grāhakākāra as pramāṇa:
The Difference between Dignāga and Dharmakīrti

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1. Introduction

Philosophers in the Buddhist logico-epistemological school such as Dignāga and Dharmakīrti consider that all three factors of a valid cognition, namely, object of cognition (prameya), means of cognition (pramāṇa) and result of cognition (pramāṇaphala), are included in the same consciousness from the viewpoint of consciousness-only (vijñaptimātra). They are opposed to the argument of externalists such as Naivāyika and Vaiśeṣika that these factors are separate matters, so Dignāga and Dharmakīrti have to investigate these two issues. First, which aspect of consciousness is distributed to each of these factors and, second, why is the relevant aspect distributed to the factor.

This article does not focus on the first issue since both Dignāga and Dharmakīrti hold the same opinion:

prameya—appearance of the object (visayābhāsa), form of the grasped (grāhyākāra)
pramāṇa—appearance of its own (svābhāsa), form of the grasper (grāhakākāra)
pramāṇaphala—self-awareness (svasanvvedana, svasanvītī)

As to the second issue, however, they have different opinions and therefore in this article I examine the concept of form of the grasper (grāhakākāra) as pramāṇa in relationship to self-awareness as pramāṇaphala.

2. Dignāga’s View on grāhakākāra

In Dignāga’s work Pramāṇasamuccaya with its auto-commentary Pramāṇasamuccayavṛtti (PS(V)), he states only that pramāṇa is the form of the grasper (see PS I 10) and we can find no positive argument for it. However, we can find a clue in the passage below, which explains about self-awareness in the course of mentioning that the result of cognition is self-awareness.
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Or the result [of cognition] is self-awareness (svasamvitti) here. To explain: cognition (jñāna) arises with two appearances, namely, that of itself (svabhāsa) and that of the object (viśayabhāsa). The self-awareness of it (jñāna) which has these two appearances occurs, and this self-awareness is the result. 1)

In this passage, Dignāga says that cognition arises with two appearances, that of itself and that of the object, and that self-awareness of the cognition which has these appearances occurs. Moreover, this appearance of itself refers to the form of the grasper. In this way, Dignāga introduces the fact that cognition has two appearances—that is to say, a duality of cognition—as a presupposition for self-awareness, asserting one of the appearances, namely, the appearance of its own (= the form of the grasper) to be the means of cognition.

3. Dharmakīrti’s View on grāhakākāra

Whereas Dignāga apparently accepts the duality of cognition as a presupposition for self-awareness, Dharmakīrti does not agree. He proves that cognition has the nature of self-awareness on the grounds that external objects cannot be observed by direct perception, and defines self-awareness as cognition’s manifestation by itself (svayam prakāśate, see PV III 320–329). As for the duality of cognition, he does not accept it in a positive manner. If anything, he emphasizes that it is based on confusion (see PV III 212–219, 330–331). It is true that he demonstrates in detail the duality and nature of the self-awareness of cognition from the standpoint where he accepts the duality in Pramāṇavārttika (PV, see PV III 425), but in Pramāṇaviniścaya (PVin), in which Dharmakīrti constructs his own argument more vigorously, these demonstrations are omitted and an argument regarding non-duality between cognition and its object, a certain type of consciousness-only, is interpolated instead (see PVin 39,11–42,8). In addition, the duality of cognition is derived only from the non-duality of them (see PVin 43,7) and plays no direct role in the proof of self-awareness. In Dharmakīrti’s view, such as that stated above, it is not fit that self-awareness occurs based on the duality of cognition, so grāhakākāra could have a different meaning. In PVin, the establishment of prameya, pramāṇa and pramāṇaphala is dealt with in two passages that are introduced below.

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3.1. Explanation in Conformity with Conventional Appearance

A form of the object (viṣayākāra) and inner determination (paricchedo 'ntarah = grāhakākāra) appear (lakṣyate) [fictitiously as if they are separated, exactly] when they occur as those which have a self-cognized nature (svasamviditaurupa). In that, the establishment of the object, means and result [of cognition] is precisely according to [this fictitious] appearance (lakṣaṇa).2)

In this passage, Dharmakirti says that the establishment of the object, means and result of cognition is in accordance with seeing (darśana) or fictitious appearance (lakṣana), not with the own nature (tattva) of the cognition (see PVin I 44 = PV III 353). This means that the three are not divided by cognition’s own nature, but by its fictitious or conventional appearance; that is, it is a problem of the viewer. Moreover, it is in accordance with such kind of appearance that a form of the object and inner determination occur having a self-cognized nature. The position of the grāhakākāra in this context is similar to that in Dignāga’s view, in that it is treated in contrast with the form of object. However, Dharmakirti explains it in conformity with conventional appearance, describing it in another way, as inner determination, whereas Dignāga explains it using the appearances which exist within the cognition.

3.2. Explanation in Conformity with Cognition’s Own Nature

Like Dignāga, Dharmakirti approves the form of the grasper and the form of the object in conformity with convention, but he also shows another attitude toward grāhakākāra, setting up self-awareness itself at the starting point.

Therefore, the form of the grasper (grāhakākāra) is admitted to be the establishing [factor] (sādhana = pramāṇa) of self-awareness (svasamvid), because its being as it (self-awareness) is established by means of the [form of the grasper]. ... In the case [of externalism] also those [passion and so on] are capable of self-awareness, because they have the nature of immediate experience (anubhava). Therefore, the capability (yogyatā) [for self-awareness] is the means, [passion and so on] itself is the object, and self-awareness is the result. [All kinds of cognition in the case of consciousness-only are the same.] Having the nature of determination (paricchedātmata) is considered as the form of the grasper, and this is the capability for itself.3)

Here Dharmakirti states that the form of grasper and self-awareness are pramāṇa and pramāṇaphala, respectively, on the basis of their relationship where the former establishes the latter (vyavasthāpana). In other words, grāhakākāra as pramāṇa is the establishing (vyavasthāpaka), and svasamvid as pramāṇaphala is the established (vyavasthāpya).4)

Moreover, he says that all kinds of cognition have same structure as the awareness of men-
tal activities (caitta) such as passion, hatred, delusion and pleasant and unpleasant feelings. These mental activities are extended, which are already proved to have themselves as the objects, and thus constitute self-awareness (see PV III 249–280, PVIn 20,8–27,6). It is notable that the form of the grasper as pramāṇa is said in other ways, not only as having the nature of determination (paricchedātmatā), but also as the capability for itself (ātmani yogyatā) or the capability for self-awareness (svātmasamvidi yogya[tā]). Dharmakīrti does not assume any factor as the means of cognition other than self-awareness which is the result of cognition. He asserts that the capability for self-awareness itself is the means which determines the self-awareness, interpreting this to be “grāhakākāra.”

4. Conclusion

As described above, the meaning of grāhakākāra as pramāṇa differs according to Dignāga and Dharmakīrti; this difference is relative to how each considers self-awareness. On the one hand, Dignāga accepts the duality of cognition as a presupposition for self-awareness, and considers one of the two, grāhakākāra as pramāṇa. On the other hand, Dharmakīrti also admits inner determination to be pramāṇa in a way similar to Dignāga’s, according to the explanation in conformity with conventional appearance. However, considering the explanation in conformity with cognition’s own nature, he asserts that the capability for self-awareness is pramāṇa and does not presuppose the duality of cognition.


4) This notion about the relationship between pramāṇa and pramāṇaphala is one of the characteristics of Dharmakīrti. He shows the same idea from the viewpoint of externalism or Sautrāntika, cf. Tosaki [1993b: 10,n. 46], Mai Miyo [2009]: “Dharmakīrti’s View about Cognition of Objects: Why meyārūpatā Can Be a Means of Valid Cognition (ダルマキールティーの対象認識に関する——考察)”, Tōyō no Shisō to Shūkyō 26.
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Abbreviations and Bibliographical References


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