Three-Nature Models of Reality

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The Yogācāras define reality in terms of three natures, i.e., the imagined, dependent and perfect natures of mind: A dependently arising mind stream of false imagination (*abhūtapari-kalpa*), i.e., the substantially or ultimately existing dependent nature (*paratantrasvabhāva*), projects the imagined nature (*parikalpitasvabhāva*) of a perceived object and perceiving subject, which exist only nominally. The third—the perfect—nature (*pariniṣpannasvabhāva*) is the dependent empty of the imagined. This "common" model of reality dominates Yogācāra literature and is most explicitly taught in Vasubandhu's *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi* (i.e., *Triṃśikā*, verse 25), which formed the basis of Xuanzang's (玄奘) Buddhology. However, in the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* and the *Vyākhyāyukti* we also find strands of an uncommon Yogācāra model of reality that restricts the ontological status of the dependent nature to the level of relative truth/reality, especially when the three-nature model is explained in terms of the two realities/truths system.

It will be argued that if one accepts that the strands with the uncommon model of reality reflect the ultimate definite intention of Yogācāra, the latter can be easily brought in line with either Madhyamaka or Tathāgatagarbha thought. Such a synthesis also contributes to remedying the flaws Yogācāra has in the eyes of Mādhyamikas, namely that a considerable group of sentient beings is completely cut off from liberation or that a dependently arising mind exists on the level of ultimate reality/truth. This line of thought was mainly followed by the Nyingma, Kagyu and Jonang schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

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