

# The Sautrāntika-Sarvāstivāda Controversy on the Cognition of Nonexistent Objects

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## Abstract

Do all the knowables exist? Can we know things that do not exist? It seems that everything that we know must be something, that is, a being. Now can we know a nonbeing? This issue has been discussed and debated over throughout the history of Indian and Buddhist philosophy. In particular, we find rich sources on the concept of the cognition of nonexistent objects (*asad-ā lambana-jñāna*) in the Buddhist Abhidharma texts.

The present paper is one of the series studies on this concept by the author (Yao 2008, forthcoming), and it will examine the important role of this concept in the debate between the Sarvāstivādins and the Dārṣṭāntika-Sautrāntikas. Based on the pioneer study of Cox (1988) and relevant Abhidharma texts, my study aims to examine more carefully the philosophical arguments as developed by both parties. In particular, I will examine the Sautrāntika-Sarvāstivāda controversy on the cognition of nonexistent objects in the context of a long development of this concept from the Mahāsāṃghikas to the Sautrāntikas and the Yogācāras, and then to the Buddhist logician's concept of non-cognition (*anupalabdhi*).

Cox, Collett. 1988. "On the Possibility of a Nonexistent Object of Consciousness: Sarvāstivādin and Dārṣṭāntika Theories." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 11(1): 31-87.

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