Bhāviveka’s Theory of Perception

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I
Bhāviveka’s magnum opus, Madhyamakahrdayakārikā (MHK), is an important text for learning how the author explains the Mādhyamika’s standpoint in defiance of the then influential Yogācāra’s theory of, in particular, the three natures (trisvabhāva). In addition, unlike his two related works, Prajñāpradīpa and Dā-chéng-zhāng-zhēn-lūn 『大乘掌珍論』, Bhāviveka therein clearly offers his critique of the Yogācāra’s theory of both perception and meaning in the context of his refutation of parikalpita-svabhāva, or the “imagined nature”. Having already discussed his theory of meaning in which the referent of a word is explained as an entity possessing the universal (sāmānyavat vastu)2, I will here confine myself to dealing with the former topic, i.e. Bhāviveka’s theory of perception.

As is the case with his discussion of meaning, Bhāviveka’s theory of perception is worth examining from at least the following three points of view: (1) the significant features of his theory of perception within his framework of the two truths (satyadvaya), (2) the comparative analysis of these features with his later appellation, “mDo sde [spyod pa ’i] dByu ma pa (*Sautrāntika-Mādhyamika)”, and (3) the relationship of his theory of perception with theories found in other related texts belonging to the Sarvāstivāda and Sautrāntika/Yogācāra schools. The present paper examines the topic in question from mainly the first standpoint; however, when the occasion demands, it also approaches the same question from the second and third points of view.

II
While refuting the Yogācara tenets of “mind-only” (kk.17-54) and “imagined nature”
Bhāviveka’s Theory of Perception (A. Saito) (101)

(kk.55-68) in the MHK, Bhāviveka reveals his own understanding of the object of perception. It is true that the objective support (ālambana) of cognition is, according to Bhāviveka, an aggregation of atoms. However, it should also be noted in his discussion that the aggregation of atoms is not strictly the “object” of cognition but is rather the “cause” of cognition in which the aggregation appears as a certain “form-and-color” etc. Therefore, the MHK V. kk.34-36 runs as follows:

k.34: tatrasamcitārūpasya cittāgocarata yadi/
pratādhyate pareṇāpi siddha eva1 pratādhyate//
[l = E; siddhir eva L1, 2, H; siddhim eva Ms, SG]
“To this [argument given in kk.31-33 by the opponent, Dignāga or his followers, we reply]: If the opponent also proves that non-aggregated matter is not the actual object [i.e. objective support] of mind3), he proves what was already proven.”

k.35: atha samcitārūpasya hetor evam asiddhatā/
rūpāntarair upakṛtais tannirbāsodayād dhiyāh//
“Or if [the opponent intends to prove] likewise [that] aggregated matter [is not the objective support of a perceiving mind]4), the reason is not [correctly] established, because a cognition in which the [aggregated matter] appears is produced with the assistance of different atoms [of the same kind].”

k.36: tasyālambanatā cesta tadābhāmatihetutah/
rāgavatā bādhyate tasmāt pratijñā te 'numānatah//
“The [aggregation of atoms] is accepted as the objective support [of sense perception], because it causes the [occurrence of] cognition in which it appears, as is the case with desire. Therefore, your thesis is refuted by [this] inference.”

As is well-known, it is this theory of perception that made Bhāviveka later known as the forerunner of the so-called *Sautrāntika-Mādhyamika5), though a similar understanding of perception had already been given by the Sarvāstivāda school6). However, noteworthy is the subtle but significant difference to be found between Bhāviveka’s above explanation and that of the Sarvāstivāda. Unlike the latter’s traditional understanding, it is clear that Bhāviveka accepts the aggregation of atoms as the objective support of perception only in the sense that it causes the occurrence of the cognition in which it appears (tadābhāmatiheti).

Thus, we may strictly say that, according to Bhāviveka, the “object” of perception is in fact the appearance or representation of the objective support but not the ag-
aggregation itself since the latter is nothing more than the "cause" of the cognition which bears the appearance of the aggregation. The aggregation of atoms is called by Bhāviveka the objective support (ālambana), actual object (gocara), or cause (hetu) of cognition in which the very aggregation appears. This is what Bhāviveka means when he uses the traditional term ālambana.

III

In the above explanation of Bhāviveka's, it can be noticed that he adopted the two conditions related to the definition of the cognition's objective support (ālambana): that is, something is the cognition's objective support when (1) that thing produces a cognition, (2) which bears the appearance or representation of that thing. As far as we are able to determine at present, this definition is first clarified by Dignāga (c.470-540) in his Ālambanaparikṣā⁷, which was later followed by Dharmakīrti (c.600-660) in his Pramāṇavārttika III.224.⁸ It seems certain that the above so-called Sautrāntika-like definition of the cognition's support was actively adopted by Bhāviveka (c.490-570), and further, by Dharmakīrti⁹. Dharmakīrti consequently seems to have followed the above scheme of perception, using the apparently new term atiśaya "a pre-eminent quality" [of aggregated atoms]¹⁰. It is worthy of note that what Dharmakīrti followed is not exactly the above-mentioned Sarvāstivāda's traditional explanation of the object of perception but rather a Bhāviveka-like causal understanding of cognition and its objective support. According to Dharmakīrti, the cognition (buddhi) having the image (ākāra) of 'what is apprehended' (grāhyā) is caused by the very 'what is apprehended', which consists of many atoms provided with a pre-eminent quality (atiśaya).

Thus, the relation between a cognition and the cognition's objective support as explained by the Sarvāstivāda, Bhāviveka, and Dharmakīrti can probably be illustrated diagrammatically in the following manner:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective support</th>
<th>—</th>
<th>Cognition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sarvāstivāda:</td>
<td>sindhitālambana (visaya, AK 1.43-44)</td>
<td>— panca vijnānāni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhāviveka:</td>
<td>sindhitālambana (hetu, gocara)</td>
<td>— tadābhamati, arūpāma- vyvacchinnavastvābhamati</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
IV

Let us now turn back to Bhāviveka's discussion of perception. As mentioned above, Bhāviveka's refutation of "the imagined nature" is given in stanzas 55 to 68, in which the first half (kk.55-59) relates to his understanding of perception and the latter half (kk.60-68) deals with his discussion of meaning, both being on the conventional level. The stanza 59 provides his conclusive statement of the former discussion as follows:

*arūptmavyavacchinnavastvābhamatigocarah*¹/
*rūpasyātmā tadastitvād ayuktā rūpasūnyatā*// (k.59)

[¹ = L1, 2, H; -gocaram Ms, SG, E]

"The nature of form-and-color is the actual object of the cognition possessing the appearance of the entity excluded from [those having] the nature of non-form and non-color. Since that [nature of form-and-color] exists, it is untenable that form-and-color is empty of [its nature]."

The author of the *Tarkajvalā (TJ)* glosses the above stanza as follows:

In this [verse], 'non-form and non-color' (arūpa) means [those things] different from form-and-color, i.e. sounds, smells, tastes and the touchable. '[Having] the nature of non-form and non-color' (arūptman) means [having] the nature of those which are non-form and non-color, i.e. the objects of the auditory organ which have already or have not yet been apprehended, and others. 'Excluded from' (vyavacchāna) means 'excluded from those which are non-form and non-color', i.e. those having different characteristics. 'The entity' (vastu) means the objects of the visual organ, i.e. [those having] the nature of color-and-form. 'Possessing the appearance of that [entity]' means possessing the appearance of the image (*ākāra*) of that [entity]."

(de la gzugs ma yin zhes bya ba ni gzugs las gzhan pa ste/ sgra dang dri dang ro dang reg pa dag go// gzugs ma yin pa'i bdag nyid ces bya ba ni gzugs ma yin pa de dag gi bdag nyid de/ rna ba la sogs pa'i yul zin pa dang zin pa ma yin pa dag la sogs pa dag go// rnam par bcad pa'i zhes bya ba ni gzugs ma yin pa'i bdag nyid de dag las rnam par bcad pa

—1215—
The above explanation speaks clearly of Bhāviveka’s characteristic understanding of perception already examined in the preceding sections. In this stanza, Bhāviveka refers to form-and-color as the actual object (gocara) of cognition, which possesses the appearance of the entity, form-and-color, excluded from those having the nature of non-form and non-color. The negative expressions such as “arūpātmavacchinnavastv-” and anyabhinnarūpasya vastuno (k.68) etc. are commonly used in his theory of both perception and meaning. Here also may be found the influence of Dignāga’s apoha theory on Bhāviveka, though, as was discussed in my earlier paper, Bhāviveka is critical of the apoha theory of meaning. The word vastu is herein used in the sense of a certain dharma, e.g. rūpa excluded from śabda, gandha, rasa, and spraśtavya. Further, taking the above-cited stanza 36 into consideration, it can be noted that the actual object of cognition (matigocara) in this verse has the same meaning as the cause of cognition (matihetu) in which the object appears as a certain ‘form and color’.

From the above discussion, we may safely draw the following conclusions. First, concerning his theory of perception, Bhāviveka takes the aggregation of atoms as the cause of cognition in which it appears. It is in this sense that Bhāviveka regards the aggregated atoms as the objective support (ālambana) or the actual object (gocara) of perception. Secondly, this theory of perception of Bhāviveka’s more or less agrees with that of the so-called “mDo sde [spyod pa’i] dBu ma pa (*Sautrantika-Mādhyamika)” as depicted in the Tibetan doxographical tradition. Thirdly, it is interesting to note that this scheme of epistemology seems to have been followed by Dharmakīrti with the new term atiśaya, “a pre-eminent quality” of the aggregated atoms.

〈Abbreviations and References〉
AK: Abhidharmakośakārikā, see AK Bh.
Bhāviveka’s Theory of Perception (A. Saito) (105)


MHK: Madhyamakahrdayakārikā.


TJ: Tarkajvalā; D No.3856, P No.5256; see Hoornaert, P. [2001].


(Notes)

1) For the relationship of these three works of Bhāviveka, see A. Saito, “Chūganshinron no Shomei wo meguru Shomondai (Remarks on the Title and Textual Formation of the Madhyamakahrdayakārikā)”, Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies 53-2, 2005, pp.832-838.

2) For Bhāviveka’s theory of meaning, see A. Saito, “Bhāviveka’s Theory of Meaning”, Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies 52-1, 2004, pp.924-931.

3) Cf. k.32 and AP, k.1:

k.32: tatrāṇurūpam1 ekam tu rūpabuddher na gocarah/
atadābhatayā yadvad aksarūpam na gocarah/

[1 = Ms, SG, L1,2, H; tatrāṇu rūpam E]

“Of these [two possibilities], however, a single physical atom is not the actual object
Bhāviveka’s Theory of Perception (A. Saito)

of cognition of “form and color” because it does not appear as that [single atom], just as a physical sense-organ is not the actual object [of a sense cognition].”

AP, k.1: dbang po rnam par rig pa’i rgyu// phra rab rdul dag yin mod kyi//

der mi snang phyir de’i yul ni// rdul phran ma yin dbang po bzhin// (p.120)

(= *yady apindriyavijnapter anavah kāraṇam1 bhavet/
atadābhatayā tasyā nākṣavad viśayo ‘navah2//

[1 grāhyāṁśah kāraṇam AP, k.1 quoted in TSP II, p.582; 2 viśayaḥ sa tu, loc. cit.]

“Even if atoms are the cause of the cognition through the senses, since [the cognition] does not bear the appearance of those [atoms], the atoms are not the object of that [cognition], in the same way as the sense-organs are not the cognition’s object.”

4) Cf. k.33 and AP, k.2ab:
k.33: anekam api cittasya naiva tad gocaram matam/

rupam hi paramāṇunām adravyatvād dvicandravat∥

“It is not at all approved that [an aggregation of] many physical atoms is the actual object of [perceiving] mind, because [such an aggregation] is not a [real] entity, just like a double moon.”

AP, k.2ab: gang ltar snang de de las min// rdzas su med phyir zla gnyis bzhin// (p.120)

(= *yad yadabham na tat tasmād adravyatvād dvicandravat∥. The underlined text is most probably the same as the above MHK, k.33d)

“That [cognition] does not derive from that whose appearance it bears, because [such an aggregation] is not a [real] entity, just like a double moon.”


6) AKBh I, Pradhan ed.,p.34,1-2, Ejima ed., p.53,19-20: na caika indriyaparamānur viśayaparamāṇur vā vijnānam janayati samecitāśrayālambanatvāt pāncānām vijnānakāya- nām/ ata evānīdarśanah paramāṇur adṛṣṭavat∥; 『婆沙論』大正藏vol.27, 63b12: 以五識身皆依積聚。緣積聚故。『阿毘達磨俱舍論』大正 vol.29, 12a26-28: 以無根境各一極微為所依緣能發身識。五識決定積集多微。方成所依所緣性故。即由此理亦說極微名無見體不可見故。『阿毘達磨俱舍句柄論』同，172a5-7: 無唯一際無根一際無盡能生識。五識以微積為根塵故。是故薀虛無顯。不可見故。

7) AP vṛtti ad AP k. 2a (see above n.4): don gang zhig rang snang ba’i rnam par rig pa bskyed pa de ni dmigs pa yin par rigs te/ (p.120) “It is right [to say] that any thing, which produces the cognition having its appearance (i.e. the appearance of that thing), is the objective support (ālambana).” See M. Hattori, Dignāga, on Perception, HOS 47, 1968, p.118 (n.2.17); K. Mimaki, La réfutation bouddhique de la permanence des choses
Bhāviveka’s Theory of Perception (A. Saito) (107)

(sthīrasiddhidūsana) et la preuve de la momentanéité des choses (kṣaṇabhaṅgasiddhi), PICI 41, 1976, pp.37-38, 244-245 (n.143).


9) PV III.222-224:

ko vā virodho bahavah samjātātiśayāḥ sakṛd/
bhaveyuh kāraṇam buddhery yadi nāmendriyādīvat∥
hetubhāvād re nānyā grāhyataḥ nāma kācana/
tatra buddhir yadākārā tasyās ād ād grāhyam ucyate∥ (H. Tozaki, op.cit., pp.319-320).

“Or what contradiction is there if many [atoms] provided with a pre-eminent quality (atiśaya) become simultaneously the cause of cognition, as is the case with sense-organs etc.?”

“Without being the state of cause, there is no other state of ‘what is apprehended’. Of the [causes], when cognition has an image of X, X is called what is apprehended by that [cognition].”


12) A. Saito, “Bhāviveka’s Theory of Meaning” (see above n.2), pp.926-927.

13) See, e.g., lCang skya Rol pa’i rdo rje’s Grub pa’i mtha’i rnam par bzhag pa, Todai Nos.86-88 = Śata-piṭaka Series vol.233, New Delhi, 1977, Peking ed., Kha 46al-3: mdo sde spyod pa zhes bya ba’i rgyu mtshan ni/ dbang po’i shes pa rnam kyi dmigs rkyen ni rdul phra rab bsags pa’i phyi rol gyi don du bzhed pas tha snyad du mdo sde pa dang mthun pa’i dmigs rkyen bzhed pas na de lifur btags so//. “Regarding the reason why they are called ‘Sautrāntika-’, because they assert that supportive conditions (*ālambana- pratyaya) of sense perceptions are external objects, i.e. aggregated atoms, their assertion of supportive conditions accords with the Sautrāntikas conventionally. Therefore, they are designated in that way.” In addition to this, lCang skya Rol pa’i rdo rje (1717-1786) also explains that unlike both mDo sde pa (*Sautrāntika) and Sems tsam pa (*Cittamātraka), mDo sde spyod pa’i dBu ma pa (*Sautrāntika-Mādhyamika) does not accept self-cognition (rang rig, = svasamvedana/-vit, -vitti) in the sphere of perception (Kha 79a4-b3). See n.5 and Y. Kajiyama, “Chūgan-shisō no Rekishi to Bunken (History and Literature of the Mādhyamika Philosophy)”, Köza Daijō-Bukkyō 7, Chūgan-shisō, pp.1-
83 (esp. 30-51). (*Although the Tibetan doxographical tradition provides no explanation of the word spyod pa of mDo sde spyod pa, it may possibly have been borrowed, rather mechanically, from its companion rNal 'byor spyod pa (Yogācāra-).)

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(Key Words) Bhāviveka, Madhyamakārdayakārikā, Tarkajvalā, perception

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