

ORIGINAL PURITY AND  
THE ARISING OF DELUSION

Jamie Hubbard, Smith College

October 31, 2008 (1994)<sup>1</sup>

The varying answers given to the single question of whether the mind is pure by nature or defiled by nature form a convenient lenses through which to view the development of Yogācāra thought. If the mind is pure, then where do the defilements originate? If it is defiled, where does purity originate? Though the classical formulation of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu sees consciousness as *paratantric*, the source of defilement yet only the *support* of purity (an important distinction that necessitates an external source of purity), another view which was taken up by Yogācāran thinkers is that of the originally pure mind (*viśuddhi cittaprakṛiti*); a third schema brings the structure of consciousness together with that purity as seen, for example, within the \* *Mahāyāna śraddhotpādaśāstra* (*The Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith*).

### **The Defiled Mind**

The Yogācāra formulation of the eight *vijñānas* is basically a chart of consciousness, of how delusion arises within that consciousness, and of the conversion of that consciousness to wisdom (*jñāna*). The *ālaya-vijñāna* or eighth consciousness is the storehouse consciousness because it appropriates or unifies the data of the other seven consciousnesses (ego or *manas*, the mind or *mano*, and the five sense-*vijñāna*). By this act of appropriating and storing the *ālaya* becomes the source of delusion because, as the basis of the evolution of discriminating consciousness (*vijñāna-parināma*), it is the source of deluded thinking (*parapañca*). However, the *ālaya* is not the sole cause of *vijñānaparināma*, as is the basis of production in the Upanishadic sense; rather, it too is the result of the evolution of discriminating consciousness inasmuch as it is “perfumed” by that same evolution. The *ālaya* and the other consciousnesses arise together in a symbiotic or synergistic relationship. Thus the structure of consciousness, for Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, arises

---

<sup>1</sup>This was originally written in 1994; the publisher seems to have fallen into a black hole, so I am putting it up myself; I have not changed it (other than fonts and some formatting issues) in order to keep the historical in perspective. I think that I still agree with myself.

co-dependently. Yogācāra thought, however, does not stop with the mere detailing of the arising of delusion, it also sought to contextualize wisdom within the theory of consciousness and to this end the three *svabhāvas* are taught.

According to this theory, the evolution of discriminating consciousness or consciousness in the mode of *prapañca* is termed *parikalpita-svabhāva*, “false imaginings.” This mode of consciousness falsely projects existence on the non-existent, i.e., the rope which is mistaken for a snake, the hair in the eye of a man with cataracts, meaning as external to consciousness, and subject-object duality. *Paratantra-svabhāva* is the co-dependent nature of *ālaya*, arising in synergy with the other *vijñāna*. This is the most important of the three *svabhāvas*, as it is the co-dependent nature of consciousness which allows for the conversion of consciousness to wisdom. The third *svabhāva*, *pariniṣpanna-svabhāva*, is the absence of unreal imaginings, the abeyance of “extroverted consciousness.”

As mentioned above, it is important to understand the pivotal role played by the *paratantric* nature, the synergistic or co-dependant structure of consciousness. It is because of this nature that nonconsciousness can function in either an enlightened (*pariniṣpanna*) or deluded (*parikalpita*) mode. Thus all three natures are neither different nor identical. As Aśaṅga states:

“They are neither different nor identical. In one mode of being (*parayana*) *paratantra* is itself dependant on others. In another mode of being, it is *parikalpita*, and in another mode of being, it is *pariniṣpanna*.”<sup>2</sup>

Thus it is also that *paratantra* is conceived to have two natures, one defiled (*sa\_kleśa-bhāgapatita-paratantrasvabhāva*) and the other pure (*vyavadānabhāgapatita-paratantra*).<sup>3</sup> For Aśaṅga and Vasubandhu it is precisely the co-dependent, paratantric nature of the *ālaya* that allows for both ignorance and enlightenment. Vasubandhu has identified the *ālaya* as *paratantra-svabhāva*, contextualizing consciousness in terms of co-arising in order to account

<sup>2</sup>*Mahāyānasamgrahaśāstra*, T. 31.139b, quoted in John Keenan, unpub. diss. (Wisconsin, 1980), *A Study of the Buddhahūmyupadeśa: The Doctrinal Development of the Notion of Wisdom in Yogācāra Thought*, p. 207.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 209.

for both phenomenal consciousness and wisdom. There is here no “original purity of mind” serving as a support or base. This is clear when we consider Asaṅga's interpretation of the following passage from the *Mahāyānābhīdarmasūtra*:

“The Bhagavan in the *Abhidarmasūtra* has said that ‘the beginningless realm (element, *anādikālikodhātu*) is the common support of all dharmas. Because of this, there exists all destinies (*gāti*) and the access to *nirvāna*.’”<sup>4</sup>

Although this was understood by the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* to refer to *tathāgatagarbha*<sup>5</sup> for both Asaṅga and Vasubandhu the “beginningless realm” refers to the *ālaya-vijñāna*. We must be careful, though, for although this sounds like the *ālaya* would then be identified with the *tathāgatagarbha* (especially in the light of the “swinging door” aspect of the *ālaya* as *paratantra* described above, which remind one of the ideas of *nirmalā* and *samalā-tathatā* found in the *Ratnagoṭra*), for Asaṅga and Vasubandhu the *ālaya* was the cause (*hetu*) of defiled dharmas only.<sup>6</sup> The above verse was then interpreted to mean that though the *ālaya* wasn't the *source* of purity, it could *support* pure dharmas. Thus, rather than the “uncovering” of an already existent purity (the *tathāgatagarbha* model) the purification of consciousness involves in a conversion of the basis (*āśraya-parāvṛtti*) in which the *ālaya* is cut off, destroyed, and replaced with the mirror-wisdom (*ādarśa-jñāna*).

How then does the conversion come about if the *ālaya* is only the source of defiled dharmas? The answer to this question lies in the complex formula of the “four pure dharmas” (*caturvidhovyavādanadharmā*). What this basically involves is the fact that it is in the nature of the *paratantric ālaya* to be able to support pure dharmas (though it cannot originate them) and thus be converted to *pariniṣpanna*. According to Asaṅga, these pure dharmas are the outflow of the pure *dharmadhātu* (*dharmadhātu-niṣyanda*). Through the hearing (*śrutavāsanā*) of the true teachings we are led to the realization of the purity of the object (*ālambana-vyavadāna*), which,

---

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>5</sup>Jikido Takasaki, *A Study of the Ratnagoṭra-vibhāga (Uttaratantra)*, (Rome, 1966) pp. 290-291.

<sup>6</sup>Keenan, pp. 183-184.

as an outflow of purity, is *pariniṣpanna*. This in turn gives rise to the purity of the path (*mārga-vyavadāna*), the realization of *tathatā* or undefiled purity (*vaimalya-vyavadāna*) and original purity (*prakṛti-vyavadāna*).<sup>7</sup> Thus we see a dynamic process moving from the *dharmadhātu* to its expression in the teaching of the dharma and then back again. Although the *ālaya* itself is incapable of starting the process, it can support the pure dharmas or outflow and thus realize conversion to purity. It is important to note here that *prakṛti-vyavadāna* is not originally part of consciousness, for then we would have the same structure as found within the *tathāgatagarbha* literature.<sup>8</sup> In other words, if *prakṛti-vyavadāna* included consciousness, then we would be talking of a pure consciousness being the cause of *śrutavāsanā*, and this is not the case for Aśaṅga and Vasubandhu, who hold consciousness as the cause (*hetu*) of defilement only.

### The Pure Mind

Although Vasubandhu described consciousness as *paratantric* and the source of only defiled dharmas, requiring the hearing, *śrutavāsanā*, of the teachings emanating from the *dharmadhātu* in order to realize enlightenment, there was another trend in Yogācāra thought that viewed consciousness itself as originally pure. This is an old tradition, for references to a luminous, pure mind (*viśuddhicittaprakṛiti*) can be found in the Nikāyas and it was propounded by the Mahāsaṅghika, though rejected by the Vaibhasika and Theravāda.<sup>9</sup> In particular, the teaching of defilements as accidental and extraneous (*āgantuka*) to this originally pure mind seems to have led to Abhidharmic debates. These doctrines were, however, picked up by Mahāyāna followers, especially in *tathāgatagarbha* and Yogācāra literature. I feel that it is here, in this ancient context of the “originally pure mind,” reformulated after the advent of Mahāyāna concepts such as *śūnyatā* and *dharmakāya* had become widely accepted, that we will find the

---

<sup>7</sup>Hakamaya, Noriaki, “The Realm of Enlightenment in *Vijñapti-mātratā*: The Formulation of the ‘Four Kinds of Pure Dharmas,’” in *Journal of the IABS*, vol.3, no.2 (1980).

<sup>8</sup>Keenan, pp. 216-218.

<sup>9</sup>Diana Paul, unpub. diss. (Wisconsin, 1974), *A Prolegomena to the Śrīmālādevī sūtra and the Tathāgatagarbha Theory*, pp. 73-80.

context of meaning which gave birth to the notion of the *tathāgatagarbha*.<sup>10</sup>

The concept of the pure mind was also very important to *tathāgatagarbha* literature, such as the *Śrīmālādevī sūtra* and the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga*. And, just as the *ālaya* was said to be the basis or support (*āśraya*) of all dharmas, the *tathāgatagarbha* or pure mind is commonly said to be the support (*āśraya*) of all dharmas within the *tathāgatagarbha* literature:

“Therefore, O Lord, the Matrix of the Tathāgata is the foundation, the support, and the substratum of the immutable elements (properties) which are essentially connected with, indivisible from [the Absolute Entity], and unreleased from Wisdom. [At the same time], this very Matrix of the Tathāgata is also, O Lord, the foundation, the support, and the substratum of the [worldly] elements that are produced by causes and conditions, which are by all means disconnected, differentiated [from the Absolute Essence], and separated from Wisdom.”<sup>11</sup>

There is, however, an important difference in the *ālaya* and the *tathāgatagarbha* (equivalent to *cittaprakṛti*) in their function as *āśraya* or support of both phenomena and enlightenment. Unlike the *ālaya*, cut off or ended in the transformation from delusion to wisdom, the *tathāgatagarbha* is essentially pure, and merely covered with accidental defilements, the removal of which constitutes the state of suchness, *tathatā*. Thus scholars have come to term the process of enlightenment in *tathāgatagarbha* literature as one of “arithmetical subtraction,” i.e., removing the adventitious covering to reveal that which has always existed, purely and eternally. In the Yogācāra tradition described above, wisdom is engendered through a conversion of consciousness from discriminating (*parikalpita*) to pure (*pariniṣpanna*), in which the previously existing *ālaya* is described as “cut off” and “destroyed”. Although both systems refer to this as “conversion of the basis” (*āśraya-paravṛti*), the difference lies in the fact that in the *tathāgatagarbha* theory, the basis is pure from the beginning and is merely revealed when the defilements are removed. Thus “A” (the basis or *āśraya*) is “A” both before and after

---

<sup>10</sup>There was also an early confluence of *tathāgatagarbha* and Yogācāra texts, as is evident from the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*, a Yogācāra text which frequently speaks of the pure mind and is the only *śāstra* quoted by the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga*. Although traditionally listed as one of the five texts of Maitreya-Asaṅga, because of its combination of Yogācāra and *tathāgatagarbha* thought, John Keenan puts its composition somewhere “between the initial Yogācāra statement of the *Samdhinirmocana* and the *Mahāyānābhīdharma* and the later classical formulation of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu” (Keenan, p. 152).

<sup>11</sup>Takasaki, p. 292.

enlightenment. In Yogācāra, “A” (the basis or *āśraya*) is changed to “B” (wisdom) in the state of wisdom, “A” no longer exists, and the states “A” and “B” are considered disjunctive and heterogeneous.<sup>12</sup>

Because the emphasis in the teaching of the pure mind or *tathāgatagarbha* is on purity, defilements are always considered accidental (*āgantuka*). This, however, raises the question of how these accidental defilements obscure the/ purity and how they are to be removed. As it was precisely these questions which the Yogācāra explication of phenomenal consciousness was formulated to answer, it wasn't long before the two ideas came together.

### **The Yogācāra-*tathāgatagarbha* synthesis: The *ālaya* and the *tathāgatagarbha* in the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith***

There are several texts which show evidence of Yogācāra-*tathāgatagarbha* synthesis but the two most well known sutras which directly link the *ālaya* and the *tathāgatagarbha* are the *Lankāvatāra-sūtra* and the \**Mahāyānaśraddhotpādasāstra* (*Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith*). As the *Lankāvatāra* was translated into Chinese in 433, it is evident that Indian thinkers had conceived of the relation between *ālaya* and *tathāgatagarbha* by at least the beginning of the fifth century. The *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith*, translated by Paramārtha (499-569), is a text whose Indian origins have frequently been called into question, as is also true with the other Yogācāra-*tathāgatagarbha* texts translated by Paramārtha (the *Buddha-nature Treatise* and the *Annutarāśraya-sūtra*).<sup>13</sup> However, given that the same ideas are expressed in the *Lankāvatāra*, we must assume that Yogācāra-*tathāgatagarbha* synthesis was a phenomenon in India before it was transmitted to China.

The *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* is a short text composed to explain the theory and practice of the Mahāyāna in a concise manner. The main theme of this text is the Mind which is said to “support all phenomenal and transcendental dharmas” (T.32.575c). This is reiterated as

---

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 41, 60.

<sup>13</sup>Although this matter is beyond the scope of this essay, even if Paramārtha, a native of West India, had composed them, I do not see how that would make the texts any less a product of the Indian, or at least an Indian's, intellectual tradition.

the One Mind in two aspects, that of *tathatā* and that of samsara, though the two are not distinct from each other (T.32.576a). The first aspect, the *tathatā*-mind, is then defined as the “one *dharmadhātu*, the dharma of the universal trait” (T32.576a). Echoing the *Śrīmālādevī sūtra* and *Ratnagoṭravibhāga*, it is stated that *tathatā* has the two meanings of empty and not empty (T. 32. 576a). *Tathatā* is also said to be equivalent to *tathāgatagarbha* (T.32. 579a).

After this explanation of the *tathatā* aspect of Mind, the text explains the samsaric aspect, and it is here in that we find the relationship between *tathāgatagarbha* and the *ālaya-vijñāna* described:

“As for the samsaric mind, it is because it depends on the Tathāgatagarbha that there is the samsaric mind. Neither born nor destroyed, yet together with birth and destruction, not one, yet not two, this (samsaric mind) is called the *ālayavijñāna*. This [*ālaya*] *vijñāna* has two meanings, that which is able to hold all dharmas and that which produces all dharmas. What are these two? The first is enlightenment and the second is non-enlightenment” (T.32. 576b.)

Two important questions are raised by this passage: 1) is the *ālaya-vijñāna* the same as the *tathāgatagarbha*, or is the *ālaya* the samsaric mind which is dependent on the *tathāgatagarbha*? 2) What is meant by “the samsaric mind depends on *tathāgatagarbha*”? With regard to the first point, it is seen that the *ālaya* is described as having two aspects, enlightenment and non-enlightenment, or samsara. This would seem to correspond to the *tathatā* and samsaric aspects of the One Mind, making the *ālaya* and *tathāgatagarbha* (which is at the same time pure as well as the ground of samsara) equivalent. However, it states that the *ālaya* “supports all dharmas” which is given as the meaning of enlightenment, and that it “produces all dharmas” which is equivalent to the meaning of non-enlightenment or samsara. This recalls the distinction between *ālaya* as cause of only defiled dharmas (samsara) and only the support of pure dharmas (enlightenment), as found in the commentary on the *anādikāluko* passage discussed above.<sup>14</sup> Further, it will be recalled that this meant that the *ālaya*, though *paratantric* and capable of an enlightened (*pariniṣpanna*) as well as a deluded (*parikalpita*) mode of existence, was basically the source (*hetu*) of defilement, but required the perfuming or the

---

<sup>14</sup>Keenan, pp. 247-248

hearing of the dharma, the outflow of the *viśuddha-dharmadhātu*, in order to turn towards enlightenment. Is this what the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* is also saying in its distinction between “hold” or “support” and “produce”? In other words, is the samsaric mind that is dependent on the *tathāgatagarbha* the *ālaya*, albeit a *paratantric ālaya*, which is capable of supporting enlightenment, though not directly producing enlightenment itself?

This interpretation is born out in the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith*'s description of the devolution of the defiled mind in the section titled “Causes and Conditions of Samsara”:

“The causes and conditions of samsara are sentient beings, because samsara depends on the evolutions of their mind and mental consciousness. What this means is that ignorance depends on the *ālaya-vijñāna*” (T.32.577b).

Because of this inclusion of the *ālaya* and the accompanying description of the rise of defilements, the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* develops the earlier *tathāgatagarbha* teaching which only emphasized purity with no explanation of how it came to be defiled. Another passage echoes this in regard to the attainment of wisdom:

“Because of the perfuming power of the dharma, one cultivates the true practices and perfects *upāya*; therefore, the composite consciousness [the *ālaya-vijñāna* previously described as a composite of both arising and destruction and non-arising and non-destruction] is destroyed, the stream of [defiled] mind is ended, and because the wisdom is pure, the *dharmakāya* is manifested” (T.32.576c).

That the *ālaya*, capable of both purity and defilement, is not really identical to the *tathāgatagarbha* is also indicated by the fact that in the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* the *tathāgatagarbha* is described as not including any defilement (T.32. 580a.), reminiscent of the absolute purity of the *tathāgatagarbha* in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, and distinguished from the *ālaya* which does include defilement. Thus, I think it safe to say that in the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith*, the *ālaya* is, like the *ālaya* in Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, the *paratantric* appropriating consciousness which causes or produces defilement but can only support enlightenment. The difference is in the relationship to suchness or the *tathāgatagarbha*. Thus, we must look at what it means to say that the “samsaric mind depends on *tathāgatagarbha*”, which is explained through the famous water-wave analogy:



“This is like the waves of the great ocean which are caused by the wind. Water and wind are not separable, nor is the water of a moving nature; if the wind stops, the movement will cease, but the wetness will not be destroyed. Likewise, the self-nature of sentient beings is pure mind, but due to the winds of ignorance, it is moved. But the mind and ignorance have no shape and are inseparable; the mind is not of a moving nature, and thus if ignorance ceases, the continuous [movement ceases, yet wisdom is not destroyed (T.32.576c).

What this means, I believe, is simply that Mind (with a capital “M,” defined in the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* as suchness or *tathatā*) is, because of its co-dependent nature, the same as phenomenal arising, also co-dependent in nature. Thus, both suchness and phenomena partake of the “wetness” of co-dependence or *pratītyasamutpāda*. Of course, the difference is that the winds of ignorance play upon the surface of the water and the result is samsaric co-arising, or in Yogācāran terminology, *parikalpita-svabhāva*. Yet, the *parikalpita* mode of consciousness is no less co-dependent than the *pariniṣpanna* mode (as highlighted by the pure and defiled modes of *paratantra* described above), the difference being ignorance of that nature. As the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* states:

“That which is termed destruction is only the destruction of the marks of the mind, not the essence of the mind. It is like the water which moves because of the wind. If the water is destroyed, then the marks of the wind would cease but that would not be the cessation of that which is caused [i.e., samsara]. Because the water is not destroyed, the marks of the wind continue. Because only the wind is destroyed, the marks of movement are accordingly destroyed. This is not the cessation of the water” (T.32.578a).

Let me sum up. Aśaṅga, Vasubandhu, and the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* speak of a *paratantric ālaya* capable of giving rise to delusion and supporting enlightenment. So far, there is no difference. For Aśaṅga and Vasubandhu, however, the pure dharmas, which when heard give rise to enlightenment, originate outside of consciousness as the outflow of the pure *dharmadhātu*. In the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith*, however, because samsaric consciousness is rooted in or dependent upon suchness or purity, that very suchness is said to perfume the defiled consciousness, and thus there is no need to look outside of consciousness for the origin or purity:

“How is it that the pure dharma arise and perfume without interruption? It is said that this is because *tathatā* is able to permeate (perfume) ignorance. Because of the causal power of this permeation, the deluded mind is caused to detest the suffering of samsara and seek nirvana.” (T.32.578b).

In the scheme of the four-fold purity, the permeations originate from *prakṛti-vyavadāna*, identified by them as *tathāgatagarbha* or *tathatā*. In the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith*, the permeations also originate with *tathatā*, similarly identified as *tathāgatagarbha*. The only difference, of course, is in the dependence of the *ālaya* on the suchness that is capable of directly perfuming it. Even this, however, can be seen as a natural development of the Yogācāran formula, for if *prakṛti-vyavadāna* is the “all-inclusive horizon,” then surely that horizon must include consciousness. Therefore, I really do not see any difference between the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* description of *tathāgatagarbha* and *ālaya-vyavadāna* (equated with *tathāgatagarbha*) and *ālaya*. Rather, in terms of the problematic described initially, it is a question of focus: Asaṅga and Vasubandhu concentrate their efforts on the explication of the defiled nature of a *paratantric* consciousness whereas *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* focuses on the continuity between the *paratantric* nature of phenomena and suchness. Thus the former is more concerned with the defiled nature of mind and its conversion or transformation while the latter begins with the assumption of a pre-existing purity of mind. The further development of this line of thought is, of course, found in Paramārtha's system of nine consciousnesses, the ninth or *amalavijñāna* being the pure consciousness equivalent to the *tathāgatagarbha*.