Chapter 3: The Philosophy of Yogācāra

3.1 Characterisations of Yogācāra Thought

The founding of Yogācāra Buddhism is usually credited to the work of three related authors of the fourth and fifth centuries C.E. Maitreyanātha, Asaṅga and Vasubandhu. Vasubandhu who was able to themetize the central philosophical paradigms of the school and to condense them into concisely constructed texts. Prior to his joining ranks with Asaṅga, he wrote the extensive ADK. It was Vasubandhu’s shortest texts that were to have the broadest influence on the subsequent development of Mahayana Buddhism. The Viṃśatikākārikā, TSK, vijñaptikārikā, and TSN distill the core philosophical ideas, which intellectually ground the Yogācāra school of thought. The three texts contain a total of only 90 ślokas or metrical couplets.

Yogācāra is revealed as a school of “contemplative practice;” and this is ever at the prime focus of its philosophy. While every contemplative school, whether Buddhist, Jain, Sāṃkhya-Yoga or Vedāntic, couches its enterprise within a rational cosmology, which clarifies the nature and purpose of the practice. Buddhism in particular has exhibited a complex historical evolution in the way in which it has dealt with cosmological questions. It is quite germane to the central issues taken up in this study. Buddha criticized idle metaphysical speculation that did not directly relate to the Path of meditation and liberation from suffering. In an sūtra, when asked to render opinions on various metaphysical questions, Buddha each time declined to commit himself to one theoretical stance of another. He characterized each theory proposed by his questioner in terms of the following formula:
“vaccha the theory of...... is a jungle, a wilderness, a puppet-show, a writhing, and a fetter, and is coupled with misery, ruin, despair, and agony and does not tend towards aversion, absence of passion, cessation, quiescence, knowledge, supreme wisdom, and nirvāṇa”

While declining to take pan in metaphysical disputes, he did have ways of discussing the questions relating to the nature of selfhood, consciousness. Perception, experience, and quiescence for these are all directly related to the Path.

The early Yogācāra School likewise emphasizes the primacy of experience and engages in a philosophical deconstruction of “objective” appearances for the specific purpose of providing a conceptual orientation to meditation practice. The conceptual paradigms offered by both Buddha and Vasubandhu are articulated in order to draw attention to the ordinary experiential process, which the meditator is to understand. Recognize, and ultimately transcend through practice.

Although the early Yogācāra authors stressed the pervasive role of psychological factors in the construction of ordinary experience, later writers in the tradition gravitated towards a more extreme Idealistic interpretation of the doctrine. In the introduction to her translation of the Tattvārtha Chapter of Asaṅga’s Bodhisattvabhumi, Janice Dean Willis devotes an entire section to the “Two Threads of the Yogācāra and Some Later Confusions.” It will be argued in this study that the early Yogācāra formulators were not advocating a system of Absolute or Subjective Idealism, but were rather making an attempt to explicate the manner in which ordinary consciousness posits the existence of substantiality and self-nature on the part of the mutable, impermanent entities encountered in the stream of experience. Vasubandhu is
interested solely in this process of experience and the potential for its radical qualitative transformation through meditation. Objects and selves are “found” only in and as experience, and it is with experience that these treatises start and end.

One of the chief effects of Mādhyamika deconstructionism on later Buddhist thought was to militate against the formation of dogmatic metaphysical speculations. Consequently, there is no explicit effort on the part of the early Yogācāra thinkers to develop a metaphysical theory of objects in terms of substance. While Vasubandhu clearly calls into question what we can possibly mean by a “real” object, he does not refute the presence of conditions. As will be seen in the course of the translation, he can make no affirmative move in objectifying them, for, according to the Buddhist perspective independent existence. This is equally true for whatever may be meant by the “subject.”

The common characterization of early Yogācāra thought as a form of a cosmic Idealism is based upon the mistaken impression that Vasubandhu and his colleagues argued for the absolute negation of the “object” and for the absolute affirmation of the “subject.” However to affirm either one in any ordinary sense, is to refute the correlative cardinal principles of śūnyatā (emptiness) and anātman (no-self). Yogācāra seeks to reify neither subject nor object, but rather to demonstrate their “emptiness” through his philosophical analysis of the nature of experience. The principal focus of Vasubandhu’s analysis is clear from the opening verse of the TSK. ³

What concerns the author is the experience of object and self. There is no overt speculation about the “external existence” of the object, either positively or negatively. To do so would be to fall into one of the extremes of absolute existence or absolute non-existence either of which
would be inappropriate in the context of “emptiness” or Śūnyatā. A careful reading will show that a movement in either direction is something that Vasubandhu carefully and consistently avoids. He skillfully keeps to the “middle path” that he inherits from both Buddha and Nāgārjuna. Given that the principal focus of Yogācāra is centered upon the nature of “consciousness” (Skt. vijñāna) and of the “expressions of consciousness” (vijñapti). It is easy to understand why it has earned the appellation of Idealism. However, it shall be argued in this treatise that, while it is clearly a cognitively oriented philosophy. Yogācāra differs in crucial respects from the typical ontological position, which is associated with the metaphysical systems of Western Idealism.

“Idealism” is used here in capitalized form, it is being used in the general technical sense of referring collectively to the various philosophical systems associated with that name, including those championed by such thinkers as Berkeley, Fichte, Hegel, and Bradley. Since there are of course, considerable doctrinal differences among these diverse systems of thought and furthermore, Since Yogācāra evinces some proximity to certain elements of reasoning present in several of these systems. It is necessary to clarify early on in this discussion the particular feature common to many forms of Idealism, which is being called into question with respect to the classification of Yogācāra thought.

The general proposition of Idealism at issue here is the ontological assertion that the world is essentially a manifestation of “Mind,” upon which the universe entirely depends; that all of reality is understood as mental, spiritual, or psychical, and that that which is perceived as physical and material does not exist in its own right. It will be argued here that this sort of extreme metaphysical view. While quite characteristic of Western Idealist philosophers, takes
a step beyond the more subtle ontological position taken up in the early articulations of Yogācāra philosophy.

The modern interpretive trend reaches its extreme in the extensive study first published in 1962 by Ashok Kumar Chatterjee under the title of *The Yogācāra Idealism*. Chatterjee was a student of T.R.V. Murti and in his introduction he claims to be merely extending the line of reasoning initiated by his mentor. Murti gratefully endorses this in his foreword to Chatterjee’s text. Chatterjee’s characterization of the school takes the following form:

“The *Yogācāra* is the development of the logic of Buddhist thought. The object is not as it appears and cannot be of any service to knowledge. It is therefore unreal. Consciousness is the sole reality. The object is only a mode of consciousness. Its appearance as though something objective and external is the transcendental illusion, because of which consciousness is bifurcated into the subject-object duality. Consciousness is creative and its creativity is governed by the illusory idea of the object. Reality is to be viewed as a will or an idea. . . . Consciousness, as thus freed from the false duality of subject and object, is the Absolute. This is the ultimate reality, the essence of everything Idealism as a constructive pattern for explaining phenomena has been established. It is proved that the object is nothing apart from the consciousness of it.”

Chatterjee states that *Vasubandhu’s Viṃśatikā* and *TSK* together forming the *vijñaptimārtātāsādhi*, “is the complete and definitive text on the *Yogācāra* idealism.” However, throughout his study, Chatterjee’s references to these texts by *Vasubandhu* are generally loose and indirect. Of the approximately three dozen references made, only three or four make direct use of the original Sanskrit wording, and nowhere does he cite the specific verses from which he takes his paraphrasing. The texts themselves are not presented in their entirety for
inspection, even though they together number only 52 śokas, which would take but a few
pages to print. As a result, Chatterjee’s analysis is only indirectly grounded in the texts, which
he regards as definitive.

Parallel to Willis characterization of the two trends in classical versions of Yogācāra thought,
there are likewise two trends in modern scholastic treatment of the school. The interpretation
of Yogācāra in terms of Absolute Idealism presented above is one of those trends. There are,
however, several recent authors who have challenged this interpretation choosing to adopt
something closer to the “early thread” of Yogācāra thought. Willis’s position has already been
stated above. Other notable opponents to the extreme Idealistic interpretation include Stefan
Anacker, Thomas Kochumuttom, and David Kalupahana, all of who have also undertaken to
translate Vasubandhu’s TSN and VSK.

Similar or concordant statements can be drawn from the writings of Alex Wayman and Herben
Guenther, who will be referenced in subsequent chapters. The primary point being made here
is that Yogācāra and its associated Vijñānavāda (theory of consciousness) are presently
undergoing extensive re-evaluation. This treatise is intended to extend that re-evaluation
another step. Certain contributions made by these recent revisionists are incorporated into the
present work.

Along with Anacker, I affirm the recognition of the pragmatic psychological orientation of the
texts. In addition, his presentation of other key texts by Vasubandhu has provided a valuable
resource for cross-referencing technical references made by Vasubandhu in the brief texts
translated here. Although his translations are not always fully reliable, Kochumuttom’s
identification of Vasubandhu’s philosophy as a critique of the correspondence theory of
knowledge contributes significantly to a more balanced assessment of the epistemology, which is presented in the *VSK*.

Kalupabana’s historical analysis of the development of Buddhist psychology through the mirror of William James’ thought helps greatly to demystify the early Yogācāra philosophy and also points out that popular misconceptions concerning Yogācāra thought have become muddle somewhat because of the more imprecise Idealistic pronouncements in such Mahayana texts as the *LAS*, which had already been in circulation for one to three centuries before Vasubandhu’s time. It may be suggested that Vasubandhu and his associates worked to philosophically “clean up” the popular viewpoint that was already circulating through the new sūtra.

Wayman is skeptical of the effort to characterize Yogācāra in terms of any Western system of thought. He draws parallels and distinctions among contemporaneous and historically linked texts, and devotes considerable attention to the connotations of the key terms, which are pivotal to the conceptual systems. He is also concerned to ground the interpretation of doctrines in light of their significance for spiritual practice and development. He never loses sight of the soteriological and contemplative dimensions implicit in Buddhist analytical discourse. The general tone of this treatise affirms Wayman’s emphasis.

Tapping the insights of Heidegger, Herbert Guenther has displayed perhaps the most complex elaborate and sustained hermeneutical approach to later Buddhist thought of any Western scholar. Thoroughly steeped in Tibetan Buddhist scholarship, he has consistently emphasized the important contributions made by Yogācāra to the development of later forms of Buddhist meditation practice. It is notable that while Tibetan scholars both classical and contemporary
formally regard Yogācāra to be philosophically inferior to and subsidiary to Mādhayamika thought.

Guenther takes the view that Yogācāra appropriately assimilates the Mādhayamika position and constructively extends it by returning thought to the existential situation, which provoked its development in the first place. In one of his later works, Guenther goes so far as to say that the Mādhayamika emphasis on śūnyata can become an overly reductive stance when taken as a final position. He views Yogācāra as having moved on beyond the debate over substantiality and entered into a phase which places emphasis on “process” Guenther’s process orientation to Yogācāra is enlarged upon in the present essay.

3.2 Early Buddhist of Consciousness

Consciousness (Vijñāna) appears in early Buddhism as link in the process of dependent arising (pratītya-samutpāda), Dependent Co-Origination (Causality). The doctrine of dependent co-origination or co-conditioning, (pratītyasamutpāda), amounts to an analysis of the causal preconditions (nidāna) that lead to the continual re-creation of the concepts of “self” (ātman) and “things” (dharma) in “continuous going” (samsāra). Vasubandhu provides his own account of these preconditions in his commentary on the MDV a text that explications the Buddha’s method of mediation between extremes adopted by both Mādhayamika and Yogācāra Buddhism. Vasubandhu’s version of pratītya-samutpāda, as all others, ultimately grounds the causal chain leading to “birth” in ignorance (avidya). Here two different senses of “birth” may be used in this interpretation: one quite literal, and another more figurative, referring to a physical being (or the physical aspect of a human being, if you will) and a psychological being (or the psychological aspect of a human being), respectively. Vasubandhu’s account of
dependent co-origination is basically this: a certain epistemological state fosters the introduction of the causal efficacies of past moments of consciousness into the “ground of the arising” of any current experiential moment. This is caused by consciousness “being led” into circumstances in which this experiential arising is possible. The arising of the ego-sense conditions our sensory impressions, which themselves condition our interaction with and interpretation of the sensory or phenomenal world. Our contact with this world shapes our experience, which causes our willing that there (repeatedly) be a new experiential moment. These in turn shapes our “craving” to embrace our desires or avoid the objects of our aversion (based on our past experience) in the moments of our supposed or assumed future experience. And all of this is the cause of our being “born” into the world, or alternatively: being oriented towards the world, over and over again, but always with a sense of “dis-ease” or dissatisfaction because of our desire (itrṣṇā)\(^{11}\) to grasp and avoid, and our ignorance as to the true nature of our situation.

It is also listed as one of the five skandhas (aggregates) that create the false notion of “I” or an ego. The doctrine of dependent arising is so central to a clear understanding of the Buddhist thought.

The Buddha uses the doctrine of dependent arising to explain the nature of human existence and predicament. Essentially a doctrine of causality, it encompasses within its fold a set of such interrelated notions as moral responsibility, freedom, nature of psychophysical personality, sense experience, craving, rebirth, and death...\(^{12}\)

Etymologically, samutapāda means “arising in combination”, better yet “co-arising”. However, when compounded with the term “pratītya” meaning “moving” or “leaning”, the
term implies “dependence”. And so, the term “pratītya-samutpāda”\textsuperscript{13} has generally been translated as “dependent arising”. In the Buddhist texts, the formula of dependent arising has often been expressed as follows: “When this is, that comes to be; on the arising of that, this arises. When this is not, that is not; on the cessation of that, this ceases.” The Buddha explains the existence of human personality, continuity of life, and its cessation in a formula of dependent arising consisting of twelve factors.

The Buddha explains this doctrine in the Discourse to Kātyāyana in the context of explaining the doctrine of the Middle Way in which he advises Kātyāyana to avoid both extremes of existence and non-existence and asks him to follow the Middle Way. In his words:

On ignorance depends karma;

On karma depends consciousness;

On consciousness depend name and form;

On name and form depend the six organs of sense;

On the six organs of sense depends contact;

On contact depends sensation;

On sensation depends desire;

On desire depends attachment;

On attachment depends existence;
On existence depends birth;

On birth depend old age and death, sorrow, lamentation, misery, grief, and despair. Thus does this entire aggregation of misery arise? But on the complete fading out and cessation of ignorance ceases karma;

On the cessation of karma ceases consciousness...

On the cessation of existence ceases birth;

On the cessation of birth cease old age and death, sorrow, lamentation, misery, grief, and despair. Thus does this entire aggregation of misery cease?\(^{14}\)

The Buddha uses this doctrine of dependent arising to explain not only the process of human bondage but also that of freedom. In the twelve-factored causal law of dependent arising outlined above, consciousness (Vijñ\(\text{ā}na\)) is preceded by “ignorance” or “nescience” (avidy\(\text{ā}\)) and “mental formations” or dispositions (karma) and followed by name and form (n\(\text{ā}ma\)-r\(\text{ū}pa\)). It is important to note here that consciousness provides the link between the past and the present. The beginning statement “on ignorance depends karma” provides an explanation of human bondage the “name and form” refers to psychophysical personality, the human person in bondage, whose nature is conditioned by consciousness (Vijñ\(\text{ā}na\)), which is conditioned by ignorance or lack of understanding. Conditioned by ignorance and dispositions, a person experiences the empirical world surrounding him through the sense organs, becomes attached to them, and craves for them, thereby creating a desire in him to be reborn again.
In this context that each of the twelve factors is both conditioned and that which conditions. Thus the form of one’s consciousness is conditioned not only by what one experiences in this world but also by the way in which one responds to these experiences.

The “I” or the human personality, argues the Buddha, consists of five aggregates. These are the aggregates of matter, sensation, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. Consciousness, the Buddha points out, is a response based on six faculties, namely, the eyes, ears nose, tongue, body, and the manas or the mind. Each of the six consciousnesses has a corresponding object structure (visible form, sound, odor, taste, tangible things, and idea or thought).

Consciousness (Vijñāna), in this context, is simply an awareness of the presence of an object. For example, when the eye comes into contact with the color red, visual consciousness arises as a reaction, without any attendant recognition of redness. In other words, this consciousness is simply an awareness of the presence of a color. “Visual consciousness” signifies “seeing”, not recognition. The job of recognition is performed by the third skandha, namely, perception (saññā). Before proceeding further, it is important to underscore one important point: consciousness for the Buddha is not spirit as opposed to matter. Consciousness, says the Buddha, arises depending on certain conditions. Thus, the Buddha repeatedly affirms that consciousness arises depending on certain conditions, and that there is no arising of it in the absence of those conditions. He declares in unequivocal terms that consciousness depends on the four skandhas.

“All sensation whatsoever, ... all perception whatsoever, ... all predispositions whatsoever, ... all consciousness whatsoever, past, future, or present, be it subjective or
The point that the Buddha is trying to make is as follows: consciousness depends on the remaining four skandhas, namely, matter, sensation, perception, and mental formations, and cannot exist independently of them. Human personality is nothing but a name given to the collection of these five ever-changing, physical and mental aggregates. Being impermanent, these aggregates change from one moment to the next. There is no identity, simply a continuity of becoming, and a flux of momentary arising and ceasing to be. One must not lose sight of the fact that consciousness does not owe its origin to an eternal being or soul, but rather has its origin in experience that is characterized by cause and effect.

The Buddhist schools of all colors and persuasions discuss this early conception of consciousness. Eventually, the five aggregates (skandhas) came to be divided into numerous constituent elements called dharmas and the various kinds of conceptions (vijñapti) were taken to be the constituent elements of the aggregates of consciousness. The number of constituent elements assigned to the aggregate of consciousness varied from school to school. However, they agreed that a person is a cluster of these impermanent dharmas; they involve grasping and attachment, the key causes of suffering. The most systematic, detailed, and sophisticated analysis of dharmas is found in the ADK of Vasubandhu.

3.3 The Concept of Consciousness

According to Vasubandhu, the term vijñapti is synonymous with vijñāna, which means knowledge or consciousness. Vasubandhu also uses two other term: citta (mind) and praijñapti (consciousness), as synonyms of vijñapti. Consciousness is always about some
object. Vijñapti is a technical term of the Sarvāstivādin Abidharma (abbreviation: Abhidharma), which Vasubandhu has here appropriated and used in a special sense. An investigation of this term can illustrate in miniature the widespread appropriation and redefinition of the Abhidharma in Viññānavāda philosophy. An interpretation of such a technical term should consider its ordinary use, its etymology, and its technical use. This ought to reveal Vasubandhu’s precise intention in reapplying the term.

In ordinary parlance Vijñapti (Pāli viññatti) means “information” or the act of informing someone, that is “report” or “proclamation,” especially a report to a superior, and hence, “request” or “entreaty.” Vijñapti is a noun of action derived from the causative stem of the verb root jñā (“know”) with the prefix vi-. Etymologically the term Vijñapti would mean the act of causing to know distinctly, or in a concrete sense, that which causes to know distinctly.

In the Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma both Vijñapti and its opposite, avijñapti appear as technical terms, particularly in the discussion of karma. Here karma specifically means ethically significant action: “acts or deeds”. The ADK Vasubandhu defines karma as: “volition and that derived from it.” There are two kinds of karmas: volition and the act subsequent to volition. Avijñapti-rupa, is also included in the aggregate of material forms. This “unmanifest” karma is not some kind of private act not observed by others. If it could be “manifest” to another consciousness. Instead, avijñapti-rūpa is used to explain karmic continuity in certain contexts. A “manifest” vocal or bodily act is karmic, in the sense of ethically significant, because of its dependence on volition. The explanation of karmic continuity is a general problem for the Sarvāstivādin, and it is in this context that avijñapti-rūpa is added to the list of dharmas. The following sequence is postulated: (1) volition, (2) vocal or bodily act, (3) avijñapti-rūpa, (4) consequence Since both the preceding (Vijñapti) act and the succeeding (Vijñapti)
consequence are “material,” it follows that the intervening (avijñapti) dharmas, although
imperceptible, are also “material” that is, they belong to the rūpa-skandha.

This notion of avijñapti-rūpa is filled with difficulties, and Vasubandhu presents it with
considerable qualms in the ADK. The whole concept of vijñapti /avijñapti- rūpa is rigorously
criticized and finally rejected, and all karma is reduced to volition. In any case, the
Vijñaptimatrā system refers the problem of karmic continuity to the concept of Ālayavijñāna,
the “store-consciousness” which contains the “residue” of past acts and the seeds (bīja) of
future ones.

For the vijñanavādins, objects are not real; they cannot stand by themselves. To establish the
unreality of the objects the vijñanavādins offer the theory of simultaneous perception. It is
seen that the objects are invariably perceives along with their knowledge or consciousness\textsuperscript{19}. Vasubandhu’s two important works of this phase are Viṃśatikā or the Twenty Verses with his
own commentary, and TSK or the Thirty Verses. As a Yogācārins, Vasubandhu denied the
existence of the external world; in the Twenty Verses he defends Yogācāra against the
objections by the realists who believe in the existence of an external world, and in the Thirty
Verses. He develops his theses of the nature and transformations of consciousness.

The goal of VSK is repudiate the view that there is an external world corresponding to the
images of objects. It argues that a specific change occurring in the stream of successive
moments of consciousness creates the image of an object. At the outset of this work,
Vasubandhu declares that consciousness alone is real and that the object perceived in the
alleged external world are non-existent.
Everything is consciousness only, because there is the appearance of the non-existent objects, just as a person with a cataract sees hairs, moons, which do not really exist.\(^{20}\) He also anticipates the following objection on behalf of the opponent who argues for the existence of the external world. The opponent argues: if we assume for the sake of argument that external objects do not exist, how would we account for their spatial and temporal determinations, the indetermination of the various perceiving streams of consciousness and the fruitful activity which results from their knowledge.

The points that Vasubandhu is trying to make are as follows: there is no one-to-one correspondence between images and the external objects and given that no experience can occur without consciousness, consciousness is the basic presupposition of any experience. Forms of subjectivity as well as objectivity are manifestations of the same consciousness; neither is there any personal ego or any external object.

Consciousness, argues Vasubandhu, consists of a series of momentary events, giving rise to the awareness of various objects of the senses and the mind. In the very first verse of his important work *TSK*, Vasubandhu emphatically declares that all constituent elements and the entity called self (atman) are transformations of consciousness.

Consciousness undergoes triple transformations. The usages of the terms “atman” and “dharma” are manifold, but both terms just refer to the transformations of consciousness. This transformation is threefold, namely, fruition, thinking, and representations of objects. The first, which is also known as the warehouse consciousness (*Ālaya-vijñāna*), is the fruition of all seeds; the essential nature of the second, the *manonāma-vijñāna*, is to think; and the third transformation represents the six sense-based consciousness.
The term “Ālayavijñāna” etymologically means “receptacle consciousness”. The earliest use of this term is found in the SDS, a Yogacāra work that pre-dates both Asaṅga and Vasubandhu. The fifth chapter of this work elucidates Ālaya-vijñāna as the consciousness, which possesses “all the seeds” from which future experiential forms grow. It is often compared to the ocean whose surface water is disturbed by the winds, giving rise to constantly changing waves. Asaṅga regards ālayavijñāna as a dhatu, without any beginnings, which functions as the common ground of all dharmas.

 Vasubandhu holds that the ālayavijñāna is the repository of all seeds. Seeds are potentialities, habitual ties that are sediment in the life of an ego. When a person performs actions, vāsanās of these actions are left in the form of seeds in the unconscious and ālayavijñāna, a warehouse-consciousness, stores them. Thus, the ālayavijñāna is the realm of potentiality; it is the root consciousness. The accumulated karmic traces lie dormant in the ālayavijñāna. In itself, the ālayavijñāna is not a static entity; it changes instantaneously, the LAS note:

*As the ocean stirs the waves, as images are seen in a mirror, in a dream, simultaneously, so is the mind its own field.*

*Like the waves which rise on the ocean stirred by the wind, dancing and without interruption, the ālaya-ocean is, in a similar manner, constantly stirred by the winds of objectivity, and so is seen dancing about with the various Vijñāna waves.... As the waves in their variety are constantly stirred in the ocean, so in the ālaya is produced the variety of what is known as the vijñāna.*

 Vasubandhu explains the concept further: The store consciousness is the perception, abiding in, and grasping of what is unperceived. It is always associated with touch, attentiveness,
knowledge, and conception and willing. The feeling that pertains to it is that of indifference. The store consciousness is undefiled and undefined. Touch, etc., are also indifferent in feeling. The store consciousness is constantly evolving like a torrent of water. It is important to note that the wind of activity, with which the ālayavijñāna is often compared, is not something external to it.

The warehouse-consciousness carries within it the traces of all past experiences: of clinging and grasping of what is unperceived, and it is also associated with such experiential phenomena as conception, touch, knowledge, volition, and feeling. These experiences are neither pleasant nor unpleasant; they are indifferent. It is not observed by anybody and given that it can be defined as neither good nor bad, the best way to describe it is by saying that it is undefined, possibly inexpressible. In it the seeds of vāsanās that have attained maturity germinate. It is the ground of experience out of which the individual consciousness grows. These seeds, however, continue to create agitation within the ālaya and manifest under suitable conditions.

Vijñāna as consciousness is virtually coterminous with one’s samsaric existence as a whole. It occurs uninterruptedly throughout all of one’s worldly lifetimes. It “descends” into the mother’s womb at the beginning of each life and “departs” at its end. And it only comes to a complete cessation with the end of samsaric existence itself, that is, with nirvana. These characteristics will all later be attributed to the ālayavijñāna as well.

Vijñāna is associated with the continuity and perpetuation of cyclic existence in a variety of ways. Consciousness “sustains” each single life as well as one’s stream of lives. Driven by craving, the sustenance of vijñāna becomes one of the preconditions for rebirth itself: “if there
is delight, if there is craving for the … vijñāna sustenance. Vijñāna is thus a precondition not only for the development of a new sentient body (name-and-form) in this life but also for “the growth of karmic formations (sankhara). After birth, vijñāna and other accompaniments of life, the “life factor” and “heat”, continue uninterruptedly throughout that lifetime until, upon their departure, one passes away. Thereafter, I dependence upon these it conditions, consciousness being established and growing, there comes to be renewed existence in the future.

While the processes of vijñāna grow and increase, thereby sustaining samsaric life, they can also be calmed, pacified, and brought to an end, marking the end of the cycle of birth and death. Indeed, the destruction of vijñāna is virtually equated with liberation. This cessation of vijñāna is brought about through Buddhist practice, which counters the karmic activities perpetuating samsaric existence. A notion the Yogācārins will also subsequently associate with the cessation of the ālayavijñāna. Upon realizing nirvana at the end of the process of karmic driven rebirth, vijñāna, the stream of worldly consciousness which persists throughout one’s countless lifetimes, also comes to an end, or is at least radically transformed. The cessation of vijñāna is here closely identified with the destruction and cessation of the “karmic activities” which, we shall see, are necessary for the continued perpetuation of cyclic existence. Karmic formations and craving increase vijñāna and perpetuate samsara. It is karmic activities, actions instigated and informed by the cognitive and emotional afflictions.

Those cause consciousness to attain growth and become established in cyclic existence. It may seem contradictory for something to be both a cause and result at the same time, to be both constructed and constructing, conditioned and conditioning. However, these two properties are simultaneously found in many processes, especially those of living organisms, which develop
and perpetuate themselves through their own interactive feedback processes embodied in patterns of circular causality, as is now widely understood in the natural sciences.

Similarly, in the early Buddhist worldview the various kinds of bodies we inhabit, with their specific types of cognitive and sensory dispositions and apparition, are also built up over the course of countless lifetimes in the particular conditions of cyclic existence. The paths our continued embodied existence take are directed by the accumulated results of our past actions, which are continually reinforced by our afflictive activities in the present, which themselves are deeply informed by the underlying currents of our various dispositions. In Buddhist terms, these activities are conditioned by the powers of desire and craving, the inertial forces propelling cyclic life, while their deeply furrowed paths are the sankhārās, the riverbed constructed through countless lifetimes of previous existences, which both result from past actions and serve as the basis for present ones. These sankhārās are thus formative influences, which not only continuously condition our bodily forms, but also our intentional activities, the nature and direction of our mental and spiritual energies as well. That is, contoured by these banks, our stream of consciousness continuously flows with both the bubbling surface of its swift, churning waters and the deeper, hidden currents flowing beneath its surface both of which subtly yet continuously make their mark upon the contours of that very riverbed and it banks, scouring out pockets here, accumulating deposits there.

This is an extremely apt analogy for the basic Indian Buddhist view of mind, all the more so since it also illustrates early Buddhism’s radically depersonalized view of causality. Although their most prominent role is near the beginning of the standard series of dependent arising, where the karmic formations from previous lifetimes serve as a basis for further existence by directly conditioning consciousness in the rebirth process, the sankhārās also more actively
bring about the “growth” of consciousness in their capacity as intentional actions. In some passages, in fact, the karmic formations are virtually equated with intention itself, the defining characteristic of *karma*. This sense of *sankhārās* as intentional actions also conditions the arising of *vijñāna* in many formulations of dependent arising.

As we have seen, not all of one’s activities generate *karma*, only the activities informed by afflictions such as craving do. Without this afflictive dimension, without the cognitive and emotional afflictions (S. *kleśa*) to instigate actions, there would be no cyclic existence. Craving in fact is so central to Buddhist thinking that it is enshrined in the second Noble Truth, the origin suffering. That is, it is actions motivated by desire and craving that entail psycho-ontological consequences, that is, continued rebirth.

Craving leads to rebirth in the series of dependent arising in two ways. In the standard formula, sense-impressions and feeling give rise to craving, which in turn conditions the arising of appropriation; these last two are afflictive influences which instigate karmic activities, thereby indirectly conditioning the arising of “samsaric” consciousness. In other contexts, however, craving directly conditions the growth of consciousness, leading directly to further rebirth. A text that closely parallels that cited at the beginning of this section states that when there is pleasure in or craving for any or all of the four kinds of sustenance’s of those who are already born or who desire to come to be, then consciousness becomes established there and comes to growth. Wherever consciousness becomes established and comes to growth, there is a descent of name-and-form. Where there is a descent of name-and-form, there is growth in the karmic formations. Where there is growth in the karmic formations, there is the production of future renewed existence.
But how do these processes actually promote the “growth” of consciousness, leading to further rebirth? The Buddha used a series of simple vegetative metaphors to describe this, metaphors the Yogācārans will similarly use to describe the ālayavijñāna. As these vegetative metaphors illustrate, the seeds of consciousness are established or “planted” in the fertile fields prepared by karmic deeds and watered by the bountiful founts of desire and craving.

The ālayavijñāna, the individual unconscious, continues from birth to birth. It serves as the basis of both, unconscious and conscious. When once the past seeds stored in it manifest themselves, no ālayavijñāna remains. Ending of an individual ālayavijñāna may either mean the end of one’s present life or the attainment of enlightenment contingent upon how the individual ālayavijñāna had been exhausted? If, however, an individual does not attain Nirvāṇa, the traces of the deeds will create a new ālayavijñāna, and keep one involved in phenomenal existence.

Thus, the ālayavijñāna is a sort of a warehouse for traces of past experiences, capable of being awakened or activated under suitable conditions, and determining the cause and nature of one’s experience. The Yogācāra account, however, does not provide a clear explanation of what those suitable or appropriate conditions might be under which these traces become manifest. It simply says that the ālayavijñāna stores these seeds until they ripen and manifest themselves in a process referred to as “perfuming” (Vāsanā). One’s actions, experiences, behavior, etc., are conditioned by these seeds and traces—the past history—which constitute the individuality, the feeling of me, mine, and my cognitive states. It seems that these seeds or the traces of past experiences, are perfumed by each perishing cognition of the flux of consciousness, as well as produce cognition in the future. Thus, the ālayavijñāna, as the root consciousness, is the basis of the remaining seven types of consciousness.
“The second transformation of consciousness is Manovijñāna, the “consciousness called mind”. “The second transformation of consciousness, called the Manovijñāna, evolves when it takes the store consciousness as an object and support. The essential nature of the Manovijñāna is to think.”

Vasubandhu construe it as a “thinking consciousness”. Sthiramati, in his commentary on this verse, refers to it as the “defiled consciousness”. It depends on the ālayavijñāna for its origin and operation. ālayavijñāna also serves as its object, because as a thinking consciousness, it mistakes the ālayavijñāna to be the self, thereby creating the false notion of an ego. It is the I-consciousness or the consciousness of an ego. Thus, whereas ālayavijñāna is latent, the thinking consciousness is a manifest consciousness and is responsible for making discriminations and value judgments because of its misperception of the ālayavijñāna.

The third transformation of consciousness is called pravṛtti-vijñāna or the active consciousness. It consists of six sense-based consciousness’s. They are produced through the visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and the mind senses:

The five sense consciousnesses arise in the store consciousness...depending on causes and conditions, just as waves originate on water. The Manovijñāna arises at all times, except in the case of those who are born in the realm of beings without thought, those who are in the two mindless trances, or those who are in states of stupor or unconsciousness.

Thus, whereas the five sense-based consciousness’s arise depending on causes and conditions either individually or collectively, just as waves originate on water from the ālayavijñāna, manovijñāna, on the other hand, functions at all times except in those, who are in the two mindless trances, or those who are in states of unconsciousness.
We have already seen that in early Buddhism the aggregate of consciousness was taken to be of six kinds. Each type of consciousness has a specific sense organ attached to it. Early Buddhists take mind (manas) to be a faculty like any other sense organ, say, the eyes or the ears, which can be restrained and developed like any other faculty. Sensory forms, sounds, odors and tastes, and tangible objects that we experience in the world generate ideas and thoughts, which are conceived by the manas-consciousness. Given that the manas-consciousness arises as a result of the ideas and thoughts produced and conditioned by our experiences, it has thoughts or ideas as its object. It is important to note in this context that the manas-consciousness, one of the six kinds of sense consciousnesses accepted by early Buddhism, is different from the manovijñāna, which is, thinking consciousness of Vasubandhu. The manovijñāna owes its origin to the warehouse-consciousness, which not only constitutes the object of manovijñāna, but also the basis of its operation and function. Manas, a subtle mental element, and functions by receiving and disposing the data received from the other consciousnesses. The manovijñāna performs the function of organizing the data presented to it by the six sorts of sense consciousness; it also mistakenly takes the warehouse-consciousness to be an object, and misconstrues it as an independent. Manas develop attachments and aversions to the “things”, which the manovijñāna isolates.

While the ālayavijñāna is latent, the thinking consciousness and the six sense-based consciousnesses are manifest. There exists a reciprocal dependence between the ālayavijñāna and the seven manifest consciousnesses. The latter is produced from the seeds stored in the former, and, in turn, leaves its impressions on the former. The process of evolution takes place as follows: seeds ripen in the warehouse consciousness resulting in the evolution first of the
thinking consciousness and then the six fold consciousness, thereby leading to good, bad, or indifferent behavior.

The ālayavijñāna changes from moment to moment; vijñāna of one moment is replaced by the vijñāna of the next moment. As a result, there is a stream of successive moments of consciousness resulting in the formation of a consciousness complex. Self is nothing but a complex of this stream of consciousness, and the objects that are taken to exist in the external world are supplying the images that appear in the stream of consciousness. The evolution or transformation of consciousness is without any beginning. It continues to flow until the stored seeds are rooted out and one attains enlightenment. By making ālayavijñāna the receptacle of all seven types of consciousnesses, Yogācāra is able to account for such mental activities as memory.

It is the maturing of these pure seeds that is responsible for a complete restructuring of experience. Of these eight kinds of consciousness, the last seven are oriented towards the object. They create the mistaken belief that there are such objects, as trees, tables, chairs, etc., and these objects exist independently of consciousness. They are intentional. The first, the ālayavijñāna, on the other hand, is non-intentional. It is the unconscious foundation of all intentional cognitions; it is also the streaming flux of consciousness, without any reflections and conceptualizations, though unified by past habitual ties and their traces by a sort of “passive synthesis”. So for Yogācāra, the seven intentional cognitions are founded upon a no intentional flux of consciousness. Consciousness in contemporary phenomenology—even when it is intentional—is founded upon a phyletic, sensuous consciousness. It is always concrete; it is neither the purely formal thought of Kant nor the pure, intellectual thinking act
of Hegel so far Yogācāra comes close to phenomenology, excepting its thesis of non-intentional ālaya as the foundation of intentional consciousness.

To sum up, it is karma and kleśa (afflictions) that condition consciousness. This metaphorical equation of consciousness with seeds, which the Yogācārins will also use in connection with the ālayavijñāna, suggests a close association between karma and vijñāna, an association, which while equivocal, merits some attention.

### 3.4 Yogācāra is not Metaphysical Idealism

Yogācāra (yoga practice) doctrine received that name because it provided “yoga,” a comprehensive, therapeutic framework for engaging in the practices that lead to the goal of the bodhisattva path, namely enlightened cognition. Meditation served as the laboratory in which one could study how the mind operated. Yogācāra focused on the question of consciousness from a variety of approaches, including meditation, psychological analysis, epistemology (how we know what we know, how perception operates, what validates knowledge), scholastic categorization, and karmic analysis. Yogācāra doctrine is often encapsulated by the term vijñaptimātra, “nothing but-noetic constitution” (often rendered “consciousness-only” or “mind-only”) which has sometimes been interpreted as indicating a type of metaphysical idealism, namely, the claim that mind alone is real and that everything else is created by mind. Vijnaptimātra and its corollaries vijñānamātra and cittamātra have repeatedly been interpreted by Western and Asian scholars as promoting metaphysical idealism. Mātra “only”, according to this interpretation, acts as an approving affirmation of mind as the true reality.

However, the Yogācārins writings themselves argue something very different. Consciousness (vijñāna) is not the ultimate reality or solution, but rather the root problem. This problem
emerges in ordinary mental operations, and bringing those operations to an end can only solve it.

Why has Yogācāra been misinterpreted as idealism? The common way of interpreting mātra so as to valorize “consciousness” is striking since those same interpreters never impute such implications to mātra on the many other occasions it is used by Buddhists or Yogācārins. For instance, the closely allied term praṇāptimātra (only nominally real) has never led a modern interpreter to speculate that Language is the metaphysical reality behind the world of experience; on the contrary, those prone to idealist interpretations tend to privilege ineffability and yearn for a realm beyond language and conceptions, have never led interpreters to speculate that the terms accompanying mātra in those instances should be treated as metaphysical realities. It is commonly recognized that terms are emblematic of the problems Buddhism seeks to overcome namely ignorance and misconceptions so that they cannot signify a positive reality. The term vijñaptimātra has been valorized while no one would dream of valorizing the other. Mātra compounds are perhaps a testament to the pernicious persistence of bhavāsava, the compulsion to assert something existent to which one can cling. That is one of two extremes from which the middle way is designed to steer us (nihilism is the other). Yogācāra is deeply concerned about the human propensity to posit things we can appropriate. Yogācāra tends to be misinterpreted as a form of metaphysical idealism primarily because its teachings are taken to be ontological propositions rather than epistemological warnings about karmic problems. The Yogācāra focus on cognition and consciousness grew out of its analysis of karma, and not for the sake of metaphysical speculation.
3.5 The Nature of Mind

The basic ontological question of Yogācāra School is “what is there in the world?” The Indian Yogācāra theorists of the classical period said unambiguously that there is nothing but mind (Cittamātra). Many ways and synonyms used for the basic term “mind”, but the central point is always the same. Vasubandhu makes a classical and clear statement of this position at the beginning of his Twenty Verses.

He considers that the entire cosmos, standardly divided into three “realms” by Buddhist cosmologists,\(^{32}\) is nothing but “representation” (vijñapti). It is a technical term in contexts such as this refers to all mental events with intentional objects, all mental events wherein something is “represented” or communicated to the experiencer. This means that, for example, all instances of sense perception are necessarily also instances of “representation”. If, as we have seen was the case for the Vaibhāṣika theoreticians, consciousness is conceived exclusively on an intentional model, involving the idea that to be conscious is always to be conscious of something, it would seem that all mental events without remainder will have to be understood as instances of “representation” since all of them have intentional objects and all of them thus “represent” something to the experiencer. This is what Vasubandhu intends in the Twenty Verses. For him, the class of “representations” is co-extensive with the class of mental events in its entirety. This is suggested by his explicit identification of the term “representation” with “mind” (citta). The most general of the many Buddhist terms denote the mental.
This idea that all mental events are instances of representation is not surprising given what has been said in the preceding chapter about the significance of the intentional model of consciousness.

There is, however, an exception for the classical *Yogācāra* theorists to this general rule that every act of consciousness must be intentional, an exception which, though rarely stated unambiguously, seems to allow for a class of mental events which are not intentional. This class is to be identified with the “store-consciousness”. The importance of this exception for an understanding of the *Yogācāra* treatment of the attainment of cessation will become clear later in this chapter; that there is an exception to the general rule of the intentionality of consciousness does not affect the central ontological point being made, which is that all instances of experience which appear to be experiences of objects other than themselves are actually nothing but representation, nothing but mind.

The cosmos, then, is straightforwardly said to be nothing more than mental events, and, as Vasubandhu points out, mental representations do not necessarily (perhaps necessarily do not, though this interpretation is questionable) possess, or have as their intentional objects, physical objects external to the mind. Vasubandhu illustration of this point in the first verse of the Twenty Verses is illuminating: the cosmos, he says, is a series of representations of non-existent objects in just the same way that a man with faulty vision sees things which really aren’t there, things which look like hairs but are really only imperfections in the eye, or an image which appears to be of two moons when there is really only one. In such cases, Vasubandhu suggests, there is no external object corresponding to the mental representation, and he wishes to extend this analogy to all of the objects in the three-reamed cosmos.
There is clearly a radical difference between the ontology of the Yogācārin theorists and that of the Vaibhāṣika expounded in the preceding chapter. There we saw a realistic and pluralistic substance based ontology; here we find an idealistic-sounding firmly anti-substance ontology whose interest is centered almost exclusively upon the workings of consciousness. The question of how and why the Yogācārin theorists developed this new ontology is largely a historical issue and thus not strictly relevant to the purposes of this study. All that need be said about it here is that the idealism of the classical Indian Yogācāra was slow to develop, and that it appears to have arisen out of an attempt to make ontological generalizations from experiences produced by meditative practices. Buddhist meditational practice has, since the earliest times, included visualization techniques, which, among other things, are designed to “deconstruct” the meditator’s everyday experience of enduring medium-sized perceptual objects and to replace it with images over which the meditator has complete control. Such techniques, when taken as relevant to and even necessary for the attainment of nirvāṇa, salvation, tend to encourage practitioners in the belief that the way things appear as a result of these techniques is likely to be closer to the way they actually are than is the everyday subject-object structure of experience. The important step from the epistemological and psychological point that one can learn to control to a very large extent—perhaps even completely—the nature of one’s experience, to the metaphysical and ontological point that all experience represents only itself appears not to have been a difficult one for the Yogācāra theorists to take.

More important than the purely historical issue, though, is the systematic one of exactly how the Yogācārin ontological position as stated so far should be understood. There has been substantial disagreement among scholars, both Western and Japanese, as to whether the
Yogācārins ontology should properly be called idealistic. There is disagreement, for example, on the question of whether Asaṅga and Vasubandhu in the key classical texts already mentioned, are putting forward a primarily epistemological point (that all we have access to is mental representation) or a primarily ontological one (that mental representation is all there actually is). Stated briefly, the position taken in this study is that the ontology of the classical Indian Yogācāra is strictly idealist in the sense that:

i) It explicitly denies that there are any extra-mental entities

ii) Its whole philosophical interest is centered upon an examination of the workings of consciousness.

It is impossible to understand the Twenty Verses, the Thirty Verses and the Treatise on Three Aspects in any other way. Support for this view of the classical Indian Yogācāra may be found by looking at the kinds of objection raised against it by Indian philosophers. Vasubandhu outlines some of these objections in his prose commentary to the second verse of the Twenty Verses, and it is clear that they are just the kinds of question, which have been asked of idealists in the West. They amount to this: if all there is in the world is mental events how can one explain the (apparent) spatiotemporal location of such events? How is it that these events are interred subjective, that they are apparently perceived and experienced simultaneously by a large number of different experiences? And finally, how is it that mental representations, which have no corresponding external object, can do the kinds of things which (real) external objects can do? One’s empty stomach is, after all, not satisfied by food eaten in a dream, and the sword-cuts suffered in a dream-fight are not usually fatal.
I don’t wish to pursue in detail *Vasubandhu’s* answers to these questions, given in the remainder of the Twenty Verses and, from a rather different perspective, in the Thirty Verses. It must suffice to say that he uses examples of dream and collective hallucination to try and show that limitation in time and place, inter subjectivity and causal efficacy can all be explained on the “nothing but representation” model. There are, as might be expected, severe philosophical problems with this attempt, but they are not directly relevant to the purposes of this study. I shall simply note, therefore, that *Vasubandhu* asserts unambiguously that only mental events exist, whether designated as “representations”, “consciousness”, “mind” or “the thinking consciousness”, and that, given this presupposition, his major attempt at explaining the inter subjective and collective nature of our experience centers upon the image of the dream or the collective hallucination. Thus, in the seventeenth verse of the Twenty Verses and in his prose commentary Buddha, enlightened beings, are of course those who are fully awake,\(^{35}\) and *Vasubandhu* here suggests that when one is fully awake one will realize that external objects do not exist and that the only thing which does exist is “mind” or “representation”.

It is precisely upon the nature of the mental, the operations of consciousness in constructing a world of experience. All the attention of the *Yogācāra* theorists is focused. It was primarily to explain its operations that they developed the theory of the “three nature” (*trisvabhāva*) under which experience which, it must be remembered, is all that there is functions.
3.6 Vasubandhu’s Three Natures of Existence and Non-Existence

(Trisvabhāva and Niḥsvabhāva)

**Three Natures of Existence**

The *trisvabhāva*-theory has been considered to be one of the characteristic theories of Yogācāra Buddhist discourse. In many passages of the sūtras (the *Saṃdhinirmocana*, the *Laṅkavatāra* etc.) the doctrine of Three Natures (*trisvabhāva*) is taught by the Buddha. How can the doctrine of Mere-consciousness be reconciled with the TRISVABHĀVA doctrine? The *Vijñanavādins* says that the three natures are inseparable from consciousness. Nature (*svabhāva*) means self-nature, the existence of which is generally accepted. On the basis of the degree of understanding the people possess of the things, there are three natures of existence. They are:

(i) Nature of imagination (*parikalpita*-svabhāva),
(ii) Nature of dependence on others for manifestation (*paratantra*-svabhāva)
(iii) Nature of ultimate reality (*parinispanna*-svabhāva).

The knowledge, by which reality of things is imagined, is called *parikalpita*. This is imagination or illusion, as the things are imagined to exist while really they are not there. Imagined objects are not objectively real. The knowledge by which reality is examined is *paratantra* (dependence on other). Nothing is self-existent in the world. Everything depends on others for its existence. Things are all produced as mutually conditioned. Neither the *parikalpita* nor the *paratantra* are the correct views towards reality. Only the *parinispanna*,
“perfected” view, enables one to see into the true nature of reality, or to understand that the things have no self-nature.

(i) Parikalpita. The first line of the verse 20 in the TSK describes the consciousness that imagines. The second line describes the object, which is imagined by imagination. The last two lines say that the nature of the self and the things grasped by the imaginative consciousness does not exist. Only the sixth and the seventh consciousness believe in the real existence of the self and the things, and thus are capable of imagining.

(ii) Paratantra. The definition of paratantra as given in the verse 20 of the TSK, ‘paratantra is discrimination produced by causes and conditions’, indicates only the defiled paratantra, i.e. vikalpa. Pure paratantra is not vikalpa, it is as much parinīspanna as paratantra. The other opinion is that all minds and their associates, whether defiled or pure, are designated by the word vikalpa. They are all capable of apprehending and perceiving objects (ālamba). Hence the definition mentioned in the verse includes both the pure and defiled paratantras.

(iii) Parinīspanna. Ultimate reality (parinīspanna) is the complete and perfect real nature of all dharma, which is revealed by the knowledge of pudgalaśūnyatā and dharmaśūnyatā. The expression “parinīspanna” indicates (a) universality, i.e. lacking-in-nowhere of this nature, (b) eternity (non-birth-non-destruction), and (c) its reality, its non-falseness. It is different from the individual characteristics (svalakṣaṇa) of dharma, which is not universal. It is also different from the “common characteristics” (sāmānyalakṣaṇa), which is not eternal, and from space and the self, which are not real.

The conclusion is that these three natures do not exist apart (vyātireka) from the citta and caittas. The citta-caittas (saṃvittibhāga) together with the “developments” (parināma =
The phenomena produced by magician’s tricks, which does not really exist but appear to exist and thus deceive the ignorant. All this is called paratantra.

The ignorant believe them as the self and dharmas. But from ultimate viewpoint they are absolutely non-existent, “flower in the sky”, both in their “nature” and in their external aspect. All this is called parikalpita. The things, which are paratantra and are wrongly regarded as the self and the things are in reality all empty. The real nature of consciousness revealed by this “emptiness” of the self and the things is called the “nature of ultimate reality” (parinīspanna).

In this way, the three natures are inseparable from consciousness.

Three Natures of Non-Existence

The Vijñanavādins are asked if there are three natures, why does the Buddha teach, “all things are without self-nature”? In other words, if the things exist in three ways, i.e. parikalpita, paratantra and parinīspanna, why does the Buddha teach that they are empty (śūnya), they do not exist (niḥsvabhāva)?

The Ch’eng-wei-shih-lun explains that on the basis of the three natures of existence, the three natures of non-existence are established. The three natures of non-existence are:

Non-existence as regards characteristics (lakṣaṇaniḥsvabhāvatā),

Non-existence as regards origination (upattiniḥsvabhāvatā),

Non-existence as regards ultimate truth (paramārthaniḥsvabhāvatā).
The Buddha with a purpose preaches that all things are without self-nature. He did not really mean that there is absolutely no self-nature.

The *paratantra*-svabhāva and the *parinispanna*-svabhāva are not natures of non-existence. In the case of *parikalpita*-svabhāva, however, people impose upon things their false beliefs that these really have natures of their own. In order to eliminate this belief, the Buddha applied this term “non-existence” to both what really exists (the *paratantra* and the *parinispanna*) and to what does not exist (the *parikalpita*).

The *parinispanna* is *paramārtha* of all dharmas, because it is their *paramārthasatya*. It is the *bhūtatathatā*. The word *bhūta* means real. It indicates that *parinispanna* is not baseless and false (*abhūta*). The word *tathatā* means being constantly thus (*tathā-nītya*). It indicates that *parinispanna* does not change (*avikāra*). This reality remains constantly thus in its nature under all conditions. Therefore, it is called *bhūtatathatā*, which means that it is immutable and not false. The *parinispanna* is also the “real nature of *vijñaptimātratā*”.

According to the *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, *vijñaptimātratā* is of two kinds (i) false, i.e. *parikalpita*, and (ii) real, i.e. *parinispanna*. To indicate this difference, it is said that *parinispanna* is the real *vijñaptimātratā*.

The *vijñanavādins* conclude that the three natures of non-existence is not the revelation of ultimate truth. The teaching that the “*dharmas have no self-nature*” is not to be understood in its literal sense.

*Vasubandhu* says in the Treatise on the Three Aspects. The relative aspect of experience is simply experience as it appears; the imagined aspect of experience is that same experience
appearing in the mode of a subject (a person cognizing) objects. Both of these are called “imagination of the unreal” because, ontologically speaking, there are neither persons nor objects; there is only experience. There is a similar identity in difference between the relative and perfected aspects of experience. The perfected is tersely defined by Vasubandhu in the Treatise on the Three Aspects as the absence of duality and more extensively by Asaṅga in the Compendium as the complete absence of the imagined aspect of experience. The major point is that the perfected aspect of experience is that wherein experience just occurs, no longer characterized by the (imagined) duality of subject and object. This perfected aspect of experience, then, is also not ontologically distinct from the relative aspect (or the imagined aspect), since the relative is all there is. It is simply the relative aspect of experience occurring without (erroneously) constructive mental activity. It is also, of course, the kind of experience possessed by Buddha. It should have become clear in the course of the preceding brief and somewhat abstract account of the three-aspect theory of experience developed by the classical Yogācāra that what we are dealing with here is essentially a theory of the ways in which consciousness operates, the ways in which mental activity occurs. It’s true that this theory is apparently based upon an ontological postulate. They were concerned primarily with describing the operations of consciousness. How they might be modified with the soteriological goal of producing the experience of Buddhas, a ceaseless stream of “perfected experience”. To this end they developed a theory of mind substantially different from those already surveyed in this study, and to this, most especially to the idea of the “store-consciousness” (Ālayavijñāna).
References

1 This quote and the following one are from Sūtra 72 of the Majjhima-Nikaya, as translated by Heruy Clarke Warren in Buddhism in Translations (New York: Atheneum) 1979, p. 123-128.

2 This is demonstrated later in the course of the same conversation cited above: The Tathagata. Vaccha is free from all theories; but this Vaccha does the Tathagata know-the nature of form and how form arises, and how form perishes; the nature of sensation and how sensation arises and how sensation perishes; the nature of perception and how perception arises and how perception perishes; the nature of the predispositions and how the predispositions arise and how the predispositions perish; the nature of consciousness and how consciousness arises, and how consciousness perishes. Therefore say I that the Tathagata has attained deliverance and is free from attachment inasmuch as all imaginings or agitations or proud thoughts concerning the Ego or anything pertaining to an Ego have perished have faded away, have ceased, have been given up and relinquished.

3 Ātma dharmopacāro hi vidho yah pravartate/vijñāna parināme…the metaphors of self and phenomena, which certainly are diverse, proceed in the transformation of consciousness.


5 Hsuan-tsang, but rather that an object of consciousness is “internal.” And the “external” stimuli are only inferable.

6 Pratītya n. confirmation, experiment (others to be acknowledged or recognized); the chain of causation Lalit. (Twelvefold; cf. dharmas. 42). Cologne Digital Sanskrit Lexicon based on Monier-Williams’ Sanskrit-English Dictionary:

7 Nidāna n. a band, rope, a first or primary cause; original form or essence originally, Cologne Digital Sanskrit Lexicon based on Monier-Williams’ Sanskrit-English Dictionary

8 1. Saṃsāra see below. 2 saṃsāra m. going or wandering through, undergoing transmigration; course, passage, passing through a succession of states, circuit of mundane existence, transmigration, metempsychosis, the world, secular life, worldly illusion (āsaṃsārata), “from the beginning of the world”. Cologne Digital Sanskrit Lexicon based on Monier-Williams’ Sanskrit-English Dictionary saṃsāra m. wandering, esp. from one existence into another, metempsychosis, transmigration, the cycle of existence.

9 “Separation of the Middle from the Extremes,”

10 Avidya a. ignorant, without knowledge. avidyā f. want of knowledge, ignorance.

11 Trīṣṇā : thirst, desire, avidity

12 Tagawa Shun’ei (2009), p.XII.

13 Ibid., p.XII.


15 ‘Manas’ is generally translated as “mind”. In the early Buddhist tradition, manas was taken to be one of the
twelve sense-fields which included six pairs of base and object. According to this account, manas, the mind-organ, is one of the six bases and thoughts would be its objects. Like any other sense organ, mind can be restrained, developed, and trained. Buddha often talks with his disciples about the value of controlling the six faculties. It played an important role in the AD analysis of the early Buddhist psychologists and philosophers. In Mahayana, and especially in the Yogācāra school. Manas wore an additional hat as one of the eight consciousnesses that received and disposed of data from the prior six consciousnesses. It became the pivot around which their conception of the ego, the I-consciousness, revolved. It was taken to be an evolute of the eight consciousness, known as the “warehouse-consciousness” (Ālayavijñāna). In this account, the seventh consciousness represents the surface of the mind, and the warehouse-consciousness serves as the basis of all other mind activity.

16 In Vasubandhu’s words, Vijñāna is the “raw grasping” of an object. See ed. Louis de La Vallee Poussin, English translation by Leo M. Pruden (Berkeley, California: Asia Humanities Press, 1991), vol. I, p. 74. Henceforth this work will be cited as Poussin. It is not possible to experience consciousness directly. As a blade cannot cut itself, Similarly one cannot experience consciousness directly as an object. For as soon as one focuses on the consciousness, it ceases to be the subject; it becomes an object.

17 Visuddhi-māgga, Chapter xiv, Warren, p.156.

18 Vijñānapimātratā in Yogācāra Buddhism, p.31.


20 Vijñānapimātram evitad asad arthāvabhāsanāt

yathā taimirikasyāsat keśa candādi darśanām

21 The term “dhatu” is derived from the dhar meaning, “to hold”. That which carries its own characteristic mark is “dhatu”. They are so called since they are devoid of being, See Narada Mahathera, A Manual of Abhidhamma (Kuala Lumpur: Buddhist Missionary Society, 1987), p.200.


23 Ibid.,p. 42.

24 The vijñāna sustenance is a condition of renewed existence of rebirth in the future. The Ālayavijñāna is also called the vijñāna substance is such texts.

25 The Buddha declared, then consciousness becomes established there and comes to growth. Wherever consciousness becomes established and comes to growth, there is a descent of name-and-form. Where there is a descent of name-and-form, there is the growth of karmic formations

26 The conclusion is difficult to avoid that the term vijñāna in Early Buddhism indicated the surviving factor of an individual which by re-entering womb after womb produced repeated births resulting in what is generally known as Saṃsāra. (Wijesekera, 1964: 256, emphasis in original)

27 And what is the origin of suffering? It is craving, which brings renewal of being, is accompanied by delight and lust, and delights in this and that; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for being, and craving for non-being. This is called the origin of suffering.

28 The difference between the Ālayavijñāna of Yogācāra and the unconscious of the AD is as follows: In the AD, external stimulus produces vibration in the unconscious, whereas in the Yogācāra the ripening of the seed within
the warehouse-consciousness creates agitation and starts the process of transformation.


30 Wood (2009), verses 15-16.

31 Ibid., verse 16-17.

32 For an extremely detail exposition of the standard Indian Buddhist cosmologies, see the third chapter, also kloetzli (1983).

33 It is not clearly expressed, for example, in most of the Stages of Spiritual Practice, one of the earliest systematic texts of the Yogācāra tradition

34 My account here is heavily dependent upon Schmithausen’s excellent discussion of the relationship between “spiritual practice” and ‘philosophical theory’ in Buddhism (1976b). There he says: “Thus, the result of Our examination of the oldest materials of the Yogācāra school clearly speaks in favour of the theory that Yogācāra idealism primarily results from a generalization of a fact observed in the case of meditation objects, i.e., in the context of a spiritual practice”. Schmithausert (1976), p. 241.

35 This is one of the meanings of the verbal root from which the term Buddha is derived

36 Bagchi (1970), p.16-18: That the perfected aspect of experience is not accessible to language is an important point, which there has not been space to discuss in the body of this study.