

A Study of the Usages and Meanings of Ākāra in Abhidharma

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Abstract

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This essay is a study of the term ākāra in terms of its usages and meanings in abhidharma. The term ākāra has a remarkably rich history of meaning. It can mean “appearance” and “way” in pre-abhidharmic Sanskrit and Pāli sources, or “insight” (*prajñā*) in Sarvāstivādin Vaibhāṣikas’s orthodox definition in *Mahāvibhāṣāśāstra, or the “mode of” (*prakāra*) all thought and thought concomitants that grasp cognitive objects according to Vasubandhu’s revision in Abhidharmakośabhāṣya, or “mental activity” and “representational image” in Puguang’s commentary on Xuanzang’s

translation of Abhidharmakośabhāṣya. The term ākāra also plays a role in almost all major Buddhist doctrinal contexts, including the Sarvāstivāda contemplation model in its path theory as well as more general contexts of meditation and perception.

Chapter one examines the meaning of the term ākāra in pre-abhidharmic Sanskrit and Pāli sources. Chapter two focuses on the famous scheme of the “four noble truths and sixteen ākāras” found in the Sarvāstivāda path theory and its possible sūtraic ancestor in the narrative of the Buddha turning the dharma-wheel, and thereby reveals connections between the term ākāra as used in both the sūtras and abhidharma. Chapter three examines the various contexts in which the term ākāra is applied in abhidharma in order to uncover possible connections among them. Chapter four explores the evolving meanings of the term ākāra as a concept that has been interpreted and re-interpreted within the flowing river of doctrinal history.

In addition to revealing the usages and meanings of the term, this study will also use the term ākāra as a test case to illustrate innovations in abhidharma systems and methods, in the hope of bringing out important aspects of the history of abhidharma.

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Abbreviations

AKBh Abhidharmakośabhāṣya

AKBh-Xz T.1558 Xuanzang's Translation of Abhidharmakośabhāṣya

AKV Abhidharmakośavyākhyā

Ch Chinese

DN Dīghanikāya

DĀ Dīrghāgama

Ja Jātaka

Ji Ju She Lun Ji

JP Jñānaprasthāna

Lv Lalitavistara

MN Majjhimanikāya

MĀ Madhyamāgama

Mv Mahāvastu

MVŚ *Mahāvibhāṣāśāstra

MW Monier-Williams 1899

P Pāli

Pañcat Pañcatantra

R Rāmāyaṇa

RV Ṛgveda

SN Saṃyuttanikāya

SĀ Samyuktāgama

Skt Sanskrit

T Taishō

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The term ākāra is especially well known for its significant role in later Buddhist theories of cognition from Vijñānavāda through the later pramāṇa tradition. In this epistemological context, the term ākāra means the “form” that cognition takes, regardless of whether the form is intrinsic to the cognition or indicates an external projection. However, prior to its role in this specific epistemological context, ākāra underwent different stages of meaning and usage over a long period of time and in different Buddhist textual contexts. Even a cursory survey indicates the remarkable richness in the history of its meaning: in pre-abhidharmic Sanskrit and Pāli sources, it can mean “appearance” and “way;” in Sarvāstivāda abhidharma materials, the Vaibhāṣikas define it as *prajñā* (insight); Vasubandhu re-defines it as the “mode of” or “way in which” (*prakāra*) all thought and thought concomitants (*cittacaittānām*) grasp the cognitive objects; and Puguang records two notions of ākāra, either as a mental activity or as a representational image within cognition. And apart from the context of cognition, the term ākāra actually applies to almost all major doctrinal contexts. For example, it appears in the famous sūtraic narrative of the Buddha’s turning the dharma-wheel; it is used in the Sarvāstivāda contemplation model of the four noble truths and sixteen ākāras and thus becomes a key word in the Sarvāstivāda path theory; it occurs in the context of meditation; it is attached to the descriptive accounts of thought and thought-concomitants (*cittacaitta*); and of course, it is involved in issues concerning cognitive processes such as erroneous perception, and so on. This variety of meanings and contexts and its particular importance in later epistemology can only be clarified through a review of its pre-history in abhidharma.

Chapter one examines the meaning of the term ākāra in the pre-abhidharmic Sanskrit and Pāli sources. Chapter two focuses on the famous scheme of the “four noble truths and sixteen ākāras” found in the Sarvāstivāda path theory. Comparing the pattern that the Sarvāstivāda scheme of the “four noble truths and sixteen ākāras”

shared with the sūtraic narrative of the Buddha’s turning the dharma-wheel, and tracing possible sūtraic ancestors for the sixteen members of the Sarvāstivāda scheme will reveal connections between the term ākāra as used in both the sūtras and abhidharma. Chapter three is a “field investigation” for the abhidharmic usages of the term ākāra. The various contexts in which the term ākāra is applied will be examined in order to uncover possible connections among them. Chapter four examines the evolving meanings of the term ākāra as a concept. An attempt will be made to map out a trajectory from which each single instance of meaning evolved and where it will proceed. Meanings of the term ākāra can only be interpreted within this flowing river of semantic development.

In addition to revealing the usages and meanings of the term ākāra, this evolving term becomes a test case or sample that will illustrate innovations in abhidharma systems and methods. Thus, this study of ākāra will also bring out important aspects of the history of abhidharma.

1.2 The Meanings of the Term Ākāra in Pre-abhidharmic Sources

The term ākāra derives from *ā-kṛ* which means to bring near or towards, to drive near or together (as cows or cattle). Verb forms of *ā-kṛ* occur as early as the Ṛg Veda and include *ākṛṇute*,¹ *ācakrāṇaḥ*,² *ākṛdhi*.³ But the earliest usage of the noun form,

¹ For the indicative 3rd person singular form, *ākṛṇute*, see RV 5.61.7: *vi yā jānāti jasuriṃ vi tṛṣyantam vi kāmīnam devatrā krnute manah*. English translation by Jamison & Brereton, p.742: “While she pays attention to a famished man, or to a thirsting one, or to one who has desires [lust], and sets her own mind upon the Gods.”

² For the 3rd person singular form of the perfect middle participle, *ācakrāṇaḥ*, see RV 10.8.9: *bhūrīd indraḥ udinaḥśantam ojo vābhinat satpatir manyamānam tvāṣṭrasya cid viśvarūpasya gonām ācakrāṇas trīṇi śīrṣā parā varḥ*. Jamison & Brereton’s translation, p.1379: “Indra split (the heads) off the one trying to reach up to much power—the lord of settlements (split them off) the one who thought himself (the same). Having made the cows of Viśvarūpa, the son of Tvaṣṭar, his own, he twisted off his three heads.”

³ For the 2nd person singular imperative, *apa-ākṛdhi*, see RV 3.16.5: *mā no agne mataye māvirātāyai rīradhaḥ māgotāyai sahasas putra mā nide pa dveṣāmsy ā krdhi*. Jamison & Brereton’s translation, p.489: “Agni, do not subject us to lack of thought nor to lack of heroes, nor to lack of cattle, o son of strength, nor to scorn. Put hostilities away from here.” See also RV 10,142.1: *ayam agne jaritā tve iti abhūd api sahasaḥ sūno nahy anyad asty āpyam bhadram hi śarma trivarūtham asti ta āre himsānām apa didyum ā krdhi*. Jamison & Brereton’s translation, p.1628: “O Agni, this singer here has come to abide in you, for there exists no other friendship, o Son of Strength—for auspicious is your shelter, providing threefold defense. Put away in the distance the injurious missile.”

ākāra, seems not to predate epic literature.⁴ The term ākāra is found used in a wide range of non-Buddhist Sanskrit sources, basically referring to the external appearance of something or someone, but for each specific context it can be rendered as shape, form, figuration, or appearance in accordance with its context.

In the Rāmāyaṇa, for example, ākāra refers to the external shape of something or someone in cases such as “chariots in the shape of a city,”⁵ “a chariot in the shape of Mt. Meru,”⁶ “Himavan whose figure is like a silver cloud,”⁷ “palaces in various shapes.”⁸ In his commentary on several early Upaniṣads, Śaṅkarācārya uses this term along the same semantic lines in the phrases “human form,”⁹ the “figuration of the mouth,”¹⁰ “form of visible things,”¹¹ and “figure of the reflected image.”¹² When referring to people’s outer appearance, ākāra seems to be used especially to denote their facial expressions, as, according to dictionaries, “giving a clue to one’s inward thoughts or mental disposition.”¹³ Examples of this meaning include “forest dwellers’ amazed-looked facial expressions,”¹⁴ and “terrified facial expression.”¹⁵

⁴ See discussions below.

⁵ R.1.42.9: *vimānair nagarākārair... devatās*.

⁶ R.3.21.13: *tam meruśikharākāram*. (*tam* here refers to *ratham*, the chariot.)

⁷ R.4.11.16: *śvetāmbudākāra...himavān*

⁸ R.2.100.42: *prāsādair vividhākārair vṛtām ... ayodhyām parirakṣasi*.

⁹ Aitareyopaniṣad 1.1.3: which is about the creation of the world by the self: *so ’dbhya eva puruṣam samuddhṛtyāmūrccayat*. “From that very ocean he drew out and shaped a man.” (Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of terms and cited passages are my own.) In the commentary, *puruṣam* is glossed by *puruṣākāram*, the shape of *puruṣa*.

¹⁰ Aitareyopaniṣad 1.1.4: which is about the creation of bodily parts: in the commentary *mukham nirabhidyaata yathāṇḍam*. “A mouth was hatched like an egg.” In the commentary, *mukham* is glossed with *mukhākāram suṣiramajāyata yathā pakṣiṇo ’ṇḍam* specifying that the “shape/figure” of that man’s mouth is like that of a bird’s egg.

¹¹ Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad 3.9.20: *kasmin nu rūpāṇi pratiṣṭhitānīti | hṛdaya iti hovāca*. “On what are visible things founded?” “On the heart...” in the glossing: *hṛdayārabdhāni rūpāṇi, rūpākāreṇa hi hṛdayam pariṇatam* (*rūpāṇi* are undertaken by the heart, since the heart is changed/bent due to *rūpākāra*), and *rūpākāra* here means the form of any visible thing.

¹² Chāndogyopaniṣad 8.7.4: *atha yo ’yaṃ bhagavo ’psu parikhyāyate yaś cāyam ādarśe katama eṣa iti*. “Then, venerable, which is the one that is seen here in the water and in a mirror?” Here the sage Prajāpati is intending to instruct Indra and Virocaṇa of the true self. In the commentary, the commentator is glossing “*ādarśa* (mirror)” as “*ātmanah pratibimbākārah parikhyāyate khadgādu* (one’s own *pratibimbākāra* is seen on a knife surface, etc.)” Here ākāra means the figure/shape of the *pratibimba* (the reflected image).

¹³ According to Apte and Boehtlingk-Roth, under the lemma of *ākāra*.

¹⁴ R.3.1.13: *rūpasamhananam...dadṛṣur vismitākārā rāmasya vanavāsinaḥ*. “The forest dwellers whose facial expressions looked amazed saw Rāma’s physical strength.”

Besides this basic meaning which seems to be dominant in these texts, namely the early Upaniṣads, Rāmāyaṇa, and so on, there seems to be a more abstract meaning, that is, referring to a “kind,” “sort,” or “way.” This could also be understood as a natural extension from the meaning “appearance” or “form.” A typical example is *dvidhākāra*, “of two sorts.”¹⁶

The usage of the term *ākāra* in the Pāli suttas similarly represents these two categories: that is, the basic meaning of “appearance” and a more abstract meaning of “mode” or “way.” With the basic meaning of “appearance,” it is used to describe how things and people look: for example, in describing the teeth, “his teeth seemed as though they would fall out.”¹⁷ Literally, *patana* refers to the state of falling, and with *ākāra* it means that the teeth have the appearance of falling. Similarly, the term *ākāra* describes how people look as indicated by their expressions, behaviors, and so on:

They behave as if they were satisfied.¹⁸

The king showed the appearance of hunger himself.¹⁹

It also denotes the qualities²⁰ of things and beings:

It is just like a gem, a jewel, pure, excellent, well cut into eight facets, clear, bright, unflawed, endowed with all good qualities.²¹

They took for their king a certain man, good-looking, excellent, commanding, and perfect in all qualities.²²

¹⁵ Pañcat.1.20: *vyākulaḥṛdayaḥ sasādhvasam ākāraṃ pracchādya baṭatale caturmaṇḍalāvasthānenāvasthitaḥ*. “The one (i.e. the lion) whose heart was troubled, having concealed his terrified expression, arranged (his company) by four circle standings.”

¹⁶ Pañcat.3.36: *dvidhākāraṃ bhaved yānaṃ bhavet prāṇārtha-rakṣaṇam | ekam anyaj jigīṣoś ca yātrālakṣaṇam ucyate*. “It’s said to be of two forms/sorts, there could be a retreat for sake of the protection of life, and the other, an invasion for the desire of victory.”

¹⁷ J II 154: *dantā pan’ assa patanākārappattājātā*.

¹⁸ Or, they show themselves to be satisfied. DN I 175: *pasannākāraṃ karonti*.

¹⁹ Or, the king showed himself to be hungry. J I 265: *rājā attano chātakākāraṃ dassesi*.

²⁰ Here the semantic development is of the type “amelioration” as pointed by Professor Richard Salomon, personal communication, 10/4/16.

²¹ DN I 76: *seyyathā pi mahā-rāja maṇi veḷuriyo subho jātimā aṭṭhanso suparikamma-kato accho vippasanno anāvilo sabbākāra-sampanno*.

The meaning “quality” might seem a bit far from the core meaning of “appearance,” but, as these two examples show, in describing how things or beings look, or the aspects that “make” (*ā-kr*) things as they appear, the meaning of quality still fits the basic semantic realm well.

In addition to this basic sense of appearance, examples of the abstract sense of “mode” or “way” also occur. For example,

The king told [him] his way/mode of coming all in detail.²³

He remembers various past lives in all their modes and details.²⁴

Possibly related with the abstract meaning of mode or way, *ākāra* is also found used with more specific meaning of “reason:”

So the chaplain instructed the King who was making the great sacrifice with sixteen reasons, urged him, inspired him and gladdened his heart.²⁵

What are the venerable’s reasons by which he says thus...²⁶

Among early Buddhist Sanskrit texts, the *Mahāvastu* and *Lalitavistara* also use the term *ākāra* in these two meanings, sometimes paralleling the contexts of the Pāli suttas. For the basic semantic realm of “shape” or “appearance,” examples include “the physical form of Indra”²⁷ and “noble gestures.”²⁸ They also adopt the sense of quality, as the Pāli suttas do, in describing the dharma that is “endowed with all

²² J II 352: *ekam abhirūpaṃ sobhaggappattaṃ āṇāsampannaṃ sabbākāraparipuṇṇaṃ purisaṃ gahetvā rājānaṃ karimsu.*

²³ J I 266: *rājā attano āgamanākāraṃ sabbaṃ vitthārato kathesi.*

²⁴ DN I 13: *sākāraṃ sa-uddesaṃ aneka-vihitaṃ pubbe nivāsaṃ anussarati.* (also SN ii.122)

²⁵ DN 139: *atha kho brāhmaṇa purohito brāhmaṇo rañño Mahā-vijitassa mahā-yaññaṃ yajamānassa soḷasehi ākārehi sittaṃ sandassesī samādapesī samuttejesī sampahaṃsesī.* See Walshe’s English translation (2012), p.137.

²⁶ MN I.319: *ko paṇāyasmato ākāra ke anvayā yenāyasmā evaṃ vadeti...*

²⁷ Mv i.183: *ākāraṃ vajrapāṇisya nāyako abhinirmīṇe.* “The leader took on the physical form of Indra.”

²⁸ Mv i.224: *gambhīrastimitaceṣṭā āryākārā praśāntadr̥ṣṭipathā.* “Their behaviors are calm, gestures noble, range of vision tranquilized.”

qualities”²⁹ and extend this meaning to apply to disposition as in “living beings’ good or bad dispositions.”³⁰ Further, the more abstract sense of “kind” or “sort” also occurs in the Mahāvastu:

...all requisites of twelve kinds/sorts.³¹

The “twelve kinds” referred to here include the original four requisites (*pratyaya*) of a monk’s daily life plus an additional set of eight personal belongings (*pariṣkāra*).³²

For the other abstract meaning of “mode” or “way,” it appears with the more concrete rendering of “reason:”

There is one reason why Bodhisattvas lapse in their second *bhūmi*. What is that one?... There are two reasons why Bodhisattvas lapse in the second *bhūmi*... Again, there are three reasons why Bodhisattvas lapse in their second *bhūmi*... There are six reasons why Bodhisattvas who have lived in the first *bhūmi* lapse in the second *bhūmi*...³³

In this case, *ākāra* is translated as “reason,” but it seems that *ākāraiḥ* could also have a more general meaning “in the ways.” However, in the present context, since it is used as a synonym of reason (*kāraṇa*), the translator renders it as “for the reasons.”³⁴

²⁹ Mv i.60.5: *evaṃ sarvākārasaṃpannaṃ sarvākārapratipūraṃ dharmam deśeyam yathāpīṭha bhagavān suprabhāso etarahi*. “Thus may I preach the dharma that is endowed with all good qualities, altogether perfect in all good qualities, as the exalted Suprabhāsa does.” See Jones (1949) p.50.

³⁰ Lv 394.14 (prose): *santi sattvāḥ svākārāḥ suvijñāpakāḥ*. “Beings with good dispositions are easy to be instructed.”

³¹ Mv i.115: *sarvaṃ paribhojyaṃ dvādaśākāraṃ*.

³² As Jones indicated in the note, p.90 note 2.

³³ Mv i.79: *ekena kāraṇena bodhisatvā vivartanti dvitīyāyāṃ bhūmau // katamena ekena // dvihi kāraṇehi bodhisatvā vivartanti dvitīyāyāṃ bhūmau // punas trībhir ākārair bodhisatvā dvitīyāyāṃ bhūmau vivartanti // ṣaḍbhir ākārāiḥ bodhisatvā prathamāyāṃ bhūmau sthitā dvitīyāyāṃ bhūmau vivartanti // For the English translation, see Jones p.62.*

³⁴ This may reflect simple word selection rather than a different sense since Jones seems generally to prefer the former rendering, “way,” when *ākārāiḥ* stands alone (for example, i.96), and the latter, “reason,” when *kāraṇaiḥ* appears in the vicinity (for example, i.62). But this strategy is not strictly followed (for example, i.89 when *ākārāiḥ* and *kāraṇaiḥ* both appear, Jones translated *ākārāiḥ* as “in the ways” and *kāraṇaiḥ*, “for the reasons.”)

1.3 Conclusion

To conclude, we see a relatively stable semantic range for the term ākāra in the pre-abhidharmic Sanskrit and Pāli sources: that is, ākāra is used in two senses, one of which is more basic referring to the “shape,” “appearance” or “quality” of things and beings, while the other is more abstract denoting “kind” or “sort,” “way” or “mode,” and even could be translated as “reason.” Such a semantic arrangement is said to be “stable” in the sense that (1) the meaning of this term seems to be closed and restricted to these two layers and (2) the meaning is clear and most contexts present no problem with regard to its connotation. Thus, in the pre-abhidharma sources, ākāra appears to be used in a simple and straightforward sense without the deeper and more nuanced meanings that we will discover in later Buddhist texts.

Chapter 2. Linkage of the Term Ākāra Between the Sūtras and Abhidharma

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter examined the usage of the term ākāra in sūtra materials and found that it maintains its straightforward meaning as “form/shape” or “way/kind” without much doctrinal nuance. It appears to follow the pattern of any simple noun that is first meant to describe something concrete and then develops a more abstract semantic layer. On the whole, the application and meaning of this term are quite restricted and predictable. It is not a broadly used term, and in each case it simply refers to the appearance of something or somebody, or to the manner of some action. It is not even found connected with any Buddhist doctrinal categories such as the four applications of mindfulness (*catvārosmṛtyupasthāna*), three contemplations (*trīsamādhi*), eight liberations (*aṣṭavimokṣa*), and so on. However, in abhidharma materials, ākāra is found connected with all of these categories and has become a key term in the Sarvāstivāda path theory. One might understand the term’s connection with these categories as reflecting its application to the context of meditation, but the term also occurs in the context of perception. It is used in descriptive accounts of thought and thought-concomitants (*cittacaitta*), and, especially in later materials such as AKBh and Ny, it is involved in issues concerning cognitive processes such as erroneous perception, and so on.

The first major semantic innovation by the Ābhidharmaikas attested in post-canonical materials appears to be the Vaibhāṣika claim that the nature of ākāra is “*prajñā*.” This meaning, *prajñā*, deviates from the previous track of accepted meanings of ākāra as “shape/appearance” and “way/kind.” How did this innovation or deviation occur? How did ākāra, a term that was used to describe the external features of something or some action, come to be associated with processes of understanding and internal mental states? In short, as compared with its restricted usage in the sūtras, the term in abhidharma undergoes expansion both in the contexts in which it occurs and in the depth of its doctrinal connections. Such expansion is of

course not surprising, but we must attempt to understand how it occurred. In other words, how did this simple term develop such complexity in meaning, and how does it replicate itself in two core contexts of Buddhist teachings, namely, the context of meditation and the context of perception?

Any examination of changes of meaning within abhidharma should begin with a review and comparison of related contexts in sūtras and abhidharma texts. In the case of the term ākāra, can any of the abhidharmic contexts be linked to sūtraic usages of the term? In other words, the point of connection between the sūtraic and abhidharmic usages of the term may reveal where and how the term obtained a new meaning, and the various contexts will bring out a clearer picture of the term's evolution in meaning. Specifically, the structural and content similarities between the Buddha's dharma-wheel-turning narrative (abbreviated from here as the 3Dhp-12ākāra narrative) in the sūtras and the contemplation model of the four noble truths and sixteen ākāras (abbreviated from here as the 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model) in the Sarvāstivāda path theory are particularly notable and suggest fruitful contexts for examination.

2.2 The Connection Between the Sūtraic Twelve-ākāra Dharma-wheel-turning Narrative and the Sarvāstivāda Sixteen-ākāra Contemplation Model

Before a detailed comparison of the term ākāra as it appears in these two contexts, it will be helpful to review them briefly, namely the Buddha's dharma-wheel-turning narrative in the sūtras and the contemplation model of the four noble truths and sixteen ākāras in the Sarvāstivāda path theory. At the outset, it is important to note that the term ākāra is linked to the four noble truths in each context, thus signaling its connection to various applications of the concept of the four noble truths in both contexts of dharma-preaching (as in the twelve-ākāra dharma-wheel-turning narrative in the sūtras) and meditation (as in the sixteen-ākāra contemplation model in the Sarvāstivāda path theory).

2.2.1. The Twelve-ākāra Dharma-wheel-turning Narrative and the Sixteen-ākāra Contemplation Model

The narrative of the Buddha's first sermon, referred to as the dharma-wheel-turning (*dharmacakraparivarta*, referred to as Dhṛ below), appears as a complete story as early as in the vinaya, sūtra, the Mahāvastu, and Lalitavistara.³⁵ In this sermon, the Buddha explained the four noble truths three times in twelve modes (*ākāra*) (referred to hereafter as 3Dhṛ-12ākāra).

The narrative starts with a definition section in which the Buddha briefly explains each of the noble truths: the noble truth of suffering is explained in terms of the eight sufferings; the noble truth of the origin of suffering, in terms of the three cravings; the noble truth of the cessation of suffering, in terms of a description of cessation itself; and the noble truth of the path leading to the cessation of the suffering, in terms of the eight-fold path. Next, the narrative proceeds to the section of the “three turnings of the dharma-wheel” proper. The Buddha narrates his own experience regarding the knowledge of the four noble truths and details the results of such knowledge. Based on his own experience of enlightenment, the Buddha explains each of the four noble truths in three ways, which results in a twelve-fold format; this is why this sermon is named the three turnings of the dharma-wheel in twelve modes. For example, the first noble truth of suffering takes on three variants: first, knowing that “this is the noble truth of suffering,” the Buddha states that there arose in him vision (*cakkhu*, *cakṣuḥ*), knowledge (*ñāna*, *jñāna*), wisdom (*paññā*, *prajñā*), true knowledge (*vijjā*, *vidyā*) and light (*āloka*, *āloka*);³⁶ second, knowing that “the noble truth of suffering should be understood,” the Buddha states that there arose in him vision, knowledge, and so on; and finally, knowing that “the noble truth

³⁵ For the references, see the chart below.

³⁶ The lists in Vin and SN are the same and consist of five factors: *cakkhum*, *ñānam*, *paññā*, *vijjā* and *āloka*. The Mv has two more: *buddhiḥ* and *bhūriḥ*. Lv has *medhā* instead of *bhūriḥ*. See SN V 422: *idaṃ dukkham ariyasaccan ti me bhikkhave pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhum udapādi ñānam udapādi paññā udapādi vijjā udapādi āloko udapādi*. Mv 3.332: *idaṃ duḥkham iti bhikṣavaḥ pūrve ananuśrutehi dharmeḥ yoniso manasikārā jñānaṃ udapāsi cakṣur udapāsi vidyā udapāsi buddhi udapāsi bhūrir udapāsi prajñā udapāsi ālokaṃ prādur abhūsi*. Lv 417: *iti duḥkham iti me bhikṣavaḥ purvam aśruteṣu dharmeṣu yoniśomanasikārād bahulikārājñānam utpannaṃ cakṣur utpannaṃ vidyotpannā bhūrir utpannā meghotpannā prajñotpannā ālokaḥ prādurbhūtaḥ*.

of suffering has been understood,” the Buddha states that there arose in him vision, knowledge, and so on. The other three noble truths are formatted in the same way with different verbs in each case: with the second noble truth, “to be abandoned” is used; with the third, “to be realized;” and with the fourth, “to be developed.” Therefore, there are in total twelve statements, and the twelve ākāra are the twelve modes or ways in which the Buddha says he himself considered the four noble truths. As he recalls his own experience, the four noble truths are thus preached in these twelve modes or ways to the monks:

This is the noble truth of suffering;
the noble truth of suffering should be understood;
the noble truth of suffering has been understood;

this is the noble truth of the origin of suffering;
the noble truth of the origin of suffering should be abandoned;
the noble truth of the origin of suffering has been abandoned;

this is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering;
the noble truth of the cessation of suffering should be realized;
the noble truth of the cessation of suffering has been realized;

this is the noble truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering;
the noble truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering should be developed;
the noble truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering has been developed.

Thus, each statement is embedded in the Buddha’s confirmation that vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge and light arose in him as a result of knowing a noble truth in a particular mode or way: for example, regarding the first ākāra, he states that after knowing that “this is the noble truth of suffering,” there arose in him

vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge and light. The remaining eleven statements are formatted in the same way. Therefore, twelve ākāras (twelve modes or ways) are stated.

After this section, the Buddha summarizes his first sermon, highlighting the difference between thoroughly knowing or not knowing the four noble truths in these twelve modes. The difference, according to him, is vital since he would not be able to claim that he is awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment until this knowledge is attained.³⁷ In other words, to know thoroughly the four noble truths in twelve modes, as well as the vision, knowledge, and wisdom, and so on, obtained from such experience, form the watershed between the states of the unawakened and the awakened. With this, the Buddha's dharma-preaching concludes, and the narrative then describes the deva's praise of and the monks' reaction to the Buddha's sermon. The monks, represented by Kauṇḍinya, are then said to obtain the dust-free, stainless dharma-insight from the Buddha's turning of the dharma-wheel.³⁸

Therefore, to recapitulate, the Dhp narrative consists of two layers centering on the knowledge of the four noble truths: one layer describes the Buddha's own

³⁷ SN V 422ff: "So long, bhikkhus, as my knowledge and vision of these four noble truths as they really are in their three phases and twelve aspects was not thoroughly purified in this way, I did not claim to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world with its devas, Mara, and Brahma, in this generation with its recluses and brahmins, its devas and humans. But when my knowledge and vision of these four noble truths as they really are in their three phases and twelve aspects was thoroughly purified in this way, then I claimed to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world with its devas, Mara, and Brahma, in this generation with its recluses and brahmins, its devas and humans. The knowledge and the vision arose in me: 'Unshakeable is the liberation of my mind. This is my last birth. Now there is no more re-becoming.'" See Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation (2005), p. 1845ff. *yāva kīvañca me bhikkhave imesu catusu ariyasaccesu evaṃ tiparivaṭṭaṃ dvādasākāraṃ yathābhūtaṃ ñāṇadassanaṃ na suvisuddham ahoṣi. neva tāvāham bhikkhave sadevake loke samāraḷe sabrahmaḷe sassamaṇabrāhmaṇiyā pajāya sadevamanussāya anuttaraṃ sammāsambodhim abhisambuddho ti paccaññāsiṃ. Yato ca kho me bhikkhave imesu catusu ariyasaccesu evaṃ tiparivaṭṭam dvādasākāraṃ yathābhūtam ñāṇadassanaṃ suvisuddham ahoṣi. athāham bhikkhave sadevake loke samāraḷe sabrahmaḷe sassamaṇabrāhmaṇiyā pajāya sadevamanussāya anuttaram sammāsambodhim abhisambuddho ti paccaññāsiṃ. ñāṇaṇca pana me dassanaṃ udapādi Akuppā me cetovimutti ayam antiṃā jāti natthidāni punabbhavo ti.*

³⁸ SN V 423: "This is what the Blessed One said. Being pleased, the bhikkhus of the group of five delighted in the Blessed One's statement. And while this discourse was being spoken, there arose in the Venerable Kondanna the dust-free, stainless vision of the Dhamma: 'Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation.'" See Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation, p. 1846. *Idam avoca Bhagavā || attamanā pañcavaggiyā bhikkhū Bhagavato bhāsitaṃ abhinandaṃ || imasmiṃ ca pana veyyākaraṇasmim bhaññamāne āyasmato Koṇḍaññaṃ virajaṃ vītamalaṃ dhammacakkhum udapādi || yaṃ kiñci samudayaḷdhammaṃ sabbaṃ taṃ nirodhadhammaṃ ti.*

unsurpassed perfect enlightenment (*anuttarāsamyaksambodhi*) brought about by such knowledge; the second layer is the monks’ attainment of dharma-insight (*dharmacakṣuḥ*) inspired by such knowledge. In both cases, knowledge of the four noble truths according to the twelve modes is considered the key for the generation of supreme vision or the knowledge that uplifts the practitioner to a higher spiritual level.

The following chart analyzes the Dhp narrative into its components, with references to the four texts that represent relatively early textual occurrences of this narrative:

Dharmacakrapravartana narrative (3Dhp - 12ākāra)	Vin	SN	Mv	Lv
Descriptions of 4 noble truths (definition section)	1.6.19	5.421	3.331	416
3Dhp -12ākāra proper: three turnings & arising of <i>cakṣuḥ</i> , <i>jñāna</i> , <i>prajñā</i> , <i>vidyā</i> , etc.	1.23-26	5.422	3.332	417
The Buddha’s enlightenment	1.27-29	5.422	3.333	418
Kauṇḍinya’s attainment of pure dharma-insight	1.29	5.423	3.333	418

Now, after briefly reviewing the sūtraic twelve-ākāra dharma-wheel-turning narrative, let us turn to the Sarvāstivāda sixteen-ākāra contemplation model. This contemplation model of the four noble truths according to sixteen modes (referred to hereafter as 4nt-16ākāra) seems to be an innovation of the northern abhidharmic tradition, for within the Pali tradition it is found neither in the canonical suttas and

vinaya nor in the abhidhamma texts. In the Sarvāstivāda scheme of the path, which comprises five stages in total, this 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model is found in connection with two crucial and successive stages: the path of preparation (*prayogamārga*) and the path of vision (*darśanamārga*), with the former leading to the latter. To be more specific, the path of preparation is devoted to the cultivation of the so-called four “wholesome roots associated with penetration” (*nirvedhabhāgīyakuśalamūla*), and this cultivation is to be realized through the 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model. In this model, the practitioner is supposed to examine each of the noble truths in meditation, applying the sixteen ākāras³⁹ to all dharmas in such a way that all dharmas are considered to be suffering, impermanent, empty, non-self, and so on. The perfection of the 4nt-16ākāra contemplation within the *prayogamārga* then leads to the *darśanamārga*, the first moment of which marks a practitioner’s attainment of the noble path from which there is, at least according to some teachers, no retrogression.

Then on the following path of vision (*darśanamārga*) the practitioner again engages in the 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model but this time contemplates each ākāra quickly for one moment and generates sixteen forms of knowledge in total. The sixteenth moment of knowledge places the practitioner in the next stage, the path of cultivation (*bhāvanāmārga*). It should be noted that various forms of knowledge are said to arise moment by moment within the *darśanamārga*, and these successive moments characterize the Sarvāstivāda model of gradual enlightenment.

³⁹ For the sixteen items within the concept of 4nt-16ākāra, refer to page 24.

1-4. The ākāras of the noble truth of suffering: impermanence (*anitya*), suffering (*duḥkha*), emptiness (*śūnya*), non-self (*anātman*)

5-8. The ākāras of the noble truth of origin: origin (*samudaya*), cause (*hetu*), source (*prabhava*), condition (*pratyaya*)

9-12. The ākāras of the noble truth of cessation: cessation (*nirodha*), tranquility (*sānta*), excellence (*prañīta*), escape (*niḥsaraṇa*)

13-16. The ākāras of the noble truth of path: path (*mārga*), rule (*nyāya*), practice (*pratipad*), deliverance (*nairyānika*)

These will be discussed in more detail later in section 2.3, Possible Sūtra Ancestors for the abhidharmic Sixteen Ākāras.

2.2.2. A Comparison of the Sūtraic Twelve-ākāra Dharma-wheel-turning Narrative and the Sarvāstivāda Sixteen-ākāra Contemplation Model

At first glance, the Sūtraic 3Dhp-12ākāra narrative and the Sarvāstivāda 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model appear to be similar because the term “ākāra” is shared and because they are both connected with the four noble truths, but there is actually more that suggests a potential connection. One of their most notable shared features is their parallel structure, which can be presented in general in the following chart:

3Dhp-12ākāra narrative	4nt-16ākāra contemplation model	
Preparation: descriptions of 4 noble truths	<i>Prayogamārga</i> (path of preparation)	
Dhp proper: (1) three turnings in twelve modes (2) arising of <i>cakṣuḥ</i> , <i>jñāna</i> , <i>prajñā</i> , <i>vidyā</i> , etc.	<i>Darśanamārga</i> (path of vision)	(1) contemplating four noble truths in sixteen modes
(3) the Buddha’s enlightenment		(2) arising of various forms of knowledge
(3) Kauṇḍinya’s attainment of pure dharma-insight		(3) attainment of nobility

As described above, in the *darśanamārga*, the four noble truths are examined according to the sixteen ākāras, generating various forms of knowledge.⁴⁰ Similarly, in the Dhp narrative, the section of Dhp proper explains the four noble truths according to the twelve ākāras, which results in various forms of knowledge: *cakṣuḥ*, *jñāna*, *prajñā*, *vidyā*, and so on. A set of twelve ākāras and a set of sixteen ākāras are respectively involved in these two cases. Although the particular items in the sets of

⁴⁰ These forms of knowledge can be categorized into eight *kṣāntis* and eight *jñānas*, or into eight *dharmajñānas* and eight *anvayajñānas*, which will be discussed later.

twelve and sixteen ākāras are different, the pattern that an examination of the four noble truths in “certain” modes culminates in the arising of a specific type of knowledge appears to be the same. Additionally, the knowledge generated from the twelve and sixteen ākāras in both cases is significant to practice. In the Dhp narrative, for the Buddha, it marks his supreme enlightenment, and for Kauṇḍinya, it enables his attainment of pure dharma-insight. For a Sarvāstivādin practitioner in the *darśanamārga*, it marks his status as a “stream-enterer,” which constitutes the transition from an ordinary being to a noble one. In addition, both the narrative and the contemplation model assume a model of gradual enlightenment. Compared with the Sarvāstivāda model involving sixteen moments each of which produces one particular form of knowledge, the Dhp involves twelve steps each of which produces knowledge that corresponds to one particular way of expounding the four noble truths, and only after a gradual completion of these steps can the Buddha claim to be awakened. In summary, the logic underlying these two cases appears to function along the same lines: that is, the attainment of some supreme knowledge or vision is the dividing point for the inception of sainthood, the tool to obtain such knowledge is the four noble truths, and cultivating such knowledge entails examining and finally knowing thoroughly the four noble truths in specific ways, that is, in terms of twelve or sixteen ākāras.

In the case of the 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model, these “specific” ways of knowing the four noble truths are expounded in the *prayogamārga* section, which precedes immediately the *darśanamārga* section. This arrangement is analogous to the section describing the four noble truths preceding the Dharma-wheel-turning proper in the Dhp narrative:

3Dhp-12ākāra narrative	4nt-16ākāra contemplation model
Preparation: descriptions of 4 noble truths	<i>Prayogamārga</i> (path of preparation)
↓	↓
Dhp proper: three turnings & arising of <i>cakṣuḥ, jñāna, prajñā, vidyā, etc.</i>	<i>Darśanamārga</i> (path of vision)

These descriptions offer a definition of each of the noble truths, which specifies how to understand the four noble truths in the correct, “specific” way. Though it is perhaps inaccurate to suggest that the *prayogamārga* in the 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model parallels the “definition section” in the Dhp narrative, the purpose underlying the two seems to be identical: that is, to describe the preparation and requirements for the examination of the noble truths in the next step, namely, the *darśanamārga* in the Sarvāstivāda path theory, and the Buddha’s dharma preaching (or the Dhp proper section) in the Dharma-wheel-turning story. In other words, since in both the crucial *darśanamārga* and the Dhp proper sections, enlightened knowledge can arise only if the four noble truths are examined in certain specific modes, such modes must be expounded as both the preparation and requirements for the next stage of examination proper. In the 3Dhp-12ākāra narrative, such preparation and requirements are presented through the standard definitions of the noble truths, while in the 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model, they are given in the *prayogamārga* section in which the sixteen ākāras themselves serve as the standard, “correct” ways of looking at the noble truths and are discussed in detail in terms of their features, applications, and so on.⁴¹

⁴¹ The 4nt-16ākāra contemplation is to be practiced in the *prayogamārga* when cultivating the four *kuśalamūla*, namely, the *nirvedhabhāgīya*. This involves four sub-stages: heat (*ūṣmāgata*), summit (*mūrdhan*), acceptance (*kṣānti*) and highest worldly dharmas (*laukikāgradharma*). A detailed record concerning the *nirvedhabhāgīya* is to be found in MVŚ vol. 2-7.

In addition to their parallel structure, the similarity between the 3Dhp-12ākāra narrative and the 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model is also demonstrated by their word choice. For example, the word *darśana* indicates the general knowledge gained from the examination of the noble truths and also marks the practitioner’s spiritual progress. In the section on the Buddha’s enlightenment, thorough knowledge of the noble truths produces *ñānadassana*, which contributes to his unsurpassed enlightenment;⁴² in Kaunḍinya’s quasi-enlightenment experience, the Buddha’s preaching about the four noble truths stimulates his acquisition of the *dharmacakkhu*, which entails a form of vision;⁴³ in the Sarvāstivāda path theory, the point that marks one’s entrance into the path of awakening, is referred to as *darśana*, and it arises from the examination of the noble truths in the previous stage of preparation.

Another shared word is *ñāna/jñāna*. The Dhp generates various forms of knowledge including *ñāna* and *paññā*, and in the *darśanamārga* the various forms of knowledge generated can be included under the category of eight *dharmajñāna* and eight *anvayañāna*. In addition, both the narrative and the contemplation model emphasize that this *ñāna/jñāna* is a first-time, life-changing experience. For example, in the Dhp narrative, the Buddha said that *ñāna*, *paññā*, and so on, arise with regard to things unheard before,⁴⁴ and in the Sarvāstivāda path theory, the name *dharmajñāna* indicates that knowledge with regard to dharmas is acquired for the first time.⁴⁵

Concerning the various *jñānas* that arise in the *darśanamārga*, they are classified as eight *dharmajñāna* and eight *anvayañāna*, which occur either in the form of *kṣānti* or as simple *jñāna*. The differences between *kṣānti* and *jñāna* as well as between *dharmajñāna* and *anvayañāna* are discussed in the MVŚ, and, among the alternative interpretations given, the basic difference is one of succession: that is to

⁴² *ñāṇaṅca pana me dassanam udapādi*, see note 36. It is *jñāna* in Mv, and *jñānadarśana* in Lv.

⁴³ *āyasmato Koṇḍañña virajaṃ vītamalaṃ dharmacakkhum udapādi*, see note 37.

⁴⁴ SN V 422: “Knowing that this is the noble truth of suffering, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light.” *idaṃ dukkham ariyasaccan ti me bhikkhave pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhum udapādi ñāṇam udapādi paññā udapādi vijjā udapādi āloko udapādi*

⁴⁵ See the next two notes.

say, they are differentiated because one follows the other. For example, the *dharmajñāna* is said to be primary, while the *anvayajñāna* is a follower:

It is called *dharmajñāna* because knowledge with regard to the nature of the dharma [occurs] first; it is called *anvayajñāna*, which takes suffering as its object, since it follows that, after that.⁴⁶

This difference cited by the AKBh can be traced back to the MVŚ:

Furthermore, it is called *dharmajñāna* because it knows the dharma for the first time, and it is called *anvayajñāna* because it knows the dharma subsequently. And furthermore it is called *dharmajñāna* because it obtains the *dharmāvetyaprasādasamprayuktajñāna* for the first time, and it is called *anvayajñāna* because it obtains this subsequently. And furthermore, it is called *dharmajñāna* because it obtains the *pratyakṣajñāna* with regard to the dharmas before eyes [for the first time], and it is called *anvayajñāna* because it obtains this subsequently.⁴⁷

This distinction between the two types of knowledge appears similar to the double-layer structure mentioned above in the Dhp narrative, in which the enlightenment section actually involves two events that occur in succession: the Buddha's own enlightenment after examining the noble truths, and Kauṇḍinya's enlightenment after understanding the Buddha's explanation of the noble truths:

⁴⁶ AKBh 6.26c p. 350.20ff: *prathamato dharmatattvajñānād dharmajñānam, tadanvayādūrdhvaṃ duḥkhālanamanvayajñānam, tathā evānuḡamāt.*

⁴⁷ See MVŚ 106 p. 547c23ff: 復次初覺知法故名法智，後覺知法故名類智。復次若初得法證淨相應智故名法智，此後所得故名類智。復次於現見法得現量智故名法智，此後所得故名類智。

3Dhp-12ākāra narrative	4nt-16ākāra contemplation model
Preparation: descriptions of 4 noble truths	<i>Prayogamārga</i> (path of preparation)
Dhp proper The Buddha’s enlightenment ↓ Kaundinya’s attainment of pure dharma-insight	<i>Darśanamārga</i> (path of vision) <i>dharmajñāna</i> ↓ <i>anvayajñāna</i>

It is perhaps inaccurate to view the abhidharma classification of the forms of knowledge into *dharmajñāna* and *anvayajñāna* as a straightforward response to the narrative structure in the sūtra. Also, the parallel structure and the sharing of terminology, as discussed above, may have occurred for other reasons. However, when these similarities are considered together, the suggestion that there was indeed some connection between the 3Dhp-12ākāra narrative and the 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model is not entirely unreasonable.

In addition to the parallel structure and the shared terminology, another indicator for at least a later connection between the 3Dhp-12ākāra narrative and the 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model is to be found in the Vaibhāṣikas’ hermeneutical efforts to connect the two by mapping terms from the dharma-wheel-turning story in the sūtra onto their 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model. In one case, they equate *cakṣuḥ*, *jñāna*, *prajñā* and *vidyā*—the forms of knowledge that are said to arise in the sūtraic Dhp proper section, with *dharmajñānakṣānti*, *dharmajñāna*, *anvayajñānakṣānti* and *anvayajñāna*—the forms of knowledge that are said to arise within the *darśanamārga* in their 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model:

3Dhp-12ākāra narrative	4nt-16ākāra contemplation model
Preparation: descriptions of 4 noble truths	<i>Prayogamārga</i> (path of preparation)
Dhp proper Arising of <i>cakṣuḥ</i> , <i>jñāna</i> , <i>prajñā</i> , <i>vidyā</i>	<i>Darśanamārga</i> (path of vision) Arising of <i>dharmajñānakṣānti</i> , <i>dharmajñāna</i> , <i>anvayajñānakṣānti</i> , <i>anvayajñāna</i>

The Vaibhāṣikas’ hermeneutical effort of mapping *cakṣuḥ*, *jñāna*, *prajñā* and *vidyā* onto *dharmajñānakṣānti*, *dharmajñāna*, *anvayajñānakṣānti* and *anvayajñāna*⁴⁸ is found in MVŚ:

Just as in the sūtra, the Buddha told the monks that he turned the dharma-wheel with regard to the four noble truths according to the twelve ākāras, and there arose vision (*cakṣuḥ*), knowledge (*jñāna*), wisdom (*prajñā*) and true knowledge (*vidyā*)... In this case, vision refers to *dharmajñānakṣānti*, knowledge refers to *dharmajñāna*, wisdom refers to *anvayajñānakṣānti*, and true knowledge refers to *anvayajñāna*.⁴⁹

This mapping conforms to the similarities between the Dhp proper narrative and *darśanamārga* of the 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model suggested above. It is possible that the Vaibhāṣikas suggested this interpretation after noticing the similarity between the two, or perhaps they actually constructed their path theory on the basis of this narrative account. In either case, the 4nt-16ākāra contemplation

⁴⁸ These are four basic types of the sixteen forms of knowledge.

⁴⁹ See MVŚ 79 p. 411a18ff.

model is similar to the 3Dhp-12ākāra narrative. Whatever the case may be, it appears clear that when the Vaibhāṣikas speak about the 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model in their path theory, some aspect of the Dhp narrative may also be assumed. The following example illustrates that when questioned about the sūtraic narrative, the Vaibhāṣikas seem naturally to turn to the contemplation model:

Just as recorded in the sūtra, when the Buddha expounded such a dharma-gate, Kauṇḍinya and eighty thousand devas abandoned the dust and dirt, generating pure dharma-insight with regard to all dharmas... Someone asks: when the Buddha expounded such a dharma-gate, all five monks saw the dharma. Why is only Kauṇḍinya mentioned? The answer is that it is because Kauṇḍinya saw the dharma first. It is said that Kauṇḍinya has already entered the *darśanamārga*, while the other four still remained in the *nirvedhabhāgīya-kuśalamūla*.⁵⁰

Here the Vaibhāṣikas appeal to the simple fact recorded in the story that Kauṇḍinya is mentioned as a representative of the five monks, and interpret this narrative detail using the framework of their path theory together with the abhidharmic terminology of *darśanamārga* and *nirvedhabhāgīya-kuśalamūla*. They locate Kauṇḍinya's spiritual progress, which is implicit in the sūtraic narrative, in a definite and clear stage within their path theory, the stage of *darśanamārga*, and place the other monks, in a similar way, in a slightly lower stage. This passage provides an excellent example of the Vaibhāṣikas' technique of using a seemingly unrelated statements in sūtra materials to support an aspect of their theory, or so to say, constructing their theory on bits of sūtra materials with the power of a hermeneutical lever.

2.2.3 Conclusion

Thus, the two models presented in the sūtraic 3Dhp-12ākāra narrative and the Sarvāstivāda 4nt-16ākāra contemplation deal with one and the same issue, that is, what a practitioner is supposed to do right before his attainment of enlightenment or

⁵⁰ See MVŚ 182 p. 913b5ff.

as the direct cause of a practitioner’s becoming a noble person, both of which occur through the examination of the four noble truths *in specific ways* (where the term ākāra applies and makes sense). Obviously, both the Dhp narrative and the contemplation model center on the four noble truths, and they construct frameworks, driven by the four noble truths, whose mechanics are exactly the same, that is, (1) the examination of the noble truths, leads to (2) the generation of a variety of knowledge, which produces (3) the transformation of the practitioner to an awakened one. If the practitioner’s spiritual career is considered as a spectrum, then the two models point to exactly the same segments, that is, one segment that is immediately before the first moment leading to enlightenment, and the succeeding segment in which enlightenment is completed gradually. For the pre-enlightenment segment, we have the *prayogamārga* in the contemplation model and the definition section in the narrative, and, for the segment in which enlightenment is completed gradually, the *darśanamārga* in the contemplation model parallels the Dhp proper in the narrative:

3Dhp-12ākāra narrative	4nt-16ākāra contemplation model
Definition section	<i>Prayogamārga</i> (path of preparation)
Dhp proper	<i>Darśanamārga</i> (path of vision)

Therefore, the internal construction of the two models appears to be isomorphic, and, from the perspective of a practitioner’s spiritual progress, the two also belong to the same position on the spectrum. In addition to this structural similarity, the shared terms as well as the Vaibhāṣika hermeneutical effort to connect these two models also add more weight to the suggestion that the Sarvāstivāda 4nt-16ākāra contemplation bears some connection to the 3Dhp-12ākāra narrative in the sūtras.

2.3 Possible Sūtra Ancestors for the Abhidharmic Sixteen Ākāras

The previous section demonstrated a possible connection between the Sarvāstivāda 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model and the 3Dhp-12ākāra narrative in the sūtras. Such a connection suggests that the 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model bears a discernable relationship with its parental ground. However, from a broader perspective, does the 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model show other connections to sūtra materials apart from its specific linkage with the 3Dhp-12ākāra narrative? If it does, such connections would draw the abhidharmic concept of 4nt-16ākāra even nearer to its sūtraic background. Therefore, this section will investigate the abhidharmic usage of the concept of 4nt-16ākāra in terms of possible sūtraic ancestors. Although connections among concepts have become obscured in the course of time, hints may be observed as the list of the sixteen items within the concept of 4nt-16ākāra is broken down and analyzed into its components, which are as follows:

1-4. The ākāras of the noble truth of suffering: impermanence (*anitya*), suffering (*duḥkha*), emptiness (*śūnya*), non-self (*anātman*)

5-8. The ākāras of the noble truth of origin: origin (*samudaya*), cause (*hetu*), source (*prabhava*), condition (*pratyaya*)

9-12. The ākāras of the noble truth of cessation: cessation (*nirodha*), tranquility (*śānta*), excellence (*praṇīta*), escape (*niḥsaraṇa*)

13-16. The ākāras of the noble truth of path: path (*mārga*), rule (*nyāya*), practice (*pratipad*), deliverance (*nairyāṇika*)

Three items within the noble truth of suffering, namely, impermanence (*anitya*), suffering (*duḥkha*), and non-self (*anātman*), are found united as a group in several contexts in sutta/sūtra materials. One of the contexts is the list of seven conceptions (*saññā*)⁵¹ found in the Saṅgītīsutta, Dasuttarasutta and the Mahāparinibbānasutta in the DN: (1) *aniccasaññā*, (2) *anattasaññā*, (3) *asubhasaññā*, (4) *ādīnavasaññā*, (5)

⁵¹ Pāli terms have been used to refer to the sixteen ākāra from this point on, since the main source in which correspondences to the Sanskrit/Chinese list of 4nt-16ākāra are found is in Pāli.

pahānasaññā, (6) *virāgasaññā*, (7) *nirodhasaññā*. This list is translated below for the convenience of reference:

The seven conceptions (*saññā*): (1) The conception concerning impermanence (*aniccasaññā*); (2) the conception concerning non-self (*anattasaññā*); (3) the conception concerning disgusting things (*asubhasaññā*); (4) the conception concerning danger (*ādīnavasaññā*), (5) the conception concerning abandoning (*pahānasaññā*); (6) the conception concerning dispassionateness (*virāgasaññā*); (7) the conception concerning cessation (*nirodhasaññā*).

A comparison of this list with the four ākāras of the noble truth of suffering reveals that only two items within the sixteen ākāras, impermanence and non-self, appear in this list. But other versions of this list of conceptions, which are found in Pāli and Chinese sources, contain more items as will become clear in following discussions.

This list is one among many categories containing seven dhammas that are given in the Saṅgītisutta⁵² (DN 33) and in the Dasuttarasutta⁵³ (DN 34), as well as in the Mahāparinibbānasutta (DN 16) where it is referred to as the seven dhammas of non-decline (*aparihāniya-dhamma*).⁵⁴ We will show later that the Chinese parallels, which are found in the DĀ (T1.9, T1.10, and T1.2 respectively), have a different word order and a different pattern for the set of *aniccasaññā*, *anattasaññā* and

⁵² DN III 253: *satta saññā. anicca-saññā, anatta-saññā, asubha-saññā, ādīnava-saññā, pahāna-saññā, virāga-saññā, nirodha-saññā*. For the Chinese parallel see T1.9 p.52b4ff: 復有七法，謂七想：不淨想、食不淨想、一切世間不可樂想、無想、無常想、無常苦想、苦無我想。

⁵³ DN III 283: *katame satta dhammā uppādetabbā? Satta saññā, anicca-saññā, anatta-saññā, asubha-saññā, ādīnava-saññā, pahāna-saññā, virāga-saññā, nirodha-saññā. Ime satta dhammā uppādetabbā*. For the Chinese parallel see T1.10 p.54c4ff: 云何七生法？謂七想：不淨想、食不淨想、一切世間不可樂想、死想、無常想、無常苦想、苦無我想。

⁵⁴ DN II 79: *yāvakīvañca, bhikkhave, bhikkhū aniccasaññaṃ bhāvēssanti ... pe ... anattasaññaṃ bhāvēssanti ... asubhasaññaṃ bhāvēssanti ... ādīnavasaññaṃ bhāvēssanti ... pahānasaññaṃ bhāvēssanti ... virāgasaññaṃ bhāvēssanti ... nirodhasaññaṃ bhāvēssanti, vuddhiyeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhūnaṃ pāṭikañkhā, no parihāni*. For the Chinese parallel see T1.2 p.11c25ff: 佛告比丘：復有七法，則法增長，無有損耗。何謂為七法？一者觀身不淨，二者觀食不淨，三者不樂世間，四者常念死想，五者起無常想，六者無常苦想，七者苦無我想，如是七法，則法增長，無有損耗。

**dukkhasaññā*.⁵⁵ More interestingly, the Chinese lists actually group *anicca* (impermanence), **dukkha* (suffering) and *anatta* (non-self) as a three-item set.⁵⁶

Apart from these lists of seven dhammas, some variants of this seven-*saññā* list, perhaps representing another pattern or tradition, are preserved in the Saṅgītisutta and the Dasuttarasutta. These include lists of five *saññā* and six *nibbedhabhāgiya*⁵⁷-*saññā* in the Saṅgītisutta, and lists of nine *saññā* and ten *saññā* in the Dasuttarasutta. In these lists, both the Pāli and the Chinese texts have a three-item set of *saññā* including impermanence, suffering and non-self (P. *aniccasaññā*, *anicce dukkhasaññā*, and *dukkhe anattasaññā*; Ch. 無常想, 無常苦想, 苦無我想). These lists in the Saṅgītisutta and the Dasuttarasutta are summarized in the chart below⁵⁸:

⁵⁵ *Dukkhasaññā* appears with an asterisk because it is not found in the Pāli lists but only occurs in Chinese. The term *dukkhasaññā* is rendered back from the Chinese translation 苦想 or 無常苦想.

⁵⁶ This point will be discussed in a subsequent section.

⁵⁷ Skt. *nirvedhabhāgiya*. This term already appears in previous discussion concerning the Sarvāstivāda path theory. Within the five stages in total, the path of preparation (*prayogamārga*) is devoted to the cultivation of the so-called four “wholesome roots associated with penetration” (*nirvedhabhāgiya-kuśalamūla*), and this cultivation is to be realized through the 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model. Upon the completion of the *nirvedhabhāgiya-kuśalamūla*, the practitioner enters the next stage, the path of vision (*darśanamārga*).

⁵⁸ The order of items within each list strictly follows that as it appears in the Pāli or Chinese originals. Therefore, the order of terms in Pāli and Chinese does not always appear to be correspondent to each other. For example, in LIST 1, the DĀ and DN34 both have a list of 9 items. In DĀ, the list starts with 不淨 (impurity) and 觀食 (contemplating/examining [the loathsomeness of] the food), etc., while the DN34 list starts with *asubha* (impurity) and *maraṇa* (death). In this case, the second item differs as appears in our chart for the Pāli and Chinese lists.

	*DĀ	N/A										
	10	N/A										
LIST	DN34	asubha	marāṇa	āhāre patikkūl	sabbalok e	anicca	anicce dukkha	dukkhe anatta	pahāna	virāga	nirodha	
	DĀ	不淨	觀食	一切世 間不可	死	無常	無常苦	苦無我	盡	無欲		
1	9	asubha	marāṇa	āhāre patikkūl	sabbalok e	anicca	anicce dukkha	dukkhe anatta	pahāna	virāga		
LIST	DN34	asubha	marāṇa	āhāre patikkūl	sabbalok e	anicca	anicce dukkha	dukkhe anatta	pahāna	virāga		
	DĀ	不淨	食不淨	一切世 間不可	死	無常	無常苦	苦無我				
2	7	anicca	anatta	asubha	ādhāva	pahāna	virāga	nirodha				
LIST	DN33	anicca	anatta	asubha	ādhāva	pahāna	virāga	nirodha				
	DĀ	不淨	食不淨	一切世 間不可	無	無常	無常苦	苦無我				
3	7	anicca	anatta	asubha	ādhāva	pahāna	virāga	nirodha				
LIST	DN33	anicca	anatta	asubha	ādhāva	pahāna	virāga	nirodha				
	DĀ	不淨	食不淨	一切世 間不可	無	無常	無常苦	苦無我				
3	5	anicca	anicce dukkha	dukkhe anatta	pahāna	virāga	nirodha					
LIST	DN33	anicca	anicce dukkha	dukkhe anatta	pahāna	virāga	nirodha					
	DĀ	無常	無常苦	苦無我	不淨惡 露	一切世 間不可						
3	5	anicca	anicce dukkha	dukkhe anatta	pahāna	virāga	nirodha					
LIST	DN33	anicca	anicce dukkha	dukkhe anatta	pahāna	virāga	nirodha					
	DĀ	無常	無常苦	苦無我	不淨惡 露	一切世 間不可						

Let us focus on the Pāli lists in the chart first. If we compare the Pāli lists only, the first two are obviously based on the same source list, which is labeled LIST 1 in the left column of the chart, since the first list of ten dhammas simply adds only one item, *nirodha*, to a set of nine dhammas shared with the second list.

The third and the fourth Pāli lists both contain seven dhammas and are found in both the Saṅgītisutta and Dasuttarasutta. These two Pāli lists are exactly the same and are therefore labeled LIST 2.⁵⁹ This Pāli LIST 2 seems to be based on a source list different from Pāli LIST 1 first because of their different word order. As been shown in the chart, both lists actually consist of three sets of items, which are (1) a set of *anicca, dukkhe anatta*⁶⁰ (or simply *anatta* in LIST 2), and *anicce dukkha*⁶¹ (which is not included in LIST 2), united as a group; (2) a set of *pahāna, virāga* and *nirodha*⁶², which are usually fixed and always located at the very end of the list; and (3) a set of other items starting with *asubha* followed by other members that are subject to variation.⁶³ In LIST 1, which is represented by the first and second lists in the chart, the set of *anicca* follows the set of *asubha*, while in LIST 2, which is represented by the third and fourth lists, it is moved to the very beginning of each list:⁶⁴

Pāli LIST 1: (3) set of *asubha*, (1) set of *anicca*, (2) set of *pahāna*

Pāli LIST 2: (1) set of *anicca*, (3) set of *asubha*, (2) set of *pahāna*

⁵⁹ These two lists are same in Pāli, and almost the same in Chinese. Therefore, they are labeled as LIST 2.

⁶⁰ Non-self in/regarding suffering.

⁶¹ Suffering in/regarding impermanence.

⁶² For translations, refer back to page 24.

⁶³ Why is this set, *asubha, maraṇa*, etc., seen as a group, different from the set of *pahāna*? This is partly because of its being separated from *pahāna, nirodha*, etc. by the set of *anicca*, in LIST 1, and partly because LIST 3, which will be shown below, consists of only two sets, i.e., namely, the set of *anicca* and the set of *pahāna*, which leaves the set of *asubha* as a relatively independent group.

⁶⁴ This statement that the set is “moved to” the beginning of LIST 2 should not be taken to imply relative chronology of LISTS 1 and 2. It does not mean that movement occurred in LIST 2 on the basis of LIST 1, which might imply that LIST 2 is later than LIST 1. It is intended simply as a static comparative description of their differences; the historical reality of course entails a dynamic process. In fact, the chronology could be in either direction, that is, a movement of word order undertaken in LIST 1 or in LIST 2, and either list could be the older one. Or, since the two lists could represent different originals, it is perhaps not best to think in terms of movement or relative chronology.

Thus, the order of LIST 2, as presented by the lists of seven *saññā* in the Saṅgītisutta and the Dasuttarasutta that have *anicca* first, followed by the set of *asubha*, and finally the set of *pahāna*, is different from that of LIST 1. In addition, the set of *asubha* not only occupies a different place in both lists but also involves different items. LIST 1 adds *maraṇa*, *āhāre patikkūla*, and *sabbaloke anabhirati*⁶⁵ to *asubha*, while LIST 2 adds simply *ādīnava*⁶⁶ to *asubha*. The most striking point of difference between the two lists lies in the term *anicca*. Pāli LIST 1, which is characterized by a nine-*saññā* list and a ten-*saññā* list, has three items for the set of *anicca*: *anicca*, *anicce dukkha*, and *dukkhe anatta*, which matches perfectly 無常, 無常苦, 苦無我在 the Chinese parallel. But Pāli LIST 2, characterized by the seven-*saññā* list in the two suttas, uses an abbreviated form of these items with *anicca* and *anatta* instead of *anicca* and *dukkhe anatta*. Also, LIST 2 does not contain a third item, *dukkha*, or *anicce dukkha* as it appears in its full form in LIST 1, *anicce dukkha*. Therefore, instead of the set of *anicca*, *anicce dukkha*, and *dukkhe anatta* in LIST 1, only *anicca* and *anatta* are found in LIST 2. In other words, given the abbreviated form used for certain terms and fewer items in the set of *anicca*, Pāli LIST 2 presents a very different pattern from Pāli LIST 1.

But when considering the parallel lists in Chinese, we found that this difference between the two Pāli lists is not reflected in the Chinese translations: that is to say, even though Pāli LIST 2 has only two items, both in an abbreviated form, the Chinese parallel gives a set of three, in their full form, namely, 無常, 無常苦, 苦無我, exactly as the Pāli LIST 1 does. In LIST 3,⁶⁷ which appears to represent the last half section of LIST 1, in contrast to LIST 2, the Pāli set of *anicca* returns to its full form with three items, *anicca*, *anicce dukkha*, and *dukkhe anatta* that correspond to the three items 無常, 無常苦, 苦無我在 the Chinese parallel. In other words,

⁶⁵ *maraṇa*, death; *āhāre patikkūla*, loathsomeness of food; *sabbaloke anabhirati*, not delighting in all worldly things.

⁶⁶ *ādīnava*, danger.

⁶⁷ LIST 3 seems to represent the last half section of LIST 1. It is differentiated from LIST 2 by the obvious different pattern of the set of *anicca*, as explained above, that is, it contains a set of all three items as LIST 1, in contrast to the two-item set in LIST 2.

regardless of the variation in the Pāli lists, with either two items in abbreviated form or three items in full form, the Chinese lists contain the same three-item full form:

Ch. LIST1: 不淨、食不淨、一切世間不可樂、死、無常、無常苦、苦無我、盡、無欲

P. LIST1:anicca, anicce dukkha, dukkhe anatta.....

Ch. LIST2: 不淨、食不淨、一切世間不可樂、死、無常、無常苦、苦無我

P. LIST2: anicca, anatta.....

Ch. LIST3: 無常、無常苦、苦無我、不淨惡露、一切世間不可樂

P. LIST3: anicca, anicce dukkha, dukkhe anatta.....

In addition to these different patterns for the set of *anicca*, this chart also suggests that LIST 2 is distinctive. In the case of LIST 1, the Pāli and Chinese lists show the same word order and pattern for the set of *anicca*;⁶⁸ therefore, the Pāli and Chinese lists appear to have been based on the same source. The same is true for LIST 3. However, this is not the case for LIST 2 in which the Pāli and Chinese lists have different word orders and show two different patterns for the set of *anicca*: the Pāli lists have the set of *anicca* at the beginning, while the Chinese lists put it in the end; within the set of *anicca*, Pāli has an abbreviated two-item form (*anicca, anatta*), while the Chinese has the full three-item form (*anicca, anicce dukkha, dukkhe anatta*: 無常、無常苦、苦無我):

⁶⁸ Although in the case of LIST 1, the Pāli and Chinese show minor differences in word order within the set of *asubha*, and so on, the Pāli and Chinese still show a high degree of agreement concerning the overall order among the three sets and in particular with regard to the pattern of the set of *anicca*. They have thus been considered as being based on the same source list.

(1) (*anicca, anatta*)

LIST 2 Pāli: (1) set of *anicca*, (3) set of *asubha*, (2) set of *pahāna*

LIST 2 Ch.: (3) set of *asubha*, (2) set of *pahāna*, (1) set of *anicca*

(3) 不淨、食不淨 (2) 一切世間不可樂、死 (1) 無常、無常苦、苦無我

(1) (*anicca, anicce dukkha, dukkhe anatta*)

It is possible either that LIST 2 in Pāli and in Chinese are from different sources or that they are based on the same source and the difference is a result of redaction at a later time. Regardless of the source of the difference, the important point here is that, when it comes to the set of *anicca*, the Chinese materials maintain the full three-item list of impermanence, suffering and non-self even when there is no item of suffering in Pāli. Since all Chinese lists of *saññā* have three items in their sets of *anicca*, if the Chinese translators were faithful to the original, these original sources would also have contained three items in the set of *anicca*. However, it is also possible that the sources for the Chinese translations reflected the two-item tradition, just as in LIST 2 in Pāli, but the Chinese translators chose to neglect the sources and expanded the list to three items. This expansion would reflect the fact that the three items were already understood by convention as a relatively fixed group, and a set of two would have been seen as simply “incomplete.” Regardless of the reason, the result is that the Chinese materials have in every case a three-item set of impermanence, suffering and non-self within the set of seven, as well as the sets of five, six, nine and even ten *saññā*.

Another context in which impermanence and non-self appear grouped in a set together with a third item, suffering, and a fourth, emptiness, concerns a meditative approach to the five aggregates of clinging (*pañcupādānakkhandhā*). It is actually a list of perspectives through which the five aggregates are supposed to be contemplated, and the different Pāli and Chinese renderings of this list again show the Chinese tendency to generate a group of three, or even four, rather than two.

One occurrence of this list in Chinese is as follows:

At that time, Mahākoṭṭhika asked Sāriputta: If a monk who has not obtained the path of non-interruption, and so on, would like to obtain the path of non-interruption and so on, how does he seek to obtain [it]? Sāriputta said: If a monk who has not obtained the path of non-interruption, and so on, would like to obtain the path of non-interruption, and so on, [he should] diligently contemplate the five aggregates as illness, swelling, thorn, harm, hindrance, impermanence, suffering, emptiness, and non-self.⁶⁹

Sāriputta is teaching Mahākoṭṭhika that the five aggregates should be properly considered as illness, and so on. Here, *anicca, dukkha, suññā* and *anatta* (無常、苦、空、非我) are grouped as a set at the end of the list. In the Pāli parallel, these four items are not presented in a continuous series as they are in Chinese:

The five aggregates should be properly considered as impermanence, suffering, illness, swelling, arrow, pain, disease, enemy, harm, suffering, and non-self.⁷⁰

In contrast to this passage, another occurrence in Pāli does not include emptiness (*suññā*) but only mentions that the five aggregates should be observed as impermanence, suffering, non-self (*anicca, dukkha, anatta*), and so on:

Now the monks or Brahmins see lovely, agreeable *rūpa* in the world as impermanence, suffering, non-self, illness, and fear. They get rid of desire.⁷¹

The Chinese parallel has a group of four items, impermanence, suffering, emptiness, and non-self (無常、苦、空、非我), and once again, this four-item set is located at the end of the list as a group in contrast to its placement in Pāli:

⁶⁹ SĀ T2 p. 65b11ff: 時，摩訶拘絺羅問舍利弗言：“若比丘未得無間等法，欲求無間等法，云何方便求？思惟何等法？”舍利弗言：“若比丘未得無間等法，欲求無間等法，精勤思惟五受陰為病、為癰、為刺、為殺、無常、苦、空、非我。

⁷⁰ SN III 168: *bhikkhunā pañcupādānakkhandhā aniccato dukkhato rogato gaṇḍato sallato aghato ābādhato parato palokato suññato anattato yoniso manasi kātabbā*.

⁷¹ SN II 110: *etarahi samaṇā vā brāhmaṇā vā yaṃ loke piyarūpaṃ sātārūpaṃ taṃ aniccato passanti dukkhato passanti anattato passanti rogato passanti bhayato passanti, te taṃhaṃ pajahanti*.

If the monks or Brahmins see the worldly perceptible agreeable *rūpa* as illness, swelling, thorn, harm, impermanence, suffering, emptiness and non-self, their desires would then go away.⁷²

Therefore, the Pāli and the Chinese renderings of this list concerning the right way by which the five aggregates should be contemplated, as represented by these two variants, can be summarized as follows:

Pāli 1: *anicca, dukkha,suññā, anatta*

Chinese 1:無常、苦、空、非我

Pāli 2: *anicca, dukkha, anatta,*

Chinese 2:無常、苦、空、非我

From this comparison, it is clear that, regardless of the Pāli pattern, whether it splits the four items (as in list 1) or records only three items (as list 2), the Chinese keeps to the same pattern, that is, with the full set of four items located at the very end of the list. Since it is possible that a neatly patterned list, as compared to those that are more varied, has undergone more editing, then this consistent set of four in Chinese may be the result of editing involving the grouping of items that had been separated or completing the group by adding additional items. Such editing may suggest that it had become a convention among the translators/editors to use a four-item group, and any “similar” list, for example, one with four items listed separately or even only three items, was transformed into a four-item one simply because a four-item grouping had become stereotyped in their minds. On the other hand, a neatly-patterned list may not be the result of an editing effort but may simply reflect a distinctive textual lineage or doctrinal tradition. If this is the case here, then, as mentioned previously, the Chinese materials follow a doctrinal lineage that proposes

⁷² SĀ T2 p. 82c2ff: 若諸沙門、婆羅門於世間可念端政之色觀察如病、如癰、如刺、如殺、無常、苦、空、非我，彼愛則離。

a grouped set of four, and, in that tradition, the set of impermanence, suffering, emptiness, and non-self was already established, at least in the context of meditation with regard to the proper perspectives from which the five aggregates of clinging are to be observed.

Another context involving the proper perspectives for contemplating the five aggregates is found in the Yadaniccassutta:

Monks, form (*rūpa*) is impermanent. What is impermanent is suffering. What is suffering is non-self. What is non-self should be seen by correct insight as it really is as, “This is not mine, this I am not, this is not myself.” Feeling (*vedanā*) is impermanent...perception (*saññā*) is impermanent...formation (*saṅkhārā*) is impermanent...consciousness (*viññāṇaṃ*) is impermanent...⁷³

According to the Pāli text, the proper perspectives include the following: (1) each of the five aggregates is impermanent; (2) what is impermanent is suffering; (3) what is suffering is non-self; and (4) what is non-self should be seen as, “This is not mine, this I am not, this is not myself.” Once again, the Chinese text applies a group of four to the five aggregates:

The Buddha told the monks: You should see form (*rūpa*) as impermanent. Thus is the correct way of seeing... Thus you should see feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), formation (*saṅkhārā*), consciousness (*viññāṇaṃ*) as impermanent...as impermanent, suffering, empty, and non-self as thus the same way.⁷⁴

As shown above, the Chinese and Pāli lists have three items in common, *anicca* (無常), *dukkha* (苦) and *anatta* (非我), while a fourth one, 空 (emptiness), finds no correspondence in the Pāli list. This difference also might be explained as a result

⁷³ SN IV 154: *rūpaṃ, bhikkhave, aniccaṃ. Yad aniccaṃ taṃ dukkham; yaṃ dukkham tadanattā; yad anattā taṃ ‘netaṃ mama, nesohamasmi, na meso attā’ ti evametaṃ yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya daṭṭhabbaṃ. Vedanā aniccā...Saññā aniccā ... pe ... saṅkhārā aniccā ... viññāṇaṃ aniccaṃ...*

⁷⁴ SĀ T2 p. 1a7ff: 世尊告諸比丘：“當觀色無常，如是觀者，則為正觀。...如是觀受、想、行、識無常。...如觀無常，苦、空、非我，亦復如是。”

either of an editorial change or of a different Indic original for the Chinese translation, which included this fourth item. In either case, it indicates that the Chinese Buddhists at the time when this sūtra was translated already thought of impermanence, suffering, and non-self in a group of four together with emptiness.

2.4 Conclusion

As demonstrated in chapter one, ākāra seems to have had a straightforward meaning in the sūtras. It simply refers to “appearance” or “way,” and its usage has no particular connection with any aspect of Buddhist teaching. But among all its occurrences in sūtras, as shown in chapter 2.2, there seems to be one exception to this general impression: that is, ākāra as used in the Buddha’s dharma-wheel-turning narrative. Here, ākāra is related to a specific aspect of Buddhist teaching or doctrine since it is connected with the core concept of the four noble truths. Further, in contrast to the sporadic usage of the term in other contexts, ākāra accompanies all occurrences of the Buddha’s dharma-wheel-turning narrative, which is cited repeatedly in sūtras. That is to say, in the case of the dharma-wheel-turning narrative, the term ākāra seems to have developed an inherent connection with the narrative itself.

Among the abhidharmic contexts in which ākāra occurs, we found that the Sarvāstivāda contemplation model displays close connections to the sūtraic dharma-wheel-turning narrative since they share similar patterns, terminology, and so on (see 2.2). Moreover, considering the fact that the sixteen members within the contemplation model find possible ancestors in the sūtras (see 2.3), we have suggested that the contemplation model may in fact be the abhidharmic context that has the closest connection with the sūtras: that is to say, among all the contexts in which ākāra appears in abhidharmic materials, this context of the sixteen-ākāra contemplation model may be the closest logically or perhaps even historically to the sūtra usage. It connects the term’s sūtraic and Abhidharmic usage and serves as the starting point from which the expansion of application of this term in abhidharma occurs. Thus, in response to the question of how the term came to be adopted in

abhidharma, it is possible that it was adopted from the sūtra narrative of the Buddha's dharma-wheel-turning story. And since ākāra is intrinsically bound to the narrative and to a consideration of the four noble truths, it is then incorporated into the Sarvāstivāda contemplation model, which is also focused on the four noble truths. From this it then enters the abhidharmic horizon.

Chapter 3: Expansion of Usage of Ākāra in Abhidharma

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2.2 we have shown a possible connection between the 3Dhp-12ākāra narrative in the sūtras and the Sarvāstivāda 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model. Chapter 2.3 further demonstrates possible sūtraic ancestors of certain items of the Sarvāstivāda 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model. Both examinations suggest a linkage between the term's usage in abhidharma, especially the Sarvāstivāda 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model, and its sūtraic ancestors.

If we tentatively accept this point of linkage between the term's usage in the sūtras and in abhidharma, we can then consider the question of how the term's usage expanded in abhidharma, that is, how it came to be used not simply in the contemplation model but in more general meditation contexts as well as in perception. If some connection can be discerned between ākāra's usages in various contexts and its usage in the 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model, we will gain a clearer picture of the term's evolution in meaning, and this in turn may strengthen the suggestion that the 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model was the starting point for the expanded use of the term ākāra in abhidharma.

3.2 Hermeneutical Tool: How the Term Ākāra is Used Beyond the Context of *nirvedhabhāgīya*

Turning to the abhidharmic materials, we find that the Vaibhāṣika masters use the sixteen ākāras of the contemplation model as a hermeneutical tool, in particular to interpret and systemize certain traditional doctrinal lists related to meditation. For example, the list of three contemplations (*tri-samādhi*) common in the sūtra is reinterpreted from the perspective of sixteen ākāras:

Their ākāras are different; [therefore, the three contemplations are different].
The contemplation of emptiness (*śūnyatā-samādhi*) has two ākāras: namely, the ākāra of emptiness and non-self. The contemplation of non-contrivance

(*apraṇihita-samādhi*) has ten ākāras: namely, the ākāra of suffering and impermanence as well as the [eight] ākāras for the noble truth of the origin and the path. The contemplation of no-marks (*ānimitta-samādhi*) has four ākāras: namely, the four ākāra for the noble truth of cessation.⁷⁵

In this way, the sixteen ākāras are neatly allotted among the three *samādhis*. However, the allocation seems somehow arbitrary, and no further explanation is given as to why a certain *samādhi* should only be practiced in terms of a certain set of ākāra. Although the connection between one contemplation and a certain set of ākāras seems arbitrary and the allocation as a whole seems formulaic, this allocation achieves the purpose of assigning differentiating marks to each of the three contemplations, even if the allocation itself makes little sense. In other words, if the purpose is merely to explain why the Buddha taught three kinds of *samādhi* instead of, for example, one *samādhi* only, the hermeneutical tool of the sixteen-ākāra system indeed provides at least one perspective. In fact, the Vaibhāṣika masters claim that the Jñānaprasthāna in its allocation of the sixteen ākāras to the three *samādhis* was motivated by this purpose of finding some way to differentiate the three *samādhis*:

The three *samādhis* are established on the basis of differentiation in terms of ākāra. (See the passage from the MVŚ cited above.) Therefore, there are only three *samādhis*. The Jñānaprasthāna first proposed that the contemplation of emptiness is [the contemplation of] emptiness, not [the contemplation of] non-contrivance or no-marks, and the contemplation of non-contrivance is [the contemplation of] non-contrivance, not [the contemplation of] emptiness or no-marks, and the contemplation of no-marks is [the contemplation of] no-

⁷⁵ See MVŚ 33 p. 172a7ff: 復次行相別故。謂空三摩地三行相俱，即空、非我。無願三摩地十行相俱，即苦、非常、集道各四。無相三摩地四行相俱，即緣滅四。

marks, not [the contemplation of] emptiness or non-contrivance. Why is this?
It is because the ākāras for these three [*samādhis*] are different⁷⁶.

Similarly, the sixteen ākāras are also used as a hermeneutical tool to distinguish the four applications of mindfulness (*catur-smṛtyupasthāna*). The mindfulness of the body (*kāya-smṛtyupasthāna*), of feeling (*vedanā-smṛtyupasthāna*), and of thought (*citta-smṛtyupasthāna*) are said to arise on the basis of the twelve ākāras of the three noble truths, while the mindfulness of dharma (*dharma-smṛtyupasthāna*), on the whole set of sixteen.⁷⁷

The Ābhidharmikas' effort to apply the sixteen ākāras to old lists can be seen especially through a comparison of the lists as they appear in sūtra and in abhidharma. One example is the case of the four forms of knowledge. The sūtra proposes forty-four kinds of knowledge, among which the knowledges of the four noble truths are the first to be listed as below:

Monks, what are the forty-four kinds of knowledge? Knowledge of aging and death, knowledge of origin, knowledge of cessation, knowledge of the path leading to its cessation...⁷⁸

In this sūtra passage, the knowledges of the four noble truths are simply named without any explanation, but in the Jñānaprasthāna the list is tagged with the sixteen ākāras, which are used to define each of the four knowledges:

⁷⁶ See MVŚ 104 p. 538c6ff: 復有說者，三三摩地皆依行相差別建立。謂空三摩地有空、非我二行相。無願三摩地有苦、非常，及集道各四行相。無相三摩地有滅四行相，故三摩地唯建立三。《施設論》中初作是說，空三摩地是空，非無願、無相。無願三摩地是無願，非空、無相。無相三摩地是無相，非空、無願。所以者何？由此三種行相別故。

⁷⁷ See MVŚ 188 p. 941c8ff: 從三義觀有聞所成身念住，先作無常乃至無我行相，緣苦諦起。次作因乃至緣行相，緣集諦起。次作道乃至出行相，緣道諦起。從此無間有聞所成受念住、心念住，各作十二行相，緣三諦起亦爾。從此無間有聞所成法念住，先作無常乃至無我行相，緣苦諦起。次作因乃至緣行相，緣集諦起。次作滅乃至離行相，緣滅諦起。次作道乃至出行相，緣道諦起。從聞所成法念住無間有思所成身念住，作十二行相，緣三諦起。從此無間有受念住，作十二行相，緣三諦起。從此無間有心念住，作十二行相，緣三諦起。從此無間有法念住，作十六行相，緣四諦起。

⁷⁸ SN II 57: *katamāni, bhikkhave, catucattārisaṃ nāṇavatthūni? jarāmarañe nāṇaṃ, jarāmarāṇasa-mudaye nāṇaṃ, jarāmarāṇanirodhe nāṇaṃ, jarāmarāṇanirodhagāminiyā paṭipadāya nāṇaṃ.....*

What is the knowledge of suffering (*duḥkhajñāna*)? Answer: It is the knowledge that operates on all things with the ākāras of suffering (*duḥkha*), impermanence (*anitya*), emptiness (*śūnya*), and non-self (*anātman*). What is the knowledge of origin (*samudayajñāna*)? Answer: It is the knowledge that operates on the origin of all things with the ākāras of cause (*hetu*), origin (*samudaya*), rising (*prabhava*), and condition (*pratyaya*). What is the knowledge of cessation (*nirodhajñāna*)? Answer: It is the knowledge that operates on the cessation of all things with the ākāras of cessation (*nirodha*), tranquility (*śānta*), excellence (*praṇīta*), and escape (*niḥsaraṇa*). What is the knowledge of path (*mārgajñāna*)? Answer: It is the knowledge that operates on the path against all things with the ākāras of path (*mārga*), rule (*nyāya*), practice (*pratipatti*) and deliverance (*nairyāṇika*).⁷⁹

Thus, in these examples, the sixteen ākāras have been applied to old doctrinal lists found in sūtras, either to provide supplementary definitions for them or to mark differences among items in the lists. In this process, the sixteen ākāras, although still related to meditation, extend beyond the context of the *nirvedhabhāgīya*,⁸⁰ but the term “ākāra” is still linked with the sixteen items and is not brought into connection with other things. However, as mentioned previously, in abhidharma, ākāra appears not only in the context of meditation but also in other contexts such as the thought-concomitants and perception. These other contexts may be connected in ways that indicate how the term ākāra became freed from its attachment to the sixteen items in the context of the *nirvedhabhāgīya* and was applied more broadly.

⁷⁹ See JP 8 p. 957b19ff: 云何苦智？答：於諸行作苦、非常、空、非我行相轉智。云何集智？答：於諸行因作因、集、生、緣行相轉智。云何滅智？答於諸行滅作滅、靜、妙、離行相轉智。云何道智？答於諸行對治道作道、如、行、出行相轉智。

⁸⁰ For the meaning of *nirvedhabhāgīya*, refer back to page 14.

3.3 Two Circumstances: How the Term Ākāra is Attached to Items Outside of the 16- ākāra System

The first circumstance in which ākāra is applied to items other than the set of sixteen occurs when items in old doctrinal lists are “converted” to the framework of the sixteen ākāras. For example, the three contemplations (*tri-samādhi*), as discussed above, can be perfectly reinterpreted according to the sixteen ākāras, but other lists cannot be identified as easily such as the list of the ten conceptions (*saṃjñā*) as will be shown below.

The list of ten conceptions is an old one, found in the Saṅgītīsutta, Dasuttarasutta and the Mahāparinibbānasutta in the DN with a few variations as noted in section 2.3. In the MVŚ , the Abhidharmikas use the tool of ākāra to interpret the list:

- (1) The conception concerning impermanence (無常想, *aniccasaññā*⁸¹) is functioning with the ākāra of impermanence, (2) the conception concerning suffering of impermanence (無常苦想, *anicce dukkhasaññā*) functions with the ākāra of suffering, (3) the conception concerning non-self of suffering (苦無我想, *dukkhe anattasaññā*) functions with the ākāra of non-self, (4) the conception concerning disgusting things (不淨想, *asubhasaññā*) functions with the ākāra of impurity, (5) the conception of being disgusted with food (厭食想, *āhāre paṭikkūlasaññā*) functions with the ākāra of disgustingness, (6) the conception concerning displeasure with the world (一切世間不可樂想, *sabbaloke anabhiratisaññā*) functions with the ākāra of displeasure, (7) the conception concerning death (死想, *marāṇasaññā*) functions with the ākāra of death, (8) the conception concerning abandoning (斷想, *pahānasaññā*) functions with the ākāra of abandoning, (9) the conception concerning dispassionateness (離想, *virāgasaññā*) functions with the ākāra of

⁸¹ The Pāli equivalents are adopted here from suttas; refer back to page 24-25.

dispassionateness, and (10) the conception concerning cessation (滅想, *nirodhasaññā*) functions with the ākāra of cessation.⁸²

Among these ten, the first three *saññās*, the conception concerning impermanence (*aniccasaññā*), the conception concerning suffering of impermanence (*anicce dukkhasaññā*), and the conception concerning non-self of suffering (*dukkhe anattasaññā*), are defined by three of the sixteen ākāras, that is, the ākāra of impermanence (*anitya*), suffering (*duḥkha*), and non-self (*anātman*) which belong to the noble truth of suffering.⁸³ The ākāra assigned to the next six *saññās* are totally alien to the sixteen; only the last conception of cessation shares the ākāra of the noble truth of cessation⁸⁴ with the sixteen.

Before we investigate possible connections of this list with the sixteen-ākāra system, a question may arise that since only the first three and last *saññās* out of nine show a connection with the sixteen-ākāra system, can we assume that the Vaibhāṣika masters established this list of ten *saññās* on the basis of the sixteen-ākāra system? In fact, the next section in the MVŚ suggests that this discussion of the ten conceptions is informed by the sixteen ākāras. In this section, the Vaibhāṣika masters attempt to fit the conception of death into the framework of the ākāra of impermanence, which does belong to the sixteen:

Why does the noble path have the ākāra of death? Answer: Death is the cognitive object (*ālāmbana*) so that it is called the conception of death; nevertheless, it still functions with the ākāra of impermanence. Question: In that case, what is the difference between the conception of death and that of impermanence? Some say that the conception that examines final impermanence is named the conception of death, while the conception that

⁸² See MVŚ 166 p. 838a9ff: 行相者，無常想作無常行相。無常苦想作苦行相。苦無我想作無我行相。不淨想作不淨行相。厭食想作厭逆行相。一切世間不可樂想作不可樂行相。死想作死行相。斷想作斷行相。離想作離行相。滅想作滅行相。

⁸³ The ākāras of the noble truth of suffering: impermanence (*anitya*), suffering (*duḥkha*), emptiness (*śūnya*), non-self (*anātman*). The sixteen ākāras of the four noble truths can be reviewed in section 2.3.

⁸⁴ The ākāras of the noble truth of cessation: cessation (*nirodha*), tranquility (*śānta*), excellence (*prañīta*), escape (*niḥsaraṇa*).

examines impermanence at each moment is named the conception of impermanence...⁸⁵

As for the last three *saññās*, the conception concerning abandoning (斷想, *pahānasaññā*), the conception concerning dispassionateness (離想, *virāgasaññā*), and the conception concerning cessation (滅想, *nirodhasaññā*), the Vaibhāṣika masters also tried to make them fit into the three ākāras of the noble truth of cessation, which belong to the sixteen-ākāra system:

Some say that the last three [conceptions] all function with the ākāra of cessation (*nirodha*), tranquility (*śānta*), excellence (*praṇīta*) and escape (*niḥsaraṇa*) [which are the four ākāra for the noble truth of cessation]⁸⁶.....Those who claim that there exists no noble path outside of the sixteen ākāras say that the [last three] conceptions of abandoning, dispassionateness and cessation just function with the [same set of] four ākāras of [the noble truth of cessation, namely,] cessation, tranquility, excellence and escape. Those who claim that the noble path does exist outside of the sixteen ākāras say that the conception of abandoning functions with the ākāra of abandoning, up to that the conception of cessation functions with the ākāra of cessation.⁸⁷

These passages would suggest that, when there are items that cannot be easily identified with any of the sixteen ākāras, the Vaibhāṣika masters do one of the following:

1. They attempt to draw that item nearer to a certain ākāra within the sixteen-ākāra system. For example, the conception of death in this case is made to

⁸⁵ See MVŚ 166 p. 838a13ff: 云何聖道作死行相耶？答死為所緣故名死想，然彼還作無常行相。問：若爾死想、無常想有何差別？有說，觀察諸行最後無常，此想名死想；觀察諸行刹那無常，此想名無常想。

⁸⁶ See MVŚ 166 p. 838a13ff: 有說，後三一切皆作滅、靜、妙、離四種行相。

⁸⁷ See MVŚ 166 p. 838a26ff: 諸有欲令十六行相外無聖道者，彼說無漏斷、離、滅想，即作滅諦四種行相。諸有欲令十六行相外有聖道者，彼說無漏斷想即作斷行相，乃至無漏滅想即作滅行相。

match the ākāra of impermanence, which is the first of the sixteen, whereas the last three *saññās* are made to fit in the four ākāras of the noble truth of cessation in the sixteen-ākāra system,

2. Or, when an identification seems too far-fetched, the extraneous item is simply marked or tagged with the term ākāra or “converted” in order to make it consistent with the items that are identified with one of the sixteen ākāras. In this way, the *saññās* in the middle of the list, which cannot be identified with any of the sixteen, are simply tagged with the term ākāra.

Thus, the term ākāra comes to be used with items other than the list of sixteen.

In addition, this passage also implies a dispute concerning whether ākāras exist apart from the set of sixteen. As this passage states, those who do not allow the existence of “other” ākāras make an effort to convert the last three *saññās* into something that can be identified with the ākāras of the sixteen-ākāra system, while those who allow “other” ākāras do not attempt to do so. In other words, in the process of reinterpreting old lists by applying the tool of the sixteen-ākāra system, it is inevitable that certain items occur and yet cannot be easily fit into the hermeneutical framework of the sixteen ākāras. In such situations, some people would stick to a strict application of the sixteen-ākāra system, while others would adopt a more flexible attitude. This attitude of flexibility might then be the starting point of the legitimization of the term ākāra as applied to more items in contexts outside of the sixteen-ākāra system.

The dispute concerning whether there exists any ākāra without outflow (*anāsrava*) outside of the sixteen is found recorded in MVŚ and quoted in the AKBh as follows:

Is there an ākāra without outflow [outside of the sixteen] or not? For those of Kaśmīra, there are no ākāras without outflow outside of the sixteen. Others,

namely the outsiders, say that there are [ākāras without outflow outside of the sixteen].⁸⁸

Also in this process, the recognition of the sixteen ākāras as a defined set became stronger. The set is titled and directly referred to as “the noble ākāras (聖行相)” in order to distinguish it from other ākāras. Some references to “the noble ākāras” are listed below:

Except for the wisdom obtained by hearing (*śrutamayī-prajñā*) and the wisdom obtained by thinking (*cintāmayī-prajñā*), and the subtle mind in the concentration of cessation (*nirodhasamāpatti*), in other cases ordinary people are without the noble ākāra.⁸⁹

How about the case of the breath counting meditation (*ānāpānasmṛti*)? ... It is not the case that it is a noble ākāra.⁹⁰

... the defiled and undefiled sixteen noble ākāra.⁹¹

Thus, in sum, the first circumstance in which the term ākāra is applied to items other than the set of sixteen, which is also known as “the noble ākāras,” concerns the “conversion” of old lists in terms of the already established set of the sixteen ākāras. The establishment of the sixteen ākāras as a set is indicated by their being referred to as the primary set of “the noble ākāras,” which is then differentiated from all other normal ākāras, and by the question that arose among groups concerning whether any ākāra outside of this noble set of sixteen could be called as “noble.”

The second circumstance in which ākāra is applied to items other than the set of sixteen involves the creation of “parallel opposites.” One example of this can be

⁸⁸ AKBh 7.12cd p.399.5ff: *kim anāsravaḥ svalakṣaṇākāro 'sty atha na / kāsmīrāṇāṃ tāvat nāmalaḥ ṣoḍaśabhyo 'nya ākāraḥ nasy anāsravākāraḥ ṣoḍaśākāranīrmuktaḥ / anye 'stī śāstrataḥ // anye punar astī 'ty āhur vahirdeśakāḥ /*

⁸⁹ See MVŚ 189 p. 945a21ff.: 唯除聞思所成慧及入滅定微微心時，餘一切異生又無聖行相。

⁹⁰ See MVŚ 26 p.133a5ff.: 問入出息行相者，非聖行相。

⁹¹ See MVŚ 64 p.331a18ff, b2ff.: 有漏無漏十六聖行相。

found in the discussion concerning the ākāras for the two paths, the path of non-interruption (*ānantaryamārga*) and the path of liberation (*mokṣamārga*):

How many ākāras do the path of non-interruption (*ānantaryamārga*) and the path of liberation (*mokṣamārga*) have? Answer: There are three ākāras for the path of non-interruption: the ākāra of coarseness (*sthūlatā*), of suffering (*duḥkha*), and of obstacle (*duṣṭatā*). There are three ākāras for the path of liberation: the ākāra of tranquility (*śānta*), of excellence (*praṇīta*), and of escape (*niḥsaraṇa*).⁹²

Obviously the three ākāras for the path of liberation, namely, the ākāra of tranquility, excellence, and escape, are carried over from the sixteen-ākāra system.⁹³ The three ākāras for the path of non-interruption seem to be a response to those of the path of liberation:

The path of non-interruption (<i>ānantaryamārga</i>)	The path of liberation (<i>mokṣamārga</i>)
ākāra of coarseness (<i>sthūlatā</i>)	ākāra of tranquility (<i>śānta</i>) [16-ākāra system]
ākāra of suffering (<i>duḥkha</i>)	ākāra of excellence (<i>praṇīta</i>) [16-ākāra system]
ākāra of obstacle (<i>duṣṭatā</i>)	ākāra of escape (<i>niḥsaraṇa</i>) [16-ākāra system]

Since the three ākāras of the path of liberation are already found both as a fixed set in the sixteen ākāras and in other contexts,⁹⁴ while the three ākāras of the path of non-interruption are found only in conjunction with the ākāras of the path of liberation, it would seem that the three ākāras of the path of non-interruption, namely, the ākāra of coarseness, suffering and obstacle, are derived from the three ākāras assigned to the

⁹² See MVŚ 64 p. 330a26ff: 無間解脫有幾行相? 答: 諸無間道有三行相, 一龜行相, 二苦行相, 三障行相。諸解脫道有三行相, 一靜行相, 二妙行相, 三離行相。

⁹³ The ākāras of the noble truth of cessation: cessation (*nirodha*), tranquility (*śānta*), excellence (*praṇīta*), escape (*niḥsaraṇa*). The sixteen ākāras of the four noble truths can be reviewed in section 2.3.

⁹⁴ Such contexts include the four kinds of knowledge, the three contemplations, the nine thoughts as discussed above, and so on.

path of liberation. Thus, it appears reasonable that the Ābhidharmikas are using the tool of the sixteen ākāras to interpret the path of liberation, after which they construct parallel but opposite content for the path of non-interruption, rather than the reverse. Actually, this method of “parallel opposites” is supported by questions in the next passage concerning which ākāra in the path of liberation serves as the antidote to a certain ākāra in the path of non-interruption.⁹⁵

A similar example can be found in the Vaibhāṣika masters’ effort to construct two ākāras as the opposite of the two antidote ākāras practiced in the contemplation of emptiness (*śūnyatāsamādhi*):

Question: There are two ākāras, namely, emptiness and non-self, for the contemplation of emptiness (*śūnyatāsamādhi*). There are two ākāras, namely, self (*ātman*) and mine (*ātmīya*), for the view of self (*satkāyadr̥ṣṭi*). Among these, which ākāra is overcome by which ākāra? Answer: The ākāra of self should be overcome by the ākāra of non-self, and the ākāra of mine should be overcome by the ākāra of emptiness. Furthermore, the five ākāras of self should be overcome by the ākāra of non-self, and the fifteen ākāras of mine should be overcome by the ākāra of emptiness, just as the ākāra of self and the ākāra of mine should be overcome.⁹⁶

As discussed previously, the three contemplations (*tri-samādhi*) are differentiated by the Vaibhāṣikas using the hermeneutical tool of the sixteen-ākāra system. In their differentiation, the contemplation of emptiness (*śūnyatā-samādhi*) is assigned to the first two of the sixteen ākāras, that is to say, the contemplation of emptiness operates with the ākāra of emptiness (*śūnya*) and non-self (*anātman*). In this case, the ākāra of

⁹⁵ See MVŚ 64 p. 330a29ff: 問：無間道中何行相後起解脫道何行相耶？有作是說：從麤行相無間道後，起靜行相為解脫道，從苦行相無間道後，起妙行相為解脫道，從障行相無間道後，起離行相為解脫道。有餘師說：從麤行相無間道後，起妙行相為解脫道，從苦行相無間道後，起靜行相為解脫道，從障行相無間道後，起離行相為解脫道，麤妙苦靜障離對故。評曰：此事不定。從麤行相無間道後，容起靜等三種行相為解脫道，從苦行相無間道後，容起妙等三種行相為解脫道，從障行相無間道後，容起離等三種行相為解脫道。以此六種有漏行相隨離染者所樂起故。

⁹⁶ See MVŚ 104 p. 538b2ff: 問：空三摩地有空、非我二行相，有身見有我、我所二行相，此中以何等行相對治何等行相耶？答：以非我行相對我行相，以空行相對治我所行相。復次以非我行相對治五我見行相，以空行相對治十五我所見行相，如對治我見我所見行相。

non-self is taken as the antidote for the ākāra of self, and the ākāra of emptiness is taken as the antidote for the ākāra of mine. In this way, self and mine, which are associated with the view of body (*satkāya-dṛṣṭi*), are connected with the term ākāra.

The contemplation of emptiness (<i>śūnyatā-samādhi</i>)		
ākāra of emptiness (<i>śūnya</i>) [16-ākāra system]	→	ākāra of mine (<i>ātmīya</i>)
ākāra of non-self (<i>anātman</i>) [16-ākāra system]	→	ākāra of self (<i>ātman</i>)

As the Vaibhāṣikas add, not only these two ākāras, the ākāra of self (*ātman*) and the ākāra of mine (*ātmīya*), but also others, namely, five ākāras belonging to the self and fifteen ākāras belonging to mine,⁹⁷ are also brought into the context by being taken as the healing objects of the two ākāras, non-self and emptiness. To sum up, self and mine, the ākāras of the view of body, as well as the five and fifteen ākāras of self and mine, are all tagged with the term ākāra. In other words, by serving as antidotes, the ākāras of emptiness and non-self also allow their opposites to be referred to as “ākāra:”

The contemplation of emptiness (<i>śūnyatā-samādhi</i>)		
ākāra of emptiness (<i>śūnya</i>) [16-ākāra system]	→	ākāra of mine (<i>ātmīya</i>) → 5 ākāras belonging to the self
ākāra of non-self (<i>anātman</i>) [16-ākāra system]	→	ākāra of self (<i>ātma</i>) → 15 ākāras belonging to mine

⁹⁷ The five views of self and the fifteen views of mine are a more detailed version of the commonly used concepts of the view of self and the view of mine. The five views of self are views that are generated when the view of self is applied to the five aggregates. Similarly, the fifteen views of mine are also generated by applying the view of mine to the five aggregates, with each aggregate correlated with three perspectives of the view of mine. See JP 1 p.919a10ff: 五我見，謂等隨觀色是我，受、想、行、識是我。十五我所見，謂等隨觀我有色，色是我所，我在色中。我有受、想、行、識，受、想、行、識是我所。我在受、想、行、識中。

3.4 Generation of New Composite Lists

As more ākāras are generated through these two circumstances of “conversion” and “opposite parallels,” we find new composite lists, such as twenty-five and twenty-eight ākāras, which combine items from separately generated lists. In such composite lists, the term ākāra covers many sub-groups within the general category of meditative concepts, such as the four immeasurable minds, the contemplation of disgusting things, the contemplation of the breath, and so on, and the term ākāra can be applied quite loosely to certain items:

Some say: when the common people (*prthagjana*) escape from the defilement of desire (*kāma-saṅkleśa*), in the nine paths of non-interruption they practice nine ākāras: [the ākāra of] the three including coarseness (*sthūlatā*), [suffering (*duḥkha*), and obstacle (*duṣṭatā*); the ākāra of the four immeasurable minds, namely,] love (*maitrī*), compassion (*karuṇā*), joy (*muditā*) and impartiality/equanimity (*upekṣā*); [the ākāra of] the meditation on disgusting things (*aśubha-bhāvanā*) and the breath-counting meditation (*ānāpāna-smṛti*). In the eight paths of liberation, they practice twelve ākāras: the previous nine and the three including tranquility (*śānta*), [excellence (*praṇīta*) and escape (*niḥsaraṇa*).] In the last path of liberation, they practice these twelve ākāras and also practice the future limitless ākāra within the first concentration (*prathama-dhyāna*).

When the noble ones escape from the defilement of desire, in the nine paths of non-interruption they practice twenty-five ākāras: [the ākāra of] the three including coarseness (*sthūlatā*), [suffering (*duḥkha*), and obstacle (*duṣṭatā*); the ākāra of the four immeasurable minds, namely,] love, compassion, joy and obstacle; [the ākāra of] the meditation on disgusting things and the breath-counting meditation; as well as the defiled and undefiled sixteen noble ākāra. In the eight paths of liberation, they practice twenty-eight ākāras: the previous twenty-five and the three including tranquility, [excellence and escape]. In the

last path of liberation, they practice these twenty-eight ākāras, and also practice the future limitless ākāra within the first concentration.⁹⁸

These lists of nine ākāras, twelve ākāras, twenty-five ākāras and twenty-eight ākāras are nothing more than permutations and combinations of smaller ākāra lists. Such small lists may be from a section of the sixteen ākāras, or may be the ones that are produced according to the two methods of “conversion” and “opposite parallels” as discussed above. For example, the list of twenty-five ākāras are composed of five sub-groups:

25 ākāras	3	Three ākāras: coarseness (<i>sthūlatā</i>), suffering (<i>duḥkha</i>), and obstacle (<i>duṣṭatā</i>) ⁹⁹
	4	ākāra of the four immeasurable minds: love (<i>maitrī</i>), compassion (<i>karuṇā</i>), joy (<i>muditā</i>) and impartiality/equanimity (<i>upekṣā</i>)
	1	ākāra of the meditation on disgusting things (<i>aśubha-bhāvanā</i>)
	1	ākāra of the breath-counting meditation (<i>ānāpāna-smṛti</i>)
	16	Sixteen noble ākāras

In these lists of nine, twelve, twenty-five and twenty-eight ākāras, the term ākāra covers almost all immediate steps towards the first realization of dharma: the path of non-interruption, the path of liberation and the first concentration. The various sub-groups of meditative practice including the four immeasurable minds, the contemplation of disgusting things and the contemplation of the breath are described in terms of ākāras, which are no longer limited to the set of sixteen; instead, the sixteen ākāras themselves are included as one set in the list.

⁹⁸ See MVŚ 64 p.331b4ff: 有作是說：諸異生者離欲染時，九無間道中，修九行相，謂龜等三及慈悲喜捨，不淨觀持息念。八解脫道中，修十二行相，謂即前九及靜等三。最後解脫道中，即修此十二行相，亦修未來初靜慮地無邊行相。若諸聖者離欲染時，九無間道中，修二十五行相，謂龜等三，慈悲喜捨，不淨觀持息念，及有漏無漏十六聖行相。八解脫道中，修二十八行相，謂即前二十五及靜等三。最後解脫道中，即修此二十八行相，亦修未來初靜慮地無邊行相。

⁹⁹ As discussed above on page 46, this list may be generated on the basis of three ākāras of the noble truth of cessation, the ākāra of tranquility (*śānta*), of excellence (*prañīta*), and of escape (*niḥsaraṇa*). Thus, this is a secondary list, as compared with and on the basis of the primary list of the sixteen ākāras of the four noble truths. It is generated through the method of “opposite parallels.”

3.5 “Ākāra-ization”: Descriptive Ākāras Applied to Meditation and *cittacaitta*

These new ākāras are quite loose and would appear to function simply as an “ākāra-ization” of the original descriptive accounts of features of the meditative states in question. For example, the feature of the first concentration is “limitless;” then, in the lists above, we found that the ākāra of the first concentration is said to be “limitless.” In the same way, we might expect that other meditation concepts such as the four immeasurable minds, the contemplation of disgusting things and the contemplation of the breath could also “gain” ākāras on account of their features respectively. In other words, it is possible that the ākāras for the four immeasurable minds, etc. are not different from the descriptive features of their meditative states. Can any textual evidence be found to support this assumption?

The passage above, even though focusing on the number of ākāras, does not include all of them, but we do find the full accounts for the meditative states in question elsewhere. The ākāras for the four immeasurable minds are described as follows:

The ākāras of the four immeasurable (*catvāri apramāṇāni*): love (*maitrī*) has the ākāra of giving happiness, compassion (*karuṇā*) has the ākāra of uprooting sufferings, joy (*muditā*) has the ākāra of comforting, impartiality (*upekṣā*) has the ākāra of abandoning.¹⁰⁰

Just as expected, the ākāras for these four items seem to represent nothing more than their definitions and thus would also reflect mere “ākāra-ization” of the original descriptive accounts of features of the meditative states in question. This can also be observed in the case of the contemplation of disgusting things, where the ākāras are said to be impurity, including even a bruise, purity, and pure brightness :

The Jñānaprasthāna says that there are eight liberations... the first two among the three operate with the ākāra of impurity since they create ākāra, such as a

¹⁰⁰ See MVŚ 64 p.331b4ff: 行相者，慈有與樂行相，悲有拔苦行相，喜有喜慰行相，捨有捨置行相。

bruise. The third liberation operates with the ākāra of purity, since it operates with the ākāra of pure brightness.¹⁰¹

Thus, these ākāras, which are not included within the group of sixteen, actually correspond to the descriptions of the objects in question. In fact, similar cases can be found in the context of thought and the thought-concomitants (*cittacaitta*), in which the ākāras match exactly the descriptions of *caitta*. For example, regarding the *caitta* of ignorance (*avidyā*):

Question: thus what is the ākāra of ignorance? Answer: Ignorance, darkness and stupidity are the ākāras of this ignorance.¹⁰²

Not only in the case of the *caitta* of ignorance but also in the case of many other *caittas*, the Vaibhāṣika interpretation “generates” such descriptive ākāras by “transplanting” from their definitions. These ākāras are not formatted in terms of the sixteen-ākāra system but simply describe what a specific *caitta* does, that is, its function and its features:

Furthermore, being attached to desires is the ākāra of desire (*rāga*), being angry with sentient beings is the ākāra of anger (*doṣa*), the sinking of body and mind is the ākāra of dullness (*styāna*), disturbing the body and mind is the ākāra of restlessness (*auddhatya*), obscuring the mind is the ākāra of sleep (*middha*), letting the mind regret is the ākāra of remorse (*kaukr̥tya*), and letting the ākāra of mind hesitate is the ākāra of doubt (*vicikitsā*).¹⁰³

For the first two contemplations, the function of pliancy (*praśrabdhi*) dominates so that it is able to cover equanimity (*upekṣā*); therefore, it is

¹⁰¹ See AKBh-Xz 29 p.151b1ff: 論曰：解脫有八...三中初二不淨相轉，作青瘀等諸行相故。第三解脫清淨相轉，作淨光鮮行相轉故。

¹⁰² See MVŚ 52 p.269a23ff: 問：如是無明行相云何？答：無知、黑闇、愚癡是此無明行相。

¹⁰³ See MVŚ 48 p.250b8ff: 復次，耽求諸欲是貪欲相，憎恚有情是瞋恚相，身心沈沒是昏沈相，身心躁動是掉舉相，令心味略是睡眠相，令心變悔是惡作相，令心行相猶豫不決是疑相。Here 相 stands for 行相。

established as [one of] the factors [of enlightenment] (*saṃbodhyaṅga*). For the third and the fourth contemplations, the function of equanimity dominates so that it is able to cover pliancy; therefore, it is established as [one of] the factors [of enlightenment]. Question: why are these two able to cover each other? Answer: Because the ākāras of these two are contradictory. It is said that the ākāra of pliancy is light and lifting, [while] the ākāra of equanimity is calm and tranquil.¹⁰⁴

As for the view of attachment to self (*satkāya-dṛṣṭi*), the ākāra of attaching to the self and the possessions of self is strong; as for the view of attachment to extremes (*antagrāha-dṛṣṭi*), the ākāra of attaching to either destruction or eternality [after death] is strong; as for the evil view (*mithyā-dṛṣṭi*), the ākāra of attaching to nihility is strong; as for the view of attachment to views (*dṛṣṭiparāmarśa-dṛṣṭi*), the ākāra of attaching to superiority is strong; as for the view of rigid attachment to the precepts (*śīlavrataparāmarśa-dṛṣṭi*), the ākāra of attaching to the capability of purification [by austerities, moral practice and the vows of non-Buddhist sects] is strong; as for doubt (*vicikitsā*), the ākāra of hesitation is strong; as for desire (*rāga*), the ākāra of attachment is strong; as for hatred (*doṣa*), the ākāra of evil is strong; as for arrogance (*māna*), the ākāra of lifting high is strong; as for ignorance (*moha*), the ākāra of unclearness is strong.¹⁰⁵

3.6 Category Ākāras: How the Term Ākāra is Used in a More General Level

In addition to these descriptive ākāras that apply to *caittas*, we also find ākāras frozen as set categories by which various *caittas* are classified. Such ākāras are not

¹⁰⁴ See MVŚ 80 p.413a7ff: 初二靜慮輕安用勝，能覆行捨，故立為支。第三、第四靜慮行捨用勝，能覆輕安，故立為支。問：何故此二能互相覆？答：此二行相更相違故。謂輕安相輕舉，行捨相沈靜。

¹⁰⁵ See MVŚ 52 p.269a23ff: 有身見執我、我所行相猛利，邊執見執斷、執常行相猛利，邪見執無行相猛利，見取執最勝行相猛利，戒禁取執能淨行相猛利，疑猶豫行相猛利，貪染著行相猛利，瞋憎惡行相猛利，慢高舉行相猛利，無明不了行相猛利。

meant to define each single *caitta* in its individual function, but rather serve as more general criteria to classify other *ākāras* according to their common features. Three commonly used category *ākāras* are the pair of joy (*harṣā*) and depression (*dainya*), the pair of subtle (*sūkṣma*) and coarse (*sthūla*), and the pair of sharp (*tīkṣṇa*) and dull (*mṛdu*). As these terms suggest, the category *ākāras* are also themselves descriptive, but they are on a more general level than the descriptive *ākāras* since they classify and further characterize other descriptive *ākāras* as follows:

1. The pair of joy (*harṣā*) and depression (*dainya*):

Furthermore all defilements operate either with the *ākāra* joy or with the *ākāra* depression, or with both.¹⁰⁶

The *ākāra* of desire (*rāga*) is joy, [while] the *ākāra* of hatred (*doṣa*) is depression.¹⁰⁷

Those two views, [namely, the view of attachment to self (*satkāya-dṛṣṭi*) and the view of attachment to extremes (*antaḡrāha-dṛṣṭi*),] operate with the *ākāra* joy, [while] the root of despair (*daurmanasyendriya*) operates with the *ākāra* depression.¹⁰⁸

2. The pair of subtle (*sūkṣma*) and coarse (*sthūla*):

The *ākāra* of joy (*saumanasya*) is either coarse or subtle.¹⁰⁹

Question: Feelings, and so on, do not have space; how can they be said to be coarse or subtle? Answer: Although coarse or subtle do not exist in terms of

¹⁰⁶ See MVŚ 48 p.250b8ff.: 復次，諸煩惱等或歡行相轉，或感行相轉，或通二種。

¹⁰⁷ See MVŚ 47 p.243b10ff.: 貪行相歡，瞋行相感。

¹⁰⁸ See MVŚ 47 p.243b10ff.: 彼二見歡行相轉，憂根感行相轉。

¹⁰⁹ See MVŚ 115 p.559a3ff.: 喜受行相有麤有細。

space, coarse or subtle are found as ākāras; therefore, they can also be said to be [coarse or subtle].¹¹⁰

Question: Why is equanimity (*upekṣā*) merely brought about by wholesome karma rather than by unwholesome karma? Answer: The ākāra of equanimity is subtle and tranquil, which pleases the wise ones; therefore, it is brought about by wholesome karma. The nature of all unwholesome karma is coarse, therefore, is unable to bring about the karmic maturation (*vipāka*) of equanimity.¹¹¹

The ākāra of the seven defilements (*saptānusaya*)¹¹² including desire, and so on, is subtle (*sūkṣma*).¹¹³

Furthermore, these five coverings (*pañcāvaraṇāni*)¹¹⁴ arise in most beings in the realm of desire and their ākāras are subtle. It is not the case with other defilements. Therefore, [they are] established specifically as coverings.¹¹⁵

3. The pair of sharp (*tīkṣṇa*) and dull (*mṛdu*):

All views (*dṛṣṭi*) are light and restless, and their ākāras are sharp.....together with other dull defilements are they both established as the outflow of the desire realm (*kāmāsrava*).¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰ See MVŚ 50 p.257a28ff: 問：受等無方所，如何可施設龜細耶？答：雖無方所龜細，而有行相龜細，亦可施設。

¹¹¹ See MVŚ 115 p.599a7ff: 問：何故捨根唯善業感非不善耶？答：捨根行相微細寂靜，智者所樂故善業感。諸不善業性是龜動，故不能感捨受異熟。

¹¹² The seven defilements (*saptānusaya*) include attachment to desire (*kāma-rāga*), hatred (*dveṣa*), attachment to existence (*bhava-rāga*), arrogance (*māna*), ignorance (*moha*), view (*dṛṣṭi*), and doubt (*vicikitsā*). See MVŚ 50 p.257a18ff: 有七隨眠，謂欲貪隨眠、瞋恚隨眠、有貪隨眠、慢隨眠、無明隨眠、見隨眠、疑隨眠。

¹¹³ See MVŚ 50 p.257a28ff: 欲貪等七，行相微細。

¹¹⁴ The five coverings (*pañcāvaraṇāni*) include attachment (*rāga*), hatred (*dveṣa*), dullness and sleep (*styāna-middha*), restlessness and repentance (*auddhatya-kaukrīya*), and doubt (*vicikitsā*). See MVŚ 48 p.249b14ff: 有五蓋，謂貪欲蓋、瞋恚蓋、惛沈睡眠蓋、掉舉惡作蓋、疑蓋。

¹¹⁵ See MVŚ 48 p.249c23ff: 復次，如是五蓋，欲界有情，多數現起，行相微細。餘煩惱等則不如是，故偏立蓋。

As for the factors of enlightenment (*saṃbodhyaṅga*), the ākāras are sharp, [while] for the sensation of pleasure (*sukha*) and equanimity (*upekṣā*), [the ākāras] are dull.¹¹⁷

As for the defilement of restlessness (*auddhatya*), the ākāra is sharp, the action is prompt and fast..... As for the defilement of dullness (*styāna*), the ākāra is dull.¹¹⁸

Strictly speaking, the pairs of subtle and coarse, and sharp and dull differ from the first pair of joy and depression since they are on different levels. Subtle and coarse, and sharp and dull function as adjectives describing the ākāras, but they are not ākāras themselves. Joy and depression, on the other hand, are themselves ākāras. In other words, we can say that such and such a *caitta* operates WITH the ākāra joy or depression since joy and depression are themselves ākāras, but we cannot say that such and such a *caitta* operates with the ākāra subtle or coarse, or sharp or dull. Instead, we can only say that as for such and such a *caitta*, its ākāra is subtle or coarse, or sharp or dull, or that the ākāra of this *caitta* is subtle or coarse, or sharp or dull. Grammatically also, subtle and coarse, and sharp and dull are adjectives while joy and depression are nouns. Nevertheless, the point is that through such pairs it is clear that the term ākāra is used in a more general way, that is, to cover a number of *caittas* in terms of the general features that they share. These ākāras no longer describe the features of single individual *caitta* but instead function as a category title that either sorts other *caittas*, as in the case of joy and depression, or describes them more abstractly, as in the case of subtle and coarse, or sharp and dull. In either case, the term ākāra is connected with all *caittas* as a classifying or grading tool.

In the use of the term ākāra as a category title to sort out *caitta*, the term has in fact been taken as a keyword to define *caitta*. The other two keywords are *svabhāva* (intrinsic nature) and *ālambana* (cognitive object). In the MVŚ, the

¹¹⁶ See MVŚ 48 p.247b7ff: 諸見輕躁，行相猛利.....與餘遲鈍煩惱合立為欲有漏。

¹¹⁷ See MVŚ 96 p.498c3ff: 菩提分法行相猛利，樂、捨遲鈍。

¹¹⁸ See MVŚ 49 p.254c5ff: 以掉舉纏行相明利、所作捷速.....惛沈行相闇昧遲鈍。

Vaibhāṣikas use a formulaic pattern to describe *caittas* from these three angles. For example, in the case of the *caitta* of ignorance (*avidyā*):

Question: As for that which is said to be “unclear,” does it represent the intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*), or does it represent the *ākāra*, or does it represent the cognitive object (*ālambana*) [of the *caitta* of ignorance (*avidyā*)]?¹¹⁹

The discussion that follows presents opinions explaining the *svabhāva*, *ākāra* and *ālambana* of ignorance. This list, *svabhāva*, *ākāra* and *ālambana*, actually has connections to at least three others: the list of *ākāra* and *ālambana*; the list of *āśraya*, *ākāra* and *ālambana*; and the list of *āśraya*, *ālambana*, *ākāra*, *kāla* and *dravya*. The first list, *ākāra* and *ālambana*, is already observed in the Jñānaprasthāna, in which they are taken as two dimensions to measure the four applications of mindfulness:

As for these four applications of mindfulness, their *ākāra* and *ālambana* are both without limit; therefore, they are called limitless.¹²⁰

This list is also found in the MVŚ and is used in the context of states of meditation such as the path of non-interruption and the path of liberation,¹²¹ the three contemplations,¹²² and the eight types of knowledge.¹²³

The second list, *āśraya*, *ākāra* and *ālambana*, is applied also to the context of meditation, including the four immeasurable minds,¹²⁴ the path of non-interruption and the path of liberation,¹²⁵ and the eight excellent places.¹²⁶ In addition, it is used in the context of *caittas*:

¹¹⁹ See MVŚ 49 p.254c5ff: 問：此中所說不了名言為顯自性？為顯行相？為顯所緣？

¹²⁰ See JP 20 p.1030a17ff: 此四念住，行相、所緣，俱無邊際，故名無邊。

¹²¹ See MVŚ 64 p.331b21ff: 世俗無間及解脫道行相、所緣。

¹²² See MVŚ 43 p.221a10ff: 故三摩地有十二句：一有三摩地，一所緣是散亂。二有三摩地，一所緣非散亂。三有三摩地，一行相是散亂。四有三摩地，一行相非散亂……

¹²³ See MVŚ 147 p.755b10ff: 故苦、集智，行相無雜，所緣有雜。滅智、道智，行相、所緣，二俱無雜。滅等、道等，行相異故，有為、無為，所緣別故。

¹²⁴ See MVŚ 81 p.421a17ff: 此四無量所依者，唯依欲界身而得現起。行相者，慈有與樂行相，悲有拔苦行相，喜有喜慰行相，捨有捨置行相。所緣者，唯緣欲界，唯緣聚集，唯緣和合，唯緣有情。

¹²⁵ See MVŚ 84 p.435a11ff: 所依者……行相者……所緣者。

Question: All thought-concomitants (*caitta*) are also thus operating swiftly. Why is only thought (*citta*) mentioned?... Some say: When *citta* operates with such *āśraya*, *ālambana* and *ākāra*, *caittas* follow [accordingly] just as wherever the male fish goes, the female follows. Therefore, it is emphasized.¹²⁷

Question: Why are only present defilements said to be coverings (*nīvaraṇa*)? Answer: ... Furthermore, present defilements cover the *āśraya*, *ālambana* and *ākāra* [of *citta*] and prevent it from being liberated. This is not the case with the past and future [defilements]; therefore, [only] present [defilements] are mentioned.¹²⁸

Citta and *caittas* possess [the same] *āśraya*, *ālambana*, *ākāra* and are associated. They are said to possess an *āśraya* because they are based on the sense faculty; they are [said to] possess an *ālambana* because of grasping the object field; they are [said to] possess an *ākāra* because of acting according to the type of that very *ālambana* (cognitive object); they are associated because of the fact that they are united together. So [*citta* and *caittas*] are said to be associated.¹²⁹

And the third list involving the five items, *āśraya*, *ālambana*, *ākāra*, *kāla*, and *dravya*, is also applied to the context of *caittas*:

¹²⁶ See MVŚ 85 p.438a16ff: 所依者，皆依欲界身起。行相者，一切皆非分明行相。所緣者，皆緣欲界一切色處。

¹²⁷ See MVŚ 180 p.902c25ff: 問：諸心所法亦有如是速疾迴轉，何故但說心耶.....有說：心於如是所依、所緣、行相轉時，心所隨轉，如雄魚行處，雌魚皆隨，是故偏說。

¹²⁸ See MVŚ 38 p.195c8ff: 問：何故唯說現在煩惱是覆，非餘。答：.....復次，現在煩惱障礙所依、所緣、行相，令不解脫，過未不爾，故說現在。

¹²⁹ AKBh 2.34b-c p.62.3ff: *cittacaittasāḥ / sāśrayāḥ ālambanākārāḥ samprayuktāś ca / ta eva hi cittacaittāḥ sāśrayā ucyante indriyāśritatvāt, sālambanā viṣayagrahaṇāt, sākārās tasyaivāḥ ālambanasya prakāraśā ākaraṇāt, samprayuktāḥ samaṃ prayuktatvāt.*

[*Citta* and *caittas* are associated] in five ways. [*Citta* and *caittas* are associated] because of five [types of] identity (*samatā*): namely, identity in *āśraya*, *ālambana*, *ākāra*, *kāla*, and *dravya*.¹³⁰

3.7 Conclusion

Chapter one examined the usage of the term *ākāra* in sūtras and found that it maintains its semantic value as referring either to the appearance of something or somebody, or to the manner of some action. The meanings are straightforward, found in common, everyday contexts with almost no specific doctrinal sense or reference. Section 2.2 revealed connections between the Sarvāstivāda 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model and the sūtraic 3Dhp-12ākāra narrative on the basis of their similar pattern, shared terminology, and so on. Moreover, section 2.3 uncovered possible ancestors in the sūtras for some items within the sixteen ākāras of the Sarvāstivāda 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model. Since the abhidharmic sixteen ākāras bear the closest resemblance to the sūtraic usage of the term, it is possible that this connection between the sūtraic 3Dhp-12ākāra narrative and the Sarvāstivāda 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model served as the bridge that brought the term *ākāra* into the abhidharmic usage.

The use of the term *ākāra* expanded greatly after the MVŚ, and section 3.2 examined the various abhidharmic contexts to which *ākāra* was applied in that text. Starting from the sixteen ākāras, which appears to be the tangent point where the sūtraic and abhidharmic semantic circles of this term touch, that is, the Vaibhāṣikas' use of this set of sixteen ākāras as a hermeneutical tool to reinterpret old doctrinal lists. Such lists are most often related to the context of meditation, as for example the three contemplations, the four applications of mindfulness, and so on. The items within these lists are defined and differentiated from each other from the perspective

¹³⁰ AKBh 2.34d p.62.8ff: *pañcadhā / pañcabhiḥ samatāprakāraiḥ āśrayāḥ ālambanākāra kāladravyasamatābhiḥ*. Also see MVŚ 16 p.80c13ff: 霧尊者曰：四事等故說名相應，一時分等，謂心心所同一剎那而現行故；二所依等，謂心心所同依一根而現行故；三所緣等，謂心心所同緣一境而現行故；四行相等，謂心心所同一行相而現行故。復次，五事等故說名相應，即前四事及物體等。

of ākāra. Through this, ākāra extends beyond the narrow context of *nirvedhabhāgiya* and its location within the Sarvāstivāda 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model, and is applied to a more general context of meditation. However, in these broader contexts of meditation, the term ākāra itself still remains connected with the sixteen items such as impermanence (*anitya*), suffering (*duḥkha*), emptiness (*śūnya*), non-self (*anātman*), etc.

On the other hand, section 3.3 also presented quite a few cases in the MVŚ in which the term ākāra is applied to items other than the sixteen. However, even in such cases, there are hints suggesting that the list of sixteen itself, which had become a handy and an almost stereotyped hermeneutical tool for the Vaibhāṣikas, actually played a part in expanding the application of the term to other things. Two specific circumstances of “conversion” and “opposite parallels” were examined. First, when a doctrinal list is reinterpreted according to the system of sixteen ākāras, the items that are not easily identified with any of the sixteen are left unconverted but still tagged with the term ākāra to maintain formal unity with other successfully converted ones. Second, also in cases of the reinterpretation of doctrinal lists, opposite parallels of the items in the lists are also sometimes created, and perhaps also for the sake of formal unity, such opposite parallels are also tagged with the term ākāra. In these two circumstances, more items are tagged with the term ākāra.

As more ākāra are created, composite doctrinal lists are created as well. Within such lists, ākāras are created according to the circumstances as shown above, and there are also a few items that appear to have been added loosely. In both cases, the term ākāra is applied in a loose and descriptive way in contrast to the sixteen ākāras, which appears more abstract and simplified.

This tendency of a more loose and descriptive application of ākāra reaches its apex in the context of *cittacaitta*. The definition of the function or feature of each single *caitta* is simply identified as an ākāra, or “ākāra-ized,” resulting in many descriptive ākāras; for example, “giving happiness” is said to be the ākāra of love (*maitrī*), “the attaching to the capability of purification by austerities, moral practice and vows of non-Buddhist sects” is said to be the ākāra of the view of rigid

attachment to the precepts (*śīlavrataparāmarśa-dṛṣṭi*), and so on. Thus, every *caitta* is said to possess an *ākāra*, which seems to be simply an “*ākāra*-ization” of the original descriptive accounts of features of the *caitta* in question. In addition, certain *ākāras* are frozen as set categories and are then used to sort out other *ākāras* in terms of their shared features. This use of *ākāras* to mark a category reveals a tendency to use *ākāra* on a more general level. In fact, the term *ākāra*, along with some other terms such as *āśraya* and *ālambana*, function as major categories according to which various doctrinal lists, especially those concerning meditation and *cittacaitta*, are analyzed.

Chapter 4: Evolusion of the Meanings of the Term Ākāra in Abhidharma

4.1 Introduction

As shown in chapter one, ākāra is restricted with clear meanings (“appearance” and “way”) in pre-abhidharmic sources, and the contexts in which it occurs are mostly straightforward without additional doctrinal connotations. In chapter two and three we have seen that this term undergoes great expansion in abhidharma both in the contexts in which it occurs and in the depth of its doctrinal connections. It becomes a key concept in Sarvastivāda path theory, specifically within the context of meditation, and is also used for the descriptive accounts of various *caittas*. As for possible connections among the term’s various abhidharmic usages, we have suggested that its incorporation into the Sarvastivāda path theory may have started from the meditative model of 4nt-16 ākāra (contemplation of four noble truths in sixteen ākāra) in the *nirvedhabhāgīya*, and this meditative model may be in the end closely linked to the sūtraic narrative of the Buddha’s turning the dharma-wheel. Then, through several steps of expansion, this term emerges from the context of meditation and extends to issues regarding *cittacaittas*. But up to this point, we have not touched on the meaning(s) of this term in its various abhidharmic usages. In fact, in connection with its expansion in usage, the meaning also develops. As we will find in this chapter, the term as a concept undergoes at least three stages in meaning: from the Vaibhāṣikas’ definition of ākāra as *prajñā*; to Vasubandhu’s revision of this definition to refer to the “mode of” or “way in which” (*prakāra*) all thought and thought concomitants (*cittacaittānām*) grasp objects, for which Yaśomitra offers two interpretations; and finally to the two notions of the concept ākāra (activity and image) as reported by Puguang.

In conjunction with this semantic innovation, ākāra in abhidharma also transforms from a rather straightforward to a more complex concept in terms of its doctrinal significance, and it comes to be enveloped in issues that reflect major differences among groups. One of these major issues concerns a difference in the

basic notion of the term, that is, whether it refers to the activity or function of a discriminating consciousness, or to the image, whether internal or external, that represents the cognitive object. This difference became a major point of debate and resulted in significant later doctrinal innovations. The purpose of this chapter, however, is not to go into the debate itself, but to explore how and where this discrepancy in the two notions of ākāra may have developed, that is, to examine the trajectory of the development of the term's meaning through the three steps mentioned.¹³¹ To this end, it is necessary to review and compare the meaning of ākāra in these three stages and explore their context.

4.2 From Step 1 (*prajñā*) to Step 2 (*prakāra*) (from the Vaibhāṣika Definition of Ākāra as *prajñā* to Vasubandhu's Revised Definition of Ākāra as *prakāra*)

In order to observe the developing meaning of the concept ākāra from the Vaibhāṣika to Vasubandhu's viewpoint, it would be best first to examine and compare the definition(s) of this term given in the MVŚ and the AKBh.

4.2.1 A Comparison of the Vaibhāṣika's and Vasubandhu's Definitions

As we have already shown in chapter two where we sorted out the occurrences of the term ākāra in the MVŚ, it is used in the context of meditation, primarily in the meditative strategies within the *nirvedhabhāgīya* and also in other meditative states outside of the *nirvedhabhāgīya* more generally, and it is also used to describe the features of *cittacaittas*. The traditional Vaibhāṣika view about what the concept of ākāra means has been given in the MVŚ, and was also reported by Vasubandhu in the AKBh:

¹³¹ This trajectory extends from from step 1, the Vaibhāṣika definition (*prajñā*), to step 2, Vasubandhu's revised definition (*prakāra*), to step 3, the two notions of the term (activity and image) reported by Puguang.

Vaibhāṣika definition 1 (in the MVŚ):

“Question: Why is it called ākāra? What is the meaning of ākāra? Answer: The meaning of ākāra is the discriminative operation with regard to the characteristics of the cognitive object (*ālambana*).”¹³²

Vaibhāṣika definition 2 (from the AKBh report):

“[Question:] What is the *dharma* that is called ākāra? [Answer:] ākāra is insight (*prajñā*).”¹³³

These two definitions are in fact equal because the discriminative operation with regard to *dharmas* (*dharmapraṇicaya*) is exactly said to be the meaning of *prajñā*.¹³⁴ Therefore, since ākāra means *dharmapraṇicaya* (A=X), and *dharmapraṇicaya* is *prajñā* (X=B), it would be equivalent to say that ākāra is *prajñā* (A=B). Actually, the Vaibhāṣikas’ equation of ākāra with *prajñā* is again confirmed in another place in the MVŚ, in which, upon the inquiry about the meaning of ākāra, the Vaibhāṣikas omit the definition connector, the X, namely the discriminative operation with regard to *dharmas* (*dharmapraṇicaya*), and instead say directly that the intrinsic nature of ākāra is *prajñā* (A=B):

Vaibhāṣika definition 3 (in the MVŚ):

“Question: What is the intrinsic nature of that which is called as ākāra? Answer: The intrinsic nature [of ākāra] is insight (*prajñā*).”¹³⁵

Strictly speaking, what the Vaibhāṣikas offer here in MVŚ definition 3 is not exactly a definition, or at least not a standard, direct one in the form of A=B (ākāra is *prajñā*). The term “intrinsic nature” attached here makes this expression sound a little reserved as compared to the direct, definite definition offered in Vasubandhu’s report

¹³² See MVŚ 79 p409a10 問：何故名行相？行相是何義？答：於諸境相簡擇而轉是行相義。

¹³³ AKBh 7.13a p.401.18ff: *ākāro nāma ka eṣa dharmah / prajñākārah /*

¹³⁴ AKBh 1.2a p.2.4ff: *tatra prajñā dharmapraṇicayaḥ*.

¹³⁵ See MVŚ 79 p408c25 問：言行相者，自性是何？答：自性是慧。

in the AKBh, namely ākāra is *prajñā* (*prajñākārah*).¹³⁶ But according to the Vaibhāṣikas, since a *dharma* cannot be distinguished from its intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*), this definition 3, although not in a standard definition form of A=B (*ākāra is prajñā*), can be taken to mean the same thing. It is thus clear that for the Vaibhāṣikas, ākāra is equivalent to one single thought-concomitant (*caitta*), *prajñā*.

In the AKBh, Vasubandhu refers to what the concept of ākāra means in two places. One is in chapter 7 where he gives a formal definition: ākāra is the way or mode of grasping the object (*ālambanagrahaṇaprakāra*) of all the thought and thought-concomitants (*cittacaitta*).¹³⁷ This definition is proposed as a revision of the “traditional”¹³⁸ Vaibhāṣika definition, which, as claimed by Vasubandhu, contains a potential doctrinal problem.¹³⁹ The other place in which Vasubandhu refers to the meaning of the term ākāra is in chapter 2, where he glosses *sa-ākāra*, one of the characteristics of the thought and thought-concomitants (*cittacaitta*). *Cittacaittas* are said to be that which bear ākāra (*sa-ākāra*), and he glosses *sa-ākāra* as referring to their acting (*ākaraṇa*) on that very cognitive object (*ālambana*) in a particular way (*prakāraśaḥ*).¹⁴⁰ In this context, *cittacaitta* is actually the subject under discussion whereas ākāra is mentioned only as an elaboration. Although the phrase, which is embedded in the definitional framework for *cittacaitta*, is obviously not intended specifically as a definition of the concept of ākāra, it still sheds some light on Vasubandhu’s interpretation. The phrasing itself appears to be an echo of the clause defining ākāra in the first place since it involves almost all of its major elements,

¹³⁶ In Chinese, the MVŚ states that the intrinsic nature of ākāra is *prajñā* (自性是慧), while in Sanskrit, AKBh states that ākāra is *prajñā* (*prajñākārah*).

¹³⁷ See note 141.

¹³⁸ The traditional Vaibhāṣika definition we refer to here is that ākāra is *prajñā*. The term “traditional” here should be used with caution because this definition is not necessarily “traditional” in the sense of being the earliest definition, nor the only definition. There are obviously layers and different definitions proposed even in the MVŚ itself. For example, as we will discuss later in this chapter, although according to this definition, ākāra is restricted to a single *caitta prajñā*, we do find the tendency of generalizing its application to all *cittacaittas* and in various meditations in the MVŚ. The seeming contradiction between this tendency of generalization and the “traditional,” or to say, the official Vaibhāṣika definition indicates development in understanding ākāra already in the MVŚ, which may eventually lead to Vasubandhu’s revised definition where the tendency of generalization becomes solidified.

¹³⁹ See below section 4.2.2.

¹⁴⁰ AKBh 2.34cd 62.6ff: *sākārās tasyaivālambanasya prakāraśa ākaraṇāt*.

namely, *cittacaitta*, *ālambana*, and *prakāra*. As a result, it may be seen as an etymological or pseudo-definition of *ākāra*. For the convenience of further comparison, these two “definitions” can be summarized as follows:

(1) The direct definition of *ākāra* in the AKBh, chapter 7:

*sarveṣāṃ cittacaittānām ālambanagrahaṇaparakāra ākāra iti*¹⁴¹

“*Ākāra* is the way or mode of grasping the object of all the thought and thought-concomitants.”

(2) The reference to *ākāra* when glossing *cittacaitta* in the AKBh, chapter 2:

cittacaittasāh / *sāśrayālambanākārāḥ samprayuktās ca* / *ta eva hi cittacaittāḥ sāśrayā ucyante indriyāśritatvāt, sālambanā viṣayagrahaṇāt, sākārās tasyaivālambanasya prakāraśa ākaraṇāt, samprayuktāḥ samaṃ prayuktatvāt.*¹⁴²

“The thought and thought-concomitants possess [the same] sense faculty (*āśraya*), cognitive object (*ālambana*), and *ākāra*, and are associated (*samprayukta*). Those very thought and thought-concomitants are said to possess an *āśraya* because they are based on the sense faculty; they are [said to] possess an *ālambana* because of grasping the object-field; they are [said to] possess an *ākāra* because of acting (*ākaraṇa*) on that very cognitive object in a particular way (*prakāraśah*); they are associated because of the fact that they are united together.”

To be brief, for the Vaibhāṣikas, *ākāra* is the single mental function of *prajñā* (insight). But for Vasubandhu, *ākāra* means the *prakāra* (way or kind) of all thought and thought-concomitants (*cittacaitta*) in grasping the object. There are at least two noticeable amendments evident in Vasubandhu’s definition as he revises the Vaibhāṣika definition: one is generalizing the application of *ākāra* from one thought-

¹⁴¹ AKBh 7.13b 401.21ff.

¹⁴² AKBh 2.34bc 62.3ff.

concomitant *prajñā* to all thought and thought-concomitants (*cittacaittas*); another is changing the definition of *ākāra* from a specific mental activity (*prajñā*) to a generic way or kind (*prakāra*). We will elaborate on these two amendments in the following sections.

(1) Vasubandhu's Amendment 1: Generalizing the Application of Ākāra from a Restriction to *prajñā* to All *cittacaittas*

As the comparison of the definitions shows, for the Vaibhāṣikas, *ākāra* is equivalent to the single thought-concomitant *prajñā*. But for Vasubandhu, *ākāra* is no longer a *dharma* that only relates to one single thought-concomitant (*caitta*); instead, it is applicable to all thought and thought-concomitants (*cittacaittas*). In his formal definition, *ākāra* is the *prakāra* of all thought and thought-concomitants (*sarveṣāṃ cittacaittānām*). In the second definition,¹⁴³ *cittacaitta* itself is the context in which *ākāra* appears. That is to say, in Vasubandhu's revised definition, the range of application of *ākāra* is found to be expanded from the specific case when thought functions discriminatively towards objects (which is *prajñā*), to all circumstances when thought cognizes or functions in all various possible ways (which includes all *cittacaittas*)¹⁴⁴.

Vasubandhu seems to be fully aware of this major difference between his interpretation and that of the Vaibhāṣikas in this respect, since he highlights this right after offering his definition in the AKBh chapter 7, reaffirming that *ākāra* is to be applied to all *cittacaittas*:

[Question:] Is it the case that only *prajñā* perceives with *ākāra* (*ākārayati*)?

[Answer:] No.

[Question:] Then what?

¹⁴³ See above the direct definition of *ākāra* in the AKBh, chapter 7, and the reference to *ākāra* when glossing *cittacaitta* in the AKBh, chapter 2.

¹⁴⁴ An indication of such expansion is already seen in the MVŚ, which will be discussed later. See section 4.2.3.

[Answer:] Together with that [namely, *prajñā*, all states] that are possessed of a cognitive object, namely, all *cittacaittas*,] perceive with ākāra (*ākārayati*). *Prajñā* and all *dharmas* that are possessed of a cognitive object, [namely, all *cittacaittas*,] perceive with ākāra (*ākārayanti*).¹⁴⁵

(2) Vasubandhu's Amendment 2: Defining Ākāra from Referring to an Activity (*prajñā*) to a Mode or Way (*prakāra*)

Another noticeable amendment Vasubandhu makes to the Vaibhāṣika definition of ākāra is to define ākāra as *prakāra*:

*sarveṣāṃ cittacaittānām ālambanagrahaṇaparakāra ākāra iti*¹⁴⁶

“Ākāra is the way or mode of grasping the object of all the thought and thought-concomitants.”

Therefore, for Vasubandhu, ākāra is first a *prakāra*. We have translated *prakāra* very generally at this point as mode, way, or manner since no more information is given by Vasubandhu as to what exactly the term means in this context. Does it refer to a mode, way, or manner as it does normally? If so, to what specific kind of mode, way, or manner does it refer? For example, is it the (different¹⁴⁷) mode in which the cognitive subject (*cittacaitta*) functions? Or does it refer to the object side, namely, the (different) mode of the form of the objects (*ālambana*) that are to be grasped by (correspondingly different) *cittacaittas*? In fact, this mode (*prakāra*) has something to do with both the subject side (*cittacaittas*) and the object side (*ālambana*), and the intended nuance results simply from the particular side a particular interpretation emphasizes. In other words, *prakāra* could be a subject mode; this would result in a subject ākāra, which refers to the specific function of *cittacaitta* in grasping the characteristics of the object. Or, it could be an object mode; this would result in an

¹⁴⁵ AKBh 7.13bc 401.22ff: *atha kiṃ prajñāivākārayati netyāha / kiṃ tarhi / tayā saha / ākārayanti sālambāḥ / prajñā cānye ca sarve sālambanā dharmā ākārayanti /*

¹⁴⁶ AKBh 7.13b 401.21ff.

¹⁴⁷ Whether or not this mode is “different” becomes significant in the context of the five sameness theory of *cittacaitta*. See below section 4.3.5.

object *ākāra*, which refers to the specific form of the object as grasped by a particular function of *cittacaitta*. Both involve *cittacaitta* and *ālambana*, whereas the different emphasis in interpretation leads to different dynamics in the implied cognitive model.

Vasubandhu does not comment on *prakāra* in this ambiguity, but later commentators such as Yaśomitra and Saṅghabhadra do.¹⁴⁸ They offer alternative interpretations of *prakāra*, which may be categorized according to the two possibilities mentioned above. We will discuss in detail Yaśomitra's and Saṅghabhadra's commentaries concerning the potential different meanings of *prakāra* in later sections.

4.2.2 From Step 1 (*prajñā*) to Step 2 (*prakāra*): Why Does Vasubandhu Make These Amendments?

The reason why Vasubandhu made these two amendments is to solve a deficiency, from his perspective, in the traditional Vaibhāṣika definition, that is, a contradiction resulting from the Vaibhāṣika definition when it is tested in the context of *sa-ākāra*, one of the definitions for *cittacaitta*. In other words, he thinks that the Vaibhāṣika definition of *ākāra* as *prajñā* does not meet the requirement that *cittacaitta* be *sa-ākāra*:

[Question:] What is the *dharma* that is called *ākāra*?

[Answer:] Insight (*prajñā*) is *ākāra*.

[Question:] If it is thus, then *prajñā* [as a *caitta*] will not be possessed of an *ākāra*, [which is contradictory to the definition for *caitta*, namely, *caitta* is that which is possessed of an *ākāra*,] since *prajñā* cannot be associated with

¹⁴⁸ For Yaśomitra's adoption and Saṅghabhadra's rejection of the two interpretations of *prakāra*, see below 4.3.1 and 4.3.2.

another *prajñā*. Thus, it should be said: *ākāra* is the way or mode of grasping the object of all the thought and thought-concomitants (*cittacaitta*)¹⁴⁹.

To rephrase Vasubandhu's argument, since *cittacaitta* is by definition *sa-ākāra*¹⁵⁰ (that which possesses *ākāra*), then *prajñā*, as a kind of *caitta*, should also be *sa-ākāra*. This being said, if the Vaibhāṣika definition were followed, namely *ākāra* is *prajñā*, then a problem would result. Specifically, the *caitta* factor, *prajñā*, as *sa-ākāra*, would be *sa-prajñā* (that which possesses *prajñā*), which would make no sense because *prajñā* cannot possess another *prajñā*. The derivation can be simplified as below,

All *cittacaittas* are *sa-ākāra*

As a *caitta*, *prajñā* is *sa-ākāra*

The Vaibhāṣika definition: **ākāra** is *prajñā*

The *caitta*, *prajñā*, is *sa-prajñā*

Since the Vaibhāṣika definition leads to an undesirable conclusion, Vasubandhu believes that it is incompatible with the larger definition of *cittacaitta* as *sa-ākāra* and therefore must be revised. His revised definition, as we already mentioned above, is that *ākāra* is the way or mode of grasping the object of thought and all thought-concomitants. Then the question arises as to whether his revision of the Vaibhāṣika definition is necessary. In other words, is the Vaibhāṣika definition really “deficient” as Vasubandhu pointed out? Or, does it make perfect sense within the Vaibhāṣika doctrinal framework? Whether or not the definition is deficient is dependent upon the system within which it functions and the doctrinal perspective from which it is judged. In that case, what in particular made Vasubandhu think that the Vaibhāṣika

¹⁴⁹ AKBh 7.13b 401.18ff: *ākāro nāma ka eṣa dharmah / prajñākārah / evaṃ tarhi prajñā sākārā na bhaviṣyati / prajñāntarāsaṃyogāt / evaṃ tu yuktaṃ syāt / sarveṣāṃ cittacaittānām ālambanagrahaṇaprakāra ākāra iti /*

¹⁵⁰ For the fact that *cittacaittas* are said to possess [the same] *āśraya*, *ālambana*, and *ākāra*, see section 3.6.

definition is deficient? And what has his revision brought to the changing meaning of the concept of ākāra?

It should be recognized that Vasubandhu's revision solved at least one "problem" since the Vaibhāṣika definition is circular, namely, that the *caitta, prajñā*, possesses a *prajñā* (*prajñā* is *sa-prajñā*). According to his revised definition, this circularity is resolved since he abandoned the sense of ākāra as the specific mental function of *prajñā* and understood it as kind (*prakāra*) by which any mental function grasps the object. As a result, instead of claiming that the *caitta, prajñā*, possesses another *prajñā*, one would say that it possesses a mode or way (*prakāra*) of grasping the object. In this case, if we substitute Vasubandhu's revised definition for the Vaibhāṣika original, and carry out the derivation above, the revised definition would appear as follows:

All *cittacaittas* are *sa-ākāra*

As a *caitta, prajñā* is *sa-ākāra*

Vasubandhu's revised definition: **ākāra** is the way/kind (*prakāra*) of grasping the object

The *caitta, prajñā*, is *sa-prakāra*

Actually, the case of the *caitta, prajñā*, is only one example that Vasubandhu used to demonstrate the problem caused by the Vaibhāṣika definition of ākāra as *prajñā*, perhaps because it looks particularly ridiculous to say that *prajñā* possesses another *prajñā*. In fact, not only *prajñā*, but also all the other *caittas* potentially encounter a similar problem since the Vaibhāṣika definition of ākāra would entail that other kinds of *caitta* also possess a *prajñā* (*sa-prajñā*).¹⁵¹ As a result, Vasubandhu's revised

¹⁵¹ Indeed, for the Vaibhāṣikas, all moments of thought occur with *prajñā*. In this sense, all *cittacaittas* can be said to be *sa-prajñā*. A problem arises since, according to the Vaibhāṣika model, *citta* functions together with several *caittas*. If the Vaibhāṣika definition were followed, it would turn out that *citta* functions with multiple *prajñās* (because all *caittas* are said to be *sa-ākāra*, and ākāra, as the Vaibhāṣikas define, is *prajñā*). However, if the revised definition were followed, *citta* could function with multiple ways of grasping object, which means that the revised definition of ākāra encounters no problem in this situation.

definition solves the conceptual circularity found in the case of the specific *caitta*, *prajñā*, but also benefits all the other *cittacaittas*: that is, on the one hand, it immunizes all *cittacaittas* against the potential danger of being defined as *sa-prajñā*, and on the other hand, it opens up a whole new horizon in which all *cittacaittas* can be defined according to the standard of *sa-ākāra* (in the sense of *sa-prakāra*). In other words, whereas the standard definition of *cittacaittas* as *sa-ākāra* cannot be explained well by the Vaibhāṣika definition (*ākāra* is *prajñā*) because otherwise all *cittacaittas* would be *sa-prajñā*.¹⁵² However, this standard definition can be applied under Vasubandhu's revised definition (*ākāra* is the way or kind (*prakāra*) of grasping the object) because any kind of *cittacaitta* can be said to be possessed of a way or mode (*prakāra*) of grasping the object. For example, the way or mode (*prakāra*) in which the *citta* (thought) grasps the object is that it perceives (*upalabhate*) it; *vedanā* experiences (*anubhavati*) that very object; *saṃjñā* determines (*paricchinatti*) it; while *cetanā* acts volitionally (*abhisamskaroti*) on it, and so on.¹⁵³ In summary, by revising the Vaibhāṣika definition of *ākāra* as way or kind (*prakāra*) and generalizing it to all *cittacaittas*, Vasubandhu not only solved the specific definitional problem but also managed to extend the interpretative power of this new understanding of *ākāra* to all *cittacaittas*, which will form the basis of the application of *ākāra* to all *cittacaittas* in the AKBh and thereafter.

¹⁵² See the note above.

¹⁵³ This is exactly how Yaśomitra interpreted the phrase *tasyaivālambanasya prakāreṇa ākāraṇāt*, which is Vasubandhu's gloss on the definition of *cittacaitta* as *sa-ākāra*. Yaśomitra offered a second approach, which also concentrates on the way or mode (*prakāra*) by which all *cittacaittas* grasp the object: that is, *citta* grasps (*grhṇāti*) the perceivable form (*upalabhyatārūpa*, literally, *viññāna* grasps the form of being the perceivable-ness) of that very object (*ālambana*) in its generic form (*sāmānyarūpeṇa*). *Vedanā* grasps (*grhṇāti*) the sensible form (*anubhavanīyatārūpa*) of that very object in its specific form (*viśeṣarūpeṇa*). *Samjñā* grasps (*grhṇāti*) the determinable form (*paricchedyatārūpa*) [of that very object in its specific form (*viśeṣarūpeṇa*)], and so on. It will be discussed below on in section 4.3.1.

4.2.3 The Inclination of Generalizing Ākāra to All *cittacaittas* in the MVŚ

Even though “the actual practice” of generalizing the application of ākāra to all *cittacaittas* is observed in the AKBh and thereafter, an inclination of this practice of making ākāra (semantically and doctrinally) accessible to all *cittacaittas* is not seen first in the AKBh but in the MVŚ. One interesting hint preserved in the MVŚ occurs alongside the Vaibhāṣikas’ definition of ākāra restrictively as *prajñā* after which are recorded different opinions regarding possible wider applications of ākāra:

Question: What is the intrinsic nature of what is called as ākāra?

Answer: Its intrinsic nature is insight (*prajñā*). Some say that what is called ākāra has collectively all the *cittacaittas* as its intrinsic nature. According to such a theory, *cittacaittas* are all ākāra..... Some others say that what is called ākāra has all *dharmas* as its intrinsic nature..... The judgment is that it should be said that as for what is called ākāra, [its] intrinsic nature is insight (*prajñā*), as said in the first [explanation].¹⁵⁴

No more details are given as to the reason why some people believe that the scope of the application of ākāra extends collectively to all the *cittacaittas*, or even to all *dharmas*. But from this we know that there were already those who suggested that ākāra be applied beyond the single *caitta*, *prajñā*, (which is the default Vaibhāṣika opinion) to all the *cittacaittas*, and even to all *dharmas*.

In addition to this direct report, another pre-ACBh hint that indicates the generalizing tendency in defining ākāra is in fact already discussed in our last chapter: that is, the process that we call as ākāra-ization.¹⁵⁵ A quick reminder may be helpful. In the MVŚ, we found that in some cases regarding either meditation or *caitta*, the original plain descriptive accounts of features or definitions of some meditative states, or features or definitions of some *caittas*, are directly converted

¹⁵⁴ See MVŚ 79 p.408c25ff 問：言行相者，自性是何？答：自性是慧。.....有作是說：言行相者，總以一切心心所法為其自性。若作是說，諸心心所皆是行相。.....復有說者：所言行相，以一切法為其自性。.....評曰：應作是說：言行相者，自性是慧，如初所說。

¹⁵⁵ Refer back to section 3.5.

and referred to as the ākāra of those meditative states or *caittas* in question. For example, since the feature of the first concentration is “limitless,” the first concentration is said to be possessed of the ākāra called “limitlessness;” for the *caitta*, *avidyā* (ignorance), since its feature is “ignorant, dark and stupid,” it is then said to be possessed of the ākāra called “ignorance, darkness and stupidity.” Through this process, more items within the traditional lists regarding meditation and contexts of *cittacaitta* are labeled with the term ākāra, and this process of generating ākāra by mechanically converting the literal features or definitions of the concepts in question into ākāra is referred to as ākāra-ization. More examples are given in the previous chapter.

So, as these two hints demonstrate, there are before the AKBh already inclinations toward a generalized application of ākāra, and the term ākāra was indeed connected with various *caittas* other than one single *caitta*, *prajñā*. It is only that it was not yet solidified and was not represented in the formal definition of ākāra, as Vasubandhu did in his revised one. Then, aren’t the Vaibhāṣikas contradicting themselves in still insisting, in their formal definition of ākāra, that ākāra equals and only equals a single *caitta*, *prajñā*?

4.2.4 Indications of Seeming Contradictions in the Vaibhāṣika Definition

So far, the Vaibhāṣika definition of ākāra as *prajñā* seems to entail “contradictions” on at least two different levels. The first, as we can see in Vasubandhu’s analysis discussed before, is the contradiction between this Vaibhāṣika definition of ākāra as *prajñā* and their definition for *cittacaitta* as *sa-ākāra*. Here, Vasubandhu claims that his revision is meant to solve this contradiction or problem. The other, as we find now, is the contradiction between the fact that ākāra is actually found used with various *cittacaittas* already in the MVŚ and the Vaibhāṣikas’ still define ākāra as one single *caitta*, *prajñā*, in the MVŚ.

Before we view the MVŚ as internally contradictory, we should note that there are a number of other possibilities. For example, we cannot expect most traditional Buddhist texts, especially a compendium of various views such as the MVŚ, to be internally consistent. In addition, apparent contradictions themselves can be relative and perspective-oriented, which means that what we take for granted as a contradiction may actually be no more than statements that appear to be contradictory from a certain perspective. Instead, such apparently contradictory statements could represent positions that developed and changed over time. For example, the first “contradiction” mentioned above represents Vasubandhu’s view of the incapacity of the Vaibhāṣika definition of ākāra to explain *cittacaitta*, but it is possible that the Vaibhāṣikas did not intend it to do so. In other words, Vasubandhu perhaps takes the Vaibhāṣika definition (ākāra is *prajñā*) out of its context, applies it as a test regarding one cognitive feature of *cittacaitta* (*cittacaitta* is *sa-ākāra*), and determines that it does not fit into the cognitive model underlying that cognitive feature of *cittacaitta*. But the question remains as to whether, when the Vaibhāṣikas offer the definition of ākāra as *prajñā*, they are really concerned with its epistemological function as noted by Vasubandhu, that is, its cognitive compatibility with the functioning model of *cittacaitta*. Indeed, the term ākāra, for the Vaibhāṣikas, may function primarily in a soteriological sense instead. As we have discussed in chapter two and three, the path theory, especially the *nirvedhabhāgīya*, is the main context where the Vaibhāṣikas play with the term ākāra. The 4nt-16ākāra (contemplation of four noble truths in sixteen ākāra) may very possibly be the context in which the Vaibhāṣikas first adopted the term from its sūtraic background and applied it to an abhidharmic development, which would suggest that at the outset the term is anchored by them with a soteriological sense. And, not only from the beginning, but also in all occurrences of this term in the MVŚ, a concern with soteriological contexts is dominant. As examined in the last chapter, this trajectory is seen emerging from the original context of the *nirvedhabhāgīya* out to still more

meditative states, which a practitioner is supposed to experience on the path towards awakening.¹⁵⁶

When reading their definition for ākāra, we must bear in mind the Vaibhāṣikas' attachment of the term ākāra to the *nirvedhabhāgīya* and more generally, to meditative states in the path theory. This suggests that we might consider whether their definition of ākāra as *prajñā* should also be understood from a soteriological perspective; that is, since *prajñā* (*dharmapracaya*) like ākāra plays an essential role in the path theory, and their functions seem to be similar (in terms of *dharmapracaya*), then why not use the more familiar term *prajñā* (*dharmapracaya*) to define and gloss the new term ākāra? In this way, when the Vaibhāṣikas select *prajñā* to define ākāra, they may simply stress that the significance of ākāra in the practices of meditation is as great as *prajñā*. They may not be concerned about other issues such as the cognitive mechanics of *prajñā* itself or the doctrinal compatibility of ākāra with the cognitive model of *cittacaittas* once it is equated to *prajñā*, etc., which later become Vasubandhu's main concern.

So, since the Vaibhāṣika definition of ākāra as *prajñā* originally comes from and is designed in the context of a soteriological motivation, on the one hand it makes perfect sense mainly in the context of meditation, and on the other hand it would not be surprising that, once extracted from this context, the interpretative efficiency of this definition fades and it appears pointless and even contradictory from an epistemological standpoint. Whereas from Vasubandhu's standpoint, this inconsistency within an epistemological context proves that the Vaibhāṣika definition of ākāra is "deficient," since it was never designed to function in that context, such

¹⁵⁶ The application of the term ākāra to more general meditative states should be a natural overflow of its application to the meditative states in the *nirvedhabhāgīya*. And this tight connection with meditative states in the *nirvedhabhāgīya* might be a result of the four noble truths, which act as a mediator; that is, since the Vaibhāṣika path theory is centered on the four noble truths, the term ākāra which is connected with the concept of four noble truths in the form of the 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model is then brought into the Vaibhāṣika path theory. Then why does the term ākāra show an almost inseparable attachment with the four noble truths in the Vaibhāṣika path theory? It may come from the sūtraic 3Dhp-12ākāra narrative in which ākāra is bound with the four noble truths. The fact that the Vaibhāṣika path theory is centered on the four noble truths is a complex historical issue whose reasons are as yet uncertain.

criticism of the Vaibhāṣika definition is unfounded. However, this is often the pattern of scholastic criticism, namely, that one at a later stage looks back and criticizes a preceding definition without being cognizant of or even ignoring its original effective context.

As for the second “contradiction,” that is, the contradiction between the fact that ākāra is actually already found used with various *cittacaittas* in the MVŚ and the Vaibhāṣika definition of ākāra as the single *caitta*, *prajñā*, we should note that there is a difference between the MVŚ and Vasubandhu in terms of their treatment of the term ākāra as applied to various *cittacaittas*.

The term ākāra does indeed also reach out to *cittacaittas* in the MVŚ, being attached to various *caittas* through the process of ākāra-ization, but this process seems to be on a more mechanical level,¹⁵⁷ generating a somehow superficial relationship between the term ākāra and the *caitta* to which it attaches. In other words, in contrast to Vasubandhu’s treatment, the Vaibhāṣikas in the MVŚ, after applying the term ākāra to a given *caitta*, provide no further expansion asking or discussing how that ākāra functions with that *caitta*. So even though the term ākāra is applied to various *cittacaittas* in the MVŚ, the actual relationship between ākāra and *cittacaitta* is not seriously treated as an epistemological issue. The connection of the term ākāra with different *caittas* is basically semantic rather than doctrinal. We might say that, in the MVŚ, there is an inclination to apply the term ākāra to various *cittacaittas* and there may have been some thought considering the relationship between *cittacaittas* and their possessed ākāra, but this inclination has not yet reached the point that it is represented in the formal definition of ākāra in the MVŚ. So, we still have ākāra being equated with the single *caitta*, *prajñā*, in the MVŚ although the term is found connected with various other *caittas*. In comparison, the generalization of ākāra to all *cittacaittas* is finally represented on the definitional level in Vasubandhu’s revision in the AKBh.

¹⁵⁷ For more details, refer back to section 3.5.

So, returning to the question of whether Vasubandhu really solved the problem he claimed to have “detected” in the Vaibhāṣika definition, the answer appears to depend upon how one defines “solve” and “problem.” Vasubandhu detected a problem that appears reasonable from his epistemological standpoint and offered a solution to it. But for the Vaibhāṣikas, who discussed ākāra mainly in a soteriological context, the epistemological problem seems to have been of little concern.

4.3 From Step 2 (*prakāra*) to Step 3 (Two Notions of the Term) (from Vasubandhu’s Definition of Ākāra as *prakāra* to Puguang’s Two Notions of Ākāra as Activity and Image)

We have briefly mentioned that the concept of ākāra experiences development in meaning through three steps from the MVŚ to the AKBh: that is, from the Vaibhāṣikas’ definition of ākāra as *prajñā*, to Vasubandhu’s revision of this definition to refer to the “mode of” or “way in which” (*prakāra*) all thought and thought-concomitants (*cittacaittānām*) grasp objects, for which commentators (such as Saṅghabhadra and Yaśomitra) offer two interpretations, and finally to the two notions of the concept of ākāra (activity and image) as reported by Puguang. In the previous section we examined Vasubandhu’s amendments to the Vaibhāṣikas’ definition and the significance of his revision. In this section we will focus on the so-called two notions of ākāra and their possible connections with Vasubandhu’s revised definition.

The confusion concerning the meaning of ākāra in its two notions is known to us through Puguang’s commentary¹⁵⁸ to Xuanzang’s translation of the AKBh. In search of how and where this confusion arises and grows, it is then best to start with

¹⁵⁸ Puguang’s Jushelunji, T1821, in 30 volumes, is the most famous one among the so-called “three great commentaries” on Xuanzang’s translation of the AKBh. The other two are composed by Shentai and Fabao, who are also Xuanzang’s students.

the AKBh, the object of Puguang's commentary, and its remarks about the meaning of ākāra.

In the AKBh, Vasubandhu refers to the meaning of ākāra in two places. One is in chapter 7 where he gives a formal definition: ākāra is the way or mode of grasping the object (*ālambanagrahaṇaprakāra*) of all the thought and thought-concomitants (*cittacaitta*).¹⁵⁹ The other place is in chapter 2 where he glosses *sa-ākāra* as referring to the acting (*ākaraṇa*) of *cittacaittas* on that very cognitive object (*ālambana*) in a particular way (*prakāraśaḥ*).¹⁶⁰

For Vasubandhu, ākāra is first a *prakāra*. We have translated *prakāra* very generally at this point as mode, way, or manner. But what exactly does this mode, way, or manner mean in this context? Does it refer to the mode, way, or manner in which the cognitive subject (*cittacaittas*) functions? Or does it refer to the object side, namely, the mode, way, or manner of the form of the objects (*ālambana*) that are to be grasped by (correspondingly different) *cittacaittas*?

Vasubandhu also does not comment on *prakāra* in relation to this ambiguity, but later commentators such as Yaśomitra and Saṅghabhadra do.¹⁶¹ They offer alternative interpretations of *prakāra*, which may be categorized basically according to the two possibilities mentioned above. Specifically, Yaśomitra offers two possible interpretations of *prakāra* dependent upon the functions of *cittacaittas* or upon the object, while Saṅghabhadra rejects both interpretations.

¹⁵⁹ For the direct definition of ākāra in the AKBh, chapter 7: Ākāra is the way or mode of grasping the object of all the thought and thought-concomitants. See AKBh 7.13b 401.21ff: *sarveṣāṃ cittacaittānām ālambanagrahaṇaprakāra ākāra iti*.

¹⁶⁰ For the reference to ākāra when glossing *cittacaitta* in the AKBh, chapter 2: The thought and thought-concomitants possess [the same] sense faculty (*āśraya*), cognitive object (*ālambana*), and ākāra, and are associated (*samprayukta*). Those very thought and thought-concomitants are said to possess an *āśraya* because they are based on the sense faculty; they are [said to] possess an *ālambana* because of grasping the object-field; they are [said to] possess an ākāra because of acting (*ākaraṇa*) on that very cognitive object in a particular way (*prakāraśaḥ*); they are associated because of the fact that they are united together. See AKBh 2.34bc 62.3ff: *cittacaittasāḥ / sāśrayālambanākārāḥ samprayuktāś ca / ta eva hi cittacaittāḥ sāśrayā ucyante indriyāśritatvāt, sālambanā viṣayagrahaṇāt, sākārāś tasyaivālambanasya prakāraśa ākaraṇāt, samprayuktāḥ samam prayuktatvāt*.

¹⁶¹ For Yaśomitra's two interpretations of *prakāra* and Saṅghabhadra's rejection of the two interpretations of *prakāra*, see below 4.3.1 and 4.3.2.

4.3.1 Yaśomitra's two interpretations of *prakāra*

Yaśomitra offers two possible interpretations of *prakāra*: *prakāra* can refer to the way in which (different) *cittacaittas* function, or, it can also refer to the form of (different) aspects of the object that are to be cognized:

“Because *vijñāna* cognizes (*vijānāti*) a blue or yellow thing (*vastu*), which means it perceives (*upalabhate*) it. In the same way, *vedanā* experiences (*anubhavati*) that very cognitive object (*ālambana*), namely that thing. *Samjñā* determines (*paricchinatti*) it. *Cetanā* acts volitionally (*abhisamkaroti*) on it, and so on.

Or, *vijñāna* grasps (*grhṇāti*) the perceivable form (*upalabhyatārūpa*, literally, *vijñāna* grasps (*grhṇāti*) form in the state to be perceived) of that very *ālambana* in its generic form (*sāmānyarūpeṇa*). *Vedanā* grasps (*grhṇāti*) the sensible form (*anubhavanīyatārūpa*) of that very cognitive object (*ālambana*) in its specific form (*viśeṣarūpeṇa*). *Samjñā* grasps (*grhṇāti*) the determinable form (*paricchedyatārūpa*) [of that very cognitive object in its specific form (*viśeṣarūpeṇa*),] and so on.”¹⁶²

Both interpretations involve specifying the dynamics of cognition in terms of the interaction between *cittacaittas* and the cognitive object (*ālambana*): the gist is that *cittacaittas* perceive the cognitive object, but the emphasis of each interpretation is obviously different. In the first interpretation, the subject side is emphasized: each of the *cittacaittas* is assigned a different verb, while the object side remains unspecified. For example, with regard to the same object, *vijñāna* is said to cognize (*vijānāti*) the object, *vedanā* is said to experience (*anubhavati*) it, and so on. In the second interpretation, the function of the subject side, the *cittacaittas*, remains in all cases unspecified as simply *grhṇāti* (to grasp) while the difference lies in the object side:

¹⁶² AKV 142, 1-6: *vijñānaṃ hi nīlaṃ pītaṃ vā vastu vijānāti upalabhata ity arthaḥ. tad eva tathālambanaṃ vastu vedanānubhavati. samjñā paricchinatti. cetanābhisamkarotīty evamādi. atha vā tasyaivālambanasya vijñānaṃ sāmānyarūpeṇa upalabhyatārūpaṃ grhṇāti. viśeṣarūpeṇa tu vedanānubhavanīyatārūpaṃ grhṇāti. samjñā paricchedyatārūpaṃ grhṇatīty evamādi.*

different forms or aspects of the cognitive object are specified, whether as the form in the state to be perceived, or the form in the state to be sensed, etc. These two interpretations suggest that for Yaśomitra, *prakāra* could be understood from at least two angles: one pointing to the activities of the cognitive subject, specifically, the *cittacaittas*, and the other, to the forms of the object *ālambana* as they are to be cognized by the subject.

4.3.2 Saṅghabhadra's rejection of the two interpretations of *prakāra*

In contrast to Yaśomitra, Saṅghabhadra rejects the two interpretations of *prakāra* as referring either to different forms of the object or different activities of grasping the object:

“If *prakāra* refers to different forms of the object, then the proposal that all *cittacaittas* have [the same] *ākāra* cannot be established since the object has different forms such as skillfulness and permanence, etc. Or, furthermore, [if *prakāra* refers to the different forms of the object,] then *rūpa-dharmas* can also be *ākāra* since *rūpa-dharmas* can also take on the forms of others.

If *prakāra* refers to different activities of grasping the object, then *ākāra* should not be applied to the five perceptual consciousnesses because they are not able to grasp the different, specific characteristics of the object. Only discriminative consciousness can grasp the different, specific characteristics of the object such as blue and yellow, etc.”¹⁶³

Saṅghabhadra proposes counter-examples to prove that *prakāra* can refer neither to forms of the object nor to different activities of grasping the object. Then what could *prakāra* be? He turns back to the Vaibhāṣika definition of *ākāra* as *prajñā*:

¹⁶³See Ny 74 p.741b6ff: 若謂境相品類差別，一切能像理必不成，境有善常等眾相差別故。或諸色法亦行相收色法亦能像餘相故。若謂能取境差別相，則應五識行相不成，不能取境差別相故，有分別識方能取境青非黃等差別相故。

Therefore, the explanation of our school is correct, that is to say, all *prajñās* that operate through investigation with regard to the cognitive objects are called *ākāra*.¹⁶⁴

As this passage shows, Saṅghabhadra defends the interpretation that *ākāra* equals *prajñā*. Then how does he solve the contradiction that Vasubandhu pointed out, that is, the problem with the characterization of all *cittacaittas* as *sa-ākāra* under this definition of *ākāra* as *prajñā*.¹⁶⁵ He proposes that the prefix *sa-* should be interpreted in the sense of *sama-* (equal) instead of *saha-* (possessing):

Thus *ākāra* has *prajñā* as its nature. Isn't it the case that *cittacaittas* are all called *sa-ākāra*?... The *cittacaittas* associated with *prajñā* are all called *sa-ākāra*. It is because that the *cittacaittas* can equally (*sa-*) grasp the way (*prakāra*) of the cognitive object.¹⁶⁶

He also explains that *ākāra* applies to all *cittacaittas* given their cooperation with *prajñā*:

Therefore, all the other *cittacaittas* operate on the cognitive objects equally (*sa-*) with *ākāra*, that is to say, they operate simultaneously, neither earlier nor later.¹⁶⁷

In this way, Saṅghabhadra attempts to elude the contradiction that all *cittacaittas* are themselves possessed of *ākāra* as *prajñā*.

4.3.3 Puguang's Two Notions of Ākāra: Activity Ākāra and Image Ākāra

These two interpretations of *prakāra*, supported by Yaśomitra and criticized by Saṅghabhadra, resemble the two notions of *ākāra* that are reported by Puguang:

¹⁶⁴ See Ny 74 p.741b12ff: 由此我宗所釋為善，謂唯諸慧於境相中簡擇而轉名為行相。

¹⁶⁵ Refer back to section 4.2.2 for a detailed discussion of the contradiction.

¹⁶⁶ See Ny 74 p.741a19ff: 如是行相以慧為體，豈不心心所皆名有行相？...唯慧相應心等皆名有行相者，是心心所等於所緣品類相中有能取義。

¹⁶⁷ See Ny 74 p.741a25ff: 如是所餘心心所法等與行相行於所緣，是俱時行，無前後義。

“As for ākāra, there are two kinds: the first is ākāra in the sense of image, and the second is ākāra in the sense of comprehending activity.”¹⁶⁸

For sake of convenience, we may call these two notions as “activity ākāra” and “image ākāra.”

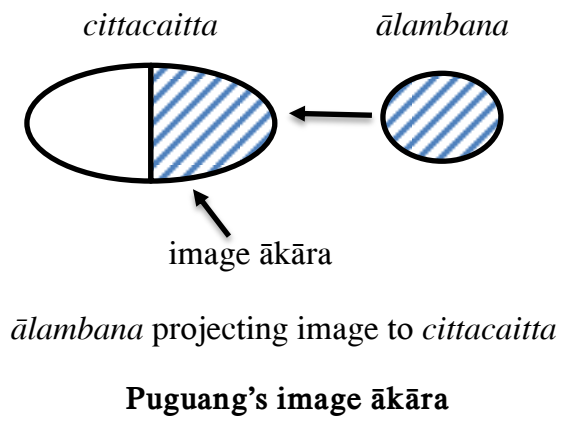
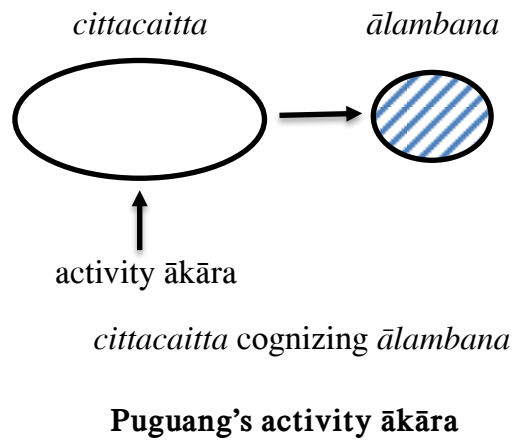
“Question: What is the difference between the comprehending activity [ākāra] and image ākāra?

Answer: That which is called the comprehending activity [ākāra] is the difference in cognition of the *cittacaittas* as grasping the generic and specific characteristics with regard to the object. It therefore is the difference in the activities of the *cittacaittas*. This comprehending activity [ākāra] may give rise to a correct comprehension or a wrong one with regard to the object... That which is called image ākāra is a representation or image that appears naturally without any mental exertion when the *cittacaittas*, which is clear in nature, is confronted with the object, just as images appear in a clear pond or bright mirror...”¹⁶⁹

Therefore, according to Puguang’s commentary, there are two kinds of ākāra. The activity ākāra refers to the activities of *cittacaittas* as they function in regard to the object in cognition, and the image ākāra refers to the form of the object as it is represented upon the “pond” of *cittacaittas*:

¹⁶⁸ See Ji 1 p26c7ff: 若言行相有其二種。一影像名行相，二行解名行相。

¹⁶⁹ See Ji 1 p.26b26ff: 問：行解、行相差別云何？解云：言行解者，謂心心所行解不同，於諸境中取總別相，即是心心所法作用差別，此之行解於所緣境或起正解，或起邪解。...言行相者，謂心心所，其體清淨，但對前境，不由作意，法爾任運，影像顯現，如清池明鏡，眾像皆現。



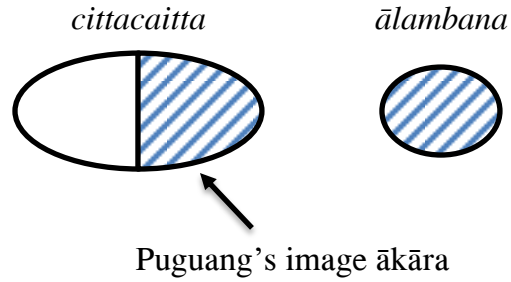
4.3.4 Puguang's Two Notions of Ākāra and Yaśomitra's Two Interpretations of *prakāra*

It would appear clear that Puguang's first notion, the activity ākāra, is exactly along the same lines of Yaśomitra's (and Saṅghabhadra's) subject *prakāra* as mentioned above,¹⁷⁰ both of which indicate the activities of *cittacaittas* (subject *prakāra*--activity ākāra). And Puguang's second notion, the image ākāra, resembles Yaśomitra's object *prakāra* (object *prakāra*--image ākāra), at least in the sense that both refer to the forms of the object, rather than to the activities of the subject. In this second notion, the two can be distinguished in that, unlike Puguang, Yaśomitra does not specify *prakāra* as an "image" of the cognitive object.

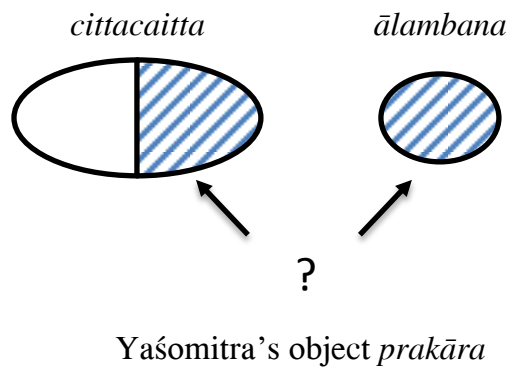
What then does an "image of the object" mean in Puguang's interpretation? Puguang provides a metaphor for ākāra in the sense of an image, namely, that of an image appearing in a clear pond or a bright mirror. Given that *cittacaittas*, clear in nature, are seen as a pond or mirror, the image ākāra would be like the representation of the object, appearing in the pond or mirror of *cittacaittas*. Therefore, according to Puguang's explanation, the image ākāra, being the form of the cognitive object (*ālambana*), is clearly within cognition (*cittacaittas*) itself. It is an image that is projected by the object side into the subject side.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ See section 4.3.1 and 4.3.2.

¹⁷¹ Another issue in Puguang's commentary concerns whether there is indeed a distinction between the object side and the subject side, and whether the object side even "exists." In this case, it is clear that this explanation contends that the image ākāra belongs to cognition, in other words, inside rather than outside of *cittacaittas*.

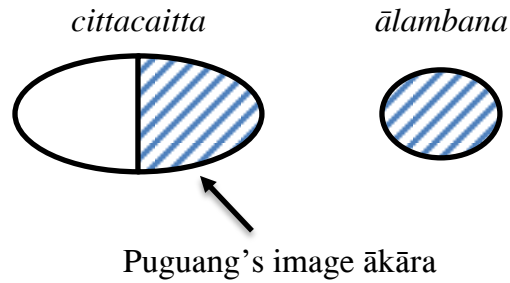


For Yaśomitra, the object *prakāra* does mean the form of the object, but he does not clarify whether such form exists inside or outside of cognition. In his interpretation of the object *prakāra*, all *cittacaittas* are said to grasp the forms of cognitive objects (*ālambana*), which leaves indefinite precisely where the “forms” belong. The forms of cognitive objects could well be outside of *cittacaittas* and simply refer to the forms or aspects of the object itself.



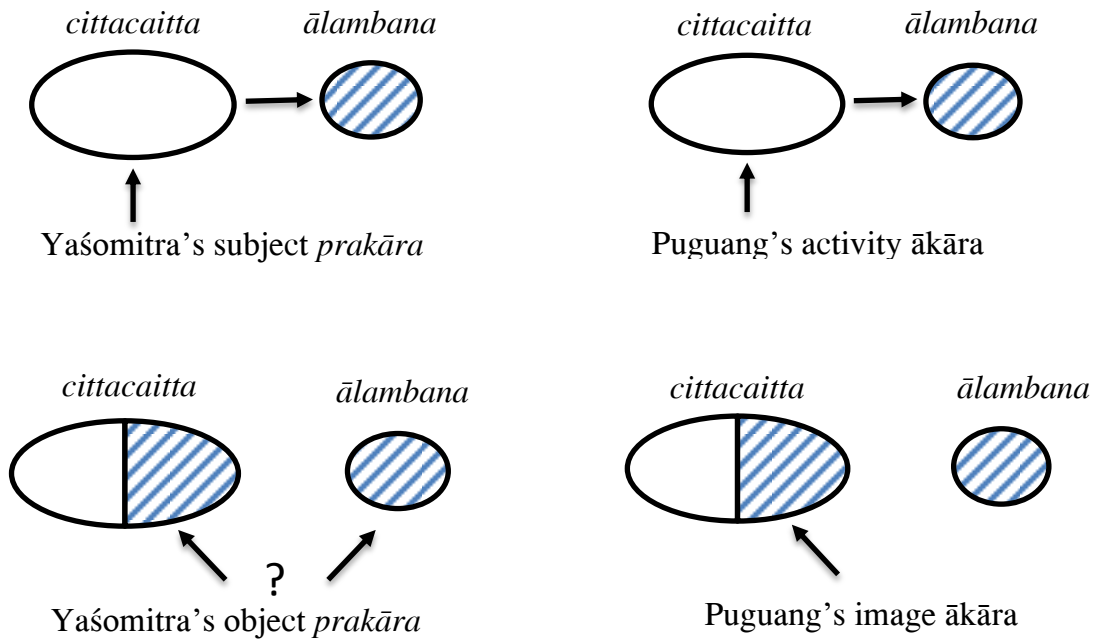
Or, the forms of *ālambana* could be within *cittacaittas*, which means that the forms are **of** the cognitive object but no longer **belong to** the cognitive object as an entity

distinct from cognition; instead, they are projected within the *cittacaittas* as the representations or images of the object. It is this latter interpretation that appears to be the conclusion of Puguang's image ākāra goes to.



As this comparison shows, Puguang specifies very clearly what this image ākāra refers to and where it should be placed within his cognition model, while Yaśomitra's explanation for object *prakāra* is much vaguer. Apparently both have something to do with the cognitive object (*ālambana*), but Yaśomitra's object *prakāra*, being generally object-related, has not been specified and assigned a place within the map of *cittacaittas* and *ālambana*. Instead, *prakāra* is as if still wandering in the grey area between the object side (*ālambana*) and the subject side (*cittacaittas*) with its ultimate direction as yet undetermined. Puguang's image ākāra, on the other hand, seems to take a clear step forward from an objective *ālambana* to a place firmly within *cittacaittas*.

So, a comparison of Puguang’s activity ākāra with Yaśomitra’s subject *prakāra*, and of Puguang’s image ākāra with Yaśomitra’s object *prakāra* is as follows:



These two notions of ākāra did not appear from nowhere, although it cannot be said that Puguang’s comments are directly connected to Yaśomitra, or that their respective interpretations of the two notions of ākāra come from the same source. Instead, at the very least, these two parallel interpretations suggest possible confusion or ambiguity within Vasubandhu’s definition of ākāra, especially in terms of the meaning of the keyword *prakāra*. In regard to this confusion, Yaśomitra and Saṅghabhadra offered solutions, and other commentators may have responded to this issue and offered their own solutions.¹⁷² And a twofold interpretation that distinguishes a subject and an object *prakāra* seems to have been a common solution

¹⁷² For example, Saṅghabhadra responded to the two interpretative possibilities for *prakāra* without pointing out who the advocates are for each possibility.

for this issue at that time, known by many contemporaneous teachers or groups. The twofold-interpretation pattern underlying Puguang's two notions of ākāra, that is, of assuming a similar distinction between a subject activity ākāra and an object image ākāra, may then be seen as a natural development out of the ambiguity of the term *prakāra*.

4.3.5 Why Propose the Two Notions: Contexts in Which the Confusion Regarding *prakāra* Arose

This interpretation of the twofold *prakāra* and the two notions of ākāra suggest that there was confusion with regard to Vasubandhu's definition of ākāra, especially in terms of the meaning of the keyword *prakāra*. As a result, it is necessary to explore the context(s) in which this confusion may have arisen and whether the proposed interpretations clarify the confusion.

An examination of Puguang's comments concerning the two notions of ākāra suggests that the confusion caused by the ambiguity of the term *prakāra* might have emerged from at least two contexts: first, the context of the five types of identity of the *citta* and *caittas*, especially the fact that the *citta* and *caittas* have identity of ākāra (*ākārasamatā*); and second, the context of designating an inactive cognitive subject. A notable point is that in both contexts, the second notion (ākāra in the sense of image) is judged as the correct one.

(1) Context 1: *cittacaittas' ākārasamatā* (the *citta* and *caittas'* Having Identity of Ākāra)

The first context occurs right after Puguang's explanation of the two notions of the term ākāra. Within the following section of questions and answers, he (or his teacher Xuanzang) uses the identity of ākāra characterizing *cittacaittas* as an example to demonstrate how the newly introduced, two notions of ākāra should be applied:

“Question: In terms of which sense [of the two, namely, comprehending activity or image], is it said that [the *cittacaittas*] have identity of ākāra (*ākārasamatā*)?”

Answer: It is in terms of [the sense of] image that [the *cittacaittas*] are said to have identity of ākāra (*ākārasamatā*). The *cittacaittas* are clear in nature, and an image appears naturally as long as they are confronted with the object. Since [the *cittacaittas*] have this very image identically they are said to have identity of ākāra (*ākārasamatā*).”¹⁷³

As seen previously, *cittacaittas* are said to have the same *āśraya*, *ālambana*, and ākāra and are associated (*samprayukta*) with each other,¹⁷⁴ and in turn to be associated means that they have five types of identity, that is, identity of *āśraya*, *ālambana*, ākāra, *kāla*, and *dravya*.¹⁷⁵ With this in mind, the question asks about the implications of the statement that *cittacaittas* are said to have identity of ākāra (*ākārasamatā*). Does it mean that *cittacaittas* perform identical activity with regard to the cognitive object (in which case the notion of activity ākāra applies), or that *cittacaittas* bear an identical image of the cognitive object (in which case the notion of image ākāra applies)?

In response to this question, Puguang, or possibly his teacher Xuanzang, without specifying the reason, authorizes the notion of image as the correct one in

¹⁷³ See Ji 1 p.26c14ff: 問：行解、行相，據何名為同一行相？解云：據行相同名一行相。心心所法，其體明淨，隨對何境，法爾相現，同有此相，名同一行相。

¹⁷⁴ AKBh 2.34bc 62.3ff: *cittacaittasāḥ / sāsrayāḥ / ālambanākārāḥ samprayuktās ca / ta eva hi cittacaittāḥ sāsrayā* ucyante indriyāśritatvāt, *sālambanā* viṣayagrahaṇāt, *sākārās* tasyaivāḥśrayā prakāraṣa ākaraṇāt, *samprayuktāḥ* samaṃ prayuktatvāt. “*Cittacaittas* possess [the same] *āśraya*, *ālambana*, and ākāra, and are associated. They are said to possess an *āśraya* because they are based on the sense faculty; they are [said to] possess an *ālambana* because of grasping the object field; they are [said to] possess an ākāra because of acting on the type of that very *ālambana* (cognitive object); they are associated because of the fact that they are united together. So [*cittacaittas*] are said to be associated.”

¹⁷⁵ AKBh 2.34d p.62.8ff: *pañcadhā / pañcabhiḥ samatāprakāraiḥ āśrayāḥ / ālambanākārakālaśrayasamatābhiḥ*. ([*citta* and *caittas* are associated] in five ways. [*citta* and *caittas* are associated] because of five [types of] identity (*samatā*): namely, identity of *āśraya*, *ālambana*, ākāra, *kāla*, and *dravya*.) Also see MVŚ 16 p.80c13ff: 霧尊者曰：四事等故說名相應，一時分等，謂心心所同一剎那而現行故；二所依等，謂心心所同依一根而現行故；三所緣等，謂心心所同緣一境而現行故；四行相等，謂心心所同一行相而現行故。復次，五事等故說名相應，即前四事及物體等。

this context. And, it is indeed the interpretation in terms of image rather than activity that seems to make more sense here: since the *citta* and various *caittas* need to have identity of ākāra (*ākārasamatā*), then ākāra has to refer to image rather than activity. *Citta* and various *caittas* can be said to share identically the same “image” of the cognitive object, but not the same “activity,” since *citta* and various *caittas* are distinguished precisely on the basis of their different activities. In other words, why is the second notion (image) is chosen to be the correct one in this case? It may be because in this context of the five types of identity for *cittacaitta*, ākāra in the second notion of image fits better with the requirement that *cittacaittas* have identity of ākāra (*ākārasamatā*).

Although the second notion (image) is confirmed by Puguang to be the correct one, apparently it is not universally accepted. People disagree on which notion, activity or image, makes more sense in this context:

“Question: there are also some who say that the comprehending activities of *cittacaittas* are identical. Then why is it not in terms of the comprehending activities of *cittacaittas* that [the *cittacaittas*] are said to have identity of ākāra (*ākārasamatā*)?”

[Opinion 1: the notion of image applies]

Answer: There are different opinions with regard to [whether] the comprehending activities of *cittacaittas* [are identical]; the principle has not actually been decided. [But people] agree that the images [are identical], so we clarify [the *cittacaittas* as having identity of ākāra (*ākārasamatā*)] in terms of image.

[Opinion 2: the notion of activity applies]

Another answer: For people who maintain that the *cittacaittas* have identical comprehending activities, it could also be that, in terms of the comprehending

activities of *cittacaittas*, [the *cittacaittas*] are said to have identity of ākāra (*ākārasamatā*). In this case, ākāra is interpreted in terms of activity.”¹⁷⁶

The arguments supporting each of these two opinions are quite weak. According to the argument that supports opinion one, only some people accept the fact that *cittacaittas* share identical activity, but all people accept that *cittacaittas* share identical image. Therefore, it would be more convenient simply to adopt the sense of image in this context since the sense of activity may not be accepted universally. Thus, it is only for sake of convenience that the image sense is highlighted, not for any definite doctrinal reason. The argument supporting the second opinion is also weak. It merely asserts that the sense of activity for ākāra would work for people who accept that *cittacaittas* share identical activity. In fact, neither of these reasons constitutes an argument, but the fact that the question is proposed and the different opinions are recorded indicates that there was disagreement regarding the connotation as well as application of the two notions of ākāra.

(2) Context 2: the Designation of an Inactive Cognitive Subject

The second context in which the confusion with regard to Vasubandhu’s definition for ākāra may have arisen resulting in two notions of the term concerns the interactive model of the cognitive subject and object in perception in a broader sense. This context highlights the difference between the two notions of ākāra as an active function or a passive representation. To paraphrase, in perception, how, or on account of what, can the cognitive subject (and the cognitive object) be designated? Is it on account of an active function that a cognitive subject is designated? Or, is it on account of bearing a representation of the object that a cognitive subject is designated?

¹⁷⁶See Ji 1 p.26c19: 問：心等行解，有說亦同，如何不名同一行相？解云：行解異說不同，理非決定，行相同說故約此明。又解：心等行解有說同家，亦得名為同一行相，此言行相即行名相。

“Question: With regard to which sense [of the two, namely, comprehending activity or image], is the cognitive subject designated?”¹⁷⁷

“Subject” as a concept that demands a careful definition since it can slide into the dangerous territory of a “self” (*ātman*). So, is the subject that which performs activities, or is the subject that which bears a representation of an object? Apparently, the former option assumes *ākāra* in the sense of activity, and the latter assumes the sense of image. And if either one of the two senses is chosen, what difference, if any, does it make with regard to the designation of a cognitive subject (and the object), and with regard to the overall model of perception more generally?

Puguang considers the latter to be the correct interpretation, that is, the cognitive subject is that which bears a representation of the object. Such a choice is not surprising because, as compared with defining the cognitive subject as performing activities, this choice more easily protects the cognitive subject from the suspicion of being a “self.” He argues:

“Answer: It is with regard to [the sense of] image, not [the sense of] comprehending activity, that the cognitive subject is designated. It is said that at the time when *cittacaittas* are confronted with the object, an image appears [in *cittacaittas*]; in this way, the *cittacaittas* are designated as the cognitive subject, while the object [which projects the image] is designated as the cognitive object. It is because when *cittacaittas* seize or depend upon (*ā-lamb*) the object, they are not like a lamp that extends its light beams toward the object, [which it is to illuminate], or pincers that grasp the object. It is in terms of the presentation of an image that a cognitive subject or a cognitive object is designated.”¹⁷⁸

Puguang uses metaphors to describe the models of perception that he supports and denies; he supports the lake or mirror model in which the clear lake or mirror of

¹⁷⁷ See Ji 1 p.26c24: 問：行解、行相，為約何者說名能緣？

¹⁷⁸ See Ji 1 p.26c25ff: 解云：據行相說，非據行解。謂彼心等對境之時，有影像現，據此義邊名為能緣，境名所緣，以心心所緣境之時，非如燈焰舒光至境，亦非如鉗押取彼物，據影現義名能所緣。

*cittacaittas*¹⁷⁹ bear the image of the object, and rejects the lamp or pincer model in which *cittacaittas* take actions to grasp the object. In the lamp or pincer model, the *cittacaittas* carry out discriminative functions. However, in the lake or mirror model, *cittacaittas* are deprived of any action, and perception is made possible when the *cittacaittas* bear an image that is projected by and resembles the object. In such a model, ākāra that takes the notion of representative image instead of the notion of functional activity is required.

This perceptual model, which claims that the *cittacaittas* are deprived of any action but still perceive, was not created by Puguang (or his teacher Xuanzang). It was presented in the AKBh, chapter 9, as an essential component of the “non-perceiver” theory:

“Question: Since it is said in the sūtra that consciousness cognizes, what in this case does the consciousness do?

Answer: It does nothing. Just as the effect is said to conform to the cause because it comes into existence through resemblance [to the cause] without doing anything, in the same way, consciousness is also said to cognize [the object] because it comes into existence through resemblance [to the object] without doing anything.

Question: Then what is its resemblance to it, [namely, to the object]?

Answer: [It resembles it in the sense that] it has the ākāra of that [object]. Simply because of this, consciousness that has arisen from the sense faculty is also said to cognize [the object] and not the sense faculty.”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Vasubandhu also used the metaphor of a lake or a mirror to explain the object *prakāra*, which is similar to the image ākāra under discussion here.

¹⁸⁰ AKBh 9 p.473.25ff: *yat tarhi "vijñānaṃ vijñātī"ti sūtra uktaṃ, kim tatra vijñānaṃ karoti? na kiñcit karoti. yathā tu kāryaṃ kāraṇaṃ anuvidhīyata ity ucyate, sādrśyenātmalābhād akurvad api kiñcit; evaṃ vijñānaṃ api vijñātīty ucyate, sādrśyenātmalābhād akurvad api kiñcit. kim punar asya sādrśyam? tadākāratā. ata eva tad indriyād apy utpannaṃ viṣayaṃ vijñātīty ucyate, nendriyam.*

As this passage demonstrates, in this perceptual model, the relationship between the object and the consciousness is parallel to the cause-effect (*hetu-phala*) succession. The effect (*phala*) comes into existence without “doing” anything, but simply through its resemblance to the cause (*hetu*). In the same way, consciousness is said to cognize, not in the sense of undertaking any functional activity to cognize; consciousness is not the perceiver that undertakes some activity to cognize the object, but instead it does nothing. The cognition of a certain object comes into existence simply in the sense that consciousness arises with a resemblance to the object, and this resemblance is *ākāra*. In other words, consciousness is devoid of actions, but bears the resemblance of the object, and *ākāra* is that resemblance of the object.

This passage specifically discusses the non-perceiver theory, but the meaning of *ākāra* is also clarified. Which notion does *ākāra* take in this context? If we were to choose between the two notions, namely the activity *ākāra* and the image *ākāra*, apparently once again the image *ākāra* appears to fit. In that case, *ākāra* is placed in a passive position, with its active role as a discriminative function (the activity notion) cancelled. In such a non-perceiver model of perception, *ākāra* is required to take up the notion of image, representing and resembling the object, just as it does in Puguang’s lake or mirror model.

Therefore, it would appear that the discrepancy between the two notions of *ākāra* actually has further implications for different models of perception: that is, one focusing on the active function of the discriminative consciousness, and the other preventing an active perceiver by specifying a representational perceptive in which the action of the consciousness is not emphasized. Returning to our main topic of *ākāra*, in the context of this discussion of perception, it now makes perfect sense that the image notion of *ākāra* is chosen to be the correct one by Puguang. In this context, designation of an inactive cognitive subject, which requires that *ākāra* takes the sense as image, may help make *ākāra* compatible with the non-perceiver model in the AKBh, which functions to cancel the active role of the cognitive subject.

Once again, just as in the first context, although the notion of image is claimed to be the proper meaning for ākāra in this context, there are advocates for each one of the two notions (activity and image):

[Opinion 1: the notion of image applies]

“Question: A clear pond or bright mirror also has images [of objects] that appear [in them]; therefore, such kinds of things [namely, a clear pond or bright mirror,] should also be said to be the cognitive subject.

Answer: Although they, [namely, a clear pond or bright mirror, etc.,] have a presentation of image appearing [in them], they have no comprehending activity as *cittacaittas* do, so they cannot be said to be the cognitive subject.

Question: If so, it should be in terms of the comprehending activity that [*cittacaittas*] are designated as the cognitive subject. Why is it that [*cittacaittas*] are designated as the cognitive subject in terms of the presentation of an image appearing [in them]?

Answer: The comprehending activity may give rise to a correct comprehension or a wrong one, [and whether it is correct or wrong] is not decided by the object. [But] the presentation of the image is decided by the object, so [the cognitive subject] is clarified in terms of the presentation of image.

[Opinion 2: both apply with an emphasis in the notion of image]

Another answer: To be precise, it is in terms of the presentation of an image appearing [in them] that [*cittacaittas*] are designated as the cognitive subject. But as a matter of fact, they are also designated in terms of comprehending activity.

[Opinion 3: the notion of activity applies]

Another answer: It is only in terms of comprehending activity that [*cittacaittas*] are designated as the cognitive subject because their function [is important].

[Opinion 4: both apply with an emphasis in the notion of activity]

Another answer: It is in terms of comprehending activity that [*cittacaittas*] are designated as the cognitive subject. But as a matter of fact, they are also designated in terms of the presentation of an image appearing [in them].

[Opinion 5: both apply]

Another answer: It is in terms of both comprehending activity and the presentation of an image appearing [in them] that [*cittacaittas*] are designated as the cognitive subject. Because both of these two factors are important.”¹⁸¹

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter examined the trajectory of the evolving meanings of the term *ākāra* through three steps in the MVŚ, the AKBh, and its commentaries. In the MVŚ the Vaibhāṣikas present their orthodox definition of *ākāra* as *prajñā*, which is also the first abhidharmic innovation in the meaning of the term as compared to its sūtraic meaning of either “appearance” or “way.” Then in the AKBh, Vasubandhu criticizes this definition and offers a revision, which defines *ākāra* as the “mode of” or “way in which” (*prakāra*) all thought and thought concomitants (*cittacaittānām*) grasp cognitive objects. And as the third step, in his commentary on Xuanzang’s translation of the AKBh, Puguang reports the confusion concerning the meaning of *ākāra* in its two notions, that is, *ākāra* as a mental activity or as a representative image.

¹⁸¹ See Ji 1 p.26c29ff: 問：清池、明鏡，亦有像現，應說彼類亦是能緣。解云：雖有像現而無行解，非如心等，亦不說能緣。問：若爾應約行解名為能緣，何故約彼有影像現說名能緣？解云：行解或正或邪，於境不定，行相理定，故約此明。又解：正約行相名為能緣，理實而言，亦兼行解。又解：但約行解名為能緣，以是用故。又解：約行解名為能緣，理實而言，亦兼行相。又解：俱正約彼行相、行解名為能緣，以此二種必定有故。

Interesting issues arise as we explore the transitions from one step to the next. For example, focusing on the revision from step one, the Vaibhāṣikas’ orthodox definition of ākāra as *prajñā*, to step two, Vasubandhu’s definition of ākāra as the “mode of” or “way in which” all thought and thought-concomitants grasp the cognitive objects, we find that Vasubandhu offers two amendments to the Vaibhāṣika definition. First, he generalizes the restricted application of ākāra from the one thought-concomitant of *prajñā* and expands it to all thought and thought-concomitants (*cittacaittas*). Second, he changes the definition of ākāra from the specific mental activity of *prajñā* to a generic way or kind (*prakāra*) of mental activity. Vasubandhu states that the aim of his revision is to help avoid a doctrinal circularity caused by the Vaibhāṣika definition. However, we have suggested that the Vaibhāṣika definition actually makes perfect sense in its original context; it is only from Vasubandhu’s later epistemological point of view that a problem arises and needs revision. Nevertheless, through his revision, Vasubandhu managed to extend the interpretative power of ākāra to all *cittacaittas*, which initiates the practice in the AKBh and thereafter of applying ākāra to all *cittacaittas* in the context of epistemological concerns. However, Vasubandhu’s revised definition is open to confusion, and later commentators offer alternative interpretations especially with respect to the keyword, *prakāra*. As an example, we can point to Yaśomitra’s adoption and Saṅghabhadra’s rejection of two possible interpretations of *prakāra*: a subject *prakāra*, which refers to the way in which *cittacaittas* function, and an object *prakāra*, which refers to the form of (different) aspects of the object that are to be cognized.

After Vasubandhu’s revised definition, the third step in the evolution of the meaning of ākāra is found in Puguang’s record of the so-called two notions of ākāra, that is, the activity ākāra and the image ākāra. We discovered that the distinction between these two notions of ākāra is exactly along the same lines as Yaśomitra’s and Saṅghabhadra’s distinction between the two notions of *prakāra*. This suggests that the twofold-interpretation pattern that distinguishes a subject *prakāra*/ākāra and an object *prakāra*/ākāra seems to have been a common solution at that time, which

was adopted by several contemporaneous teachers or groups in response to the confusion innate in Vasubandhu's revised definition. Thus, the twofold-interpretation pattern underlying Puguang's two notions of ākāra, and echoed in Yaśomitra and Saṅghabhadra's two notions of *prakāra*, may then be seen as a natural development emerging from ambiguity in the term *prakāra*. And this twofold-interpretation pattern becomes the basis of the further development of ākāra within an epistemological context in Vijñānavāda and later *pramāṇa* sources.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

With Puguang’s two notions of ākāra, we conclude our survey of the pre-history of the usages and meanings of the term ākāra in abhidharma. In chapter one, we saw that the term ākāra in pre-abhidharmic Sanskrit and Pāli sources maintains its straightforward meaning as “form/shape” or “way/kind” without much doctrinal connotation. In chapter two we discovered that the Sarvāstivāda contemplation model of the four noble truths and sixteen ākāras (4nt-16ākāra contemplation model) displays close connections to the sūtraic narrative of the Buddha’s three turnings in twelve ākāras of the dharma-wheel (3Dhp-12ākāra narrative). Moreover, since the sixteen members within the Sarvāstivāda 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model find possible ancestors in the sūtras, it is likely that the 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model was the abhidharmic context that has the closest connection with the sūtras. In other words, it is possible that the term ākāra was adopted from the sūtraic narrative of the Buddha’s dharma-wheel-turning story through this 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model, and thereafter entered the abhidharmic horizon.

Starting from its application in the 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model, the usage of the term ākāra sees a great expansion in MVŚ. Chapter three surveyed the steps through which the application of the term ākāra moves towards broader contexts and reaches a more general level. For example, through the Vaibhāṣikas’ usage of the set of sixteen ākāras as a hermeneutical tool to reinterpret traditional doctrine lists, the term ākāra extends beyond the narrow context of *nirvedhabhāgiya*. As a result, the particular location of ākāra within the Sarvāstivāda 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model is expanded through its application to a more general context of meditation. In addition, through this same process of reinterpretation, more random items originally outside of the system of sixteen ākāras are tagged with the term ākāra through two specific processes of “conversion” and “opposite parallels.” As more ākāras are created, composite doctrinal lists are produced in which the term ākāra is used in an increasingly loose and more generally descriptive way. This loose and generally descriptive application of ākāra reaches its apex in the context of the

cittacaittas through a process referred to as “ākāra-ization” where numerous descriptive ākāras are created and mechanically attached to the *cittacaittas*. Finally, certain descriptive ākāras come to be frozen as set categories and are then used to sort out other ākāras on the basis of their shared features. This use of ākāras as a category reveals a function ākāra on a much more general level.

In conjunction with its expansion of usage in abhidharma, the meaning of the concept of ākāra also evolves in relation to its doctrinal significance. Chapter four examined how its meaning develops through three steps in abhidharma: that is, from the Vaibhāṣikas’ definition of ākāra as *prajñā*, to Vasubandhu’s revision of this definition to refer to the “mode of” or “way in which” (*prakāra*) all thought and thought concomitants (*cittacaitta*) grasp objects, for which Yaśomitra offers two interpretations that are rejected by Saṅghabhadra, and finally to the two notions of the concept of ākāra (activity ākāra and image ākāra) recorded by Puguang.

Our journey mapping the development of ākāra from the sūtras to abhidharma, although difficult and complex has revealed certain patterns. The difficulty is partly due to the relatively long time span our materials cover, which undermines any simple line of development, and the large quantity of textual samples required in order to reveal the patterns hidden within them. In addition, the term ākāra is unevenly distributed within these many textual samples in terms of its density of occurrence as well as its doctrine involvement. As a result, the patterns are hard to catch. For example, the pre-abhidharmic Sanskrit and Pāli sources witness sporadic occurrence of the term with stable meanings and with little doctrinal relevance. Then, from the period of early abhidharma the usage of the term sees a great expansion, and from the MVŚ it seems to appear in almost every major context of doctrinal significance. Although abhidharmic doctrinal innovations are not surprising, our challenge is to clarify how the term develops such complexity in usage and meaning, and how we can map correlations among these usages and meanings in an attempt to isolate significant factors in their development.

Finding patterns is the key in mapping. For example, discovering the similar pattern underlying both the Sarvāstivāda 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model and the sūtraic 3Dhp-12ākāra narrative of the Buddha's dharma-wheel-turning story suggests the possibility of the Sarvāstivāda 4nt-16ākāra contemplation model as the linking context by which the term ākāra was adopted to abhidharma from a sūtraic background. Another example presented in chapter four is the similar pattern underlying Yaśomitra and Saṅghabhadra's two notions of *prakāra* and Puguang's two notions of ākāra. This pattern indicates a missing link that can fill the gap between Vasubandhu's definition of ākāra as a *prakāra* and Puguang's two notions of ākāra, which suggests that Puguang's two notions of ākāra did not come from nowhere but were a natural development of the ambiguity of *prakāra* in Vasubandhu's definition.

The mapping of the term ākāra's evolving meanings also reveals important aspects in the historical dynamic of the development of abhidharma. For example, at a later stage one can look back and criticize preceding doctrines without being cognizant of their original effective context. Such criticism seems to miss the target, as in the case of Vasubandhu's criticism of the Vaibhāṣikas' definition of ākāra as *prajñā*. Even though such criticism may reveal little about the actual object of criticism, it does expose the new angles and contexts from which these later doctrinal innovations emerged; that is, it uncovers the ongoing history of doctrinal innovation. In this way, Vasubandhu's criticism and revised definition itself becomes a new locus for later doctrinal innovations including Yaśomitra and Saṅghabhadra's two notions of *prakāra* as well as Puguang's two notions of ākāra.

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