

**General Discussion on “Cause, Accumulation, Arising, Turning” and
“Condition” in Buddhism**

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Summary

In this article, I attempt to clarify all terms related to causality within Buddhist teachings and make the following bold claims:

1. “The mere doctrinal explanation of Dependent Origination does not define ‘cause.’”
2. “The sequence of ‘consciousness, contact, feeling, perception, and thought’ is based on the meaning of ‘accumulation’ (集) as aggregation, rather than being the true sequence of Dependent Origination.”
3. “Therefore, we have the terms ‘contact with ignorance’ (無明觸) and ‘contact with wisdom’ (明觸).”

Materials Used

According to Saṃyuktāgama Sūtra 298, Dependent Origination is divided into two parts: a doctrinal explanation (法說) and a hermeneutical explanation (義說). This corresponds to Saṃyuktāgama Sūtra 296’s explanation of Dependent Origination and Conditional Arising, allowing us to clearly differentiate between “condition” (緣) and “arising” (生). In Sūtra 298, during the beginning of the hermeneutical explanation, when discussing “conditions of ignorance,” the Buddha mentions “cause” and “phenomena arising from a cause.”

According to Saṃyuktāgama Sūtra 287, which describes the Buddha’s process of tracing the cause before attaining enlightenment, this sūtra can be regarded as the most formal exploration of “cause.” Once we thoroughly understand this sūtra, we can then distinguish “condition,” “cause,” and “arising” by referencing the previous two sūtras.

Lastly, by referring to Saṃyuktāgama Sūtra 292 and synthesizing the previous three sūtras, we can differentiate the meanings of “accumulation” (集) and “turning”

(轉).

My Argument and Explanation

In Saṃyuktāgama Sūtra 296, the Buddha establishes the basis of “truth.” He explains that Dependent Origination is a truth that remains unchanged regardless of whether a Buddha appears or not; it is not determined by anyone but is an eternal realm (法常住、法住、法界). Because of this truth, we can consider the term “condition” (緣) as the fundamental term within “cause, accumulation, arising, turning, and condition.”

In the context of Dependent Origination, the term paired with “condition” is often “arising” (起) or “existence” (有), which should be interchangeable. However, when we focus on “existence,” we find that in Saṃyuktāgama Sūtra 287, the concepts of “existence” and “nothing,” typically seen as symmetrical pairs, are not symmetrical here. When the Buddha traces the cause with the question, “What phenomena arise due to the presence of this phenomenon?” he can only trace it back to “Due to the existence of consciousness, there is name-and-form; due to the condition of consciousness, there is name-and-form.” However, when explaining “nothing,” the Buddha can trace it back to “ignorance.” This indicates a critical point, leading me to claim:

“The mere doctrinal explanation of Dependent Origination does not define ‘cause.’”

In Saṃyuktāgama Sūtra 287, the Buddha ultimately discovers the true “cause.” I believe the key passage is, “As I reflect, I trace back up to consciousness and cannot go beyond it.” Here, the Buddha identifies the true “cause”—the cause of what? The cause of sentient beings’ suffering. It is crucial to remember that Sūtra 296 states that Dependent Origination is a truth, regardless of whether a Buddha or any sentient beings exist, as it remains an eternal realm (法常住、法住、法界). If there were no sentient beings, and thus no suffering, there would be no need to discuss the true “cause.” However, with the existence of sentient beings, the Buddha must explore the

true “cause” to guide them towards liberation. Thus, the true “cause” begins with “ignorance.” The hermeneutical explanation of “ignorance” in Saṃyuktāgama Sūtra 298 already includes the discussion of “cause,” with the phrase, “Not knowing the cause and the phenomena arising from the cause.”

When we truly understand that the cause is “ignorance,” we can formally discuss “accumulation” (集) in the context of the Four Noble Truths (苦、集、滅、道). While Saṃyuktāgama Sūtra 292, like Sūtra 287, also uses reverse tracing to explore the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination, Sūtra 292 is different in that it is not the reverse tracing the Buddha undertook before enlightenment, but an explanation after attaining enlightenment and understanding the true “cause.” Thus, this sūtra employs all the key terms related to causality, such as “cause, accumulation, arising, turning, and condition.”

In Saṃyuktāgama Sūtra 292, “condition” and “cause” are fundamentally established in both the doctrinal and hermeneutical layers, making the exploration of “accumulation” a thorough investigation into the causality behind sentient beings’ suffering. The term “accumulation” (集) carries the meaning of aggregation, which, as I explained in previous articles, is not evident before the Six Sense Bases (六入處). From “ignorance” to “name-and-form,” none of these links possess the sense of aggregation. By examining the relationships within the Twelve Links through the meaning of “accumulation,” we find reversed sequences in certain sūtras, such as Saṃyuktāgama Sūtra 59: “The accumulation of delight and attachment is the accumulation of form; the accumulation of contact is the accumulation of feeling, perception, and formations; the accumulation of name-and-form is the accumulation of consciousness.” Therefore, I claim:

“The sequence of ‘consciousness, contact, feeling, perception, and thought’ is based on the meaning of ‘accumulation’ (集) as aggregation, rather than being the true sequence of Dependent Origination.”

Additionally, as previously mentioned, when Saṃyuktāgama Sūtra 292 explains the causality of the Six Sense Bases, it uses the terms “cause of contact, accumulation of contact, arising of contact, and condition of contact” (觸因、觸集、觸生、觸緣),

where “condition” (緣) in Dependent Origination establishes the fundamental causal nature of “contact” in the hermeneutical context. Thus, I assert:

“Therefore, we have the terms ‘contact with ignorance’ (無明觸) and ‘contact with wisdom’ (明觸).”

However, regarding the Five Aggregates (五蘊), which possess the meaning of aggregation, we find similarly fundamental hermeneutical causality related to “contact,” such as in Saṃyuktāgama Sūtra 58: “The five aggregates of clinging have desire as their root, desire as their accumulation, desire as their arising, and desire as their contact.” Where does “desire” (欲) appear? Desire typically appears in the hermeneutical context of “grasping” (取), with the phrase “grasping due to desire” (欲取). However, the phrase “the detachment of desire and the arising of wisdom” leads me to reflect on the fundamental nature of “desire” in the hermeneutical context.

Postscript

I noticed that in the comments section of my previous discussion on “cause, accumulation, arising, and turning” on other Facebook Buddhist group, some practitioners attempted to clarify the Buddha’s causal relationships using logical material conditionals. However, I am aware that classical logic and material conditionals cannot capture the Buddha’s causal relationships, as traditional logic is far too superficial to be applied to the Buddha’s teachings.

For those interested in using logic to clarify Buddhism, I still recommend my dialectical logic symbol system. Regarding the claims in this article, I believe this system can provide clarity. Interested practitioners can focus on the paper *The Continuum of Causality*, particularly on the transformation of causal categories, *The Category of Reciprocity*, RECI (x, y), and *The Category of Substantial Relationships*.

1. *The Continuum of Causality* and *The Category of Causality* can formalize the causality discussed in this article.

2. The Category of Substantial Relationships can formalize the formation of “aggregation.”

3. The Category of Reciprocity, RECI (x, y) is the most important.

This is a newly developed system, and I do not intend to monopolize its application to formalize the meaning of the scriptures. Instead, I hope everyone will try using it to see if they can arrive at the same conclusions.

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