

Being as Consciousness: Yogacara Philosophy of Buddhism

By Fernando Tola and Carmen
Dragonetti.

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Tola and Dragonetti's *Being as Consciousness* brings much detail of the Yogacara school and mind-only philosophy to the front by a practical study of its place in Buddhism which is explored usually in a mere philosophical, and by some writers, somewhat obscure manner. In pursuing Buddhist studies, one must dig deep in researching voluminous literature to compile the approach to written text offered by these two authors.

The General Introduction of this book lays out the ideology and material with some clear details highlighted in the body of this volume. The divisions of early Buddhism into learning-oriented schools, cr: 350 b.c.e. are named with some details that these names generalize the sects (*nikaya*), e.g. Sthaviravadins (Theravadins), Lokottaravadins, Mahasanghikas and Bahusrutiyas. These names are after the founder, location and/or doctrines taught.

Some explanation is given of the fundamental doctrines of the Yogacara "idealistic" school in the theories of mind-only (*cittamatra*), receptacle-consciousness (*alayavijnana*) and three-natures (*trisvabhava*). They center around the idea that the empirical world is nothing other than a mental creation (*cittamatra*). In the Introduction to the book six sutras are named and described which support the "Idealistic Tendency". These include the Lankavatara, Dasabhumika and the Bhadrapala sutras.

The authors explore the launching of Yogacara in the citta-matara, alayavijnana and trisvabhava elements which were assembled and logically constructed by

Maitreya, Asanga and Vasubandhu cr: 300-380 c.e. Because of his treatise, "Alambanapariksa", Dignaga (480-540 c.e., the founder of the Buddhist school of logic and epistemology, is added to names of Yogacara masters.

Following the flow of presentations in the General Introduction, Tola and Dragonetti describe in brief detail principle events of the Yogacara school and treatises. "Storehouse consciousness" (*alayavijnana*) is the arguing theme of many Buddhist writers, and these authors present a complex proposal that thoughts are a series of consciousnesses which rest as deposited in the mind at a subliminal, latent level. On this point I argue that our conscious state and unconscious state differ as fully awakened consciousness to that consciousness in the subliminal domain. However, in the karmic sense the *vasanas* (authors' term) are *not* the alayavijnana. This is the storehouse *for* consciousness and not a condition of arousal or non-arousal.

There appears valid reason, as brought out in the section on the "Importance of the Yogacara School of Philosophy" for the authors to dive into the details of better informing the reader of their treatment of this subject. However, there is only a slight "nod" (my term) in this direction only to note that the school gave rise to huge literature (some "masterpieces"), and as far as it shows a great capacity for change and self-enrichment, one wonders if this is for the school, Buddhism in general and/or the individual practicing devotee. (?). There is no reference to a system concept or belief-divergence from a religious idea as mode or reason which formed the Yogacara School. This short paragraph is too little of an explanation, even with directing the reader's attention to the "three treatises that this volume contains". There is no reference to their specifics.

Tola and Dragonetti have organized the body of the book around great masters of the idealistic Yogacara school, viz. Maitreya, Asanga and Vasubandhu. They added the fourth, Dignaga, chronologically the last (480-540 c.e.) contributor who, by

his treatise "Alambanapariksa" was acknowledged as "the founder of the Buddhist school of logic and epistemology". As one reads Part I on Dignaga it must be remembered that this specific reference is back in the Introduction. For ease of referral and for the integrity of the text (flow of information), this should be contained in Part I of the three parts of the text, "Alambanapariksavrtti of Dignaga".

The three works of the two Yogacara masters, one by Dignaga and two by Vasubandhu, are the titles of the three parts of the main body of this book. This arrangement gives a consistency to identifying one master with a particular prominent treatise. In each part however there are numerous referenced works listed by each of the two masters, and the intended effort to clarify and verify authenticity of Tola and Dragonetti's research by naming authors and titles in numerous different languages only serves to encumber any material which would give the reader information on the tenets of the Yogacara School.

Sixteen works, for instance, are enumerated as written by Dignaga with only a brief notation as to the theme and content explaining the text. For most of these, as in the case of the two main Parts given to Vasubandhu, translation credits are cited within the text, where normally there would be added descriptions of the text. These should be in the "Notes" section at the end of each "Part" or immediately after the treatise description. This causes the reader to stumble over the citation and original language credits, e.g. Japanese, Tibetan, Sanskrit, Chinese, German, and lose the important points and description of the purpose of the treatise.

The authors style of enumerating texts important to the two Yogacara school founders and teachers amounts to a brief statement or two of the title, original score, translated text (available or not), reference to other authors on the subject, etc., but there is an absence of descriptions of any

of the sutra, sastra or other works by the primary writers.

In Part III, "The Trisvabhavakarika of Vasubandhu", Tola and Dragonetti venture into great detail about the discovery of this treatise, notes of verification that Vasubandhu (the older) is the author, additional works that treat the theory of "Three Natures", names ad causes of modern authors who refer to this treatise, etc. However, the content and description of the treatise itself is not there, only its importance being that it is brief and "leaves aside, without treating them, several questions that have to do with the subject matter and are developed in other treatises of the school". (The "other" treatises are not referred to by the authors.) Preceding the above is the opening comment of the paragraph, "The present work is not one on the most important works of Vasubandhu because of its brevity.

As a last and summary comment on this text by Tola and Dragonetti, I wish to emphasize the confusion any reader would encounter regarding specific contents of Yogacara literature, and that specifics for study are not there. Trudging through the plethora of references to the literature cited detracts from most details of the works discussed in this text. The omission of a glossary, authors' names index and subject index renders this book awkward for the Buddhist scholar's use and one certainly to be avoided as a worthwhile, informative manual of Yogacara for use in class instruction on Buddhism.

-- Thich An-Hue