

# Dependent Arising in Abhidhamma Philosophy

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*This paper seeks to define the Buddha's conceptions as a causal theory that is doubtless coincides with the notion of dependent arising. We know that the concept of dependent arising is core subject upon which we can indisputably resolve the problem of the previous interpretation of the general causal theory in early Buddhism. Furthermore we can understand the notion of dependent arising in the Abhidhamma philosophy in order to defining the original meaning of Buddha. Additionally we survey the general nature of the law of causation to specify the dependent arising, but which is a little different from the notion of dependent arising in our survey. There are four kinds of general characteristic states that are similar ideas to the law of causation, i.e., suchness, necessity, invariability and conditionality in the Abhidhamma philosophy. These four characteristics form the supporting basis for dependent arising in the Buddhist schools. Lastly, this paper has a brief overview of the dependent arising for the careful study that seems to us highly structured and well worth for the investigation of ideas viewed the Abhidhamma philosophy.*

Key words: Dependent Arising, Suchness, Necessity, Invariability, Conditionality.

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## I. General Characteristics of Dependent Arising

Dependent arising appears to us as a system of substance with factors which stand in various relation to one another in respect of characteristics. The general characters of dependent arising represent the relation of coexistence, of equality and inequality, and of interaction or reciprocity. Generally we accept substantial existence as true, a reality among other realities which also act and react upon one another. In early Buddhism the act is regarded as the cause and the following result as the effect. Consequently relation between the two is called the law of causation or dependent arising. The term 'cause' is used diversely in Buddhist literature: *kāraṇa*, *hetu*, *nidāna* and *samudaya*, according to the context. Buddhaghosa held that these terms are all synonyms for reason (*kāraṇa*). Reason is 'cause' (*hetu*) because it appears to produce effect; source (*nidāna*) is also cause because effect arises from it, as if commanding 'come and take it'; origin (*samudaya*) is cause because effect originates from it; and 'condition' (*paccayā*) is also cause because effect is dependent on it. In this regard Buddhaghosa has established a pattern related to dependent arising, which satisfies the empirical rigors of the philosophy of causality.

Based on this analysis, Buddhaghosa realized that dependent arising is entirely subjective in respect of time, favoring a priority and posteriori time sequence. Actually, substantial existence itself, everywhere presents change; even what appears to us as motionlessness is in flux and process. A constant thing is only accessible to us as an idea, just as a flame is actually a succession of events. Although it is changing in every moment, it appears to be always the same flame. Buddhaghosa, having studied the Buddha's elaborate teachings on dependent arising, believed that dependent arising is the basic law of existence in respect of the functional world. The Buddha's teachings are well suited as a basis for tracing the diversity of things and relations according to an ultimate principle, the concept of dependent arising being unique in this regard. In the *Nikāya* and *Āgama* we can find four typical examples of dependent arising:

Whenever this is present, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. Whenever this fades away, that does not occur; with the ceasing of this, that ceases (*imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti; imassa uppādā idaṃ uppajjati. imasmiṃ asati idaṃ na hoti; imassa nirodhā idaṃ nirujjhati*) (SN. II: 28, 65, 70, 96; T.2.245).

Dependent arising is not without consequence in formation of conditioned reflex. On the one hand there are phenomena which are both generalized and differentiated from all phenomenal happening. On the other hand, these phenomena are also similar; one is ‘dependent arising’ (*paṭiccasamuppāda*, 緣起法) and the other is the ‘dependently arisen phenomena’ (*paṭiccasamuppannā dhamma*, 緣生法). The former is often understood as natural process; whatever comes into being originates through conditions and ceases when conditions cease. One can say it is unique in phenomenal appearance, arising as a result of conceived actions which are causally conditioned. The second, ‘dependently arisen phenomena’ is much the same idea as dependent arising. Although such concepts are instructional only, there is much evidence of the nature of causality in the world which requires our careful investigation.

Firstly, we will consider a detailed explanation about dependent arising according to a number of scholarly investigations. The interpretation below adopts a traditional method to illustrate the nature of causality by the Buddhist scholars over time. Kalansuriya stated:

The commentary to the *Saṃyutta-Nikāya* explains the above notions in this way: where (i) suchness as conditions alone, neither more nor less, bring about this or that event, is said to be suchness; (ii) necessity: where there is said to be ‘necessity’ since there is no failure even for a moment to produce events, which arise when conditions come together; (iii) invariability: where, since no event different from the effect arises with the help of other events, there is said to be ‘invariability’; (iv) conditionality: where, from the condition or group of conditions which give rise to such states as decay and death as stated, there is said to be conditionality (Kalansuriya 1987: 129).

The *Paccayasutta* in the *Saṃyutta-Nikāya* has also a clear explanation of dependent arising according to the Buddha's teaching. Here, the nature of dependent arising is referred to by the Buddha such as, suchness (*tathatā*, 法爾性), necessity (*avitathatā*, 不離如性), invariability (*anaññathatā*, 不異如性) and conditionality (*idappaccayatā*, 此緣性) (SN II: 26). The seeming distinctions among these terms can ultimately be reduced to oneness of the physical character, where physical objects are merely appearance or a phenomenon. Thus, it is evident that the Buddha admitted of an objective universe in which a principle of dependent arising was operative, on the basis of which uniformities were recognizable and inference was possible as to the events. Accordingly, all events and their relations are immediate and therefore true in our perception. Thus, it is important to note that dependence upon a limited number of factors are similar to concept of the dependence of all others. While the notion of dependent arising states that the entire state of the universe at any one time is the cause of the entire state of the universe in the next moment. It seems to us also quite clear that a principle such as dependent arising would be consistent with the principle of causality in accordance with the Buddha's teaching. Thus, the dependent arising is the relations in their contiguity, whenever physical world is constantly changing itself.

### 1. The nature of suchness

Suchness regarded as 'undifferentiated whole of things' (*tathatā*) is most comprehensively discussed in the Buddhist philosophy. Because the whole doctrine of the Buddha in advance arousing his investigation about the nature is a decisive method in the concept of suchness. Therefore, we consider the 'undifferentiated whole of things' as all aspects produced by a combination of phenomenal world in the preceding moment and by causal modification in them. By this analysis, we generally think that the empirical and phenomenal conception of cause and effect, which is the most effective in the idea of the nature of suchness. This not only gives us a true picture of the actual

physical world as a system of events, but it also highlights the difficulty in distinguishing between dependent arising as subjectively conceived and causality as it objectively visualized in nature. Irrespective of any particular cause or effect, all events can be explained by the law of causality in this sense, entirely replacing the notion of natural sequence. Kalupahana has a very similar idea having rejected the traditional interpretation. He states:

Causation is not a category of relations among ideas but a category of connection and determination corresponding to a feature of the actual world, both subjective and objective, so it has an ontological status. It is a component of experience because it is an objective form of interdependence in the realm of nature (Kalupahana 1975: 92).

In the *Chinese Āgama* of the *Paccayasutta* (因緣經) the Buddha says: “the dhamma is clear and not disordered, so it naturally follows dependent arising” (審諦真實不顛倒, 如是隨順緣起) (T.2.84). This statement he is very clear about suchness as ‘not disordered’ (不顛倒). If we notice that the tide rises higher on some days, the principle of causality implies that this variance is not dependent on time but occurs because of certain factors or conditions, such as winds, lunar cycles, etc. No single law of physics would have meaning if everything depended upon everything else. For example, if the freezing of water depended upon an infinite number of factors it would be nonsense to say it depends upon temperature and pressure, or that one of these can be varied while the other is constant. We can only speak of water at all because certain qualities or groups of qualities continue to maintain their identity while other things change, yet their substance remains; this is ‘the nature of suchness.’

## 2. The meaning of necessity

In respect to necessity (*avithatā*), the Buddha offers what appears to be an unsystematic account, nevertheless, it is essentially an exhaustive treatment of the subject. According to the Buddha the idea of necessity has

assumed a distinctly phenomenal truism to the utter conviction both of the idea of abstract and concrete formulae of dependent arising (MN. 1, 264). The purpose or finality which is so necessary for a causal genesis was adopted by the Buddha himself. Necessity is already implicit in the abstract or concrete causal formula itself and is borne out in the illustration of the abstract formula through the dependent arising, where each of factors are shown as necessarily arising from another. From this point of view necessity accentuates the two important aspects of abstract and concrete formulae of dependent arising. In order to understand this we must consider the meaning of necessity as it was understood in early Buddhism, that is, as the undisputed basis of dependent arising. And cause and effect are not spared by an abstract formula that gauges everything in terms of subjective impressions. It also is nothing but two successive mental or physical phenomena. Hence, the phenomenon x will be the cause of phenomenon y, which follows upon phenomenon x, if they are repeated in causal linear sequence. Such repetitions in experience of two consecutive phenomena beget a one-way relation; since phenomenon x has happened, phenomenon y will follow. The abstract formula is as follows:

Whenever x, then y: whenever this is present, that comes to be;  
whenever this fades away, that does not occur.

This abstract formula representing dependent arising is none other than a purely subjective invariable sequence of mental or physical phenomena. Nor can we find anything that explains why x should be followed by y, we are merely satisfied to see how one follows the other. So it appears there is no necessity (*avitathatā*) between cause and effect. This is the explanation of dependent arising offered by the Buddha in particular. The following is a passage from the Buddha:

With the arising of this; that arises, with the ceasing of this; that is ceasing (*imassa uppada idaṃ uppajjati, imassa nirodha idaṃ nirujjhati*) (DN. I.180).

This concrete formula is a faithful ally of empiricism. It accepts that which has been posed through external observation and experiment. Internal speculation based on subjectivity or suchness, views causality in dependent arising as regularity or lacking exception (Kalupahana 1975: 93).

To more thoroughly understand the meaning of necessity we might consider that dependent arising does not differ from regularity in its integral character. Regularity itself, in the concept of the dependent arising, is not muddled together to produce events that arise whenever there are disturbing conditions. Therefore, we would do well to first weigh the early Buddhist interpretation against the modern view and we will surely find that the two ideas are in harmony. Every object can be viewed from two angles of static and dynamic in respect of regularity in dependent arising. Viewed in its static aspect an object is substance continuing on into another movement. This does not mean that regularity is purely static. Nothing is truly static in the world as reality is ceaseless, being dictated by physical necessity.

### 3. The essence of invariability

According to the general Buddhist view a physical phenomenon is a continuous series of events without ceasing. Any event in this infinite series has a two-way linkage, with the past and future. Buddhaghosa explains invariability (*anaññathatā*) as that which replaces traditional causal theory since there are no [causal] events or conditions that can said to be invariable. We talk about one event as cause and another as effect, on the basis of one preceding and a second succeeding. Tatia sees it as a stream where successor follows predecessor without break in continuity. This continuity is not a case of absolute identity or absolute utterness. When milk turns to curd there is causal continuity, but the curd is certainly not identical with the milk from which it is produced. Nor is it absolutely different either (Tatia 1976: 191). Invariability, as will be seen from the view of Tatia, is inextricably bound up with this concept of necessity in the dependent arising. Another example from Tatia explains it as, the absence of emergence of effects from factors,

other than their proper conditions (Tatia 1976: 180). In case the opinions of Buddhaghosa and Taita have caused confusion, I will endeavor to correct any mistaken idea that there is separation between events. For even if we put aside subjectivity of dependent arising, there is probably an objective sequence of happening in our conception of cause and effect. So, mere sequence cannot prevent this conclusion. And anyway, why should not there be dependent arising between two successive phenomenon such as day and night? Even the concept of invariability offers no escape from empirical dependent arising, because day and night and similar phenomena are instances of invariable sequence. Yet these events are never regarded as cause and effect. Here again, invariability of sequence is an inference from the uniformity of nature as a cause datum, which is anything but convincing. Meaningfully whereas causal datum suggests consistency it remains to be proved a logical possibility.

Now to examine Jayatilleka's view of Buddhaghosa's explanation of 'samuppāda':

The word denotes the presence of a plurality of conditions and their occurrence together (in bringing about a result). The 'samuppanna' means 'when arising, it arises together,' i.e. coordinately, not singly nor without a cause (*uppajjamāno ca saha sannā ca uppajjati na ekekato na pi ahetuto ti samuppanno*) (Jayatilleka 1980: 447).

Here also 'samuppanna' takes identical sets of conditions under which one of them is said to be behaving similarly to the other for reasons of mutual dependence. In this regard invariability may be understood as "whatever comes into being originates through conditions, and ceases when its conditions cease" (Bhikku Bodhi, 2). In this case we can assume that invariability can be applied to both body and mind in respect of the psychological sphere of active and reactive. For example, from the ceasing of that contact which makes for painful feeling, which had arisen because of the contact making for an appropriate experience in the relation of cause and effect. Yet, this elementary notion of cause and effect is quiet inconsistent



with a strictly causal scheme in the psychological sphere of active and reactive.

#### 4. The meaning of conditionality

According to the Buddha, where one factor acts and reacts upon the other and thereby limits the other, conditional dependent arising functions according to empirical causation. No single factor is mentioned as cause but numerous conditions are shown as operating together to bring about any particular effect. Therefore, the conditional notion of causation labors under a fundamental difficulty to explain how two independent moments, cause and effect, will always cooperate with each other. In order to find a solution to this problem the term *idappaccayatā* or conditionality, was conceived, to stand for empirical causal relation that is other than the one-sided causation according to reality from unreality. Such fundamental reality will be a creative and synthetic principle of causation according to relative reality when functions take place to cause and effect. Furthermore, the meaning of conditionality is serving as infrastructure for appearance and other relations between cause and effect. Consequently we can perceive that those relations are on one-side, relation between cause and effect, and on the other, are its own nature. We can acknowledge two independent entities as being cause and effect as they have at least some characteristics in common.

Thus, it is possible that a one-one correlation is established between the conditions through cause and their effect. Here, we may imply that all formulae related to dependent arising are specific applications under this principle of conditionality when applied to the phenomena of cause and effect only. The more important issue concerning the relationship between cause and effect is to identify a center for whatever designates causal genesis in dependent arising. Definitely we can say that causal genesis is probable as “the nature of things is little more than a definitely causal genesis” (Jayatileka 1980: 447). We can judge the terms of conditionality in a certain way by entirely universal characteristics marked by changes, phenomena, modes or

appearances, without the locus of reality that becomes or appears. In the *Saṃyutta-Nikāya* the Buddha makes a statement to the effect that:

What is dependent arising? Ageing and death are due to birth, whether Buddhas arise or not, this is the state of things. Stability of nature, pattern in nature, causality occur together (*katamo ca paṭiccasamuppādo? jātipaccayā jaramaranaṃ uppādā vā tathāgatānaṃ anuppādā vā tathāgatānaṃ, thitā va sā dhātu dhamma t̥thitatā dhammaniyāmatā idappaccayatā*) (SN I: 24).

In the above, birth is regarded as origination of existence. Simultaneously, ageing and death are actual states of arising and ceasing from the pattern of natural sequence or movement. Without doubt we see here that the Buddha realizes the law of causality in these events as these events are independently necessary and essential elements for dependent arising. Conditionality is emphasized throughout the Buddhist texts and this emphasis does not seem to be incidental but deliberate.

If we attempt to consider conditionality as effect of arising only, we must apply the two postulates: ‘the effect of what has already arisen, and the effect of what has not yet arisen.’ To unravel this further we must take a condition that reveals a necessary or invariably productive effect, such that absence will necessarily and invariably obstruct the effect from taking place. This is in contrast to an idea of cause, which must necessarily and invariably bring about effect, but this cause is a plurality of conditions (En. B, IV: 220). In summing up the discussion about this ontological problem; we know that conditionality can be equated with causal happening.

## II. Dependent Arising in the Theravāda View

In the previous section we discussed problems related to philosophical aspects and factors of dependent arising. Such problems naturally present themselves to us as we consider these ideas on the basis of existence. Having established that these factors of dependent arising are as they are

according to the nature of the world, the question remains as to the nature and function of the diversity of existence or nonexistence, as it constitutes a creation formula. This is an accurate principle as it at least has the ability to dispel the ignorance associated with the old, shrewd account of dependent arising. We enunciate dependent arising to account for each event in terms of the conditions of its occurrence. There is nothing at all in this world that is without dependent arising, that is not therefore, dependent in its existence as a consequence of something else.

According to the *Nikāya* causality is unable to get past their functional efficiency that obviously operates merely as: “the nature of things stands with causal elements, the nature of stability, the nature of causal orderliness and conditionality” (SN. I:24-25). This is quite similar to *Nikāya*’s analysis of causality, but is a little different from the *Āgama* wherein “the nature of causal law is always presenting the nature of stability (法住), emptiness (法空), sameness (法如), and the undifferentiated whole of things (法爾) respectively” (此等諸法, 法住法空法如法爾) (T.2.84b). Buddhism’s main interest is to solve the human problem of suffering and lead the way to enlightenment of all beings. The Buddha was not much concerned with defining nature itself, or with origins of the material world or individual life.

He recognized that everything in the world is in constant change, but where change occurs within a certain system. So, in relation to the theory of dependent arising, what implications might these considerations have on the ultimate nature of the physical universe, and more particularly on the issues between nominalistic or subjective empiricism and realistic or objective idealism? Here the main points to keep in mind are the Buddha’s teachings on the essential unity of dependent arising in existence and consistency in the laws of nature in all transformations. This is evident in the formulae concerning the nature of things, in the relationship between dependent arising on the basis of formation formulae on the one hand, and the various coordinates on the other. But if this were the case, if there was no element of truth in the way each set of coordinates describes the nature of things, from one point of view, dependent arising which unites all these descriptions

would have no significance. The fact is that specific numerical relations indicated by any causally chosen coordinate, and dependent arising which unites the infinitude of such relations, are each elements in logical analysis.

### 1. Theravāda doctrine and the theory of dependent arising

The ‘twelve-linked dependent arising’ (*dvadasanga paṭiccasamuppada*) is a foundational and essential Buddhist doctrine. It is considered the most significant and original teaching which illuminates understanding about how all events are conditioned, giving rise to other events through the formulaic succession. As previously mentioned, the Buddha was not interested in applying this teaching to explain natural phenomena. Essentially, his aim was to explain the three states of existence, i.e. sensual existence (*kāmaabhava*), fine material existence (*rūpabhava*) and formlessness (*arūpabhava*). In this regard, the twelve-links of dependent arising is the central point from which dynamic reality emerges from insubstantiality. The central point of dependent arising is to start from dynamic reality and progress ‘backwards’ to awareness of insubstantiality. Moreover, dependent arising theory interprets the origin of suffering in all its forms, so called, the nature of things (*dhammatā*). Thus, the twelve-linked chains of dependent arising are not the primal occurrence in the *Nikāya*. The Buddha’s standard distinction, besides setting a limit to uncertainty involved in an assessment, limited the scope of operation to the three factors of the six sense organs, actions or mental formations and ignorance. Why the Buddha omitted these three factors from standard dependent arising in the *Mahānidānasutta* is a deep question?

We have already discussed dependent arising according to the early Buddhist viewpoints. Similarly, Theravāda has offered a rational explanation with a detailed account of dependent arising. At the outset of this study of dependent arising, we note Buddhaghosa’s view, which is consistent with the original Theravāda view. Buddhaghosa closely follows and summarizes early Buddhist ideas about dependent arising in the text of *Visuddhimagga*. He offers a rational basis for his division by distinguishing four species of quality

in dependent arising. According to Buddhaghosa's classification there are four aspects of quality: (1) the wheel of Becoming, its essence or nature itself as intact, (2) the three times, its intrinsic principles of acting and receiving action arising from its time order, (3) cause and fruit, its deceptiveness of rebirth-linking affected by such action, (4) variousness, the determination of the quantity in a certain condition (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli 1991: 594-604). With regard to this analysis of dependent arising it is advisable that we summarize the conditions of efficiency, some points of which we have already mentioned and it is a subject extensively discussed in Buddhist texts. A full and detailed account of these conditions is outlined below:

#### A. The Concept of the wheel of becoming

The general view is that the cause of a thing does not enter the definition of a thing as a statement of its nature. This is a vital point where many Theravāda followers have gone astray. Theravādins insist that 'to be' is ignorance as such, defining ignorance as 'the act to being' in rational nature. Buddhaghosa, a representative Theravāda scholar, states:

When ignorance is established since it is present when its condition is present and when 'with ignorance as condition there is formation; with formations as condition, consciousness,' there is no end to the succession of cause with fruit in this way (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli 1991: 282).

Quotations from the above, this is a rejection of the Pakativādin view of the Saṃkhyas who similarly believe that 'the act to being' is the unifying principle of its nature (*prakṛti*). According to Johnston:

Prakṛti denotes the primitive or fundamental form of a thing, and so its essential or real form, its nature, the introduction of the term, therefore, seems to imply some degree of preoccupation with the problem of the nature of reality (Johnston 1974: 66).

The nature of reality is, therefore, the substance or nature of a being

which possesses that actuality of essence. In the entire Brahmanical speculation it is only the Saṃkhya who deny the existence of God. The classical Saṃkhya view therein avoids the two extremities of actor or agent. One extremity holds that union of the two characters is merely accidental between actor and agent while the other considers it to be a merging of the two kinds of nature into one trait, by mixing the two or one swallowing the other. Conversely, the main principle of classical Saṃkhya is (a) absorption of the inferior principles (*tattva*) into the superior ones and their emanation from them, (b) the existence of a subtle body consisting of the functions and potentialities of the individual, which accompanies the soul while it revolves on the wheel of transmigration (Johnston 1974: 81).

Buddhaghosa also mentioned that ignorance—and similarly the factors consisting of formations, etc—is neither self nor in self nor possessed of self. That is why this wheel of Becoming should be understood as a ‘void with a twelve-fold void’ (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli 1991: 596). In the above account we see that the formula of dependent arising is without peer to compare with the Saṃkhya concerning causal genesis. More empirically, also, we might add also that it is difficult to see a Saṃkhya notion of empirical dependent arising. Perhaps this is because their view of dependent arising was already partially informed by the theories of procession of each principle from a preceding one by modification (*tattavavikāra*) and manifold of phenomenal appearance (*guṇaparipīḍāma*) (Johnston 1974: 88). Johnston also mentions that the ever-varying proportions of the *guṇas* (objects of the senses) are responsible for manifold phenomenal appearances, and *satkārya*, the existence of effect in cause (Johnston 1974: 25).

#### B. The Concept of three times

In the Theravādin view, time is vital regarding the sequence of events in twelve linked-dependent arising. So even the Theravādins acknowledge time-order merely as a result in dependent arising. However, in this regard the division of three times is not experienced; ie. they are not real things and they are never present as components of experience. If we concede divisions



Present	-----	3. Consciousness
		4. Name and form
		5. Six sense organs
		6. Contact
		7. Feeling
		8. Desire
		9. Grasping
		10. Becoming
Future	-----	11. Birth
		12. Aging and death

### C. Concept of cause and fruit as theory of action

In an analytic composition we encounter an interesting phenomena that might be called cause and fruit in the sequence of dependent arising. Here, the meaning of cause in the concept of dependent arising (represented as the motive and fruit) is the result from previous active-process. The only way it is possible to see the relationship between cause and fruit in dependent arising is through insight from interaction; this is consistent with the doctrinal view of four noble truths. Curiously, most Mahāyānists hold this same view regarding the relationship (cause and fruit) between dependent arising and the four noble truths (T.26.921). Thus, this interactive doctrine excludes the possibility of making a reduction from psychological laws to laws of causality, because dependent arising establishes a certain limit in advance beyond which knowledge cannot go. Theravādins generally emphasize their differences from Sarvāstivādin views of dependent arising, they seldom acknowledge where there is agreement. But the Theravāda view on the ‘relationship between cause and fruit’ (業感緣起) is similar to the Sarvāstivādin view of causality as ‘cause and effect in the three periods’ (三世因果說). Here we elaborate on Buddhaghosa’s explanation of the relationship between cause and fruit: “(a) there were five causes in the past, (b) and now there is a fivefold fruit, (c) there are five causes now, (d) and in the future fivefold fruit” (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli 1991: 597). Then we can define instance (twelve linked dependent



arising in cause and fruit) in a way completely analogous to the above idea of verification:

<b>1. Previous Kamma-Process</b>	<b>➔</b>	<b>2. Present: Rebirth-linking Process</b>
<b>[Cause]</b>		<b>[Fruit]</b>
Ignorance		Consciousness
Action and Mental Formation		Name and Form
Desire		Six sense organs
Grasping		Contact
Becoming		Feeling
<hr/>		
<b>3. Present Kamma-Process</b>	<b>➔</b>	<b>4. Future: Rebirth-linking Process</b>
<b>[Cause]</b>		<b>[Fruit]</b>
Desire		Consciousness
Grasping		Name and Form
Becoming		Six sense organs
Ignorance		Contact
Action and Mental Formation		Feeling

From the Theravāda perspective, these conformations are necessary conditions in the relationship between cause and fruit in order to explain dependent arising. But as our critique of the Theravāda view of causal theory has already indicated, it is not sufficient to reach a general view of dependent arising as elaboration of Buddhaghosa's systemic view shows that new contradictions may arise in identification of any being in causal theory or conditional relations. Later we will demonstrate how dependent arising is the basic theory of relative conditions in Theravāda denotation.

### III. Other Concepts of Dependent Arising in Abhidhamma Schools

#### 1. The theory of dependent arising among the mahāsāṅghika

The theory of dependent arising is accepted by all Buddhist schools but there are varying interpretations. If we consider the early Buddhist view it was about external existence; although empirically, each such existent is

subject to change from moment to moment. This is known as ‘dependent arising’ in early Buddhism, where some elements are accompanied or followed by others. These elements do not necessarily sequentially influence one after another, yet when some are present they occasion others to appear simultaneously or in succession. Definitely all phenomena including material, mental or psycho-physical events in nature, are the result of a combination or disintegration of various elements according to laws of interconnection. The Mahāsāṅghikas (大衆部) had a slightly different but parallel view about phenomena to the Theravādins, in that they regarded each element by itself as constantly changing. However, both schools agreed upon the basic character of these real elements; their views only differing from an epistemological perspective.

#### A. Doctrine: early Mahāsāṅghika on the theory of dependent arising

In addition to the Theravāda’s view, we have the important philosophical doctrines on dependent arising of the first group of Mahāsāṅghikas. They divided objects of experience into a number of elements, which may be characterized as metaphysical realism. Their reason was to find a systematic expression of the undefined epistemological and metaphysical implications contained in the original teachings of the Buddha. Their view was based on the five skandhas or constituents of human personality. Each constituent was divided into a number of subdivisions, making the total number of elements or dharmas, both material and mental, to be forty-eight factors, with an additional nine in later differentiated doctrines (Dutt 1960: 71). This number rose to more than a hundred in the second group of Mahāsāṅghika. Hence, the early Mahāsāṅghika schools do not accept the Theravādin proposition that the elements, which give rise to various phenomena in mutual reaction, are real but transient. In fact, over time a tendency arose among followers of the realist school to regard the elements as more or less temporal, unfixed and changeable elements forming the basis of the world of phenomena. This view surpassed the original doctrine of thorough-going impermanence or momentariness suggested by early Buddhism.

And in this respect, the first group of Mahāsāṅghika contributed to a reassessment of the spirit of early Buddhism.

From the Mahāsāṅghika standpoint on the changing character of all phenomena, they ultimately gave idealistic color to their exposition of the nature of causality. For example, the Theravādins asserted that whereas aggregates are conditioned by ignorance, it should not however be said that ignorance is conditioned by aggregates. Commenting on this point the Mahāsāṅghikas state that ignorance (*avijja*) is directly the cause of mental formation (*samkhara*) and there is no bilateral relationship between two factors (Dutt 1960: 104). Associated and reciprocal relations between any two consecutive links of the chain of dependent arising have been entirely dealt with, showing clearly the attitude of the Theravādins to the problem. For this reason we generally cannot know an object as it is apart from its phenomenal appearances. These phenomena are in an unceasing process of change, apart from their phenomenal attributes and activities. Logically, the view of the first group of Mahāsāṅghikas regarding the relation of substance and its attributes implies that one phenomenon can be related to another in one way only. In order to correlate the Mahāsāṅghika view of 'one-way causality' we refer back to the Buddha's teaching where, in actual experience no object appears to have independent existence. There is only conditional existence, being dependent upon other existences that in turn, are similarly conditioned. This certainty of interdependency of objects is brought home to us in the Buddha's theory of dependent arising or origination, where an object can never be known as it is, nor can it be known by its relations, as relations can exist only between entities. This is true also in our own experience as we can never encounter a self-existent entity. So we find evidence for our view that change is everywhere in nature as well as in mind function and there can be no subsisting reality or entity in any changing phenomena. So, the first group of Mahāsāṅghika had a valuable idea concerning causality or dependent arising in the concept of self-existent entity.

B. Doctrine: second group of Mahāsāṅghika on the theory  
of dependent arising

From the second group of Mahāsāṅghika as Andhakas (案達羅) according to the *Kathavatthu*, we have a clear enunciation of spiritual idealism, identified with their conception of causality as ‘asamkhata’ or ‘unconditioned.’ The Andhakas held the view that there are some external or physical objects which are counterparts of ideas. Thus, we move in a world of ideas, and there is no reason to assume that there is another world of physical events corresponding to the world of ideas. So we cannot create our own ideas, but it seems to be forced upon us: (1) there is no intermediate state of existence, and (2) phenomena exist neither in the past nor in the future. Above two notions having no objective existence, come from the Andhakas. We know from physics, that form, color, sound, taste, smell etc. have no objective existence. They come into being when certain parts of the brain are affected by outside stimuli. Certainly what exists outside may be quite different from the perceived objects but unfortunately we have no means of knowing what the nature of objective stimuli really is. For all we know they may merely be events in space-time continuum, or ideas in universal nature. The Adhakas, perhaps finding no means of being sure about the nature of outer events, preferred the explanation that unconditioned beings are made of mind-stuff only. These mental ideas are considered to arise out of the ocean of universal consciousness like waves, and to disappear again into the same ocean.

On this point Mahāsāṅghika held the opposite view, (viz. eyes see colors, ears hear sounds etc.) by conceiving a pasada-cakkhu or ‘a subtle eye,’ which does not have power of reflection (*avajjana*) like the consciousness of eye (*cakkhuvinnana*) but possesses instead, the power of knowing (*patijānati*) objects (Dutt 1960: 120). Here, we consider the power of knowing objects is equal to the continuous flow of imagining, which arises like waves from ocean and vanishes again immediately in its infinity, as with various forms of individuals, things, events, qualities and phenomena. The Andhakas’ main tenet viewed as the repository of their causality or dependent arising. In its essential nature, it is pure but when it is agitated distinctions of subjects and

objects arise, although, according to the doctrine of dependent arising, in reality there are no such distinctions. The Andhakas pointed out the notion of unconditioned things (*asamkhata*), because they did not acknowledge separate links of dependent arising. They viewed dependent arising as unchangeable laws or conditions; (a) the origin of object through cause, and (b) the unchangeable nature, ie. undisturbed by appearance or disappearance and continuity (Dutt 1960: 122).

While these two modes of expression differ from the Andhakas view, the basic nature of one manifestation is the same as the other. In the doctrine of dependent arising, both are equally divine but expressed differently. For example, if we consider pots made of clay, the shapes may be different and they may be used for different purposes, but they are all made of clay. On this point the Andhakas also denied the indeterminable (*avyakatas*) due to the idea of pure absolute consciousness where unconscious tendencies are left behind as the effect of previous karma is extinguished. To return to our earlier example where world phenomena are sometimes compared to ocean waves, while no two waves are identical to each other they are of the same essence which remains unchanged whatever the forms and shapes assumed by the waves. Here, the Andhakas are concerned with the important problem of “whether the mind at the beginning was pure or not” (Dutt 1960: 123).

In the Andhaka view, mind is characterized by ceaseless and perpetual activity, whereas from another point of view it is conceived as being ‘above change.’ The Andhakas also emphasized being present in all phenomena, it is also a standard where all phenomena approach, which shows the transient character of all things; even the final basis of things. Even Dutt draws our attention to the fact that early Theravādins are decidedly of the opinion that the beginnings and ends of beings are unknowable. Thus, they do not actually go into the question of whether the mind is pure at any time before emancipation. However, the second group of Mahāsāṅghikas fully developed this theory in the later idealistic Yogācāra school of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The Yogācāra school merely constructs the notion of ‘above change,’ as a ‘storehouse of pure consciousness’ (*alayavijñāna*) that is expressed with

worldly objects through the faculty of consciousness and mentally creates a world around it.

## 2. Mahīsāsaka doctrine on the theory of dependent arising

The Mahīsāsakas (化地部) make a nominal distinction between their view and that of the Theravādins in that a subject is distinct from its becoming through existence. Based on their explanations we must infer some sort of distinction between a subject and its becoming. Because of a kind of distinction between simplicity and complexity, we propose that Mahīsāsakas deny the view of cause and fruit accepted by Theravādins. According to the Mahīsāsakas, the real distinction of a subject from its becoming is often propounded as a distinction between insubstantial being (*anatta*) and substantial being (*atta*). This kind of concept reflects the ontological status of potency and action. Perhaps this Mahīsāsaka manner of expression underlies the real distinction, ie. as a distinction between adequate concepts differs from the real distinction which is a difference between ‘is’ and ‘is not.’ At any rate, the expression, ‘adequate concepts,’ does not seem useful at a particular time as they are subject to disintegration, but not the dhamma themselves (Dutt 1960: 159). We started earlier, to explain the Mahīsāsaka’s view of existential dependent arising, which is slightly different in view of the Theravāda and Mahāsāṅghika. It would be strange indeed if we ended our explanation with the idea that a subject of becoming is, but a subject itself is not becoming, different in itself. But this is exactly what is propounded by those who distinguish between subject and becoming as one mode of being. Mahīsāsaka therefore denied past and future in existence, only accepting present and nothingness in existence (Dutt 1960: 161). Even the Sarvāstivādins admit impermanence (*anityatā*) of the constituents, they contend that the dhamma or bhāvas of the past is transmitted into the present and likewise the dhamma of the future is latent in the present. Both of these traditions have an element of truth, but they also both err badly. First, it is ridiculous to say that physical things do not persist through time—that an object observed at one

time can never in any literal sense to be the same object as one served at another time.

Furthermore, according to Dutt's account, a being is composed of five dharmas, viz., (i) mind (*citta*), (ii) mental states (*caitasika*), (iii) matter (*rūpa*), (iv) states independent of the mind (*visaṃprayuktasaṃskāra*), and (v) the unconditioned (*asaṃskṛtas*) (Dutt 1960: 162-163). On this point we consider that the five dharmas (not elements as usually understood) persist in a being, as the present being, from the results of the past, and potentiality of the future. This is the same with the status of being or existence in dependent arising. It is self-evident in existential dependent arising that the existent are caused or not caused. The existence of factors in the twelve-linked dependent arising could not be either caused or uncaused, but neither can we know which it is, caused or uncaused, until we examine it in detail.

Concerning causality by the groups of causal factors according to Mahīśāsakas, there is nothing in the status of existence that demands it be caused or uncaused; no more than does anything in the nature of number demand that it be odd or even. In this view of causality, all that is required for existence to be existent is that it exists, actually or possibly.

In the Mahīśāsaka's view of causality one does not necessarily find the reason why there is existence, not necessarily a principle of being. So causality is a principle of caused being, not a principle of being, and this view that a being is caused must be proved by the Mahīśāsaka. For example, the Vaibhāṣika Sarvāstivāda holds that if causes (like seed) were to continue to be present in unmodified form, effect (sprout) could not be produced. The seed has to cease to be before a sprout can emerge (Murti 1955: 173). Furthermore, Murti states that dependent arising in the theory of Vaibhāṣika (毘婆沙) is a matter of 'cooperative action' (*pratyayas*) rather than self-becoming. If we consider the view of causality adopted by the Mahīśāsakas, they are led here to the theory of causality; together to cause something to happen from the conventional point of view, but then other factors tie these all together (Murti 1955: 175).

From the various tenets held by the Mahīśāsaka, the becoming being

could be identical with itself according to various causes. On the point of causality Mahīśāsaka mentioned that the very action or mental formation is the end of momentariness. Within the limited context of identity in causal theory, Savāstivāda (a sect branch from Mahīśāsaka) said that the law of causality is undoubtedly constituted (Dutt 1960: 182). On this point there is inscription evidence on a relic-casket which mentions the twelve-linked causality (Hazra 1984: 154)

We suggest therefore, that the Savāstivāda followed the earliest teachings regarding the law of causality or dependent arising. But they seem to translate a fairly easy and adequate way to measure the doctrine of dependent arising into complex abstract patterns. We consider that the Mahīśāsaka have a role in determining causality, in relation to the concept from nonexistence (*anatta*) to existence (*atta*) by comparing it to the doctrine of dependent arising known as ‘vitalism’ which is based on transmigration. This does not imply that the causal mechanism in all possible creatures must be the same.

### 3. Doctrine of Vajjiputtaka and the theory of dependent arising

In order to put our minds at ease concerning insubstantial being, we must see clearly how transmigration is responsible for contradictions among the Vajjiputtaka (犢子部). The Vajjiputtaka view of dependent arising is also unclear with respect to the theoretical history of Buddhist philosophy. We already recognize the basic error that gave rise to the problem of insubstantiality, with all of its pitfalls. The mistake is in considering ‘mind-body relation’ as something real, possessing inherent spatial extension, according to the doctrine of dependent arising. It was only through a comparison of all Buddhist philosophies that the source of identity was uncovered.

Before we consider dependent arising, we should consider that the cause of transmigration takes effect in the idea of personal being. It is also sufficiently identified with the doctrine of dependent arising by means of personality when we point out the fundamental difference between mental and



physical. That things, as different as body and mind relations, could act on one another, is totally incompatible with the concept of dependent arising.

Thus, there were two domains of reality between both, and no one knew how to build a bridge between them. No one was willing to assume that body and mind coexist as two absolutely separate entities having nothing to do with each other. The Sautrantika view of the relation of 'mind-body' in the constituents is explained by the simile of fire and fuel. Dutt states that fire exists as long as the fuel lasts, so the 'reality of mind-body relation' exists so long as there are constituents (*skandhas*). But fire is different from fuel inasmuch as it has the power of burning an object or producing light, which fuel by itself does not possess. Fire and fuel are coexistent, and the latter is a support of the former and one is not wholly different from the other; fuel is not wholly devoid of the fiery element (*tejas*). In the same way 'reality of mind-body' stands in relation to the constituents of a being (Dutt 1960: 297).

In the example of a and b, where one or both are entities which do not involve temporal reference, then no distinction can be made due to logical identity in dependent arising. Nevertheless, if we were to ask how one can know that a=b, in regard to this the Vajjiputtaka posit the existence of a soul, that is not eternal and changeless throughout all its existence but which continues to exist along with the constituents of a being. Perhaps these Vajjiputtaka principles are the most important in comparison with Sarvāstivāda, for we know that Sarvāstivādins have said that things must be of the same kind in order to act on one another in different time-sequences.

Conversely, Vajjiputtakas have the opinion that the most disparate things stand in a relation of dependency to one another and thus interact with one another. And even if experience did not show this relation, there is surely nothing in the concept of interaction to confine its applicability to things of the same kind. In analyzing causality or dependent arising, the Vajjiputtakas had a serious obstacle to the existence of casual relation through elemental constituents. The Vajjiputtaka view concerning the theory of reality of mind-body relation is that it is neither caused and conditioned nor it is like

nibbana, uncaused and unconditioned; again it is neither constituted being nor unconstitutional being (Dutt 1960: 296). At this point we begin to see that the ‘reality of mind-body relation’ is to blame for the genesis of the problem among them. But at first the real interconnection between caused and uncaused was not properly understood by Vajjiputtaka as they regarded the concept of ‘reality of mind-body relation’ as insignificant. The different putative sayings of the Buddha are evident in Vajjiputtaka views concerning the ‘reality of mind-body relation’: (1) there are four pairs of (saintly) persons or eight (saintly) persons, (2) a sotāpanna has to be reborn seven times at most to put an end to his sufferings (i.e., attain full emancipation); this is expressed in the Buddha’s statement, (3) the cycle of existence of a being is without any beginning, i.e. the beginning is not apparent for beings entangled in desires, and lastly (4) the Buddha very often spoke of the acquisition of higher powers or knowledge, one of which was the power to remember one’s previous existence (Dutt 1960: 299-300).

In a different way, the conjunction of these last three clauses mentioned by the Buddha gives us a more or less traditional analysis of memory. We can find many other examples in Kimura that at first appear to be examples of memory of past existence. Apparently all other Buddhist sects have objected to the memory of past existence, but perhaps these objections of memory can be easily satisfied by modifying the previous awareness condition to require implicit knowledge rather than explicit knowledge. So we can see that the Vajjiputtakas concede memory of past existence. Such memory is not possible for the constituents which change every moment, and moreover undergo drastic change when passing from death to rebirth (Kimura 1937: 300). In this analysis causal requirement has been the subject of much debate. Most Buddhist sects reject it on the grounds that memory is not acquisition of new knowledge but rather, retention of old knowledge; as such knowledge is not caused anew by anything. But this objection misses the target as far as the causal clause in the analysis of memory goes. Therefore, we feel that it is more essential to study the theory, i.e. reality of mind-body relation without prejudice.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Now, we conclude with the stages of dependent arising, grouped and classified by a number of Abhidhamma schools according to their different types of relations. In order to discern dependent arising in its original and genuine form, we must of course consider it in all its breadth and in the full diversity of its possible aspects in Abhidhamma philosophy.

In summary, we consider the category of dependent arising as the only classification, or as the truly constitutive category for all empirical existence and events. It is thus built into our very concept of a law of nature that such a structure of dependent arising must correspond to universal generalization claimed to possess nomic necessity rather than the possibility of accidental status. Not every empirical nexus can be mediately or immediately dissolved into a causal nexus; rather, there are certain basic forms of combination, which can only be understood if we resist the temptation to dissolve them into dependent arising. The reason is that the existence of unreal possibilities is limited by their status as objects of phenomena, so that their existential status is relatively dependent in an ontological sense. As for ontological consideration, it has been forced to recognize more and more clearly in the course of its history that this relationship cannot simply be categorized as conditional phenomena. So the history of ontology shows us clearly that every conceptual attempt has had to describe dependent arising in relation to cause and effect, which has given rise to inextricable difficulties.

An outline of causal factors highlights the fact that possibilities do not exist in some subsistent realm that is wholly independent on causality or dependent arising. Thus, we consider that dependent arising, as accepted by all Abhidhammic schools, is a conception of a purely practical relation, which can be applied both between phenomenal things and as dependent arising in the noumenon. For dependent arising is based upon and is a derivative of real functional potentiality represented by suffering, and it reflects the attitude resulting from the purely expressive phenomenon that follows from a theorization by the Buddha.

This however, is not a matter of what causal law states, but of what is to be done with it, and so its lawfulness does not inhere in the meaningful statement. Therefore, long before the beginning of any formal metaphysics, before the time of the Buddha, dependent arising did not possess a radical sharpness to give rise to questions. The reality of a phenomenon can be conditioned from its representative function; the idea of dependent arising changes as soon as it implies something different, as soon as it points to another total complex as its background. It is not mere abstraction to attempt to detach the phenomena from the phenomenon, or merely from this involvement to apprehend it as an independent something outside of, and preceding any function of indication. Without the assumption of the existence of evidential elements or their dependent arising, all common sense, as well as scientific assertion, becomes not simply false but meaningless. So it is necessary to explain natural events, to believe that nothing can ever happen except the chain of dependent arising which is adequately described by the commonly accepted laws of regularities. This axiomatic analogy holds that dependent arising is essentially analogous with the axioms in a formalized system, when these considerations are largely pragmatic in nature and have to do with the way generalization in certainty fits into our picture or context.

## Glossary of Chinese Terms

(K=Korean, C=Chinese)

Anaññathatā 不異如性

Andhakas 案達羅

Avitathatā 不離如性

Idappaccayatā 此緣性

Mahīsāsakas 化地部

Paṭīccasamuppāda 緣起法

Paṭīccasamuppannā dhamma 緣生法

Tathatā 法爾性

Vajjiputtaka 犢子部

## Abbreviations

- DN *Dighanikaya*. Trans. by T. W. Rhys Davids and J. E. Carpenter, London: PTS, 1890-1911.
- En. B *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, Ed. by G.P. Malalasekera, Government of Srilanka, 1961-90.
- SN *Samyuttanikaya*. Trans. by L. Feer, London: PTS, 1884-1904.
- T *Taisho shinshu daizokyo* (大正新修大藏經: *Japanese Edition of the Buddhist Canon*), Ed. by Takakasu, Junjiro, et al (高楠順次郎). Tokyo: Taisho Issaikyo Kankokai, 1924-1935.

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