

The Crux of the Yogācāra Project

Dan Lusthaus

When Yogācārins deny ‘external objects,’ what are they rejecting and what, if anything, are they affirming? Yogācāra employs many words to designate types of cognitive objects — *viśaya*, *artha*, *ālambana*, *vastu*, *ākāra*, *prameya*, *jñeya*, *viśaya-gocara*, *rūpa-pratibhāsa*, *grāhya*, *nimitta*, etc. We lose access to the nuances of their phenomenology when we homogenize their discourse by using the single English term ‘object’ for all these (and more). Many of these terms are never rejected at all by Yogācārins. As we have seen repeatedly Yogācārins do not reject the category of *rūpa* (matter); eleven of the one hundred dharmas in Yogācāra abhidharma are *rūpa*-dharmas. They also employ a technical, phenomenological vocabulary for the sorts of cognitive activities in which cognitive objects appear — *pratyakṣa*, *upalabdhi*, *grāha*, *khyāti*, *pratibhāsa*, *pratibimba*, *viññapti*, *parināma*, *viśeṣa-prāpti*, *pravṛtti*, *abhūta-parikalpa*, etc. Without some understanding of what these cognitive activities entail, it would be difficult to decide what they include or exclude and why.

Yogācāra is not Metaphysical Idealism

Yogācāra (yoga practice) doctrine received that name because it provided a ‘yoga,’ a comprehensive, therapeutic framework for engaging in the practices that lead to the goal of the bodhisattva path, namely enlightened cognition. Meditation served as the laboratory in which one could study how the mind operated. Yogācāra focused on the question of consciousness from a variety of approaches, including meditation, psychological analysis, epistemology (how we know what we know, how perception operates, what validates knowledge), scholastic categorization, and karmic analysis.

Yogācāra doctrine is often encapsulated by the term *viññapti-mātra*, “nothing-but-noetic constitution” (often rendered “consciousness-only” or “mind-only”) which has sometimes been interpreted as indicating a type of metaphysical idealism, namely, the claim that mind alone is real and that everything else is created by mind. *Viññapti-mātra* and its corollaries *viññāna-mātra* and *citta-mātra* have repeatedly been interpreted by Western and Asian scholars as promoting metaphysical idealism. *Mātra* (“only”), according to this interpretation, acts as an approving affirmation of mind as the true reality. However, the Yogācārin writings themselves argue something very different. Consciousness (*viññāna*) is not the ultimate reality or solution, but rather the root problem. This problem emerges in ordinary mental operations, and it can only be solved by bringing those operations to an end.

Why has Yogācāra been misinterpreted as idealism? The common way of interpreting *mātra* so as to valorize ‘consciousness’ is striking since those same interpreters never impute such implications to *mātra* on the many other occasions it is used by Buddhists or Yogācārins. For instance, the closely allied term *prajñapti-mātra* (“only nominally real”) has never led a modern interpreter to speculate that Language is the metaphysical reality behind the world of experience; on the contrary, those prone to idealist interpretations tend to privilege ineffability and yearn for a realm beyond language and conceptions. Similarly, terms found in Yogācāra texts such as *kalpanā-mātra* (nothing but imaginative construction),¹ *bhṛānta-mātra* (nothing but cognitive error),² *ākāra-mātra* (nothing but a noema),³ *ākṛti-mātra* (nothing but construction),⁴ and so on, have never led interpreters to speculate that the terms accompanying *mātra* in those instances should be treated as metaphysical realities. It is commonly recognized that terms such as *kalpanā*, *bhṛānta*, etc., are emblematic of the problems Buddhism seeks to overcome — namely ignorance and misconceptions (*avidyā*, *moha*, etc.) — so that they cannot signify a positive reality. That the term *viññapti-mātra* has been valorised while no one would dream of valorizing the other *-mātra* compounds is perhaps a testament to the pernicious persistence of *bhāvāsava*, the compulsion to assert something existent to which one can cling. That is one of two extremes from which the middle way is designed to steer us (nihilism is the other). Yogācāra is deeply concerned about the human propensity to posit things we can appropriate.

Yogācāra tends to be misinterpreted as a form of metaphysical idealism primarily because its teachings are taken to be ontological propositions rather than epistemological warnings about karmic problems. The Yogācāra focus on cognition and consciousness grew out of its analysis of karma, and not for the sake of metaphysical speculation.

Yogācāra

Tellingly no Indian Yogācāra text ever claims that the world is created by mind. What they do claim is that we mistake our projected interpretations of the world for the world itself, i.e., we take our own mental constructions to be the world. Their vocabulary for this is as rich as their analysis: *kalpanā* (projective conceptual construction), *parikalpa* and *parikalpita* (ubiquitous imaginary constructions), *abhūta-parikalpa* (imagining something in a locus in which it does not exist), *prapañca* (proliferation of conceptual constructions), *samāropa* (assertive reification), *khyāti* (appearance according to conceptual, linguistic assertions), *pratibimba* (projection), to mention a few. Correct cognition is defined as the removal of those obstacles which prevent us from seeing dependent causal conditions in the manner they actually become (*yathā-bhūtam*). For Yogācāra these causal conditions are cognitive, not metaphysical; they are the mental and perceptual conditions by which sensations and thoughts occur, not the metaphysical machinations of a Creator or an imperceptible domain of inchoate or insensate material. What is known through correct cognition is euphemistically called *tathatā*, “suchness,” which Yogācāra texts are quick to point out is not an actual thing, but only a word (*prajñapti-mātra*).

What is crucial in the forgoing for understanding Yogācāra is that its attention to perceptual and cognitive issues is in line with basic Buddhist thinking, and that this attention is epistemological rather than metaphysical. When Yogācārins discuss “objects,” they are talking about *cognitive* objects, not metaphysical entities.⁵ Rather than offer one more ontology, they attempt to uncover and eliminate the predilections and proclivities (*āśrava*, *anuśaya*) that compel people to generate and cling to such theoretical constructions. Since, according to Yogācāra, all ontologies are epistemological constructions, to understand how cognition operates is to understand how and why people construct the ontologies to which they cling. Ontological attachment is a symptom of cognitive projection (*pratibimba*, *parikalpita*). Careful examination of Yogācāra texts reveals that they make no ontological claims, except to question the validity of making ontological claims.⁶ The reason they give for their ontological silence is that were they to offer a metaphysical description, that description would be appropriated by its interpreters who, due to their proclivities, would project onto it what they wish reality to be, thereby reducing the description to their own presupposed theory of reality. Such projective reductionism is the problem. That is what *vijñapti-mātra* means, viz., to mistake one’s projections for that onto which one is projecting. Vasubandhu’s *Thirty Verses (Trīṃśikā)* states that if one clings to one’s projection of the idea of *vijñapti-mātra*, then one fails to truly dwell in an understanding of *vijñapti-mātra* (verse 27). Enlightened cognition free of all cognitive errors is defined as *nirvikalpa-jñāna*, “cognition without imaginative construction,” i.e., without conceptual overlay. Ironically, Yogācāra’s interpreters and opponents nevertheless could not resist reductively projecting metaphysical theories onto what Yogācārins did say, at once proving Yogācāra was right and at the same time making actual Yogācāra teachings that much harder to access. Interpreting their epistemological analyses as metaphysical pronouncements fundamentally misconstrues their project.

The arguments Yogācāra deploys frequently resemble those made by epistemological idealists. Recognizing those affinities Western scholars early in the twentieth century compared Yogācāra to Kant, and more recently scholars have begun to think that Husserl’s phenomenology comes even closer. There are indeed intriguing similarities, for instance between Husserl’s description of noesis (consciousness projecting its cognitive field) and noema (the constructed cognitive object) on the one hand, and Yogācāra’s analysis of the (cognitive) grasper and the grasped (*grāhaka* and *grāhya*) on the other hand. But there are also important differences between those Western philosophers and Yogācāra. The three most important are: Kant and Husserl play down notions of causality, while Yogācāra developed complex systematic causal theories it deemed to be of the greatest importance; there is no counterpart to either karma or enlightenment in the Western theories, while these are the very *raison d’être* for all Yogācāra theory and practice; finally, the Western philosophies are designed to afford the best possible access to an ontological realm (at least sufficient to acknowledge its existence), while Yogācāra is critical of that motive in all its manifestations. To the extent that epistemological idealists can also be critical realists, Yogācāra may be deemed a type of epistemological idealism, with the proviso that the purpose of its arguments was not to engender an improved ontological theory or commitment, but rather an insistence that we pay the fullest attention to the epistemological and psychological conditions compelling us to construct and attach to ontological theories.

Karma, Matter, and Cognitive Appropriation

The key to Yogācāra theory lies in the Buddhist notions of karma which it inherited and rigorously reinterpreted. As earlier Buddhist texts already explained, karma is responsible for suffering and ignorance, and karma consists of any intentional activity of body, language, or mind. Since the crucial factor is intent, and intent is a cognitive condition, whatever lacks intent is both non-karmic and non-cognitive. Hence, by definition, whatever is non-cognitive can have no karmic influence or consequences. Since Buddhism aims at overcoming ignorance and suffering through the elimination of karmic conditioning, Buddhism, they reasoned, is only concerned with the analysis and correction of whatever falls within the domain of cognitive conditions. Hence questions about the ultimate reality of non-cognitive things are simply irrelevant and useless for solving the problem of karma. Further, Yogācārins emphasize that categories such as materiality (*rūpa*) are cognitive categories. “Materiality” is a word for the colors, textures, sounds, etc., that we experience in acts of perception, and it is only to the extent that they are experienced, perceived and ideologically grasped, thereby becoming objects of attachment, that they have karmic significance. Intentional acts also have moral motives and consequences. Since effects are shaped by their causes, an act with a wholesome intent would tend to yield wholesome fruits, while unwholesome intentions produce unwholesome effects.

In contrast to the cognitive karmic dimension, Buddhism considered material elements (*rūpa*) karmically neutral. The problem with material things is not their materiality, but the psychology of appropriation (*upādāna*) — desiring, grasping, clinging, attachment — that permeates our ideas and perceptions of such things. It is not the materiality of gold that leads to problems, but rather our *ideas* about the value of gold and the attitudes and actions we engage in as a result of those ideas. Those ideas have been acquired through previous experiences. By repeated exposure to certain ideas and cognitive conditions, one is conditioned to respond habitually in a similar manner to similar circumstances. Eventually these habits are embodied, becoming reflexive, presuppositional. For Buddhists this process by which conditioning becoming embodied (*saṃskāra*) is not confined to a single life-time, but accrues over many life-times. *Samāsāra* (the continuous cycle of birth and death) is the karmic en-act-ment of this repetition, the reoccurrence of cognitive embodied habits in new life situations and life forms.

For all Buddhists this follows a simple sensory calculus: Pleasurable feelings we wish to hold on to, or repeat. Painful feelings we wish to cut off, or avoid. Pleasure and pain, reward and punishment, approval and disapproval, and so on, condition us. Our karmic habits (*vāsanā*) are constructed this way. Since all is impermanent, pleasurable feelings cannot be maintained or repeated permanently; painful things (such as sickness and death) cannot be avoided permanently. The greater the dissonance between our actual impermanent experience and our expectations for permanent desired ends, the more we suffer, and the greater tendency (*anuśaya*) toward projecting our desires onto the world as compensation. Though nothing whatsoever is permanent, we imagine all sort of permanent things — from God to soul to essences — in an effort to avoid facing the fact that none of us has a permanent self. We think that if we can prove something is permanent, anything, then we too have a chance for permanence. The anxiety about our lack of self and all the cognitive and karmic mischief it generates is called several things by Yogācāra, including *jñeyāvaraṇa* (obstruction of the knowable, i.e., our self-obsessions prevent us from seeing things as they are) and *abhūta-parikalpa* (imagining something — namely permanence or a self — to exist in a locus in which it is absent).

The karmic cause of the fundamental dis-ease (*duḥkha*) is desire expressed through body, speech, or mind. Therefore Yogācāra focused exclusively on cognitive and mental activities in relation to their intentions, i.e., the operations of consciousness, since the problem was located there. Buddhism had always identified ignorance and desire as the primary causes of suffering and rebirth. Yogācārins mapped these mental functions in order to dismantle them. Because maps of this sort were also creations of the mind, they too would ultimately have to be abandoned in the course of the dismantling, but their therapeutic value would have been served in bringing about enlightenment. This view of the provisional expediency of Buddhism can be traced back to Buddha himself. Yogācārins describe enlightenment as resulting from Overturning the Cognitive Basis (*āśraya-paravṛtti*), i.e., overturning the conceptual projections and imaginings which act as the base of our cognitive actions. This overturning transforms the basic mode of cognition from consciousness (*vi-jñāna*, dis-cernment) into *jñāna* (direct knowing). Direct knowing was defined as non-conceptual (*nirvikalpa-jñāna*), i.e., devoid of interpretive overlay.

The case of material elements is important for understanding one reason why Yogācāra is not metaphysical idealism. No Yogācāra text denies materiality (*rūpa*) as a valid Buddhist category. On the contrary, Yogācārins include materiality in their analysis. Their approach to materiality is well rooted in Buddhist precedents. Frequently Buddhist texts substitute the term “sensory contact” (Pāli: *phassa*, Sanskrit: *sparśa*) for the term “materiality.” This substitution is a reminder that physical forms are sensory, that they are known to be what they are through sensation. Even the earliest Buddhist texts explain the four primary material elements are the sensory qualities solidity, fluidity, temperature, and mobility; their characterization as earth, water, fire, and air, respectively, is declared an abstraction. Instead of concentrating on the fact of material existence, one observes how a physical thing is sensed, felt, perceived. Yogācāra never denies that there are sense-objects (*viśaya*, *artha*, *ālambana*, etc.), but it denies that it makes any sense to speak of cognitive objects occurring outside an act of cognition. Imagining such an occurrence is itself a cognitive act. Yogācāra is interested in why we feel compelled to so imagine.

The Crux

Everything we know, conceive, imagine, or are aware of, we know through cognition, including the notion that entities might exist independent of our cognition. The mind doesn’t create the physical world, but it produces the interpretative categories through which we know and classify the physical world, and it does this so seamlessly that we mistake our interpretations for the world itself. Those interpretations, which are projections of our desires and anxieties, become obstructions (*āvaraṇa*) preventing us from seeing what is actually the case. In simple terms we are blinded by our own self-interests, our own prejudices (which means what is already prejudged), our desires. Unenlightened cognition is an appropriative act. Yogācāra does not speak about subjects and objects; instead it analyzes perception in terms of graspers (*grāhaka*) and what is grasped (*grāhya*).

Yogācāra at times resembles epistemological idealism, which does not claim that this or any world is constructed by mind, but rather that we are usually incapable of distinguishing our mental constructions and interpretations of the world from the world itself. This narcissism of consciousness Yogācāra calls *viññapti-mātra*, “nothing but conscious construction.” A deceptive trick is built into the way consciousness operates at every moment. Consciousness projects and constructs a cognitive object in such a way that it disowns its own creation — pretending the object is “out there” — in order to render that object capable of being appropriated. Even while what we cognize is occurring within our act of cognition, we cognize it as *if* it were external to our consciousness. That self-deception folded into the very act of cognition is what Yogācārins term *abhūta-parikalpa*. Realization of *viññapti-mātra* exposes this trick intrinsic to consciousness’s workings, catching it in the act, so to speak, thereby eliminating it. When that deception is removed one’s mode of cognition is no longer termed *viññāna* (consciousness); it has become direct cognition (*jñāna*).

Consciousness engages in this deceptive game of projection, dissociation, and appropriation because there is no “self.” According to Buddhism, the deepest, most pernicious erroneous view held by sentient beings is the view that a permanent, eternal, immutable, independent self exists. There is no such self, and deep down we know that. This makes us anxious, since it entails that no self or identity endures forever. In order to assuage that anxiety, we attempt to construct a self, to fill the anxious void, to do something enduring. The projection of cognitive objects for appropriation is consciousness’s main tool for this construction. If I own things (ideas, theories, identities, material objects), then “I am.” If there are permanent objects that I can possess, then I too must be permanent. If I can be identified with something permanent, then I too must have a permanent identity. To undermine this desperate and erroneous appropriative grasping, Yogācāra texts say: Negate the object, and the self is also negated (e.g., *Madhyānta-vibhāga*, 1:4, 8).

That this is the motive behind the denial of external objects is reinforced by Vasubandhu who, in two texts, offers a nearly identical formula, both hinging on two terms: *upalabdhi*, which means to ‘cognitively apprehend,’ i.e., to grasp or appropriate cognitively; and *artha*, ‘referent’ of a linguistic or cognitive act, i.e., that towards which an intentionality intends.⁷

Apprehending *viññapti-mātra* is the basis for the arising of the nonapprehension of *artha*. The nonapprehension of *artha* is the basis for the nonapprehension of *viññapti-mātra*.

vijñapti-mātrapalabdhim niśrityārthānupalabdhir-jayate. Arthānupalabdhim niśritya vijñapti-mātrasyāpi-anupalabdhir-jayate. (Madhyāntavibhāga-bhāṣya I.7)

By the apprehending of citta-mātra, there is the nonapprehension of cognized *artha*. By nonapprehending cognized *artha*, citta also in nonapprehended.

citta-mātra-upalambhena jñeyārthārthānupalambhatā. Jñeyārtha anupalambhena syāc-cittānupalambhatā. (Trisvabhāvanirdeśa 36)

By recognizing that what appears as something apart from an act of consciousness only assumes that appearance within an act of consciousness, that is, that cognitive-objects appear to exist apart from cognition only within an act of cognitive construction, one ceases to grasp at one's own construction as if it were a graspable entity 'out there.' One does not reject the 'object' or noema in order to reify or vaorize noesis or noetic constitution. On the contrary, because one ceases to grasp at the noema, noesis too ceases to be grasped. The circuit of grasped and grasper (*grāhya-grāhaka*) is disrupted, and the type of cognition that endeavors to seize and 'apprehend' its 'object' ceases. This bears repeating. Not only is the object, the *artha*, negated, but that which noetically constitutes it (*vijñapti-mātra*, *citta-mātra*) is also negated.⁸ *Vijñapti-mātra* or *citta-mātra* are provisional antidotes (*pratipakṣa*), put out of operation once their purpose has been achieved. They are not metaphysically reified or lionized.

Vasubandhu's Twenty Verses (*Vimśatikā*)

Vasubandhu's *Twenty Verses* defends Yogācāra from objections by Realists who would assert that what we experience corresponds accurately to real entities that cannot be limited to the constructive activity of individuals. The Yogācāra view is that consciousness is driven by karmic intentionalities (the habitual tendencies produced by past actions), and how we perceive is shaped by that conditioning. The goal of Yogācāra is to break out of this cognitive narcissism and finally wake up to things as they are, devoid of erroneous conceptual projections.

The objections Vasubandhu allows the Realist are strong and pointed. Realists, in fact, must hold precisely these assumptions. For them, external things must exist because such objects are consistently located in

- (1) space and
- (2) time;
- (3) individuals reach a collective consensus about objects in the world rather than each individual being solipsistically trapped in her own private world; and
- (4) the objective world operates by determinate causal principles, not through unreal, ineffective fantasies.

The rest of the text replies to these four objections on a variety of levels. I haven't time to lay this out in full detail, but will sketch some highlights.

(1 & 2) Objects also seem to have spatial and temporal qualities in dreams, although nothing 'external' is present. Thus the appearance of cognitive objects does not require an actual object external to the consciousness cognizing it; but without the consciousness, nothing whatsoever is cognized. In other words, consciousness is a necessary and sufficient condition for the appearance and perception of cognitive objects, while external objects are neither necessary nor sufficient.

(3) Vasubandhu argues that groups, due to collective karma, give rise to misperceptions or interpretations in common. According to karma theory, it is the consequences of one's own actions (karma) that determine what sort of situations one will be 'born into,' and thus the types of groups with which one will share common views and ways of seeing. Thus, his general point is that how we see things is shaped by previous experience, and since experience is intersubjective, we congregate in groups that see things the way we do (based on similarities in our previous experiences). In an intriguing example, Vasubandhu argues that the torturing guards in hell are not real beings but communal projections by hell denizens with which they torture themselves, since it is illogical that one would be born into hell unless one deserved it based on one's previous actions, and if so, then one would not be immune to hell's tortures—but the guards

don't suffer, they mete out suffering. The implication of his argument is that hell itself is merely a paranoid projection.

(4) The appearance of causal efficacy also occurs in dreams. Moreover, in a wet dream, even though the erotic 'object' is not externally real, it causes an observable physical effect (with moral consequences) observable in the waking world as well in the dream. Thus our conscious 'dreams' do have causal efficacy.

After critiquing Indian atomist theories and explaining his seed theory, he returns to the analogy of dreams when addressing the question 'Can we know other minds?' To the claim that other minds are unknowable or at least opaque, Vasubandhu replies that they are knowable, and no more opaque than our own minds are to ourselves. Buddha, who is fully Awakened (=enlightened) knows others' minds more clearly than we know our own. The reason objects and events seem less clear, less consistent in dreams than when awake is because during sleep the mind is overcome by sleepiness and, thus, it is not 'thinking clearly'; therefore, in a dream one does not know the objects therein are only dream-objects until one awakens. To awaken (become enlightened) is to perceive clearly without any mental obstructions. Not only can we know other minds, but we constantly influence each other for better and for worse. Thus karma is intersubjective. Moreover, since the more awake one is, the more causally effective one's mind becomes, sages and Buddhas can exert powerful effects on the world, including devastating destruction, and even life and death.

Here is a partial schematic illustrating how the text develops each of the four issues:

Space	Time	intersubjectivity	causal efficacy
dreams are spatial	dreams are sequential	pretas share a common vision (pus-river) though erroneous	wet dream (fiction has real, ethical consequences)
hell...	...denizens..	...imagine hell guards on the basis of previous karma...	...and are tortured by their own imaginings
seed and its fruit occur in the same place	as seeds mature	by understanding 'this,' one is initiated into non-essentialism of pudgala and dharmas	in terms of their being essentially imagined (<i>kalpita-ātmanā</i>)
atoms not in same place	at same time	not joined (<i>saṃyoga</i>)	atoms cannot form things
perception (<i>pratyakṣā-buddhi</i>) like dream...	...involves an inexistent <i>artha</i>	from vijñapti...	...memories arise.
those not awake...	...don't know that the viṣaya seen in a dream are nonexistent	vijñaptis of various individuals determine each other (<i>anonya-adhipatitvena vijñapti-niyamo mithaḥ</i>)	In a dream, citta is overpowered by sleepiness, ergo their causal power and consistency is less than when awake
...	...	knowing other minds is as hard as knowing one's own mind; but Buddhas know other minds since they no longer discriminate grasped-grasper	...

Conclusions

Yogācārins deny the existence of external objects in two senses:

1. In terms of conventional experience they do not deny objects such as chairs, colors, and trees, but rather they reject the claim that such things *as perceived* appear anywhere else than in consciousness. It is *externality*, not objects per se, that they challenge.
2. While such objects are admissible as conventionalisms, in more precise terms there are no chairs, trees, etc. These are merely words and concepts by which we gather and interpret discrete sensations that arise moment by moment in a causal flux. These words and concepts are mental projections. The point is not

to elevate consciousness, but to warn us not to be fooled by our own cognitive narcissism. Enlightened cognition is likened to a great mirror that impartially and fully reflects everything before it, without attachment to what has passed nor in expectation of what might arrive. What sorts of objects do enlightened ones cognize? Yogācārins refuse to provide an answer aside from saying it is purified from karmic pollution (*anāśrava*), since whatever description they might offer would only be appropriated and reduced to the habitual cognitive categories that are already preventing us from seeing properly.

Enlightenment consists in bringing the eight consciousnesses to an end, replacing them with enlightened cognitive abilities (*jñāna*). Overturning the Basis turns the five sense consciousnesses into immediate cognitions that accomplish what needs to be done (*krtyānuṣṭhāna-jñāna*). The sixth consciousness becomes immediate cognitive mastery (*pratyavekṣaṇa-jñāna*), in which the general and particular characteristics of things are discerned just as they are. This discernment is considered nonconceptual (*nirvikalpa-jñāna*). *Manas* becomes the immediate cognition of equality (*samatā-jñāna*), equalizing self and other. When the Warehouse Consciousness finally ceases it is replaced by the Great Mirror Cognition (*Mahādarśa-jñāna*) that sees and reflects things just as they are, impartially, without exclusion, prejudice, anticipation, attachment, or distortion. The grasper-grasped relation has ceased. It should be noted that these “purified” cognitions all engage the world in immediate and effective ways by removing the self-bias, prejudice, and obstructions that had prevented one previously from perceiving beyond one’s own narcissistic consciousness. When consciousness ends, true knowledge begins.

¹ *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa* 2.

² *Ibid.* 15.

³ *Ibid.* 27.

⁴ *Ibid.* 29.

⁵ This becomes clear as soon as one examines the rich vocabulary Yogācārins employ to denote ‘objects’ and their place in cognitive acts. This vocabulary will be briefly examined shortly.

⁶ Instead of making ontological claims, Yogācāra texts tend to offer a discourse on “purity” (*viśuddhi*, *vyavadāna*, *anāśrava*, etc.), which will be discussed later.

⁷ The double sense of *artha* as both a linguistic referent (‘meaning’) and a sensorial object is poignantly reinforced in *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa* by the repeated use of the term *khyāti* ‘cognitive appearance.’ *Kyāti* actually means a ‘statement,’ or ‘theoretical assertion,’ or something asserted to be the case (Monier-Williams, p. 341a: “‘declaration,’ opinion, view, idea, assertion... perception, knowledge... name, denomination, title...”); in other words, something which appears to be the case because it has been linguistically, conceptually asserted as such. The explication and disruption of this linguistic-cognitive construction is one of the primary subtexts of *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa*.

⁸ While some later traditions in China and Tibet differentiated sharply between *vijñapti-mātra* (Ch. *wei-shih*) and *citta-mātra* (Ch. *wei-hsin*), it is clear from passages such as these that Vasubandhu countenanced no such distinction.