An Overview of the Concepts of Vijñaptimātratā

Content

Introduction

In general, individuals tend to perceive their surroundings, including people, phenomena, and things, as objectively existing independent of their minds. They consider them to have an independent existence. However, according to the Vijñaptimātratā (Consciousness-only) Doctrine (Vijñānavāda [‘Doctrine of consciousness’] or Vijñaptimātratā School) of Buddhism, all external phenomena are actually manifestations of the mind. They are generated by one's consciousness and are not mere images perceived by the mind. Everything individuals see, touch, feel, and interact with is a manifestation of their minds. This is the fundamental teaching of the Vijñaptimātratā, implying that everything is created by the mind.

This idea (that everything is created by the mind) may appear strange to some individuals. Is it really true? Could it be possible? To address these doubts, Vijñaptimātratā philosophers propose an indisputable example of dreaming. When individuals dream, the things they perceive—the sights, touches, and experiences—are all manifested by their minds, or more precisely, by their consciousness. However, in the dreaming state, individuals perceive these things as real, completely unaware that they are manifestations of their consciousness. Since everyone has experienced dreaming, no one can deny that within the dream, these experiences seem genuine. Vijñaptimātratā philosophers utilize dreams as an analogy to illustrate that every experience in daily life while awake is also a manifestation of consciousness.

The main point of Vijñaptimātratā is not only to assert that all is consciousness-manifested, but also to make individuals aware that due to their afflictions, everything the consciousness manifests is mistaken. Furthermore, individuals mistakenly attach to these manifestations, leading to incorrect decisions and behaviors. This is known as “illusory consciousness-only.” It is like wearing yellow-tinted glasses that taint their perception of the world. If individuals are unaware of this tinted effect, they would think that the world is actually yellow. To correct this error, they have to remove the tinted glasses and perceive the world in its original true form. The purpose of studying Vijñaptimātratā is to change their erroneous manifestations, cognitions, and attachments, resulting in correct perceptions and actions. This is known as “transforming consciousness into wisdom.” Of course, this is just a simple explanation, as Vijñaptimātratā involves many complex theories. Nevertheless, once individuals grasp the fundamental concepts, further study becomes easier. The purpose of this book is to introduce the basic concepts of Vijñaptimātratā as easily as possible to those who are interested.

Vijñaptimātratā is one of the two major philosophical systems and Schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India, the other being Madhyamaka (Middle Way). While there are many Mahāyāna sūtras and treatises, if we consider Schools or systematic philosophical systems, only Madhyamaka and Vijñaptimātratā can be categorized as such. The Madhyamaka School primarily focuses on the concept of emptiness based on the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* (*Perfection of Wisdom*). The Vijñaptimātratā School emphasizes the idea of everything being consciousness-manifested, stating that everything individuals perceive is illusory, a manifestation of “consciousness.” Therefore, it is called “illusory consciousness-only.” In this book, we will explain the concepts of Vijñaptimātratā in detail.

The term *vijñaptimātratā* (唯識 weishi) is known by various names. It is sometimes referred to as mind-only (唯心; *cittamātra*) because consciousness and mind are considered essentially the same from a certain perspective. It is also called the Yogācāra School in which *yogācāra* simply refers to yogic practice, because many of the developments in Vijñaptimātratā theory stem from meditative experiences. For instance, there is a well-known story about Bodhidharma crossing a river on a reed. According to the theory of meditation, he was actually contemplating the water as land during a meditative state. Among Buddhist meditative contemplations, there are the so-called eight contemplations of the eight elements such as earth, water, fire, wind, and blue, yellow, red, and white. When Bodhidharma perceived the water as land, it became land for him to walk across. However, for ordinary people, the water remains as water. On the contrary, if a meditator perceives the land as water, they can dive into it, seemingly disappearing into the ground. Therefore, through such contemplation, these yogic practitioners come to realize that the external world is not as it appears, leading to the development of cognition based on the manifestation of the mind. In other words, they believe that a powerful mind can transform everything external. Why can't ordinary people do the same? It is because the perceptual abilities of ordinary people are constrained by their karmic forces, making it difficult for them to easily alter their perception of the external world. For instance, as human beings, what they see is generally similar due to the influence of human karmic forces. However, the same object appears differently in the eyes of a dog. Therefore, it is said in the scriptures: "one object, four minds." Water, for example, appears as crystal in the eyes of celestial beings, as water in human eyes, as air in the eyes of a fish, and as pus and blood in the eyes of ghosts.[1] This theory suggests that external objects are merely a shared construct based on consensus, lacking an unchanging essence. The commonality of objects perceived by humans is a result of the influence of karmic forces. Similarly, ghosts of the same category share similar perceptions due to their respective karmic forces. This is why the Vijñaptimātratā School is also known as the Yogācāra School.

Vijñaptimātratā is the general term for this School. However, when the emphasis lies on the theory of manifestation of consciousness, it is called the Vijñaptimātratā School; when the focus is on meditation, it is called the Yogācāra School. Furthermore, although Vijñaptimātratā focuses on the manifestation of consciousness, there are two different concepts regarding the manifestation of consciousness based on two different Sanskrit terms. One concept states that the outside world is the manifestation of one's consciousness. In this case, consciousness is the primary subject, as the Sanskrit term used is *vijñāna*, which can be translated into English as consciousness-only. The other concept asserts that all of one's experiences are within the scope of their own cognition. Everything they see is within their own cognition. In this case, consciousness refers to cognition, and the Sanskrit term is *vijñapti*, which can be translated into English as mere-cognitive representation. What is the difference between *vijñāna* and *vijñapti*?

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[1]Vasubandhu, *She dacheng lun shi lun* (《攝大成論釋論》): "Animals perceive water as their abode, hungry ghosts perceive it as elevated plateaus. Just as humans consider excrement as filthy, swine and other animals perceive it as pure and exquisite. Humans perceive food and drink as pure, while celestial beings perceive them as impure." T.31, 310b.
Ming Yu, *Cheng weishi lun shuquan* (《成唯識論俗詮》) explains, "The consciousness of the four types of sentient beings individually distinguishes and perceives different forms due to their contradictory natures. Celestial beings perceive (water) as a treasure adorned abode, fish and dragons perceive (water) as their dwelling caves, humans perceive (water) as clear and cold water, and ghosts perceive (water) as pus-filled rivers and raging fires." X.50, 607a

The difference can be explained by distinguishing between epistemology and ontology. Ontology discusses how the external world is formed. Epistemology discusses how one perceives the external world. In Western philosophy, ontology explores the nature of existence, while epistemology examines how perceptions of the external world are cognized by the mind.

Generally, the distinction between ontology and epistemology relates to existence and cognition. When *vijñapti* is used to represent Vijñaptimātratā, it signifies the external world being manifested from their mind, placing emphasis on the ontological aspect of Vijñaptimātratā. On the other hand, *vijñapti* refers to cognitive representation, indicating the cognition of what is represented or presented to individuals, specifically focusing on how they perceive things in the external world. Therefore, when discussing Vijñaptimātratā, one must be aware of these two distinct meanings. In its early stages, Vijñaptimātratā primarily focused on epistemology, while later it shifted more towards ontology. As a result, there is a certain degree of variation in emphasis between early Vijñaptimātratā and later Vijñaptimātratā. Early Vijñaptimātratā dealt with the state of cognition, while later Vijñaptimātratā focused on the formation of the external world.[2]

The opening chapter of this book delves into the key factors that shaped the development of the Vijñaptimātratā School, encompassing the progression towards idealism, the elucidation of reincarnation, the reinterpretation of emptiness, and the emphasis on meditation. Firstly, the shift towards idealism finds extensive reflection in numerous Mahāyāna scriptures, as their doctrines predominantly lean towards the development of inner mind rather than external circumstances. Secondly, the explanation of reincarnation has always held a central position in Buddhism. The *Āgamas* merely present similes and examples to elucidate the concept of rebirth, leaving room for further clarification of its intricacies. Questions arise: What precisely entails the process of reincarnation? How does the transition occur between past lives and future lives? The Abhidharma and Mahāyāna Schools are called upon to offer a more comprehensive understanding. Thirdly, the reinterpretation of emptiness is imperative for achieving clarity. Although the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* introduce the notion of emptiness, which later evolves into the Madhyamaka doctrine by Nāgārjuna, the concept itself remains enigmatic. What does emptiness truly entail, and how should it be grasped? The Vijñaptimātratā scholars have played a pivotal role in providing additional insights into emptiness. Their explanation may differ from that of the Madhyamaka scholars, but their reinterpretation of emptiness becomes an indispensable factor in the evolution of Vijñaptimātratā. Lastly, the Vijñaptimātratā School places great emphasis on the practice of meditation. Based on the experiences of numerous meditators, it becomes evident that the external world is profoundly influenced by their consciousness. Consequently, the external realm lacks inherent nature, while the inner mind assumes relatively greater significance. In summary, the aforementioned factors have propelled the development of Vijñaptimātratā thought.

In the next chapter, the representative figures and doctrines of the early Vijñaptimātratā School are introduced. The foremost individual to be discussed is undoubtedly Maitreya Bodhisattva. Legend has it that Maitreya imparted the teachings of Vijñaptimātratā to Asaṅga Bodhisattva, who subsequently expanded upon them in collaboration with Vasubandhu

[2] Yinshun, *Weishi xue tanyuan* (《唯識學探源》[Studies in the origins of the Vijñaptimātratā]), (Taipei: Zhengwen Publishing House, 1992), 200-207.

Bodhisattva. The foundation of Vijñaptimātratā lies in both scriptures and treatises, with a notable emphasis on the latter. These treatises are associated with the three founding figures of Vijñaptimātratā, namely Maitreya, Asaṅga, and Vasubandhu. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the teachings of Śākyamuni Buddha are ultimately integral to this discourse. Maitreya Bodhisattva supplemented the teachings of our teacher, Śākyamuni Buddha, while Asaṅga and Vasubandhu provided further explanations and commentaries to Maitreya's commentary.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the main doctrines of the Vijñaptimātratā School. Firstly, it explores the root of all cognition, which is the *ālayavijñāna* (storehouse consciousness). Subsequently, it delves into the aspects of cognition in accordance with the three self-natures of Vijñaptimātratā doctrine. Thirdly, it elucidates the theory of practice in Vijñaptimātratā, known as transformational dependence (轉依 zhuanyi). Lastly, it presents the reinterpretation of emptiness by the Vijñaptimātratā School using the concept of the threefold nature of nonself-existence (*nir-trisvabhāva*). In summary, the main doctrines of Vijñaptimātratā revolve around the concepts of *ālayavijñāna,* the three self-natures, and the threefold nature of nonself. Understanding these key themes will enable individuals to gain a comprehensive understanding of the teachings of Vijñaptimātratā.

The concluding chapter centers on the observation and practice of Vijñaptimātratā, elucidating its practical dimensions. It encompasses various subjects, starting from the daily observation of all phenomena as manifestations of consciousness, to the process of investigating into the true essence of Vijñaptimātratā through meditative contemplation.

Chapter 1 The key factors in the developent of vijñaptimātratā

1.1 Development towards Mind-only Concept

The first factor contributing to the development of Vijñaptimātratā is associated with the Buddhist movement towards mind-only idealism. This evolution of the mind-only idealism in Buddhism, which significantly influenced the development of Vijñaptimātratā, can be discussed in three sequential phases: ethical idealism, epistemological idealism, and finally, ontological idealism.

1.1.1 ethical idealism

Ethics represents an early form of idealism, primarily found in early scriptures such as the *Āgamas*, which hold significant importance for two reasons. First, from a religious perspective, they can be considered as the earliest teachings after the Buddha's awakening, addressed to monks or awakened individuals such as Arhats. Second, from a historical viewpoint, they are regarded as the earliest scriptures to have emerged. The main focus of early Buddhism revolves around the defilements or purification of the mind, as well as the actions and karmic consequences driven by the mind. In other words, the concept of wholesomeness and unwholesomeness is based on cognitive intentions, which subsequently result in wholesome or unwholesome karma, leading to corresponding consequences (wholesome actions yield wholesome results, while unwholesome actions yield unwholesome results). Regarding external phenomena and the inner state of mind, the *Āgamas* propose that both exist objectively, as they are conditioned by causes and conditions. Unlike Vijñaptimātratā's idealism, the external world is not perceived as a projection of the mind.

1.1.2 epistemological Idealism

From the perspective of the Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika Schools, representing the Abhidharma Buddhism, different sentient beings have varying perceptions of the external world. This exemplifies another form of idealism. They assert that the external world exists objectively, independent of the mind. However, due to variations in individuals' mental states, their perceptions of the external world differ. For instance, as previously mentioned, the concept of “one-object-four-minds” elucidates that due to the karmic limitations of sentient beings, they possess distinct perceptions of the external world.[3] Drawing from everyday life, individuals receive contrasting treatment from different people. Those who hold a negative view of a person

[3] Zhongxian, *Shun zhengli Lun* (《順正理論》) : “Moreover, just as purity and impurity are not real. In other words, this implies that sentient beings, born in different realms, perceive the purity or impurity of the same thing differently. Since the attributes of purity and impurity are not definitively achievable, there are no inherently pure or impure objects.” T.29, 639a.

perceive all their actions as unfavorable, while those who favor them might appreciate their every gesture. When a preferred employee brings their supervisor a cup of coffee in the morning, the supervisor perceives them as thoughtful and exceptional. Conversely, when a disliked employee performs the same action, the supervisor suspects ulterior motives or plans for a raise. These examples highlight that the external world indeed exists objectively. However, due to divergent mental states, their perception of objective matters can greatly vary. This exemplifies the perspective of epistemological idealism.

1.1.3 ontological Idealism

Finally, within the context of Vijñaptimātratā, it is proposed that the external world manifests as a projection of the mind. Essentially, these external objects are not objectively existing entities, but rather products of mental projections. When they manifest externally from the mind, individuals perceive them and mistakenly assume their independent existence. Therefore, according to Vijñaptimātratā, objectively existing physical entities do not exist. The Vijñaptimātratā perspective shifts the focus away from the objective existence of something and instead emphasizes the true nature of its existence as mere manifestations of the mind. The mind projects an object externally, and subsequently, individuals perceive it as a physically existing object. However, the external object they perceive does not exist independently beyond the mind. This viewpoint embodies ontological idealism. Furthermore, this perspective not only explores the variations in the perception of the external world but also delves into the very existence of the external world, ultimately attributing its existence to the theory of mind-only idealism. Consequently, Vijñaptimātratā's evolution towards ontological idealism closely aligns with the prevalent idealistic movement within Buddhism.[4]

1.2 elucidation of rebirth

1.2.1 sectarian buddhism’s interpretation

Buddhism teaches the doctrine of no-self, but it also acknowledges the concept of reincarnation. This raises the question: if there is no enduring entity (also known as an *ātman*, self, or soul), then who undergoes the cycle of rebirth? Buddhist scholars have grappled with this important question since the early days of Buddhism. The doctrine of no-self in Buddhism aims to dispel the mistaken belief in a truly existing, inherent self that individuals cling to from birth. Nevertheless, Buddhism does not reject the existence of a composite entity made up of causes and conditions. While people commonly refer to this composite entity as the personal identity or self, Buddhism describes it as the false self or the composite entity of causes and conditions. This is to avoid falling into an annihilationist view. To illustrate, consider two distinct individuals, A and B. It would be incorrect to completely disregard their differences under the concept of no-self. Undeniably, A is different from B, B is different from C, and various fruits like bananas, guavas, and apples are all distinct. Each individual is the product of countless causal factors, making them unique. However, at the core of each individual, there is no eternal and unchanging essence, which is the essence of no-self.

[4] Yinshun, *Wei Shi*, 200-207.

In early Buddhist scriptures, reincarnation is described as an infinite progression of causes and conditions. Like a river—whether it is the Yangtze River or the Yellow River—does it possess an inherent entity or an unchanging essence? The answer is no. The upstream and downstream sections of a river, as well as its current and future states, are unquestionably distinct due to their perpetual transformation. However, individuals can still distinguish between the Yangtze River and the Yellow River because of their unique and identifiable characteristics formed by various factors. Furthermore, these rivers maintain a continuous flow without an inherent and unchanging essence. Similarly, reincarnation persists in a cyclical manner based on boundless causes and conditions, yet it lacks an inherent entity. According to Buddhism, all individuals experience afflictions and develop self-attachment, leading to the creation of karma. As each person makes different karma, the resulting causes and conditions differ from those created by others. Driven by the impetus of afflictions and karma, this intricate composite continues to undergo the cycle of rebirth and redeath.[5]

After the period of early Buddhism, the teachings gradually evolved to address diverse needs, leading to a greater emphasis on systematic and theoretical aspects. During this time, numerous important Buddhist concepts were further examined and elucidated, and the theory of reincarnation emerged as one of the significant subjects of interest.

Within sectarian Buddhism, the Sarvāstivāda School explicates its concept of reincarnation primarily through the theory of karma. The issue surrounding reincarnation can be resolved through a clearer understanding of the theory of karmic force. According to Sarvāstivādin scholars, all dharmas (phenomena including material and mental) of the past, present, and future possess a genuine and inherent existence.[6] Based on their belief, karma possesses a perpetual and inherent essence, even though it remains invisible. The creation of karma does not entail generating new karma but establishing a connection with the karmic force through actions. Once a connection with karma is established, and if further actions continue to stimulate it until all conditions mature, the effects of karma begin to manifest, giving rise to karmic fruition. The effects of karma cease when the fruition of karmic retribution is complete. Therefore, the inherent essence of karma always exists. Its efficacy depends on its connection with causes and conditions. For instance, an electric current already exists, albeit invisible to our

[5] (The author:) The continuity of the cycle of rebirth, is neither nihilist nor eternalist. Nāgaśena used the analogy of the continuity of flames of different candles to illustrate the continuity of the flame. Please see *Naxian biqiu jing* (《那先比丘經》), T. 32, 698a. The author, for more clarity, here uses the analogy of a river and the uninterrupted flow of water to illustrate the continuity of the cycle of rebirth.

[6] Yinshun, *Shuoyiqieyoubu weizhu de lunshu yu lunshi zhi yanjiu* (《說一切有部為主的論書與論師之研究》 [The study based on the commentaries and authors of the Savāstivāda School]), (Taipei: Zhengwen Publishing House 1992, 7th edition), 91-95; Tetsuya Tabata, *Sansei jitsu aru no genbun ni tsuide* (" '三世實有'の原文について" [On the term *adhvatrayam asti* in the Sarvāstivāda]), INBUDS 28, S54/12; Kudo Kato, *Sanze jitsu yū hōtai tsune-teki no shōko no okori* ("三世實有法體恒的の称呼のお こり" ['Sanzejitsu-Hottaigou' and its origin]), INBUDS 22-1, S48/12; Nobuyuki Yoshimoto, *Sanze jitsu yū setsu saikō - sono gengo to shisō-teki haikei* ("三世實有說再考 ー その原語と思想的背景" [A reconsideration of the theory of advatrayam asti-The original term and its philosophical background]), Buddhist Seminar 46 (1987 October): 16-30.

naked eyes. However, as soon as we connect the television to the electric current, it displays images. The electric current always exists; it merely manifests its effects through the television.

From the Sautrāntika School, which emerged as a sect of the Sarvāstivāda School, a theory of seeds (bīja) was further proposed as a metaphor to illustrate the functioning of the karmic force. Sautrāntika scholars explain that when karma is created, it is akin to planting seeds in the soil. Although the action of creating karma passes in an instant, the karmic force, like a seed, persists. It continues to exist until the conditions are ripe for karmic fruition.

Why do they choose seeds as a metaphor to explain karma? Scholars believe that seeds and karma share several similarities. Firstly, both are seemingly invisible on the surface. Seeds planted in the soil are not visible, just as karma is intangible and not visible. Secondly, their process of maturation require various conditions to nurture. Seeds need fertilization, watering, sunlight, and air to grow and mature. Similarly, karma also relies on specific conditions to strengthen its effects, leading to karmic fruition. Thirdly, a common saying, "you reap what you sow," reflects the notion that seeds possess distinct characteristics, and similarly, karmic force has its own unique qualities. For example, when individuals engage in unwholesome actions, and when the karmic force subsequently matures, they will only experience negative results. Positive outcomes are not possible, much like seeds. This specific characteristic of karmic force is also referred to as the inherent nature or characteristic of seeds. Lastly, both karma and seeds are dynamic; they grow and evolve. As individuals continue to generate actions, the karmic force undergoes changes until all conditions mature and the fruits of karma manifest. Similar to seeds that blossom and bear fruit with the nourishment of sunlight, water, and fertilizer, the karmic force flourishes. Due to these similarities, the ancient scholars of the Sautrāntika School proposed a comprehensible theory of seeds to elucidate the profound and complex concept of the karmic force.[7]

Additionally, certain Buddhist sects posit the existence of a subtle mind or substratum consciousness besides the six consciousnesses, which bears resemblance to the concept of the subconscious mind in modern psychology. This subtle mind serves as a storage system, akin to a database, capable of retaining diverse information from daily life, particularly our karmic force. This substratum consciousness, as it is called, not only elucidates the continuity of karmic force but also sheds light on the process of reincarnation.[8] These sects suggest that the sixth consciousness encompasses two levels of cognitive processes: a superficial level that engages in

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[7] Zhongxian, *Shun zhengli lun*, T. 29, 534c, the Dārṣṭāntika makes the following claim:
"Similar to seeds, fruition occurs when all conditions are met. Likewise, karmic fruition follows the same principle. When fruits vanish and their seeds encounter other conditions, the seeds are the main cause of continuing progressing through various stages, such as roots, buds, stems, branches, leaves, and other diverse elements until fruition is reached. The nature of this progression is impermanent, constantly subject to change. At the last stage of this process, when other conditions appear, [the seeds] are the main cause for its own fruition. Similarly, all karma, in its continuous state, experiences subsequent influences and conditions that give rise to a different progression. Despite the impermanent nature of this transformation, it persists. Eventually, at the conclusion of this transformation, if further conditions arise [the initial karma] is still the main cause for its own fruition... Thus, all karma cannot be considered the direct cause of retributive fruits, as if it were self-producing. Instead, fruition is brought about by subsequent influences."

[8] Xuanzang, *Cheng weishi lun* (《成唯識論》), T. 31, 16c: "Other Schools claim that there is a subtle consciousness within the cycle of rebirth. However, its specific characteristics and perceived objects remain unknown."

autonomous thinking and collaborates with the preceding five consciousnesses, and a deeper level that stores memories and karmic force. While the superficial consciousness arises and ceases in an instant, the deeper consciousness proves more resilient and can undergo transmigration based on karmic force.[9]

In addition to the aforementioned theories, there are numerous other theories that exist, but as they are not closely related to the development of the Vijñaptimātratā School, they will not be elaborated upon here.

1.2.2 Ālayavijñāna of the vijñaptimātratā

Based on the developed theories mentioned above and the integration of scholars, the theory of ālayavijñāna of the Vijñaptimātratā School began to take shape. The term *ālaya* can be directly translated as "store," implying the act of storing or concealing something. Notably, what is stored within it is not material but rather cognitive data, including karmic force, experiences, memories, and so on. In his work *Cheng-Wei-Shi-Lun*, the Great Master Xuanzang translated it as "storable, that which is stored, and the storage attached as self."[10] The Vijñaptimātratā School suggests that *ālaya* serves as the entity of reincarnation. Additionally, *ālayavijñāna* is referred to as the eighth consciousness, which was further refined through the analysis of the sixth consciousness, also regard as the consciousness of all seeds. This is due to the fact that our karmic force, memories, experiences, and so on are stored in the *ālayavijñāna* in the form of seed-like imprints.[11]

The Vijñaptimātratā scholars have divided the sixth consciousness into different levels: the superficial level is the sixth consciousness itself, while hidden in the depths lies a seventh consciousness, and even deeper is an eighth consciousness. While this division indicates a distinction between the depth and shallowness of the sixth consciousness, it is important to note that the deep consciousness possesses certain characteristics that differentiate it from the general sixth consciousness. In order to differentiate their distinct characteristics and functions, the Vijñaptimātratā scholars established a seventh consciousness and an eighth consciousness upon the sixth consciousness. The seventh consciousness pertains to its only function, which is its attachment to the eighth consciousness as self. The eighth consciousness can be compared to a warehouse, specifically designed to store seeds. The various karmic actions we have accumulated since the beginning of time, much like seeds, are stored within this eighth consciousness and perpetuate through the cycle of rebirth. Below, a detailed discussion regarding various aspects of ālayavijñāna will be presented.

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[9] *Mahāvibhāśa* (《大毘婆沙論》/ *Da pipuosha lun*), T. 27, 55b: "There are two views of skandhas (aggregates): 1. Basic skandhas, and 2. Functional skandhas. The former is considered permanent, while the latter is impermanent. Proponents of this view assert that although both basic and functional skandhas are distinct, they come together to form a sentient being. Consequently, memory is made possible by the influence of the functional skandhas and the memorization capacity inherent in the basic skandhas."

[10] T. 31, 7b.

[11] *Saṃdhinirmocana Sūtra* (《解深密經》/*Jie shenmi jing*), T. 16, 692a: "From within, at the very inception, there exists the "all-seeds-consciousness." This consciousness is also known as the ādāna-consciousness. Why? It is because it attaches to the body. It is also referred as the ālaya-consciousness. Why? It is because it merges with the body as a unified entity, sustaining its existence."

1.3 The reinterpretation of emptiness (śūnyatā)

When discussing emptiness (skt. *śūnyatā*), most people immediately associate it with the *Heart Sūtra* or the *Diamond Sūtra*. The central theme of both these sutras undeniably revolves around emptiness. While the Diamond Sūtra employs the term "formlessness" instead of "emptiness," the underlying meaning essentially points to the concept of emptiness. Emptiness is a recurrent topic in the majority of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*, but its profound nature can be challenging for many individuals to grasp. Consequently, the *Saṃdhinirmocana Sūtra* (*The Scripture on the Explication of Underlying Meaning*), which serves as a fundamental text in the Vijñaptimātratā School, acknowledges that the profound teachings on emptiness within the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* often give rise to confusion. Therefore, it suggests the necessity of employing a different approach to clarify this profound doctrine of emptiness.[12]

In his work, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way), Nāgārjuna asserts that attachment to the self (skt. *ātman*) can be overcome through the doctrine of nonself (skt. *anātman*) or emptiness. However, teaching those who are deeply attached to the concept of emptiness proves to be a challenge. Hence, it is said to be "that which all Buddhas cannot teach."[13] When the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* discuss emptiness, it often leads to significant misunderstandings. Some individuals interpret emptiness as the existence of a substantial entity from which all phenomena arise, while others view it as indicating the absence of everything, embracing eternalism or nihilism. The *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* were originally expounded for advanced bodhisattvas possessing profound intellectual capacity, but many individuals have not yet attained such a level of capacity. Consequently, they tend to misinterpret the teachings on emptiness. Therefore, the Buddha mentioned in the *Saṃdhinirmocana Sūtra* that it is crucial to provide further explanations regarding emptiness. As shown in the title, the explication of profound secrets (解深密 / jie shen mi) pertains to the clarification of underlying meanings, including the meaning of emptiness.

First of all, the *Saṃdhinirmocana Sūtra* delineates three distinct periods of teachings, tailored to the intellectual capacities of different sentient beings. The initial period is referred to as the teaching of existence, encompassing early teachings found in the *Āgama Sūtras*. These teachings include the four noble truths and the twelve links of dependent origination. The four noble truths are regarded as genuine and not illusory. The cycle of rebirth, associated with suffering and its origin, is acknowledged to truly exist. Likewise, liberation in relation to the path to liberation and the cessation of suffering is also acknowledged as a genuine existence. Consequently, it is aptly named the teaching of existence.

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[12] *Jie shenmi jing*, T. 16, 18c: "If one were to hear such teachings, they may not truly grasp the profound and esoteric meaning of my doctrine. Although they may believe in these teachings, they tend to attach to their literal meaning and express statements such as: 'All things are completely devoid of inherent nature, devoid of arising or ceasing, inherently tranquil, and self-nature nirvana.' As a result, in terms of all things, they develop the concepts of nothingness and formlessness. Consequently, due to these views of nothingness and formlessness, they believe that all forms are actually formless."

[13] *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (《中論》/ *Zhong lun* [Verses on the fundamentals of the middle way]), verses nine, T. 30, 18c: "The great sage (Buddha) teaches the doctrine of emptiness to eliminate all extreme views. Yet, if one holds onto the notion of an intrinsic emptiness, it is beyond the capacity of all Buddhas."

The second period is known as the teaching of emptiness, as reflected in the claim of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* that all phenomena are empty. As stated in the *Heart Sūtra*, “When Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara was practicing the profound prajñāpāramitā, he saw that all the five aggregates are empty and thus transcended all suffering and distress... Form does not differ from emptiness, emptiness does not differ from form. Form is emptiness, emptiness is form... There is no suffering, no origination, no cessation, no path; there is no wisdom, no attainment.” This indicates that the four noble truths and the twelve links of dependent origination do not possess inherent existence, and this is what is meant by the teaching of emptiness. However, some people mistakenly interpret emptiness as the absence of everything, failing to grasp its true meaning. Others perceive emptiness as a substantial entity that gives rise to all phenomena, which is also a misconception regarding the concept of emptiness.

To correct these misconceptions, in the third period, the Buddha taught the concept of both emptiness and existence. In other words, some things truly exist, while others are empty, nonexistent, and illusory. What is the distinction between reality and illusion? The *Saṃdhinirmocana Sūtra* introduces the concepts of the Three natures and three non-natures to explain emptiness and clarify the distinction between what is reality and what is illusory. A detailed explanation of these concepts will be provided later in the book.

1.4 The emphasis of meditative contemplation

Contemplation arising from concentration is called meditative contemplation, also known as Vijñaptimātratā. The Sanskrit word *yogā* means to connect and refers to the connection of body and mind. What does it mean for the body and mind to be connected or in balance? Usually, people’s minds are scattered and restless. When the mind wanders off, it naturally becomes disconnected from the body. Their body may be here, but their mind is miles away, indicating a lack of connection. Therefore, individuals often experience a disconnection between their body and mind, which can eventually lead to an imbalance of body and mind, affecting their lives and hindering their spiritual practice.

The fundamental training of meditative contemplation is to help individuals focus their minds, allowing the body and mind to connect. The training method of meditative contemplation is called 'single-pointedness of mind,' which means focusing the mind on a specific object. This training method of gathering the mind is also known as cultivating tranquility or *śamatha*. The term *cāra* in Vijñaptimātratā means practice and implies training, engagement, and practical application. It also conveys the idea of progression or advancement. Therefore, Vijñaptimātratā refers to the engagement in the connection of body and mind or, in other words, the practice of meditative contemplation. There is a strong connection between the development of Vijñaptimātratā and the practice of meditative contemplation, which is why the Vijñaptimātratā School is often referred to as the Vijñaptimātratā School within the Vijñaptimātratā tradition.

In the early days of Buddhism, there were various types of monastic practitioners. Among them were ascetics, known as *dhutanga* practitioners, who adhered to austere practices. These ascetics lived simple lives, possessing only the bare minimum in terms of clothing and possessions. They sought out seclusion in places such as forests or burial grounds to engage in

meditation and contemplation. They are also commonly known as forest monks/nuns. Another category of practitioners encompassed urban monks/nuns, who concentrated on training within monastic communities and resided in institutional settings. Furthermore, there were those who had specific inclinations, such as a focus on meditation, dedicated study of scriptures, engagement in social welfare or missionary work, and a special emphasis on chanting to benefit sentient beings through the power of their voices. Ancient India already exhibited a diverse range of monastic practitioners.[14]

Among the various types of monastic practitioners, there were monks known as masters of Abhidharma who organized, studied, analyzed, and provided interpretations of the Buddha's teachings. Consequently, their works are referred to as Abhidharma.[15] In this context, the term "teachings" primarily refers to the *Āgama Sūtras*. The systematic explanations they offered for the *Āgama Sūtras* are known as *Abhidharma Treatises*. For instance, the complete title of the *Kośas* is *Abhidharmakośa-bhāsya*. These masters devoted themselves to scripture analysis and engaged in rigorous systematic study. Notably, several prominent scholars of the Vijñaptimātratā School, including Asaṇśga and Vasubandhu, originally began their monastic journey as Abhidharma masters.

Furthermore, there were practitioners who placed a greater emphasis on the practice of meditative contemplation and dedicated most of their time to meditation. These practitioners are known as yogis. Concentration (samadhi) is a powerful and wholesome action referred to as "immovable karma" in the scriptures, signifying its resistance to unwholesome phenomena within the desire realm. In the practice of meditative contemplation, meditators can utilize the power of concentration to alter certain aspects of reality. For instance, by engaging in the practice of "water-pervading," they can perceive the ground as a body of water. While it appears as water to the meditator, it remains as land for others. Similarly, they can practice "earth-pervading" and perceive a body of water as land. Through such meditative contemplation, practitioners come to realize that inner cognition is, in fact, more real than external phenomena. The supernatural powers frequently mentioned in the scriptures are developed through these contemplative practices. The famous story of Bodhidharma crossing the river on a reed serves as an illustration of this principle. How did he manage to cross the river on a reed? By employing the practice of "earth-pervading," he perceived the water as solid ground through the power of concentration, enabling him to walk across it. These stories do not primarily highlight supernatural powers but aim to help everyone comprehend the profound influence of meditation and contemplative practices on the development of the Vijñaptimātratā School. Through prolonged meditative practices, these meditation masters gradually discovered, through the profound effect of concentration, that the mind is more real than the external world. Consequently, they developed the concept and theory that external phenomena are projections of the mind. The dialogue between the Buddha and Maitreya Bodhisattva in the "Analysing Yoga" section of the *Saṃdhinirmocana Sūtra* serves as significant evidence of the close relationship between meditation and the Vijñaptimātratā School.[16]

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[14] Yinshun, *Chuqi dacheng de qiyuan yu kaizhan* (《初期大乘的起源與開展》 [The origin and development of the early period of Mahāyāna Buddhism]), (Taipei: Zhengwen Publishing House, 1992, 7th edition), 200-233.
[15] Yinshun, *Shuoyiqieyoubu*, 56-64.
[16] *Jie shenmi jing*, T.30, 697c: "Once again, the Bodhisattva of compassion, Maitreya, asked the Buddha: 'Bhagavan (World Venerable)! Are all the images that arise from vipaśyana and samadhi different from the mind, or are they

The development of the Buddhist Vijñaptimātratā School has undeniably been influenced by a multitude of complex factors. However, several key elements can be identified as crucial in its development, namely, the inclination towards idealism, the exploration of rebirth, the reinterpretation of emptiness, and the emphasis on meditative contemplation.

not different from the mind?' The Buddha answered Maitreya bodhisattva, saying: 'Virtuous man! They should be considered as not different. Why? This is because those images are mere consciousness. Virtuous man! I said that the objects of the consciousness are mere manifestations of the consciousness… Bhagavan! If all sentient beings remain in their own natural being, the imprints of the objects they perceive from color and so on, are these imprints not different from the mind? Virtuous man! There is no difference. However, due to the mistaken view of ignorant beings who do not realize that these imprints are mere consciousness, they misunderstand them."

Chapter 2 Main figures and texts

2.1 Main Figures

When discussing the main figures of Vijñaptimātratā, the first one to mention is undoubtedly Bodhisattva Maitreya, who is considered the pioneer of Vijñaptimātratā. Maitreya Bodhisattva can be regarded as a legendary figure in the scriptures or an actual historical figure. According to the legends in the scriptures, he is known as the future Buddha, who will appear in the next life as Maitreya Buddha. Additionally, he is the founder of the Vijñaptimātratā School. According to the legends in the scriptures and commentaries, it is said that Bodhisattva Asaṅga, when faced with unresolved questions in the teachings, engaged in meditation and visualization to ascend to Maitreya's abode to seek guidance from Bodhisattva Maitreya. After descending, he composed the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* (Treatise on the Stages of Yoga Practice). The second figure is Bodhisattva Asaṅga, who lived approximately between 310 CE and 390 CE. He is also one of the founders of the Vijñaptimātratā School and a historically recognized individual. The third figure is Bodhisattva Vasubandhu, who is the younger brother of Asaṅga. Vasubandhu is also a historical figure, estimated to have lived between 320 CE and 400 CE. Maitreya Bodhisattva, Asaṅga Bodhisattva, and Vasubandhu Bodhisattva are the three main figures widely recognized in the Vijñaptimātratā School.

According to the records of both major and minor scriptures and commentaries, Maitreya Bodhisattva is widely known as the future Buddha who will attain enlightenment after Śākyamuni Buddha. This notion is mentioned in various scriptures, including the Āgama Sūtras. However, from a historical perspective, around the 3rd century CE, there was a group of meditators in northwest India who proposed teachings related to early Vijñaptimātratā.[17] These teachings later merged with the figure of Maitreya Bodhisattva from the Tuṣita Heaven, and he became referenced as the progenitor of the Vijñaptimātratā doctrine. Eventually, Maitreya came to be considered the author of early Vijñaptimātratā treatises. This is the scholarly viewpoint. On the other hand, from a more traditional standpoint, as mentioned earlier, whenever Asaṅga encountered ambiguity in the Buddha's teachings, he would meditate and ascend to Maitreya's inner court to seek guidance. As a result, Maitreya also became Asaṅga's teacher, and the transmission of Vijñaptimātratā from Maitreya in the Tuṣita Heaven became the traditional belief.[18]

Numerous treatises are attributed to Maitreya Bodhisattva; however, within the legends of Chinese and Tibetan traditions, five treatises are considered representative, despite some variations between the two traditions. According to the Chinese tradition, the five treatises are as follows: "Maulyo-bhūmayaḥ" in *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* (《瑜伽師地論》-本地分 ["The main

[17] Yinshun, *Shuoyiqieyoubu*, 634-640. Hakuju Ui, "Shitekjin butsu toshite no Miroku Oyobi Mujaku no Chojutsu (史的人物としての彌勒及び無着の著述)， "Indotetsugaku Kenkyu (NVWF), vol. 1 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1924), 335-414.

[18] Paramārtha trans., *Poshupandou Fashi Zhuan*, T.50, 188a, "Asaṇga is translated as Wuzhuo. He later ascended numerous times to Tuṣita heaven to consult with Maitreya regarding the doctrine of Mahāyāna. After receiving Maitreya's explanation, he would return to Jambudvīpa (Rose Tree Island/mundane earth) and teach people what he had heard."

stages section" in the Treatise on the stages of yogic practice]; *YBS*), *Vibhāga-yogācāra-śāstra* (《分別瑜伽論》 [The treatise on the discrimination of yogic pratices), *Mahāyāna-sūtra-alamkāra-kārikā* (《大乘莊嚴經論頌》 [Verses on the glory of the Mahāyāna sūtra]), *Madhyānta-vibhaṇga-bhāṣya* (《辯中邊論》 [commentary on the discrimination of the middle and extremes]), and *Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā-śāstra-kārikā* (《金剛般若經論頌》 [verses on the commentary of the Diamond Sūtra]). In the Tibetan tradition, the five treatises are: *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra-kārikā*, *Madhyānta-vibhaṇga-bhāṣya*, *Dharma-dharmatā-vibhaṇga* (《辨法法性論》 [distinguishing between phenomena and the nature of phenomena]), *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* (《現觀莊嚴論》 [ornament of/for realization]), and *Ratnagotravibhāga* (《寶性論》 [treatise on the treasure of buddha nature]).[19] Consequently, the total number of both the Chinese and Tibetan traditions in circulation is eight:
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1. *YBS*:
   The earliest treatise of Vijñaptimātratā. The term *Yogācāra-bhumi* refers to the stages of observation and practice for meditators. Legend holds that this treatise was composed by Asaṅga Bodhisattva after ascending to Maitreya's inner abode and receiving teachings from Maitreya Bodhisattva. In the Tibetan tradition, *YBS* is not among the five treatises of Maitreya; rather, it is attributed to the works of Asaṅga. This distinction arises from the fact that only the "Maulyo-Bhūmayaḥ" of *YBS*—the first of the five chapters consisting of a hundred scrolls—is exclusively attributed to the works of Maitreya.
2. *Vibhāga-yogācāra-śāstra*:
   This text has been lost and there are no translations available in either Chinese or Tibetan.
3. *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra-kārikā*:
   The verses in this text are attributed to the works of Maitreya, which are commented by Asaṅga. It is primarily discusses how to adorn Mahāyāna with *prajñā* (wisdom) and *karuṇā* (compassion) from the perspectives of Vijñaptimātratā.
4. *Madhyānta-vibhaṇga-bhāṣya*: The Chinese translated text *Zhong Bian Fen Bie Lun* (《中邊分別論》), also known as *Bian Zhong Bian Lun* (《辨中邊論》), meticulously elucidates the distinction between the middle path and various extreme viewpoints and attachments. These encompass eternalism, nihilism, monism, dualism, and other philosophical stances. The primary objective of this treatise is to differentiate the characteristics of the middle path from those of the extreme views. The central assertion of this text is that all extreme viewpoints emerge from self-attachment. The realization and embodiment of the middle path, in turn, hinge upon the cessation of such self-attachment. When an individual is ensnared by self-attachment, a plethora of extreme viewpoints arise—alternatively referred to as attached views or erroneous cognitions. Examples of these include attachment to concepts such as emptiness, inherent existence, nihilism, and eternalism. Through diligent engagement with the Buddha's teachings, coupled with persistent practice, one progressively cultivates accurate comprehension while simultaneously disentangling oneself from self-attachment. This gradual process culminates in the genuine perception of the authentic essence of reality—the very embodiment of the middle path.
5. *Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā-śāstra-kārikā*: This text provides a commentary on the *Diamond Sūtra* from the perspective of Vijñaptimātratā. The verses are attributed to Maitreya and have been commented by both Asaṅga and Vasubandhu.
6. *Dharma-dharmatā-vibhaṇga*: This text distinguishes between "dharmas" (phenomena) and "dharmatā" (the nature of phenomena). Here, "dharmas" refer to the phenomena of birth and death, while "dharmatā" refers to ultimate nirvāṇa. In other words, it is the distinctions between birth and death and nirvāṇa.
7. *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*: This text elucidates the eight-thousand-verse *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (Perfection of Wisdom Sutra).
8. *Ratnagotravibhāga*: This text is also known as *Jiu Jing Yi Cheng Bao Xing Lun* (《究竟一乘寶性論》) in the Chinese translated version. It explores the concept of an inherent Buddha nature and aligns with the

[19] Hirakawa Akira, *Indo bukkyōshi*, gekan (インド仏教史 ，下巻 / *A History of Indian Buddhism*) (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1988, 9th print), 93-99.

Tathāgatagarbha (Buddha-nature) teachings. Consequently, in the Chinese tradition, it is not classified as one of the five treatises of Vijñaptimātratā.

Asaṅga lived approximately between 310 and 390 AD. He was born in northwest India and ordained in the Sarvāstivāda or Mahīśāsaka School. Throughout his life, he authored numerous important works, including the *Mahāyānābhidharma-samuccaya-vyakhyā*, *Prakaraṇāryavācā-śāstra*, *YBS*, *Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra-śāstra*, *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha*, *Madhyamaka-śāstra-artha-anugata-mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra-ādiparivarta-dharmaparyāya-praveśa* (《順中論義入大般若波羅蜜經品法門》; abbr. *MSA*), and more.[20] Although the Vijñaptimātratā School originated with Maitreya, its ideas were propagated by Asaṅga. Therefore, from a historical perspective, Asaṅga can be regarded as the founder of the Vijñaptimātratā School. As mentioned earlier, among the five chapters of the *YBS*, apart from the "maulyo-bhūmayaḥ", the rest were composed by Asaṅga. The *MSA* is Asaṅga's concise commentary on Nāgārjuna's *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā* (《中論》 [Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way]). The *Mahāyānasaṃgraha* is an important treatise as it integrates the preceding Vijñaptimātratā theories and establishes the fundamental system and concepts of the Vijñaptimātratā School, representing Asaṅga's Vijñaptimātratā thought.

Vasubandhu lived approximately between 320 and 400 AD, and he was also ordained in the Sarvāstivāda School. As mentioned earlier, Vasubandhu and Asaṅga were brothers. In fact, they had three brothers, and the middle brother was also ordained, but he was not as well-known as the other two. All three brothers could be called Vasubandhu, hence the term "Three Vasubandhus." However, to differentiate them, the eldest was called Asaṅga, and the youngest was referred to as Vasubandhu. According to the *Poshupandou Fashi Juan* (《婆藪槃豆法師傳》 [biography of Vasubandhu]), since Vasubandhu was ordained in the Sarvāstivāda School, his studies corresponded with the theories of the Hinayāna School, wherein, his most famous representing such theories was called the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāsya* (Treasury of Abhidharma, abbr. *AKB*). Later, influenced by Asaṅga, he embraced the teachings of the Mahāyāna and began writing treatises on the Mahāyāna doctrines.

Due to his extensive writings, he was known as the "Master of a Thousand Treatises."[21] Some of his important works include the *AKB*, *Viṃśatikā-vijñaptimātratā* (《唯識二十頌》 [Twenty verses on consciousness-only]; in short, *Twenty-verses*)"Twenty Verses on Consciousness-Only," Triṃśikā-vijñaptimātratā (《唯識三十頌》 [Thirty verses on consciousness-only]; in short, *Thirty-verses*), *Karmasiddhi-prakaraṇa* (《大乘成業論》/*Da Cheng Cheng Ye Lun* [The Mahāyāna demonstration on karma])，*Da Cheng Wu Yun Lun* (《大乘五蘊論》, also known as the *Kwang Wu Yun Lun* /《廣五蘊論》[The Mahāyāna demonstration on the five aggregates]), *Mahāyāna-śatadharma-prakāśamukha-śāstra* (*Bai Fa Ming Men Lun* /《百法名門論》 [Treatise on the door to understand the hundred dharmas of the Mahāyāna]; in short, *Hundred-dharmas*), and *Buddhagotra-śāstra* (Fo xing lun /《佛性論》 [Treatise on Buddha-Nature]). He also wrote commentaries on some of Maitreya's and Asaṅga's treatises.

[20] P. Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundation* (London: Routledge, 2009), 86-87.
[21] Paramārtha trans., *Poshupandou*, T.50, 188a.

The *Twenty-verses* focuses on refuting heretical views, while the *Thirty-verses* establishes and expands the system of Vijñaptimātratā thought. The *Hundred-dharmas* analyzes and explains the characteristics of phenomena, dividing all phenomena into five categories: form, mind, mental faculties, non-corresponding activities, and unconditioned phenomena, totaling one hundred dharmas. It is essentially based on the seventy-five dharmas of the *ABK* and expands upon them to form one hundred dharmas. The *Buddhagotra-śāstra* discusses the concept of the Buddha's nature from the perspective of Vijñaptimātratā.

Among Vasubandhu's works, the *Thirty-verses* can be considered his most important treatise on Vijñaptimātratā. Unfortunately, the text only provides verses without further explanations. After Vasubandhu, numerous scholars of the Vijñaptimātratā School offered commentaries on this treatise, and it is said that ten prominent commentators emerged. Xuanzang's *Cheng Weishi Lun* mainly relies on the commentary of the master Dharmapāla, while the other nine works serve as supplemental references.

2.2 Main Texts

There are numerous canonical texts that the Vijñaptimātratā School relies on, with treatises being the primary source. According to the transmission of Master Xuanzang, there are six scriptures (sūtras) and eleven treatises (śāstras).[22] The six scriptures are as follows:

1. *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Hua Yan Jing* /《華嚴經》 [Flower garland sūtra]): translated by Buddhabhadra and Śikṣānanda.
2. *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra* (*Jie Shen Mi Jing* /《解深密經》; abbrev. *SN*): two translations by Bodhiruci and Xuanzang.
3. *Rulai Chu Xian Gongde Zhuangyan Jing* (《如來出現功德莊嚴經》 [The merit and glory of the Tathāgata's appearances]): not translated.
4. *Mahāyāna-abhidharma-sūtra* (*Da Cheng A Pi Da Mo Jing* /《大乘阿毗達磨經》): not translated.
5. *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* (*Neng Yan Jing* /《楞嚴經》): three translations by Guṇabhadra, Bodhiruci, and Śikṣānanda.
6. *Mahāyāna-ghana-vyūha-sūtra* (*Hou Yan Jing* /《厚嚴經》, also known as *Da Cheng Mi Yan Jing* /《大乘密嚴經》): not translated.

The eleven treatises are as follows:

1. *YBS* (*Yu Qie Shi Di Lun* /《瑜伽師地論》): translated by Xuanzang.
2. *Xian Yang Sheng Jiao Lun* (《顯揚聖教論》 [Treatise on the propagation of the noble teaching]): translated by Xuanzang.
3. *Mahāyāna-sūtra-alaṃkāra-śāstra* (*Da Cheng Zhuang Yan Jing Lun* /《大乘莊嚴經論》): translated by Prabhākaramitra.
4. *Pramāṇa-samucaya*: two translations by Paramārtha and Yijing; both translations are lost.

[22] Kuiji, *Cheng weishi lun shuji* (《成唯識論述記》), T.34, 229c, "Now this treatise references six scriptures, which are the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*, *Rulai Chu Xian Gongde Zhuangyan Jing*, *Mahāyāna-abhidharma-sūtra*, *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*, and *Mahāyāna-ghana-vyūha-sūtra*; and eleven treatises, including the *YBS*, *Xian Yang Sheng Jiao Lun*, *Mahāyāna-sūtra-alaṃkāra-śāstra*, *Pramāṇa-samucaya*, *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha*, *Daśabhūmikavibhāṣā-śāstra*, *Ālambana-parīkṣā*, *Abhidharma-samuccaya-śāstra*, *Viṃśatikā-vijñaptimātratā*, *Madhyānta-vibhāga-śāstra*, and *Fen Bie Yuqie Lun*."

5. *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha* (*She Da Cheng Lun* /《攝大乘論》; abbr. *MSg*): three translations by Buddhaśānta, Paramārtha, and Xuanzang.
6. *Daśabhūmikavibhāṣā-śāstra* (*Shi Di Jing Lun* /《十地經論》[Treatise on the ten stages sutra]): translated by Bodhiruci.
7. *Ālambana-parīkṣā* (*Guan Shuo Yuan Yuan Lun* /《觀所緣緣論》): translated by Xuanzang.
8. *Abhidharma-samuccaya-śāstra* (*A Pi Da Mo Ji Lun* /《阿毘達磨集論》): translated by Xuanzang.
9. *Viṃśatikā-vijñaptimātratā* (*Weishi Sanshi Song* /《唯識二十頌》 [Twenty verses on consciousness-only]: three translations by Bodhiruci, Paramārtha, and Xuanzang.
10. *Madhyānta-vibhāga-śāstra* (*Bian Zhong Bian Lun* /《辯中邊論》): two translations by Paramārtha and Xuanzang.
11. *Fen Bie Yuqie Lun* (《分別瑜伽論》): no translation.

Among them, there are several important scriptures and treatises that we will focus on. The main scriptures include the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*, and *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*. The main treatises include the *YBS*, *MSg*, and *Thirty-Verses* (as the *Thirty-Verses* is the main treatise referenced by Xuanzang in his work, *Cheng Weishi Lun* , it is not included in his list of the eleven treatises).

We will begin by examining the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, whose full title is the *Mahāvaipulya-buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*. Currently, there are two complete Chinese translations: the sixty-scroll version by Buddhabhadra of the Eastern Jin dynasty (known as the *Sixty-scroll Avataṃsaka*) and the eighty-scroll version by Śikṣānanda of the Tang dynasty (known as the *Eighty-scroll Avataṃsaka*). Additionally, there are numerous partial translations.The *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* serves as an exposition of Buddhist cosmology, with a particular emphasis on elucidating the Dharmakāya Buddha and the infinite realms. The term “Dharmakāya” Buddha, also known as Pi-ru-zhe-na (毗盧遮那), transliterates from the Sanskrit Vairocana, meaning “illuminating” or “sunlight.” Early translations rendered it as Vairocana, while later translations used Mahāvairocana (大日如來). The Dharmakāya Buddha represents not a single Buddha but the essence shared by all Buddhas, symbolizing the embodiment of the Dharma. Furthermore, this scripture explores the interpenetration of various realms of phenomena, presenting a strong idealistic philosophy akin to idealistic ontology. It states, “If someone wishes to thoroughly understand all Buddhas of the three periods (past, present, and future), they should contemplate the nature of the dharmadhātu (the realms of all phenomena), which is all constructed by the mind alone.” This statement underscores the depth of its idealistic doctrine. Moreover, in the “Chapter on Entry into the Dharmadhātu,” the text discusses the extensive practices of bodhisattvas and the various stages of their development. Due to its robust idealistic philosophy (*cittamātra*), the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* is considered to have influenced the development of Vijñaptimātratā to some extent. However, many key concepts and terms associated with Vijñaptimātratā, such as *ālayavijñāna* and the three natures, are not found in this scripture. Therefore, its influence on Vijñaptimātratā can only be regarded as indirect.

Next, the *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*, dating back to around 300 CE, holds a special place as the earliest and foundational scripture of the Vijñaptimātratā School. Unlike typical sūtras, which are often more narrative, religious, and inspirational, this text takes on the form of an Abhidharma treatise. In Buddhist terminology, “sutra” generally refers to various teachings given by the Buddha to individuals with varying capacities, while Abhidharma treatises were meticulously compiled and structured by the Buddha's disciples after rigorous research.

Although categorized as a sūtra, the *SN* stands apart due to its clear and systematic literary structure, reminiscent of the Abhidharma. In essence, it departs from the conventional sūtra format.

The main ideas of the *SN* are as follows:

1. Three periods of dharma (or three turnings of the dharma wheel):
   The teaching of existence (found in the *Āgama-sūtras*), the teaching of emptiness (found in the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras*), and the teaching of both emptiness and existence (found in the *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*).
2. Idealism (Consciousness-Only):
   This form of idealism stems from meditative experiences, as mentioned earlier. In Chapter Six of the *SN*, titled "The Analysis of Meditation (Yoga)," there is a dialogue between the Buddha and Maitreya Bodhisattva that provides a clear explanation of idealism arising from meditative experiences. Maitreya Bodhisattva poses a question to the Buddha, asking, "In meditative contemplation, the objects of observation are perceived as manifestations of the mind, which is understandable. But does this also apply to external objects in everyday life?" The Buddha affirms this and responds, "Yes, they too are manifestations of the mind."
3. The concept of *ālaya*:
   The concepts of *ālaya*, *ādāna*, and seed (*bīja*) are explicitly mentioned in the *SN*. What sets this scripture apart is its treatment of *ādāna* as the storehouse consciousness that holds the seeds, while *ālaya* functions as the support for the physical body and mind. Furthermore, within the scripture's discussion of the mind, cognition, and consciousness (心意識), it does not differentiate into three aspects as later Vijñaptimātratā scholars did. Instead, it focuses on "mind" (referring to *ālaya*) and "cognitive consciousness" (referring to the six consciousnesses). It is in later Vijñaptimātratā theories, following the work of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, that "mind" is associated with *ālaya*, "cognition" with the defiled manas (the seventh consciousness), and "consciousness" with the sixth consciousness and the preceding five consciousnesses.
4. The concept of Three natures:
   The three natures are the dependent nature (*paratantrasvabhāva*), the constructed or conceptualized nature (*parikalpitasvabhāva*), and the perfected nature (*pariniśpannasvabhāva*). The theory of the Three natures is the fundamental doctrine of Vijñaptimātratā, and the *SN* can be considered as one of the earliest scriptures to establish this concept.
5. Establishing the Mahāyāna doctrine of emptiness based on the three nonself-existent natures:
   The three nonself-existent natures are the negations of the three natures, namely the nature of nonself-existence regarding characteristics, nonself-existence regarding arising, and nonself-existent regarding the ultimate. The *SN* elucidates the emptiness of all phenomena based on these three nonself-existent natures. *Ālaya*, the three natures, and the three nonself-existent natures are all essential teachings of Vijñaptimātratā, and detailed explanations will follow in subsequent sections of this book.

Third, the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* is believed to have been compiled around the 5th century CE. Its main ideas center on the interplay of Tathāgatagarbha (Buddha-nature), *ālaya*, and "emptiness." It elaborates on these concepts with a central focus on the five dharmas, three natures, eight consciousnesses, and two non-selves. Although Master Xuanzang classified it as a Vijñaptimātratā scripture, in reality, this scripture contains profound Tathāgatagarbha ideology. It systematically explains the concept of Tathāgatagarbha and serves as an early canonical text for the Chinese Ch'an (Zen) tradition. While the primary emphasis of the scripture is on Tathāgatagarbha, it also presents a comprehensive Vijñaptimātratā system, which is why Master Xuanzang included it among the Vijñaptimātratā scriptures.

The Tathāgatagarbha ideology primarily emphasizes the inherent Buddha-nature, asserting that all sentient beings possess the complete qualities of Tathagata's wisdom and

virtues. However, these qualities are obscured by afflictions and ignorance. The *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*'s main focus is ñ, followed by its connection with *ālaya* and the "emptiness" aspect. According to this combined theory, the wisdom and virtues of the Tathāgata, inherent in all sentient beings, constitute the Tathāgatagarbha. This pure Tathāgatagarbha is enveloped by defilements, and this overall state of being, encompassing purity internally and defilements externally, is known as *ālaya*. With the integration of Tathāgatagarbha and *ālaya*, the question arises concerning "emptiness." What is empty? The scripture explains that the external layer of defilements is empty, illusory, and unreal, while the internal Buddha-nature is the ultimate truth and not empty. Thus, it is termed the Tathāgatagarbha that is simultaneously empty and non-empty.

Another focus of the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* involves the concepts of the five dharmas, three self-natures, eight consciousnesses, and two non-selves. The five dharmas are appearance, name, discrimination, right wisdom, and suchness, which are related to the understanding of both the mundane and transcendental aspects. From the mundane view, it involves the consciousness that can discriminate and the objects that are discriminated. The six consciousnesses are capable of perceiving and distinguishing external objects, hence the term "discrimination." The objects distinguished by consciousness include names and forms. Names refer to labels or designations, while forms represent concrete matter and objects. The objects recognized fall into these two categories: linguistic expressions and tangible entities. For example, if one says, "Bring me that bi (筆)," what is a "bi"? "Bi" is a name, and in English, it is translated as "pen." So, when that object is brought, what is it? It is the form of an object referred to as a "pen." "Discrimination" arises because perception is derived from discrimination. The ability to recognize objects is based on distinguishing their differences from other objects, comparing the distinct characteristics of names and forms. The perception of ordinary beings is tainted by afflictions and is thus not real. Through spiritual practice, one can ultimately transform consciousness into wisdom, and this purified and untainted perception is called the right wisdom, which is synonymous with *prajñā* (transcendental wisdom). Suchness refers to the ultimate truth, the nature of emptiness, nonself, and impermanence, representing the true nature of all phenomena (reality). Right wisdom can perceive the true nature of all phenomena. From the perspective of the Vijñaptimātratā School, there is conventional knowledge of conventional things and transcendental knowledge of the ultimate truth, which is what the five dharmas represent. The three self-natures are the conceptualized nature, the dependent nature, and the perfected nature. The eight consciousnesses include the first six consciousnesses, the defiled consciousness of the seventh, and the ālayavijñāna (storehouse consciousness) of the eighth. The two non-selves refer to the non-inherent-entity of persons and the non-inherent-entity of phenomena. These are key points in Vijñaptimātratā philosophy and will be further explained in subsequent chapters.

The previously mentioned texts are the three important scriptures that serve as the foundation of the Vijñaptimātratā School. Now we will introduce some significant treatises within Vijñaptimātratā philosophy. The first one is the *YBS*, in which the "Maulyo-bhūmayaḥ" section is attributed to Maitreya Bodhisattva, with the rest of *YBS* being commentary by Asaṅga Bodhisattva. This treatise represents as the earliest work on Vijñaptimātratā philosophy. In Asaṅga's commentary, one finds a systematic and meticulous explanation of Vijñaptimātratā, incorporating a substantial portion of the ideas from the *SN*. In this treatise, in the discussion regarding the characteristics of *ālayavijñāna*, Asaṅga presents eight logical reasonings to

establish the existence of *ālayavijñāna* and explains the cycle of birth and death and its cessation based on the concept of *ālayavijñāna*. The discussion of the three self-natures and two non-selves in this treatise is similar to the discourse found in the *SN*.

This treatise comprises one hundred scrolls. Similarly, the "*Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra*" (*Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*) consists of one hundred scrolls, while the *Mahāvibhāṣā-śāstra* (*Great Exposition of the Abhidharma*) comprises two hundred scrolls. To delve into Buddhist teachings, it is imperative to study these three treatises. The *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra* represents the Madhyamaka School, the *Mahāvibhāṣā-śāstra* represents the Abhidharma School (shared by the three vehicles), and the *YBS* represents the Vijñaptimātratā School. The *YBS* is divided into five major parts, known as the five sections. The first section, called the main section or the "seventeen stages treatise," forms the core of the *YBS*. The name *YBS* is derived from both the main section and the "seventeen stages treatise," which expound the meditation practices and stages of the Yogis. It is said that the main section was written by Asaṇga after receiving teachings and clarifying his doubts with Maitreya Bodhisattva in the inner chamber of Maitreya. Hence, the main section is attributed to Maitreya Bodhisattva. The second section is the supplementary section, representing Asaṅga's commentary on the main section. Together, these two sections comprise eighty scrolls out of the total one hundred scrolls.

The remaining three sections are not directly related to Vijñaptimātratā and mainly elucidate the arrangement of the *Āgama-sūtras*. The main section primarily discusses the practice of meditation and consists of several chapters that describe various stages and levels of meditative cultivation. In Buddhism, these levels are often referred to as grounds (*bhūmi*). For example, it explores the ten grounds of a Bodhisattva, representing the final ten of the fifty stages in a Bodhisattva's progress. Additionally, the text discusses the wisdom of listening, contemplating, and cultivating, the stages of the Śrāvaka (Hearer) and Pratyekabuddha (Solitary Realizer), as well as the stages of a Bodhisattva, and so on.[23]

The *MSg*, authored by Asaṅga Bodhisattva, stands as an immensely significant treatise and is considered Asaṅga's seminal work. It holds a prominent place in the middle period of ancient Vijñaptimātratā philosophy. Vijñaptimātratā philosophy can be broadly categorized into ancient and modern periods. The period before Vasubandhu is termed ancient Vijñaptimātratā, while the period after Vasubandhu, primarily represented by authors like Dharmapala, is known as modern Vijñaptimātratā. Ancient Vijñaptimātratā can be further subdivided into three periods: early, middle, and late. The early period encompasses Maitreya Bodhisattva's Vijñaptimātratā, the middle period is characterized by Asaṅga Bodhisattva's Vijñaptimātratā, and the late period is exemplified by Vasubandhu Bodhisattva's Vijñaptimātratā. The *MSg* gathers various scriptures and elucidates the characteristics of the *ālayavijñāna* (storehouse consciousness) by explaining it through the three aspects of self-nature, causal nature, and resultant nature. Additionally, this

[23] The author has previously collaborated with his supervising professor at the University of Calgary to translate the "Bodhisattvabhūmi" from Chinese into English. There is an organization in Japan that has invited Buddhist scholars from around the world to translate the Chinese-translated classics, primarily those by Master Xuanzang, into English, with the aim of creating a comprehensive English Tripitaka. Their specific task was to translate the "Bodhisattvabhūmi" from the main section of the *YBS*. It took them seven years to translate only one-fifth of the text, and unfortunately, the professor passed away during this time. Before passing, the professor asked them to continue and complete the project. Through these years of training and translation work, they came to truly understand the difficulties of translating scriptures. They also realized the immense greatness of ancient translation masters like Master Xuanzang and Master Kumārajīva, recognizing their profound wisdom.

treatise highlights the superiority of Vijñaptimātratā Mahāyāna over the two vehicles (Śrāvakayāna and Pratyekabuddhayāna) by presenting ten outstanding qualities. It also introduces the six concepts of seeds and provides a clear definition of "seeds (*bīja*)."

Lastly, the *Thirty-Verses* deserves our attention. This work represents the culmination of Vasubandhu Bodhisattva's thoughts on Consciousness-Only and is regarded as the quintessentia work of his Vijñaptimātratā philosophy. In these thirty verses, Vasubandhu comprehensively explains all aspects of Vijñaptimātratā thought. Notably, Vasubandhu composed these verses without providing further commentary. Subsequently, other scholars undertook the task of providing commentaries on this text. Among these scholars, the most influential commentaries were composed by ten major masters, with particular emphasis on those by Dignāga and Dharmapala. Later, Master Xuanzang compiled these commentaries, mainly relying on Dharmapala's ideas. This compilation became the primary theoretical foundation of Chinese Vijñaptimātratā, known as the *Cheng Weishi Lun* (*Treatise on the Establishment of Consciousness-Only*). In recent years, translations of Dignāga's commentary on the Thirty-Verses in Sanskrit and Tibetan editions have been made available in Chinese. Dignāga's Vijñaptimātratā teachings carry the heritage of ancient Vijñaptimātratā, greatly contributing to our understanding of Vasubandhu Bodhisattva's Vijñaptimātratā philosophy.[24]

The above provides a brief introduction to the prominent figures and treatises of the early Vijñaptimātratā School. Following Vasubandhu Bodhisattva, Vijñaptimātratā underwent further complex developments, giving rise to numerous treatises and renowned Vijñaptimātratā scholars. Detailed exploration of these developments may be reserved for another occasion.

[24] Hirakawa, *Indo bukkyōshi*, gekan, 233-235. Taohui Huo, *Anhui 'sanshi weishi shi' yuandian shizhu* (《安慧「三十唯識釋」原典譯註》[*Sthiramati's Commentary on Triṁśikávijñapti : A Chinese Translation with Notes and Interpretations*]), (Hongkong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1980).