Yoga and Vijñaptimātra Theory

—Establishment of the Asallakṣaṇānupraveṣopāya, the Way to Enter into Nonexistence of Both Object and Subject—

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When we take up Yogācāra thought, we are apt to focus on the ālayavijñāna theory or the trisvabhāva theory. But it seems that the most important idea of the Yogācāra school is that of vijñaptimātra—that all things, including every objective thing and phenomena, are just images which appear in the mind or are made by the mind, and that nothing exist in the outer world. For this idea they have also called the Cittamātra school. They practised yoga (śamatha and vipaśyanā) in order to attain nirvikalpa-jñāna. And the idea of vijñaptimātra has an important role in yoga. The way to attain nirvikalpa-jñāna of the Yogācāra is called the asallakṣaṇānupraveṣopāya, the way to enter into nonexistence of both object and subject.

The purpose of this article is to trace how in the Yogācāra school the idea of asallakṣaṇānupraveṣopāya first appeared and how it developed.

The Śrāvakabhūmi and the Bodhisattvabhūmi of the Yogācārabhūmi do not yet mention the idea of vijñaptimātra in yoga (śamatha and vipaśyanā), although great importance is attached to the pratibimba (reflection or image) in yoga, which is a reflection of any real object in those texts.

In chapter 8 of the Saṃdhinirmocanasūtra, it is stated that the pratibimba is a reflection of the mind itself, the pratibimba itself is object and
every objective thing are just mind. It explains that nirvikalpañāna is gained through a yoga grounded on the idea of viññaptimātra. However the asallakṣaṇāṇupraveśopāya is not yet established.

Although the Mahāyānasūtrakāra does not use the expression asallakṣaṇāṇupraveśopāya, it is implicit in the text. It is explained as follows. Through considering the meaning of viññaptimātra deeply in yoga, bodhisattvas understand that objects of recognition do not exist; therefore when object does not exist, the subject which cognizes it, too, does not exist. The asallakṣaṇāṇupraveśopāya also is regarded as the prayogamārga, the way of preparation for penetration of truth, or nirvedhabhāgiya, the situation conducive to penetration of truth. It consists of four degrees, that is, uṣmagaīta (becoming warm), mūrdhan (summit), kṣānti (patience), and laukikāgradharma (most preeminent degree in the worldly situation).

In the Madhyāntavibhanga the discussion of the asallakṣaṇāṇupraveśopāya is almost the same as that found in the Mahāyānasūtrakāra. However there are some differences in the way they demonstrate the nonexistence of both the object and the subject.