusārasāstra*, T.29.1562.736a: 現量總有三種，依根，領納，覺慧別故。依根現量，謂依五根現取色等五外境界。領納現量，謂受想等心心所法正現在前。覺慧現量，謂於諸法隨其所應證自共相。 Cf. also Dhammajoti 2004: 71.

<sup>32</sup> Dhammajoti 2004: 71.

assumed, the five sensory perceptions are characterized as “non-discriminative” and mental consciousness is characterized as “discriminative” (*vikalpaka*). According to the Sarvāstivāda, the notion of *vikalpa* is divided into three types: (1) *svabhāvavikalpa*, i.e., reasoning (*vitarka*) and investigation (*vicāra*) as the essence of discrimination. (2) *anusmaraṇavikalpa*, discrimination through the mental contribution of recollection (*smṛti*). (3) *abhinirūpaṇavikalpa*, i.e., discrimination through the mental contribution of intellection (*prajñā*). It is due to the strong activity of recollection and intellection, which can be appeased in the meditative state, that mental consciousness possesses the function of conceptual discrimination.<sup>33</sup> However, mental consciousness is capable of retaining the pure function of mental perception as intellectual intuition when the discriminative function of recollection and intellection has been appeased, or even eliminated in the meditative state. This explains why mental consciousness is capable of cognizing the universal character of the object through intellectual intuition whereas the five sensory consciousnesses are capable of cognizing only the particular character of the object through sensory intuition. In short, it seems likely that the Sarvāstivāda maintained the realist thesis that mental perception also takes the external object as its object of cognition.

## 5. Concluding remarks

Demonstrating true philosophical genius, Dignāga aptly refuted the Buddhist realists’ theory of *ālambana* in one short philosophical treatise. Although he gave his own interpretation in prose, there are still some puzzles left for further pondering. In this article I have simply chosen one of these puzzles, that of the ontological status of the object of mental consciousness to serve as an entry point into the ocean of Buddhist scholastic epistemology. Now it becomes clear that Buddhist philosophers in fifth and sixth century

<sup>33</sup> Dhammajoti 2004: 61–63.

India and China, including the Mādhyamika and the Yogācāra in particular, could not construct their philosophies without reference to the whole net of concepts weaved in the Abhidharma literatures, which indeed forms the matrix of all Buddhist philosophical systems. This applies to our proposal for solving the interpretative conflicts in Paramārtha's and Xuanzang's translations of Dignāga's *Ālambanaparīkṣāvṛtti*, which were based on differing interpretations that can be traced back to the scholastic debate engaged by various Buddhist schools, especially the Sarvāstivāda and the Sautrāntika.

As far as the *Ālambanaparīkṣāvṛtti* is concerned, there is no doubt that, for both Paramārtha and Xuanzang, the main target of Dignāga's criticism is Sarvāstivāda's direct realism. Dignāga did not consider the Sautrāntika as the main target because they shared the same assumptions regarding *ālambana*. Both belonged to *sākāra-vijñānavāda*. However, Paramārtha and Xuanzang were not in consensus with regard to Sarvāstivāda's theory of the object of mental consciousness. Following Dharmapāla's *Commentary*, Xuanzang did not count the object of mental consciousness as that which required refutation in Dignāga's critique because Xuanzang assumed that mental perception was not accepted in the Sarvāstivāda. On the contrary, Paramārtha might have held a different opinion of Sarvāstivāda with regard to the same issue when the latter contends that all existents of the three time-periods are real in the form of substance and also knowable to the mental consciousness. Moreover, as recorded in the *\*Abhidharmanyāyānusārasāstra*, the mental consciousness is said to be capable of perceiving both the individual and the universal through "perception of understanding," which can be interpreted as the same function of mental perception. Accordingly, for Paramārtha, all six objects of cognition, including the object of mental consciousness, need to be refuted in Dignāga's critique of realism.



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