

Re-examination of Dignāga's Definitions of *sapakṣa*

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1 Introduction

As already known, there are two different definitions of *sapakṣa* given by Dignāga (ca. 480–540):

1. That which are similar to the property to be established. (NMkh)
2. That which are similar to the subject of a thesis in possessing the common characteristic of the property to be established. (PSV)

As Katsura (2004) points out, the latter is the standard definition accepted by Dharmakīrti (ca. 600–60) and later Indian Buddhist logicians, whereas the former makes less sense, perhaps because of problems with Xuanzang's Chinese translation. The issue at stake here is whether *sapakṣa* has commonality with the subject of the thesis (*dharmin*) or with the property to be established (*sādhyadharmā*). Tibetan scholars of the Sa skyā pa pay full attention to this issue. What they make clear, along with specific examples, is that the former definition may be valid in cases of improper arguments, such as one for proving sound's permanence by means of the sign "being an object of cognition." Furthermore, they are also trying to clarify that the latter definition fits not only proper arguments but also improper ones. The Sa skyā pa's discussion provides a new perspective on the two different definitions of *sapakṣa* that Dignāga gives. Therefore, this paper aims to shed some light on Sa skyā pa's idea.

2 Dignāga's Definitions of *sapakṣa*

In Dignāga's *Nyāyamukha*, *sapakṣa* is defined as a set of objects which are similar to the property to be established. Katsura (2004) translates the passage as follows:

"In this connection, if a set/group (*pakṣa*) [of objects] are proximate and similar to the property to be proved, they are called the similar set/group (*sapakṣa*), for any object can be called *pakṣa*."¹

Then, in the *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, *sapakṣa* is defined as a set of objects which are similar to the subject of a thesis in possessing the property to be established. Katsura (2004) translates the passage as follows:

"In this connection, *sapakṣa* is [a set/group of objects] which are similar [to the subject of a thesis, i.e., *pakṣa*] on account of the common characteristic (*sāmānya*) of a property to be proved [such as non-eternity] due to proximity/affinity (*pratyāsatti*), for any object can be called *pakṣa*."²

¹NMkh (T1628, vol. 32, 1c29–2a1): 此中若品與所立法隣近均等說名同品。以一切義皆名品故。Tucci (1930: 22) translates: " 'Positive instance' (*sapakṣa*) is called that particular instance [only], which is analogous to the predicate to be proved; in fact every object can be an instance." Tachikawa (1971: 117) remarks: "The term '*sapakṣa*' refers to an individual members of a class, not to a class considered as a single collective entity. For example, the fireplace mentioned as an instance of the *sapakṣa* is a member of the class fireplace, not the class Fireplace. Smoke or fire can upon a fireplace, but not upon the class Fireplace taken as an abstract entity."

²PSV_K P 130a6f.: *de la don thams cad phyogs su byas pas nye ba'i phyir bsgrub par bya ba'i chos kyi spyis mthun pa'i phyogs so* || Sanskrit reconstruction is given in Katsura (2004: 121): **tatra pratyāsattēḥ sādhyadharmasāmānyena samānaḥ [pakṣaḥ] sapakṣaḥ sarvo 'rthaḥ pakṣa iti kṛtvā* |

With respect to the above definitions of *sapakṣa*, Katsura (2004: 121–123) makes the following remarks:

1. The definition of *sapakṣa* in NMkh does not make much sense, and it is possible that Xuanzang’s Chinese translation contains some textual problems. Therefore, we can assume that the original of the definition of *sapakṣa* in NMkh was something like one in PS.
2. *Sapakṣa* consists of all those which are known by both parties to possess a property to be proved, non-eternity (*anityatā*), but the presence of a property to be proved in *pakṣa* (in other words, whether sound is non-eternal or not) is not known to the opponent.
3. The distinction between *pakṣa* and *sapakṣa* is made in the epistemological sense. In the ontological sense, there is no difference between *pakṣa* and *sapakṣa* as long as both possess the property to be proved, such as non-eternity, whether it is known or not.

The important points have already been made clear here, but the issues that still need to be examined are [1] whether the definition given in the *Nyāyamukha* is really not valid in all arguments (both proper and improper), and [2] why the definition given in the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* is valid even in the case of improper arguments (e.g., “Sound is permanent because it is an object of cognition”). The Sa skya pa’s epistemological works provide a good perspective from which to consider these issues.

3 Sa paṇ on *sapakṣa*

In accordance with Dignāga’s *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, Sa paṇ considers *sapakṣa* as a set of objects which are similar to the subject on account of possessing the similar property to be established. In his *Tshad ma rigs gter*, Sa paṇ says:

“*Sapakṣa* is [a set of objects] that are similar to *pakṣa* [i.e., the subject] on account of [having] the commonality with the property to be established; and *vipakṣa* is [a set of objects] that are not similar to that.”³

As stated here, *sapakṣa* is what is similar to the subject due to the fact that it is considered as a set of objects that possess the property to be established as the subject does, and it is exemplified in the autocommentary on *Tshad ma rigs gter* as follows:

“The kitchen, on the basis of which the relation between smoke and fire is established, and a [smoky] mountain are similar in that both possess fire.”⁴

What Sa paṇ has in mind is the argument for establishing the existence of fire on a smoky mountain (i.e., “There is fire on that mountain because there is smoke on that”). Sa paṇ confirms that the kitchen, which is a member of *sapakṣa*, is similar to *pakṣa*, namely, a smoky mountain, due to the fact that both possess fire.

What Sa paṇ calls attention to, however, is that *sapakṣa* that occurs in some improper arguments is not what is similar to the subject in actuality. He says:

³*Tshad rigs gter* 162b6f.: *phyogs dang bsgrub bya’i chos kyi spyis* | | *mtshungs dang mi mthsung phyogs gnyis yin* | |

⁴*Rigs gter rang ’grel* 163b2f.: *du ba dang me’i ’brel ba grub pa’i tshang mang ’di dang la gnyis me dang ldan par mthun no* | |

“The second section: Dispelling the undesirable consequence of a common indefinite sign being a contradictory one.

[Question:] Suppose that someone presents [a formulation like this]: “The subject, sound, is permanent because it is an object of cognition.” In that case, [1] it is not possible that [*sapakṣa* in this argument] and sound, which is *pakṣa* in its secondary sense (*phyogs btags pa ba*), are similar in that they possess [the same] permanent nature; and [2] [the sign, ‘being an object of cognition’] occurs only in *vipakṣa*. [Because of these two reasons], it absurdly follows that, [‘being an object of cognition’] is [not a common indefinite sign but instead] a contradictory sign.

[Answer:] Although the specific character (*rang mtshan*) of permanent [factors] cannot exist [in actuality], the exclusion of others (*gzhan sel*) of them can exist and so does space etc. Furthermore, both [space etc. understood as the exclusion of others] and a pot etc. are [equally] pervaded by [the property of being] an object of cognition. Hence [‘being an object of cognition’] is an indefinite [sign] and can never be a contradictory one.”⁵

With regard to the improper argument (e.g., “Sound is permanent because it is an object of cognition”), there cannot exist *sapakṣa* in actuality since there are no such things that would be permanent and similar to sound on account of possessing the same property of permanence; for there is no permanent entity at all in actuality. Although there is no specific character (*rang mtshan*)⁶ of permanent entities, there exists the exclusion of others (*gzhan sel*)⁷ of them, which is postulated at the conceptual level. When the existence of permanent entities is postulated at the conceptual level by taking those entities as the mere exclusion of others, one can establish the existence of *sapakṣa* at the conceptual level as well and thereby state that the sign “being an object of cognition” is present in both *sapakṣa* and *vipakṣa*. It is for this reason that “being an object of cognition” is a common indefinite sign and not a contradictory one.

Other Sa skya pa thinkers, 'U yug pa rig pa'i seng ge (ca. 1200–1269, hereafter “'U yug pa”), G-yag ston sangs rgyas dpal (1350–1414, hereafter “G-yag ston”), Shākya mchog ldan, and Go rams pa bsod nams seng ge (1429–1489, hereafter “Go rams pa”) also discuss the same problem in their commentaries on the *Tshad ma rigs gter* and follow Sa paṅ's idea.⁸

According to these Sa skya pa logicians, the definition of *sapakṣa* as given in the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* is fine with respect to both proper and improper arguments. In the case of proper arguments, *sapakṣa* must to be a set of objects that are similar to the subject in actuality, whereas, in the case of improper

⁵*Rigs gter rang 'grel* 163b3ff.: *gnyis pa thun mong gi ma nges pa 'gal bar thal ba spang ba ni | sgra chos can rtag ste | gzhal bya yin pa'i phyir ces bkod pa'i tshes phyogs btags pa ba sgra dang rtag pa'i chos yod du mthun pa mi srid phyir dang | mi mthun pa'i phyogs nyid la 'jug pa'i phyir 'gal bar 'gyur ro zhe na | rtag pa'i rang mtshan mi srid kyang gzhan sel srid cing de dang mthun pa nam mkha' la sogs pa srid pas de dang bum pa la sogs pa gnyis ka la shes byas khyab pa'i phyir ma nges pa yin gyi 'gal bar ga la 'gyur |*

⁶*Tshad ma rigs gter* 4b4f.: *rang mtshan 'dzin pa rtog med de || spyi 'dzin pa ni rtog pa yin || de la rang mtshan dngos po ste || spyi ni dngos por grub pa med ||* (“The specific character is apprehended by non-conceptual cognition; and universal is apprehended by conceptual cognition. In this regard, the specific character is an actual entity, but there is not the universal which is established as an actual entity.”)

⁷*Tshad ma rigs gter* 6a5f.: *gzhan sel blo yi 'jug tshul yin || bem po'i don la gzhan sel med ||* (“The exclusion of others (*gzhan sel*) is the mode of conceptual construction. There is not the exclusion of others in the case of the reality of matters.”). Katsura (2014: 105) remarks: “According to Dignāga, a linguistic item refers neither to an individual object (*vyakti*) nor to the universal (*sāmānyaljāti*) that shared by the individual members of the same class, but refers rather to *apoha*, or more precisely, *anyāpoha* (exclusion of others), which is nothing other than our mental construction. [...] ‘Exclusion of others’ is a mode of indirectly knowing an object. As discussed immediately below, an object of such an indirect cognition itself is regarded as ‘exclusion of others’ as well.”

⁸See *Rigs pa grub pa* 144a1ff.; 'Od stong 'phro ba 203a1ff.; *Sde bdun ngag gi rol mtsho* 127b4f.; *Rigs gter don gsal* 112a6f.

arguments, it is a set of objects that are similar to the subject either in an actual way or only conceptually; for in the case of some improper arguments, such as “sound is permanent because it is an object of cognition,” which is found in Dignāga’s *Hetucakraḍamaru*,⁹ *sapakṣa*, namely, the collection of things that are permanent, is not existent in actuality but only postulated at the conceptual level.

4 Rong ston on *sapakṣa*

Rong ston also discusses the problem about the definition of *sapakṣa* that occurs in improper arguments. Interestingly, he remarks that *sapakṣa* in that case need not be similar to the subject, but rather it is supposed to be a set of objects that have the property to be established. This reminds us of the definition of *sapakṣa* given in the *Nyāyamukha*. The following are quotes from his *Nyi ma’i snying po*:

“[Question:] It absurdly follows that, when ‘being an object of cognition’ is presented as a sign for establishing sound’s permanence, there is not *sapakṣa* in that [argument], because there is no such thing that is similar to sound in [possessing the property of] being permanent.

If you admit this, then it follows that [being an object of cognition] does not occur completely in the domain of *sapakṣa*.

[Answer:] As we have already explained, [Dignāga] defines *sapakṣa* by considering the subject of inquiry as a common element (*mtshun yul*) but this statement is made in the light of the basis of consideration (*ltos gzhi*) of the mode of a [proper] sign. However, this is not the case here because [a set of objects having] the property to be established is said to be *sapakṣa* and [a set of objects having] the property to be negated is said to be *vipakṣa*.”¹⁰

In such an improper argument (i.e., “Sound is permanent because it is an object of cognition”), *sapakṣa* is regarded as a set of objects that have the property to be established, i.e., permanence, which of course should be the mere exclusion of others, rather than a set of objects that are similar to the subject “sound.” In the case of proper arguments, on the other hand, the subject of inquiry is the thing to which *sapakṣa* is said to be “similar.” Rong ston says:

“When [Dignāga] says: ‘what is similar to it’ (*tattulye*), he regards the subject of inquiry as a common element (*mtshun yul*, lit. ‘the object to which [*sapakṣa*] is said to be similar’) and establishes the mode of positive concomitance (*rjes ’gro’i tshul*) on the basis of a set of objects that are similar to the [subject]. This is done in consideration of proper signs.”¹¹

As indicated here, it is only in terms of a proper sign that Dignāga says that the subject of inquiry is the element that is similar to *sapakṣa*, and that *sapakṣa* is a set of objects that are similar to the subject in possessing the property to be established. Only in the case of a proper argument, one can safely state that

⁹See HCD D 93a3ff.

¹⁰*Nyi ma’i snying po* 202b4ff.: ’o na sgra rtag par sgrub pa la gzhall bya rtags su bkod pa’i tshes | de’i mthun phyogs med par thal | sgra dang rtag par mtshungs pa mi srid pa’i phyir | ’dod na | mthun phyogs la khyab byed du ’jug pa min par thal zhe na | shes ’dod chos can mthun yul du bzung nas mthun phyogs su bshad pa ni rtags kyi tshul gyi ltos gzhi la bzung ngo zhes sngar bshad zin la | ’dir ni bsgrub bya’i chos dang dgag bya’i chos la mthun phyogs dang mi mthun phyogs su brjod pas don mi gcig go | |

¹¹*Nyi ma’i snying po* 196a3f.: de dang mthun pa zhes ’byung ba’i mthun yul shes ’dod chos can du bzhang nas | de dang mthun pa’i phyogs la rjes ’gro’i tshul bzhang pa ni rtags yang dag gi dbang du byas pa yin |

a sign is present in what is similar to the subject, thus satisfying the second condition of a proper sign.¹²

What Rong ston means to say is that *sapakṣa* in an improper argument and one in a proper argument are not the same. The former is not always supposed to be a set of objects that are similar to the subject in actuality. But it must be a set of objects that have the property to be established, as shown in the definition of *sapakṣa* given in the *Nyāyamukha*. The latter, on the other hand, must be a set of objects that are similar to the subject in possessing the property to be established, as indicated in the definition of *sapakṣa* in the *Pramāṇasamuccaya*.

5 Shākya mchog ldan on *sapakṣa*

Shākya mchog ldan interprets *sapakṣa* along the line of Sa paṅ's idea. He says in his commentary on the *Tshad ma rigs gter* that *sapakṣa* must be a set of objects that are similar to the subject:

“*Sapakṣa* and *vipakṣa* are defined respectively as follows: [1] that which is ascertained, by means of a valid cognition, by an opponent at a particular situation as [a set of objects] that are similar to *pakṣa* [i.e., the subject] on account of [having] the commonality with the property to be established. [2] that which is ascertained, by means of a valid cognition, by an opponent at a particular situation as [a set of objects] that are dissimilar to *pakṣa* [i.e., the subject] on account of not [having] the commonality with the property to be established.”¹³

As explained here, *sapakṣa* is regarded as a set of objects that are similar to the subject because of having the commonality with the property to be established. As will be discussed, although *sapakṣa* that occurs in some improper arguments is not similar to the subject in actuality, it is said to be “similar” to that from an opponent's perspective. Shākya mchog ldan says in his *Lugs ngan pham byed* as follows:

“[Our theory] is not dispelled by [pointing out] the fallacy that the first type of indefinite signs falls into the category of a contradictory one because whatever is *sapakṣa* does not necessarily meet the etymologically analyzed meaning of *sapakṣa*. Even space that is ascertained as a permanent thing by an opponent meets the etymologically analyzed [meaning] of *sapakṣa* for establishing sound's permanence, though merely on the basis of [the opponent's] cognition, because the exclusion of others, namely, the mere elimination of ‘what is not permanent sound’ is possible from his perspective.”¹⁴

As Shākya mchog ldan remarks here, as regards the invalid argument using the first type of indefinite signs, i.e., “common indefinite signs” (e.g. “being an object of cognition” for establishing sound's permanence), *sapakṣa* is not a set of objects that are similar to the subject in actuality, but rather it is described as a set of objects that are “similar” to that from an opponent's¹⁵ perspective. Suppose someone thinks

¹²PS II 5cd (cf. Katsura 1983: 543; Majiujie 2020:146): *anumeye 'tha tattulye sadbhāvo nāstitāsati* | (“[A proper sign] is that which must be existent in the object to be inferred as well as in what is similar to that, and nonexistent in the absence of that.”)

¹³*Sde bdun ngag gi rol mtsho* 127a6f.: *phyogs dang bsgrub bya'i chos kyi spyis mtshungs pa dang | der mi mtshungs pa nyid du skabs kyi rgol ba'i tshad mas nges pa ni | go rim bzhin du phyogs gnyis kyi mtshan nyid yin no |*

¹⁴*Lugs ngan pham byed* 28a6ff.: *ma nges pa'i dang po 'gal bar thal ba'i nyes pas kyang mi gnod de | mthun phyogs yin pa la | mthun phyogs kyi don gyi sgra bshad ni tshang bas ma khyab pa'i phyir | rgol bas rtag par nges pa'i nam mkha' la'ang | sgra rtag par sgrub pa'i mthun phyogs kyi sgra bshad blo ngo la ltos pa tsam zhig tshang ste | blo ngor sgra rtag pa ma yin pa rnam par bcad tsam gyi gzhan sel srid pa'i phyir |*

¹⁵In this section, the word “*rgol ba*” refers to a proper opponent as Nemoto (2013: 153) remarks: “Take for example an argument: ‘Sound is impermanent because it is a product.’ If someone is a proper opponent for

that permanent sound exists. Although permanent sound does not exist in actuality, the exclusion of others (*gzhan sel*, **anyāpoha*) of such sound can be established by eliminating “what is not permanent sound” in his mind. Therefore, in terms of exclusion of others, space can be described as a member of *sapakṣa* that is similar to the subject “sound” at the conceptual level, for it has the property of being permanent as the subject “sound” has at least in his understanding. However, Shākya mchog ldan does not follow Rong ston’s idea of differentiating two types of *sapakṣa*, namely, that which are similar to the subject (as defined in the *Pramāṇasamuccaya*) and that which have the property to be established (which reminds us of the definition in the *Nyāyamukha*). He considers only the definition given in the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* as valid.

6 Conclusion

We have examined so far the Sa skya pa Buddhist logicians’ ideas of the definition of *sapakṣa*. Sa paṅ and his followers, ’U yug pa, G-yag ston, Shākya mchog ldan, and Go rams pa, only accept the definition of *sapakṣa* that is given in the *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, and maintain that *sapakṣa* is a set of objects that are similar to the subject on account of having commonality with the property to be established either in actuality or conceptually. In the case of proper arguments, a set of objects can be similar to the subject in actuality, but in the case of some improper arguments, such as “Sound is permanent because it is an object of cognition,” a set of things that are permanent is only hypothetically said to be similar to the subject “sound” at the conceptual level.

However, according to Rong ston, another definition of *sapakṣa*, namely, “a set of objects that is similar to the property to be established,” is also justifiable in the case of improper arguments such as “Sound is permanent because it is an object of cognition.” In this case, a set of things that are supposed to have the property to be established, i.e., being permanent, is said to be *sapakṣa*. This implies that, in Rong ston’s understanding, the definition of *sapakṣa* given in the *Nyāyamukha* can be valid in such improper arguments, though he makes a slight modification to this definition. He does not state that a set of objects that are similar to the property to be established, as mentioned in the *Nyāyamukha*, is *sapakṣa*. Instead, he says that a set of objects that have the property to be established is *sapakṣa* in such improper arguments.

Abbreviation and References

(1) Primary sources

HCD D *Hetucakraḍamaru* (Dignāga): Tibetan Sde dge ed. *Tshad ma*. Ce. Tohoku no. 4209.

Lugs ngan pham byed *Tshad ma rigs pa’i gter gyi dgongs rgyan lung dang rigs pa’i ’khor los lugs ngan pham byed* (Shākya mchog ldan). In *Collected Writings of Gser-mdog Pan-chen Shākya-mchog-ldan*, vol. 9. Delhi: Jaryed Press. 1988.

NMkh *Nyāyamukha* (Dignāga). The Chinese translation: *Yinming zhengli men lun ben* (trans. Xuanzang). Taishō 1628, vol. 32.

presenting this argument, he must be a person who has not yet understood that sound is impermanent but has already ascertained that sound is a product, that the the property of being a product is present in similar instances (that which is impermanent) only, and that the property of being a product is completely absent in dissimilar instances (that which is permanent). When the argument is presented for the sake of this opponent, the inferential sign ‘being a product’ works effectively and hence is said to be a proper sign (*rtags yang dag*); and by using the sign this opponent can newly realize that sound is impermanent.”

- Nyi ma'i snying po** *Tshad ma rigs pa'i gter gyi rnam bshad nyi ma'i snying po* (Rong ston shākya rgyal mtshan). In *The Collected Works of Rong-ston Sha-kya-Rgyal-mtshan*, vol. 1. Kathmandu: Sakya College. 1999.
- 'Od stong 'phro ba** *Sde bdun gyi dgons 'grel tshad ma rigs pa'i gter gyi de kho na nyid gsal bar byed pa rigs pa'i 'od stong 'phro ba* (Gyag ston sangs rgyas dpal). In *Collection of Commentaries on Buddhist Epistemology by Various Authors*, vol. 8. Rdzong sar khams bye: Rdzong sar khams bye'i slob gling thub bstan dar rgyas gling. 2009.
- PSV_K P** *Pramāṇasamuccaya* (Dignāga, trans, Kanakavarman and Dad pa'i shes rab): Tibetan Peking ed. *Tshad ma*. Ce. Ötani no. 5702.
- Rigs gter don gsal** *Sde bdun mdo dang bcas pa'i dgongs pa phyin ci ma log par 'grel pa tshad ma rigs pa'i gter gyi don gsal bar byed pa* (Go rams pa bsod nams seng ge). In *The Collected Works of Kun-mkhyen Go-rams-pa Bsod-nams-seng-ge*, vol. 2. Dehra-dun: Sakya College. 1979.
- Rigs gter rang 'grel** *Tshad ma rigs pa'i gter gyi rang 'grel* (Sa skya paṇḍita kun dga' rgyal mtshan). Dehradun: Sakya Centre. 1983
- Rigs pa grub pa** *Bstan bcos tshad ma rigs pa'i gter gyi rgyan rigs pa grub pa* ('U yug pa rigs pa'i seng ge). In *Collection of Commentaries on Buddhist Epistemology by various authors*, vol. 7. Rdzong sar khams bye: Rdzong sar khams bye'i slob gling thub bstan dar rgyas gling. 2009.
- Sde bdun ngag gi rol mtsho** *Tshad ma rigs pa'i gter gyi rnam bshad sde bdun ngag gi rol mtsho* (Shākya mchog ldan). In *The works of Pen-chen Shakya mchog-ldan*, vol. 19. Kathmandu: Sachen International, Guru Lama. 2006.
- Tshad ma rigs gter** *Tshad ma rigs pa'i gter* (Sa skya paṇḍita kun dga' rgyal mtshan). In *The Collected Works of the Founding Masters of the Sa-skya*, vol. 11. Dehradun: Sakya Center. 1993.

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Re-examination of Dignāga's Definitions of *sapakṣa*

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This paper examines the Sa skya pa's view of different definitions of *sapakṣa* ("similar set") given by Dignāga. Sa paṅ and his followers, such as 'U yug pa and Shākya mchog ldan, only accept the definition of *sapakṣa* that is given in the *Pramañāsamuccaya*, and assert that *sapakṣa* is a set of objects that are similar to the subject on account of possessing the property to be established either in actuality or conceptually. However, according to Rong ston, *sapakṣa* that occurs in improper arguments is to be distinguished from one that occurs in proper arguments, since *sapakṣa* that occurs in improper arguments need not be similar to the subject, but rather it is a set of objects that have the property to be established. Therefore, this implies that another definition of *sapakṣa*, namely, "a set of objects that is similar to the property to be established," given in the *Nyāyamukha* is also justifiable in the case of improper arguments such as "Sound is permanent because it is an object of cognition." Nevertheless, he makes a slight modification to this definition in the following manner: A set of objects that have the property to be established.