Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma

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Summary and Keywords

Abhidharma had its origin in certain systematizing, analytical, and exegetical features found in the Sūtra, particularly, *mātṛkā* (summary list), *abhidharma-kathā* (discussion about the doctrine), *vibhaṅga* ("analytical exposition"), and *upadeśa* (exegetical elaboration). Buddhist philosophies may have been primarily initiated and vigorously elevated in the Abhidharma tradition. However, while the Abhidharma treatises undoubtedly exhibit highly developed scholastic and hermeneutical components, Abhidharma is essentially a soteriology. The Sarvāstivāda Ābhidhārmikas consistently claim that Abhidharma is truly "Buddha-word," being the sine quo non for ascertaining the true intents of the *sutras*—it constitutes the ultimate authority for discerning the definite and explicit discourses (*nītārtha-sūtra*) of the Buddha.

Sarvāstivāda, the "All-exist School," was undoubtedly one of the most important Buddhist schools in the period of Abhidharma Buddhism. Since its establishment around the 2nd century BCE, it exerted tremendous impact, directly or indirectly, on the subsequent development of Indian Buddhism. This school possesses a complete set of seven canonical Abhidharma texts, nearly all of which are now preserved in Chinese translation, and one, the *Prajñapti-śāstra*, is preserved in a complete Tibetan translation. A huge compendia, *The Great Abhidharma Commentary* (*Abhidharma-mahāvibhāṣā*), whose gradual compilation must have spanned over more than half a century and was fully completed around 150 CE, is now extant only in Chinese. This compendia, encyclopedic in scope, defines the doctrinal positions of the orthodox Sarvāstivādins based in Kaśmīra, who subsequently came to be known as the Vaibhāṣikas.

The central thesis of the school is *sarvāstivāda* or *sarvāstitā* (/*sarvāstitva*), which claims that all "*dharma*s"—fundamental realities or real entities of existence—sustain their unique intrinsic natures throughout the three periods of time. That is, whether future, past, or present, a *dharma*'s intrinsic nature remains the same, even though its mode of existence (*bhāva*) varies. This thesis was vehemently challenged by the Vibhajyavādins (Distinctionists) who denied the reality of the past and future *dharma*s. The reverberation of this "Sarvāstivāda-versus-Vibhajyavāda" controversy can be observed to have generated decisively significant doctrinal implications throughout the history of Buddhist thoughts.

The Savāstivāda school was also known as Hetuvāda, a "school which expounds on causality." Kātyāyanīputra (*c*. 150 BCE), often regarded as the effective "founder" of the Sarvāstivāda school, was credited with the innovation of a theory of sixfold causes, of which the coexistent or simultaneous causality was the most important legacy. For the first time in human history, he systematically articulated a form of causality in which the cause and its effect coexist simultaneously. This theory contributed importantly to Buddhist doctrinal development, particularly its epistemology. Mahāyāna Yogācāra had embraced it from their very inception, finding it indispensable for the establishment of many of their fundamental doctrines, including "store consciousness" (*ālaya-vijñāna*) and "cognition-only" (*vijñaptimātratā*).

Keywords: Sarvāstivāda, Abhidharma, Buddhist philosophy, Indian Buddhism, sectarian Buddhism, Vaibhāṣika, Sautrāntika, Vibhajyavāda, Saṃghabhadra

The Sarvāstivāda School and Its Fundamental Treatises

Sarvāstivāda (All-exist School) is an Abhidharma school of Buddhist thought whose adherents are generally known as the Sarvāstivādins. This school may have been effectively established by Kātyāyanīputra (*c*. 150 BCE) with his *Jñānaprasthāna* (Foundation of Knowledge).[1] Eventually the orthodox Sarvāstivādins based in Kaśmīra composed the *Abhidharma-mahāvibhāṣā* (*Mahāvibhāṣā*; hereafter MVŚ), a gigantic commentary on the *Jñānaprasthāna*, and came to be known as the Vaibhāṣikas (advocates of the [great] commentary) because they upheld the collectively sanctioned orthodox Sarvāstivāda views in this *Mahā-vibhāṣā* (Great Commentary).

This school possesses a well-defined Abhidharma canon of seven texts: (1) *Dharma-skandha* ("doctrine-aggregate) by Śāriputra; (2) *Saṅgīti-paryāya* (Representation of Collectively Sanctioned Doctrines) by Mahākauṣṭhila[2]; (3) *Prajñapti-śāstra* (/*Prajñapti-bhāṣya*; Treatise of Conventional Designations) by Mahā-maudgalyāyana; (4) *Vijñāna-kāya* (Consciousness-collection) by Devaśarman; (5) *Prakaraṇa-pāda* (/*Prakaraṇa-grantha*; hereafter PrP; Treatise on the Topical Categories) by Vasumitra;[3] (6) *Jñāna-prasthāna* (hereafter JPŚ) by Kātyāyanīputra; and (7) *Dhātu-kāya* (Element-collection) by Pūrṇa. Of these, the first three belong to the earlier period; or, very probably, the first two may be considered to be the earliest. The rest may be grouped under the later period. Nearly all of them are preserved only in ancient Chinese translation, though the full version of the *Prajñapti-śāstra* is also extant in a Tibetan translation.

Some of the earlier texts must have originally existed as independent treatises, and came to be gradually "Sarvāstivādized," a process that probably took place sometime before the composition of JPŚ. But there are indications that subsequently they were influenced by the overwhelmingly authoritative JPŚ, incorporating some of its doctrines. Thus, the extant version of the *Dharma-skandha*, while generally still preserving throughout the very early format of commentarial elaboration of *sūtra* passages, with little signs of systematization or development in respect to doctrinal presentation of argumentation, nevertheless has already incorporated the classification of the ninety-eight *anuśaya* ("proclivities") in its chapter on the *śrāmanya-phala*.[4] This ninety-eight-*anuśaya* taxonomy was a clear advancement on the basis of the Sūtra analysis of seven proclivities, and came to dominate the general Sarvāstivāda tradition.[5] Another example is the well-known innovation in PrP of the five-category taxonomy of all *dharma*s—matter (*rūpa*), thought (*citta*), thought-concomitants (*caitasika*), and the unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*) *dharma*s—in place of the traditional *skandhas-dhatu-āyatana* taxonomy (see the section on "The Five-Category Subsumption of Seventy-Five Classes of *Dharmas*"). This was in fact a further systematization on the basis of the earlier attested, albeit as yet unsystematized or generalized, analysis in JPŚ in terms of these five categories of *dharma*s.[6]

Indeed, among the seven canonical texts, JPŚ contributed most significantly and definitively to the doctrinal articulation of Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma. As remarked by Yin Shun, in this regard, a distinctive feature of JPŚ is its ability to bring out the integrative and coordinating functions vis-à-vis the *dharma*s—avoiding the pitfall of mechanistic expositions of *dharma*s conceived of as abiding individually in their intrinsic natures.[7] Yin Shun illustrates this hermeneutical contribution with the innovative definition of the retribution-cause (*vipāka-hetu*), hitherto confined to volition (*cetanā*) or bodily and vocal *karma*s. JPŚ now extends the constituent scope of this cause to include all the five aggregates (*skandha*): "all the *citta-caitasika-dharma*s, . . . all the bodily and vocal *karma*s (*rūpa*), the *cittaviprayukta-saṃskāra*s, serve as the retribution-cause of the [corresponding] retribution."[8] (See also the section "Doctrine of Causality.")

Most importantly, JPŚ consolidates and further clarifies the central thesis of *sarvāstitva* through its various topics of discussion from various doctrinal perspectives; particularly noteworthy is the perspective of acquisition (*prāpti*) or endowment (*samanvāgama*), a unique Sarvāstivāda doctrine often elaborately discussed in terms of the tritemporal existence of *dharma*s. MVŚ certainly highlights and elaborates on this intention and endeavor of JPŚ in numerous contexts. To conserve space, only one such context is cited below.[9] Here, JPŚ discusses the binding of a tritemporal defilement, and in the process also clearly affirms its tritemporal existence. The commentary, MVŚ, elaborates on it, analyzing further in terms of acquisition:

JPŚ (T26, 939c10-21):

> [i] Have all past *saṃyojana*s ("fetter"; a synonym for defilement) bound (已繫, **upanibaddha*; i.e., to the object)?
>
> Answer: All past *saṃyojana*s have bound. There are *saṃyojana*s which have bound [but] are not past; viz, future or present *samyojana*s that have bound.
>
> [ii] Will all future *saṃyojana*s bind in the future?
>
> Answer: There are four possible cases (*catuṣkoṭi*): . . .
>
> [iii] Are the present *saṃyojana*s now binding?
>
> Answer: The present *saṃyojana*s are now binding. There are *saṃyojana*s which are binding, [but] are not present; viz, past and future *samyojana*s that are now binding.

MVŚ (T27, 311c8-312b5):

> "[JPŚ:] Have the past *saṃyojana*s bound?"
>
> Question: What is the purpose of this discussion?
>
> Answer: The purpose is to refute the doctrinal positions of others and demonstrate the true principle: There are some who claim that the past and the future do not exist truly. . . . To refute them, it is demonstrated here that the past and future exist truly. [There are also other purposes] . . .
>
> A *saṃyojana* vis-à-vis its acquisition is of three types: (1) [the *saṃyojana*] is like a head bull (*vṛṣabha*), leading before the acquisition; (2) it is like a calf, following after its acquisition; (3) it is like a figure and its shadow, co-nascent with its acquisition.

In the first case, the *saṃyojana* precedes its acquisition; in the second, the *saṃyojana* succeeds its acquisition; in the third, the *saṃyojana* and its acquisition are co-nascent.[10]

> [i] The past *saṃyojana*s have bound: A *saṃyojana*, as well as its acquisition have existed in the past; it has already bound, hence said to have bound.
>
> There are *saṃyojana*s which have bound, [but] are not past: A future or present *saṃyojana* that has bound—a *saṃyojana* existing in the future or present; its acquisition has already bound in the past. This is the case of a *saṃyojana* that is like a calf, following after its acquisition. . . .
>
> [ii] There are four possible cases: (1) A future *saṃyojana* is not one that will bind—A future *saṃyojana* that has been abandoned (*prahīṇa*), . . .will definitely not retrogress: the future *saṃyojana*s. . . of a non-retrogressive (*aparihāṇa-dharman*) *arhat* will definitely not retrogress; . . . (2) There are *saṃyojana*s that will bind, [but] are not future—the past *saṃyojana*s which have been abandoned . . . of a retrogressive (*parihāṇa-dharman*) *arhat*, will definitely retrogress; . . . (3) There are future *saṃyojana*s that will bind in the future . . . (4) There are *saṃyojana*s which are neither future nor will bind in the future.
>
> [iii] All present *saṃyojana*s are now binding: A present *saṃyojana* necessarily possesses a present acquisition; because the two are necessarily co-existent, like a shape and its shadow. There are *saṃyojamna*s that are now binding, [but] are not present: A past or future *saṃyojana* that is now binding; i.e., a past or future *saṃyojana* that possesses a present acquisition—a past *saṃyojana* that has preceded like a bull leader, or a future *saṃyojana* that comes along subsequently to its acquisition, like a calf following [the bull]; it is said to bind at the present because its acquisition is present.

The special position that the *Jñānaprasthāna* occupies is seen from the fact that it was generally regarded in the school as the "body," whereas the other six were called the "feet" (*pāda*).[11]

However, it would seem that the *Prakaraṇa* (*c*. 100 BCE) was likewise highly esteemed by the Sarvāstivādins, including the compilers of MVŚ, and especially by the so-called Western Masters (*pāścātya*) or Outside Masters (*bahirdeśaka*) based mainly in the Gandhāra region. This text is best known for its innovative systematization of the totality of *dharma*s into a five-category taxonomy (see the section "The Five-Category Subsumption of Seventy-Five Classes of *Dharmas*")in its first chapter, "The Analysis of the Five Categories" (辯五事品), which, before Xuanzang's translation, had been translated into Chinese (T no. 1557) by An Shigao around 148 CE and again by Facheng in the Tang Dynasty. Another important contribution of PrP is its distinctive tendency toward organization and succinctness—a tendency that had come to significantly influence the composition style of the post-MVŚ manuals starting with the **Amṛtarasa*.

The following discussion in MVŚ (231c3–12) on the "ordinary-worldling-nature" (*pṛthagjanatva*) shows that the authority of both JPŚ and PrP were highly respected by the Sarvāstivāda community in general. Moreover, in spite of the indication that PrP had been doctrinally influenced by JPŚ, the same discussion further suggests that even at the time of the compilation of MVŚ the relative chronology of JPŚ and PrP had not been fully agreed upon among the Sarvāstivādins:

> Question: Why is it that this original treatise (JPŚ) speaks of the ordinary-worldling-nature, and not the ordinary-worldling-*dharma*, whereas PrP speaks of the ordinary-worldling-*dharma* and not the ordinary-worldling-nature?
>
> Answer: The ordinary-worldling-nature excels, not the ordinary-worldling-*dharma*; this original treatise speaks in terms of that which excels. Since this original treatise has already spoken of the ordinary-worldling nature, PrP does not mention it again. Since this original treatise has not spoken of the ordinary-worldling *dharma*, PrP mentions the ordinary-worldling *dharma*. This shows that that [PrP] was composed later than this [JPŚ].
>
> According to some: since that [*Prakaraṇa*] treatise has already spoken of the ordinary-worldling-*dharma*, this treatise (JPŚ) does not mention it again. Since that treatise has not spoken of the ordinary-worldling-nature, this treatise mentions it. This shows that that [PrP] was composed earlier than this [JPŚ].[12]

MVŚ, which establishes the doctrinal authority of the Sarvāstivāda, is encyclopedic in scope. It is now extant only in Chinese translations, of which Xuanzang's version (T no. 1545) comprises 200 fascicles. It is undoubtedly an extremely important Abhidharma manual, providing a wealth of information on the various schools of thought known up to the time of its compilation. However, gigantic as it was, both its structure and doctrinal interpretations were dictated by those of JPŚ, of which it purported to be a commentary. Moreover, its discussions were often long-winded and lacked systematization. More importantly, its submission to the absolute authority of JPŚ had provoked reaction from certain sectors within the broad Sarvāstivāda communities.

This led to a line of development of Abhidharma manuals, beginning with the **Amṛtarasa* (Taste of Ambrosia) by a certain Ghoṣaka, preserved in a Chinese translation (T no. 1553) of sixteen short chapters in just two fascicles. Essentially, it is a succinct, systematic composition based on JPŚ, MVŚ, and PrP, with a clear emphasis on praxis and realization (as its title, *Amṛtarasa*, suggests), and an inclination toward the Gandhāra (Western) school of thought (more so than to the Kaśmīra orthodoxy). In short, it represented the beginning of a line of commentarial development that stresses systematization and an attitude of openness.

Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (hereafter AKB; *c*. 4th century CE), extant now in its Sanskrit original and in Chinese and Tibetan translations, may be regarded as the culmination along this line of development. Puguang's summarized description (T41, 1c10–2a19) of the structure and content of this text is in Table 1:[13]

Table 1. Puguang's Summary of the Structure and Contents of AKB

	CHAPTER	ELUCIDATION		
Non-self *dharmas*	1. *Dhātu*	Essential nature of *dharmas*	With-outflow & outflow-free: general exposition	
	2. *Indriya*	Functions of *dharmas*		
	3. *Loka*	With-outflow fruits	With-outflow & outflow-free: separate expositions	Separate expositions on with-outflow
	4. *Karma*	Causes of retribution		
	5. *Anuśaya*	Conditions for the *karmas*		
	6. *Mārga-pudgala*	Outflow-free fruits		Separate expositions on outflow-free
	7. *Jñāna*	Causes for the realization of the fruits		
	8. *Samāpatti*	Conditions for the *jñānas*		
No-self doctrine	9. *Ātmavāda-pratiṣedha*	Principle of non-self-ness		

Vasubandhu often favors the views of the Sautrāntikas, a group of masters emerging from around late 2nd century CE, who were anti-Ābhidhārmikas, claiming to take the Sūtra rather than the Abhidharma treatises as the authourity.[14] But he does not affiliate himself with any particular school of thought. At the end of chapter 8 of AKB, he states:

> This Abhidharma proclaimed by us is for the most part established according to the principles of the Kaśmīrian Vaibhāṣikas (*kāśmīra-vaibhāṣikāṇāṃ nīti-siddhaḥ*). Whatever herein has been badly grasped by us is our fault. But then, with regard to the principle of the True Doctrine, the Buddha and the sons of the Buddha alone are the authority (*pramāṇa*).[15]

However, his brilliant exposition of the Abhidharma doctrines, often advocating the Sautrāntikas against the Vaibhāṣikas, led to strong reactions among the latter. Saṃghabhadra, an equally brilliant junior contemporary of Vasubandhu, eventually composed the **Nyāyānusāra* (Conformity to True Principles; hereafter Ny; T29, no. 1562) to defend the Vaibhāṣika orthodoxy against Vasubandhu's critique in AKB. This text is now preserved only in a Chinese translation by Xuanzang, comprising 80 fascicles (Xuanzang's translation of AKB comprises 30 fascicles). It is one of the most important Abhidharma texts representing the orthodox Sarvāstivādin views brilliantly expounded and articulated by Saṃghabhadra. Its importance also lies in its recording of a large amount of detailed expositions of the Dārṣṭāntika-Sautrāntika doctrines—mostly not available elsewhere—particularly those represented by the Śrīlāta, mostly just quoted as "the Sthavira" (The Elder). It is no exaggeration to state that this text is decidedly indispensable for a proper understanding of the Sarvāstivāda and Dārṣṭāntika-Sautrāntika doctrines.[16]

Partly as a reaction to the distractive disputations abounding in these Abhidharma polemical texts, Skandhila composed a succinct Abhidharma manual, entitled **Abhidharmāvatāra*, now extant only in Chinese (T no. 1554) and Tibetan (Tohoku no. 4098, Peking no. 5599). It expounds the totality of the Sarvāstivāda doctrines without sectarian polemics, in an eight-category (*padārtha*) scheme—five *skandha*s and three *asaṃskṛta*s. The Xuanzang tradition tells us that Skandhila was Saṃghabhadra's teacher. Judging from the scheme of presentation and the contents of this work, it may be inferred that he was an orthodox Vaibhāṣika who nevertheless displayed an open-minded attitude evident in his inclination to some doctrinal positions of the Western Masters.[17]

Origin and Development of the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma

Very soon after the Buddha's demise, or possibly earlier, some monks began to specialize in either the Sūtra, or the Vinaya, or in elaboration and exposition of the doctrines. In the Pāli *sutta*s (and generally also the corresponding Chinese *āgama*s), such specialization is reflected in such terms as *suttantika*, *vinaya-dhara*, *dhamma-dhara*, *dhamma-kathika* and *mātikā-dhara*. However, noticeably, they usually occur in a stock-phrase description of learned monks, and therefore could possibly be later insertions in the gradual process of the compilation of the canon. For instance, the Majjhima-nikāya teaches that a monk possessing eleven qualities is capable of growth in the Dhamma-vinaya. One is that he frequents and learns from the learned monks "who are 'experts in the *Dhamma*' (*dhamma-dhara*), who are 'experts in the Vinaya' (*vinaya-dhara*), and who are 'experts in content-summaries' (*mātikā-dhara*)."[18] On the other hand, in the Vinaya, we find not only the appellations of these specialist monks mentioned together in the same context, but also descriptions of their specific natures or roles. For instance, the *Mahāvagga* of the Vinaya-piṭaka records that on the *Pavaraṇā* day at the end of the rainy retreat, they gather in their respective groups to engage in mutual discussion and deliberation: the *suttantika*s rehearse the *sutta*s together; the *vinaydhara*s ascertain the Vinaya together; and the *dhammakathika*s discuss the *Dhamma* together.[19]

The Ābhidhammikas/Ābhidhārmikas, "Specialist in the Abhidhamma/Abhidharma," may be considered to have been in the main evolved from the *dhammadhara*s/*dharmadhara*s and the *mātikā-dhara*s/*mātṛkā-dhara*s. It may be said that "Sarvāstivādins" in a narrower sense refers to the Sarvāstivāda Ābhidhārmikas. However, while the Ābhidhārmikas constituted the mainstream of the schools, there were other Sarvāstivādins who were basically anti-Abhidharma. These were the early Dārṣṭāntikas (the Illustrators), who were mainly *sūtra*-centred, being evolved from the *suttantikas*/*sūtrānta-dhara*s(/*sūtra-dhara*s)—even though some masters from this subgroup also came to exhibit a certain amount of Abhidharmic tendencies in their doctrinal expositions or disputations with the Ābhidhārmikas properly so called. It is important to note that these early Dārṣṭāntikas figuring in MVŚ were still Sarvāstivādins, sharing the doctrine of the tritemporal existence of *dharma*s. They were generally well respected by the compilers of MVŚ, who nonetheless criticized and rejected their views. Two of the most prominent Dārṣṭāntika masters, Dharmatrāta and Buddhadeva, were spoken of by these compilers as among the "four great masters of the Sarvāstivāda" (see the section "Ascertainment of the Contents of the *Sūtras*"). In general, the Dārṣṭāntikas may be characterized as being primarily concerned with meditative praxis and popular preaching.[20] Subsequent to MVŚ, these masters, partly under the influence of the Mahāsāṃghikas and the Vibhajyavādins, evolved into the Sautrāntikas, totally rejecting the central Sarvāstivāda doctrine of the tritemporal existence of the *dharma*s. In the post-MVŚ texts, such as AKB, the *Abhidharmadīpa-Vibhāṣāprabhāvṛtti*, and Ny, the two appellations, "Dārṣṭāntika" and "Sautrāntika," are often interchangeable.

We also see a group of praxis-oriented meditators in MVŚ, known as the *yogācāra* masters. They are mentioned some 140 times in the text and appear to have been highly respected, even by the Ābhidhārmikas. Moreover, some of their doctrinal explanations based on meditative experiences must have significantly contributed to the body of Sarvāstivāda doctrines pertaining to meditative praxis and spiritual realization. These doctrines also probably contributed to those of the subsequent Dārṣṭāntika-Sautrāntikas and of the early Mahāyānist Yogācāras seen in the Basic Section (**Maulī Bhūmi*) of the *Yogācārabhūmi*.[21] An example is the epistemological doctrine in the Basic Section that a moment of mental consciousness necessarily follows immediately after a moment of sensory consciousness.[22] In MVŚ, this position is explicitly stated to be held by the *yogācāra* masters.[23]

Both the Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda Ābhidhammikas/Ābhidharmikas claim that Abhidhamma/Abhidharma is "Buddha's word" (*buddha-vacana*), that is, it is taught by the Buddha himself. However, in the case of Sarvāstivāda, it is acknowledged that the seven canonical texts were actually composed by the Buddhist masters on the basis of the scattered Abhidharma teachings in the Buddha's discourses and compiled them into structured texts. The following are the major doctrinal features in the *sūtra*s generally considered to have contributed to the development of the Abhidhamma/Abhidharma canon: (1) group discussion and analysis on the Buddha's discourses in the form of *abhidhamma-kathā*/*abhidharma-kathā* and *vibhaṅga*; (2) summary statements of doctrinal contents in the form of *mātikā*/*mātṛkā*, such as the list of the thirty-seven doctrinal topics known as the *bodhipakṣya-dharma*s (factors conducive to Enlightenment); (3) exposition of implicit and profound teachings in the form of *vedalla*/*vaidalya* (splitting open/unraveling [the profound or nonobvious]) and *upadeśa* (expository elaboration)—noteworthily, *vedalla* and *upadeśa* constitute, respectively, the last member of the Theravāda ninefold division (*navaṅga*) and the Sarvāstivāda twelvefold division (*dvādaśāṅga*) of the Buddha's teachings. And in either tradition, this last member is claimed to represent the Abhidhamma/Abhidharma.[24]

In Sarvāstivāda, the feature of *mātṛkā* came to be extended from the original signification of a doctrinal summary list. Saṃghabhadra mentions *mātṛkā* as being synonymous with *abhidharma* and *upadeśa*; and, quoting Mahākāśyapa, cites the early Sarvāstivāda canonical texts: the *Saṅgītiparyāya*, the *Dharma-skandha*, and the *Prajñapti-śāstra* as among examples of *mātṛkā*.[25] Similarly, in explaining the *Abhidharma-piṭaka*, the *Mūla-sarvāstivāda-vinaya-kṣudraka-vastu* also says, "the four *smṛtyupasthāna*s, the four *samyak-prahāṇa*s . . . the *Dharma-saṃgīti*, the *Dharma-skandha*—these are collectively known as *mātṛkā*s."[26]

Saṃghabhadra further argues that in the twelvefold division of the *sūtra-piṭaka* (*sūtra*, *geya*, *vyākaraṇa*, etc.), *upadeśa*, the twelfth division, representing the Abhidharma, in fact serves as the very criterion or authority for nonerroneously unraveling and ascertaining the true meanings of all the other eleven divisions. Accordingly, he claims, Abhidharma is not only properly *buddha-vacana*, but indeed the *pramāna* of the Sūtra. In brief, for the Ābhidhārmikas, Abhidharma is the explicit (*nītārtha*) and definitive (*lākṣaṇika*) teachings of the Buddha, in contrast to the *sūtras*, which are generally, or at least in some cases, implicit (*neyārtha*) and intentional (*ābhiprāyika*).[27]

Definition, Nature, and Purpose of Abhidharma

Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma minutely analyzes the complexity of the human experiences together with his environment and arrives at a definite list of fundamental factors of existence known as *dharma*s, each being a unique force contributing in a definite manner to the experiential complex. As articulately defined in AKB, "a *dharma* is so called because it sustains its specific characteristic (*svalakṣaṇadhāraṇād dharmaḥ*)." For instance, "matter" (*rūpa*) is a *dharma* because the characteristic specific to it—such as resistance (*sapratighatva*) or visibility (*sanidarśanatva*)—is always sustained (always remains unchanged). Likewise, "sensation" (*vedanā*) is another *dharma*, a mental force, whose specific characteristic is invariably "experience" (*anubhava*). "Understanding" (*prajñā*), another distinct *dharma*, also a mental force, whose specific characteristic is "discernment of *dharma*s" (*dharma-pravicaya*), contributes to the human faculty of understanding in any cognitive act.

The term, "*abhi-dharma*" (*abhi-* meaning "facing," "towards") is defined thus:

> This is called *abhidharma* since it is a *dharma* facing towards the *Dharma* in the highest sense, *Nirvāṇa*, or *dharma*-characteristic. (AKB, 2)

This etymological definition underscores the soteriological—rather than "scholastic"—significance of Abhidharma: It is a direct realization, not mere intellectual understanding of the Reality (*Nirvāṇa*), or of the true nature of the real existents (the specific characteristics of all the *dharma*s)—the conditioned (*saṃskṛta*) and the unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*) ones, those with outflow (*sāsrava*, or impure) and those that are outflow-free (*anāsrava*, or pure). It is only through such a direct realization (*abhisamaya*) that liberation from the saṃsāric predicament, along with all the existential unsatisfactoriness (*duḥkha*) that it entails, comes to be possible. The following stanza from AKB on the purpose of the Buddha's teaching of the Abhidharma clarifies this soteriological nature:

> Since other than the discernment of *dharma*s there is no
>
> Excellent means for the appeasement of defilements,
>
> And on account of defilements that the world wanders in this existence-ocean
>
> —Thus, for this reason, it has been taught, they say (i.e., the Vaibhāṣikas), by the Teacher.

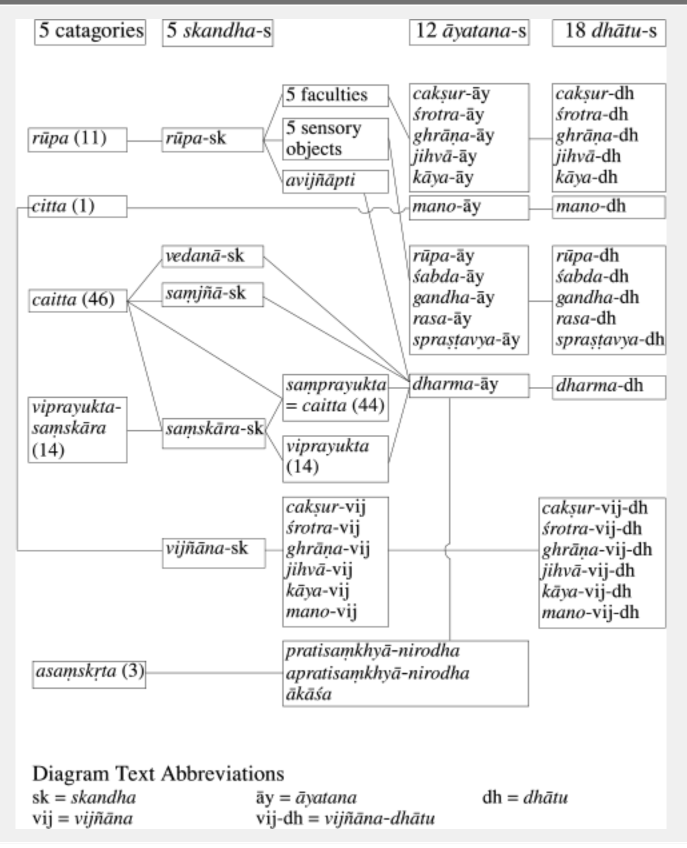
Abhidharma in the absolute (true) sense is declared to be the outflow-free *prajñā*. And *prajñā* is defined as the "discernment of *dharma*s" (*dharma-pravicaya*), which is absolutely indispensable for transcending *saṃsāra*.

In the conventional sense, however, "Abhidharma" includes all forms of understanding capable of conducing to this pure *prajñā*: all the with-outflow understandings that are derived from listening (*śruta-mayī*), from reflection (*cintā-mayī*), and from cultivation (*bhāvanā-mayī*); understanding that is innate (*upapatti-pratilambhika*), as well as the Abhidharma treatises which provide intellectual learning.[28]

The Five-Category Subsumption of Seventy-Five Classes of *Dharmas*

The process of *dharma-pravicaya* leads to the ascertainment of some seventy-five classes or types of *dharma*s, subsumable into five major classes. The five-category taxonomy is attributed to Vasumitra, author of the *Prakaraṇa-pāda*. It is a systematization developed on the basis of JPŚ (see the section "Sarvāstivāda School and Its Fundamental Treatises") and of the traditional taxonomy in the Sūtra, of the Five Aggregates (*skandha*), Twelve Abodes/Entrances (*āyatana*), and Eighteen Elements (*dhātu*). The figure, "seventy-five," seems to have been eventually arrived at by a pupil of Xuanzang (*c*. 602–664 CE), Puguang, on the basis of his studies of AKB. The correlation of these taxonomies is represented in Table 2:[29]

Table 2. *Correlation Between the 5 Categories, 5 Skandhas, 12 Āyatanas, and 18 Dhātus*.



Among the five basic categories, the first noteworthy feature is that, under *rūpa*, there is a *dharma* known as *avijñapti* (noninformation). In spite of being a type of material

entity, it is invisible and nonresistant, existing as a serial continuity of karmic force. This is a special and controversial *karma* doctrine of the Sarvāstivāda, formulated to account for the preservation of karmic efficacy. Once projected by a physical or vocal *karma*—known in contrast as *vijñapti* (information/informative) *karma*s—it arises continuously in every moment, interacting with the person's mental series and modifying the resultant status of the *karma* until the time of retribution or the person's death. It additionally came to be further developed in connection with the conception of restraint (*saṃvara*), irrestraint, (*asaṃvara*), and neither-restraint-nor-irrestraint (*nava-saṃvara-nāsaṃvara*), with further stipulated conditions for its acquisition and relinquishment.

Its nature of being an invisible and nonresistant matter is highlighted in Saṃghabhadra's definition:

> That morally defined, non-resistant matter, which [continues to] exist in the thought at the time even subsequent to [the karmic action] having been done, and even when the thought and thought-concomitant is of a dissimilar moral species [from that when the action was done], and even in the thoughtless state—this is conceded as the non-informative [matter]. (*kṛte'pi visabhāge'pi citte cittātyaye ca yat | vyākṛtāpratighaṃ rūpaṃ sā hy avijñaptir iṣyate* ||)[30]

Another noteworthy category is the conditionings disjoined from thought (*cittaviprayukta-saṃskāra*). Unlike the Theravāda, which subsumes all *dhamma*s under the dualistic scheme of *nāma* (the nonmaterial factors) and *rūpa*, the Sarvāstivāda recognizes a category of real entities under this appellation—real forces in the universe—that are neither material nor mental in nature. It may be considered an important doctrinal innovation of the Sarvāstivāda. An example of this category is a *dharma* called "acquisition" (*prāpti*; see also the JPŚ discussion on *saṃyojana* cited in the section "Sarvāstivāda School and Its Fundamental Treatises"). It is the sine qua non making possible the possession of a *dharma* by a sentient being. For instance, the phenomenon of a human possessing craving (*rāga*) is explained thus: craving—and, for that matter, any other negative or positive (such as faith) *dharma*—is an existent force in the universe. The person in which craving with regard to a cognitive object arises comes to be specifically linked with him necessarily through an "acquisition" of this instance of craving. Once so linked, the person continues to possess this craving, irrespective of whether he is conscious of it or not in the given moment—until the serial flow of this acquisition is interrupted by a sufficiently strong counteragent, a specific *prajñā*. At this juncture, another important *cittaviprayukta-saṃskāra dharma* of the opposite nature, a nonacquisition (*aprāpti*), conspires or coordinates to ensure the delinking (and no further arising) of this craving from the person.

Being a force that is neither material nor mental, such a *dharma* can act on other *dharma*s of both types, and, in the case of acquisition, even on an unconditioned *dharma*. When one attains *Nirvāṇa* as a result of spiritual striving, it is not the case that the path pertaining to the domain of the conditioned "produces" a fruit that is unconditioned. The path as the cause produces the acquisition (a conditioned *dharma*) of the *Nirvāṇa*, so that the latter comes to be linked with the person: It is this particular person that acquires the *Nirvāṇa*, not any other sentient being. As a matter of fact, the existence of acquisition as a real entity is emphatically argued for by the Sarvāstivādins for whom it is, specifically, the sine qua non for establishing the distinction between an ordinary worldling (*pṛthagjana*) and a noble one (*ārya*). Thus, the *Abhidharmāvatāra* argues:

> If acquisition were non-existent, when defilements like greed, etc., arise, the trainee (*śaikṣa*), being without an outflow-free thought, ought not to be an *ārya*. [Likewise,] an ordinary worldling gives rise to a skillful or non-defined thought, he ought to be at that moment regarded as one who is detached (*vītarāga*). Moreover, there being no acquisition of *nirvāṇa* for the *ārya* and ordinary worldling, both of them would be similar to each other and, therefore, both ought to be called an ordinary worldling or *ārya*.[31]

The category of the unconditioned *dharma*s is likewise noteworthy. Unlike in the Theravāda Abhidhamma, the unconditioned in the Sarvāstivāda is not confined to *Nirvāṇa*. There are three types: cessation through deliberation (*pratisaṃkhyā-nirodha*), cessation without deliberation (*apratisaṃkhyā-nirodha*), and Space (*ākāśa*). Of these, the first two are pluralistic. In MVŚ, it can be observed that their ontological status is a contentious issue. The Dārṣṭāntika masters mostly deny the reality of all the three (MVŚ, 388c); some, like the Bhadanta (大德), deny Space (MVŚ, 388c24–28). In AKB, the Sautrāntikas explicitly state that "all the unconditioned is not real entity."[32] However, all the three *asaṃskṛta*s are attested in the earliest canonical Abhidharma texts of the Sarvāstivāda.[33] The *Jñānaprasthāna*, in an Abhidharmically more formal manner, enumerates *ākāśa* and *apratisaṃkhyā-nirodha* as the two types of *dharma*s that are "to be penetrated (*pratividhātavya*), to be fully known (*parijñātavya*), not to be abandoned (*aprahātavya*), not to be cultivated (*abhāvayitavya*), and not to be directly realized (*asākṣāt-kartavya*)"; whereas the *pratisaṃkhyā-nirodha* is "to be penetrated, to be fully known, not to be abandoned, not to be cultivated, and to be directly realized."[34]

The term "deliberation" (*pratisaṃkhyā*) refers to an outflow-free understanding (*prajñā*) strong enough to effectuate a disjunction (*visaṃyoga*)—and hence a liberation—from a given defilement. "There are in fact as many disjunction-entities as there are conjunction-entities (*saṃyoga-vastu*)."[35] As the following discussion in MVŚ shows, for the Sarvāstivāda, each abandonment of defilement is actually a *nirvāṇa*; even though this designation is specifically reserved for an *arhat*'s perfect attainment:

> Question: The abandonment of any [defiled] *dharma* such as *satkāya-dṛṣṭi* is *nirvāṇa*; why does it herein speak only of the absolute abandonment of greed (*rāga*) and so on up to the absolute abandonment of all defilements?
>
> Answer: Although the abandonment of each and every [defiled] *dharma* is *nirvāṇa*, herein it speaks only of the "perfect *nirvāṇa*." . . . Furthermore, the name *nirvāṇa* is [reserved] exclusively for the stage of the non-trainee. The stage of the trainee being yet incomplete, it is not called *nirvāṇa*.[36]

The "cessation without deliberation" is not a disjunction. It is likewise pluralistic.

> It is . . . not acquired through deliberative understanding. . . . It is . . . not acquired through deliberation by means of necessary effort, necessary preparation or necessary exertion. Furthermore
>
> . . . It is [acquired] on account of the deficiency in conditions (*pratyaya-vaikalyāt*). Thus, when one is focused [on an object] in one direction, all the other objects—visible, sound, smell, taste and tangible—in the other directions cease. The thought and thought-concomitants that would have taken these objects do not arise absolutely (*atyantam*); they do not arise owing to the deficiency in conditions. On account of this non-arising, their cessations without deliberation are acquired.[37]

Saṃghabhadra vehemently argues for the reality of the *apratisaṃkhyā-nirodha* having this efficacy:

> Should it be claimed that a condition that is lacking is simply a condition that is non-existent (/the deficiency in conditions is simply the non-existence of conditions), it is also unreasonable. For, a non-existent cannot obstruct the arising of an existent. From this decisive principle, it is not the mere deficiency in conditions which is called the *apratisaṃkhyā-nirodha*. Rather, there exists a distinct *dharma* (*dharmāntara*) which is acquired (*prāpta*) owing to the deficiency in conditions. This [real entity] has the special efficacy capable of obstructing a *dharma* susceptible to arising, causing it never to arise—this is called the *apratisaṃkhyā-nirodha*. If it is the case that there was not a distinct *dharma* capable of obstructing, and the non-arising of the *dharma* was due simply to the deficiency in conditions; then when the required species of conditions happen to assemble subsequently, the previously non-arisen *dharma* ought to arise again.[38]

A spiritually significant example of *apratisaṃkhyā-nirodha* is that of existence in the unfortunate planes of existence (*durgati*), acquired by an *ārya* when he attains the spiritual fruition of stream-entry (*srotaāpatti*). A practitioner in fact can acquire such *apratisaṃkhyā-nirodha*s by practicing *dāna*, *śīla*, or penetration into a doctrinal teaching, and so on.[39]

The third type of the unconditioned, Space, is the most controversial among the Abhidharma schools. MVŚ distinguishes the conditioned space-element (*ākāśa-dhātu*) and the unconditioned Space (*ākāśa*):

> What is the difference between Space and the space-element? Space is not matter; the space-element is matter. Space is invisible (*anidarśana*); the space-element is visible (*sanidarśana*). Space is non-resistant (*apratigha*); the space-element is resistant (*sapratigha*). Space is outflow-free; the space-element is with-outflow. Space is unconditioned; the space-element is conditioned.[40]

Saṃghabhadra further articulates the difference between the two—the unconditioned Space is both nonobstructive and not obstructed by other things:

> the space-element is a fine *rūpa*; although not obstructing others, it is obstructed by others, and is so classifiable as impermanent and conditioned (*saṃskṛta*). Space has the characteristic of being neither obstructive to others nor being obstructible by others, at the time when material elements are being produced.[41]

Discernment of *Dharma*s (*dharmapravicaya*): Scope, Fundamental Standpoints, and Methodology

MVŚ defines the scope of the Ābhidhārmikas' "discernment of *dharma*s" as follows:

> The meanings of the *abhidharma-piṭaka* should be understood by means of fourteen things: (1–6) the six causes (*hetu*), (7–10) the four conditions (*pratyaya*), (11) subsumption/inclusion (*saṃgraha*), (12) conjunction (*saṃprayoga*), (13) endowment (*samanvāgama*), (14) non-endowment (*asamanvāgama*). Those who, by means of these fourteen things, understand the *abhidharma* unerringly, are called Ābhidhārmikas, not [those who] merely recite and memorize the words.
>
> Other masters say that the meanings of the *abhidharma-piṭaka* should be understood by means of seven things: (1) skillfulness with regard to causes (*hetu-kauśalya*), (2) skillfulness with regard to conditions (*pratyaya-kauśalya*), (3) skillfulness with regard to intrinsic characteristic (*svalakṣaṇa-kauśalya*), (4) skillfulness with regard to common characteristic (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa-kauśalya*), (5) skillfulness with regard to subsumption and non-subsumption (*saṃgraha-asaṃgraha-kauśalya*), (6) skillfulness with regard to conjunction and disjunction (*saṃprayoga-viprayoga-kauśalya*), (7) skillfulness with regard to endowment and non-endowment (*samanvāgama-asamanvāgama-kauśalya*). Those who, by means of these seven things understand the *abhidharma* unerringly, are called Ābhidhārmikas.[42]

The **Abhidharmāvatāra* too explains the thought-concomitant, *prajñā*, as "the examination (*upalakṣaṇa*), as the case may be, of the following eight kinds of *dharma*: subsumption, conjunction, endowment, cause, condition, fruit, intrinsic characteristic, common characteristic."[43] From the soteriological perspective of the Ābhidhārmikas, *prajñā* may be considered as the most important *dharma* in sentient existence—so much so that it is said to be the true intrinsic nature of *abhidharma* itself. This is in fact quite in keeping with the whole of Buddhism, which consistently underscores the indispensability of *prajñā*/*paññā* for the attainment of ultimate, absolute liberation. In this process, it is a specific and sufficiently strong mode of operation of *prajñā* that counteracts a defilement(s), resulting in a corresponding state of spiritual attainment. It is for this reason that in the above *Abhidharmāvatāra* definition of *prajñā*, we find the whole scope of Ābhidhārmika *dharma-pravicaya*. And within this scopic enumeration, it is the investigation into intrinsic characteristics, which is the same as that of intrinsic natures (*svabhāva*), that may be considered the most important.[44] Failure to truly ascertain the intrinsic natures of *dharma*s is tantamount to the ignorance of the true nature of reality—the essential cause of the inherent unsatisfactoriness (*duḥkha*) of saṃsāric existence.

Investigation in Terms of Doctrinal Perspectives

Abhidharma also investigates the nature of *dharma*s from different doctrinal perspectives. In AKB, there are some twenty-two such perspectives in the first chapter: (1) visible (*sa-nidarśana*), invisible (*anidarśana*); (2) resistant (*sa-pratigha*), nonresistant (*apratigha*); (3) skillful (*kuśala*), unskillful (*akuśala*), nondefined (*avyākṛta*); (4) connected with/pertaining to (*pratisaṃyukta*) sensuality sphere, to fine-materiality sphere, to nonmateriality sphere; (5) with-outflow, outflow-free; (6) with-reasoning (*savitarka*), with-investigation (*savicāra*); (7) with cognitive object (*sa-ālambana*), without cognitive object (*anālambana*); (8) appropriated (*upātta*), nonappropriated (*anupātta*); (9) great elements (*bhūta*), derived from great elements (*bhautika*); (10) accumulated (*saṃcita*), nonaccumulated (*asaṃcita*); (11) that which cuts (*chinatti*), that which is cut (*chidyate*); (12) that which burns (*dāhaka*), that which is burnt (*dahyate*); (13) that which weighs (*tulayati*), that which can be weighed (*tulya*); (14) the five species: retribution-born (*vipākaja*), accumulative (*aupacayika*), emanational (*naiḥsyandika*), yoked with a real entity (*dravya-yukta*), momentary (*kṣaṇika*); (15) acquisition (*prāpti*/*pratilambha*), endowment (*samanvāgama*); (16) external, internal; (17) participative/active (*sabhāga*), nonparticipative/facsimile (*tat-sabhāga*); (18) abandonable through seeing/vision (*darśana-heya*), abandonable through cultivation (*bhāvanā-heya*), not to be abandoned (*aheya*); (19) view (*dṛṣṭi*), not view; (20) consciousness (*vijñāna*), object of consciousness (the cognized; *vijñeya*—i.e., what elements are cognized by which consciousness); (21) permanent, impermanent; (22) faculties (*indriya*), nonfaculties.[45]

Thus, through such a process of perspectival analysis, the nature of an ultimate real factor in the universe can be articulately determined. For example, a given mental factor is invisible, nonresistant, skillful/unskillful/neutral, nonaccumulative, emanational, momentary, a consciousness or object of consciousness, and so on.

The Ascertainment of the Contents of the *Sūtra*s

An essential aspect of the "discernment of *dharma*s" is the discernment or ascertainment of the meanings of the *sūtra*s. The explicit Ābhidhārmika standpoint is that one must truly discern the meanings of the *sūtra*s, rather than blindly clinging to their literal expressions. JPŚ states:

> one should therefore discern the meanings of the *sūtra*s. As the Bhagavat has said: Animals have their final abode in the forest; birds have their final abode in the sky; the *ārya*s have their final abode in *Nirvāṇa*; *dharma*s find their final abode in discernment.[46]

On this, the MVŚ explains:

> The wise ones should therefore skilfully discern the meanings of the *sūtra*s, and should not understand them [merely] at face value. If one does so, one will not only make the noble teachings appear contradictory, but also generate topsy turvy views in one's own mind.[47]

This Ābhidhārmika standpoint of the need to critically ascertain the *sūtra*s is also shared by other Sarvāstivāda masters, including some Dārṣṭāntikas. In this connection, we may note an interesting discussion in MVŚ on the wording of the *Dharmacakrapravartana-sūtra*. In this *sūtra*, the Buddha says: (1) first he gained the pure spiritual insight that: "this is the truth of unsatisfactoriness (*duḥkhasatya*)"; (2) next, that this truth was to be fully known (*parijñeya*); (3) next, that it has been fully known (*parijñāta*).[48] The Venerable Dharmatrāta remarks that he is horrified by these *sūtra* wordings, which contradict a noble one's sequence of spiritual realization—the initial insight that the truth will be known (i.e., [2]) cannot arise subsequent to his having fully gained the pure insight (i.e., [1]).[49] Nevertheless Dharmatrāta, considering that this first preaching had led to the spiritual realization of the five *bhikṣu*s together with a host of divine beings, simply adjusts the sequence of the wording, without actually rejecting the *sūtra*. He asserts:

This *sūtra* should have said as follows:

> "This is the noble truth of unsatisfactoriness." With regard to [these *dharma*s] unheard before by me . . . Likewise for the truths of origination, cessation and the path.
>
> "This noble truth of unsatisfactoriness is to be fully known by understanding. This noble truth of origination is to be fully abandoned by understanding. This noble truth of cessation is to be directly realized by understanding. This noble truth of the path is to be cultivated by understanding. With regard to . . . unheard of before."

The Ābhidhārmikas here do not deny Dharmatrāta's criticism. But they assert that instead of adjusting the wording, one should search for the *sūtra*'s intention (**abhiprāya*): A preacher of the *Dharma* may either follow a sequence that accords with that of the preaching—as in the case of this *sutra*; or a sequence that accords with that of spiritual realization (*abhisamaya*)—as proposed by Dharmatrāta.[50]

This discussion reflects the attitude of ancient (at least by the time of MVŚ) critical scholarship, essentially matching modern Buddhist critical scholarship! Elsewhere, the MVŚ compilers differentiate the Sūtra and Vinaya from the Abhidharma thus:

> In the Abhidharma, one should seek the true nature and characteristics of *dharma*s, not sequential order [of exposition—as one should in the Sūtra], or introductory account (*nidāna*)[—as one should in the Vinaya]: there is nothing wrong that [an exposition] is given earlier or later, or without an introductory account.[51]

The following articulate remarks by the later Ābhidhārmika, Saṃghabhadra (*c*. early 5th century CE), illustrates further their critical approach to the study of the *sūtra*s:

> Simply because one comes across a *sūtra* incomplete in meanings, one must not [rush to] generate obstinate denial of other noble teachings. This is because, the noble teachings comprise a large variety; there is no single *sūtra* wherein all meanings are to be found. The noble teachings are twofold: Some are explicit in meaning (*nītārtha*), others implicit (*neyārtha*); some are context-dependent, others are not; some expound the conventional, others the absolute truth (*parmārtha-satya*); some expound generically, others specifically; some expound from their own viewpoint, others from others' viewpoint; some pertain to the characteristics of *dharma*s (*dharma-lakṣaṇa*), others to religious instructions (**śāsana*)—there are such innumerable perspectives. Sometimes, even though the exposition of a certain doctrinal point is found in a *sūtra*, its signification (*artha*) cannot be clarified (made manifest) unless it is considered together with other [related] expositions. Take for instance, the statement in a *sūtra* that one must apply the mind (*manas-√kṛ*) to the *saṃskāra*s. To begin with, it is first to be clarified what "*saṃskāras*" [here] refer to. There are many types of "*saṃskāra*" referred in the *sūtra*s: The "*saṃskāras*" in the *sūtra* reference "*avidyā pratyayāḥ saṃskārāḥ*"; the *kāya-saṃskāraḥ* in other *sūtra*s, referring to the in-breathing and out-breathing, *vitarka*, *vicāra*, *saṃjñā*, *cetanā*; . . . [the "*saṃskāra*"] in the *sūtra* statement "all *saṃskāra*s are impermanent." . . . One must investigate into all such [related notions and contexts].
>
> Thus, there should be places in the noble teachings that fully elucidate the intrinsic natures, names, etc., of *dharma*s. This is because the Bhagavat, in order to benefit sentient beings to be guided (*vineya*), takes into consideration the particular contexts, occasions, and personality types, etc.—and then he expounds to them accordingly particular doctrinal perspectives (*dharma-paryāya*). Since there is no single *sūtra* in which complete exposition [of a given doctrine] can be found, it is difficult to discern its [proper] signification in isolation from other expositions elsewhere.[52]

In the above-cited scope of Ābhidhārmika studies, subsumption stands out as a most important taxonomical device for *dharma-pravicaya*. To discern the reals (the *dharma*s), one must determine their intrinsic natures. And a rigorous methodology for this is subsumption. For instance, the *sūtra*s speak at different places of "understanding," "knowledge," "insight," "views" (proper and improper ones), "vision," defiled and nondefiled "nescience" (*akliṣṭa-ajñāna*), "wisdom," and so on.[53] Through the methodological device of subsumption, all these are ascertained as having the same intrinsic nature of *prajñā*: there are different modes of being of *prajñā*. As a matter of fact, it is this methodology that outstandingly contributed to determination of the Abhidharmic list of *dharma*s.

MVŚ further explains the soteriological function of the study of subsumption: Necessarily starting with the examination of the subsumption of *dharma*s in respect of intrinsic nature, one comes to eradicate the clinging to the ideation of the Self (*ātman*) and a unity as an ontological existent. With this, progressively, one finally acquires the pure *prajñā* into Reality, coming to be liberated:

> Subsumption in respect of intrinsic nature applies without being independent of occasion and causes. Independence of time—at no time(/on no occasion) is there no *saṃgraha* of a *dharma* in respect of its intrinsic nature. Independence of causes—without any cause, a *dharma* is subsumed [by itself] in respect of its intrinsic nature, since without dependent on causes and conditions it exists in itself ("it has its intrinsic nature").
>
> One wishing to examine all *dharma*s should first examine their subsumption in respect of their intrinsic natures (examine how they are subsumed in terms of their intrinsic nature).
>
> Question: what advantage is there, what merit, in examining the subsumption of *dharma*s in respect of intrinsic nature?
>
> Answer: It removes the ideation of the Self and the ideation of a unity [as a true entity in itself]], and one then readily perfects the cultivation of the ideation of *dharma*s and distinctness. [In this way one progressively realizes the impermanence of all material and non-material *dharma*s.]
>
> In this way, one will come to acquire the seeds similar to the gateway of liberation of emptiness (*śūnyatā*). Examining that conditioned *dharma*s are empty and not-Self, one will come to be deeply averse to *saṃsāra*, thus further acquiring the seeds similar to the gateway of liberation of the signless (*animitta*). Not delighting in *saṃsāra*, one then comes to take deep delight in *nirvāṇa*, thus further acquiring the seeds similar to the gateway of liberation of non-aspiring (*apraṇihita*).
>
> With regard to these three *samādhi*s [of liberation], one generates the medium with the support of the lower, and the higher with the support of the medium, bringing forth *prajñā*, becoming detached from the triple spheres, attaining perfect enlightenment and realizing absolute quiescence. Indeed, when one examines the subsumption of *dharma*s in respect of intrinsic nature, one comes to gain these advantages and merits.[54]

The Central Doctrine of *Sarvāstivāda* Versus *Vibhajyavāda*

The Sarvāstivāda's fundamental standpoint is that all the previously mentioned categories of *dharma*s—both the conditioned and the unconditioned—exist throughout time as unique, ultimate reals. This doctrine is expressed by the statement "all exists" (*sarvam asti*), hence the name of the school, Sarvāstivāda. This "all" therefore firstly indicates the reality of each and every ultimate factor that is truly a "*dharma*," that is, each exists uniquely in its intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*) and uniquely maintains its intrinsic characteristic (*svalakṣaṇa*). It further indicates that every conditioned *dharma* is existent throughout the three periods of time—future, present, and past—and this is expressed by stating that its intrinsic nature always exists (*sarvadā asti*).

The tritemporal existence of a *dharma* is articulated by Saṃghabhadra from the epistemological perspective:

> The characteristic of a real existent (*sal-lakṣaṇa*) is that it serves as an object-domain for generating cognition (覺, *buddhi*).
>
> This is divisible into two: What exists truly (*dravyato'sti*) and what exists conceptually (*prajñaptito'sti*), the two being designated on the basis of conventional truth and absolute truth. If, with regard to a thing, a cognition (*buddhi*) is produced without depending on anything else, this thing exists truly—for example, *rūpa, vedanā*, etc. If it depends on other things to produce a cognition, then it exists conceptually/relatively—for example, a vase, army, etc.
>
> Those that exist truly are further divisible into two: Those that have only their essential natures (*svabhāva*/*svarūpa*) and those that, [in addition,] have activities (*kāritra*). Those that have activities are again of two types: with or without function (*sāmarthya*/*vyāpara*/*śakti*) . . . Those that exist relatively are also of two types: having existence on the basis of something real or on something relative, like a vase and an army, respectively.[55]

Thus, the past and future *dharma*s are existent as much as the present ones, because they are equally efficacious in generating distinctive cognitions:

> [*Dharma*s pertaining to] the past and future times are not non-existent as [ontological] entities, since the cognitions taking them as cognitive objects (*ālambana*) are distinctive [in each case]—just as in the case of the present *dharma*s, visibles, sounds, etc. [On the other hand,] since non-existent *dharma*s are not distinctive, no distinctive cognition can be generated therefrom.[56]

To summarize: any act of cognition at all—be it a true cognition (as that through spiritual insight), or an imagination, or an illusion, or even a cognition of "absence,"—necessarily presupposes an existent object. These existent objects, of course, may be either relative existents such as a "person," or absolute existents such as matter, sensation, and so on. This Sarvāstivāda doctrine that a notion or concept (*prajñapti*) is necessarily based ultimately on some absolute reals came to importantly influence the epistemological and ontological doctrines of the subsequent Buddhist schools, particularly the Yogācāra.

Within the broader lineage of Sarvāstivāda, all members—whether Ābhidhārmikas, Dārṣṭāntikas, *yogācāra*s, or other individual masters—subscribe to this central doctrinal position of *sarvāstitva*, and are known as the *Sarvāstivādāḥ* or *Sarvāstivādinaḥ*. This position is diametrically opposed by those called the *Vibhajyavādāḥ*/*Vibhajyavādinaḥ* (Distinctionist), who include the Sautrāntikas, the Mahāsāṃghikas, the Mahīśāsakas, the Dharmaguptakas, the Kāśyapīyas, and others. Their contrasting position, known as Vibhajyavāda, is that only the present—or, for some, the present and those *karma*s that have not yet given fruits (*adattaphala*)—exists; the future and the past *dharma*s do not exist.

In AKB, Vasubandhu defines and contrasts the two doctrinal positions and their respective adherents as follows:

> Those who hold that "all exists"—the past, the present and the future—are the Sarvāstivādas. On the other hand, those who making a distinction (*vibhajya vadanti*), hold that some exist—viz, the present and the past *karma* that has not given fruit—and some do not exist—viz, what has given fruit and the future—are the Vibhajyavādins.[57]

In Saṃghabhadra's Ny, a post-AKB polemic in defense of the Vaibhāṣika orthodoxy, an additional requirement for the definition is noticeable:

> It is only those who believe in the real existence of the three periods of time, as discussed above, as well as of the three kinds of the unconditioned, who can be considered as belonging to the Sarvāstivāda.[58]

This same requirement is also found in the ADV: Sarvāstivāda is so called because it accepts [the reality of] the three periods of time, distinguished on account of activity, and the three reals [—the three unconditioned].[59] It seems possible that even as late as the time of the AKB and Ny, there were still some Buddhists, both within and without the broad Sarvāstivāda lineage—including some sections of the Sautrāntika-Dārṣṭāntikas—who would accept the doctrine in a revised or different version from that adopted by the orthodox Vaibhāṣikas. It is perhaps because of this that Saṃghabhadra felt it necessary to dissociate the Vaibhāṣikas distinctly from the others whom he could not accept as real Sarvāstivādins in any sense. In Ny, he names them as follows:

> Pudgalavādins, called by him "the Superimposers or Additionists (Samāropavādin)" on account of their acceptance of the reality of the Person (*pudgala*) in addition to that of the tri-temporal *dharma*s;
>
> Vibhajyavādins who accept the existence of only the present and the past *karma* that has not given fruit;
>
> Kṣaṇikavādins (holders of the view that nothing exists for more than a moment, *kṣaṇa*) who accept only the reality of the 12 *āyatana*s of the present *kṣaṇa*;
>
> Prajñaptivādins (holders of the view that all exists as mere concept, *prajñapti*) who deny the reality of even the *dharma*s of the present;
>
> Vaināśikas ("Destructionists"/"Annihilationist") who hold that all *dharma*s are without *svabhāva*, like empty flowers.

The Sautrāntikas, here referred to as the Kṣaṇikavādins, are singled out by Saṃghabhadra who denies that they qualify as Sarvāstivādins, for their view "differs from the Vaināśikas by just a mere *kṣaṇa*!"[60]

But if a *dharma*'s intrinsic nature remains the same throughout times, how can its tritemporality be accounted for? The following four major theories on this issue are given in MVŚ, attributed to the "Four Great Masters" of the Sarvāstivāda:

> The Venerable Dharmatrāta says that there is change in mode of being (*bhāva-anyathātva*). The Venerable Ghoṣaka says that there is change in characteristic (*lakṣaṇa-anyathātva*). The Venerable Vasumitra says that there is change in state (*avasthā-anyathātva*). The Venerable Buddhadeva says that there is change in [temporal] relativity (*anyathā-anyathātva*).
>
> [I] The advocate of "change in mode of being" asserts that when *dharma*s operate (*pra-√vṛt*) in time, they change on account of their modes of existence/being (*bhāva*); there is no change in substance. This is like the case of breaking up a golden vessel to produce another thing—there is just a change in shape, not in *varṇa-rūpa*. It is also like milk, etc., turning into curds, etc.—just the taste, digestibility, etc., are given up, not the *varṇa-rūpa*. Similarly, when *dharma*s enter into the present from the future, although they give up their future mode of existence and acquire their present mode of existence, they neither lose nor acquire their substantial essence (AKB: *dravya-bhāva*). Likewise, when they enter the past from the present, although they give up the present mode of existence and acquire the past mode of existence, they neither give up nor acquire their substantial nature.
>
> [II] The advocate of "change in characteristic" asserts that when *dharma*s operate in time, they change on account of characteristic (*lakṣaṇa*); there is no change in substance. A *dharma* in each of the temporal periods has three temporal characteristics; when one [temporal] characteristic is conjoined, the other two are not severed. This is like the case of a man being attached to one particular woman—he is not said to be detached from other women. Similarly, when *dharma*s abide in the past, they are being conjoined with the past characteristic but are not said to be severed from the characteristics of the other two temporal characteristics. When they abide in the future, they are being conjoined with the future characteristic but are not said to be severed from the characteristics of the other two temporal characteristics. When they abide in the present, they are being conjoined with the present characteristic, but are not said to be severed from the characteristics of the other two temporal characteristics.
>
> [III] The advocate of "change in state" asserts that when *dharma*s operate in time, they change on account of state (*avasthā*); there is no change in substance. This is like the case of moving a token [into different positions]. When placed in the position (*avasthā*) of ones, it is signified as one; placed in the position of tens, ten; placed in the position of hundreds, hundred. While there is change in the positions into which it is moved, there is no change in its substance. Similarly, when *dharma*s pass through the three temporal states, although they acquire three different names, they do not change in substance.
>
> In the theory proposed by this master, there is no confusion as regards substance, for the three periods are differentiated on the basis of activity (*kāritra*).
>
> [IV] The advocate of "change in [temporal] relativity" asserts that when *dharma*s operate in time, they are predicated differently [as future, present, or past], relative to that which precedes and that which follows (cf. AKB: *pūrvāparam apekṣyānyo'nya ucyate avasthāntarato na dravyāntarataḥ*); there is no change in substance. This is like the case of one and the same woman who is called "daughter" relative to her mother, and "mother" relative to her daughter. Similarly, *dharma*s are called "past" relative to the succeeding ones, "future" relative to the preceding ones, "present" relative to both.

The compilers of MVŚ fully endorse Vasumitra's theory, and criticize the other three. On Dharmatrāta's theory, they question:

> Apart from a *dharma*'s *svabhāva*, what is it that is called its *bhāva*? When a conditioned *dharma* reaches the present from the future, its preceding mode of existence ought to cease. When it reaches the past from the present, its succeeding mode of existence ought to arise: How can it be logical that what is past can arise and what is future can cease?[61]

Vasubandhu's criticism in AKB is much more severe, branding it a Sāṃkhya doctrine of *pariṇāma*.

Saṃghabhadra, however, argues that Dharmatrāta's theory is in part similar to Vasumitra's theory.[62] In fact, Saṃghabhadra himself consistently employs the *bhāva-anyathātva* theory along with Vasumitra's *avasthā-anyathātva* theory in his exposition and defense of the thesis of *sarvāstitva*. In this way, Saṃghabhadra is able to argue more cogently that the tritemporal existence of a *dharma* implies neither its permanence (*nityatā*)[63]—since "all that is permanent does not traverse times"[64]; nor that its existence is identical in the three temporal periods—since "it is conceded that the past, the future and the present assume different modes of existence (*bhāva*)"[65]:

> The essential nature of a *dharma* remains always; its mode of existence (*bhāva*) changes: When a conditioned *dharma* traverses time, it gives rise to its activity (*kāritra*) in accordance with the causal conditions, without abandoning its *svabhāva*; immediately after this, the activity produced ceases. Hence it is said that the *svabhāva* exists always and yet it is not permanent, since its *bhāva* changes.[66]

This is part of Saṃghabhadra's response to Vasubandhu's critique of the Vaibhāṣika position—which is ridiculed as an act of the Almighty (*īśvara*)—that a *dharma*'s *sva-bhāva* ("intrinsic nature") exists always and yet its *bhāva* ("nature," "mode of being") is not acknowledged to be permanent, nor is its *bhāva* acknowledged to be distinct from its *svabhāva*.[67] That is, notwithstanding the fundamental Sarvāstivāda position that a *dharma*'s intrinsic nature always remains the same, the Vaibhāṣika has come to further hold that a *dharma*'s mode of being (= nature) changes throughout times—an ostensibly contradictory position which is as arbitrary as an act of the Almighty God who can simply say and do whatever He likes! This ridicule implies that between the completion of MVŚ and AKB, such a position must have become an integral part of the Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣika exposition of *sarvāstitva*. From this perspective, Saṃghabhadra's advocation of Dharmatrāta's theory is not an innovation. Nevertheless, it was he who most articulately (at least in the extant Abhidharma texts) demonstrated its doctrinal significance for the thesis of *sarvāstitva*.

Another exposition of Saṃghabhadra follows, in which he brilliantly argues that a *dharma* with the same intrinsic nature can assume different modes of being, and thus a distinct mode of being implies a distinct existence of that *dharma*. Such a position, when successfully established, importantly supports the defense that the claim of the tritemporal existence of a *dharma* does not amount to a doctrine of its permanence.

> [Opponents:]—When a conditioned *dharma* is traversing the three periods of time, there being no variation in respect to its essential nature (體相; **svarūpa*, **svabhāva*), how can there be difference in respect to existence (有; *astitva*) and mode of existence (性 [類]; *bhāva*)?
>
> [Saṃghabhadra:]—Isn't it observed that there are *dharma*s co-existing simultaneously, whose essential natures do not vary, but whose existences and modes of being differ? For instance, the Earth Elements (*pṛthivī-dhātu*), etc., differ as being internal and external; sensations (*vedanā*), etc., differ as being [sensations] of oneself and [sensations] of others, and as being pleasurable, etc.
>
> [For a given entity], this mode of being and existence cannot be different. When its mode of being changes, it necessarily exists differently. It is on this account that Earth, etc., while identical in respect to essential nature, can be said to differ in respect to their modes of being—as internal and external. [Likewise], sensations, etc., while identical in respect to their essential nature of being experience (*anubhava*), can be said to be different modes of being, pleasure, etc. Again, it is like the eye, etc., within the same serial continuity (i.e., same sentient being), which, while identical in respect to their essential nature of being derived matter of tranquillity (*rūpa-prasāda*), differ among them as distinct species of existence—since their efficacies (*gong neng*; 功能) of seeing, hearing, etc., are distinct.[68] It is not the case that, therein, the efficacy differs from the existence, so that there can be the different efficacies, such as seeing, etc.[69] Rather, the efficacy of seeing, etc., is none other than the existence of the eye, etc. A distinct efficacy necessarily implies a distinct existence.
>
> Thus, we know that there are *dharma*s which, while existing simultaneously and not differing in respect to essential nature, [nonetheless] differ in respect to mode of being.
>
> Since it is seen that there are *dharma*s existing simultaneously, which while not varying in respect to their essential natures, differ in respect to their modes of being,

we know that when a *dharma* is traversing the three periods of time, while not varying in respect to essential nature, it has different modes of being. In this way, the Abhidharma tenet comes to be well established.[70]

The Vaibhāṣikas further articulate on the difference between the "activity" of a *dharma* on the one hand and its efficacy or potency or capacity on the other. The latter notion generically characterizes an existent—an eye is observed to be existent because it has the efficacy for seeing a visible—and is represented by several Sanskrit terms, including *śakti* (power), *vyāpara*, *kriyā*, *sāmarthya*, and so on. A past *dharma* (a *karma*) is existent because it can exercise the efficacy of generating or "giving of fruit" (*phala-dāna*) at the present moment. By contrast, "activity," when used strictly or formally, is specifically represented by the Sanskrit *kāritra*, defined as a *dharma*'s efficacy for inducing the next moment of its own existence in its serial continuity. It is its "efficacy for projecting its own fruit" (**svaphala-ākṣepa-sāmarthya*). This "activity" is also described as the grasping/seizing of fruit (*phala-grahaṇa* / *phala-pratigrahaṇa*): the determination of a present *dharma*'s causal relation with its future fruit-to-be. Since, unlike such efficacy as an eye's seeing a visible, or a past *karma*'s "giving of fruit," a *dharma*'s activity exists necessarily and uniquely in every present *dharma*, it comes to be officially adopted by the Sarvāstivādins as the criterion for temporal distinction of conditioned *dharma*s.[71]

The long drawn out controversy on *sarvāstivāda* versus *vibhajyavāda* is an extremely important historical fact that must not be overlooked by any Buddhist historian for a proper perspective of the understanding of the development of Buddhist thought in which its reverberation is continuously seen in various forms throughout the centuries, both within and outside India.

Doctrine of Causality

Given the Sarvāstivāda theory of distinctive tritemporal *dharma*s, which in their intrinsic nature are totally unrelated to one another and totally devoid of any activities, it is of fundamental importance that the school has an articulated causal doctrine capable of accounting for the arising of *dharma*s as phenomena and their dynamic interrelatedness in accordance with the Buddha's teaching of conditioned co-arising (*pratītya-samutpāda*).[72] Moreover, for the establishment of each of the *dharma*s as an ontological existent, a conditioning force (*saṃskāra*), its causal function in each case must be demonstrated. It is probably for this reason that the Sarvāstivāda was also known as *Hetuvāda (說因部)—a "School which expounds on causality."[73] Indeed, as discussed earlier, *hetu* or *hetu-kauśalya* and *pratyaya* or *pratyaya-kauśalya* top the lists of the fundamental topics of Ābhidhārmika investigation. The Sarvāstivādins eventually articulated a doctrine of four conditions, six causes, and five fruits.[74] Noticeably, significant portions of the Sarvāstivāda canonical *abhidharma* treatises are devoted specifically to these topics. Thus, the *Vijñāna-kāya-śāstra* discusses the four conditions (*pratyaya*) at length; JPŚ expounds on the six causes; and the chapter "On *saṃgraha*, etc." of the *Prakaraṇa-pāda-śāstra* contains a total of twenty doctrinal perspectives connected with *hetu-pratyaya*.[75]

It was Kātyāyanīputra who innovated a doctrine of the six causes in JPŚ. Prior to this, the Sarvāstivādins had been sharing with other Buddhists the doctrine of the four conditions: (1) condition qua cause (*hetu-pratyaya*), (2) equal-immediate condition (*samanantara-pratyaya*), (3) condition qua object (*ālambana-pratyaya*), and (4) condition of dominance (*adhipati-pratyaya*).

The six causes are:

(1) Efficient cause (*kāraṇa-hetu*). This is the most generic cause, either in the sense of a general causal contribution or simply of being nonobstructive: "A conditioned *dharma* has all *dharma*s, excepting itself, as its efficient cause, for, as regards its arising, [these *dharma*s] abide in the state of non-obstructiveness."[76]
(2) Homogeneous cause (*sabhāga-hetu*). This obtains in the case of a mental series and among physical matter. "The similar *dharma*s are the homogeneous causes of *dharma*s similar [to them], for example, the five *skandha*s which are skilful, are [the homogeneous causes] of the five skilful *skandha*s, among themselves. Likewise the defiled and the non-defined five *skandha*s, [in each case, among themselves]."[77]
(3) Universal cause (*sarvatraga hetu*). "The universal *dharma*s arisen previously and belonging to a given stage (*bhūmi*) are the universal causes of later defiled *dharma*s belonging to their own stage. . . . On account of their being a cause applicable to all defiled *dharma*s, they are established [as a cause] separate from the homogeneous causes and [also] because they are the cause of [defiled *dharma*s] belonging to other categories [of abandonability] (5 categories: (i)–(iv) defilements are abandonable either through insight into the four Truths, or (v) through the path of cultivation) as well, for, through their power, defilements belonging to categories different from theirs are produced."[78] The Vaibhāṣikas hold that three defilements are universal: doubt (*vicikitsā*), view (*dṛṣṭi*), and ignorance (*avidyā*), which are abandonable by insight into unsatisfactoriness, the cause of unsatisfactoriness, together with their conjoined and co-existent *dharmas*."[79]
(4) Coexistent cause (*sahabhū hetu*). "The co-existent [causes] are those that are reciprocally effects . . . For example: the four great elements are co-existent [causes] mutually among themselves; so also, thought and the *dharma*s that are thought-accompaniments (*cittānuvarttin*); . . . [The case of the co-existent cause] is like the staying in position of three sticks through their mutual strength/support—this establishes the causal relationship (*hetuphalabhāva*) of the co-existents."[80] Conascence is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for two or more *dharma*s to be coexistent causes. Saṃghabhadra articulates that this causal category obtains in only three cases: "[i] among those that share the same effect; or [ii] that are reciprocally effects; or [iii] where by the force of this, that *dharma* can arise. Such co-nascent [*dharma*s] have a cause-effect relationship [i.e., are coexistent causes]."[81]
(5) Conjoined cause (*saṃprayuktaka-hetu*), a subset of the coexistent causes. As stated previously, thought and concomitants necessarily arise in conjunction. Mental factors, in their role of contributing to their mutual arising and operational coordination, are called "conjoined causes." Moreover, being so conjoined and coordinated, they accomplish the same activity in grasping the same object.
(6) Retribution (/maturation) cause (*vipāka-hetu*). This is the karmic cause, leading to a corresponding karmic fruit, that is, determining the specific type of rebirth that a sentient being will experience. The fruit is necessarily morally neutral (*avyākṛta*): If the retribution cause leads to a desirable (*iṣṭa*) fruit, it is "skilful" (*kuśala*); if it leads to an undesirable (*aniṣṭa*) fruit, it is "unskilful" (*akuśala*). Neutral and outflow-free *dharma*s do not yield any retribution fruit.

Since the time of the *Jñānaprasthāna*, the Sarvāstivādins have held that retribution causes and fruits comprise all the five *skandha*s: that is, not only thought and the thought-concomitants, but also the matter accompanying thought (*cittānuvṛttaka-rūpa*) and the conditionings disjoined from thought (see also the section "The Sarvāstivāda School and Its Fundamental Treatises")—the ideationless attainment (*asaṃjñī-samāpatti*), the cessation attainment (*nirodha-samāpatti*), all acquisitions that are unskilful and skilful but with-outflow (*sāsrava*), and the accompanying characteristics of the conditioned (*saṃskṛta-lakṣaṇa*)—can constitute retribution causes.[82]

Of these six causes, the truly innovative, and by far doctrinally most important, is the coexistent cause. For the Sarvāstivādins, the fact of direct perception (*pratyakṣa*) cannot be established without the type of simultaneous causality represented by this cause. This is because, given that a sensory faculty and its object last only one single moment—a doctrine commonly accepted by all Abhidharma schools with the exception of the Sāṃmitīya, etc—if the corresponding consciousness (*qua* effect) were to arise in the second moment (as claimed by the Sautrāntikas and others), it would not have an existent object. If direct perception cannot be established, then inferential knowledge too would be impossible—and this would result in the absolute impossibility of any knowledge of the external world!

Rejecting the *sahabhū* causality, the Dārṣṭāntika-Sautrāntikas have to admit that all perceptions are indirect (*apratyakṣa*) and representational.[83] In the first moment, the sensory faculty and object exist; the sensory consciousness then arises in the next moment: As the object arises only to cease, it leaves behind an imprint or exact resemblance (*ākāra*) of itself, which becomes the cognitive object (*ālambana*) that generates the corresponding knowledge of it in the next moment. Thus, external reality is never known directly. Its knowledge is necessarily derived from our mental content. This Sautrāntika theory came to be known as the "theory of the inferability of the external object" (*bāhyārtha-anumeyavāda*).[84]

More importantly, the coexistent cause serves as the only valid paradigm of causation. In general, if *X* causes *Y*, both *X* and *Y* must be existent at the same time (an utter void or a nonexistent cannot be causally efficacious)—although they may belong to different time periods with respect to their own temporal frame of reference; that is: *X* may be past or present or future, and *Y* may also be past or present or future, *but X and Y must coexist, although not necessarily be conascent*. To borrow Dharmatrāta's terminology, they are both existent but are not necessarily of the same mode of existence (*bhāva*). Where *X* and *Y* are necessarily conascent (i.e., both existing at the same *present* moment), the causality involved reduces to the category known as the coexistent cause. In fact, in the Sarvāstivāda conception, all *dharma*s in their intrinsic nature have always been existent; it is only a matter of inducing their arising through causes and conditions. This is the fundamental principle underlying the Sarvāstivāda doctrine of causality. Past and future *dharma*s are also endowed with efficacies including that of actually giving an effect, although it is only a present *dharma* that has "activity."

This Sarvāstivāda theory of simultaneous or coexistent causality has come to significantly impact the subsequent development of Buddhist thoughts. For the Mahāyāna Yogācāra school in particular, this theory is indispensable for the establishment of some of their most fundamental teachings, including the *ālayavijñāna* doctrine, with its explanations on seeds (*bīja*) and perfuming (*vāsanā*), and the doctrine of cognition-only (*vijñaptimātratā*).

Abbreviations

ADV
P. S. Jaini, ed. Abhidharmadīpa with Vibhāṣāprabhāvṛtti. Patna, 1959.
AKB
P. Pradhan, ed. Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu. Patna, 1975.
Entrance
K. L. Dhammajoti. Entrance into the Supreme Doctrine. 2nd rev. edn. Hong Kong, 2008.
JCBSSL
Journal of the Centre for Buddhist Studies, Sri Lanka.
JPŚ
Jñānaprasthāna-śāstra 阿毗達磨發智論 (T no. 1544).
MVŚ
Abhidharma-mahā-vibhāṣā-śāstra 阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論 (T no. 1545).
Ny
*Abhidharma-nyāyānusāra 阿毘達磨順正理論 (T no. 1562).
PrP
Abhidharmaprakaraṇa-śāstra 阿毘達磨品類足論 (T no. 1542).
Sar Abhi
K. L. Dhammajoti. Sarvāstivāda Abidharma. 5th rev. ed. Hong Kong, 2015.
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J. Takakusu, ed. Taishō Shinshu Daizokyo 大正大藏經.1924–1932.

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Notes:

(1.) MVŚ, 4c4–11, gives several explanations on this title: It is so named because: (i) all absolute knowledges have this as their initial foundation; (ii) all absolute knowledges are established with this as their basis; (iii) this is the causal condition (*pratyaya*) for generating mighty knowledge; (iv) all knowledges rely on this to reach the other shore; (v) this excels all in unfolding the intrinsic characteristics (*svalakṣaṇa*) and common characteristics (*sāmānya-lakṣaṇa*) of all *dharma*s; (vi) this is the gateway for generating all mundane (*laukika*) and supramundane (*lokottara*) knowledges. Also, cf. MVŚ, 2b16–19: Kātyāyanīputra composed this for dispelling ignorance (*avidyā*) and bringing forth (發; *pra-√sthā*) wisdom, like a lamp dispelling darkness and bringing forth light.

(2.) Śāriputra, according the Xuanzang tradition. (For example, cf. Puguang's ascription of authourship of the canonical texts: T41, no. 1821, 8b26–c12).

(3.) In Yin Shun opines that this Vasumitra is none other than the Vasumitra (*c*. 100 bce) recognized in MVŚ as one of the "four great masters of the Sarvāstivāda." Yin Shun, *History of Indian Buddhist Thoughts* (Taipei, 1966), 148.

(4.) Cf. Yin Shun, *A Study of the Śāstras and cāryas of the Sarvāstivāda and Other Schools* (Taipei, 1964), 131.

(5.) For example, JPŚ at Dīgha-nikāya III, 254, 284; Saṃyutta-nikāya V, 60; and Aṅguttara-nikāya, IV, 9.

(6.) This has been pointed out by Yin Shun, *Study of the Śāstras*, 149, 154; *History of Indian Buddhist* Thoughts (Taipei, 1986), 68a; and, *Study of the Śāstras*. See JPŚ, 974c19–975a2, 929a11–13, 987b14–15, 1025c9–12 (here all the three types of unconcoditioned *dharma* are mentioned), etc.

(7.) Yin Shun, *Study of the Śāstras*, 188.

(8.) JPŚ, 920c27–921a4.

(9.) For the notion of *prāpti*, see JPŚ § IV; *samanvāgama* refers to the continuous *prāpti* of a *dharma*, without losing it. See Sar Abhi, §11.3.1.1.

(10.) See also, Sar Abhi, §11.3.1.2.

(11.) Cf. Puguang, *Commentary on the Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 《俱舍論記》T41, no. 1821, 8c9–11: "The preceding six treatises have less doctrinal topics; it is the *Jñānaprasthāna* that contains the most extensive doctrinal perspectives. Accordingly, the Abhidharma masters of later time spoke of the six as the feet, and of the *Jñānaprasthāna* as the body."

(12.) MVŚ, 231c3–12.

(13.) See a "Summary and Discussion of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*," in Lodrö Sangpo (trans.), *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya of Vasubandhu: The Treasury of the Abhidharma and Its (Auto) commentary* (Delhi, 2012), 1:1–69.

(14.) Cf. U. Wogihāra (ed.), *Sphuṭārthā Abhidharmakośā-vyākhyā of Yaśomitra*, 11: *kaḥ sautrāntikārthaḥ* | *ye sūtraprāmāṇikā na śāstraprāmāṇikāḥ* | *te sautrāntikāḥ* | ("What is the meaning of "Sautrāntika"? Those who take the *sūtra*s, and not the treatises, as authority are the Sautrāntikas.").

For a most insightful discussion of the Sautrāntikas, see Yin Shun, *Study of the Śāstras*, especially chapters 10–13; Yin Shun, Part II, chapters 1–3. J. Kato *Kyōryōbu no Kenkyū* [*A Study of the Sautrāntika*] (Tokyo, 1989) is a book-length study of the Sautrāntikas that contains useful material cited from the Sanskrit and Tibetan in addition to Chinese, though many of his major views and explanations have in fact already been made by Yin Shun (which Kato apparently fails to acknowledge). See also, K. L. Dhammajoti, especially chapters 2, 6–10.

(15.) AKB, 460.

(16.) For a discussion of Saṃghabhadra's doctrinal contribution, see K. L. Dhammajoti, "The Contribution of Saṃghabhadra to our Understanding of Abhidharma Doctrines," in *Text, History, and Philosophy: Abhidharma across Buddhist Scholastic Traditions*, ed. B. Dessein and W. Teng, 223–247. There is no modern translation of Ny. However, Louis De La Vallée Poussin has presented very helpful French translations of many of its passages in several works, especially "Documents d'Abhidharma" (see "Further Reading" for details) and the very rich annotations in his *L'Abhidharmakośa de Vasubandhu* (1923–1931). In English, K. L. Dhammajoti has also translated numerous passages from Ny (see "Further Reading" for details).

(17.) For an English translation and study of this work, see *Entrance*. For further discussion on the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma literature, see Erich Frauwallner, *Studies in Abhidharma Literature and the Origins of Buddhist Philosophical Systems*, (trans. Sophie Francis Kidd); Sar Abhi, chapter 4; and C. Willemen, B. Dessein, and C. Cox, *Sarvāstivāda Buddhist Scholasticism* (Leiden, 1998), especially ch. 3 and 4.

(18.) Majjhima-nikāya I, Mahāyamakavagga, *Mahāgopālaka-sutta*, 223: *idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu ye te bhikkhū bahussutā āgatāgamā dhammadharā vinayadharā mātikādharā te kālena kālaṃ upasaṅkamitvā paripucchati, paripañhati*: *"idaṃ, bhante, kathaṃ? imassa ko attho"ti*? *tassa te āyasmanto avivaṭañceva vivaranti, anuttānīkatañca uttānī karonti* | *anekavihitesu ca kaṅkhāṭhānīyesu dhammesu kaṅkhaṃ paṭivinodenti* | Same stock phrase in the Dīgha-nikāya, *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*, and several *sutta*s of the Aṅguttara-nikāya.

(19.) Vinaya, *pavāraṇākkhandhaka*: *idha pana, bhikkhave, aññatarasmiṃ āvāse tadahu pavāraṇāya bhikkhūhi dhammaṃ bhaṇantehi. . .pe. . . suttantikehi suttantaṃ saṅgāyantehi . . . vinayadharehi vinayaṃ vinicchinantehi . . . dhammakathikehi dhammaṃ sākacchantehi* |

(20.) Cf. Yin Shun (1968), 365–367; Sar Abhi, §3.6; Dhammajoti, KL (2018), § 2.2.

(21.) Cf. Dhammajoti, KL (2018), ch. 2, esp. §§2.3, 2.4; Yin Shun (1968), 615.

(22.) V. Bhattacharya, ed., *The Yogācārabhūmi of Ācārya Asaṅga*, 58: *na cāsti pañcānāṃ vijñānakāyānāṃ saha dvayoḥ kṣaṇayor utpattiḥ nāpy anyonyasamanantaram anyonyotpattiḥ* | *ekakṣaṇotpannānāṃ pañcānāṃ kāyavijñānānām anantaraṃ manovijñānam avaśyam utpadyate* |

(23.) MVŚ, 291b1–3.

(24.) Cf. K. L. Dhammajoti, "Abhidharma and *Upadeśa*," *JCBSSL* 3 (2005): 112–125.

(25.) T29, 330b6–19.

(26.) T24, no. 1451, p. 408b6–11; also quoting Mahākāśyapa. See also Sar Abhi, §1.1.2.

(27.) Cf. Sar Abhi, §2.2.

(28.) AKB, 2 f.

(29.) See Sar Abhi, §2.4.1, and chart on p. 39.

(30.) Cf. Ny, 335b29–c8. The Sanskrit is quoted in U. Wogihāra, *op.cit*., 32. Vasubandhu's definition (AKB, 8) is as follows: *vikṣiptācittakasyāpi yo 'nubandhaḥ śubhāśubhaḥ* | *mahābhūtāny upādāya, sā hy avijñaptir ucyate* || Saṃghabhadra (*loc. cit*.) objects to it, and criticizes particularly its description of the *avijñapti* as a serial flow (*anubandha*).

(31.) See *Entrance*, 108.

(32.) AKB, 92: *sarvam evāsaṃskṛtam adravyam* |

(33.) For instance: the *Saṅgītiparyāya* (T26, no. 1536, 369c6–8) and the *Dharmaskandha* (T26, no. 1537, 505a5). Likewise in the more developed canonical texts, as PrP (T26, 692c9–10).

(34.) T26, no. 1544, 1025c9–12.

(35.) AKB, 4.

(36.) MVŚ, 147b2–5. Cf. Sarv Abhi, §16.2.

(37.) MVŚ, 164b13–21. Cf. AKB, 4. Also cf. Sarv Abhi, §16.3, and *Entrance*, 127.

(38.) Ny, 434b12–17. See also *Entrance*, 45; 207n374.

(39.) For example, cf. MVŚ, 164c30–165a15; etc.

(40.) 388b19–21.

(41.) Ny, 429c13–16.

(42.) MVŚ, 116b.

(43.) *Entrance*, § 4.5.8.

(44.) Cf. MVŚ, 179b4-5: "Its intrinsic being (自體; **svarūpa*, **ātma-bhāva*) and intrinsic characteristic (自相; *svalakṣaṇa*) are none other than its intrinsic nature (自性; *svabhāva*). Thus, it is said, 'intrinsic natures of *dharma*s are their very intrinsic characteristics; their homogenous nature is their common characteristic (共相, *sāmānya-lakṣaṇa*).'" Also cf. U. Wogihāra, *op. cit*., 889 f: "To be existent as an absolute entity is to be existent as an intrinsic characteristic" (*paramārthena sat svalakṣaṇena sad ity arthaḥ*).

(45.) Cf. Gelong Lodrö Sangpo (2012), 1:14.

(46.) JPŚ, 922c.

(47.) MVŚ, 145c.

(48.) Cf. Saṃyutta-nikāya, *Dhammacakkapavattana-sutta*: "*idaṃ dukkhaṃ ariyasaccan*"*ti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi* | "*taṃ kho panidaṃ dukkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ pariññeyyan*"*ti me, bhikkhave, pubbe. . .pe. . . udapādi* | "*taṃ kho panidaṃ dukkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ pariññātan*"*ti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi* |

(49.) This is actually stated in the specifically Abhidharmic terminology: the *ajñātam-ājñāsyāmi-indriya* must first arise; then the *ājñātendriya*; and finally the *ājñātāvindriya*. For the nature and functions of these three outflow-free *indriya*s, see AKB, 40, 49.

(50.) MVŚ, 410c10-411a10.

(51.) MVŚ, 1c18–25.

(52.) 708b26–c19. Saṃghabhadra's remarks here are made in the context of arguing for the Sarvāstivāda position that defilements can also be abandoned through the mundane paths (*laukika-mārga*).

(53.) For a detailed discussion, see K. L. Dhammajoti, "The Defects in the *Arhat*'s Enlightenment: His *Akliṣṭājñāna* and *Vāsanā*," *Bukkyō Kenkhū* 27 (1998): 65–98.

(54.) 307a9–307a28. Cf. also Ny, 342c8–19.

(55.) Ny, 621c20–622a2.

(56.) Ny, 640c4–6. See also, Ny, 622b19–27; and Sarv Abhi, §3.5.3.3.

(57.) AKB, 296: *ye hi sarvamastīti vadanti atītam anāgataṃ pratyutpannaṃ ca te sarvāstivādāḥ* | *ye tu kecid asti yat pratyutpannam adatta-phalaṃ cātītaṃ karma kiṃcin nāsti yad datta-phalam atītam anāgataṃ ceti vibhajya vadanti te vibhajyavādinaḥ* |

(58.) Ny, 630c.

(59.) ADV, 259: *icchaty adhva-trayaṃ yasmāt kṛtyataś ca dhruva-trayam* | *sarvāstivāda ity uktas tasmād. . .* ||

(60.) Ny, 630c–631a. A similar distinction between the Sarvāstivāda and other schools is also made in the ADV, 257 f.

(61.) MVŚ, 396b18–22.

(62.) Ny, 631, b9–10.

(63.) See also, Sarv Abhi, 122 *f*; and Ny, 633c, 136.

(64.) Ny, 630b3–4. See also, Sar Abh, § 3.5.3.2.

(65.) Ny, 630b4–5.

(66.) Ny, 633c24–26. Further examples: Ny, 628b26–27: 非去來有如現在, 以於一切同實有中, 許有種種有性別故. Also, establishing tri-temporality in terms of both Vasumitra's as well as Dharmatrāta's theories: Ny, 633b29–c11: 又略說者: 如諸有為, 實體雖同而功能別; 如是三世實體雖同, 於中非無作用差別, 以有性類有無量種. . . 是故現在過去未來三種有性, 條然差別. 寧如現在, 去來亦然? 依有, 可言有未生滅; 約所無故, 未生滅成. 謂: 於有中先闕作用, 彼未有故, 名未已生. 有法後時復闕作用, 彼已無故, 名為已滅. 故唯有中, 有未生滅. 由斯建立三世理成.

(67.) AKB, 298: *svabhāvaḥ sarvadā cāsti bhāvo nityaśca neṣyate* | *na ca svabhāvād bhāvo 'nyo vyaktam īśvaraceṣṭitam* |

(68.) 有性類別. In Xuanzang's translation of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, 有性 corresponds to both *astitva* and *bhāva*.

(69.) Considering the immediately following sentence, 見等功能, I believe that 性 in 性等功能差別 is a script error for 見.

(70.) Ny, 625, a19–b2: 諸有為法歷三世時, 體相無差, 有性寧別? 豈不現見, 有法同時, 體相無差, 而有性別? 如地界等, 內外性殊; 受等, 自他, 樂等, 性別. 此性與有, 理定無差. 性既有殊, 有必有別. 由是: 地等, 體相雖同, 而可說為內外性別; 受等, 領等體相雖同, 而可說為樂等性別. 又如眼等, 在一相續, 清淨所造色體相同, 而於其中, 有性類別; 以見聞等功能別故. 非於此中, 功能異有, 可有(見)等功能差別. 然見等功能, 即眼等有; 由功能別故, 有性定別. 故知諸法, 有同一時, 體相無差, 有性類別. 既現見有法體同時, 體相無差, 有性類別; 故知諸法歷三世時, 體相無差, 有性類別. 如是善立對法義宗.

(71.) Cf. Ny, 631c5-17; Sar Abhi, §5.5.

(72.) Cf. MVŚ, 105c, 108c, 283b, 396a, etc.

(73.) T 49, 15b.

(74.) See Sar Abhi, §§ 6 and 7.

(75.) Cf. Sar Abhi, §§ 4.1.2 ff.

(76.) AKB, 82.

(77.) AKB, 85.

(78.) AKB, 89.

(79.) MVŚ, 90c; Ny, 416c.

(80.) AKB, 83–85.

(81.) Ny, 419c.

(82.) Cf. MVŚ, 96a–c.

(83.) Cf. ADV, 47: *dārṣṭāntikasya hi sarvam apratyakṣam* |

(84.) Cf. K. L. Dhammajoti, *Abhidharma Doctrines and Controversies on Perception*, 4th rev. ed. (Hong Kong, 2018), ch. 8 and 9.

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