

Abhidharma Debate on the Nature of the Objects of Sensory Perception

KL DHAMMAJOTI

0. In the **Nyāyānusāra* (= Ny), Saṃghabhadra cites the view of Śrīlāta, the leading Dārṣṭāntika-Sautrāntika master at the time, on the nature of the cognitive object of a sensory consciousness, and refutes it at length. I have discussed this controversy elsewhere.¹ I would, however, like here to make some supplementary remarks and offer a fuller translation of the important passages involved. I shall also attempt to show how Saṃghabhadra's explanations and criticisms came to be taken as authoritative and representative of mainstream Sarvāstivāda doctrines by subsequent critics of the Sarvāstivāda doctrines.

The controversy assumes the form of centering on the reality, or otherwise, of the cognitive object of a sensory perception. But, when looking closer, other major concerns become evident, including that on the possibility, or otherwise, of direct perception (*pratyakṣa*).

The Dārṣṭāntika-Sautrāntikas, led by Śrīlāta, deny the validity of simultaneous causality (*sahabhū-hetu*). Accordingly, they view sensory perception as necessarily an indirect one. What is cognized by a sensory consciousness is only a resemblance or image of the object in the preceding moment.

On the other hand, Saṃghabhadra, representing the Vaibhāṣika standpoint, is bent on establishing that a sensory perception necessarily cognizes a present real existent and is thus a direct perception in the true sense. For the Vaibhāṣikas, knowledge of the external world would be impossible if it were otherwise — for, even the validity of inferential knowledge must necessarily be based on “direct” perception, and the latter is possible thanks to the operation of simultaneous causality.

The Yogācāra rejects the theories of both the Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣikas and the Dārṣṭāntika-Sautrāntikas, arguing that in actual fact, “without an external object (*artha*), consciousness itself arises having the form/

image of the external object”.² My concern here, however, is the Abhidharma controversy; parallel descriptions from the Yogācāra are only discussed below insofar as they relate to this controversy.

1. Śrīlāta's main argument: Sensory perception takes a conceptualized collection as cognitive object
2. Saṃghabhadra's refutation: Sensory consciousnesses necessarily cognize absolute reals
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1. Śrīlāta's main argument: Sensory perception takes a conceptualized collection as cognitive object

Śrīlāta (= the Sthavira) asserts that, in fact, both the support-basis (*āśraya*) and the cognitive object (*ālambana*) of a sensory perception are non-existent. For him, only the momentary *dharma*-s qua causal efficacies—i.e., the elements (*dhātu*)—are existent.

[1.1.] Herein, the Sthavira claims thus: Both the support-basis as well as the cognitive object for the five sensory consciousnesses do not exist as real entities. For each individual atom by itself cannot serve as a support-basis or a cognitive object. They can do so only in the form of a collected whole (和合; *he-he*; **samcita*).³ To establish this claim, he falsely cites the Noble One's words:

The Buddha told his noble disciples: “You should now train yourselves thus: All the past, future and present *rūpa*-s cognised by the eyes are completely devoid of permanence, devoid of stability ... devoid of non-topsy-turvi-ness, viz. [devoid of] the supramundane Noble Truth. They are all false and deceptive in nature.

He asserts that if sensory consciousnesses take existent object-fields, the noble knowledge [of the Buddha] ought not to regard their cognitive objects as being all false and deceptive in nature. Based on the

consideration of their cognitive objects, it follows, without any need for explanation, that their supporting bases too are non-existent.

[1.2.] He and his disciples further employ the simile of the blind in support of their tenet. It is said that (*kila* — showing Saṃghabhadra's disagreement) that each blind person by himself is devoid of the function of seeing visible forms, and an assemblage (和集 *he-ji*) of these blind persons is equally devoid of the function of seeing. In just the same way, each individual atom by itself is devoid of the function of being a support-basis or a cognitive object, and an assemblage/collection of many atoms is equally devoid of such functions. Hence, the *āyatana*-s are unreal; the *dhātu*-s alone are real existents.⁴

2. Saṃghabhadra's refutation: Sensory consciousnesses necessarily cognize absolute reals

Saṃghabhadra refutes the above arguments of Śrīlāta at length (Ny, 350b29–352a25). He starts by accusing Śrīlāta's tenet as being adversary to the Dharma.

[2.1.] (Saṃghabhadra): A sensory consciousness does not take a non-existent object-field as cognitive object, for it is an assemblage/collection (和集) of atoms that serves as its cognitive object (*ālambana*).

[2.2.] (Saṃghabhadra): Moreover, since the group of sensory consciousnesses are non-conceptualizing (*avikalpaka*), they do not take a [conceptually] collected whole (和合) as cognitive object. It is not the case that the term “collected whole” refers to any *dharma* that can be derived from what is seen ... what is touched, outside the fact of conceptualization (*vikalpa*). Since this collected whole does not exist as a distinct *dharma* (*dharmāntara*) but is no more than what is grasped through judgmental conceptualization (*abhinirūpanā-vikalpa*), the sensory consciousnesses do not take a collected whole as cognitive object, being without the capability of judgmental conceptualization.

The very atoms themselves, assembled in a particular manner

(和集安布), serve always as the support-basis and cognitive object of a sensory consciousness. This is because the atoms are always in an assembled state. Even where some atoms exist unassembled (in a non-collected state), they still are of the same species [as the assembled atoms], and are thus also of the category of being support-bases and

cognitive objects. However, the group of five sensory consciousnesses do not arise having such [non-assembled] atoms, for they take only an assemblage as their cognitive object. This is just like the case where even though there are past and future object-fields, visual forms, etc., the group of five sensory consciousnesses do not arise with them as cognitive objects. And although they are not taken as cognitive objects, they are [nonetheless] included as the object-spheres of the five [consciousnesses].

[2.3.] (**Samghabhadra**): Moreover, visual consciousness does not take a collected whole as cognitive object; for, otherwise, the colour forms, blue, etc., would be non-existent: If visual consciousness were to take a collected whole as cognitive object, there would definitely not be any cognition of blue, yellow, etc. This is because blue, etc., ought not to be collected wholes: If they were collected wholes, they ought not to be existents. It would then follow that colour forms too are conceptual (/unreal) and unreal! While there is no possibility that a visual consciousness does not apprehend blue, etc., there exist some mental consciousnesses capable of conceptualizing/discriminating blue, etc.

[2.4.] (**Samghabhadra**): If it is claimed that blue, etc., are like collected wholes — it is unreasonable. This is because, from the perspective of the absolute reals (*paramārthatas*), a collected whole is not acknowledged to be of the nature of *rūpa*.

[2.4.1] **According to some masters**: This is because a collected whole is also not an object of mental consciousness.

[2.4.1.1] (**Samghabhadra**): Or rather: the group of five sensory consciousnesses take only absolute reals as cognitive objects; the conventionally [reals] serve as the cognitive objects of mental consciousness alone. Accordingly, there is no fallacy of blue, etc., being similar to a collected whole.

[Question:] As in the case where one apprehends a future object, one does not see a *rūpa* that has ceased — at what stage does one take a collected whole as object?

[(**Samghabhadra**)'s Answer:] At the stage when its support-basis has already ceased.

[Question:] Isn't it that there is no collected whole at this stage?

[(**Samghabhadra**)'s Answer:] There also is no [collected whole] at other stages — why find fault with this stage alone?

This is like the case that some blue, etc., originally without being collected wholes, are grasped [as collected wholes] only through mental conceptualization. Just as, with regard to a present assemblage (和集) of visual forms, etc., one collectively conceptualizes them as a whole, and this is called a cognition of a collected whole.

Likewise, it ought to be the case that, by virtue of the cognitive understanding (*buddhi*, *prajñā*), one collectively conceptualizes as a whole with regard to non-assembled *rūpa*-s, etc., existing at the stage of having been ceased, and this is called a cognition of a collected whole.

It is also like the case that, although a cognitive understanding gathers together *rūpa*-s that are future, past, present, etc., grouping them as a single heap, and this is called a cognition of *rūpa-skandha*; yet the *rūpa*-s that are past, future, etc., are dissimilar and cannot be grouped together as a single collected heap. Now even though each separate [type of *skandha*] generates a *skandha-buddhi*, the *rūpa*-s that are past, future, etc., are nonetheless dissimilar, and ought not to collectively generate a single *rūpa-skandha-buddhi*. Yet such a collective *rūpa-skandha-buddhi* does exist. Hence we know that, *rūpa*-s, etc., that have ceased—though being dispersed and not capable of being assembled (和集)—are grouped together as a heap by virtue of a cognitive understanding to form the cognition of a collected whole. It does not contradict reason that the cognition of a unified object (一合境; **piṇḍīkṛta-ālamabana*, *piṇḍa-ālamabana*) is called a cognition of a collected whole.

It is just like the case where, with regard to a blue visual form object-field, one takes it to be of a blue nature, the cognition being distinctive, and furthermore tells others: “I see such and such a [form] of a blue nature.”

Likewise, with regard to *rūpa*-s that have ceased, etc., one generates the cognition—appearing distinctively in front—of a collected whole, and furthermore tells others: “I see such and such a collected whole.”

[2.4.1.2.] (**Samghabhadra continues**): If one maintains that mental consciousness too, cannot take a collected whole as cognitive object, then one would have to acknowledge that a cognition of a collected whole does not have a cognitive object.

If it is argued that [this cognition] takes its support-basis as cognitive object, then one ought to call it a cognition that takes *rūpa* as cognitive object. *Rūpa*, etc., being individually not a collected whole, how can one call it a cognition of a collected whole?

If one asserts that this is a designation (施設; *prajñapti*), it is also unreasonable, since there cannot be a designation without an object — it cannot be that an absolute non-existent can be designated as an existent.

Hence, there are mental consciousnesses that are capable of taking a collected whole as cognitive object. The group of five sensory consciousnesses cannot do so, as they take only existent cognitive objects.

2.5. (Saṃghabhadra:) If one maintains that, since atoms are not visible, visual consciousness does not take an existent as object — this view is untrue. For, they are [in fact] visible; that they are not cognized (了; *vijñāta*) is due to the fact that the visual faculty apprehends only a gross object-field.

Moreover, it is because the visual consciousness is non-conceptualizing; only those endowed with the power of a superior wisdom (*viśiṣṭa-prajñā-bala*) are capable of discerning the subtle characteristics of the atoms. [The difference here] is like that between observing an embroidered picture from afar and nearby.

It is also as we have stated before. What has been stated before? We have stated that atoms are never non-assembled, and since they are always assembled, they are not invisible.

2.6. According to some: The nature and characteristic of atoms are such that they necessarily serve as cognitive objects for visual consciousness; but visual consciousness does not necessarily manifest on them. That they cannot be seen individually qua specific characteristic is because they do not come together, not because they are non-characteristics (*alakṣaṇa*).⁵ This is because, there are some *dharma*-s, which, though visible, cannot arise due to certain reasons. It is just like the case that we cannot see the *rūpa*, salt, in water, or the *rūpa* blocked by a wall, etc.

2.7. (Saṃghabhadra:) Moreover, the words of the Noble One have been cited [by you] (Śrīlāta) without their meaning being well comprehended.

If you maintain that the *sūtra* does have such a meaning [as comprehended by you], then the cognitive objects of mental consciousness would also be non-existent; for they are likewise spoken of as being false and deceptive in nature. That being so, there would not be any cognitive

understanding that takes an existent as cognitive object. This is then clearly a tenet adversary to the *Dharma*.

If you maintain that there is no such fault, since mental consciousness can also be outflow-free — this reasoning is invalid, since an outflow-free mental consciousness as well, takes *dharma*-s collectively (including those that are with-outflow and those that are outflow-free) as cognitive objects. Since your tenet concedes also that the five sensory consciousnesses, visual, etc., can also be outflow-free, you ought not to falsely maintain that the cognitive objects of the five sensory consciousnesses are exclusively conceptual/unreal and not existent. There are some mundane (*laukika*) knowledges which take the *dhātu*-s as objects; these *dhātu*-s taken by them as cognitive objects also ought not to be existent, [even though according to you, the *dhātu*-s are all existent]. Yet, that the *sūtra* states that, the cognitive objects of the six consciousnesses, without any difference, are all false, etc. Hence, your claim that the with-outflow cognitive objects are exclusively conceptual/unreal is nothing but an adherence to the tenet you happen to fancy.

2.8. (Śrīlāta:) If so, what then can the meaning of the *sūtra* be?

(Saṃghabhadra:) [The meaning is this:] The ignorant worldlings have for a long time been falsely attached to object-fields, *rūpa*, etc., as possessing the true nature of permanence, etc. Accordingly, the Tathāgata instructs the noble disciples to observe them truly as they are, and be free from those false attachments, stating that what are cognized by the six consciousnesses are all devoid of the permanence, etc. as falsely attached to by them, and are all false and deceptive in nature. This shows the deceptiveness of the objects as grasped through false attachment; it does not show that all cognitive objects are non-existent. It is for this reason that the *sūtra* states further thus: “Those who can thus observe truly, completely abandon their false resolve, topsy-turviness with respect to ideation, thought and view (*saṃjñā-citta-dṛṣṭi-viparyāsa*), greed, bodily ties (*kāya-gratha*), etc. ..., with regard to the *rūpa*-s cognized by the past, future and present eyes.” Thus, in this context, the permanence, etc.—as attached to by the ignorant worldlings through false views—are observed by the Buddha’s noble disciples as being false and deceptive in nature. It is not that the object-fields themselves are observed to be deceptive, etc. This is the meaning of the *sūtra*, which does not contradict reasoning.

Furthermore, such an interpretation necessarily accords with reason. For, the *sūtra* says, “with regard to the *rūpa*-s cognized by the past, future and present eyes”; and it is not the case that there is any visual consciousness capable of cognizing the past or the future.

Furthermore, there can be no collected whole of the past and the future.

Furthermore, your tenets do not concede that the past and the future exist.

Thus, you should not cite this noble teaching (*sūtra*) to prove that the five sensory consciousnesses take a collected whole as their cognitive objects. This *sūtra* contradicts your tenets, as it speaks of the permanence, etc., [in the *rūpa*-s cognized by the past, future and present eyes] as being deceptive, etc.

2.9. (Saṃghabhadra:) Moreover, what is stated in that *sūtra* is not with reference to the object-fields of the five sensory consciousnesses, visual, etc., for, it is by observing those object-fields that one comes to be freed from the permanence that one is attached to.

Furthermore, because [the *Sūtra*] speaks of those object-fields as being differentiated in respect of the three periods of time.

Furthermore, because it states that by observing them, one comes to completely abandon the topsy-turvi-ness with respect to ideation, thought and views, greed, bodily ties, etc.

Furthermore, if one takes the words as they are literally, one will generate a restrictive view (定執; *avadhāraṇa*): For those who do not seek out the intended implication, sensation, etc., also ought not to be absolute existents (*paramārtha-sat*), since it speaks of the six object-fields as being deceptive, etc.

2.10. (Saṃghabhadra:) Moreover, everywhere, it is mentioned only generically that “conditioned by the eye and visual forms, visual consciousness arises (*cakṣuḥ pratītya rūpāṇi cotpadīyate cakṣurvijñānam*); how do we know that it is with the collected whole of *dhātu*-s (界和合) as support-basis and cognitive object that visual consciousness arises, and not with the assemblage of *dhātu*-s (界和集) as support-basis and cognitive object?

2.11. (Śrīlāta:) How then do we know that it is only with the assemblage [of *dhātu*-s]?

(Saṃghabhadra:) The reason is as stated above. There are also the words of the Noble One showing that visual consciousness, etc., do not take false cognitive objects. Thus it is stated in the *sūtra*: “With regard to what has not been seen, one says that one has seen, and with regard to what has been seen, one says that one has not seen — this is not the noble mode of speech (*anārya-vyavahāra*). With regard to what has been seen, one says that one has seen, and with regard to what has not been seen, one says that one has not seen — this is the noble mode of speech (*ārya-vyavahāra*).” Now if visual consciousness, etc., were to take false cognitive objects, then saying that one has seen with regard to what has been seen would not be noble mode of speech. [On the other hand,] saying that one has not seen with regard to what has been seen would be noble mode of speech.

If you assert that there is no such fault, as it is a statement from the conventional standpoint, then it follows that the statement that mental consciousness takes an existent cognitive object would also be one from the conventional standpoint. That being so, all is nothing but conventional statement — and this would be abiding in a tenet adversary to the Dharma. Or [if you don’t admit thus,] you would have to explain how it differs [from such an adversary tenet].

Furthermore, to what kind of object-field do these noble words refer? If [you say] they refer to a collected whole (和合), we have already extensively established that visual consciousness does not take a non-existent object. If [you say] they refer to an assemblage (和集), it is indeed an absolute real (*paramārtha*) — what do you mean when you assert that the statement “... seen ...” is from the conventional standpoint?

2.12. (Saṃghabhadra:) Moreover, the visual forms seen being exclusively absolute reals, to say that one has seen with regard to what has been seen can be in conformity with conventional usage, since linguistic expression is not fixed, being dependent on the different localities. [But] the visual forms seen are not [so referred to] in conformity with conventional usage. And when the *sūtra* says: “O great mother (大母?), in the seen there is only the seen (**dṛṣṭe dṛṣṭamātram*) ...”:⁶ it is with reference to the nature of impermanence, etc., superimposed [by the worldlings], that the word “only” is mentioned; not with regard to the object-field seen.

2.13. (Saṃghabhadra:) Moreover, because the *rūpa-āyatana* is described as being visible (*sanidarśana*) and resistant (*sapratigha*), and because

the *āyatana*-s, *śabda*, etc., are described differently [in respect of their intrinsic characteristics], the *āyatana*-s are not conceptual existents (*prajñapti-sat*). Conceptual existents such as the person (*pudgala*), a jug, etc., cannot be distinctively predicated. For, it is only with regard to real existents, *rūpa*, etc., that there can be distinctive predication in respect of intrinsic and common characteristics (*sva-sāmanya-lakṣaṇa*).

2.14. (Saṃghabhadra:) Moreover, in this connection, how do the *spraṣṭavya*- and *dharma-āyatana*-s differ from the [corresponding] *dhātu*-s, so that the *spraṣṭavya*- and *dharma-āyatana*-s are said to be definitely conceptual/unreal and the [corresponding] *dhātu*-s, are real/existent?

You might say that these two differ thus: it is only when a multiplicity of entities are collected into a whole that the name “*āyatana*” is acquired; each individual entity in itself acquires the name “*dhātu*”. But, this can be so only with regard to the *spraṣṭavya-āyatana*-s; how can [you say this] with regard to the *dharma-āyatana*-s [which are non-accumulative]? Although your tenet acknowledges that three *dharma*-s exist,⁷ they are non-accumulative, how then does the *dharma-dhātu* differ [from the *dharma-āyatana*]?

2.15. (Saṃghabhadra:) Moreover, their attempt to establish the difference between the *āyatana*-s and the *dhātu*-s is completely lacking in logical reasoning and other means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*). It is only the Sthavira's arbitrary claim. It should not be accepted by others on-looking objectively.

2.16. (Saṃghabhadra:) Moreover, if indeed the *āyatana*-s are non-existents and the *dhātu*-s [alone] are absolute reals, such a claim by the Sthavira would contradict the *sūtra*-s. For instance, there is a *sūtra* as follows:

[A brahmin asks:] The Venerable Gautama states elsewhere: “I know all”. Referring to what “all” is it said “I know [all]”? Please expound to me the absolutely real *dharma*-s.

Buddha: O brahmin! “all” refers to the twelve *āyatana*-s. These exist as absolute reals; all the rest are deceptive.

Now, the Fortune One would not have spoken of absolute existents referring to unreal *dharma*-s. Furthermore, it is not possible that he attained perfect enlightenment merely by virtue of the direct realization of the conceptual existents. The advocates of sky-flowers (*ākāśa-puṣpa*,

kha-puṣpa) may assert so; those who claim the Buddha as their teacher should not be partisan to such [a claim]. Thus, all the twelve *āyatana*-s are real existents; conceptual *dharma*-s cannot be spoken of as absolute reals.

2.17. (Saṃghabhadra:) In this way, the Sthavira's claims, when carefully scrutinized, turn out to be contradictory for the most part. They may be respectfully accepted by those who have faith but not understanding. Those possessing both understanding and faith would definitely not go along with them.

2.18. (Saṃghabhadra:) Moreover, their simile of the blind contradicts their own tenets: Each individual atom cannot constitute a support-basis or cognitive object; [only] atoms as a collected whole constitute a support-basis or cognitive object — such [a claim] is extremely discordant with the simile of the blind. [On the other hand,] the thesis that an assemblage of atoms constitute a support-basis or a cognitive object does not logically contradict this simile of the blind.

This is because, each individual atom is conceded to serve as support-basis and cognitive object. It is also because, if each individual atom is held to be invisible, then a collected whole of atoms likewise ought to be invisible — just as the simile of [a group of] blind—like the coming together of non-*rūpa*-s.

2.19. (Saṃghabhadra:) Hence, the group of five sensory consciousnesses definitely do not take a collected whole as cognitive object. But they necessarily have a cognitive object. Hence, it is established that they take existent *dharma*-s as cognitive objects.

2.20. (Śrīlāta:)* If the group of five sensory consciousnesses cognize objects which are absolute reals, why is it that these sensory consciousnesses do not abandon defilements?

(Saṃghabhadra:) Because they cognize intrinsic characteristics [and not common characteristics]; because their operation is externally directed (*bahir-mukhatvāt*); because they are not equipoised (*asamāhita*); because they are non-conceptualizing; because they are focused on the object only once (i.e., for a single *kṣana*) [and not repeatedly, as in the case of mental consciousness]; because they have few cognitive objects. [For all these reasons,] they are incapable of abandoning defilements even though they cognize absolute reals.

It is therefore said that among the *dhātu*-s that take cognitive objects—the seven [mental elements] and one part of the *dharma-dhātu* (i.e., those conjoined with thought)⁹—five *dhātu*-s take only absolute reals as cognitive objects; the rest take objects that are absolute reals as well as those that are conventional [existents].¹⁰

2.21. In his *Xian Zong Lun* (顯宗論; **Samaya-pradīpika*), in the same context, Saṃghabhadra additionally explains the role of appellation (/designated name; *adhivacana*) in the conceptualization of a “collected whole”:

We should know that because the five sensory consciousnesses are non-conceptualizing, they take an assemblage (和集) of the existent atoms as cognitive objects, not a collected whole. The word “collected whole” does not refer to any distinct *dharma* that can serve as an object graspable by a non-conceptualizing consciousness. One speaks of a “collected whole” with reference to that operated through speech when a designated name (*adhivacana*) arises with regard to a multiplicity of *dharma*-s. Thus, a collected whole is not the cognitive object of a sensory consciousness.¹¹

2.22. In chapter III, AKB gives the Vaibhāṣika explanation¹² that mental contact (*manāḥ-samparśa*) is called *adhivacana-sparśa* because name (*nāma* = *adhivacana*) is its predominant cognitive object (*adhikam ālambanam*).¹³ In this context, Saṃghabhadra explains that this is

because mental consciousness takes both *nāma* and *artha* as its cognitive objects, while the sensory consciousnesses do not take *nāma* as its cognitive object — hence “*adhika*” According to some: mental consciousness has *nāma* as its *adhivacana* because in producing speech, [*nāma*] serves as the predominant [condition]. Some say that it is only with speech as its predominant [condition] that mental consciousness can operate on an object. This is not the case with the five sensory consciousnesses. Thus, mental consciousness alone is called *adhivacana*¹⁴

3. Sthiramati's comments

In his sub-commentary on AKB, entitled *Abhidharmakośaṭīkā Tattvārthā*, Sthiramati quotes Saṃghabhadra by name extensively. Judging by the portion of the first chapter of Xuan Zang's translation

published in *Zang Wai Fo Jiao Wen Xian* (= ZW), vol. I,¹⁵ these quotations are often verbatim identical with those found in Ny. I have marked them out with underlining in the translated sentences above. Sometimes, the quotations do not carry Saṃghabhadra's name. Sthiramati is very clearly concerned with Saṃghabhadra's refutation of the doctrinal positions of Vasubandhu and of those of the Dārṣṭāntika-Sautrāntikas cited in Ny, and generally strives hard to defend them against Saṃghabhadra. However, it appears that where Saṃghabhadra's explanations are not felt as being threatening in nature, Sthiramati has little hesitation in adopting them — or at least citing them without complaint.

3.1. A case in point is the discussion on whether the sensory consciousnesses can be morally defined (i.e., *kuśala* or *akuśala*). Saṃghabhadra quotes a certain opinion which states that since they, unlike mental consciousness, are completely lack the capacity to conceptualize and since they focus on an object-field for no more than a single moment, they cannot be morally defined. He then proceeds to refute this view:

It is an over-generalization (*atiprasaṅga*) to state that the five sensory consciousnesses are neither *kuśala* nor *akuśala* on account of their being non-conceptualizing. Or rather: all mental consciousnesses that pertain to the equipoised (*samāhita*) stages, being non-conceptualizing, would be *akuśala* in nature. Furthermore, the group of five sensory consciousnesses are not devoid of conceptualization, for it is acknowledged that they are always conjoined with reasoning (*vitarka*) and investigation (*vicāra*).¹⁶ Furthermore, although they focus on an object for just one moment, what prevents them from being conjoined with faith, greed, etc.?

The Mahīśāsaka school asserts that the group of the first four sensory consciousness, being only retribution-born, are only morally non-defined (*avyākṛta*). The bodily consciousness may sometimes be born of transformation, and may therefore, together with mental consciousness, be morally defined. This claim is unreasonable, for it contradicts the meaning of the six craving-groups (*ṣaṭ trṣṇā-kāyāḥ*)¹⁷ designated in the *sūtra*. ...

Sentient beings are of different natures; some with mild (*mṛdu*) defilements, others with strong (*tīkṣṇa*) defilements. For those with mild defilements, they must first generate false

conceptualization (虚妄分別; **abhūta-parikalpa*) before defilements can manifest. For those with strong defilements, without depending on conceptualization, defilements arise as soon as they meet with favourable object-fields. For this reason, some at first generate a defiled mental consciousness, others at first generate a defiled consciousness of another type. ... Thus, the group of the five sensory consciousnesses can be of all the three moral natures (*kuśala, akuśala, avyākṛta*).¹⁸

Sthiramati quotes the above discussion (including the Mahīśāsaka view) virtually verbatim from Saṃghabhadra, agreeing with him, albeit without acknowledgment.¹⁹

3.2. On the above discussion as to whether a sensory consciousness cognizes a conceptualized whole or an assemblage of atoms, Sthiramati, after verbatim quoting Śrīlāta's view and his simile of the blind from Ny verbatim (underlined parts in §§1.1, 1.2), elaborates as follows:

The meaning here is: the support-basis and cognitive objects of the five sensory consciousnesses are both not real existents, because each individual atom does not constitute a support-basis or cognitive object. Not only does each individual [atom] not constitute a support-basis or cognitive object, even if there is an assemblage (和集) of numerous atoms, [such an assemblage also] is not a support-basis or a cognitive object. It is only the whole [conceptually] collected (和合) on these assembled atoms that serves as support-basis and cognitive object. And their collected whole is a conceptual existent. Thus both the support-basis and the cognitive object of the five sensory consciousnesses are not real existents.²⁰

3.3. This is immediately followed by a description of the “Vaibhāṣika view”, taken verbatim from Saṃghabhadra's words (§§2.1–2.3), that the sensory consciousnesses, being non-conceptualizing—inasmuch as they lack the capability of judgmental conceptualization (*abhinirūpaṇā-vikalpa*) and recollectional conceptualization (*anusmaraṇa-vikalpa*)—do not cognize a collected whole, which is an unreal existent. To this, Sthiramati adds:

As is said in the *sūtra*: with the eye as support-basis and visual forms as cognitive objects, visual consciousness arises, and so on up to with mind as support-basis and *dharma*-s as cognitive

object, mental consciousness arises. From this, we know that collected wholes are not visual forms, sound, and other *dharma*-s. Accordingly, they cannot serve as the objects for the five sensory consciousnesses.²¹ (Cf. §2.10)

3.4. Sthiramati moves on to the final discussion on why, if the sensory consciousnesses indeed cognize ultimate reals, they do not effectuate the abandonment of defilements. Here, once again, he simply records verbatim the brief dialogue in Ny (§2.20), without further comments. His only addition is the positive identification of the question as being raised by Śrīlāta. (He begins the dialogue with “Śrīlāta further says: ...”).²²

3.5. To summarize: On this question of the nature of the cognitive objects of the sensory consciousnesses, Sthiramati simply, and basically verbatim, records the whole discussion given in Ny. He adds only a couple of short remarks by way of elaboration, which are of a non-committal nature. However, judging by the Uighur version of his *Tattvārthā* (vol. II, 141), he too accepts that the sensory consciousnesses take only present cognitive objects.

3.6. The reason for Sthiramati's non-committal attitude becomes clear when we observe that in his²³ *Triṃśikā-vijñaptibhāṣya* (= TVB), he in fact rejects both the views of the Dārṣāntika-Sautrāntika and of the Vaibhāṣika/Saṃghabhadra's.

On the collected whole theory, he states:

The group of five sensory consciousnesses take a collected whole as cognitive object (*saṃcitālamābana*), for it bears its form/image (*tadākāra*). But a collected whole does not exist apart from the mere collocation (*saṃhati*) of the individual components (*avayava*; i.e., the atoms). This is because, its individual components having been removed (conceptually), there will not be any consciousness bearing the form of the collected whole (e.g., a jug). Therefore, consciousness arises indeed without an external object.²⁴

Immediately joining onto this, the text continues:

Neither (*na ca*) do the very atoms, collected/accumulated as a whole (*saṃcita*), become its cognitive object, because the atoms do not bear their form [in the consciousness]. For, the

atoms in the collected state do not—when compared to their non-collected state—possess any additional excellence in respect of their nature (*ātmātīśaya*). Therefore, just as when they are non-collected, the atoms—when collected as a whole—definitely do not serve as a cognitive object.²⁵

3.6.1. In the same sequence, CWSL again has a closely corresponding passage.²⁶ Kui Ji, in his commentary on the CWSL, comments that this refers to the original tenet of the Sarvāstivādin Vaibhāṣika masters (本薩婆多毘婆沙師義), i.e., the so-called “old Sarvāstivāda tenet”:

In the manner of the Sautrāntika [theory], what is formed as a collection/accumulation (和合) of atoms is unreal and cannot serve as a condition to generate a sensory consciousness. Here in this [Sarvāstivāda theory, it is held that,] in their collected state, each atom possesses a gross image/form of collection. Each can serve as a condition to generate the sensory consciousness, because there exists a real nature capable of serving as condition. However, since a separate image of the atom does not occur in the sensory consciousness, the theory is rejected.²⁷

However, the supposed Sarvāstivāda theory that the atoms in their collected or accumulated state each possesses a “gross image of collection” cannot be traced to the *Abhidharma-mahāvibhāṣā* (= MVŚ). What we find in MVŚ is that: not an individual atom, but a group of them as a whole, serves as the support-basis and cognitive object of the sensory consciousnesses:

Question: Is there an individual atom that can serve as a support-basis, or an individual atom that can serve as a cognitive object?

Answer: No. This is because the five sensory consciousnesses, visual etc., have an agglomeration (積聚; **saṃghāta*, **saṃhati*, **saṃcaya*) as support-basis, take an agglomeration as cognitive object; have a resistant (*sa-pratigha*) [matter] as support-basis, take a resistant [matter] as cognitive object; have a collection/accumulation (和合; *he-he*) as support-basis, take a collection as cognitive object.²⁸

We can thus see that the Sarvāstivādins represented in MVŚ hold that a sensory consciousness has a “collection” or “accumulation” of atoms as cognitive objects. Judging by Xuan Zang’s rendering, *he-he*, ‘collection’, possibly translates *saṃcita*/*saṃcaya*. It is also clear that this view

intends that the atoms themselves, collocated or collected — and not a conceptualized collection as held by the Dārṣṭāntika-Sautrāntikas—serve as the cognitive object which is stated to be “resistant”. Thus, it appears possible, as suggested by both Poussin²⁹ and Yin Shun,³⁰ that Xuan Zang translated the same Sanskrit term (probably *saṃcita*) as both *he-he* (和合) and *he-ji* (和集). Yin Shun believes that he did so in order to distinguish a collection in the sense of a conceptualized whole (i.e., *he-he*) which is unreal, from collection in the sense of a multiplicity of atoms physically assembled together (i.e., *he-ji*) (and thus real).³¹

In this connection, we may also note that, in AKB, it is stated that the five sense-faculties and the corresponding object-spheres “are *saṃcita*, because of the nature of being an aggregation of atoms” (*pañcendriyadhātavaḥ pañca viśayāḥ saṃcitāḥ | paramāṇusaṃghātavāt* |).³² Xuan Zang’s translation there is *ji-ji* (積集),³³ which should mean the same as *he-ji*, referring, as it does, to the atoms being aggregated. This is undoubtedly the same Vaibhāṣika view as found in the MVŚ, which speaks of the resistant atoms being *ji-ji*.³⁴ Saṃghabhadra simply repeats the AKB statement (identical Chinese rendering) without complaint.³⁵

In another context, Saṃghabhadra asserts that, according to the Vaibhāṣika masters, although the four Great Elements (*mahābhūta*) are always co-existent, the fact that we perceive one specific material quality, such as solidarity, in a given material aggregate, is due to there being an increase in substance—not merely an increase or intensification in efficacious strength—of that particular Great Element in the aggregate. He cites the sūtra which states that if the Water Element were completely absent in a material aggregate, the latter would not be aggregated or collected (*ju-ji*; 聚集), as there would be no cohesion. The term *ju-ji* here, once again, is likely to have been Xuan Zang’s rendering of *saṃcita* (*/saṃhata*). Saṃghabhadra comments here:

It is not the case that there can be any material aggregate completely devoid of the Water Element. If this [Element] were completely absent, [the aggregate] would not be collected (*he-he*; 和合). But there are [atoms of the Water Element] incapable of cohering other material aggregates, making them collected (*he-he*), on account of their being in a small number As for

logical reasoning (*yukti*): If by increase, one means only an increase in efficacious strength of the Great Element and not in substance (體) of the aggregate (聚集 *ju-ji*), then there ought to be also the case of an increase in efficacious strength in a single atom of a Great Element or derived matter... . Why is it then that an individual atom abiding singly cannot generate a sensory consciousness?³⁶

Here, obviously, “collected”, *he-he* (again probably *saṃcita*), is obviously not intended by Saṃghabhadra to mean a conceptualized unity, but a physical combination or collection of atoms constituting the material object: The atoms become *he-he* when held together by virtue of the Water Element; and it is only in this *he-he* state that they can function as a cognitive object for a sensory consciousness. In other words, where Xuan Zang describes Saṃghabhadra’s argument, in the Abhidharma debate above, that the atoms in their *he-ji* state generate a cognition, we find here essentially the same argument described with the term *he-he*. This is then another indication that Xuan Zang probably employs two (or more) different renderings, *he-ji* (*/ji-ji/ju-ji*) and *he-he*, for the same Sanskrit word *saṃcita/saṃhata* (also possibly *saṃghāta*).

3.6.2. Coming back to the TVB and CWSL context, we may indeed also find some support for the assertion of Poussin and Yin Shun in the immediately following description in TVB of another view, which is attributed to the “neo-Sarvāstivādins” by Kui Ji:

Another person thinks: “Each individual atom, independent of others, is beyond the sense faculties (*atīndriya*; i.e., imperceptible). But many of them, mutually in dependence, become apprehensible by the sense faculties.”

But again, since they do not possess any additional excellence, whether in their independent or mutually dependent state, they are necessarily either apprehensible by the sense faculties or are beyond the sense faculties. Moreover, if it is the case that the atoms themselves in mutual dependence become the object-sphere of the consciousness, then there would not be any difference in respect of the form (*ākāra*) of a jug, a wall, etc. — since the atoms do not bear such images. Neither is it logical that a consciousness of one appearance has an object-sphere related

to another different form — this would entail a fallacy of over-generalization (*atiprasaṅga*). ...³⁷

CWSL again, in the same sequence, contains an essentially identical description of a claim of “someone” (有說 ...), though with a more elaborate refutation:

Someone claims: “Each individual atom—not assembled with others (不和集)—of a visual form, etc., is not the object-sphere of a sensory consciousness. When they are assembled together

(共和集) and mutually in dependence, there arises a gross form (粗相) serving as the object-sphere of this consciousness. That form exists truly, and serves as the cognitive object of this [consciousness].”

This theory is not true, because [i] [the atoms], whether in their assembled or not-yet assembled (未和集) state, have the same nature and form; [ii] [For two given objects, such as] a jug and a plate, etc.—that are composed of equal number of atoms—a consciousness taking their forms as cognitive objects would perceive no difference between them; ... [iv] it is not the case that a consciousness bearing a gross form takes an object bearing a subtle form as cognitive object — lest it be the case that a consciousness bearing one appearance takes another object of a different [form] as cognitive object. ...³⁸

3.6.2.1. Kui Ji quite rightly states that the theory refuted here is that of Saṃghabhadra.³⁹ According to Kui Ji, this “neo-Sarvāstivāda” tenet (新薩婆多義) is intended to counteract the earlier objection that in the old Sarvāstivāda theory, the atoms cannot serve as cognitive object (*ālambana*), even if they can be a condition (*pratyaya*).⁴⁰

It is to be noted that in the CWSL passage, Xuan Zang uses the term *he-ji* (和集) throughout in his account of the theory under discussion. And this, as we know, is the same key term appearing in Ny, where Saṃghabhadra is expounding his theory. Thus, although the corresponding TVB passage does not spell out the theory as being Saṃghabhadra’s, the equivalence in content and near identical wording in Xuan Zang’s rendering of the corresponding sentences in the Ny and CWSL passages strongly indicate that all the three texts are here describing Saṃghabhadra’s theory. And note-worthily, we see that there is no Sanskrit equivalent to the term *he-ji* in TVB.

Kui Ji actually proceeds here to explain the term, *he-ji*, thus:

he (和) means being collocated ('being in one place'), juxtaposed; *ji* (集) means not being [unified into] a single entity. Because these very juxtaposed [atoms] are distinct entities, and because they truly exist, they are capable of generating consciousness. Because they are in a gross form, and because the consciousness bears this form, they fulfill the requirements of being a condition qua cognitive object (*ālambana-pratyaya*).⁴¹

Kui Ji's way of glossing *he-ji* seems more Chinese than Indian, being based entirely on the compounded Chinese term. It may well reinforce the probability that the interpretation of Saṃghabhadra's theory in terms of *he-ji* by the Xuan Zang tradition is indeed influenced by Xuan Zang's rendering of the same Sanskrit **saṃcita* as *he-ji*, in this case—in addition to the rendering *he-he* in the case of the Dārṣṭāntika-Sautrāntika theory—and then consistently stressing it as the key term in explaining Saṃghabhadra's position in Ny and CWSL.

4. Dārṣṭāntika-Sautrāntikas: Sensory perception cognizes only a past object

4.1. The contrasting positions on the ontological status of a cognitive object

One important doctrinal position of the Dārṣṭāntika-Sautrāntikas that is in keeping with Śrīlāta's above-discussed tenet is that a cognition can be generated by either a real/existent or unreal/non-existent object. Such a position can be traced to that held by the early Dārṣṭāntikas seen in MVŚ. In contrast, the Sarvāstivāda position has always been that a cognitive object is necessarily existent. Saṃghabhadra in fact articulately defines a real existent as that which serves as an object generating a cognition.⁴² He, however, concedes that an existent is further divisible as either absolute or relative; the latter being an existent based on the former, e.g., a "person" which we cognize is a relative existent based on (i.e., conceptually superimposed on) the five *skandha*-s.⁴³ In relation to the above debate, we can see that, for Saṃghabhadra, a collected whole is a relative existent; and this collected whole can generate a cognition only in the case of mental consciousness where conceptualization can operate properly.

4.2. Saṃghabhadra: A sensory consciousness does not take a past object

Ny also records a claim—clearly in line with the Dārṣṭāntika-Sautrāntika tenet above—that a sensory cognition necessarily takes a past object. Since for the Dārṣṭāntika-Sautrāntikas, past and future *dharma*-s are non-existent, this claim reduces to their consistent position that the cognitive object of a sensory cognition is necessarily an unreal. I shall provide, below, a translation of Saṃghabhadra's criticism of this claim.

4.2.1. Some maintain that the objects of the five sensory consciousnesses are exclusively past.

(Saṃghabhadra:) They should be told thus:

If this be the case, would it not amount to that only what has arisen before (*agraja*) serves as causal condition (*pratyaya*), and that whatever that is co-nascent (*sahaja*) with consciousness is devoid of the nature of being a condition?

Furthermore, they hold that the *rūpa*-s that have ceased do not exist as real entities. [Then, it would mean that] they arise simply as objects apprehended by the conceptualizing thought.

Furthermore, they should definitely concede that the faculty constituting its (i.e., the sensory consciousness's) support-basis (*āśraya*) is also past, and is capable of generating a present consciousness.

Such claims of theirs are all illogical.

4.2.2. (Saṃghabhadra:) Laying aside [the issues of] support-basis and objects of other consciousnesses, how is it that visual consciousness, whose objects are exclusively past, does not cognize all past *rūpa*-s — there being no difference between what has ceased immediately (*anantaram*) and what has ceased for a hundred years?

(Opponents:) There is no fault, because it apprehends its specific (own) cause — the immediately ceased *rūpa* is the cause for the present consciousness; the *rūpa* that has ceased for a hundred years cannot constitute a cause.

(Saṃghabhadra:) This is also not true, because there is no reason that distinguishes [the two] — what reason is there to prove that what has immediately ceased alone serves as the cause for the present consciousness, and what has ceased for a hundred years does not?

Just as those *rūpa*-s that have ceased for a hundred years are totally unrelated to the present visual consciousness, likewise an immediately

ceased *rūpa* [is totally unrelated to it]. There being thus no difference [in these two cases], why does [an immediately ceased *rūpa*] alone serve as a cause?

(Opponents:) There is actually a difference between this [*rūpa*] compared to that which has ceased] for a hundred years: At the moment when visual consciousness is about to arise, this *rūpa* serves as the condition.

(Saṃghabhadra:) If so, then the object of visual consciousness would not be past, since the consciousness while abiding in the future period [and is about to arise], takes the object abiding in the present period.

Neither can you say it serves as condition in one time period, and as object in another different time period. In what capacity does it serve as a condition for visual consciousness other than serving as its object? Not being any different from a newly ceased *rūpa*, why do those that have long ceased not serve as condition when the visual consciousness is arising — since you hold that what has long ceased and what has newly ceased do not differ, both being non-existents?

Moreover, whether long ceased or newly ceased, it is equally logically invalid that [a ceased object] can serve as condition. This is because: [a] it is not a present object-field [for the present sensory consciousness], [b] the two serial continuities [of existents and non-existents] are different, [c] they do not effectuate a common fruit [since they are not acknowledged as being co-existent causes (*sahabhū-hetu*)],⁴⁴ [d] there is no difference [among the ceased *dharma*-s].

Moreover, you need to explain: How are the olfactory, gustatory and bodily [consciousnesses] said to apprehend in-contact objects (*prāpta-viṣaya*)⁴⁵ — since the past and future are said to be “far”?⁴⁶

4.2.3. (Saṃghabhadra:) Moreover, if you maintain that a sensory consciousness takes only a past cognitive object, then how does one have a direct-perception discernment (**pratyakṣa-buddhi*) with regard to it?

(Opponents:) This is like the case where—when one has a direct-perception discernment with regard to a sensation within oneself—one says: “I have experienced such and such displeasure or pleasure.”

(Saṃghabhadra:) This reply is invalid. This is because, with regard to a sensation within oneself, the time of experiencing it (*anubhava*) and the time of discerning/comprehending it (**buddhi*, **avabodha*, **anubodhana*) are different. That is: the time of experiencing it is the time when it is harming or benefitting [the experiencer]. At that

time, this sensation has not become the object for discerning. That is: when a sensation co-nascent with a consciousness discerning another object is being present, it can harm or benefit. This stage of harming or benefitting is referred to as the time of experiencing, because sensation qua intrinsic nature (*svabhāva-vedanā*; viz, the *caitta*, *vedanā*) arises experiencing its object, and because the consciousness, etc., arise experiencing its harmful or beneficial activity-mode (*ākāra*). It is only after this has become past that it can serve as the object to generate a present recollection. This stage of recollection is referred to as the time of discerning.

It follows from this principle that there can be a direct-perception cognition only with regard to what has been sensed through a direct perception. Accordingly, it becomes possible to have a direct-perception cognition with regard to a sensation within oneself.

On account of direct perception being different in nature, there are three types of direct perception: faculty-based [direct perception] (依根; **indriyāśrita-pratyakṣa*), [direct perception qua] experience (領納; **anubhava-pratyakṣa*), and [direct perception qua] discernment (覺了; **buddhi-pratyakṣa*).

Now, since you concede that the past *rūpa*-s, etc., have not been sensed through direct perception, how can you say: “This is like the case where, when one has a direct-perception discernment with regard to a sensation within oneself, [...]”? Just as, with regard to a sensation within another person, which is not sensed through one’s own direct perception qua experience, there can be no direct-perception discernment: “I have sensed such and such displeasure or pleasure.” Since the knowledge (*jñāna*) that cognizes it is not a direct-perception discernment—such a present *rūpa*, etc., not being sensed through one’s own faculty-based direct perception—there ought not to be a direct-perception discernment. The knowledge that cognizes that object, saying “I have sensed such and such a *rūpa*, etc.”, ought not to be a direct-perception discernment.

4.2.4. Moreover, if the five sensory objects, *rūpa*-s, etc., are not perceived (‘obtained’; *prāpta*) through direct perception, [there will be the following consequence]: Just as, a knowledge generated by taking a future sensation as object, since it is acquired by taking an object not [having been directly perceived] through a direct perception qua experience, would not [make the experiencer] say: “I have experienced such and such displeasure or pleasure”. Likewise, a knowledge generated by taking a past *rūpa*, etc., as object, since it is acquired by taking an object not [having been directly perceived] through

a faculty-based direct perception, would not [make the experiencer] say: “I have experienced such and such displeasure or pleasure”. Just as, an unpleasurable sensation, etc., must first have been experienced through a direct perception qua experience, before a direct-perception qua discernment taking that as object can arise. Likewise, a *rūpa*, etc., must have been experienced through a faculty-based direct perception before a direct-perception qua discernment taking that as object can arise. One is necessarily convinced [of its being a direct-perception] on account of its thrust of direct-ness.

4.2.5. (Opponents:) If at the time of experiencing (*anu-√bhū*) a sensation, one does not take sensation as the cognitive object, and at the time of taking sensation as the cognitive object, one does not experience the sensation: then, why did the Fortunate One say, “when experiencing a pleasurable sensation, he knows truly, ‘I am experiencing a pleasurable sensation’”, etc.?

(**Samghabhadra:**) There is no fault here. Such a statement refers to the time when one is observing, not the time when one is experiencing. It is so stated in this way to show that the meditator is not confused (**bhrānta*) regarding the sensation of pleasure, etc., which is acquired through having experienced it by means of the direct perception qua experience. Therefore, there ought not to be a direct-perception discernment with regard to an object that has not been experienced through a direct perception.

Hence, the five sensory consciousnesses cognize only present objects, for they necessarily take the co-nascent [*dharmas*] as cognitive objects.⁴⁷

5. Summary

The Dārṣṭāntika-Sautrāntikas, represented by Śrīlāta, hold that the cognitive object of a sensory perception is a non-existent, being a collected whole conceptually superimposed on a group of atoms (§1). Samghabhadra argues that this is not possible because a sensory consciousness lacks the capacity of conceptualization (despite the existence of a rudimentary form of discrimination intrinsic to every type of consciousness) (§2.2). For the Dārṣṭāntika-Sautrāntikas, however, this is necessarily the case; and since they do not allow simultaneous causality (*sahabhū-hetu*), the sensory consciousness necessarily arises in the second moment, with a cognitive object corresponding to the external object-sphere that has now become past. This conceptually

constructed image corresponding to the external object is called the *ākāra* of the latter.⁴⁸

Śrīlāta questions as to why, if indeed the sensory consciousnesses cognize absolute reals, they do not abandon defilements. Samghabhadra gives several reasons, albeit in very brief statements without elaboration. But they are not so difficult to comprehend. For instance, he briefly states: “because they focus on the object only once”, “because they are not conceptualizing”; etc. We can understand thus: They cognize the object for only one (present) moment, whereas a defilement is abandoned only when it is fully known (*parijñāta*), and this requires the repeated working of *prajñā* and *smṛti*, which together power the conceptualizing function of mental consciousness — this is lacking in the sensory consciousnesses. “They have few objects”, “they cognize [only] intrinsic characteristic”, “they are not equipoised”, “their operation is externally directed”: To fully know and hence abandon defilements, one must understand their common characteristics (*sāmānya-lakṣaṇa*), such as unsatisfactoriness, impermanence, etc., and this cannot be achieved without the ability to focus on a multiplicity of objects. Moreover, proper abandonment occurs only in an equipoised stage;⁴⁹ and equipoise can only be achieved when the consciousness is operated inwardly (*antaramukha*).

Given the Dārṣṭāntika-Sautrāntika denial of simultaneous causality and considering from their perspective of the unreality of the cognitive object of a sensory consciousness, it is not difficult to understand their corollary tenet that a sensory consciousness takes exclusively a past, non-existent, cognitive object. Samghabhadra refutes this. He argues that since the Dārṣṭāntika-Sautrāntikas (as Vibhajyavādins) acknowledge only the present *dharmas* as existents, all past objects—whether immediately past or long past—are equally non-existents. How is it that only the immediately ceased object can serve as the cognitive object generating the sensory consciousness in the present moment? In fact, both, being equally non-existent past objects, are totally unrelated to, and thus incapable of generating, the present consciousness (§4.2.2).

Another important argument of Samghabhadra is in terms of the direct-perception experience. He explains direct perception as involving three necessarily related aspects spanning two moments: I. faculty-based,

II. qua experience, III. qua discernment. The first two stages occur in the first moment of a sensory perception, when the sensory faculty perceives the external object (I), and at the very same time—thanks to simultaneous causality—the sensory consciousness arises together with sensation (*vedanā*) and other thought-concomitants (II). This fact of directly sensing/experiencing the outside object in the very same present moment enables the person to have the vivid impression of having directly and personally perceived the object. It is only on the basis of this vivid, direct experience, that it becomes possible, in the immediately following moment, to have a clear discernment of the object as having been directly perceived (III). This third and last aspect is the stage of the corresponding mental consciousness which is capable of discerning.

From this consideration, Saṃghabhadra argues, the Dārṣṭāntika-Sautrāntika position would entail that phase II is not possible since the object does not exist in the present moment when the sensory consciousness, together with sensation, arises. And without the second aspect, the fact of direct perception cannot be completed at the stage of discernment.

In the above-cited passages, the Dārṣṭāntika-Sautrāntikas respond simply by citing the *sūtra*, without offering any logical argument (*yukti*), to contend that II and III occur in the same moment, not successively (§4.2.5). This then makes it possible to have the direct-perception experience completed as a discernment. But we know that they hold the doctrine of successive arising of thought and thought-concomitants, and deny the *sahabhū-hetu* causality. Even for Śrīlāta who concedes the reality of three (and only three) concomitants—*vedanā*, *saṃjñā*, *cetanā*—*vedanā* arises subsequently to the *citta* (i.e., the *viññāna*). As Saṃghabhadra points out elsewhere, it follows from this model that a concomitant arises only in the third moment.⁵⁰ Thus, this Dārṣṭāntika-Sautrāntika assertion, that the experiencing and discerning of the cognitive object occur simultaneously, can only be comprehended in terms of their doctrine—not here explicitly stated—of the nature of reflexive awareness (which later came to be commonly known as *svasaṃvedana*) of thought and thought-concomitants. For them, it is this fact that accounts for the thrust of vividness and immediacy in a direct-perception experience.⁵⁰

Among all the extant Abhidharma works, it is Saṃghabhadra's Ny that provides us with adequate accounts of these tenets being developed in the Abhidharma schools. Parallel accounts given in Sthiramati's *Abhidharmakośaṭīkā Tattvārthā* and TVB, and the CWSL, provide further information with which these tenets can be checked and confirmed. Saṃghabhadra's expositions are often simply followed or adopted in the *Tattvārthā*, though criticized where they have constituted a threat or attack on Vasubandhu's views in AKB. In TVB and CWSL too, we find the same influence of Saṃghabhadra's accounts in this connection. In particular, all these works have come to contrast the "assemblage" (*he-ji*) theory of the Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣika theory with the "collected whole" (*he-he*) theory of the Dārṣṭāntika-Sautrāntikas.

A comparison among the corresponding Sanskrit passages in TVB, on the one hand, and Xuan Zang's translation in MVŚ, AKB, Ny and CWSL, on the other, suggests that Xuan Zang seems to have rendered the same Sanskrit word (probably *saṃcita*) as both *he-he* and *he-ji*. If this is indeed the case, then we may understand the Abhidharma controversy thus:

Śrīlāta claims that an individual atom in itself does not have the efficacy of generating a perception. Only when being *saṃcita* (collected together) are they capable of being cognized as a whole unity by consciousness. Since this *saṃcita* state forming a unified whole is a mental construction (an *ākāra*), and since it arises only in the second moment in the perceptual process at which time the atoms have become past and are no more existent, the cognitive object is necessarily a non-existent. It is from this same perspective that the *āyatana*-s qua objects are declared to be unreal/conceptual. The *āyatana*-s qua the subjective counterparts of cognition are likewise declared as unreal on account of their becoming causally efficacious only as a collected whole. Nevertheless, as realists, Śrīlāta and the other Dārṣṭāntika-Sautrāntikas accept the empirical fact of the causality of a cognitive process being necessarily contributed by the efficacies of the so-called "subjects" and "objects". Hence, the reality of the *dhātu*-s—the eighteen types of *dharma* themselves—qua specific causal efficacies must be recognized. These fundamental elements of the cognitive process are the *dharma*-s themselves, now experienced as "cause", now experienced as "effect".⁵²

In contrast, Saṃghabhadra holds that each individual atom in itself is actually efficacious. But it is only when they are *saṃcita* (physically assembled together) that their combined efficacy becomes strong enough to generate a cognition. However, this *saṃcita* state is not a conceptualized whole, but a physical collocation or aggregation of the atoms. Moreover, since from the Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣika perspective, this takes place in the very first moment, thanks to simultaneous causality, the cognitive object is a real existent.

It seems in fact more appropriate to understand Saṃghabhadra's *he-ji* explanation as essentially a fine-tuning of the Sarvāstivāda theory, rather than labeling it as being “neo-Sarvāstivāda” — as did the Xuan Zang tradition (followed by many modern scholars).

Abbreviations

AKB	Pradhan, P (ed.) <i>Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu</i> (Patna, 1975. 2 nd edn)
CWSL	成唯識論, T no. 1585
MVŚ	<i>Abhidharma-mahāvibhāṣā</i> 阿毗達磨大毗婆沙論, T no. 1545
Ny	* <i>Nyāyānusāra</i> 順正理論, T no. 1562
Tattvārthā(C)	Su Jun 蘇軍(ed.) 阿毗達磨俱舍論實義疏 (Xuan Zang's tr. of Sthiramati's <i>Abhidharmakośa-ṭīkā Tattvārthā</i>), collected in ZW
Study	Yin Shun 說一切有部為主論書與論師之研究 (Taipei, 1968)
TVB	Lévi, S (ed.), <i>Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi — Deux Traités de Vasubandhu</i> (Paris, 1925)
ZW	Fang Guang Chang 方廣鎬 (Chief Editor), 藏外佛教文獻, Vol. I (1995)

Notes

1. See, See Dhammajoti, KL (2007), *Abhidharma Doctrines and Controversies on Perception*, chapters 8 & 9.
2. Cf. Lévi, S (ed., 1925), *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi — Deux Traités de Vasubandhu* (= TVB), 16: *vinā bāhyenārheṇa vijñānam evārthākāram utpadyate* |
3. The underlined sentences correspond to those quoted (mostly verbatim) in Sthiramati's *Abhidharmakośaṭīkā Tattvārthā* in ZW. See also remark in §3.
4. *Ibid*, 350c.
5. 不能一一別相見者, 不和會故, 非非相故.
6. In the *Udāna* of the *Khuddaka-nikāya*, the Buddha instructs Bāhiya thus: “*diṭṭhe diṭṭhamattaṃ bhavissati | sute sutamattaṃ bhavissati ...*”
7. I.e., *vedanā*, *saṃjñā* and *cetanā*. See Dhammajoti, KL, *op. cit.*, §7.2.
8. Cf. Tattvārthā(C), 239: 室唎羅多復云:
9. Cf. AKB, 23: *caḥṣuḥśrotagrahrāṇajihvākāyavijñāna-dhātavo manodhātuś caite sapta citta-dhātavaḥ sālambanā viṣayagrahaṇāt* |
10. Ny, 350b29–352a25.
11. T29, no.1563, 788c.
12. AKB, 144: *adhivacanam ucyate nāma | tat kilāsyādhikam ālambanam a(t) o 'dhivacanasamsparsa iti* | ... Note the word *kila*, which usually indicates Vasubandhu's personal disagreement with the Vaibhāṣika view being presented.
13. Or, as Poussin renders: “*par excellence l'objet (ālambana)*”.
14. Ny, 506c5–13. Saṃghabhadra's explanation is similar to an alternative interpretation offered by certain masters (有說; *kecid āhuḥ*) in MVŚ (See T27, 760c20–761a5).
The adjective, “*adhika*”, has several connotations: additional, excellent, superior, abundant, etc. Pu Guang (T41, 175c19–29) gives several explanations:
“The contact conjoined with the sixth consciousness is called *adhivacana* because speech is sound and is unable to make an expression; *nāma* can make an expression, and is [thus] superior to speech. Hence it is called *adhivacana*. Another explanation: This *nāma* is able to make an expression only with speech as its dominant [condition].
Another explanation: ‘*adhi*’ signifies development/enhancement; by taking name as object, speech comes to be developed. Another explanation: By the force of *nāma*, speech comes to be enhanced, thus it is called *adhivacana*: This *nāma* is the additional (*adhika*) object that serves as the cognitive object for mental consciousness. Thus, in terms of cognitive object, [the contact conjoined with mental consciousness] is called *adhivacana-samsparsa*. It is a *tatpuruṣa* compound: ‘contact of *adhivacana*’. *Nāma* is the additional object for this reason: For instance, visual consciousness can only discern blue, but not the name ‘blue’ (does not discern, ‘It is blue’). Mental consciousness discerns blue as well as the name ‘blue’. Having cognized an object like the sensory consciousnesses,

- mental consciousness additionally cognizes its name, hence the name is said to be additional.”
15. Fang Guang Chang 方廣錫 (Chief Editor), 藏外佛教文獻, Vol. I (1995). The part on Sthiramati's subcommentary, entitled 阿毗達磨俱舍論實義疏, is edited by Su Jun 蘇軍.
 16. Saṃghabhadra explains here that the sensory consciousnesses do have a rudimentary or basic form of conceptualization, called *svabhāva-vikalpa*, which is intrinsic to any type of non-equipoised consciousness. They are, however, said to be non-conceptual because they lack *abhinirūpaṇā*- and *anusmaraṇa-vikalpa*. (Ny, 349a16–24)
 17. See *Saṅgūti-paryāya*, T26, no. 1536, 429, b26–c4; etc. The MVŚ (T27, 261c7 ff) view is that, of these six, those generated from olfactory contact and gustatory contact are *akuśāla*; the other four groups may be either *akuśāla* or *avyākṛta*.
 18. Ny, 348c12–349b7.
 19. Tattvārthā(C), 222 f.
 20. Tattvārthā(C), 238.
 21. Tattvārthā(C), 239.
 22. Tattvārthā(C), 239.
 23. I have opted for the view that the author of this commentary on Vasubandhu's *Triṃśikā* is the same person as the author of the *Abhidharmakośaṭīkā Tattvārthā*.
 24. TVB 16: *saṃcitāmbanāśca pañcavijñānakāyās tadākāratvāt | na ca saṃcitam avayavasamḥatimātrād anyad vidyate | tadavayavān apohya saṃcitākāravijñānābhāvāt | tasmād vinaiva bāhyenārthena vijñānam saṃcitākāram utpadyate |*
- This passage is virtually identical with that in Xuan Zang's *Cheng Wei Shi Lun* (= CWSL) T31, no. 1585, 4b6–9: 眼等五識了色等時, 但緣和合; 似彼相故. 非和合相, 異諸極微, 有實自體. 分析彼時, 似彼相識, 定不生故 ...
25. TVB, 16: *na ca paramāṇava eva saṃcitās tasyāmbanam paramāṇūnām atadākāratvāt | na hy asaṃcitāvasthātāḥ saṃcitāvasthāyām paramāṇūnām kaścid ātmātīśayaḥ | tasmād asaṃcitavat saṃcitā api paramāṇavo naivāmbanam |*. See the following note on the corresponding passage in CWSL.
 26. CWSL, 4b13–16: 非諸極微, 有和合相; 不和合時無此相故. 非和合位, 與不合時, 此諸極微, 體相有異. 故和合位, 如不合時, 色等極微, 非五識境.
 27. 成唯識論述記T43, no. 1830, 270c5–9: ... 本薩婆多毘婆沙師義. 如經部師, 極微和合所成是假, 不能為緣發生五識. 今: 和合時, 一一極微有和合龜相, 各能為緣, 發生五識, 以有實體能為緣故. 然, 別極微相, 五識不得, 故非之也.
 28. MVŚ, T27, 63c22–25.
 29. La Vallée Poussin (1928), *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi – La Siddhi de Hiuan-tsang*, 44, under: c. *Doctrines des Sarvāstivādins*.
 30. *Study*, 704 f.

31. *Study*, 105.
 32. AKB, 24.
 33. 《阿毘達磨俱舍論》T29, 8c27–29: 五根五境, 十有色界, 是可積集; 極微聚故. 義准餘八, 非可積集; 非極微故.
 34. Cf. MVŚ, 391a20–26: 問: 有對法云何? 答: 十處. 謂五內色處, 及五外色處. ... 問: 有對無對是何義耶? 答: 諸極微積聚是有對義; 非極微積聚, 是無對義. ... 復次, 諸可積集, 是有對義; 不可積集是無對義.
 35. T29, 357c20–22.
 36. T29, 355c16–24: 如種喻經說: “若有地界, 無水界者, 應不聚集; 無能攝故...” 此經意言: 非有色聚, 全無水界; 若全無者, 應不和合. 然有不能攝餘色聚令和合者, 以其少故... 理謂: 大種若但用增, 非體聚積, 而說增者, 應有大種或所造色一極微上, 亦有用增... 何緣極微一一別住, 不能為境生五識身?
 37. TVB, 16: *anyas tu manyate | ekaika-paramāṇur anyanirapekṣyo 'indriyo bahavas tu parasparāpekṣā indriyagrāhyāḥ | teṣām api sāpekṣanirapekṣāvasthayor ātmātīśayābhāvād ekāntenedriyagrāhyatvam atīndriyatvaṃ vā | yadi ca paramāṇava eva parasparāpekṣā vijñānasya viśayibhavanti evaṃ sati yo'yaṃ ghaṭakuḍyādyaṅkārabhedo vijñāne sa na syāt paramāṇūnām atadākāratvāt | na cānyanirbhāsasya vijñānasyānyākāro viśayo yujyate 'tiprasaṅgāt | ...*
 38. CWSL, 4b16–22: 有執: 色等一一極微, 不和集時, 非五識境; 共和集位, 展轉相資, 有龜相生, 為此識境. 彼相實有, 為此所緣.
彼執不然. 共和集位與未集時, 體相一故; 瓶甌等物, 極微等者, 緣彼相識應無別故; ... 非龜相識, 緣細相境, 勿餘境識緣餘境故. ...
 39. CWSL, 271a9: 此第四, 敘眾賢論師新薩婆多義.
 40. CWSL, 270c10–12: 色等極微, 設許是五識緣, 非是所緣; 五識上無彼極微相故.
 41. CWSL, 271a18–21: 一處相近名和; 不為一體名集. 即是相近體各別故, 是實法故, 有力生識. 以相龜故, 識有此相故, 所緣緣理具足有.
 42. Ny, 621c21.
 43. Ny, 621c21–25: 為境生覺, 是真有相. 此總有二: 一者實有, 二者假有; 以依世俗及勝義諦而安立故. 若無所待, 於中生覺, 是實有相; 如色受等. 若有所待, 於中生覺, 是假有相; 如瓶軍等.
- I have discussed this controversy in some details in Dhammajoti, KL (2007, 2nd edn), *Abhidharma Doctrines and Controversies on Perception*, §§ 3.1–3.2.
44. For this, see Dhammajoti, KL, *op. cit.*, §9.1.
 45. AKB, 32: ... *ghrāṇajihvākāyākhyam ... prāptaviśayam ...*
 46. Cf. AKB, 13: *dūraṃ atītānāgatam | antikaṃ pratyutpannam |*
 47. Ny, 374b12–375a5.
 48. See KL Dhammajoti, *op. cit.*, §§9.2, 9.3.
 49. Cf. MVŚ, 820c, 937b, 937c; etc.; Ny, 676c; etc.
 50. Cf. Ny, 385b27–28: 上座於中起異分別, 說諸心所唯在第三.

51. See also: Dhammajoti, KL, *op. cit.*, 158 f.
52. Cf. the Sautrāntika statement at the end of the debate on “what sees” in AKB, 31: *atra sautrāntikā āhuḥ | kim idaṃ ākāśaṃ khādyate | cakṣur hi pratītya rūpāṇi cotpadyate cakṣurviññānaṃ | tatra kaḥ paśyati ko vā dṛṣyate | nirvyāpāraṃ hīdaṃ dharmamātraṃ hetuphalamātraṃ ca |*