All Dharmas Are Empty, Causal Efficacy Remains: Rethinking Alienation in Marxian Political Economy

Wanhong HUANG
huangwanhong@serendip.ngo

Abstract

This discussion paper develops a generative relational reinterpretation of alienation through a dialogue between Buddhist emptiness and Marxian political economy. Its starting point is a distinction between intrinsic substantiality and relational causal efficacy. A form may be empty of self-subsisting essence while remaining capable of producing stable, persistent, and materially consequential effects within a relational system. Recognition of emptiness therefore does not abolish causal efficacy.

This distinction provides a framework for reconsidering socially generated forms such as the self, currency, and credit. Currency has no intrinsic monetary essence in its material carrier, while its socially stabilized relations can reorganize exchange and access to resources. Credit makes the structure still clearer: a relationally constituted claim upon a possible future can become causally operative in the present and participate in generating that future. The paper interprets such forms as relationally stabilized mediators that emerge from social relations and subsequently enter the reproduction and transformation of those relations.

Alienation is then reconsidered as a pathology in which the causal powers of relation-generated forms are experienced or institutionalized as intrinsic powers of the forms themselves, while their relational provenance, dependence upon others, and conditions of revision become increasingly opaque. This interpretation distinguishes alienation from mediation itself. Mediating forms can function as practical *upāya*: they may be used without being granted intrinsic essence.

The paper further applies this principle reflexively to Generative Relational theory itself. Relation, system, generativity, and GR are treated as provisional analytical means rather than final ontological substances. Emptiness thereby constrains reification, causal efficacy constrains nihilism, and generativity preserves the historical possibility of transformation.

Keywords: alienation; emptiness; causal efficacy; relational reality; Marxian political economy

Discussion Paper Note

This paper is a conceptual discussion at the intersection of Buddhist philosophy, Marxian political economy, and Generative Relational theory (GR). Its purpose is to develop a relational interpretation of alienation through a limited structural dialogue among these traditions. It does not claim that Buddhist emptiness and Marxian alienation are historically equivalent doctrines, nor that either tradition can be reduced to the vocabulary of GR.

The paper begins from a distinction between *intrinsic substantiality* and *relational causal efficacy*. A form may arise dependently, possess no self-subsisting essence, and nevertheless participate persistently in the generation of later relational states. In the provisional notation used throughout the paper,

$$\mathrm{Svabhava}(X) = 0, \qquad X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}.$$

The first expression denies intrinsic self-subsistence. The second records causal or generative participation within a relational system. The paper treats these statements as compatible.

> Recognition that X lacks intrinsic self-subsistence does not abolish the relational causal efficacy of X.

This proposition supplies the central philosophical interface of the paper. It avoids two opposite reductions. The causal efficacy of a form does not establish an intrinsic essence residing within that form. Conversely, the absence of intrinsic essence does not render the form causally irrelevant, practically dispensable, or socially unreal.

Currency and credit make this distinction especially visible. A currency carrier does not contain an intrinsic monetary essence within its material composition. Credit makes the relational structure still clearer: a claim, obligation, expectation, institutional recognition, and relation to a possible future can become causally operative in the present. Such forms may reorganize access to resources, investment, production, labor, and future possibilities despite the absence of an independently existing monetary or credit substance.

The paper therefore distinguishes the material or symbolic carrier of a form from the relational configuration through which that form becomes effective. Its recurring generative architecture is

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow X_t \overset{\mathrm{med}}{\rightsquigarrow} \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}.$$

Here X_t denotes a relationally stabilized mediator. Depending upon the domain, X_t may refer to a monetary form, currency, credit relation, social identity, institutional category, religious image, or another historically generated configuration. Membership in this common analytical architecture does not imply common ontology, meaning, history, or normative status.

This distinction also clarifies the paper's treatment of mediation. Mediation itself is indispensable to social and practical life. Language, currency, law, symbolic forms, institutions, and concepts all mediate relations. Alienation therefore cannot be identified simply with the existence of mediation.

The central problem emerges when a relation-generated form acquires persistent causal power while the relations through which that power is generated become opaque, naturalized, or inaccessible to those who continuously reproduce them. A preliminary schema is

$$\mathrm{Power}(\mathfrak{R}) \longmapsto \mathrm{Property}(X).$$

The expression represents a movement of reification: efficacy generated through relations becomes apprehended as though it were an intrinsic property of the stabilized form.

Alienation, however, involves more than an epistemic mistake. A socially generated form can genuinely reorganize the relations that produced it. Currency, credit, legal categories, institutions, and social identities can be relation-dependent while exercising material and historically consequential power. The form therefore cannot be dissolved merely through intellectual recognition of its relational origin.

> To recognize the emptiness of a social form is to transform the understanding of how that form exists. It does not, by itself, interrupt the causal relations through which the form continues to operate.

This distinction gives the paper its practical orientation. Critique of reification concerns the attribution of self-subsisting power to a generated form. Transformation concerns the relational conditions through which its causal efficacy is produced, reproduced, distributed, and revised.

The Buddhist concept of emptiness enters the paper at this level. The analysis draws especially upon the distinction between absence of intrinsic nature and dependently arisen efficacy. It does not claim that Buddhist traditions offer a theory of Marxian political economy or that the slogan "causal efficacy remains" exhausts Buddhist accounts of karma, dependent origination, or emptiness. Within Madhyamaka-informed analysis, causal relations themselves are also empty of intrinsic nature. The present formulation therefore avoids turning causality into a new substance.

The expression "All Dharmas Are Empty, Causal Efficacy Remains" should be read accordingly. It indicates that emptiness does not entail practical or causal nullity. It does not assert an intrinsically existing causal order behind empty phenomena.

The paper occasionally employs the recurrent linguistic movement associated with the *Diamond Sūtra* as an analytical device. A deliberately anachronistic example may be stated as follows:

> The Tathāgata speaks of currency; therefore it is no intrinsically self-subsisting Currency; hence it is called currency.

This sentence is not a scriptural quotation. It is a contemporary analytical paraphrase modeled upon a recurrent form of negation and renaming in the text. Its function is to illustrate a three-stage movement: practical naming, deconstruction of intrinsic essence, and provisional re-entry into practice.

Currency remains usable after its intrinsic essence has been denied. Likewise, the analytical categories employed in this paper remain usable without being granted final ontological status.

This reflexive point applies directly to GR.

GR treats *relation*, *system*, *generativity*, *relational reality*, and GR itself as provisional analytical means. The framework does not claim that "relation" constitutes the final substance of reality or that "generativity" names an ultimate metaphysical essence.

> GR is itself an *upāya*: a provisional means of access whose usefulness does not require intrinsic theoretical essence.

Its analytical vocabulary therefore remains revisable:

$$\mathcal{L}_{\mathrm{GR}}^{(t)} \longrightarrow \mathcal{L}_{\mathrm{GR}}^{(t+1)}.$$

A relational theory that reified "relation" would reproduce the very movement examined in this paper. A theory of generativity that transformed its own analytical concepts into immutable ontological substances would similarly become detached from its status as a method of inquiry.

This reflexivity also suggests the possibility of theoretical alienation. Concepts initially generated as tools for understanding can become institutionally stabilized, detached from their provisional origins, and subsequently imposed upon the domains they were intended to illuminate. Models, classifications, metrics, and theories may thereby acquire causal authority within epistemic and institutional systems.

The paper therefore treats *upāya* as more than an analogy. It provides a useful practical distinction between non-attached use and reification. A form can be employed because of its relational efficacy while its provisional, dependent, and revisable character remains visible.

The resulting orientation can be summarized in three connected commitments:

> Emptiness constrains reification. Causal efficacy constrains nihilism. Generativity preserves the possibility of historical transformation.

These commitments define the scope of the discussion that follows. The paper does not seek a synthesis in which Buddhism becomes Marxism, Marxism becomes Buddhism, or both become GR. It examines a structural problem shared across their intersection: how relation-generated forms can lack intrinsic essence, exercise persistent causal power, become misrecognized as self-subsisting, and eventually confront the agents whose relations continue to reproduce them.

The Introduction develops this problem through the concepts of dependence, mediation, social production, and alienation, and specifies the contribution of the paper within the wider GR account of relational reality.

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1 Introduction

Alienation occupies a distinctive position in Marxian thought because it concerns a peculiar reversal within human social activity. Human beings produce objects, institutions, relations, and social forms through their own activity, yet the products and structures emerging from that activity can confront them as powers possessing an apparently independent existence. Marx's early analysis of estranged labor describes this problem through the worker's relation to the product, productive activity, species-being, and other human beings [8]. His later critique of political economy develops related problems through commodity fetishism, the money-form, capital, and the objective forms assumed by social relations [6].

The present paper approaches this reversal through a question concerning the mode of existence of socially generated forms. If currency, credit, legal personhood, economic identity, and other institutional forms are generated through relations among human beings, institutions, practices, and material conditions, how can these forms subsequently acquire persistent causal power over the people whose relations sustain them?

A familiar response describes such forms as social constructions. That description remains incomplete for the present problem. A socially generated form can alter access to food, housing, labor, investment, mobility, institutional recognition, and future possibilities. Its relational origin therefore provides no reason to regard its consequences as unreal.

The problem can be stated through two propositions:

$$\text{Svabhava}(X) = 0, \qquad X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}.$$

The first proposition concerns intrinsic self-subsistence. The second concerns causal or generative participation within a relational system.

The central claim of this paper begins from their compatibility:

> Recognition that X lacks intrinsic self-subsistence does not abolish the relational causal efficacy of X.

This distinction opens a dialogue between Buddhist analyses of emptiness and Marxian analyses of socially generated forms. Buddhist philosophy provides conceptual resources for understanding dependent existence without requiring intrinsic nature. Marxian political economy provides a powerful account of historically generated social forms that acquire objective and materially consequential powers within social reproduction. Generative Relational theory (GR) connects these questions through the concept of relational reality: forms generated through relations can become sufficiently stabilized to participate persistently in subsequent generation.

The resulting problem is neither the unreality of social forms nor their conversion into independent substances. It concerns how dependently generated forms become causally effective, how their relational origins can become obscured, and how the agents participating in their reproduction can eventually confront these forms as apparently autonomous powers.

1.1 Alienation and Relation-Generated Forms

The 1844 manuscripts describe estranged labor through relations generated within the organization of production. The product of labor confronts the worker as something external; productive activity becomes experienced under conditions of estrangement; the worker's relation to human potential and to other human beings is correspondingly transformed [8].

The present paper takes one structural feature of this analysis as its point of departure. Human activity can generate a form that subsequently enters the conditions governing further human activity.

In GR notation, the general structure is

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow X_t \overset{\text{med}}{\rightsquigarrow} \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}.$$

Here $\mathfrak{R}_t$ denotes a relational configuration, and X_t a form stabilized through that configuration. Once stabilized, X_t can mediate later relations and thereby contribute to the production of $\mathfrak{R}_{t+1}$.

This structure appears particularly clearly in political economy. Exchange relations generate monetary forms; monetary forms subsequently organize exchange. Legal and institutional relations generate credit; credit subsequently reorganizes investment and production. Social relations generate economic positions such as worker, creditor, debtor, and owner; these positions subsequently structure the possibilities available to persons occupying them.

The relation-generated form therefore possesses a double historical position. It is an outcome of preceding relations and a condition of later relations:

$$X_t \in \text{Outcome}(\mathfrak{R}_t), \qquad X_t \in \text{Condition}(\mathfrak{R}_{t+1}).$$

This double position is essential for understanding alienation. A generated form may become sufficiently persistent that its dependence upon the relations producing it becomes difficult to perceive. Its observable causal effects then appear increasingly attributable to the form itself.

The present paper describes this movement provisionally as

$$\text{Power}(\mathfrak{R}) \longmapsto \text{Property}(X).$$

The expression identifies a shift in attribution. A power generated and maintained through a relational configuration comes to appear as a property located intrinsically within the stabilized form.

This formulation intersects with Marx's analysis of fetishism in *Capital*, where relations among producers acquire an objective social form through commodities and exchange [6]. The paper does not treat estranged labor, commodity fetishism, and later theories of reification as interchangeable concepts. They belong to distinct textual and theoretical contexts. Their intersection for the present inquiry concerns the autonomization and misrecognition of relation-generated forms.

1.2 Dependence, Otherness, and Social Existence

Alienation also concerns the subject who participates in these relations.

A person does not produce the conditions of individual existence alone. Food, housing, clothing, language, knowledge, infrastructure, medicine, transportation, law, and technological systems depend upon the activities of other people distributed across space and time. The apparently individual subject exists within an extensive field of social production.

Marx's sixth thesis on Feuerbach famously locates human essence in the ensemble of social relations rather than in an abstraction inhering in each isolated individual [5]. The present paper develops the epistemic implication of this relational dependence.

Need can make dependence visible.

A need for food discloses dependence upon agriculture, labor, ecology, transportation, exchange, and institutions. A need for shelter discloses dependence upon land, construction, law, credit, labor, and social coordination. A need for language already presupposes a symbolic world received through other human beings.

The relation to the other therefore participates in the manifestation of the self:

$$\text{need} \rightsquigarrow \text{relation to others} \rightsquigarrow \text{manifestation of relational dependence.}$$

This does not mean that every need creates the subject from nothing. The claim is narrower. Need exposes the incompleteness of the image of an independently self-sufficient subject.

> Through dependence upon others, the subject encounters the relational conditions of its own continued existence.

This structure has a broader philosophical resonance. In religious configurations, relation to a transcendent Other can participate in the constitution and recognition of the human subject. In political economy, dependence upon the labor and production of others discloses a different form of relational non-self-sufficiency. These domains carry different histories, meanings, and ontological commitments. Their limited structural intersection lies in the fact that relation to what exceeds the isolated self can disclose the conditions through which the self exists.

Within political economy, this relation to others is frequently mediated.

The worker who eats bread does not directly encounter the complete network of agricultural labor, logistics, energy, finance, law, and knowledge through which the bread became available. Exchange compresses a distributed network of dependence into a comparatively simple interaction.

Currency is one such mediator.

1.3 Currency, Credit, and Relational Mediation

The distinction between money, currency, and credit requires care.

The term *money-form* is useful when discussing Marxian political economy because it concerns a social form within exchange and value relations. *Currency* identifies more concrete institutional and representational forms through which monetary relations can operate. *Credit* brings the relational structure into particularly sharp relief because its efficacy depends upon claims, obligations, recognition, institutions, expectations, and future performance.

A currency carrier does not contain an intrinsic monetary essence.

Paper, metal, and electronic records can all participate in currency systems under appropriate relational conditions. Their physical properties alone do not explain their capacity to reorganize access to goods and services.

The corresponding process can be represented as

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^{\text{mon}} \rightsquigarrow C_t^{\text{currency}} \overset{\text{med}}{\rightsquigarrow} \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{\text{mon}}.$$

The carrier becomes effective through a relational field of recognition, institutional authority, accounting, exchange, law, production, and social practice.

Credit makes the same structure even more visible.

A credit relation can exist as a claim upon a possible future. Its present causal efficacy can influence borrowing capacity, investment, production, employment, consumption, and the allocation of resources before the future production upon which it depends has occurred.

Schematically,

$$C_t^{\text{credit}} \rightsquigarrow I_{t+1}^{\text{inv}} \rightsquigarrow P_{t+2}.$$

Credit therefore demonstrates a distinctive form of temporal relational reality:

> A relation to a possible future can become causally operative in the present and participate in generating the future toward which the relation refers.

The social efficacy of credit is consequently difficult to explain through the ontology of a material carrier. Its power belongs to a historically organized relational configuration.

Currency and credit provide especially useful cases for the central distinction of this paper:

$$\text{Svabhava}(X) = 0$$

can coexist with

$$X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}.$$

Their dependent constitution does not diminish their capacity to generate material consequences.

1.4 Emptiness and Causal Efficacy

Buddhist emptiness provides a philosophical vocabulary for examining this combination without interpreting dependent existence as nonexistence.

Madhyamaka analysis connects emptiness with dependent arising and directs critique toward intrinsic nature, or *svabhāva* [10]. The present paper draws upon this conceptual resource within a deliberately limited comparative framework.

The relevant distinction is between

$$\text{Svabhava}(X) = 0$$

and the practical or causal disappearance of X.

These are different claims.

A person may be empty of intrinsic self-subsistence while actions, commitments, memories, bodily processes, and relations continue to generate consequences.

A currency form may be empty of intrinsic monetary essence while continuing to mediate exchange.

A credit relation may possess no independently existing credit substance while reorganizing material production.

A socially stabilized category may depend entirely upon institutions and collective recognition while affecting people's opportunities and conduct.

The shared analytical principle can therefore be stated as:

> Non-substantiality and causal efficacy belong to different analytical dimensions of a relational form.

This distinction prevents two symmetrical errors.

The first infers intrinsic substantiality from causal efficacy. A form produces powerful effects, and its power is consequently attributed to an essence located within the form.

The second infers practical nullity from absence of intrinsic substantiality. A form is dependently generated, and its causal effects are consequently treated as unreal or dispensable.

The present framework accepts neither inference.

Emptiness constrains the first movement. Causal efficacy constrains the second.

This is also why the expression in the title, *Causal Efficacy Remains*, requires careful interpretation. Causality itself is not introduced as a new intrinsically existing substance. Causal relations are themselves dependently conditioned. The phrase indicates that recognition of emptiness does not erase the consequences occurring through dependent relations.

1.5 Mediation, Practical Use, and *Upāya*

Once non-substantiality is separated from causal nullity, mediation can be reconsidered.

Human practice continuously relies upon generated forms. Language, classification, currency, credit, law, institutions, models, identities, and symbols make complex coordination possible. Their dependent constitution does not require their abandonment.

The relevant practical attitude can instead be described through the Buddhist idea of *upāya*, used here cautiously as a philosophical resource for provisional and purpose-sensitive mediation.

A convenient form may be used while its dependent and revisable character remains visible.

This generates a three-stage analytical movement:

$$X \ ; \ \text{Svabhava}(X) = 0 \ ; \ X^{\text{provisional}}.$$

The final term is epistemically different from the first. The form has returned to practice after its claim to intrinsic self-subsistence has been suspended.

The recurrent linguistic movement of the *Diamond Sūtra* provides an especially vivid model for this operation. In a deliberately contemporary and anachronistic paraphrase introduced later in this paper, one might say:

> The Tathāgata speaks of currency; therefore it is no intrinsically self-subsisting Currency;
> hence it is called currency.

The analytical purpose of the example is simple. Currency remains available for use after the deconstruction of an intrinsic monetary essence.

The same applies to theoretical concepts. A concept can function as a practical means of access without being elevated into the final ontology of its object.

1.6 Relational Opacity and Alienation

This distinction allows alienation to be separated from mediation itself.

A mediated relation can remain visible, revisable, and accessible to the agents participating in it. Under such conditions, the mediator may function as a practical instrument of coordination.

A different configuration arises when the mediator acquires persistent causal authority while its relational provenance becomes increasingly obscure.

The paper calls this dimension *relational opacity*.

Relational opacity concerns the loss of practical and epistemic access to the relations through which a stabilized form acquires and reproduces its power.

For a relation-generated form X_t, alienation may therefore involve several mutually reinforcing processes:

- stabilization of X_t across repeated social interaction;
- increasing causal dependence of participants upon X_t;
- decreasing visibility of the relations generating its efficacy;
- attribution of relationally generated power to X_t itself;
- decreasing capacity of affected participants to revise the conditions reproducing X_t.

This provides a provisional definition:

> Alienation describes a condition in which a relation-generated form acquires persistent causal autonomy relative to the agents whose relations reproduce it, while its relational provenance and conditions of revision become increasingly opaque or inaccessible.

The term *causal autonomy* here is relative rather than absolute. The form continues to depend upon relational reproduction. Its autonomy concerns its capacity to constrain individual participants even when no single participant intends or controls the resulting structure.

This distinction helps explain why intellectual recognition alone cannot dissolve alienation.

A person may understand that creditworthiness is institutionally generated and still be denied credit.

A worker may understand that currency is relationally constituted and still require currency to obtain necessities.

A citizen may understand that a legal category is historically constructed and still remain subject to its institutional consequences.

Recognition changes the epistemic relation to the form. Transformation of its causal efficacy requires intervention in the relations through which that efficacy is reproduced.

1.7 Emptiness, Reification, and Historical Transformation

The dialogue between emptiness and Marxian political economy therefore produces a practical consequence.

If a social form possesses no intrinsic self-subsisting essence, its present configuration does not acquire necessity merely from historical persistence.

Its stability has conditions.

Those conditions have histories.

They can therefore become objects of inquiry and, where practically possible, objects of transformation.

The sequence is

$$\text{dependent generation} \rightarrow \text{stabilization} \rightarrow \text{causal efficacy} \rightarrow \text{possible reconstruction}.$$

Emptiness thus has a political-economic significance distinct from nihilistic dissolution. It opens historically stabilized forms to questions concerning their conditions of generation.

Marxian historical analysis supplies the complementary insight that these conditions are materially and institutionally organized. Revision therefore requires more than conceptual redescription.

The combined orientation can be stated succinctly:

> To see a social form as empty is to recover its dependence upon conditions; to take its causal efficacy seriously is to recognize that transforming the form requires transforming the relations through which those conditions are reproduced.

This gives alienation a generative interpretation. Critique reveals the relations hidden behind apparently intrinsic social powers. Practice concerns the reconstruction of those relations.

1.8 Methodological Self-Emptiness of GR

The argument also applies reflexively to GR.

GR employs concepts such as *relation*, *system*, *generativity*, and *relational reality*. These terms function as analytical devices for identifying patterns of dependence, stabilization, causal participation, and transformation.

The framework does not grant them exemption from the critique of intrinsic essence.

Accordingly,

$$\text{Svabhava}(\text{GR}) = 0.$$

The statement should be understood methodologically. GR possesses no final theoretical essence whose vocabulary must remain unchanged across inquiry.

Its concepts can nevertheless have epistemic and practical effects:

$$\text{GR}_t \rightsquigarrow K_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow A_{t+1}.$$

This combination defines what the paper calls *methodological self-emptiness*.

A theory can be used because it produces valuable distinctions and generative questions while remaining open to revision of the very concepts through which those distinctions were produced.

The alternative creates a theoretical form of the pathology examined in this paper. A theory generated as an instrument of inquiry may become stabilized, institutionalized, and eventually treated as though its categories belonged intrinsically to reality.

GR therefore accepts the same principle it applies to currency, credit, and social forms:

> Analytical efficacy does not establish intrinsic theoretical essence.

Its vocabulary remains historically revisable:

$$\mathcal{L}_{\text{GR}}^{(t)} \longrightarrow \mathcal{L}_{\text{GR}}^{(t+1)}.$$

Methodological self-emptiness is thus part of the theory's internal anti-reification condition.

1.9 Contribution and Scope

The paper makes four principal contributions.

First, it distinguishes intrinsic substantiality from relational causal efficacy and uses this distinction to connect Buddhist emptiness with the problem of socially generated causal power.

Second, it develops a generative relational account of mediation in which currency, credit, subject positions, and other stabilized forms can emerge from relations and subsequently become conditions of later relations.

Third, it reinterprets one dimension of alienation through relational opacity, reification, causal autonomy, and loss of practical revisability. This interpretation complements Marxian analyses of estranged labor, fetishism, and social form while preserving their textual differences.

Fourth, it applies the argument reflexively to GR and introduces methodological self-emptiness as a constraint against the reification of the framework's own concepts.

The paper does not claim a historical influence of Buddhist philosophy upon Marx, nor a doctrinal identity between emptiness and Marxian critique. It does not treat all Buddhist traditions as expressing one theory of emptiness, and it does not reduce Marxian alienation, commodity fetishism, and later reification theories to one concept.

Its comparative method is structural and problem-oriented. It asks what can be learned when two traditions illuminate different dimensions of a common problem:

> How can a form possess no intrinsic self-subsisting essence, acquire real and persistent causal power within relations, and eventually confront the agents whose relations continue to reproduce it?

The question establishes the domain of inquiry without determining its answer in advance.

1.10 Organization of the Discussion

Section 2 reconstructs the relevant philosophical lineages of Buddhist emptiness, dependent arising, Marxian alienation, fetishism, and social form. Section 3 develops the distinction between intrinsic substantiality and relational causal efficacy. Section 4 examines dependence upon others and the relational constitution of the social subject. Section 5 analyzes currency, the money-form, and credit as relationally stabilized mediators.

Section 6 develops alienation through relational opacity, reification, causal autonomy, and restrictions upon revisability. Section 7 examines mediation and *upāya*, including the practical use of empty yet causally effective forms. Section 8 extends the analysis to the self, religious images, legal and institutional categories, and theoretical forms. Section 9 develops the political and practical implications of transforming relation-generated forms. Section 10 examines methodological self-emptiness and the possibility of theoretical alienation. Section 11 specifies conceptual boundaries and research obligations. The conclusion returns to the relation among emptiness, causal efficacy, alienation, and historical transformation.

2 Philosophical Lineages of Emptiness, Alienation, and Social Form

This section reconstructs the principal philosophical lineages through which the present argument becomes possible. Buddhist emptiness and Marxian alienation arise from different historical, practical, and philosophical problems. Their concepts should therefore retain their local meanings before any structural comparison is attempted.

The purpose of the section is not to establish doctrinal equivalence. It is to identify several conceptual interfaces: dependent arising and absence of intrinsic nature; conventional designation and practical efficacy; estranged labor and the products of human activity; fetishism and the apparent independence of social forms; and later theories of reification.

These interfaces prepare a narrower question developed in the following sections:

> How can a form depend entirely upon relations for its emergence and persistence while nevertheless acquiring stable causal power within the relations that sustain it?

2.1 Dependent Arising and Emptiness

Buddhist philosophical traditions develop several accounts of dependent arising, non-self, causation, conventional designation, and emptiness. The present paper draws most directly upon a Madhyamaka-informed interpretation in which emptiness concerns the absence of intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*) rather than the disappearance of phenomena from practical and conventional life [10, 2].

Nāgārjuna's analysis links dependent arising and emptiness in a manner that undermines the search for independently self-grounding entities. Phenomena arise through conditions and relations. Their intelligibility and causal participation therefore do not require an intrinsic essence standing behind those dependencies.

For the present paper, the relevant distinction can be written simply as

$$\text{Svabhava}(X) = 0.$$

The expression should be interpreted cautiously. It does not translate Madhyamaka into a complete formal ontology. It marks the analytical claim that X is not treated as possessing an independently self-sufficient essence.

This immediately separates emptiness from simple nonexistence.

A conventionally identifiable form may remain available for action, responsibility, communication, and causal interaction even when intrinsic self-subsistence is denied.

The paper therefore uses emptiness to challenge one particular inference:

$$\text{stable appearance or efficacy} \quad \not\Rightarrow \quad \text{intrinsic essence.}$$

The denial of intrinsic nature changes the interpretation of how a form exists. It does not automatically remove the form from the network of conditions and consequences through which practical life unfolds.

2.2 Conventional Designation and Practical Efficacy

The distinction between intrinsic nature and conventional designation is especially important for the present argument.

Human practice relies upon names, categories, persons, objects, obligations, institutions, and distinctions. Their usefulness does not require that every named form possess a self-subsisting essence corresponding exactly to its designation.

A useful schematic distinction is

$$X \ ; \ \text{Svabhava}(X) = 0 \ ; \ X^{\text{conv}},$$

where X^{conv} denotes the form as conventionally and relationally available.

The third term should not be interpreted as a return to the first under the same epistemic conditions. The form remains usable after its intrinsic status has been subjected to critique.

This movement is important for avoiding a nihilistic interpretation of emptiness.

> The absence of intrinsic nature changes the ontological interpretation of a form without requiring the suspension of every practical relation mediated through that form.

A person can remain responsible for a promise.

A name can remain useful for communication.

An institution can continue to produce consequences.

A currency unit can continue to mediate exchange.

The relevant philosophical problem is therefore not whether such forms "really exist" in one undifferentiated sense. It concerns which mode of existence is being attributed to them and which consequences arise through their dependent relations.

2.3 The Linguistic Movement of Negation and Renaming

The recurrent language of the *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā* provides a particularly useful model for thinking about conventional designation after the critique of intrinsic identity [3]. The text repeatedly employs formulations in which a named category is introduced, denied as intrinsically what its name seems to imply, and subsequently retained at the level of designation.

The present paper treats this pattern as a philosophical resource rather than as a formal doctrine reducible to one logical formula.

Its movement can be represented schematically as

$$X \longrightarrow \text{deconstruction of intrinsic } X \longrightarrow \text{designation of } X.$$

The practical significance lies in the third movement.
The category has not simply disappeared.
It returns under altered ontological commitment.
This structure will later support the deliberately anachronistic analytical example:

> The Tathāgata speaks of currency; therefore it is no intrinsically self-subsisting Currency; hence it is called currency.

The example is intended to illustrate the continued usability of a relationally constituted form after intrinsic essence has been denied. It is not presented as a translation or historical interpretation of an economic doctrine contained in the sūtra.

2.4 Non-Self and Relational Continuity

The problem becomes still more striking in Buddhist analyses of the person.

The denial of an intrinsically existing self does not require the denial of all continuity among bodily processes, memory, responsibility, action, experience, and consequence. Buddhist traditions developed sophisticated accounts of continuity without grounding that continuity in an immutable personal substance [2, 12].

For the present inquiry, this creates a significant structural possibility.

The self may be analyzed as dependent upon relations and processes while remaining causally consequential:

$$\text{Svabhava}(S) = 0, \qquad S_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}.$$

The notation does not claim that Buddhist traditions conceptualize the person through GR terminology. It identifies a structural problem that later becomes important for political economy.

A socially recognized person, worker, debtor, creditor, owner, or consumer can similarly be constituted through relations while producing real consequences within institutional and material systems.

The comparison therefore concerns a distinction between substantial identity and relational continuity rather than an identity between Buddhist and Marxian theories of the person.

2.5 Alienated Labor in the Early Marx

Marx's early analysis of alienated labor begins from a different problem. The *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* examines how labor performed under particular social relations can confront the worker through forms of estrangement involving the product, productive activity, human sociality, and relations with others [8].

The product is significant because it originates in human activity and then appears before the worker as an external power.

The general movement can be represented as

$$A_t \rightsquigarrow X_t \rightsquigarrow A_{t+1},$$

where A_t denotes socially organized activity and X_t a generated form that subsequently conditions further activity.

The problem is therefore more complex than separation between a producer and a physical object. Production occurs within a social organization that determines ownership, access, command, labor conditions, and the disposition of products.

Alienation concerns the relational organization through which what emerges from human activity acquires a position capable of confronting the humans whose activity participates in producing it.

This feature provides one of the principal interfaces with the present analysis of relationally generated forms.

2.6 The Social Constitution of the Human Subject

Marx's critique of an abstract isolated individual develops further in the *Theses on Feuerbach*. Human existence is situated within an ensemble of social relations [5].

This formulation is especially important for the present paper because it complicates any model in which a fully constituted individual first exists and only subsequently enters social relations.

Production itself depends upon others.

Language depends upon others.

Needs are satisfied through relations whose histories usually precede the individual.

Institutions stabilize positions through which individuals become socially recognizable.

The subject of political economy therefore exists through a distributed field of relations.

This relational field should not itself be transformed into a higher substantial Subject. The present paper treats it as a historically evolving configuration of persons, institutions, material processes, norms, technologies, inherited labor, and future commitments.

The relevant structure is distributed:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^{\text{social}} \rightsquigarrow S_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{\text{social}}.$$

The socially stabilized subject emerges within relations and subsequently participates in reproducing or changing them.

This structure establishes a further point of contact with the Buddhist critique of self-subsistence while preserving the profound differences in their philosophical objectives.

2.7 Commodity Fetishism and Objective Social Form

The later critique of political economy shifts the analytical terrain. In *Capital*, commodity fetishism concerns a social world in which relations among producers acquire the appearance of relations among things through the commodity form [6].

This is particularly important for the present paper because the resulting forms are neither private hallucinations nor merely linguistic mistakes.

Commodity exchange is socially objective.

Prices matter.

Ownership matters.

Monetary obligations matter.

The forms through which these relations become organized generate material consequences.

The difficulty lies in how their social and relational constitution becomes obscured by the form in which they appear.

A simplified GR reconstruction is

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^{PE} \rightsquigarrow X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{PE},$$

while the observable attribution tends toward

$$\text{Power}(\mathfrak{R}^{PE}) \longmapsto \text{Property}(X).$$

The second expression identifies the structure relevant to reification. A socially generated power becomes readable as though it belonged naturally to the object or form through which it operates.

The power remains effective.

Its apparent location has changed.

This is one reason that a simple opposition between "real" and "constructed" is inadequate for Marxian political economy.

2.8 The Money-Form and Mediated Social Dependence

The money-form intensifies this problem because it condenses distributed relations of production and exchange into a highly portable social form.

Individuals encountering currency in ordinary transactions need not reconstruct the complete social relations through which its monetary efficacy has been generated.

The transaction can therefore appear relatively simple:

$$C^{\text{currency}} \longleftrightarrow \text{commodity}.$$

Yet the currency relation presupposes a much wider configuration involving production, recognition, institutions, law, accounting, exchange practices, and historically stabilized expectations.

Currency consequently provides a useful example of what this paper later calls *relational opacity*.

Its convenience depends partly upon compression.

One does not need to reconstruct the entire history of social production whenever a transaction occurs.

The same compression can obscure the relations through which the mediator obtains its efficacy.

This ambivalence is important.

> The capacity of a mediator to simplify complex relations can be practically generative while simultaneously making the conditions of its own efficacy less visible.

Mediation and alienation therefore cannot be identified with one another. The same form can facilitate coordination while participating in structures of opacity and domination under particular relational conditions.

2.9 Credit and the Objectification of Future Relations

Credit makes the temporal dimension of social form especially visible.

A credit relation links present activity to claims, obligations, and expectations concerning future activity. Its efficacy depends upon social and institutional recognition, yet it can reorganize material activity in the present.

The relation therefore has a temporally recursive form:

$$C_t^{\text{credit}} \rightsquigarrow A_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow P_{t+2}.$$

The future becomes relevant to current production through a stabilized relational form.

This does not mean that the future already exists as a completed object. Rather, an expectation concerning a possible future becomes operational within present relations.

Credit therefore sharpens the distinction between material carrier and social efficacy.

The causal power of the credit relation cannot be adequately located in a contract sheet, database entry, credit score, or other isolated representation of the relation.

Its efficacy belongs to the wider system through which those representations are recognized and acted upon.

This makes credit an especially strong case of causal efficacy without intrinsic substantiality.

2.10 Reification after Marx

Later Marxian theory developed the concept of reification more explicitly. Lukács, in particular, analyzed the extension of commodity structure into forms of social objectivity and consciousness, treating reification as a broader organization of social life under capitalist relations [4].

The present paper draws upon this lineage while maintaining a distinction among Marx's analyses of alienated labor, commodity fetishism, and later theories of reification.

For GR, reification identifies a particularly useful analytical movement: a relation-generated form is treated as though its efficacy arose from an intrinsic property.

This can be expressed schematically as

$$\text{RelationGenerated}(X) \longrightarrow \text{Intrinsicized}(X).$$

Alienation concerns a wider practical condition. The generated form can also become difficult for participants to revise, redirect, or escape even while their activity continues to reproduce it.

Reification is therefore one possible mechanism within a broader generative account of alienation.

2.11 Mediation and Alienation

The historical lineages reviewed above support an important distinction.

Social life depends upon mediation.

Alienation concerns particular configurations of mediation.

Currency allows distributed producers to coordinate without direct personal knowledge of one another.

Credit allows possible future production to enter present economic decisions.

Law allows complex obligations to remain legible beyond immediate interpersonal relations.

Language allows knowledge to travel beyond direct experience.

Such mediation can expand generative possibilities.

A pathology emerges when the mediator's relational provenance, distribution of power, and conditions of revision become inaccessible while dependence upon the mediator increases.

The present paper therefore separates

$$\text{Mediation}(X)$$

from

$$\text{Alienation}(X).$$

The distinction is crucial for the practical argument developed later.

The goal of critique need not be the elimination of every socially generated form. It can concern reconstruction of the relations through which forms acquire, distribute, and reproduce causal power.

2.12 Emptiness and Reification

A structural dialogue between Madhyamaka and Marxian political economy becomes possible at this point.

The Madhyamaka critique asks whether the stability and intelligibility of a form require intrinsic nature.

Marxian critique asks how socially generated relations can appear through forms whose powers confront participants as objective and apparently independent.

The two analyses address different historical and philosophical problems, but their intersection reveals a useful distinction:

> Causal efficacy provides no sufficient reason to attribute self-subsisting essence to the form through which that efficacy is mediated.

The Buddhist side of the dialogue therefore challenges substantialization.

The Marxian side prevents that challenge from becoming socially passive. Relation-generated forms can organize labor, production, access, obligation, and material possibility even when their intrinsic substantiality is denied.

The combined problem is consequently practical as well as ontological.

A form may be empty.

Its effects may remain powerful.

Its conditions may be historical.

Those conditions may therefore become objects of transformation.

2.13 The Boundary between Emptiness and Nihilism

The distinction from nihilism is indispensable.

If emptiness were interpreted as practical nonexistence, political-economic critique could conclude that relation-generated forms require only conceptual demystification.

Such a conclusion would fail to explain why knowledge of social construction does not automatically remove debt, wage dependence, ownership relations, institutional classifications, or unequal access to resources.

The causal architecture persists:

$$\mathrm{Svabhava}(X) = 0, \qquad \mathrm{Eff}_{\mathfrak{R}}(X) \neq 0.$$

The second expression remains qualitative. The paper does not introduce a numerical measure of causal efficacy.

The important point is conceptual.

> Emptiness removes the necessity of intrinsic essence; it does not remove the necessity of engaging with the conditions through which consequences arise.

This is the practical meaning of the title's formulation *Causal Efficacy Remains*.

2.14 *Upāya* and the Status of Mediating Forms

The Buddhist concept of *upāya*, or skillful means, supplies another limited philosophical interface.

The present paper does not identify currency, credit, or political-economic institutions with Buddhist skillful means in their doctrinal sense. It uses the concept more narrowly to illuminate the possibility of employing a form without attributing final ontological status to it.

A concept can be useful.

A category can coordinate practice.

A currency can facilitate exchange.

A theory can disclose relations.

Their practical efficacy need not establish their intrinsic essence.

This allows a form to remain provisional and revisable while continuing to mediate action.

The distinction becomes especially important for GR itself, whose vocabulary is treated as an analytical means rather than a final ontology.

The later discussion of methodological self-emptiness extends this principle from political-economic mediation to theory formation.

2.15 Structural Interface of the Two Lineages

The preceding discussion can now be summarized without collapsing the two traditions.

The Buddhist lineage contributes a critique of intrinsic self-subsistence and a vocabulary for dependent existence.

The Marxian lineage contributes an account of socially and historically generated forms whose objective efficacy can confront the agents participating in their reproduction.

The structural interface lies in a common analytical possibility:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1},$$

together with

$$\text{Svabhava}(X) = 0.$$

The first expression concerns relational generation and causal participation. The second concerns the absence of intrinsic self-subsistence.

Taken together, they allow the paper to analyze forms that are simultaneously dependent and effective.

Alienation enters when additional conditions emerge: relational provenance becomes opaque, socially generated efficacy is intrinsicized, dependence upon the form intensifies, and the practical capacity to revise the relations sustaining it becomes restricted.

This yields the conceptual trajectory developed in the remainder of the paper:

> dependent generation, relational stabilization, causal efficacy, reification, relational opacity, and restricted revisability.

2.16 Boundary of the Comparative Argument

Several limits follow from the preceding reconstruction.

The paper does not interpret Madhyamaka as a political-economic theory.

It does not interpret Marx as advancing a Buddhist theory of emptiness.

It does not claim that commodity fetishism and Buddhist attachment describe the same psychological or social mechanism.

It does not infer a common historical source from a structural resemblance.

It also does not treat "Buddhism" or "Marxism" as internally homogeneous systems.

The comparative contribution is narrower.

Buddhist emptiness clarifies how dependent forms can be denied intrinsic essence without being reduced to nothing.

Marxian political economy clarifies how historically generated forms can acquire objective social power whose operation exceeds the intentions and control of individual participants.

GR uses the intersection to formulate a research problem concerning *empty yet causally efficacious forms.*

The next section develops this problem directly by distinguishing substantiality, relational stabilization, causal efficacy, persistence, and generative mediation.

3 Intrinsic Substantiality and Relational Causal Efficacy

This section develops the principal conceptual distinction of the paper: absence of intrinsic substantiality and persistence of relational causal efficacy belong to different analytical dimensions. A form

Table 1: Intrinsic substantiality and relational causal efficacy

	Relationally efficacious	**Relationally inefficacious**
Treated as intrinsically substantial	A form is attributed intrinsic reality and produces observable consequences.	A form is attributed intrinsic reality despite little or no demonstrated relational consequence.
Empty of intrinsic substantiality	A dependently generated form participates persistently in subsequent relations.	A transient or analytically posited form produces no relevant subsequent effect within the specified domain.

may depend upon relations for its emergence, stabilization, recognition, and reproduction while continuing to alter the subsequent states of the relational system in which it participates.

The distinction can be stated compactly as

$$\text{Svabhava}(X) = 0, \qquad X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}.$$

The first expression concerns the mode of existence attributed to X. The second concerns what X can do within a historically situated relational configuration.

The paper therefore adopts the following principle:

> Recognition that X lacks intrinsic self-subsistence does not abolish the relational causal efficacy of X.

This principle provides the basis for analyzing social forms that are dependently generated and nevertheless practically unavoidable, materially consequential, and historically persistent.

3.1 Two Analytical Dimensions

Questions of substantiality and questions of efficacy should first be separated.

The substantiality question asks:

> Does the power, identity, or persistence of X arise from an intrinsic essence belonging independently to X?

The efficacy question asks:

> Does the presence, recognition, or operation of X alter the subsequent development of the relational system?

A negative answer to the first question does not determine the answer to the second.

This gives four logical possibilities:

The present paper is primarily concerned with the lower-left position: forms whose intrinsic substantiality is denied while their relational efficacy remains significant.

Currency, credit, legal identity, social status, and the socially stabilized self provide examples of this problem.

3.2 Dependent Efficacy

The causal efficacy discussed here is itself dependent.

If X_t operates only through a supporting relational configuration, then its efficacy may be represented as

$$\mathrm{Eff}\left(X_t; \mathfrak{R}_t, \Gamma_t\right),$$

where Γ_t denotes relevant historical and material conditions.

The expression emphasizes that efficacy is indexed to conditions.

A currency note outside the institutional and social relations through which it is recognized may lose much of its monetary efficacy.

A credit score can matter enormously within one lending system and have no direct force in another.

A legal title can determine access within the jurisdiction that recognizes it while lacking equivalent force elsewhere.

The efficacy therefore belongs neither exclusively to the material carrier nor exclusively to an abstract social consensus. It arises through the configuration in which carrier, recognition, institution, practice, material resources, and enforcement become connected.

Thus,

$$\mathrm{Eff}(X) = \mathrm{Eff}\left(X \mid \mathfrak{R}, \Gamma\right)$$

is conceptually preferable to treating efficacy as an isolated property of X.

This is the relational meaning of causal efficacy developed in the paper.

3.3 Stabilization without Substance

Dependently generated forms can become stable.

Stability should not be confused with intrinsic essence.

A form may persist because the relations reproducing it remain sufficiently stable:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow X_t \rightsquigarrow X_{t+1}.$$

The persistence of X can therefore arise through repeated relational reproduction rather than through an unchanging substance contained within the form itself.

Currency illustrates this structure. Individual notes deteriorate, accounts change, payment technologies evolve, and monetary institutions are reorganized. Yet a monetary form can remain socially stable across these changes because the relations supporting its recognition and use continue to be reproduced.

The self offers an analogous structural problem. Bodily states, memories, social positions, desires, and relationships change over time, while a practically recognizable continuity can persist.

The relevant distinction is:

> Persistence can be an achievement of reproduction rather than evidence of intrinsic identity.

This distinction becomes essential when persistent social forms later appear natural or necessary.

3.4 Relational Reality

The concept of relational reality developed in the preceding GR work can now be stated in a form appropriate to the present problem.

A relationally generated form becomes relationally real when it is sufficiently stabilized within a specified relational system and temporal horizon to participate persistently in the generation, reproduction, or transformation of subsequent states.

The characteristic architecture is

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow X_t \overset{\text{med}}{\rightsquigarrow} \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}.$$

The term X_t therefore occupies a double position.

It is produced:

$$X_t \in \text{Outcome}(\mathfrak{R}_t).$$

It also becomes productive:

$$X_t \in \text{Condition}(\mathfrak{R}_{t+1}).$$

Relational reality does not require an ontological claim that X possesses independent substance.

Its reality lies in persistent generative mediation.

This makes relational reality particularly suitable for the analysis of currency and credit. Their efficacy is difficult to explain through the intrinsic properties of their carriers, while their capacity to reorganize future material relations is readily observable.

3.5 Currency as a Stabilized Relational Form

Currency provides a comparatively visible example of stabilization without intrinsic monetary substance.

Consider a currency carrier C_t.

Its material properties are insufficient to generate its monetary role. Paper, metal, magnetic storage, and electronic records can all function as currency under different institutional conditions.

The relational structure is closer to

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^{\text{mon}} \rightsquigarrow C_t \overset{\text{med}}{\rightsquigarrow} \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{\text{mon}}.$$

The first movement includes social recognition, institutional authority, accounting practices, exchange relations, legal enforcement, historical expectations, and connections to production.

The second movement includes altered access to goods, services, labor, mobility, investment, and future opportunities.

Currency therefore does not need intrinsic monetary essence in order to produce monetary consequences.

A deliberately simplified formulation is:

> The carrier is not the source of monetary essence; it is a relationally recognized interface through which monetary relations become practically operable.

This is why changing the carrier does not necessarily eliminate the monetary form.

3.6 Credit and Present Causation by Possible Futures

Credit provides a stronger example because even the temptation to identify the form with a material carrier becomes weaker.

A credit relation may involve a contract, ledger entry, institutional assessment, promise, claim, obligation, or combination of these elements. None independently contains a substance called "credit."

Its efficacy nevertheless becomes observable through subsequent action:

$$C_t^{\text{credit}} \rightsquigarrow A_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow P_{t+2}.$$

A firm receives financing and purchases equipment.
A household obtains or loses access to housing.
A government issues debt and reorganizes expenditure.
A lender changes present behavior on the basis of an expectation concerning future repayment.
Credit therefore allows a possible future to become operational in the present.

> A future that is not yet materially actual can acquire present causal relevance through a socially stabilized relation to that future.

This does not imply backward causation from a completed future event. The operative structure lies in present expectations, obligations, institutions, and recognized claims concerning what may occur later.

Credit thus provides an especially clear example of relational reality: the form exists through relations, yet those relations generate material consequences before the anticipated future has been realized.

3.7 The Self as a Relationally Stabilized Form

The same distinction can be applied to the self without identifying the person with a monetary form.

A socially and practically recognizable self may depend upon bodily continuity, memory, language, recognition by others, legal identity, institutional records, promises, responsibilities, and historical participation.

These relations can generate a sufficiently stable form:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^{\text{person}} \rightsquigarrow S_t.$$

The stabilized person then affects later relations:

$$S_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{\text{person}}.$$

Promises remain attributable.
Labor is performed.
Care is given.
Debts are recognized.
Responsibilities are assigned.
Relationships accumulate histories.

The denial of an intrinsically self-subsisting subject therefore does not eliminate the causal importance of personal continuity.

The structural comparison with currency or credit concerns only this relational architecture:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}.$$

It does not imply that persons and financial forms possess the same ethical, phenomenological, or ontological status.

3.8 From Causal Efficacy to Reification

The distinction developed above also explains how reification can arise.

Participants repeatedly encounter the consequences of X.

Currency purchases goods.

Credit opens or closes possibilities.

Legal status changes rights.

Institutional categories determine access.

Social identities alter treatment.

The causal power is therefore experienced as real.

A further inference can then occur:

$$\mathrm{Eff}_{\mathfrak{R}}(X) \longrightarrow \mathrm{IntrinsicPower}(X).$$

The form's efficacy becomes evidence for an imagined self-subsisting source of that efficacy.

This is the central reification error analyzed in the paper.

The mistake does not consist in believing that the effects are real.

The effects may be entirely real.

The mistake lies in locating their source exclusively inside the stabilized form.

> Reification confuses the reality of relational effects with the intrinsic substantiality of the mediator through which those effects occur.

This distinction is essential because critique should preserve the first while challenging the second.

3.9 The Nihilistic Error

A symmetrical error arises in the opposite direction.

Once the relational constitution of X becomes visible, one may conclude that X is merely invented, merely symbolic, or practically unreal.

The inference takes the form

$$\mathrm{Svabhava}(X) = 0 \quad \Longrightarrow \quad \mathrm{Eff}_{\mathfrak{R}}(X) = 0.$$

The present framework rejects this inference.

A debt can be socially constituted and still result in foreclosure.

A border can be historically generated and still constrain physical movement.

A legal identity can be institutionally constructed and still determine rights.

A currency can lack intrinsic monetary essence and still purchase food.

A theory can be provisional and still transform institutional practice.

The term *constructed* therefore has little explanatory value unless the relations of construction and subsequent causal effects are specified.

> Dependence upon relations explains how a form exists; it does not imply that the consequences generated through those relations are imaginary.

This is the paper's principal safeguard against nihilism.

3.10 A Middle Analytical Position

The preceding errors define two opposed reductions.

The reifying reduction moves from efficacy to essence:

$$\mathrm{Eff}(X) \Rightarrow \mathrm{Svabhava}(X).$$

The nihilistic reduction moves from emptiness to causal nullity:

$$\mathrm{Svabhava}(X) = 0 \Rightarrow \mathrm{Eff}(X) = 0.$$

The present analysis occupies neither position.

Its central structure is

$$\mathrm{Svabhava}(X) = 0, \qquad \mathrm{Eff}_{\mathfrak{R}}(X) \neq 0.$$

This is not intended as a complete formalization of Buddhist Middle Way philosophy. It is a GR reconstruction of the conceptual space opened by the compatibility of dependent constitution and causal efficacy.

The practical implication is substantial.

A form can be approached without metaphysical attachment while its effects remain objects of serious practical engagement.

3.11 Practical Necessity without Ontological Necessity

A relation-generated form can become practically difficult to avoid even though it possesses no intrinsic necessity.

Currency provides a simple example.

An individual living within a monetary economy may depend upon currency for food, shelter, transportation, or institutional participation.

At the individual scale,

$$C_t$$

can therefore appear nearly unavoidable.

At the historical scale, the specific monetary configuration remains contingent upon institutions, law, production relations, technology, and collective reproduction.

The paper therefore distinguishes:

$$\text{practical necessity within } \mathfrak{R}_t$$

from

$$\text{ontological necessity of } X.$$

This distinction is crucial for political economy.

A form can be locally compulsory while historically contingent.

The fact that an individual cannot presently opt out does not establish that the form is natural, eternal, or intrinsically necessary.

Historical contingency and practical compulsion can coexist.

This coexistence helps explain why alienated forms can feel inevitable even when their existence depends upon reproducible social conditions.

3.12 Causal Autonomy without Ontological Independence

A related distinction concerns autonomy.

Once stabilized, X_t can constrain individual participants in ways no single participant controls.

This can be represented as

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow X_t \rightsquigarrow A_{i,t+1},$$

where A_i denotes the possible actions of participant i.

The causal effect of X_t may therefore be relatively autonomous with respect to any one participant.

Yet the form remains dependent upon the wider relational system:

$$X_t = X_t(\mathfrak{R}_t, \Gamma_t).$$

The paper calls this condition *relative causal autonomy*.

> A form is relatively causally autonomous when it constrains or enables participants beyond the control of any one participant while continuing to depend upon the relational system that reproduces it.

This concept helps explain how relation-generated forms can confront participants as external powers without requiring the claim that those forms have become ontologically independent substances.

3.13 Causal Efficacy and Revision

The relational dependence of X also opens the possibility of revision.

If the efficacy of X depends upon conditions

$$\mathcal{C}_X = \{c_1, c_2, \ldots, c_n\},$$

then transformation of sufficiently important conditions may transform the form or its effects.

Schematically,

$$\mathcal{C}_{X,t} \longrightarrow \mathcal{C}_{X,t+1}$$

can produce

$$X_t \longrightarrow X_{t+1}.$$

This does not imply that social transformation is easy.

Stable forms can be deeply embedded within institutions, habits, infrastructure, legal systems, material dependencies, and expectations.

The point is narrower:

> Dependently generated stability is historically revisable in principle because its persistence depends upon conditions of reproduction.

This provides the bridge from emptiness to political-economic transformation.

Emptiness removes intrinsic necessity.

Causal analysis identifies the conditions through which the form remains effective.

Historical practice concerns whether and how those conditions can be changed.

3.14 Emptiness as an Anti-Naturalization Principle

Within the present comparative framework, emptiness therefore has an important anti-naturalizing function.

A historically persistent form can appear natural because the relations reproducing it remain stable over long periods.

Its stability can then be interpreted as evidence that the form belongs to the intrinsic order of social reality.

The critique of intrinsic nature interrupts this inference.

A social form can be persistent without being self-grounding.

It can be widely reproduced without being historically necessary.

It can be causally powerful without possessing an internal essence that explains its power independently of relation.

This gives emptiness a political-economic implication:

> What arises dependently can become durable without thereby becoming necessary in itself.

The historical question then concerns the conditions under which durability is produced.

3.15 Causal Efficacy as an Anti-Nihilistic Principle

Causal efficacy supplies the complementary constraint.

If a form continuously reorganizes access, action, production, obligation, or future possibility, the practical consequences require analysis regardless of whether the form possesses intrinsic substance.

Thus critique cannot stop at the statement:

$$X \text{ is empty.}$$

It must continue toward:

$$\text{How is } X \text{ generated?}$$

$$\text{How is } X \text{ reproduced?}$$

$$\text{What does } X \text{ enable or constrain?}$$

$$\text{Who can alter the conditions of } X\text{?}$$

This is where emptiness becomes compatible with materialist analysis.

The absence of intrinsic essence redirects attention toward the conditions through which efficacy is actually produced.

3.16 Generativity as the Historical Opening

The two preceding principles lead to a third.

Emptiness constrains reification.

Causal efficacy constrains nihilism.

Generativity concerns the historical production and transformation of the relations through which forms become effective.

The resulting architecture is:

> Emptiness reveals dependence. Causal efficacy identifies consequence. Generativity identifies the processes through which dependence and consequence are reproduced and transformed.

This structure avoids treating existing forms as eternal substances while also avoiding the assumption that recognition alone can dissolve their effects.

A relation-generated form may therefore be analyzed through three dimensions:

$$(\text{dependence}, \text{efficacy}, \text{generativity}) .$$

The first asks upon what the form depends.

The second asks what consequences follow through it.

The third asks how the relevant relations evolve and whether alternative configurations can be generated.

3.17 Theoretical Forms as a Reflexive Case

The distinction applies to theories as well.

A theory is generated within historical conditions of inquiry:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^K \rightsquigarrow T_t.$$

Once stabilized, it can alter later research, institutions, classifications, and practices:

$$T_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^K.$$

A theory can therefore be empty of intrinsic theoretical essence while remaining causally and epistemically effective.

Its success provides no sufficient reason to treat its categories as final features of reality.

Conversely, its conventional and historical construction provides no reason to deny its capacity to generate knowledge or practical consequences.

GR itself belongs to this category.

The framework's methodological self-emptiness therefore follows directly from the principle established in this section:

$$\text{Svabhava}(\text{GR}) = 0$$

while

$$\text{GR}_t \rightsquigarrow K_{t+1}, A_{t+1}.$$

A theory can function as a means without becoming an essence.

3.18 Summary of the Distinction

The argument of this section can be summarized through three separations.

First, persistence and intrinsic identity are distinct.

Second, causal efficacy and intrinsic substantiality are distinct.

Third, historical dependence and practical irrelevance are distinct.

The central configuration is therefore:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow X_t \overset{\text{med}}{\rightsquigarrow} \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}, \qquad \text{Svabhava}(X) = 0.$$

This allows X_t to be dependently generated, historically stabilized, causally consequential, and potentially revisable within one coherent analysis.

The distinction also establishes the basis for the paper's reinterpretation of alienation.

Alienation becomes especially significant when a relation-generated form retains strong causal efficacy while its dependence upon relations becomes opaque, its power becomes intrinsicized, and the agents affected by it lose effective access to the conditions through which it is reproduced.

The next section turns to the human side of this structure by examining dependence upon others and the relational constitution of the social subject.

4 Dependence upon Others and the Relational Constitution of the Social Subject

This section examines the human side of the relational architecture developed in the preceding sections. If currency, credit, legal categories, and other social forms are dependently generated, the subjects who use and reproduce those forms must also be situated within relations of dependence.

The central claim is that dependence upon others can disclose the relational conditions of one's own existence. Need, labor, language, care, production, institutional recognition, and access to material resources reveal that the social subject does not reproduce itself independently.

This does not require the replacement of the individual by a substantial collective Subject. The relevant structure is distributed. Persons remain distinct centers of experience and action while their practical capacities depend upon relational fields extending far beyond any one person's control, knowledge, or lifetime.

The section therefore develops a relational conception of the social subject: a subject whose practical continuity is stabilized through relations and who, once stabilized, participates in the reproduction and transformation of those relations.

4.1 Need as a Disclosure of Relational Dependence

Need is usually described as a state of an already existing individual.

An individual exists, lacks something, and subsequently seeks an object or another person capable of satisfying the lack.

The present framework adds another dimension.

Need can disclose the relational conditions under which the individual continues to exist.

A need for food reveals dependence upon processes of agriculture, transportation, preservation, energy, labor, exchange, and ecology.

A need for shelter reveals dependence upon land, construction, law, infrastructure, finance, maintenance, and social coordination.

A need for care reveals bodily vulnerability and dependence upon other persons.

A need for language reveals dependence upon symbolic forms inherited from communities that precede the individual.

The epistemic movement can be represented as

$$N_{i,t} \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{D}_{i,t},$$

where $N_{i,t}$ denotes a need of subject i and $\mathfrak{D}_{i,t}$ the field of dependencies disclosed through that need.

The important point is not that dependence begins only when need becomes conscious.

The dependence may have existed long before the subject recognizes it.

Need makes an already operative relational structure visible.

Through need, the subject can encounter the conditions supplied by others through which its own practical existence is sustained.

4.2 The Other as a Condition of Practical Existence

The other therefore occupies a position deeper than that of an optional partner added to an otherwise complete subject.

Many capacities attributed to an individual are possible only through relations with others.

Speaking presupposes a language received from others.

Working presupposes accumulated knowledge, tools, infrastructure, and social organization.

Buying food presupposes producers whose activities are usually invisible to the buyer.

Legal agency presupposes institutions capable of recognizing and enforcing claims.

Credit presupposes other actors who recognize obligations and expectations concerning future action.

The relational field of practical existence can therefore be written schematically as

$$S_{i,t} = \mathcal{E}_S \left(B_{i,t}, M_{i,t}, L_{i,t}, R_{i,t}, I_t, H_t \right),$$

where bodily continuity, material conditions, language, interpersonal relations, institutions, and inherited historical structures all participate in the stabilization of the social subject.

The notation does not define an exhaustive ontology of persons. It records the insufficiency of a model in which the socially effective subject is generated entirely from within itself.

4.3 Encountering the Self through Dependence

Dependence upon others can also possess an epistemic function.

A subject may become aware of its own relational constitution when a required relation becomes visible, interrupted, or unavailable.

Ordinary access to food may conceal the production network on which eating depends.

A disruption of supply reveals that network.

Ordinary access to medical care may conceal institutional and technical dependencies.

Illness makes them more visible.

Ordinary participation in a monetary system may conceal dependence upon collective recognition.

A financial crisis can expose that dependence.

The self is therefore encountered partly through the boundaries of its self-sufficiency.

This yields a relational proposition:

> The encounter with what the self cannot generate alone can become an encounter with the relational conditions of the self itself.

The claim has a limited resonance with philosophical traditions of recognition and alterity, while the present analysis emphasizes material and productive dependence.

The relevant other is not restricted to another consciousness immediately present before the subject.

It can include anonymous workers, distant producers, previous generations, institutional actors, and persons whose future actions remain necessary for the continuation of present relations.

4.4 The Distributed Other of Social Production

Political economy makes the distributed character of otherness especially visible.

The material conditions of an individual's life are generated through the activities of many people who may never encounter one another directly.

A loaf of bread can depend upon agricultural labor, machinery, fuel, transportation, warehousing, retail labor, financial infrastructure, law, information systems, and accumulated technical knowledge.

The relevant other is therefore distributed:

$$\mathcal{O}_t = \{O_1, O_2, \ldots, O_n, I_1, I_2, \ldots\},$$

where the set includes persons and institutional structures participating in the relevant production network.

The notation should not be interpreted as a complete enumeration. The number and identity of contributors can remain partly unknown.

What matters is that ordinary consumption can depend upon a relational field whose complexity far exceeds the bilateral encounter through which the final commodity is obtained.

This provides a political-economic form of relational non-self-sufficiency.

> The practical independence of the individual is frequently sustained by relations whose distributed character makes that dependence difficult to perceive.

4.5 The Labor of Others as a Condition of the Self

The labor of others does more than produce external commodities.

It participates in producing the conditions under which other persons can act, learn, travel, eat, communicate, and reproduce their lives.

The relation can be represented as

$$L_{j,t} \rightsquigarrow C_{i,t+1},$$

where $L_{j,t}$ denotes labor performed by another participant j and $C_{i,t+1}$ a practical capacity later available to subject i.

The capacity may concern access to food, infrastructure, information, transportation, care, or another condition of action.

This suggests a broader understanding of production.

Production creates commodities and services, but it also produces *conditions of possible action for others*.

The subject who depends upon those conditions is therefore linked to the labor of others before any explicit interpersonal recognition takes place.

This relation becomes important for alienation because social mediation can make the dependence highly effective while leaving its human and relational provenance largely invisible.

4.6 Mediation of Dependence

Complex societies cannot require every participant to reconstruct the full network of social dependence before acting.

Mediating forms compress distributed relations into manageable interfaces.

Currency provides a clear example.

A buyer does not need to know every worker who participated in producing a commodity.

The relation can be compressed into

$$C_t^{\text{currency}} \longleftrightarrow Q_t,$$

where Q_t denotes the commodity or service exchanged.

The apparent simplicity of this relation is practically powerful.

It permits interaction among persons who do not share personal histories, languages, communities, or direct reciprocal obligations.

Currency therefore expands the spatial and social scale over which coordination can occur.

Yet the same compression has an epistemic consequence.

The distributed relations supporting the exchange recede from view.

The buyer sees a price.

The producer may see revenue.

The relation between their activities is mediated through a form whose operation does not require either party to reconstruct the full field of production.

This is one source of relational opacity.

4.7 Necessary Compression and Relational Opacity

Relational opacity should not be treated as intrinsically pathological.

A finite subject cannot represent every causal and social relation relevant to every action.

Some compression is therefore necessary for practical coordination.

Language compresses histories of meaning.

Legal categories compress complex facts into institutionally actionable forms.

Prices compress heterogeneous information relevant to exchange.

Maps suppress detail to make spatial orientation possible.

The problem is consequently not opacity in itself.

The relevant distinction is between opacity that enables manageable coordination and opacity that blocks understanding, participation, accountability, or revision of the relations producing consequential forms.

This distinction can be stated as:

$$\text{functional compression} \ ; \ \text{alienating opacity}.$$

Functional compression reduces complexity while preserving sufficient access to the conditions necessary for responsible use and revision.

Alienating opacity emerges when the compression conceals relations whose distribution of power and consequences must remain accessible if participants are to understand or modify the form governing them.

> Complex social mediation requires selective opacity; alienation concerns the point at which opacity begins to obstruct meaningful access to the relations that generate and distribute causal power.

This prevents the analysis from treating complete transparency as either possible or desirable.

4.8 Currency as an Interface to the Labor of Others

Currency can now be interpreted as an interface between distributed labor and individual need.

Suppose subject i requires a commodity produced through a distributed network of labor.

Rather than establishing a direct reciprocal relation with every producer, the subject enters the network through currency:

$$N_{i,t} \rightsquigarrow C_t^{\text{currency}} \rightsquigarrow Q_{i,t+1}.$$

Behind the exchange lies a broader relation:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^{\text{production}} \rightsquigarrow C_t^{\text{currency}} \overset{\text{med}}{\rightsquigarrow} \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{\text{exchange}}.$$

Currency therefore does more than represent value.

It functions as a relational interface through which a subject gains access to the labor and production of others.

This gives the form a double character.

It facilitates encounter with the products of others while simultaneously reducing the need to encounter the producers themselves.

The mediation can therefore expand social cooperation and obscure the social relations through which that cooperation becomes possible.

4.9 Credit and Dependence upon Future Others

Credit extends relational dependence across time.

A present credit relation depends upon future actions that have not yet occurred.

Borrowing presupposes future repayment.

Investment presupposes future production or income.

A bond presupposes future institutional capacity.

A mortgage organizes decades of future obligations.

Credit therefore connects present capacity to future others and future versions of presently existing subjects.

The relational structure can be represented as

$$C_t^{\text{credit}} \rightsquigarrow A_{i,t+1} \rightsquigarrow O_{j,t+2},$$

where a present credit relation changes current action on the expectation that future obligations will be recognized or fulfilled.

This temporal extension makes the social field more than a network of currently existing interpersonal relations.

Past labor and future commitments participate in present action.

> Credit makes social dependence temporally distributed: the present becomes actionable through relations to anticipated future activity.

The resulting relational form can become causally powerful even though the future upon which it depends remains uncertain.

4.10 Past Labor as Present Condition

Social dependence also extends backward in time.

Current productive activity relies upon infrastructures, concepts, institutions, technologies, languages, and accumulated knowledge produced by earlier generations.

The social subject therefore enters a world already structured by inherited labor.

A present capacity may take the form

$$L_{t-k}^{\text{past}} \rightsquigarrow C_t^{\text{present}}.$$

Roads, electrical systems, scientific knowledge, software, legal institutions, agricultural techniques, and linguistic practices all carry historical labor into present activity.

This temporal structure complicates the image of exchange among isolated contemporaneous individuals.

The field of social production includes relations with persons whose labor continues to condition the present even after direct reciprocal interaction is impossible.

The subject therefore emerges within an intergenerational relational field.

4.11 The Social Subject as Relational Stabilization

The preceding dependencies suggest that the social subject itself can be analyzed as a relationally stabilized form.

This does not deny embodied experience or reduce the person to an economic position.

It concerns the socially actionable form through which a person becomes recognizable across time and institutions.

A provisional architecture is

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^{\text{social}} \rightsquigarrow S_{i,t} \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{\text{social}}.$$

The first movement includes bodily continuity, memory, interpersonal recognition, language, records, legal identity, social roles, and historical participation.

The second includes action, labor, promise, care, responsibility, communication, ownership, debt, and institutional participation.

The subject is therefore both relation-generated and relation-generating.

This double position parallels the general architecture of relational reality without reducing the person to the same ontological category as currency or credit.

4.12 The Subject as a Second-Order Stabilization

The social subject may be described more precisely as a second-order stabilization of distributed relations.

Many relations contribute to the practical continuity of a person:

$$\left\{R^{\text{body}}, R^{\text{memory}}, R^{\text{legal}}, R^{\text{social}}, R^{\text{economic}}, R^{\text{linguistic}}, \dots\right\}.$$

These relations do not remain separately represented in every practical encounter.

They become compressed into a socially actionable identifier:

$$\{R_1, R_2, \dots, R_n\} \rightsquigarrow S.$$

The form S then becomes capable of carrying promises, responsibilities, rights, debts, and histories across situations.

This resembles the structure of other social mediators in one limited sense: distributed relations become stabilized into a form that can subsequently operate as a node within later relations.

The comparison concerns relational architecture.

It does not collapse the ethical status of a person into that of an institutional or monetary object.

4.13 Social Roles and the Political-Economic Subject

Political economy further stabilizes persons through roles.

A person may become institutionally legible as

$$\text{worker}, \quad \text{owner}, \quad \text{debtor}, \quad \text{creditor}, \quad \text{consumer}, \quad \text{tenant}.$$

These categories are relational.

A debtor exists in relation to a creditor.

A worker position exists in relation to a structure of production and labor.

Ownership exists through legal and institutional relations.

The categories can therefore be represented as

$$P_{i,t}^{(k)} = \mathcal{E}_k \left(S_{i,t}, \mathfrak{R}_t^{PE} \right).$$

Once stabilized, these positions affect the subject's future possibilities:

$$P_{i,t}^{(k)} \rightsquigarrow A_{i,t+1}.$$

The political-economic subject is consequently shaped by categories generated through social relations and then acts through those categories.

This produces another recursive structure of relational reality.

4.14 The Risk of Reifying the Social Subject

The relational conception of subjecthood can itself become reified.

A category such as "worker," "debtor," or "consumer" may begin as an analytical or institutional relation.

It can subsequently be treated as though it expressed an intrinsic property of the person.

The movement is familiar:

$$\text{Position}_{\mathfrak{R}}(S) \longmapsto \text{Property}(S).$$

The worker becomes imagined as intrinsically a worker.

The debtor becomes reduced to debt status.

The unemployed person becomes treated as possessing an individual defect detached from labor-market relations.

A socially generated position thereby becomes attached to the person as an apparently self-subsisting identity.

This is a form of subject reification.

The Buddhist critique of intrinsic selfhood becomes relevant here because it provides a conceptual resource for refusing the conversion of historically generated positions into fixed personal essence.

4.15 No Privileged Substantial Subject

The framework therefore does not begin from a substantial human subject who stands outside all social relations and subsequently encounters socially constructed objects.

Both sides of the relation require analysis.

The subject is relationally stabilized:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow S_t.$$

The mediator is relationally stabilized:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow X_t.$$

They subsequently interact:

$$S_t \rightleftarrows X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}.$$

This structure complicates a simple picture of alienation in which an ontologically complete subject produces an external object and then loses control over it.

The subject itself is historically becoming.

Alienation therefore occurs within relations among already relationally constituted subjects and forms.

4.16 No Substantial Social Subject

The critique of substantial individuality should not be answered by creating a substantial collective subject.

Terms such as "society," "the market," "capital," or "the social" can themselves become reified.

The present framework therefore uses

$$\mathfrak{R}^{\text{social}}$$

to denote a distributed and historically evolving relational field.

The field contains heterogeneous persons, institutions, artifacts, infrastructures, symbolic systems, legal forms, material resources, and temporal dependencies.

It has no requirement for a single center of consciousness or intention.

Its aggregate effects may nevertheless exceed the control of individual participants.

This gives rise to emergent social constraint without requiring a metaphysical social super-subject.

> Distributed social causation can exceed individual control without being attributed to a self-subsisting collective Subject.

This distinction will become important when the next sections analyze the relative causal autonomy of alienated forms.

4.17 Dependence and Recognition

Dependence and recognition should also remain analytically distinct.

A subject can materially depend upon another person's labor without recognizing that dependence.

A worker can contribute to the conditions of another person's life without being individually known by that person.

Recognition may therefore lag behind dependence.

This creates an important political-economic asymmetry:

$$\text{Dependence}(i, j) > 0$$

can coexist with weak or absent

$$\text{Recognition}(i, j).$$

The notation is qualitative.

The important point is that social reproduction can connect subjects whose mutual dependence is much stronger than their mutual awareness.

Alienation can deepen when the system preserves dependence while erasing recognition of the persons and relations through which the dependence is sustained.

This produces a problem of relational invisibility.

The commodity arrives.

The labor relation disappears from immediate view.

The service functions.

The persons who made its functioning possible remain absent from the encounter.

4.18 Recognition of Dependence and the Limits of Moralization

Making dependence visible is important, but recognition alone does not transform the structure of production.

A consumer may learn that a commodity depends upon exploitative labor conditions while remaining embedded in an economic system that supplies few practical alternatives.

A worker may understand the structure of wage dependence while remaining materially dependent upon wages.

A debtor may understand the relational nature of credit while remaining bound by enforceable obligations.

The present analysis therefore avoids reducing alienation to an ethical failure of interpersonal recognition.

The problem concerns social and material conditions that organize dependence.

Recognition can alter the epistemic relation to those conditions.

Political-economic transformation concerns the conditions themselves.

4.19 Dependence, Vulnerability, and Power

Dependence also creates possible asymmetry.

If subject i depends strongly upon a relation controlled disproportionately by subject or institution j, the dependence can become a source of power.

A simplified structure is

$$D(i \to j) \rightsquigarrow A_{ij},$$

where D denotes dependence and A_{ij} an asymmetry in practical capacity.

Dependence itself does not imply domination.

Many dependencies are reciprocal, enabling, caring, or collectively beneficial.

The political question concerns how dependencies are organized, whether alternatives exist, how risks are distributed, and who can modify the rules through which the dependence operates.

This distinction is important because a relational ontology should not treat the elimination of dependence as the ideal of freedom.

Human life is relationally dependent.

The relevant problem is the organization of dependence.

4.20 Alienation as a Pathology of Dependence

The preceding analysis suggests that alienation can be interpreted partly as a pathology in the organization and mediation of dependence.

The social subject depends upon others.

Complex society mediates this dependence through stabilized forms.

These forms permit large-scale coordination.

They can also obscure the relations they mediate.

When dependence upon the mediator increases while the relational provenance, distribution of consequences, and conditions of revision become inaccessible, the mediator can acquire relative causal autonomy over participants.

The trajectory is:

distributed dependence → relational mediation → stabilization → opacity → relative causal autonomy.

Alienation therefore does not originate from dependence as such.

It concerns the transformation of dependence into relations whose operative conditions confront participants as increasingly external and difficult to revise.

> The problem of alienation is not that subjects need others; it is that the forms mediating this dependence can obscure, rigidify, and reorganize the relations through which subjects sustain one another.

4.21 The Other and the Manifestation of the Self

The section can now return to its initial philosophical claim.

The subject encounters others because it is already situated within relations of dependence.

Through those encounters, some of the conditions of the subject's own existence become visible.

The other therefore participates in the manifestation of the self:

$$\mathcal{O}_t \rightsquigarrow \mathcal{D}_t \rightsquigarrow S_t^{\mathrm{rel}}.$$

The first term denotes relations to others.

The second denotes the dependencies made visible through those relations.

The third denotes a relational understanding of the self that emerges from recognition of those dependencies.

This structure has a limited analogy with the role of transcendent otherness in religious configurations. In both cases, relation to what exceeds the apparently self-sufficient individual can participate in disclosing the conditions through which that individual understands itself.

The analogy stops at the structural level.

The distributed labor of others, a religiously transcendent Other, and the relational field of dependent arising possess different ontological, historical, and practical meanings.

Their comparison concerns the capacity of alterity to expose the limits of self-sufficiency.

4.22 Relational Existence without Substantial Totality

The account developed here therefore occupies a position between isolated individualism and substantial collectivism.

The individual is relationally constituted.

The social field is distributed rather than a single substantial Subject.

Mediating forms organize dependence without containing the relations they mediate as intrinsic properties.

The resulting architecture is:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^{\text{social}} \rightsquigarrow S_{i,t}, X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{\text{social}}.$$

Both subjects and mediators emerge within the relational field and subsequently participate in its evolution.

This architecture permits analysis of individual agency without imagining self-sufficient individuals, and analysis of structural power without reifying "society" into an autonomous metaphysical agent.

4.23 Transition to Monetary and Credit Mediation

The relational constitution of the subject clarifies why currency and credit matter beyond their technical financial functions.

They mediate access to the labor, resources, and future commitments of others.

They allow distributed dependence to operate across large spatial and temporal distances.

They compress complex social relations into actionable forms.

Their convenience can expand generative possibilities.

Their opacity can conceal the relations through which their efficacy arises.

Their stabilization can produce relative causal autonomy over participants.

Currency and credit therefore provide unusually clear cases in which the subject's dependence upon others becomes mediated by empty yet causally effective relational forms.

The next section examines these monetary and credit forms in detail and asks how their mediating capacity can shift from practical coordination toward reification and alienated social power.

5 Monetary Forms, Currency, and Credit as Relational Mediators

This section examines monetary forms, currency, and credit as relationally stabilized mediators. The purpose is to clarify how a form generated within social relations can acquire persistent causal efficacy without requiring an intrinsic monetary or financial substance.

The analysis distinguishes three levels. The *money-form* refers to the political-economic form through which relations of value and exchange become socially organized. *Currency* refers more specifically to recognized media through which monetary relations become practically operable. *Credit* refers to a relational configuration of claims, obligations, recognition, and expectations whose effects can extend across time.

These levels overlap in practice but should not be treated as interchangeable.

Their common relational architecture is

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^{PE} \rightsquigarrow X_t \overset{\text{med}}{\rightsquigarrow} \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{PE}.$$

The form X_t emerges within political-economic relations and subsequently participates in reorganizing those relations. Its causal efficacy therefore belongs to a recursive process of social stabilization and reproduction.

Table 2: Analytical roles of money-form, currency, and credit

Form	**Primary analytical role**	**Relational basis**	**Principal significance here**
Money-form	Organization of value and exchange relations	Commodity production, exchange, social validation, and circulation	Objective social form
Currency	Practical interface for monetary operation	Recognition, payment conventions, institutions, law, accounting, and acceptance	Carrier–efficacy distinction
Credit	Present organization of claims upon possible futures	Obligation, expectation, institutional recognition, enforcement, and future capacity	Temporal causal efficacy

5.1 Money-Form, Currency, and Credit

The distinction among money-form, currency, and credit prevents several conceptual ambiguities.

The money-form concerns the organization of social relations through monetary expression. In Marx's critique of political economy, money develops within the analysis of commodity exchange and the value-form and subsequently mediates increasingly complex relations of circulation and capital [6].

Currency identifies historically specific means through which monetary relations become actionable. A note, coin, deposit balance, or another recognized medium can permit payment and settlement under appropriate institutional conditions.

Credit emphasizes a different relation. It organizes present action through claims and obligations concerning future action. Its causal efficacy therefore depends especially clearly upon institutional recognition, expectation, enforcement, trust, accounting, and future productive capacity [7].

The conceptual division can be summarized as follows.

The table identifies analytical emphasis rather than mutually exclusive economic categories. Actual monetary systems combine these dimensions in historically specific ways.

5.2 Monetary Form without Monetary Substance

The monetary efficacy of a form cannot be derived from the physical constitution of its carrier alone.

Paper possesses physical properties.

Metal possesses physical properties.

A digital record possesses technical properties.

None of these properties independently explains why the corresponding form can settle an obligation, purchase goods, or alter access to resources.

The monetary relation therefore cannot be located wholly inside the carrier.

A more adequate architecture is

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^{\mathrm{mon}} \rightsquigarrow C_t \overset{\mathrm{med}}{\rightsquigarrow} \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{\mathrm{mon}},$$

where C_t denotes a currency form and $\mathfrak{R}_t^{\text{mon}}$ the relational configuration through which that form is recognized and operationally effective.

The supporting configuration may include institutional authority, legal recognition, payment practices, accounting systems, exchange relations, production, expectations, and infrastructures of transfer.

Currency therefore supplies a particularly clear example of

$$\text{Svabhava}(C) = 0, \qquad \text{Eff}_{\mathfrak{R}}(C) \neq 0.$$

The first statement concerns intrinsic monetary essence. The second concerns relationally generated consequences.

5.3 Carrier and Relational Form

The distinction between carrier and relational form is central.

Let K_t denote a material or technical carrier and C_t the currency form operating through it.

Then

$$K_t \ ; \ C_t$$

should remain analytically distinct.

The same broad monetary relation may persist through changes in carrier:

$$K_t^{(1)} \longrightarrow K_{t+1}^{(2)}$$

while relevant monetary functions remain socially continuous.

Conversely, possession of a materially similar carrier does not guarantee the same monetary efficacy when recognition and institutional conditions differ.

The carrier therefore participates in the monetary relation without containing monetary essence.

> A currency carrier is materially real, while its monetary efficacy emerges through the relational system in which the carrier becomes recognized, accepted, transferred, and acted upon.

This distinction will later support the paper's comparison with religious images. In both cases, a material carrier may mediate relational effects that cannot be reduced to the carrier's physical composition. The comparison concerns mediation and causal organization, not common ontology.

5.4 Currency as a Relational Interface

Currency functions as an interface through which highly distributed social relations become locally actionable.

A participant need not reconstruct the entire productive history of a commodity before acquiring it.

Instead, a complex relation can be operationally compressed into an exchange:

$$C_t \longleftrightarrow Q_t.$$

The simplicity of this local interaction depends upon a much wider relational field.

Production has occurred elsewhere.

Other participants recognize the currency.

Institutions maintain relevant accounting and settlement systems.

Legal and social practices stabilize claims.

Future participants are expected to continue recognizing related forms.

Currency therefore makes distributed social dependence practically usable without making that dependence fully visible.

This produces a dual function:

> Currency expands the capacity for coordination across distributed relations while compressing the relations through which that coordination becomes possible.

The same structure can be both generative and epistemically opaque.

5.5 Relational Compression

The concept of *relational compression* clarifies this dual function.

Let

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^{\text{dist}}$$

denote a distributed relational field involving production, labor, institutions, knowledge, infrastructure, and exchange.

A mediator X_t can condense some actionable consequences of this field:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^{\text{dist}} \rightsquigarrow X_t.$$

Participants can then act through X_t without representing the complete field.

Relational compression is therefore not intrinsically alienating. It is one of the mechanisms through which finite agents operate within complex systems.

A problem arises when compression removes access to relations whose distribution, consequences, or revisability become important for those affected by them.

The relevant distinction introduced in the preceding section can now be specified more clearly:

$$\text{functional compression} \; ; \; \text{alienating opacity}.$$

The boundary between them depends upon what information, participation, and revision are required for the relation under consideration.

5.6 Currency and Distributed Labor

Currency also mediates relations to the labor of others.

A commodity appearing before a buyer condenses a history of production whose participants may remain absent from the transaction.

The visible exchange can take the simple form

$$C_t \longleftrightarrow Q_t,$$

while its generative history includes a much wider process:

$$\mathfrak{R}_{t-k:t}^{\text{labor}} \rightsquigarrow Q_t.$$

Currency permits the buyer to enter this productive network without directly encountering its complete social history.

The mediation therefore simultaneously connects and separates.

It connects the participant materially to the labor of distant others.

It separates the local transaction from immediate knowledge of those relations.

This helps clarify why monetary mediation can support large-scale cooperation while also contributing to the appearance of commodities and monetary forms as self-contained objects.

5.7 Monetary Recognition

Currency efficacy depends upon recognition, but recognition should not be reduced to individual belief.

A person may privately reject the legitimacy or desirability of a currency while remaining materially dependent upon institutions that recognize it.

Monetary recognition is therefore distributed across practices, organizations, accounting systems, legal structures, contractual relations, and expectations.

The relevant relation is closer to

$$\mathrm{Recog}(C_t; \mathfrak{R}_t^{\mathrm{mon}})$$

than to a collection of isolated psychological beliefs.

This explains why intellectual disbelief does not automatically eliminate monetary efficacy.

A participant can know that the form is socially generated and still be required to act through it.

> Recognition of relational construction changes one's understanding of currency without immediately changing the institutional relations through which currency remains effective.

This is one concrete expression of the paper's central principle.

5.8 Credit as a Relational Form

Credit exposes the relational structure with even greater clarity.

A credit relation cannot be identified with any one of its representations.

A contract may record it.

A ledger may register it.

A score may estimate aspects of it.

A bank account may operationalize it.

Yet the credit relation depends upon a wider configuration of claims, obligations, expectations, institutional practices, enforcement mechanisms, and anticipated capacities.

A provisional representation is

$$C_t^{\mathrm{cred}} = \mathcal{E}_C\left(\mathcal{O}_t, \mathcal{Q}_t, \mathcal{I}_t, \mathcal{E}_t^F\right),$$

where the terms refer broadly to obligations, recognized claims, institutional conditions, and expectations concerning future performance.

The notation is schematic. Its purpose is to emphasize relational constitution rather than provide an economic measurement model.

5.9 The Future as a Present Relational Condition

Credit has a distinctive temporal structure.

At time t, the future event upon which a claim depends has not yet become materially actual.

Nevertheless, the relation to that possible future can alter present action.

A firm can invest.

A household can acquire housing.

A government can finance expenditure.

A lender can restrict or extend access.

A worker can become bound to a future repayment schedule.

The generative sequence may take the form

$$C_t^{\text{cred}} \rightsquigarrow A_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow P_{t+2}.$$

The first arrow occurs before the future production represented by P_{t+2} has been realized.

This produces one of the strongest examples in the paper:

> A relation to a possible future can become causally operative before that future becomes materially actual.

Credit therefore shows especially clearly why causal efficacy need not be identified with substantial presence.

5.10 Expectation and Causal Efficacy

The future does not cause the present from an already completed future state.

Present relations concerning the future generate the effect.

Expectations, contractual commitments, institutional recognition, models of risk, collateral, reputation, and legal enforceability can all participate in present decisions.

The causal architecture is therefore

$$\text{present relation to possible future} \rightsquigarrow \text{present action},$$

rather than

$$\text{future event} \rightsquigarrow \text{past event}.$$

This distinction prevents the temporal argument from being confused with a claim of backward causation.

Credit is powerful because representations and commitments concerning possible futures become embedded in current relational structures.

5.11 Credit and the Production of the Future

Credit can do more than respond to an independently given future.

It can participate in generating the future against which it was initially evaluated.

Suppose financing makes an investment possible:

$$C_t^{\text{cred}} \rightsquigarrow I_{t+1}.$$

Investment changes productive capacity:

$$I_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow P_{t+2}.$$

The later production can then alter the credit relation:

$$P_{t+2} \rightsquigarrow C_{t+2}^{\text{cred}}.$$

The resulting cycle is

$$C_t^{\text{cred}} \rightsquigarrow I_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow P_{t+2} \rightsquigarrow C_{t+2}^{\text{cred}}.$$

Credit therefore participates in a reflexive relation between expectations and the future conditions those expectations help generate.

This is a particularly clear case of relational reality.

5.12 Credit and Counterfactual Futures

The same structure also implies that several futures may remain possible.

Credit can enable one path while constraining another.

Approval may generate an investment trajectory.

Refusal may prevent the same trajectory from becoming available.

A change in interest, collateral requirements, institutional judgment, or creditworthiness may redirect the future state space.

Credit therefore participates in the selection of possible futures:

$$\mathcal{F}_t^{\text{possible}} \xrightarrow{C_t^{\text{cred}}} \mathcal{F}_{t+1}^{\text{accessible}}.$$

The notation does not imply deterministic selection. It represents alteration of the practical set of futures available to participants.

The causal significance of credit consequently includes the capacity to shape which future trajectories become materially reachable.

5.13 Creditworthiness as a Second-Order Form

Credit also generates secondary relational forms.

A person or organization can acquire a stabilized classification such as "creditworthy" or "high risk."

Such classifications emerge from histories of relation:

$$\mathfrak{R}_{i,t}^{\text{cred}} \rightsquigarrow W_{i,t},$$

where $W_{i,t}$ denotes a creditworthiness form.

The classification subsequently alters later access:

$$W_{i,t} \rightsquigarrow A_{i,t+1}^{\text{credit}}.$$

A relation-generated judgment therefore becomes a condition of future relations.

The form can then become recursively reinforced:

$$\mathfrak{R}_{i,t} \rightsquigarrow W_{i,t} \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{i,t+1} \rightsquigarrow W_{i,t+1}.$$

This structure is particularly important for alienation because a historically generated classification can increasingly confront the subject as though it expressed an intrinsic property.

5.14 From Relational Position to Personal Property

A credit classification belongs initially to a relational field.

It concerns a history of obligations, income, institutional rules, measurement procedures, economic circumstances, and anticipated future performance.

Yet ordinary and institutional language can compress this complexity into statements such as:

"this person is risky".

The relational position becomes grammatically and institutionally attached to the individual.

The general movement is

$$\text{Position}_{\mathfrak{R}}(S) \longmapsto \text{Property}(S).$$

This is another manifestation of reification.

The classification has real effects.

The error lies in allowing those effects to conceal the relational and historical conditions through which the classification was generated.

5.15 Monetary Power and Relational Attribution

Currency and credit therefore illustrate a recurring movement between relational generation and intrinsic attribution.

The actual architecture is

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}.$$

The reified appearance is closer to

$$X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1},$$

with the first generative relation increasingly absent from practical attention.

The form appears to possess power on its own.

Money appears to generate more money.

Credit appears to belong naturally to the creditworthy.

Prices appear as properties of goods detached from the social processes through which they become established.

The causal effects remain observable while the provenance of causal efficacy becomes obscure.

This is the point at which relational stabilization begins to approach the problem of alienation.

5.16 Monetary Mediation and Relative Causal Autonomy

Currency and credit can acquire relative causal autonomy.

No individual participant needs to control the monetary system for its rules to constrain that participant.

A person may require recognized currency to purchase necessities.

A borrower may remain subject to repayment conditions regardless of private belief concerning the nature of credit.

A firm may modify production in response to financing conditions generated by distributed institutions and markets.

The mediator therefore has effects exceeding the intentions of particular participants:

$$X_t \rightsquigarrow A_{i,t+1}.$$

Yet its efficacy continues to depend upon wider relations:

$$X_t = X_t(\mathfrak{R}_t, \Gamma_t).$$

This is causal autonomy without ontological independence.

The distinction is essential for explaining how an empty relational form can confront individuals as an external social power.

5.17 Monetary Mediation and Practical Constraint

The dependence of individuals upon monetary mediation can create practical constraint.

A person can recognize that currency lacks intrinsic monetary essence while remaining unable to acquire necessities without it.

A debtor can recognize that credit is relationally constituted while remaining legally and materially constrained by an obligation.

Thus:

ontological de-reification

does not immediately produce

practical exit.

This distinction is central to the political argument of the paper.

> To understand a monetary form as dependently generated can dissolve an illusion of intrinsic necessity while leaving intact the relations that make the form practically compulsory.

Political-economic transformation therefore requires attention to the conditions reproducing practical dependence.

5.18 Mediation and Generative Expansion

The analysis should also preserve the generative capacities of monetary mediation.

Currency can allow cooperation across distance and anonymity.

Credit can make projects possible before sufficient resources have been accumulated internally.

Accounting can coordinate complex organizations.

Claims upon future production can mobilize present resources.

A relational form can therefore expand the generative possibilities of a system.

The structure is:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathcal{G}^{+}_{t+1},$$

where $\mathcal{G}^{+}_{t+1}$ denotes newly available generative possibilities.

This is why critique should not begin from the assumption that mediation itself is pathological.

The relevant question concerns the distribution and governance of the generative possibilities created through mediation.

5.19 Mediation and Generative Restriction

The same mediator can restrict generativity.

Lack of currency can close access to otherwise available resources.

Credit conditions can prevent productive activity.

Debt obligations can narrow future choices.

A classification can reduce the range of institutional opportunities available to a subject.

The corresponding structure is

$$X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathcal{G}^{-}_{i,t+1},$$

where the superscript indicates restriction of accessible generative possibilities for participant i.

The same monetary system can therefore expand generativity for some participants and restrict it for others.

The evaluation cannot be reduced to a single system-wide quantity.

Distribution matters.

5.20 Asymmetric Access to Monetary Mediation

Relational mediators are embedded in asymmetries.

Participants differ in their access to currency, credit, collateral, institutional recognition, financial information, bargaining capacity, and the ability to modify contractual conditions.

The mediator therefore does not simply connect equal nodes.

Its operation can reproduce or intensify pre-existing asymmetries:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^{\text{asym}} \rightsquigarrow X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{\text{asym}}.$$

The political-economic question concerns how the mediator redistributes capacity across the relational field.

This begins to connect causal efficacy with power.

A form that is empty of intrinsic essence can still participate in highly unequal distributions of practical possibility.

5.21 Opacity, Expertise, and Access to Revision

Modern monetary and credit relations can also become difficult for ordinary participants to reconstruct.

Complexity may arise from institutional architecture, contractual design, technical infrastructure, accounting practice, risk modelling, or regulatory systems.

Some complexity is functionally necessary.

Yet increasing complexity can produce asymmetry in epistemic access.

Participants may be subject to a form whose generative conditions they cannot meaningfully inspect or modify.

This adds a further dimension to alienating opacity:

$$\text{dependence upon } X \quad + \quad \text{limited knowledge of } X \quad + \quad \text{limited capacity to revise } X.$$

The relevant problem therefore concerns both information and agency.

Transparency alone is insufficient if participants can see the structure but remain unable to affect it.

Participation alone is insufficient if the operative relations remain unintelligible.

A non-alienating mediation would require some appropriate relation among legibility, participation, accountability, and revisability.

5.22 Currency, Credit, and the Diamond Sūtra Paraphrase

The conceptual structure developed above allows the deliberately anachronistic paraphrase introduced earlier to acquire a more precise meaning:

> The Tathāgata speaks of currency; therefore it is no intrinsically self-subsisting Currency;
> hence it is called currency.

The first movement permits practical identification.

The second removes the attribution of intrinsic monetary essence.

The third returns the form to conventional and relational use.

The result is neither monetary substantialism nor monetary nihilism.

Currency can still be used.

Its causal effects can still be studied.

Its institutions can still be governed.

Its distribution can still be criticized.

Its historical form can still be revised.

The deconstruction of intrinsic essence therefore changes the mode of attachment to the form rather than eliminating practical engagement with it.

5.23 Credit as the Stronger Empty-Form Case

Credit makes the same logic even more explicit.

The question *Where is credit itself?* does not yield one self-sufficient object.

A document may express a claim.

A database may record it.

An institution may recognize it.

A court may enforce it.

A borrower and lender may act through it.

A future productive process may eventually validate or disrupt the expectation upon which it depends.

Credit is distributed across these relations.

Yet the absence of a singular credit substance does not diminish its consequences.

Credit can produce investment, foreclosure, expansion, constraint, risk, opportunity, and future obligation.

It therefore offers an especially strong instance of:

> The absence of a self-subsisting entity does not entail the absence of a causally effective relational form.

In this sense, credit exposes a general structure that currency can partially conceal through the visibility of its carrier.

5.24 Monetary Forms and Historical Revisability

Monetary and credit forms also change historically.

Carriers change.

Payment infrastructures change.

Institutional architectures change.

Legal definitions change.

Credit instruments change.

Relations among states, banks, firms, households, and other participants change.

The persistence of monetary mediation therefore does not establish the necessity of any one historical monetary configuration.

The relational architecture permits:

$$X_t \longrightarrow X_{t+1}.$$

The transformation may preserve some functions while changing others.

This historical plasticity reinforces the anti-naturalizing function of the paper's emptiness analysis.

A form can be deeply embedded and difficult to change while remaining dependent upon reproducible historical conditions.

5.25 Monetary Forms as Empty and Effective

Currency and credit now permit the central argument of the paper to be stated in political-economic terms.

They can be:

- dependently generated;
- relationally stabilized;
- materially consequential;
- temporally persistent;
- capable of relative causal autonomy;
- generatively enabling or restrictive;
- historically revisable.

None of these properties requires an intrinsic monetary or credit substance.

The characteristic structure remains

$$\text{Svabhava}(X) = 0, \qquad \mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}.$$

The practical problem therefore concerns neither belief in the form as an independent substance nor dismissal of the form as unreal.

It concerns the relational conditions through which the form acquires, distributes, and reproduces causal power.

5.26 Transition to Alienation

The analysis of currency and credit brings the paper to the threshold of alienation.

A mediator can simplify distributed dependence.

It can enable coordination.

It can expand generative possibilities.

It can acquire stability.

It can also become opaque.

Its consequences can exceed individual control.

Its relationally generated powers can be attributed to the mediator itself.

Dependence upon it can become practically compulsory.

Access to its conditions of revision can become asymmetrically distributed.

These developments do not follow automatically from monetary mediation, but they identify the dimensions along which mediation can become alienating.

The next section therefore develops alienation as a relational pathology involving the interaction of stabilization, opacity, reification, relative causal autonomy, asymmetric dependence, and restricted revisability.

6 Relational Mediation and Alienation

This section develops a generative relational reconstruction of alienation. The preceding analysis established that mediation is a normal and often indispensable feature of complex social life. Currency, credit, law, classification, institutions, and other stabilized forms can compress distributed relations, extend coordination, and generate capacities that would otherwise remain unavailable.

Alienation therefore cannot be identified with mediation itself.

The present framework locates alienation in a particular organization of mediation: a relation-generated form becomes increasingly opaque in its provenance, increasingly intrinsicized in the interpretation of its power, increasingly autonomous relative to individual participants, increasingly embedded in asymmetric dependence, and increasingly difficult for affected participants to revise.

The resulting pathology can emerge while the mediator continues to perform useful or generative functions.

This point is essential. Alienated forms need not be useless forms. Their social power can derive precisely from the fact that participants genuinely depend upon functions they perform.

6.1 Relational Mediation and Its Pathologies

A relational mediator has the general architecture

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow X_t \overset{\text{med}}{\rightsquigarrow} \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}.$$

The form X_t condenses or organizes relations already present in $\mathfrak{R}_t$ and subsequently participates in shaping later relational states.

Nothing in this architecture is intrinsically alienating.

A linguistic convention can facilitate communication.

A currency can facilitate exchange among strangers.

A legal form can preserve obligations across time.

A credit relation can make future productive activity possible.

A theoretical model can reduce complexity sufficiently for inquiry to proceed.

The alienation problem emerges through the organization of the arrows rather than through the mere existence of X_t.

Several questions therefore become decisive:

> Can participants understand the relations through which X_t acquires its power? Can they identify who bears its consequences? Can they participate in revising its operative conditions? Can they meaningfully refuse, contest, or redirect the relation when its effects become harmful?

Alienation concerns deterioration along these dimensions.

6.2 A Multidimensional Alienation Profile

The present paper treats alienation as multidimensional.

For a relation-generated form X_t, let

$$\mathbf{A}_t(X) = (o_t, r_t, a_t, d_t, v_t)\,, \tag{1}$$

where the components provisionally denote:

- o_t: relational opacity;
- r_t: reification or intrinsicization;
- a_t: relative causal autonomy;
- d_t: asymmetric dependence;
- v_t: restriction of practical revisability.

The profile is conceptual rather than universally quantitative.

Different domains can exhibit different configurations.

A mediator may be highly opaque yet remain easy to revise.

Another may be clearly understood while remaining practically unavoidable.

A third may be institutionally revisable in principle while the persons most affected by it possess little actual capacity to participate in revision.

Alienation therefore should not be compressed prematurely into a single scalar measure.

Its structure matters more than an imagined total score.

6.3 Relational Opacity

Relational opacity concerns the visibility of the conditions through which a form is generated and remains effective.

A stabilized form can make complex relations manageable by suppressing detail. This functional compression is often necessary.

Alienating opacity begins when the suppressed relations include conditions that are important for understanding responsibility, power, distribution, dependence, or revision.

The relevant distinction is:

$$\text{functional compression} \ ; \ \text{alienating opacity}.$$

The boundary is contextual.

A traveler using currency need not reconstruct the entire banking system before purchasing food.

A borrower affected by an automated lending decision may nevertheless have a strong practical interest in understanding which classifications, data, institutional rules, and assumptions determined access to credit.

Opacity becomes politically significant when causal power remains operative while the provenance of that power becomes inaccessible.

> Alienating opacity appears when a mediator remains practically consequential while the relations responsible for its consequences become difficult for affected participants to reconstruct.

6.4 Reification and the Attribution of Intrinsic Power

Reification concerns a different dimension.

A relation-generated form repeatedly produces observable consequences. The consequences are real. Their repeated appearance can encourage the attribution of causal power directly to the form.

The relational architecture

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}$$

is then apprehended increasingly through the shortened appearance

$$X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}.$$

The first generative relation recedes from attention.
This produces the familiar movement:

$$\text{Power}(\mathfrak{R}) \longmapsto \text{Property}(X).$$

Currency appears to possess monetary power by itself.
Creditworthiness appears to belong naturally to a person.
A market price appears to be simply a property of an object.
An institutional classification appears to describe an intrinsic feature of the classified subject.
Reification therefore concerns the apparent location of efficacy.

> The error of reification lies in treating relationally generated efficacy as evidence of an intrinsic source of power within the stabilized form.

The reality of the effects survives this critique.

6.5 Relative Causal Autonomy

A relation-generated form can constrain participants beyond the control of any one participant.
This condition was described earlier as relative causal autonomy.
Suppose

$$X_t \rightsquigarrow A_{i,t+1},$$

where $A_{i,t+1}$ denotes the available actions of participant i.
The individual may be unable to alter X_t even though X_t continues to depend upon the activity of many participants collectively.
A monetary system provides an obvious example.
No individual user creates the currency relation alone.
No individual user can ordinarily suspend its consequences alone.
Yet widespread participation continuously reproduces the system through which those consequences arise.
Alienation therefore contains a scale problem.
What is collectively generated can become individually external.
The form is dependent at one relational scale and relatively autonomous at another.

> A socially generated form can remain dependent upon collective reproduction while confronting individual participants as an effectively external power.

This is causal autonomy without ontological independence.

6.6 Asymmetric Dependence

Dependence becomes especially significant when access to the mediator, control over its conditions, and exposure to its consequences are unevenly distributed.
Let participants i and j depend upon a relational form X, but with different capacities to influence its operation.
The relevant asymmetry may concern:

- access to resources mediated through X;
- ability to exit the relation;
- bargaining power within the relation;
- capacity to change its institutional rules;
- access to information concerning its operation;
- capacity to transfer risks or costs to others.

Dependence itself is therefore insufficient to diagnose alienation.

A reciprocal relation of care involves dependence.

A cooperative institution involves dependence.

Language itself creates profound dependence upon others.

The political-economic problem concerns the organization of dependence.

A relational form becomes more strongly alienating when participants who are most dependent upon it possess the least capacity to influence its conditions.

6.7 Restricted Revisability

Restricted revisability concerns practical access to the conditions through which a form is reproduced.

A social form can be historically contingent and institutionally alterable in principle while remaining effectively beyond the reach of particular participants.

This distinction can be represented as

$$\text{Revisable}_{\text{historical}}(X) \ ; \ \text{Revisable}_{i,\text{practical}}(X).$$

The first concerns whether alternative configurations are historically possible.

The second concerns whether participant i possesses meaningful capacity to participate in producing such alternatives.

Alienation becomes especially severe when these diverge.

A participant can understand that an institution is historically constructed, recognize the relations sustaining it, and still possess virtually no capacity to alter its operative rules.

Thus epistemic de-reification does not guarantee practical de-alienation.

> A form can be known to be contingent while remaining practically non-revisable for those whose lives it substantially organizes.

6.8 Practical Exit and Collective Revision

Revisability should also be distinguished from individual exit.

A person may be unable to leave a monetary system while the system remains collectively revisable.

Conversely, some individuals may possess easy exit options while the wider structure remains deeply constraining for others.

Exit and revision therefore represent different capacities:

$$\text{Exit}_i(X) \ ; \ \text{Revise}_{\mathcal{P}}(X),$$

where $\mathcal{P}$ denotes an appropriate collectivity of participants.

The distinction matters because freedom cannot be reduced to individual withdrawal.

A relationally constituted society necessarily contains structures from which complete individual exit is difficult or impossible.

The relevant issue is whether participants possess institutions and procedures through which consequential relations can be contested and reconstructed.

6.9 Alienation and Loss of Relational Provenance

The preceding dimensions converge around the idea of relational provenance.

Relational provenance concerns the history and conditions through which a form acquired its current efficacy.

For a form X_t, one can schematically write

$$\Pi(X_t) = \{\mathfrak{R}_{t-k}, \ldots, \mathfrak{R}_t\},$$

where $\Pi(X_t)$ denotes the relevant generative history of the form.

Alienation increases when this provenance becomes practically inaccessible or socially irrelevant to the interpretation of X_t.

The result is historical compression.

The form appears present without its becoming.

A debt appears as a number.

A property right appears as a title.

A market position appears as individual merit or failure.

A commodity appears independently of the labor and ecological conditions of its production.

A theory appears as a timeless description rather than a historically generated analytical device.

Restoring provenance does not automatically dissolve the form.

It restores information about how the form became possible and which relations continue to sustain it.

6.10 Alienation as a Loss of Generative Visibility

Relational provenance can be generalized into the concept of *generative visibility*.

A form possesses high generative visibility when participants can identify, at an appropriate level of resolution, the principal conditions through which it is generated and reproduced.

Complete visibility is neither possible nor necessary.

The relevant question concerns sufficient visibility for responsible participation and revision.

Alienation can therefore involve a decline in generative visibility:

$$\mathrm{Vis}_{\mathrm{gen}}(X_t) \downarrow$$

while causal dependence upon the form increases.

This produces a characteristic asymmetry:

effects remain visible generation becomes obscure.

Participants experience what the form does while losing access to how its power is produced.

This asymmetry lies near the center of the present account of alienation.

6.11 Alienation and the Compression of Causality

Reification can therefore be understood partly as a compression of causal explanation.

The complete relation may resemble

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow X_t \rightsquigarrow Y_{t+1}.$$

The reified account compresses the sequence into

$$X_t \rightsquigarrow Y_{t+1}.$$

Such compression can be pragmatically useful.

One can say that "credit enabled the investment" without reconstructing every institutional relation through which credit became efficacious.

The problem emerges when the compressed description becomes the assumed ontology of the phenomenon.

A convenient causal shorthand becomes an intrinsic attribution.

This is another reason why upāya becomes relevant later in the paper. Practical shorthand can remain useful when its provisional status remains visible.

6.12 Alienation and the Objectification of Social Power

Marxian political economy provides a particularly important case because social powers can acquire objective forms.

Commodity, monetary, contractual, and institutional forms allow relations to persist beyond immediate interpersonal interaction [6].

This objectification can be practically generative.

A contract remains legible after the participants leave the room.

A currency circulates among strangers.

A legal title persists beyond individual memory.

A credit claim can be transferred institutionally.

Objectification therefore expands the temporal and spatial reach of social relations.

Alienation concerns the conditions under which this objectified social power returns to participants in a form that appears external, unavoidable, and detached from their collective participation in its reproduction.

The same mechanism that allows a relation to persist can therefore contribute to its apparent independence.

6.13 Objectification and Alienation

Objectification itself should therefore remain distinct from alienation.

The production of stable external forms can expand human practical capacity.

Writing objectifies language.

Tools objectify technical capacities.

Institutions objectify norms and procedures.

Currency objectifies aspects of monetary relation.

Externalization can preserve and circulate capacities beyond the individual.

Alienation arises under additional relational conditions.

A useful distinction is:

$$\text{Objectification}(X) \ ; \ \text{Alienation}(X).$$

The distinction protects the argument from a romantic ideal in which non-alienated life would require all relations to remain immediate, interpersonal, and unmediated.

Complex social life depends upon externalized and stabilized forms.

The critical problem concerns how those forms are governed.

6.14 Alienation without Illusion

The present account also allows alienation to exist without explicit false belief.

A participant may fully understand that a credit relation is institutionally constructed.

A worker may understand the social organization of wage labor.

A consumer may understand the distributed labor behind commodities.

A citizen may understand the historical origins of a legal institution.

Alienation may nevertheless persist if practical dependence, asymmetry, causal autonomy, and restricted revisability remain intact.

Thus,

de-reification in thought

does not necessarily produce

de-alienation in practice.

This distinction is fundamental.

> Alienation can survive its own intellectual diagnosis because the relations that generate its causal power can survive unchanged.

Critique of consciousness therefore forms only one dimension of de-alienation.

6.15 Alienation without Complete Reification

The reverse possibility also exists.

Participants may understand the relational origin of a form and resist treating it as intrinsically substantial while still experiencing severe alienation.

For example, a debtor may recognize that creditworthiness is institutionally generated while possessing little capacity to alter the classification or its consequences.

A worker may understand the historical contingency of labor institutions while remaining dependent upon them for survival.

The alienation profile can therefore contain high values of dependence, causal autonomy, and restricted revisability even where explicit intrinsicization is comparatively weak.

This is one reason to treat alienation as multidimensional.

Reification is a significant mechanism, but alienation cannot be reduced to reification alone.

6.16 Recursive Alienation

The dimensions of alienation can reinforce one another.

Opacity can make revision difficult.

Restricted revisability can increase dependence.

Dependence can strengthen the mediator's relative causal autonomy.

Relative causal autonomy can encourage intrinsicization of its power.

Reification can further reduce inquiry into the mediator's relational provenance.

The result is a recursive cycle:

$$\text{opacity} \rightsquigarrow \text{restricted revision} \rightsquigarrow \text{dependence} \rightsquigarrow \text{causal autonomy} \rightsquigarrow \text{reification} \rightsquigarrow \text{opacity}.$$

The sequence is schematic rather than universal.

Different cases may follow different paths.

Its importance lies in showing that alienation can become self-reinforcing without requiring a central agent who intentionally designs the entire process.

6.17 Alienation as an Attractor

In sufficiently stable conditions, recursive alienation can produce an attractor-like relational configuration.

Participants adapt to the form.

Institutions are reorganized around it.

Expectations presuppose its continuation.

Alternatives become increasingly costly or difficult to imagine.

The form consequently becomes easier to reproduce than to revise.

The term *attractor* is used here analogically unless a domain-specific dynamical model is provided.

Its conceptual role is to identify a condition in which repeated relational adjustment returns the system toward a familiar configuration.

The appearance of necessity can then arise from historical stabilization:

$$\text{high reproductive stability} \longrightarrow \text{experienced inevitability}.$$

Emptiness becomes important precisely here.

Stability does not establish intrinsic necessity.

The attractor has conditions.

6.18 Alienation and Historical Naturalization

Long-lived social forms can lose their visible historical character.

Practices inherited across generations become ordinary.

Institutional rules become background assumptions.

Categories become embedded in language.

Infrastructure makes alternative arrangements increasingly costly.

The resulting form appears natural because its history is no longer experienced as an active process.

Historical naturalization therefore combines persistence with opacity.

A dependently generated form comes to appear as part of the necessary order of things.

The emptiness perspective interrupts this inference:

$$\text{historical persistence} \quad \not\Rightarrow \quad \text{intrinsic necessity}.$$

The Marxian perspective supplies the complementary demand to reconstruct the material and social conditions responsible for that persistence.

6.19 Alienation and the Empty Form

The concept of emptiness now changes the interpretation of alienated social power.

An alienated form does not become powerful because it has acquired a hidden intrinsic substance.

Its power remains dependently generated.

Thus:

$$\text{Svabhava}(X) = 0$$

continues to hold while

$$X_t \rightsquigarrow A_{i,t+1}$$

may become increasingly consequential.

Alienation therefore does not transform an empty form into a substantial one.

It transforms the relational configuration through which an empty form is experienced and reproduced.

> Alienation is compatible with emptiness because the autonomy of the alienated form is causal and relational, not intrinsic and self-subsisting.

This proposition is one of the central results of the paper.

6.20 Why Emptiness Alone Does Not End Alienation

The preceding argument clarifies why recognition of emptiness is insufficient for practical de-alienation.

Suppose a participant recognizes:

$$\text{Svabhava}(X) = 0.$$

The recognition can weaken reification.

Yet opacity may remain.

Dependence may remain.

Institutional enforcement may remain.

Asymmetry may remain.

Practical revisability may remain restricted.

The causal architecture

$$X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}$$

therefore continues to operate.

This leads directly back to the central proposition of the paper:

> Recognition that X lacks intrinsic self-subsistence does not abolish the relational causal efficacy of X.

Applied to alienation, the practical consequence is clear.

Understanding the form differently is one part of transformation.

Changing its causal effects requires engagement with the relations through which those effects are reproduced.

6.21 De-Alienation and Relational Reconstruction

The present analysis suggests a preliminary conception of de-alienation.

If alienation involves opacity, reification, relative causal autonomy, asymmetric dependence, and restricted revisability, then de-alienation concerns relational reconstruction along corresponding dimensions.

Possible directions include:

greater generative visibility,

de-reification,

more distributed practical agency,

reduction of coercive asymmetry,

and

effective revisability.

These conditions do not imply complete transparency, elimination of mediation, or disappearance of dependence.

The objective is a different organization of relational mediation.

> De-alienation concerns recovery of meaningful participation in the conditions through which consequential social forms are generated, reproduced, and revised.

This formulation will be developed more fully in the later political and practical sections.

6.22 De-Alienation without Destruction of the Mediator

The distinction between mediation and alienation has an important practical consequence.

Removing alienation does not always require eliminating the mediator.

A currency system could, in principle, become more legible, accountable, and revisable without ceasing to mediate exchange.

A credit institution could preserve its capacity to mobilize future possibilities while changing the distribution of risk and access.

A legal category could remain operational while its scope and revision procedures become more participatory.

A theory could remain useful while its concepts are treated as provisional.

The relevant transformation is therefore often

$$X_t \longrightarrow X_{t+1}$$

rather than

$$X_t \longrightarrow \varnothing.$$

This is where the concept of *upāya* becomes especially productive.

A form can continue to be used after attachment to its intrinsic status has been released.

6.23 Alienation and Generativity

Alienation can also be evaluated through its effects upon generativity.

A mediator can open possibilities:

$$X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathcal{G}^{+}_{i,t+1}.$$

It can also close possibilities:

$$X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathcal{G}^{-}_{j,t+1}.$$

The relevant issue is therefore not maximal generativity in the abstract.

A system can expand the generative capacity of one participant by extracting or constraining the generativity of another.

The political problem concerns the organization, circulation, sustainability, and revisability of generative capacities across the relational system.

Alienation becomes especially serious when participants continuously reproduce a mediator whose operation systematically narrows their capacity to influence their own future relational conditions.

6.24 Alienation and Collective Self-Relation

At a broader level, alienation can be understood as a disturbance in the relation between a social system and the forms generated through its own activity.

The system generates X_t.

Participants adapt to X_t.

Their adaptation reproduces X_t.

The form increasingly constrains the possibilities through which it could be changed.

The resulting recursion is:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow X_{t+1}.$$

Alienation arises when the recursive process becomes difficult for participants to recognize and collectively redirect.

The problem is therefore partly one of social self-relation.

A society acts through forms whose conditions of generation become opaque to the persons whose activity continuously sustains them.

6.25 A Generative Relational Definition of Alienation

The preceding dimensions can now be consolidated into a provisional definition.

Definition 6.1 (Generative relational alienation)**.** Alienation is a relational condition in which a form generated and reproduced through social relations acquires persistent causal autonomy relative to affected participants while its generative provenance becomes increasingly opaque, its relationally produced powers become intrinsicized, dependence upon its operation becomes asymmetrically organized, and meaningful access to the conditions of its revision becomes restricted.

The definition is intentionally multidimensional.

Not every case requires every dimension to appear with the same intensity.

Nor does the definition replace Marx's historically specific analyses of estranged labor, commodity fetishism, or capitalist social form.

Its purpose is to provide a GR architecture through which different manifestations of alienation can be compared without reducing them to one psychological state or one object relation.

6.26 Alienation and the Central Principle

The section can now return to the paper's central proposition.

An alienated form may be entirely dependent upon relations:

$$\text{Svabhava}(X) = 0.$$

Its consequences may nevertheless be profound:

$$X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}.$$

Its lack of intrinsic essence therefore supplies no reason to ignore it.

Its causal power supplies no reason to substantialize it.

Its relational generation supplies a reason to investigate the conditions through which it persists.

Its historical reproduction supplies the opening through which transformation can be conceived.

The relation among the three principal concepts can therefore be stated as:

> Emptiness reveals that the alienated form has no self-subsisting necessity. Causal efficacy explains why the form cannot simply be ignored. Generativity directs attention toward the relations through which its power is reproduced and can potentially be reconstructed.

The next section develops the practical counterpart of this argument through the concept of *upāya*: the deliberate use of empty yet causally effective forms without converting their practical efficacy into intrinsic ontological authority.

7 Provisional Mediation, *Upāya*, and Non-Attached Practice

This section develops the practical counterpart of the preceding analysis. If relation-generated forms can be empty of intrinsic substantiality while remaining causally effective, practical life requires a mode of engagement that can use such forms without converting their usefulness into evidence of intrinsic essence.

The Buddhist concept of *upāya*, commonly discussed as skillful or expedient means, provides a useful philosophical resource for this problem [11, 12]. The present paper employs the concept within a deliberately restricted comparative framework. It does not identify monetary, legal, political, or theoretical instruments with Buddhist *upāya* in their doctrinal and soteriological sense. It draws instead upon a more general practical insight: a means can be valuable because of what it enables under particular conditions without acquiring final ontological status from that value.

This produces a practical structure corresponding to the ontological distinction developed earlier:

$$\text{Svabhava}(X) = 0, \qquad \text{Eff}_{\mathfrak{R}}(X) \neq 0, \qquad X \text{ remains practically usable.}$$

The first term constrains attachment to intrinsic essence. The second preserves attention to causal consequence. The third introduces deliberate and provisional practice.

7.1 From Emptiness to Practical Re-Entry

The critique of intrinsic substantiality need not terminate in withdrawal from the world of forms.

A concept can be de-reified and then used.

A currency can be understood as relationally generated and then employed in exchange.

A legal category can be recognized as historically constituted and still serve a practical institutional function.

A theory can be treated as provisional and still organize inquiry.

The relevant movement therefore contains three stages:

$$X \longrightarrow \text{de-reification}(X) \longrightarrow X^{\text{provisional}}.$$

The third stage differs epistemically from the first.

At the first stage, a form may be encountered as though its apparent identity and efficacy belonged intrinsically to it.

At the second, its dependent constitution becomes visible.

At the third, the form re-enters practice under a revised understanding of its status.

> Practical re-entry allows a form to remain usable after its intrinsic self-subsistence has been denied.

This is the practical significance of emptiness for the present argument.

7.2 Naming, Deconstruction, and Renaming

The linguistic movement discussed earlier through the *Diamond Sūtra* provides an especially vivid model for this practical re-entry.

A form is named.

Its apparently intrinsic identity is interrupted.

The name returns as a conventional designation.

The deliberately anachronistic monetary example can therefore be read as:

> The Tathāgata speaks of currency; therefore it is no intrinsically self-subsisting Currency; hence it is called currency.

The first "currency" allows practical recognition.

The second movement denies an independently existing monetary essence.

The final "currency" returns the category to relational and conventional practice.

The practical result is neither the preservation of naïve substantialism nor the destruction of the category.

The category survives in a different mode.

One may still ask how currency circulates, who controls its conditions, how it affects production, and whether its institutions should be changed.

The deconstruction of intrinsic essence therefore increases rather than eliminates the importance of relational analysis.

7.3 Provisional Use

The paper calls this mode of engagement *provisional use*.

Definition 7.1 (Provisional use)**.** Provisional use is the deliberate employment of a relation-generated form because of its context-dependent causal or practical efficacy while maintaining the visibility of its dependent constitution, limited domain, and revisability.

Three elements are essential.

First, the form must perform some practical or epistemic function.

Second, its usefulness is indexed to conditions.

Third, the form remains available for modification, replacement, or abandonment when those conditions change.

Provisionality therefore concerns neither hesitation nor weak commitment.

A surgeon can rely strongly upon a medical classification during treatment while recognizing that the classification is historically revisable.

A legal system can apply a category consistently while maintaining procedures through which the category can be challenged.

A researcher can employ a formal model rigorously while recognizing that its domain is restricted.

Practical seriousness and ontological provisionality can coexist.

7.4 Non-Attached Mediation

The same structure can be described as *non-attached mediation*.

Attachment, in the limited analytical sense relevant here, occurs when practical dependence upon a mediator becomes coupled with an attribution of intrinsic necessity or identity.

Non-attached mediation preserves a distinction between:

$$\text{this form is useful here}$$

and

$$\text{this form must exist in this form.}$$

Currency may be useful within a particular economic architecture.

That does not establish that every possible system of social coordination must employ the same currency arrangement.

Credit may enable productive projects.

That does not establish that every historically existing credit relation is necessary or desirable.

A legal classification may solve an institutional problem.

That does not establish that the category expresses an eternal property of persons.

The practical attitude can therefore be summarized as:

> Use the mediator according to the causal relations through which it is effective while withholding the inference that its present form is self-grounding or historically final.

7.5 *Upāya* and Conditional Adequacy

The concept of *upāya* is especially useful because it directs attention toward the adequacy of means under particular conditions rather than toward the intrinsic authority of one fixed form [11].

For the present paper, this motivates the idea of *conditional adequacy*.

A means X can be adequate relative to:

$$(\text{problem}, \text{context}, \text{participants}, \text{time}, \text{consequences})\,.$$

Its adequacy can change when these conditions change.

This matters for social mediation.

A monetary institution that once solved a coordination problem can later generate forms of exclusion.

A classification created for one administrative purpose can acquire consequences far beyond that purpose.

A theoretical model developed for one scale can become misleading when extended to another.

A provisional means therefore requires continuing attention to its domain of adequacy.

7.6 Means and Ends

The practical status of a mediator also depends upon the ends it serves.

The existence of causal efficacy alone does not establish that a form should be used.

A coercive institution can be highly effective.

An exploitative credit arrangement can coordinate repayment with great efficiency.

A discriminatory classification can produce stable institutional outcomes.

Causal efficacy therefore answers:

$$\text{Does } X \text{ produce consequences?}$$

It does not answer:

$$\text{Are those consequences desirable?}$$

The concept of provisional use must consequently remain separate from ethical approval.

> A causally effective means requires normative evaluation in addition to ontological de-reification.

The present paper does not attempt to derive a complete normative theory from emptiness. Its narrower claim is that absence of intrinsic essence leaves the mediator open to evaluation and reconstruction rather than granting it automatic legitimacy.

7.7 The Practical Difference between Tool and Authority

A provisional mediator functions as a tool.

An alienated mediator increasingly functions as an authority over the relations that generated it.

The distinction is structural.

In a provisional configuration,

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow X_t \rightsquigarrow A_{t+1},$$

while the relation between X_t and its conditions remains visible and revisable.

In an alienated configuration, the same mediator increasingly acquires the appearance:

$$X_t \rightsquigarrow A_{t+1},$$

while the first generative relation becomes opaque.

The transition can therefore be described as:

$$\text{means} \rightsquigarrow \text{stabilized mediator} \rightsquigarrow \text{apparently self-authorizing form.}$$

A form initially adopted to serve a practical purpose may eventually define the purposes against which action itself is evaluated.

This reversal is especially visible in metrics, rankings, financial indicators, bureaucratic categories, and theoretical models.

7.8 When the Means Becomes the Goal

A further pathology arises when a mediator created to support an activity becomes the activity's dominant objective.

Money can mediate production and exchange.

Accumulation can subsequently reorganize production around monetary expansion.

A metric can measure institutional performance.

The institution can subsequently reorganize activity around optimization of the metric.

A publication indicator can assist evaluation.

Research can subsequently become organized around production of the indicator.

The relation takes the form:

$$A_t \rightsquigarrow X_t \rightsquigarrow A_{t+1},$$

followed by a shift in which

$$A_{t+1}$$

is increasingly organized for the reproduction or maximization of X.

This is a particularly important form of alienation because the means acquires generative priority over the activity for which it was initially introduced.

The critique of intrinsic essence provides one way of interrupting this naturalization.

The mediator can be asked again:

> What relation generated this form, and what purpose was the form meant to > serve?

7.9 Currency as Provisional Mediation

Currency provides a straightforward practical example.

A participant may understand that:

$$\text{Svabhava}(C) = 0.$$

The recognition does not require refusal to use currency.

The participant can still purchase food, pay rent, transfer resources, or coordinate activity through the monetary system.

The practical stance changes at another level.

Currency is no longer interpreted as carrying monetary power within itself.

Its operation is traced to the relations that recognize, support, distribute, and enforce its efficacy.

This makes questions of governance possible.

Which institution defines the currency?

Who obtains access?

How are risks distributed?

What forms of dependence does the monetary architecture create?

Which features can be revised?

A non-attached relation to currency therefore increases the visibility of political-economic questions that substantialization tends to hide.

7.10 Credit as Provisional Relation to the Future

Credit provides a more demanding case because it links present action to uncertain futures.

A credit relation can be practically useful while remaining explicitly provisional.

Its projections concern possibilities rather than completed future facts.

Its classifications depend upon models, institutions, evidence, and historically situated assumptions.

Its obligations can generate real consequences even though the future remains open.

A non-reified treatment of credit therefore preserves two truths simultaneously:

> The credit relation is sufficiently real to alter present possibilities, and the future represented through that relation remains contingent.

This distinction is especially important where financial classifications begin to convert probabilistic expectations into fixed identities.

A person assessed as high risk may become institutionally treated as though "riskiness" were an intrinsic personal property.

Provisional use keeps the assessment attached to its conditions, evidence, purpose, and possibility of revision.

7.11 The Religious Image as Relational Mediator

A religious image provides another illuminating comparison.

A statue can possess material properties as wood, stone, metal, pigment, or another substance.

Its religious efficacy within a community can exceed those physical properties.

The image may organize attention, ritual, memory, devotion, giving, spatial practice, and relations among participants.

Its causal participation therefore depends upon a relational configuration:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^{\text{relig}} \rightsquigarrow B_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{\text{relig}},$$

where B_t denotes the image as a relationally situated religious form.

The comparison with currency concerns the architecture of mediation.

A physical carrier becomes a node through which wider relations operate.

The comparison does not imply that sacred images and currency share their meaning, ontology, or value.

Its purpose is narrower:

> A material carrier can mediate causally significant relations whose efficacy cannot be derived from the carrier's material properties alone.

This makes the religious image a useful counterpart to currency in the analysis of empty yet effective forms.

7.12 The Self as a Practical Designation

The same logic can be extended to the self.

Practical life requires continuity of reference.

Promises require attribution.

Responsibility requires some continuity across time.

Care depends upon recognition of persons.

Legal and institutional practices require identifiable participants.

The critique of a self-subsisting subject therefore need not eliminate the practical designation of persons.

The movement is again:

$$S \longrightarrow \text{de-reification}(S) \longrightarrow S^{\text{provisional}}.$$

The resulting subject can remain actionable without being understood as an unchanging intrinsic essence.

This has an important ethical implication.

Non-substantiality does not dissolve responsibility.

A promise can remain consequential because responsibility itself is carried through relational continuity rather than through an immutable metaphysical substance.

7.13 Institutions as Provisional Forms

Institutions also require provisional stabilization.

A university, corporation, court, state agency, or cooperative can persist across changes in personnel.

The institution is therefore not reducible to any one current participant.

Its persistence depends upon rules, records, practices, material infrastructure, legal recognition, and repeated participation.

This makes institutions powerful examples of relational reality.

They are generated forms that become conditions of later action.

Provisional institutional practice requires preserving the distinction between:

institutional continuity

and

institutional intrinsic necessity.

An institution can require stability in order to function while retaining procedures through which its rules and purposes can be reconstructed.

The political problem is therefore not stability itself.

It concerns stability without effective revisability.

7.14 Law and Provisional Normative Form

Law illustrates another version of the same tension.

Legal systems depend upon stable categories and procedures.

A law that changed unpredictably at every encounter would lose important coordinating functions.

Yet stability can become reification when a historically generated legal form is treated as though its existing content were intrinsically just or necessary.

A provisional relation to law therefore permits commitment to current rules while preserving institutional pathways for criticism and revision.

This can be expressed in a simple principle:

> Operational stability and historical revisability can coexist.

The same principle applies to monetary, institutional, and epistemic forms.

Stable use does not require ontological finality.

7.15 Theoretical Concepts as *Upāya*

The argument becomes reflexive when applied to theory.

Concepts such as *alienation*, *relation*, *system*, *causal efficacy*, and *generativity* allow complex phenomena to become analytically tractable.

They compress.

They select.

They foreground some relations and suppress others.

They are therefore mediators within knowledge.

The relation can be represented as

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^K \rightsquigarrow T_t \rightsquigarrow K_{t+1}.$$

A theory is generated within an epistemic field and subsequently reorganizes that field.

Its usefulness can therefore produce the same temptation toward reification that appears in political economy.

A concept works.

Its success becomes repeated.

The concept becomes institutionalized.

Eventually, the analytical category can appear to belong intrinsically to the world.

Treating theory as *upāya* interrupts this movement.

> A theory may be used strongly without being believed finally.

This principle is central to the methodological self-emptiness of GR.

7.16 GR as a Provisional Analytical Means

GR therefore places itself inside the domain of its own critique.

Its concepts arise through a particular history of inquiry.

They stabilize recurring distinctions.

They help generate further questions.

They may become relationally real within scholarly practice by influencing later thought, writing, comparison, or action.

None of these effects establish intrinsic theoretical essence.

Thus:

$$\text{Svabhava}(\text{GR}) = 0.$$

Yet:

$$\text{GR}_t \rightsquigarrow K_{t+1}, A_{t+1}.$$

GR can therefore be both empty and epistemically efficacious.

Its appropriate status is methodological rather than ontologically final.

> GR is a means of access whose value lies in what it allows inquiry to see, generate, compare, and revise.

If another vocabulary performs these functions more adequately, methodological self-emptiness requires openness to that vocabulary.

7.17 The Alienation of Theory

Theories themselves can become alienated forms.

A theory begins within a relational context:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^K \rightsquigarrow T_t.$$

It subsequently structures education, publication, evaluation, research funding, policy, or institutional classification:

$$T_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^K.$$

Over time, its historical and methodological origins may become less visible.

Students learn categories as natural divisions of reality.

Institutions reward conformity to established models.

Measurements are constructed through theoretical assumptions.

Later evidence is then generated under conditions partly shaped by the theory.

A method becomes a governor of the domain it was designed to investigate.

This produces a theoretical analogue of relational alienation.

The theory remains a human-generated epistemic form while acquiring relative causal autonomy within institutions of knowledge.

7.18 Self-Emptiness as an Anti-Alienation Condition for Theory

Methodological self-emptiness provides a safeguard against this trajectory.

The framework must retain visibility of:

- the questions that generated its concepts;
- the domains over which those concepts are useful;
- the assumptions embedded in its categories;
- the cases that resist its vocabulary;
- the procedures through which its concepts can be revised.

A theory therefore requires something analogous to relational provenance.

Its concepts should retain an accessible history of why and under which conditions they were introduced.

The principle can be stated as:

> A theory avoids reifying itself by preserving access to the conditions of its own generation and to the procedures through which its categories can cease to be useful.

This is methodological self-emptiness in practical form.

7.19 Revisability as a Property of Means

A provisional means should contain pathways toward its own modification.

This requirement differentiates practical flexibility from merely declaring a form "socially constructed."

The relevant architecture is:

$$X_t \rightsquigarrow X_{t+1}$$

when the conditions justifying X_t change.

For currency, revision may concern institutional rules or technological carriers.

For credit, revision may concern classification, risk distribution, access, or contractual structure.

For law, revision may concern legislation, interpretation, and procedural challenge.

For theory, revision may concern concepts, assumptions, methods, or scope.

A form that systematically eliminates access to its own revision approaches the pathology described in the preceding section.

7.20 Legibility without Total Transparency

Provisional mediation does not require complete transparency.

The analysis developed earlier already established that complexity compression is often necessary.

The practical requirement is sufficient legibility.

Participants need access to the relations relevant to the consequences, responsibilities, and revision of the mediator.

This may differ across roles.

A consumer need not understand every component of a payment system.

Regulators, operators, and affected communities may require deeper forms of access.

A borrower need not reconstruct every mathematical detail of a lending model, but should have appropriate access to the basis, consequences, and contestable dimensions of a consequential classification.

Thus:

$$\text{legibility} \neq \text{complete representation}.$$

Provisional mediation seeks the level of visibility appropriate to meaningful participation.

7.21 Participation without Complete Control

Likewise, non-alienated mediation does not require every individual to control the entire system.

Distributed systems are often too complex for such control.

The relevant question concerns meaningful participation in the procedures through which consequential relations are governed.

This distinguishes:

$$\text{individual command}$$

from

$$\text{relational participation}.$$

A participant may lack unilateral power while possessing institutional routes for voice, challenge, collective decision, representation, appeal, or revision.

The practical ideal therefore concerns distributed agency rather than a return to isolated individual sovereignty.

7.22 Non-Attachment and Institutional Design

The idea of non-attachment can consequently be translated into an institutional question.

An institution displays a form of structural non-attachment when its own procedures recognize that its categories and rules may require revision.

Such recognition can appear through:

- review mechanisms;
- sunset or reconsideration procedures;
- appeal and contestation;
- plural forms of evidence;
- transparent provenance of consequential classifications;
- procedures for affected participants to contribute to revision.

These mechanisms do not make an institution Buddhist.

They instantiate a structural principle compatible with the present use of *upāya*: a form can function seriously while retaining procedural openness concerning its own adequacy.

7.23 The Risk of Reifying *Upāya*

The concept of *upāya* itself must remain subject to the same caution.

One could easily transform the term into a universal solution:

everything is merely an *upāya*.

Such a claim would erase important distinctions among institutions, religious practices, theories, and forms of power.

It could also become a rhetorical device for avoiding accountability: a harmful institution might be defended as merely provisional while its consequences remain severe.

The present use of *upāya* therefore carries its own boundary.

Provisionality does not excuse harmful consequences.

Emptiness does not suspend responsibility.

Flexibility does not remove the need for justification.

> To call a form provisional increases the obligation to examine its conditions and consequences; it does not reduce that obligation.

7.24 Non-Attached Practice and Responsibility

Non-attachment should therefore remain compatible with responsibility.

A participant can recognize that a role is relationally generated and still take responsibility for actions performed through it.

A government can recognize that law is historically contingent and still be responsible for legal consequences.

A researcher can treat a model as provisional and remain responsible for how the model is used.

A lender can recognize that risk categories are constructed and remain responsible for the distributional consequences of applying them.

The absence of intrinsic essence removes one basis for absolutization.

It does not remove causal or ethical accountability.

This distinction further protects the framework from nihilism.

7.25 Provisional Mediation and De-Alienation

The concept of provisional mediation now provides a practical counterpart to the alienation profile developed in Section 6.

Where alienation increases through opacity, reification, causal autonomy, asymmetric dependence, and restricted revisability, provisional mediation seeks:

appropriate legibility,

de-reification,

distributed agency,

governable dependence,

and

effective revisability.

The goal is neither elimination of relation nor elimination of mediation.

It is the transformation of the relation through which the mediator operates.

7.26 From *Upāya* to Relational Governance

The practical lesson can now be extended toward governance.

If a form possesses no intrinsic necessity, governance can ask whether its current configuration remains adequate.

If the form possesses real causal efficacy, governance must take its consequences seriously.

If its effects are generated relationally, governance should focus upon the conditions producing those effects.

If those conditions are revisable, governance should maintain pathways through which revision can occur.

The resulting orientation can be stated as:

> Use what works without treating its present form as ultimate; trace the relations through which it works; govern the consequences those relations produce; and preserve the possibility of changing the means when its conditions or effects change.

This is the political-economic significance of provisional mediation.

7.27 Emptiness, Efficacy, and Practice

The section can now return to the central principle of the paper.

Emptiness concerns the absence of intrinsic self-subsistence.

Causal efficacy concerns consequences generated within relations.

Upāya, in the limited comparative sense developed here, concerns how an empty yet effective form can be used without being ontologically absolutized.

The three together produce a practical architecture:

> Know the form as dependent. Take its consequences seriously. Use it where it remains adequate. Preserve access to its conditions of revision.

This architecture avoids substantialism because the means remains empty.

It avoids nihilism because the effects remain causally significant.

It avoids paralysis because provisional forms remain practically usable.

It avoids historical closure because generative conditions remain open to reconstruction.

The next section extends this analysis beyond monetary mediation to the self, religious images, legal and institutional forms, and theoretical concepts. The purpose is to examine whether the distinction between emptiness, causal efficacy, provisional use, and alienation can illuminate a broader family of relationally stabilized forms.

8 Relationally Stabilized Forms across Domains

The preceding sections developed currency and credit as especially visible cases of empty yet causally effective relational forms. The present section extends the analysis across several further domains: the socially actionable self, religious images, legal and institutional forms, and theoretical concepts.

The purpose is comparative rather than reductive.

These forms possess different histories, materialities, meanings, normative statuses, and modes of experience. A person is not a currency, a religious image is not a legal institution, and a theory is not a credit relation. Their comparison concerns a more limited structural architecture:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow X_t \overset{\text{med}}{\rightsquigarrow} \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}.$$

A form emerges through relations, becomes sufficiently stabilized to mediate later relations, and may subsequently be treated as though the efficacy generated through those relations belonged intrinsically to the form itself.

The comparison therefore asks three recurring questions:

> How is the form generated? Through which relations does it remain causally effective?
> Under what conditions does practical stabilization become reification or alienation?

8.1 The Socially Actionable Self

The self provides the most sensitive case because practical life requires continuity of personal reference while Buddhist analysis challenges the idea of an intrinsically self-subsisting subject.

The present paper distinguishes these two issues.

A socially actionable person may be stabilized through bodily continuity, memory, recognition by others, language, institutional records, legal identity, promises, responsibilities, and histories of action.

The relevant structure is

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^{\text{person}} \rightsquigarrow S_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{\text{person}}.$$

Once stabilized, S_t becomes causally consequential.

A promise can be attributed to the same person at a later time.

A debt can remain enforceable.

A friendship can accumulate history.

A legal responsibility can persist.

A person can care for another on the basis of earlier commitments.

None of these relations requires the analytical claim that an immutable personal substance persists independently of bodily, social, historical, and relational conditions.

Thus,

$$\text{Svabhava}(S) = 0$$

can coexist with practical continuity and responsibility.

> The absence of an intrinsically self-subsisting subject does not eliminate the relational continuities through which persons remain causally and normatively consequential.

8.2 Practical Identity and Reification

The practical stabilization of a person can itself become reified.

A relational position becomes a personal property.

A person enters a labor relation and becomes institutionally classified as a worker.

A person enters a debt relation and becomes a debtor.

A person is assessed through a credit system and becomes "high risk."

The grammatical movement is subtle:

$$\text{Position}_{\mathfrak{R}}(S) \longmapsto \text{Property}(S).$$

The relation disappears from the description.

The debtor becomes someone who *is* a debtor.

The unemployed person becomes someone who *is* unemployed in a manner detached from labor-market organization.

The credit-risk category begins to appear as a characteristic of the person.

Such classifications may remain institutionally useful while producing alienation when their relational provenance becomes obscure and their consequences become difficult to contest.

The problem is therefore not practical identity itself.

It is the conversion of a historically and relationally generated identity into an apparently intrinsic personal essence.

8.3 The Self as a Convenient Designation

The linguistic movement discussed through the *Diamond Sūtra* can also clarify the status of personal identity.

One can continue to say "I" after rejecting an immutable metaphysical self.

The designation retains practical efficacy.

The first-person pronoun coordinates action, memory, commitment, and communication.

The appropriate movement is therefore:

$$S \longrightarrow \text{de-reification}(S) \longrightarrow S^{\text{provisional}}.$$

The final form is usable without being ontologically absolutized.

This provides a particularly clear case of provisional mediation.

The practical self can function as an interface through which distributed bodily, mnemonic, social, and institutional relations become actionable.

The designation is therefore neither an ultimate substance nor an empty nothing.

It is a dependently stabilized practical form.

8.4 Religious Images and Material Carriers

Religious images provide a second comparison.

A statue, icon, shrine object, painting, or another material form possesses physical properties that can be described independently of its religious role.

Yet within a religious configuration, the same carrier may organize attention, ritual, memory, devotion, offering, spatial orientation, communal identity, or perceived relation to sacred or transcendent reality [9, 1]

The relevant architecture can be represented as

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^{\text{relig}} \rightsquigarrow B_t \overset{\text{med}}{\rightsquigarrow} \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{\text{relig}},$$

where B_t denotes the religious image as a relationally situated form.

The material carrier participates in this process.

Its materiality matters.

Its location matters.

Its visibility matters.

Its history may matter.

Yet its relational religious efficacy cannot be reduced to material composition alone.

This makes the comparison with currency structurally informative.

8.5 Religious Image and Currency

A currency note and a religious image can both function as material carriers through which relational effects become locally operable.

The comparison should remain limited.

A religious image may participate in sacred, ritual, devotional, and transcendent relations.

Currency participates in monetary, institutional, legal, and productive relations.

Their local meanings differ fundamentally.

The common structure lies here:

$$\text{material carrier ; relationally generated efficacy.}$$

Neither the physical paper of a banknote nor the physical stone of a statue contains, by material composition alone, the full social efficacy mediated through it.

The carrier becomes a node within a wider relational system.

> The material reality of a carrier and the relational efficacy mediated through that carrier belong to distinguishable analytical levels.

This distinction allows the material object to be taken seriously without locating the complete source of its social power within the object itself.

8.6 The Religious Image and the Risk of Reification

The same distinction also makes reification analytically possible.

A form may mediate relations effectively enough that the relational history through which its efficacy arises recedes from attention.

The resulting analysis should nevertheless remain especially cautious in religious domains.

GR does not determine in advance whether a religious image refers to or participates in a transcendent reality independently of human relations. That metaphysical question remains open.

The more limited claim concerns relational manifestation.

Whatever its ultimate ontological interpretation, the religious form can possess observable relational effects within a historical community.

Thus:

$$T^* \ ; \ B_t^{\mathrm{rel}} \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{\mathrm{relig}}.$$

The first term preserves metaphysical openness.

The second records historically accessible relational efficacy.

This allows the paper to analyze religious mediation without reducing sacred meaning to social construction and without using causal efficacy as proof of an intrinsic sacred substance.

8.7 Image, Absence, and Mediated Presence

Religious images also reveal an important feature of mediation: a mediator can organize relations to something that is not materially present in the local encounter.

A statue may organize relation to the Buddha.

An icon may organize relation to a saint or divine figure.

A memorial object may organize relation to a person who is absent or dead.

The mediator therefore allows absence to become relationally consequential in the present.

Credit exhibited a comparable temporal structure through a relation to a possible future.

Religious images exhibit another structure in which something absent from the immediate material situation can become practically and affectively operative through mediation.

The comparison concerns relational presence rather than metaphysical identity.

> A mediator can make what is materially absent relationally operative without making the mediator identical to what it mediates.

This principle extends beyond religion to archives, photographs, contracts, memorials, and symbolic institutions.

8.8 Legal Forms

Legal forms provide a third domain.

Law depends upon categories sufficiently stable to guide action across cases and across time.

A contract, legal person, property title, citizenship status, corporate form, or procedural category can therefore become relationally real.

The structure is:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^{\mathrm{law}} \rightsquigarrow L_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{\mathrm{law}}.$$

The legal form emerges through legislation, precedent, interpretation, institutional practice, documentation, enforcement, and social recognition.

Once stabilized, it can reorganize future possibilities.

A corporation can own property.

A contract can generate obligations.

A citizenship status can alter mobility and rights.

A legal classification can determine institutional treatment.

The causal consequences are real even though the legal form possesses no independent physical substance corresponding to its legal identity.

8.9 Legal Fiction and Relational Reality

The language of "legal fiction" can easily create confusion if fiction is understood as causal unreality.

A corporation may be a legally constituted person without being a biological person.

Its legal status can nevertheless generate consequential relations involving property, liability, employment, taxation, and contractual action.

The important distinction is therefore between

$$\text{intrinsic ontological identity}$$

and

$$\text{institutionally stabilized causal capacity.}$$

A form can be conventional in one sense and highly consequential in another.

This is another instance of the general principle:

> A conventionally generated form can become causally real through the relations that recognize and reproduce it.

The practical danger arises when legal stabilization becomes naturalization.

8.10 Law and Historical Naturalization

A legal form may persist long enough to appear inevitable.

Property arrangements, corporate structures, family categories, contractual rules, or jurisdictional distinctions can become embedded in institutions and ordinary expectations.

Historical persistence then produces an appearance of necessity.

The emptiness perspective interrupts this movement.

A rule can be stable without being self-grounding.

A legal form can be highly consequential without being intrinsically just.

An institution can be difficult to change without being ontologically fixed.

Thus:

$$\text{legal stability} \quad \not\Rightarrow \quad \text{intrinsic necessity.}$$

This provides another anti-reification function for emptiness.

8.11 Institutional Forms and Distributed Agency

Institutions extend this structure beyond individual legal categories.

A university, corporation, ministry, court, bank, or international organization can persist despite turnover among individual participants.

The institution therefore possesses continuity at a scale different from the persons composing it.

Its persistence may depend upon:

rules, records, roles, infrastructure, resources, recognition, repeated practice.

The resulting form can acquire relative causal autonomy.
No individual participant fully controls the institution.
Yet institutional procedures can constrain every individual participant.
This reproduces the scale structure identified earlier:

What remains collectively generated can become individually external.

The institution therefore provides a strong case of causal autonomy without ontological independence.

8.12 Institutional Alienation

Institutional alienation becomes possible when procedures generated for human purposes acquire practical priority over the purposes they were intended to serve.

An evaluation system may begin as a tool for allocating attention.
Participants subsequently reorganize their conduct around the evaluation.
The evaluation then becomes a condition of institutional survival.
The recursive structure is:

$$A_t \rightsquigarrow I_t \rightsquigarrow A_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow I_{t+1}.$$

The institution can gradually become oriented toward reproducing the mediating form.
A university can become organized around metrics rather than learning.
A hospital can become organized around administratively legible outputs rather than care.
A bureaucracy can become organized around compliance with procedures whose original purposes have receded from view.
This is closely related to the earlier transition from means to authority.

8.13 Metrics as Relationally Real Forms

Metrics provide an especially transparent example.
A metric begins as a representation.
Once institutionalized, it can become a causal operator.
A ranking changes applications.
A performance score changes funding.
A citation metric changes research behavior.
A risk score changes access.
The sequence is:

$$\text{measurement} \rightsquigarrow \text{classification} \rightsquigarrow \text{behavioral adaptation} \rightsquigarrow \text{new measured reality}.$$

The representation thereby participates in generating the reality later represented.
This makes metrics second-order relational forms.
They are generated through observation of a system and subsequently alter the system being observed.
The possibility is especially important for alienation because participants may increasingly act for the metric while the metric continues to present itself as a neutral description of their activity.

8.14 Theory as a Relationally Stabilized Form

Theory belongs to the same broad family at the epistemic level.

A theory arises through questions, historical concepts, evidence, debate, formalization, institutional practices, and available methods:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^K \rightsquigarrow T_t.$$

Once stabilized, the theory alters later inquiry:

$$T_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^K.$$

Researchers formulate questions through it.

Students learn its categories.

Instruments may be designed around its distinctions.

Institutions may allocate resources according to its relevance.

Theoretical concepts therefore possess relational causal efficacy within knowledge production.

Their epistemic success can make them increasingly difficult to recognize as historically generated analytical forms.

8.15 Theoretical Reification

Theoretical reification occurs when an analytical category becomes treated as though reality itself were intrinsically divided according to that category.

The movement resembles:

$$\text{Method}(T) \longmapsto \text{Ontology}(T).$$

A classification introduced for analytical convenience becomes a presumed natural kind.

A model introduced under simplifying assumptions becomes treated as a complete description.

A disciplinary boundary becomes interpreted as a boundary in reality.

A relational vocabulary becomes transformed into a relational metaphysics by default.

The success of theory can therefore create its own reification risk.

> A concept can become more dangerous to inquiry precisely because it has been useful enough to become invisible as a concept.

This is why methodological self-emptiness is necessary.

8.16 GR as a Reflexive Case

GR must therefore apply the same analysis to itself.

The concepts of relation, system, generativity, relational reality, mediation, and alienation arise within a particular history of inquiry.

They are stabilizations.

They select some structures and suppress others.

They can become useful enough to organize subsequent interpretation.

This yields:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^K \rightsquigarrow \text{GR}_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^K.$$

GR therefore satisfies its own general architecture of relational reality.

Its analytical efficacy provides no exemption from emptiness.

$$\text{Svabhava}(\text{GR}) = 0.$$

The appropriate consequence is neither abandonment nor skepticism.

It is provisional use.

8.17 Methodological Self-Emptiness

Methodological self-emptiness requires a theory to preserve access to the conditions of its own generation.

For GR, this includes:

- the problems that motivated its concepts;
- the historical and disciplinary sources from which its vocabulary emerged;
- the domains where its distinctions remain useful;
- the cases in which its categories become inadequate;
- the procedures through which its vocabulary can be revised.

The framework should therefore permit:

$$\mathcal{L}_{\text{GR}}^{(t)} \longrightarrow \mathcal{L}_{\text{GR}}^{(t+1)}.$$

A later framework may replace "relation," "system," or "generativity" with concepts better suited to a problem not yet visible.

Such replacement would not necessarily refute the practical value of the earlier vocabulary.

It could represent successful completion of its role as a provisional means.

8.18 Theoretical Alienation

The opposite trajectory is theoretical alienation.

A framework originally generated to assist inquiry becomes increasingly institutionalized.

Its categories organize evaluation.

Its vocabulary determines what questions count as legitimate.

Evidence is generated through methods already structured by the framework.

The framework's relational provenance becomes less visible.

Its concepts begin to confront researchers as external conditions of intelligibility.

The profile resembles the general alienation structure:

$$\text{stabilization} \rightsquigarrow \text{opacity} \rightsquigarrow \text{relative causal autonomy} \rightsquigarrow \text{restricted revisability}.$$

Theoretical alienation therefore belongs to the same broad family as political-economic alienation while operating through epistemic institutions.

Table 3: Relationally stabilized forms across domains

Form	Relational generation	Subsequent efficacy	Reification risk
Social self	Body, memory, recognition, language, institutions, history	Responsibility, action, promise, identity, social participation	Relational position becomes intrinsic personal identity
Religious image	Material carrier, ritual, memory, sacred positioning, communal practice	Attention, devotion, ritual action, spatial and social organization	Relational efficacy becomes attributed wholly to the carrier
Legal or institutional form	Rules, recognition, records, practice, enforcement, historical reproduction	Rights, obligations, access, classification, organizational action	Historical form becomes naturalized or self-authorizing
Theory	Questions, concepts, evidence, methods, scholarly institutions	Later inquiry, classification, measurement, institutional practice	Analytical categories become presumed intrinsic structures of reality

8.19 A Common Architecture without Common Ontology

The four domains can now be compared.

The table does not establish ontological equivalence.

Its purpose is to isolate a recurrent process:

> distributed relations → stabilized form → causal mediation → possible reification.

The same architecture can occur through very different substantive forms.

8.20 The Family of Empty yet Effective Forms

The preceding cases motivate a provisional analytical family:

$$\mathfrak{F}_{\mathrm{EEF}} = \{X : \mathrm{Svabhava}(X) = 0,\ \mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}\}\,.$$

The notation identifies *empty yet effective forms*.

Membership in this family does not imply common metaphysical status.

It identifies a shared analytical problem:

> How can a dependently generated form become sufficiently stabilized to participate persistently in the generation of later relational states?

This question applies to political economy, religion, law, institutional analysis, identity, and epistemology.

It is therefore broader than a theory of monetary alienation.

8.21 Different Modes of Efficacy

The family also requires differentiation because causal efficacy takes different forms.

Currency may reorganize exchange.

Credit may reorganize future possibility.

A legal form may reorganize rights and obligations.

A religious image may reorganize ritual and attention.

A self-designation may organize responsibility and continuity.

A theory may reorganize perception and inquiry.

Thus:

$$\mathrm{Eff}_{\mathfrak{R}}(X)$$

should always be indexed to a domain.

The concept of causal efficacy is therefore relational and plural.

A form can be highly effective in one dimension and negligible in another.

This prevents the abstract family from erasing substantive differences.

8.22 Different Modes of Alienation

Alienation likewise appears differently across domains.

Monetary alienation may involve dependence upon exchange and credit forms.

Institutional alienation may involve procedures that become self-reproducing.

Identity alienation may involve a relational classification becoming fixed as personal essence.

Religious alienation, where the concept is appropriate at all, would require careful domain-specific analysis and should not be inferred merely from the presence of sacred mediation.

Theoretical alienation may involve analytical categories gaining authority over inquiry.

The alienation profile

$$\mathbf{A}_t(X) = (o_t, r_t, a_t, d_t, v_t)$$

therefore remains domain-sensitive.

Different components may dominate in different cases.

8.23 The Limits of Cross-Domain Analogy

Cross-domain comparison becomes misleading when structural correspondence is converted into identity.

The fact that both currency and a religious image involve carriers does not make religion a monetary system.

The fact that both a self and a corporation involve relational stabilization does not make persons legal fictions.

The fact that both credit and religious hope can involve future orientation does not establish a common causal mechanism.

The fact that both theories and institutions can become reified does not make epistemic and political authority identical.

The comparative method therefore preserves local histories and meanings.

> A shared relational architecture licenses comparison of structure, not collapse of the forms compared into a common substance.

8.24 Relational Reality beyond Material Substance

The cases nevertheless support a broader conclusion.

Material reality alone does not exhaust the forms through which material history develops.

Legal categories alter material access.

Credit changes investment.

Currency changes exchange.

Religious forms can alter conduct and institutions.

Theories change technological and political practice.

Personal identities organize labor, responsibility, and social relations.

The causal history of a society therefore includes relationally stabilized forms whose efficacy cannot be understood solely through the intrinsic properties of their material carriers.

This does not oppose materialism.

It expands the analysis of material history to include the relational forms through which material activity becomes organized.

8.25 From Cross-Domain Comparison to Political Practice

The comparative cases also clarify the practical question developed in the preceding section.

If empty yet effective forms are unavoidable features of complex relational life, political practice cannot consist simply in eliminating them.

Persons require practical identities.

Institutions require stable forms.

Law requires categories.

Economic coordination requires mediating structures.

Knowledge requires concepts.

The practical problem concerns whether these forms remain visible as relation-generated, causally accountable, and revisable.

The distinction becomes:

$$\text{stabilization with revisability} \ ; \ \text{stabilization with alienation.}$$

This distinction prepares the transition from ontology and diagnosis toward political-economic reconstruction.

8.26 Transition to Relational Reconstruction

The cases examined in this section share one practical lesson.

De-reification is insufficient when causal relations remain unchanged.

Destruction of every mediator is neither possible nor desirable.

The remaining task is therefore to ask how relation-generated forms can be governed without being treated as intrinsically necessary and how their causal effects can be reorganized when they restrict the generativity of the persons and relations sustaining them.

The relevant movement is:

$$\text{de-reification} \rightarrow \text{causal reconstruction} \rightarrow \text{institutional revisability.}$$

The next section develops this political and practical problem by examining de-alienation as the reconstruction of generative conditions rather than the simple abolition of relational forms.

9 Relational Reconstruction and De-Alienation

The preceding sections have treated alienation as a relational pathology of mediation. A socially generated form can become increasingly opaque in its provenance, increasingly autonomous relative to individual participants, increasingly embedded in asymmetric dependence, and increasingly difficult for affected participants to revise.

This section develops the practical counterpart of that diagnosis.

The central claim is that de-alienation concerns the reconstruction of the relations through which consequential forms are generated, reproduced, and revised. Conceptual recognition of emptiness can weaken reification. Practical transformation requires intervention in the causal architecture that sustains the form.

The relevant movement is therefore

$$\text{de-reification} \longrightarrow \text{causal inquiry} \longrightarrow \text{relational reconstruction}.$$

This orientation preserves the useful functions of mediation while opening their generative conditions to examination and revision.

9.1 From De-Reification to Reconstruction

De-reification changes how a form is understood.

Suppose a participant recognizes that

$$\text{Svabhava}(X) = 0.$$

The form is no longer interpreted as possessing an intrinsic and self-subsisting source of power.

Yet the causal architecture may remain:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}.$$

Currency can continue to regulate access.

Debt can continue to structure future choices.

Institutional classifications can continue to allocate opportunities.

Legal forms can continue to organize obligations.

The practical task therefore begins after de-reification.

One must ask which relations continue to generate the efficacy of X, how those relations are distributed, and which of them can be modified.

> De-reification reveals that the form has conditions. De-alienation begins when those conditions become objects of practical reconstruction.

9.2 Causal Chains and Generative Conditions

A relational form derives its efficacy from a network of supporting conditions.

Let

$$\mathcal{C}_t(X) = \{c_{1,t}, c_{2,t}, \ldots, c_{n,t}\}$$

denote the relevant conditions through which X_t is reproduced.

These conditions may include:

- legal recognition;

- institutional procedures;
- technical infrastructures;
- material resources;
- patterns of social recognition;
- expectations and conventions;
- distributions of bargaining power;
- information and classification systems;
- inherited historical arrangements.

The practical efficacy of X_t therefore depends upon a generative chain:

$$\mathcal{C}_t(X) \rightsquigarrow X_t \rightsquigarrow Y_{t+1}.$$

Political transformation concerns intervention somewhere within this chain.
The critical question becomes:

> Which conditions are responsible for the consequences under examination, and which actors possess the practical capacity to alter those conditions?

This question moves critique from ontology toward governance.

9.3 The Governance of Causal Efficacy

The causal efficacy of a form can be governed without requiring the form to possess intrinsic essence.

Indeed, its relational constitution makes governance conceptually possible.

If

$$\mathrm{Eff}(X) = \mathrm{Eff}\left(X \mid \mathfrak{R}, \Gamma\right),$$

then changes in relevant components of $\mathfrak{R}$ or Γ can alter the consequences generated through X.

The practical problem is therefore the governance of relations rather than the metaphysical destruction of forms.

For credit, this may concern access, risk allocation, assessment procedures, enforcement, or the distribution of future obligations.

For currency, it may concern institutional design, monetary access, payment infrastructure, or conditions of exchange.

For legal categories, it may concern recognition, appeal, interpretation, or revision.

For theory, it may concern methodological pluralism, evidential standards, or the institutional authority granted to a model.

The object of governance is the generative configuration.

9.4 De-Alienation as Recovery of Revisability

Revisability occupies a central place in the present account.

A social form can remain stable while procedures exist through which its conditions may be reconsidered.

The relevant distinction is between stability and closure.

A stable form can support coordination.

A closed form increasingly prevents affected participants from influencing the conditions through which it operates.

De-alienation therefore involves recovery of meaningful revisability:

$$X_t \longrightarrow X_{t+1}$$

through procedures accessible to those substantially affected by the form.

Definition 9.1 (Relational de-alienation)**.** Relational de-alienation is the process through which affected participants recover meaningful access to the generation, interpretation, contestation, and revision of consequential relational forms and the conditions sustaining their causal efficacy.

The definition emphasizes process.

De-alienation can remain incomplete, uneven, and historically revisable.

9.5 Revisability and Temporal Scale

Revisability must also be evaluated across time.

Some relations can be altered quickly.

Others depend upon infrastructures, laws, accumulated obligations, habits, technologies, and long-term expectations.

A form may therefore be revisable in principle while requiring a long transition in practice.

This produces several temporal scales:

$$\tau_{\text{individual}} \ ; \ \tau_{\text{institutional}} \ ; \ \tau_{\text{structural}}.$$

A participant may alter personal behavior within days.

An institution may require years to revise procedures.

A deeply embedded political-economic structure may change across generations.

Practical de-alienation should therefore distinguish immediate relief, institutional reform, and structural transformation.

Failure to distinguish these scales can produce unrealistic expectations about the disappearance of causal effects after conceptual critique.

9.6 Generative Visibility

Relational reconstruction requires sufficient visibility of generative conditions.

The objective is not exhaustive transparency.

Finite participants cannot reconstruct every causal relation within a complex system.

The relevant criterion is *generative visibility*: sufficient access to the conditions necessary for understanding consequential effects and participating meaningfully in their revision.

For a mediator X, generative visibility concerns questions such as:

- which relations generate its efficacy;

- which institutions maintain it;
- whose labor and resources sustain it;
- which assumptions are embedded in it;
- who receives benefits and bears costs;
- which procedures allow contestation;
- which conditions can be changed.

Generative visibility therefore turns provenance into a practical resource.

9.7 Provenance as a Condition of Revisability

A form becomes easier to naturalize when its history disappears.

Relational provenance restores the history of generation:

$$\Pi(X_t) = \{\mathfrak{R}_{t-k}, \ldots, \mathfrak{R}_t\}.$$

The purpose of provenance is practical as well as historical.

Knowing how a form arose can reveal which of its components are contingent, which institutions reproduce it, and where revision may be possible.

A credit classification may appear as a fixed judgment until its data, assumptions, institutional rules, and historical purpose become visible.

A legal category may appear timeless until its legislative and interpretive history is reconstructed.

A theory may appear natural until the questions and limitations that generated its vocabulary are recovered.

Thus:

> Provenance converts apparent necessity into a map of generative conditions.

9.8 Participation and Relational Agency

Visibility alone remains insufficient.

Participants may understand a system accurately while possessing little capacity to influence it.

De-alienation therefore requires relational agency.

Relational agency concerns the practical capacity to participate in the processes through which consequential forms are maintained and revised.

This capacity can be distributed through:

- voice;
- representation;
- negotiation;
- appeal;
- collective organization;
- institutional review;

- alternative provision;
- rule-making participation.

Relational agency does not require unilateral control.

The relevant criterion is meaningful participation within a distributed system.

A participant can lack sovereign command while still possessing effective routes for contestation and revision.

9.9 The Distribution of Revisability

The existence of revision procedures at the system level does not guarantee their equal accessibility.

One group may possess extensive legal, financial, technical, or political capacity to modify a form.

Another may remain strongly affected while possessing little influence.

Revisability is therefore distributed:

$$\mathrm{Rev}_i(X) \neq \mathrm{Rev}_j(X).$$

This inequality matters for alienation.

A system can be highly adaptable for powerful participants while remaining rigid for those most dependent upon it.

The practical analysis should therefore ask:

> Who can revise the relation, who can merely adapt to it, and who bears the consequences when revision fails?

This moves the concept of revisability directly into questions of power and justice.

9.10 Dependence and the Organization of Power

Dependence itself is unavoidable within relational life.

The political problem concerns its organization.

Let

$$D_{ij}(X)$$

denote the dependence of participant i upon participant or institution j through mediator X.

Where dependence is highly asymmetric and alternatives remain limited, relational power can become concentrated.

The resulting problem concerns:

$$\text{dependence}, \quad \text{control}, \quad \text{alternatives}, \quad \text{revision}.$$

A relation can remain mutually dependent while distributing these capacities unequally.

De-alienation therefore seeks forms of dependence in which affected participants retain sufficient agency over the conditions through which the dependence operates.

9.11 Exit, Voice, and Transformation

Individual exit provides one response to an alienating relation.

Its significance depends upon the domain.

A consumer may switch providers.

A worker may change employment.

A borrower may seek another lender.

Yet some mediating systems operate at scales where meaningful exit is limited.

Currency, legal jurisdiction, infrastructure, and broad labor-market conditions provide obvious examples.

De-alienation therefore requires more than exit.

Three capacities can be distinguished:

$$\text{exit}, \qquad \text{voice}, \qquad \text{transformation}.$$

Exit concerns leaving a particular relation.

Voice concerns participating within its governance.

Transformation concerns changing the generative conditions from which the relation emerges.

These capacities can complement one another while remaining conceptually distinct.

9.12 Counter-Power and the Preservation of Revisability

Where causal autonomy and dependence become strongly concentrated, revisability may require counter-power.

Counter-power here refers to relational capacities that prevent one node, institution, or mediator from acquiring irreversible control over the conditions of future generation.

Possible mechanisms include:

- institutional checks;
- collective organization;
- competing infrastructures;
- procedural review;
- distributed decision authority;
- protections for contestation;
- preservation of alternative pathways.

The purpose is to preserve the possibility of revision.

Counter-power therefore functions as an anti-rigidification mechanism within the relational system.

It prevents causal stabilization from becoming complete closure.

9.13 Reconstruction without Total Transparency

Relational reconstruction should preserve the practical advantages of complexity reduction.

A monetary system cannot require every participant to understand every institutional dependency.

A legal system cannot require every citizen to reconstruct every doctrinal history before relying upon a rule.

A scientific theory cannot include every possible scale and variable in each model.

The objective is therefore selective visibility.

The system should preserve access to the information required for appropriate levels of responsibility, contestation, and revision.

This suggests a layered architecture of legibility:

$$\mathcal{L}^{(1)} \subseteq \mathcal{L}^{(2)} \subseteq \cdots \subseteq \mathcal{L}^{(n)},$$

where different participants may require different depths of access according to their roles and the consequences at stake.

The relevant design question becomes the adequacy of access rather than the fantasy of complete transparency.

9.14 Reconstruction without Elimination of Mediation

The same reasoning applies to mediation itself.

A complex society depends upon mediators that allow relations to travel across distance, time, and immediate embodiment.

Currency allows exchange among strangers.

Credit links present action to possible futures.

Law preserves obligations across time.

Institutions maintain collective capacities beyond individual lifetimes.

Theory carries conceptual structures across generations of inquiry.

Relational reconstruction therefore seeks

$$X_t \longrightarrow X_{t+1}$$

when the mediator remains useful but its generative configuration requires change.

Abolition represents one possible transformation among others.

The appropriate response depends upon the consequences, alternatives, and historical conditions of the form.

9.15 De-Alienation and Functional Preservation

A reconstruction may preserve some functions while replacing the relations through which they are produced.

For example, a credit system may preserve the function of mobilizing future resources while changing assessment procedures, access conditions, or risk distribution.

An institution may preserve continuity while replacing exclusionary categories.

A legal system may preserve predictability while expanding avenues for revision.

A theory may preserve a useful abstraction while narrowing its claimed domain.

This gives relational reconstruction a functional question:

Which generative capacities should be preserved, which causal pathways require change, and which forms have ceased to serve the purposes through which they were justified?

The answer remains domain-specific.

9.16 Generativity and the Evaluation of Reconstruction

GR introduces generativity as one dimension for evaluating relational change.

A reconstructed relation can alter the range of possible future action:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \longrightarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}$$

with corresponding changes in accessible possibilities.

Yet generativity should not be maximized as an abstract scalar.

One participant's expanded possibilities can depend upon another's restriction.

A financial system may generate large investment capacity while concentrating risk.

A labor arrangement may expand organizational production while narrowing worker autonomy.

The relevant evaluation therefore concerns the distribution and sustainability of generative capacity.

Questions include:

- whose future possibilities expand;
- whose possibilities contract;
- which capacities become dependent upon extraction from others;
- whether the relation can reproduce itself without destroying the conditions on which it depends;
- whether affected participants retain capacity to redirect future generation.

Generativity therefore opens the practical analysis without supplying a complete ethical calculus.

9.17 De-Alienation and the Conditions of Co-Generation

The relational subject depends upon others.

De-alienation can therefore be understood partly as restoration of co-generative relations.

A co-generative relation allows participants to contribute to and benefit from the processes through which shared conditions of action are maintained.

Its architecture can be represented as

$$S_{i,t}, S_{j,t} \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow S_{i,t+1}, S_{j,t+1}.$$

The relation becomes problematic when one participant's capacity is reproduced through persistent erosion of another's capacity to participate in future generation.

Co-generation therefore concerns reciprocity at the level of generative conditions rather than simple equality of immediate outputs.

9.18 Alienated and Co-Generative Mediation

The contrast can now be stated more precisely.

Alienated mediation tends toward:

$$\text{opacity}, \quad \text{intrinsicization}, \quad \text{asymmetric dependence}, \quad \text{restricted revisability}.$$

Co-generative mediation tends toward:

$$\text{appropriate legibility}, \quad \text{provisionality}, \quad \text{distributed agency}, \quad \text{effective revisability}.$$

These are orientations rather than binary states.

A single institution may contain both patterns.

A credit system can expand productive capacity and simultaneously impose alienating dependencies.

A legal category can protect rights while rigidifying identity.

A theory can illuminate one domain while suppressing another.

Relational analysis therefore examines the configuration rather than assigning one permanent label to the form.

9.19 The Role of *Upāya* in Reconstruction

The concept of *upāya* provides a useful orientation for reconstruction.

A form can be retained while it remains conditionally adequate.

Its use can be revised when circumstances change.

Its practical value does not establish permanent authority.

Its historical success does not exempt it from future criticism.

This produces a recursive relation:

$$X_t^{\text{provisional}} \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow \text{Evaluation}(X_t) \rightsquigarrow X_{t+1}^{\text{provisional}}.$$

The mediator remains inside a cycle of use, consequence, evaluation, and revision.

Such a cycle is structurally opposed to alienating closure.

9.20 Recursive Governance

Relational reconstruction is therefore an iterative activity.

A reform creates new relations.

Those relations create new consequences.

The consequences may generate new forms of opacity, dependence, and power.

Governance must consequently remain recursive:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \longrightarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1} \longrightarrow \text{Observe} \longrightarrow \text{Revise} \longrightarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+2}.$$

No institutional arrangement guarantees permanent freedom from alienation.

The anti-alienation condition lies partly in preserving the capacity to detect and revise newly emerging pathologies.

This is another consequence of methodological and institutional self-emptiness.

9.21 De-Alienation without Final Form

A theory of de-alienation can itself become alienating if it specifies one final institutional arrangement and treats that arrangement as historically complete.

The present framework therefore leaves the final form open.

Different historical conditions may require different mediators.

Different communities may organize dependence differently.

New technologies may generate new forms of relational power.

A successful reconstruction can itself later require reconstruction.

Thus:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^* \ ; \ \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^* \ ; \ \mathfrak{R}_{t+2}^*$$

should not be interpreted as convergence toward one timeless institutional configuration.

The asterisk can at most indicate provisional adequacy relative to specified conditions.

This is the political consequence of emptiness.

9.22 Currency and Relational Reconstruction

Applied to currency, relational reconstruction begins by preserving the distinction between carrier and monetary relation.

The question is therefore broader than whether one physical or digital carrier should replace another.

Relevant conditions include:

access, institutional authority, distribution, payment infrastructure, legal recognition, systemic depende

A change of carrier can leave the underlying relations intact.

Conversely, a change in relational governance can alter the practical meaning of the same carrier.

The unit of analysis is therefore the monetary configuration rather than the object alone.

9.23 Credit and Relational Reconstruction

Credit provides an even clearer case.

A de-alienating credit architecture would require attention to the conditions through which possible futures are opened or closed.

Relevant questions concern:

- who receives access to future resources;
- how uncertainty is represented;
- who defines creditworthiness;
- how classifications can be challenged;
- how risk is distributed;
- which future obligations become practically compulsory;
- whether participants retain meaningful capacity to recover from adverse trajectories.

Credit governance is therefore partly governance of future possibility.

A present classification can shape the trajectories that later become available.

Relational reconstruction asks whether participants retain sufficient agency within that temporal recursion.

9.24 The Self and Relational Reconstruction

The same orientation applies to socially stabilized identities.

A relational position can remain useful without becoming a permanent personal essence.

The practical task is to preserve pathways through which subjects can revise, contest, or exceed the categories through which institutions recognize them.

A worker is more than a labor-market position.

A debtor is more than an obligation.

A citizen is more than an administrative classification.

The category may remain operational while the person retains generative possibilities beyond it.

De-alienation therefore includes preservation of the subject's capacity to generate identities and relations that exceed inherited classifications.

9.25 Theory and Relational Reconstruction

Theoretical practice requires the same discipline.

A framework should preserve its generative provenance.

Its categories should remain open to modification.

Its domain of adequacy should remain explicit.

Anomalies should be able to transform the framework rather than being forced into inherited categories.

For GR, this means:

$$\mathrm{GR}_t \longrightarrow \mathrm{GR}_{t+1}.$$

A concept such as "relation" may eventually become inadequate.

A future problem may require a vocabulary that no longer treats systems, entities, or generativity in their current form.

Such change would express methodological self-emptiness.

The theory remains alive through its capacity to revise the means by which it approaches reality.

9.26 From Causal Governance to Historical Transformation

The practical argument can now be summarized.

A social form appears stable.

Emptiness reveals the absence of intrinsic necessity.

Relational analysis reconstructs the conditions through which its efficacy is generated.

Political-economic inquiry identifies the distribution of power and dependence within those conditions.

Governance intervenes in causal pathways.

Historical transformation produces new relational configurations.

The movement is therefore:

$$\text{emptiness} \rightarrow \text{provenance} \rightarrow \text{causal analysis} \rightarrow \text{revisability} \rightarrow \text{relational reconstruction}.$$

This sequence provides the practical bridge between Buddhist de-substantialization and Marxian concern with material social transformation.

9.27 A Practical Principle of De-Alienation

The orientation of this section can be expressed in a compact practical principle:

> Reveal the conditions through which a form becomes effective, preserve the generative functions worth sustaining, reconstruct the causal relations that produce alienating consequences, and maintain the ability of affected participants to revise the resulting form.

This principle does not prescribe one institutional solution.
It identifies the structure of inquiry required before a solution can be considered adequate.

9.28 Emptiness, Causality, and Transformation

The relation among the central concepts can now be stated more precisely.

Emptiness concerns the absence of intrinsic necessity.

Causal efficacy concerns the consequences produced through dependent relations.

Alienation concerns the organization of those relations when generated forms become opaque, asymmetrically constraining, and difficult to revise.

De-alienation concerns reconstruction of the conditions through which such effects are reproduced.

Generativity concerns the future possibilities opened by that reconstruction.

The practical sequence is therefore:

> See the form as empty. Trace the relations that make it effective. Intervene in the relations that generate harmful consequences. Preserve the capacity to revise the new configuration when its own limitations emerge.

The next section turns this principle back upon knowledge itself. It develops methodological self-emptiness, theoretical alienation, and the conditions under which a theory can remain generative without transforming its own categories into an authoritative ontology.

10 Methodological Self-Emptiness and Theoretical Alienation

This section applies the preceding account of relational mediation reflexively to theory itself. Theories are generated within historical and epistemic relations, become stabilized through repeated use, and subsequently participate in the production of later knowledge. Their concepts can therefore acquire causal efficacy within scholarly, institutional, and practical systems.

The purpose of the section is to distinguish productive theoretical stabilization from theoretical alienation. A useful conceptual framework requires sufficient stability to support cumulative inquiry. At the same time, the framework must preserve access to the conditions of its own generation, the limits of its concepts, and the procedures through which those concepts can be revised.

For Generative Relational theory (GR), this requirement takes the form of *methodological self-emptiness*: the framework applies its critique of intrinsic substantiality to its own vocabulary.

10.1 Theory as a Relationally Generated Form

A theory does not emerge independently of an epistemic environment.

Questions precede it.

Conceptual vocabularies make some distinctions available.

Methods determine which observations can become evidence.

Technologies extend or restrict what can be observed.

Historical problems direct attention toward some domains.

Institutions influence which inquiries can be sustained.

A theory T_t can therefore be represented schematically as emerging from an epistemic relational field:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^K \rightsquigarrow T_t.$$

The field $\mathfrak{R}_t^K$ includes relevant conceptual, linguistic, material, methodological, institutional, and historical conditions of knowledge production.

Once generated, the theory enters subsequent inquiry:

$$T_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^K.$$

Researchers formulate new questions through its vocabulary.

Evidence is interpreted through its distinctions.

Students inherit its concepts.

Instruments and classifications may be designed around its assumptions.

The resulting structure is recursive:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^K \rightsquigarrow T_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^K \rightsquigarrow T_{t+1}.$$

Theory therefore belongs to the same broad architecture of relational reality developed throughout this paper.

10.2 Epistemic Causal Efficacy

The causal efficacy of theory is primarily epistemic, although its effects can extend into material and institutional practice.

A conceptual distinction can change which phenomena become visible.

A classification can change which cases are grouped together.

A model can redirect experimentation.

A theory can reorganize institutional decision-making.

Its efficacy can therefore be represented as

$$T_t \rightsquigarrow K_{t+1}, Q_{t+1}, A_{t+1},$$

where K denotes knowledge claims, Q subsequent questions, and A actions or practices informed by the framework.

Theoretical efficacy remains relational.

A theory ignored by every relevant epistemic community has a different relational effect from the same theory embedded in textbooks, instruments, professional classifications, and institutional procedures.

Thus:

$$\mathrm{Eff}_K(T) = \mathrm{Eff}\left(T \mid \mathfrak{R}^K, \Gamma\right).$$

The success of a theory therefore indicates efficacy within specified relations.

It does not by itself establish that the theory's conceptual vocabulary constitutes the final intrinsic structure of reality.

10.3 Analytical Success and Ontological Authority

A successful theoretical concept can become increasingly stable.

Repeated explanatory usefulness produces confidence.

Confidence encourages wider application.

Wider application produces further observations expressed through the same concept.

The resulting feedback can make the conceptual vocabulary appear increasingly self-evident.

A transition can then occur:

$$\text{Method}(T) \longmapsto \text{Ontology}(T).$$

A provisional means of inquiry acquires the status of an assumed structure of reality.

The risk is especially strong when a theory becomes sufficiently successful that its conceptual origin disappears from ordinary use.

> A theoretical form approaches reification when the conditions under which its concepts became useful disappear from view while the concepts themselves retain epistemic authority.

This is the theoretical analogue of the relational opacity examined earlier in political economy.

10.4 The Disappearance of the Question

Concepts frequently arise in response to particular questions.

Over time, the concept can survive while the question that generated it is forgotten.

Let Q_t denote an epistemic problem and T_t a theoretical response:

$$Q_t \rightsquigarrow T_t.$$

Institutional stabilization can later produce:

$$T_t \rightsquigarrow T_{t+1}$$

without continued access to Q_t.

The concept then becomes detached from the conditions that once justified its introduction.

This produces a loss of theoretical provenance.

A useful category begins to appear self-explanatory.

A disciplinary distinction begins to appear natural.

A simplifying assumption becomes invisible.

Theoretical self-emptiness therefore requires preservation of the generative question as part of the conceptual history of a theory.

10.5 Theoretical Provenance

The concept of relational provenance can be extended directly to theory.

For a theoretical form T_t, let

$$\Pi_K(T_t)$$

denote the accessible history of the conditions through which the theory or concept emerged.

Such provenance can include:

- the original research problems;

- conceptual and disciplinary predecessors;
- methodological assumptions;
- relevant observational limitations;
- historical and institutional conditions of inquiry;
- empirical or conceptual anomalies already recognized;
- revisions through which the present form was produced.

The purpose of provenance is epistemic rather than antiquarian.
Knowing why a concept was introduced helps determine where it remains useful.
Knowing which problem it solved helps identify when the problem has changed.
Knowing which assumptions supported it helps reveal where revision may become necessary.

> Theoretical provenance preserves the relation between a conceptual form and the epistemic conditions through which that form acquired its authority.

10.6 Theoretical Compression

Theory necessarily compresses.

A useful model cannot reproduce every feature of the reality under investigation.
A category suppresses variation in order to make comparison possible.
A formalism selects variables and relations relevant to a specified problem.
A disciplinary vocabulary determines a practical resolution at which inquiry can proceed.

Theoretical compression therefore resembles the relational compression identified earlier in monetary and institutional mediation.

It is often generative:

$$\text{complex field} \rightsquigarrow \text{tractable theoretical form} \rightsquigarrow \text{new inquiry}.$$

A theory becomes problematic when the information removed by compression becomes relevant to the consequences produced through the theory while remaining inaccessible to revision.

The distinction is therefore:

$$\text{productive abstraction} \ ; \ \text{alienating epistemic opacity}.$$

The relevant question concerns the adequacy of the abstraction for its present domain and purpose.

10.7 Classification and Recursive Reality

Theoretical categories can become especially powerful when institutions act through them.

Suppose a classification C_t is generated from observed relations:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow C_t.$$

The classification then changes treatment of the classified:

$$C_t \rightsquigarrow A_{t+1}.$$

Changed treatment alters subsequent relations:

$$A_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}.$$

Later observation then encounters a field already partly reorganized through the classification:

$$\mathfrak{R}_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow C_{t+1}.$$

The resulting recursion is:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow C_t \rightsquigarrow A_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow C_{t+1}.$$

A description thereby becomes one of the conditions generating the reality later described.

This structure is especially important for theories applied to social systems.

10.8 Measurement and the Governance of the Measured

Metrics provide a concentrated example of theoretical mediation.

A measure is introduced to represent some feature of a system.

Institutional actors begin to make decisions through that measure.

Participants adapt their conduct to the measure.

The measured field changes.

The measure therefore acquires generative power:

$$M_t \rightsquigarrow A_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}.$$

A publication indicator may change research behavior.

An educational metric may change teaching practice.

A performance indicator may change organizational priorities.

A risk measure may change access to resources.

The epistemic form becomes a governance form.

This transition does not make measurement inherently alienating.

It changes the causal position of the measure.

Once a representation begins governing the represented domain, its assumptions and revision procedures acquire practical importance.

10.9 From Representation to Generative Operator

The preceding examples motivate a distinction between a representation and a generative operator.

A representation primarily describes or models a relational state.

A generative operator participates in changing subsequent states.

The same theoretical form can move between these roles:

$$T_t^{\mathrm{rep}} \rightsquigarrow T_t^{\mathrm{op}}.$$

Institutional adoption frequently drives this transition.

A diagnostic category used for description may later determine eligibility.

A model used for prediction may later allocate resources.

A ranking used for comparison may later reorganize behavior.

Theoretical self-emptiness becomes especially important after this transition, because errors in conceptualization can become mechanisms of social generation.

10.10 Theoretical Relative Causal Autonomy

A theory can also acquire relative causal autonomy.

No individual researcher may retain authority to revise an established framework.

Yet researchers may need to publish, teach, classify, or justify work through its vocabulary.

Institutions may reproduce the framework through curricula, journals, funding procedures, professional standards, and evaluation systems.

The theory can then confront individual participants as an external epistemic condition:

$$T_t \rightsquigarrow A^K_{i,t+1}.$$

At the same time, its continued authority remains dependent upon collective and institutional reproduction:

$$\mathfrak{R}^K_t \rightsquigarrow T_t.$$

The theoretical form therefore possesses causal autonomy at one scale while remaining relationally dependent at another.

This is the same scale structure identified earlier in currency, credit, and institutions.

10.11 Theoretical Alienation

The preceding dimensions allow a more precise formulation of theoretical alienation.

Definition 10.1 (Theoretical alienation)**.** Theoretical alienation is a relational condition in which an epistemic form generated as a means of inquiry acquires persistent authority over subsequent knowledge production while the problems, assumptions, historical conditions, and procedures of revision through which the form gained that authority become increasingly opaque or inaccessible.

The concept includes several possible processes:

- loss of theoretical provenance;
- conversion of analytical categories into presumed ontological divisions;
- institutional dependence upon established vocabulary;
- recursive generation of evidence through the framework itself;
- increasing cost of conceptual alternatives;
- restriction of meaningful revision.

Theoretical alienation therefore concerns relations among concepts, institutions, practices, and epistemic agents.

10.12 A Theoretical Alienation Profile

The multidimensional alienation framework can be specialized to theory.

Let

$$\mathbf{A}^K_t(T) = \left(o^K_t, r^K_t, a^K_t, d^K_t, v^K_t\right), \tag{2}$$

where:

- o^K_t concerns opacity of theoretical provenance and assumptions;

- r_t^K concerns reification of conceptual categories;
- a_t^K concerns relative causal autonomy of the framework;
- d_t^K concerns asymmetric epistemic dependence upon its institutions and vocabulary;
- v_t^K concerns restricted conceptual or institutional revisability.

As before, the profile is conceptual.
Its purpose is to distinguish different mechanisms through which a theory can become alienated.
A framework can be heavily institutionalized while maintaining high revisability.
Another can remain conceptually transparent while possessing strong gatekeeping power.
The specific configuration matters.

10.13 The Difference between Stability and Dogmatization

Theoretical stability is necessary for cumulative inquiry.

If every concept were reconstructed from the beginning in every paper, communication and comparison would become extremely difficult.

A theoretical vocabulary therefore requires some persistence.
Dogmatization emerges when persistence becomes insulated from relevant challenge.
The distinction can be represented as:

$$\text{stable vocabulary with revision pathways} \; ; \; \text{stable vocabulary with epistemic closure.}$$

The first permits cumulative knowledge.
The second increases theoretical alienation.
Methodological self-emptiness therefore does not demand permanent conceptual instability.
It demands that stability remain conditionally revisable.

10.14 Self-Emptiness and Theoretical Commitment

Methodological self-emptiness should also be distinguished from weak theoretical commitment.

A researcher can work rigorously within a framework.
Definitions can remain precise.
Consequences can be derived consistently.
Empirical claims can be tested seriously.

Theoretical commitment concerns the discipline with which a framework is used within its domain.

Self-emptiness concerns the status attributed to that framework.
A theory can therefore be used strongly while remaining ontologically provisional.

> Methodological self-emptiness permits rigorous commitment to a means of inquiry while preserving the possibility that the means itself may require revision.

10.15 Self-Emptiness and Relativism

Self-emptiness also leaves room for epistemic discrimination.

The fact that theories are relationally generated does not make every theory equally adequate.

Some frameworks explain more.

Some predictions perform better.

Some conceptual schemes reveal structures that others suppress.

Some models remain coherent across wider domains.

Some theories survive stronger attempts at disconfirmation.

GR can therefore compare theoretical adequacy without assigning intrinsic essence to the theories compared.

The appropriate question becomes:

$$\mathrm{Adeq}\left(T; Q, \mathfrak{R}^K, \Gamma\right),$$

where adequacy is indexed to a problem, epistemic context, and relevant conditions.

Self-emptiness removes finality from theory while preserving the possibility of better and worse means of inquiry.

10.16 Anomaly as a Generative Resource

A self-emptying theory should maintain openness to cases that resist its categories.

An anomaly can indicate several possibilities.

The evidence may be unreliable.

The domain may differ from the one for which the theory was developed.

An auxiliary assumption may require revision.

A central concept may have reached its limit.

The anomaly therefore becomes a generative resource:

$$\text{anomaly} \rightsquigarrow \text{re-examination} \rightsquigarrow T_{t+1}.$$

A highly alienated theoretical system can reverse this relation.

The framework becomes protected, while anomalous cases are continually reclassified until they fit existing concepts.

Methodological self-emptiness preserves the possibility that the anomaly may transform the theory.

10.17 Disconfirmation and Conceptual Revision

A theory should therefore specify conditions under which some of its claims or concepts would require reconsideration.

These conditions need not always take the form of simple empirical falsification.

A conceptual framework can fail through:

- persistent contradiction;
- inability to distinguish cases relevant to its stated purpose;
- excessive dependence upon ad hoc reinterpretation;
- systematic exclusion of consequential relations;

- failure across domains where transfer had been claimed;
- emergence of a more generative explanatory vocabulary.

Methodological self-emptiness gives these possibilities positive theoretical status.

Revision is part of the life of the framework.

10.18 Replacement as Successful Use

The strongest consequence follows when a theoretical means has completed its useful role.

Suppose GR concept X_t^{GR} helps reveal a problem that later becomes better described through another concept Y_{t+1}.

The transition can be written:

$$X_t^{GR} \rightsquigarrow K_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow Y_{t+1}.$$

The disappearance of X_t^{GR} from later analysis need not count as failure.

Its epistemic efficacy may consist precisely in generating the conditions under which a better conceptual instrument becomes possible.

> A provisional theory can succeed by helping to generate the conditions under which its own vocabulary becomes replaceable.

This is a strong form of methodological self-emptiness.

10.19 GR and the Emptiness of Relation

The principle must apply specifically to the central terms of GR.

GR frequently uses *relation* as a method of access.

Relation therefore cannot be granted automatic ontological privilege.

Likewise, *system*, *entity*, *generativity*, *subject*, and *relational reality* remain analytical stabilizations.

Accordingly,

$$\text{Svabhava(relation)} = 0,$$

$$\text{Svabhava(generativity)} = 0,$$

and

$$\text{Svabhava(GR)} = 0.$$

These expressions do not deny that relational analysis can be productive.

They deny that analytical productivity automatically transforms the vocabulary into final ontology.

The methodological principle is:

> Relation is a method of access whose adequacy remains open to revision.

10.20 Generativity without a Generativity Substance

The term *generativity* requires the same caution.

GR uses generativity to direct attention toward the production, maintenance, and transformation of possibilities within relational systems.

This does not require a metaphysical substance called Generativity.

Generativity is an analytical orientation toward processes of becoming.

Its manifestations remain indexed to specified systems, observers, scales, and historical conditions.

A future framework may distinguish several forms currently compressed under one term.

Methodological self-emptiness leaves this possibility open.

The usefulness of generativity lies in the questions it enables rather than in a claim to ultimate metaphysical status.

10.21 The Self-Emptying Revision Cycle

A self-emptying framework can therefore be represented through a recursive cycle:

$$T_t \rightsquigarrow K_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow Q_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow E_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow T_{t+1}, \tag{3}$$

where K denotes generated knowledge, Q newly available questions, and E relevant evidence, experience, or encounter.

The cycle remains open.

The theory generates knowledge.

Generated knowledge exposes new questions.

New questions alter what evidence becomes relevant.

New evidence can alter the theory.

This is a generative alternative to theoretical closure.

10.22 Institutional Conditions of Theoretical Self-Emptiness

Individual intellectual openness alone is insufficient when theories operate through institutions.

A researcher may personally accept revisability while professional structures reward conformity to established categories.

Methodological self-emptiness therefore has institutional conditions.

These can include:

- preservation of conceptual and methodological pluralism;
- accessible histories of important categories and assumptions;
- space for anomalous or boundary cases;
- procedures for revising standards and classifications;
- distinction between provisional indicators and substantive goals;
- opportunities for affected subjects to contest consequential epistemic categories.

The exact institutional realization remains domain-specific.

The general principle is that epistemic systems should preserve the capacity to revise the means through which they generate knowledge.

10.23 Epistemic Power and the Subjects of Classification

Theoretical alienation becomes politically significant when classifications are applied to persons.

The classified subject may participate minimally in defining the category while experiencing substantial consequences from its application.

The relational structure is:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^K \rightsquigarrow C_t \rightsquigarrow S_{i,t+1}.$$

If the classification alters access, recognition, opportunity, or institutional treatment, it becomes part of the subject's subsequent relational environment.

The epistemic form has entered the subject's causal history.

This creates obligations concerning provenance, contestability, and revision.

A classification that governs persons should remain accessible as a generated and revisable form rather than becoming an unquestionable description of who those persons intrinsically are.

10.24 The Subject as a Participant in Knowledge Formation

The reflexive structure becomes stronger where subjects respond to the categories applied to them.

A classification can alter conduct.

Changed conduct can alter later observation.

The later evidence can then appear to confirm the original classification.

The loop is:

$$C_t \rightsquigarrow A_{i,t+1} \rightsquigarrow E_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow C_{t+1}.$$

The resulting knowledge cannot be understood solely as observation of a passive external object.

The epistemic relation participates in the field being known.

Methodological self-emptiness therefore requires attention to the causal effects of knowing practices themselves.

10.25 Theory as *Upāya*

The concept of *upāya* now reaches its strongest methodological application.

A theory can serve as a means for approaching a problem.

Its usefulness can be substantial.

Its application can be rigorous.

Its vocabulary can remain stable enough for cumulative inquiry.

Yet its authority remains conditional upon the relations through which it continues to illuminate the problem.

The theoretical attitude is therefore:

$$T_t^{\text{use}} \rightsquigarrow K_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow \text{Evaluation}(T_t) \rightsquigarrow T_{t+1}^{\text{use}}.$$

The cycle contains use, consequence, reflection, and revision.

Theory remains an instrument within inquiry rather than becoming the final arbiter of reality.

10.26 Provisional Theory and Alienated Theory

The distinction developed in this section can be summarized comparatively.

Table 4 presents orientations rather than binary classes.

A theoretical tradition can contain both dynamics simultaneously.

Table 4: Provisional and alienated theoretical mediation

Dimension	Provisional theoretical mediation	Theoretical alienation
Provenance	Questions and assumptions remain accessible	Conceptual origins become opaque
Ontological status	Categories remain analytically conditional	Categories become naturalized
Anomalies	Resistance can generate revision	Resistance is absorbed to preserve the framework
Institutional role	Theory supports inquiry	Inquiry becomes organized around preservation of theory
Classification	Categories remain contestable and domain-sensitive	Categories acquire fixed authority over classified subjects
Revision	Replacement remains an admissible outcome	Revision becomes increasingly costly or illegitimate

10.27 Methodological Self-Emptiness as an Internal Constraint

Methodological self-emptiness can now be stated as an internal constraint upon GR.

Definition 10.2 (Methodological self-emptiness)**.** Methodological self-emptiness is the requirement that a theoretical framework treat its own concepts, distinctions, and boundaries as historically and relationally generated analytical means whose epistemic efficacy does not grant them intrinsic or final ontological authority.

The definition entails several commitments.
GR must preserve access to the generative history of its concepts.
Its vocabulary must remain revisable.
Cases that resist its categories must retain the capacity to transform the framework.
Successful use cannot by itself establish metaphysical finality.
The framework must permit its own replacement where another means becomes more adequate.

10.28 A Theory that Can Release Itself

The strongest expression of methodological self-emptiness concerns release.

A theory normally seeks persistence.
Its concepts are refined.
Its applications expand.
Its institutional presence grows.

Yet a framework committed to provisionality must also preserve the capacity to recognize when persistence has ceased to be generative.

This produces a distinctive criterion:

> A self-emptying theory must remain capable of releasing concepts whose continued preservation obstructs the inquiry those concepts were introduced to support.

The capacity to release is the epistemic counterpart of institutional revisability.
It prevents theoretical mediation from becoming theoretical domination.

10.29 The Emptiness of GR and Its Causal Efficacy

GR therefore becomes an explicit instance of the central structure developed throughout the paper:

$$\text{Svabhava}(\text{GR}) = 0,$$

while

$$\text{GR}_t \rightsquigarrow K_{t+1}, Q_{t+1}, A_{t+1}.$$

The framework can generate distinctions, questions, interpretations, and practical orientations.

Those effects can become epistemically real.

Their reality does not require an intrinsically existing GR essence.

The theory is consequently subject to the same principle applied earlier to currency, credit, personal identity, institutions, and other relationally stabilized forms:

> Causal or epistemic efficacy does not confer intrinsic substantiality upon the form through which that efficacy is mediated.

10.30 Theoretical Self-Emptiness and De-Alienation

The relation between self-emptiness and de-alienation can now be stated directly.

Theoretical alienation develops when conceptual forms gain authority while their conditions of generation and revision become inaccessible.

Methodological self-emptiness preserves those conditions as part of inquiry.

The practical movement is:

$$\text{theoretical stabilization} \rightarrow \text{provenance preservation} \rightarrow \text{critical encounter} \rightarrow \text{revision}.$$

Theory remains stable enough to generate knowledge and open enough to be changed by what it encounters.

This is the epistemic form of non-alienated mediation.

10.31 Transition to Conceptual Boundaries and Research Obligations

The argument developed so far has moved from Buddhist emptiness and Marxian political economy toward a wider account of relationally generated forms.

It has distinguished intrinsic substantiality from causal efficacy, examined currency and credit as relational mediators, reconstructed alienation through opacity and restricted revisability, developed provisional mediation through *upāya*, and extended the analysis reflexively to theory itself.

Several questions remain open.

The relationship between Buddhist emptiness and the formal notation used here requires further philosophical scrutiny.

The proposed alienation profile remains conceptual and requires domain-specific operationalization before empirical use.

The boundary between necessary relational compression and alienating opacity requires contextual criteria.

The normative conditions of legitimate reconstruction cannot be derived from causal efficacy alone.

The comparative movement among Buddhist philosophy, Marxian political economy, and GR also requires safeguards against historical or doctrinal collapse.

The next section therefore specifies the conceptual boundaries, limitations, and research obligations that accompany the present proposal.

11 Conceptual Boundaries and Research Obligations

The preceding sections developed a generative relational interpretation of empty yet causally effective forms and used that framework to reconsider alienation, mediation, currency, credit, personal identity, institutions, religious images, and theory. The breadth of this comparison creates a corresponding obligation to specify the boundaries of the argument.

This section therefore distinguishes the conceptual claims established within the paper from analogical extensions, heuristic formalizations, normative questions, and empirical problems that require further investigation.

The purpose is methodological. A framework committed to provisionality should make visible the conditions under which its own concepts remain adequate.

11.1 Comparative Scope

The dialogue between Buddhist philosophy and Marxian political economy is structural and problem-oriented.

Madhyamaka discussions of emptiness arise within Buddhist philosophical and soteriological contexts. Marxian analyses of alienation, commodity fetishism, money, and capitalist social form arise within a historically distinct critique of political economy.

The present paper draws a more limited connection.

Both traditions provide resources for analyzing a problem in which apparent stability, dependence, efficacy, and the attribution of intrinsic status must be carefully distinguished.

The shared analytical space can be represented as

$$\text{Svabhava}(X) = 0, \qquad \mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}.$$

The first expression draws upon a Buddhist critique of intrinsic self-subsistence.

The second belongs to the GR reconstruction of relational generation and causal mediation.

Their conjunction is an analytical interface developed in this paper. It should not be read as evidence that Buddhist emptiness and Marxian alienation constitute historically identical doctrines.

> Structural comparability permits conceptual dialogue while preserving the historical and philosophical differences of the traditions compared.

11.2 Emptiness and Dependent Causality

The phrase *Causal Efficacy Remains* requires a specific boundary.

The paper does not attribute intrinsic substantiality to causality.

Within the Madhyamaka-informed perspective used here, causal relations are themselves dependently arisen and empty of intrinsic nature.

Accordingly, the central formula

$$\text{Svabhava}(X) = 0, \qquad \text{Eff}_{\mathfrak{R}}(X) \neq 0$$

should be read as a distinction between intrinsic self-subsistence and relational consequence.

The second term does not posit an independently existing causal substance behind empty phenomena.

Its meaning is conditional:

$$\text{Eff}\left(X \mid \mathfrak{R}, \Gamma\right).$$

Causal efficacy therefore remains dependent upon relational and historical conditions.

This qualification is necessary to prevent the anti-nihilistic argument from reintroducing substantialism at the level of causality.

11.3 Formal Notation and Philosophical Translation

The mathematical notation used throughout the paper is schematic.

Expressions such as

$$\text{Svabhava}(X) = 0$$

do not constitute a mathematical formalization of Madhyamaka philosophy.

Likewise,

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}$$

does not specify a complete dynamical system unless a particular domain provides state variables, transition rules, observations, and appropriate measurement procedures.

The notation performs three more limited functions.

It separates concepts that ordinary prose can easily conflate.

It exposes recursive structures across different domains.

It creates a vocabulary from which later domain-specific formalization may be developed.

The symbols therefore remain analytical means.

Their apparent precision should not be mistaken for empirical operationalization.

11.4 Relational Reality and Ontological Commitment

The concept of relational reality also requires ontological restraint.

To describe X_t as relationally real is to say that the form becomes sufficiently stabilized within a specified relational system and temporal horizon to participate persistently in later generation, reproduction, or transformation.

This claim concerns relational efficacy.

It leaves the ultimate ontological status of X open.

Thus:

$$X^* \ ; \ X_t^{\text{rel}}.$$

The first term marks the possibility of questions concerning ontic or metaphysical status.

The second marks the historically accessible relational manifestation under analysis.

The paper's account of currency, credit, religious forms, and subjects primarily concerns the second level.

GR therefore uses relation as a method of access without treating relation as the final substance of reality.

11.5 Carrier, Form, and Relational Efficacy

The distinction among material carrier, stabilized form, and relational efficacy should remain explicit.

A banknote is materially real.

Its monetary role depends upon a wider monetary configuration.

A religious statue is materially real.

Its ritual or devotional efficacy depends upon the relational configuration within which it is situated.

A written contract is materially instantiated.

Its legal efficacy depends upon institutions of recognition and enforcement.

These distinctions can be summarized as

$$K_t \ ; \ X_t^{\mathrm{rel}} \ ; \ \mathrm{Eff}_{\mathfrak{R}}(X_t),$$

where K_t denotes a carrier, X_t^{rel} the relationally stabilized form, and the final term its domain-specific efficacy.

The three levels can interact strongly.

Their analytical separation prevents the physical carrier from becoming the assumed location of the complete social or symbolic power mediated through it.

11.6 Currency and Credit as Political-Economic Cases

Currency and credit have been used as theoretically revealing cases rather than as complete descriptions of modern monetary systems.

The analysis distinguishes:

$$\text{money-form} \ ; \ \text{currency} \ ; \ \text{credit relation}.$$

The distinction isolates different analytical problems.

The money-form concerns the organization of value and exchange within Marxian political economy.

Currency makes the distinction between carrier and relational efficacy especially visible.

Credit exposes the temporal structure through which claims and expectations concerning possible futures become causally operative in the present.

A complete political economy of money and credit would require substantially more analysis of banking, state institutions, monetary sovereignty, financial markets, accounting, debt, interest, capital accumulation, and historically specific monetary regimes.

The present paper uses these cases to develop an ontology and theory of mediation relevant to alienation. It does not offer a comprehensive monetary theory.

11.7 Possible Futures and Temporal Causality

The claim that credit makes a possible future causally operative in the present should also be interpreted precisely.

The argument does not require backward causation.

Present expectations, promises, claims, obligations, models, and institutional arrangements concerning future events influence present action.

The structure is:

$$\text{present relation to possible future} \rightsquigarrow \text{present action} \rightsquigarrow \text{later state}.$$

The future remains open.

Credit can participate in producing the conditions through which one among several possible futures becomes more accessible.

This temporal recursion deserves further analysis because expectations can both respond to possible futures and participate in producing them.

11.8 Religious Mediation and Metaphysical Openness

The comparison between religious images and monetary carriers remains deliberately limited.

A Buddha image and a currency note may both function as material nodes within wider relational systems.

This structural correspondence concerns mediation.

It establishes no identity between sacred and monetary meaning.

It also establishes no conclusion concerning whether a transcendent or sacred referent exists independently of the relational manifestations analyzed by the paper.

For a religious form,

$$T^* \ ; \ T_t^{\mathrm{rel}}$$

remain distinct.

GR can analyze how a sacred or transcendent form becomes relationally manifest, how it organizes practice, and how those practices generate later relations.

The metaphysical status of T^* remains open.

This boundary allows historical-material and religious interpretations to coexist without requiring agreement about ultimate ontology.

11.9 The Social Subject and Ethical Asymmetry

The comparison among self, currency, credit, legal forms, and theories concerns relational architecture.

It does not place persons and institutional forms on one ethical level.

A person can be represented schematically through

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow S_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1},$$

while currency may exhibit a formally similar generative structure.

The similarity indicates that both can be relationally stabilized and causally consequential.

It supplies no reason to treat a person as an interchangeable instrument.

Embodiment, experience, vulnerability, agency, care, responsibility, and normative standing require additional analysis.

Cross-domain structural comparison therefore preserves ethical asymmetry among the forms compared.

11.10 Relational Dependence and Social Totality

The critique of the self-sufficient individual should also avoid substantializing the social whole.

The term

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^{\mathrm{social}}$$

denotes a distributed and historically evolving field of relations.

It carries no implication of a single collective consciousness.

The field may contain heterogeneous persons, institutions, infrastructures, norms, artifacts, ecological conditions, inherited histories, and future commitments.

Aggregate effects can emerge without a central subject who intends those effects.

This distinction is important for alienation.

A social form can exceed individual control through distributed generation without requiring "society," "the market," or "capital" to be treated as a metaphysical super-subject.

11.11 Alienation and Marxian Terminology

The generative relational definition of alienation developed in this paper should be distinguished from a claim about the complete meaning of *Entfremdung* in Marx.

Marx's early account of estranged labor, the later analysis of commodity fetishism, and subsequent theories of reification have different textual, historical, and conceptual locations.

The GR alienation profile

$$\mathbf{A}_t(X) = (o_t, r_t, a_t, d_t, v_t)$$

is a contemporary analytical reconstruction.

It identifies relational opacity, reification, relative causal autonomy, asymmetric dependence, and restricted revisability as dimensions useful for comparison.

The profile can illuminate Marxian problems.

It does not replace close interpretation of Marx's texts or the extensive scholarship surrounding them.

Future work should therefore distinguish textual Marx scholarship from the constructive GR theory of alienation developed here.

11.12 Alienation Profile and Operationalization

The alienation profile remains conceptual.

The components

$$o_t, \quad r_t, \quad a_t, \quad d_t, \quad v_t$$

have not been assigned universal numerical measures.

Several difficulties prevent premature scalarization.

Opacity depends upon the information relevant to a participant's role.

Causal autonomy depends upon scale.

Dependence can be reciprocal or asymmetric.

Revisability differs between formal possibility and practical accessibility.

Reification involves linguistic, institutional, phenomenological, and epistemic dimensions.

Future empirical use therefore requires domain-specific operationalization.

A lending system, labor institution, legal classification, and scientific theory would require different indicators and observational methods.

The profile currently functions as a diagnostic topology rather than a measurement instrument.

11.13 Functional Compression and Alienating Opacity

One of the central unresolved problems concerns the boundary between functional compression and alienating opacity.

Complex systems require simplification.

Currency compresses distributed exchange relations.

Legal categories compress heterogeneous facts.

Metrics compress observations.

Theory compresses complex fields into tractable conceptual structures.

The existence of compression therefore provides no sufficient diagnosis of alienation.

Future research must identify conditions under which compression begins to obstruct the forms of access required for accountability, participation, and revision.

The relevant relation may be represented as

$$\text{complexity} \rightsquigarrow \text{compression} \rightsquigarrow \begin{cases} \text{functional coordination}, \\ \text{alienating opacity}. \end{cases}$$

The branching conditions remain domain-sensitive.

This is one of the major research obligations generated by the present paper.

11.14 Generative Visibility and Appropriate Resolution

The concept of generative visibility likewise requires an appropriate resolution.

Complete provenance is impossible in sufficiently complex systems.

Every form has a potentially enormous causal history.

The practical requirement therefore concerns a relevant level of visibility.

Future work must ask which relations need to remain visible for which participants and purposes.

The required depth may differ among:

ordinary users, operators, regulators, affected communities, researchers.

Generative visibility should therefore be understood as role-sensitive and consequence-sensitive.

The concept becomes useful when it identifies the information required for meaningful agency rather than demanding exhaustive representation of the system.

11.15 Relative Causal Autonomy and Scale

Relative causal autonomy is explicitly scale-dependent.

A form can be collectively generated and individually constraining.

It may be modifiable by a legislature and practically immutable for an individual citizen.

It may be revisable by a financial institution and compulsory for an individual borrower.

The relevant statement is therefore:

$$\mathrm{Aut}_i(X \mid \mathfrak{R})$$

rather than an unqualified claim that X is autonomous.

Future analysis should specify:

- the actor relative to whom autonomy is attributed;
- the spatial and temporal scale;
- the institutional mechanisms through which the form operates;
- the practical alternatives available to the actor.

This prevents causal autonomy from becoming another hidden ontological substance.

11.16 Revisability and Power

Revisability is also distributed unequally.

A system can be formally revisable while remaining practically inaccessible to those most affected by it.

Thus:

$$\mathrm{Rev}_{\mathrm{formal}}(X) \; ; \; \mathrm{Rev}_{i,\mathrm{practical}}(X).$$

Future work must therefore analyze revisability as a dimension of power.

Relevant questions include who can initiate revision, who possesses the resources required to participate, whose knowledge is institutionally recognized, whose objections trigger review, and who bears the costs of delay or failure.

This is particularly important for the political-economic extension of the theory.

A relational account of de-alienation cannot rely upon abstract revisability alone.

11.17 Generativity and Normative Evaluation

Generativity supplies no complete theory of justice.

A system can generate many possibilities while distributing them unjustly.

One actor's generative expansion can rely upon another's exploitation.

A highly innovative institution can remain coercive.

A causally effective mediator can produce destructive consequences.

The paper therefore treats

$$\text{Generativity} \; ; \; \text{Justice}$$

as distinct analytical dimensions.

Likewise:

$$\mathrm{Eff}(X) > 0$$

provides no normative endorsement of X.

Future work requires explicit ethical and political criteria concerning distribution, procedure, care, responsibility, domination, sustainability, and the preservation of others' capacities for generation.

The present paper supplies an account of how forms acquire and reproduce causal power.

It leaves the complete normative evaluation of that power open.

11.18 De-Alienation and Institutional Adequacy

The account of de-alienation developed here should therefore be interpreted as a procedural and generative orientation.

Legibility, participation, contestability, and revisability can reduce important dimensions of alienation.

They do not guarantee justice in every case.

A transparent institution can remain exploitative.

A participatory institution can reproduce exclusion.

A revisable institution can continually revise itself in ways that transfer harm to less powerful participants.

Future work must therefore examine the relation between anti-alienation procedures and substantive normative outcomes.

De-alienation provides part of a theory of relational freedom and governance. It does not complete that theory.

11.19 *Upāya* and Comparative Restraint

The use of *upāya* in this paper is intentionally limited.

The term carries Buddhist doctrinal, pedagogical, and soteriological histories that exceed the present application.

The paper draws from it a methodological possibility: a means can remain practically valuable while its status remains conditional and revisable.

This should be understood as a philosophical borrowing under explicit translation.

Currency, law, political institutions, and scientific theories are therefore not being classified as Buddhist *upāya* in a doctrinal sense.

The comparison concerns provisional use.

Future work drawing more extensively upon *upāya* should engage Buddhist textual and historical scholarship in greater depth.

11.20 The *Diamond Sūtra* Paraphrase

The monetary formulation introduced in the paper,

> The Tathāgata speaks of currency; therefore it is no intrinsically self-subsisting Currency; hence it is called currency,

is an intentionally anachronistic analytical paraphrase.

It is not a scriptural quotation.

Its purpose is to illustrate a movement among naming, de-reification, and provisional re-entry into practice.

Future textual work should carefully distinguish this analytical construction from philological claims concerning the recurrent formulations of the *Diamond Sūtra* itself.

The example functions as philosophical pedagogy within the present paper.

11.21 Theory, Reflexivity, and Self-Application

Methodological self-emptiness creates an obligation of self-application.

The concepts introduced in this paper should remain subject to the same questions directed toward other relational forms.

For example:

relational reality, alienation profile, generative visibility, provisional mediation, methodological self-empti

may themselves become stabilized theoretical forms.

Their usefulness could encourage wider application.

Wider application could conceal their original domain and assumptions.

GR must therefore preserve the possibility that later research will divide, rename, abandon, or replace these concepts.

The framework's reflexivity is tested by its willingness to accept such revision.

11.22 Disconfirmation and Revision

The present framework generates several conditions under which revision would be required.

The theory would require reconsideration if relational reconstruction systematically failed to distinguish forms whose causal architectures are substantively different.

The alienation profile would require revision if its dimensions repeatedly failed to capture mechanisms central to well-established cases of alienation.

The distinction between functional compression and alienating opacity would require refinement if no defensible context-sensitive boundary could be identified.

The account of empty yet effective forms would require reformulation if the distinction between intrinsic substantiality and relational efficacy proved incapable of clarifying the cases for which it was introduced.

The comparative framework would require narrowing if its cross-domain analogies systematically erased historically significant differences.

Such possibilities are part of the research programme rather than threats external to it.

11.23 Empirical Research Obligations

The paper remains primarily philosophical.

Its concepts nevertheless produce empirical obligations.

Future case studies could examine:

- how borrowers experience and contest credit classifications;
- how monetary infrastructures distribute practical exit and revision capacity;
- how institutional metrics move from representation to generative governance;
- how legal classifications acquire relative causal autonomy;
- how participants reconstruct the provenance of socially consequential categories;
- how religious mediators organize practice across changes in material carrier;
- how scientific classifications alter the subjects and systems they classify.

Such studies should be designed to test distinctions developed here rather than merely illustrate them.

A useful case should create the possibility that the conceptual framework itself will require revision.

11.24 Historical Research Obligations

Historical inquiry is equally important.

The present theory treats stability as generated through repeated reproduction.

Historical research can therefore reconstruct how apparently self-evident forms acquired their current stability.

Relevant objects include monetary conventions, debt institutions, legal categories, labor relations, scientific classifications, and religious mediators.

The key historical movement is:

$$\mathfrak{R}_{t-k} \rightsquigarrow \cdots \rightsquigarrow X_t.$$

Recovering this sequence can reveal alternatives that disappeared during stabilization.

Historical provenance therefore contributes directly to the anti-naturalization function of the theory.

11.25 Comparative Research Obligations

Cross-domain comparison also requires cases in which the proposed common architecture fails.

If every example is redescribed until it fits

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1},$$

the framework risks becoming analytically empty through unlimited applicability.

Future comparison should therefore seek:

- forms that stabilize without significant causal mediation;
- forms whose efficacy cannot be usefully reconstructed through the proposed relational architecture;
- domains in which carrier and mediated form cannot be separated in the manner assumed here;
- cases where greater provenance visibility increases rather than decreases alienation;
- cases where restricted revisability serves defensible protective functions.

Negative and resistant cases are essential to methodological self-emptiness.

11.26 Theoretical Development Obligations

Several conceptual tasks remain open.

The relation among mediation, objectification, reification, and alienation requires further differentiation.

The temporal structure of credit suggests a broader theory of relationally operative futures.

The concept of generative visibility requires domain-specific criteria.

The distribution of revisability requires integration with a fuller theory of power.

The distinction between relational efficacy and normative legitimacy requires a developed ethical framework.

The interaction between subject formation and institutional classification requires deeper analysis.

The relation between emptiness and historical transformability also deserves further philosophical scrutiny.

These problems define extensions of the present discussion rather than conclusions already established by it.

11.27 Summary of Boundaries and Obligations

The principal boundaries and corresponding research obligations can be summarized in Table 5.

Table 5: Conceptual boundaries and research obligations

Domain	Present boundary	Research obligation
Buddhist–Marxian comparison	Structural dialogue with preserved historical difference	Deeper textual and historical comparison
Causal efficacy	Condition-dependent relational consequence	Domain-specific causal reconstruction
Formal notation	Conceptual and schematic	Operationalization where measurement is justified
Currency and credit	Illustrative political-economic cases	Historically specific monetary and financial analysis
Alienation profile	Multidimensional diagnostic framework	Empirical differentiation and operationalization
Relational opacity	Context-sensitive loss of generative visibility	Criteria separating useful compression from alienating opacity
Revisability	Distributed practical capacity	Analysis of power, access, and institutional procedure
Generativity	Future-producing relational capacity	Independent normative evaluation of distributions and consequences
Cross-domain comparison	Shared architecture without common ontology	Negative cases and limits of structural transfer
GR itself	Provisional analytical means	Continuous self-application, revision, and possible replacement

11.28 Boundary of the Present Contribution

The contribution of the paper can therefore be stated with a deliberately limited scope.

It proposes that absence of intrinsic self-subsistence and relational causal efficacy can be analyzed together.

It uses this distinction to reconstruct socially stabilized forms as dependently generated mediators.

It interprets alienation through the interaction of relational opacity, reification, relative causal autonomy, asymmetric dependence, and restricted revisability.

It develops provisional mediation and methodological self-emptiness as anti-reification principles.

It then opens a practical path from recognition of emptiness toward causal and institutional reconstruction.

The framework remains a discussion proposal.

Its concepts require historical, textual, empirical, and normative development.

Its own vocabulary remains subject to the principle it advances:

> A useful form can remain causally and epistemically effective while its provisional, dependent, and revisable character remains visible.

The conclusion returns to this principle and considers what it means for a political economy in which socially generated forms can be simultaneously empty, powerful, alienating, and transformable.

12 Conclusion

This paper began from a simple proposition:

Recognition that X lacks intrinsic self-subsistence does not abolish the relational causal efficacy of X.

The proposition separates two questions that are easily conflated. Emptiness concerns the mode through which a form exists. Causal efficacy concerns the consequences generated through that form within a relational configuration. A dependently arisen form can therefore possess no intrinsic essence while remaining stable, actionable, historically persistent, and materially consequential.

This distinction provided the point of contact between Buddhist emptiness, Marxian political economy, and Generative Relational theory. The dialogue developed here does not identify these traditions with one another. It uses their intersection to illuminate a recurrent problem: human beings generate forms through relations, those forms become stabilized, and stabilized forms subsequently enter the conditions through which later relations are produced.

The recurring architecture has been

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow X_t \overset{\text{med}}{\rightsquigarrow} \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}.$$

A form occupies a double historical position. It is generated by preceding relations and becomes generative within subsequent relations. Its dependence upon relational conditions therefore coexists with genuine causal efficacy.

Currency made this structure visible through the distinction between material carrier and monetary efficacy. Paper, metal, or electronic records contain no intrinsic monetary essence capable of explaining their monetary operation. Their efficacy emerges through institutional recognition, law, accounting, exchange, production, expectation, and repeated social practice.

Credit made the structure still clearer. A credit relation need not correspond to a self-subsisting material entity. It can nevertheless alter investment, production, access, obligation, and future possibility. A socially stabilized relation to a possible future can become causally operative in the present and participate in producing the future toward which it refers.

The analysis therefore supports a broader category of empty yet effective forms:

$$\text{Svabhava}(X) = 0, \qquad \mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}.$$

The self, currency, credit, legal forms, institutions, religious images, metrics, classifications, and theories can each instantiate aspects of this architecture under different conditions. Their structural comparability does not imply common ontology, history, meaning, or normative standing. It identifies a recurrent relation among dependent generation, stabilization, mediation, and subsequent efficacy.

This perspective also reframes alienation.

Alienation need not begin with the existence of mediation. Complex social life depends upon mediated forms. Currency permits coordination among strangers. Credit connects present activity with future possibilities. Law preserves obligations across time. Institutions maintain capacities beyond individual lifetimes. Concepts and theories allow knowledge to travel beyond immediate experience.

Mediation can therefore be generative.

Alienation emerges through particular developments within mediation. The analysis proposed five interconnected dimensions: relational opacity, reification, relative causal autonomy, asymmetric dependence, and restricted revisability.

A form becomes increasingly alienating as its consequences remain powerful while the conditions through which that power is generated become difficult to reconstruct. Relational efficacy becomes attributed to the stabilized form itself. Participants become increasingly dependent upon its

operation. Its effects exceed their individual control. Access to meaningful revision becomes uneven or inaccessible.

The resulting condition can be summarized through a characteristic asymmetry:

$$\text{effects remain visible} \qquad \text{generation becomes obscure.}$$

This formulation helps distinguish alienation from false belief.

A participant may understand perfectly well that currency is socially constituted, that a credit score is institutionally produced, or that a labor relation is historically contingent. The corresponding relations can continue to govern access, obligation, and future possibility.

Intellectual de-reification therefore changes one dimension of alienation. The causal structure may persist.

This point gives the Buddhist critique of intrinsic nature a distinctive political-economic significance. Emptiness can interrupt the naturalization of existing forms. A form that arises dependently carries no intrinsic necessity simply because it has become stable.

Historical persistence can be generated.

Practical compulsion can be generated.

Institutional authority can be generated.

The apparent inevitability of a social form can likewise be historically generated.

Recognition of dependent generation therefore opens a space for transformation. That opening acquires practical significance only when the causal relations sustaining the form are also examined.

The paper consequently interpreted de-alienation through relational reconstruction.

Its practical sequence is:

$$\text{de-reification} \rightarrow \text{generative visibility} \rightarrow \text{causal reconstruction} \rightarrow \text{effective revisability.}$$

De-reification reveals the dependence of the form.

Generative visibility reconstructs the conditions through which its efficacy is produced.

Causal reconstruction intervenes in relations responsible for consequential effects.

Effective revisability preserves meaningful access for affected participants to contest and modify the resulting configuration.

This orientation changes the political objective. The central task is the governance of causal relations through which socially generated forms become powerful.

A mediator can therefore remain in use while its generative configuration changes.

Currency can continue to mediate exchange under revised institutional conditions.

Credit can continue to mobilize future resources while its distributions of risk, access, and classification are reconstructed.

Legal categories can remain operational while retaining pathways for contestation.

Institutions can remain stable while preserving procedures for their own revision.

The distinction between mediation and alienation therefore allows stability and transformability to coexist.

The concept of *upāya* supplied a philosophical language for this possibility.

A practical means can be used according to its conditional efficacy while its provisional status remains visible. Its usefulness provides a reason for use within appropriate conditions. Its usefulness supplies no intrinsic ontological authority.

This produces a movement of practical re-entry:

$$X \longrightarrow \text{de-reification}(X) \longrightarrow X^{\text{provisional}}.$$

The form returns after the attribution of intrinsic essence has been suspended.

The intentionally anachronistic paraphrase introduced in this paper captures this movement:

> The Tathāgata speaks of currency; therefore it is no intrinsically self-subsisting Currency; hence it is called currency.

The final naming differs from the first. Currency remains available for practical use while its monetary efficacy is understood through the relations that generate it.

The same movement applies to the self.

Personal continuity remains practically and ethically consequential while intrinsic self-subsistence is withheld.

It applies to institutions.

Institutional stability can coexist with historical revisability.

It applies to theories.

Conceptual rigor can coexist with methodological provisionality.

The final extension is particularly important because the argument of this paper must apply to itself.

GR is also a relation-generated theoretical form.

Its concepts arise through historical problems, inherited vocabularies, interdisciplinary encounters, available methods, and previous theoretical work. Once articulated, those concepts influence later questions, interpretations, and practices.

GR therefore participates in the same architecture examined throughout the paper:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^K \rightsquigarrow \mathrm{GR}_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^K.$$

Its epistemic efficacy supplies no exemption from the critique of intrinsic nature.

$$\mathrm{Svabhava}(\mathrm{GR}) = 0.$$

Likewise, relation, system, generativity, relational reality, and alienation remain provisional analytical vocabularies.

Their usefulness lies in the distinctions and questions they generate.

Their authority remains conditional upon their adequacy to the phenomena encountered.

This requirement was described as methodological self-emptiness.

A self-emptying theory preserves the history of its concepts, the assumptions supporting them, the domains in which they remain useful, the anomalies that resist them, and the pathways through which they can be revised.

Its development therefore remains open:

$$\mathcal{L}_{\mathrm{GR}}^{(t)} \longrightarrow \mathcal{L}_{\mathrm{GR}}^{(t+1)}.$$

A stronger consequence also follows. A theoretical framework may successfully generate questions and insights that eventually require a vocabulary beyond the framework itself.

Replacement can therefore belong to theoretical success.

A theory can complete its role as a means by helping to generate conditions under which another means becomes more adequate.

This reflexive requirement protects GR from reproducing the very alienation analyzed in the paper. A method can become alienated when it forgets its status as a method. A conceptual tool can acquire theoretical authority over the reality it was introduced to approach. Methodological self-emptiness keeps the distinction between analytical efficacy and ontological finality visible.

The title of this paper can now be read in this fuller sense.

"All Dharmas Are Empty" directs attention toward dependent constitution and the absence of intrinsic self-subsistence.

"Causal Efficacy Remains" directs attention toward the consequences that continue to arise through those dependencies.

The second expression grants no intrinsic essence to causality itself. Causal relations also arise dependently. The claim is therefore modest and practical: recognition of emptiness does not cause already operative relational consequences to disappear merely through recognition.

This gives the paper an anti-reifying and anti-nihilistic orientation at the same time.

Emptiness constrains the inference

$$\text{causal power} \Rightarrow \text{intrinsic essence}.$$

Causal efficacy constrains the inference

$$\text{absence of intrinsic essence} \Rightarrow \text{practical nullity}.$$

Generativity then adds a historical dimension.

If a form is dependently generated, its present configuration has conditions.

If those conditions are reproduced, they can be investigated.

If they can be investigated, some may become accessible to intervention.

If they change, the form and its consequences can change with them.

The resulting orientation can be summarized in three propositions:

> Emptiness constrains reification.
>
> Causal efficacy constrains nihilism.
>
> Generativity opens historically stabilized forms to transformation.

These propositions also clarify the paper's reinterpretation of alienation.

The alienated form possesses no mysterious substance through which it gains power over human beings. Its power is generated through relations. That power can nevertheless become sufficiently stabilized to confront individual participants as an effectively external condition.

The theoretical and political task is therefore to recover the movement that reification compresses:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}.$$

The first arrow restores provenance.

The second preserves causal seriousness.

Their combination restores history.

Alienation appears less as the triumph of an independently existing thing over the subject and more as a pathology of recursive mediation in which relation-generated forms acquire causal authority while access to their own conditions of generation becomes restricted.

De-alienation correspondingly concerns recovery of participation in that recursive process.

The practical aspiration is therefore neither a world without relations nor a world without mediating forms. It is a relational world in which forms remain available for use without becoming immune to inquiry, contestation, and revision.

The paper can finally return to its central intuition in a compact form:

Know the emptiness of the form without abandoning its use.

Recognize its causal efficacy without attributing intrinsic essence.

Trace the conditions through which its power is generated.

Preserve the possibility of transforming those conditions.

Or, more concisely:

> Know its emptiness and preserve its use; see its consequences and govern their conditions; see its generation and therefore know its transformability.

The resulting perspective treats emptiness as an opening toward causal inquiry, causal inquiry as an opening toward relational reconstruction, and relational reconstruction as an unfinished historical practice.

Social forms can be empty and powerful.

They can be powerful and historically generated.

What has been generated can become difficult to change without becoming necessary in itself.

The recognition of this distinction is where critique begins, and the reconstruction of its generative conditions is where practice continues.

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