

Reconsidering Dharmottara's Place in the Intellectual History of the Consciousness-Only Theory

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1. Introduction Buddhist philosophers of the Yogācāra school after Dharmakīrti (ca. 600–660) can be divided into two: *satyākāravādin* and *alīkākaravādin*, in terms of whether or not they accept the reality of the form of consciousness. This conflict is most pronounced between Jñānaśrīmitra (ca. 980–1040) and Ratnākaraśānti (ca. 970–1030) and the conflict between them has been well covered in previous studies. However, with regard to Dharmottara (ca. 740–800), modern scholars have only classified him as a Yogācāra thinker advocating the view that the consciousness has a false form (*alīkākāra*) and is stained (*samala*) on the basis of the classification found in a Tibetan literature, and have not clarified the details of his view. This paper provides some materials for considering Dharmottara's place in the intellectual history of the consciousness-only theory by presenting Jitāri's (ca. 960–1040) understanding of Dharmottara's view and his original statements.

2. Classification in Tibetan literature as a basis for the traditional understanding

The classification of the consciousness-only theory found in the Tibetan literature, which is a basis for the traditional understanding of the intellectual history of the consciousness-only theory, is derived from the five types classified by Jitāri in the fourth chapter of his SMVBh, which deals with the doctrine of the Madhyamaka School. Jitāri does not give names to the five types, nor does he specify the thinkers who advocate them. On the other hand, the Tibetan literature gives the following names: 1) The same number of subjects and objects (*gzung 'dzin grangs mnyan pa*), 2) One egg and a half piece (*sgo nga phyed tshal ba*), 3) Manifold and non-dual (*sna tshogs gnyis med pa*), 4) Stained (*dri bcas*), and 5) Unstained (*dri med*); and classifies 1)–3) as *satyākāravāda* and 4)–5) as *alīkākaravāda*.¹⁾ Shirasaki (1986), introducing the five types of the theory classified by Jitāri according to the names given in the Tibetan literature, identifies the first view as Devendrabuddhi's, the second as Śākyabuddhi's, the third as Prajñākara Gupta's, the fourth

as Dharmottara's, and the fifth as Kambala's.

3. Jitāri's understanding of Dharmottara's view Of the five types of the theory, Jitāri explains the fourth view, which is considered to be Dharmottara's, as follows:

SMVBh IV 113.2-10: *gghan dag ni bdag tu 'dzin pa'i gzhi 'dzin par byed pa nyid du nang du yongs su gsal ba'i bde ba la sogs pa gang yin pa de nyid ni don dam pa pa'i rnam par shes pa yin la / gzung ba'i rnam pa ni ma rig pas nye bar bstan pa gcig dang du mas stong pas stong pa kho na'o // de med pa'i phyir de la ltos pa'i 'dzin pa bde ba la sogs pa yang med pa yin te /*
bdag tu 'dzin pa'i gzhi tsam ste //
blo yi ngo bo rnam med yin //
'khrul pa yi ni rnam pa rnams //
sgyu ma byas pa bzhin du snang //
zhes gang bshad pa snyam du lta'o //

Others state the following. (a) Only the basis for the ego-consciousness (**ahāṅkāśpāda*), i.e., such a thing as the pleasure that flows inside as the grasping [form], is the consciousness at the ultimate level (**pāramārthikajñāna*). (b) The grasped form is presented by the ignorance (**avidyā*) and it is entirely empty because it lacks [the essence of] one and many. (c) Since there does not exist the [grasped form], there does not also exist the grasping [form], i.e., such a thing as the pleasure which relies on the [grasped form].

Only the basis for the ego-consciousness exists, and the essence of the consciousness is formless. The forms that are erroneous appear as if they were created by illusion.

Here Jitāri describes the following characteristics of Dharmottara's view:

- (a) The grasping form is the basis for the ego-consciousness, i.e., such a thing as the pleasure that flows inside, and only it is the consciousness at the ultimate level.
- (b) The grasped form is presented by the ignorance and it is empty because it lacks the essence of one and many.
- (c) Since the grasped form does not exist, the grasping form, which relies on it, also does not exist.

It should be noted that there is no statement here that identifies Dharmottara's view as "Stained" (*dri bcas*).

Jitāri criticizes Dharmottara's view on the following points:

- (a'b') It is not the case that only the grasping form is the consciousness. The grasped form is also the consciousness because it shines and shining (**prakāśa*) is the essence of the consciousness. [SMVBh IV 127.1-6]

- (c') Even if the grasped form is false, the grasping form, which is the consciousness, is ultimately real (**paramārthasat*). It is because the ignorance, i.e., the capacity of illuminating the non-existent (**asatprakāśanaśakti*), which is the essence of the consciousness, would not exist if the grasping form did not exist. [SMVBh IV 127.6–10]

These criticisms are based on a correct understanding of Dharmottara's view and its weak points.

4. Dharmottara's statements in his PVinT

4.1. Interpretation of *grāhaka*

First, we will examine the three characteristics of the grasping form in Dharmottara's view presented by Jitāri, 1) the basis for the ego-consciousness, 2) such a thing as the pleasure flowing inside, and 3) the consciousness at the ultimate level, on the basis of Dharmottara's own statements.

4.1.1. The basis for the ego-consciousness and such a thing as the pleasure flowing inside

Dharmottara builds his own view on the grasping form into the following two statements in the first chapter of Dharmakīrti's PVin.

- A. PVin I 15.1–3: *sa eva tāvad ayaṃ vikalpaḥ saṃvidīta upayann apayaṃś* ca kvāntarbhāvyatām arthe buddhau vā / nārthe, adhyātman parisyandād ihāvaśenodayāstamayāyogāc ca /* * *upayann apayaṃś* em.; *upayannāpayaṃś* PVin I.

First of all, to which, the object or the consciousness, should we attribute this conceptual cognition,²⁾ which arises or perishes [only] when it is cognized? [It is] not [attributed] to the object. For it flows inside and it cannot be created or destroyed by the influence of desire.

- B. PVin I 24.5: *tatrāpi saṃvedanam evaikam āntaram prītiparītāparūpaṃ paśyāmaḥ /*

In that case, too, we observe the consciousness itself as a single internal form of pleasure and pain.

In explaining the expression “inside” (*adhyātman*, *āntaram*) in the underlined parts of A and B, Dharmottara refers to it as “the basis for the ego-consciousness.”

- A'. PVinT I D68b3–4, P81a4–5: *bdag tu gnas pa ni nang ste phyi rol gyi don las tha dad par bdag tu 'dzin pa'i gnas nyid du yongs su gsal ba'i phyir ro // yongs su gsal ba ni snang ba ste rang gi ngo bor gsal ba* zhes bya ba'i don to //* * *ba* D; om. *ba* P.

For it flows inside (**adhyātman=*āntaram*), i.e., in the basis for the ego-consciousness (**ahankārādhiṣṭhāna*) as distinct from the external object. [The expression] “flows”

means that it appears, i.e., that it shines by itself.

- B'. PVinT I D108a5, P124b5-6: 'di nyid bstan pa'i don du **nang du** zhes gsungs so // bde ba la sogs pa'i rang bzhin myong ba la gnas pa ni **nang du** bdag tu 'dzin pa'i gzhi 'dzin pa'i rnam par **mithong** gi phyi rol gzung ba'i rnam par ni ma yin te /

To explain this very point, [Dharmakīrti] says “**internal**.” We observe the form of pleasure and others belonging to the consciousness as **internal**, i.e., as the grasping form that is the basis for the ego-consciousness (**ahaṅkāārāspada*), not as the grasped form that is external [to consciousness].

Dharmottara rephrases the expressions “*adhyātmam*” and “*āntaram*” as “the basis for the ego-consciousness” (**ahaṅkāārādhiṣṭhāna*, **ahaṅkāārāspada*). What Dharmakīrti intends in A and B is the inside-outside relation between the consciousness and the external object, but Dharmottara reads here the relation between the grasping form and the grasped form. In Jitāri's understanding of Dharmottara's view, the grasping form is characterized as 1) the basis for the ego-consciousness, 2) such a thing as the pleasure flowing inside. This is based on Dharmottara's interpretation of “*adhyātmam*” in Dharmakīrti's statement “*adhyātmam parisyandāt*” as “the basis for the ego-consciousness.”

4.1.2. The consciousness at the ultimate level

As mentioned earlier, the grasping form is described by Jitāri as 3) the consciousness at the ultimate level (**pāramāṛthikajñāna*). Let us examine Dharmottara's statements in this regard. The following is Dharmottara's explanation on Dharmakīrti's statement “*uktam atra grāhyagrāhakalakṣaṇāyogād iti*” (PVin I 39.12).

PVinT I D157a2-3, P182b4-5: *slob dpon gyis kyang rnam pa med pa'i phyogs la shes pa 'dzin pa nyid dang / don gzung ba nyid sngar gsal* la / rnam pa dang bcas pa'i phyogs la yang rnam par rig pa smra ba rtsom pa nyid kyi tshe gzung ba'i mtshan nyid gsal ba yin no zhes gsungs pa ni / bshad zin to zhes bya ba yin te / gzung ba'i mtshan nyid de dang mi ldan pa'i phyir ro zhes smos so //* * gsal D; bsal P.

Furthermore, as for the view that the consciousness does not involve its form (**nirākārapakṣa*), it has been previously clarified by the Master [Dharmakīrti] that the consciousness is the grasping [form] and the object is the grasped [form]. On the other hand, as for the view that the consciousness involves its form (**sākārapakṣa*), at the beginning of arguing [the theory of] the consciousness[-only] (PVin I k.38), it has been stated that what is characterized by the grasped [form] shines. This is what he means by the expression “**Is has been stated**.” It has been stated that [the consciousness] is not connected to the grasped form (**grāhyalakṣaṇāyogāt*).

Here we can see a conflict between Dharmakīrti's *sākāravāda* and Dharmottara's *nirākāravāda*. According to Dharmakīrti, the consciousness does not exist apart from the grasped form, for the consciousness is nothing other than manifestation of the grasped form. According to Dharmottara, on the other hand, the term "consciousness" refers only to the grasping form as distinguished from the grasped form which is called "object." He demonstrates his own position that the consciousness does not involve the grasped form by modifying Dharmakīrti's expression "*grāhyagrāhakalakṣaṇāyogāt*" to "*grāhyalakṣaṇāyogāt*." Jitāri's description of the grasping form as the consciousness at the ultimate level indicates this Dharmottara's position.

4.2. The interpretation of *grāhya*

With regard to the grasped form, Jitāri describes it as i) being presented by the ignorance and ii) being empty because it lacks the essence of one and many. This is based on the argument in PVinṬ I (D157a7–158b6, P183a4–184b7). There Dharmottara denies that the grasped form is singular and that it is manifold, and then he concludes that the consciousness, i.e., the grasping form, has the capacity called "the ignorance" (*avidyā*), which presents a false form, i.e., the grasped form.

4.3. The reason the grasping form does not exist

The reason for the non-existence of the grasping form is explained by Jitāri as follows: since the grasped form does not exist, the grasping form relying on it also does not exist. In this regard, Dharmottara himself states the following.

PVinṬ I D152b6, P177b5–6: *gang yang 'dzin pa'i rnam pa mi bden pa nyid du*^{*1} *brjod pa de ni tha dad pa'i don shes pa las snang bar chad nas med pa'i phyir tha dad pa'i don 'dzin pa la ltos nas mi bden pa nyid yin gyi / mi bden pa gsal bar byed pa'i rang bzhin yang brdzun*^{*2} *pa ni ma yin no //* ^{*1} *nyid du P; gnyis D.* ^{*2} *brdzun D; rdzun P.*

Furthermore, since the grasping form called "false" (**asatya*) does not exist after the perishment of the manifestation of the entity which is different from the consciousness[, i.e., the grasping form], it is false depending on grasping the entity which is different [from the consciousness], but the essence that makes the false thing shine is not false (**alika*) as well.

The reason the grasping form is called "false" is that it does not exist after the manifestation of the grasped form has been perished. Dharmottara's explanation is consistent with that of Jitāri. However, the essence of the grasping form that makes the false form shine is not false. This point leads to Jitāri's criticism (c'): if the grasping form

does not exist, the ignorance, the essence of the grasping form, would not exist either, thus the grasping form should be ultimately real, not non-existent.

5. Conclusion Modern scholars have regarded Dharmottara as a thinker who advocates the consciousness-only theory which maintains that the consciousness is formless and stained. This is based on the classification found in the Tibetan literature. Though this classification is derived from the five types of the theory classified by Jitāri, it does not reflect his statements correctly. Jitāri, on the other hand, extracts the main points of Dharmottara's view based on an accurate reading of it. He is well aware of Dharmottara's unique interpretations of “*grāhaka*” and “*avidyā*” that characterizes his consciousness-only theory, and this is the core of Dharmottara's view.

Notes

1) For the text and Japanese translation, see Hakamaya (1976).

2) Here, what is called “*vikalpa*” is self-awareness which is the conceptual cognition for the opponent.

Abbreviations

PVin I, II *Dharmakīrti's Pramāṇaviniścaya Chapters 1 and 2*. Ed. Ernst Steinkellner. Beijing: China Tibetology Publishing House, 2007.

PVinT I Tibetan translation of Dharmottara's *Pramāṇaviniścayaṭīkā*, the first chapter. D: 4227, P: 5727.

SMVBh IV Tibetan translation of Jitāri's *Sugatamatavibhaṅgabhāṣya*, the fourth chapter. Shirasaki Kenjo. 1985. “The *Sugatamatavibhaṅgabhāṣya* of Jitāri (II).” *Kōbe Joshi Daigaku kiyō* 神戸女子大学紀要 18(1): 101-145.

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