

Ālayavijñāna* as Keystone Dharma: The *Ālaya* Treatise of the *Yogācarabhūmi

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The *Ālaya Treatise* – an abbreviation of SCHMITHAUSEN's longer term for one short section of the *Yogācarabhūmi-Viniścayasamgrahaṇī*¹ – is remarkable for its presentation of *ālayavijñāna*. Neither its earliest mention, nor its lengthiest exposition, what the *Ālaya Treatise* provides rather is the most *systematically* Abhidharmic treatment of *ālayavijñāna* in Indian Yogācāra literature. The *Treatise* analyzes *ālayavijñāna* in terms of standard Abhidharma categories – its cognitive objects (*ālambana*), associated mental factors (*caitta*), and simultaneous (*sahabhū*) and reciprocal conditions (*anyonyapratyaya*) – while placing all this in the larger context of the ongoing perpetuation (*pravṛtti*) and eventual cessation (*nivṛtti*) of *ālayavijñāna* as a *saṃsāric* process.²

The significance of treating *ālayavijñāna* in such thoroughly Abhidharmic terms, in effect the significance of the *Ālaya Treatise* itself, is not patently obvious. It can only be appreciated in its larger historical and doctrinal context, i.e., in relation to problems that contemporaneous Abhidharma schools faced in trying to explain the continuity of *saṃsāric* existence, particularly the continuity of karmic potential and the latent afflictions as well as the gradual nature of the path to liberation, solely in terms of momentary factors (*dharma*s). Since *ālayavijñāna* is thought to participate in both temporal dimensions – the momentary, dharmic dimension as well as one's continuing *saṃsāric* existence – it could be seen as the keystone *dharma*, the *dharma* that bridges the Abhidharmic analyses of mind in terms of momentary *dharma*s, on the one hand, with the wider, indispensable dimension of *saṃsāric* existence (and its cessation), on the other.

With this new *dharma* in place, the *Ālaya Treatise* of the *Yogācarabhūmi* is able to develop a dynamic model of mind whose explanatory power is larger than the sum of its parts, providing a more thoroughly-going constructivist theory of cognition than Indian Buddhist thought had hitherto seen.

To demonstrate these twin theses – that the *ālayavijñāna* in the *Ālaya Treatise* both responds to and yet transcends its originating Abhidharmic context – we need to examine the text in some detail, first its overall structure, then its specific content. Only then might we comment on the dharmic nature of *ālayavijñāna*.

***Ālayavijñāna* as Core Component of *Saṃsāric* Existence: The *Ālaya Treatise* as a whole**

The larger, *saṃsāric* role that *ālayavijñāna* plays in the *Ālaya Treatise* is evident in its basic structure. The first and larger part of the *Treatise*, the *Pravṛtti Portion*,³ depicts how *ālayavijñāna* arises with and is perpetuated (*pravṛtti*) by various conditions, i.e., with its own cognitive objects and associated mental factors, and by other simultaneous and mutually conditioning influences. In this respect, *ālayavijñāna* represents the continuity of the mental stream (*cittasantāna*) as the essential element of *saṃsāric* existence, corresponding to that aspect of cognitive awareness (*vijñāna*) which earlier Buddhist traditions also considered to persist uninterruptedly from one lifetime to another for as long as *saṃsāra* lasts. Conversely, the second part of the text, the *Nivṛtti Portion*,⁴ discusses the eventual cessation (*nivṛtti*) of *ālayavijñāna* far along the Buddhist path; this, too, corresponds to the cessation of *vijñāna* posited by

¹ See SCHMITHAUSEN (1987.I:10). In SCHMITHAUSEN's usage, the *Ālaya Treatise* includes the short *Proof Portion* as well as the *Pravṛtti* and *Nivṛtti Portions*. Since we will not discuss the *Proof Portion*, '*Ālaya Treatise*' will refer here only to these latter two portions.

² Since this portion of the *Yogācarabhūmi* is extant only in Tibetan and Chinese, *all* the Sanskrit terms are reconstructions, based mostly on HAKAMAYA (1979) and SCHMITHAUSEN (1987). We have therefore dispensed with the usual asterisk for reconstructions.

³ *Pravṛtti Portion*: D4038.zhi.3b7-7a₁; T1579.580a₂-581a₂₄; T1584.1019a₂₉-1020a₁₃. We have followed the outline from HAKAMAYA (1979), with some slight modification, for ease of reference both to his and SCHMITHAUSEN's work (1987).

⁴ *Nivṛtti Portion*: D4038.zhi.7a₁-8b₇; T1579.581a₂₄-582a₃; T1584.1020a₁₃-c₃.

other schools. In sum, the perpetuation and cessation of the form of *viññāna* that Yogācārin came to call '*ālaya*' is effectively equated in the *Ālaya Treatise* with the perpetuation and cessation of *saṃsāric* existence itself. *Ālayaviññāna* represents *saṃsāric* existence *par excellence*.

But how does the *Ālaya Treatise* reconcile this continuing, *saṃsāric* aspect of *ālayaviññāna* with the standard Abhidharmic analyses of mind exclusively in terms of momentary factors? For, insofar as *ālayaviññāna* is a form of *viññāna* it ought – in Abhidharmic terms – only occur from moment to moment in dependence upon equally momentary causal factors. The *Pravṛtti Portion* of the *Treatise* sets out to answer this question in specifically Abhidharmic terms. And in doing so it constructs a new model of mind, one that also provides at the same time a strongly constructivist theory of cognition.

Ālayaviññāna* as Keystone Dharma for the Yogācāra Theory of Cognition: The *Pravṛtti Portion

The *Pravṛtti Portion* is divided into four sections, each of which explains how *ālayaviññāna* arises (or is perpetuated; *pravṛtti*) in conjunction with specific concomitant or causal conditions. *Ālayaviññāna* arises 1) with its own cognitive objects (*ālambana*); 2) in relation to the mental factors with which it is conjoined or associated (*samprayoga*); 3) through its mutual conditioning relationship (*anyonyapratyayatā*) with other forms of cognitive awareness (*pravṛttiviññāna*); and 4) with mental processes that arise simultaneously (*sahabhū*) with it. Together, these constitute, *in systematic Abhidharmic terms*, the causal conditions that influence the continual arising, the perpetuation, of the form of cognitive awareness that Yogācārin call '*ālaya*' *viññāna*, the 'home' or 'store-house' consciousness.⁵

1. The first section sets forth the various 'objects' (*ālambana*) with which *ālayaviññāna* arises (*ālambanapravṛttivyavasthāna*).⁶

Briefly, *ālayaviññāna* arises by means of a twofold objective support:

- (1) by the perception of the inner substratum (*adhyātman upādānaviññapti*); and
- (2) by the perception of the external, shared world whose aspects are not clearly delineated (*bahirdhā-aparicchinnākāra-bhājana-viññapti*).⁷

This section begins describing the cognitive dimension of *ālayaviññāna*, that is, *ālayaviññāna* as a form of cognitive awareness (*viññāna*) in its own right. Accordingly, it follows the traditional formulation for the arising of a moment of cognitive awareness, i.e., it arises or occurs in dependence upon various conditions. As with earlier Buddhist analyses of mind, *ālayaviññāna* here is *not* a cognitive faculty that actively *cognizes* objects, nor is it the subject of cognition as opposed to its object. In standard Abhidharmic modes of analyzing cognitive processes, *viññāna* is a resultant *dharma* (*vipāka*) that automatically arises when specific objects impinge upon their correlative faculties. For example, when a round red object impinges upon an unimpaired visual faculty (which is not color-blind), triggering a conceptual schema concerning round objects, then a mental cognitive awareness that one 'sees a red ball' also occurs. This awareness is the *result* of the interaction of that object with its correlative faculties. The awareness itself is neither the faculty nor the agent of those cognitive processes. It doesn't act, it arises.

Similarly, Yogācārin maintain that another mode of cognitive awareness (*viññāna*), which they call '*ālaya*,' occurs with the coming together of the "perception of the external shared world" and the "inner substratum." In what sense, though, are these conditions correlative to each other? First, the text explains that the inner substratum (*adhyātman-upādāna*) is twofold, it consists of: 1) the "material sense faculties along with their bases" (*sādhiṣṭhānam indriyarūpam*), as well as 2) the "impressions of

⁵ *Ālaya* is a nominal form composed of the prefix *ā*, "near to, towards" plus the verbal root *lī*, "to cling or press closely, stick or adhere to, to lie, recline, alight or settle upon, hide or cower down in, disappear, vanish." It has the derivative senses of 'home,' 'base,' or 'store,' along with the affective sense of 'clinging.' No English word combines all these.

⁶ Section 1: D4038.zhi.3b7-4b2; T1579.580a2-28; T1584.1019a29-b16.

⁷ D4038.zhi.3b7. (1.b)A. *mdor bsdu na kun gzhi rnam par shes pa ni dmigs pa rnam pa gnyis kyis 'jug ste / nang gi len pa rnam par rig pa dang / phyi rol gyi snod rnam pa yongs su ma chad pa rnam par rig pas so*. This passage is paralleled in the *Triṃśikābhāṣya* (LÉVI, 1925:195f): *ālayaviññānam dvidhā pravartate/ adhyātman upādānaviññaptito bahirdhā 'paricchinnākārabhājanaviññaptitā ca*.

attachment to the falsely discriminated" (*parikalpita-svabhāva-abhiniveṣa-vāsanā*).⁸ That is, the 'inner' conditions that correlate with a perception of the "external shared world" are *all* the sense faculties as well as the various cognitive predispositions to partition the world into discrete and apparently real entities, i.e., the "falsely discriminated." Thus, based upon this full bodily consciousness accompanied by cognitive schemas, a mode of awareness arises with an indistinct perception of the external world as its object. And since humans as a species have similar faculties and similar predispositions that enable similar perceptions, this 'world' that we indistinctly perceive is largely similar or 'shared' (*bhājanaloka*). As the text states, "the continuous, uninterrupted perception of the continuity of the shared world [is] based upon that very *ālayavijñāna* which has the inner substratum as an object."⁹ 'External' perception depends upon 'inner' capacities.

As a condition for the arising of *ālayavijñāna* (i.e., '*ālambanapravṛtti*'), however, this object is both effectively outside our immediate awareness and yet more or less constant. First, the text says these objects are "subtle" (*sūkṣma*), "difficult to discern" (*duṣpariccheda*), "not clearly delineated" (*apariccinnākāra*);¹⁰ they are, in short, subliminal. This subliminal perception of the surrounding, shared world is also continuous: it is "always there, not sometimes this and sometimes that."¹¹ That is, our faculties and cognitive predispositions are always engaged with "the external, shared world whose aspects are not delineated" in such a way as to continuously give rise to forms of subliminal awareness. For example, we are continuously aware, albeit only vaguely, of our bodies in relation to the surrounding world, a sense we now call proprioception. Since we always exist in relation to an 'external' world, *ālaya* awareness is said to "continuously arise in a stream of moments," although, the text warns, this does not mean that "it is singular (*ekatva*) or eternal."¹² Like a stream, it is a process that *occurs* uninterruptedly as long as its enabling conditions persist.

In sum, this section outlines a mode of subliminal cognitive awareness (*ālayavijñāna*) that continuously occurs in dependence upon the interaction between our embodied sensory and mental faculties and the surrounding world – a world whose aspects are, however, not clearly discernible. In this analysis of "the arising of *ālayavijñāna* by means of its objects," the text closely follows the basic mode of Abhidharmic analysis: *ālayavijñāna* arises moment to moment in dependence upon the concomitance of specific, correlative conditions, the same kind of conditions that give rise to other, more standard forms of cognitive awareness (*vijñāna*). The only departure from standard models so far is that these processes are subliminal, "hard to discern."

2. The second section of the *Ālaya Treatise*¹³ further describes the cognitive aspects of *ālayavijñāna* by noting the equally subliminal mental factors that are associated with (*samprayoga*) this subliminal awareness. This prominently includes the list of mental factors (*caitta*) that are thought to characterize each and every moment of conscious mind (*citta*) in the Yogācāra system (*citta-samprayukta-sarvatraga*): attention (*manaskāra*), sensation or contact (*sparśa*), feeling (*vedanā*), apperception (*saṃjñā*) and intention (*cetanā*).¹⁴ Only here, as we might expect, the mental processes accompanying *ālayavijñāna* are also said to be "subtle and hard to perceive even for worldly sages."¹⁵ They are, moreover, hedonically neutral (neither pleasurable nor painful) and, since they are results, not causes, of actions, they are also karmically indeterminate (*avyākṛta*), i.e., they do not cause new karma.

⁸ D4038.zhi.3b7-4a₁. (1.b)A.1. *de la nang gi len pa ni kun brtags pa'i ngo bo nyid la mngon par zhen pa'i bag chags dang rten dang dbang po'i gzugs so.*

⁹ D4038.zhi.4a₁₋₂. (1.b)A.2. *de la phyi rol gyi snod rnam pa yongs su ma bcad pa rnam par rig pa ni kun gzhi rnam par shes pa nang gi len pa'i dmigs pa gang yin pa de nyid la brten nas/ rtag tu rgyun mi 'chad par 'jig rten dang snod kyi rgyun rnam par rig pa ste.*

¹⁰ D4038.zhi.4a₃₋₄. (1.b)B.1 *dmigs pa de ni 'jig rten gyi mkhas pa rnam kyis kyang yongs su gcad par dga' ba'i phyir phra ba yin no.* Translation: "The object is subtle because it is difficult to discern even by worldly sages."

¹¹ D4038.zhi.4a₄. (1.b)B.2. *dmigs pa de ni rtag tu yod pa yin te/ lan 'ga' gzhan du 'gyur la/ lan 'ga' gzhan du 'gyur ba ma yin no.*

¹² D4038.zhi.4a₅ (1.b)B.3. *kun gzhi rnam par shes pa de ni dmigs pa la skad cig pa yin par blta bar bya ste/ skad cig pa'i rgyun gyi rgyud kyis 'jug pa yin gyi/ gcig pa nyid ni ma yin no.* The last phrase, "not eternal," is added in Xuánzàng's Chinese translation only: T1579.580a₁₈: 非一非常 *fēi yī fēi cháng*.

¹³ Section 2: D4038.zhi.4b₂₋₇; T1579.580a_{29-b8}; T1584.1019b₁₆₋₂₂.

¹⁴ For more on these *caittas*, see the article by KRAMER in the present volume.

¹⁵ D4038.zhi.4b₃. (2.b)B.(2). *'jig rten gyi mkhas pa rnam kyis kyang rtog par dka' ba'i phyir phra ba.*

Therefore they do not interfere with the karmic and hedonic nature of supraliminal cognitive processes, and so may occur simultaneously with all types of mental processes – a point we shall return to below.

3. The dynamism of this model of mind is most clearly evident in the third section of the *Pravṛtti Portion*,¹⁶ which presents the ongoing, mutually causal relationship between the *subliminal ālaya* awareness and the *supraliminal* forms of cognitive awareness (*pravṛttivijñāna*). It is in this section that we most clearly see the *Ālaya Treatise's* theory of cognition as a continuous, constructive process – a theory that is itself based upon the innovative Yogācāra response to the problem of the continuity of karmic potential in terms of momentary *dharmas*.

The text describes how *ālayavijñāna* arises in terms of mutual or reciprocal causality (*anyonya-pratyayatā-pravṛtti-vyavasthāna*). It first states that *ālayavijñāna* provides the seed and the support for the traditional six forms of 'arising' or 'functioning' *vijñāna* (*pravṛttivijñāna*) to occur. 'Being a seed' here means that the causal potential for these forms of *vijñāna* to occur (since *vijñāna* is a result, a *vipāka*) persists or is 'stored in' *ālayavijñāna* waiting, as it were, to come to fruition. This function of 'storing seeds' is not only central to the notion of *ālayavijñāna*, the 'store-house' consciousness, but initiates one of Yogācāra's main innovations to Abhidharmic thought. This requires some explanation.

Seeds and the Problem of Karmic Potential in Abhidharma¹⁷

All Buddhist schools posit a causal relation between actions and their results, that is, the 'law' of karma. These results often occur long after their instigating causes, traditionally even after many lifetimes. Hence, all Buddhist schools accepted the idea that the *potential* for karmic results (*upacita*) must persist in some fashion throughout this intervening period (*AKBh ad IV 120*). Most also considered this potential to be closely related to *vijñāna*, the only one of the five components (*skandha*) of human existence that continues from one lifetime to the next. But the crucial question is: what exactly is the relation between this karmic potentiality and the ongoing stream of mind? For once Abhidharma thinkers held that all phenomena (*dharmas*) are momentary (*AKBh ad IV 2b-3b*) and that only present *dharmas* are truly real (since the past is gone and the future has not yet come), they found it difficult to explain how these karmic potentials could exist moment-to-moment until they come to fruition. After all, if they were not present in each and every moment, how could they possibly exist? (*AKBh ad V 25b*) And if they were present, why wouldn't we be experiencing them in each moment?

As is well known, the *Abhidharmakośa* records many of the debates between the Sarvāstivādins and the Sautrāntikas concerning just this question. To address it, the Sarvāstivādins posited a new, *ad hoc dharmā*, 'possession' (*prāpti*), to denote the karmic potentials in one's mind stream (*cittasantāna*). But they considered this 'possession' to persist outside of, or apart from, our moment-to-moment mental processes; its precise relation to such processes was not explicitly prescribed. The Sarvāstivādins thus never fully integrated this new *dharmā*, 'possession,' into their elaborate analyses of mind and mental processes in terms of momentary *dharmas*.¹⁸ The Sautrāntikas agreed that karmic potential could not be related to standard Abhidharmic analyses of momentary mental processes, but they argued that this was because such potentials were not really *dharmas* at all, but merely nominal entities (*prajñaptisat*) best designated by the admittedly conventional metaphor of seeds (*bīja*).¹⁹ In short, neither of these schools successfully integrated the ongoing influences of past actions, of past karma, into their analyses of

¹⁶ Section 3: D4038.zhi.4b7-5a7; T1579.580b₉₋₂₉; T1584.1019b_{22-c6}.

¹⁷ The problems concerning the continuity of karmic potential, as well as of the latent afflictions and the gradual nature of the path – the three major conundrums in Abhidharma thought – have been traced from early Buddhism into Abhidharma and Yogācāra in my work, WALDRON (2003:55-80).

¹⁸ 'Possession' (*prāpti*) is considered 'dissociated from mind' (*cittaviprayukta*). It has no direct influence upon manifest cognitive processes and is therefore karmically neutral (*avyākṛta*). *AKBh II 35a-b* (SHASTRI, 1981:209): *viprayuktās tu saṃskārāḥ prāptyaprāpti*. "Possession and non-possession are however karmic formations dissociated [from mind]."

¹⁹ *AKBh ad II 36d* (SHASTRI, 1981:217). "What is called a seed? Any psycho-physical organism (*nāma-rūpa*) that is capable of producing a fruit, either mediately or immediately, through a specific modification of the mental stream." (*kiṃ punar idaṃ bījaṃ nāma? yan nāmarūpaṃ phalotpattau samartham sāksāt pāramparyeṇa vā; santatipariṇāma-viśeṣāt*). In his commentary on the *Abhidharmakośa*, Yaśomitra warns that a 'seed' is simply a nominal entity. *Vyākhyā ad AKBh II 36* (SHASTRI, 1981:219). "Power, seed, and impression have the same sense. The seed is a specific power... What is called a seed doesn't really exist at all, because it is nominally existent" (*śakti bījaṃ vāsānā iti eka ayam arthaḥ ...śaktiviśeṣa eva bījam. na bījaṃ nāma kiñcit asti, prajñaptisattvāt*).

moment-to-moment mental processes. This was a glaring omission for traditions that so intently analyzed the relation between actions, their results, and the effect of these results on our subsequent actions.

The concept of *ālayavijñāna* as described in the *Ālaya Treatise* presents a solution to this conundrum. *Ālayavijñāna* refers to a distinct kind of subliminal mental process which "continuously arises in a stream of moments" in constant dependence upon its own conditions: its distinct cognitive objects, distinct concomitant mental factors, etc. It thus follows the strictures of Abhidharmic analyses in terms of moment-to-moment arising of mental processes, yet it also persists uninterruptedly throughout one's entire lifetime and into the next. Moreover, this mode of awareness, along with its concomitant factors, is subliminal, "subtle," "difficult to discern." Hence, the 'seeds' – ultimately a metaphor for karmic potentiality – could readily persist in relation to the ongoing stream of *ālayavijñāna* without contradicting the karmic or hedonic nature of supraliminal cognitive processes (and their concomitants). *Ālayavijñāna* is therefore a most appropriate medium for 'storing' the potentiality of karmic actions until they eventually come to fruition – serving, again, as the key *dharma* that holds the two temporal dimensions of karma together. But unlike either the Sarvāstivādin notion of 'possession' or the Sautrāntika metaphor of seeds, *ālayavijñāna* is actually integrated into the analysis of moment-to-moment mental processes; indeed, this integration constitutes the core contribution of the *Ālaya Treatise*.

To return to the text, the *Ālaya Treatise* declares:

Ālayavijñāna functions as the condition (*pratyaya*) for [the forms of] active cognitive awareness (*pravṛttivijñāna*) in two ways: by being their seed (*bījabhāva*), and by providing their support (*āśrayakara*).²⁰

The text states here that the ongoing and underlying mental processes that comprise *ālayavijñāna* also continuously condition the arising of supraliminal cognitive processes, first by 'storing' the specific causal conditions, the seeds, for these resultant processes to arise, and second by serving as a basal consciousness, the most basic level of embodied, sentient awareness. In this way,

when there is *ālayavijñāna*, which is the support of the mind (*manas*) and mental cognitive awareness (*manovijñāna*) [as well as of the other five groups of sensory cognitive awareness], then mind and mental cognitive awareness [etc.] will also arise, but not when there is no [*ālayavijñāna*].²¹

This is the first half of the mutual conditionality (*anyonyapratyayatā*) between the subliminal *ālayavijñāna* and the supraliminal forms of cognitive awareness (*pravṛttivijñāna*).

Conversely, "the forms of supraliminal cognitive awareness function as the condition of *ālayavijñāna* in two ways: by nurturing (or fattening, *paripuṣṭi*) the seeds in this life,"²² and by causing *ālayavijñāna* to persist on into the next life. "Nurturing seeds in this life" means that the kinds of actions beings perform, whether karmically positive, negative, or neutral, continuously reinforce the conditions for similar actions to occur again through the process of "infusing impressions (*vāsanā bhāvayati*) into *ālayavijñāna*." As a consequence, these behaviors "will arise successively more well-nurtured, well-tempered, and distinct."²³

In short, the text depicts an ongoing feedback process between the underlying awareness of *ālayavijñāna*, which supports the manifest forms of cognitive awareness, and the effects that these manifest forms of cognitive awareness (by their accompanying karmic behavior) have on that supporting *ālayavijñāna*; as the text states, the two kinds of *vijñāna* mutually condition each other. This process is apparent in the gradual acquisition of skills or habits, where repetition leads to routinization, refinement,

²⁰ D4038.zhi.4b₇. (3.b) A. 'di la kun gzhi rnam par shes pa ni rnam pa gnyis kyis 'jug pa'i rnam par shes pa'i rkyen gyi bya ba byed de / sa bon gyi gnos po dang rten byed pas so.

²¹ D4038.zhi.5a₂₋₃. (3.b)A.2.). yid dang yid kyi rnam par shes pa'i gnas kun gzhi rnam par shes pa yod na / yid dang yid kyi rnam par shes pa yang 'byung bar 'gyur gyi med na ni ma yin no.

²² D4038.zhi.5a₃. (3.b)B. de la 'jug pa'i rnam par shes pa ni rnam pa gnyis kyis kun gzhi rnam par shes pa'i rkyen gyi bya ba byed de / tshe 'di la sa bon yongs su brtas par byed pa dang.

²³ D4038.zhi.5a₄₋₆. (3.b)B.1. de la tshe 'di la sa bon yongs su brtas par byed pa ni/ ji lta ji ltar kun gzhi rnam par shes pa la brten pa 'jug pa'i rnam par shes pa dge ba dang/ mi dge ba dang/ lung du ma bstan pa 'byung bar 'gyur ba de lta de ltar rang gi rten la rten de dang lhan cig skye ba dang 'gag pas bag chags sgo bar byed do// rgyu de dang rkyen des na 'jug pa'i rnam par shes pa rnams kyang phyir zhing phyir zhing dge ba la sogs pa'i dngos pos shin tu brtas pa dang/ shin tu sbyangs pa dang/ shin tu 'od gsal ba dag tu 'byung bar 'gyur ro.

and habituation, both physiological and psychological. This process was difficult to explain in standard Abhidharma systems in which only present *dharmas* were real and the effects of past experience were largely consigned to *ad hoc* categories. A model of mind based on multiple, simultaneous and interactive processes, however, more easily explains the process of gradual change in *dharmic* terms.

This process occurs simultaneously as well as sequentially, since both levels of awareness are "arising and ceasing simultaneously" (*lhan cig skye ba dang 'gag pas*) with each other. Even the perception of a simple object, such as a red ball, requires the coordinated activity of both conscious and unconscious processes such as attention, an unimpaired visual faculty, and cognitive predispositions that include the concept 'ball,' etc. – most of which occur outside our immediate awareness.

And since many of the manifest cognitive processes that are thought to occur in every moment of mind, such as feeling (*vedanā*), are themselves the result of previous causal conditions, there are very few moments in which seeds are *not* coming into fruition, just as there are very few moments in which seeds or impressions (*vāsanā*) are *not* being 'infused' into *ālayavijñāna* through one's intentional actions. In sum, the mutual conditionality (*anyonyapratyayatā*) between *ālayavijñāna* and *pravṛttivijñāna* is a continuous, accumulative, and constructive process. This is a dynamic constructivist theory of cognition – in which the way that objects appear is 'constructed' or determined by our capacities to perceive and conceive them, while these capacities themselves only develop through recurrent cognitive experience – that goes well beyond the Abhidharma context in which it originated.

The text stated that it is the karmically positive, negative, or neutral actions that seed and infuse *ālayavijñāna*. It did not, however, indicate what instigates those actions, that is, what makes them *karmically* effective. But for Buddhists, the conative or volitional dimensions of behavior are even more important than the cognitive dimensions. The *Ālaya Treatise* thus proceeds to discuss these as well.

4. The next section of the *Ālaya Treatise*²⁴ discusses the processes that arise simultaneously with *ālayavijñāna* (*sahabhū-pravṛtti-vyavasthāna*), clearly establishing its status as a distinct stream of mind, while introducing another distinctive kind of process called 'mentation' (*manas*) – a continuous, yet subliminal sense of self-centeredness. This is the second innovative concept in Yogācāra cognitive theory.

The text states that *ālayavijñāna* (which is both hedonically neutral and karmically indeterminate, *avyākṛta*), can occur simultaneously with all manner of manifest mental processes:

In this way, *ālayavijñāna* arises and functions concurrently with the [forms of] active cognitive awareness. It also arises and functions concurrently with [their] incidental (*āgantuka*) feelings, as well as with [their] incidental skillful, unskillful, and indeterminate mental factors (*caitasika-dharma*).

But it is not said to be conjoined (*saṃprayukta*) with them. Why is that? Because it arises with a different object (*asamālabhāna*).²⁵

Since *ālayavijñāna* has its own accompanying conditions, associated (*saṃprayukta*) mental factors, and cognitive objects, it constitutes a distinctive stream of mind in its own right.

But even before stating that *ālayavijñāna* could arise simultaneously with the traditional six forms of active cognitive awareness, the section introduces its new notion of *manas*:

Sometimes *ālayavijñāna* arises concurrently (*saha pravartate*) with just one of the [forms of] active cognitive awareness, for example, with mentation (*manas*).

In this way, the mentation (*manas*) – whose mode (*ākāra*) is conceiving (*manyānā*) "I-making" (*ahamkāra*) and the conceit "I am" (*asmimāna*) – always arises and functions simultaneously with *ālayavijñāna* in states with mental activity (*sacittaka*) and even in states lacking mental activity (*acittaka*).

That [mentation] has the mode of taking *ālayavijñāna* as [its] object and conceiving [it] as "I am [this]" (*asmīti*) and "[this is] I" (*aham iti*).²⁶

²⁴ Section 4: D4038.zhi.5a7-7a1; T1579.580b29-581a24; T1584.1019c6-1020a13.

²⁵ D4038.zhi.6a4.5. (4.b)B.1. *de ltar na kun gzhi rnam par shes pa ni 'jug pa'i rnam par shes pa rnam dang yang lhan cig 'byung zhing 'jug go// glo bur gyi tshor ba rnams dang/ glo bur gyi chos dge ba dang/ mi dge ba dang/ lung du ma bstan pa rnams dang yang lhan cig 'byung zhing 'jug ste/ de ni de dag dang mtshungs par ldan pa yin par ni mi brjod do// de ci'i phyir zhe na/ dmigs pa mi mtshungs pa la 'jug pa'i phyir te.*

²⁶ D4038.zhi.6a4.5. (4.b)A.1.(a) *kun gzhi rnam par shes pa ni (a) res 'ga' ni 'jug pa'i rnam par shes pa gcig kho na dang lhan cig tu 'jug ste / 'di lta ste yid dang ngo // 'di ltar ngar 'dzin pa dang/ nga'o snyam pa'i nga rgyal dang/ rlom pa'i rnam pa can gyi yid gang yin pa de ni sems yod pa dang/ sems med pa'i gnas skabs dag na yang dus*

There are several remarkable points in this passage. First, the text states that there is a kind of continuous mental process – occurring in nearly all states of mind – that is preoccupied with the notion or sense of self, a process it calls 'mentation.' And this process "always arises and functions simultaneously with *ālayavijñāna*," which serves as the object of its self-conceiving. From what we have seen of the *ālayavijñāna* in the *Ālaya Treatise* this should not be surprising. For while it is often difficult to clearly identify the referent of our sense of self, it is surely related to the processes associated with *ālayavijñāna*: the continuity of our bodily experience, the persistence of our implicit cognitive schemas, and the ongoing effects of our various behavior patterns, all of which exhibit considerable continuity and consistency. For most people, this sense of self never fully disappears, though it is usually implicit rather than explicit, lurking about in the shadows as it were. As the text observes, this mentation "always arises... even in states lacking mental activity," such as in deep meditation (*nirodhasamāpatti*). Like *ālayavijñāna* itself, this mentation, and the afflictive tendencies associated with it, are both constant yet subliminal.

There are significant, systemic *Abhidharmic* reasons why the Yogācārins formulated our underlying sense of self in this way. This, too, requires some explanation.

Mentation (*manas*) and the Continuity of Latent Afflictions

The second major conundrum created by Abhidharma theory was the continuity of the *kleśas*, the afflictive emotions and attitudes that make actions *karmically* deleterious. Since, like karmic potential, the *kleśas* were also thought to persist through various states of mind until very advanced stages along the path, Abhidharmic theory had a similarly difficult time accounting for their continuity within a theory in which only present *dharma*s are real. For if the *kleśas* were present and active in each and every moment, then karmically skillful states could never arise and liberation would be impossible. But if they were not present, they would not be fully 'real.' As with karmic potential, the Sarvāstivādins and Sautrāntikas also used the concept of 'possession'²⁷ and the metaphor of seeds,²⁸ respectively, to represent the afflictions in an inert or latent state outside of or separate from the moment-to-moment processes of mind. But here, too, they failed to integrate these concepts into their sophisticated analyses of mind and mental processes, resorting instead to factors effectively outside that analysis. And here, too, Yogācārins posited a more *systemic* solution. Addressing this problem the same way they addressed the problem of the continuity of karmic potential, the Yogācārins posited a subliminal stream of afflictive dispositions that continuously arises simultaneously with, *but not contradictory to*, supraliminal mental processes.

This is clearly stated later in this section:

The mentation (*manas*) which was explained above always arises and functions concurrently with *ālayavijñāna*.

One should know that until that [mentation] is completely destroyed [it] is always associated with the four afflictions (*kleśa*) which by nature arise innately (*sahaja*) and concurrently: a view of self-existence (*satkāyadr̥ṣṭi*), the conceit "I am" (*asmimāna*), self-love (*ātmasneha*), and ignorance (*avidyā*).

One should see that these afflictions arise without impeding (*avirodha*) the [karmic quality of] skillfulness (*kuśala*), etc., in states of meditative collectedness (*samāhita*) or non-collectedness, and are obscured-indeterminate (*nivṛtāvyakṛta*).²⁹

rtag tu kun gzhi rnam par shes pa dang lhan cig 'byung zhing 'jug ste/ de ni kun gzhi rnam par shes pa la nga'o snyam pa dang/ bdag go snyam du dmigs shing rlom pa'i rnam pa can yin no. SCHMITHAUSEN (1987.I:149) notes that this passage has "good chances of being the oldest occurrence of the new *manas*."

²⁷ "The term 'latent affliction' is a figure of speech in the discourses for [the dharma] 'possession.'" *AKBh V ad 1d-2a* (SHASTRI, 1981:762): *aupacāriko vā sūtre 'nuśayaśabdaḥ prāptau*.

²⁸ *AKBh ad V 1d-2a* (SHASTRI, 1981:763): "What is called a 'seed-state'? It is the capacity (*śakti*) of an individual for an affliction to arise born from a [previous] affliction." *ko 'yaṃ bījabhāvo nāma? ātmabhāvasya kleśajā kleśotpādanaśaktiḥ*.

²⁹ D4038.zhi.6b₅₋₇ (4.b)B.4. *gang sngar bstan pa'i yid gang yin pa de ni dus rtag tu kun gzhi rnam par shes pa dang lhan cig 'byung zhing 'jug ste/ de ni yang dag par ma bcom gyi bar du dus rtag pa kho nar lhan cig skyes pa'i rang bzhin 'dra ba'i kun nas nyon mongs pa rnam pa bzhi po 'jig tshogs la lta ba'i kun nas nyon mongs pa dang/ nga'o snyam pa'i nga rgyal gyi kun nas nyon mongs pa dang/ bdag la chags pa'i kun nas nyon mongs pa dang/ ma rig pa'i kun nas nyon mongs pa dang mtshungs par ldan pa yin par blta bar bya'o// kun nas nyon mongs pa rnam pa*

Although the afflictions of self-view, etc., arise simultaneously with both *ālayavijñāna* and the six forms of *pravṛttivijñāna* in every state of mind until far along the path, they are not directed toward the same objects as the supraliminal states of mind and thus do not interfere with their karmic quality.³⁰ This concept of mentation (which the *Mahāyānasamgraha* and later Yogācāra texts will amend as 'afflictive mentation,' *kliṣṭamanas*) constitutes a more systemic, a more 'dharmic,' response to this problem than any of the other Abhidharma schools. For the latent afflictions, ignorance, self-view, etc., are now systematically integrated into its comprehensive model of mind.

But how, then, do actions become afflicted so they actually do lead to karmic entanglement? This requires some connection between the latent (and neutral) afflictions associated with mentation (*manas*) and the active afflictions that actually affect manifest mental and physical processes. The *Ālaya Treatise* suggests that the way we usually conceive things is intimately connected to this underlying sense of self:

Mental-cognitive awareness (*manovijñāna*) is said to be *based on* mentation because as long as mentation has not ceased then [mental-cognitive awareness] is not freed from the bondage of perception (*vijñapti*) in regard to phenomena (*nimitta*); but if [mentation] has ceased, then [mental-cognitive awareness] will be freed.³¹

As long as this mentation, with its accompanying ignorance, self-view, and sense of "I am" persists ("until it is completely destroyed"), so long will mental cognitive awareness (*manovijñāna*) be bound to cognize phenomena (*nimitta*) in relation to this sense of self. In other words, to the extent that our mental processes are accompanied by this deep-seated, unconscious self-centeredness, then no moments of mind will ever be entirely free from conceiving things in terms of subject and object, self and other, etc., inviting all the erroneous and afflictive actions such self-centeredness entails.

This section of the text does not, however, specify the circumstances in which these latent afflictions actually would (or would not) instigate afflictive actions, that is, karma. That question is not directly raised by the theoretical themes of the *Pravṛtti Portion*, but it does relate to the practical concerns of the Buddhist path, the theme of the *Nivṛtti Portion*, the closing section of the *Ālaya Treatise*.

Nivṛtti Portion

In contrast to the momentary arising or perpetuation (*pravṛtti*) of the cognitive dimensions of *ālayavijñāna* in the *Pravṛtti Portion*, the *Nivṛtti Portion* discusses its cessation (*nivṛtti*) in the long-term, *samsāric* dimension. *Ālayavijñāna* is virtually equated here with the roots of the defilements (*saṃkleśamūla*) and the mass of accumulated karmic seeds, appropriations (*upādāna*), and spiritual corruptions (*dauṣṭhulya*) that bind beings in the vicious cycle of death and rebirth. As such, it comprises those very processes – *kleśa* and karma – that effectively constitute *samsāric* existence and whose cessation (*nivṛtti*) therefore is tantamount to liberation. What is significant here *Abhidharmically* is that the concept of *ālayavijñāna* also addresses the third major conundrum created by Abhidharmic analysis in terms of momentary *dharmas*: how can one account for progress along the path – which is a gradual process involving differing and often mutually contradictory factors, skillful and unskillful, etc. – if only present *dharmas* are real? And if *ālayavijñāna* were indeed nothing but the root of the defilements, then – since it is the basis for all manifest mental processes – how could skillful states (*kuśala*) ever arise?

The short answer is that despite its close association with the 'seeds' of defiled *dharmas* and the afflictive processes called mentation (*manas*), *ālayavijñāna* itself is karmically neutral (*avyākṛta*). Hence, it presents no inherent impediment to the presence or cultivation of skillful seeds. As the text states,

bzhi po de dag kyang mnyam par bzhag pa dang/ mnyam par ma bzhag pa'i sa la dge ba la sogs pa dag la 'gal ba med par 'jug pa dang/ bsgribs la lung du ma bstan pa yin par blta bar bya'o.

³⁰ A similar discussion occurs in the *Abhidharmakośa* regarding the difference between merely innate (*sahajā*) self-view, which presumably exists in animals and is karmically neutral (*avyākṛta*), and a self-view that is deliberate or conceptual (*vikalpitā*) and is karmically unskillful (*akuśala*). (*ad* V 19; SHASTRI, 1981:794: *sahajā satkāyadrṣṭir avyākṛta... vikalpitā tvakuśaleti*). The concern here is finding the best model for the persistence of innate afflictions.

³¹ D4038.zhi.5b4. (4.b)A.2. *yid kyi rnam par shes pa de ni yid la brten pa zhes bya ste/ rgyu mtshan gi yid ma 'gags na rnam par rig pa'i 'ching ba mi 'grol la/ 'gags na ni de 'grol ba'i phyir ro.*

ālayavijñāna also "holds the seeds of the skillful roots conducive to liberation (*mokṣabhāgīya*) and conducive to penetrating insight (*nirvedhabhāgīya*)."³²

And just as the two-tier model of mind allows Yogācārins to more adequately analyze how karmic habits become "successively more well-nurtured, well-tempered, and distinct," so too does this model allow for a more adequate analysis of the gradual nature of purification along the Buddhist path:

If these [skillful roots] do occur, other mundane skillful roots will become very clear, and therefore they will have greater capacity (*sāmarthyavattara*) to uphold their own seeds and will have greater strength towards [their own future] realization through having nurtured [those very] seeds. Skillful *dharma*s from those seeds will in turn become clearer, and subsequently more desirable and more pleasant results (*vipāka*) will also be realized.³³

In this way, although "the *ālayavijñāna* is the root of the defilements," it nevertheless eventually "ceases through the cultivation of skillful *dharma*s (*kuśaladharmabhāvanā*)."³⁴ Serious practitioners will come to "personally realize that they are bound by the external bond of objective phenomena (*nimittabandhana*) and by the internal bonds of spiritual corruption (*dauṣṭhulya*),"³⁵ which occurs once they have attained deep understanding of the Four Truths (*satyābhisamaya*) and reached the Fully Determined Stage (*saṃyaktaniyāma*) of the Disciple (*śravaka*) or Bodhisattva. Until then, of course, the processes referred to by the term *ālayavijñāna* remain "subtle and hard to perceive even for the wise."

Once the skillful *dharma*s leading to "the wisdom (*jñāna*) which takes true reality (*tathatā*) as its object"³⁶ have been assiduously cultivated, then the very basis of *samsāric* consciousness, *ālayavijñāna*, will also be completely abandoned (*prahīna*), along with all the defilements associated with it. At this point, the text claims, the latent afflictions will no longer have the power to instigate karmically efficacious actions so that "only the mere conditions of physical life remain,"³⁷ free from compulsive drives or aims, ever mindful, responsive, and aware.

Conclusion

What, then, may we say about *ālayavijñāna* based upon this text? First, as we have seen, the *Ālaya Treatise* analyzes *ālayavijñāna* in a systematically Abhidharmic fashion, as a *dharma* that arises from moment-to-moment in dependence upon specific conditions. Furthermore, it analyzes it as a form of *vijñāna* that arises with the same conditions other forms of *vijñāna* do, i.e., in dependence upon sense faculties, cognitive dispositions, and objects. The main difference from traditional forms of *vijñāna* is that '*ālaya*' *vijñāna* arises conditioned by *all* the sense faculties, by potent cognitive dispositions such as the "impressions of attachment to the falsely discriminated," and by an unusual object, the indistinct shared world that is subliminal, subtle, and "hard to discern" – as are, of course, the mental factors (*caitta*) with which *ālayavijñāna* is conjoined. In sum, *ālayavijñāna* arises as a distinct mental stream, similar to but separate from the traditional six forms of *vijñāna*. So far, it seems a standard, if strange, kind of *dharma*.

Moreover, as a distinct stream of mental processes, *ālayavijñāna* is said to arise simultaneously with the traditional six *vijñānas*, constantly interacting with them in a mutually conditioning relationship that suggests a more robust cognitive theory than previous Abhidharmic analyses had heretofore provided. For, in addition to the standard *supraliminal* conditions for *vijñāna* to arise – attention, a sense faculty, and an object – we now also find several simultaneous *subliminal* conditions – the embodied and implicit cognitive schemas, an indistinct external world, and, most importantly, the 'seeds' or causal antecedents for the appearance of such cognitions.

³² D4038.zhi.7a₇-b₃. (5.b) B.1 *kun gzhi rnam par shes pa thar pa'i cha dang mthun pa dang / nges par 'byed pa'i cha dang mthun pa'i dge ba'i rtsa ba rnam kyi sa bon yongs su 'dzin pa gang yin pa.*

³³ D4038.zhi.7b₁₋₃. (5.b) B.1 *de byung na de las gzhan pa 'jig rten pa'i dge ba'i rtsa ba rnam ni ches 'od gsal bar 'gyur zhing/ des na de dag rang gi sa bon yongs su bzung ba la ches mthu dang ldan pa dang sa bon yongs su brtas pas bsgrub pa la ches stobs dang ldan par 'gyur ro// sa bon de las dge ba'i chos de dag kyang ches 'od gsal bar 'grub pa dang/ phyi ma la yang rnam par smin pa ches sdug pa dang/ ches 'dod pa 'grub par 'gyur ro.*

³⁴ D4038.zhi.7b₅. (5.b)B.1. *de ltar na kun nas nyon mongs pa'i rtsa ba kun gzhi rnam par shes pa de ni 'di ltar dge ba'i chos bsgoms pas rnam par ldog par rig par bya'o.*

³⁵ D4038.zhi.8a₁₋₂ (5.b)B.2. *de nang gi so so'i bdag nyid la phyi rol gyi mtshan ma'i 'ching ba dang / nang gi gnas ngan len gyi 'chings bas bdag nyid bcings pa rtog par byed do.*

³⁶ D4038.zhi.8a₃. *de bzhin nyid la dmigs pa'i shes pa.*

³⁷ D4038.zhi.8b₂. (5.b)C.3. *srog gi rkyen du gyur pa tsam kun tu gnas*

The simultaneity of these momentary processes is crucial, for it expresses *in dharmic terms* the multiple, yet implicit conditions necessary for ordinary cognitive process to occur – the physiological schemas (*saṃskārāḥ*) necessary for the sense faculties to even receive and process sense impressions, the conceptual schemas (*saṃskārāḥ*) necessary for these to make any sense, and the causal conditions (*bīja*) for them to arise in the first place. All of these support the strongly constructivist quality of this cognitive theory. As the text says, the six *pravṛttivijñānas* arise *based upon ālayavijñāna*, which "supports" them through its close relation with the sense faculties, the impressions of the "falsely discriminated," and the sheer potentiality for them to occur.

The dynamic nature of this mutually conditioning relationship is central to its larger explanatory aim: by analyzing behavior in terms of the constant interaction between discrete, yet interdependent, streams of mind, with all their attendant conditions, we can better explain how habits are made and unmade *in dharmic terms*. Bad habits become "well-nurtured, well-tempered, and distinct," while skillful habits "become very clear" leading to "more desirable and more pleasant results."

It is the potent combination of all these characteristics – the moment-to-moment continuity of the accumulating results of past actions that persist subliminally yet simultaneously interacting with supraliminal cognitive processes – that make the *Ālaya Treatise's ālayavijñāna* such a keystone *dharma*. For it bridges the past, present, and future in explicitly *dharmic* terms in the three arenas that standard Abhidharmic theory found so problematic: the continuity of karmic potential, the continuity of the afflictions, and the gradual nature of progress along the path. All three of these were essential to the Indian Buddhist worldview, but all three were equally awkward and for the same reason: Abhidharmic theory based on momentary *dharmas* could not explain their continuity in a *dharmically* consistent fashion. This invited a series of *ad hoc* solutions poorly integrated into the Abhidharma system.³⁸ Whatever its own limitations, the concept of *ālayavijñāna* did provide a comparatively parsimonious model for addressing these crucial conundrums.

But one must wonder to what extent this presentation of *ālayavijñāna* exceeds the spirit of Abhidharma, not in its innovative cognitive theory but in transgressing its methodological intent. As PIATIGORSKY (1988:202, n. 17) observes, "the Abhidhamma does not deal with what is non-conscious, because the Abhidhamma is a 'theory of consciousness,' and the rest simply does not exist in the sense of the Abhidhamma." In this sense, designating subliminal awareness as a distinct *dharma* demonstrates the limits of *dharmic* analysis as much as 'possession' or the metaphor of seeds do. For the notion of *ālayavijñāna* is, at bottom, built on the metaphor of seeds – or more precisely, on the concept of potentiality – whether in terms of karma, *kleśa*, or one's evolving habits. And potentiality is not an empirical as much as a conjectural or theoretical concept, based not so much on the observable regularities of one's behavior as on the arguable need for systemic coherence. While few would question the claim that diverse kinds of mental processes occur outside our conscious awareness, many would contest the specifics or significance of their particulars. Nor it is clear that all such processes are best subsumed under a single category. Since the conditions for the arising of *ālayavijñāna* are so various, the functions *ālayavijñāna* plays are equally variegated. If the *Ālaya Treatise* illustrates anything, it is that *ālayavijñāna* arises at the vortex of numerous, multi-faceted processes. In this respect, it seems misleading to consider *ālayavijñāna* a single, substantive term. This has led to considerable confusion.

However unorthodox a *dharma* it may be, *ālayavijñāna* in the *Ālaya Treatise* is nevertheless, first and foremost, a dependently arisen form of awareness. The thoroughly Abhidharmic mode of its analysis – the specific concepts, their systemic relations, the very syntax of dependent arising – evinces the pre-eminence of *dharmic* discourse throughout. These characteristics, and the problems to which they are obviously addressed, not only bespeak a deep commitment to *dharmic* analysis, but to the value of its systemic coherence as well. For early Yogācārins at least, the *dharmic* analysis of *ālayavijñāna* surely supersedes the mere metaphor of 'storing seeds,' a metaphor whose precise sense is nearly always glossed in terms of *dharmas* – never the other way around.

Conversely, when the conventional metaphor of storing seeds is allowed to supersede *dharmic* analyses of *ālayavijñāna* (inverting the conventional and ultimate discourses, in Abhidharmic terms), then the notion of *ālayavijñāna* takes on a decidedly idealistic air, as if it literally and unilaterally "brought

³⁸ As CONZE (1973:138) observed years ago: "the dogmatic assertion of instantaneousness could be made credible only by introducing a number of pseudo-permanencies." He failed to appreciate *ālayavijñāna's* contribution to these problems.

forth the animate and inanimate worlds"³⁹ (rather than, for example, referring to the potentiality for such experiences to arise depending upon multiple, requisite conditions). There are plenty of passages in Yogācāra texts that, at first reading, invite this latter interpretation. But to sustain it, one would have to studiously ignore the *Ālaya Treatise* of the *Yogācarabhūmi*.

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³⁹ D4038.zhi.7a₂₋₃. (5.b)A.1,2. *kun gzhi rnam par shes pa ni / mdor na kun nas nyon mongs pa thams cad kyi rtsa ba yin no / 'di ltar (1.) de ni sems can gyi 'jig rten 'grub pa'i rtsa ba yin te snod kyi 'jig rten 'grub pa'i rtsa ba yang yin te.* “*Ālayavijñāna* is, in short, the root of all defiled [*dharmas*]. Accordingly, it is the root of the coming about of the animate world (**sattva-loka*)... as well as the root of the coming about of the common [inanimate] world (**bhājana-loka*).”