

Tathāgatagarbha Influences in the Three Nature

l s i Ms - u K æ e r t D e a

Retaining the Abhidharma distinction between the "real" () of false projections, the Yogācāras restricted the emptiness of the Prajñāpāramitāsūtras to the imagined nature (

Yogācāra model of reality. Besides this Yogācāra type of ontological distinction between real and nominal existence there are also, throughout the Maitreya Works, influences of the

(once even referred to as such in one of the Yogācāra texts of the Maitreya

model of reality contributes to remedying the flaws Yogācāra has in the eyes of Mādhyamikas, namely that a considerable group of sentient beings is completely cut off

Nothingness is never nothing, even less is it a something in the sense of an object;

overcome himself as a subject, and that is, when he no longer presents the being as an object.

Looking for that, which truly exists behind the seeming reality of a subject and object, Martin Heidegger proposed his famous "ontological distinction" between the "Sein" and the "Seiende", i.e., the ontic existence of what truly exists (Sein) and the ontological "being" (Seiende) of the cognitively processed data of our daily experience. In Buddhism, the Ābhidharmikas

() of false projections; and in order to retain an ontological distinction (even though in a modified way), the Yogācāras restricted the emptiness of the Prajñāpāramitāsūtras to the imagined nature (

nature from the dependent nature, constitute the Yogācāra model of reality. Parallel to it, two further Mahāyāna models of reality imagined of

interpretation of the Prajñāpāramitāsūtras.

responsible for the false projection of the perceived object () and the perceiving subject

defilements

constituted by these defilements] must be abandoned.

Asaṅga takes issue with a pure nominalist position, arguing against Prajñaptivāda, and

There are some who say: "Everything is designation only; this is reality. If one sees in this way, one sees correctly." Since for them there is no thing-in-itself (

for their existence. Nāgārjuna contends, however, that the dependent origination of
. See Burton 1999: 90 & Rospatt 1995: 69ff.

designation and reality, the [Prajñaptivādin] should be understood to be the foremost

The Sautrāntika ontology of ultimate truth in terms of momentary real particulars (

Mahāyānistic Yogācāra it refers to the inexpressible, bare particulars of the dependent nature.

) in Yogācāra.

("Because of its non-existence, this does not exist either."),
consciousness in its aspect of a perceiving subject (

Because of its (i.e., the perceived object's) non-existence, this (i.e., consciousness) —
inasmuch as it is the perceiving subject — does not exist either.

||. See also Salvini 2015: 29.

8 See also Hacker's (1985: 109) definition of "substance".

is much later and not exactly a Yogācāra work, it characterizes the true nature

"the particular (i.e., actual reality) of the uncontrived."

: "For inasmuch as the true nature of all phenomena, namely what is called the co-emergent, is
the "actual reality" of the uncontrived. ..." (

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]. For a translation of the entire verse and commentary, see

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It cognizes; thus it is consciousness. In the absence of a perceived [object], the very act of cognizing does not make sense. Therefore, given the object's non-existence, consciousness as the subject of cognition is non-existent, but not as [the consciousness, which has] objects, sentient beings, a self, and cognitions as its

It has been argued that the Yogācāra texts of Maitreya negate the real existence of non-dual mind, because in the formulas defining the fourfold Yogācāra practice, which leads to the realization of a state free from perceived and perceiver, "mind-only" ("cognition-only" () is also left behind. False imagining (i.e., "mind-only" as the

Based on the non-perception of a [perceived] object, the non-perception of mere

is here not the technical term referring to the Yogācāra tenet

cognition without any object. The formula in

verse, which means that mind refers here to its aspect of being a perceiving subject (

Having understood that there is no perceived object (

[referential] objects;

an object mere cognition () is not admissible in the absence of an object of cognition;

To sum up, the original Yogācāra model is centred around a real dependent nature. What is

|| VI.8.

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| (the root text is in bold letters).

472f.) for reading the denial of any real or ultimate existence of "mere mind" into these passages.

whether the Prajñāpāramitāsūtras are nihilistic:

Question: The Illustrious One taught in the _____ : "Both
and retribution [for it] exist, but an acting subject is not perceived."

[truth], one should not say that an acting subject is not perceived, since the latter, too,

In pointing to the problem to which the ontology of the Prajñāpāramitāsūtras leads, Vasubandhu

Prajñāpāramitāsūtras so dangerous in the eyes of Vasubandhu. What is offered, then, is a three

First of all, what is this "relative" and what the ultimate? By [finding answers to] this,

If [the Śrāvakas] answer: "The relative consists of names, expressions, designations
) of phenomena," [one

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but not ultimately, because they are the experiential object of worldly knowledge.
() is supramundane wisdom, and being the object ()
latter, it is the ultimate object ()
and retribution) are not an experiential object of it,
since [any] experiential object of it is an inexpressible general characteristic.

final analysis, the dependent nature is also taken here to belong to the relative truth. The reason

Prajñāpāramitāsūtras' stance that phenomena are empty of such particulars. It should be noted that Vasubandhu responds to a Śrāvaka who would obviously prefer to distinguish the two truths in the context of his Abhidharma system (and thus our original Yogācāra model above).

three nature model becomes compatible with either Svātantrika-Madhyamaka, which allows the relative to be explained in terms of either Sautrāntika or Yogācāra; or else with the Tathāgatagarbha model, which finds a place for the dependent within its adventitious defilements.

Even though Tathāgatagarbha influences in the Yogācāra texts of Maitreya are numerous, the

Even though suchness is undifferentiated in all [sentient beings],
In its purified form it is the state of a Tathāgata.

) of him (i.e., the Tathāgata).

used, in the way common to Tathāgatagarbha literature, namely as an exocentric compound

Suchness is undifferentiated in all sentient beings, and the Tathāgata is by his nature

Tathāgata as their nature.

The way buddha nature is explained here exactly matches its definition as "suchness
accompanied by stains"

interprets buddha nature from a Yogācāra perspective.

One problem with the thesis of a consistent Yogācāra-Tathāgatagarbha synthesis, however,
is the teaching of a "cut-off potential" (lit. "those without a family") in

those whose roots of virtue are cut off, those who are without the roots conducive

have buddha nature. Again, we have here an element from the original Yogācāra model, i.e., a liberation, over against Yogācāra strands that show Tathāgatagarbha and/or Madhyamaka influences. A possible solution to this problem is offered in

Again, the saying: "Icchantikas (lit. 'those with great desire') do not have at all the " is taught with the hidden intention of another time to remove hatred towards the Mahāyāna doctrine, this being the reason why they

-system with a cut-off potential and an ultimately existing dependent nature have in common their incompatibility with the Tathāgatagarbha model of reality. Their respective

in the Yogācāra passages that were subjected to Madhyamaka and, as we will see now, also

Tathāgatagarbha influences. One could further argue, if one's not exist ultimately (just as the dependent nature), the ultimate goodness of an all-pervading even of those with a cut-off potential.

's definition of buddha nature as suchness accompanied by stains (). In the final version of the

[Emptiness is] neither defiled nor undefiled, neither pure nor impure. How is it that it is neither defiled nor impure? It is because of the natural luminosity of mind. How is it that it is neither undefiled nor pure? It is because of the adventitious nature of defilements.

in the sense of "forever" instead of "absolutely", suggesting the reading that even though all sentient beings have the potential to become a Buddha,

RGV I.148 "Its nature being unchangeable, sublime, and pure, suchness is illustrated by a piece of gold." (RGVV

by Asaṅga as follows: "Although the mind is accompanied by limitless phenomena which are defilements or suffering, it itself does not undergo change, on account of its natural luminosity. This is why it is called suchness, for it will never become something else, any more than sublime gold will." (RGVV 71

]. First quoted and translated in

How should the differentiation vis-à-vis emptiness be understood?

(MAV I.16a). Thus is the differentiation vis-à-vis it. In what state is it defiled and in what is it pure?

stains, it is defiled, and when [these] stains are abandoned it is pure. If, after being

It should be noted that the terms "defiled" and "pure" which dominate the first part of the , are explicitly equated with "accompanied by stains" and "stainless" — terminology probably imported from the difficult to see how false imagining retains its central position as the existing ground or basis of

in Asaṅga's commentary on

In the same way, O Sāgaramati, the Bodhisattva knows the natural luminosity of the mind of sentient beings. He [here] again perceives that it is defiled by adventitious

: "Of these, the suchness accompanied by stains is the [buddha] element when not freed from the sheath of defilements. It is called buddha nature. Stainless suchness is that [element] called the Tathāgata, that which has the defining characteristic of [having undergone] a fundamental transformation at the level of a Buddha."

)

adventitious defilements have sprung from false imagining.

To sum up, the presentation of false imagining in the first part of the first chapter is structured around the original Yogācāra model with its dominating Abhidharma background of the said

and/or Tathāgatarbha influences, the dependent nature becomes the relative truth of the Yogācāra-Mādhyamikas, or else subsumed under the adventitious stains in the Tathāgatarbha system. This is fully in line with the general trend of early Mahāyāna to label Abhidharma

accepts original Yogācāra elements such as the cut-off potential only as a teaching with a

Original Yogācāra and Tathāgatarbha Elements — Unbalanced Strands of Thought or

offers a solution by claiming that the doctrine of a cut-off potential

to the Tathāgatarbha teachings, was taught with a purpose in MSA XI.54:

with such and such intent in this and that sūtra. But it is not that the three vehicles

] First translated and

Sthiramati's sub-commentary classifies the single vehicle theory as a teaching with provisional

As for the explanation of "single vehicle" here, it must be taken to have provisional meaning, because he (i.e., the Buddha) taught it with a [specific] intent, [namely] for the sake of sentient beings. The teaching of three vehicles has definitive meaning.

, though, every sūtra (including definitive ones), has an aim or intent that needs to be identified. In other words, one does not need to

Śrāvakas and the others are not separate from the

one accepts that the final author of the attempted a synthesis of Yogācāra and Tathāgatagarbha thought, a synthesis that can also be found in the

. This requires a shift from the original Yogācāra model of an

existent duality would describe what is true and false on the level of relative truth only, just as

such a Yogācāra-Tathāgatagarbha synthesis. It should be noted that in accordance with

Tathāgatagarbha model of reality. The third and fourth lines would then be an explanation of

to accommodate the Yogācāra notion of the three fortified potentials. While the original Tathāgatagarbha notion of a permanent can fit, for example, into the framework of Nāgārjuna's the Yogācāra interpretation of buddha nature requires the

): "Your body, consisting of buddha qualities (has been taught by you." (

]. This does Thl t =

with the Tathāgatagarbha theory. It should be noted that this restriction of the dependent to the relative truth also enables the Yogācāra-Madhyamaka synthesis of Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla.

A way into a Yogācāra-Tathāgatagarbha synthesis can be also found in the relative and ultimate truths. Still, the two truths system finds a correspondence in the distinction definitions are as follows:

As to the defining characteristics of

differentiation between a perceived object and a perceiving subject, an expressed object and expression.

there and a ~~correspondence~~ ~~between~~ ~~the~~ ~~two~~ ~~truths~~ ~~system~~ ~~finds~~ ~~a~~ ~~correspondence~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~distinction~~ ~~definitions~~ ~~are~~ ~~as~~ ~~follows~~ ~~:~~

In other words, it partakes of a higher degree of reality, just as in the . This is also clear from the definition of a perceived object and perceiving subject, and of an expressed object and a corresponding expression, is negated but false imagining is not. In the final analysis, it must be included within

is evident, as can be gathered from Vasubandhu's final summary:

objects of comparison], not [their] substance, was taught as being analogous [to the

[. The additions in brackets are in accordance with Vasubandhu's commentary (see

DhDhVV 706-8: |

In Maitreya's Yogācāra texts, there are at least two models of reality. Besides the common

relative and ultimate truths. In the light of these Tathāgatagarbha and Madhyamaka strands, the original Yogācāra notion of a cut-off potential in the

against the Tathāgatagarbha model, ascribing provisional meaning (

can be taken as a synthesis of Yogācāra and

Tathāgatagarbha thought, a synthesis that is also at work in the

. The Yogācāra model of this synthesis describes, then, relative truth in a way similar to Yogācāra-Svātantrika Madhyamaka.

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