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**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THEORIES OF
PERCEPTION IN SARVĀSTIVĀDA AND
SAUTRĀNTIKA**

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Abstract

The Sarvāstivāda assumed that perception (*buddhi*) is a direct process, while the Sautrāntika believed that the object is perceived indirectly. My hypothesis is that the root reason for their disagreement on how to perceive the external object arises from ontology. The Sarvāstivāda recognized “tri-temporal existence”, while the Sautrāntika insisted that the past and the future do not actually exist. This paper finds that their ontological theories can be conversely justified from an epistemological perspective. The Sarvāstivāda assumed that the physical assemblage (和集 (*saṃcaya*) of atoms (*paramāṇu*) can be directly perceived, and refined the theory of presentational perception by proposing “simultaneous causality” (*sahabhū-hetu*) and three kinds of “direct perception” (*pratyakṣa*). The Sautrāntika, on the other hand, based on the “pursuant element” (*anudhātu*), proposed the theory of “consciousness having representational form (*ākāra*)”. Therefore, the cognition of the external object is indirect, and the direct object of cognition is the unified complex (和合 (*sāmagrī*) atoms, by which the Sautrāntika refined its theory of representational perception.

Keywords: Perception, *saṃcaya*, *Sahabhūhetu*, *Pratyakṣa*, *Anudhātu*, *Ākāra*, *sāmagrī*

Introduction

The right perception (*buddhi*) can destroy our distortion of view, thus extinguishing ignorance (*avidyā*) and achieving liberation. Therefore, epistemology has always been given importance in Buddhism. However, the topic of perception has not attracted much attention from contemporary scholars. This paper draws mainly on the literature of the Sarvāstivāda. On the one hand, there are few Sautrāntika texts, and on the other hand, the Sarvāstivāda texts contain many of the main ideas of the Sautrāntika. The views of the two schools on epistemology are to be reconstructed from material scattered in the canonical texts and this paper seeks to clarify a thread of the epistemology of the two schools and to conduct a comparative study. The main contribution of this paper is to reproduce the epistemological system of the two schools putting into logical form.

Because of “tri-temporal existence”, the Sarvāstivāda believed that the external object can be directly perceived. The simultaneous presence of faculty, object, and consciousness makes it necessary to establish “simultaneous causality” (*sahabhū-hetu*). Since the Sarvāstivāda did not recognize the self-cognition (*sva-saṃvedana*) of consciousness, three kinds of “direct perception” (*pratyakṣa*) must be established to complete its system of cognition. The Sautrāntika acknowledged the nonexistence of the past and the future, prompting the necessity of establishing the theory of “consciousness having representational form (*ākāra*)” based on the “pursuant element” (*anudhātu*). In this way, the Sautrāntika can also justify the process of cognition on the premise of self-cognition of consciousness.

This paper seeks to answer the following questions:

- (1) What is the fundamental reason for the disagreement between the Sarvāstivāda and the Sautrāntika on the perception of the external object?
- (2) How did the Sarvāstivāda's theory that consciousness must have an object and the Sautrāntika's theory that consciousness arises without a perceptual object evolve?
- (3) The external object is composed of atoms, and according to the Sarvāstivāda view on existence, the external object should be considered as having only nominal existence. Accordingly it is questioned as to why the external object should have the actual effect of generating consciousness?
- (4) Since the Sarvāstivāda did not recognize self-cognition, what should be considered as being productive of the explicit awareness of consciousness?
- (5) The Sautrāntika believed that when consciousness arises, the object has already been extinguished into the past, so how does present consciousness cognize the object in the past?

1. Perception and Existence

2.1 Sarvāstivāda Theory of Actual Existence and Nominal Existence

It is said that the three times are real, as are the essences of phenomena. The Sarvāstivāda asserted that all dharmas have intrinsic nature and that the dharmas of past, present, and future all exist. Then, how is it to be judged whether the dharmas actually exist (*dravyato'sti*) or nominally exist

(*prajñaptito 'sti*)? According to the descriptions of Saṃghabhadra in Ny, the way the Sarvāstivāda discerned actual existence (*sad-bhāva*) or nominal existence (*prajñapti-sat*) of dharmas is by analyzing them and seeing whether there exists perception.

“As the aggregates of compounded form are broken into subtle parts, the perception of them is nonexistent (*nāsti*). Thus, like vases and so forth, they are called conventional truth (*saṃvṛti-satya*). It is not that the clay fragments and suchlike of broken vases can give rise to perception again. Although something aggregated is broken into many, the perception isn't nonexistent like that of water and so forth.

The thing is also called conventional truth if the perception is nonexistent after its remainders are analyzed by superior wisdom (*jaya-mati*). It is not that water and so forth being analyzed into form (*rūpa*) can give rise to the perception of water and so forth again. When those things are not broken and analyzed, they are called conventional truth, for they are nominally existent by conventional designation (*prajñapta*). According to conventional principles, it's said that there are vases and so forth that are true, but not false, and can be called conventional [truth], for they are existent according to conventional principles.”¹

¹ Ny, 666a 谓且于色诸和合聚破为细分, 彼觉便无, 名世俗谛, 犹如瓶等。非破瓶等为瓦等时, 复可于中生瓶等觉。有和合聚虽破为多, 彼觉非无犹如水等。若以胜慧析除余法, 彼觉方无亦世俗谛。非水等被慧析除色等时, 复可于中生水等觉故。于彼物未破析时以世想名施设为彼施设有, 故名世俗。依世俗理说有瓶等, 是实非虚名世俗谛, 如世俗理说有故。

“If the thing differs from this, it is called the ultimate truth (*paramārtha-satya*). It means that the perception is not nonexistent after it is broken and its remainders are analyzed by wisdom (*prajñā*). It is called the ultimate truth, for the perception still exists like form (*rūpa*) and so forth. After thing like form, is broken down into subtle parts and gradually dismantled to atoms (*paramāṇu*), or analyzed to sensations such as taste (*rasa*), the perception of form and so forth remains as it always exists. Feeling (*vedanā*) and so forth are likewise, but they are not form (*rūpa*), for they have no subparts and can't be broken up and dismantled into atoms. Still, it's possible to analyze them with wisdom up to an instant (*kṣaṇa*) or analyze other dharmas like ideation (*saṃjñā*), and the perception of feeling and so forth remain as they always exist.

These actually exist, so they are called ultimate [truth], for their essence is always present at all times. According to the ultimate principle, it's said that there is form and so forth that are true, but not false, and can be called ultimate [truth], for they are existent according to ultimate principles.”²

It can be seen that the method of determining the actual existence or nominal existence of the dharmas (in this case, the conventional truth and the ultimate truth) is based on the decomposition or rational analysis of things, and

² Ny, 666a 若物异此,名胜义谛。谓彼物觉,彼破不无,及慧析余。彼觉仍有,名胜义谛,犹如色等。如色等物,碎为细分渐渐破析乃至极微,或以胜慧析除味等,彼色等觉如本恒存。受等亦然但非色法。无细分故不可碎彼,以为细分乃至极微。然可以慧析至刹那,或可析除余想等法,彼受等觉如本恒存。此真实有故名胜义。以一切时体恒有故,依胜义理说有等,是实非虚名胜义谛。如胜义理说为有故。

on whether the subject's initial sensation or impression disappears or changes after the analysis.

From the epistemological standpoint, the Sarvāstivāda stated that the existent things can be divided into two categories: things of cooperation of causes and conditions (*hetupratyaya-sāmagrī*), and ultimate elements. When a compound, like a vase, is analyzed by wisdom or broken into pieces by external force, its characteristic disappears. For example, when water and fire are analyzed as described above, the initial sensation or impression of them disappears, and they are therefore said to be of nominal existence.

These things, material compounds that are nominally established can be referred to as conventional existence. Ultimate existence is the opposite of conventional existence. The external object (*bāhya-viṣaya*), can be subdivided eventually into an atom; or an infinite division of the internal mind is only a thought of an instant.

If the characteristic of a thing is not lost through destruction by force or inference with superior wisdom, and the thing in itself can still be perceived, i.e., the initial sensation and impression are not lost, then there is an identity in this thing and its components, and this is ultimate existence.

In brief, the Sarvāstivāda's view of "existence" is based on the intrinsic nature that cannot be analyzed through wisdom or dismantled by force. When form (*rūpa*) is analyzed to an atom, and the mind (*citta*) is analyzed to an instant, there is still a perception of these dharmas' intrinsic nature. Thus, these dharmas can be determined as ultimate existence.

The Sarvāstivāda decided that the external atom is as real as the instant

of the inner mind. The general characteristics of the compound of things, once analyzed, have no intrinsic nature, so it is the conventional truth. This is the significance of the Two Noble Truths in the Sarvāstivāda's epistemology.

2.2 Sautrāntika Theory of Actual Existence and Nominal Existence

On the other hand, the Sautrāntika's view of the actual existence or nominal existence is also dependent on the distinction between conventional truth and ultimate truth. Ny described this view of the master of the Sautrāntika, Śrīlāta as follows.

“If many things are designated as existence, they are called the conventional [truth]. If only one thing is designated as existence, it is called the ultimate [truth]. And when the dharma that is perceived is separated and this dharma loses its original name, it is called conventional [truth]; when the dharma that is perceived is separated and this dharma does not lose its original name, it is called ultimate [truth].”³

The Sautrāntika distinguished between the actual existence, or nominal existence of the dharmas (the two truths) by setting up two main criteria: The first depends on whether the constituent elements of the dharma are one or many. The dharma that consists of many elements is called conventional truth, while the intrinsic nature of the dharmas is called ultimate truth. The second is that what is cognized by us generally is the phenomenon of concordance, and this

³ Ny, 666a 若于多物施设为有名为世俗，但于一物施设为有名为胜义。又细分别所目法时便失本名，名为世俗；若细分别所目法时不失本名，名为胜义。

phenomenon nominally posited is conventional truth. If one inspects the intrinsic nature of dharma through superior wisdom, the dharma that loses its name is the conventional truth and the dharma that does not lose its name is the ultimate truth.

In addition, the Sautrāntika only discussed the actual existence or nominal existence in the context of the Three Noble Truths, namely the Truth of suffering, the Truth of the cause of suffering, and the Truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering. It is assumed that the Truth of the cessation of suffering, namely the unconditioned dharma, is only the negation of existence and has no reality. Ny described this as follows.

“The three Noble Truths are available for conventional and ultimate [truth]. It is said that the Truth of suffering is assumed to be conventional, but the reality on which it is based is ultimate and so are the Truth of the cause of suffering and the Truth of the path of the cessation of suffering... Only the Truth of the cessation is ineffable (*anabhilāpya*), like karmic indeterminacy (*avyākṛta*) that cannot be said to exist.”⁴

It can be known that the Sautrāntika discussed “existence” in the context of the Four Noble Truths, while it limited the scope to the Three Noble Truths, and considered that there is no such thing as “existence” in the Truth of the cessation of suffering because this Truth is ineffable (*anabhilāpya*).

⁴ Ny, 666a 三谛皆通世俗胜义。谓一苦谛，假是世俗，所依实物名为胜义。集谛、道谛，例亦应然。…唯灭谛体不可说故，同诸无记，不可说有。

2. The Mind and the Perceptual Object

3.1 Sarvāstivāda theory of Consciousness Having an Object

The “tri-temporal existence” is the foundational topic of the Sarvāstivāda. The Vaibhāṣika argued that all *viṣaya-s* are actual existences. The Ny stated,

“whatever that does not fall outside the object-domain of [sensory] consciousness, visual, etc. exists truly.”⁵ “Whatever that is conceptually real (*prajñaptito'sti*) can only be the perceptual object (*ālambana*) of mental consciousness.”⁶ From epistemology, one of the seven fundamental treatises of the Sarvāstivāda, VKŚ states, “In line with the Buddha’s teachings, consciousness must have an object. The fact that we can cognize the past and the future is the proof that the past and the future exist.”⁷

The AKB summarizes them into four major arguments including two teachings and two principles. One of the teachings is, “The Sūtra says that consciousness arises from two conditions. What are the two? It refers to the visual faculty (*caḥsur-indriya*) and visual object (*rūpa-viṣaya*), and it’s explained in detail up to the mind (*manas*) and mental dharma (*dharmadhātu*).”⁸ One of the principles is, “When consciousness arises, there must be an object. It is said that there must be an object for consciousness to arise, and

⁵ Ny, 472b “谓若不越眼等识境，皆是实有。”

⁶ Ny, 536a “以诸假有唯是意识所缘境界。”

⁷ VKŚ, 535a “谓，契经中世尊善语善词善说，为本鱼师莎底苾刍说言：苾刍！由彼彼因、由彼彼缘，发生于识。识既生已，堕彼彼数。由眼及色，发生于识。识既生已，堕眼识数。由耳、鼻、舌、身、意及法，发生于识。识既生已，堕意识数。”

⁸ AKB, 104b 契经说，识二缘生，其二者何？谓眼及色，广说乃至意及诸法。

if there is none, it does not arise.”⁹ Both of them identify the same issue that consciousness must have a perceptual object. Since it is possible to cognize the events of the past and the future, therefore, the past and the future actually exist.

3.2 Controversies

3.2.1 Vibhajyavādins, Early Dārṣṭāntika and Vaibhāṣika

Contrary to the Sarvāstivāda position, the Vibhajyavādins¹⁰ denied that the past and the future exist, and decided that only the present actually exists. Moggaliputta Tissa, a proponent of the Vibhajyavādins said, “The mind without a perceptual object (*asad-ālambanaṃ cittam*) is definitely existent. What is it? It’s the mind cognizing the past or the future.”¹¹ Therefore, starting from the same cognition of the past and the future, the Sarvāstivāda argued that consciousness must have the perceptual object, while Sautrāntika verified the mind without the perceptual object.

Like the Vibhajyavādins saying that there is mind without a perceptual object, the early Dārṣṭāntika¹² (Metaphorist) from Sarvāstivāda accepted the

⁹ AKB, 104b 识起时必有境故。谓必有境，识乃得生，无则不生。

¹⁰ Due to contradictory information from different sources, it is difficult to discern who exactly are the Vibhajyavādins. Cousins (2001) has recently argued that it refers to “the Mahimsāsaka, Dhammaguttaka, Kassapiya and Tambapaṇṇiya branches of the ancient Theriyas”. The reference to MVŚ reveals that it can be inferred without unfairness that the Vibhajyavādins refer generally to those who did not agree with the Vaibhāṣikas. See La Vallée Poussin 1988-1990: 38-41, Yinshun 1992: 408-468, and the entry “Vibhajyavāda” in the *Zhōng huá fó jiào bǎi kē quán shū*.

¹¹ VKŚ, 535a 无所缘心，决定是有。何者是耶？谓缘过去，或缘未来。

¹² See Dhammajoti, K.L., *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, 2015: 84.

In the time of MVŚ, the early Dārṣṭāntikas who were the sūtradhara-s, with Dharmatrāta and Buddhadeva as the most eminent, also constituted a school of thought within the fold of the Sarvāstivāda.

existence of the mind without a perceptual object. They questioned the theory that all cognitions have perceptual objects by giving examples such as “mirror image”, “sound of the valley”, and “*satkāya-dr̥ṣṭi*”.

“The face doesn’t enter the mirror, and the mirror isn’t in the face. How can there be an image of a face on a mirror that comes into existence?”¹³

“Because of the momentary nature (Tib. *skad cig ma nyid*) of all sounds, here they arise, and here they cease. In a moment, it’s naturally produced and then ceases. How can it cause the valley and so forth to make a sound?”¹⁴ “*Satkāya-dr̥ṣṭi* is clinging to ‘self and what belongs to self’ (*ātma-ātmiya*). In the ultimate truth, there’s no ‘self and what belongs to self’. They’re like a person who sees a rope and thinks it’s a snake, and who sees a stump and thinks it’s a human being. Since it is the same, there is no perceptual object.”¹⁵

Vaibhāṣika (the specialist in the Abhidharma) of the Sarvāstivāda refuted the mind without a perceptual object as follows. For the question of the mirror, Vaibhāṣika replied, “it actually exists, for it is what the eye sees, what the sensory consciousness cognizes, and what the field of the visible form (*rūpa-āyatana*) includes. ... There arise images through the cognition on water, mirror, human faces and so forth, and these are actual existence, for they serve

¹³ MVŚ, 390c 面不入镜，镜不在面。如何镜上有面像生？

¹⁴ MVŚ, 390c 一切音声，刹那性故，于此处生，即此处灭。刹那顷生，自然即灭，如何能至谷等生响？

¹⁵ MVŚ, 36a 萨迦耶见计我我所；于胜义中，无我我所。如人见绳谓是蛇，见机谓是人等。此亦如是，故无所缘。

as the perceptual object (*ālambana*) that can give rise to perception.”¹⁶ For the question of the sound of the valley, Vaibhāṣika replied, “it actually exists, for it is what the ear hears, and what the auditory consciousness cognizes, and what the field of sound (*śabda-āyatana*) includes. ... There arises sound through the cognition on sound, valley and so forth, and these are actual existence, for they serve as the perceptual object (*ālambana*) that can give rise to perception.”¹⁷ For the question of “*satkāya-dṛṣṭi*”, the Vaibhāṣika replied, “*satkāya-dṛṣṭi* cognizes the five aggregates of grasping and images ‘self and what belongs to self’. It is like the rope and stump are cognized mistakenly as snake and human being. This is a mistaken perception of the form (*ākāra*) in regard to objects, rather than that it is without a perceptual object, for the five aggregates of grasping actually exist.”¹⁸ It can be seen that the Sarvāstivāda’s refutation of the mind without a perceptual object is still based on the fact that “there exists perception”.

3.2.1.1 *Ākāra*

What is noteworthy here is the Sarvāstivāda’s understanding of the nature of form (*ākāra*). In the tradition of the Sarvāstivāda, we initially note that the Sarvāstivāda masters gave various interpretations of the *ākāra*.

¹⁶ MVŚ, 390c 此是实有，是眼所见，眼识所缘，色处摄故。... 缘水镜等及人面等，有影像生，非不实有；所生影像，能为所缘，生觉念故。

¹⁷ MVŚ, 390c 此是实有；是耳所闻，耳识所缘，声处摄故。... 缘声及缘谷等，而有响生，非不实有；能为所缘，生觉念故。

¹⁸ MVŚ, 36a 萨迦耶见，缘五取蕴，计我我所。如缘绳、杌，谓是蛇、人。行相颠倒，非无所缘；以五取蕴是实有故。

“Question: What is the intrinsic nature of the so-called “*ākāra*”?”

Answer: The intrinsic nature is wisdom (*prajñā*). We should know that wisdom (*prajñā*) is the *ākāra*. It is also what cognizes with a form (*ākārayati*), and what is cognized with a form (*ākārayate*). Although the mind and mental factors (*citta-caitta-dharmas*) corresponding to wisdom (*prajñā*) are not *ākāra*, it is both what cognizes with a form (*ākārayati*) and what is cognized with a form (*ākārayate*). The *citta-viprayuktāḥ* of wisdom (*prajñā*) and other existent dharmas, while being neither *ākāra* nor what cognizes with a form (*ākārayati*) are what is cognized with a form (*ākārayate*).”¹⁹

It is clear that the orthodox view of Sarvāstivāda is that the *ākāra* is *prajñā* because *prajñā* is interpreted as the role of selection (*pravīcaya*)²⁰ acting on the objects. It is essentially in line with the definition of wisdom as “selection”. But the selection acting on the objects can be right or wrong. Therefore, when one misunderstands the rope as a snake or the five aggregates as *pudgala*, it is a mistaken perception of the form (*ākāra*) in regard to objects. But the perceptual object, the rope, and the five aggregates in this case, for instance, exist and they are not nonexistent.

¹⁹ MVŚ 408c 问言行相者自性是何。答自性是慧。应知此中慧是行相。亦是能行亦是所行。与慧相应心心所法虽非行相而是能行亦是所行。与慧俱有不相应行，及余有法虽非行相亦非能行而是所行。

²⁰ MVŚ 161c 择者谓慧。

3.2.2 Sautrāntika-Dārṣṭāntika and Master of the Nyāyanusāra-śāstra

The Sautrāntika-Dārṣṭāntika inherited the position of the early Dārṣṭāntika from Sarvāstivāda and used the examples of perception (*buddhi*) of human, fire wheel, self-perception (*ātma-buddhi*) and illusion to prove “mind without a perceptual object”. Saṃghabhadra refuted each of them in Ny as follows, and further argued that consciousness must have the perceptual object.

“For example, when in the far distance or dark, after seeing a form (*rūpa*) of a stump in the world, the perception of a human then arises. One makes the following statement, ‘Now, I’ve seen a human being.’ It’s not that the person that is seen has little substance. It’s not that the perception arises without a perceptual object, for the form of the stump serves as the perceptual object. If not, why wouldn’t this perception of a person also arise in a place where the stump is absent?”²¹

“The principle of the perception of the revolving fire wheel should also be the same case. It means that the perception of the [fire] wheel doesn’t arise entirely without an object. That is, the colour of fire quickly circles around in other directions and serves as the perceptual object. However, the substance of fire colour is not really a wheel. And it is called a wheel when the perception arises. This is a mistaken perception of the form (*ākāra*) regarding objects. It is not that this perception of the

²¹ Ny, 623b 如世间，于远暗处，见机色已，便起人觉；作如是说，我今见人。非所见人，少有实体。非所起觉，缘无境生，即以机色为所缘故。若不尔者，何不亦于无机等处，起此人觉？

wheel arises in response to the absence of an object.”²²

“It means that this self-perception is conditioned by form and other aggregates as objects. It’s only the mistaken perception of the form (*ākāra*) arising that it’s not self but said to be self. It doesn’t mean that the perceptual objects are also mistaken. ... It’s because when the aggregates are truly penetrated, all views of self are permanently eliminated.”²³

“Even though someone who sees that which is illusory attaches to nothing, it’s not the absence of illusory marks. If not, the illusory marks should be nonexistent. What’s the illusory mark? That is the result of an illusion. It is like a form created by supra-normal power. Thus, the illusory marks have real manifestations. It is produced from illusory techniques and can serve as visual objects.”²⁴

3. Sarvāstivāda Definition of Existence

Acting on the contention of serving as an object that can produce perception (*buddhi*), Saṃghabhadra defined existence (*asti*) in Ny.

“Why is the characteristic of existence is only present (*pratyutpanna*) and nothing other than that? Therefore, what they are arguing is not really a characteristic of existence. Here, I have made this

²² Ny, 623b 旋火轮觉，理亦应然。谓轮觉生，非全无境。即火糟色，速于余方，周旋而生，为此觉境。然火糟色体实非轮，而觉生时谓为轮者，是觉于境，行相颠倒，非此轮觉，缘无境生。

²³ Ny, 623b 谓此我觉，即缘色等蕴为境。故唯有行相，非我谓我，颠倒而生；非谓所缘亦有颠倒。... 以于诸蕴如实见时，一切我见皆永断故。

²⁴ Ny, 623b 见幻事者，虽所执无，非无幻相。若不许尔，幻相应无。幻相是何？谓幻术果。如神通者所化作色；如是，幻相有实显形，从幻术生，能为见境。

statement that the characteristic of existence is what serves as an object that is capable of producing perception. This [existence] is divisible into two: what exists actually, and what exists nominally, the two being designated on the basis of ultimate truth and conventional truth [respectively]. If relying on nothing, a thing can produce perception, this thing exists actually, e.g. *rūpa*, *vedanā*, etc. If it produces a perception relying on something, then it exists nominally, e.g., a vase, an army, etc.”²⁵

The so-called “existence” is something that can give rise to perception, and there is a distinction between the actual existence and the nominal existence according to the ultimate truth and conventional truth. The existent dharma, such as five aggregates that give rise to perception without depending on anything else is actual existence (ultimate truth). On the other hand, those things that produce perception depending on anything else, such as bottles and clothes, are only nominal existence (conventional truth). Both the actual and nominal existences, though different in nature, can be regarded as objects cognized by the mind.

4. Sarvāstivāda Theory of Assemblage of Atoms

As mentioned above, if the perception of a thing in itself is not lost by forceful decomposition or wisdom analysis, it means that there is an identity

²⁵ Ny 621c 何缘有相唯现非余？故彼所辩，非真有相。我于此中作如是说：为境生觉，是真有相，此总有二，一者实有、二者假有，以依世俗及胜义谛而安立故。若无所待，于中生觉，是实有相，如色受等。若有所待于中生觉，是假有相，如瓶军等。

of the intrinsic nature of the thing and its components. That is the ultimate truth, the actual existence. It can be seen that the intrinsic nature of the Sarvāstivāda can be understood as the singleness or indivisibility of the constituent elements of a thing, while the so-called conventional existence refers to the fact that a thing is made up of many elements of different natures. Therefore, according to the Sarvāstivāda view on “the nominal and the actual existence”, the atom that cannot be further decomposed is actual existence. However, the external objects made up of atoms can be decomposed, so they should not be actual existence. But if the external object is nominally existent, then it is like the conception of self (*sattvātman*) composed of the five *skandhas*, and it does not produce any real effect. Then how does the theory that all cognitions have perceptual objects hold up?

The Sarvāstivāda believed that the atom is actually existent, but when it exists alone, it is not perceived.²⁶ Saṃghabhadra suggested that a sensory consciousness must take a physical assemblage or agglomeration of atoms (和集 *saṃcaya*)²⁷ as its object, saying, “The atoms are assembled and arranged. They’re always the conditions for the arising of the sensory consciousness. There is no atom that does not take a physical assemblage.”²⁸

From the quotation, it can be deduced that Saṃghabhadra emphasized that the five faculties and five objects refer to each of the atoms making them

²⁶ MVŚ, 702a 问彼极微量复云何知。答应知极微是最细色不可断截破坏贯穿不可取舍乘履转掣。非长非短。非方非圆。非正不正。非高非下。无有细分不可分析。不可睹见。不可听闻。不可嗅尝。不可摩触。故说极微。是最细色。此七极微成一微尘。是眼眼识所取色中最微细者。

²⁷ See Dhammajoti, K.L., *Abhidharma Doctrines and Controversies on Perception*, 2007: 142.

²⁸ Ny 350c 诸极微和集安布，恒为五识生起依缘，无有极微不和集故。

up. The union of the five faculties and five objects leads to the kinds of sensory consciousness.²⁹ Each atom cannot exist alone but is always in the state of agglomeration, that is, many atoms have been arranged and combined in a certain way. Each of the atoms in this state is actually existent, and therefore can become the faculties and the subjects from which the kinds of sensory consciousness arise. In this sense, both the faculties and the subjects are actual existence. Meanwhile, Samghabhadra also explained how to recognize the atom as follows.

“If they cling to the view that because the atom is invisible, the visual consciousness doesn’t cognize the object that actually exists, then they are not correct, because the atom is visible. The single atom can not be cognized, for the visual faculty cognizes³⁰ the external object just in general terms and the visual consciousness has no power of discrimination. Those who have the power of superior wisdom can discern the subtlest characteristic of the atom. Think of the embroidery with decorative lines showing in the far or close distance as an example.”³¹

²⁹ See La Vallée Poussin 1988-1990: 346, n. 258; Dhammajoti 2002: 53, n. 21.

The doctrine that the union of the faculty and the object leads to the consciousness has its roots in early Buddhism.

³⁰ “The eye sees” is a specifically Vaibhasika view. See MVŚ, 61c:

Now, if visual consciousness sees, then consciousness should have the characteristic of seeing; since consciousness does not have this characteristic, the proposition is not acceptable. If the understanding conjoined with visual consciousness sees, the understanding conjoined with auditory consciousness should also hear sound; since understanding does not have this characteristic of hearing, the proposition is not acceptable. If it is the complex that sees visible forms, it follows that we should be able to see forms at all times, since a complex always exists; hence this proposition too is unacceptable.

³¹ Ny, 351a 若执极微不可见故，眼识不缘实有为境。此执不然，是可见故。而不了者，由彼眼

Since the external actual existence is each of the atoms in the state of agglomeration from which the consciousness arises, it is these atoms that directly enter the cognitive range. For example, when one recognizes a piece of embroidery, the external actual existences are the atoms of the embroidery, which are arranged in a certain way and are in the state of agglomeration, and under the effect of the vision, the atoms enter the cognitive range. The visual faculty can only cognize the external object generally and the eye consciousness does not have the power of discrimination, so the atoms cannot be distinguished one by one. It seems like that what is recognized is only the totality of embroidery, but not the atoms. But as a matter of fact, the decorative lines on the embroidery have already entered the cognitive range, and due to the limitation of vision, one fails to distinguish them all at a distance, but can only see the whole embroidery. It can be seen that the invisibility of the atom is in fact due to the limitation of our cognitive ability. Thus, the atom is visible in fact, because it has entered the realm of cognition and has a cognizable appearance. The one with superior wisdom would be able to distinguish each of these atoms in agglomeration. Thus, the Sarvāstivāda believed that the cognition of things is direct perception and that the cognitive object actually exists, so they are regarded as taking the position of the realist.³²

Therefore, the presence of an external object is the condition for the validity of cognition, and this condition can be satisfied only if the faculty and the object give rise to consciousness as a process of “simultaneous causality”

根取境粗故，又彼眼识无分别故。诸有殊胜智慧力者，乃能了别细极微相，如远近观锦绣文像。

³² See D.J. Kalupahana 1992: 81.

(*sahabhū-hetu*) under the premise of momentary arising and ceasing (*kṣaṇotpanna-bhaṅga*). This is the main reason why the Sarvāstivāda proposed the theory of “simultaneous causality”.

6. The Simultaneous Causality of the Sarvāstivāda

The Sarvāstivādins are known as Hetuvādins (causalists) having introduced a rigorous theory of causality. In the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma, everything is explained in terms of the six causes (*hetu*) and four conditions (*pratyaya*). Broadly speaking, *hetu* is the primary factor, while *pratyaya* is the subsidiary factor. However, Stcherbatsky pointed out that it is difficult to distinguish between *hetu* and *pratyaya*. He observed that “the six causes seem to be a later doctrine, which is then grafted onto the original system of the four conditions”³³. As MVŚ stated in this regard, “But these six causes are not mentioned by the sutra and the sutra only mentioned that there are four causes.”³⁴ The first systematic discussion of the six cause doctrine is given by Jñānaprasthāna in his Treatise, by *Kātyāyanīputra*.³⁵ With the development and refinement of the theory of the Sarvāstivāda, on the issue of cognizing the external objects, MVŚ illustrated “simultaneous causality” with “the union of the three”.

“The sutra says, ‘Being conditioned by visual faculty and visual object there arises visual consciousness. Sensory contact is defined as the

³³ Stcherbatsky, 1962 (Vol.1): 138.

³⁴ MVŚ, 79a 然此六因非契经说，契经但说有四缘。

³⁵ See Buswell & Jaini 1996: 107b.

union of the three, arising concurrently with feeling (*vedanā*), ideation (*saṃjñā*), and volition (*cintā*).’ Because of these, the sutra says that there is simultaneous causality.”³⁶

According to the quotation of the sutra in MVŚ, “simultaneous causality” should refer to the concurrent arising and reciprocal causation of the consciousness and mental factors. But there is no discussion of faculty and object as “simultaneous causality”. However, from the definition of “simultaneous causality” in MVŚ - “the same (cooperative) fruit” - the case that consciousness springs up from the interaction of faculty with the object also conforms to “simultaneous causality”. Cooperative fruit (*puruṣa-kāra-phala*) originally refers to the fruit of the cause of the heroic performance (*puruṣa-kāra*), and it covers a wide range of all conditioned dharmas. According to the explanation of the cooperative fruit in *Abhidharmāvatāra*, with this momentum as the condition, that arises and this is called heroic performance, while that is called fruit (*phala*).³⁷ The two dharmas, the visual faculty, and the visual object are also the heroic performance (*puruṣa-kāra*) for the visual consciousness that arises at the same moment. Therefore, the visual faculty and the visual object certainly have cooperative fruit. Accordingly, the faculty and the object should be the simultaneous cause of consciousness. Even in the case of the faculty of the mind (*manas*) of the previous moment and mental dharma (*dharmadhātu*), they are also the simultaneous cause of mental

³⁶ MVŚ 79b 又契经说：“眼及色为缘，生眼识。三和合故触，俱起受、想、思。”如是等经说俱有因。

³⁷ Avatāra, 988b 由此势力彼得生故，此名士用，彼名为果。

consciousness, since the Sarvāstivāda recognized “tri-temporal existence”.³⁸

In Ny, Saṃghabhadra put forward several arguments for “simultaneous causality”, one of which is related to epistemology.

“The sutra says, ‘Being conditioned by visual faculty and visual object there arises visual consciousness.’ [If the visual faculty, visual object, and visual consciousness aren’t present at the same time,] the visual faculty, and visual object arising in the past should not be the support basis (*āśraya*) and the perceptual object (*ālambana*) respectively for the subsequent visual consciousness, because [the former is actually] existent and [the latter is] nonexistent. It is not that the absolute nonexistence (*atyantābhāva*) can be called the support basis or the perceptual object.”³⁹

“This should also be the case. When visual consciousness arises, the visual faculty and the visual object have ceased. There should be no conditions when the visual consciousness arises on its own. It is because of the fact that the nonexistent dharma fails to serve as the supporting basis, and that the visual consciousness only has cognition of the present object. If the visual faculty, visual object, and visual consciousness aren’t present simultaneously, then the visual faculty and visual object shouldn’t be the conditions for the visual consciousness, or the auditory faculty and

³⁸ Ny, 421a 由第六识无别俱生所依缘故，但说前起意为依缘意识得生，非如余识。又诸识缘非唯前起，以契经说：意法为缘生于意识，意识通以三世无为为境界故。

³⁹ Ny, 420c 如契经说：[眼色为缘，生于眼识。][若眼根、色境与眼识非俱时有，]前生眼色与后眼识，应非所依及非所缘，[后者]有[前者]无有故。非毕竟无，可说此是所依所缘。

sound, etc. would also be the conditions for visual consciousness.”⁴⁰

Thus, in the view of the Vaibhāṣika, the faculty as the supporting basis and the object as the object qua condition (*ālambana-pratyaya*) must exist in the same moment as consciousness. Otherwise, it would be contrary to the principle of the Buddha’s teaching that consciousness arises from these two requisites. It is because of the action of simultaneous causality that the external object can be cognized directly, despite its momentary arising and ceasing. At the same moment of seeing, the visual consciousness discerns the object. Therefore, the fruit of consciousness can be born at the same time as the faculty and the object at the first moment of cognition.

7. Sautrāntika Refutation of Simultaneous Causality and Sarvāstivāda Response

The Sautrāntika clearly opposed the simultaneous causality theory of the Sarvāstivāda ⁴¹. In Ny, Saṃghabhadra cited Śrīlāta’s criticism of Sarvāstivāda’s simultaneous causality as follows.

“The concurrent (*sahaja*) dharmas at the stage of imminent birth haven’t already arisen, so they shouldn’t have existed. How can it be referred to as what has the nature of producer (*prasava-dharmin*) and what is produced (*janya*)? Furthermore, it is said that when there is a

⁴⁰ Ny, 420c 此亦应尔，彼眼识生时，眼色已灭。故应无缘力，眼识自生。无法无容为所依故，眼识唯缘现在境故。若眼、色、识不俱生者，则应眼色非眼识缘。或耳声等，亦眼识缘。

⁴¹ See Katō 1989: 309-313.

cause, there's an effect. If things have the nature of production in the future, then it should be mistaken that dharmas constantly arise. Moreover, the two concurrent dharmas are like two horns of a bull, and there is no way to effectively prove, which the cause is, and which the effect is. What is more, it is generally acknowledged in the world that no such simultaneous causality is found in cases where the law of causality, such as when a bud is born from a seed, is consistent with."⁴²

In Ny, Saṃghabhadra replied to the Sautrāntika's rejection of simultaneous causality.

“He said that if the visual object, etc. can serve as the condition for the arising of the visual consciousness, etc., the visual object, etc. must have arisen in the previous moment. If the visual consciousness does not arise when the visual object arises, what can be the cognition? What can be cognition if the visual consciousness exists and the visual object has disappeared? The visual consciousness should not cognize the nonexistent object, because all five types of sensory consciousness only cognize the present. And your school of thought asserts that the present is not nonexistent. The visual object that is cognized at this present moment is not the object qua condition (*ālambana-pratyaya*), for it arises at the

⁴² Ny, 418c 俱起诸法于将生位既非已生，並应未有，如何可说能生所生？又说有因则有果故，若未来世诸法能生，应有诸法恒时生过。又俱生法，此果此因无定因证，如牛两角。又诸世间种等芽等极成因果相生事中，未见如斯同时因果。

same time as the present visual consciousness.”⁴³

According to this quotation, we can know that like the Sarvāstivāda, the Sautrāntika also believed that the cognitive object must be at the present moment and that it is the only way direct perception (*pratyakṣa*)⁴⁴ can be established. But the external object (*bāhya-viṣaya*) as the union of faculty and perceptual object (*ālambana*) is at the previous moment, which no longer exists. Therefore, as opposed to the Sarvāstivāda assuming that the external object is the perceptual object, the Sautrāntika argued that they are different objects. In this way, the sensory perception of external objects is beyond attainment. Then how does the Sautrāntika’s cognitive process unfold under such a premise of heterochronous causality?

8. Sautrāntika Theory of Representational Perception

8.1 Heterochronous Causality of Sautrāntika

The Sautrāntika proposed “heterochronous causality”, which holds that the cause comes before the effect. Based on this, the Sautrāntika explained the sutra’s saying, “[Being conditioned by visual faculty and visual object, there arises visual consciousness.]” As the cause of the arising of consciousness, the faculty and the object must come first. And consciousness, as the result, must come after. Take visual consciousness as an example, “he says that if the visual

⁴³ Ny, 447b 彼说色等若能为缘，生眼等识，如是色等必前生故。若色有时眼识未有，识既未有谁复能缘？眼识有时色已非有，色既非有谁作所缘？眼识不应缘非有境，以说五识缘现在故。彼宗现在非非有故。现所缘色非所缘缘，与现眼识俱时生故。

⁴⁴ See below for details.

object, etc. can be the cause for the arising of visual consciousness and so forth, must arise before.”⁴⁵ In other words, the visual faculty and visual object, which are the causes, exist first and only afterward does the visual consciousness, which is the effect, come into being.

Since they are in two different moments, there is no such thing as “sensory touch” denoting that the three are in unity at the same moment. It is called “consciousness of touch”, and it is actually consciousness rather than a mental factor (*caitta*) that is different from consciousness and actually existent. In addition, because the Sautrāntika believed that the mind and mental factors arise in succession rather than at one moment, it is at the third instant when such mental factors like feeling and so forth caused by “consciousness of touch” arise. According to Śrīlāta, only the three mental factors of feeling, ideation, and volition actually exist, while the rest of the mental factors do not, but are only the different functions of one mind.⁴⁶ According to the study of Katō, although Śrīlāta spoke of the three mental factors as arising together, he actually regarded them as arising in succession. The faculty and object arise at the first instant, consciousness including sensory touch arises at the second instant, and then the receptivity, “feeling”, “perception”, and “volition” arise at the third, fourth, and fifth instant.⁴⁷

On the other hand, the Sautrāntika, like the Sarvāstivāda, also recognized the “momentary arising and ceasing” of conditioned dharmas. In

⁴⁵ Ny, 447b 彼说色等若能作为缘生眼等识，如是色等必前生故。

⁴⁶ Ny, 384b 彼上座言：无如所计十大地法，此但三种，经说俱起受想思故。岂不彼经亦说有触，如彼经言：三和合触。经虽言有触，不说有别体，故彼经言：如是三法聚集和合说名为触。故无如所计十大地法性。

⁴⁷ See Katō 1989: 206-216.

the case of “momentary arising and ceasing”, the faculty and the object, which were the cause in the previous instant, have been extinguished. Then how does the extinguished cause give rise to the consciousness of the following instant? Śrīlāta’s answer is recorded in Ny as follows.

“The mental consciousness cognizing the past and so forth is not without a perceptual object, nor does it merely cognize the existent objects. Why is that the case? Because the mental consciousness arising after these sensory forms of consciousness as “similar and immediately antecedent conditions” (*samanantara-pratyaya*) can experience (*anubhava*) the object of the past mind (*manas*). Thus, mental consciousness takes the mind (*manas*) as its cause. The object as the object qua condition (*ālambana-pratyaya*) is the object of the five types of sensory consciousness, because, the past mind (*manas*) is present first, the mental consciousness arises successively; and according to the existence or nonexistence [of *ālambana-pratyaya*], this [mental consciousness] comes into existence or nonexistence. Yet this mental consciousness does not merely cognize the existent objects, for at that time the object has ceased. This mental consciousness is not without a perceptual object, for according to its existence or nonexistence, this mental consciousness comes into existence or nonexistence. Furthermore, when the recollection (*smṛti*) arises on an object that has ceased for a long time, this recollection in the present moment takes the past mental consciousness cognizing the object as the condition, for his consciousness

of recollection falls to the same series, and arises successively. Although the consciousness of recollection arises with other conditions, it must cognize the former object first.”⁴⁸

Śrīlāta concluded that the cognitive object is the cause of the arising of consciousness, that is, *ālambana-pratyaya*; but the cognitive object does not necessarily have to be existent at present. The example he gave is the mental consciousness arising from sensory consciousness as similar and immediately antecedent condition (*samanantara-pratyaya*). It is believed that although the external object falls into the past and becomes nonexistent, the mental consciousness is able to experience (*anubhava*) the external object cognized by the past sensory consciousness. In other words, first of all, the direct cause of mental consciousness is the consciousness of the previous instant, and the objects of the five forms of sensory consciousness that are the *ālambana-pratyaya* only serve as the auxiliary cause. And the object of sensory consciousness, having existed, has already fulfilled its function as an auxiliary cause. Next, the consciousness of the previous instant plays the role of giving rise to mental consciousness. Secondly, consciousness has the ability to experience extinguished objects.

In this case, the Sautrāntika has to answer two questions.

⁴⁸ Ny, 447c 缘过去等所有意识，非无所缘，非唯缘有。何缘故尔？以五识身为等无间，所生意识，说能领受前意所取诸境界故。如是意识以意为因。此所缘缘，即五识境。要彼为先，此得生故。随彼有无，此有无故。然此意识，非唯缘有。尔时彼境。已灭坏故。非无所缘，由此意识随彼有无此有无故。又随忆念久灭境时，以于彼境前识为缘，生于今时，随忆念识堕一相续，传相生故。虽有余缘。起随念识。而要缘彼先境方生。

1. Where do the objects experienced by the mental consciousness come from?
2. What is the theoretical basis for the cognitive object serving as the auxiliary cause and the past consciousness serving as the direct cause of mental consciousness?

This involves the Sautrāntika's theory of "resemblance or representational form" and "*anudhātu*".

8.2 Resemblance or Representational Form

The first question can be answered by the Sautrāntika with the theory of "resemblance or representational form (*ākāra*)". Because the Sautrāntika believed that the external object that gave rise to the sensory consciousness is absent at the instant of the arising of the sensory consciousness, it is impossible for the external object to directly stimulate the arising of the visual consciousness. According to the Sautrāntika, the visual consciousness can actively unite with the external atoms in the previous instant and produce a corresponding form (*ākāra*) on this visual consciousness, and the generation of this image means indirect (*apratyakṣa*) cognition of the external object, which is known as "carrying resemblance or representational form". As it is said in AKB, "although this consciousness cognizes an object accomplishing no action, it is said to know the object, for it carried the resemblance form."⁴⁹ To "carry" means that one's cognitive and sensory apparatus conveys to consciousness an impression that is qualitatively similar to the object in its

⁴⁹ AKB, 157b 如是识生虽无所作，而似境故，说名了境。如何似境？谓带彼相。

mode of activity.

In fact, the Sautrāntika's view is confirmed by Dharmakīrti, who also believed that the external object is cognized by the consciousness that arises. It is explained as follows.

“If one asks how one can cognize an object in a different time, we answer that the essence of the perceptual object is nothing but the cause of its distinctive appearance that is capable of transferring its knowledge-form (*jñāna-ākāra*).”⁵⁰

This doctrine was later referred to as the “*sākāra-(vi)jñāna-vāda*” in the *Tarkabhāṣā*. It is described as follows.

“The Sautrāntika said that all appearances such as blue, etc. are the knowledge, not the external object, because an inanimate thing (*jaḍa*) has no capability of manifestation. As mentioned above, the objects of the sense faculties are not perceivable, although they produce a knowledge possessing their corresponding form (*svākārajñāna*).”⁵¹

In this way, the external atoms are the cause of cognition, but they are

⁵⁰ Pramāṇa-vārttikā of Dharmakīrti, III, v.248 (Tibetan Sanskrit Works Series):
bhinnakālaṃ kathaṃ grāhyaṃ iti ced grāhyatāṃ viduḥ |
hetutvam eva ca vyakter jñānākārārpaṇa-kṣamam ||

⁵¹ *Tarkabhāṣā*, 94: *sautrāntikānāṃ matam | jñānam evedaṃ sarvaṃ nīlādy-ākāreṇa pratibhāsate | na*
bāhyo 'rthaḥ | jaḍasya prakāśāyogāt | yathoktam | svākārajñāna-janakā dṛśyā nendriyagocarā iti |

not cognized in themselves; what is known is a unified complex (和合 (*sārnagrī*)⁵² of atoms which is carried by the previous consciousness. The (*sāmagrī* is not composed of atoms. In other words, the cognitive process of the Sautrāntika has been divided into two realms: the external one, which is not cognizable, and the internal one, which is cognizable. The external realm is composed of atoms, and the internal realm is the cognitive domain into which the atoms enter. The form of this unified complex is the counterpart of the external realm and is the cause of consciousness. Therefore, what the Sautrāntika called the external cognitive object is actually the internal realm of cognition.

It should be emphasized here that, as mentioned above, the Sarvāstivāda understood the form (*ākāra*) as wisdom (*prajñā*) that is defined as selection (*pravīcaya*). Both the *ākāra* and the perceptual object are actually existent, so they are matched together by the Sarvāstivāda to form a dichotomy of subject and object. In the Sautrāntika, the form (*ākāra*) is equivalent to the image. The Sautrāntika believed that the external object also exists, but this existence can only be inferred from the internal form (*ākāra*). Therefore, the Sautrāntika is also known as those who infer the existence of the external object “*bāhyārthānumeyatva*”.⁵³

⁵² See Dhammajoti, K.L., *Abhidharma Doctrines and Controversies on Perception*, 2007: 142.

⁵³ See *Sarvadarśanasamgraha* (《摄一切见论》)

8.3 *Anudhātu*

The second question can be answered by the Sautrāntika with the theory of “*anudhātu*”. In order to complete the process of perception in the Sautrāntika, in addition to the theory of resemblance or representational form, it is necessary to use “pursuant element” (*anudhātu*) as the basis. The term “pursuant element” (*anudhātu*) is derived from *anuśaya*. According to the Sautrāntika, *anuśaya* means affliction (*kleśa*) lying within the mind that does not manifest in the present behavior.⁵⁴ “Element” (*dhātu*) has the meaning of seed,⁵⁵ the root cause of all phenomena, the constituent elements of the universe and human beings, and the essence of nature. According to Śrīlāta, the latent state of afflictions can be maintained for a long time and latent deep enough to constitute an element, so it is called “pursuant element”. As recorded in Ny, the Sautrāntika expanded the scope of *anuśaya*. “Pursuant element” that includes all latent functions that comes into being.

“The causative (*hetu-svabhāva*), as the Sthavira (Śrīlāta) said, is the old pursuant element (**purāṇa-anudhātu*), can be the cause of all sentient beings as a continuous succession. It is said in the sūtra by the Fortunate One that one should know that in such a *pudgala*, skillful dharmas are concealed and the unskillful dharmas arise and the accompanying wholesome roots are not yet cut off. On account of their not being cut off, there still exists the possibility of other wholesome roots

⁵⁴ Ny, 596c 烦恼睡位说名随眠，于觉位中即名缠故。

⁵⁵ AKB, 18c 界谓种子。

arising from these wholesome roots. The accompanied wholesome root is *purāṇa-anudhātu* being the cause of a continuous succession. Something like this is called the causative (*hetu-svabhāva*).”⁵⁶

Accordingly, it has been known that *anudhātu* is the causality that is embodied in each moment of the individual’s physical and mental continuity. By the theory of “resemblance or representational form” and “*anudhātu*”, the Sautrāntika refined its process of perception. Consciousness arises, carrying the resemblance form. As mentioned above, the object of cognition serves as an auxiliary cause in the consciousness continuum, and the direct cause of mental consciousness is the previous instant of consciousness.

Combining the theory of “resemblance or representational form” and “*anudhātu*”, we can summarize the cognitive process of Sautrāntika as follows. According to the Sautrāntika’s theory of “heterochronous causality”, the mental consciousness caused by the five types of sensory consciousness can only arise after at least the third instant. The faculty is united with the object at the first instant, the five types of sensory consciousness arise from the union of the faculty and object at the second instant, and the mental consciousness arises from the five types of sensory consciousness at the third instant. The mental consciousness takes the cognitive object (*ālambana*) of the five types of sensory consciousness of the second instant as the cognitive object.

⁵⁶ Ny, 440b 然上座言因緣性者，謂旧隨界，即諸有情相續展轉能為因性。彼謂世尊契經中說：應知如是補特伽羅，善法隱沒、惡法出現，有隨俱行善根未斷。以未斷故，從此善根尤有可起余善根義。隨俱善根，即旧隨界，相續展轉能為因性。如斯等類，說名因緣。此亦同前經主所執種子義破，此旧隨界即彼種子名差別故。

At the second instant, the cognitive object of the five types of consciousness is the counterpart of the external object of the first instant which is the unified complex of atoms. The counterpart of the external object is perceived due to the unified complex (和合 *sāmagrī*) of atoms carried by the five types of sensory consciousness at the second instant, while the external object is failed to be cognized directly. As mentioned above, the *sāmagrī* is the resemblance or representational form. Since the consciousness of the third instant is caused directly by the five types of sensory consciousness of the second instant, the characteristics of the five types of sensory consciousness as the direct cause are transmitted as a potential force and manifested in the mental consciousness as the effect in the cause-and-effect continuum of the stream of consciousness. As mentioned above, this transmitted potential force is called “*anudhātu*” by the Sautrāntika. In other words, the mental consciousness of the third instant is able to cognize the counterpart of the external object of the first instant through the intermediary of the five types of sensory consciousness of the second instant.

9. Sarvāstivāda and Sautrāntika Explanation of Direct Perception

9.1 Sautrāntika Theory of Self-cognition

In epistemology, it is assumed that in order to cognize objects, one should come into possession of direct perception (*pratyakṣa*). If direct perception cannot be established, inference (*anumāna*) cannot be established, and there is no possibility of cognition. In this case, there is no way to cognize objects.

The *pratyakṣa* of the Sautrāntika is based on the self-cognition (*sva-saṃvedana*) of consciousness. The Sautrāntika believed that consciousness possesses the function of self-cognition (*sva-saṃvedana*), “like a lamp shining on itself and on others”⁵⁷. They aired the view that unless one knows that one is now cognizing, that is, unless self-cognition is available, it is not sufficient to explain the experience of knowing that one has cognized something. This is the self-cognition theory of Sautrāntika.⁵⁸ The Sautrāntika’s argument for self-cognition is mainly through the mechanism of recollection (*smṛti*).

As is well known, the Sautrāntika insisted on the strict sense of momentary arising and ceasing (*kṣaṇotpanna-bhaṅga*). As mentioned above, the Sautrāntika believed that when the faculty and the object are united, consciousness has not yet arisen, so in their cognitive system, cognition cannot be completed until the next moment of consciousness arises. But at this moment, the faculty and the object have already passed away, leaving the visual consciousness with only the innate form (*ākāra*). And the consciousness that cognizes these experienced innate forms (*ākāra*) is the recollection. Therefore, recollection becomes the only tool for the Sautrāntika to infer the existence of external objects and self-cognition.

The Sautrāntika’s argument for the existence of external objects can be found in *Viṃśatikā*, a Yogācāra text of Vasubandhu. In this text, Vasubandhu refuted various types of realism, including the Sautrāntika. Here the

⁵⁷ Ny, 742b 又若许灯是能照故，便许自照亦能照他。

⁵⁸ See May (1959: 113 - 114, n.284), He said here that self-cognition is derived from the Sautrāntika or Mahāsāṃghika. (L’origine de la thèse, que la pensée se connaît elle-même, est rapportée aux Sautrāntika ou aux Mahāsāṃghika.)

Sautrāntika intended to prove the existence of external objects through the same argument from recollection. The text stated the following.

“That which is not experienced actively [as an object] is not remembered by mental consciousness. Therefore, the object that has been experienced does exist, and those objects such as the visible (*rūpa*) should be considered as involving direct perception (*pratyakṣa-s*).”⁵⁹

Their argument of recollection began with the most basic phenomenon: someone cannot recall any object that has not been experienced. The object that appears in memory must have been experienced in a moment when the recollection has not yet occurred. At this moment, this object is the external object, and what perceives this object is the direct perception. Therefore, the existence of the external object can be inferred from this memory phenomenon, although memory is not directly associated with the external object.

9.2 The Sarvāstivāda’s Refutation of self-cognition

The Sarvāstivāda did not accept the theory of self-cognition. According to MVŚ, they insisted that “the *citta-caitta-dharma-s* fail to cognize themselves”⁶⁰, just as “the end of the finger fails to touch itself, the sword fails to cut itself, the eyes fail to see themselves, and the strong man fails to bear

⁵⁹ *Vimśatikā*, 76b 要曾现受，意识能忆。是故决定有曾受境，见此境者，许为现量。由斯，外境实有义成。

nānanubhūtam manovijñānena smaryata ityavaśyam arthānubhavena bhavitavyaṃ tacca darśanam ity evaṃ tadviśayasya rūpādeḥ pratyakṣatvaḥ mataḥ

⁶⁰ MVŚ, 42c 诸心心所不了自性。

himself.”⁶¹ They thought that nothing can act on themselves. One of the Sarvāstivāda’s arguments on this is the illustration of active cause (*kāraṇa-hetu*) recorded in MVŚ.

“If the intrinsic nature of something (*savabhāva*) were the active cause (*kāraṇa-hetu*) of itself, there would be no causal difference between cause and effect, the creator and what is created, producer and what is produced, leader and what is lead, characterizer and what is characterized, transformation and what is transformed, continuity and what is continued. There is a difference between cause and effect, and so forth, so the intrinsic nature of something cannot be the active cause of itself.”⁶²

According to the quotation above, if the *citta-caitta* wants to cognize itself, then it must get stuck in a causal relationship with itself. Once this *citta-caitta* is in a causal relationship, there should be a difference between cause and effect. However, nothing can be different from itself, so it is impossible for anything, including a *citta-caitta*, to be in any kind of causal relationship with itself. Therefore, the *citta-caitta* cannot be the active cause (*kāraṇa-hetu*) of itself, nor can it cognize itself.

In Ny, Samghabhadra further discussed the reason why a thing cannot be its own cause as follows.

⁶¹ MVŚ, 43a 指端不自触，刀刃不自割，瞳子不自见，壮士不自负。

⁶² MVŚ, 104b 若自性于自性为能作因者，则应因、果，能作、所作，能生、所生，能引、所引，能相、所相，能转、所转，能续、所续，皆无差别。因、果等二既有差别，故于自性非能作因。

“Dharma is not dependent on itself. This means that the dharmas should depend on the proper [condition] of the four causes when they arise. If the conditions are lacking, the dharmas will not arise. If not, the dharmas will arise. Thus, the condition is established as a condition. All things do not lack themselves, so it will be not that the dharmas do not arise because they lack themselves. How can the intrinsic nature (*savabhāva*) of something be the active cause of itself.”⁶³

Synthesizing the Sarvāstivāda’s understanding of the active cause, and the analysis of Samghabhadra, here is the point that self-cognition is impossible. If consciousness is able to cognize itself, it means that it is both cognition and the object of cognition, and consciousness has these two functions at the same time, one is to cognize others, and the other is to cognize itself. Evidently, in the sight of the Sarvāstivāda, this does not seem logical. Since the mind fails to cognize itself, how can *pratyakṣa* be established by the Sarvāstivāda?

9.3 Three *pratyakṣa*-s of the Sarvāstivāda

The Sarvāstivāda argued that under the premise of momentary arising and ceasing of dharmas, only the faculty and the object giving rise to consciousness is a process of “simultaneous causality”, and the condition for

⁶³ Ny, 742b 诸法必无待自体 (svabhāva) 故。此言意显：诸法生时，随其所应 (yathāyogam)，待四缘性。随有所阙，法则不生。不阙便生，立为缘性。诸法无有阙自体 (svabhāva) 时。故毕竟无阙不生义。宁可建立为所待缘？

direct perception can be satisfied. Samghabhadra distinguished three kinds of direct perception (*pratyakṣa-s*) as below.

“They are the one that is dependent on the sense faculty (**indriyāśrita*), the one that is experience (*anubhava*), and the one that is discernment (**buddhi*). The first refers to direct cognition, supported by the five faculties, of the five types of external objects, *rūpa*, etc. The second refers to the direct presence of the mind and mental factors, *vedanā*, *saṃjñā*, etc. The third refers to the direct realization (*sāksāt-√kr*) of the distinctive characteristics or common characteristics (*sva-sāmānya-lakṣana*) according to the way they should be.”⁶⁴

Based on the principle that there is only one consciousness in one instant,⁶⁵ the first *pratyakṣa* is the union of the sensory faculty and object; the second *pratyakṣa* is the arising (*pravṛtti-lakṣaṇa*) of five sensory consciousnesses and its *caitta*, which can be classified as the first *pratyakṣa*; and the third *pratyakṣa* is mental consciousness. The first and second *pratyakṣa* are at the first instant, and the third *pratyakṣa* is at the second instant.

In the case that self-cognition is not available, the proof of the object of cognition of consciousness must be undertaken by another consciousness. Therefore, it is only the next moment of consciousness that has the function of

⁶⁴ Ny, 763a 现量总有三种：依根、领纳、觉慧，别故。依根现量，谓：依五根，现取色等五外境界。领纳现量，谓：受、想，等心心所法正现前。觉慧现量，谓：于诸法，随其所应，证自、共相。

⁶⁵ MVŚ 563a 一有情一刹那中唯起一识。

this explicit awareness. In other words, *anubhava* and *buddhi* are not at the same instant. In the Sarvāstivāda's view, it is the existence of *indriyāśrita* and *anubhava* that ensures the emergence of the present of *buddhi* in the latter moment. It is explained by Samghabhadra in Ny as follows.

“If the five forms of sensory consciousness only cognize the past, how can they have *pratyakṣa* experience of the past? Because the five forms of sensory consciousness have experienced and discerned the past at other times. It is only after the experience is extinguished into the past that it can become a cognitive object, and recollection can arise. At this point, the recollection is called discernment (*buddhi*). Because of this reasoning, only in the matter experienced by *anubhava* does discernment (*buddhi*) arise. Therefore, the reasoning that *pratyakṣa* experience arises in one's own experience is valid.”⁶⁶

“If the five sensory objects, such as visual object and so forth, are not presently cognized, then there is no such thing as ‘I have experienced such objects as visual object and so forth.’ For example, in the case of painful feeling (*duḥkha-vedanā*) and so forth, one must have experienced *anubhava* before one can cognize the object and have the perception of the present arise. In the case of visual object and so forth, for example, it must be after experiencing sense faculty (*indriyāśrita*) that the object can be cognized and the direct perception arises, for it is what the present

⁶⁶ Ny, 347c 若五识唯缘过去，如何于彼，有现量觉？……谓，于自身曾所生受，余时领纳，余时觉了。[领纳（自性受，领所随触）]灭过去，方能为境，生现忆念。此忆念位，名觉了时。由斯理趣，唯于现量曾所受事，有现量觉故，现量觉于自身受，有义得成。

qualifies. So it is impossible to have a direct perception of a subject that is not experienced directly. Because the five forms of sensory consciousness only cognize the present object, i.e., they must be able to cognize only the object that arises at the same time, the sutras indicated, ‘With the visual faculty and the visual object as conditions, there arises visual consciousness.’⁶⁷

According to Samghabhadra’s explanation of the establishment of the Sarvāstivāda’s *pratyakṣa*, a summary can be made as follows. There are at least two conditions for this explicit awareness of the cognitive object to arise in the following instant. The first is the memory function of the mental factor (*caitta*) of recollection (*smṛti*), which is one of ten universally operating mental factors (*mahā-bhūmikā dharma*) in Sarvāstivāda, the mental factor (*caitta*) that arises concurrently with any consciousness. It is capable of remembering the present moment of cognition, thus making later memory possible. However, the memory ensured by the *smṛti* is usually in the distracted mind (*vikṣiptam cittaṃ*), such as when we recall something that happened a long time ago, and it does not have the clarity of *pratyakṣa*. Therefore, the second condition must be satisfied to make *pratyakṣa* available, and that is discernment (*buddhi*) appearing in the second instant. The mental factors (*caitta-s*) are present in the first instant of cognition along with the visual consciousness, sensing, categorizing, and so forth of the same object that is cognized in general by the

⁶⁷ Ny, 437c 若现在色等五境，非现量得…… 应无自谓“我曾领受如是色等”。如苦受等，必为领纳现量受已，方有缘彼现量觉生。如是色等，必为依根现量受已，方有缘彼现量觉生；现所逼故。…… 是故不应，于诸现量曾未受境，有现量觉。由此五识唯缘现境，必以俱生为所缘故，契经既说：“眼色为缘，生于眼识”。

visual consciousness.

The third kind of *pratyakṣa*, discernment (*buddhi*) is the mental consciousness that follows immediately after the first instant. The main function of discernment (*buddhi*) is to witness (*sākṣin*) the previous *pratyakṣa* experience, *indriyāśrita* and *anubhava*. This can still be recognized as *pratyakṣa*, for it is a distinct perception directly derived from the previous sensory perception.⁶⁸ Thus, without acknowledging the *pratyakṣa* of self-cognition (*sva-samvedana*), the explicit awareness of the object in the Sarvāstivāda is assumed by discernment (*buddhi*).

The Sautrāntika interprets direct personal experience as *pratyakṣa*. Although the Sarvāstivāda denied that consciousness does not have the function of self-cognition, it developed its own theoretical system for the interpretation of *pratyakṣa*.

Conclusion

The root reason for the disagreement between the Sarvāstivāda and the Sautrāntika on how to perceive the external object arises from ontology. The Sarvāstivāda use perception as a criterion for judging existence, which is one of the arguments for its ontology, “tri-temporal existence”. Though the existent external object is composed of atoms, each of its atoms enters the realm of cognition. Therefore, the Sarvāstivāda argued that what is cognized is the physical assemblage of atoms, that is, the external object can be recognized directly and the cognitive object is the perceptual object. It shows that the

⁶⁸ *Jūshēlùnjì* (《俱舍论记》), 135b: 五识无间所生意识名现量。及定心后所引意识亦名现量。以五识缘境。及定心缘境于境分明俱是现量。从彼所引意识，亦于彼所缘境分明亦得名现量。

consciousness and the object must be present simultaneously. That's why the Sarvāstivāda evolved "simultaneous causality". Since The Sarvāstivāda opposed self-cognition of consciousness, *pratyakṣa* should be assumed by another consciousness. Thus, the Sarvāstivāda distinguished three kinds of *pratyakṣa-s* including *indriyāśrita*, *anubhava*, and *buddhi*. *Indriyāśrita* and *anubhava* are at the first instant, while *buddhi* is at the second instant. Through the role of recollection, *pratyakṣa* witnesses the previous *pratyakṣa* experience, *indriyāśrita*, and *anubhava*.

The Sautrāntika accepted the existence of cognition without a perceptual object, thus proving that the past and the future do not actually exist. Moreover, the Sarvāstivāda did not recognize simultaneous causality. In this way, the union of the faculty and the object occurs at the first moment, while the arising of consciousness occurs at the second moment. The past object no longer exists, and the arising of consciousness can cognize the object that has been extinguished by carrying a resemblance or representational form. Therefore, what the consciousness cognizes is not the external object, but the unified complex of atoms, i.e., the counterpart of the external object. By this, the Sautrāntika deduced the existence of the external object. The external object is only auxiliary to the arising of consciousness, and the previous moment of consciousness is the direct cause of consciousness. This causal transmission of consciousness is called *anudhātu* by the Sautrāntika. In addition, the Sautrāntika believed that consciousness can cognize itself and used this to explain *pratyakṣa*.

Abbreviations

- AKB Abhidharmakośabhāśyam Chinese tr. by Xuan Zang (T no. 1558).
 Avatāra Abhidharmāvatāra Chinese tr. by Xuan Zang (T no. 1554).
 MVŚ Abhidharma-mahāvibhāṣā-śāstra T27, No. 1545.
 Ny Abhidharma-nyāyānusāra-śāstra T29, No. 1562.
 Viṃśatikā Viṃśatikā-vijñapti-mātratā-siddhi Chinese tr. by Xuan Zang (T no. 1590).
 VKŚ Abhidharma-vijñāna-kāya-śāstra, 阿毗达摩识身足论, (T no. 1539).

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阿毗达摩俱舍论	T no. 1558	trans. Xuanzang
入阿毗达摩论	T no. 1554	trans. Xuanzang
唯识二十论	T no. 1590	trans. Xuanzang
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