

Reflecting the Other Side of Sāṃkhya:

Klong chen pa on the Two-Sided Mirror Simile

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Introduction

The Sāṃkhyas, making a sharp distinction between the self (*puruṣa*) and the intellect (*buddhi*), attempt to explain the figurative relationship between the two. They use mirrors, crystals, and various other reflectors as similes to explain that the self as an experiencer (*bhokṛ*) is reflected in the intellect, or the intellect is reflected in the self. The most notable of these similes is a two-sided mirror (*ubhayamukhadarpaṇa*), which is generally explained as follows: the intellect, like a two-sided mirror, reflects the self on one side and the object on the other side, and it appears as if the self experienced the object.¹⁾ Interestingly, this simile is not found in any extant Sāṃkhya texts and occurs frequently in Tibetan doxographical literature (*grub mtha'*). In particular, the *Grub mtha' mdzod* (*GDz*) of the rNying ma pa master Klong chen rab 'byams (1308–1364, hereafter Klong chen pa) deserves attention for his twofold application of the two-sided mirror simile, the details of which remain to be investigated. This paper aims to clarify the distinctive feature and its theoretical background, referring to his *GDz* and *Yid bzhin mdzod 'grel* (*YDzG*, *Padma dkar po*), an auto-commentary of his *Yid bzhin mdzod*.²⁾

1. Klong chen pa's Unique Use of the Two-Sided Mirror Simile

In the Sāṃkhya section of the *GDz*, Klong chen pa introduces the two-sided mirror simile:

[1] Among the twenty-three [modifications (*nam 'gyur*, **vikāra*)], first [generates] the great (*chen po*, **mahat*), which is [identical with] the intellect (*blo*, **buddhi*), [as well as one of] the internal organ. As it is said: “Cognition (*shes pa*) has the nature of luminosity and awareness (*gsal zhing rig pa*),” [the great], like a two-sided mirror (*me long ngos gnyis pa*), externally grasps the five objects such as color, and internally has the aspect or form of awareness, that is, pleasure, pain, and indifference (*bde sdug btiang snyoms rig pa'i cha can nam nam pa can*).³⁾

As seen in the general explanation presented above, the outward side of the two-sided mirror reflects external objects. However, the inward side is said to have “the aspect or form of awareness, that is, pleasure, pain, and indifference.” This means that it reflects the intellect itself or a derivative of the intellect, not the self, because pleasure, pain, and indifference are equivalent to the three *guṇas* (*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*), which constitute the intellect. Shortly after the passage [1], Klong chen pa applies the mirror simile to explain how the self experiences objects in the way the intellect, like a mirror, reflects objects when directed outward and reflects sentience (*shes rig*), that is, the self when directed inward, as in other doxographical texts.⁴⁾ It is specific to Klong chen pa to use the two-sided mirror simile to explain the intellect’s self-reflection as well.

In the Sāṃkhya section of the *YDzG*, Klong chen pa uses the simile of “crystal house” (*shel gyi khang pa*, **sphaṭikamandira*). A crystal house virtually has the same function as a two-sided mirror, as gTsong nag pa brTson ’grus seng ge (12th c.) suggests in his *Tshad ma rnam par nges pa’i ṭi ka legs bshad bsdus pa*.⁵⁾ The intellect, like a crystal house, reflects an object externally and the self internally.⁶⁾ Here, it is said that the intellect, even though appearing as awareness, remains insentient, for awareness or sentience (*sems*) belongs to the self.⁷⁾ In passage [1], however, Klong chen pa explicitly states that the intellect has “the aspect or form of awareness, that is, pleasure, pain, and indifference,” suggesting the intellect’s sentience, which is against the Sāṃkhya doctrine that only the self is sentient. At this point, his description of the intellect is unique. Next, we discuss the theoretical background outside the context of the Sāṃkhya philosophy.

2. Linking the Two-Sided Mirror Simile to Self-Awareness

A clue to understand the simile in passage [1] from the *GDz* is found in the Yogācāra-Cittamātra (rNal ’byor spyod pa Sems tsam pa) section of the same text. Criticizing the self-awareness (*rang rig*, **svasaṃvedana*) asserted by the **sākāra*-proponents (*rnam pa dang bcas pa*) and the **nirākāra*-proponents (*rnam pa med pa*), Klong chen pa concludes the section by utilizing the two-sided mirror simile:

[Objection:] Even though self-awareness and other-awareness [refer to] distinct exclusions of a single cognition, there is no fault because [the cognition] is one substantial entity.

[Answer:] This is not correct. How do [you] refute the intellect (*blo*) [like] a two-sided mirror [maintained] by the Sāṃkhyas? Likewise (*yang*), [your assertion is refuted:] if a substantially

single cognition (*blo*) simultaneously cognizes itself and the other (i.e., an external object), it follows that the cognition (*mam shes*) of a sentient being possesses two sides and [thus] is not different from [the intellect like a two-sided mirror maintained by] the Sāṃkhyas, and⁸⁾

Klong chen pa refutes the Yogācāra idea that a cognition, a single substance, is capable of cognizing itself and others simultaneously in the same way that the Buddhists refute the Sāṃkhya idea of the intellect as a two-sided mirror. He illustrates the incapability by using the simile of a sword, which is incapable of cutting itself.⁹⁾ Here, Klong chen pa suggests that the two-sided mirror simile is applicable to the two sides of cognition, namely self-awareness and other-awareness. Thus, we could understand Klong chen pa's analogical explanation in passage [1] that the intellect reflects itself in the form of pleasure and the others. This might echo the Yogācāra idea of self-awareness that cognition reflects cognition itself. Furthermore, we should note the statement introduced in passage [1], "cognition has the nature of luminosity and awareness." Although his sources are unknown, it strongly suggests a close affinity to the nature of self-awareness that is frequently discussed in the Buddhist epistemological tradition.¹⁰⁾

These considerations suggest that some Sāṃkhyas actually argued for self-awareness or its equivalents, even though the extant Sāṃkhya texts bear no such traces. We now analyze the analogy between self-awareness and a two-sided mirror from the perspective of the Pratyabhijñā philosophy of Śaivism, which also developed the theory of self-awareness under the significant influence of the Buddhist epistemological tradition. In addition to the twenty-five *tattvas* of Sāṃkhya, the Pratyabhijñā tradition set forth eleven *tattvas*, including Śiva, but upheld a non-dualistic nature of Śiva, which was unlike the dualistic view in the classical Sāṃkhya. In the Pratyabhijñā philosophy, the non-active *puruṣa* of the classical Sāṃkhya is relegated to a mere individual active soul. According to them, Śiva is the Self; that is, the self-illuminating cognition or the sole cognizing and conscious subject. Śiva as the cognition—that is, of the nature of self-awareness—constitutes the world itself. To clarify Klong chen pa's unique interpretation of the Sāṃkhya doctrine, we now delve into his description of the self in the Sāṃkhya section of the *GDz*.

The Sāṃkhyas assume that the self is the consumer (*za po*), of the nature of permanence, a non-agent, and devoid of the [three] *gunas* and actions.

By this [half-verse, it is stated that] the self, the *puruṣa* of a sentient being, has five properties:

(1) cognition (*shes pa*), (2) permanent and single, (3) beyond actions, (4) the consumer, for he experiences objects, and (5) incapable of being seen by anyone and [radically] inaccessible due to being within the bag of the *pradhāna*, that is, the intrinsic cause.¹¹⁾

Klong chen pa quotes an altered version of *Madhyamakāvatāra* (MA) 6.121ab and, glossing it, enumerates the five properties of the self, including “being cognition” and “being single,” neither of which is mentioned by Candrakīrti in the MA. Moreover, according to the classical Sāṃkhya system, neither is the property of the self. If the Tibetan *shes pa* is equivalent to the Sanskrit *jñāna*, it is the property of the intellect; the self is not single but plural. Additionally, in the *YDzG*, Klong chen pa explains the property of “permanence” that seems to deviate from the immutable self in the classical Sāṃkhya: “the state [of the self] mutates into pleasure and the others according to conditions (*rkyen*).”¹²⁾ The self that is intended here is strongly reminiscent of the self that is set forth in the framework of the non-dualistic Trika doctrine, according to which pleasure and the others belong to the self.¹³⁾ Furthermore, his description of the self as “clear and illuminating cognition” (*shes pa yer re seng nge*) is untenable,¹⁴⁾ as the classical Sāṃkhya teaches that the illumination is attributed to the function of the *sattva*.

Considering these affinities with the Pratyabhijñā doctrine, one may surmise the theory underlying Klong chen pa’s analogy between the intellect and the two-sided mirror in passage [1] from the *GDz* as follows: The insentient intellect has the aspect of awareness, which entails sentience of the self, but the self itself does not occur here. This implies that the properties of the self are integrated into the intellect. The attribution of the nature of awareness, that is, pleasure and the others, presumably results from the influence of the non-dualistic Śaivism, although the reflection theory is not essential to the non-dualistic philosophy and, in fact, does not have much significance for the Pratyabhijñā doctrine.¹⁵⁾ Thus, the Sāṃkhya reflection theory presented by the two-sided mirror simile in the *GDz* can be portrayed as a Sāṃkhya doctrine that is reinterpreted, partly under the influence of the non-dualistic Śaiva doctrine.

Concluding Remarks

Compared to a two-sided mirror or a crystal house, the intellect is generally considered to reflect the self and external objects, as Klong chen pa explains in the *GDz* and *YDzG*. In the *GDz*, however, he also applies the simile to the self-reflection of the intellect, which is

not found in the classical Sāṃkhya texts or other Tibetan doxographical texts; thus, it is unique to him: the intellect, like a two-sided mirror, reflects itself in the form of pleasure, pain, and indifference, inwardly. The properties that he attributes to the self also deviate from those in the classical Sāṃkhya system. The idea of the intellect as self-awareness and illuminating cognition was possibly formed under the influence of the non-dualistic Śaiva doctrine. Although Klong chen pa's sources are unknown, it is likely that in his days some Sāṃkhya doctrines containing Śaivistic ideas were prevalent, or that Śaiva doctrines were prevalent as "Sāṃkhya." Klong chen pa's unique use of the two-sided mirror simile can thus help us to reveal a different aspect of Sāṃkhya history.

Notes

- 1) For the dual implications of the two-sided mirror simile, see Kondō 2017. 2) Here we note the *GDz* and *YDzG* editions used in this study. *GDz*: In [vol. 2] of *gSung 'bum* (sDe dge par ma), 1a–148a ([sDe dge]: [sDe dge Par khang Chen mo], [2000]); *YDzG*: In [vol. 7] of *mDzod bdun*, 1:1a–2:[306a] (n.p.: Palri Parkhang, 2005). 3) *GDz* (23a1–2): . . . *nyi shu rtsa gsum las dang po ni chen po | blo | nang gi byed pa | shes pa gsal zhing rig pa'i bdag nyid ces bya ba | me long ngos gnyis pa lta bu | phyi gzugs sogs yul lnga 'dzin pa dang | nang bde sdug btang snyoms rig pa'i cha can nam rnam pa can no ||* 4) *GDz* (23b6–7): "Experience [of an object by the self occurs in the following] manner: the reflected image of an object such as sound appears on the one side of the intellect-mirror that is directed outward, and the reflected image of sentience (*shes rig*, **caitanya*) appears on the [other] side [of the intellect] that is directed inward. It is asserted that experience means the intermingling of the two [images]. [Thus] the self cognizes the [object] that has appeared in the intellect." For the two-sided mirror simile in other doxographical texts, see Kondō 2020, 168, 169n46, 178. Here we note an instance of the simile in *Phya pa Chos kyi seng ge's* (1109–1169) doxographical text (in vol. 9 of *bKa' gdams gsung 'bum*, [Chengdu]: Si khron Mi rigs dPe skrun khang, 2006, 15a7–15b1): "The 'great' is synonymous with the 'intellect' and is similar to a two-sided mirror, which is established by the internal self and is also established by external pleasure, pain, and indifference, the nature of the five **tanmātras*." 5) See *Chishikiron kecchaku kōchū Zenshaku yōshū* 知識論決広註善釈要集 (Kyoto: Rinsen Shoten, 1989), 57b7–8: *de yang thog mar chen po 'am blo zhes bya ba shel gyi khang pa 'am me long ngo[s] gnyis pa'i bum pa lta bu bem pa po phyi nang gi gzugs brnyan 'char ba'i rten byed pa dang |* "The first [modification], that which is termed the great or the intellect is insentient like a pot, is, [like] a crystal house or a two-sided mirror, the foundation where the reflected images of the external and the internal appear, and" 6) See *YDzG* (1:292b4–293a4): "[The intellect's] taking the form [of an object] means that [its] reflected image appears. [More specifically,] in the intellect similar to a crystal house, the reflected images of color, sound, smell, taste, and touch appear from the external and the reflected image of the self appears from the internal. . . . Therefore, it is said that the self determines the [object] that has appeared in the intellect. All the appearance (*snang ba*) is the mere intermingling of sentience (*sems*) and objects in the intellect. Even though [the intellect] appears as awareness (*rig pa*), [it] is not [real] sentience, whereas even though [the intellect] appears as [an object] such as a pot, [it] is not

the [real] object (i.e., pot).” 7) See YDzG (1:295b4, 296a5–296b2). 8) GDz (39b5–6):
rang rig dang gzhan rig shes pa gcig gi ldog pa tha dad kyang | rdzas gcig yin pas nyes pa med do zhe
na'ang ma yin te | grangs can pa'i blo'i me long ngos gnyis pa ji ltar 'gog | yang blo rdzas gcig dus
gcig tu rang rig dus gzhan rig na 'gro ba gcig gi nram shes ngos gnyis pa can grangs can dang khyad
med pa nyid dang | . . . 9) See Higgins 2013, 95. GDz (39a7–39b2): *blo rdzas gcig dus gcig la*
rig bya dang rig byed gnyis rdzas 'gal ba'i phyir | rang gis rang rig pa'ang mi srid de | ral gris rang gi
rtse mo gcod pa'am reg par mi nus pa bzhin no || 'phags pa lang kar gshegs pa las | dper na ral gri
rang gis rang || reg cing gcod par mi nus pas || de bzhin shes pa rang nyid kyis || rang nyid rig par nus
ma yin || ces gsungs pa bzhin no || This quotation from the *Āryalaṅkāvatāra ('phags pa lang kar
 gshegs pa) is slightly different in text from the present Sanskrit edition. *The Laṅkāvatāra sūtra*, ed.
 Bunyiu Nanjio (Kyoto: Otani Univ. Press, 1956) 10.568: *svadhārām* (em. [see Yao 2005, 151n10];
svadhārām ed.) *hi yathā khaḍgaṃ svāgraṃ vai aṅgulir yathā | na cchindate na sprāte tathā cittam*
svadarśane || 10) See Fukuda 1984. 11) GDz (22b4–6): *za po rtag dngos byed po min*
pa'i bdag | yon tan byar med grangs can nrams kyis brtag | ces pas | bdag ni sems can gyi skyes bu ste |
shes pa yin pa | rtag pa gcig pu pa | bya byed dang bral ba | yul la longs spyod pas za ba po yin pa |
rang bzhin rgyu'i gts'o bo'i khug ma na gnas pas | sus kyang mi mthong ba'i llog tu gyur pa dang chos
lnga ldan pa'o || For *pāda* b of the MA, Tibetan translation reads (D no. 3861, 'a 210a4; P no. 5262, 'a
 254b4): *yon tan bya med mu stegs nams kyis brtags (brtags) rtags* P no. 5261, 'a 235a2). See MA
 6.121ab (Li 2015, 19): *ātmā tīrthyaiḥ kalpyate nityarūpo 'kartā bhoktā* (em.; 'kartābhoktā ed.)
nirguṇo niṣkriyāś ca | 12) YDzG (1:295b1–296a2). 13) See Vasudeva 2014, 204.
 14) YDzG (1:296a2–4). 15) See Ratié 2017.

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