NOTES


2. Vātsyāyana, in his Nyāyabhāṣya, observes that it is impossible to have knowledge of everything ‘for the simple reason that the number of things to be known is endless’.

3. Cf. ‘padārthaḥjñānasyā paramam prajñānan pramokṣaḥ’, Tarkasāngraha of Ananābhāṭṭa, p. 66. Ananābhāṭṭa recognizes only seven categories and thinks that the sixteen categories of Gautama can be accommodated within his seven-fold division. See Tarkasāngraha, Section 81, and Tartakaṭīkā thereof.

4. We shall see below that the vyāpāravat definition of karana can lead the Naiyāyikas into trouble when it comes to designating a karana of anumāti, because here the definition yields more than one karana in the realm of a pramāṇa.


11. Ingalls, on the other hand, calls Athalya’s ‘modern view’ the ‘modified theory’ and ascribes it, in the context of inferential cognition, to Śivādiṭṭha, Raghunātha, and Ananābhāṭṭa. (Daniel H. H. Ingalls, Materials for the Study of Nāyika-Nyāya Logic (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), pp. 31–32.) He calls the other view, again in the context of inferential cognition, ‘Gaṅgēsa’s theory’ and names Mathura, Visvanātha, and Bhāskara as its other subscribers. (Ingalls, pp. 30–32) According to Keith, however, the modern view was held by Gaṅgēsa and Bhāskara, among others. (Keith, pp. 115, 201) Ingalls takes note of Keith’s position on Gaṅgēsa, but he believes that Keith is mistaken on this point. (Ingalls, pp. 32, n. 16) It is indeed a good question as to which of the Naiyāyikas held which of the two views regarding the notion of a karana.

12. See Tarkasāngraha, Section 47, and Tartakaṭīkā thereon.

13. Incidentally, Govardhana in his Nyāya-Bodhinī, which is a commentary on Ananābhāṭṭa’s Tarkasāngraha and Tartakaṭīkā, explicitly accepts the vyāpāravat notion of karana all along.

14. ‘Parāmarśa is a complex cognition which arises from a combination of the knowledge of invariable concomitance (vyāpiṭaṁ) and that of the presence of the reason (hetu) in the subject (pakṣa) – technically known as pakṣa-dharmatāṁjñāna.’ S. Kuppuswami Sastri, A Primer of Indian Logic (Madras: The Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute, 1961), p. 194.

15. Tarkasāngraha of Ananābhāṭṭa, Section 47, p. 40.


THE NOTION OF SVABHĀVA IN THE THOUGHT OF CANDRAKĪRTI*

The idea of svabhāva, which literally means ‘[its] own (sva) existence or being or nature (bhāva)’, is of central importance in Madhyamika Buddhist philosophy. As such, it has been a subject of considerable discussion in recent scholarly literature.1 It is closely related to the question of the two truths2 and the problem of the existence and nature of the absolute3 in Madhyamika thought. Since the Madhyamika, like all Buddhist philosophy, is never without a soteriological purpose, the concept of svabhāva is also connected with the way in which the Buddhist path and its goal, enlightenment, are understood.4

In this paper, I propose to examine the notion of svabhāva as it occurs in two major works by Candrakīrti, who was one of the most important figures in the development of Madhyamika thought. He represents the Prāsaṅgika sub-school of the Madhyamika, as distinct from the Svātantrika sub-school. The two works are the Prasannapadā, a commentary on Nāgārjuna’s Mālamadhyamakakārikās, and the Madhyamakāvatāra, an independent work in the form of verses and auto-commentary. The Prasannapadā is available both in Sanskrit and in Tibetan, whereas the Sanskrit of the Madhyamakāvatāra has been lost. The first of the two works to be written was the Madhyamakāvatāra, since Candrakīrti refers to it and quotes from it several times in the Prasannapadā.

How, then, does Candrakīrti define svabhāva? Perhaps the clearest statement occurs in the Prasannapadā: “Here that property which is invariable in a thing is called its svabhāva, because [that property] is not dependent on another. For, in common usage, heat is called the svabhāva of fire, because it is invariable in it. That same heat, when it is apprehended in water, is not svabhāva, because it is contingent, since it has arisen from other causal conditions.”5 Thus ‘intrinsic nature’ or ‘inherent nature’ seems to be a good translation for svabhāva. The same applies to the term svartipa, literally, ‘[its] own (sva) form or nature (rūpa)’, which appears to be used as a synonym of svabhāva. In this paper, I will translate svartipa as ‘intrinsic nature’ and leave svabhāva untranslated.

At this point, two technical problems need to be discussed. In Tibetan, svabhāva is normally translated by rang bzhiṅ or ngo bo nyid, while svarīpa is normally translated by rang gi ngo bo. In a Mādhyamika context, there seems to be no difference in meaning between rang bzhiṅ and ngo bo nyid. That is, the Tibetan translation appears to use the terms interchangeably, rather than to distinguish different senses of the Sanskrit word svabhāva.

More troublesome is the fact that rang bzhiṅ also translates prakṛti, ‘original nature’ or simply ‘nature’. Clearly, the Tibetan translators and their Indian collaborators felt that svabhāva and prakṛti were synonymous. Also, in a passage from the Prasannapadā which will be translated in this paper, Candrakīrti lists prakṛti as one equivalent of svabhāva. Thus in translating from the Madhyamakāvatāra, where the original Sanskrit is not available, I have consistently translated rang bzhiṅ as svabhāva.

We have seen how Candrakīrti defines svabhāva. What does he say about it? In the Prasannapadā, we read, “There being no svabhāva, because entities (bhāva) are dependently originated (pratityasamutpanna) . . .” Likewise, in the Madhyamakāvatāra, “Because simply the fact of being conditioned by such-and-such (rkyen nyid ’di pa tsam zhitig, idampratayatmātā) is determined to be the meaning of dependent origination, svabhāva is not accepted for any entity.” According to the Prasannapadā, ordinary persons impute “a false svabhāva, [which] has a nature not at all perceived by the āryas”.

From these quotations, it would seem that Candrakīrti categorically denies that any svabhāva, or intrinsic nature, exists. Other passages, however, give a very different impression. In contrast to the last quotation from the Prasannapadā, the Madhyamakāvatāra states that “svabhāva does not in any way appear to those having misknowledge (avidyā).” In the Prasannapadā itself, we read that, without verbal teaching, “the learner is not able to understand svabhāva as it really is”. In the Madhyamakāvatāra, Candrakīrti goes so far as to say, “Ultimate reality (don dam pa, paramārtha) for the Buddhas is svabhāva itself. That, moreover, because it is nondeceptive is the truth of ultimate reality. It must be known by each of them for himself (so so rang gir par bya ba, pratyātmavedya).”

Thus it is apparent that Candrakīrti is using the term svabhāva in at least two different senses. To explore this further, we will examine in detail two longer passages, one from the Madhyamakāvatāra and one from the Prasannapadā. Both of these excerpts deal with the first two kārikās in chapter fifteen of Nāgārjuna’s Mālamadhyakakārikās. The Madhyamakāvatāra passage begins by quoting them:

A305–1 The arising of svabhāva through causes and conditions is not right.

A svabhāva arisen from causes and conditions would be artificial (krīṭaka). (15–1)

But how will svabhāva be called artificial?

For svabhāva is non-contingent (akṛtima) and without dependence on another. (15–2)

[Question:] But does there exist a svabhāva of the sort defined by the ācārya [Nāgārjuna] in the treatise [Mālamadhyakakakārikās], which is accepted by the ācārya?

A306–1 [Answer:] What is called dharma-ness (chos nyid, dharmatā) exists, regarding which the Blessed One said, “Whether Tathāgatas arise or do not arise, this dharma-ness of dharmas remains,” etc.

[Question:] But what is this which is called dharma-ness?

[Answer:] The svabhāva of these [dharmas], such as the eye.

[Question:] But what is their svabhāva?

[Answer:] That which these have [which is non-contingent and without dependence on another; it is their] intrinsic nature, which is to be comprehended by cognition free from the opthalmia of misknowledge.

Who would ask whether that exists or not? If it did not exist, for what purpose would bodhisattvas cultivate the path of the perfections? Because [it is] in order to comprehend that dharma-ness [that] bodhisattvas undertake hundreds of difficult actions.

After a quotation from the Ratnamegha Sūtra, Candrakīrti resumes:

A307–9 [Objection:] Incredible! (kye ma ma la, aho bata) You do not accept even the slightest entity; [yet] suddenly (glo bur du) you accept a svabhāva which is non-contingent and without dependence on another. You are one who says mutually contradictory things!

[Answer:] You are one who does not understand the intention of the treatise. Its intention is this: The dependently arising
intrinsinc nature of the eye, etc., is graspsable by spiritually immature (byis pa, bdiya) persons. If just this were the svabhāva of those [dhammas], then since that svabhāva would be comprehended even by one who is in error, the religious life (tshangs par spod pa, brahmacarya) would be pointless. But because just this is not svabhāva, therefore, in order to see that [svabhāva], the religious life is to the point.

Moreover, I speak of non-contingency and non-dependence on another, with regard to the conventional truth (kun rdzob kyi bden pa, samvyrtisatya). Only that which spiritually immature people cannot see is suitable as svabhāva. By that very [fact], ultimate reality (don dam pa, paramārtha) is not an entity or a non-entity, because it is tranquil by [its] intrinsic nature (rang bzhin gyis zhi ba nyid).

Not only is this svabhāva accepted by the ēcārya [Nāgārjuna], but he is able to make others accept this point as well. Therefore, it is also determined that this svabhāva is established for both [that is, Nāgārjuna and his opponent, once he has admitted the force of Nāgārjuna's arguments].

As for those who say that the svabhāva of fire is heat, and so on, they are totally wrong, because [heat] is contingent and dependent, due to [its] dependent origination. Nor is it right to say that, because of the existence of [heat], that [heat] exists without contingency and without dependence on another. [This is so] because the entity referred to by this [term] 'that [heat]' does not exist and because a thing (don, artha) of such a kind is taught as conventional reality (kun rdzob tu, samvyrtayā).

First, Candrākīrti asserts that Nāgārjuna does, indeed, accept a svabhāva of the sort which he defines in MMK 15–2cd exists. This is not a trivial question, because to define a term is not necessarily to assert that there exists anything which satisfies the definition. One can define 'unicorn' without believing that unicorns exist. From the Mālamadhyamakakārikās alone, it is far from clear that Nāgārjuna would be willing to use the term svabhāva in any positive way, as he occasionally does tattva and dharmaṭā. (Unlike Candrākīrti, Nāgārjuna does not explicitly equate svabhāva and dharmaṭā.) One possibly ambiguous case, MMK 7–16b, sāntām svabhāvataḥ, ‘trquil by svabhāva’, is glossed by Candrākīrti (B160–6) as svabhāvavirahitam, ‘devoid of svabhāva’. This interpretation is supported by MMK 22–16, which states that the Tathāgata and the world have the same svabhāva, but immediately adds that the Tathāgata is without svabhāva and the world is without svabhāva. However, a study of all of Nāgārjuna’s works, with which Candrākīrti was certainly familiar, might lead to a different conclusion about his views.

Candrākīrti goes on to relate the question of svabhāva to the idea of a path of spiritual practice. The concept of a path presupposes that one does not ordinarily perceive things as they really are, but that through practicing a path — in Buddhism, conduct, meditative concentration, and discernment (siла, samādhi, and prajñā) — one can come to perceive reality. Thus ultimate reality can neither be what is ordinarily perceived, nor can it be finally unrealizable. Therefore, genuine svabhāva, real intrinsic nature, must exist; but it can be directly perceived only by those who are advanced on the path.

Candrākīrti apparently equates this genuine svabhāva with ultimate reality (paramārtha). Thus although svabhāva exists, it, like paramārtha, is neither an entity nor a non-entity. Implicitly, this is why it is not an object of ordinary perception, since we perceive the world in terms of entities or their absence. Also, Candrākīrti cautions that the definition of svabhāva as non-contingent and independent is conventional truth. Presumably, this is because svabhāva, as ultimate reality, is not susceptible of being defined by words and concepts.

Finally, Candrākīrti distinguishes svabhāva as ultimate reality from the conventional idea that, for example, heat is the svabhāva of fire. He rejects the latter on the grounds that heat originates dependently and therefore is contingent. He then refutes an objection which is not entirely clear. The opponent may mean that if heat is said to arise dependently, then it must exist. To exist, it must be a real entity and therefore not contingent. Candrākīrti’s reply would then mean that the opponent makes a false assumption about what the Mādhyamika means by dependent origination. For the Mādhyamika, what is dependent can never be a real entity.

Many of these points are expanded and clarified in the Prasannapadā. It seems that, between writing the Madhyamakāvatāra and writing the Prasannapadā, Candrākīrti thought further about the questions surrounding the notion of svabhāva. Our Prasannapadā passage begins immediately after kārikā 15–2ab. For the sake of context, the translation of 15–1, 2ab is repeated.
The arising of *svabhāva* through causes and conditions is not right.

A *svabhāva* arisen from causes and conditions would be artificial (*kṛtaka*). (15–1)

But how will *svabhāva* be called artificial? (15–2ab)

"Both artificial and *svabhāva:*" because [these terms] are mutually incompatible, this [phrase] has an inconsistent sense. For here the etymology [is] that *svabhāva* is [something's] own nature (*svo bhaṇḍhaḥ svabhāva*). Therefore, in common usage, a thing (*pādārtha*) which is artificial, such as the heat of water... is never called *svabhāva*. But what is not artificial is *svabhāva*, for example, the heat of fire... For that is called *svabhāva* because of not being produced by contact (*samparka*) with other things.

Therefore, since the fixed worldly usage (*lokavyāvahāra*) is thus that the non-artificial is *svabhāva*, we now say: Let it be recognized (*grhyatām*) that heat, also, is not the *svabhāva* of fire, because of [its] artificiality. Here one apprehends that fire, which arises from the conjunction of a gem and fuel and the sun or from the friction of two sticks, etc., is purely (eva) dependent on causes and conditions; but heat does not occur apart from fire. Therefore, heat, too, is produced by causes and conditions, and therefore is artificial; and because of [its] being artificial, like the heat of water, it is clearly ascertained that [the heat of fire] is not [fire's] *svabhāva*.

[Objection:] Isn't it well known (*prasiddhā*) to people, including cowherds and women, that the heat of fire is [its] *svabhāva*?

[Answer:] Indeed, did we say that it was not well known? Rather, we say this: This does not deserve (*arhati*) to be *svabhāva*, because it is destitute of the defining characteristic (*lakṣaṇa*) of *svabhāva*. But because of following the errors of misknowledge, the world accepts the whole class of entities (*bhāvaḥ tattvam*), [which is] totally (eva) without *svabhāva*, as having *svabhāva*.

For example, those with ophthalmia, due to the ophthalmia as causal condition, believe (*abhinivṛśṭa*) that [illusory] hairs and the like, [which are] purely without *svabhāva*, have *svabhāva*.20 Likewise, the spiritually immature, due to their eye of understanding (*matinīyaya*) being impaired by the ophthalmia of misknowledge, believe that the whole class of entities, [which is] without *svabhāva*, has *svabhāva*. In accordance with their belief, they declare the defining characteristic. [For instance,] heat is the specific characteristic (*svalakṣaṇa*) of fire because it is just [fire's] own defining characteristic (*svaneva lakṣaṇam*), since it is not apprehended in anything other than that [fire] and thus is peculiar (*asadhāraṇa*) [to it].

And just because of the consensus (*prasiddhi*) of spiritually immature persons, this same conventional intrinsic nature (*sāmyaṃtāṃ svarūpam*) of these [entities] was laid down by the Blessed One in the Abhidharma. A generic property (*sādharānām*), however, such as impermanence, is called a 'general characteristic' (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*). But when it is a question of (*apekṣaya*) the vision of those having clear eyes of discernment (*prajñā*), free from the ophthalmia of misknowledge, then it is stated very clearly by the dryas,21 who do not apprehend the *svabhāva* imagined in the opinions of spiritually immature people — as those without ophthalmia do not see the hairs imagined by those with ophthalmia — that this [imagined *svabhāva*] is not the *svabhāva* of entities.

After quotations from the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, Candrakīrti's commentary resumes:

[Objection:] If, indeed, [you] say that such [things] as this heat of fire are not *svabhāva*, since they are due to causes and conditions and thus are artificial — in this case, what is the defining characteristic of the *svabhāva* of that [fire, etc.]? And what is that *svabhāva*? [This] ought to be stated.

[Answer:] For *svabhāva* is non-contingent (*akṛtriṇa*) and without dependence on another. (15–2cd)

Here *svabhāva* is [something's] own nature (*svo bhaṇḍhaḥ svabhāva*). Thus that which is some thing's own character
svabhāva is called its svabhāva. And what is something's own? That which, for it, is not contingent. But that which is contingent, such as the heat of water, is not its own.

And what is under someone's control (yacca yasyāyattam) is also his own, such as his own servants, his own wealth. But that of his which is under another's control is not his own, such as something temporarily borrowed, not subject to himself (asvatantram).

Thus what is contingent and what is dependent on another are not considered to be svabhāva. For just this reason, it is not correct that heat is fire's svabhāva — because it is dependent on causes and conditions, and because it is artificial, since it arises after having previously been non-existent (pūrvamabhūtvā pāścādutpādena). And because this is so, therefore, just that is called [fire's] svabhāva which is:

1. [a] invariable (avyabhicāri) for fire even in the three times,
2. [b] its innate nature (nīyam rūpam),
3. [c] non-contingent,
4. [d] which does not occur after having previously been non-existent; and
5. [c] which is not — like the heat of water, like the farther and nearer shore, or like long and short — dependent on causes and conditions.

[Question:] Does that intrinsic nature (svārūpam) of fire, [which is] thus, exist?

[Answer:] It neither exists, nor does it not exist, by intrinsic nature (na tadasti na cāpi nāsti svārūpataḥ). Although [this is] so, nevertheless, in order to avoid frightening [our] hearers, we say that it exists, having imputed [it] as conventional reality (saṃvṛtyā saṃdṛṣṭya).

As the Blessed One said,

Of the Dharma without syllables (anakṣara), what hearing [is there] and what teaching?

Because of imputation (saṃdṛṣṭya), [that which is] without syllables is heard and also taught.

Here, also, [Nāgārjuna] will say:

'Empty' should not be said, nor should 'non-empty'. Nor both, nor neither. But it is spoken of for the sake of conventional designation (prajñaptiyartham). (MMK22–11)

[Question:] If, indeed, through imputation (adhyātyāpato) you say that that [intrinsic nature] exists, what is it like?

[Answer:] Just that which is called the dharma-ness of dharmas (dharmaṇāṃ dharmatā) is their intrinsic nature (tatsvarūpam).

[Question:] Then what is this dharma-ness of dharmas?

[Answer:] The svabhāva of dharmas.

[Question:] What is this svabhāva?

[Answer:] Original nature (prakṛti).

[Question:] But what is this original nature?

[Answer:] That which emptiness is (veyaṃ sānyatā).

[Question:] What is this emptiness?

[Answer:] Lack of svabhāva (naiveṣvabhāvyam).

[Question:] What is this lack of svabhāva?

[Answer:] Thusness (tathātā).

[Question:] What is this thusness?

[Answer:] The being thus, changelessness, ever-abidingness (tathābhāvo 'vikaritvā sadaiva sthitā). For complete non-origination (sarvasa anutpada) itself — because of [its] not depending on another and its being non-contingent — is called the svabhāva of such [things] as fire.

This is what has been said: The whole class of entities is apprehended through the power of the ophthalmia of misknowledge. With whatever nature [that class] becomes an object — by means of non-seeing — for the āryas, who are free from the ophthalmia of misknowledge, just that intrinsic nature is determined to be the svabhāva of these [entities]. Also, it should be understood that learned teachers (acārya) have laid down this as the definition of that [svabhāva]:

For svabhāva is non-contingent and without dependence on another. (15–2cd)
And that svabhāva of entities, [which is] of the nature of non-origination, is — because of being a mere non-entity, since it is nothing at all — just non-svabhāva. Therefore, it should be understood that there is no svabhāva of entities.26

Candrakīrti begins by showing that there is a contradiction in the conventional view of svabhāva. In accepted usage, contingent qualities of a thing are not that thing’s svabhāva. Heat is not the svabhāva of water because water may be either cold or hot and still be water. Fire, on the other hand, is invariably hot. Moreover, at least in ancient Indian physics, heat is not found apart from fire. Thus heat is commonly accepted to be the svabhāva of fire. But, Chandrakirti continues, if svabhāva must be non-contingent, heat cannot be svabhāva. Heat exists only when fire exists; and fire itself is contingent, dependent for its existence on causes and conditions. Thus heat, also, is contingent and hence is not svabhāva.

In fact, for the Mādhyamikas, the basic error in the conventional view is its assumption that the world is composed of entities possessing svabhāva, so that they exist by virtue of their own intrinsic nature. The Mādhyamikas see this as being incompatible with the fundamental fact that things are dependent on causes and conditions. On the purely conventional level, where the belief in svabhāva is taken for granted, it is surely better to say that the svabhāva of fire is heat, rather than wetness, since fire and heat are, at least, always found together. But when one is not speaking purely conventionally, it has to be denied that heat qualifies as svabhāva, due to the dependent, contingent nature of both heat and fire.

In a criticism of the Mādhyamika’s critique of svabhāva, B. Bhattacharyya says, “But Nāgārjuna here seems to overlook the simple fact that warmth is an inseparable feature of fire . . . We find no logical difficulty in admitting that the nature of a thing is dependent on the conditions that bring the thing itself into being.”28 Nāgārjuna, as far as I know, does not use the example of heat and fire. On the other hand, as we have seen, Chandrakīrti is well aware that heat is an inseparable feature of fire. In fact, he holds that, as long as the assumption that things have an intrinsic nature is not questioned, being an ‘inseparable feature’ is the proper criterion for svabhāva. The kind of nature which the Mādhyamikas reject is a nature which would be dependent on nothing else and thus would make the thing possessing it an independent entity. On the other hand, if heat, fire’s supposed svabhāva, is, like fire,
he sees hairs in the jar, does the first person, in order to remove his misapprehension, tell him that the hairs do not exist. Thus the notion of the non-existence of svabhāva can arise only in relation to the illusion that svabhāva exists. The enlightened are without the illusion and have no need of its negation, but they negate it in order to teach the unenlightened. This negation, however, cannot be the ultimate truth because it is left behind as unnecessary after the illusion has been left behind.

Returning to the Prasannapadā, Candrakīrti continues, “... nevertheless, in order to avoid frightening [our] hearers, we say that [intrinsic nature, svātīpa] exists, having imputed [it] as conventional reality.” What is this imputed intrinsic nature then? Candrakīrti leads us, not without some humor, through a succession of Buddhist terms for ultimate reality, including both svabhāva and naiśsvabhāvyam, lack of svabhāva! Finally, we are told that “complete non-origination itself ... is called the svabhāva of such [things] as fire,” because it satisfies the criteria given in Nāgārjuna’s definition of svabhāva. We should note that a little earlier, Candrakīrti quoted a line from the Lankāvatāra Sūtra which says, “Oh Mahāmati, I have said that all dharmas are unoriginated, meaning (sandhāya) nonorigination by svabhāva.”

Hence the fact that things do not arise through svabhāva, intrinsic nature, is their svabhāva.

Does this mean that the imputed svabhāva is the very non-existence of svabhāva? Apparently, this is just what it does mean, since Candrakīrti concludes by saying that the “svabhāva of entities ... is ... just non-svabhāva. Therefore, it should be understood that there is no svabhāva of entities.”

Here two apparent contradictions need to be discussed. The first is that between the statement in the Madhyamakāvatāra that svabhāva exists and the statement in the Prasannapadā that “it neither exists, nor does it not exist, by intrinsic nature”. In the Prasannapadā, Candrakīrti adds that, through imputation, it is said to exist. Thus we can reconcile the two statements if we suppose that, in the Madhyamakāvatāra, Candrakīrti is speaking on the level of imputation and conventional reality (saṃvyātya samādopya).

This explanation becomes more plausible if we recall that in the Madhyamakāvatāra, Candrakīrti lays great stress on the idea of the Buddhist path. This is true, in fact, not only of the passage translated but also of the work as a whole, which deals with the ten bhūmis of the bodhisattva and the stage of Buddhahood. “In order to avoid frightening the hearer” into the nihilistic conclusion that the spiritual path is pointless, Candrakīrti says that a svabhāva of things exists. It is their ultimate reality, and the path is the means for comprehending it. According to the Prasannapadā, though, one eventually comes to realize — by means of the path — that the notion of existence through svabhāva and the corresponding notion of nonexistence are inapplicable to reality.

The second apparent contradiction occurs in the Prasannapadā when, after saying that svabhāva exists, Candrakīrti later says that there is no svabhāva. The first statement is explicitly made on the level of conventional truth; the second presumably is, since Candrakīrti does not want to assert either existence or non-existence as ultimate truth. Thus the contradiction cannot be resolved by appealing to different levels of truth.

After the first of the two statements, Candrakīrti quotes kārikā eleven of chapter twenty-two of the Milamadhyamakakārikās. In his commentary on that kārikā, in chapter twenty-two of the Prasannapadā, he explains that the Buddha has taught emptiness, non-emptiness, etc., on different occasions in accordance with the needs and capacities of various disciples. Similarly, we may suppose that the statement that svabhāva exists is designed here, as in the Madhyamakāvatāra, to dispel any tendency to nihilistic negation (apavāda) of things. The statement that there is no svabhāva is designed to counter the opposite tendency to make the fact that things lack svabhāva itself a thing.

It might be objected that, even if this is the intention behind the statements, the statements themselves are still contradictory. One might reply that this is not a problem if the intention is understood. In this case, however, I think that more than this can be said. The two statements are not, in fact, contradictory because “svabhāva” does not mean the same thing in both.

To begin with, it seems to be implicit in what Candrakīrti has said that the svabhāva of an entity is normally considered to be some positive quality, rather than the mere absence of a quality. Moreover, we have the explicit definition of svabhāva as non-contingent and without dependence on another. Thus the statement that svabhāva does not exist means that none of the qualities of things can be their svabhāva, since things, and therefore all their qualities, are contingent and dependent on causes and conditions.

Now Candrakīrti observes that the fact that things are without svabhāva is, itself, invariably true and thus non-contingent. The fact that things lack
svabhāva follows from their being dependent on causes and conditions; but it does not depend on the presence of some particular conditions, rather than others. Thus the fact of the absence of svabhāva satisfies the explicit part of the definition of svabhāva! However, it differs from such candidates for svabhāva as the heat of fire in two ways: (1) Being purely negative, it does not satisfy the implicit condition that svabhāva be a positive quality. (2) It is not a quality of things, but a fact about qualities of things, namely, that none of them are svabhāva.

Candrākīrti discusses the first of these two differences, but not the second. He says that the imputed svabhāva is non-svabhāva "because of being a mere non-entity, since it is nothing at all". An absence is a non-entity; thus although we may speak of the absence of svabhāva in things as being their svabhāva, there is still no entity which is their svabhāva. The phrase about svabhāva's becoming an object "by means of non-seeing" probably alludes to this. When we see the absence of svabhāva, we do not see any entity.

On the second point, if we say that the svabhāva of things is that they have no svabhāva, this is analogous to the paradox of the liar. Examples of this paradox are the sentences 'I am lying', 'This sentence is false', etc., which seem to be true if they are false and false if they are true. Likewise, if lack of svabhāva is the svabhāva of things, then it seems that things have svabhāva if they do not have it and vice versa.

The paradox can be resolved by observing that here the svabhāva which things lack is a positive quality which would satisfy the definition of svabhāva. The svabhāva which things are said to have is the very fact that none of their qualities satisfy the definition of svabhāva. Thus the svabhāva which is affirmed belongs to a higher level of abstraction than the svabhāva which is negated. Since what is being negated is not the same as what is being affirmed, there is no paradox.

To sum up, we can distinguish five levels31 in Candrākīrti's consideration of svabhāva:

(1) On the conventional level, the belief that reality is composed of entities possessing svabhāva is not questioned. On this level, it is correct to say that heat is the svabhāva of fire, since heat is invariably a property of fire.

(2) Next, it is denied that the conventional svabhāva is truly svabhāva. Things arise through dependence on causes and conditions. Therefore, they, and all their qualities, are contingent and dependent; but svabhāva is defined to be non-contingent and independent.

(3) The fact that things lack svabhāva is invariably true and not contingent on any particular circumstances. Therefore, that fact itself could be said to be their svabhāva.

(4) The svabhāva of level three is purely negative. Thus it is not the same as the svabhāva considered on level one; it is, in fact, the negation of it.

(5) Finally, even to say that svabhāva does not exist is to imply that either oneself or one's audience is not entirely free from the belief in svabhāva. Therefore, ultimate truth, truth as it is for those who are free from misknowledge, cannot be expressed by asserting either the existence or the nonexistence of svabhāva.

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NOTES

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1 Bhattacharyya (1979); Mehta (1979); Sopa (1980); Sprung (1978); Sprung (1979); Wayman (1978); Wayman (1980).

2 Matsumoto (1979); Sprung (1973); Streng (1971); Sweet (1979).

3 De Jong (1972a); De Jong (1972b); May (1978).

4 Ruegg (1971).

5 Iha yo dharmo yam padārtham na vyabhicarat sa tasya svabhāva iti vyapādyate, aparapratībaddhatvat. Āgnerasaṃyam hi loke tadasvabhācitvālāsvabhāva ityucyate. Tatvaśauyamapātālābhyānam parapratyayusambhāvatākārtrātmanā svabhāva iti. B241–7 through 9.

6 B87–1. 2

7 A228–9 through 11.

8 BS8–1. 2. The āryas, "Noble Ones," are spiritually advanced persons, specifically, the Buddhhas, the bodhisattvas of the Mahāyāna (from the first bhumi on), and the eight āryapadgalas of the Śrāvakayāna and Pratyekabuddhayāna. Here the important point about the āryas is that they all have direct experience of emptiness (śūnyata), the absence of svabhāva in things. See chapter one of the Madhyamakāvatāra, verse five ff. All those who are not āryas are called bāla, "spiritually immature."


11 Ācārya is a title meaning 'learned teacher'.

12 'di dag ni (A306–6, D157–3–7, P151–2–5). I have read 'di dag gi.
svabhāva in the thought of Candrakīrti

BIBLIOGRAPHY


BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ABBREVIATIONS

A


B


D


P


Identified by Tsongkhapa, 504–1.

Or 'intrinisc nature, dependent origination'. Rang gi ngo bo rten cing 'brel bar byung ba (A307-15, D157-4-7, P151-3–6).

De Ita ba'i don du (A307-19, P151-3–7). Derge has de'i lla ba'i don du (D158-1-1). Tsongkhapa has de ba' ba'i don du (S06-1).

Or 'besides, he is able to make this point accepted'. See Tsongkhapa S06-4, 5.

Read me... tsha ba with D158-1–3 and Tsongkhapa, 506–6.

'byung ba'i (D44-3–5, P42-3–5); missing in B260–11.

B261–2, 3 has yathā hi taimirīkāstīmirpratīyadāsantāmaya keśādīsvabhāvaṃ sasvabhāvavetānābhāvītiṣṭḥ. The Tibetan (D44-4–1, P42-4–1) appears to have niśvabhāvavetāma keśādī svabhāvatavatā. I have read niśvabhāvavetāma keśādī svabhāvatavatvā, as both more intelligible and corresponding to the Sanskrit of the preceding sentence and the following clause.

Omit pariḥsāyapāṇāh (B261–9) with Tibetan (D44–4–5, P42–4–5, 6).

B262–8, 9 has niśvabhāvam, 'without svabhāva.' The Tibetan (D44–4–7, P42–5–1) has rang bzhin ma yin no. Read with Tibetan.


Read ca... iti prabhāvatvā ca in B265–2, with Tibetan (dang, D45–2–3, P43–1–6).

Yenlitmanii vigaiiividylitimiriilJiimiirya1}timadarsanayogena (B265–2, 3) with Tibetan (D44–4–7, P42–5–1) has rang bzhin ma yin no. Read with Tibetan.

Tibetan, loc. cit., has dagos po'i rang bzhin du yod pa ma yin no, 'it' does not exist as the svabhāva of an entity'.

Read with Tibetan.


