

An Overview of the Concepts of Yogācāra (Consciousness-only)

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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 Yogācāra (Consciousness-only) Doctrine (Vijñānavāda [‘Doctrine of consciousness’] or Yogācāra 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 Yogācāra, 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, Yogācāra 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 individuals have experienced dreaming, no one can deny that within the dream, these experiences seem genuine. Yogācāra 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 Yogācāra 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 Yogācāra 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 Yogācāra 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 Yogācāra as easily as possible to those who are interested.

Yogācāra 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 Yogācāra can be categorized as such. The Madhyamaka School primarily focuses on the concept of emptiness based on the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* (*Perfection of Wisdom*). The Yogācāra 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 Yogācāra in detail.

The term *vijñaptimātra* (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 Yogācāra 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 Yogācāra School is also known as the Yogācāra School.

Yogācāra is the general term for this School. However, when the emphasis lies on the theory of manifestation of consciousness, it is called the Vijñaptimātra School; when the focus is on meditation, it is called the Yogācāra School. Furthermore, although Yogācāra 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*? 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 Yogācāra, it signifies the external world being manifested from their mind, placing emphasis on the ontological aspect of Yogācāra. On the other hand, *vijñāna* 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 Yogācāra, one must be aware of these two distinct meanings. In its early stages, Yogācāra 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 Yogācāra and Yogācāra of later period. Early Yogācāra dealt with the state of cognition, while in later period, it 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 Yogācāra School, encompassing the progression towards idealism, the elucidation of reincarnation, the reinterpretation of emptiness, and the emphasis on meditation. Firstly, the shift

¹Vasubandhu, *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

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

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 Yogācāra 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 Yogācāra. Lastly, the Yogācāra 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 Yogācāra thought.

In the next chapter, the representative figures and doctrines of the early Yogācāra School are introduced. The foremost individual to be discussed is undoubtedly Maitreya Bodhisattva. Legend has it that Maitreya imparted the teachings of Yogācāra to Asaṅga Bodhisattva, who subsequently expanded upon them in collaboration with Vasubandhu Bodhisattva. The foundation of Yogācāra lies in both scriptures and treatises, with a notable emphasis on the latter. These treatises are associated with the three founding figures of Yogācāra, 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 Yogācāra 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 Yogācāra doctrine. Thirdly, it elucidates the theory of practice in Yogācāra, known as transformation of the root (轉依). Lastly, it presents the reinterpretation of emptiness by the Yogācāra School using the concept of the threefold nature of nonself-existence (*nir-trisvabhāva*). In summary, the main doctrines of Yogācāra 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 Yogācāra.

The concluding chapter centers on the observation and practice of Yogācāra, 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 Yogācāra through meditative contemplation.

Chapter 1 The key factors in the development of Yogācāra

1. Development towards Mind-only Concept

The first factor contributing to the development of Yogācāra 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 Yogācāra, can be discussed in three sequential phases: ethical idealism, epistemological idealism, and finally, ontological idealism.

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 Yogācāra's idealism, the external world is not perceived as a projection of the mind.

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 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

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.

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.

1.3. Ontological Idealism

Finally, within the context of Yogācāra, 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 Yogācāra, objectively existing physical entities do not exist. The Yogācāra 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, Yogācāra's evolution towards ontological idealism closely aligns with the prevalent idealistic movement within Buddhism.⁴

2. Elucidation of Rebirth

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 a nihilist 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.

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

⁴ Yinshun, *Wei Shi*, 200-207.

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.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 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 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

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 biqu 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 Sarvāstivāda School]), (Taipei: Zhengwen Publishing House 1992, 7th edition), 91-95; Tetsuya Tabata, *Sanze 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 tsuneteki no shōko no okori* (“三世實有法體恒的の称呼の起こり” [‘Sanzejitsu-Hottaigou’ and its origin]), INBUDS 22-1, S48/12; Nobuyuki Yoshimoto, *Sanze jitsu yū setsu saikō - sono gengo to shisō-teki haikai* (“三世實有說再考 — その原語と思想的背景” [A reconsideration of the theory of *adhvatrayam asti*-The original term and its philosophical background]), Buddhist Seminar 46 (1987 October): 16-30.

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 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

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.”

⁹ *Mahāvibhāṣā* (《大毘婆沙論》/ *Da pipuoshā 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.

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 Yogācāra School, they will not be elaborated upon here.

2.2. Ālayavijñāna of the Yogācāra

Based on the developed theories mentioned above and the integration of scholars, the theory of ālayavijñāna of the Yogācāra 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 Yogācāra 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 Yogācāra 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 Yogācāra 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.

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

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 *Samdhinirmocana 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.”

“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 *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra* (*The Scripture on the Explication of Underlying Meaning*), which serves as a fundamental text in the Yogācāra 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 *Samdhinirmocana 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 *Samdhinirmocana 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.

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

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.”

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 *Samdhinirmocana 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.

4. The Emphasis of Meditative Contemplation

Contemplation arising from concentration is called meditative contemplation, also known as Yogācāra. 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 Yogācāra means practice and implies training, engagement, and practical application. It also conveys the idea of progression or advancement. Therefore, Yogācāra 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 Yogācāra and the practice of meditative contemplation, which is why the Yogācāra School is often referred to as the Yogācāra School within the Yogācāra 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-bhāṣya*. These masters devoted themselves to scripture analysis and engaged in rigorous systematic study. Notably, several prominent scholars of the Yogācāra School, including Asaṅga 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 Yogācāra 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 *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra* serves as significant evidence of the close relationship between meditation and the Yogācāra School.¹⁶

¹⁴ Yinshun, *Chuqi dacheng de qi yuan 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 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.’”

The development of the Buddhist Yogācāra 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.

Chapter 2 Main figures and texts

1. Main Figures

When discussing the main figures of Yogācāra, the first one to mention is undoubtedly Bodhisattva Maitreya, who is considered the pioneer of Yogācāra. 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 Yogācāra 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 Yogācāra 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 Yogācāra 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 Yogācāra.¹⁷ These teachings later merged with the figure of Maitreya Bodhisattva from the Tuṣita Heaven, and he became referenced as the progenitor of the Yogācāra doctrine. Eventually, Maitreya came to be considered the author of early Yogācāra 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 Yogācāra from Maitreya in the Tuṣita Heaven became the traditional belief.¹⁸

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, “Asaṅga 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.”

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-bhūmayah” in *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* (《瑜伽師地論》-本地分 [“The main 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 practices), *Mahāyāna-sūtra-alamkāra-kārikā* (《大乘莊嚴經論頌》 [Verses on the glory of the Mahāyāna sūtra]), *Madhyānta-vibhaṅga-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-vibhaṅga-bhāṣya*, *Dharma-dharmatā-vibhaṅga* (《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 Yogācāra. The term *Yogācāra-bhūmi* 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-Bhūmayah” 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 Yogācāra.

4. *Madhyānta-vibhaṅga-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 Yogācāra. The verses are attributed to Maitreya and have been commented by both Asaṅga and Vasubandhu.

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

6. *Dharma-dharmatā-vibhaṅga*: 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* (《究竟一乘實性論》) in the Chinese translated version. It explores the concept of an inherent Buddha nature and aligns with the Tathāgatarbha (Buddha-nature) teachings. Consequently, in the Chinese tradition, it is not classified as one of the five treatises of Yogācāra.

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 Yogācāra School originated with Maitreya, its ideas were propagated by Asaṅga. Therefore, from a historical perspective, Asaṅga can be regarded as the founder of the Yogācāra School. As mentioned earlier, among the five chapters of the *YBS*, apart from the “maulyo-bhūmayah”, 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 *Mahāyānasamgraha* is an important treatise as it integrates the preceding Yogācāra theories and establishes the fundamental system and concepts of the Yogācāra School, representing Asaṅga's Yogācāra 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-bhāṣya* (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-Yogācāra* (《唯識二十頌》 [Twenty verses on consciousness-only]; in short, *Twenty-verses*) “Twenty Verses on Consciousness-Only,” *Triṃśikā-Yogācāra* (《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

²⁰ P. Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundation* (London: Routledge, 2009), 86-87.

²¹ Paramārtha trans., *Poshupandou*, T.50, 188a.

aggregates]), *Mahāyāna-śatadharmā-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.

The *Twenty-verses* focuses on refuting heretical views, while the *Thirty-verses* establishes and expands the system of Yogācāra 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 Yogācāra.

Among Vasubandhu's works, the *Thirty-verses* can be considered his most important treatise on Yogācāra. Unfortunately, the text only provides verses without further explanations. After Vasubandhu, numerous scholars of the Yogācāra 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. Main Texts

There are numerous canonical texts that the Yogācāra School relies on, with treatises being the primary root. 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 Buddhābhadda and Śikṣānanda.
2. *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra* (*Jie Shen Mi Jing* / 《解深密經》); abbrev. *SNS*): 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.

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-samucaya-śāstra*, *Vimśatikā-Yogācāra*, *Madhyānta-vibhāga-śāstra*, and *Fen Bie Yuqie Lun*.”

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-samuccaya*: two translations by Paramārtha and Yijing; both translations are lost.
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-Yogācāra* (*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 *Mahāvaiṣṭya-buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*. Currently, there are two complete Chinese translations: the sixty-scroll version by Buddhahadra 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 Yogācāra to some extent. However, many key concepts and terms associated with Yogācāra, such as *ālayavijñāna* and the three natures, are not found in this scripture. Therefore, its influence on Yogācāra 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 Yogācāra 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, “sūtra” 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 *SNS* 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 *SNS* 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 *SNS*, 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 *SNS*. What sets this scripture apart is its treatment of *ādāna* as the storehouse consciousness that holds the seeds, while *ālaya* functions as the root 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 Yogācāra scholars did. Instead, it focuses on “mind” (referring to *ālaya*) and “cognitive consciousness” (referring to the six consciousnesses). It is in later Yogācāra 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 other-dependent nature (*paratantrasvabhāva*), the conceptualized nature (*parikalpitasvabhāva*), and the perfected nature (*pariṇiṣpannasvabhāva*). The theory of the three natures is the fundamental doctrine of Yogācāra, and the *SNS* 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 *SNS* 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 Yogācāra, 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 Yogācāra 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 Yogācāra system, which is why Master Xuanzang included it among the Yogācāra 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 Yogācāra 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 other-dependent nature, and the perfected nature. The eight consciousnesses include the first six consciousnesses, the tainted mental-consciousness (seventh), and the *ālayavijñāna* (storehouse consciousness, 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 Yogācāra 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 Yogācāra School. Now we will introduce some significant treatises within Yogācāra philosophy. The first one is the *YBS*, in which the “Mauḷyo-bhūmayāḥ” section is attributed to Maitreya Bodhisattva, with the rest of *YBS* being commentary by Asaṅga Bodhisattva. This treatise represents as the earliest work on Yogācāra philosophy. In Asaṅga's

commentary, one finds a systematic and meticulous explanation of Yogācāra, incorporating a substantial portion of the ideas from the *SNS*. 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 *SNS*.

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 Yogācāra 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 Asaṅga 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 Yogācāra 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 Yogācāra philosophy. Yogācāra philosophy can be broadly categorized into ancient and modern periods. The period before Vasubandhu is termed ancient Yogācāra, while the period after Vasubandhu, primarily represented by authors like Dharmapala, is known as modern Yogācāra. Ancient Yogācāra can be further subdivided into three periods: early, middle, and late. The early period encompasses Maitreya Bodhisattva's Yogācāra, the middle period is

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.

characterized by Asaṅga Bodhisattva's Yogācāra, and the late period is exemplified by Vasubandhu Bodhisattva's Yogācāra. 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 treatise highlights the superiority of Yogācāra 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 quintessential work of his Yogācāra philosophy. In these thirty verses, Vasubandhu comprehensively explains all aspects of Yogācāra 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 Yogācāra, 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 Yogācāra teachings carry the heritage of ancient Yogācāra, greatly contributing to our understanding of Vasubandhu Bodhisattva's Yogācāra philosophy.²⁴

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

²⁴ Hirakawa, *Indo bukk'yōshi*, 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 Trīmśikāvijñapti : A Chinese Translation with Notes and Interpretations*]), (Hongkong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1980).

Chapter 3: Overview of Yogācāra Doctrine

1. The Root of the Knowable: Ālayavijñāna (Storehouse Consciousness)

1.1. The Source of All Knowledge

The Yogācāra doctrine has two main focuses: the core principle and practical aspects, represented by the *ālayavijñāna* and the three self-natures. The *ālayavijñāna*, often termed “the root of all knowable,” serves as the source of all knowledge. Meanwhile, the three self-natures, manifested from the *ālayavijñāna*, embody the practical aspects of this doctrine.²⁵

What is the definition of *ālayavijñāna*? Commonly translated as storehouse consciousness, “*ālaya*” means store or preserve. It is a repository deep within the stratum of consciousness that stores all past experiences, including learning, memories, and karmic imprints from beginningless time. *Ālayavijñāna* holds all past actions, whether virtuous or non-virtuous, transforming them into seed-like elements stored within. Thus, it is aptly referred to as the “all-encompassing seed consciousness.”

In Yogācāra, *ālayavijñāna* is also referred to as the eighth consciousness. In contrast, early Buddhism, including the Madhyamaka School, acknowledges only six consciousnesses: the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind-consciousness. Among these, mind-consciousness holds particular importance as it has the capacity to cognize the preceding five consciousnesses, and, reciprocally, they can function based on mind-consciousness. When mind-consciousness and the preceding five consciousnesses operate simultaneously, they are collectively referred to as the “five concurrent consciousnesses.” For example, in the case of eye-consciousness, when the eye organ receives sensory information, it requires the functioning of mind-consciousness to generate eye-consciousness, enabling the perception of objects. Without the involvement of mind-consciousness, one is unable to perceive anything with the eyes, commonly referred to as “seeing but not perceiving.”

²⁵ In *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha*, Asaṅga termed *ālayavijñāna* as the “root of knowable” and the three natures as the “characteristics of knowable,” T.31, 133a.

Cognition in Buddhism involves the perception of the sixth consciousness (mind-consciousness) towards the six sense objects. However, in Buddhism, this cognition is not considered objective but rather defiled. Due to the afflictions of greed, aversion, and ignorance, ordinary individuals tend to develop attachment and grasping towards the sense objects when the sixth consciousness perceives them. So, where do these afflictions of greed, aversion, and ignorance reside? Although the sixth consciousness are momentary, the afflictions of individuals persist. Hence, as the (momentary changing) sixth consciousness cannot store these afflictions, Yogācāra scholars propose that the sixth consciousness can be divided into superficial and substratum layers. The superficial layer is the sixth mind-consciousness, while the substratum layer can be further divided into the seventh consciousness and the eighth consciousness. The afflictions of greed, aversion, and ignorance are concealed within the seventh consciousness, while memories, experiences, and all data related to rebirth are stored within the eighth consciousness, namely *ālayavijñāna*, which is neutral and serves as a pure repository of information, indiscriminately storing both positive and negative data.

Ālaya, also known as *ādāna*, carries two distinct meanings according to the scriptures. First, when *ālaya* is referred to as *ādāna*, it signifies the “rebirth-consciousness.” In other words, at the end of one’s life, *ālayavijñāna*, guided by the force of karma, takes on a new existence during the process of rebirth. Here, this aspect of *ālaya* is known as *ādāna*. Second, *ādāna* is associated with the sustaining of the physical body. That is, after rebirth with a new body, *ālaya* sustains this physical body throughout the entire life from birth to death. This aspect of *ālaya* sustaining the physical body and life is also referred to as *ādānavijñāna*.²⁶

1.2. Interdependent Origination based on *Ālayavijñāna*

One significant reason why the scholars of Yogācāra proposed the theory of *ālayavijñāna* was to provide a reinterpretation of the doctrine of interdependent origination (*pratītyasamutpada*) from a different perspective. In other words, they aimed to present a more systematic and detailed explanation of the samsaric phenomena, the possible cessation towards *nirvana*, and the conditions for attaining Buddhahood. By using *ālayavijñāna* to explain interdependent origination, they sought to address several key questions such as the cycle of rebirth, the nature of *nirvana*, and the path leading to Buddhahood. The teachings of Yogācāra intend to elucidate these issues with the notion of *ālayavijñāna* as the main subject.

The core doctrine of Buddhism is interdependent origination. The Buddha himself often stated, “I discuss causal conditions and teach interdependent origination.” Needless to say, the theory of Yogācāra is closely connected to interdependent origination, but it offers a more detailed analysis of the aspect of existence, or phenomena. It explains that the rise and cessation of all phenomena are based on interdependent origination, particularly associated with the notion of *ālayavijñāna*. This is known as the Yogācāra theory of interdependent origination based on *ālayavijñāna*.²⁷

²⁶ *Shedachenglunben* (攝大乘論本), T. 31, 133b.

²⁷ Ibid: “The *dhatu* since beginningless time is the root of all phenomena; Given this, there exists various realm of existences and the achievement of nirvana.”

1.2.1. The Fundamental Doctrine of Buddhism - Interdependent Origination

The earliest teachings on interdependent origination, as expounded by the Buddha, can be found in the *Āgama Sūtras*. During this early period of Buddhism, the doctrine of interdependent origination aimed to elucidate the existence of both body and mind, with a particular focus on karma. Hence, it is also referred to as the interdependent origination of karma. Within this context, interdependent origination encompasses two aspects: the cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*) and cessation (*nirodha*).

Regarding the aspect of interdependent origination concerning the cycle of rebirth, it is based on the principle, “When this exists, that comes to be; when this arises, that arises.” This principle elucidates the continuous cycle of rebirth. But what does it mean when one says, “When this exists, that comes to be; when this arises, that arises?” In simpler terms, it signifies that everything comes into existence, and all phenomena arise due to specific causal conditions. All things in the world are composed of intricate causal conditions. “When this exists, that comes to be” refers to the present compositions of things that arises from various causal conditions, while “when this arises, that arises” denotes the temporal causal relationship of things in time.

What does this intricate network of causal conditions involve? To illustrate, take the relationship between fabric and clothing as an example. Prior to the transformation of a piece of fabric into clothing, it would be incorrect to label the fabric as the instigator of the clothing, or to consider the clothing as an outcome of the fabric. However, the pivotal moment arises when the fabric is cut and skillfully fashioned into clothing; at this point, the fabric assumes the role of the catalyst for the clothing, and the clothing emerges as a direct result of the fabric. Thus, clothing owes its existence to the fabric, and fabric and clothing coexist in a concurrent manner. This concept vividly demonstrates the simultaneous presence of cause and effect, echoing the essence of “when this exists, that comes to be.”

Now, what about the temporal causal relationship? Consider the case of an apple seed as an illustration. During the process of growth, the seed sprouts, roots, branches, blooms, and eventually yields fruit. The seed serves as the initial cause of the apple, and the apple emerges as the result of the seed. However, it is important to note that by the time the apple comes into existence, the original seed has undergone transformation and no longer exists in its original form. This sequential relationship of cause and effect unfolding over time is referred to as “when this arises, that arises.” A further elaboration to this simplified representation will be discussed later.

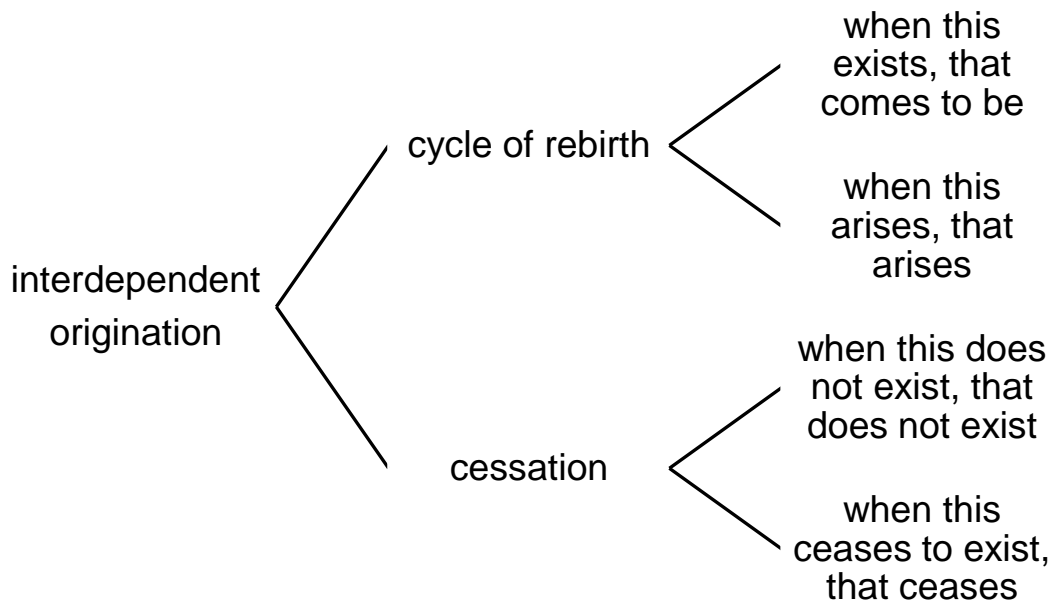
Moreover, in the context of the *Āgama Sūtras*, when discussing the principle of interdependent origination, its focus lies on the body and mind. This principle is often summarized as “when this exists, that comes to be; when this arises, that arises,” which can be further explained as the cycle of affliction (*kleśa*), karma, and suffering (*duḥkha*), and even more, the twelve-fold chain of interdependent origination.

Ignorance (*avidyā*), the first link in the twelve-fold chain, is the general term for all afflictions. Afflictions, in turn, lead to the creation of karma (*samskhāra*). The creation of karma gives rise to karmic force (*ālayavijñāna*; rebirth-consciousness), which initiates the cycle of rebirth. Consequently, the sequence unfolds with the emergence of name and form (*nāma-rupā*;

embryo), the six sense bases (*sadāyatana*), contact (*sparśa*), sensation (*vedanā*), craving (*trṣṇā*), grasping (*upādāna*), becoming (*bhava*), birth (*jāti*), and finally, aging and death (*jarā-maraṇa*). When the creation of karma arises due to ignorance, it aligns with the principle of “when this arises, that arises.” Ignorance not only prompts the creation of karma, which later evolves into karmic force, but it also continues to impel us to create karma and nurture the existing karmic force until it reaches maturation. This encapsulates the essence of the principle “when this exists, that comes to be.” Likewise, in the last two links of the twelve-fold chain, the presence of birth inevitably leads to aging and death.

Based on the principle, “when this does not exist, that does not exist; when this ceases to exist, that ceases,” the counteractive process of interdependent origination elucidates the path leading to the liberation from the cycle of rebirth. In other words, by eradicating ignorance and afflictions at the root of this cycle, ceasing the creating of karma, and preventing karmic force from further afflicted influence. As the karmic force that propels the cycle of rebirth stops, aging and death ceases. Consequently the root problem of “I” is resolved. This doctrine of interdependent origination mentioned above is the core tenet of Buddhism. The principle of interdependent origination can be represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

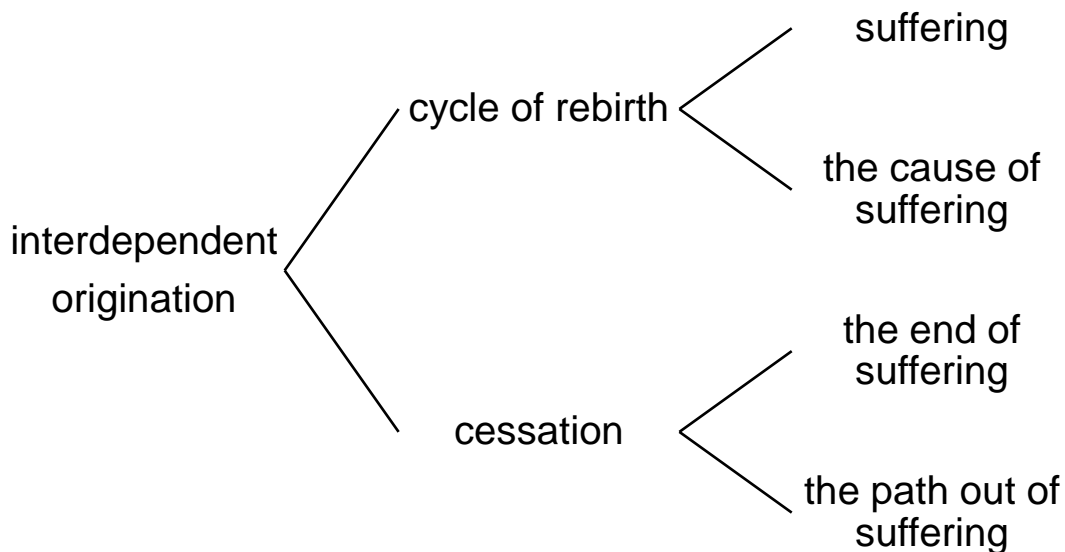


In the *Āgama Sūtra*, the explanation of reincarnation and liberation, based on the universal principle of interdependent origination, elucidates the Four Noble Truths (as illustrated in Figure 2). Suffering, representing the truth of daily life, serves as the first Noble Truth. The

second Noble Truth delves into the origin of suffering, encompassing afflictions and karma. Afflictions give rise to karma (action), resulting in the retribution of karma as suffering. The origin of suffering serves as the cause, and suffering becomes the effect, expressed as “when this exists, that comes to be; when this arises, that arises.” This cycle of suffering and its origin pertains to the aspect of the rebirth cycle affecting the body and mind. The third Noble Truth introduces cessation, signifying that through practice, sentient beings can eliminate afflictions. By eradicating afflictions, they cease to generate karma and sustain the karmic force, thereby breaking free from the cycle of rebirth. This cessation (*nirodha*) holds two meanings: one is the process of gradually eliminating afflictions by following the path, and the other is a state—the realm achieved after complete elimination of all afflictions, known as *nirvana*, or cessation.

The primary focus for everyone should be the process of practice. Eliminating afflictions requires specific methods outlined in the fourth Noble Truth, known as the “path.” Liberation is attainable only through these methods. By diligently following them, anyone has the potential to reach the state of liberation and nirvana. This is why scriptures emphasize the importance of “following the ancient path of the sages.” The method involves the three trainings of morality, concentration, and wisdom, along with the Noble Eightfold Path, which can be detailed into Thirty-Seven aids to enlightenment. In Buddhism, regardless of the chosen path, it is inseparable from the three trainings and the Noble Eightfold Path. Any deviation from these principles leads to an incorrect method or a mere expedient means. Dedication to these specific practice methods eliminates afflictions, allows one to attain nirvana, and escape the cycle of rebirth. This embodies the counteractive process of interdependent origination, cessation, i.e., “when this does not exist, that does not exist; when this ceases to exist, that ceases.”

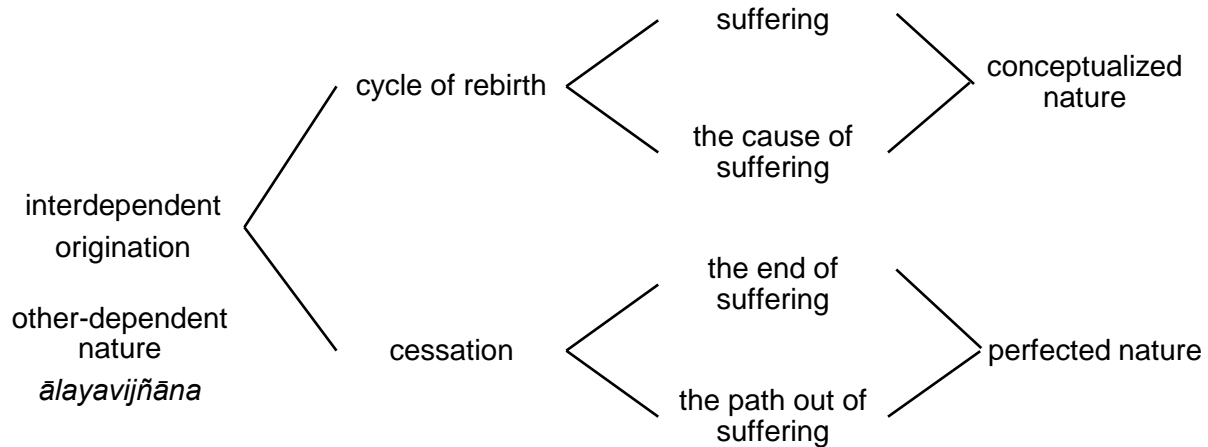
Figure 2



The doctrine of interdependent origination, elucidated in the *Āgama Sūtra*, centers on the principle of "because of this, therefore that," representing a cause-and-effect relationship. Essentially, it posits that the existence of one thing leads to the emergence of another, and conversely, when the former ceases, so does the latter. This fundamental principle governs the arising and cessation of all phenomena. Building upon this foundational concept, the Yogācāra School delves deeper into the exploration of physical and mental phenomena. The Yogācāra perspective on interdependent origination is intricately linked to the notion of *ālaya*; therefore, it is known as *ālaya*-interdependent-origination.

The interdependent origination described in the *Āgama Sūtra* includes two aspects of phenomena – the cycle of rebirth (i.e. suffering and its cause) and cessation (i.e. end of suffering and the path leading to the end of suffering). According to the Yogācāra School, the suffering and its causes within the perpetual cycle of reincarnation is called the conceptualized nature because it arises from attachment. On the other hand, the end of suffering in the aspect of cessation is referred to as the perfected nature, elucidating liberation and true nature. In the Yogācāra School, the principle of interdependent origination is called the other-dependent nature because the arising of all phenomena depends on various causes and conditions. Here, "other" refers to various causal conditions. The other-dependent nature, the conceptualized nature, and the perfected nature are the three natures of Yogācāra. Other-dependent nature focuses on explaining the principle of interdependent origination, conceptualized nature focuses on the vicious cycle of rebirth, and the perfected nature focuses on the state of purity, i.e. the cessation of suffering. In other words, the cycle of rebirth represents the conceptualized nature, and the elimination of afflictions and achievement of liberation through spiritual practices refers to the perfected nature. Whether it is the conceptualized nature of reincarnation or the perfected nature of liberation and cessation, they both rely on the law of interdependent origination, which is the other-dependent nature. According to the Yogācāra School, among the numerous causal conditions for the arising of all phenomena, the *ālayavijñāna* is the primary cause, while others are auxiliary conditions. The term other-dependent nature refers to relying on the *ālaya* as the primary cause, supplemented by other conditions, for the arising of all phenomena and cognition. This is known as the *ālaya*-interdependent-origination in the Yogācāra School (further details in subsequent sections below). Refer to Figure No.3 for reference.

Figure 3



1.3. Seeds

1.3.1. “Seeds Giving Rise into Manifestations; Manifestations Imprinted into seeds.”

The concept that *ālayavijñāna* is the root of all phenomena literally means that these phenomena are manifested from the “seeds” within *ālayavijñāna*. In other words, these seeds have the capacity to manifest as various phenomena one experiences. Seeds refer to a type of function with the ability to generate things, as they depend on a variety of causes and conditions to change from a dormant state into diverse phenomena. Seeds can also refer to a kind of function that has the capacity of producing things, as it relies on various causes and conditions to transform from a latent state into various phenomena. This transformation is called manifestation (*samudācāra*).²⁸

Manifestation refers to the process by which things come into existence and become apparent. But where do these seeds originate? They arise from perfuming. In everyday life, all perceptions, actions, and experiences are transformed into seeds and stored in the *ālayavijñāna*.

²⁸ Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*: “Among which, what are called seeds? They are the functions of all close interactions within the self-generating fruits of name (mental) and form (physical). This is due to continuous transformation leading to variations. What is transformation? It is the different characteristics between former and Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*: “In this context, what are seeds? Seeds, in this context, refer to the functions of close interactions within the self-generating fruits of name (mental) and form (physical). This is due to continuous transformation leading to variations. What is transformation? Transformation is the process of evolving characteristics between former and latter within continuity. What is continuity? Continuity, on the other hand, encompasses the causality within conditioned phenomena across the three periods (past, present, and future). What is it meant by variations? Variations represent the ongoing and continuous fruit-generating function. The term “*samudācāra*,” in a general sense, refers to the act of “generating” or “manifesting,” capturing the essence of the seeds’ continuous generative nature, T. 29, 22a.

This transformation and storage process is referred to as perfuming (*vasanā*).²⁹ For example, when individuals listen to a Dharma teaching and hears the master's comprehensive illustration, a mental image resembling the master's words will manifest from their own *ālayavijñāna*. That is, "seeds giving rise to manifestations." Subsequently, when they cognize and perceive this manifested image, it simultaneously becomes a new seed and enters into the *ālayavijñāna* through perfuming. However, during the formation of this new seed, it has already been influenced by external factors, such as the master's teachings, so its nature differs from the previous seeds, and such process is known as "manifestations perfumed into seeds." Consider another example to illustrate this process. Supposedly, when people's eyes receive information about an object (table A). Based on the stimulation from this information as an external condition, relevant seeds within the *ālayavijñāna* will manifest. After these seeds in the *ālayavijñāna* manifest, they will appear as an object with the appearance of a table (table B). Intuitively, individuals perceive it (table B) as an objective existence (an external phenomenon) external to the mind. When their eye-consciousness arises upon seeing this object (table B), all the information is perfumed into seeds and stored in their *ālayavijñāna*. According to the teachings of the Yogācāra School, this entire process is referred to as "seeds giving rise to manifestations, and manifestations perfumed into seeds".

According to Buddhist theory, when perceiving external phenomena, humans not only rely on sensory organs (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body) but also require the corresponding consciousness to work together. For example, the eyes require the coordination of eye-consciousness to see things, and the ears require the coordination of ear-consciousness to hear sounds, and so on. Otherwise, they would be "seeing without perceiving, hearing without listening." According to Yogācāra, the arising of all consciousnesses fundamentally relies on four conditions: the condition qua cause, the condition qua object, the immediate condition, and the condition of dominance.

First, in the earlier mentioned example, the image of the table, (table B), that manifests from the seed is the object of perception, referred by Yogācāra as an object. When this object becomes a condition for the arising of eye-consciousness, it is termed the condition qua object. Second, the emergence of eye-consciousness also requires the seed of eye-consciousness. Only when the seed of eye-consciousness manifests as eye-consciousness can the visual perception of this table (table B) occur. Hence, this seed of eye-consciousness is denoted as the condition qua cause. Following the arising of eye-consciousness, the object (table B), manifested by the

²⁹ The term "perfuming" in this context serves as a metaphor within the philosophy of the Yogācāra School. The metaphor draws a parallel between the process of perfuming and the conditioning of mental "seeds." Much like the application of perfume, where a single spray may not produce a lasting fragrance, the Yogācāra School posits that the conditioning of mental "seeds" requires continuous contact and influence. In this metaphor, perfuming is analogous to the gradual influence or conditioning of the mind through external stimuli. The idea conveyed is that this process takes time, akin to how a room becomes imbued with the scent of perfume through regular and prolonged exposure. Notably, the term "perfuming" is used metaphorically here, emphasizing that the conditioning is an ongoing and lengthy process. According to the Yogācāra School, the perfuming process cannot originate from within itself; rather, it must result from external factors. If a hand carries the fragrance of a flower, for instance, the scent is not produced by the hand itself but is acquired through contact with the flower or perfume. The school asserts that Buddhist cultivation aligns with this perfuming analogy, suggesting that instant Buddhahood or awakening is implausible because the conditioning of the mind is a gradual and continuous process. This explanation is grounded in the teachings of the *MSg*, T. 31, 328a.

ālayavijñāna becomes perceivable, known as “mind perceiving mind.” Third, there are other supporting conditions, such as the eye organ, light, distance, etc., collectively referred to as the conditions of dominance. Last, the immediate condition pertains to the cessation of the eye-consciousness in the previous moment, immediately generating the impetus for the subsequent arising of eye-consciousness.

According to the scriptures, the arising of eye-consciousness necessitates a total of nine conditions. Only when all nine conditions are fulfilled can one see this thing (table B). At the moment of seeing this thing, all sensory information is once again stored in the *ālayavijñāna*. The same principle governs the cognitive processes of other senses.

1.3.2. Six Meanings of Seeds

The concept of seeds encompasses various characteristics and functions, which are summarized into six points in the *MSg*:³⁰

1. Momentary cessation:
Momentary cessation denotes rapid disappearance, signifying the moment when the seed manifests as a phenomenon and promptly vanishes. Consequently, it embodies the nature of impermanence.
2. Simultaneous coexistence:
Simultaneous coexistence indicates that when the seed manifests, both the seed and the resulting phenomenon exist concurrently as cause and effect. This concept of simultaneous coexistence implies that during the seed's transformation into manifestation, cause and effect exist simultaneously. Subsequent to this moment, both the seed and the manifestation cease to exist concurrently.
3. Perpetual continuity:
Perpetual continuity refers to the uninterrupted functionality of the seed, persisting even before its manifestation. The seed's function endures until conducive conditions mature, triggering its manifestation. Until then, the seed continues to exist. For instance, consider an apple seed: without essential conditions like sunlight and water, it remains dormant. However, with the advent of suitable conditions, it sprouts, grows, transforms into an apple, and the original seed also ceases to exist. Moreover, under a certain circumstance, the seed will never manifest due to the absence or elimination of the primary cause for the seed's manifestation even when the functionality of the seed remains intact. According to *AKB*, this is known as “absence of conditions for arising.”³¹ In the context of reincarnation, afflictions are the primary conditions for the generation, nourishment, and manifestation of karmic seeds. Afflictions serve two functions in relation to karma: generating and strengthening it. Based on afflictions, individuals engage in various wholesome and unwholesome actions, subsequently producing karmic seeds. However, for these karmic seeds to manifest and mature, they require influence from afflictions. Within our *ālayavijñāna*, numerous karmic seeds exist. Through spiritual practice, afflictions can be gradually resolved until eventually eliminated. At this point, although the function of the karmic seeds remains, the primary condition (afflictions) enabling their manifestation has been eliminated, leading to liberation from the cycle of rebirth. In this sense, as long as a seed has not yet manifested and the primary condition for its manifestation has not been eradicated, it retains the potential to manifest, regardless of the time it takes.
4. Determined nature:
The term, determined nature, encompasses the three inherent qualities of seeds: wholesome, unwholesome, and indeterminate. For instance, within our minds, various mental phenomena or activities exist. Among these, some are wholesome, such as faith, carefulness, peacefulness, indifference (mental equilibrium), bashfulness, and remorsefulness. The inherent nature of the seeds giving rise to these wholesome qualities

³⁰ *Shedachenglunshi* (攝大乘論釋), T.31, 329b.

³¹ When the ability of discrimination is removed and no further arising occurs due to the absence of conditions, such is called non-discriminative cessation, T. 29, 33c.

is fundamentally good. Conversely, numerous unwholesome mental phenomena, including ignorance, indulgence, laziness, doubt, dullness, and restlessness, are associated with inherently bad seeds. Additionally, there are other types of seeds, like those related to the five sensory faculties or those capable of manifesting as mountains, rivers, and lands. The nature of these seeds is indeterminate. A specific category of seeds is the karmic seed, formed through wholesome or unwholesome actions. However, the inherent nature of the karmic seed itself remains indeterminate, possessing only the quality of being either pleasant or unpleasant. Consequently, the resulting karmic outcome, or fruit, will be experienced as either pleasant or unpleasant. For instance, if a person is born with a weak heart, it is not inherently bad; rather, it represents an unpleasant or undesirable karmic result. Despite seeds having the three natures of wholesome, unwholesome, and indeterminate, these qualities are not apparent when the seeds are in a dormant state.

5. Interdependent causal conditions:

All seeds require various causes and conditions to manifest. As mentioned earlier, nine conditions are necessary for vision to occur. First, there must be light. Second, there must be spatial distance, and no objects should obstruct the view. Third, there must be a healthy sense organ—in this case, the eye. Fourth, there must be an object to be seen, referred to as form (*rūpa*) in Buddhism. Fifth, there must be volition, a mental factor that directs the mind's attention towards an object. Without volition, individuals see but do not perceive. Sixth, there is the fundamental base—the *ālayavijñāna*. The *ālayavijñāna* is the root of all knowable. Seventh, there is the base of defilement and purity, which is the tainted mental-consciousness (*kliṣṭamanovijñāna*). All defiled and purified phenomena arise based on this consciousness. From the mundane perspective, when all sense consciousness including eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind-consciousness, interact with the six sense objects such as form, sound, smell, taste, tactile, and mental objects, afflictions, delusion, and karma will arise. Eighth, there is the discriminating base, which is the sixth consciousness. This tainted mental-consciousness can discern between wholesome and unwholesome, defiled and undefiled, and physical and mental phenomena. Although the five sense organs can perceive objects, they rely on the sixth consciousness for discrimination. Finally, the ninth condition is the seed of eye-consciousness. The present manifestation of eye-consciousness relies on the seed of the eye-consciousness. Only when all nine conditions are present, can visual perception arise. In other words, for the seed of eye-consciousness to manifest, it must be accompanied by the other eight conditions.

6. Only induces respective fruits:

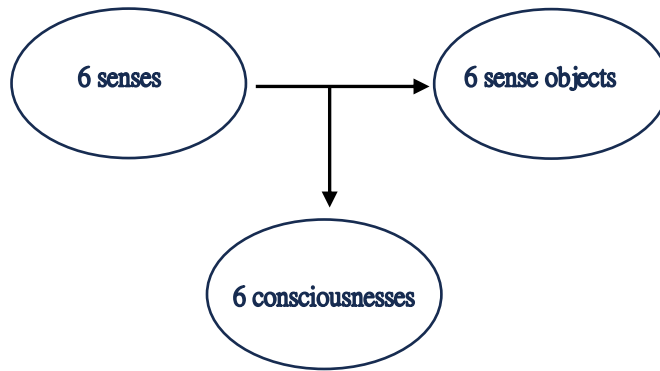
Each seed yields its specific outcome. For instance, the seed of grains results only in grains, and similarly, the seed of the sense faculties—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind—generates their respective faculties. Likewise, the seeds of external sense objects—forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and mental objects—give rise to their corresponding objects. The seeds of the six consciousnesses produce their respective consciousness.

Although seeds have many characteristics and functions, they can be summarized into these six major attributes.

1.4. From Epistemological Idealism to Ontological Idealism

In the discussion of human cognition in Buddhist studies, the doctrine of *ālayavijñāna* plays a crucial role in the transition from epistemology to ontology. Epistemology primarily examines how the objective external world is perceived. In early Buddhism, Abhidharma, or Madhyamaka philosophy, commonly describes the interaction between the six senses and their corresponding objects when exploring cognition, resulting in the emergence of the six consciousnesses (as depicted in Figure 4). When our six consciousnesses engage with the external world, they apprehend an image of the external object, which then manifests within the inner mind. The sixth consciousness further cognizes and discerns this image, referred to as the “perceptual image” or “phenomenal object” (the dharma-object within the six objects of senses).

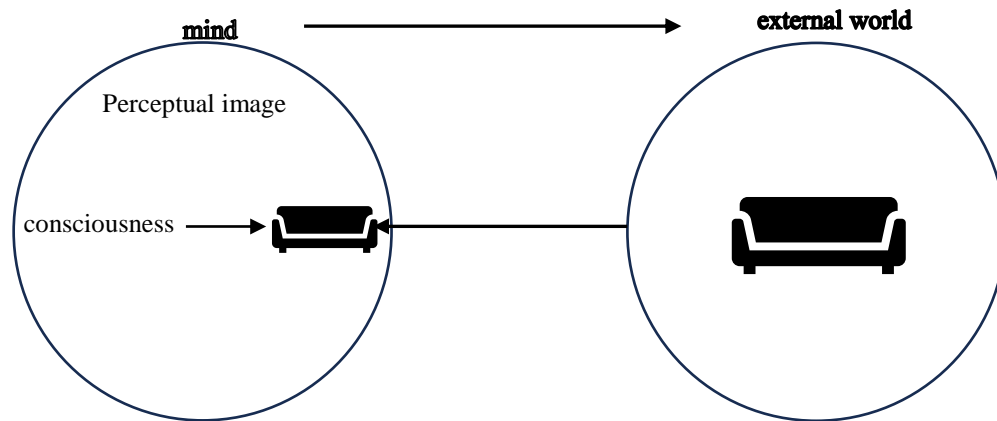
Figure 4



For example, when one perceives a chair, the mind captures the appearance of the chair, forming a mental image within me. Subsequently, the mind analyzes this image (as illustrated in Figure 5). Whether it is seeing, hearing, sensing, or knowing, all these activities follow a common process known as the process of cognition. Epistemologists assert that the external world is objective and can be accessed directly. In the process of cognition, individuals resemble photographers who bring the external world into their inner minds to acknowledge and analyze it. This reflects the fundamental epistemology of Buddhism.

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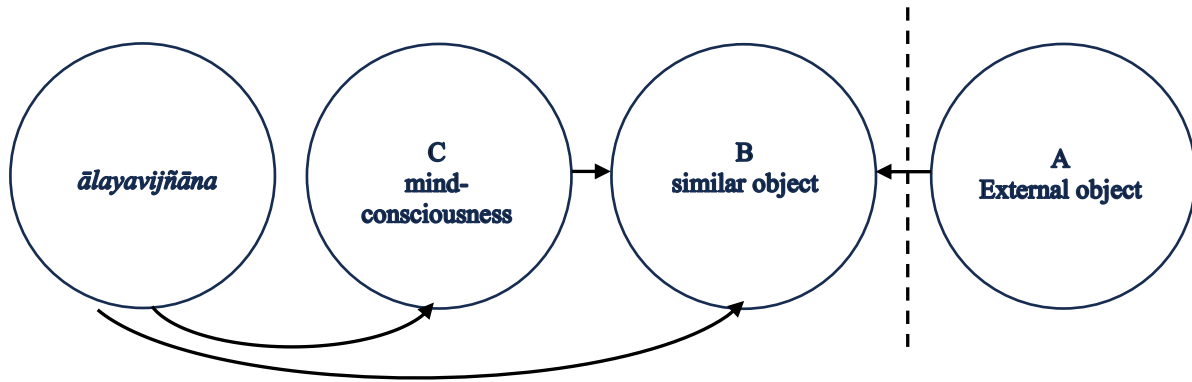
Figure 5



In the exploration of human cognition, scholars of Yogācāra gradually developed ontological idealism on top of the fundamental theory of epistemology. According to ontological idealism, everything perceived by individuals is inseparable from the cognition within their own consciousness; essentially, the external world is a manifestation of the mind. This process is elucidated in Figure 6. When senses make contact with an external object, denoted as A, *ālayavijñāna* manifests something akin to this external object, designated as B. Simultaneously, *ālayavijñāna* generates a mind-consciousness, labeled as C, capable of discrimination. This mind-consciousness, C, then discerns and cognizes the externally manifested object, B, originating from the mind. Throughout this process, whether it is the discriminating mind-

consciousness, C, or the manifested external object, B, both are manifestations of the *ālayavijñāna*. Hence, the term “(*ālayavijñāna*) consciousness-only without an external object.” Regarding the original external object, A, scholars of Yogācāra uphold its objective existence and its influence on the manifested object, B. However, since the consciousness cannot directly perceive it, the Yogācāra school does not primarily focus on its existence. Instead, the emphasis lies in the existence of the manifested object, B, and how the mind-consciousness cognizes it.

Figure 6



Additionally, scholars of Yogācāra assert that not only are six consciousnesses and the perceived external objects (six sense objects) manifestations of the *ālayavijñāna*, but even the sense organs (six faculties) are also brought forth by it, serving as the supporting conditions for generating the six consciousnesses. The six consciousnesses, along with the defiled seventh consciousness, are all manifestations of the *ālayavijñāna*, collectively termed the “seven transformed consciousnesses.” In contrast, the *ālaya* is referred to as the eighth consciousness or the “root consciousness.”³² According to the scriptures of *Yogācāra*, the storehouse consciousness and the transformed consciousnesses are mutually causal. While the transformed consciousnesses arise from the current manifestation of the seeds in the *ālayavijñāna*, during the process of perceiving the manifested objects, the active transformed consciousnesses imprint new information into the *ālayavijñāna*, creating a reciprocal causal relationship.³³ Founded on the principle of “seeds giving rise to manifestation, and manifestation perfuming seeds,” Yogācāra establishes its theory of ontological idealism. However, akin to other Buddhist theories, Yogācāra does not solely engage in discussions about ontological idealism; its primary aim is to assist individuals in practice and achieving liberation. The central message that Yogācāra seeks to convey is that problems arise in the process of human cognition, leading to the cycle of rebirth. The nature of these problems and how to resolve them will be thoroughly analyzed and explained in the subsequent sections.

2. Phenomena of Cognition: The Three Natures

³² *Shedachenglunben* (攝大乘論本), T. 134a-135b.

³³ *Ibid.*

2.1. Introduction to the Three Natures

2.1.1. Interpretation of Interdependent Origination

Yogācāra introduces the concept of the three natures to elucidate interdependent origination and the existence of sentient beings, encompassing both the cycle of rebirth and the attainment of liberation and Buddhahood. The first aspect of the three natures is the other-dependent nature (*paratantra*), encapsulating the principle that all phenomena emerge in dependence on various causes and conditions. The second aspect is the conceptualized nature (*parikalpita*), which explicates the cycle of rebirth stemming from delusions, karma, and suffering. The third aspect, the perfected nature (*pariniṣpanna*), represents the state of liberation and Buddhahood—the ultimate and perfect outcome. The three natures can be comprehended as three fundamental qualities or characteristics (of the existence of sentient beings), often referred to as the three aspects (相). They constitute the core theory of Yogācāra, with the entire system revolving around the *ālayavijñāna* and the three natures. The discourse on the three natures is intricately intertwined with the context of *ālaya*; conversely, an exploration of *ālaya* cannot be complete without considering the three natures. This elucidation clarifies the relationship between the universal principle and the phenomena. To illustrate, consider the relationship between Newton's laws and the falling of an apple—one being a principle and the other a phenomenon resulting from that principle. Similarly, the principles and phenomena of the cycle of rebirth align in this manner. The central focus of the three natures is to expound on the causal conditions in connection with the emergence and cessation (of the suffering of) sentient beings, the facets of transmigration and cessation within (the context of) interdependent origination, and the cycle of rebirth and liberation, as illustrated in Figure 3 from the previous section.

To comprehend the three natures, it is essential to grasp the Four Noble Truths. The other-dependent nature aligns with interdependent origination, and delving into the law of dependent origination essentially involves exploring the dependent origination of the *ālaya*. Governed by the law of interdependent origination, sentient beings continuously undergo the cycle of rebirth, stemming from delusions, karma, and suffering—referred to as the conceptualized nature. Similarly, in harmony with the law of interdependent origination, specific methods of practice can interrupt the emergence of suffering and lead to a state of perfectly pure liberation—known as the perfected nature. Notably, the three natures serve as an explanation of the Four Noble Truths. Therefore, for a comprehensive understanding of the three natures, one must also understand the Four Noble Truths.

2.1.2. Remedy for Nihilist View

The earliest known scripture introducing the concept of the three natures is the *SNS*.³⁴ It outlines three distinct periods of teachings. First, the teaching of Āgama, as represented by the *Āgama Sūtras*, where the Buddha expounded the Four Noble Truths as the ultimate truth. Anything conveyed in the *Āgama Sūtras* is also referred to as the lesser vehicle or the teaching of existence. The second teaching is the profound doctrine of the *Prajñāpāramitā*, with the

³⁴ The *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra* (*SNS*) holds a significant place as the earliest scripture widely acknowledged by the Yogācāra School. It explicitly addresses and elucidates the concept of the three natures, stating, “The characteristics of all phenomena can be categorized into three types. What are the three? First, the conceptualized nature; second, the other-dependent nature; and third, the perfected nature.” T. 16, 693a.

emphasis on emptiness found in the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*, asserting the emptiness of all phenomena. Therefore, it is termed the teaching of emptiness. The third teaching, presented in the *SNS*, introduces the concept of the three natures. It posits that some phenomena are “empty,” while others cannot be considered as such. This teaching integrates the prior concepts of existence and emptiness, thus being known as the teaching of both existence and emptiness.

The *SNS* employs the three natures to elucidate the Four Noble Truths and the concept of emptiness. It asserts that the other-dependent nature aligns with interdependent origination, serving as the universal truth giving rise to the cycle of rebirth and liberation. Consequently, the other-dependent nature is deemed non-empty. On the contrary, the conceptualized nature embodies the delusory aspect caused by afflictions and erroneous attachment. Therefore, the conceptualized nature is characterized as empty and lacks inherent existence. The perfected nature symbolizes the true nature of all phenomena and the state achieved by the noble ones. It is considered real and, consequently, not empty.³⁵

Although the doctrine of existence asserted in the *Āgama Sūtras* and the doctrine of emptiness elaborated in the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* are both teachings of the Buddha, following the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*, some individuals misconstrued emptiness as a form of nothingness, falling into the extreme view of nihilism. Consequently, the *SNS* introduces the concept of the three natures as a corrective measure for the nihilist perspective, providing a comprehensive elucidation of various aspects of phenomena.³⁶ The *SNS* clarifies that the term “*saṃdhinirmocana*” signifies the Buddha’s profound and esoteric intent in the teachings of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*, particularly emphasizing the emptiness of all phenomena. The *SNS* views the Buddha’s teaching on the emptiness of all phenomena as tailored for individuals with advanced capacities. While those with advanced capacities can readily comprehend this teaching, many individuals with lower capacities and wisdom, (lacking five favorable conditions), later misunderstood the concept, assuming that everything is empty. These individuals not only reject interdependent origination or the other-dependent nature but also deny the ultimate liberation, *nirvana*, or the perfected nature attained by the awakened ones. Hence, the scripture introduces the concepts of the three natures and the three non-natures to reinterpret the teachings of interdependent origination based on the nature of emptiness. The *SNS* asserts that the Buddha did not explicitly elucidate the meaning of emptiness in the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*. Apparently, the doctrine of emptiness presented in the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* is not considered the ultimate meaning. However, in the *SNS*, the Buddha thoroughly clarifies the meaning of emptiness based

³⁵In general discussions about various sentient beings, including those who have not yet attained a superior level of virtuous merits and wisdom, if they express an inability to comprehend my profound and esoteric teachings – asserting that all phenomena are absolutely devoid of self-nature, neither arising nor ceasing, inherently tranquil, and intrinsic-nirvana nature– they tend to adopt the views of nothingness and characterlessness. Holding both perspectives of nothingness and characterlessness, they assert that all phenomena lack inherent characteristics, rejecting the attributes of conceptualized, other-dependent, and perfected natures. Why do they make such claims? Do they not realize that the conceptualized nature can only be applicable due to the presence of other-dependent and perfected natures? Denying character to the other-dependent and perfected natures inevitably leads to the denial of the conceptualized nature. Consequently, this is referred to as the denial of the three natures. T. 16, 695b.

³⁶Ibid, “Sons of good families! The three non-natures constitute the esoteric teachings of the Tathāgata. They are the essential teachings of the esoteric nature, refuting the non-ultimate teachings that assert, ‘all things are devoid of self-nature, neither arising nor ceasing, inherently tranquil, and exhibits an intrinsic-nirvana nature.’” T. 16, 695b.

on the three natures and the three non-natures. Therefore, the teaching of both emptiness and existence is deemed the teaching of the ultimate meaning.³⁷

From the perspectives of the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra Schools, the Madhyamaka school, rooted in the teachings of emptiness found in the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*, emphasizes the elucidation of the emptiness aspect of interdependent origination. In contrast, the Yogācāra school, based on the teachings of the three natures in the *SNS*, focuses on establishing the phenomena of interdependent origination and explains the cycle of rebirth and its cessation. Madhyamaka underscores the ultimate reality behind all phenomena, seeking to comprehend the true nature of things. On the other hand, Yogācāra concentrates on analyzing and explaining the origin of all phenomena. Consequently, in Chinese Buddhism, Madhyamaka is referred to as the Dharma-Nature School (法性宗), highlighting its emphasis on the true nature of all things. Meanwhile, Yogācāra is known as the Dharma-Characteristics School (法相宗), emphasizing its focus on the characteristics or manifestations of phenomena. These two schools have distinct emphases, with one demonstrating the characteristics of interdependent origination and the other explaining the nature of emptiness. However, both aim to elucidate the cycle of rebirth and the ultimate cessation and liberation.

2.2. Other-Dependent Nature (*Paratantrasvabhāva*)

The term “*para*” (other) in *paratantrasvabhāva* pertains to causes and conditions, and “*paratantra*” conveys that the arising and ceasing of all phenomena are contingent upon causes and conditions. Consequently, the other-dependent nature is essentially synonymous with interdependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*).³⁸ The Sanskrit term *pratītyasamutpāda* is composed of “*pratītya*” meaning various, “*sam*” meaning combine, “*ut*” as a prefix, and “*pāda*” meaning arising. The overall translation indicates the coming together of various causes and conditions to give rise to something, and this is known as interdependent origination. Since the era of Abhidharma Buddhism, various causes and conditions have been categorized into four conditions, namely, the condition qua cause, the condition qua object, the immediate condition, and the condition of dominance. In the context of *paratantrasvabhāva*, the term “*para*” (other) refers to these four conditions.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid, “In the (*Prajñāpāramitā*) *Sūtra*, (the Buddha expounds that) if sentient beings have already planted superior wholesome roots, cleared away various obstacles, established a mature body and mind, cultivated profound understanding, and accumulated a wealth of virtuous fortune and wisdom, then, upon hearing such teachings, having correctly understood my profound esoteric meanings, they develop great confidence and understanding of these teachings. With an unwavering wisdom, they accurately comprehend the profound meanings of these teachings. Through diligently practicing in accordance with this understanding, they swiftly attain the ultimate and supreme realization.” T. 16, 695b.

³⁸ Ibid, “How do all phenomena arise dependent on others? It means the interdependent-origination nature of all phenomena: when this exists, that comes to be; when this arise, that arises This is to say, ignorance leads to mental formation, up to the aggregation of great suffering.” T. 16, 693a.

³⁹ These four conditions can be found in *Shedachenglunshi*, “What are the conditions that generate the six consciousnesses? They are, namely, the condition of dominance, the condition qua object, and the immediate condition. The three types of interdependent origination—perpetual-rebirth aggregate (*ālayavijñāna*), twelve-links, and functional faculty (six consciousnesses)—require four conditions. T. 31, 330b.

First, the condition qua cause (*hetu-pratyaya*), in the context of Yogācāra, specifically refers to the *ālayavijñāna*. It denotes the intricate relationship between the *ālaya* and all phenomena, emphasizing “the mutual dependence between the root and the transformed; the manifestations and perfuming of seeds.” The “root” pertains to the root consciousness, which is the *ālayavijñāna* itself. The “transformed” denotes the seven consciousnesses that arise as transformations from the *ālayavijñāna*, commonly known as the preceding seven transformed consciousnesses. While these transformed consciousnesses manifest from the root consciousness, the continuous existence of the root consciousness relies on the perfuming of the transformed consciousnesses. This dynamic relationship between the root and transformed consciousnesses is characterized by mutual causality, where they reciprocally arise from each other based on their manifestations and perfuming. The *ālaya*, often considered as the direct condition for the arising of all phenomena, is not merely static but dynamic. The mutual causality between the *ālaya* and the transformed consciousnesses is an ongoing and interactive process. This dynamic causality is how Yogācāra explains the principle of interdependent origination, illustrating the constant and interactive causation between the root and transformed consciousnesses in the emergence of all phenomena.

Second, the immediate condition (*samanantara-pratyaya*) is described as the momentary ceasing thought (*citta*) that immediately precedes and serves as the condition for the arising of the subsequent thought or consciousness. This ceasing thought refers to the thought that came to an end in the previous moment. By ceasing in the previous moment, it facilitates the uninterrupted emergence of another thought in the subsequent moment. This is what is referred to as the immediate condition. Taking the example of eye-consciousness, as long as the necessary conditions are present, eye-consciousness continues to arise moment after moment. Within this continuous flow of eye-consciousness, the moment when the preceding eye-consciousness concludes, it seamlessly transitions to and triggers the emergence of the next moment of eye-consciousness. The eye-consciousness that ceased in the previous moment serves as the immediate condition for the next moment of eye-consciousness, without any interruption. Therefore, it is termed the immediate condition for the successive moment of eye-consciousness. It's worth noting that the preceding moment of eye-consciousness can only function as the immediate condition for the succeeding moment of eye-consciousness and not for the other five consciousnesses. However, mind-consciousness can serve as the immediate condition not only for itself but also for the preceding five consciousnesses. In the realm of cognition, this interplay is a crucial factor in the arising of perception.

Third, the condition qua object (*ālambana-pratyaya*) involves the object as a condition. In this context, the term “object” refers to the entity or phenomenon that is perceived by consciousness. The condition qua object signifies that what consciousness perceives is one of the primary conditions for the emergence of perception. For instance, the arising of eye-consciousness requires a tangible object, while ear-consciousness requires a sound, and similar requirements exist for the other types of consciousness. Therefore, the object of perception is an essential condition for the initiation of perception. In summary, the presence of a specific object is a critical factor influencing the generation of perception by the corresponding consciousness.

Fourth, the condition of dominance indicates that, in addition to the condition qua cause, immediate condition, and the condition qua object, various supporting conditions are necessary

for the emergence of a thought or consciousness. These supporting conditions collectively constitute the condition of dominance. Consider eye-consciousness as an example, when an eyeball is damaged, even if the seed of eye-consciousness is present in the *ālaya*, eye-consciousness cannot arise, and visibility becomes impossible. While the eye organ is not the primary cause for visual perception, it is an essential condition and is therefore considered a supporting condition. Other factors such as light, space, and distance, as mentioned earlier, also serve as supporting conditions for visual perception. In summary, for the first six consciousnesses to function, they must possess these four conditions. Besides the three important conditions mentioned earlier, all other factors fall under the category of the condition of dominance.

The concept of other-dependent nature is essentially the doctrine of interdependent origination, and a comprehensive discussion of it requires considering the four conditions. Among these conditions, the most crucial is the condition *qua cause*, which is the *ālayavijñāna*. The Yogācāra School elucidates the doctrine of interdependent origination by building upon the concept of *ālayavijñāna* and offers a profound analysis of how phenomena and cognition come into existence. Other-dependent nature serves as a central point in understanding the three natures, and the existence of the other two natures (conceptualized nature and perfected nature) relies on it. While the other-dependent nature associated with defilement explains the cycle of *samsāra*—the conceptualized nature; the purity aspect of the other-dependent nature elucidates the process of ultimate liberation—the perfected nature, as depicted earlier in Figure 3.

2.3. Conceptualized Nature (*Parikalpitasvabhāva*)

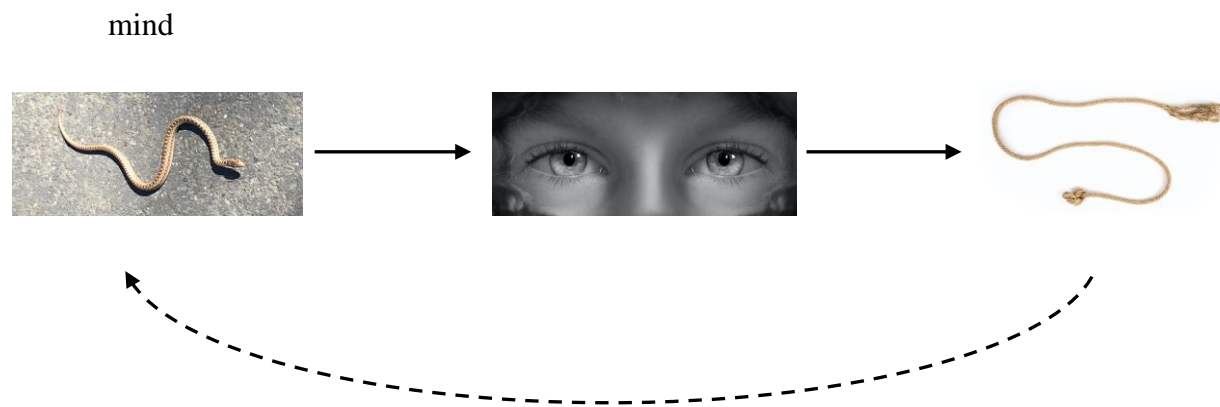
The Sanskrit term for conceptualized nature is “*parikalpitasvabhāva*,” which can be understood as “pervasively conceptualized” or “pervasive attachment to misconceptions.” In the context of other-dependent nature, this term denotes the tendency to grasp onto perceptions of an inner self and the external world, erroneously viewing both the self and the world as independently and truly existent.⁴⁰ The object of the other-dependent nature pertains to the manifestation of a seemingly objective existence, such as the concepts of “self” and “mine,” manifested by the *ālayavijñāna* when all conditions are met. When individuals mistakenly attach to these objects as an independent and truly existent reality, it transforms into the conceptualized nature. Therefore, the other-dependent nature indicates that, in the cognitive process, attachment to conceptualized objects is erroneous. A common mistake made by ordinary individuals is the attachment to a “self.” Believing in an unchanging “self” gives rise to the notion of “mine” encompassing what one perceives and possesses. Holding onto an unchanging “self” is termed “self-attachment,” while attaching to an external world is termed “mine-attachment.” Thus, the conceptualized nature refers to the errors and attachments individuals have in the process of cognition.

Consider a rope formed from various causes and conditions as an example. When individuals see the rope, an image of it forms in the mind. This process of perception is labeled as other-dependent, and the manifestation of the rope’s image in the mind constitutes the

⁴⁰ Sons of good families, what is the conceptualized nature? It signifies that all things are distinguishable through constructed names, extending to various expressions. It is comparable to eye patients perceiving floaters in their vision. The nature of conceptualization is akin to that experience. T. 16, 693a

characteristics of other-dependent. However, under specific circumstances, an individual might erroneously perceive the rope as a snake, leading to fear. The mental representation (embodying the features of a snake) that emerges in the mind is the conceptualized nature, originating from misunderstanding and attachment, as illustrated in Figure 7. The flawed cognition and attachment stemming from the other-dependent nature are denoted as the conceptualized nature. Although the analogy of the rope and snake provides a straightforward illustration commonly employed in Yogācāra to elucidate the conceptualized nature. In reality, human cognition is significantly more intricate.⁴¹

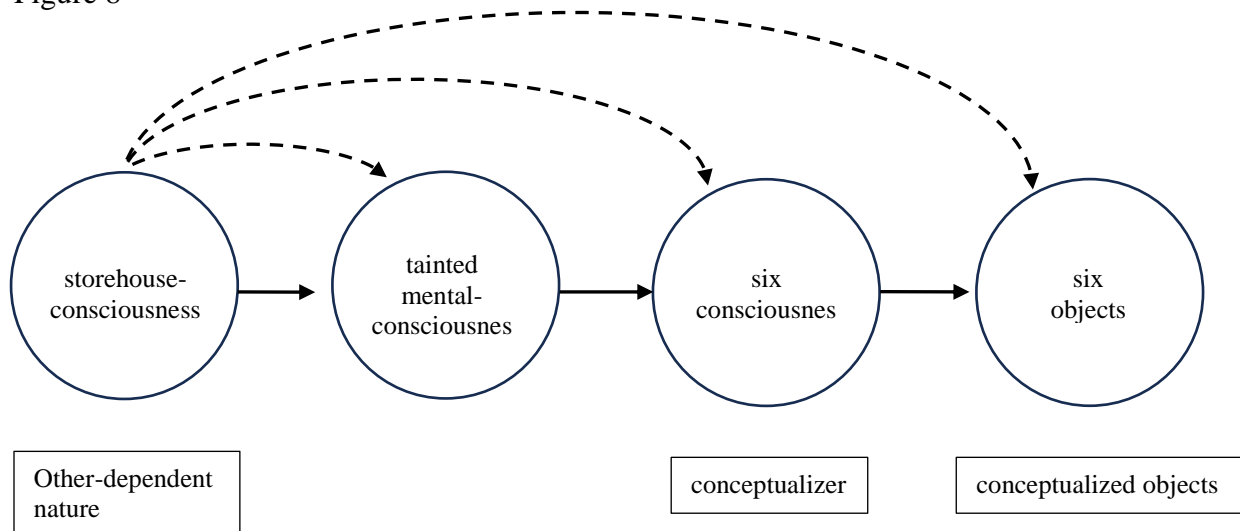
Figure 7



The attachment to the conceptualized objects originates from the seventh consciousness, also known as the tainted mental-consciousness. According to the scriptures, this tainted mental-consciousness is consistently associated with the four fundamental afflictions: (wrong) views, desire, pride, and ignorance. Whether it involves the concept of a “personal self (人我)” or the concept of an “inherent self in phenomena (法我),” there is always an attachment to an unchanging essence, the “self.” The *ālayavijñāna* of ordinary individuals is tainted by this self-attachment, resulting in the contamination and corruption of all the seeds. It is akin to throwing a handful of mud into a bucket of clean water, causing contamination. Hence, the six consciousnesses (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind), the sense organs, and the external world manifested from this contaminated *ālaya*, shows the inclusion of self-attachment. This is the definition of conceptualized nature. Among them, the six corrupted consciousnesses that can perceive are conceptualizers, while the sense organs and the external world are the objects of conceptualization, known as the attachment to conceptualized objects. Therefore, it can be seen that the objects of other-dependent nature in the realm of ordinary beings is definitely characterized by conceptualized nature, as shown in Figure 8.

⁴¹ *Shedachenglunben*, scroll 2, T. 31, 142c.

Figure 8



In general, the external environment is believed to be objective, while defilements within the mind corrupt it. However, according to the theories of Yogācāra, as the external environment is also a manifestation from the tainted substratum consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*), it is characterized by afflictions and defilements, possessing the potential to trigger further afflictions. Yogācāra specifically refers to the defiled external environment as the conceptualized object. Additionally, the Yogācāra School suggests that the problem begins with the seeds within the *ālayavijñāna*; since these seeds are already defiled, the six consciousnesses manifested from them also naturally become attached to the external environment, the object of perception that can induce attachments.

These attachments lead to two outcomes: firstly, suffering. Individuals, lacking an understanding that all phenomena arise from various causes and conditions and are illusory and impermanent due to conceptualization, persist in attaching and desiring every changing thing. The contradiction between self-attachment and impermanence results in inevitable conflicts, leading to suffering. Hence, the scriptures assert, “Because of impermanence, there is suffering.” Secondly, ignorance and karma. From the standpoint of other-dependent nature, due to misconceptions and attachments, defiled bodily, verbal, and mental actions (karma) arise, leading to defiled karma seeds imprinted in the *ālayavijñāna*. The force of defiled karma is nurtured with the nutrients of afflictions, ripens when all necessary conditions are met, and results in the cycle of rebirth. Thus, the cycle of rebirth perpetuates with ignorance, karma, and suffering. The conceptualized nature aims to elucidate the suffering of cyclic rebirth and the cause of suffering in the context of interdependent origination.

2.4. Perfected Nature (*Pariniṣpanna*)

Perfected nature, known as *pariniṣpanna* in Sanskrit, signifies perfect accomplishment. It encompasses concepts such as nirvana, liberation, Buddhahood, and the ultimate truth. In essence, it refers to the absence of conceptualized objects from the other-dependent nature,

enabling the view of the true nature of all things and understanding that the rise of all things depends on various causal conditions. This is what is meant by perfected accomplishment.⁴² In the path of cultivation, all efforts are directed towards eliminating attachment to conceptualized objects from the other-dependent aspect of things and perceiving the true nature of all things. Using the earlier example of a piece of rope lying there due to various causal conditions, but are mistakenly perceived it as a snake. The image of the snake is illusory; it is a false image arising within the mind, making it a conceptualized object. Removing the mental image of the snake (conceptualized object), seeing the image of the rope as it truly is, and returning the rope to its true nature signify eliminating the conceptualized aspect from the other-dependent aspect of things, which is the perfected nature.

According to the theory of Yogācāra, ordinary people are like those who are chronically delusional and constantly mistaking a rope for a snake. Within their deluded minds, only the image of the snake exists. Therefore, although the theory of perfected nature is simple, realizing it is not easy. This difficulty arises because their *ālayavijñāna* has been accumulating countless defiled seeds since beginningless time. To transform these defiled seeds into pure ones, extensive and continuous cultivation is necessary. Only through many lifetimes of cultivation can individuals gradually transform the defiled seeds into pure ones. As the number of pure seeds increases, the strength of the tainted mental-consciousness weakens. Consequently, the attachment of the conceptualizer—the six consciousnesses—also weakens, and the conceptualized objects gradually become purified. When the seeds in the *ālayavijñāna* are completely purified, the conceptualized objects will no longer manifest, indicating the perfection of the perfected nature. The perfected nature can be achieved through diligent practice in accordance with the path of the ultimate truth. However, the levels of achievement varies. For example, only a fraction of the perfected nature can be achieved at the first fruit in the Two Vehicles (hearers [*śrāvaka*] and solitary Buddhas [*pratyēkabuddha*]) and the first ground in the Mahāyāna Vehicle, where the root problem of self-attachment (view of an inherent self) has been eliminated. The full attainment of the perfected nature can only be realized at the level of Buddhahood.

3. Theory of Practice: Transformation of the Root

Before exploring into the discussion of the Yogācāra doctrine of practice, referred to as “transformation of the root (of what is to be known—i.e. *ālayavijñāna*),” it is crucial to recognize the varying interpretations of practice within the three major schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Although their teachings aim to guide practitioners towards Buddhahood, their approaches differ. Madhyamaka emphasizes the continuous cultivation and accumulation of virtuous merits and wisdom, thus known as “accumulation.” On the other hand, Yogācāra uses the term “transformation,” signifying the transformation of consciousness into wisdom or the “transformation of the *ālayavijñāna*.” Tathāgatagabha (Buddha nature) focuses on manifestation, emphasizing the revelation of purity after the removal of all defilements.

In detail, Madhyamaka teaches that all phenomena arising from various causal conditions lack an inherent self. Thus, the achievement of Buddhahood requires diligent effort in

⁴² SNS, scroll 2, “What is the perfected nature? It signifies the equality of all things—suchness (*tathātā*)... By removing the conceptualized nature, which is caused by self-attachment, from the other-dependent nature, one can comprehend the perfected nature.” T. 16, 693a-b.

accumulating virtuous merits and wisdom. Yogācāra emphasizes the transformation from defilement to purity, specifically the transformation of *ālayavijñāna*, which becomes pure through continuous perfuming. The doctrine of Tathāgatagarbha asserts manifestation, suggesting that the innate Buddha nature is complete within oneself but obscured by ignorance. By completely removing external defilements, the inner pure Buddha nature is revealed, leading to Buddhahood.

While these three theories have different approaches and logic from common understanding, they all share the common goal of guiding individuals in their practice, tailored to different inclinations and capacities.

3.1. Transformation of Consciousness into Wisdom

The theory of practice within Yogācāra is known as the “transformation of the root,” signifying the transformation of the substratum consciousness—*ālayavijñāna*, the root of all knowable. The term “transformation” refers to the process of converting defiled seeds into pure ones.⁴³ It involves transforming consciousness into wisdom and specifically, converting the eight consciousnesses into the four wisdoms (or knowledges). The transformation of the *ālayavijñāna* leads to the attainment of the wisdom of the great-perfect-mirror (*mahādarśajñāna*) or the untainted consciousness, known as *amalavijñāna* in Sanskrit. Transforming tainted mental-consciousness results in the achievement of the wisdom of equality (*samatājñāna*), while transforming the sixth consciousness (mind-consciousness) leads to the wisdom of excellent discrimination (*pratyavekṣaṇajñāna*). Finally, transforming the first five consciousnesses results in the attainment of the wisdom of accomplishment (wisdom that accomplishes what needs to be done; *kṛtyānuṣṭhanajñāna*). Further explanations are provided below:

1. Wisdom of great-perfect-mirror:

This is the transformation of the *ālayavijñāna* into the wisdom of the great-perfect-mirror, also known as the untainted consciousness. In this context, “great-perfect” is a metaphorical term signifying complete perfection, while “mirror” alludes to its clear and untainted nature—much like a mirror that accurately reflects whatever appears before it. It is also referred to as the *dharmakāya* (truth-body), representing the ultimate state of perfection. When discussing the attainment of Buddhahood in Yogācāra, it is understood that seeds still exist, but they become non-defiled and pure. The wisdom of a Buddha cannot be expressed in words; it is the utmost pure and perfect, which can reluctantly be described as the wisdom of the great-perfect-mirror.

2. Wisdom of equality:

This is the transformation of tainted mental-consciousness (*kliṣṭamanovijñāna*) into the wisdom of equality. Tainted mental-consciousness is primarily responsible for conceptual discrimination. It is not an ordinary cognitive process but a defiled discrimination driven by a strong attachment to the self. This involves discriminating between oneself and others, I and mine, giving rise to notions of superiority and inferiority, beauty and ugliness, love and hatred, and other biased critiques and attachments. Such self-attachment can only be eliminated and transformed into purity through practicing and understanding the nature of the interdependent origination of all phenomena, which lacks inherent nature. When the discrimination driven by self-attachment is completely ceased, removing all distinctions between oneself and others, love and

⁴³ *Shedachenglunben*, “The perfuming referred to here is not encompassed within *ālayavijñāna* but rather within the liberated body of truth, or *dharmakāya*. As the perfuming of thusness (tathāta) gradually increases, there is a corresponding decrease in the consciousness of maturing fruition (*vipākaphala*). This change involves the transformation of the root (*ālayavijñāna*), the root of all seeds, the consciousness of maturing fruition, the consciousness of all seeds. Ultimately, this process leads to the permanent elimination of all (defiled) seeds.” T. 31, 136c.

hatred, and other afflictions, everything becomes equal. Therefore, it is called the wisdom of equality. The characteristic of the wisdom of equality primarily lies in understanding the common characteristics of all phenomena, such as interdependent origination, non-inherent nature, emptiness, impermanence, and so on.

3. Wisdom of excellent discrimination:

This is the transformation of the sixth consciousness into the wisdom of excellent discrimination. While the eighth consciousness functions as a storehouse collecting data and the seventh consciousness grasps everything as “self” without engaging in reflective thinking, it is the sixth consciousness that is responsible for daily thinking and observation. When this consciousness is transformed into purity, one can clearly and directly observe the distinct characteristics of all phenomena. Therefore, it is referred to as the wisdom of excellent discrimination. While ordinary perception of the distinct characteristics of phenomena is often connected with self-attachment, the wisdom of excellent discrimination corresponds to the wisdom of equality. Distinct characteristics refer to the unique attributes of each individual phenomenon, whereas common characteristics refer to the common attributes within the same category of phenomena. For example, each person has distinct characteristics allowing people to differentiate oneself from another, while common characteristics represent the common attributes of different sentient beings. In Buddhist teachings on matter (*rūpa*), it refers to all material entities. The distinct characteristics of material entities encompass the five sense faculties, the five sense objects, and non-informative (or invisible) matter, each possessing unique attributes. The wisdom of excellent discrimination enables individuals to discern the distinct characteristics of phenomena, such as individual personalities, the adaptability of various teachings, and the characteristics of different objects. This wisdom greatly facilitates the Bodhisattva’s skillful means in benefiting sentient beings.

4. Wisdom of accomplishment:

This involves the transformation of the first five consciousnesses into the wisdom that accomplishes what needs to be done. The sixth consciousness is responsible for discriminating and observing, while all actions require the engagement of the body and speech, accomplished by the first five consciousnesses. When the first five consciousnesses are transformed into purity, it is referred to as the wisdom of accomplishment. The wisdom of excellent discrimination primarily involves observing, cognizing, and motivating, while the wisdom of accomplishment focuses on practically executing and achieving what needs to be done. This wisdom also includes the ability to manifest supernatural powers. For example, the capacity to read minds, traverse great distances in an instance, and see distant realms. These are all manifestations of the wisdom of accomplishment. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, Bodhisattvas skillfully transform themselves in various ways to benefit sentient beings based on the wisdom of accomplishment.

The wisdom of the great-perfect-mirror is the primary one responsible for the emergence of the other three wisdoms, which is similar to how the transformed consciousness are manifested from the root consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*). It can be asserted that the wisdom of the great-perfect-mirror is the essence, while the other three wisdoms serve as its functions. The attainment of the wisdom of the great-perfect-mirror is certainly not easy. It demands countless *kalpas* (vast periods of time) of perfuming through cultivation for it to gradually become perfect. As the wisdom of the great-perfect-mirror experiences this gradual transformation, the other three wisdoms undergo parallel changes. Upon the full realization of the wisdom of the great-perfect-mirror, the subsequent three wisdoms also simultaneously become perfect. During the attainment of Buddhahood, these four wisdoms are also complete at the same time. However, during the process, they are perfected gradually.

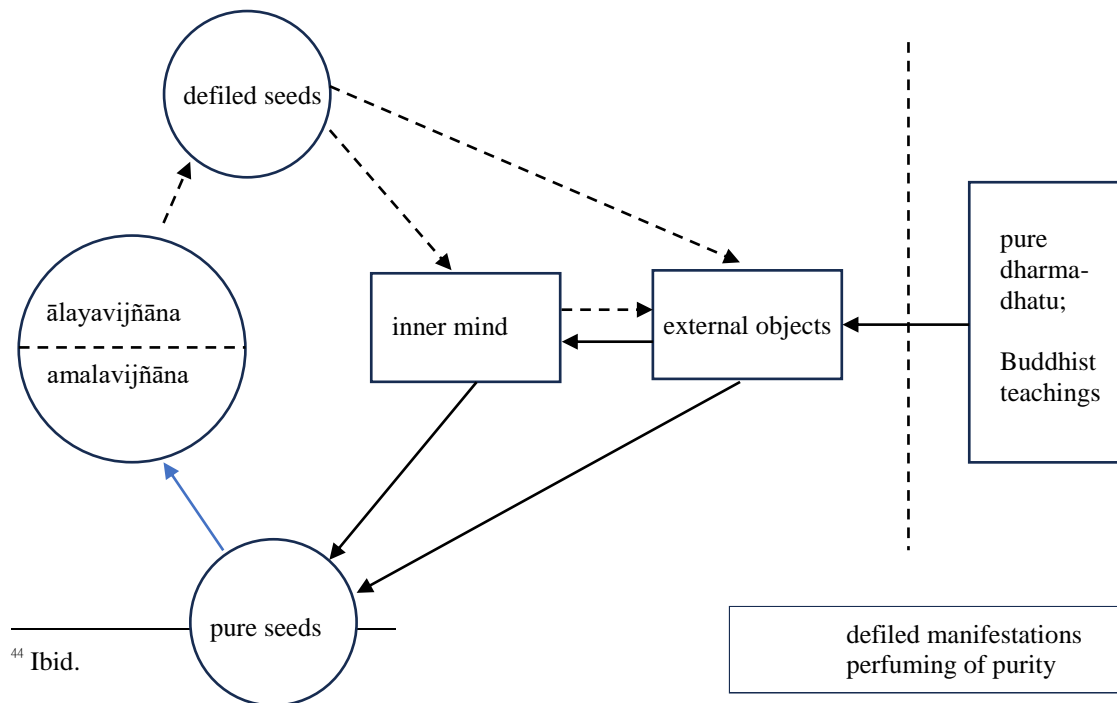
3.2. The process of transformation from defilement to purity is as follows:

For ordinary individuals, the *ālayavijñāna* is tainted by the defiled mental-consciousness, marked by self-attachment. The seeds arising from this defiled *ālayavijñāna* are similarly tainted and contaminated. Consequently, both the inner six consciousnesses and the external sense faculties and world, manifested from these defiled seeds, also carry the stain of impurity. On one hand, the defiled inner consciousness clings to the external sense faculties and world, and on the other hand, the defiled sense faculties and world possess the influence to perpetuate

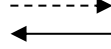
further defilement. Without the commitment to Buddhist practice, all manifestations originating from the *ālayavijñāna* remain defiled, leading to a cycle of defiled perfuming. Consequently, the *ālayavijñāna* retains its state of defilement. The Buddhist scriptures emphasize that beyond individual consciousness, there exists a pure *dharmadhātu*, which embodies the realm of Buddha’s teachings, commonly known in mundane expression as Buddhism. According to the Yogācāra School, although the initial seeds emerging from the *ālayavijñāna* are defiled, the process of manifestation provides an opportunity for simultaneous perfuming of correct teachings. This concurrent perfuming introduces new seeds into the *ālayavijñāna*, which, when imprinted with correct teachings, become partially purified. In turn, these purified seeds within the *ālayavijñāna* counteract the defiled seeds. Through continuous and uninterrupted perfuming of correct teachings, the pure seeds gradually increase, weakening the seeds of attachment, aversion, and ignorance. Ultimately, with the elimination of all defilements, individuals are liberated from the cycle of rebirth. According to the Yogācāra School, the perfuming of correct teachings is considered of utmost importance as it forms the initial step in cultivation.⁴⁴

Figure 9 below illustrates this process (dotted lines represent defiled manifestations, solid lines represent the influence of purification):

Figure 9



⁴⁴ Ibid.



In summary, the transformation of the *ālayavijñāna* requires constant perfuming and gradual progression. Cultivation engages various methods, including ethical conduct, meditation, and wisdom, to consistently perfume the Buddha’s teachings onto the *ālayavijñāna* through the six consciousnesses. This process gradually purifies the *ālayavijñāna*, leading to the final attainment of the wisdom of the great-perfect-mirror.

4. Further Interpretation of Emptiness: Three Non-Natures

As mentioned earlier, the *SNS* offers a clearer and more detailed explanation of the profound meaning of emptiness, which denotes the emptiness of all phenomena. Its method involves interpreting the emptiness of all phenomena and establishing the non-self (non-inherent) nature of everything from the other aspect of the three natures.

The term “self-nature” holds two meanings. Firstly, it refers to the specific characteristics or attributes of things. All entities possess their distinct characteristics, as illustrated in the scriptures: “Form has the characteristic of solidity.” Secondly, it denotes self-existence or self-becoming, indicating unchanging entities that exist independently without causes and conditions. The notion of “non-self nature” mentioned in the *SNS* aims to eliminate the misconception of things existing independently and self-becoming. The three natures are the other-dependent nature, conceptualized nature, and perfected nature. In contrast, the three non-natures are the non-self nature of characteristics (*lakṣaṇa-niḥsvabhāvatā*), non-self nature of arising (*utpatti-niḥsvabhāvatā*), and non-self nature of the ultimate (*paramārtha-niḥsvabhāvatā*). The conceptualized nature corresponds to the non-self nature of characteristics, as the emergence of conceptualized objects is illusional due to self-attachment. It is devoid of an inherent nature; hence, it is non-self in nature.⁴⁵ The other-dependent nature is associated with the non-self nature of arising because it depends on various causes and conditions to arise. In the context of *Yogācāra*, the existence of the other-dependent nature relies on the seed-perfuming interaction between the *ālayavijñāna* and the seven transformed consciousnesses. It is not self-existing or self-generated, thus it is devoid of an inherent nature in arising.⁴⁶ The perfected nature is connected to the non-self nature of the ultimate truth, as the perfected nature is parallel to the ultimate truth, which possesses the non-self nature. By realizing the non-self nature within the nature of other-dependent, understanding that everything is illusional, and removing the grasping of conceptualized objects, insight into the ultimate truth is possible. The ultimate truth is shown through non-inherent nature; thus, it is called the non-self nature of the ultimate truth. In summary, according to the *SNS*, the understanding of the emptiness of all phenomena, which is

⁴⁵ *SNS*, scroll 2, “Sons of good families! What is the nature of characteristics non-self nature? It corresponds with the conceptualized nature. Why? This is because conceptualized objects are established based on names and not inherently self-established. Therefore, it is termed characteristics of non-self nature.” T. 16, 694a.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, “What is the arising non-self nature? The arising non-self nature corresponds with the other-dependent nature. Why? The emergence of all things is a result of diverse causal conditions and not spontaneous. Hence, it is termed the arising non-self nature.” T. 16, 694a.

the non-self nature of everything, arises from the contemplation of the three non-natures. This provides a clear comprehension of the profound meaning of emptiness as taught in the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*.⁴⁷

The method of explaining emptiness in Yogācāra is referred to as the “emptiness of other” (*parasvabhāva-śūnyatā*), which involves unfolding emptiness by removing existence. This method eliminates the illusory existence of the conceptualized nature, revealing the emptiness of the ultimate reality of the perfected nature. Yogācāra places a strong emphasis on practical application in terms of cultivation. Thus, in practice, it becomes necessary to remove the conceptualized from the other-dependent and unveil the non-self nature of the ultimate truth. According to Yogācāra, emptiness and existence cannot coexist. Other-dependent can only be either pure or impure. In reality, mundanity and supramundanity cannot exist simultaneously within the same sentient being. On the other hand, Madhyamaka takes a more theoretical approach, emphasizing the direct elucidation of fundamental principles from the perspective of reasoning. It posits that all phenomena are interdependently originated and, therefore, lack inherent self-nature. While Madhyamaka delves into the understanding of principles, Yogācāra excels in the practical aspect of cultivation.

⁴⁷ Ibid, “The perfected nature is also known as the ultimate truth non-self nature. Why? The doctrine that asserts the absence of a self-nature in all things is considered the ultimate truth, which is also referred to as the non-self nature. This nomenclature arises because all things are connected to the ultimate truth and are disclosed by the non-self nature. Hence, it is termed the ultimate truth non-self nature.” T. 16, 694a.