The Intent and Structure of Yogācāra Philosophy: Its Relevance for Modern Religious Thought

John P. Keenan
Middlebury College

Yogācāra philosophy developed long ago in a far away land to answer questions that were then relevant. Together with Mādhyamika, it laid the basis for subsequent Mahāyāna thinking. But it did not arise in a cultural vacuum. Rather it followed upon and was called forth from the Mādhyamika refutation of Abhidharma conceptualism. The Mādhyamika focus upon emptiness and dependent co-arising and the negation of the validity of all views whatsoever left more theoretically inclined Buddhist thinkers in a quandary. The perception of Nāgārjuna's "Middle Path" as overly negative and leading to feelings of despondency, which is reported in the *Ratnagotravibhāga* (Takasaki, pp. 305-6), elicited a rethinking of the meaning of emptiness and dependent co-arising, a rethinking that issued in the Yogācāra synthesis.

Yet, despite the fact that it constitutes one of the main streams of Mahāyāna Buddhist thinking, it is not always immediately obvious that it retains relevance in the context of modern religious discourse, especially Western discourse. Indeed, the task of unravelling the meaning of Yogācāra texts issues at times in disappointing results. As with all philosophies, Yogācāra is embedded in its own cultural and rhetorical Indian context. Its forms of argumentation presuppose the consensual background of fourth and

fifth century Buddhist India. To one not convinced of the validity of Indian Buddhist cosmology, with its three worlds, or of the literal validity of transmigration through the six destinies, much of the proofs for the container consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*) are simply unconvincing.

One of these proofs given in the *Mahāyānasaṃgraha* argues from the "fact" that rebirth into a higher realm is accompanied with a progressive chilling of corpse from the feet to the head, while rebirth to a lower realm chills downward (Lamotte 1973; Nagao, 1.42). Although such forms of argument had, no doubt, some punch in their original *sitz-im-leben*, they leave modern readers somewhat unmoved.

Even in medieval China and Japan, among believers who did accept that consensual background, the classical Yogācāra teachings seem not to have engaged much native philosophical response. The doctrinal discussions on Yogācāra in China focused on questions elicited from the Chinese Buddhist context, such as the validity of the three vehicles vs. the one vehicle, or the existence of a pure (*amala*) consciousness. It seems at times that Yogācāra thinking provided answers for questions not asked in China. The case in Japan is even more instructive, for here Yogācāra was transmitted almost without significant change, a fact which suggests that it did not elicit much creative response on the part of medieval thinkers in Japan.

By contrast, the center of modern Yogācāra study is clearly Japan, where a host of excellent textual studies and interpretations continue to be produced. In the West, although there have been and are good textual studies by eminent scholars, such as Lamotte, de la Vallée Poussin, Schmithausen, etc., there are few attempts to relate Yogācāra thinking to present day religious thought and

it remains largely unknown in wider philosophical and theological circles.

The question urges itself on us: Can Yogācāra be reclaimed as a viable way of philosophizing in the modern world? Or is it merely of historical interest as an important, but now no longer relevant, aspect of Buddhist doctrinal development?

It is the contention of this paper that it is relevant to modern thinking, not indeed in all its rhetorical and cosmological forms, but in its overall intent and structure. Yet a reclaiming of that relevance necessarily involves a reinterpretation of classical Yogācāra thought. Every living philosophical endeavor constantly stands in need of such reinterpretation and can only be reclaimed within the living content of the reinterpreter in response to felt needs and new, or at least current, questions.

Statement of the Thesis

The present thesis is that the basic intent of Yogācāra philosophy is to develop a scriptural and critical hermeneutic in a context of emptiness and that its structural themes of the other-dependent nature of conscious interiority and the three patterns of conscious understanding are meant to lay the foundation for that hermeneutic.

Yogācāra aims at developing a hermeneutic, i.e., a method for interpreting doctrine and adjudicating truth-claims. In its opening section the *Saṃdhi-nirmocana* highlights the confusion that arises from conflicting truth-claims and focuses on the problem of illusory argumentation, describing those who cling tenaciously to verbal descriptions as "confronting one another and arguing fiercely, emitting barbed, pointed, captious, angry, vicious comments, without

any hope of ever reaching a definitive conclusion" (Lamotte 1935, 2.1).

That hermeneutic is scriptural, i.e., it is based on the sūtras and focuses on understanding their meaning. The constant attempt of the Yogācāra masters was to uncover and interpret the meanings presented in the scriptures.

It is also a critical hermeneutic, i.e., focused not simply upon the texts of the scriptures as something to be understood (*jñeya*), but upon the consciousness that understands (*jñeya-āśraya*). In the West such critical philosophy is generally thought to have begun with Immanuel Kant and flowed from there to influence most of continental philosophy. Its aim was to critique and clarify the implicit structures and forms of understanding necessary to all understanding. In parallel fashion, the Yogācāra masters consciously developed a critical understanding of religious consciousness more than a thousand years before Kant, an understanding that focuses upon the inner structure and operations of understanding and not just the content understood.

But that scriptural and critical hermeneutic was developed in a context of emptiness, i.e., in awareness that beings have no supporting essence that might be imagined and clung to as validating a naively objective view of understanding, that they are dependently co-arisen. The Yogācāra thinkers taught not just that things in the world are interdependent, but that the very genesis of meaning in its own arising is dependently co-arisen. The notion of dependent co-arising is brought to bear upon conscious interiority, for the normative value of the subject-object dichotomy is negated and mind comes to be and falls away in dependence on its own other-dependent structure.

The main themes of Yogācāra philosophy were meant to ground and validate this scriptural and critical hermeneutic by explicating the underlying

nature of the consiousness that understands. The theory of the evolutions of consciousness (*vijñāna-pariṇāma*) attempts to show the interdependent nature of understanding whereby illusion arises and thus, by reversal, how illusion may be abandoned. The theory of the three patterns (*trisvabhāva*) strives to show that the basic other-dependent pattern of consciousness accounts both for the genesis of illusion and the possibility of its reversal into awakening and wisdom. Thus the three patterns present the *gestalt* of consciousness, both true and illusory.

Intent of Yogācāra Thinking

The classical Yogācāra thinkers aimed at developing a hermeneutic that might interpret the meaning of the scriptures within a critical understanding of emptiness. The classic source for such a hermeneutic is found in the *Saṃdhinirmocanasūtra* (*Scripture on the Explication of Underlying Meaning*), the foundational Yogācāra scripture. In its teaching on the three turnings of the Wheel of Doctrine, it states:

> The Bodhisattva Paramārthasamudgata said to the Buddha: "In the country of Benares at Ṛṣipatana in the Deer Park the Bhagavat first turned the Wheel of Doctrine, demonstrating the Four Noble Truths for the followers of the Word Hearers' Vehicle. This turning of that Wheel was marvelous and wonderful, such as nobody, whether gods or men, had ever turned before in the world. Nevertheless, there were superior doctrines. This [first turning] gave rise to criticism, had to be interpreted, and became an object of controversy. Then the Bhagavat with an implicit intention turned the Wheel for the second time for the sake of the followers of the

Great Vehicle, explaining that all things are without essence, do not arise, are not destroyed, are quiescent from the beginning, are originally in cessation. Nevertheless, there were teachings superior to this, for it also gave rise to criticism, had to be interpreted, and became an object of controversy. Then the Bhagavat with an explicit intention turned the Wheel a third time for the sake of the followers of all vehicles, explaining that all things are without essence, do not arise, are not destroyed, are quiescent from the beginning, are originally in cessation. This turning of the Wheel is absolutely marvelous and wonderful. It is unsurpassed, does not give rise to criticism, is explicit, and does not become an object of controversy" (Lamotte 1935, 7.30).

This passage highlights the Yogācāra understanding of meaning and its interpretation. The first turning of the Wheel includes the teachings of early Buddhists and of the Abhidharma theoretists, both of which focused on the Four Truths. These teachings are characterized as imperfect and in need of the Prajñāpāramitā negation that all things are without essence and empty. They need to be interpreted, *neyārtha*, for their meaning (*artha*) needs to be drawn out (*neya*), since they have not rendered explicit nor identified the ground upon which their meaning is established. But even the second turning of the Wheel, Prajñāpāramitā, as well as its Mādhyamika presentation, did not make this ground explicit and it too must be interpreted, for it did not identify the ground for its negations. Instead, its teachings also remained an object of controversy and criticism. It is only the third turning, Yogācāra, that is beyond such controversy, for it is precisely the explication of the ground within conscious interiority for the meanings affirmed in teachings. It is critically explicit

(*nitārtha*) because the ground for its meaning (*artha*) has been drawn out (*nita*) in the Yogācāra understanding of consciousness. Note that this third turning does not differ form the second in terms of content, for the same themes are repeated in both. Rather Yogācāra intends to be a critical grounding of the insights of the Prajñāpāramitā and Mādhyamika teachings. It is a drawing out and a making explicit of the doctrinal discourse of those earlier texts. Yogācārā is not then a higher teaching, but an explication (*nirmocana*) of the underlying meaning (*saṃdhi*) of the scriptures.

Asaṅga in his *Mahāyānasaṃgraha* summarizes the Mahāyāna teaching, i.e., his understanding of the intent and structure of Yogācāra, as aimed at the development of hermeneutic:

> If one desires to explain the teaching of the Great Vehicle succinctly, he should explain it in three points: (1) a presentation of dependent co-arising; (2) a presentation of the character of dependently co-arisen states; and (3) a presentation of the meaning of what has been declared [in the scriptures] (Lamotte 1973; Nagao, 2.32).

The first point refers to the Yogācāra analysis and reinterpretation of the meaning of dependent co-arising as the interdependence between the container consciousness and the active consciousnesses and constitutes the first chapter of Asaṅga's text. The second, comprising the second chapter, continues the analysis in terms of the three patterns. The third point introduces the Yogācāra theme that from these first two points one can evolve a hermeneutic whereby to interpret the meaning (*artha*) of what has been declared (*ukta*) in the scriptures by the Buddha. Indeed the *Saṃdhinirmocana* and Asaṅga's *Mahāyānasaṃgraha* constantly interpret the meaning, often implicit, of various pre-Mahāyāna and

Mahāyāna scriptures. The passages immediately following Asaṅga's above passage reinterpret the qualities of a Buddha and the goals of a Bodhisattva; their importance, however, is not so much in their content, but in the fact that such a reinterpretation is consciously performed. Thus when Asaṅga interprets the presentation of the meaning of what has been declared (*ukta-artha-nirdeśa*) as the elucidation of what had already been declared by means of subsequent discourse, he seems to have had in mind the above passage from *Saṃdhinirmocana*, i.e., a critical Yogācāra interpretation of basic Mahāyāna themes.

This hermeneutic is scriptural. The classical Yogācārins based themselves upon the scriptural tradition. They insisted that it is necessary to hear and ponder the scriptures in order attain conversion to wisdom. In his *Mahāyāna-saṃgrahopanibhandana*, Asvabhāva reports the Buddha as insisting that one must first read the collection of the scriptures before being able to understand the teachings (Lamotte 1973; Nagao, commentary to 3.1) When Asaṅga attempts to demonstrate the existence of the container consciousness in his *Mahāyānasaṃgraha*, he claims that it is already taught implicitly in the Āgamas (Lamotte 1973; Nagao, 1.10-11). The entire Yogācārā endeavor is grounded and based upon the scriptures and its hermeneutic is aimed at interpreting scriptural discourse.

But one must not merely read the scriptures and categorize their teachings. It is equally important to understand the intention with which they were preached. Asvabhāva again in his *Mahāyānasaṃgrahopanibhandana* explains:

> Up until now, explanations of the meaning [of the scriptures] have not taken into consideration the intention of [their] author. But it is in taking

> into consideration that intention that one should explain the meaning of what has been declared (Lamotte; Nagao, commentary to 2.33).

It is the Yogācāra meditational practice and the understanding of consciousness that issues therefrom which allows one to uncover this intention, for it is only such a critical understanding of religious understanding that grounds doctrinal discourse within consciousness as generating meaning. The point is treated by the *Saṃdhinirmocana:*

> Through a wisdom born from [hearing] the doctrine, the Bodhisattvas base themselves upon the words [of the scriptures], take the text literally and do not yet understand the intention.... Through a wisdom born from reflecting [on that doctrine], the Bodhisattvas do not base themselves upon the words or take the meaning literally and do understand the intention.... Through a wisdom born from meditation, the Bodhisattvas either base themselves on the words or do not, either take the text literally or do not, but, in understanding the intention, they see the heart of the matter through images understood in concentration (Lamotte 1973; Nagao, 8.24).

The point is not to take the words themselves as containing meaning but, through the experience of concentration (*samādhi*), to understand the meaning those words were intended to express, i.e., to duplicate the wisdom of the Buddha and become awakened. Only when one has to some extent understood this intention is it possible to do valid textual study (no matter how well philologically researched). A literalistic method of interpreting scripture is thus rejected as being another example of the imagined pattern of understanding, for it would cling to words as if meaning were a property of speech, rather than a function of understanding. But, after having understood that intent, then

one can stick close to the text or recast it in other terms as appropriate, for concentration has led one into the heart of the matter, into a personal and immediate experience of ultimate meaning.

Thus the Yogācāra hermeneutic is drawn from the practice of concentration and focuses upon the understanding of religious meaning, both silent and enunciated, ultimate and conventional. It is not merely the result of logical reasoning or textual study. In the West, hermeneutic questions arose from considerations of literary analysis and have frequently been opposed to religous practice. But in the monasteries of Buddhist India, the above method of interpretation flowed from an understanding in the religious practices of meditation and concentration. The *Saṃdhinirmocana* explains that meditation has four kinds of content:

> The first is that content accompanied by images for reflection. The second is that content not accompanied by images for reflection. The third is that content which extends to the limits of being. The fourth is that content which fulfills duty (Lamotte 1973; Nagao, 8.).

Here the imageless content is direct, unmediated awareness of ultimate truth. The image-accompanied content is awareness of conventional truth. But such awareness does not function in isolation, as if it were unrelated to ultimate truth. Thus the third and fourth relate to the embodiment of wisdom in concrete thought and practice, for conventional truth issues not only from an awareness of ultimate truth, but also extends to all possible cultures and languages in order to fulfill the duties of compassion. The longest section of *Saṃdhinirmocana*, Section Six, entitled "An Analysis of Centering," depicts the process of this meditational practice and describes how it issues in awareness of the meaning

of doctrine, thus highlighting its central importance.

Furthermore, this hermeneutic is also critical, focusing on an understanding of conscious understanding. It is from the awareness gained in such meditative states that the Yogācārins evolved their theory of conscious construction only (*vijñapti-mātra*). The refrain that all meaning units are only conscious constructs (*sarvadharmāḥ vijñapti-mātra*) is meant both to affirm the negation of essences and of any theory based upon such essences (in quietude there is no image that could occasion such imaginings) and to ground doctrinal discourse within an understanding of other-dependent consciousness as constructive of mediated meaning through insight into image and through verbalization of immediate experience. The term *vijñapti* (conscious construction) is an abstract noun formed from causative root of the verb *vi-jñā*, to know, and denotes that which causes knowing to occur. It thus comes to mean a sign or symbol that brings about knowing, such as a letter imparting information. In its technical Yogācāra usage, it means that which causes conscious knowing to occur, and thus it is the mental construction of ideas and words whereby conventional meanings are brought about and mediated to others. The fact that such constructed ideas and words are not impressed upon the mind through the causality of external essences is emphasized by the term *mātra*, only. Thus, the theory of conscious construction-only means that meanings occur through ideas constructed within the mind without any appeal to the imagined realities of confrontational knowing. Interpretation then bears upon the constructed meanings expressed through the scriptures and not upon the very nature of ultimate truth itself, which is always ineffable and silent. But, as mediated through words, doctrines are subject to intelligent and rational analysis.

This hermeneutic is carried out under a number of themes, the first of which is that of the double truth (*satya-dvaya*). Here the truth of ultimate meaning (*paramārtha-satya*) transcends all reasoning, for it is not a meaning brought about through any conscious operation. It is attained only in a quietude that must be experienced by each individual (*paraspara-vedanīya*); it does not function through images (*animitta-gocara*); it is ineffable (*anabhilāpya*); it severs all expression (*vyayahāra-vyucchedaka*); and it severs all disputation (*vivāda-vyucchedaka*). Thus, while Yogācārins are insistent on the utter ineffability and transcendence of ultimate truth beyond all language, yet they raised conventional truth (*saṃvṛtti-satya*) above commonsense pointers to occupy a limited, but valid, role in presenting the meaning of teachings. They argued that, once consciousness is converted from the imagined pattern, it can engage in true and proper reasoning upon the teaching of the scriptures and skillfully embody that teaching in ever new forms of doctrinal discourse.

The Structure of Yogācāra Philosophy

Yogācāra inherited the themes of emptiness and dependent co-arising (as well as the two truths) from the Prajñāpāramitā scriptures and the Mādhyamika philosophy. Mādhyamika dialectic was directed against the assertion that essences in things grounded an objective view of their reality. The constant opponent against whom Nāgārjuna argues is a naive realist.

Yet, a problem occurs here in regard to the reclaiming of Mādhyamika thinking for present day religious discourse, for today hardly anyone argues in these terms. In its actual presentations (such as in the *Mādhyamikakārikā*) engaged in dispute with realist thinkers, Mādhyamika tends to offer arguments

that have little resonance or cogency to non-realist thinkers. Western philosophy, whether continental or analytical, does not base itself upon any theory of realism. Thus since Mādhyamika is presented in contrast to a form of logical reasoning no longer employed, it seems to itself be dated. To disclose the inadequacies of realism one might as well, and for a Westerner more profitably, read Heideigger, Derrida or any of other Western philosophers. Is Mādhyamika then passé? Is it opposed merely to particular philosophic theories, no longer held, of ancient India? Here Yogācāra thought might be of use in clarifying the fact that the Mādhyamikan "opponent" is not merely a dated realist, but the tendency present in everyone to "extra-vert" (turn outward) meaning upon things, to construct self-enclosed metaphysical systems (even in existentialist terms). Yogācāra philosophy in its understanding of the container consciousness presents a more critical awareness of the source of essence-clinging. Thus it can help to clarify and reclaim the richness of the Mādhyamika understanding.

The Evolutions of Consciousness (vijñāna-pariṇāma)

The Yogācāra explanation of the development of consciousness centered on the container consciousness in its constant interplay with the active consciousnesses (*pravṛtti-vijñāna*) of thinking (*manana*) and perception. The notion of the container consciousness marks the inital thrust of Yogācāra into the realm of conscious interiority. Nāgārjuna had criticized all verbal attempts at explanation as fabrication (*prapañca*) based on clinging to essences (*svabhāva*). The *Saṃdhinirmocana* profers its understanding of the container consciousness as a critical insight into the genesis of such illusory fabrication.

It describes all conscious experience as based upon the synergistic evolutions of the container consciousness and the active consciousnesses.

> From the very first instance [of the birth of sentient beings] the maturation, evolution, unification, increase and growth of their mind, together with all its seeds, depends on two appropriations. The first is its appropriation of the material senses with their bodies. The second is the appropriation of the propensity toward verbal fabrication (*prapañca*) in discriminating images and words (Lamotte 1935, 5.2).

These two appropriations function in unison. It is because one has a body and sense organs that a propensity toward verbal fabrication occurs. Just as one distinguishes one's own body from that of others, just as sensed objects are seen as over against the sensing subject, so essences are seen as discrete meaning units over against the knowing subject. Implicit in the sense base of knowing is a tendency to find meaning as units "out there" apart from the "in here" of consciousness itself. Thus the *Saṃdhinirmocana* grounds fabrication in the biological response of sense knowing to external stimuli, a response that takes the sense pattern to be normative for all understanding. The assertion of essences is then not just one particular theory among others, but a general extroversion of consciousness whereby one "extra-verts" meaning upon images and words, creating "views," whether theoretical and metaphysical or common sense and unsophisticated.

Asaṅga's *Mahāyānasaṃgraha* makes the same point. A questioner grants that immaterial objects, like the images constructed in concentrated states, are only conscious constructs, but doubts that the same applies to material things, which are perceived as solid and perduring. Asaṅga answers that the mistaken

assumption of the reality of external, material objects underlies all the other illusions of mistaking immaterial objects as essences. He further adduces a quotation from the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* which affirms that confusion in regard to material objects is the reason for the engendering of illusion in regard to other, immaterial things (Lamotte 1973; Nagao, 2.9). The quoted verse identifies the cause for all illusion as *bhrānter nimitta*, which here seems best rendered as "images of confusion," i.e., images of external things which are assumed to contain meaning in themselves and without the occurrence of insight. Again the basis for the genesis of illusion is the presence of images sensed as apart from oneself and therefore solidly perduring and essential.

Underlying the active consciousnesses of thinking and perceiving is this basic pattern of biological extroversion. The seed impressions in the container consciousness form habitual proclivities to cling to imagined meanings as if they represented an assured reality. Furthermore, as the active consciousnesses function in such a pattern, they engender new seeds which are deposited in the container consciousness in an ongoing cyclical process of mutual dependence.

The container consciousness itself is then a store of unmediated and karmically formed experience which, being mediated through "realistic" words appears to validate the pattern of its connatural biological extroversion. It is programmed to assume that external meaning units (*dharmas*) correspond to its internal knowing, and thus that there is a real subject who knows real objects. It constantly mistakes the appearance of images to be the manifestation of realities, thus generating an assumed world of essences.

In this notion the Yogācāra thinkers offer a critical understanding of the

underlying genesis of fabrication, an understanding of the mind-set that generates a truth-clinging to objects deemed not to be empty. Thus the theme of the evolutions of consciousness figure prominently in any attempt to understand doctrine, for doctrine itself can be mistakenly understood in an imagined, extraverted manner, issuing in a truth-clinging that in its fundamentalist attachment obviates further insight.

The Three Patterns

The Yogācārins inherited the two themes of emptiness and dependent co-arising and reinterpreted them in their analysis of the three patterns of consciousness: the imagined pattern, the other-dependent pattern, and the fully perfected pattern. The illusory, imagined pattern (*parikalpita-lakṣaṇa*) of consciousness is empty of any reality, for it is a grasping at imagined meaning units (*dharma-svabhāva*), as if the presence of a named image signified the reality of a corresponding real essence over against the knower. This imagined pattern arises from within the basic pattern of consciousness as other-dependent (*paratantra-lakṣaṇa*) and sees external reality as a necessary component for gaining insight into image—external reality being regarded as the analogue of the inner reality of the subject. It takes the sense pattern of knowing to be obviously valid for all understanding. So, just as one can test vision by grasping the object seen, it imagines that one can validate objective reality by grasping the essences apprehended. But that subject-object dichotomy is not normative and does not validate an assumption of naive realism. Rather, consciousness dependently co-arises in the seeming appearance of subject and object, for it is structured by the appearance of insight

(*darśana*) and image (*nimitta*).

The foundational container consciousness functions as a store of conceptually and verbally unmediated karmic experience, acting in synergy with the active consciousnesses that do mediate those experiences in thoughts and ideas. There is then a mutual dependency between base experience and verbally conceptualizing upon that experience, for each causes the other. In addition, consciousneess is other-dependent because it does appears as image and insight. Images are presented from the senses, but do not in themselves issue in meaning, for imagination is not constructive of meaning. By itself, imagination merely imagines (*abhūta-parikalpa*) without in any way being able itself to understand or judge the status of images. It is only the occurence of insight into those images that constructs meaning. Without insight, however, images remain uninterpreted pictures. Without images, there is nothing to interpret. The erroneous assumption that those imagined pictures are already endowed with their own meaning precludes understanding and awakening, for it aborts the process of gaining insight before it can begin. Thus the third, fully-perfected pattern (*pariniṣpanna-lakṣaṇa*) is precisely the absence of the imagined pattern within the other-dependent pattern. It is the conversion of consciousness to wisdom and awakening.

Yogācāra is a critical reinterpretation of the prior, Abhidharma pre-critical notion that all things arise in dependency on one another, for it locates that co-arising within the other-dependent structure of the genesis of conscious meaning. It is a reinterpretation of emptiness because it reinterprets emptiness in the framework of the three patterns as the true character of all imagined realities, i.e., their non-being. It is aimed at grounding both the awareness of

the Prajñāpāramitā and Mādhyamika thinkers and the theoretical exigency of the Abhidharma philosophers within an examination of conscious interiority and at evolving a hermeneutic for interpreting religious discourse.

Relationship between Structure and Intent

The above structure of Yogācāra thinking is meant to ground the hermeneutical intent of understanding the meaning of the scriptures, i.e., the intent of the Awakened Buddha. In explicating the genesis of fabrication, the Yogācāra masters were identifying the source of defiled, illusory understanding. In the three patterns they were sketching the basic nature of consciousness as other-dependent, thereby enabling one to understand not only defilement but also purification. The Yogācāra hermeneutics then comes full circle to include not only the meaning of scriptures heard and reflected upon, but also the understanding of the hearer. No scriptural fidelity can be of value without a conversion of support (*āśraya-parivṛtti*), i.e., a conversion of consciousness from the imagined pattern of truth-clinging to the perfected pattern of reaffirmed other-dependent understanding. No parikalpitan understanding of philology or history can issue in understanding the meaning of texts. Rather, in awareness of the constant presence of historical and language factors influencing all verbal and constructed understanding, one becomes free to interpret the text either literally or not, as befits the needs of the situation, both to do solid textual study and to reinterpret its meaning in the light of ever changing circumstances.

Such a hermeneutic is relevant to modern religious thinking, especially thinking concerned with questions of interpretation. Since mediated meanings

are all constructed by conscious insight into image, the Yogācārins affirm a host of valid, if delimited, discourses on the ineffable truth of ultimate meaning and silence, while guarding constantly against the projection of metaphysical essences as if they constituted an absolutely correct "view" of truth.

In sum, Yogācāra philosophy is intent on developing a hermeneutic of emptiness by critically explicating the underlying structure of conscious understanding. Its hermeneutic is both scriptural and critical because it is based on the *sūtras* and grounded in critical understanding of the evolutions of consciousness and its three patterns of operation. It would then seem both advisable and profitabe to reclaim Yogācāra philosophy and introduce it more cogently into a broader context of religious thinking. Its principal themes must, however, be culled from the particular cultural context of the Indian, Chinese, and Japaese masters, for it cannot be cogently presented in its traditional garb. The rethinking of these base themes is itself a practice of Yogācāra hermeneutics: a wrestling with the ever new questions of religious meaning and the age-old quest for wisdom and awakening.

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