



## ***Toward a Non-Eurocentric Social Psychology: The Contribution of the Yogacara***

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**Abstract:** The social psychological paradigm created by Western social science has virtually ignored the worlds' other most highly developed system of psychological theorizing. This paper argues that an understanding of Buddhist psychology and especially its most sophisticated school, the Yogacara, can provide the basis for an independent confirmation of Western social psychology's fundamental insights, a means to reduce its Eurocentric bias, and a way to expand its theoretical breath within a more thoroughly integrated framework. Toward this end, a comparative analysis of Yogacara psychology is presented which highlights the similarities and differences with the interactionist tradition—two schools of thought that developed in radically different cultural milieus in almost complete isolation from each other. It is argued that Western social psychology must move toward a new paradigm that draws both Western and non-Western perspectives into a single integrated framework, and some preliminary steps toward that goal are outlined.

Science, theory would have it, is the pursuit of an unbiased understanding of objective reality, and must therefore be independent of the cultural assumptions and biases of those who carry it out. This has always been a tall order, however, especially in the social sciences. In this age of globalization and the nearly instant flow of information, it is becoming increasingly clear that much of what was billed as "objective science" has been built on a foundation of Western cultural assumptions and beliefs.

In sociology, the problem is most obvious in macro theories which have often drawn sweeping conclusions with data

from a relatively narrow range of Western experience, but the same issues occur at the micro level as well. No one would question the fact that the social psychological paradigm used in sociology and the other social sciences is derived almost exclusively from the work of a relatively small group of male scientists and social philosophers from the middle and upper classes of the Western European nations and their former colonies. Its defenders would say that this narrow base is not the result of Eurocentric bias, but the fact that no other civilizations have developed any comparable body of psychological knowledge upon which to draw. Such claims may or may not stem

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from some kind of cultural chauvinism, but whatever their origins, they are clearly false. While it is true that only a few intellectual traditions, whether Western or Non-Western, have focused on social psychological issues, there is a highly developed school of psychological thought that began in India and spread throughout East Asia that has been ignored by most Western social scientists.

Aside from simple ignorance about this tradition and the discomfort many Westerners feel in attempting to deal with a system of thought that developed under a very different set of cultural assumptions, there are other reasons Western social psychologists have ignored the world's other major school of psychological thought. One is that this body of social psychological theorizing developed within the Buddhist religious tradition and was therefore seen as something quite different from secular scientific thought. But this sharp distinction between the secular and the religious is itself part of the Eurocentric cultural assumptions of the social sciences. Simply because a line of intellectual endeavor is carried by monks in a religious context does not mean *ipso facto* that their conclusions are based on faith and not reasoned investigation. A second criticism is that the conclusions of these Buddhist thinkers are mere philosophy without empirical foundations. It is certainly easy to dismiss their views as unscientific, since the monastics and intellectuals who developed this tradition did not view themselves as scientists in the Western sense. But the body of psychological knowledge they developed was based on centuries of the careful systematic observation of the operations of the human mind and rigorous logical analysis and debate. The value of introspection in social psychology has, of course, also long been a point of contention (See, Varela & Shear, 1999). The behaviorists have been particularly vehement in their claims that introspection is too subjective

and undependable to be of any scientific use. Yet whatever its weaknesses, even a cursory look at the history of social psychology shows us that its founders' most common subject of research was often themselves. The entire interactionist tradition from James and Mead on down was built upon introspective reflection on the mental process. The same is true of in the psychoanalytic tradition, and a slightly different kind of introspection is central to the *verstehende* methodology used so effectively by Max Weber (1949) and numerous other macro theorists.

Once the legitimacy of introspection as a scientific tool is admitted, the Buddhist psychologists become virtually impossible to dismiss, since they are widely recognized as masters of the introspective examination of the mind. Of course, the development of a social psychological paradigm is not the aim of Buddhist meditation, but it has nonetheless been one of its byproducts. Moreover, the scope and duration of this endeavor was far greater than was involved in the creation of Western social psychology—which after all was developed by a rather small group of intellectuals and researchers over no more than a few centuries. In contrast, Buddhist meditative practices and the intellectual debates surrounding them have been carried on for over 2,500 years by a far larger number of people in many different countries. At one time, probably as much as 20 percent of the male population of Tibet were monastics (see Thurman, 1998), and there were similar periods in the history of other Buddhist countries such as Thailand, China, and Japan.

### **BUDDHIST PSYCHOLOGY AND THE YOGACARANS**

There have been a number of efforts to bring Eastern and Western psychological thought together in recent years, but thus

far at least they have had decidedly little impact on the social psychological paradigm used in the social sciences. The first of these synthetic efforts occurred during the “Zen boom” of the 1950s and ‘60s (for example, Kondo, 1958; Fromm et. al. 1960; Watts, 1961; Doi, 1962), and more recently there has been an resurgence of interest in this project (Goleman and Thurman, 1991; Kabot-Zinn, 1990, 2005; Hayward and Varela, 1992; Epstein, 1995, 1998; Molino, 1998; Safran, 2003; Kornfield, 2008). One reason these works have had so little influence in the social sciences is that most of them focused more on psychotherapy than psychological theory. And even those efforts that have been more theoretically focused have tended to rely on the work of the early schools of Buddhism (see for example Varela et al.: 1991; deCharms, 1998), and have not utilized what many would hold to be the most sophisticated and potentially most useful school of Buddhist psychological thought—the Yogacaran.

Damien Keown (2003: 341) writing in the *Oxford Dictionary of Buddhism* holds that: “Yogacara thought arguably represents the most complex and sophisticated philosophy developed in Indian Buddhism but this richness has led to considerable difficulties in accurately evaluating its doctrines.” In order to begin developing an understanding of this vast and often highly abstract school of thought, it is necessary to place it in the context of the earlier Buddhist schools from which it developed. The Yogacarans were not so much trying to create some new way of viewing things, but attempting to reinvigorate traditional Buddhist views by reformulating them for the far more intellectually sophisticated times in which they found themselves (Kalupahana, 1992). Many of the original contributions of the Yogacara school bring to fruition ideas and trends clearly present in earlier Buddhist thought in a more inchoate form. The Yogacarans feel that the

historical Buddha's audience was not sophisticated enough to understand his deepest teachings and to avoid leading them into confusion, he gave these teachings only in an implicit form. Their new school was then providing an “explication of the underlying meaning” of the Buddha's teachings.<sup>1</sup>

Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha, is in many ways a paradoxical figure for Western scholars. Although he is usually seen as a religious profit, he was as much a philosopher and psychologist as a classic religious figure in the Western sense. Indeed, it is often argued that Buddhism itself has more in common with Western psychotherapy than Western religion, since like psychotherapy its goal is to eliminate human suffering, not to promote faith in a particular set of doctrines or the worship of a particular deity. Unlike most religious figures in the Western tradition, Gautama warned his followers not to accept his words on faith, but to examine their own experience and see for themselves if they are true.

Although the historical record is not entirely clear, Siddhartha Gautama is believed to have taught and lectured for over forty years after his enlightenment, and the task of preserving his teachings fell to one of the most prodigious feats of rote memory ever attempted. Generations of monks devoted their lives to memorizing particular discourses Gautama delivered. These *suttas* (skt. *sutras*) were passed along from generation to generation until they were finally put to writing some three centuries after the Buddha's death.

In addition to attempting to preserve the founder's talks in as authentic a form as possible, Buddhist monastics soon set out to organize and systematize his ideas—a

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<sup>1</sup> The title of the foundational text for the Yogacaran school has been translated among other ways as “The Scripture on the Explication of Underlying Meaning” (trans. by John P. Keenan, Berkeley, CA: Namata Center, 2000).

formidable task since the records of Gautama's words and actions run to thousands of pages, and he varied his message depending on the experience and sophistication of his audience. The result of these efforts became what is known in Pali as the *Abhidhamma* (skt. *Abhidharma*). In this massive scholastic endeavor, often compared to the intellectual enterprise of the medieval Christian monks, Buddhist monastics compiled detailed compendiums that attempted to categorize every possible moment of experience in terms of Buddhist psychological understanding. The *Abhidhamma* is sometimes referred to as the "valley of dry bones" for its seemingly endless lists of detailed categories and classifications. This taxonomy can seem rather odd from the modern Western standpoint both for what it includes and as well as what it omits. But for monks practicing in a traditional setting, its goal was nothing less than the classification and analysis of every possible experience they might have (Conze 1951: 85 *passim*).

With the Yogacara, we move from the early schools of Buddhism, which some term rather pejoratively the Hinayana (small vehicle) to the Mahayana (great vehicle). The Yogacara began in India around the fourth century, some 900 years after the death of the Buddha. Scholars view it and its primary Mahayana competitor, the Madhyamika, both as an amplification and refinement of original Buddhist doctrine and an attempt to return to the original message which had been clouded over in the ensuing centuries (one this point see Kalupahana, 1987; King, 1994). The evolution of the great monastic universities, the centuries of debates and inquiry, and the continual practice of the intense observation of the operations of the mind in disciplined meditation help produce a level of intellectual sophistication in both the Madhyamikan and the Yogacaran camps not seen in early Buddhism. While debates between these two intellectual traditions

continue to this day, it is the psychology of the Yogacarans, not the withering dialectics of the Madhyamikans, that is most relevant here (see, Sponberg 1979).

The Yogacaran school was not, however, focused exclusively on a psychological understanding of the operation of the mind. It is best known for an idealistic philosophical position that nothing exists but consciousness. For that reason, it is sometimes known as *cittamatra* or *wei-shih*—the consciousness only school. While there is no question that many later schools of Yogacaran thought took a strong idealist position with respect to the nature of reality, a significant group of contemporary Western scholars have concluded that the original founders of this school were concerned with epistemology rather than ontology. They were not, in other words, questioning the existence of a material world as per the classic idealist position, but were arguing that average unenlightened individuals are only able to perceive it as mediated through the habits, predispositions, and tendencies contained in their minds and the words and images it generates. Thus, all we can know is consciousness only (see Wayman 1979; Willis, 1982; Kochumuttom, 1982; Anacker, 1984). This new interpretation has, in turn, come under attack from other Western scholars especially those associated with the doxological traditions of the Tibetan Geluk sect (Hopkins, 1999, 2004; Garfield, 2002). To delve further into this hotly debated issue would take us too far afield from our social psychological concerns. Whatever the veracity of the criticisms, this new scholarship has at least shown that the original texts of the Yogacaran school do not need to be read in terms of an idealistic ontology and that the Yogacaran psychological system need not be coupled to such philosophical underpinnings.<sup>2</sup>

The origins of this school can be traced to the *Sandhinirmocana Sutra*<sup>3</sup> dating from around the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE.<sup>4</sup> Like many

Mahayana texts, it purports to be the words of the Buddha which were not revealed until his audience was sophisticated enough to understand them properly. The Indian intellectual tradition is notoriously indifferent to historical context, and it is impossible to be sure of the origins of this text. Many of its core ideas may have been passed along in the tradition of oral memorization, but not included by the conferences that put together the early orthodox canons, or it may be entirely the work of later thinkers. It is clear that sutra contains many elaborations, such as criticisms of other Buddhist schools, which must have been added at a later date. Whatever its origins, it is a remarkable text that presents a new perspective on the nature of phenomena and proposes a revolutionary break with the Buddhist psychology set forth by the traditional Abhidharma schools.

Two 4<sup>th</sup> century monks, Asanga and his half brother Vasubandhu, are considered the actual founders of the Yogacaran school. Maitreya may have been another

founding figure, although some scholars do not consider him to be an actual historical personage (see Scott, 2004). Both Asanga and Vasubandhu were well schooled in the Abhidharma before their conversion to the Mahayana. The Yogacaran psychology they created can be seen as a reworking of Abhidharma psychology using the radical insights of the *Sandhinirmocana Sutra* to help resolve some difficult problems faced by Abhidharma thought (Waldron, 2003). As time went on, this new approach won increasingly popularity with scholars in the Buddhist monasteries and universities of medieval India, and the Yogacara became one of the two major schools of Mahayana philosophy.

Yogacaran thought continued its development in India influenced by such figures as Sthiramati, Dignaga, and Dharmakirti, and it spread, along with Buddhism itself, to Tibet and East Asia where it continues as an active school of thought (see for example, Shun'ei, 2009). Over the years, the Yogacarans tended to veer in an increasingly philosophical direction, but its psychological doctrines continued some development as well. Today, there seems to be renewed interest in its psychological side, and several prominent Asian Buddhist, most notably the Vietnamese monk in exile Thich Nhat Hanh (2001), have published works in Western languages on Yogacaran psychology.<sup>5</sup>

In the presentation that follows, I will attempt summarize the key psychological propositions of the Yogacaran school as well its philosophical principles most relevant to social psychology. It should be pointed out, however, that the meaning of many of the ancient texts upon which the Yogacaran school is based is far from clear, and as with other traditions contemporary representatives of the school often share

<sup>2</sup> The early Yogacarans were, as the name of their school implies, primarily concerned with yogic practice, not philosophy—whether idealistic or not. As the Yogacara moved into the great centers of Indian learning, some of its adherents took up a more formally idealistic position, at least in part because the materialist end of the philosophic attention space was already occupied by both Buddhist and Hindu contenders (see Collins, 1998; 177-271; Sparham, 1993; Nagao, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> The Sanskrit title of this sutra is open to variety of translations including “The Sutra that Explains the Profound Secret,” “Explanation of the Mysteries” and “Sutra Explaining the Thought” See Powers (1992).

<sup>4</sup> This text is no longer existent in the original Sanskrit, but there are five Chinese translations and one in Tibetan. Powers (1995) provides an extremely careful English translation from the Tibetan with extensive footnotes from the Tibetan exegetical tradition. Cleary's (1995) translation from the Chinese is less literal, and makes a greater attempt to express the underlying meaning in contemporary language, while Keenan's (1992) translation from the Chinese fall somewhere between the two.

<sup>5</sup> An excellent presentation of Yogacaran psychology from a Tibetan standpoint is Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's (2002) *Everyday Consciousness and Buddha-Awakening*.

significant differences in interpretation and perspective.

Although a version of all the most important texts are still existent, some valuable works have been lost and others survive in only in translations from the original Sanskrit into Chinese or Tibetan. The style of presentation is another problem for the Western interpreter. Mahayana texts often make liberal use of contradiction, and it is common for them to make an assertion in one sentence and deny it in the next—perhaps because Buddhist intellectuals feel that clinging to any fixed position is an obstacle to real understanding. One also has the uncomfortable feeling that the meanings of the key terms are often being subtly shifted from one passage to the next. I do not mean to imply that these are insurmountable barriers but what follows are my interpretations drawn from the perspective of contemporary social psychology. Others would certainly emphasize different points and interpret similar points in different ways. Because the Yogacara is based on many earlier strains of Buddhist thought which may not be familiar to many Western readers, I will also try to provide sufficient context to make them intelligible.

### THE CONSTRUCTION OF CONVENTIONAL REALITY

It would carry us too far a field to thoroughly explore all the complex and difficult Yogacaran ideas about the nature of reality. But some of them are very relevant to the western literature on the social construction of reality (such as Mannheim, 1936; Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Holzner, 1972) and demand our attention. Before proceeding, however, it is necessary to set out more clearly what is meant by the term “reality.”

In the West, reality and unreality are usually seen as a dichotomy. A perception is held to be true and therefore real, or false

and therefore unreal. Western relativists both inside and outside the sociological tradition have moved away from this absolutist stance viewing reality as a socially constructed phenomena base on consensus rather than ontological status. Most Asian thought recognizes varying degrees of reality so that a certain perception or idea may have some reality in terms of day to day life, but be unreal from an ultimate perspective. What we might call conventional reality, the Yogacarans call the “imagination of the unreal”—unreal not because it doesn't exist, but because it is based on a basic misapprehension of the way things are.

This fundamental misapprehension stems from our imputation that the world is composed of separate independent objects instead of an interdependent flux of mutually codetermined events. At the root of this delusion lies the predisposition of mind to see the world in dualistic terms—subject and object, self and other, the grasped and grasper. As Vasubandhu put it in his treatise on the *Discrimination Between Middle and Extremes*:

There exists the imagination of the  
unreal,  
Namely, the discrimination  
Between the graspable and the  
grasper.  
However, there is no pair,  
Such as the graspable and the  
grasper.  
(Kochumuttom, 1982:31)

A fundamental insight of the Yogacaran school is that in order for the intellect to operate it must divide the world up into discrete objects it can manipulate conceptually. It creates subjects (the thinker) and its objects (the thoughts). While there is nothing inherently wrong with the creation of such conventional designations, we mistake them for actually reality which in the words of the *Samdhinirmocana Sutra* is: “inexpressible and non dual.... The ulti-

mate belongs to the signless realm, while argumentation belongs to the realm of signs (words and concepts)” (Powers, 1992: 11& 27). Words and concepts are useful tools, but reality is beyond the power of words to grasp. In an ultimate sense, phenomena are neither created nor uncreated; they neither exist nor do they not exist.

Like contemporary social scientists, the Yogacarans place great importance on language. It is a key agent for the perpetuation of conventional reality which in their perspective includes not just thoughts, ideas, and beliefs, but the way we perceive the physical world. Asanga (1992:39) in his *Summary of the Great Vehicle* writes that:

The construction of the body, the experiencer, the experienced content, valid experiencing, time, number, place and language are all engendered from the seminal permeation of language.

The “seminal permeation of language” is the process in which we are conditioned by our past exposure to language. Thus, Asanga was arguing that conventional reality is created by a linguistic process some sixteen centuries before the social constructionist school emerged in sociology.

## THE STRUCTURE OF MIND

Like contemporary theorists, ancient Buddhist psychologists perceived various ongoing processes within the mind. In the earliest records of the Buddha's talks, he divides individual experience up into five *skandhas* (heaps or aggregates): *rupa*, *vedana*, *samjna*, *samskara*, and *vijnana*. Although exact English equivalents are somewhat hard to find, they can be roughly translated as form, sensation or feeling, perception, mental or volitional formations, and consciousness.

Rupa or form is physical reality. Sensation or feeling refers to only three of the many experiences those words would include in most Western languages: pleasantness, unpleasantness, and neutrality. Perception, which can be of form, sound, smell, taste, bodily impressions, or thoughts, is the faculty that recognizes an object by picking out its distinctive features. *Samskaras*, the mental formations or impulses, arise along with consciousness and involve a wide range of phenomena such as volition, attention, discrimination, joy, happiness, equanimity, resolve, exertion, and concentration. Consciousness is the awareness of an object that occurs when an appropriate sense organ comes into contact with a sense object. There were traditionally considered to be six types of consciousness: one for each of the five senses and mind consciousness, which is aware of mental phenomena such as thoughts, concepts and images.

It is of particular importance to point out what is *not* included in the aggregates and that is any independent self or soul. There is probably no more debated or misunderstood Buddhist doctrine than that of *anatman*—no self—and it is impossible to do justice to the controversy here. In this context, however, its meaning is fairly straightforward. Each human being is composed of an on going stream of events each of which is impermanent, interdependent with all other events, and without any separate essence—that is to say, without self. This ever-changing stream of events is all we are. There is no self or independent entity, which is in charge or to which those events happen.

After the Buddha's death, scholar/monks set about the enormous task of systematically classifying all of human experience into an elaborate set of categories based on Gautama's more general typologies. The mastery of these Abhidharma teachings allows a monk to break down his or her experience into a series of

momentary experiences (*dharmas*) without imputing any self-nature or essence to the process. Edward Conze (1951:86) argues that:

It is the great merit of the Abhidharma that it has attempted to construct an alternative method of accounting for our experience, a method in which the “I” and “mine” are completely omitted, and in which all the agents invoked are impersonal dharmas. The Abhidharma is the oldest recorded psychology, and it is, I think, still sound for the purpose for which it was designed.

As is typical among innovators in Buddhist thought, the Yogacarans did not reject the conclusions of their predecessors, but recast and reinterpreted them emphasizing some elements, de-emphasizing others, and adding new ideas of their own. The founders of the Yogacaran school were certainly thoroughly grounded in the Abhidharma. In fact, before converting to the Mahayana, Vasubandhu is thought to have composed one of the most thorough and influential of all the many commentaries on the Abhidharma.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the fact that the Buddha listed consciousness as only one of the five aggregates, the Abhidharmists always gave it a certain priority while grouping most of the other dharmas together under the heading of mental factors or mental events which were seen to co-arise with the various consciousnesses (Bodhi, 1999:76; Thera, 1998; Trungpa, 1975). But the Yogacarans went much farther, seeing all the other skandhas as manifestations of consciousness. Moreover, the Yogacarans added more consciousnesses to the original six-

<sup>6</sup> Some historians argue that that commentary was actually composed by a different scholar with the same name, but most hold a single personage to be responsible for them both.

fold list. The seventh and eighth consciousnesses are the *klista-manas* (*afflicted thinking*), a concept apparently originating with Asanga or possibly his mentor Maitreya, and the *alaya-vijnana* (store consciousness) first described a century or so earlier in the *Samdhinirmocana Sutra*.<sup>7</sup> A few Yogacarans add a ninth conscious, nirvana, but the construction of eight consciousnesses is by far the most common.

As Waldron (2003) points out, Abhidharmic psychology was highly synchronic in that it saw experiences as a flow of discrete individual moments. Abhidharmic analysis sought to break each moment of phenomenal psychic experience into its constituent parts which in turn served as critical causal factors for the arising of the succeeding moment of experience. The two new consciousness added by the Yogacarans added a critical diachronic dimension to this psychological model by creating a mechanism whereby the effects of some experience might have no effect on the immediately succeeding moment, but were manifested at some later time. The interplay of these eight consciousnesses and the mental factors that arise with them lies at the heart of Yogacaran psychology and it is to them that we now turn.

### ALAYA-VIJNANA: THE SUBCONSCIOUS FOUNDATION OF MIND

The innovation for which Yogacaran psychology is most known is the discovery of the subconscious mind usually referred to in Sanskrit as the *alaya-vijnana*. The term is often translated as “store consciousness,” but sometimes as “container consciousness” or “base consciousness.” Etymologically, *alaya* also carries the connotation of clinging or attachment and that was also an important part of its meaning.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> On this point see Keenan, 1992.

The store consciousness is conceived as a kind of container in which the seeds (*bijas*) or imprints of our past actions and experiences are deposited. Among other things, these “seeds” are predispositions to think, act, respond or perceive the world in a particular way. But it is important to note that the alaya is not a passive repository of dormant seeds. Rather, in the words of the *Samdhinirmocana Sutra*, it “flows like a river.” Even when the seeds are not manifested in our conscious mind, they are changing and interacting. Thus, not only do the seeds manifest in response to a particular set of circumstances, they also “ripen” on their own and produce spontaneous conscious manifestations.

In the Yogacaran view, the *alaya-vijnana* has two aspects or functions—as basis and as resultant. The alaya as basis provides the foundation for all the other consciousnesses and therefore for all experience. The alaya is in some sense the original consciousness and all the others arise as transformations of it and depend upon the alaya for their support. This aspect of the alaya was also seen as the vivifying principle that brings energy to the body—something like the Chinese concept of *chi* or the Freudian id. The alaya as resultant, on the other hand, is the product of individual experience. All the thoughts and actions of the mind consciousness and the events of individual experience lay down the seeds that give each individual’s *alaya* its distinctive character (Tsong kha pa, 1993:51-86). Thus, psychic life is based on a complex feedback loop in which the predispositions in the alaya stimulate certain types of actions which engender new predispositions and reinforce or undermine existing ones, which in turn give rise to new patterns actions which plant their own seeds and on and on. For example, some people have a predisposition to respond to stressful situations with anger and hostility,

and when such responses occur they reinforce the predisposition to become angry the next time a similar situation arises. Likewise, a particular pattern of thought or perception creates the predisposition to think or perceive that way again in the future.

The contemporary Buddhist scholar Thich Nhat Hanh (2001) uses the metaphor of a garden to explain the action of the alaya. This garden may contain seeds that the individual planted or ones that come from other people or our culture as a whole. We as individuals “water” some seeds with our thoughts and actions and they grow stronger. Other seeds are ignored, either intentionally or unintentionally, and they grow weaker. These behavioral tendencies not only interact in the conscious mind, but subconsciously as well. If we plant many seeds supporting a particular behavioral tendency, they may eventually outweigh and transform the seeds containing an opposite behavioral tendency without ever being consciously manifested.

In typical Buddhist fashion, the store consciousness and its seed are seen to have a very subtle relationship. Asanga (1992:21) writes that the seeds “are not different from it (the store consciousness) yet they are not identical with it either.” The seeds are seen as a kind of “permeation” that is suffused through the store consciousness so that while the stored consciousness itself is undifferentiated, it nonetheless produces many different manifestations depending on the causes and conditions to which it is exposed. Again quoting Asanga (1992:22): “When the container consciousness is permeated by a cluster of varied mental states, its one nature is not variegated. But when it is put into the dying vat of karmic results it takes on an incalculable variety of patterns.”

Classic Yogacaran thought holds that the *alaya-vijnana* contains two general types of seeds: the common or primordial seeds and the uncommon seeds. The common

<sup>8</sup> See for example Kalupahana (1987: 137).

seeds are those that are shared by all people. These seeds are held to come down to us from primordial time and in more contemporary terms might be called human nature. The uncommon seeds are those unique to the individual that have been caused by something that they have experienced or some action they have taken (Hsuan-tsang, 1999:52-52; Tsong kha pa, 1993:72). Thus, as humans we all share many common unconscious predispositions, but at the same time we each have our own unique subconscious landscape.

The question of how Buddhist psychologists discovered the concept of the unconscious some 17<sup>th</sup> centuries before Freud is an interesting one. While the other elements of Buddhist psychology were probably uncovered by the direct examination of experience in various meditative states, the *alaya* is different. Since by definition it is not subject to direct observation (at least in all but the most enlightened individuals), it was probably discovered by inference. Griffins (1986) argues that the concept was developed to explain certain observations related to the practice of meditation. One of the highest attainments for monks in the early schools of Buddhism was a state known as *nirodha* or cessation. In this state, which according to traditional sources might last as long as a week, all thought and perception ceases, and the mind became a blank slate. But eventually the monks would spontaneously emerge from this cessation and return to everyday reality—a phenomena that is difficult to explain based on the Abhidharmic paradigm that envisions human existence as a stream of consecutive events each one caused in large measure by its predecessor. Once that steam of experience ceases, early Buddhist psychology had no basis for explaining how it could start up again.

The existence of a subconscious mind that continues to function even during periods of cessation provided a logical explanation for this phenomena. As Waldron (2003)

points out, the concept *alaya-vijnana* also served to explain the common observation that it may take a considerable length of time for the karmic effects of some behaviors or experiences to manifest in the conscious mind. One may, for example, commit some brutal action but not feel conscious guilt until months or even years after the event. In Yogacaran thought, such actions form seeds in the *alaya*, which manifest themselves only when they mature or are stimulated by exposure to an appropriate set of causes and conditions. It is also possible, however, that certain individuals were able to directly observe this unconscious realm while in extremely deep state of meditation. But whatever its origins, the discovery of the unconscious mind was an enormous psychological breakthrough that became a cornerstone of Yogacaran psychology.

Despite its explanatory power, however, the concept of the *alaya-vijnana* has been a controversial one in Buddhist thought just as the Freudian conception of the unconscious has been in the West. The primary objection raised by other Buddhists was that this concept comes too close to being some kind of independent self. For example, early in his career Tsong kha pa, the founder of the Geluk sect of Tibetan Buddhism, wrote a very useful treatise on the nature of the *alaya-vijnana* and the *manas*, but he eventually came to argue that both concepts were entirely fictitious and useful merely as heuristic devices (Sparham, 1993). The current Dalai Lama (who is the head of this sect) continues to uphold this view in spite of its strong parallels with Western psychological thought (Varela, 1997:86-88). For their part, the Yogacarans were clearly aware of the danger of this kind of misinterpretation and warned against it from the start. The *Samdhinirmocana Sutra* actually gives that as a reason the Buddha did not teach openly about the *alaya-vijnana*:

The clinging consciousness (*alaya-*

*vijnana*) is very deep and subtle;  
 All potentials are like a torrential flow.  
 I do not explain this to the ignorant,  
 For fear they will get the idea it is self. (Cleary, 1995:21)

### THE *KLISTA-MANAS* AND *MANO-VIJNANA*: THE THINKING CONSCIOUSNESSES

In the Yogacaran system two different consciousnesses are involved in the formation of mental images, concepts, and symbolic thought—the *klista-manas* and the *mano-vijnana*. Yogacaran thinkers have not been consistent in the way they conceptualize the differences between the two especially with reference to the location of discursive thought. Following the traditional Indian view of the mind as a sense organ, the Abhidharma did not consider *manas* a separate consciousness, but as thinking or mentation that was an object of the mind consciousness (*mano-vijnana*) just as shapes and colors are the objects of eye-consciousness. In his foundational work on the Yogacaran system, Asanga elevated the *manas* to the status of a separate consciousness (usually numbered as the seventh of eight consciousnesses). But even though Asanga and Vasubandhu continued to call this new type of consciousness *manas*, which literally means “thinking,” it does not appear that they intended term to refer to all types of thought, but only to the afflictive thinking that arises from our sense of self. Some Yogacarans have, however, stuck to the literal meaning of the term holding the *manas* to be the locus of all thinking. But this interpretation is hard to reconcile with the fact that the *manas* is held to be a “stable consciousness” that is always operating except in the deepest states of medita-

tion or in the most advanced yogins. Discursive thinking, on the other hand, is often interrupted by such things as deep sleep, stupor, or rapped attention. Thus, although *manas* is often used as a short hand expression, the other common term for the seventh consciousness, *klista-manas* or “afflicted thinking,” appears to be a more accurate designation.

The *klista-manas* centers around our tendency to create a sense of self and cling to it. Vasubandhu says that the *manas* is “constantly concealed and undefined, involving self-view, self-confusion, self-esteem and self-love” (Kalupahana, 1987:197). This pattern of thinking is called afflicted because in the Buddhist view it is the attachment to self that lies at the root of human suffering. Thus while the consciousness of the *klista-manas* involves a type of thought, it is not centered on the kind of discursive thinking that is usually associated with the English term. The conceptualizations of “I” and “me” are essential to the *manas*, but they are not subject to discursive elaboration at this level of consciousness. Rather, *manas* is more like a constant on going thought “I exist” intertwined with a strong sense of grasping and desire. From the *Samdhinirmocana Sutra* on, the Yogacarans often distinguished between “name and sign,” that is to say, words and conceptual images. One reasons that the *klista-manas* is “constantly concealed and undefined” is that it appears to operate primarily on a prelinguistic level, that is, with signs more than names. Consistent with this is the assertion sometimes made that at least some lower animals that are obviously incapable of symbolic thought still have an operating *manas*. On a yet more subtle level, the *manas* can be seen as the operation of the predisposition toward conceptual grasping that divides the seamless flow of phenomena up into discrete objects for which the self is seen to be the subject.

Unlike the *alaya*, it is possible to be

conscious of the activities of the *manas*, but that requires a high level of concentration for they take place on the fringes of the focus of awareness. While the thoughts that occupy the center stage of our conscious awareness come and go with great rapidity (several Yogacaran sources describe them as being like waves upon the water), the *manas* and the *alaya* are considered to be “stable consciousnesses” that continue on even during periods of stupor or sleep.<sup>9</sup> In sum, the *klista-manas* is the activity of the mind that constructs the world in terms of subject-object dualism and the emotionally charged sense of self that arises from that process and it in turn serves as a foundation of our conscious awareness.

In contrast to the *klista-manas*, *mano-vijnana* usually occupies the focal point of our awareness. The mind-consciousness is the consciousness involved in discursive thought, and it is the mind conscious that holds opinions, forms judgments, and makes conscious decisions. It is mind consciousness that plans our activities and reflects upon the past. While the compulsion to divide up the world into discrete objects and then create, protect, and cherish a sense of self (that is a subject) comes from the *manas*, the on-going mental discourse about the self and its relationship to others is part of the mind consciousness.

The activities of the mind consciousness are not, however, limited to conceptual thought. Mind consciousness also forms mental images compounded from the data provided by the five sense consciousnesses and our habits of perception. Although these mental images are not as clear and sharp as the impressions of the original sense consciousnesses, they make up the lived world and are the basis upon which we construct our behavior (Khenchen, 2002).

The concept of the *manas* was widely

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<sup>9</sup> For a good discussion of this point see Khenchen Thrangu (2002: 31-40).

used in Abhidharmic thought, but conceptualization of “afflicted mentation” as a separate form of consciousness was a new one with the Yogacara. The *klista-manas* has not, however, received as much attention as the *alaya*, and it does not appear in all formulations of the complex system of Yogacaran psychology. The seminal *Samdhinirmocana Sutra* does not, for example, propose the *manas* as a separate type of consciousness at all. The American Yogacaran, Tenshin Reb Andersen (1999:#5 p. 5), argues that “it may be better to understand *manas* as an ability or activity of consciousness to reflect itself, than to see it as a separate consciousness.” But while the *manas* need not necessarily be conceptualized as a distinct form of consciousness in its own right, the self-centered mentation to which the term refers is an essential part of the dynamics of mind.

The mind-consciousness is thus the seat of our volition, and it is there that decisions about our behavior are made. In some sense, it is also the mind consciousness that carries on meditation, since the quieting of thought or visualizations that are central to most meditative practices occur in its domain. Just as the *alaya* is sometimes described with the metaphor of a garden, the *mano-vijnana* is the metaphorical gardener which plant and nurtures some seeds with its thoughts and actions and allows other to wither away.

## THE FIVE SENSE CONSCIOUSNESSES AND THE PROCESS OF PERCEPTION

The remaining consciousnesses are those associated with the senses. The five “sense gates” that help give rise to the sense consciousnesses recognized in Buddhist psychology would certainly be familiar to Western psychologists. The eye faculty perceives form. The ear faculty perceives sound. The nose consciousness perceives smell. Tongue consciousness perceives

taste, and the body conscious that perceives touch and other bodily sensations. Each sense faculty can perceive only one type of object, although several kinds of perceptions may occur together at the same time. According to the Abhidharma, a moment of a sense consciousness, which in Western terms might be called a perception, arises depending upon three conditions: a dominant condition, an object condition, and an immediate condition (Rabten, 1978; Rinbochay, 1980). Take the perception of a rose. Its dominant condition (sometimes termed the organ condition) is the perceiver's eye. Its object condition is the rose itself, and its immediate condition is the moment of consciousness immediately preceding the perception. While some contemporary students of perception might not include the immediate condition as part of this process, in the Buddhist view it "is a requirement because consciousness does not occur in a vacuum; each moment of consciousness is simply and necessarily part of a stream of moments of consciousness stretching into the past and future" (Komito, 1987: 38). The perception of the rose would be quite different if it is preceded by the kiss of a lover or an image of the frozen face of a cadaver.

This original moment of relatively pure perception is, however, quickly seized upon and transformed by the mind consciousness which is itself considered to be a type of sensory consciousness since it too can perceive objects. The original "pure" perception becomes an object of mind (an object condition for mind consciousness) and is mixed with whatever mental factors and habit energies arise and is turned into a concept. (An idea of a rose rather than a direct perception of a rose.) Since the mind consciousness does not have a physical organ like an eye or ear, the Yogacarans hold that the manas serves as its dominant condition as well. Furthermore, since the manas is an ever present consciousness, it is also part of the immedi-

ately preceding condition for mind consciousness. The manas takes the raw sensory inputs and chops them up into subjects and objects that can be mentally manipulated. A new moment of mind consciousness based on the original sense perception, the subject object dualism of the manas, and the various conceptions, feelings, and thoughts that became associated with it, then becomes the immediately preceding condition and the object condition for the next moment of mind consciousness. Thus the impact of the original "pure" perception becomes weaker and weaker until attention is eventually returned to a sense consciousness and the whole process starts again. Even what appear to be direct perceptions of external reality are in this view almost always constructions of our consciousness based on the latent tendencies in the alaya, the self grasping and predisposition toward subject object dualism of the manas, and the conceptualizing discrimination of the mind consciousness.

It is at this point that some branches of the Yogacara reject the existence of the material objects themselves, arguing that everything is "consciousness only." However as previously mentioned many hold that the original position of the Yogacarans was that we only know the products of our consciousness, not that there is nothing other than our consciousness (Wayman, 1979; Willis, 1982; Kochumuttom, 1982; Anacker, 1984). Moreover, later thinkers in the Yogacaran tradition such as Dharmakirti, whose work Randal Collins (1998:240) holds to be the "apex of Buddhist philosophy," created a subtle syncretism that transcended both realism and idealism.

## THE DYNAMICS OF MIND

In order to understand Yogacaran psychology, it is important to realize that these eight consciousnesses and the mental

factors that arise with them are not some kind of separate mental structures but ongoing mental processes. As Thich Nhat Hanh (2001:102) puts it:

The eight consciousnesses are not eight separate entities that have nothing to do with each other. Different functions of consciousness are given different names, but those functions are closely linked with each other. Although they are eight, they are also one.

These various forms of consciousness are all in a constant state of flux, continually interacting with each other and the rest of the world. There is, nonetheless, a kind of hierarchy among them. The *alaya-vijnana* is the foundation for all the others and contains the predispositions that shape the whole system. The *manas* uses the *alaya* as its foundation. It seizes on some of the *alaya*'s particular potentialities and grasps them as self. The imagined self of the *manas* then becomes an object for the reflections of the mind consciousness, which is molded by this self-grasping. The mind consciousness is in some sense the apex of the pyramid, since it lies at the center of awareness and can also take the perceptions of the sense consciousnesses as its object. The sense consciousnesses in turn take the world as their object.

This entire system depends on constant reciprocal interaction between these various functions of mind. As Waldron (2003:116) puts it: "this picture of mind... portrays a constant, simultaneous, and reciprocal feedback relationship between the *alaya-vijnana* and the six types of manifest cognitive awareness. While the *alaya-vijnana* supports the waves of the mind by both supporting its underlying structures and by providing the seeds, the causal conditions, for their arising, the modes of manifest cognitive awareness in turn are constantly affecting the contents of the

underlying stream of mind." The mental factors and *manas* are, moreover, equally enmeshed in this web of mutual reciprocity. The mind consciousness, for example, is deeply influenced by the seeds of selfhood upon which the *manas* fixate. But the thoughts and actions of the mind consciousness also plant new seeds in the *alaya* and encourage the growth or decay of existing seeds. Mental factors such as anger, greed, or attention arise from the seeds of the *alaya* when stimulated by one or more of the active consciousnesses. The mental factors that arise then become part of the functioning of the active consciousnesses and the actions in which they are implicated. The effects of those thoughts and actions are absorbed back into the *alaya* that, even without new input, is itself in a constant state of constant flux "flowing like a river."

Just as the various consciousnesses are separate entities in one sense but a unitary whole in another, the same is true of the relationships between the consciousnesses sometimes (collectively termed the primary mind) and the mental factors that arise with them. Take, for example, the mental factor of anger and the mind consciousness that is reflexively aware of it. Looked at from one perspective they appear as separate phenomena, an emotion and a cognitive awareness, but from another they appear as the same event. One analogy that is used to explain this relationship is that the primary mind is like a hand while the mental factors are its fingers (Rabten, 1978:99-106).

Finally, something needs to be said about the ontological status of this complex psychological scheme. As we have seen, the Yogacarans are very aware of the limitations of conceptual understanding and the conventional reality that is based upon it, and of course their whole intellectual scheme is very much apart of that conventional reality. As Tenshin Reb Anderson (1999: #6 p.1), perhaps the leading expo-

ment of Yogacaran praxis in the West, puts it: "... the Yogacara position doesn't really hold up in the final analysis. It's just a story, a presentation of reality, which is constructed in order to help people and finally there's really nothing to it."

### **TOWARD A NEW SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL PARADIGM**

The fact that the Eastern and Western psychological traditions developed in such markedly different cultural contexts in almost total isolation from each other provides us with a unique historical opportunity. In comparing the two, many striking parallels are immediately apparent, and those instances in which both traditions arrived at similar conclusions can provide the bedrock for the construction of a social psychology with a far more universal application. Once allowances are made for their different modes of cultural expression, there are actually surprisingly few areas where these traditions are directly contradictory. Yet even when they are expressing similar ideas, there are subtle differences in interpretation and emphasis that arise from the refraction of the same psychological datum through such radically different cultural prisms, and it is often the differences as much as the similarities that hold the keys to greater understanding. There are, moreover, many instances where one tradition has explored important issues that have been ignored or neglected by the other, and a new social psychology obviously needs to combine the strengths of both traditions.

Among the Western approaches to the understanding of the mind, the cognitive and neurological sciences stand at the opposite extreme from Buddhist psychology. While the former usually rejects, or at least ignores, introspective methodology and seeks to understand behavior in strictly materialistic terms from "the

outside," the latter is founded upon the introspective understanding of consciousness from "the inside." Yet the effort to explore the synergies between the cognitive and neurological sciences and the Buddhist psychological tradition, while still in its formative stages, has proven surprisingly fruitful (Goleman and Thurman, 1991; Varela et. al.: 1991; Hayward and Varela, 1992; Varela, 1997; deCharms 1998; Austin, 1999; Panye, 2002; Wallace, 2002, Hanson and Mendius, 2009).

The common ground with the more introspective social psychological schools is, nonetheless, much more pronounced, and at this point more theoretically fecund. The most obvious parallels are with the psychoanalytic school and the central importance it gives to the unconscious mind. Indeed, a number of prominent psychoanalysts have explored the connections of these two schools of thought (see Fromm et. al. 1960; Epstein, 1995; Molino, 1998; Safran, 2003; Deikman 1983). The main focus of this work has, however, been on the use of Buddhist psychological understanding to improve Western psychotherapeutic techniques, and as such is somewhat outside the scope of this paper.

When the focus shifts from therapy to a more general social psychological understanding, the greatest synergies appear between Buddhist psychology and the interactionist tradition. Both share a commitment to introspective methodology, a relativist epistemology, and an overriding interest in the nature of the self and the consequences it has for human life. But just as importantly, there are also many differences, both subtle and gross, that can provide the stimulus for new thinking and theoretical exploration. Where one is weak the other is often strong, and an integration and reinterpretation of the two promises to provide a far more cogent foundation for social psychological understanding than either alone can provide. Since interactionism has already been the basis of so much

work in the social sciences, it will be used as our home base. What follows then will be a few steps toward a neo-interactionism that integrates the Eastern and Western perspectives.

Both the Yogacaran and the interactionist/social constructionist traditions independently concluded that the conventional reality which we inhabit is not "out there" in the exterior world, but a human construction based on language and habit. The fact that the Yogacarans would add that there is an absolute reality from which this socially constructed reality distracts us, while the interactionists/social constructionists are silent on this point, does not diminish the force of the coincidence of their thought. Sociologically oriented Westerners have laid out the process by which social interaction creates this conventional reality in some detail—something not easily apparent to solitary Buddhist meditators.

The Yogacarans, on the other hand, emphasize not only the ways in which conventional imputations structure our understanding of the world, but also the way they structure our perception of physical reality. This point is, of course, recognized in the interactionist tradition as well. William James, for example, was very much aware of the role of language and habit in giving form to our perception of what is actually "an undistinguishable, swarming *continuum*, devoid of distinction or emphasis" (1892:38 emphasis in the original). This important point seems, however, to have been given less attention as interactionism developed.

Another area in which an understanding of Yogacaran thought leads interactionists back to James's seminal work concerns the actual nature of reality. In contemporary interactionism and especially its social constructivist variation, reality is equated with meaning that is then shown to be socially constructed. Thus, the social world of words, symbols, and conventional

understanding doesn't just capture reality, it is reality—a view that leaves the material world in a rather questionable ontological status.

The Yogacarans, on the other hand, are deeply skeptical of the ability of conventional designations (words and symbols) to capture reality. Although they would agree that society's construction of reality is "real" in the sense that it is a dependently arisen phenomenon like all others, the meanings it imputes onto the world are held to be illusory. Indeed, it is the conventional designations with which we overlay the world that prevent us from seeing things directly as they actually are. James (1909: 296-7) was also clearly aware of the limitations of conceptual understanding, at least when it comes to our inner life: "The real units of our immediately-felt life are unlike the units that intellectualist logic holds to and makes it calculations with.... It (intellectualism) can only approximate to reality and its logic is inapplicable to our inner life... I must *point*, point to the mere *that* of life, and you by inner sympathy must fill out the *what* of life for yourselves..."

It is the pivotal concept of the self, however, where the most striking similarities and the most fruitful differences between these two paradigms are to be found. Cut through the radically different modes of cultural expression, and we arrive at the arresting conclusion that perhaps the most controversial and most often attacked tenet of Buddhist thought—the unreality of the self—is also a pillar of the interactionist system. At first reading, this may seem a radical misstatement, since the direct assertion that the self is unreal is nowhere to be found in the interactionist literature, and virtually no interactionists would be willing to admit that the self simply doesn't exist. But when Buddhists refer to the unreality of the self, they intend a rather more limited meaning than is implied in this English phrase; for taken at

its extreme this statement would seem to assert the absurd position that there is no personal experience at all. Rather, the Buddhist position is that the self has no separate independent existence, but is only a momentary phenomenon that depends upon a vast web of causes and conditions beyond itself. It lacks, in other words, what Buddhists call *svabhava* — “own being” or an independent essence or substance. This seems to be exactly the same point that George Herbert Mead (1934:178) was making in *Mind, Self and Society* when he said that “The self is not so much a substance as a process in which the conversation of gestures has been internalized...” Or even more clearly a few pages further on: “The self is not something that exists first and then enters into relationship with others, but it is, so to speak, an eddy in the social current and so still a part of the current” (Mead, 1934:182). If the self is only a process of interaction or an eddy in the social current, it obviously has no independent essence, no *svabhava*.

One area where the Yogacarans appear to be at odds with the interactionists concerns the way the former divide up self-functioning between the *mano-vijnana* and the *klista-manas*. Interactionist theory starting with James and continuing with Mead did recognize a distinction between the “I” (the active subject) and the “Me” (the passive object) within the self. But while there are some suggestive parallels, it would I think be an overstatement to claim that they are getting at the same basic distinction. The *klista-manas* might be viewed as more passive and the *mano-vijnana* as more active, but the Yogacaran literature always sees the self as subject and never explores the role of the self as an object for others.

The *mano-vijnana* on the other hand coincides much more closely with Mead’s construction of the self since that is the part of the mind involved in symbolic thought. It would be misleading to assert a complete

identity between the *mano-vijnana* and the self. The continual mentation of the *mano-vijnana* is not exclusively centered on the self, and the self-grasping of the *manas* is an equally important component of self. But it is fair to say that the central focus of the *mano-vijnana* is an on-going pattern of “self talk.” Surprisingly then, an understanding of Yogacaran thought seems to lead interactionism back to a reevaluation of its roots in another way, and to a broader model of self that includes both Cooley’s self-feeling and Mead’s emphasis on the symbolically constructed self. Rather than seeing the self as an exclusively social construction, this reconceptualization of self recognizes a subtle interaction between an inherited predisposition (a “seed” in Yogacaran terms) toward subject/object dualism and the self-conceptualization to which it gives rise, and the powerful social influences to which we are all subject. A much closer parallel can be seen in the different views of the self between Mead and that of the other founding interactionist, Charles Horton Cooley. Mead saw the self as a pattern of symbolic thought learned from interaction with other people. As can be seen in his famous concept of the “looking-glass self,” Cooley was also well aware of this point, but for Cooley the self at its most basic level was an innate pattern of emotional response. “The distinctive thing ... (about the “I”) is apparently a characteristic kind of feeling which may be called the my-feeling or sense of appropriation.... The emotion or feeling of self may be regarded as an instinct, doubtless evolved in connection with its important function in stimulating and unifying the special activities of individuals” (1902:137&139). “Since ‘I’ is known to our experience primarily as a feeling, or as a feeling-ingredient in our ideas, it cannot be described or defined without suggesting that feeling” (1902:140). In talking about this “self-feeling,” Cooley appears to be talking about the same mental pattern the

Yogacarans refer to as the *klista-manas*. At its root, the *manas* is a grasping at self and that is exactly what Cooley's described as the "my-feeling or sense of appropriation."

The area where interactionists might learn the most from the Yogacarans about the self, however, concerns its function not its structure. Although contemporary social scientists have detailed the relentless struggle we undergo to create, reproduce, and maintain our sense of self (for example, Giddens, 1991), and their analyses shows that the self is not any kind of real substantial entity, they have not taken this line of thinking to the obvious conclusion that has been the central tenet of Buddhist thought right from its beginning. That is, clinging to this unstable, unreliable, and impermanent social construct is a root cause of human suffering. Although Asian thought has many contributions to make to contemporary social psychology, it is this insight that may have the most profound and far reaching consequences. It certainly suggests many new avenues of investigation concerning the pattern of self-referential emotional response and the role it plays in such problems as suicide, mental disorder, violence, and drug abuse. Even more intriguingly, the combination of the Yogacaran view with the interactionist understanding of the self as a socially constructed and socially maintained process, leads to the question of what kinds of social groups or changes in existing social and cultural structures might be created that would weaken the iron grip this ego-delusion has on the modern psyche.

Finally, like many other social scientists (and indeed many Buddhists), interactionists have generally been reluctant to speculate about the existence of an unconscious mind, since it is by definition not subject to direct observation. But the remarkable parallels between Western psychoanalysis and Yogacaran thought on this point ought to give interactionists reason to reconsider

the importance of the unconscious. As the Yogacarans discovered in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and the psychoanalysts in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, there are simply too many mental phenomena that can be explained in no other way. But if the unconscious is to be incorporated into the interactionist model of mind, what sort of unconscious is it to be? Orthodox Freudian psychoanalysis sees it in terms of repressed desire, while the Jungians see an unconscious landscape of universal archetypes. But it appears the Yogacarans' conceptualization of the subconscious mind in terms of mental and behavioral predispositions is both broader and more useful.

These dispositional seeds can be planted not only by the repression of desire, but by any kind of strong personal experience. There are, moreover, common seeds that are not the result of any individual thought or experience, but are present in one degree or another in all humans. This broad conceptualization of the contents of the unconscious mind in terms of mental and behavioral potentials and predispositions, some of which are individual and some shared, also provides an elegant way to bring the growing body of evolutionary and biological research on human behavior into interactionist thought. For as many contemporary Yogacarans recognize, those common seeds are in large part based our common biological inheritance. They are in a sense part of human nature. But unlike the one sided approach of some sociobiologists, the Yogacarans recognize that those common predispositions are only one source of our behavioral predispositions. Our unconscious also contains countless other predispositions that arise from our personal experience and social interactions. These unconscious predispositions, even those of biological origins, are not simply fixed behavioral responses waiting to be triggered as some biological theories would hold, but are always in a dynamic interac-

tion with each other even while they lie unmanifested. Seeds of whatever source do not, moreover, exercise a deterministic control of thought and behavior, but only come to fruit when exposed to favorable causes and conditions which includes the conscious intentions of the individuals involved. The great virtue of this approach is that it provides a seamless way to integrate the influence of both "nature" and "nurture" into the interactionist paradigm while still allowing for the critical influence of human agency.

The present era of globalization presents us with a unique opportunity to move social psychology beyond the confines of its European cultural origins. Although bits and pieces of Buddhist psychology have been known in the West for some time, Westerners are only now developing the necessary background to understand what it is really trying to say. Whether we will seize the opportunity that presents or just muddle along with the comfortable status quo is very much open to question. At best, this paper presents only a few tentative steps towards this new social psychology, but if carried through to its fruition, this project holds enormous transformative potential.

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