

The Buddhist World-View as Elucidated in the Three-Nature Theory and Its Similes

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MAGIC SHOWS, performed on roadsides, stages, and elsewhere, have been popular in India since ancient times. The magician, by using some material such as wood, stone, or grass, by casting magic spells, and by other devices, produces his illusions and conjures up fierce animals such as tigers or elephants, which appear to the audience and frighten them by pretending to attack.

The magic show appears in Buddhist texts as an illustration for the view which holds that worldly things are not real but only appear to be so. It is also used to elucidate the so-called "three-nature theory" (*tri-svabhāva*)¹ which was expounded and elaborated by the Yogācāra school of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The magic show is cited to illustrate that a magically-created form, while devoid of substance, still appears clearly to the eyes of the audience. The three-nature theory was systematized by the Yogācāra school to illustrate what it believed to be a similar feature in the world at large: the apparent reality of what is actually non-existent and empty (*śūnya*).

In this essay, I would like to discuss briefly the main features of the three-nature theory, and to examine several of the similes (*upamā*) which have been used to illustrate it. I hope to clarify the characteristics of the general

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¹ The term "three-nature" is sometimes replaced by "three-characteristic" (*tri-lakṣaṇa*); the implication remains virtually the same. Main sources of the theory are: *Saṃdhinirmocana-sūtra*, Chapters VI–VII; *Yogācārabhūmi-viniścayasamgrahaṇī* (Taishō xxx, p. 703a ff.); *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṃkāra*, XI.13, 38–41, etc.; *Madhyāntavibhāga*, Chapter III; *Trisvabhāva*; *Triṃśikā*, kk. 20–24; *Cheng-wei-shih-lun*, chūan 8–9.

theory, the characteristics of each of the individual natures, and the relationship between the three. This should help to elucidate the Yogācāra view of the world as it is explicated by this theory, a *Weltanschauung* of a sort peculiar to Buddhist philosophy.

I

According to the Yogācāras, all beings, whether psychical or physical, can be comprehended within these three states of existence, which in this context are called “natures,” *svabhāva* in Sanskrit. Everything in the world possesses these three natures. They are: 1) *parikalpita-svabhāva* or the imagined nature, 2) *paratantra-svabhāva* or the other-dependent nature, and 3) *pariṇiṣpanna-svabhāva* or the consummated nature.

The names given to these categories seem to have been selected not from a single consistent viewpoint but rather from several different viewpoints, epistemological, ontological, soteriological, and so on. Therefore it may be better to explain first the general meanings and usages the three terms have.

The word *parikalpa* means in Buddhist usage “imagination” with a common implication of falsity; hence its cognate word, *parikalpita*, “imagined.” The past participle form, *parikalpita*, even suggests attachment (Hsüan-tsang’s Chinese translation of the term 遍計所執 conveys this). When one (falsely) imagines something and becomes attached to it, the reality and existence of the thing imagined are negated. The “imagined” nature, therefore, is characterized by ‘unreality’ and ‘total nonexistence.’

In contrast to this, *pariṇiṣpanna* or “consummated” means perfect, real, and existent; and connotes ‘reality,’ ‘truth,’ ‘real existence,’ or ‘the absolute.’ It does not mean that this reality exists in an ontological sense or that it is to be perceived epistemologically. It is a reality completely perfected or “consummated” by a practitioner through arduous practice. This implies that the world of reality and truth should not be imagined to exist independently in a transcendental manner outside this ordinary world; the ordinary everyday world becomes real and true only when it has been “consummated.” Hence a translation such as “consummated,” which conveys this fact, seems preferable to a more direct interpretive rendering such as ‘truth’ or ‘absolute.’

The imagined nature on the one hand, which is nonexistent, and the consummated on the other, which is real and existent, stand as direct

opposites. Between them is the third nature, called *paratantra*, the "other-dependent." It exists, but only by depending on some other entity. *Paratantra* stands opposed to the idea of *svatantra*, which means self-dependent, independent, and hence absolute. It is relative and characterized by 'relativity.'

The three-nature theory holds that the world is constituted of these three natures. This does not mean that the world is divided into three divisions or parts, and that these three components make up the world. Neither does it mean that there are three separate and different worlds. According to the three-nature theory, the world remains at all times one and the same, appearing on different occasions to possess one of the three natures. While various different worlds exist, the world of human beings, the world of animals, or the heavens, the hells, and so on, according to the three-nature theory this fact is understood and explained as the one unchanging world being converted into these various other worlds; those various other worlds do not exist from the first.

It must be emphasized that the world remains one and the same at all times. This is the world which is dearest to us, the world into which we are born, in which we are to die, and in which we are now living. It is always this world with which we are concerned, not some other world outside and beyond it, though we might believe otherwise.

Now let me explain the three natures one by one in more detail. This one unchanging world is originally neither contaminated nor purified, but rather neutral, just like the world which a scientist deals with as the object of his research. However, insofar as our interaction with this world occurs directly or instinctively, like an animal, without reflection or self-consciousness—that is, insofar as we are not yet enlightened to its reality but remain in a deluded state—we speak of this world as a world of the imagined nature; it is an imagined world. Through our cognitions, or discriminations, or intellect, we are always projecting some kind of imagination (which is always false imagination from the Buddhist point of view) onto the world that is originally neutral. This projection of false imagination changes or "contaminates" the world. People become attached to this contaminated or imagined world, thinking that it is the real world. This attachment gives rise to all forms of human suffering, discontent, conflict, defilement, and so on. In short, this contaminated world to which people become attached is the world of *samsāra* which the Buddha declared to be full of suffering. The imagined world, then, appears upon the change,

conversion, or turnabout of the world from a neutral, pure, uncontaminated state to an impure, imagined, contaminated state.

The sages and enlightened ones also live in this one, unchanging world. But, because they are enlightened and are free of all false imagination and attachment, for them, the world is no longer imagined and contaminated; it is pure and "consummated." The world in which they live their lives differs in no way from our world. For them, too, summer is hot and winter is cold; willows are green and flowers are red.² Due to their deep insight and detachment, however, only the pure and real world is manifested to them; the imagined world does not appear. It is in this sense that the one, unchanging world is referred to as possessing a "consummated" nature. It is "consummated" in the sense that it has assumed a nature of perfection owing to the long, assiduous training of the enlightened sages. In other words, the consummated world is established anew by them. It is not established independently outside of this world; it is the very same world, thoroughly transformed and purified. Although the *sahā-lokadhātu*, the world system in which we are born, is the Buddha-land of the Buddha Śākyamuni, it appears to us to be contaminated, with good and bad, wisdom and folly, and so on; this world system is now manifested as the Buddha's "Pure Land" in which all these differentiations disappear, a land whose purity is visible only to those with the eye of a Buddha. This consummated world is the world of *nirvāṇa*.

But what is the constituent nature of such a world, which, although neutral itself, can be transformed into the imagined world of the ordinary being or consummated by the enlightened being as the world of purity? It is the "other-dependent" nature as the constituent of this one unchanging world that makes both the transformation and the consummation possible.

The term *paratantra* (other-dependent) is very closely related to and conveys almost the same meaning as the term *pratītya-samutpāda* (dependent co-origination). According to tradition, the Buddha Śākyamuni acquired his Great Enlightenment by realizing the principle of dependent

² "Willows are green and flowers are red" is a popular Zen saying which denotes the Zen enlightenment or *Satori*. The willows and flowers in this saying are not those belonging to the imagined world, but those viewed by the enlightened ones, i.e., those of the consummated nature. While there is a difference of dimension between the ordinary, mundane level, and the supramundane, still willows remain willows, flowers remain flowers.

co-origination under the Bodhi-tree, and later taught this principle on various occasions. Many scholars regard it as the basic principle of Buddhism. It connotes the idea of the "relativity" of all things, and denies all absolutes, either *ātman*, *brahman*, *prakṛti*, etc., as permanent entities, or *īśvara* as an absolute god. This characteristic of *pratitya-samutpāda* is to be found in the notion of the other-dependent nature. It is owing to this relativity that the world, as Nāgārjuna revealed, is *śūnya* (empty), devoid of the absolute. (Thus, the one unchanging world mentioned above is relative and *śūnya*, and the principle underlying its existence is *śūnyatā* itself.)

A world constituted of the other-dependent nature, the world of dependent co-origination, however, is beyond the scope of ordinary reasoning,³ and thus a world not easily realized. It is realized only by a Buddha, and only as the result of his assiduous effort. Nevertheless, it often happens that an ordinary person, living in the world of the imagined nature, believes that he has grasped the *paratantra* world by the ordinary means of his human reasoning, which, being far from perfect, leads him to become attached to the absolute that he has grasped. He believes his imaginary creation to be true. His belief has great conviction for him. His attachment to his belief, as well as the belief to which he has become attached, are nothing other than the figments of the false imagination referred to above. The other-dependent world (the one unchanging world) is thus transformed into the imagined world. Only when attachment and false imagination are removed is the one unchanging world thoroughly purified and consummated as the pure world; that is to say, the imagined nature has been changed or converted into the consummated nature.

From the discussion above, the other-dependent nature can be understood to be the "basis" (*āśraya*)⁴ for the other two natures; it is the "basis" in its capacity as the essential relativity. On this "basis" of the other-

³ In this sense, it is not strictly identical with the world dealt with by a scientist; it is realized only upon realization of the consummated world. See below, p. 13 (n. 13).

⁴ *Mahāyānasamgraha*, IX.1: de la hkhor ba ni gzan gyi dbaṅ gi ḥo bo ḥid de kun nas ḥon moḥs paḥi char gtogs paḥo/ /mya ḥan las ḥdas pa ni de ḥid nam par byaṅ baḥi char gtogs paḥo/ /gnas ni de ḥid gñi gaḥi char gtogs pa ste / gzan gyi dbaṅ gi ḥo bo ḥid do / "Saṃsāra is referred to the other-dependent nature in its aspect of defilement. Nirvāṇa is referred to the same in its aspect of purity. The basis is referred to the twofold aspect of the same, the other-dependent nature." With regard to the 'twofold aspect (= two divisions) of the other-dependent nature,' see n. 9 below for the locus of its first appearance.

dependent, the imagined nature presents itself on the one hand as false imagination, which the ordinary person believes and becomes attached to as an absolute. On the other hand, the consummated nature is realized, on the same "basis," by the enlightened. Thus the other-dependent nature is the "basis" upon which the imagined nature and consummated nature both become possible. Therefore, there is neither an independent world of delusion of ordinary unenlightened people, nor an independent world of purification of enlightened sages; the worlds of the imagined and the consummated natures are both relative and interrelated, being based upon and encompassed by the other-dependent nature.

This notion of the "basis" of the other-dependent nature leads us to an idea of "convertibility,"⁵ which describes the relationship between the three natures. The other-dependent world converts itself into the imagined world, or into the consummated world, and vice versa. The principle of "convertibility" (expressed by words such as 'change,' 'transformation,' or 'conversion' in the previous discussion) is a remarkable and important feature of the three-nature theory. It prevails in all the three natures and enables them to constitute one and the same world. Through "convertibility," it is possible for the world to be one and at the same time to possess the three natures. These changes, conversions, or transformations are possible only on the "basis" of the other-dependent nature.

The other-dependent nature functions as a "medium" or "mediator"⁶ also in its capacity as the "basis." It mediates the relationship between the imagined world and the consummated world and thus it makes possible the leap from the former to the latter, the crossing over from this shore to

⁵ "Convertibility" is my term; a Sanskrit equivalent is not readily available. "Convertibility" may include various notions, "change, transformation" (*vikāra, parināma, anyathābhāva*), "turnabout, transmutation" (*parāvṛtti*), etc. Special attention may be drawn to the term *paryāya* which, originally meaning "turning round, revolution; way, manner; opportunity, occasion," and so on, is generally used with a meaning of "synonym," "convertible term." *Mahāyanasamgraha*, II.17 reads: /gzan gyi dbaṅ gi to bo ṅid ni rnam graṅs kyis na (= *paryāyena*) gzan gyi dbaṅ no/ /rnam graṅs kyis na (= *paryāyena*) de ṅid kun brtags paḥo/ /rnam graṅs kyis na (= *paryāyena*) de ṅid yoṅs su grub paḥo/ "The other-dependent nature is on occasion the other-dependent; on occasion the same is the imagined; and on occasion the same is the consummated." In these sentences, the term *paryāyena* ("on occasion") indicates simply what I have called "convertibility."

⁶ "Medium," "mediator," and the like are also notions obtained by extending the function of the "basis." It is not a translation of a Sanskrit term.

the other shore. It is because the imagined and consummated natures both are essentially transformations of the other-dependent nature that the imagined world can become the consummated world through the medium of the other-dependent.

The Buddhist's ultimate concern is enlightenment, or reaching the world of *nirvāṇa* by ridding himself of the world of *saṃsāra*. Salvation, liberation, and enlightenment refer to a "crossing over" from this shore to the other shore. From the viewpoint of the three-nature theory, it is a crossing over from this imagined world to the consummated world yonder. To this extent, only the imagined and consummated natures would seem to be the ultimate concern. Actually, the dualistic view—the dualism of the deluded world and the purified world—plays a great role in most religions.

However, a bridge that will link the two worlds, a boat that will carry one across the ocean from this shore to the other, often remains as a problem. It is sometimes even said that such a link is entirely lacking in our world, because the gap between the two worlds is so despairingly deep that no conceivable human effort would be sufficient to enable one to leap over the gap or to build a bridge across it. Although most religions believe or operate under the assumption that such a bridge exists, they have rarely substantiated their claims upon a firm logical basis. It goes without saying that, insofar as it is the Buddhist's concern to get to the other shore, a bridge must exist. Actually, in the history of Buddhism, such a bridge has been postulated in various ways; one such instance is the Mahayana understanding of *pāramitā* ("perfection") as *pāram-ita* ("reached to the other shore"). But what is the fundamental principle that enables the bridge to be postulated? The three-nature theory, especially through the other-dependent nature which functions as the "basis" of and the "mediator" between the imagined and the consummated, supplies an answer to this question.

Crossing over is possible only in the world of the other-dependent nature; it is not possible either in the imagined world, wherein everything is false, or in the consummated world, where the problem of crossing over, having already been overcome, no longer exists. The jump from the imagined world to the consummated world, at least from a purely theoretical point of view, cannot take place in a direct way. The abyssal gap which yawns between them is too deep and too wide. The jump must be made indirectly via the other-dependent world.

There are in Buddhism some well-known old sayings such as, "*saṃsāra*

is identical with *nirvāṇa*" or "defilements are themselves enlightenment." In the ordinary sense, *samsāra* can never be *nirvāṇa*; defilements (*kleśa*) are the very opposite of enlightenment (*bodhi*). They should never be confused or identified. And yet those enigmatic sayings have flown out from the very fact of enlightenment; they represent directly the deep insight and profound intuition of the enlightenment experience; they are enlightenment itself. In these sayings two contradictory, opposing situations are identified directly, without mediation by something else.

From a theoretical point of view, however, the crossing over to the consummated world occurs indirectly via the other-dependent nature. That is to say, through the elimination of the imagined world, the other-dependent world is recovered in its original purity; whereupon this recovery⁷ of 'pure relativity' itself turns out to be the consummated world. It is in this way that the other-dependent nature functions as a "mediator." In this manner, the other-dependent nature is proposed by the Yogācāras as the logical "basis" not only for the other two natures but also for the identification postulated in the sayings mentioned above.

The Yogācāras devoted much attention to the investigation of "cognition" (*viñāṇa*). They are also known as the Viñāṇa-vāda or Cognition (-only) school, the theory of "cognition-only" (see below, p. 14-15, n. 16, 18) being one of its major themes. According to the Yogācāras, although 'cognition' is essentially other-dependent, it is in ordinary life always defiled and always appears in the guise of the imagined nature. Hence they regard it as the 'discrimination of the unreal' or 'unreal imagination' (*abhūta-parikalpa*). At the same time, however, they maintain that "this cognition is turned about to constitute the Buddha's wisdom" (轉識得智). This turnabout, the 'transmutation of the basis' (*āśraya-parāvṛtti*) as they call it, is the final goal of the school. In this case, again, the other-dependent nature (of the cognition) functions as the basis for the turnabout or transmutation.

II

Now, let us examine several similes which appear in the Yogācāra texts as illustration of the three-nature theory. The quoting of similes to ex-

⁷ With regard to the notion of crossing over to the consummated world indirectly via the other-dependent world, and the notion of "recovery," see below, p. 13.

emplify abstract theories is a characteristic feature of Indian and Buddhist texts. Similes or examples (*dr̥ṣṭānta*, *upamā*) are regarded as indispensable even for logical syllogisms (*pramāṇa*, *prayoga*). We must be aware, however, that a simile is nothing more than that. Even though it may be helpful for our understanding, it does not necessarily convey the full meaning which the theory intends to clarify.

In the following, I shall examine the "snake-rope-hemp," "gold-ore," and "magic show" similes.

In the first of these, "snake-rope-hemp" simile,⁸ a man encounters a snake lying on a road at twilight, and becomes frightened. He starts to run away but then decides to examine it more closely. A close inspection of the "snake" reveals that it is not a snake after all but a "rope." He realizes that the "snake" is illusory and does not exist; what really exists is the "rope." He is enlightened to the fact that the situation of him seeing a snake was illusory, and imaginary. But he then perceives that the "rope" is also illusory and less than the final reality. It can be analysed into strands of "hemp," or further into elements such as earth, water, fire, and wind, or even further. What exists in reality is thus hemp or elements or atoms, not "rope."

In this simile, the "snake" is, of course, to be equated with the imagined nature, the "rope" with the other-dependent nature, and the "hemp" with the consummated nature. Both "snake" and "rope" are negated to reach the final, substantial reality, "hemp." The simile illustrates well the progressive steps from the imagined "snake" to the "rope," and from the "rope" to "hemp," which is assumed to be the final form of existence. This simile has also been very popular in Sino-Japanese Buddhism, in which, for the sake of convenience, it is called simply the "snake-rope-hemp" simile; there is no mention of elements or atoms. Its significance seems to be somewhat different from the Indian usage discussed above. But I shall return to that later.

In the "lump of clay containing gold" simile⁹ (*kāñcanagarbhā mṛttikā*, lit., "clay as an embryo of gold" (called the "gold-ore" simile here for con-

⁸ *Mahāyānasamgraha*, III.8 (Taishō xxxi, p. 143a). The first two factors in the simile, snake and rope, are often used as a simile for delusion in other schools such as the Mādhyamika, but the third factor, hemp, and the rest, are peculiar to this simile.

⁹ *Mahāyānasamgraha*, II.29 (Taishō xxxi, p. 140c), where the simile is introduced to illustrate the famous theory of "the other-dependent nature having two divisions (= twofold aspect)." The simile appears by name in Mvy 7650.

venience), the gold-bearing ore appears simply as clay, for no gold is visible. When the clay is burned, it disappears and gold becomes manifest.

In this simile, three things are mentioned: the gold-ore, the clay, and the pure gold. The gold-ore represents the 'earth-element' (*prthivī-dhātu*), which is characterized by 'hardness' and which contains the 'seed' of gold. It is equated with the other-dependent nature. The clay, which is the transformed state of gold-ore (i.e., other-dependent nature), represents the imagined nature. The gold, another transformed state of gold-ore, is the consummated nature.

Just as it was the case in the "gold-ore" simile, insofar as the other-dependent world has not yet been burned away by the fire of 'non-discriminative wisdom'¹⁰ (*nirvikalpajñāna*; the highest wisdom, free of discrimination), the whole world remains as the imagined world of ordinary beings. But when burned away by the fire of non-discriminative wisdom, the one world is transformed into the consummated world of the enlightened ones, and the consummated nature is fully manifested.

The manner in which the other-dependent nature functions as a "basis" is illustrated well by this simile, because gold-ore is the basis for both the clay and the obtaining of the gold. From the same train of reasoning, the characteristic of the other-dependent nature as the "mediator" becomes evident. The simile illustrates clearly also the "convertibility" of the three natures—that is to say, the conversion from gold-ore (other-dependent) to clay (imagined), from gold-ore (other-dependent) to gold (consummated), or from clay (imagined) to gold (consummated).

What becomes evident in this connection, however, is that the factor which actuates the conversion from clay to gold—that is, the non-discriminative wisdom that converts the world from the defiled state to the purified state—seems to stand apart from the three-nature theory. Of course, non-discriminative wisdom is designated as belonging to consummated nature, but it is cultivated and achieved through assiduous training pursued on an established path, the logic of which seems to be somewhat different from that of the three-nature theory.

Usually, in ordinary cognition, the two factors of subject and object

¹⁰ While the term non-discriminative or non-dichotomizing wisdom rarely appears in the Mādhyamika texts, it is, together with its counterpart "the mundane (discriminative) wisdom obtained after [the non-discriminative wisdom accomplished]" (*prṣṭhalabdha-laukikajñāna*), one of the most important notions of the Yogācāra school.

are assumed to be indispensable. Non-discriminative wisdom, however, materializes where both subject and object are abolished. How is this possible? When the two epistemological factors, subject and object, are examined in the context of the three-nature theory, a path leading toward this non-discriminative wisdom will be found to open up naturally. That is to say, even when subject and object are held to be originally of the other-dependent nature, the discernment which makes that discrimination, being the cause of false imagination, will perforce be regarded as belonging to the imagined nature. If the cognition becomes free of this discrimination (and hence of the imagined nature) and recovers its other-dependent nature, then non-discriminative wisdom will establish itself with the consummated nature.

Thus, the three-nature theory becomes the basis not only for the conversion of the world through non-discriminative wisdom, but also for the cultivation and perfection of this wisdom.

The final simile is the one I referred to at the beginning of this paper. It is called the "magic show" (*māyā*) simile.¹¹ The word *māyā*, on its primary level of meaning, connotes 'deception,' 'trick,' 'phantom,' or 'apparition'; secondarily, it connotes 'illusion,' 'magic,' 'unreality.' *Māyā*, as the 'unreality' or 'illusory image' of the universe, is a term used widely in almost a technical sense in several Indian philosophical systems. In Buddhism, however, the term *māyā* usually denotes 'illusion' and, more specifically, 'magic show.' In a metaphorical sense, it is used especially as a simile for the three-nature theory, and for the other-dependent nature in particular.

As I stated before, the magician in a magic show takes pieces of wood or other materials, and by employing chemical compounds, incantations, and so forth, creates an elephant, tiger, or some other illusion. The audience is astonished, even frightened, by the magically-created form. But once the magic show is over, what remains on the stage is not an elephant, but the wood or other material that was hidden from the audience throughout the performance. Although the audience is frightened by the magically-created elephant, the magician is not. He remains calm and unmoved throughout, because he knows the truth about the magic and skillful

¹¹ The simile of *māyā* is widely used not only in the Yogācāra but also in other schools for the purpose of illustrating the delusive character of the world. For the simile's special association with the three-nature theory, see: *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*, XI.18-29; *Trisvabhāva*, kk. 26-30.

deception he is working.

The purport of this simile can be summarized as follows. An elephant form appears; but this magically-created elephant is not real; what really exists is the wood or other material. It is not difficult to see which of the three natures these three elements are intended to represent. The words 'an elephant form appears' stands for the other-dependent nature; 'magically-created elephant' stands for the imagined nature which is 'not real'; and 'what really exists is the wood or other material' stands for the other-dependent nature as well as the consummated nature.

The audience is frightened on seeing the magically-created elephant, because they believe that the elephant they are seeing really exists. They believe and become attached to what they see on the stage. This belief, attachment, or imagination is called the imagined nature. Because the audience believe that what is not real is real, their belief is called 'imagination.'

However, no one would deny that an elephant form has appeared on the stage and that this elephant is seen by all. This undeniable fact, which would be acceptable to ordinary people and enlightened people alike, belongs to the other-dependent nature. The wood and other materials the magician employs, and the whole process of making the elephant form appear from these materials, can also be understood to pertain to the other-dependent nature. The form of the elephant is magically created with these materials as its basis, in the manner of dependent co-origination (*pratitya-samutpāda*), and this means that the creative process at work has a nature of other-dependence.

Thus, the appearance of the magically-created elephant and the process by which it was made to appear on the basis of certain materials (both of the other-dependent nature) are events which occur to both unenlightened and enlightened onlookers alike. Yet there is a difference. For the unenlightened ones, the events that occur only serve to expand their imagined world, because they are the causes of their attachment to the world which is originally of the other-dependent nature. For the enlightened ones, such is not the case. The unenlightened ones look at the other-dependent world through colored glasses, as it were, the original other-dependent world appearing to them not as it is, but tinged by the colored glass of imagination. Removing the colored glasses, like burning away the clay from the gold-ore by means of the non-discriminative wisdom, is no easy task, but once it is achieved, then the other-dependent world recovers its

original nature. This recovery of the other-dependent nature is none other than the realization of the consummated nature, as stated before.

The consummated world thus becomes manifested by the recovery of the other-dependent nature. Explaining the notion of the consummated nature, Vasubandhu states in his *Trīṃśikā*:¹²

When the other-dependent nature obtains a state absolutely free of the imagined nature, it is then the consummated nature.

'A state absolutely free,' equated here with the consummated nature, is the 'recovery' I mentioned above. In the "magic show" simile, the magically-created elephant which is not real illustrates the imagined nature, while the fact that what really exists is wood or other material refers to both the other-dependent nature and the consummated nature. The recovery of the other-dependent nature, the wood and so on, thus means that what really exists is manifested. It also implies that the consummated nature is to be realized indirectly via the other-dependent nature.

In the "magic show" simile, the consummated nature is understood also to be the knowledge by which one becomes aware of the totality of events constituting the "magic show"—in other words, of the whole ongoing process of the world. It is the knowledge through which the world is seen simply as a magic show and through which it is understood that there is no elephant, except as an apparition whose nature is other-dependent. The Buddha, who is accomplished in this knowledge of the consummated nature, is compared in the simile to the magician (*māyākāra*), because the magician, like the Buddha, differs from his audience in that he is well aware of the magic show's hidden secrets.

The *Trīṃśikā*, however, goes on to state:¹³

When this is not seen, that is not seen.

Here, 'this' refers to the consummated nature and 'that' to the other-dependent nature. The verse is in effect saying that so long as the consummated nature is not realized, the other-dependent nature cannot be realized either. This is very important in that it reveals that a direct intuitive knowledge of the truth—enlightenment—precedes everything. As

¹² *Trīṃśikā*, k. 21cd: *niṣpannas tasya pūrveṇa sadā rahitatā tu yā*. The English translation is free. Although a short treatise of thirty verses, the *Trīṃśikā* of Vasubandhu is one of the fundamental texts of the Yogācāra-vijñānavāda.

¹³ *Trīṃśikā*, k. 22d: *nādr̥ṣṭe 'smin sa dṛśyate*.

quoted above, through the state of 'being free of' attachment, the other-dependent nature is recovered in its original state, and through this recovery becomes equated with the consummated nature. This indicates a direction from the other-dependent to the consummated. In the verse above the direction is opposite,¹⁴ from the consummated to the other-dependent. Unless the consummated nature is realized, the other-dependent nature cannot be realized truly either, though the latter can be apprehended theoretically by human intellect. It is clear from this that the realization of these two natures is simultaneous. Theoretically speaking, or from a logical approach, the consummated nature may be accomplished indirectly, through the mediation of the other-dependent nature. But the basic fact of the religious experience itself is an essentially direct realization of the truth.

Therefore, the three natures are spoken of in Yogācāra texts as being 'neither different from each other, nor identical to each other.'¹⁵ It should be clear from the magic show simile that the difference between the other-dependent nature and the imagined nature is very subtle and delicate; the former is compared to an elephant form and the latter to an attachment to that form. The difference is established on the basis of whether 'attachment' is operative or not. The difference between the other-dependent and consummated natures is likewise very subtle. When the other-dependent nature ceases to be the cause for the delusory imagination to appear, it is identified with the consummated nature, the difference being whether such a cause is operative or not. The three natures, then, are neither different from each other nor identical to each other; or, rather, they are both different and identical at one and the same time.

Another significant feature of the magic show simile is that it can also be used to illustrate the thought of 'cognition-only'¹⁶ which is fundamental

¹⁴ The opposite direction, from the consummated to the other-dependent, also suggests remarkable Buddhist features such as: a bodhisattva's return from the nirvāṇic world to the saṃsāric world, descending from Buddhahood to bodhisattvahood, from the non-discriminative wisdom to the mundane discriminative but pure wisdom, etc.

¹⁵ Cf. *Mahāyānasamgraha*, II.17; *Trisvabhāva*, kk. 18–21; *Triṃśikā*, k. 22ab, etc.

¹⁶ The term 'cognition-only' (*viññāna-mātra*), or more properly, 'presentation-only' (*viññapti-mātra*), is referred to variously as 'mind-only' (*citta-mātra*), 'discrimination-only' (*vikalpa-mātra*), and so on, but for convenience, the term 'cognition-only' will be used here.

to the Yogācāra school. In the Yogācāra school, the term 'to appear' (*pratibhāsate*, *khyāti*, etc.), a word generally suggestive of the world of magic, is often used to elucidate the term 'cognition' or 'to know.' The *Madhyāntavibhāga*, for instance, states:¹⁷

When cognition (*vijñāna*) functions, it appears as the outer world, individuality, the self, and [various other] presentations.

Here, the term 'cognition' signifies simply that something appears and is seen by us; in this verse, four things, 'the outer world,' etc., appear and are seen. In the case of the magic show, the form of the magically-conjured elephant appears and is seen by the audience, though the real cause for its appearance is unknown to them. What exists in the magic show is the 'appearance-only,' not an elephant. An understanding of 'appearance-only' can lead to an understanding of 'cognition-only,' though it may belong to a lower level.¹⁸ The magic show simile differs from the other

¹⁷ *Madhyāntavibhāga*, I.3: artha-sattvātma-vijñapti-pratibhāsam prajāyate / vijñānam. . . .

¹⁸ It seems that there are different types of 'cognition-only' according to the situations under which it is expounded. *Dharmadharmatā-vibhāga*, IX.7 (section number given by S. Yamaguchi; ed. J. Nozawa, p. 17.7-10) reads:

"Having acquired [the illusiveness of the conceptual discrimination], one realizes the acquisition of the cognition-only. Having acquired the cognition-only, one realizes the non-acquisition of all objects. From the non-acquisition of all objects, one realizes the non-acquisition of even the cognition-only. From the non-acquisition of that, one realizes the acquisition of the non-distinction of the two, the objects and the subject." (My translation)

This is the so-called 'means for entering into the characteristic of non-existence' (*asallakṣaṇānupraveśopāya*) or the 'aid for penetration' (*nirvedhabhāgiya*), and expositions similar to the one quoted here are found in: *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*, VI.7-8; *Madhyāntavibhāga*, I.6-7; *Trisvabhāva*, kk. 35-37, etc. In these expositions, the cognition-only is once established as a realization of truth of a sort, but it is negated the next moment to lead one to a higher position, which is expressed in the above quotation as 'the acquisition of the non-distinction of the two, the objects and the subject,' i.e., the acquisition of non-duality. Cognition-only of this type can be said to belong to a lower level. Apart from this, with regard to the higher level cognition-only, Asaṅga declares in his *Mahāyānasamgraha*, Chapter III, that to realize cognition-only means the realization of the three natures, the ultimate truth. Further, in his *Triṃśikā*, kk. 25d and following, Vasubandhu defines the consummated nature as the state of cognition-only. In these texts, cognition-only is never negated, itself being the highest reality. It is likely that the cognition-only of the lower level is referred to by

two similes in that it combines thus the three-nature theory with the notion of 'cognition-only.'

Apart from the three similes explained above, there are several other also used to illustrate the three-nature theory. The "crystal simile" (*sphaṭika*), for instance, is found in the *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*.¹⁹ When a crystal, transparent and colorless, is placed together with things of various colors, it takes on their colors. If placed with something yellow, it appears as a precious golden stone; people seeing this are deceived and become attached to what they assume to be gold. Here, the appearance and the attachment to the appearance correspond to the imagined nature, the crystal itself to the other-dependent nature, and non-existence of the gold to the consummated nature. I will not, however, explain these other similes in detail; they are, I think, represented sufficiently by the magic-show and gold-ore similes elucidated above.

III

Now, we notice that each of three similes discussed above possess certain implications of their own which may influence somewhat the way in which we understand the characteristics of the three natures.

The "gold-ore" and "magic show" similes illustrate well the 'convertibility' of the three natures. In the simile of the "magic show," the very principle of magic—the fact that there is 'appearance-only' with no real existence—is applied, equally and consistently, to all three natures. Elimination of attachment to this appearance (the imagined nature) reveals directly both the other-dependent nature and the consummated nature. The fact that the one principle remains valid for all three natures indicates most clearly the convertibility of the three natures. 'Convertibility' is also evident in the "gold-ore" simile, but there the other-dependent nature is more cogently exemplified as the 'basis' or 'mediator' for the other two natures. Thus, although the "gold-ore" and "magic show" similes may differ in emphasis, as aids to understanding the world in terms of the three-nature theory, they both enable us to grasp the structure underlying the conversion of the one world into three and the conversion of the three into one.

terms such as *viñaptimātra* or *cittamātra*, while the cognition-only of the higher and ultimate level is named always *viñaptimātrata*, with an affix *-tā*.

¹⁹ *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*, VI.8 (ed. É. Lamotte, p. 61–62; Taishō xvi, p. 693b).

In the "snake-rope-hemp" simile, the principle of 'convertibility' hardly appears at all. It is perhaps possible to say that the relation between the rope and snake is a case of conversion similar to that found in the magic show, but the relation between the rope and hemp is entirely different. 'Hemp,' introduced to illustrate the consummated nature, is in fact a third element totally unrelated to the snake; it has no relation either to the snake delusion or to the elimination of that delusion. The understanding of 'rope' as 'hemp' results not from conversion but from an analysis which concludes that the rope is hemp, and further, elements and atoms. The analytical knowledge of 'hemp' as the consummated nature is far removed from the Buddha's non-discriminative and yet all-embracing wisdom.

The understanding process, which takes place in the realization that the rope is a snake, is 'conversion.' The understanding process which occurs in the realization that rope is hemp, is 'analysis.' In the "snake-rope-hemp" simile, then, the two wholly different principles of 'conversion' and 'analysis' are merely fused together. The simile thus fails to convey the sense of a world supported and encompassed by one dynamic principle. The world it illustrates is not one world but a world of two or three separate parts fused together. The world view of a practitioner who relied solely on this simile would possess no sense of conversion, and consequently, any absolute world he postulated would have to exist somewhere entirely apart from this world of delusion.

The merit of the "snake-rope-hemp" simile is, however, that it illustrates 'phases of spiritual advancement' or 'stages' through which a practitioner advances in the course of his training. First, the illusion of the snake is eliminated by the perception of the rope; then, the rope is analyzed into hemp and negated. These stages of negation and analysis help a practitioner proceed, step by step, to the final stage of *śūnyatā*, absolute negation, which corresponds to the consummated nature.

In this case, however, the other-dependent nature remains simply a stage or a step which connects the imagined nature to the consummated nature. The rope is analyzed into hemp, the hemp into elements, the elements into atoms, and so on. The number of steps is indefinite, the analysis virtually endless. As a result, the world comes to be conceived as being not of three but of many natures. The other-dependent nature can still be assumed to be a step mediating between other steps or stages, but it loses its role as a "basis" from which to construe the steps above and below it.

It may be said that the highest merit of the three-nature theory lies in its having established a systematic and well organized world-view, one which provides a doctrinal foundation for yogic practice. As a simile for exemplifying this world-view, the "magic show" is perhaps the most appropriate. The "snake-rope-hemp" simile, while illustrating the path towards final liberation in terms of the three natures, fails to clarify the organic working of this world-view. To explicate the three-nature theory, the Chinese Fa-hsiang school employed almost exclusively the "snake-rope-hemp" simile. Since most Sino-Japanese interpretations of this theory follow the Fa-hsiang, the world-views they expound mostly lack the organic wholeness depicted in the magic show simile; particularly rare are interpretations which demonstrate the 'convertibility' of the three natures, and the other-dependent nature's role as 'basis.'

To recapitulate, in the three-nature theory a world-view peculiar to Buddhism was developed. The ancient notion of 'dependent co-origination' was integrated into the theory. It was called the other-dependent nature, and was taken as the 'basis' of the world. The other-dependent nature thus occupies the central position in the theory, the consummated nature does not, though sometimes it may be conceived to do so. From this 'basis,' the 'convertibility' of the world, a characteristic of this world-view, is derived. This 'convertibility' explains the world of delusion as a product of the neutral and pure world of the other-dependent nature; it is also the principle which enables the practitioner to make the leap from this shore to the other shore.

Other topics remain to be discussed, in particular the relationship between this theory and fundamental Mahāyāna standpoints such as *śūnyatā* and Middle Way. In this paper, however, my intention was simply to discuss the three-nature theory by way of its similes. It is hoped that, through the discussions above, a general idea has been given of the Buddhist world-view revealed in this theory.