On Dharmakīrti's Proof of the Existence of External Objects*

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1. It is a well-known fact that Dharmakīrti makes reference to the proof of the existence of external objects (*bāhyārtha*) in PV III 390d-391ab and PVin I 59d. According to this theory, which has been ascribed to the *Sautrāntika* tenet by later Buddhist and non-Buddhist sources,¹⁾ it is by means of inference that we can cognize the existence of external objects. On the contrary, external things themselves are often referred to as perceptible in Dharmakīrti's theory of perception, since they are treated as the particular (*svalakṣaṇa*), i.e., the object of perception.²⁾ In his recent study Prof. Dreyfus described this issue as a kind of conflict between 'direct realism' and 'representationalism', considering how it was argued in the *pramāṇa* tradition of Tibetan Buddhism.³⁾ Little attention, however, has so far been given to the question whether Dharmakīrti and his successors in India had already been conscious of this issue or not. The aim of this short paper is to examine how the proof of the existence of external objects can agree with Dharmakīrti's theory of perception, but here I limit the discussion mainly to the Indian commentaries on PV III 390d-391ab and PVin I 59d.

2. The context in which this proof comes into question is closely linked with Dharmakīrti's well-known statement that cognition itself is identical with its object, i.e., cognitive form. The 'given' inside our mind is regarded not as an external object, but as a cognitive form, which is thrown into our cognition by force of the external object. In this connection, the proof is referred to in PV III 390d-391ab.⁵⁾ If there arises no sensory cognition in spite of the presence of every other cause, one can infer the existence of another cause, i.e., an external object.⁶⁾ As stated in PV III 391ab (and PV III 336), however, this proof is valid unless we realize that our cognition is produced merely by an internal and immediate cause (*saman-*

antarapratyaya), i.e., latent impressions. Paraphrasing PV III 390d, Devendrabuddhi definitely affirms that external objects are cognizable by inference, but not by perception.⁷⁾ According to Manorathanandin's commentary too, which must have been borrowed partly from Devendrabuddhi, the apparent perceptibility of external objects is not acceptable even before one quits the externalism and turns to the *Yogācāra* doctrine.⁸⁾ Furthermore, Manorathanandin attributes this proof to an anonymous opponent (*para*), by introducing it with *syād etat*.⁹⁾ Here he seems to look it upon as irreconcilable with the *Yogācāra* doctrine, in which the latent impressions are adopted as the causal factor of our cognition. We should notice that Jinendrabuddhi also cites this proof in his commentary on PS I 9ab.¹⁰⁾ Immediately after explaining that cognition itself is never different from its object, he introduces the proof as a supposed objection. Judging from these facts, it would be reasonable to consider if the *Sautrāntika* doctrine, which involves the proof of the existence of external objects, can always be understood as conforming to the *Yogācāra* doctrine in Dharmakīrti's epistemology.¹¹⁾

Let us now turn to PVin I 59d, which is also preceded by the statement of the non-difference between cognition and its object. Following this statement, Dharmakīrti supposes the question how we can cognize the existence of something different from the manifestation (*śnañ ba*) of a cognitive form inside our mind. In his commentary, Dharmottara paraphrases this question as follows:

If that which is established as perceptible (in our cognition) is not the (external) thing, which is distinct (from the cognition inside our mind), how is it to be ascertained that it (i.e., the external thing) is existent? ¹²⁾

As the answer for this question, he introduces PVin I 59d, where the proof of the existence of external objects is indicated simply by the term 'exclusion' (*ldog pa, vyatireka*).¹³⁾ This paraphrase of Dharmottara implies that he had the perceptibility of external objects on his mind, although Jñānaśrībhadrā makes no particular mention of it.

3. Concerning the perceptibility of external objects, most noteworthy is the following passage in Prajñākaragupta's commentary on PV III 39lab:

[Question:] Then, how can it (i.e., external thing) be the object of perception? [Answer:] It is by means of metaphorical expression (*upacāra*) that (external thing is accepted as the) object (of perception), since there is no other alternative than (admitting that) the (cognitive) form (of external thing) is the object of perception.¹⁴⁾

Interestingly enough, he reduces the perceptibility of external objects to 'metaphorical expression' (*upacāra*). Ravigupta also follows Prajñākaragupta's idea, even though he does not explicitly refer to the term *upacāra*.¹⁵⁾

As is generally known, Dharmakīrti explains the object of sensory cognition (*indriyajñāna*) as the aggregate of atoms (*paramāṇu*), which possesses the ability to cause its cognition.¹⁶⁾ He also equates sensory cognition with non-conceptual perception, since the aggregate of atoms is thought to be not the universal (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*) but the particular, i.e., the object of perception. This is a valid argument, so long as we take into account that Dharmakīrti received the *pramāṇaviplava* theory from Dignāga. According to the *Sautrāntika* doctrine, however, the causality of cognition requires a time gap between cause (object) and effect (cognition), as Dreyfus acutely pointed out.¹⁷⁾ The problem increases when this time gap associates itself with the statement that any object, which has already disappeared at the last moment, cannot be directly perceptible.¹⁸⁾ In that sense, Prajñākaragupta's interpretation is suggestive of the way in which the perceptibility of external objects can avoid conflicting with their imperceptibility postulated in the proof of the existence of external objects.

4. In concluding, I should note that the following two epistemological aspects are to be differentiated in Dharmakīrti's externalism: (1) external objects are directly perceptible; (2) the existence of external objects is cognizable only by means of inference. While (1) is associated mainly with Dharmakīrti's theory of sensory (or mental) perception, (2) is rather subordinate to the context of self-awareness (*svasaṃvedana*). These two aspects are not contradictory to each other, if (1) is to be

seen as *upacāra* from the *Sautrāntika* viewpoint, as Prajñākaragupta suggested. However, it remains to be proved whether we may introduce the two distinct levels of truth into these aspects of Dharmakīrti's externalism or not.

(This research is supported in part by a Grant-in-Aid for Young Scientists (B) from JSPS)

*I am obliged to Prof. Shōryū Katsura for his valuable comments and suggestions.

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〈Notes〉

1) Cf. KANAKURA 1955; TOSAKI 1985: 73, fn. 71; as well as PrP 177,4-11; TORELLA 2002: 112-113, fn. 9. The prototype of this proof can be traced to the argument of Vś k. 2, which is attributed to the *Sautrāntika* (cf. MIMAKI 1972: 84ff.; 1988: 245ff.; YŪKI 1986: 354ff.). Prof. Mimaki suggests the possibility that this theory of inference had already been presupposed in the *Abhidharmakośa* (-bhāṣya), since *bāhyārthavāda* and *sākārajñānavāda*, both of which should encompass the theory of inference, are to be found there (cf. MIMAKI 1972: 79ff.; 1988: 246). In any case, it would also be necessary to consider when such a primordial theory was actually formulated into a logical proof. In this regard, it is also to be noted that Vasubandhu, as *Yogācārin*, insists on the imperceptibility of external objects in Vś 8,29ff. On the other hand, this imperceptibility is related to the *Dārṣāntika* in AD 47,13ff. (cf. also AD 32,9-10 and fn. 2.)

2) Cf. PV III 1ab'; PV in I 32,1f.; NB I 8-9; 12 etc., as well as OKI 1982: 104ff. In contrast, the imperceptibility of external objects is suggested in PV III 348b etc. This 'epistemological' inconsistency is concisely expressed in SDS 43, 9-11 (cf. MIMAKI 1972: 77, fn. 83). As concerns this inconsistency, it has recently been pointed out that direct realism is one of the basic traits of Dharmakīrti's theory of perception, which has been understood mostly as phenomenalism or representationalism. Cf. TANIZAWA 2002: 20ff. He concludes that the following two phases are to be distinguished in Dharmakīrti's theory of perception: (1) we directly perceive external objects (= a kind of direct realism), (2) we perceive the cognition itself (= *svasaṃvedana*, which might correspond to 'sense-datum' in Western

philosophy) brought about by (1).

3) Cf. DREYFUS 1997: 416ff. Some modifications have recently been made to Dreyfus' classification of Dharmakīrti's ontology in DUNNE 2004: 69ff., where Prof. Dunne discriminates between the following four stages: (1) the belief of ordinary persons, (2) the *abhidharma* typology, (3) external realism (Dunne suggests that this stage might be called *Sautrāntika*), (4) epistemic idealism. The direct perceptibility of external objects might be allocated to (1) / (2), and the proof of their existence to (3) in Dunne's classification. As Dunne himself suggests (cf. *ibid.* : 59, fn. 13), however, it is doubtful whether one may confine the term 'external realism' only to the *Sautrāntika* ontology. In this paper I tentatively use the term 'externalism' or 'external realism' in a broad sense, i.e., as subsuming all of (1)-(3) in Dunne's classification.

5) These verses are translated into German in VETTER 1964: 74; IWATA 1991 (Teil I): 5. For Japanese translation, cf. TOSAKI 1985: 73ff.

6) This proof is named *hetubhedānumā* in PV III 390d. Devendrabuddhi interprets the compound *hetubhedā* as 'another cause' (*rgyu gzan*, PVP P277a6 = D234b6), while Ravigupta and Manorathanandin read it as 'a specific cause' (*kāraṇaviśeṣa* / *rgyu'i khyad par*, see 'eine besondere Ursache' in VETTER 1964 and IWATA 1991). Cf. PVṬ(R) P167b4 = D140a6; PVV 236.4. The term *vyāptireka*, which is common to PVin I 59d, is used for indicating this proof in PVP P277a5 = D234b6; PVV 236.5. It is fairly surprising that Prajñākaragupta defines this proof not only as *vyāptirekimātra* but also as *sāmānyato drṣṭa* in PVA 411.9. We may note, in passing, that the archetype of another proof, whose reason is the recollection (*smṛti*) of external objects, is suggested in Vś 9.1-2. Cf. also MIMAKI 1972: 79, fn. 83.

7) PVP P277a6-7 = D234b6-7. Śākyabuddhi seems to pay no particular attention to this point.

8) PVV 236.5-6.

9) PVV 265.25ff.; 236.5.

10) PST P36a1-3 = D31b6-32a1.

11) For this conformity, cf. IWATA 1991 (Teil I): 4. Nonetheless, Dharmakīrti's wording such as PV III 341a and PV III 345'b suggests that he was never indifferent to the epistemological consistency between both doctrines.

12) PVinṬ(D) P194a4 = D166a6-7.

13) The term *vyāptireka* / *ldog pa*, which means 'negative concomitance' in the context of logic, is paraphrased as *kāryavyāptireka* / '*bras bu ldog pa*, i.e., the exclusion of effect (= cognition) in PVP P277a5 = D234b6; PVinṬ(J) P239b4 = D201b7; PVinṬ(D) P194a8 = D166a7. Some parallel passages are found in NM II 492.7 (cf. PVin I 100, fn. 1); TBh 64.3-4; KYŪMA 2005a: 8.6-7 (and fn. 54 in German translation).

14) PVA 411.12-13. The perceptibility of external objects is also rejected in PVA 390.24f. (ad PV III 336); 411.5-6.

15) PVṬ(R) Pl67b4-5 = D140b1-2. Ravigupta also relates *don rig pa* (*arthavedana*) to *tha sñad* (*vyavahāra*) in PVṬ(R) Pl55a3 = D128b7-129a1 (cf. TOSAKI 1985: 36, fn. 132; PVA 395,3-4).

16) This minimum causal efficacy (*arthakriyāśakti*), called *viśeṣa* or *atiśaya* in PV III 195-196 and 223-224, guarantees not only the immediacy of sensory perception but also the non-conceptual perceptibility of external objects. For the close connection between the *Sautrāntika* doctrine and Dharmakīrti's idea of *viśeṣa* / *atiśaya*, cf. MIMAKI 1972: 90ff.; TOSAKI 1979: 37ff. In PV III 224 and 247, this ability is identified with one of the two conditions for *ālambanatva* defined in Dignāga's *Ālambanaparīkṣā*, k. 6.

17) Cf. DREYFUS 1997: 416ff. In spite of this time gap, Dharmakīrti regards the sensory cognition, which arises one moment later than sensory organ and object, as the non-conceptual perception, for which no intermediary factor should be required. This might be an important clue to the tension between direct realism and representationalism in Dharmakīrti's philosophy. Cf. also PV III 54cd; OKI 1982: 103ff.; YOSHIMIZU 2003: 365ff.

18) For this statement, cf. AD 47,13ff.; Vś 8,31-9,1.

〈Key Word〉 *anumāna*, *bāhyārtha*, Dharmakīrti, *pratyakṣa*, *Sautrāntika*, *Yogācāra*
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