

# The Three Natures Theory and the Idea that There is No Object in Consciousness-Only:

*Madhyānta-vibhāga* and *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha*

HYŌDŌ Kazuo

Originally the three natures theory was not a necessary component of consciousness-only philosophy. Hence it is important to reconsider the texts of Yogācāra Buddhism by focusing on how they depict the relationship between the three natures theory and consciousness-only philosophy. This will also help us to clarify the original significance of the three natures theory as well.

I have already published several articles on the three natures theory in the early Yogācāra school with such issues in mind. In this paper, I consider the three natures theory in the *Madhyānta-vibhāga* and Asaṅga's *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha*, focusing on the relation between this theory and the notion that there is no object in consciousness-only.

The three natures theory in the *Madhyānta-vibhāga* is developed by connecting it closely with the modes of being and non-being in false discrimination. Here, based on the position that there is nothing but false discrimination, i.e., the standpoint of consciousness-only, the true unerring expression of all dharmas is presented.

(1) *Parikalpita-svabhāva* is the “object” that appears through false discrimination and “is always non-existent.” It is the object of false discrimination which manifests itself in four forms: object (six sense objects), sentient being (five sense faculties), self (*kliṣṭa-manas*) and manifest consciousness (six consciousnesses). In this case, one of the above four — object, sentient being, self and manifest consciousness that appear as the object of false discrimination — manifest itself as object to be grasped (object of grasping) and one of the four above corresponding to it manifests itself as the grasping subject. In this way, the subject which

grasps and the object which is grasped are distinguished and discrimination arises. Therefore, if we take the term “object” in the verse of the *Madhyānta-vibhāga* in a wide sense, it is possible to say that both the object which is grasped and the subject which grasps are *parikalpita-svabhāva*.

(2) *Paratantra-svabhāva* is “false discrimination itself.” This is because false discrimination arises from other causes and does not exist in itself. Moreover, “although it exists, it is not real.” This is false discrimination as delusion. Therefore, *paratantra-svabhāva* as false discrimination does not just indicate the subject which grasps. Furthermore, even though *paratantra-svabhāva* as false discrimination is said to contain *śūnyatā* fundamentally it is understood to be defiled.

(3) *Pariniṣpanna-svabhāva* is “the fact that the subject which grasps and the object which is grasped (*parikalpita-svabhāva*) do not exist in false discrimination (*paratantra-svabhāva*).” It is devoid of the duality of grasper and grasped. The same thing is called *śūnyatā*.

Based on the idea of consciousness-only, Asaṅga’s *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha* holds that the *ālayaviññāna* is the support of all things. It holds that the three natures theory is the truth that should be learned, and argues that non-discriminating knowledge is attained by understanding the three natures.

(1) *Paratantra-svabhāva* is one of eleven manifest consciousnesses included in false discrimination. It is divided into the defiled portion and pure portion. *Paratantra-svabhāva* that is manifested as the defiled portion refers to the manifest consciousness revealing itself as *nimitta* and *dṛṣṭi*. *Paratantra-svabhāva* that is manifested as the pure portion refers to the manifest consciousness which is not manifested as *nimitta* or *dṛṣṭi*.

(2) *Parikalpita-svabhāva* is the object when *paratantra-svabhāva* (eleven consciousnesses) manifest themselves as defiled. To be more specific, it refers to the *nimitta* and *ākāra* that *dṛṣṭi* has which is the object of *paratantra-svabhāva* that is manifested as the defiled portion.

(3) *Pariniṣpanna-svabhāva* is *paratantra-svabhāva* manifested as the pure portion. Here the manifest consciousness is not manifested as *nimitta* or *dṛṣṭi*, but is manifested as *tathatā*, *dharmtā* or *śūnyatā*. Non-discriminating knowledge as understood by Aśaṅga is non-*ākāra* knowledge.

(4) Aśaṅga himself does not discuss the relationship between the three natures and pure knowledge of worldly things attained after gaining insight into emptiness.