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From Self-Attaching to Self-Emptying: An Investigation of Xuanzang's Account of Self-Consciousness

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Abstract: In this paper, I investigate the account of self-consciousness provided by Chinese Yogācārins Xuanzang (602-664CE) and Kuiji (632-682CE). I will explain how they clarify the transition from self-attaching to self-emptying through the articulation of consciousness (*vijñāna*). Current scholarship often interprets the Yogācāra account of consciousness either as a science of mind or as a metaphysical idealism. Both interpretations are misleading, partly because they perpetuate various stereotypes about Buddhism, partly also because they overlook the religious goal of realizing in practice the wisdom of emptiness and the non-egoistic compassion. Against the status quo, I argue that through their account of self-consciousness, Xuanzang and Kuiji advocate what can be referred to as transcendental idealism that stresses the correlation between subjectivity and objectivity. Yogācārins thus neither nullify the existence of subjectivity nor formulate subjectivity as a higher entity. The transcendental idealism yields a Buddhist phenomenology that is similar to and also different from Edmund Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. In what follows I will first characterize Husserl's phenomenology as an approach to consciousness at two levels (the descriptive level and the explicative level). Then, I elicit the Buddhist phenomenology from Yogācāra philosophy that is not only descriptive and explicative but also prescriptive. This three-level architectonic of consciousness, while reaffirming the importance of agency, further justifies the role of religious rituals and moral practices for Yogācāra devotees.

Keywords: phenomenology, Husserl, transcendental idealism, Chinese Yogācāra, self-consciousness

1 Introduction

The Yogācāra school of Buddhism is known for using the investigation of consciousness to reach the religious goal of realizing the wisdom of emptiness and the non-egoistic compassion. According to Xuanzang (602-664)[1], the Chinese Yogācārin, consciousness (識，*vijñāna*) is defined through *liao-bie* (了別, *vijñāpti*).[2] Xuanzang's disciple Kuiji (632-682) further elaborates that *liao-bie* shows the feature of consciousness to transform (轉變, *pariṇāma*) itself into the act of knowing (*liao*) its distinct (*bie*) phenomenon.[3] This definition raises the possibility, at least in principle, of comparing Yogācāra philosophy with Edmund Husserl's (1859-1938) phenomenology insofar as Husserl also characterizes consciousness through the relation of the intending act with the intended phenomenon, a relation

1 All dates listed are Common Era (CE), unless otherwise noted.
2 T31N1585, P1a.
3 T43N1830, P240c17.

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commonly known as intentionality. This paper focuses on Yogācāra philosophy and Husserl's phenomenology because of their shared concern about the ultimate nature of consciousness and how this nature can influence our life.

My purpose here is thus not merely to juxtapose Yogācāra with Husserl's phenomenology or vice versa. Nor do I attempt to synthesize them into a new theory. Rather, following the Buddha's teaching of the Middle Way, I intend to preserve a middle ground for initiating a dialogue between Yogācārins and Husserl. Such a method that goes beyond juxtaposition and synthetization does not lead us back to the starting point of comparing. Rather, it will advance our knowledge of the ultimate nature of consciousness. Hereby, aside from listing similarities and dissimilarities, I hope to reveal the latent possibility of religious philosophy in Husserl's phenomenology on the one hand and make a case for Buddhist phenomenology in the Yogācāra sense on the other. This method further allows me to challenge current misrepresentations of the Yogācāra doctrine of consciousness.

Existing Yogācāra scholarship offers two standard interpretations of such doctrine. Some scholars construe Yogācāra Buddhism as a natural science of mind,[4] whereas others perpetuate the stereotype that Yogācārins reduce mundane reality into a stratum of illusion by conceptualizing the eighth consciousness *qua ālaya* as a transcendent entity.[5] Aside from their differences, both interpretations depict worldviews that later Yogācārins do not endorse. They further leave an impression that the true Buddhism exists in its philosophical doctrines, not in practices.[6] This, however, is very misleading. Yogācārins' investigation of consciousness is first and foremost subservient to the religious goal of realizing emptiness and compassion. This teleology determines the religious character of Yogācāra Buddhism, that is, devotees shall first understand the Buddha's teaching, and, then, they must faithfully apply their understanding to practices through which they eventually awaken the wisdom of emptiness and the non-egoistic compassion. Given the importance of everyday religious practice, Yogācārins do not endorse the scientific or nihilist worldview described by current scholars.

To clarify the religious character of Yogācāra philosophy, I turn to the account of self-consciousness offered by Xuanzang and Kuiji. I bring in Husserl's transcendental phenomenology to facilitate our understanding of the Yogācāra worldview. In what follows, I begin by characterizing Husserl's phenomenology as a two-level approach to consciousness: at the descriptive level, it portrays intentional activities and at the explicative level, it explains the condition for the possibility of phenomena to appear in consciousness. Then, I continue to elucidate the conception of self-consciousness articulated by Chinese Yogācārins. This elucidation permits me to interpret the Yogācāra architectonic of consciousness as a three-level approach: descriptively, it depicts consciousnesses and their transformation; explicatively, it clarifies the way in which the transformation of consciousness implements the possibility for both forming and removing attachments; prescriptively, it establishes norms for religious practices and moral actions. This dialogue between Husserl and Yogācārins, as I contend in the conclusion, will advance our understanding of Yogācāra Buddhism and enrich our knowledge of the ultimate nature of consciousness.

4 For the interpretation of Buddhism as a science or philosophy, please refer to the following works. Flanagan, *The Bodhisattva's Brain*, 79; Coseru, *Perceiving Reality*, 21.

5 For scholars who equate consciousness-only with 'nothing existing but consciousness, please see the following works. Chatterjee, *Yogācāra Idealism*, 174; Wayman, "The Yogācāra Idealism", 67; Griffiths, *On Being Mindless*, 82; Schmithausen, *Ālayavijñāna*, 166. Although these scholars are debating on how to define the existence of the higher entity *qua* ālaya, they tend to characterize the mundane reality as the void.

6 Most critics attribute this tendency of prioritizing philosophy over others to Orientalism, namely, a romanization of Buddhism into what it is not. We can trace this Orientalist discourse from Victorian Buddhologists, among them T.W. Rhys Davids (1896) who envisages Buddhism as a rational philosophy, to D.T. Suzuki (1927) who characterizes Buddhism with non-rational psychology. Recent scholarship closely scrutinizes this tendency of overlooking the practical side of Buddhism (Hori, "Openings", 13). In this paper, I hope to exhibit how philosophical argumentation is interdependent with religious practices and historical contexts. I contend that these three aspect are equally important and mutually complementing in the Yogācāra doctrine of consciousness.

This examination of self-consciousness allows me to argue that later Yogācārins in China do not rid ideality of Buddhism to architect a science of mind. Nor do they purport to become nihilists who negate worldly reality. Rather, the continuous transformation of consciousnesses opens up the possibility for subjective ideality to correlate with everyday reality moment by moment. Devotees can realize this possibility by complying with rules for religious practices. The experience of subject-object correlation first yields the wisdom of emptiness and then awakes the non-egoistic compassion.

2 Husserl's conception of intentionality and the rejection of naturalism

Every day, when we open our eyes, we are immediately aware of our surroundings, such as the weather, the tree in front of my apartment, my room, my cat, and the pigeons on the balcony. Yet, even if we close our eyes and fall asleep, we continue to experience other images in dreams. Consciousness enables us to access various kinds of objects, some of which have the psycho-physical existence like the tree outside my house yet others do not, such as the unicorn in my dream.

Modern philosopher Edmund Husserl, who engaged himself in investigating human experience, highlighted the intentional characteristic of consciousness that correlates mind, body, and the world. As I will argue in this section, Husserl's phenomenology can be categorized as a two-level approach to consciousness, depicting intentional consciousness at the descriptive level while expounding transcendental idealism at the explicative level. This sketch of Husserl's phenomenology first allows us to explore the nascence of a phenomenology of religion and then prepares us for the interpretation of Yogācāra philosophy in the subsequent sections.

At the descriptive level, Husserl begins by pinpointing the defining feature of consciousness, namely, intentionality. Husserl's well-known formula of intentionality goes as follows: 'consciousness is always the consciousness *of* (something)'.[7] Throughout his life, Husserl kept elaborating on his conception of intentionality. Here I mainly pinpoint four phases in this development.

In *Logical Investigations*, Husserl defines intentionality as the characteristics of mental acts that always aim at an object.[8] Each mental act encompasses two elements, or in Husserl's terms, two inseparable moments known as quality and matter. While quality determines the genre (of the act), matter offers the content.[9] For instance, my recollection of my cat sleeping on my lap differs from my dreaming that my cat was sleeping on my lap. Even though the contents remain the same, namely, my cat sleeping on my lap, the quality of the act demarcates my recollecting from my dreaming. Contrariwise, matter differentiates one recollection from other recollections. My recollection of my last family reunion is not the same as my recollection of my breakfast this morning insofar as the matter or the content of the former act of recollecting is distinct from that of the latter act.

In the second phase, Husserl replaces this quality-matter pair with the *noesis-noema* dichotomy in *Ideas 1*. After performing *epoché*, the reduction, we move to the realm of pure consciousness. I will revisit Husserl's articulation of *epoché* and pure consciousness soon. While *noesis* describes the subjective act of intending, *noema* refers to the intended phenomenon that an object appears as such in pure consciousness.[10]

In the third phase, Husserl develops the threefold schemata called *ego-cogito-cogitatum*, complementing the *noesis-noema* dichotomy.[11] As is documented in *Inner Time Consciousness* and *Cartesian Meditations*, *ego* serves as the absolute flow of consciousness from which derive the subjective act *qua cogito* and the objective phenomenon *qua cogitatum*. This absolute flow lays the ground for us

7 Husserl, *Hua3*, 181.
8 Husserl, *Hua19*, 379.
9 Husserl, *Hua19*, 412.
10 Husserl, *Hua3*, 174; 213.
11 Husserl, *Hua1*, 87.

to recollect the past or to anticipate the future in our temporal experience. In this sense, consciousness becomes not only the consciousness *of* something but also the consciousness *for* someone *qua* the *ego*.

Eventually, Husserl inquires into collective consciousness by expanding the solipsist account of intentionality. Exemplars of such inquiries are Husserl's analysis of socio-historical groups such as cultural communities[12] as well as his investigation[13] of the transcultural life-world. He thus enriches the schemata of *ego-cogito-cogitatum* into the tripartition among the *egos* or the *we*, the collective act of intending, and the intended collective phenomena.

Throughout these four phases, Husserl gradually expands his conception of intentionality from the empirical to the transcendental, from the *noesis-noema* dichotomy to the *ego-cogito-cogitatum* schemata, and from individual to collective consciousness. Not only does intentionality open subjective consciousness(es) to its(their) objects, it further explains the way which we correlate ourselves with the world. At the explicative level, this correlation yields Husserl's conception of transcendental idealism that first defines the condition for the possibility of phenomena to appear in consciousness and then serves as the refutation to what Husserl calls naturalism.

Husserl's critique of naturalism can be viewed as a concern for objective knowledge – how can objectivity be ensured in subjective consciousness. What Husserl refers to as naturalism is what we call today the reductionist worldview that distorts objectivity in a specific way. In the naturalistic worldview, scientists and philosophers presume objectivity to be free from subjective interference. This polarization between objectivity and subjectivity has *ipso facto* driven intellectuals to treat mind and the world as two separate entities. On the one hand, there is a material world that is pre-given and mind-independent, and, on the other, mind becomes the unity of psychological activities.[14] The former facilitates the rise of physicalism which reduces the world into contingent material realities whereas the latter encourages the emergence of psychologism which simplifies mind into the sum-total of contingent psychical realities. Physicalism and psychologism constitute the two facets of this reductionistic naturalism, the defining feature of which is the mind-world dichotomy.[15] Such dualistic reductionism, or naturalism in Husserl's terms, not only distorts objectivity but also problematizes subjectivity insofar as the disconnection of human mind to the world, as Husserl expounds later in the *Crisis*, provokes an existential crisis[16]- if the objectively real world becomes separate from and irrelevant to the subjective mind, how can humans meaningfully relate themselves to the world?

To prevent us from falling back to naturalism, Husserl devises the *epoché*. Before the *epoché*, things exist in the psycho-physical natural order. "Nothing else but the natural world is seen".[17] Through the *epoché,* the natural existence of the world is suspended. Our judgments and presumptions about the natural world are also neutralized. Thus, after the *epoché*, consciousness becomes a residuum of the intending act and its intended object which appears as a phenomenon. Husserl refers to such post-*epoché* consciousness as the pure consciousness. In our pure consciousness, the world appears as an intelligible phenomenon for the subject.[18] When I enact the *epoché*, I dwell back to our pure consciousness and put aside all my presumptions about the natural existence of objects such as eight, height, physical expansion, or being attracted by gravity.[19] Every time I fix my eyes on an object, my intuition reaches out to the entire world to constitute an intelligible background for me. When my focus changes, the background dissembles and reassembles accordingly to make the intentional object distinguishably appear in my consciousness. For instance, when I am working in my room and focusing on my reading, the maple tree with yellow and red leaves outside my window immerses itself as an integral part of the background. Then, I become tired. I look outside my windows at the tree. At that moment, the

12 Husserl, *Hua27*, 54.
13 Husserl, *Hua6*, 258.
14 Husserl, *Hua3*, 8.
15 Husserl, *Hua6*, 61.
16 Husserl, *Hua6*, 8.
17 Husserl, *Hua3*, 68.
18 Husserl, *Hua3*, 68.
19 Husserl, *Hua3*, 188.

tree surfaces from the background and the background alters itself in this new scenario to make the maple tree stand out. This maple tree never vanishes. The data I have about the tree remain the same. Yet, the way in which this tree appears in my consciousness becomes different in these two scenarios. Simultaneously, the sense bestowed on the appearance of the maple tree in my pure consciousness equally varies from one scenario to another.

This example demonstrates the way in which objectivity for Husserl, consequently, is not mind-independent. Through intuition, we build up intentionality between the intended phenomenon (*noema*/*cogitatum*) and the intending act (*noesis/cogito*). Without subjective acts, objects can never appear as phenomena in our consciousness. Objectivity thus is secured by subjectivity. When an object appears as a phenomenon, there has been a sense that is bestowed on the appearance as such. The intuitive sense becomes the ground for the validity of concepts or meaning-intentions. This sense of the intentioned phenomenon is what Husserl calls essence.

The way in which the world can be correlated with our consciousness, or, in short, how intentional consciousness is possible, entails Husserl's conception of transcendental idealism. As per Husserl, subjectivity is transcendentally ideal insofar as subjectivity serves as the condition for the possibility of phenomena. Even though subjectivity cannot exhaust the natural existence of reality, it determines the specific way and the distinct sense for objects to appear in pure consciousness. This determination alludes to the meaningful correlation between objective reality and subjective ideality. In this sense, Husserl *ipso facto* distances himself from both metaphysical idealists who proclaim ideality to be exhaustive of reality and reductionist scientists such as Galileo for whom the world is mind-independent. What Husserl endorses is a transcendental idealism which indicates the way in which mind makes the world meaningful through the mind-world connection.

Given that naturalism is Husserl's prime concern, he confines his investigations in transcendental idealism in order to challenge naturalism. He is confident that transcendental phenomenology can cure the existential crisis insofar as it enables humans to relate themselves to the world meaningfully. Husserl thus had not in his lifetime fully developed the possibility of a phenomenology of religion. Nevertheless, later phenomenologists such as Edith Stein (1891-1942) and Michel Henry (1922-2002) elaborate this latent possibility by following Husserl's phenomenological approach.

3 The Yogācāra description of consciousness and its intentional structure

While Husserl considers the existential crisis in Europe as a product of modern naturalism, Yogācārins, from the 600s, conceive of such crisis (also known as suffering) as a birthmark of life. Yogācārins' conception of existential crisis alludes to their fidelity to the Buddha's teaching. Historically, the Buddha or Siddhārtha Gautama (c. 500s BCE) sympathized with all beings, so he preached the way of overcoming suffering through the wisdom of emptiness and the non-egoistic compassion. Later Buddhist clergy inaugurated their own approach to elaborate the Buddha's teaching.

Yogācārins are known for using their investigation of human consciousness to serve their religious goal of realizing emptiness and compassion. After *depicting* how consciousness transforms itself at the descriptive level, Yogācārins *account for* how this transformation gives rise to both attachments and liberation at the explicative level. To remove attachments and to awake wisdom and compassion, Yogācārins *prescribe* norms for religious practices and moral actions. At the prescriptive level, these practices, sometimes quite challenging, not only test but will also reinforce devotees' religious fidelity. These three levels, namely, the descriptive, the explicative, and the prescriptive, constitute the Buddhist phenomenology in the Yogācāra sense.

To indicate this three-level approach, I focus on the account of self-consciousness provided by Chinese Yogācārins.[20] I begin by introducing Yogācārins' description of intentional consciousness in the current section. Then, I clarify how this description allows Yogācārins to account for self-attachments in the next two sections and to necessitate religious practices at the prescriptive level in the last part.

According to *Chengweishilun* (*Vijñāptimātratāsiddhi*, 成唯識論, henceforth the Siddhi) and Kuiji's commentary, Yogācārins articulate four theories to explain the way in which consciousness transforms itself to the phenomenon when an object appears and the act that can perceive such a phenomenon. Since all these theories accentuate the relation between the act and the phenomenon, they are in parallel to Husserl's conception of intentionality.

The first account is inaugurated by Sthiramati (c. 500s) who defines consciousness as *svasaṃvitti* (自證). As per Sthiramati, consciousness is that which continuously transforms itself. Albeit transformation brings about mental acts and phenomena, these acts and phenomena are derivative, illusory, and non-existing. It is only the ceaselessly transforming consciousness that has existence. Kuiji coins the term "onefold structure (一分說)" to define Sthiramati's theory.[21]

Nanda (c. 500s) contends that consciousness must have an object to intend to (T31N1585, P10a26). He thus dichotomizes self-consciousness into the transforming act and the transformed phenomenon produced by the act.[22] The act is commonly referred to as *darśana-bhāga* (the seeing part), the phenomenon as *nimitta-bhāga* (the seen part). Nanda's view thus represents the second demarcation of intentional consciousness, the twofold structure (二分說). Between Nanda's twofold structure and Husserl's *noesis-noema* dichotomy, a parallel can be drawn.

Nanda's twofold structure, scrutinized by later Yogācārins like Dinnāga (c. 500s), cannot fully resolve the problem of recollection. If consciousness encompasses only the seeing act and the seen phenomenon, how can we recollect mental events that have passed?[23] To remedy the issue of recollection, Dinnāga reintroduces *svasaṃvitti* which serves as the underlying flow from which all conscious acts arise and perish. This results in his threefold structure (三分說) – consciousness continuously flows as the underlying process *qua svasaṃvitti-bhāga* (自證分) which gives rise to the seeing act *qua darśana-bhāga* and the seen phenomenon *qua nimitta-bhāga*. Here, we can discern a similarity between Dinnāga's threefold structure and Husserl's *ego-cogito-cogitatum*.

20 Here, I would like to provide a short history of Chinese Yogācāra. This Buddhist doctrine has been brought to China ever since the Northern-Southern Dynasty period (420-589). Back then, Yogācāra Buddhism was represented by two teachings, the "Samgraha" or "Shelun攝論" in the north initiated by Paramārtha (499-569), and the "Dilun地論" (Daśabhūmikā) in the south founded by Bodhiruci (arriving in China in 508). These teachings were named after the major Buddhist texts they revered, the *Mahāyānasamgraha* and *Daśabhūmika*. Due to socio-historical and sectarian issues, Shelun and Dilun found their readings of Yogācāra incompatible with each other. Debates constantly occurred among clerics of these two teachings on the nature of the eighth and seventh consciousness, on the proper understanding of consciousness-only, and on the definition of Buddha nature. Facing the confrontation of these two teachings, Xuanzang (602-663) was convinced that the Buddha's true teaching had not yet been transmitted to China. He thus determined to travel to India to study Buddhism. After completing his study in Nalānda temple, Xuanzang returned to China in 645. He tried to promote what he learned in India to the Chinese by translating countless Buddhist texts. Translation is always self-reflexive. In Xuanzang's case, he was not only passively receiving the theories from Indian Yogācāra masters but also creatively imbueing in his translation his own understanding of the Yogācāra doctrine of consciousness. His new translation thus marked the divide between early Yogācāra in China, namely, Samgraha and Daśabhūmikā, and later Yogācāra represented by Xuanzang's Dharmalakṣaṇa School (法相宗). Supported by the Emperor, the Dharmalakṣaṇa School thrived in the late 600s and developed its own lineage. Early Yogācāra however was gradually absorbed by the Huayan School of Buddhism. After the Great Prosecution of Buddhism in the 800s, Chinese Yogācāra declined. Fortunately, Xuazang and Kuiji recruited several Japanese and Korean disciples so that Chinese Yogācāra, its teaching and scriptures, survived inside Japanese monasteries till today, among them Kōfuki-ji. In the late 1800s, Yang Wenhui (1837-1911), with the help of his friend Nanjō Bunyū (1849-1927), brought back to China several Yogācāra texts together with many other scriptures that had been long lost. These texts laid the foundation for the revival of Buddhism in modern China. During this revival, numerous remarkable Buddhist scholars and scholar monks emerged, among them Lü Cheng (1896-1989) and Taixu (1890-1947). Lü, after comparing Buddhist texts in various languages, argued that the divide between early and later Yogācāra was more than a difference in translation. Rather, this divide represented fundamental different understandings of consciousnesses inside the Yogācāra school both in India and in China (Lü, "Collected Writings", 73). I will expound on this divide later in this paper.

21 T43N1830, P242a25.

22 T31N1585, P10a22-23.

23 T31N1585, P10b8.

Nevertheless, Dinnāga's disciple Dharmapāla (c. 550s) poses the question about the knowability of the underlying process, *svasaṃvitti-bhāga*. Dharmapāla contends that all consciousness is immediately aware of its own movement and then there should be a fourth part called "awareness of self-consciousness" or the *svasaṃvitti-saṃvitti-bhāga* (證自證分). As per Dharmapāla, whenever consciousness transforms itself, we are immediately aware of such transformation. This fourfold structure of *svasaṃvitti-saṃvitti-bhāga, svasaṃvitti, darśana-bhāga*, and *nimitta-bhāga* is that which Xuanzang and his disciples support.

Unlike Husserl or any modern philosophers who demarcate sensation and intuition from conceptualization, Yogācārins metaphorize these cognitive faculties as eight different types of consciousness. The first five consciousnesses pertain to our five senses that arise and perish from time to time. These senses, more often than not, are discontinuous. Thus, to produce knowledge, these five senses must rely on the sixth consciousness or the mind that is capable of synthesizing and conceptualizing all sense data. Nevertheless, even the mind does not endure throughout time. There are times when we lose the sixth consciousness in a comatose state or in deep sleep.

The temporary loss of the sixth consciousness does not affect the continuous flow of our experience. When a patient wakes up from a coma or when we are awakened from deep sleep, we lose neither our entire life experience nor our cognitive capacity. Thus, Yogācārins presume that there must be some more underlying conditions that sustain the function of the first six consciousnesses. To secure the functionality of the sixth consciousness or mind, Yogācārins affirm the existence of the seventh consciousness called *manas* that ceaselessly transform throughout time.

All these seven consciousnesses further depend on the eighth consciousness, *ālaya*. To describe *ālaya,* the Yogācārins adopt a figurative terminology. They compare the eighth consciousness to the storehouse of seeds (*bījā*). The image of the seed epitomizes what we call in modern language the idea of possibility. A seed can grow up into a plant when it lives in proper conditions such as climate, nutrition, and cultivation. Yet, a seed can also remain in its nascent state without being able to grow up. Analogically, our experience of certain events persists as a possibility. When all the conditions are fulfilled, we can realize such experience. Yet, this possibility might also stay latent, never able to come into being. By formulating *ālaya* as the storehouse of seeds, Yogācārins *ipso facto* indicate that this eighth consciousness serves as the condition for all the possibilities of experiences throughout endless time. From this conception of *ālaya*, I infer the transcendental argument that is an integral part of the explicative level of the Buddhist phenomenology in the Yogācāra sense.

Hence, for later Yogācārins, not only can all these consciousnesses transform themselves into *darśana-bhāga* and *nimitta-bhāga,* but each consciousness is also reflexively aware of its own transformation. Such an architectonic of consciousness allows later Yogācārins to account for the way in which this self-aware transformation raises an open possibility both for forming and removing attachments. While the dual role of transformation remains nascent in Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, it becomes a crucial constituent in Yogācāra's Buddhist phenomenology.

4 The Yogācāra explication of self-attaching and self-emptying

In our everyday life, we have a very natural way of perceiving our 'self'. Sometimes we express it in language by uttering propositions such as "I am a coffee person", "I don't like grocery shopping", or "I'm into cats, not dogs". Or, we perform certain kind of actions without keeping in mind the "I"-proposition. This is always the case when I wake up every day at seven o'clock in the morning, make my coffee, feed my cats, and go to work. We have inhabited this lifestyle so deeply that we almost forget the implicit "I" narrative. I am the maker of my life story, so I must possess an immutable identity *qua* the "I".

Buddhists categorize our view of the immutable "I" as Essentialistic[24] to which they attribute the cause of suffering. In Buddhist terminology, this Essential nature of things to be *sui generis*, permanent,

24 To distinguish the Buddhist notion of *svabhāva* from Husserl's conception of essence, I decided to translate *svabhāva* into Essence with the capital E. For Husserl, as explained earlier, essence is the ideal sense constituted by subjective ideality. Since essence can be constituted, it is not the *svabhāva* or Essence contested by Buddhists.

and immutable is called *svabhāva* (自性). Once we condition ourselves to this *svabhāvic* view of ego, we naturally attach to this fixed self-identity. Attachment subsequently leads to suffering. I suffer when I, a coffee person, cannot get my coffee in my workplace. Or, I suffer when I, who hate grocery shopping, must go to the supermarket. Or, I suffer when I should get up earlier at five o'clock. Suffering, thus, does not always have to be propositional knowledge. It could also exist just as emotions or afflictions.

The questions Yogācārins intend to answer are why most of us are inclined to presume our ego to be *svabhāvic,* how this presumption leads to attachments, and how attachments can be removed. At the explicative level, Xuanzang and Kuiji clarify the way in which the transformation of consciousness gives rise to the possibility of forming and removing self-attachments. In what follows, I will focus on the self-attachment which has been further classified by Xuanzang and Kuiji into the embodied self-attachment (俱身我執, *sahaja-ātmangrāha*) and the discriminative self-attachment (分別我執, v*ikalpita-ātmangrāha*).[25]

The first type of self-attachment is characterized as "embodied" insofar as it accompanies us so long as consciousness transforms itself in our bodily experience. As per Xuanzang and Kuiji, in our experience, the eighth consciousness *ālaya* turns itself into the subjective act *qua darśana-bhāga* and the phenomenon or *nimitta-bhāga*.[26] Likewise, our bodily experience is possible because *ālaya* transforms itself into a lived body in the subject sense and a corporeal body in an objective sense. When I am cooking, I hold the ladle, constantly stirring the soup. By 'I', I'm *de facto* referring to my body as the subject of these actions of cooking, holding, and stirring. Suddenly, I feel the pain from my thumb. I look down, realizing that I cut myself earlier when chopping the meat. In my recollection, I perceive my body as something objective. For Yogācārins, our experience of our subjective and objective body is grounded in the incessant transformation of *ālaya*. To illustrate such perpetual transformation, Yogācārins compare *ālaya* to the waterfall, namely, the dynamic flow throughout our entire experience.[27] In this depiction of *ālaya* as the condition for the possibility of bodily experience, we again infer Yogācārins' transcendental argument.

For most sentient beings including humans, we are inclined to misperceive this perpetual transformation of *ālaya*. This misbelief subsequently gives rise to the embodied self-attachment. Yogācārins attribute the cause of this embodied self-attachment to the sixth and the seventh consciousnesses. *Manas*, the seventh consciousness, targets the subjective body transformed from *ālaya* and falsely imagines this subjective body as a stable identity.[28] The six consciousness, while receiving data from the first five senses about the objective body transformed from *ālaya,* tends to conceptualize the objective body into *svabhāva*.[29] After miscomprehending *ālaya*'s perpetual transformation as a stable self-identity, we become permanently attached to our ego.

This embodied self-attachment captured by Yogācārins amounts to our sense of self-sustainment. Since I am the maker of my own life story, I can and must maintain this narrative. This sense of self-sustainment explains how we have inhabited in our self-centered life story. When I get up every day to make my coffee, to feed my cat, to dress myself, and to go to work, I am self-reflexively aware of my life, too unique to be experienced by others. Habitual feelings creep into our experience, further cultivating and reinforcing my embodied self-attachments. Yogācārins compare this cultivation to perfuming – while *ālaya* stores the seeds for the experience of self-attachments, this seed will not grow up unless it has been perfumed or nourished by our delusion of the self.

From the embodied self-attachment, the second self-attachment, namely the discriminative self-attachment, derives. After confirming the immutable self-identity in bodily experience, we continue to secure our egocentric life-story by differentiating ourselves from others. The criteria of differentiating can be either material such as height or weight, or, ideological like cultural, social class, or just fashion taste.[30] When I proclaim to be a MacBook person, I deliberately identify myself with MacBook lovers, distinguishing

25 T31N1585, P2a10.

26 *Ālaya* can transform into three types of objective phenomena: the seeds or all the possibilities of experiences, our corporeal body, and the external world (T31N1585, P10a13-14).

27 T31N1585, P12c5.

28 T31N1585, P2a13.

29 T31N1585, P2a14.

30 T31N1585, P2a21.

myself from others such as Samsung or Thinkpad users. The way in which I distinguish myself from others alludes to the second type of self-attachment, the discriminative self-attachment. For Yogācārins, only the sixth consciousness is capable of establishing criteria to distinguish ourselves from others.[31]

Unlike early Yogācārins, Xuanzang and Kuiji do not ascribe the cause of attachment to the transformation of consciousness *per se*.[32] All consciousnesses transform. That is how consciousnesses are. What eventually leads to that *svabhāvic* worldview is the misunderstanding of this transformation. As previously mentioned, the sixth and the seventh consciousnesses are both capable of falsely imagining *ālaya* as a fixed identity.[33] This imagination further encourages us to polarize our egos with others and keeps reinforcing such self-identify throughout social interactions. Xuanzang compares our continuous reinforcement or cultivation to the perfuming of the seeds of self-attachments in the eighth consciousness. Perfuming thus nourishes attachments that eventually pollute consciousnesses.

In the meantime, the transformation of all consciousnesses also preserves the possibility for removing attachments. Two factors contribute to this possibility. First, all consciousnesses are aware of their own transformation into the act of seeing or *darśana-bhāga* and the seen phenomenon or *nimitta-bhāga*. For instance, *manas* is self-aware of the entire process when *manas* falsely imagines the subjective body transformed from *ālaya* into a svabhāvic entity. *Mutatis mutandis*, the six consciousness possesses the self-awareness of its misperception of the objective body transformed by *ālaya*. Now that consciousness is self-aware, we can know how false imaginations arise. This knowledge makes it possible for us to avoid false imagination, to remove attachments, and to purify consciousness. Yet, as previously mentioned, the first six consciousnesses are discontinuous. If so, how can we purify the consciousnesses when they are not in function? How can we purify previously polluted consciousnesses? These questions lead us to the second factor, the perpetually transforming *ālaya*. Given that *ālaya* serves as the condition for the possibility of all experiences throughout time, it stores all past events and ensures the re-rising of discontinuous consciousnesses. Consequently, even when the first six consciousnesses are not functioning, even when some events have passed away, the incessant transformation of *ālaya* still allows us to purify the polluted consciousnesses. In short, given that consciousnesses are all self-aware, what can be polluted by *us* can also be purified by *us*; due to the perpetuity of *ālaya*, it is never too late for *us* to embark on such purification.

To purify consciousnesses, Yogācārins establish norms for religious practices and moral actions. Once devotees realize that things are empty of any *svabhāvic* nature, they will comprehend the interdependence between the self and others. This comprehension further evokes their non-egoistic compassion for all sentient beings. By conducting altruistic deeds, devotees reversely cultivate and reinforce their realization of emptiness. As Xuanzang documents in the *Siddhi*, the purified seventh consciousness becomes the wisdom of equality (平等性智) through which we see ourselves as equals to other beings. Likewise, the purified sixth consciousness turns into the wisdom of wondrous observation (妙觀察智) which enables us to view the interdependence between humans and everything else in the external world.

5 The Yogācāra explication of emptiness and its metaphysical implications

As analyzed in the previous section, to remove self-attachments, Yogācārins argue for self-emptying. What is this experience of self-emptying? How can we describe this worldview in which we realize emptiness? These questions propel us to explicate the meaning of emptiness and its metaphysical implications. This elucidation allows me to clarify the Yogācāra worldview which I term transcendental idealism which correlates subjective ideality with objectivity reality. This clarification further contests the current interpretation of Yogācāra philosophy and then prepares me to argue for the importance of subjectivity or agency at the prescriptive level of the Buddhist phenomenology in the Yogācāra sense.

31 T31N1585, P2a19.
32 T31N1585, P45c26.
33 T31N1585, P45c26.

A typical answer to those questions is to equate emptiness with a void. Emptiness thus amounts to the doctrine in which nothing exists. Yet, if the self does not exist at all, who is going to conduct all the religious performance and who is going to realize emptiness and compassion? Both Xuanzang and Kuiji criticize the equation of emptiness with a void. As Kuiji explains, emptiness (*śūnyatā*) differs from empty (*śūnya*) because the affix "-ness" or "*-tā*" in Sanskrit denotes a very positive understanding of the ultimate nature of things in the cosmos.[34] Kuiji continues to define emptiness as the nature of things being empty from *svabhāva*.[35] As Xuanzang documents in the *Siddhi*, after we remove attachments, the transformation of consciousness continues although we no longer falsely imagine such transformation as *svabhāvic*.[36] This experience of emptiness thus is to embrace the continuous arising and perishing of events, to be interdependent with each other, and to live life as it is. Such experience parallels to what Husserl proclaims, 'back to the things themselves' and 'seeing them as they really are'.

To clarify the metaphysical implication of the experience of emptiness as such, I turn to the three-nature framework by which Yogācārins[37] portray the process from recognizing how we false imagine the transformation of consciousness through the falsely imagining nature (*parikalpita-svabhāva*), to understanding the transformation of consciousness through the all-dependent nature (*paratantra-svabhāva*), and eventually to realizing emptiness through the ultimate nature (*pariniṣpanna-svabhāva*).

Later Yogācārins, such as Dharmapāla and Xuanzang, do not negate the existence of transformed phenomena. For them, what can be perceived must have a distinct kind of existence, even though such existence is not ultimately real. In Chinese, Xuanzang refers to such existence of transformed phenomena as seemingly real (虛實) or nominally existing (假有, *prajñāptisat*).[38] For instance, the subjective body and objective body which we falsely imagine to be *svabhāvic* in our embodied self-attachment or discriminative self-attachment have nominal existence.[39] However, our seventh and sixth consciousnesses misperceive this nominal existence to be the *svabhāva*. Thus, it is not the transformation of consciousness, not the nominal existence of these transformed phenomena, but the misconception of transformation that causes attachment. In this way, to realize the ultimate empty nature of things does not involve nullifying transformation but requires us to refrain from misconception. Now that transformation is not to be nullified, the second all-dependent nature also has its specific way of existing.

What is the metaphysical implication delivered by later Yogācārins through their articulation of emptiness and the three-nature framework? First, regarding objective reality, later Yogācārins refuse to generalize such existence as the *svabhāva* even though they affirm the momentary existence of transformed phenomena. Hence, for them, reality is not exhausted by consciousness. Nor is reality mind-independent insofar as the perception of reality requires consciousness. Husserl expresses a similar view of reality. If we can misperceive reality, we can also correct this misconception, or in Yogācāra terms, purify this misconception.

To encourage devotees to practice, Yogācārins do not negate the existence of subjectivity. Rather, they affirm the existence of subjectivity or agency (the latter being more practical), even though this subjectivity is not a *svabhāvic* ego. The agency can give rise to yet can also remove attachment. As previously mentioned,

34 T43N1830, P234c20.

35 T43N1830, P234c21.

36 T31N1585, P56a10.

37 While all Yogācārins endorse this three-nature theory, the way in which it has been interpreted in early Yogācāra differs from that in later Yogācāra. Early Yogācārins such as Nanda or Sthiramati, while focusing on the transformative act of consciousness, conceive of transformed phenomena to be generative and thus to have no existence (T31N1604, P613b14-16). Since all objective phenomena are transformed by consciousness, consciousness exhausts objective reality. In modern philosophical language, early Yogācāra embraces a metaphysical idealism. Due to this metaphysical view, early Yogācārins attribute attachments to the transformation of consciousness *per se* – transformation gives rise to duality and duality further empowers attachments. Since all consciousnesses transform, they all can dichotomize and can falsely imagine. Since what is transformed from consciousness does not exist, the transformation as such likewise does not have real existence. Thus, for early Yogācārins, the second nature does not exist. Once we realize that duality is generated from transformation, we can liberate ourselves from suffering by removing duality.

38 T31N1585, P59a8.

39 T31N1585, P1a20.

the possibility for us to remove attachment is secured by both the self-awareness of consciousnesses and the perpetual functioning *ālaya*. What characterizes this subjectivity or agency, for which both polluting and purifying consciousnesses is possible, is ideality.

Thus, at an explicative level, later Yogācārins have clarified the correlation between subjective ideality and objective reality: on the one hand, objective reality is neither exhausted by consciousness nor mind-independent, and on the other, subjective ideality is not a higher identity or a substance. Through the transformation of consciousness, subjectivity ideality determines the way in which reality appears as a phenomenon with its distinct sense. Sometimes, such determination nourishes false imagination and then attachments. Yet, this determination also reveals the way for us to remove attachments and to go back to the things themselves. Husserl coins this subject-object correlativism as transcendental idealism. Thus, Yogācārins are neither scientists of mind nor nihilists who renounce the world. Rather, Yogācārins are believers of the Buddha's teaching of emptiness. They perform religious actions through which they can eventually realize emptiness and compassion. In this sense, transcendental idealism for later Yogācārins is not only a worldview but also a norm, not only an explication of what we see but also a prescription of what we should do.

6 The Yogācāra prescriptions for self-emptying and its religious performances

In the Yogācāra doctrine of consciousness, the experience of emptiness is gradually realized through performing various religious practices. At the prescriptive level, Xuanzang articulates five phases for devotees to eventually realize emptiness and compassion. He depicts in great detail about the experience of each phase known as the path (位，*mārga*).[40] Unlike Yogācārins, Husserl does not concern himself with religious practices. After formulating transcendental idealism to secure objectivity in subjective mind, Husserl accomplishes his project. Contrariwise, for Yogācārins, to demonstrate their fidelity to the Buddha's teaching, they continue to prescribe rules for devotees to realize emptiness in understanding and in practice. This examination of the prescriptive level, I contend, will demonstrate the importance of agency in the process from self-attaching to self-emptying. Agency further illustrates the crucial role of faith in Buddhism.

In the first path known as the path of accumulation (資糧位, *saṃbhāra-mārga*), devotees make the determination to follow the Bodhisattva's way, to realize emptiness and compassion.[41] Devotees in this path are accumulating energy or karmic grain by carrying out altruistic deeds and familiarizing themselves with the wisdom of emptiness.[42] Though devotees start the practice of meditation and insight (止觀, *śamatha-vipaśyanā*),[43] they are incapable of purifying false imagination from consciousness, thus unable to remove attachments such as the embodied self-attachment or the discriminative self-attachment. Nevertheless, these deeds fortify devotees' fidelity to the Buddha's teaching, preparing them for the next phase of practice.[44]

The karmic energy enables devotees to enter the second path called the path of preparation (加行位, *prayoga-mārga*)[45] at which devotees will scrutinize the nature of conceptualization in meditation and insight.[46] They will understand that our *svabhāvic* perception of the self or any other object in the cosmos is incorrect.[47] However, as per Xuanzang, intellectual speculation can only remove discriminative attachments such as the discriminative self-attachment, not embodied attachments of the self and of other things. Thus,

40 T31N1585, P48b11.
41 T31N1585, P48c1.
42 T31N1585, P49a17-18.
43 T31N1585, P49a2.
44 T31N1585, P48c3.
45 T31N1585, P49a27.
46 T31N1585, P49b7.
47 T31N1585, P49b11.

the second path does not bring a follower the ultimate realization of emptiness.[48] Devotees shall proceed to the third path of seeing (見道位, *darśana-mārga*).

At the third path of seeing, emptiness for devotees is no longer a subject matter for speculation but an underlying principle of life.[49] By practicing a more profound type of meditation, devotees will see thing as they really are, as different yet interdependent.[50] Even though consciousness still transforms itself, devotees no longer treat transformation through a clear-cut category but become one with the transformation in each moment of life.[51] Xuanzang describes this state as "being born in Maitreya's home and living in a delightful land".[52] This analogy shows how devotees become bodhisattva themselves after following the path. Till then, every moment on earth for these devotees is free from mental affliction and suffering, every moment being like the most desirable in the delightful land. They are not only awake from their egocentric lives but also see others as their equals. It is in this third path that the sixth and the seventh consciousnesses eventually purify themselves from the embodied attachments and discriminative attachments. The sixth consciousness evolves (轉依, *āśraya-parivṛtti*) into the wisdom of wondrous observation[53], the seventh consciousness into the wisdom of equality.[54]

In the fourth path of refinement (修習位, *bhāvanā-mārga*), religious performances for devotees become increasingly more altruistic.[55] While continuing to refine their own realization of emptiness, devotees are motivated to conduct the ten perfections of actions (勝行, *pāramitā*) to benefit and help others.[56] These deeds reversely purify their consciousness.

When devotees purify all consciousnesses, they proceed to the last path, the ultimate level (究竟位, *aśaikṣā-mārga*).[57] Devotees eventually turn all polluted consciousness into the pure wisdom.[58] Aside from the aforementioned purified sixth consciousness or the wisdom of wondrous observation and the purified seventh consciousness called the wisdom of equality, the eighth consciousness *ālaya* evolves itself into the wisdom of perfection (大圓鏡智),[59] the first five consciousnesses into the wisdom of accomplishment (成所作智).[60] These four kinds of wisdom, namely, the wisdom of perfection, the wisdom of equality, the wisdom of wondrous observation, and the wisdom of accomplishment, not only bring about the awakening of devotees but also benefit all sentient beings by actualizing the pure dharma realm.[61] *Āśraya-parivṛtti* (轉依) or the evolution of basis thus indicates the way in which devotees turn the polluted world into a pure one. This implication alludes to, I conjecture, the modern concept of 'Pure Land on the earth' in humanistic Buddhism.

Xuanzang and other Yogācārins contend that devotees need various *kalpas* to travel through each path. In the Buddhist context, each *kalpa* lasts for four billion years. This time span is beyond human imagination. *Kalpa,* I suggest, can be understood as an artistic way of highlighting the ideal existence of a purified dharma realm (which can become real in the future if devotees strive for realizing it). By stressing the long process of awakening emptiness and compassion, Yogācāra clergy do not purport to intimidate devotees. Rather, they remind devotees of the importance of faith and persistence when embarking on the arduous journey towards awakening. The stress of faith for devotees in their practice of realizing emptiness and compassion demonstrates the religious aspect of the Buddhist phenomenology in the Yogācāra sense.

48 T31N1585, P49c5.
49 T31N1585, P50a5.
50 T31N1585, P50b11.
51 T31N1585, P50b20.
52 T31N1585, P50c14.
53 T31N1585, P56b16.
54 T31N1585, P56b20.
55 T31N1585, P50c22.
56 T31N1585, P51a21.
57 T31N1585, P52b9.
58 T31N1585, P50c20.
59 T31N1585, P56b7.
60 T31N1585, P56b26.
61 T31N1585, P57b27.

7 Conclusion

Since Husserl is concerned about the crisis of meaning in modern Europe, he stops his investigation of consciousness at transcendental phenomenology, through which he secures objective meaning with subjective consciousness. Husserl is thus confident that transcendental idealism can remedy naturalism. He further implies that transcendental phenomenology can establish a meaningful worldview for modern humans. For Yogācārins, such meaning stems from our understanding of objects that appear as phenomena for us but also from our engagement with these objects in everyday life. To put it differently, a meaningful life is not only viewed by us but also lived by us. Yogācārins, who cherish their distinct motive for examining human consciousness, stress the performative side of transcendental idealism and the role of faith in performances.

Nevertheless, though coming from completely different cultural-historical contexts, why do both Husserl and Yogācārins endorse a very similar worldview, known as transcendental idealism in modern terms? It would be inappropriate to assert that Yogācārins anticipate Husserl's phenomenology or to assume that Husserl is influenced by Yogācārins. While Yogācārins are not precursors of Husserl's phenomenology, Husserl did not, at least according to currently available resources, read any Yogācāra texts.

I propose understanding this mutual interest in the ultimate nature of consciousness as a shared concern for existence – how consciousness shows the correlation between mind and the world so much so that we can find a way of navigating life and coping with an existential crisis like suffering. Through their investigation, they discover the way in which consciousness correlates the subjective mind with the objective world. As Husserl argues, we ensure objectivity through subjectivity. It is through consciousness that humans can reconnect themselves meaningfully with the world. Yogācārins further indicate that subjectivity gives us an open possibility. It can either obstruct objectivity by nourishing attachments or secure objectivity through removing attachments. This open possibility thus yields the importance of faithful practice through which we gradually see things as they are and realize the wisdom of emptiness and non-egoistic compassion. Both Husserl and Yogācārins thus insightfully pinpoint the ultimate nature of consciousness as the mind-world correlation. They remind us that our consciousness is not a brain in a vat or a ghost in the machine, not a realm that is closed off from the outside. Rather, through consciousness, we can go back to the things themselves and see them as they actually are. Yogācārins further expound the way in which faithful practice and performances will eventually enable us to realize the wisdom of emptiness and compassion. This prescriptive level not only demarcates Yogācāra Buddhism from Husserl's phenomenology but also characterizes the religious aspect of the Buddhist phenomenology in the Yogācāra sense.

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