Derpendent Origination: Its Elaboration in Early Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma Texts

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1. INTRODUCTION

Perhaps no aspect of early Buddhist teaching has been the object of greater scholarly attention than dependent origination (Skt. pratītyasamutpāda; Pali. paṭicasamuppāda). And given its key role in certain early sūtras and the reverential characterizations of later traditional interpreters, this scholarly attention is not unjustified. Among his wide-ranging studies of early Indian Buddhist doctrine, Professor Alex Wayman has devoted several major articles to the topic of dependent origination.¹ However, as he warns us, we should not consider dependent origination 'as something before [our] eyes to see in clear relief, as one might see a book.'² Instead, we should be alert to the possibility of multiple meanings and purposes that must be extracted from the traditional accounts. Professor Wayman has himself suggested several different interpretative models for dependent origination, models which view variation in the elaboration of the dependent origination formula as reflecting different geographical traditions or different ways in which the formula could be used. Following the lead of Professor Wayman, whose life has been devoted to investigating many areas of Buddhist doctrine, this paper will explore one facet of the complicated evolution of the doctrine of dependent origination.

Indeed, our understanding of the function and significance of all aspects of early Buddhist doctrine, including dependent origination, can be clouded by a variety of different factors. For example, our own distance from traditional sources and scholarly predispositions toward certain interpretative models can result in a failure to recognize the determining role of particular historical and cultural contexts in the development of the systems of Buddhist teaching and practice. Interpretation of Buddhist
doctrine can also, however, be complicated by a failure to take into account the natural growth of the tradition. This growth has been guided by Buddhist interpreters whose primary interests were not presenting historical events accurately, but rather representing preserving, and clarifying a valued message. The contributions of these interpreters complemented and often superseded one another in the ever continuing construction of the Buddha's message that came to constitute the tradition. The textual and precedent mediated horizon of the monastic transmission and elaboration of the Buddhist tradition has been formed through the accumulation of successive layers of interpretative commentary; each commentary became the point of departure and determining focus for further layers of supercommentary, which were themselves potential authoritative bases for future interpretation. Relying upon this stream of traditional interpretation without first clarifying, as best we can, its compositional strata results in an interpretative stance that mirrors the historicist perspective of the tradition itself and ignores the particular context for each stage or particular contribution. Instead, one must remain sensitive to the transformation by interpretation within the tradition and to the likelihood that later traditional interpretation, more often than not, obscures rather than clarifies earlier positions. Therefore, it remains a task for continuing textual and historical research to become conscious of this process by which the tradition grew, to isolate the significant contexts that constitute its various components and stages, and to arrest the collapsing of these contexts through ahistoricist interpretative models.

This sensitivity to context must also direct our attempts to understand specific doctrinal issues. That is to say, we must be attentive to the particular traditional context in which a doctrinal issue was elaborated and be open to the possibility that this context may have changed over time; a difference or change in context of exposition would then, in all probability, reflect a difference or change in function or purpose. In the case of dependent origination, this contextual sensitivity is particularly important in determining its relation to causation. For in the later Buddhist tradition, examination of dependent origination occurs in a context determined by philosophical and doctrinal discussions concerning the broader topic of causation, a context that is
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assumed to be original. Yet, despite later explicit connections drawn by the tradition between dependent origination and causation, or our own efforts to find in dependent origination a context for the development of the Buddhist theory of causation, we cannot assume that the early theory of dependent origination functions as an abstract causal principle or is even initially or intrinsically related to causal functioning. Instead, we must allow for the possibility that causation and dependent origination have quite different origins and different contexts of development.

The need to attend to origin and context is hindered by the structure and style of early texts, which often contain only essential characterizations of topics such as dependent origination, and thus make inferring the underlying purpose and interpretative context of these topics difficult. Sometimes we are limited to noting the bare occurrence of an item or topic in a text. Further, the omission or inclusion of a topic within a text may have been determined by the particular purposes of that text and cannot be taken as an indication of the relative importance or priority of that topic within the Buddhist tradition as a whole. Thus, contextual sensitivity demands that we not assume the function of dependent origination as a causal principle. Instead, we must examine the role of dependent origination from its earliest appearance within Buddhist teaching and its relation at each stage to other aspects of earlier and later Buddhist doctrine. Moreover, we must trace the process through which dependent origination came to be recognized as the central teaching of the Buddha and was reformulated in accordance with the changing interpretations of this teaching.

To date, the majority of the scholarly investigations of dependent origination have focused either on its presentation in early Buddhist sūtras or on its more detailed elaboration in the late scholastic Abhidharma and Mahāyāna treatises. These studies often assume the centrality of dependent origination and of its twelve member formulaic expression even within the earliest stratum of Buddhist teaching. They also frequently adopt one of two interpretative approaches, each of which implicitly assumes the importance of its own perspective within the earlier materials. These two approaches emphasize either the role of dependent origination as a generalized and logical principle of abstract
conditioning applicable to all phenomena, or its role as the descriptive model for the operation of action (karman) and the process of rebirth. Though these assumptions of the centrality of dependent origination in general and of each of these interpretative approaches find support within both the early sūtras and later Abhidharma and Mahāyāna treatises, they have also not remained unchallenged by yet other historical and textual scholarly studies. For example, Ernst Waldschmidt, after examining accounts of the Buddha’s enlightenment experience, questions the priority of those passages that identify dependent origination as the culmination of that experience.4 Franz Bernhard pursues a structural and historical study of the twelve member formula of dependent origination and concludes that it is a compilation of earlier partial formulae.5 Both Waldschmidt and Bernhard’s research would, therefore, challenge the assumption that the later standardized doctrine of dependent origination actually constituted one of the core teachings of the Buddha. Studies adopting either of the two interpretative approaches—affirming either the role of dependent origination as an abstract principle of causation, or its function as a descriptive model for action—present an implicit challenge to those adopting the other. As an example of these conflicting interpretative approaches, Taiken Kimura in 1927 records a disagreement concerning the original meaning of dependent origination among four of Japan’s eminent earlier Buddhist scholars: Chizen Akanuma, Hakuju Ui, Tetsurō Watsuji and himself.6 The disagreement among these scholars is three-sided: Akanuma claims that dependent origination describes the temporal relation over several lifetimes as evidenced in the process of rebirth; Ui and Watsuji claims that it refers to the non-temporal logical or abstract relation among those factors constituting a given life; and Kimura himself suggests that it explains the course of the development of animate and, in particular, psychological activity.

Each of these scholars presents convincing arguments for his position and there is no doubt that each approach is solidly supported by one of the several interpretations of dependent origination offered by later Abhidharma literature. As with all questions of doctrinal development, the character of historical evidence available from the Indian Buddhist tradition precludes sure and clear reconstructions. Thus, sorting out the role of the
dependent origination within the earliest Buddhist tradition, weighing the evidence for its centrality to the enlightenment experience of the Buddha, and assessing its later doctrinal development will require extensive and prolonged future research. Nevertheless, in this paper I hope to contribute, however provisionally, to this project by considering the presentations of dependent origination and their relation to theories either of causality or of karman and rebirth in the early Abhidharma literature, material that perhaps has not been examined as carefully in previous discussions of this issue. These texts provide the crucial transition between the earlier sutras and the later Abhidharma texts and should be able to clarify the contexts from which the independently defined doctrine of dependent origination emerged and the process by which it was crystallized or transformed and finally incorporated into the stable doctrinal edifice of the later tradition. In particular, these transitional texts will be examined for the evidence they provide concerning the relation of dependent origination to abstract causal functioning.

2. THE CHARACTERIZATION OF DEPENDENT ORIGINATION IN THE SUTRA LITERATURE

In order to appreciate the interpretative transformation that the doctrine of dependent origination underwent within the early Abhidharma treatises, we must first briefly review the varying descriptions and purposes of dependent origination as presented in the early sutras. Unfortunately, the character of the sutra collection as an open-ended body of anonymous texts precludes our establishing a single universally applicable interpretation of dependent origination and presents certain difficulties to any attempt to trace the development of the doctrine of dependent origination and its historical importance through the various textual strata. Nonetheless, it is clear that within at least certain segments of the sutra collection, dependent origination is accorded a very important role. For example, formulaic descriptions of dependent origination in the sutras state that one who sees dependent origination, sees the teaching; or, whether or not Buddhas appear in the world, dependent origination is established as a fact, and it is this that the Buddhas comprehend. And at least one version of the Buddha's enlightenment and its subse-
quent lineage of interpretation sees dependent origination as the very culmination of that formative experience.9

These formulaic descriptions of dependent origination in the sūtras often include two parts. First, an abstract statement of dependency or conditionality takes the form: ‘When this is, that is, from the arising of this, that arises; when this is not, that is not, from the cessation of this, that ceases.’ This twofold abstract statement is usually coupled with a specific list of conditioned and conditioning factors.11 The variety in the early descriptions of dependent origination becomes apparent in these lists of factors, which also provide clues for the history of the development of what was to become the standard characterization of dependent origination in twelve members. The Nidāna book of the Saṃyuttanikāya offers ample evidence of this variety in its lists of conditioning factors. For example, in certain texts the principle of dependent origination is illustrated through the conditioning activity of the five appropriating aggregates (upādānakkhandha).12 Other texts describe a series of conditioning relations that begins with perceptual consciousness (vīññāna), which is established upon an object-support (ārammanā) by means of volition, intention, and being occupied; this series of conditioning relations concludes with the consequent future rebirth (punabbhava), birth (jāti), old age and death (jarāmarāṇa), and indeed the origin of the entire aggregation of grief, lamentation, suffering, and so on.13

The more frequent lists of conditioning factors include some factors that form part of a standard listing of twelve members. For example, the Suttanipāta, in explaining the origin of quarrels, disputes, lamentation, grief, selfishness, pride, arrogance, and calumny, traces a series of factors, including affection (piyā), inclinations (chanda), determination of something as pleasant (sāta) or unpleasant (asāta), contact (phassa), name and form (nāmarūpa), and concept (saññā).14 The Suttanipāta also offers a listing of twelve factors that explain the origin of suffering: these include the substratum or seizing (upadhi), ignorance (avijjā), motivations (saṅkhāra), perceptual consciousness (vīññāna), contact (phassa), feelings (vedanā), craving (taṇhā), grasping (upādāna), undertaking (ārambha), sustenance (āhāra), and instigation (iñjīta).15 In the Saṃyuttanikāya, certain texts, adopting what would appear to be an epistemological perspective, trace the origin of suffering
to contact (phassa) and attribute the cessation of this contact to the cessation of the six sense spheres (saḷāyatana), which in turn conditions the cessation of feelings (vedanā), craving (tanha), grasping (upādāna), becoming (bhava), birth (jāti), old age and death (jarāmarāṇa), and indeed all forms of suffering. This explanation of the origin of suffering is contrasted with four other causal theories according to which suffering depends upon oneself, another, both oneself and another, or occurs by chance without a cause. Other texts in the Samyutta Nikāya adopt the perspective of the dynamic of action and rebirth. For example, in one case, the origin of birth (jāti) is traced through becoming (bhava), grasping (upādāna), and craving (tanha), and ultimately to feelings (vedanā). These feelings, in all three modes as pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral, are impermanent and, thereby, are attended with suffering. The destruction of birth then is said to result from the destruction of all grasping. Another text emphasizes equally the roles of both ignorance (avijñā) and craving (tanha) as the foundation of a collocation of factors including the body (kāya), name and form (nāmarūpa), contact (phassa), and the six sense spheres (saḷāyatana), all of which produce happiness and suffering (sukhadukkha) and ultimately rebirth, birth, old age and death, and so on. Several texts appeal to the ‘descent’ or ‘entry’ (avakkanti)—presumably into a rebirth state or womb, or possibly into some post-meditative form of embodiment—of name and form (nāmarūpa) or of perceptual consciousness (viññāna). Still others ground the series of conditions culminating in suffering in a relation of reciprocal conditioning between name and form and perceptual consciousness.

Despite this variation in the scriptural accounts of dependent origination, the later Abhidharma and Mahāyāna treatises most frequently standardize their presentation of dependent origination in a twelve member formula. Though a doctrinal and textual history of the process by which the members came to be standardized at twelve lies outside the scope of this paper, two interpretative options have dominated scholarly explanations: the twelve member formula is original and is abbreviated in the various partial series of conditioning factors; or the twelve member formula is the product of combining earlier partial formulae.

Regardless of its ultimate origin, this twelve member formula-
tion finds support in the *sūtras.* One representative example, again from the *Nidāna* book of the *Samyuttanikāya* is as follows:

Now, in this case, oh monks, the learned noble disciple thoroughly directs correct attention precisely toward dependent origination: when this is, that is, from the arising of this, that arises; when this is not, that is not, from the cessation of this, that ceases. Which is to say, there are motivations in dependence upon ignorance, there is perceptual consciousness in dependence upon motivations [and so on... up to old age and death]. In this way, there is the origin of this entire aggregation of suffering. But from the complete turning away from, the complete cessation of ignorance, there is the cessation of motivations, and from the cessation of motivations, there is the cessation of perceptual consciousness [and so on... up to old age and death]. In this way, there is the cessation of this entire aggregation of suffering.24

In this passage, the abstract statement defining dependent origination—‘when this is, that is’—and so on—is applied to the conditioning relation between successive pairs in a list of twelve factors, including ignorance (*avijñā*), motivations (*saṅkhāra*), perceptual consciousness (*viññāna*), name and form (*nāmarūpa*), six sense spheres (*salāyatana*), contact (*phassa*), feelings (*vedanā*), craving (*tanha*), grasping (*upādāna*), becoming (*bhava*), birth (*jāti*), and old age and death (*jarāmarana*). This list detailing conditioned arising is referred to in the tradition as the ‘emanation’ series (*anuloma*). However, this series of twelve-fold conditioned arising is also followed by an analogous series representing the conditioned cessation of each factor and, consequently, of all suffering. This list detailing conditioned cessation is referred to as the ‘extirpation’ series (*paṭiloma*).25 The twelve member formulation thus offers a specific program through which the religious objective of the cessation of suffering can be effected. By understanding that suffering arises through the mutual conditioning of certain specific factors, one is freed from the delusion that suffering is caused by oneself, another, both oneself and another, or is without a cause. Furthermore, through correct insight into this process of dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) and into those things that
have originated dependently (paticcasamuppanna) one is freed from the mistaken perspective of self expressed through such concerns as: ‘Did I exist in the past? What was I in the past? Will I exist in the future? What will I be in the future? And, do I or do I not exist in the present? What am I at present?’ and so on. Therefore, it would appear that in these early accounts, conditioning or causation, as such, is important neither as an abstract descriptive principle nor as an explanation for the process of rebirth, but rather insofar as it explains the presence of suffering and thereby makes possible its termination.

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3.1 The Earliest Abhidharma Texts

It is against this backdrop of the various descriptions of dependent origination presented in the sūtras that one should examine its treatment in the early Abhidharma texts. Among the earliest northern Indian Abhidharma texts, the Saṅgītikarṇāyana merely uses the terms ‘dependent origination’ and ‘dependently originated factors’ as categories in its classification of other factors. Though this practice is attested in the Dharma-skandha, both the Dharmasūtra and the Śāriputrābhidharma-śāstra also devote long independent sections to the topic of dependent origination. The structural similarity between the Dharma-skandha and the Śāriputrābhidharma-śāstra, and between both and the Theravāda Abhidhamma text, the Vibhaṅga, has long been noted. This similarity suggests a possible historical affinity among these texts and, as will be discussed, provides possible clues as to the development of the Abhidharma exposition of dependent origination.

In its exposition of dependent origination, the Dharma-skandha follows its normal pattern of first citing at length an appropriate sūtra passage, which is then elaborated by a detailed commentary. In the passage cited here, the Buddha announces that he will expound both the process of dependent origination (pratītya-samutpāda) as well as those factors that have originated dependently (pratītyasamutpanna). In defining the process of dependent origination, he first offers the abstract statement of conditioning—‘when this is, that is’, and so on—and next lists the twelve
factors in their presentation order from ignorance to old age and death. The Buddha then notes that the conditioning relations among these factors are established whether or not Buddhas appear to realize them. Indeed, the principle of dependent origination is comprehended, expounded, established, and clarified by all Tathāgatas; it is fixed, regular, true, and so on. In defining the second component of dependently originated factors, the Buddha explains each of the twelve members as impermanent, conditioned, constructed, dependently originated, being destroyed, passing away, fading, and ceasing. The Buddha concludes his discussion of dependent origination and dependently originated factors with the observation that correctly understanding both components prevents self-centered inquiry into the past, present, and future, inquiry which characterizes those holding the view of the persistence of self, the persistence of beings, the persistence of life, or the persistence of merit or demerit. All such views of persistence produce suffering; only through the view of dependent origination can this suffering and, in the end, rebirth be terminated.

In its subsequent comments on this passage, the Dharmaskandha presents an extensive analysis of both the general definition of dependent origination and the conditioning relation between each of the individual members constituting dependently originated factors. First, it notes that dependent origination and dependently originated factors are identical in their intrinsic nature, but differ in specific instances: that is to say, the same factor can be considered either conducive to ‘dependent origination’ or ‘dependently originated’. This dual character of all factors can be further clarified through an analytical matrix of four categories (catuskoti): namely, factors that are dependently originating and not dependently originated—a null category; factors that are dependently originated and not dependently originating—the twelve members of dependent origination, presumably considered solely as effects of conditioning; factors that are both—the twelve members considered both as conditions and as effects of conditioning; and, finally, factors that are neither—factors, here unspecified, other than those listed above. Without mentioning the abstract statement of conditioning, ‘when this is, that is’, and so on, the Dharmaskandha next
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examines the regular and established character of both the principle of dependent origination and of the individual conditioning relations. These individual conditioning relations are declared to be established for factors in the three time periods of past, present, and future, whether Buddhas appear or do not appear in the world; the principle of conditioning is declared unwavering as the natural and unchanging character of all factors and will be constant in its truth for all past and future sages.

In a subsequent section, the Dharmaskandha details the conditioning relations between pairs of members constituting the twelve member formulation. The treatments of each of the individual relations utilize a limited range of topics and reveal a set of expository patterns that would, upon closer examination, provide internal textual criteria upon which to suggest possible origins of or connections among certain groups of members. The effort to unravel these topics and expository patterns is aided by a comparison of comparable discussions in structurally similar and possibly historically related texts: in this case, the Dharmaskandha, the Śārīputrābhidharmaśāstra, and the Vibhaṅga. Though the antecedents of the exposition of both dependent origination and its individual members and the process of its development cannot be unequivocally determined from internal textual grounds alone, at the very least, the recurrent topics and patterns testify to the composite character of the exposition—especially that of the Dharmaskandha—and suggest certain concerns that directed it at this comparatively early stage of doctrinal development.

Whereas the enumeration of the individual conditioning relations in both the Śārīputrābhidharmaśāstra and the Vibhaṅga includes only the twelve members of the standard formulation, the exposition of the Dharmaskandha is distinctive in several of the specific relationships it isolates. The three initial relations accord with those of the standard formula: namely, ignorance—motivations, motivations—perceptual consciousness, and perceptual consciousness—name and form. The Dharmaskandha next includes the relation, name and form—perceptual consciousness, which suggests a reciprocal relationship between name and form and perceptual consciousness as is attested in those sūtra passages that begin the conditioning series from this reciprocal relation.

The Dharmaskandha then follows the remainder
of the standard formulation with one exception: between the
two relations of the standard formulation, name and form—six
sense spheres and six sense spheres—contact, the Dharmaskandha
includes the relation, name and form—contact. This particular
relationship is once again reminiscent of a sūtra passage, speci-

cally the Mahānidānasūtra, which includes only nine members
in a ten stage series that begins with a reciprocal relationship
between name and form—perceptual consciousness and omits
the six sense spheres.38 Though it is not possible to trace un-
equivocally the source for the Dharmaskandha’s unique enumera-
tion of the individual conditioning relations, the similarity of
the Dharmaskandha to the Mahānidānasūtra is striking. Indeed,
the Dharmaskandha quotes the Mahānidānasūtra as a source for
its elaboration of those members that are included in the nine-
fold enumeration of the Mahānidānasūtra. This would suggest
that the Mahānidānasūtra was an important source for the
composite exposition of the Dharmaskandha.

In its elaboration of these individual factors, the Dharma-

skandha interweaves definitions and variant interpretations
with quotations from the sūtras, certain of which are cited
repeatedly in association with several different members. For
example, in commenting on the first relationship, ignorance—
motivations, the Dharmaskandha initially offers a definition of the
first member, ignorance, through a list of synonyms. Next, the
ignorance—motivations relation is explained as signifying the
arising of lust, hatred, and delusion, all in dependence upon
ignorance. Several illustrative quotations from the sūtras are
then added, the last of which describes the arising of three
varieties of motivations in dependence upon ignorance: namely,
meritorious, demeritorious, and non-instigated motivations.39
This final quotation then serves as the basis for a lengthy discus-
sion of those circumstances, specifically those rebirth or medi-
tative states in which ignorance gives rise to each of the three
varieties of motivations.

A comparison of this exposition of the ignorance—motiva-
tions relation in the Dharmaskandha with that of the Śāriputrā-
bhidharmaśāstra and the Vibhaṅga reveals certain basic similari-
ties. All three begin their exposition with a definition of igno-
rance and explain the ignorance—motivations relation through
the threefold categorization of motivations as meritorious,
demeritorious, and non-instigated.\(^{40}\) The Śāriputrābhidharma-
śāstra and the Vibhaṅga then expand these three categories
through the three varieties of motivations or actions arising from
the body, speech, or mind. The Dharmaskandha, however, uses
the characteristically Abhidharma categories of corporeal or
verbal action, thought and thought concomitants, and dissociated
factors.\(^{41}\) For all three texts, the subsequent elaboration of the
ignorance—motivations relationship focuses on the enumeration
of those states in which ignorance gives rise to various types of
motivations or action.

Aside from these structural similarities in exposition among
the three texts, several basic concerns underlie and connect their
discussions of certain individual members or conditioning rela-
tions. For example, in the Dharmaskandha, the concern with the
effect of conditions upon meditative or rebirth states evident in
the exposition of the initial ignorance—motivations conditioning
relation also characterizes the exposition of virtually all other
members and their conditioning relations. Some of these condi-
tioning relations also mention explicitly the process of transit at
death and the subsequent descent into the womb: the recipro-
cal relationship between perceptual consciousness and name
and form; name and form—six sense spheres; name and form—
contact; and grasping—existence. By contrast, the explanations
of certain relations include a reference to what might be termed
‘epistemological concern’, which recounts the conditions upon
which consciousness and experience occur: motivations—per-
ceptual consciousness, name and form—perceptual conscious-
ness, name and form—contact. Other relations focus exclusively
on this epistemological concern: six sense spheres—contact:
contact—feelings. And finally, still other relations combine this
epistemological concern with discussion of the arising of defile-
ments: feelings—craving; and craving—grasping.

The exposition of the twelve individual conditioning relations
in the Śāriputrābhidharmaśāstra falls into two patterns. The ex-
position of those relations from ignorance—motivations to name
and form—six sense spheres focus on the rebirth or meditative
state in which these conditioning relations occur, with special
attention given to the temporal status as present or future of the
effect produced. The remaining conditioning relations, from the
six sense spheres—contact to birth—old age and death, show a
typological emphasis, listing the varieties of effects produced in dependence upon each type of condition. The *Vibhaṅga* differs from the other two texts in its use of a bi-level analysis that divides its discussion into two sections: namely, analysis in accordance with the *sutta* (*suttabhājantya*), a relatively straightforward exegesis of a passage from the *sutta* through simple questions and definitions; and analysis in accordance with the *abhidhamma* (*abhidhammabhājintya*), which further explains the passage through the application of various matrices and further questions. The underlying concern of the *Vibhaṅga*’s exposition of dependent origination is set by the *sutta* passage selected for comment, a passage addressed explicitly to the conditions for the arising of virtuous (*kusala*) factors. The subsequent *abhidhamma* exegesis then details the conditions for the arising of virtuous, unvirtuous, and indeterminate factors in various cosmic realms and meditative states.

Of the three texts, the *Dharmasūkhaṇḍha* shows the greatest evidence of compilation and variation in its exposition of the relations among the individual members of dependent origination. However, in the absence of external evidence, a relative dating of these three texts is only possible through internal structural comparisons. Determining the relations among the texts is complicated by their independent historical contexts and the probability of multiple recensions. Despite the difficulty of determining their precise historical relations, the three texts give little if any consideration of causal theories and no explicit linking of causation and dependent origination. There is no dependent discussion of causation in the *Dharmasūkhaṇḍha* or the *Vibhaṅga*. Only the *Śāriputrābhīdharmaśāstra* refers to a causal model: in its exposition of the conditioning relation between the motivations and perceptual consciousness members of dependent origination, it refers to eight within its own distinctive enumeration of ten conditions (*pratyaya*). However, these ten conditions are not discussed again in the context of dependent origination, but serve as the subject of a separate detailed exposition in a later section.

3.2 **The Middle Abhidharma Texts and the Emergence of Causal Theory**

It is precisely on these points of the emergence of causal
theory as a separate topic, the exposition of dependent origination and its individual members in terms of causal theory, and the relative importance given to each that the subsequent early Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma texts differ from those of the earliest period. In the Vijñānakāya, dependent origination and its individual members do not constitute the subject of a separate section, but instead are mentioned within a section devoted to the topic of ‘causes and conditions’.44 As would be expected from the Vijñānakāya, whose focus is the description of perceptual consciousness, the section on causes and conditions presents a detailed analysis of the range of conditions that give rise to consciousness analyzed from a variety of perspectives. The result is a complex matrix of varieties of consciousness that are dependent upon specific types of generative conditions in specific circumstances. For example, consciousness is itself analyzed: according to six varieties (i.e. visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental); according to ten varieties (i.e. virtuous, unvirtuous, and either obscured or unobscured indeterminate within the realm of desire, and virtuous and either obscured or unobscured indeterminate within the realms of form and the formless realm); or according to fifteen varieties (i.e. five varieties—to be abandoned through the vision of the four noble truths or through cultivation—associated with each of the three realms). Consciousness is further specified according to time period, moral quality, association with certain types of defilements, and status as abandoned or not yet abandoned. These varieties of consciousness are then correlated to generative conditions themselves similarly analyzed according to the same varieties.

To begin this section detailing ‘causes and conditions’, the Vijñānakāya appeals to the twelve member formulation of dependent origination but with a noteworthy innovation. Without taking any specific sūtra passage as a point of departure, the Vijñānakāya offers two accounts of the twelve individual conditioning relations constituting the standard formulation: one reflects a simultaneous and the other a sequential temporal model. According to the simultaneous model, all twelve members function within a single moment and account for the arising of ordinary experience. For example, in the case of the arising of lust toward a desirable object in dependence upon lack of knowledge, this ‘motivation’ of lust is conditioned by the
eleven remaining members: the lack of knowledge is ignorance; present cognition is perceptual consciousness; the collection of five aggregates is name and form; the organ bases of those aggregates are the six sense spheres; the composite of those six spheres is contact; sensation within that composite is feelings; pleasure produced by those feelings is craving; the extension of this craving is grasping; action that is able to produce the subsequent lifetime is existence; the present state of the aggregates is birth; the maturation of these aggregates is old age; and the passing of these aggregates is death. By contrast, in the sequential model, each of the twelve members, beginning with ignorance, serves as the condition for the arising of the subsequent member. The explanations of several of the individual members emphasize their role in the operation of karmans and rebirth; for example, ignorance serves as the cause and condition for the arising of three varieties of motivations as meritorious, demeritorious, and non-instigated; these motivations condition the arising of perceptual consciousness, which constitutes passage either to a favorable or unfavorable destiny; this perceptual consciousness conditions the arising of name and form either in this lifetime or the next; name and form conditions the arising of the six sense spheres that are either complete or incomplete; and so on. The question of the temporal relation among the individual members is not addressed in the sūtras; thus, the important innovation of the Vijnānakāya consists in the suggestion that this conditioning process operates through both a simultaneous and successive temporal model.

Before proceeding with its matrix of varieties of consciousness and their respective ‘causes and conditions’, the Vijnānakāya presents a list of fourteen conditions for the arising of thought (citta) and then isolates from among them four conditions (pratyaya) that function to produce perceptual consciousness. These four conditions constitute a significant component of later Sarvāstivādin causal theory. Thus, it is clear that in the Vijnānakāya abstract causal relations are beginning to be considered for their own sake, and not merely as a part of discussions of dependent origination. Indeed, consideration of dependent origination occupies the subordinate role of introducing an independent consideration of causal operations.

In the Prakaraṇapāda, as in the Saṅgṭṭiparyāya, the terms
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‘dependent origination’ and ‘dependently originated factors’ occur only as categories in its classification of other factors; dependent origination in its traditional twelve member formulation is not discussed. However, the category of ‘dependently originated factors’ (pratītyasamutpāna) is declared to constitute the totality of conditioned factors. This abstract redefinition and radical extension of the meaning of dependent originated factors to include all conditioned factors plays a key role in later Abhidharma texts. Though the four conditions presented in the Vijñānakāya are mentioned also in the Prakaraṇapāda, they are not discussed in detail as a separate topic. Instead, the issue of causal relations is addressed only implicitly in the catechetical examination and elaboration of other factors.

The *Āryavasumitra* also devotes much more attention to the contextual operation of causes and conditions and restricts its discussion of dependent origination. It raises the issue of and offers several explanations for a distinction between causes (hetu) and conditions (pratīya). It also refers to the four conditions as the basis for the arising of all moments of thought, and discusses the operation of each condition in appropriate contexts. The issue of simultaneous conditions, so important to later Abhidharma analyses of causal operations, is also raised in discussions of the functioning of mental factors and the relationship of association proposed among these factors. The twelve member dependent origination formula is accorded a certain measure of abstract importance: personal realization of the twelve causes and conditions and of the twelve dependently originated factors constitutes the essence of the Abhidharma; the twelve causes and conditions are declared to be the deep meaning of the sūtras and śāstras and the silence of the sages; and knowledge of the twelve causes and conditions distinguishes the person of knowledge from the fool. Nonetheless, dependent origination and the individual conditioning relations do not serve as the topic of a separate lengthy section. Instead, discussion is limited to certain of the individual relations—in particular that between feelings and craving—and to certain aspects of the traditional sūtra passage referring to dependent origination. Specifically, discussion of the traditional sūtra passage is restricted to the Buddha’s declaration that to see dependent origination is to see the teach-
ing, and to various points of distinction between dependent origination and dependently originated factors.

Finally, in the most recent of the early Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma texts, the Jñānaprasthāna, which became the central Abhidharma text for at least one branch of the Sarvāstivādin school, conditioning relations are examined not in the context of dependent origination, but rather in relation to specific causal operations and, in particular, a newly elaborated theory of six causes. The path of religious practice through which defilements are abandoned, the four noble truths are realized, and suffering is terminated is explained in terms of the operation of these six causes, and not in terms of dependent origination as such. However, unlike the Prakaraṇapāda, the Jñānaprasthāna does not completely ignore the traditional twelve member formulation of dependent origination, but instead offers an unprecedented reinterpretation. The twelve members, the Jñānaprasthāna claims, are to be interpreted as extending over three lifetimes: the first two members operate in the previous lifetime to produce the middle eight members in the present lifetime; these present members then produce the last two members in the subsequent lifetime.

4. CONCLUSION

Thus, by the time of the Jñānaprasthāna, the Sarvāstivādin development of a separate theory of causal relations was extended through the theory of the six causes, which, from the Mahāvibhāṣā onward, was combined with the theory of four conditions as the two major components of the Sarvāstivādin causal model. The Mahāvibhāṣā also marks the beginning of abstract considerations of the process of causation and various specific causal models. With the emergence of an independent and abstract causal theory, dependent origination and its twelve member formulation, which had remained a stable but not doctrinally evolving teaching throughout the early Sarvāstivādin texts, was activated, as it were, through reinterpretation: it received its own particularized role, as an explanation of the process of rebirth, completely divorced from general causal theory.

The later Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma texts retain the advances in causal theory as well as the new interpretation of dependent origination evident in the Jñānaprasthāna. However, they also
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appear to innovate by connecting dependent origination to causality such that dependent origination becomes the conditioning principle underlying all specific causal interaction. As a general conditioning principle, dependent origination is then applied to all conditioned phenomena in either successive or simultaneous form through the specific causal theories of the six causes and four conditions. The twelve member formulation is reserved for a detailed explanation of the operation of action and the process of rebirth. This later twofold reinterpretation of dependent origination as a general conditioning principle and as providing the specific conditions for rebirth is achieved through a complex and extensive exegesis of the original sūtra passage—an exegesis that is claimed, of course, to represent its implicit original meaning.

References


6. This disagreement was occasioned by the interpretation of dependent origination presented in Kimura’s book, Genshi Bukkyō shisō ron, completed in 1921. Articles published by Akanuma, Uī, and Watsuji then prompted a response by Kimura now included as an appendix to Genshi Bukkyō shisō ron, in Kimura Taiken zenshū 3 (1923; reprint, Tokyo: Daihōrinkaku, 1968), 363ff.


10. Though this phrase usually accompanies lists of specific conditioning factors, it also occurs alone: v. MN #79. Cūlasakuludāvisutta 2: 32. dhāmanāṃ te desessāmi: imasmiṃ sati idam hoti, imassu' ppādā, idam uppajjati; imasmiṃ asati idam na hoti, imassa nirodhā idam nirujjhati. V. also EA. 32 #9 p. 724b 16-17. Mitsuyoshi Saigusa reviews various patterns for this phrase in the sūtra collection; v. Mitsuyoshi Saigusa, “Shoki bukyō no ‘kore ga aru o tki kare ga aru’”, *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 28 (1979): 38-44.

11. An interpretation defending the historical priority of this twofold abstract statement—“when this is, that is, from the arising of this...”—would argue that dependent origination begins as an abstract causal principle and the varying lists of factors reflect later and often conflicting elaborative material.


16. SN 12.24 Aṭṭāriyātivahanasutta 2: 33ff. V. also SN 12.25 Bhūmijāsutta 2: 37ff; 12.26 Upavānasutta 2: 41ff. For other texts with this apparent epistemological perspective, v. SN 12.43 Dukkhasutta 2: 72, which traces the arising of suffering to the initial contact that arises among the sense organ, the object-field, and the appropriate perceptual consciousness; contact in turn gives rise to feelings and then to craving as the origin of suffering. Suffering ceases through the cessation of craving, which in turn undermines grasping, existence, birth, old age and death, and so on.

17. For other suttas that counter these four views, v. SN 12.17 Acelahassapasutta and SN 12.18 Timbarukasutta 2: 19ff; SA. 12 #302 p. 86a4ff; #303 p. 86b24ff.
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18. SN 12.32 Kālārasutta 2: 50ff. Cf. SN 12.52 Upādānasutta, 12.53-54 Samyojanasutta 2: 84ff, which trace the origin of suffering to craving.


23. It is important to keep in mind that it is possible, if not probable, that the sūtra canon was influenced in both style and content by an emerging Abhidharma corpus. Therefore, the priority of references in sūtra cannot be assumed. V. Bronkhorst, “Dharma and Abhidharma”, 316ff.

24. SN 12.37 Natukhasutta 2: 65, tatra kho bhikkhave satavā ariyasāvako paṭicecamuppādaṁ ṛeva sādhukam yoniso manasi karoti. iti imasmiṁ sati idam hoti, imassu ‘ppādā idam uppaţjati. imasmiṁ asati idam na hoti. imassa nirodhā idam nirujhati. yad idam avijjāpaccayā saṅkhārā. saṅkhārapaccayā viññāṇam... eva etassa kevalassa dukkhaṁkhandhassa samudayo hoti. avijjāya tv eva asesavirāganiruddhā saṅkhāraṁniruddhā viññāṇaṁ. niroddho... eva etassa kevalassa dukkhaṁkhandhassa niroddho hoti. V. also SN 12.20 Paccayasutta 2: 25; SA 11 #296 p. 84b14ff; MN #38 Mahāvibhūṣāsaṅkhyasutta 1: 261ff; MA 54 # 201 p. 768a13ff; Yūn-ch'i ching T.2 (124) p. 547b17ff.

25. It should also be noted that these twelve factors between ignorance and old age and death are listed in two different orders: one from old age and death to ignorance, which reflects the order in which these factors were discovered by the Buddha; and the other from ignorance to old age and death, which reflects the order in which the members were presented by the Buddha and observed by others. Though the ‘presentation’ order from ignorance to old age and death is more common in the later sources, Hakku UÜ suggests that the ‘discovery’ order from old age and death to ignorance is earlier. V. Hakku UÜ, “Jūni enga no kaishaku—engisetsu no igi”, in Indo tetsugaku kenkyū (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1965), 2: 303ff. For a review of the various orders in which the dependent origination formula is presented, v. Isshii Yamada, “Premises and Implications of Interdependence” (Pratītyasamutpāda)”, in Studies in History of Buddhism, edited by A. K. Narain, (Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1980), 373ff, and for Japanese scholarship on this issue, nt. 8 p. 388. Cf. Wayman, “Dependent Origination: the Indo-Tibetan Tradition”, 163ff.

26. SN 12.20 Paccayasutta 2: 25-27; SA 11 #296 p. 84b26ff; MN #38
Mahātānābhāsaikhayasutta 1: 265; MA 54 § 201 p. 769a9ff. Cf. also NAS 27. p. 496b17ff; AKB 3. 25c-d p. 133.20ff.

27. As an example of this common interpretation, v. I. Yamada, “Premises and Implications”, 375.

28. Saṅgītāparīyāya T.26 (1536) 1 p. 367c22ff, 1 p. 369a3ff, 12 p. 419a20ff.

29. V. Dhammaskandha T.26 (1537) [DS] 8 p. 491c18ff, 8 p. 492b4ff, where the category of dependently originated factors is listed as one category of factors to be observed within the investigation limb (dharmapavicayasyasambodhyāṅga) among the seven limbs of enlightenment.


32. Though this sūtra passage is not identified in the Dhammaskandha, it closely resembles SA 11 § 296 p. 84b12ff; cf. SN 12.20 Pacayassutta 2: 25ff.

33. DS 11 p. 505b14ff.

34. In the Prakaraṇapāda (T.26 (1542) [PP] 6 p. 715c4) dependent origination (pratītysamutpāda) is mentioned only in conjunction with dependently originated factors (pratītyasamutpāna) and both are defined simply as comprising conditioned factors. Cf. also the Prakaraṇapāda T.26 (1541) 6 p. 656a16ff, where the contents of ‘dependent origination’ and ‘dependently originated factors’ are spelled out as those factors included within the eighteen elements, the twelve sense spheres, the five aggregates, the nine varieties of knowledge, and so on. For a later discussion of this and other interpretations of the relationship between dependent origination and dependently originated factors, v. MVB 23 p. 118a25ff.

35. The Mahāvībhāṣā (MVB 23 p. 118b15ff) attributes to the master Pūrṇāśa a different fourfold analytical matrix, which reflects the more developed doctrinal analysis and categorization characteristic of later Abhidharma texts: namely, factors that are dependent originating and not dependently originated are future factors; factors that are dependently originated and not dependent originating are the past and present five aggregates constituting arhats in the last moment prior to the termination of their life-streams; factors that are both include all past and present factors other than those of the previous categories; and, finally, factors that are neither are the unconditioned factors.


37. V. supra nt. 21.

38. DN Mahānīdānasutta 2: 55ff, 62; MA 24 §§ 97 p. 579c13ff; Jen Penyü-sheng
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ching T.1 (14) p. 243b5ff. Cf. Dirghāgama 13. [DA] 10 p. 60b8ff, which lists the twelve members of the standard formulation, including the six sense spheres.

39. SA 12 $292 p. 83a27ff; SN 12.51 Parivimānaśanasutta 2: 82.
40. SAŚ 12 p. 606b28ff; Vibhaṅga p. 135; DS 11 p. 505c13ff.
42. SAŚ 12 p. 608a9.
43. SAŚ 15 p. 628c10ff, 25 p. 679b7ff.
45. VK. 3 p. 547b22ff. The Mahāvibhāṣā (MVB 21 p. 108c21ff) cites the Prajñāpāramitāśāstra as the source for this theory of four conditions, though they do not appear in the sections of the Prajñāpāramitāśāstra extant in Chinese translation (T.26 (1538)). For further application of the four conditions to an analysis of thought, v. VK 11 p. 548a29ff.
46. Prakaraṇapāda [PP]. T.26 (1542) 5 p. 711c6, 8 p. 725b16ff. Cf. similar use in the Saṅgītiṣṭhāya, supra nt. 28.
47. PP. 6 p. 715c4.
49. For example, v. PP 10 p. 733c17ff.
50. On the character and possible sectarian affiliation of the *Āryavasumitrabodhisattvasaṅgitiṣṭhāstra as connected with a possibly non-Kāśmīra lineage of the Sarvāstivādin sect, v. Watanabe, Ubu Abidatsumaron, 186ff, 248ff; R. Yamada, Daijō Bukkyō seiritsu, 401ff, 413ff; Sakurabe, Kusharon, 54, 87ff. For its dating as contemporaneous with or slightly later than the Jñānapraṣṭhāna, v. Chizen Akanuma, (1934). Sonbasumitsubosatsushōhōron, Kokuyaku issaikyō indo senjutsu, Bidonbu 6 (Tokyo: Daitō shuppansha), 62ff; Watanabe, Ubu Abidatsumaron, 195ff; Sakurabe, Kusharon, 54ff.
51. *Āryavasumitrabodhisattvasaṅgitiṣṭhāstra [VŚŚ] T. 28 (1549) 1 p. 724c20ff. This topic is raised again in Saṅghabhadra's Nīyāṇusāra, NAS 20 p. 449b21ff.
52. VŚŚ 3 p. 739c7.
53. VŚŚ 2 p. 734b13ff, 3 p. 738c2ff.
54. VŚŚ 2 p. 733a20ff.
55. VŚŚ 4 p. 745c18ff.
56. VŚŚ 10 p. 802b27ff.
57. VŚŚ 2 p. 734a23ff.
58. VŚŚ 2 p. 735a27ff. Noteworthy in this discussion is a distinction between seeing the dharma and seeing the individual (pudgala), and a reference to the voidness and the signless gates of liberation (vimokṣaṇaṃkha).
62. JP. 1 p. 921b16ff. The Mahāvibhāṣā (MVB. 21 p. 109b21ff; cf. also NAS 25 p. 481a9) claims that the sūtra passage interpreted here is the Mahānīdānasūtra. V. supra nt. 38.