

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Saṅghabhadra's arguments for the existence of an intermediate state (*antarābhava*) between biological death and rebirth as translated by Xuanzang (602?–664 CE)

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Abstract

The Buddhist doctrine of transmigration (*samsāra*) offers a coherent model of a cycle of existence wherein a sentient being continues throughout life, survives death, traverses the afterlife, and is, sooner or later, reborn, thus inaugurating another lifecycle as a new life-form. The Buddhist tenets of no-self (*anātman*) and impermanence, however, deny the possibility of a self, soul, or any form of spiritual substance that persists throughout the cycle of transmigration. This article examines the argumentation developed by the Indic Buddhist philosopher, Saṅghabhadra (fl. fifth-century CE), as part of his effort to reconcile the doctrines of no-self and karmic continuity. In his **Nyāyānusārasāstra* and the **Samayapradīpikāśāstra*, two seminal, yet vastly understudied, doctrinal treatises of Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma Buddhism that survive only within the translation corpus of the Sinitic scholar-monk Xuanzang (602?–664 CE), Saṅghabhadra defines the *antarābhava*, the 'intermediate state of existence', as the interstitial space and interim time-period existing between the locus wherein the sequentially reproducing psychic constituents of an individual sentient being, including consciousness, desert the no-longer viable body at the moment of biological death, and the locus wherein these psychic constituents become associated with a new gross physical body in the form of a new viable embryo at the moment of rebirth. By instantiating the *antarābhava* as an actual interval with real extension in space and time, necessarily traversed by the vast majority of sentient beings after dying in order to reach the next gross physical body, Saṅghabhadra provides, for Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma Buddhism, a rigorous account for how karma is transmitted, via the psychic constituents of a sentient being, beyond biological death into future lives, as well as future afterlives.

Keywords: Dying; biological death; afterlife; Saṅghabhadra; Vasubandhu

Introduction

Within the Abrahamic traditions, the lifecycle of the human being is envisioned as beginning with life from the moment of conception, having a brief segue with dying and/or biological death, before finally culminating in the eternal afterlife. In contradistinction to this, the earliest Sarvāstivāda Buddhist treatises describe the 'individual sentient

being' (Skt.: *ātmabhāva*; Chinese, hereafter, Chi.: *ziti* 自體),¹ as cycling continuously through four 'states of existence' (Skt.: *catvāro bhavāḥ*; Chi.: *siyou* 四有):² living, dying and/or biological death,³ the afterlife, and rebirth. In the early models of the Buddhist life cycle, the 'stage' (Skt.: *avasthā*; Chi.: *fenwei* 分位)⁴ of living – defined as life as lived in association with a gross physical body – begins in the moment that immediately follows conception and terminates, not in death, but in rebirth (the stage wherein the sentient being is reassociated with a new fleshy body).

Later models of the sequence of the four stages of the lifecycle, as reflected by the Indic philosophers Vasubandhu (fl. fifth-century CE) and his slightly senior contemporary and rival Saṅghabhadra (fl. fifth-century CE) in their seminal Abhidharma treatises,⁵ envision the stage of living as beginning with the discrete stages of gestation leading up to, and including, birth. To Vasubandhu and Saṅghabhadra the stage of living begins immediately after a sentient being becomes reborn. During the moment of rebirth, a sentient being discards the 'extremely subtle' (Skt.: *accha*; Chi.: *ji weixi* 極微細)⁶ physical body with which it was associated during the entirety of the interim period known as the 'intermediate state' (Skt.: *antarābhava*; Chi.: *zhongyou* 中有)⁷ and assumes a new gross physical embodiment. Vasubandhu and Saṅghabhadra mark the beginning of the stage of living as when the life-form that persisted throughout the intermediate state becomes reborn in association with a new physical body.

As formulated by Vasubandhu and Saṅghabhadra, the Buddhist lifecycle diverges from the Abrahamic model in four fundamental ways. First, biological death is not treated as the termination of the physically embodied existence of an individual sentient being. Second, the afterlife is not considered to be the final or culminating stage within the lifecycle. Third, the afterlife is understood to be a form of post-mortem existence that consists as an interim, rather than as a final, stage in the ongoing lifecycle of an individual sentient being. Fourth, the individual sentient being is continuously existent in that it undergoes, and outlasts, the radical changes – both substantial and qualitative – that take place during each stage of the lifecycle. Here the Abhidharma Buddhist theorists postulate that, across the lifecycle, a sentient being withstands the total material replacement of the constituents of the body yet maintains an identity as a distinct life-form with a unique karmic history that can be traced back through innumerable past lives.

This study examines the Abhidharma Buddhist doctrinal models of the intermediate state, the stage of the lifecycle during which an individual sentient being, in the moment after becoming deceased, traverses an interval of time and space while associated with a subtle body until becoming associated with another viable gross physical embodiment. It investigates the arguments in support of the existence of an intermediate state that are developed by Saṅghabhadra in his exegesis of the early Buddhist texts on the four stages of the Buddhist cycle, and in his rejoinder to Vasubandhu's analysis of the nature and existence of interstitial space in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*.

Saṅghabhadra lays out the framework for his conceptualization of the afterlife in two surviving treatises, the *Nyāyānusāra* (Chi.: *Shun zhengli lun* 順正理論) and the **Samayapradīpikā* (Chi.: *Apidamozang xianzong lun* 阿毘達磨藏顯宗論),⁸ both extant in their complete forms only within the Chinese translation corpus of Xuanzang (602?–664 CE), the peripatetic Sinitic scholar-monk of the seventh century. In these two masterworks of the Abhidharma doctrine, Saṅghabhadra defines 'life after death' as an interstitial interval during which an individual sentient being, as an intermediate life-form, courses through time and space before becoming reembodied as a new life-form.

In formulating his doctrinal theories of the intermediate stage of the lifecycle, Saṅghabhadra grapples with a knotty question: how does an individual sentient being withstand the changing conditions of living in the material world, survive the dissolution and loss of a functioning corporeal body, transmigrate through the afterlife, and

transition into a new embodied form? Throughout his body of work Saṅghabhadra takes great pains to uphold the doctrine of the existence of the intermediate state as an actual spatio-temporal interval within the lifecycle of an individual sentient being. In his defence of the real existence of the intermediate state, Saṅghabhadra enlists the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma doctrines of survivability that are predicated upon the notion that an individual sentient being is comprised of a continuum (Skt.: *saṃtāna*) that survives the destruction and replacement of its constituent dharmas. He also draws upon the analysis by Vasubandhu, found in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, regarding the existence of the intermediate stage as a form of interstitial space, the interval of time and space between two gross physical bodies. Saṅghabhadra enlists the Abhidharma concepts of survivability and interstitial space to explain how an individual sentient being withstands the passage between the time and spatial location of biological death and the time and spatial location of rebirth.

Saṅghabhadra predicates his explanations for the survivability of the individual sentient being throughout the lifecycle on the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma postulate that each, and every, sentient being is comprised of a continuum of five sequentially reproducing psycho-physical aggregates (Skt.: *skandhāḥ*). These include one corporeal or 'bodily form' (Skt.: *rūpa*; Chi.: *se*) and four mental or psychological components: 'sensation' (Skt.: *vedanā*; Chi.: *shou* 受), 'perception' (Skt.: *saṃjñā*; Chi.: *shou* 受), 'mental formation' (Skt.: *saṃskāra*; Chi.: *xing* 行), and 'consciousness' (Skt.: *vijñāna*; Chi.: *shi* 識). While different series of sequentially reproducing physical aggregates provide the subserving basis for the physiological functioning of an individual sentient being passing through different lifecycle stages, the four mental aggregates that comprise the psychological profile of an individual sentient being perdure in a continuous series across space and time.⁹

The five psycho-physical aggregates are composed of innumerable individual dharmas, the indivisible bits of physical, mental, and neither entirely physical nor entirely mental stuff that make up the totality of reality. Dharmas are defined by their abilities to discharge a momentary burst of 'causal efficacy' (Skt.: *kāritra*; Chi. *zuoyong* 作用), the energy that brings material entities, discrete mental functions, and the psycho-somatic phenomena that are neither entirely mental, nor entirely physical, into being. Causal efficacy is the temporary exercise of 'causal potency' (Skt.: *sāmarthya*; Chi. *gongneng* 功能), the latent store of causal power that facilitates the activation of the specific characteristic function of a dharma.¹⁰ The collective causal efficacies of the multiple dharmas of the continua enable an individual sentient being to arise, abide, cease, expire, and arise again in an ongoing and unbroken sequence of momentary events that comprises the Buddhist cycle of life.

Saṅghabhadra employs the theories of the casual efficacy of the dharmas to support his arguments for the survivability of the individual sentient being, the *ātmabhava*, throughout the lifecycle. The multitude of dharmas that are assembled within the five psycho-physical aggregates engender the changes (in the form of the sentient being) that take place during the four stages of the lifecycle, yet maintain the continuity of the overall physical and psychological profile of the individual sentient being from one moment to the next and over extended periods of time. To Saṅghabhadra, the ongoing moment-to-moment decrepitude and dissolution of the five psycho-physical aggregates, each of which bundle innumerable individual dharmas of a corresponding type together, provide the serial continuity of the physical and mental existence of a single sentient being throughout the four stages of the lifecycle. Saṅghabhadra reasons that, because an individual sentient being is composed of multiple dharmas with specific capacities to engender and endure constant change and replacement, a sentient being can undergo radical change, yet remain the same entity.

In his formulations of the intermediate state, Saṅghabhadra assiduously addresses how the continuum of an individual sentient being persists while undergoing radical change over time. The theories of the Abhidharma Buddhists upheld by Saṅghabhadra maintain that a continuant – from one moment to the next and over extended periods of time – can evince mutually incompatible properties yet persist as the same entity.¹¹ Thus, the Abhidharma Buddhists predicate their arguments for continuity upon the premise that an entity persists by remaining *wholly* present through every moment of its existence, while rejecting the notion of persistence as *necessarily* predicated upon the continuous endurance, or the whole and unbroken presence of the self-same entity over time.

Throughout his body of work, Saṅghabhadra affirms the real existence of the intermediate state as an actual spatio-temporal interval within the Buddhist lifecycle. He predicates his explanation for the existence of an interstitial space and time between lives upon the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma postulate that the dharmas comprising the continuum of an individual sentient being all have specific temporal-spatial properties. The composite entities that comprise the continuum are comprised of both purely, and not purely, ‘physical dharmas’ (Skt.: *rūpadharmāḥ*; Chi. *sefa* 色法). The physical dharmas are ‘physically resistant’ (Skt.: *sapratighā*; Chi.: *youdui* 有對) and ‘mutually obstructive’ (Skt.: *āvāraṇa*; Chi.: *you’ai* 有礙) in that they compete with, and take up volume apart from, other physical dharmas.¹² Their specific properties of physical resistance and obstruction prevent different physical dharmas from crowding into the exact same spatial locus at the same time. A corollary flowing from this logical principle dictating the impossibility of two distinct physical dharmas perfectly coinciding is that the individual physical dharmas that constitute them are discrete. One distinct composite of physical dharmas cannot arise, discharge the store of causal efficacy contained in its constituent dharmas, decay, and expire in the same place and at the same time as another distinct composite of physical dharmas.¹³

Saṅghabhadra directly applies the Abhidharma Buddhist doctrinal theory regarding the nature and existence of physical dharmas to his understanding of the intermediate stage. He concludes that the state intervening between biological death and rebirth in the lifecycle of an individual sentient must necessarily consist in an ‘interval’ (Skt.: *antarā*) with actual spatial extension and temporal duration. His conclusion is that the intermediate state is definitely real, founded on two conditional propositions. First, if the dharmas that comprise the continuum of an individual sentient being are physically resistant to other concurrently active dharmas or mutually obstruct one another and compete with one another for space, then two distinct physical continua (both comprised of a multitude of physical dharmas) cannot be located in exactly the same place at the same time. Second, if an individual sentient being dies in one location at a certain time and begins life as a new life-form in another location at a later point in time, then an interstitial ‘state of being’ (Skt.: *bhava*) must necessarily exist between the two distinct states of grossly embodied existence, comprising its two ‘bookends’. Because the physical dharmas that comprise the dead body, and the physical dharmas that comprise the new living body, cannot exactly coincide in the same place and time, the dead body and the new living one are separated from one another within space and in time.

Saṅghabhadra advances detailed argumentation to bolster the doctrinal premise that the capacity of an individual sentient being to withstand the four stages of a lifecycle as a ‘fully-fledged life-form’ (Skt.: *paripūrīn*; Chi.: *yuanman zhe* 圓滿者)¹⁴ depends upon the sequential reproduction of, and continued interactions between, the five aggregates that make an individual sentient being a distinct psycho-physical continuum. Here he dispels the notion that any one of the four psychic aggregates required for sentient life, including consciousness, is capable of perduring without an embodied basis in a corporeal aggregate. Saṅghabhadra clearly states that, aside from sentient beings who die and are

reimbodied within the rarified ‘formless realm’ (Skt.: *arūpyadhātu*; Chi. *wusejie* 無色界) of the Buddhist universe, the continuous presence of a corporeal aggregate is *essential* to sustaining a fully-fledged life-form – whether animal or plant – over time.¹⁵ He argues that, while traversing a spatio-temporal interstice – from the locus of death to the locus of rebirth – four types of sequentially reproducing psychic aggregates must be affiliated with some bodily form, however subtle or tenuous, of a corporeal aggregate.¹⁶

This article examines the argumentation used by Saṅghabhadra to establish the persistence of an individual sentient being throughout the spatio-temporal interval of the intermediate state, and the three other stages, of the Buddhist lifecycle. The first section explores the models of the four sequential states or stages of existence used by Saṅghabhadra to conceptualize the intermediate state. These models appear in the venerable Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma doctrinal treatises, the *Jñānaprasthāna* (Chi. *Fazhi lun* 發智論) and the **Mahāvibhāṣā* (Chi. *Da piposha lun* 大毘婆沙論), both of which are extant in their complete forms only within the translation corpus of Xuanzang. The second section describes how Saṅghabhadra arrives at his determination of the real existence of the intermediate state as a separate and distinct interstitial space and interim period that necessarily must be traversed by almost all types of sentient life-forms in order to locate another viable fleshy body (a new embryo), a process taking a certain amount of time (traditionally seven to forty-nine days).¹⁷ Here Saṅghabhadra puts pressure on Vasubandhu’s analysis of the space intervening between the ‘reflection’ (Skt.: *pratibimba*; *yingxiang* 影像) appearing in the mirror and the surface of the mirror itself to see if it holds water as an exemplar of the existence of interstitial spaces between distinct physical bodies (found in *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 3.11). By upholding the inherited Sarvāstivāda arguments establishing the lifecycle as divisible into four discrete stages, and by testing the limits of the ontological status of interstitial space as exemplified by the reflection in the mirror, Saṅghabhadra instantiates for Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma Buddhism the existence of the intermediate state as a spatio-temporally extended stage in the lifecycle through which (almost) all individual sentient beings must transmigrate as an invariable part of each lifecycle.

‘From death to death’: the four states of existence in the Buddhist lifecycle

The descriptions of the Buddhist lifecycle as extending not ‘from conception to death, but from death to death’ (Kachru (2021), 97) appear in the earliest Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma treatises, most notably the *Jñānaprasthāna* and the **Mahāvibhāṣā*, the elaborate commentary on this ancient treatise. In conceptualizing his argument for the intermediate state, Saṅghabhadra draws from the inherited descriptions of the four successive states of existence and the doctrine of the *ātmabhava*, wherein an individual sentient being is said to transmigrate through all stages of the lifecycle in various different physically embodied forms while maintaining a continuous, uninterrupted psychological profile despite the instantaneous disaggregation from a defunct physical body taking place during the momentary event of biological death, and eventually in the moment immediately prior to the joining with a new gross physical body.

Saṅghabhadra contests the definition of the stage of living as a certain type of sentient being, presented in the **Jñānaprasthāna*, as beginning in the moment immediately following conception. Instead, he contends that this stage of living begins prior to conception, in the moment following the intermediate state, concurring with his Sarvāstivādin forebears in envisioning the intermediate state as the stage of the Buddhist lifecycle wherein the individual sentient being, in association with the ephemeral bodily form of the *antarābhava*, traverses the spatial distance and the temporal interim between biological death and rebirth prior to embodying an entirely new gross physical form.¹⁸

In his two surviving Abhidharma masterworks, the *Nyāyānusāra* and the **Samayapradīpikā*, Saṅghabhadra refines the sequence of the four stages of existence, positioning the beginning of the stage of living not with conception, but with the distinct sub-stages of gestation leading up to birth. He bases his doctrinal refinements on his close readings of the **Jñānaprasthāna* (T1544.26.1024a3) wherein the sequence of the stages of existence is defined. In his Chinese translation of the **Jñānaprasthāna*, Xuanzang renders the order of the four stages of existence as follows:

1. The 'state of fundamental existence' (Skt.: *pūrvabhava*; Chi.: *benyou* 本; Tibetan, hereafter Tib.: *sngon dus srid*)¹⁹ is defined by the editors of the **Jñānaprasthāna* as that of 'previous existence' during which an individual sentient being is associated with a gross physical body for a longer or shorter period of time. Here, the editors of the **Jñānaprasthāna* determine the state of living as the time in the lifecycle when an individual sentient being is associated with a gross physical body. The Sanskrit word *pūrvabhava* literally means 'previous existence'. Xuanzang consistently translates it across his body of work as 'fundamental existence' (Chi.: *benyou* 本有).
2. The editors of the **Jñānaprasthāna* determine the 'state of becoming deceased' (Skt.: *marāṇabhava*; Chi.: *siyou* 死有; Tib.: '*chi ba'i srid pa*') as the moment during which the individual sentient being ceases to be a particular life-form and becomes an 'intermediate being' (Skt.: *antarābhava*). They define the final termination of the state of living as beginning when the physical aggregate of the living body ceases to function. They describe how during this time, the four series of psychic aggregates that were formerly associated with, and sustained by, the previous living body, are no longer able to reproduce.²⁰ Elaborating upon the account found in the **Jñānaprasthāna*, the *Mahāvibhāṣā* also depicts how at the time of cessation of the living body, the four psychological aggregates immediately, and without any discernible hiatus, latch onto a subtle body to form the profoundly evanescent and spectral form of the *antarābhava*, also known as an *upapāduka*, which is described as an instance of 'spontaneous rebirth' (Skt.: *upa√pad*; Chi.: *huasheng* 化生). The editors of the **Jñānaprasthāna* define the 'intermediate state'²¹ (Skt.: *antarābhava*; Chi.: *zhongyou* 中有; Tib.: *srid pa bar ma*) as the transitional time and space between the stage of dying and the stage of living. According to the **Jñānaprasthāna*, while occupying the intermediate state, the sentient being takes the form of the *antarābhava*, which survives in this interim state from seven to forty-nine days, until the four psychic aggregates become associated with the physical aggregate of an embryo, thus initiating the stage of rebirth in an instantaneous state of fertilization. While it is implied by the doctrine postulate established in the **Jñānaprasthāna*, and solidified in the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, in drawing from these inherited source materials, Vasubandhu and Saṅghabhadra explicitly point out that the *antarābhava* is a form of *upapāduka*, the most populous form of sentient life in the Buddhist universe, being considered to be even more numerous than insects.²²
3. The 'state of becoming reborn' (Skt.: *upapattibhava*; Chi.: *shengyou* 生有; Tib.: *skye ba'i srid pa*) is defined by the editors of the **Jñānaprasthāna* as the 'state of becoming reincarnated'. This 'moment of rebirth' (Skt.: *pratisaṃdhikṣaṇa*; Chi.: *jiesheng chana* 結生剎那)²³ is when the four psychic aggregates of the intermediate being dis-aggregate from the subtle physical aggregate of the *antarābhava* and become bundled together with a new gross physical body. The account located within the *Jñānaprasthāna*, and the more detailed exegesis presented in the **Mahāvibhāṣā*, fundamentally concur that becoming reborn marks the beginning of another lifecycle as a new life-form.

As laid out above, the sequence of the stages of the lifecycle set forth in the **Jñānaprasthāna*, and reinforced in the **Mahāvibhāṣā*, orients the intermediate state as the final stage and the state of becoming reborn as the initial stage in the lifecycle. However, Saṅghabhadra positions the intermediate state as the initial stage in the lifecycle of an individual sentient being. In chapter 3 of the *Nyāyānusāra*, ‘The Discrimination of Dependent Arising’ (Chi.: *bian yuanqi pin* 辯緣起品), Saṅghabhadra writes:

就有情前後位別分析為四：一者中有，義如前說；二者生有，謂於諸趣結生剎那；三者本有，除生剎那，死前餘位；四者死有，謂最後念。

The prior and subsequent stages of individual sentient beings are fourfold: Firstly, the intermediate state, the meaning of which is described above; secondly, the state of becoming reborn, which refers to the moment of becoming reborn within the transmigratory realms; thirdly, fundamental existence, which excludes the moment of becoming reborn, and comprises the stage prior to biological death. Fourth, the state of becoming deceased, which refers to the final moment of cognition [occurring in association with a particular gross physical body]. (Cf. *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 3.13, trans. Xuanzang, T1558.29.46a15–17; corresponding to Pradhan (1967), 124)

In chapter 3 of the *Nyāyānusāra* (T1562.29.468a28–a29), Saṅghabhadra cites Vasubandhu’s signature gloss on the *antarābhava*, which is located in the auto-commentary to the tenth stanza of the third chapter of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, the ‘Discrimination of the World’ (*Lokanirdeśa*; T1558.29.44b10–11):²⁴

於死有後、在生有前，即彼中間有自體起，為至生處，故起此身，二有中間，故名中有。T1558.29.44b10–11

Where there is the arising of an individual being (*ātmabhava*) in between the states of becoming deceased and becoming reborn, the body [of five aggregates] arises in order to get to the locus of rebirth. Because it lies between two transmigratory paths, it is thus called the ‘intermediate state’.

In their specific depictions of what occurs in the intermediate stage, Vasubandhu and Saṅghabhadra explain that, in the moment immediately following biological death, the four psychic aggregates detach from the gross physical aggregate to which they were bundled in life and latch onto an ephemeral corporeal aggregate to form the *antarābhava*. Both Vasubandhu and Saṅghabhadra regard the intermediate stage as the inauguration of an entirely new lifecycle, wherein a new *ātmabhava* – a sentient being that is causally connected, though distinct from the *antarābhava* of the intermediate stage – begins the stage of living life in association with another physically embodied form.

The ātmabhava as the embodied locus of transmigration

In his Chinese translations of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, Xuanzang glosses the Sanskrit term *antarābhava* as ‘the body [of five aggregates] that arises in order to get to the locus of rebirth’. Reflecting a similar understanding of this terminology to that of Xuanzang, Jinamitra (fl. eighth century CE), et al., in their Tibetan translation of Vasubandhu’s work (Derge, vol. 136, no. 4066), render the Sanskrit term *ātmabhava* simply as ‘body’ (Chi.: *shen* 身; Tib.: *lus*),²⁵ although an explicit mention of a ‘body’ is absent in the original Sanskrit wording.²⁶ Here both Xuanzang and Jinamitra emphasize that it is a physically embodied entity that transmigrates across the four stages of the lifecycle,

with consciousness and the other four psychic aggregates of sensation, perception, and mental formation that define an individual sentient being persisting only when clustered within a physical form.

Both Vasubandhu and Saṅghabhadra accept the basic contours of the account found in *Mahāvibhāṣā*, wherein the *ātmabhava* is defined as the embodied form of the individual sentient being throughout each, and every, stage of the Buddhist lifecycle. In this text the *ātmabhava* is characterized as necessarily consisting of one physical aggregate and the four psychic aggregates of sensation, perception, mental formation, and consciousness. The editors of the **Mahāvibhāṣā* contend that the individual sentient being maintains continuity, and survives, the radical changes incurred during the stages of living (biological death, the intermediate state of the afterlife, and birth) precisely because the *ātmabhava* provides the embodied basis necessary for the perdurance of the four types of series of psychic aggregates. Therefore, immediately following the moment of biological death, the four types of series of psychic aggregates of the *ātmabhava* – which were previously bundled together with the deceased body – must rapidly enter the bodily form of the *antarābhava* prior to becoming associated with the physical aggregate of a new life-form. To Vasubandhu and Saṅghabhadra, the body of the *antarābhava* quite literally carries the psychological profile of the individual life-form from one stage of the lifecycle to the next. While the physical aggregate of the sentient being undergoes the transition from a gross corporeal body to an ephemeral body and back again, the psychic aggregates never cease their serial reproduction. This allows for a sentient being to undergo radical physical transformations yet maintain psychological continuity throughout the lifecycle.

The reflection in the mirror, the surface of the mirror, and the existence of interstitial space

To solidify his case for the existence of an intermediate state that is bracketed by the termination of one biological entity and the birth of another, Saṅghabhadra is hard pressed to prove the existence of interstitial space. Indeed, the credibility of Saṅghabhadra's argument in support of the existence of an intermediate state hinges upon the existence of a real spatio-temporal interstice between two discrete physical bodies that are either composed of a single dharma, or are a composite of multiple dharmas. To prove the existence of interstitial space between two physical bodies, Saṅghabhadra mounts an elaborate rejoinder to an attempt made by Vasubandhu to invalidate the Abhidharma contention that a reflection appearing on the surface of a mirror, and the material stuff of which the surface of the mirror itself is made, stands as a valid and literal example of an interstitial space between two real physical entities. While Vasubandhu seeks to discredit the stock example of the mirror and the reflection cast on its surface as basically irrelevant to accounts of the actual existence of the intermediate state, Saṅghabhadra endeavours to salvage this example of a real instantiation of the specific property that distinguishes the intermediate state as a spatio-temporal interstice of finite extension between two gross physical states: the state of becoming deceased and the state of becoming reborn.

In chapter 3 of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, Vasubandhu employs an interlocutor (Skt. *pūrvapakṣin*) to debunk the venerable Abhidharma exemplar wherein a reflection, and the space between a reflection appearing within the surface of a mirror, is used to stand in for the space between the state of becoming deceased and the state of rebirth. Vasubandhu argues that the example of the reflection appearing on the surface of the mirror fails to exemplify the 'property to be proven' (Skt. *sādhya*) – in this case, the existence of an interstitial space between two discrete physical bodies. Here Vasubandhu reasons that, because a reflected image can only come about in the presence of another real

physical factor in the environment (the mirror), a reflected image is a pseudo-entity and devoid of any intrinsic reality of its own. Vasubandhu claims that the reflected image is as unreal as a shadow and, as such, cannot be equated to an actual physical thing. Xuanzang's rendition of *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 3.11cd further adduces the example of the moon's reflection appearing within the surface of water in a well, invariably seen as recessed from the aperture of the well, to attempt to dispel with the erroneous conception according to which reflection and surface are actually collocated:

又陝水上，兩岸色形同處一時俱現二像，居兩岸者，互見分明。

Again, on the opposite banks of a narrow channel of water a visible form appears simultaneously in the same spatial locus as two distinct reflections [each of which is] clearly and distinctly visible to [either of] two individuals residing on opposite banks.

曾無一處並見二色，不應謂此二色俱生。

But two physical things coinciding in one and the same spatial locus at the same time has never been witnessed. It is logically inappropriate to assert this [particular example] as [a case of] two physical things coinciding.

又影與光未嘗同處。然曾見鏡懸置影中，光像顯然現於鏡面。不應於此謂二並生。

Again, shade and direct sunlight never coincide in the same spatial locus. Now, if one places a mirror in the shade [in a shed situated close to a pond lit by the sun], then one would clearly see in this mirror the reflection of the reflection of the sun on the surface of the water. It is logically inappropriate to say that this is an example of two physical things arising simultaneously [in the same spatial locus].

或言一處無二並者，鏡面月像謂之為二，近遠別見，如觀井水 (T1562.29.470a24–a29; Pradhan [1967, 120–121]; D4090.140.116b.3).

In stating that no two physical things coincide in one and the same spatial locus, 'two physical things' refers to the surface of the mirror and the reflection of the moon, seen as recessed and distinct, like observing the water in a well.

Throughout the auto-commentary on his own stanzas treating the doctrinal topic of the existence of the intermediate state, Vasubandhu contends that because the example of a reflection appearing within the surface of a mirror fails to confirm the existence of an actual spatial interval between two physical things, it cannot be used to validate the existence of an actual spatial interval between the demise of an embodied aggregate and the birth of a newly embodied form of life.²⁷ In the second line of stanza 3.11 of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, Vasubandhu states that the reflection on the surface of the mirror and the mirror itself do not represent two distinct physical bodies. He reasons that, because the stuff making up the reflection in the mirror and the mirror are 'not equivalent' (Skt. *asādharmya*; Chi. *budeng* 不等) in both being 'actual entities' (Skt. *bhāva*), they therefore cannot stand as exemplars of the equivalence of the states of dying and rebirth as distinctively gross physical states:

像實有不成

不等故非譬。(T1558.29.44b18–19; D4090.140.116b.2; Pradhan (1967), 120)

The real existence of the reflection is not logically established (Skt. *asiddha*); because the [stuff making up the mirror and the reflection] are not equivalent [in that they do not form a single continuum], therefore, the example [of the mirror and reflection to the states of biological death and of rebirth, respectively] is invalid.

Throughout his auto-commentary on the above two hemistichs of verse, Vasubandhu argues that a reflection on a mirror is not an actual entity with an intrinsic reality apart from the material stuff that makes up the surface of the mirror. Vasubandhu contends that, because a reflection is derived from a real entity composed of physical stuff, it lacks the causal efficacy to perform a distinctive function of its own and therefore lacks the mark of an intrinsic reality. To Vasubandhu, a reflection is akin to a shadow that is derived only from the absence of sunlight. Like a shadow, a reflection is a privation, in that it lacks the qualities of actual things that have an intrinsic reality of their own. Because a reflection is derived from actual material factors and other types of physical conditions existing in the world – namely, the material constitution and physical condition, as well as spatial orientation of both the mirror and the original stuff of the reflected object – a reflection, therefore, by definition, is not a real physical entity.²⁸ Vasubandhu therefore considers a reflection to have the same ontological status as a penumbra that comes into being when opaque stuff blocks direct light in a specific location. Vasubandhu, in the voice of the interlocutor, concludes that a reflection is a pseudo-entity and that his Sarvāstivādin forebears, in their interpretation of the reflection of an image in a mirror, have erroneously reified a reflection as an actually existing physical thing.²⁹

In the *Nyāyānusāra* and the **Samayapradīpikā*, Saṅghabhadra mounts a rebuttal to Vasubandhu's interlocutor by arguing that the reflection appearing within the surface of a mirror succeeds in exemplifying the existence of the intermediate state as an actual spatial interstice between two physical entities. Saṅghabhadra contends that a reflection in the mirror, like a shadow, is a real physical entity in that it consists of actual visible 'stuff' (Skt.: *rūpa*; Chi.: *se* 色).³⁰ Here he avers that the material stuff making up the surface of the mirror and the 'original stuff' (Skt.: *bimba*; Chi.: *benzhi* 本質) that makes up the object reflected in the mirror are both real physical entities. *Contra* Vasubandhu, Saṅghabhadra argues that even if the reflection is derived from the mirror and the original object reflected, both the reflection and the mirror exist as real physical entities. In his rebuttal of Vasubandhu's denial of the reality of reflections, Saṅghabhadra contends that because the reflection and the mirror both exist as real entities, then the interstice between the reflection and the mirror stands as a legitimate example of a space existing between two physical entities.

Vasubandhu and Saṅghabhadra accept that the concept of interstitial space is required to explain two conventional aspects about 'a reflection appearing in a mirror'. The first is that the reflection and the mirror are two separate entities; the second is that the reflection and the mirror do not occupy the same physical place. The two thinkers extend the concept of interstitial space to account for two aspects of the intermediate state: the first is that the dead body and the new viable body assumed in becoming reborn are two separate physical entities, and the second that they do not occupy the same spatial temporal loci within the lifecycle of a sentient being.

Saṅghabhadra endeavours to take Vasubandhu to task by refuting his denial of the reality of reflections as real physical entities, insisting that reflections are indeed distinctly real physical entities consisting in composites of different types of physical dharmas, taking up volume and necessarily separated from other discrete physical entities extended in space by interstices with finite extension. Thus, Saṅghabhadra attempts to rehabilitate the example of the reflection as a valid exemplification of the spatiality of the intermediate state and guard it from the withering criticism levelled by Vasubandhu. Saṅghabhadra defends the premise that a reflection, like all composite entities made up of individual physical dharmas, is characterized as a form of 'conventionally real existence' (Skt.: *prajñaptisat*). By this he means that a reflection, as a composite entity, derives its temporary existence and its particular function from its 'ultimately real' (Skt.: *dravyasat*) constituents: the individual physical dharmas that make up the reflected object and the

dharmas that comprise the surface of the mirror.³¹ While the causal efficacy that distinguishes a reflection is not possessed inherently, like that of a shadow, a reflection is nonetheless a real physical thing with distinct ontological status that remains separate from the material stuff of the mirror.

For Saṅghabhadra, a reflection is a form of visible stuff and not a privation.³² A reflection is something real, in that it holds the causal potential under specific environmental conditions to serve as a basis for a certain range of sensory perceptions and mental images in observers. Instead of explaining the presence of mirror-images as akin to mirages – essentially fictitious pseudo-entities superimposed by the mind upon a basis in real physical factors in the environment³³ – Saṅghabhadra avers that mirror-images are actual physical entities, and are just like all other distinct physical entities, such as sunlight and shadow, that occupy discrete spatio-temporal loci and never overlap with one another in space and time (despite appearing to observers as coexisting in the same spot).³⁴ For Saṅghabhadra, although in the mind of an observer the mirror-image and mirror-surface indeed appear to cohabit in the same space at the same time, he remains committed to the principle of the impossibility of two distinct physical entities being in the same spatial locus at the same time, whether individual dharmas or composites made up of multiple dharmas.³⁵ In maintaining that the mirror-image and mirror-surface it is projected upon are both composed of real stuff of a physical nature, Saṅghabhadra repudiates Vasubandhu's premise that a reflection is not a valid example of something physical. In doing so, Saṅghabhadra reinstates the Abhidharma postulate that the interstitial space existing between the reflection on the surface of the mirror, and the material stuff of the surface, exemplifies the physical properties characterizing the intermediate state as a real state of existence – in that both are distinguished by the specific property of being between two distinct physical bodies, both of which necessarily occupy separate and discrete spatial loci.

Conclusion

To Saṅghabhadra, a mirror and a reflection on a mirror, like sunlight and shadow, or the physical aggregate in the conditions of becoming deceased and becoming reborn, are real entities separated from one another by a finite spatial interstice. In their analyses of the nature of interstitial space, Saṅghabhadra and Vasubandhu agree that two distinct physical things extended in space cannot be in the same place at the same time. They fundamentally disagree, however, about the ontological status of the physical composites that make up of many different individual dharmas. Remaining faithful to traditional Sarvāstivāda tenets, Saṅghabhadra maintains that a reflection is a real entity with characteristics that are distinct from the physical features of the original things they reflect and the physical stuff of the reflective surface. Saṅghabhadra argues that a reflection, the surface of the mirror, and the object reflected in the surface of the mirror are all constituted of actual physical stuff. He contends that production of a reflected image that is reliably and conventionally perceived cannot adequately be explained strictly in terms of the force of mental construction. Tenaciously upholding a realist stance, Saṅghabhadra regards seemingly non-concrete entities as negata, penumbra, mirages, and reflections as ultimately consisting of physical dharmas and therefore as constituting real entities. Vasubandhu diverges from traditional Sarvāstivāda doctrinal understandings by staunchly maintaining that, while the physical components that produce a reflection are real things, reflections are not. While Saṅghabhadra singles out the phenomenon of the reflectivity of a mirror in his discussions of this doctrinal topic, this article contends that for Saṅghabhadra, all related natural phenomena – from reflections to penumbra – serve not just as 'formal analogies' for the subtle physicality of the intermediate state between

dying and rebirth, but as actual exemplifications in the mundane world of a distinguishing quality of the intermediate state'. In short, they are not absences of something physical, but actual physical presences.

Notes

1. See Matsumoto (2004, 222–250, *passim*) for an in-depth investigation of the development of the concept of *ātmabhava* as the locus of transmigration in Abhidharma sources. The Sanskrit adjectival compound (*karmadhāraya*) is rendered by Jinamitra et al. (D4090.140.116a.5) in their Tibetan translation of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* as the monosyllabic word 'lus', meaning, most literally, 'body'. In his translation of *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, Xuanzang renders the Sanskrit term *ātmabhava* 自體 as 'ziti', literally meaning 'own-body' or 'individual body'. For example, see his translation of *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 3.10ab, at T1558.29.44b9, corresponding to Pradhan (1967), 120.
2. Both Vasubandhu and Saṅghabhadra take the word *bhava* in this context as synonymous with 'stage' (Skt. *avasthā*; fenwei 分位), often characterizing each of the four states of existence as 'stages', with the understanding that some are of longer duration than others. In this respect, they fundamentally agree with the **Mahāvibhāṣā*, a touchstone of Sarvāstivāda doctrine, and a basic source material for both thinkers' Abhidharma treatises. Fascicle 192 of the **Mahāvibhāṣā* (T1545.27.959b1–2) presents the following question and response: 'Question: Which of the four states of existence are momentary events and which are sequences? Answer: Two are momentary, namely the states of becoming deceased and of becoming reborn, and two are sequences, namely the other two states (i.e. of fundamental existence and the intermediate state)' (問：此四有幾剎那？幾相續？答：二剎那謂死有、生有二；相續謂餘有)。
3. In the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, Vasubandhu uses the Sanskrit noun, 'cyuti', derived from the verbal root '√*cyu*', literally meaning 'to fall away', to describe either the entire gradual process of 'dying' or the final moment of living (the moment of becoming deceased). Implicit in the Sanskrit word 'cyuti' are the dual constructions of dying as a process (noun) and dying as an ending (past participle). Feldman (1989, 375) points out that the word, 'dying', like the word 'winning', carry the same kind of ambiguity, in that both have a 'process' sense as well as a 'success' sense: 'A runner may be winning (process sense) even though it turns out that he does not win (success sense).'
4. Abhidharma authors take the Sanskrit term *bhava*, meaning 'state of existence' in the context of analyses of lifecycle, as synonymous with 'stage' (Skt. *avasthā*; Chi. fenwei 分位), often characterizing each of the four states of existence as 'stages', with the understanding that some stages are of longer duration than others, such as the stages of becoming deceased or becoming reborn, which each occur during a single moment (*kṣaṇa*) in time.
5. The *Record of Śākyamuni's Teachings Compiled During the Kaiyuan Period* (Chi. *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄), T2154.55.557a23, records that Xuanzang's Chinese translation of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* was put together between 3 June 651 CE, and 13 September 654 CE. *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* (T2154.55.557a26) further records that the Chinese translation of the **Samayapradīpikā* was made by Xuanzang and his team between April 30, 651 CE and 26 November 652 CE. *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* (T2154.55.557a24) also records that the Chinese translation of the *Nyāyānusāra* was compiled by Xuanzang between February 3, 653 CE and 27 August 654 CE.
6. As both Xuanzang's translation of Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (Pradhan (1967), 52; T.1558, 29.45c19) and his translation of the **Mahāvibhāṣā* (*Da piposha lun*) T1545. 27.362.a11 describe: 'the body of the intermediate being is of extreme subtlety' (中有身極微細). Abhidharma thinkers posit that the body of *upapāduka* is composed of pellucidly transparent 'derivative material' (Skt. *bhautika*; Chi.: *suozao se* 所造色) made up of constituents of the four fundamental physical elements of earth, water, fire, and air – rather than the opaque 'crude matter' (Skt. *audārikarūpa*; Chi. *cuse* 麤色) constituting a gross physical body. For a discussion of the invisible *bhautika* matter constituting the subtle body of the intermediate being, see Kritzer (1998), 8.
7. The Sanskrit word *antarābhava* – literally, 'being' (*bhava*) existing in the 'interim' (*antarā*) – denotes both the state of existence between biological death and rebirth, as well as individual beings inhabiting this state of existence. As Cuevas (1996, 264) describes: 'In early Buddhism, the temporal space between death and the next birth is given the name "antarābhava" and is believed to be inhabited by ethereal beings composed of subtle types of the five aggregates ...' Wayman (1976, 234–237) briefly looks at the baroque taxonomy of ethereal beings found in Indic Abhidharma works.
8. The original Sanskrit title of this work is alternately reconstructed as **Abhidharmakośaśāstrakārikāvibhāṣya* or **Abhidharmapiṭakaprakaraṇaśāsanāśāstra*. See Cox (1998, 242, n. 308) for an in-depth discussion of the various Sanskrit reconstructions of the title of this Sanskrit treatise.
9. Both Abhidharma theorists, and modern Western perdurantists, agree that it is conceivable for an entity, in this case a continuum consisting of five perduring series of psycho-physical aggregates, to persist (i.e. 'perdure')

as the same entity by successively occupying distinct moments in time. Thus, Abhidharma theorists converge in their understanding of the nature of persistence with modern Western perdurantists inasmuch as both maintain that an individual entity, such as a sentient being, can evince different – and even mutually incompatible – properties at different times throughout the same lifecycle while retaining a distinct and continuous identity. In this respect, both sets of theories concur in their determination that the persistence of composites over time does not imply that their individual constituents ever persevere in their activity for longer than an instant. Similar to Abhidharma theorists, modern perdurantists also contend that the different temporal parts that comprise one, and the same, space-time worm are discrete – that is, different instantaneous parts of one and the same thing cannot occupy the same place at the same time. For an in-depth analysis and critical assessment of the doctrine of temporal parts as deployed by perdurantists, see Hawley (2006), 24–30.

10. For an in-depth analysis of Saṅghabhadra's account of causal efficacy, refer to Cox (1997), 141–145.

11. In facing the problem of *what* withstands change over time, both Vasubandhu and Saṅghabhadra, as well as modern analytical perdurantists, abjure issues of quantitative or numerical identity of subjects or wholes believed to persist over time, since none of their theories postulate wholes that endure (i.e. remain fully present and statically unchanged) over finite extensions of time. Endurantist theorists take such wholes to be able to withstand alteration – that is, they are capable of evincing varying, and even mutually incompatible, properties at distinct times over their careers, and yet all the while, remain uncompromised and unbroken in their existence as numerically distinct entities.

12. This is a standard twofold definition of physical stuff (*rūpa*): first, it presents resistance (*sapratighā*), entailing that two distinct physical objects cannot occupy the same place at the same time; second, it presents obstruction (*āvāraṇa*), such as impeding the ability to see past a solid wall. Strictly speaking, individual dharmas do not displace one another, as they abide, decay, and come to cease in the same place where they arose. For the definition of *rūpa* in Sarvāstivāda Buddhist doctrine, see Dhammajoti (2015), 213–236.

13. Vasubandhu articulates this principle that rules out the possibility of the simultaneous collocation of two distinct physical continua, in the first line of stanza 3.12 of the *Kośa*, the original Sanskrit of which reads: 'Because of the fact that no two continua arising in precisely the same time coincide in the same place' (*saha-ekatra dvayābhāvāt asantānāt dvayobhāvāt*). See edition of Pradhan (1967), 120–121. Cf. Chinese translation of Xuanzang, T1558.29.44b20–21; Tibetan translation of Jinamitra et al. (D4090.140. 116a.5).

14. According to the third chapter of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, the designation of *paripūrīn* includes all life-form beings that evince fully-fledged sense faculties, thus being capable of processing somato-sensory information. According to Vasubandhu's clear stipulation, the designation of *paripūrīn* 'excludes those various [life-forms] who die out prematurely' (Skt.: *sā na tu yo 'ntarāla mriyate* 非諸中天) – namely, those not yet fully sentient beings who perish during the two earliest stages of gestation, prior to the full development and maturation of their sense faculties (see Xuanzang's translation of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, T1558.29.48b5; corresponding to Pradhan (1967), 131).

15. Saṅghabhadra maintains that plants and other insentient beings – whether living or not – are composed of only one aggregate (that of bodily form), whereas only sentient beings are composed of *all* five. As Saṅghabhadra's avers in his *Nyāyānusāra*: 'Insentient beings are constituted in only one aggregate (i.e. *rūpaskandha*)' (無有情唯具一蘊) (T1562.29.402c11).

16. In his *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, Vasubandhu avers that there is no *antarābhava* undergone by sentient beings who perish and immediately become reborn within the formless realm (T1558.29.46a18; see also 3.37d). *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 3.37d attests to this stance as follows: 'There are three [of the four] states of existence within the formless realm. It is not the case that that realm is inclusive of separation between spatial loci [not being confined by ordinary notions of spatiality (Skt.: *deśatva*)]. The intermediate being is postulated in order to get to another locus [in order to become reborn].' For the corresponding Sanskrit original by Vasubandhu, see Pradhan (1967), 152. The editors of the *Mahāvibhāṣā* explain that in the cases of sentient beings who pass away within the formless realm and subsequently become reembodyed in the form or desire realms, they undergo the course of the intermediate state within the transmigratory realm of their immediately subsequent re-embodiment (T1545.27.359b16–19).

17. Xuanzang's translation corpus presents various diverging opinions on the precise temporal duration of the *antarābhava*. For example, as recorded in Xuanzang's rendering of the **Mahāvibhāṣā*, Vasumitra 世友 states that it lasts for a maximum of only seven days, while Śarmadatta 設摩達多 declares that it lasts from seven days at the minimum up to forty-nine days or 'seven weeks' (Chi.: *qiqi* 七七) at the maximum (T1545.27.361b8–10). See Brewster (2020, 194, n. 23) for a more detailed analysis of these various early Sarvāstivāda accounts reckoning the precise duration of the *antarābhava*.

18. In his *Nyāyānusāra*, Saṅghabhadra lodges the succinct argument that the intermediate state must necessarily exist in order to account for the continuous existence of an individual sentient being not being interrupted, despite the evident spatio-temporal separation between the locus wherein the sentient being becomes deceased, and

the locus wherein they become reborn: ‘Since a sentient being perishes in a spatio-temporal locus different from where they are born, and it definitely should be granted that it continues in between; therefore, the intermediate state is not non-existent’. 既許有情，從餘處歿，生於餘處，則定應許中間連續，中有非無 (T1562.29.470a12–13).

19. Fascicle 93 of Xuanzang’s translation of the **Mahāvibhāṣā* contains the following question and answer providing a basic gloss of the terminology, *pūrvabhava*: ‘What is the fundamental state of existence (*pūrvabhava*)? Answer: It is the various forms of existence of the psycho-physical aggregates apart from that portion pertaining to the state of becoming reborn or the state of becoming deceased. This single period [of the fundamental state of existence] has four or five aggregates as its nature’. 云何本有? 答: 除生分、死分諸蘊中間諸有。此則一期五蘊、四蘊為性 (T1545.27.959a15–17). In his direct commentary on the Chinese version, Fabao 法寶, a member of the inner group of disciples within the team that undertook the Chinese translation of the *Abhidharmakośābhāṣya* under their teacher, Xuanzang, relates that the assignation of four aggregates applies to sentient beings reborn within the formless realm (Skt. *arūpyadhātu*; Chi. *wusejie* 無色界) who live, die, and are reborn in this realm without a corporeal aggregate (*rūpadhātu*) comprising a gross physical body confined by conventional notions of spatiality (*deśatva*) or spatial extension (T1822.41.621c23–24).

20. Xuanzang’s translation of **Mahāvibhāṣā*, fasc. 192 reads: ‘What is the state of becoming deceased? Answer: It has the portion of the four or five aggregates pertaining to the final moment of living as its nature’. 云何死有? 答: 死分諸蘊，則命終時，五蘊四蘊為性 (T1545.27.959a21–23).

21. Xuanzang’s translation of **Mahāvibhāṣā*, fasc. 192 explains: ‘What is the intermediate state? Answer: It is the interim existence, separate from the portion of the aggregates pertaining to [the states of] biological death and rebirth. Thus, it has the five aggregates existing in the interim between the two states [of death and rebirth] as its nature’. 云何中有? 答: 除死分生分諸蘊，中間諸有，則二有中間五蘊為性 (T1545.27.959a23–24).

22. See Brewster (2020, 195–196) for Vasubandhu’s and Saṅghabhadra’s accounts of how *upapādukas* are considered to be even more numerous than insects within the Buddhist cosmos.

23. Xuanzang’s translation of **Mahāvibhāṣā*, fasc. 192 explains: ‘What is the state of becoming reborn? Answer: It has the portion of the four or five aggregates pertaining to the moment of rebirth as its nature’. 云何生有? 答: 生分諸蘊，則結生時，五蘊四蘊為性 (T1545.27.959a28–29).

24. Cf. Xuanzang’s rendition of *Abhidharmakośābhāṣya* 3.11ab: 為至生處，故起此身。名中有 (T1558.29.44b10–b11).

25. The Tibetan rendering of Vasubandhu’s gloss by Jinamitra et al., reads: ‘lus gang yul gzhan du skye ba thob par bya ba’i phyir ‘chi ba’i srid pa dang skye ba’i srid pa’i bar du mngon par ‘grub pa de ni srid pa bar ma zhes bya ste’ (D4090.140.116a.5).

26. *Abhidharmakośābhāṣya* 3.11ab reads: ‘bhinirvarttate deśāntaropapattisamprāptaye so ‘ntarābhava ity ucyate (Pradhan (1967), 120).

27. As Xuanzang’s rendition of Vasubandhu’s prose auto-commentary to *Abhidharmakośa* 3.11cd elaborates: Again, [the reflection and the stuff comprising the mirror] are not equivalent [in that they do not form a single continuum], so the example is logically unestablished (*asiddha*). That is to say that ‘reflection’ refers to a separate physical entity. Its real existence as an entity is not logically established. In stipulating non-equivalence [between the continua of the reflection and of the stuff of the mirror], the example is thus logically unestablished. When it is said [in the above stanza] that ‘the real existence of the reflection is not established’, this is because of the fact that two physical entities cannot simultaneously occupy one and the same spatial locus. That is to say that even if the physical stuff of the mirror and the reflection appear to coincide in the same spatial locus, it is not possible that two [distinct] physical entities could simultaneously coexist in one and the same spatial locus, because of the fact that their subserving bases in the [four types of] physical elements are different. 又非等故為喻不成。謂別色生說名為像。其體實有理所不成。設成非等。故不成喻。言像不成故非喻者。以一處所無二並故。謂於一處鏡色及像並見現前。二色不應同處並有。依異大故。 (T1558.29.44b28–c1)

Reference has been made to the French translation by La Vallée Poussin (1926), vol. 2, 33–34, and the English translation from La Vallée Poussin’s French by Pruden (1990), vol. 3, 382–383.

28. Xuanzang’s translation of Vasubandhu’s commentary to 3.11cd explains reflections as the causally impotent by-product or result of real physical processes in the world:

Again, the appearance of a reflection is based upon two conditions: First, [the presence of] original stuff; and second, [the presence of] the mirror, etc. Whichever is predominant among these two serves the basis which engenders the reflection. The state of becoming reborn does not include [a gross physical support in the intermediate being], whereas the two physical conditions only arise in the state of becoming deceased, which lacks a distinctly predominant physical basis; therefore, the example cited [by the opponent] is not equivalent to the target property [of the state of becoming reborn]. Nor can one say that apart from the semen and blood, which are insentient, there is a distinctly predominant physical basis as the undergirding condition [of the state of becoming reborn]. Since *upapādukas* are spontaneously generated in space, which one of these two conditions serves as the predominant basis? Already, based upon the correct logic, we

have refuted the tenet of the opposing tradition (i.e. the *Mahāsaṅghikas*) [which denies the existence of an intermediate state]. From the time of becoming deceased, until becoming reborn, there is a spatial interstice and temporal interval. Therefore, the intermediate state necessarily exists.

又所現像由二生故，謂二緣故，諸像得生：一者本質、二者鏡等。二中勝者像依彼生，生有無容，由二緣起，唯有死有，無別勝依，故所引喻，非等於法。亦不可說以外非情精血等緣為勝依性，由化生者空中歎生，於中計何為勝依性？已依正理對破彼宗，從死至生處容間絕，是故中有決定非無。 T1558.29.44c17–c23 (for original Sanskrit wording of Vasubandhu, see Pradhan (1967), 120)

29. Xuanzang's translation of the **Mahāvibhāṣā*, fascicle 75, relates that the Darṣāntikas posit images appearing within reflective surfaces as separate entities from the material stuff of mirrors, although they regard the images projected by mirrors as simply part of the surfaces they appear within. By contrast, the editors of the **Mahāvibhāṣā* state that scholars affiliating with the Sarvāstivāda tradition postulate that reflections are indeed separate entities distinct from surfaces:

Question: Are the reflections on [the surface of] of water or a mirror, etc. really existent things or not? The Darṣāntikas state that they are not really existent things. For what reason? Because the surface does not penetrate into the mirror itself, nor does the [stuff of the] mirror exist within the surface. The masters of the Abhidharma treatises [of our Sarvāstivāda tradition] state that 'these [reflections] really exist, because of the fact that they are detected by the visual faculty, serve as the cognitive support (*ālambana*) for visual consciousness, and are subsumed under the field of visibles'.

問：水鏡等中所有影像，為是實有？非實有耶？譬喻者說此非實有。所以者何？面不入鏡；鏡不在面。如何鏡上有面像生？阿毘達磨諸論師言：此是實有，是眼所見，眼識所緣，色處攝故。 (T1545.27.390c04–5)

30. Kachru (2017), 675:

The headache Vasubandhu faced when attempting to settle the ontological status of these most familiar of phenomena had to do with squaring the intuition that while it seemed as if mirror-images are a kind of visible stuff (like colors) and so ought to resist being co-occupied by other visibilia. they yet seem to be able to live in volumes already occupied by other kinds of visible stuff: that being part of how – the thinking went – they seemed to come into being in or on (or, as part of) the visible surfaces of things.

31. See Cox (1997, 53–54) for a detailed discussion of the ontological distinction between *prajñaptisat* and *dravyasat* as articulated in Sarvāstivāda doctrine.

32. *Nyāyānusāra* reads: 'In principle, one can say, simply, that precisely because the visible stuff of the mirror and of the reflection both possess physical resistance, their coinciding in one and the same spatial locus is logically unestablished (*asiddha*)' 理但應言：鏡像二色俱有對故，同處不成 (T1562.29.470b14–15).

33. See Cox (1988, 52–55) for a discussion of mirages, echoes, and images experienced while dreaming as instances of 'conventionally-real existence' (Skt.: *prajñaptisat*), the underlying constituents of which are ultimately real dharmas.

34. In his *Nyāyanusāra*, Saṅghabhadra disputes Vasubandhu's reasoning in support of the principle of the impossibility of two distinct physical things perfectly coinciding, but not the basic doctrinal principle itself:

Again, the reasoning by which Vasubandhu argues that that two physical things cannot coincide in one and the same spatial locus – is inappropriate. A wall and sunlight [cast on the wall] can simultaneously be perceived as being present in the same spatial locus . . . Although the visible stuff of the wall and sunlight have a different subserving basis in [four types of] fundamental material elements, they can nonetheless be perceived to be in one and the same spatial locus at the same time. But one cannot also deny that sunlight does not reside on the wall.

且彼所說以一處所無二故者，其理不然，同處壁光俱可取故，，，雖壁光色異大為依，而於一時同處可取，不可亦撥在壁光無。 (T1562.29.470.b3–6)

35. Saṅghabhadra adduces the example of the inherent translucence of crystalline mica being impeded via close proximity to opaque stuff outside it. The upshot of this example, according to Saṅghabhadra, is that it shows that the opaque stuff causing the crystalline mica to appear 'cloudy' inside does not exist within the mica – that is, the opaque stuff and the crystal-mica – are not collocated but occupy separate locations despite the fact that ordinary observers, due to commonplace cognitive error, typically 'misapprehend' the two as cohabiting one and the same spatial locus:

Now, in your explanation for how the two are perceived as occupying the same spatial locus, it is asserted that because the physical stuff of the mirror-image is wondrously translucent, it cannot be concealed by

other physical stuff [of an opaque quality]. Since the mirror and the mirror-image are extremely proximate to one another, the misapprehension arises that the two are [actually] perceived to be in one and the same spatial locus. If crystalline mica, etc., which is made up of wondrously translucent stuff, is placed extremely close to visible stuff impeding [its translucence], the misapprehension arises that both [the crystal-mica and the physical stuff impeding its translucence] are perceived to be in one and the same spatial locus. 今且為仁解同取理，謂彼像色極清妙故，不能揜蔽所餘諸色，以鏡與像，最極相隣，起增上慢，謂同處取。如雲母等，極清妙色。所隔諸餘色，若極相隣，便起增上慢，謂同處取。(T1562.29.470b19–b24)

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