

CITTAMĀTRA OF YOGĀCĀRA BUDDHISM: AN INTERPRETATION WITH REFERENCE TO THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM




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OUTLINE OF THE LECTURE

- ❑ This lecture is based on my dissertation in Buddhist Studies presented to the Graduate School of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Thailand.
- ❑ The lecture covers the following points:
 - ❖ (A) Reviewing the idealistic interpretation of Yogācāra's *cittamātra* by some scholars.
 - ❖ (B) Exploring the sources on *cittamātra* as found in Yogācāra's scriptures.



OUTLINE OF THE LECTURE

- ❖ **(C)** The lecturer's perspectives on the interpretations of the Yogācāra's *cittamātra* as *Metaphysical Idealism* by other scholars.
 - ❖ **(D)** The lecturer's perspectives on how to interpret the Yogācāra's *cittamātra* in a better and possible way relating to its own scriptures, Early Buddhism and also Theravāda Buddhism.
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OUTLINE OF THE LECTURE

- ❖ **(E)** The lecturer's conclusion on how the Yogācāra's *cittamātra* can be interpreted as an epistemological-ethical teaching, not as metaphysical teaching.



YOGĀCĀRA'S SOURCES ON *CITTAMĀTRA* INTERPRETED AS METAPHYSICAL IDEALISM

- ❑ **Cittamātram idaṃ yad idaṃ traidhātukaṃ**
(*Daśabhūmika Sūtra*)

“These three worlds are nothing but mind“

- ❑ **Cittamātram lokaṃ** (*Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*)

“The world is mind-only”



YOGĀCĀRA'S SOURCES ON *CITTAMĀTRA* INTERPRETED AS METAPHYSICAL IDEALISM

❑ Mahāyāne traidhātukaṃ vijñapti- mātraṃ vyavasthāpyate (*Vimśtikā*)

“In the Mahayana system it has been established that those belonging to the three worlds are mere representations of consciousness.”



IDEALISTIC INTERPRETATION

- The concept of Yogācāra's *cittamātra* (and *vijñaptimātra*) has been interpreted by some scholars as *metaphysical idealism* (or *absolute idealism*) in terms of:
 - Mind-only
 - The world is nothing but mind
 - Nothing exists outside the mind
 - Mind alone is real and everything else is created by mind
 - Mind alone exists and everything you see or feel is just an illusion of the mind.



IDEALISTIC INTERPRETATION BY SOME SCHOLARS

- ❑ P. T. Raju: “This *Vijñapti-mātra* is some supra-mundane consciousness beyond mind and picturing thought. It is the pure element called *Dharma*, that is *Dharmadhātu*, of Buddha and is the same as his *Dharmakāya*” (*Idealistic Thought of India*, 1953)



IDEALISTIC INTERPRETATION BY SOME SCHOLARS

- ❑ **T.R.V. Murti:** “The Idealistic Position of *Vijñānavāda*, on the other hand, the knowing act or consciousness to be the only real, and the object is projected, created, out of it...” (*The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, 1955)



IDEALISTIC INTERPRETATION BY SOME SCHOLARS

- **S. N. Dasgupta:** “As a ground of this *ālayavijñāna* we have the pure consciousness called the *vijñapti-mātra*, which is beyond all experiences, transcendent and pure consciousness, pure bliss, eternal, unchangeable and unthinkable. It is this one pure being as pure consciousness and pure bliss, eternal and unchangeable like the *Brahman* of the *Vedānta*, that forms the ultimate ground and ultimate essence of all appearances...” (*Buddhist Idealism*, 1962)



IDEALISTIC INTERPRETATION BY SOME SCHOLARS

- ❑ **Th. Stcherbatsky:** “There is a transcendent Absolute Reality of the Pure Spirit (*vijñapti-mātra*), Hegel’s Absolute Idea.” (*Madhyānta-vibhāga*, 1971)




A POSSIBLE WAY TO INTERPRET *CITTAMĀTRA/ VIJÑĀPTI-MĀTRA*

- ❑ Yogacara school (or *Vijñānavāda*), as other Buddhist schools, tries to teach the worldly people that they are subject to suffering or the Round of *Samsāra* and to point the way leading escape the cessation of suffering.
- ❑ The name “Yogācāra” comes from two words: “Yoga”, which means meditation; and “ācāra”, which means practice.
- ❑ Vijñānavāda means the school emphasizing mind or consciousness as the central and leading component of life that can bring suffering and can be trained or cultivated towards enlightenment.



A POSSIBLE WAY TO INTERPRET *CITTAMĀTRA/VIJÑĀPTI-MĀTRA*

- ❑ The word “*cittamātra/vijñapti-matra*” in Yogacara’s scriptures occurs in the context regarding suffering and the cessation of suffering as found in other Buddhist schools.
 - ❑ The word “*Mātra*” (Pali = *Matta*) should not be interpreted as the word denying the existence of external world, or asserting the mind-only.
 - ❑ It should be interpreted as the word reminding ordinary people of their experiences as their mind-only (or thought-only), because they do not realize them as they really are.
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A POSSIBLE WAY TO INTERPRET *CITTAMĀTRA/VIJÑAPTI-MĀTRA*

- ❑ It should be interpreted as the word showing that the nature of ordinary people's experiences as their mind-only (or thought-only), because they do not realize them as they really are.
- ❑ *Cittamātra/vijnapti-matra* should not be viewed as the absolute state of reality, but as only what ordinary people experience as objects in the state of *saṃsāra*.
- ❑ The realization of *cittamātra/vijnapti-matra* is only an intermediary step towards final enlightenment.



AN INTERPRETATION OF *CITTAMĀTRA* WITH REFERENCE TO THE PALI TIPITAKA

- ❑ *Cittamātra/vijnapti-matra* can be interpreted with reference to the sources on mind in the Pali Tipitaka like:

- ❑ **Cittena nīyati loko**

The world is led around by mind.

- ❑ **Manopubbaṅgamā dhammā, manoseṭṭhā manomayā**

Mind precedes all mental states; they have mind as their chief; they are mind-made.

- ❑ **Cittaṃ dantaṃ sukhāvahaṃ**

The trained mind brings happiness.

- ❑ **Cittaṃ guttaṃ sukhāvahaṃ**

The guarded mind brings happiness.



“CITTAMATTA” AS FOUND IN THERAVADA COMMENTARIES

- ❑ So tāya saddhim abhiramanto dhamme cittamattampi anuppādetvā... (*Apetavatthu Commentary*)

He (the millionaire's son), while enjoying with the woman, does not cause even the thought-only to happen in *dhamma* ...”

- ❑ Mohakālussi yassa appahīnattā saññāmattaṃ vā cittamattaṃ vā uppajjati (*Patisambhidāmagga Commentary*)
- ❑ Because the darkness of delusion not being abandoned yet, perception-only or thought-only happens.



AN INTERPRETATION OF *CITTAMĀTRA* WITH REFERENCE TO THERAVADA COMMENTARIES

- ❑ From the mentioned sources, we can see that the Pali word “*cittamatta*” (Sanskrit = *cittamātra*) in Theravada commentaries is used in the context of ordinary people’s thought or thinking and perception.
- ❑ Interestingly, the *cittamatta* happens in the context of three distortions (*vipallāsa*): distortion of perception (*saññā-vipallāsa*), distortion of thought (*citta-vipallāsa*), and distortion of views (*ditthi-vipallāsa*).



AN INTERPRETATION OF *CITTAMĀTRA* WITH REFERENCE TO THERAVADA COMMENTARIES

- ❑ According to the principle of vipallāsa, ordinary people's perception, thought, and views are distorted by delusion or ignorance.
- ❑ So long as being influenced by delusion, ordinary people can not realize things as they really are.
- ❑ So, it can be said that, according to *Yogācāra* and *Theravāda*, ordinary people's perception, thought, and views are nothing but their mind-only or consciousness-only.



Q & A

