Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

The Yogācāra, also known as citta-mātra (mind-only), or vijñānāvāda (Consciousness School), is one of two major Schools of Indian Mahayana Buddhist thought, which flourished in India from the 3rd–4th century CE to the 9th century CE. It clearly comprises the majority of tenest associated with this major strand in Buddhism. Both of them synthesized and developed all aspects of contemporaneous Mahāyāna Buddhism. The emphasis came to be put on examinations of the mental processes and so are religious philosophies, which claimed the ideal status of phenomena, grew forth. This development, of “ideation-only” (Vijñaptimatrā), can be clearly discerned in the Yogācāra Abhidharma, which soon came to discard the objective dharmas. This does not, however, seem to amount to sheer solipsism, but rather to the notion of a virtually infinite number of monads. 

Its encyclopedic aims led Yogācārins first to outline the “practice of yoga,” which combined Abhidharma modes of analyzing mental processes with the Mādhyamika notion of emptiness, and, second, to systematize the Mahayana doctrines and to develop notions of Buddhahood. Both of these syntheses philosophical analyses of mental processes and systematization of the Buddhist are path and goal. The Three Nature theory (tri-svabhāva), which is explained in many Yogācāra texts including an independent treatise by Vasubandhu devoted to the subject (Trisvabhāvanirdeśaśāstra).

The conceptually constructed realm (parikalpita-svabhāva) imputes unreal conceptions, especially permanent “selves,” into whatever it experiences, including oneself.
The realm of causal dependency (paratantra-svabhāva), when mixed with the constructed realm, leads one to mistake impermanent occurrences in the flux of causes and conditions for fixed, permanent entities. It can be purified of these delusions.

The perfection realm (parinispāṇṇa-svabhāva) which like the Mādhyamika notion of emptiness on which it is based, acts as an antidote that purifies or cleans all delusional constructions out of the causal realm.

1.2 Area of Study

The theory of the three natures has a special role in the subject matter of the Yogācāra School. Intrinsically the importance of the three self-natures theory in the idealistic school is evident. Since the two of these natures, the dependent one (paratantra-svabhāva) and the imaginary one (parikalpita-svabhāva) constitute the empirical reality, and the third one, the “absolute” nature (parinispāṇṇa-svabhāva), is the absolute reality. Thus, a study of these three natures means to study the empirical reality and the absolute, to define the essence of the empirical reality and the absolute, to establish the relation between the empirical reality and the absolute, to show the process through which from the empirical mind and only from the empirical mind when the perceptible world is created. In this way, the essential problems of the Yogācāra School are reunited in the theory of the Trisvabhāva.

I have chosen to restrict my examination of the three natures to the period of time, which begins with the Samādhinirūpa and ends with the Madhyāntavibhāga. Some important considerations may account for this choice. First, the Samādhinirūpa seems to be the oldest scripture though it may presuppose some of the peculiar concepts and doctrines of the basic section of the Yogācārabhūmi. Second, virtually all those
scholars in my field or close fields of study seem unanimous in regarding the TSK as the last innovative piece of work of the Yogācāra School proper. It may be argued that Vasubandhu’s treatment of the three natures was mere repetitions of earlier forms and that the ideas of the logicians Dignāga and Dharmakīrti were considered as a novel way of defending the Yogācāra notion of “mind-only” without having to face the problems met by using an ontological defense of this notion. The three natures are even discussed by Dignāga and linked to his epistemology. However, since Vasubandhu differs from the logicians in that he does not advocate the cognitive aspects in cognition itself and conforms all too well with the old tradition, I regard Dignāga and Dharmakīrti as originators of a new tradition differing in many aspects from that which ended with Vasubandhu.

As for the selection of texts within this period of time, the main criteria of choice are the extent to which a text is representative of a well-delimited phase of Yogācāra history or of a certain author, and whether a text gives importance to the three natures. The only texts within the Yogācāra tradition, apart from a number of commentaries, known to me to deal with the three natures, which are excluded from the study, are the Abhisamayalamkara and the Bodhisattvabhūmi. The first text gives only very slight attention to the three natures and the second, as part of the Yogācārabhūmi, lies outside the scope of the thesis. The five texts used by me are indicated in the contents.

1.3 The Objective

The purpose of the thesis is to attempt to study and analyse the value and the thought of the three natures (Trisvabhāva) as expounded by Vasubandhu and the study confines itself to the writings of Vasubandhu while emphasising its pragmatic value in Yogācāra. Therefore, some primary objectives would be mentioned as follows:
To present the historical background of the Yogācāra and the thought of three natures to analyse and criticize the meaning of the theory of three natures as laid down by Vasubandhu.

To study the true value of the three natures in Yogācāra.

Finally, I will give some suggestions for showing the relevance of the three natures which will give rise to a true, permanent peace, happiness and liberation for the contemporary world.

The aim as well as contribution of this thesis is to outline the concept of trisvabhāva, which was central to the Yogācāra school of Mahayana Buddhism and apply it to real life situations. Since, to my knowledge, no such task has been undertaken, I will try to use a set of criteria by which a conceptual development may be discerned. In order to achieve this, I will select texts, which satisfy their requirement of being representative of a distinct phase, or a certain author in Yogācāra history and clearly emphasising the notion of the three natures.

Depending on the narrative structure of each text, I will try to display the main characteristics of each of the three natures and also to outline the general level of conceptual development of the three-nature-complex. I will attempt to compare the different textual expressions of the trisvabhāva as a function of time, thereby hopefully arriving at a picture of its conceptual development since it has not been my intention to undertake major philological analyses of the texts used in this study. Having used Sanskrit terms throughout the discussions of the three natures in my thesis, I have tried as far as possible to provide with the Sanskrit texts in the endnotes.
1.4 Methodology

For this study, the research methodology will be used to delineate conceptual development of the concept of trisvabhāva, I have tried to fashion a number of criteria by which this could be measured. As will be obvious, the range of inclusiveness of these four criteria successively decreases. The first deals with each nature’s relation to Buddhism as a whole, while the trisvabhāva to Buddhism with the focus on Mahayana Buddhism. The third concerns the integration, within the system, of trisvabhāva with other Yogācāra ideas and the fourth refers to the internal structure of trisvabhāva itself with emphasis on coherence. The four criteria are as follows:

a) The measure of elaboration of each nature. I propose that if the description of a nature implicitly or explicitly contains more references to Buddhist conceptions than another, the former is more developed. This is based on the common experience that it takes time for new ideas to be elaborated into the common parlance of a religion. Since each of the three natures constituting the trisvabhāva may be in itself a developed form of older ideas I delimit this first criterion to each single nature.

b) The measure of integration with pan-Buddhist dogma in general and Mahayanistic dogmas in particular. I suggest that if a description of trisvabhāva is an obvious attempt to reconcile it with other dogmas, in comparison to a description where this attempt cannot be found, the former is more developed. This criterion is based on the same assumption with the exception that it refers to trisvabhāva as a whole. Trisvabhāva is more than the sum of the three natures; it is a complex of three concepts and their internal relations some of which, though maybe implicit, sometimes are necessary for the internal logical coherence.
c) The measure of integration with other Yogācāra tenets. If a description of the trisvabhāva is an implicit or explicit part of an attempt of systematic and coherent integration of Yogācāra thought, this description is more developed than a description, which fails to convey this. The assumption, which lies behind this criterion, is again a general experience. The notion of any school of thought implies that attempts have been made by its originators and proponents to establish a coherent system, which is an expression of their view of reality and the values that are part of it.

d) The measure of logical coherence and elaboration of the internal formal structure of the trisvabhāva. Any description of the trisvabhāva in which the relations between the three natures are more elaborated and coherent is considered more developed than a description in which this is not the case. The presumption in which guided the shape of this criterion is the common observation that most successful notions of any system of thought tend to become more inclusive and universal in order to enhance the explanatory capacity of these notions. Hence, this is also a more formal criterion.

Analytical methods refer to techniques and procedure for analyzing data collected while conducting an evaluation. Data will be collected and analyzed information from both primary and secondary textual sources. Then, the data will be analyzed and organized into different chapters. Other available texts on the concept of the three natures will also be utilized as to make the work more copious and comprehensive. Identifying the sources of data and evaluating the accuracy of texts relating to the trisvabhāva based on historical materials.

The theoretical framework that is available has been done and remains. Accepting or refuting does it. There does only exist knowledge, which can be interpreted and given a new outlook. Analyzing philosophically the concept of the three natures in the Texts and
its characteristics and relation to this thesis, the writer will formulate hypothesis and draws conclusion on the basis of survey. The scope of its method is quite and extensive. The thought of the three natures in Text will be quoted and the critical analysis will be made on the basis of the definitions of each concept in the original text. Yogācāra is considered as a central figure of the study. It is undertaken and an effort is made to present a comprehensive study of the subject and its relation. Then, drawing a universal conclusion.

1.5 Research Histories and Present Situation

In previous unpublished and published papers, I have dealt extensively with the Yogācāra concept of trisvabhāva though I have not been able to draw any coherent picture of it or its temporal development. I will now venture to propose an alternative understanding of the concept based upon the results arrived at in my previous work and the theoretical standpoint adopted by David M. Ecke J. To be able to illustrate the main shape of my approach, I will give a few examples of the traditional understanding of the concept.

The first group of scholars seem to have set trisvabhāva some what out of context, treating. It is an isolated phenomenon and superimposing the Mādhyamika. Satyadvaya concept upon it. Thus D.T. Suzuki:

“The Paratantra and the Parikalpita are mutually dependent. The Pariniśpanna is to go beyond both these forms of knowledge. This is Paramartha, the highest transcendental wisdom, while the Saṁvṛiti form of truth prevails in the world of Parikalpita and Paratantra.”

Herbert Guenther agrees on the formal interpretation but promotes paratantra to the paramartha status:
“Both the “ideally absolute” and the “relative” are said to be real in an ultimate sense, while the “notional-connectional” is stated not to be so.”

A.K. Chatterjee is even more explicit about the relation of \textit{trisvabhāva} to \textit{satyadvaya} and uses Suzuki’s dichotomy:

“There are thus three, and not merely two, Truths. The paratantra and the parikalpita together constitute our empirical experience (samvṛti), while consciousness as non-conceptual (parinīspanna) is the Absolute (paramartha).”

A surprising instance of this extra-contextual treatment of \textit{trisvabhāva} is found in F.Tola and C. Dragonetti’s edition and translation of \textit{TSN}:

“...since two of these natures, the “dependent” one (paratantra) and the “imaginary” one (parikalpita), constitute the empirical reality, and the third one, the “absolute” nature (parinīspanna), is the absolute reality, the Absolute.”

In the Yogācāra case, Eckel takes his point in \textit{MDV} wherein the three categories; duality, the imagination of the unreal and emptiness are related to each other. In this tripartite structure to which duality corresponds to the imagined nature, the imagination of the unreal to the dependent nature and emptiness to the absolute nature, Eckel says:

“The key, bridging concept is that of imagination (abhūtaparikalpa). This is the point where the stream of cognition occurs, so it guarantees, for good or ill, that the process of change and growth has reality. It also is identical in essence to pure Emptiness, so it guarantees that the goal is present and accessible.”

In the fact that the imagination of the unreal exists, there is an escape from nihilism, and in the fact when the duality in it has been removed and the emptiness in it is realized, there is an escape from externalism.
1.6 Structure of The Thesis

The structure of the thesis will be divided into seven chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction. In this chapter, the general introduction to the topic, source material and the research methodology are used to discussion. We shall also comment on some of the work that has been done in this field. The reasons are for the necessaries to work on this topic.

Chapter 2: Origin and development of Yogācāra School. Dealing with Yogācāra Buddhism, I have provided a short introduction into its history and main tenets. The following exposition, it should be noted, reflects a very simplified comprehension of the subject matter and does not take into account various approaches to controversial topics. I have mainly included the consensual view on Yogācāra history as found in any authoritative handbook in this field. Yogācāra has very likely emerged as a branch of the common Mahayana- tradition during the first century C.E.

In these points, I will present with the life and works of Vasubhandu. Vasubandhu was trained in the orthodox Sarvāstivāda Order of Buddhism, during the 2nd, 3rd and 4th centuries Abhidharma. His elder brother Asaṅga, who in turn had been the disciple of a sage named Maitreyanātha, introduced him to an early version of Yogācāra theory. Beside that, I refer to the foundation of Yogācāra doctrine. Yogācāra stands on the innovative frontier as one product of the cultural interchange. Which blossomed in the first and second century Gandhāra region. The Yogācāra movement was not a philosophical speculation, but intended as a return to a pure Buddhist mysticism. The new school was clearly founded on meditation. This practical contemplative movement came to be known as the “school of Buddhist Yoga,” or in other words the “Yoga-practice” school, hence the
name Yogācāra. Beginning in the third century Abhidharma, this lineage has been passed down as an “Esoteric School” within the exoteric or outer branches of Buddhism.

Chapter 3: The main figures of Yogācāra Philosophy, Philosophy of Yogācāra Buddhism are founded on the principle of perceptions and the mind. There is nothing external to them. This negates the subject-object duality as being false. The Yogācāra or mind-only school believes it. The importance of meditation in transforming awareness is immense. Yogācāra holds that everything is only experienced in the mind. This is done by the three natures of perception (the parikalpita-svabhāva or imagined nature, paratantra-svabhāva or dependent nature, parināspanna-svabhāva or perfected nature).

Chapter 4: The aim of this chapter is a structure and function of consciousness. Yogācāra holds that the only real thing is consciousness. Everything is of the nature of emptiness except the mind itself. The concept of Śūnyata or emptiness is also central in to Yogācāra philosophy. Yogācāra identifies eight kinds of consciousness (vijñāna). These are essentially the different modes by way of which one can be aware, the eight different kinds of experiences generated by the mind. The first five modes of consciousness respond to the five essential senses-touch, taste, smell, sight and sound. The sixth consciousness is conceptualization. The sixth consciousness is that of impurity, or klesha. Stemming from this consciousness are the various vices according to Buddhism- greed, ignorance and passion. These are considered to be the causes of actions, which generate new attachments, new karma and continued rebirth. The eight consciousness is said to be the storehouse consciousness, Ālayavijñāna. It is at this level that all experiences are generated.

Chapter 5: In this chapter, I will present three natures for the 5 texts in Yogācāra (Saṃdhinirmocana-sūtra, Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, Mahāyānasutradhāmaśāstra, Mahāyānamgraṇa-sūtra, and Madhyāntavibhāga). The trisvabhāva is an extremely significant doctrine
written by the Yogācāra master Vasubandhu. Consisting of thirty-eight stanzas explain the concept of the three natures (trisvabhāva). The three nature has defined the three way by which perceive our world. It holds that the world is constituted of these three natures. According to the three natures theory, the world remains and appears on different condition and occasions. The concept of the three natures has defined particularly in following:

- The imagined nature (parikalpita-svabhāva)
- The dependent nature (paratantra-svabhāva)
- The perfected nature (parinīspanna-svabhāva)

The imaginary nature is constructed of subject/object discriminations. It is the nature that accepts the reality of the “self”. In Yogācāra theory, all objects (internal and external) are constructs, which only exist as part of our awareness. So their nature is imaginary. There is no reality in this nature, it is just illusion. This nature accepts the validity of the illusory. The nature which is imagined by the ignorant said both dual and unitary, because the object that is imagined has a two-fold nature and because the existence of that non-existence is unitary.

The other-dependent or interdependent nature is the basis from which the imaginary nature arises and the perfected nature appears. The other-dependent nature is produced by the flow of changing mental phenomena. Those arise from causes and conditions. These dhammas are real (as conditional things). We impose an imaginary “self-existence” upon our experience of them. We come up with distorted images of things. This causes suffering (samsara), since our mental constructs do not match reality. The other-dependent nature is the mirage itself.
The researcher considers that the perfected or fulfilled nature is the ultimate nature. The only one that is absolutely real. However, it is neither the same as, nor different from the other-dependent. The perfected nature is devoid of duality and sees the world as representation only. Since it is always exactly the same. The perfected nature corresponds to the end of the path in which nothing but conscious exists. There is no subjectivity and objectivity. This is the state of Nirvāṇa.

Chapter 6: The important and useful applications of three natures into real life. In this chapter, I will present primarily an ontological basis of the subject/object dichotomy as understood in terms of the Yogācāra view, and is very important because it answers fundamental questions raised concerning how we view the world in which we live. My aim is to show that the subject/object dichotomy that exists between the emerging. All-ground Consciousness and the ground of all phenomena are born from a misapprehension of a single reality. That which misapprehends this greater reality are all sentient beings born in the world, but the root of the misapprehension is created by the all-ground consciousness itself, which acts as a spell enchanting beings into believing in the factious world in which they live. After that, I will apply methodology usefully of three natures into real life.

Chapter 7: Conclusion, in this chapter, I will present a brief summary of the previous chapters, some suggestions and advices on understanding and applying of this thesis.
**References**


3 Ibid., p.1-2.


5 Cf. my licentiate thesis “Materials and tools for the study of some aspects of Yogācāra thought” Lund 1986 (unpublished paper a copy of which is available at the department of the history of religions at the university of Lund) and Boquist 1992. Eckel’s standpoint is expressed in Eckel 1985, p. 25 ff.

6 This superimposition is sometimes seen in texts like Laṅkāvatāra and Madhyāntavibhāga as well as in Kambala’s Alokamālā (cf. Lindtner 1985, p. 118). However, either system’s conception of the relation between the “two truths” and the “three natures” is incompatible with the other system’s as is evident from e.g. Eckel 1985, p. 38 ff. The employment of the theory of the “two truths” as an analytical concept in the interpretation of the trisvabhāva is therefore bound to confuse the issue.


9 Chatterjee (1975), p. 148. Cf. also the evaluation of this work by Wayman (1965).
