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A Philosophical Investigation of Yogācāra
Buddhism and the Ch'eng Wei-shih Lun*

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*A Review of Buddhist Phenomenology:
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Buddhism and the Ch'eng Wei-shih Lun*

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Buddhist Phenomenology: A Philosophical Investigation of Yogācāra Buddhism and the Ch'eng Wei-shih Lun. By Dan Lusthaus. Curzon Critical Studies in Buddhism Series. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002, xii + 611 pages, ISBN: 0-7007-1186-4 (hardcover), US \$65.00.

This book is an expanded version of Dan Lusthaus's Temple University dissertation (1989). It is built around Vasubandhu's *Triṃśikā* (Thirty Stanzas) and its Chinese exegesis in the *Cheng weishi lun*, composed in mid seventh century China by Xuanzang. *Buddhist Phenomenology* explores two major theses: first, it endeavors to establish that classical Yogācāra is a phenomenological and epistemological investigation of Buddhist questions concerning human existence and is not a form of metaphysical or ontological idealism; second, it tries to show that classical Yogācāra thought evinces a much stronger continuity with earlier lines of Buddhist thought than often assumed.¹

The assessment of Yogācāra in the past has been complicated by its complex interrelation with other branches of Buddhist exegesis such as Sarvāstivāda, Sautrāntika, Prajñāpāramitā (including Mādhyamaka), and Tathāgatagarbha, and by the coexistence of several lines of thought

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developing around core notions such as *ālayavijñāna* and *citta*. Lusthaus's book sets out to disentangle some of the problems pertaining to the constitution and unfolding of Yogācāra thought in its larger doctrinal context and some of its philosophical implications. In fact, the work thus joins an ongoing discussion in English regarding the interpretation of Yogācāra, a discussion which Lusthaus only partly takes into consideration.² Moreover, the author ignores much of the substantial body of writing in Chinese and Japanese, both pre-modern and contemporary, that is pertinent to the subject. While the book does contain important and lucid observations, at the same time it comes across as strong in speculation, but weak in terms of philological and philosophical accuracy. It is often longwinded, rambling, its language fraught with jargon, and it is moreover littered with a plethora of editorial infelicities.³ As its more than 600 pages cannot be treated comprehensively here, I will limit myself to core issues, namely the question of essentialism, problems of philology, and of the philosophy of language.⁴

Lusthaus maintains “idealism”—which he also identifies as “essentialism” and “metaphysics”—to be the most important factor in misinterpreting Yogācāra. Conversely, he offers “phenomenology” as a panacea. He places himself within the modern hybrid genealogy marked by names such as Nietzsche, Saussure, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Derrida, Lyotard, and so on.⁵ At the same time, Lusthaus, in defence of what he considers to be the right interpretation of Buddhist Yogācāra, marshals a broad assortment of weaponry to dispel the ghosts of essentialism.⁶ He goes to great lengths to show that there has always been a tendency within the Buddhist traditions to revert to an “essentialist” interpretation of Buddha's teachings. Accordingly, he assumes that most earlier interpreters have succumbed in one way or other to that tendency.

This same discussion has been going on in contemporary Buddhist studies for several years, e.g., in the work of David Kalupahana, who

believes that the Dharma is a form of empiricist positivism, and in so-called Critical Buddhism, whose representatives suggest that the larger part of East Asian Buddhism is a deviation from the originally anti-essentialist position, and that even Buddha, quite against himself, had partly succumbed to essentialism.⁷ These contemporary discussions are informed both by the challenges arising within philosophy, and by discussions within the Buddhist tradition regarding the correct understanding of impermanence as non-self, which in Prajñāpāramitā thought is phrased in terms of the emptiness of conditioned phenomena, and in Yogācāra in terms of the triple absence of nature. Lusthaus's study is a part of the historicizing movement that seeks to strip Buddhism of its "essentialist accretions." However, I find Lusthaus's argumentation to be unconvincing for two main reasons: his assertion of essentialism is overly sweeping, while at the same time his historical discussion is rather limited.

Yogācāra has often been labeled as "idealism" or "metaphysics" by its modern students, yet there has been no agreement on how that label should apply. One may provisionally distinguish two versions of prioritizing mind/consciousness before matter/object, one ontological, one epistemological. Whether Yogācāra should be subsumed under either of these two categories would, of course, entirely depend on what we can reasonably make out the respective words to infer. At first glance, Lusthaus seems to be justified in assuming that Yogācāra is epistemologically rather than ontologically oriented. However, when one already operates within these philosophical horizons, it is obvious that epistemology, even if it does so only negatively, implies an ontology. The fact that Lusthaus revisits the problematic of *rūpa* several times, and suggests that the reality of *rūpa* is not denied in the Yogācāra, seems to evince the unresolved presence of the "ontological difference" avoided in the name of anti-essentialism. But is not the very attempt of salvaging *rūpa* rather a part of the western "scandal" (Heidegger) preoccupied with the ques-

tion whether there is a material reality apart from the mind? Are the *rūpa-dharmas* really in need of special affirmation or denial, once the nature of *dharmas* has been clarified?

Lusthaus on the one hand, in line with Yogācāra thought, rightly emphasizes that the world (including *rūpa*) is accessible only within “consciousness.” Diana Paul has accordingly called Yogācāra a “philosophy of mind.” However, on the other hand, Lusthaus insists: “Nothing whatsoever exists outside the eighteen *dhātus*. This should be kept in mind by scholars who try to impose some ‘ineffable’ extra-sensory ‘reality’ into Buddhist thought” (56).⁸ Even on the basis of this single quote, the reader can guess that the simultaneous emphasis on “consciousness” and on the “sensory” involves a certain measure of tension. Given Lusthaus’s emphasis on the “sensory,” should we feel confident to interpret him as saying that the proposition cited above pertains exclusively to the sphere of the sensory? Does language, the mind’s naming of the world, primarily belong to the sensorial?

It is striking that Lusthaus, who presents himself as a proponent of phenomenology, appears not to appreciate the fact that Husserl, in his maxim “zu den Sachen selbst,” had moved beyond the flat juxtaposition of idealism and materialism.⁹ Accordingly, Lusthaus, while invoking the authority of phenomenology, insists that the consciousness Yogācāra prioritizes has to be understood as consciousness based on the body, the body being the true basis of the ever seductive *logos*,¹⁰ and the mind being just a “sense” among the senses,¹¹ giving to his interpretation of the Yogācāra doctrine what appears to be more of an empiricist than a truly phenomenological twist. But, if Yogācāra can indeed be called a philosophy, and if we allow that philosophy is the sustained inquiry into what is, and in particular, what this mind is that is asking what is, then it would seem inappropriate to suggest that Yogācāra would claim that all knowledge should be of the senses.

From the point of view of Yogācāra it is the stream of mind that appropriates the body and not the other way around. Already the *Ālaya Treatise* (T 30.1579.0581a25) makes it clear that the *ālaya*-cognition is the root of and engenders (*utpādaka*) both the receptacle world (*bhājana-loka*) and the animate world (*sattva-loka*), the latter including the faculties (*indriya*) together with their bodily foundation as well as the evolving cognitions.¹²

In fact, Yogācāra, in line with the general drift of Buddhism, does not contest that the human condition implies a strong bondage of the mind to and within the body. By this I do not mean to imply any sort of facile dualistic proposition. This notion of the mind being fettered to the sensory world does not, however, suggest a universal or even necessary condition. The evidence of the Yogācāra program regarding the path of liberation does not support the interpretation that the body should be considered as the mono-causal basis of the mind. While the path-dimension of Yogācāra thought does not figure prominently in the *Triṃśikā*, the major object of Lusthaus's investigation, a more in-depth analysis of the path could have served a double purpose, namely to clarify the Yogācāra position regarding body and mind, and at the same time to problematize the question of the limitations of labeling Yogācāra as phenomenology.

Since the whole book presents itself as being built around the *Triṃśikā*'s thirty stanzas, which have been translated into western languages several times before, the reader will want to know whether, and, if so, how Lusthaus's general presuppositions might impact upon his reading of the text. Indeed, Lusthaus presents himself as a cautious reader: "In the perennial dilemma that faces all translators, readability vs. literal accuracy, I have opted for the latter" (444, n. 19). Accordingly, Lusthaus declares earlier translations, e.g., La Vallée Poussin's, to be more readable than faithful. While one may debate some of the termino-

logical and stylistic decisions of La Vallée Poussin, there cannot be any doubt that his knowledge of Buddhism and its languages remains unsurpassed. Besides, Lusthaus's critique of earlier translators is far from convincing, particularly in light of the idiosyncrasies of his own translation,¹³ which is often inadequate and marked by a sort of pseudo-literality.¹⁴

In his exposition of the stanzas, Lusthaus juxtaposes "Vasubandhu's Sanskrit,"¹⁵ "Robinson's Translation," "Paramārtha's Chinese Translation" (the *Zhuanshi lun*) followed by his (Lusthaus's) own translation, and finally "Hsüan-tsang's Translation," followed again by his own English rendering. An examination of his translation shows that his anti-essentialist stance often distorts the *Triṃśikā*'s meaning. When Lusthaus compares Paramārtha's and Xuanzang's translations, we find that his renderings of Paramārtha's translation are deliberately chosen in such a way as to stigmatize him as an "essentialist," while at the same time he magnifies the difference between him and Xuanzang by rendering one and the same word in their respective versions differently. But, as will be seen below, even Xuanzang is not exempted from the essentialist suspicion.¹⁶

If we look at Lusthaus's translation, for instance, when he translates the character *chang* 常 in Paramārtha, but not in Xuanzang, as "eternal" (e.g., 299, 304, 316 n. 82), or when he translates Xuanzang's *liaobie jingshi* 了別境識 as "distinguishing sense-objects," while he renders Paramārtha's *chenshi* 塵識 as "dust consciousness" (in fact a time-honored translation for object-consciousness), he makes Paramārtha's translation appear awkward.¹⁷ In stanza 1 of Xuanzang's translation (275), he renders *you zhongzhong xiang zhuan* 有種種相轉 as "there is the proliferation of their mutual operations (*hsiang-chuan*)." In this case, both Paramārtha and Xuanzang use one and the same *zhuan* 轉. In Paramārtha, however, Lusthaus translates *zhuan* as "revolving," while in

Xuanzang we read “operations,” without being offered any reason for treating identical words differently. Besides, Lusthaus reads Xuanzang’s *hsiang-chuan* as compositional (“mutual operations”), while *xiang* here simply means “characteristics.” The correct interpretation can be easily gleaned from the *Cheng weishi lun* (or for that matter from any of the extant translations).¹⁸

Xuanzang is not spared from Lusthaus’s anti-essentialist onslaught. As evidence he adduces the two occurrences of the word *xingxiang* 性相 in Xuanzang’s *Triṃśikā* translation (stanzas 5 and 8).¹⁹ In the first of these, Lusthaus translates *siliang wei xingxiang* 思量為性相 as “its nature is characterized as ‘willing and deliberating,’” and asserts that “*hsing hsiang* [has] no correlate in the Sanskrit text,” suggesting that *hsing* implies an essence (*svabhāva*). “This entire line is an attempt to render the word *mananātmakam*, which simply means ‘essence of mentation.’” But is it that obvious that *ātmaka* should mean “essence” here? And what for that matter is an “essence”? Can we seriously doubt Xuanzang’s familiarity with *ātmaka* as often simply meaning “to consist in”? Lusthaus tries to strengthen his point by quoting a passage from *Cheng weishi lun* (0026b03):

Next, there are the words: DISCERNING PERCEPTUAL-OBJECTS IS ITS NATURE AND CHARACTERISTIC (*hsing hsiang*). [sic] This pair discloses the self-nature (*tzu-hsing* 自性) and activity-characteristic (*hsing hsiang* 行相 = *ākāra*) of the six consciousnesses. The Consciousnesses take DISCERNING PERCEPTUAL-OBJECTS as their self-nature, and again their ‘activity-characteristic’ (*ākāra*) is precisely the functioning (*yung*) of the [nature]. (Lusthaus’s translation.)²⁰

Following this quote, the author suggests that Xuanzang here “generates new categories in Chinese” by introducing the *tiyong* 體用 paradigm. In the present passage, *xingxiang* 性相 is indeed a shorthand for “nature”

自性 plus “operative form” 行相, namely of the six modes of evolving consciousness (六識自性行相). It is in the nature of cognition to cognize, and the cognized is the operative form of consciousness. But does the present passage qualify as an example of the use of the *tiyong* terminology? It is not difficult to see that the *yong* 用 (in 用彼為行相) is used in parallel to *yi* 以 in the preceding phrase (以了境為自性). In light of the fact that *yong* 用 and *yi* 以 are interchangeable, and that the term *ti* 體 does not occur here, it becomes clear that this passage does not support Lusthaus’s attempt to attribute such an essentializing inclination to Xuanzang. Not only does Lusthaus not provide any positive evidence in support of his reading, he moreover does not discuss the more fundamental questions as to why the *tiyong* 體用 paradigm should qualify as essentialist, and what exactly the problem of essence or truth is. While the present passage—against Lusthaus’s assertion—does in fact not contain the *tiyong* terminology, this does not mean that the *tiyong* paradigm does not occur at all in the *Cheng weishi lun*. However, the assumption that this paradigm has to be interpreted as essentialist is far from self-evident. The habit of translating the words *ti* and *yong* as “substance and function,” or similarly, is in fact within the present context philosophically quite irrelevant.

In the second of the two passages under discussion (了境為性相, stanza 8), we find Xuanzang’s translation of *viṣayasya upalabdhi*, “apprehending of objects.” Lusthaus charges him with conflating the two words *upalabdhi* and *vijñapti*, “as if they were synonyms,” again suggesting that this provides “clear evidence of Chinese interests and paradigms overshadowing and possibly obscuring the thoughts expressed in the Sanskrit text” (371). The *Cheng weishi lun* formulation, however, follows exactly the same pattern as discussed above. Again the *yong* 用 is not the *yong* of *tiyong*. Besides, in the *Abhidharmakośa*, also re-translated by Xuanzang, the commentary on the stanza *vijñānaṃ prativijñaptiḥ*, says: “the aggregate of cognition means cognition, apprehending of respective

objects” (*viṣayaṃ viṣayaṃ prati vijñaptir upalabdhir vijñāna-skandha ity ucyate*).²¹ This shows that there should be no doubt that Xuanzang was correctly aware that the two are synonymous.

Lusthaus (359) further charges Xuanzang with deviating from the *Triṃśikā* in the latter’s claim that liberation to consist in the destruction of the *ālayavijñāna*, whereas in the *Cheng weishi lun* (0013c06) this is further qualified by saying that the *ālaya* cognition’s basis (*shiti* 識體) is not destroyed. Thus, it looks as if Xuanzang did not, indeed, respect Vasubandhu’s express intent. However, we have to consider the specific commentarial conventions obtaining in Buddhist exegesis. In fact, Xuanzang in the *Cheng weishi lun* follows a standard exegetical procedure, rightly assuming that in this context Vasubandhu had a proviso in mind that could not be neglected: when Vasubandhu in the stanza suggests that the arhat has overcome the *ālaya*, this should be understood to mean that “he has not in all respects abandoned the base that is the eighth cognition, because he is not yet free from that which holds seeds [the inborn *dharma-vāsanās*]. [Only being free from that] he would enter into *nirvāṇa* without remainder (非捨一切第八識體。勿阿羅漢無識持種。爾時便入無餘涅槃).”²² Thus, this passage does not at all mean to suggest that in *nirvāṇa* there remains an ultimate “substance,” but it clarifies that the arhat’s achievement is still inferior to the Buddha’s. The impermanence of the *ālaya* is a fundamental doctrine of the *Triṃśikā* and is also clearly stated in Xuanzang’s translation of the *Yogācārabhūmi* (T 30.1579.581c09). In light of this it should be clear why it is inappropriate to suggest that Xuanzang’s interpretation of this *Cheng weishi lun* passage should deviate from Vasubandhu’s intent in the *Triṃśikā*.

While Lusthaus criticizes Sthiramati and Xuanzang as essentialists, he himself often volunteers extremely idiosyncratic interpretations

not supported by any exegetic evidence. In his interpretation of stanza 3 (325), Lusthaus writes of *ālaya-vijñāna*, *manas*, and *mano-vijñāna* that:

In this verse, they are described as:

[1] grasping and ‘feeling’ things (*upādhi* [sic! for *upādi*] 執受),

[2] locus (*sthāna* 處), and

[3] discerning (*vijñaptika* 了), respectively, with the point being that all three operate within *ālaya-vijñāna*, but subconsciously.

To gloss:

[1] *ālaya-vijñāna* ‘holds’ experience,

[2] *manas* localizes experience through thinking, and

[3] *mano-vijñāna* is the discriminating discernment of sense objects (*viṣaya*).

The verse (in stanza 3): “the [*ālaya*’s] cognizing regarding its appropriating [seeds] and its site remain unrecognized” (*asaṃviditakopādi-sthāna-vijñaptikaṃ ca tat*), is understood both within the *Cheng weishi lun* (0010a11) and in Sthiramati’s *Bhāṣya* to specifically speak of *ālayavijñāna*. Sthiramati clarifies that appropriating (*upādi*) means appropriation (*upādāna*) of the seeds; *sthāna-vijñapti* is the cognitive constitution of the receptacle-world (*bhājana-loka*). In the *Cheng weishi lun*, the interpretation of Vasubandhu’s passage is introduced by stating that it is about the “projected objective horizon” (所緣) of the operation of [*ālaya*-] cognition (識行相). Besides, *pace* Lusthaus, *mano-vijñāna* is not exclusively understood to “discern sense-objects,” since its function consists in cognizing mental objects (*dharma-viṣaya*).²³ Thus, both the available interpretations of Sthiramati and Xuanzang speak of two aspects, namely of *upādi* and *sthāna*, but not of three, and both refer to the *ālaya* alone, and not to the triple structure of *ālaya*, *manas* and *pravṛtti-vijñāna*.

A comparable grave problem is to be seen in the interpretation of stanza 22 (*nādr̥ṣṭe 'smin sa dr̥śyate*, 非不見此彼), which Lusthaus translates as “it is not the case that you don’t see ‘this’ [i.e., *paratantra*] and yet can see ‘that’ [i.e., *pariṇiṣpanna*].” Admittedly, the Chinese is elliptic, with the verbal element “to see” occurring only once, while in the Sanskrit we have *adr̥ṣṭa* and *dr̥śyate*. While Lusthaus (314, n. 73) suggests that Vasubandhu is postulating the seeing of *paratantra* as the precondition for the seeing of *pariṇiṣpanna*,²⁴ nevertheless, according to both Sthiramati’s *Bhāṣya* and the *Cheng weishi lun* (T 31.1585.0046b26), it should read: “As long as this [i.e., the accomplished (*pariṇiṣpanna*)] remains unseen (*adr̥ṣṭa*), it [i.e., the dependent] is not seen” (非不證見此圓成實。而能見彼依他起性). Thus, Xuanzang follows the Sanskrit word by word, except that he does not repeat the verbal element “to see.”²⁵

We find a similar problem in Lusthaus’s translation of stanza 17 (291): “These are the various consciousnesses [i.e., the eight consciousnesses] whose alterity (*vijñāna-pariṇāma*; Ch. *shih-chuan-pien*) discriminates and is discriminated. As this and that are entirely nonexistent, therefore all is Psycho-sophic closure.”²⁶ The attempt to collocate *ci* 此 and *bi* 彼 by translating it “as this and that” is based on a misconception of the Chinese compositional and syntactic exigencies and violates both Chinese stylistic conventions and the structure of the Sanskrit formulation.²⁷ From the Chinese point of view there has to be a hiatus between both characters. Moreover, what should alterity as an agent and object of discrimination mean? Lusthaus’s suggestion that according to Xuanzang *vijñāna-pariṇāma* “stands behind these epiphenomena and remains ultimately unaltered by the variations” (434) is another completely implausible attempt to censure him for essentialism. *Pariṇāma* is not a something behind phenomena but their “alteration” itself.²⁸

It is pertinent to consider how Lusthaus in chapter sixteen (426) attempts to extend his interpretation of *pariṇāma* to the question as to how language may impact thought. Thus, in line with his tendency to magnify “differences,” Lusthaus asserts that the respective Sanskrit and Chinese wording of stanza 1 regarding the two dimensions of the stream of mind, namely the “active” (*neng* 能) “altering” (*pariṇāma*) side (as *ālaya*, *manas* and *pravṛtti-vijñāna*), and the “passive altered” (*suo* 所) side (as the two *upacāras* of “self” and *dharma*s), “suggests an entirely different notion of identity and difference than that implied by *neng-suo*”, and that the *neng-suo* pair “creates a much neater distinction in Chinese than the distinction between locative and nominative would suggest in Sanskrit. After all, Sanskrit still has six other declensions [*sic*] to choose from (ablative, genitive, etc.)” It is true that Sanskrit has seven cases, but would the use of any of these cases not rather be a matter of the laws governing regular speech and not so much a matter of free choice? “The locative *pariṇāme* (a.k.a. *pariṇāmo*) [*sic*] ... has been installed in the ambiguous space between the alterity of the two *pariṇāmas*” (433).

Saying that one and the same word in an oblique case is “also known as” the same word in another case does not facilitate the clarification of the characteristic differences of Sanskrit and Chinese. However, more importantly, the stanza in Sanskrit does not so much suggest two separate “alterations” (*pariṇāma*), but the two *upacāras* are declared to occur “within” (locative) and as a “single” (singular) “alteration.” Xuanzang’s translation makes exactly the same point by saying that although there is a panoply of phenomena, nonetheless all share the characteristic of being manifestations of “consciousness.” Lusthaus’s grammatical speculations aside, there is no gap separating the two *upacāras*. They are the two sides of the same process, as the “altered” (*suo* 所) is the mirrored other of “alteration” (*neng* 能). The formulations in Sanskrit (*pariṇāmaḥ*, *pariṇāme*) and Chinese (能變, 所變) can be understood to relate to each other like the inside and outside of a glove.²⁹

Since the Sanskrit terms appear in the verse in grammatically recognizable forms that are nonetheless different from the ‘pure’ versions of those grammatical forms (*pariṇāme* a.k.a. *pariṇāmo*, *pariṇāmas* a.k.a. *pariṇāmah*), this too marks an alterity of Sanskrit grammar, in which words appear through their alter egos. (433)

Again, it seems to me that this fantastic formulation is highly misleading in that it seems to suggest that the locative case (*pariṇāme*) is identical to the nominative (*pariṇāmah*).

Conditions and circumstances *alter* things according to regular and definite principles. Translational alterity means that just as Hsüan-tsang’s translation alters the text, and one seeks to see through it to the original, just so when reading the English translations one attempts to see through them to the originals. (433)

If we may paraphrase what Lusthaus is suggesting here, we can say: It is a matter of principle that conditions do not impact upon things in a random way, but according to patterns co-occasioned by the things and their conditions. Applying this principle to Xuanzang’s translation, we can see that it is a translation exactly in that he says in Chinese what Vasubandhu has said before in Sanskrit. Looking through Xuanzang’s translation we can see Vasubandhu’s original. It is the original that determines the translation—not the other way around. While this has not been a secret, at the same time, Lusthaus—relying on the idea of a “hermeneutics of suspicion”—repeatedly and without sufficient discernment suggests that everybody within tradition is freely tampering with whatever best suits his tastes, that Xuanzang, and so on, invent or “alter” this or that,³⁰ and that authors are mere trajectories running through discursive nodal points.³¹ The conclusion seems to be unavoidable that the place of the “hermeneutics of suspicion” vis-à-vis the necessary acknowledgement that a translation is constellated by the original has not been sufficiently clarified. It is further to be surmised that Lusthaus’s

tendency to misconceive of the exact character of the relationship between the different texts in question is due to an inadequate grasp of the languages involved, but at the same time is additionally compounded by the “wrongly grasped snake” of the “hermeneutics of suspicion.”

Returning to the multiple suggestions that Xuanzang gives an essentialist reading to the *Triṃśikā*, it is pertinent to observe that while Lusthaus claims to “impose an informed restriction on speculation,” his interpretation of Xuanzang’s notion of “nature” in *Cheng weishi lun* hinges on a problematic correlation between the Sanskrit and the Chinese texts. Xuanzang does translate *ātmaka* by *xingxiang* 性相, but why should that mean “possessing a self”? Thus, for example, we find that the principle of “being conditioned” is referred to as the unchanging nature of the ever-changing *dharmas*. The words *svabhāva*, *ātmaka* and *svarūpa* are often used interchangeably to mark the nature of things. Thus, Sthiramati in his *Bhāṣya* speaks of *āghāta-svabhāva*, referring to a state of malice.³² Accordingly, calling a thing impermanent does not entail the claim of an eternal something that is called “impermanence.” The nature of a thing is not another thing. Any suggestion that this should have escaped Xuanzang is quite unwarranted. This rule can further be applied to apparent “Tathāgatagarbha formulations” such as *zixing qingjing* 自性清淨 “its nature being clear and pure” in the *Baoxing lun* (T 31.1611.813c10, etc.), which readily converges with *xing zi qingjing* 性自清淨, “its nature is inherently clear and pure” (in *Chan Preface*, T 48.2015.404b28). To speak of “nature” is just to speak of the nature of something, in the present case of the mind (心).

In the background of Lusthaus’s interpretation of the *Triṃśikā* stands a philosophy of language that deserves our attention, because it shows an important dimension of the general drift of his reading of Yogācāra: “That, ironically, precisely in their capacity to seemingly *refer*, both language and action cannot escape their horizons, i.e., they cannot

refer beyond themselves, I will here call *closure*. Language and action are both closed systems, self-referential..." (58-59). Lusthaus apparently subscribes to the Saussurian notion of "linguistic self-referentiality," that is of language as being conventional and being the "free fluctuation of signifiers," which is imputed to Buddhism. It is on the basis of this premise that he coins the term "psycho-sophic closure" in order to render the key term *vijñaptimātra*.³³ Lusthaus further says: "The words are used [my italics] to refer to meanings, i.e., language pointing toward language, this indicates the self-referentiality of language. As such, it marks a linguistic cycle of closure" (474).

That Lusthaus is leaning toward an instrumentalist notion of language can also be deduced from his quotation (512) of a passage from the *Zhuangzi* (至人之用心若鏡, occurring at the end of the *Inner Chapters*), which in the quoted translation from Burton Watson reads "the Perfect Man uses [my italics] his mind like a mirror." Should the *Zhuangzi* indeed be understood to be implying an agency separate from mind? It may be argued that although the character *yong* 用 does sometimes indicate instrumentality, it often does not, and certainly not in this present case. We can easily avoid a coarse instrumentalism by simply saying: "the coming forth of the mind of man perfected, is like that of a mirror."³⁴ But further, if what we refer to as "language" should be reduced to words referring to meaning, and if meaning as referent is at the same time included within language, would that really support the notion of language as a closed self-referential system? Would the very idea of meaning as referent of words not rather contradict the notion of language as instrumental? In short, from the point of view of Buddhism, Lusthaus's understanding of language as "instrumental" would imply "agency," as his "closed self-referential system" would preclude the very possibility of anything worth being called understanding or truth. Though this theory of language notoriously figures in Lusthaus's discourse, we get little real discussion, whether of its European or its Buddhist background.

In line with his position on language, Lusthaus offers the following interpretation of stanza 1 (426), in particular concerning the notion of the *upacāra* of self (*ātma*) and *dharmas*: “[L]inguistic problems, in other words, are part of what sets everything in motion. Based on proliferating interactions of two *upacāras*, ‘self’ and ‘dharmas’, everything follows.” Thus, in line with his previous assumptions regarding language, Lusthaus suggests the double *upacāra* to be almost primordial, while the *Triṃśikā* expressly declares it to be distinctly derivative, namely arising from and within the triple unfolding of *ālaya*, *manas* and *pravṛtti-vijñāna*.³⁵ It should be noted here that important dimensions of “language” in Buddhism are understood to be contained within the *saṃjñā-skandha*. However, to the extent that the five *skandhas* cooperate, none of them, including the *saṃskāra-skandha*, can be said to possess a before and an after.³⁶ Accordingly, linguistic problems would be just one aspect of the total scope of disorientations. This in turn would suggest that we are not primarily constrained by “language” but by our lack of insight into what is—whatever name we may call it.

Following the same problematic route, Lusthaus comes to his interpretation of the core term “suchness/truth” (*tathatā*) as mere “designation” (*prajñapti*). He suggests, basing himself on a strictly literal reading of the *Cheng weishi lun*, that: “Tathatā is not a real thing... It is a merely descriptive [*sic!*] term for what occurs in a cognition ‘purified’ of karmic defilements and cognitive obstructions (531).” *Tathatā* and *dharmatā* are just “a *prajñapti* name” (530), not an “ultimate reality,” merely a “linguistic fiction” (530). Unconditioned *dharmas* are not “real,” because they are “non-empirical” (529). This is perhaps the clearest indication that philosophically Lusthaus leans more towards empiricism than phenomenology. What does the *Cheng weishi lun* actually mean when it says that “suchness” (*tathatā*) is a “designation” (真如亦是假施設名)? First of all, it emphasizes (6b15) that the word “unconditioned *dharmas*” does not refer to a separate (conditioned) real-

ity apart from the sphere of conditioned *dharmas* (*citta-rūpa*), that it is not a name for an eternal entity existing apart from the mind-stream, that it “is not [of the character] of a definite something (非定實有, 6c20).” To speak of a *prajñapti*, of a name, implies that we are talking of a something that is firmly set within the stream of mind (not being more real than this stream). Does that allow for “designation” to be called a merely imagined thing, a “linguistic fiction”? In the *Sandhinirmocana*,³⁷ in the discussion of the sevenfold *tathatā*, we find that *tathatā* refers to the nature of that which is, both the defiled and the undefiled, and not only of purified cognition. Thus, while it is clear that this designation as a designation arises within the mind-stream, and while it is a designation exactly in that it is not the thing designated, and while, as a designation, it is not reality apart from the pervasive delusion marking the mind-stream, it is also clear that *tathatā* is a designation referring to this very mind-stream as what it truly is, and that this “nature” is that which ultimately is to be seen as what is. Otherwise, we would have to assume formulations closer to Tathāgatagarbha thought, saying that all things dependently arising are merely fictitious. In fact, while one can reasonably argue that the word “*tathatā*” as such is merely conventional, that does not mean that its referent should be understood to be equally conventional.

The problem with the notion that by “language” we are referring to an instrumental, self-referential system is that it does not leave any space for giving a reasonable account of the conditions of its own possibility, similarly to what has been shown above concerning the notion that all knowledge is sensory. What we are facing here is the problem of the possibility of the truth of the goal of the Dharma. While it is clear that the word *vijñapti-mātra* does not designate a supreme goal, but rather its occlusion, this does not mean that Yogācāra masters would not uphold as a goal the seeing of that which needs to be seen in order to qualify as true seeing. This goal is neither a matter of choice, convention,

or sheer destiny, but of freedom. If we consider language as a “closed system” this would jeopardize the very possibility of freedom and insight.

Can we thus still reasonably assume that Buddhism suggests language to be either or both the cause and/or fruit of systemic imprisonment? It is true that there is a plethora of formulations available all across the spectrum of Buddhist traditions apparently suggesting that language is an imprisoning obstacle. However, since the Buddhist tradition appeals to the distinction between right names and wrong names,³⁸ it would seem more appropriate to consider “language” as a neutral and universal ground allowing us to say what things are,³⁹ representing them as both implicated in delusion, but not exhaustively contained within it, as suspended between the conditioned and the unconditioned, between closure and opening. How should we otherwise account for the presentation of the freedom of a Buddha as consisting in the purified *saṃjñā-skandha* (清淨想蘊), that is the freedom to say what needs to be said?⁴⁰

The ideas of the body as basis of the mind, and of language as conventional, instrumental and systemic go hand in hand with Lusthaus’s covert empiricism and his overt anti-essentialism. The pervasiveness of these aspects of the background of Lusthaus’s analysis unfortunately seems to be more distortive than transformative.⁴¹ However, let me finally say without any irony that this work can serve as a challenge to consider more carefully our position with regard to and within the truth of the contemporary zeitgeist as it unfolds.

¹ I. Harris, *Continuity of Yogācāra Thought* (Leiden, 1991), whom Lusthaus does not mention, has already competently discussed this point (15, 68).

² The philosophically most sustained engagement of Yogācāra as idealistic may still be that of A. K. Chatterjee, *The Yogācāra Idealism* (Delhi, 1962), which Lusthaus does not engage.

³ These range from hundreds of typos to a very defective transliteration of Chinese and Sanskrit, to problems in the identification of grammatical forms in Sanskrit. The index is insufficient (e.g., there is not a single reference to L. Schmithausen's magisterial *Ālayavijñāna: On the Origin and the Early Development of a Central Concept of Yogācāra Philosophy* [Tōkyō, 1987]). Appendix four, in particular, on Xuanzang's translations and works, is strewn with mistakes.

⁴ Two earlier reviews I have seen are by W. S. Waldron (H-Buddhism: <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?-path=222281062535348>, July 2003) and by Ch. Muller (*Philosophy East and West* 55/1 (2005): 135-139). This present review will not repeat the often valuable observations already offered by Waldron and by Muller. But I firmly disagree with my colleagues' positive judgment.

⁵ As is to be expected, words such as contingency, marginality, irony, erasure, closure, trace, body and economy play major roles here. Regarding phenomenology, Lusthaus seems to subscribe to a line more closely associated with Merleau-Ponty than with Husserl. The latter's thought is less present than expected, but he gets his measure of blame: "By emphasizing the noetic constitution of experience over the hyletic contribution, his transcendental idealism talked about materiality but never took matter seriously, either on a causal or ontological level" (29).

⁶ It is in this context that we must regard Lusthaus's discussion of the figure of Śīlabhadra as presented by Kuiji. But does this discussion really add anything to our understanding of Yogācāra? Even if Lusthaus's point is well taken, would the reclaiming of Śīlabhadra by the Chinese Faxiang exegetes be any different from Lusthaus's appealing to the authority of, say, Merleau-Ponty?

⁷ See, e.g., Matsumoto Shirō, "The Meaning of 'Zen'," in *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm Over Critical Buddhism*, ed. by J. Hubbard and P. Swanson (Honolulu, 1997).

⁸ The passage should not be interpreted literally. *Manas* and *mano-vijñāna* are, in Western/English philosophical language, not sensory. Since the word "senses/sensory" does not have an unequivocal correlate in either Sanskrit or Chinese, it should be reserved to the five senses, in order to avoid projecting issues of western philosophy onto Buddhist thought.

⁹ Philosophically, in Husserl's day, "zu den Sachen selbst" had to go not just beyond simplistic objectivism and psychologism, but also, in particular, beyond the academic and highly epistemological neo-Kantian philosophy.

¹⁰ See 51, n.3; 22, and the discussion of mind as "inscribed in our flesh," 49. But why should the *logos* be eliminated from psychology? The *logos* in psychology after all does not claim a *logos* structure of the *psyche*, but only conceives of itself, justifiably or not, as a well-ordered and accountable discourse. Along the same lines, Lusthaus (171) writes: "Yet even writing and reading are at once physical (body) and mental, since we move our hand to write or move our eyes to read, and need to pay attention to understand or make sense." Compare, too, the suggestion (317, n. 99) that the "body" in "body of liberation" (*vimukti-kāya*) should be understood as "body." Lusthaus does not take seriously that the word *kāya*,

just as the English word *body*, does not always refer to a physical body; compare “body of law,” which does not mean the books into which it is printed.

¹¹ “Hence cognizance (*vijñāna*) arises as a lived-body (*nāma-rūpa*)” (59). “In this model the mind is treated as a sense” (59). In fact, the eighteen elements (*dhātu*) cover the full scope of mind, senses, and objects. To speak of *manas* as an *indriya* within the *dhātu*-model does not make it a “sense.” *Indriya* means power or faculty. The sixfold *vijñāna* is clearly meant to set it apart from the *indriyas*. Should we not rather say that the senses are treated as suffused with mind?

¹² Cf. *Xianyang shengjiao lun* (T 31.1602.567a17, 480c03).

¹³ I did not find a single passage where Lusthaus’s translation was more accurate than La Vallée Poussin’s (cf. n. 23 below). If Lusthaus had followed some of the earlier translations (e.g., Anacker or Kochumottum) many mistakes could have been avoided.

¹⁴ There are more significant problems in Lusthaus’s translation of Xuanzang’s *Triṃśikā* translation that, however, I will *not* discuss in detail: stanza 19 sounds as if the *karma-vāsanā* would perfume both of the graspings, instead of stating their coordination (293). Stanza 20 is unreadable in Lusthaus’ translation, but it should be understood (both in Sanskrit and in Chinese) as saying that all these things (*vastu*), and not so much the self-nature (*svabhāva*), do not possess ultimate existence (294). *Sti-ramati*, at least, glosses *svabhāva* here as *kāraṇam*, “cause, condition, reason.” On this interpretation, Vasubandhu is just saying that things (*vastu*) are such that their being imagined is the condition for their appearance. He is not directly talking about “self-nature” at all. The translation of stanza 21 is misconstrued, stating that *paratantra* “is produced

by discriminative conditions.” The text, however, says: “discriminations arise due to condition” (295).

¹⁵ Regarding “Vasubandhu’s Sanskrit” text, the reader wonders on which edition Lusthaus bases himself. Although he mentions (274) S. Lévi’s *Bhāṣya* edition, *Vijāptimātratāsiddhi: Deux Traités de Vasubandhu* (Paris, 1925)—which is not quite flawless—the Sanskrit text Lusthaus presents deviates from Lévi’s superior text: in the second line of stanza 1, Lusthaus unfortunately has the nominative of *pariṇāma* instead of the locative (*pariṇāme*); in stanza 2 he has *mananāca* instead of *mananākhyas ca* (thus omitting one syllable; cf. also 324), and *ālayākhyā vijñānaṃ* instead of *ālayākhyam vijñānaṃ*. In stanza 3, *avitam* should be *anvitam*, *avyāktam* in stanza 4 should be *avyākṛtam*; in stanza 6 two *visargas* (ḥ) are missing; in stanza 8 *ya, sa, advaya* must be feminine (*yā, sā, advayā*); in stanza 12 he has *mṛkṣa* instead of *mṛakṣa*; in stanza 13 *asatyā* instead of *śāṭhya*; etc. The presentation of the Chinese text is equally unsatisfactory (cf. stanza 2).

¹⁶ Paramārtha has often been labeled essentialist, mainly due to his proximity to Tathāgatagarbha thought and his presentation of a ninth level of *vijñāna*, *amalavijñāna*, that after all just points to the *ālaya* that no longer is. D. Paul’s *Zhuanshi lun* translation (*Philosophy of Mind in Sixth-century China: Paramārtha’s Evolution of Consciousness* [Stanford, 1984]) is definitely preferable to the one we find here.

¹⁷ Similarly, when in stanza 2 he renders Paramārtha’s *bu ke fenbie* 不可分別 as “cannot be discriminated,” while he renders Xuanzang’s *bu ke zhi* 不可知 as “unknowable”—both translating *asamvidita*—he again magnifies the difference to the disadvantage of Paramārtha. In stanza 8 he translates *ti tong san xing* 體通三性 as “essentially they are understood as [having] three natures,” whereas the *tong* should be translated as “comprise,” “extend to,” or in some similar fashion. In stanza 19 Lus-

thaus translates *jidi* 集諦, the standard translation for *samudaya-satya*, “truth of origination,” the same as *pratītya-samutpāda*, as “collective truth,” and in his footnote as “collected truth.” His speculations regarding the contrasting of *jidi* with *zhendi* can find their resolution simply in saying that all conditioned phenomena as conditioned are by definition non-ultimate.

¹⁸ T 31.1585.0001a24. Also cf. Yūki Reimon 結城令聞, *Yuishiki sanjū ju* 唯識三十頌 (Tokyo, 1985, 83).

¹⁹ See the section entitled ‘*Hsiang hsing in the Ch’eng wei-shih lun*’ (371-73).

²⁰ Compare the Chinese text: 次言了境為性相者。雙顯六識自性行相。識以了境為自性故。即復用彼為行相故 (*Cheng weishi lun*, T 31.1585.0026b03).

²¹ *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣyam*, ed. P. Pradhan (Patna, 1975), 11. In Xuanzang’s translation: 各各了別彼彼境界。總取境相故名識蘊 (T 29.1558.0004a21).

²² This only refers to the arhat’s abandonment of *ādāna*; cf. Kuiji, *Cheng weishi lun shuji* 成唯識論述記 (T 43.1830.0343c11); L. de La Vallée Poussin, *Vijnaptimātrasiddhi: Le Siddhi de Hiuan-Tsang, traduite et annotée* (Paris, 1928), 166; Yūki Reimon, *Yuishiki sanjū ju* (Tokyo, 1985), 148; Yanpei Fashi 演培法師, *Cheng weishi lun jiangji* 成唯識論講記 (Taipei, 1989), vol. 2, 114; Han Tingjie 韓廷傑, *Cheng weishi lun jiaoshi* 成唯識論校釋 (Beijing, 1998), 187; F. Cook, *Three Texts on Consciousness Only. Demonstration of Consciousness Only* [BDK English Tripiṭaka 60-I, II, III] (Berkeley, Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1999), 80-81). Cook’s translation at the end of III.19 is wrong.

²³ T 31.1585.0010a17; La Vallée Poussin, 125.

²⁴ Paramārtha's text (T 31.1587.0063b13) looks at the issue from another angle, saying that *paratantra* cannot be seen as such as long *parikalpita* has not been seen through.

²⁵ Lusthaus's translation and interpretation is probably misled by a misapplication of Nāgārjuna's words that the ultimate cannot be pointed out without having recourse to the conditioned (MMK 24:10). In stanza 27, Lusthaus translates "if you set up before yourself some little thing" (現前立少物), and presents (n. 88) *shao wu* 少物 (according to him "small thing") as Xuanzang's translation of *tan mātra*. But *shao wu* 少物 rather translates *kiṃcit* ("something"). Xuanzang's translation, in its rearrangement of the Sanskrit sequence, can still be correlated to the original (*vijñāptimātram evedam 謂是唯識性/ ityapi hy upalambhataḥ 以有所得故/ sthāpayannagrataḥ kiṃcit 現前立少物/ tan mātre nāvatiṣṭhate 非實住唯識*). Robinson's translation is of no help.

²⁶ Cf. the translation of the same stanza (436), where the plural marker 諸 is eliminated, but which otherwise has the same problems.

²⁷ In his further exegesis of the same stanza (436), while he quotes from *Cheng weishi lun* (0038c18), he attempts to distribute the "this" and "that" (此彼) to *vijñāna* and *caittas!*

²⁸ This stanza is not denying the existence of "this and that," but highlights the derivative and dependent character of that (discriminated) in relation to this (discrimination). Thus, partly preserving Lusthaus's terminology, Xuanzang's stanza can be translated as: "These alterations of consciousness are discrimination (是諸識轉變分別). That which is discriminated by this [discrimination] (所分別由此)—all that is inexistent (彼皆無). Therefore, all this is mere cognitive activity (故一切唯識)."

²⁹ I cannot understand how Lusthaus can say “so-yüan 所緣...in Chinese literally means ‘objective condition’” (445, n. 28). In order to have a sense what *suoyuan* 所緣 “literally means,” one will have to trace the history of its use: refer to my “Gut und Böse im Lichte der *cetanā*-Konzeption der *Triṃśikā* Vasubandhus,” *Hôrin* 4 (1997): 127-157. Literally, one could perhaps say that it is “that toward which consciousness tends.” *Suo* does not mean object.

³⁰ It is unjustified to charge that Xuanzang “terminologically conflates *pariṇāma* and *pravṛtti*” (435). Xuanzang does not play with words. He regularly translates *pariṇāma* as *bian* 變, or sometimes strengthens it with *zhuan* 轉 that otherwise translates *vṛt* and its derivatives. *Pravṛtti* and *pariṇāma* mark two aspects of the same process. In attempting to argue for the reasons why Xuanzang *alters* the words, Lusthaus quotes the *Cheng weishi lun* (T 31.1585.0038c13): “We have already examined discrimination (*fen-pieh*) [in terms of] the characteristics of the three [consciousnesses that are] ‘able-to alter’ (*neng-pien*), regarding them as that upon which the two divisions (*bhāga, fen*) of ‘what is altered’ (*so-pien*) depend” (435). It should be noted that the *fenbie* here is exegetic, that is to say, “discriminating” marks the commentarial action, and not the object, which is the triple *nengbian*. Further, *nengbian* here is not “able-to-alter” but is merely marked as active mode (已廣分別三能變相為自所變二分所依).

³¹ “Its author is merely the occasion for the intersection of the histories and chains of discourse” (170).

³² In Sthiramati’s commentary on the *Abhidharma-samuccaya*, the *Zaji lun* 雜集論 (T 31.1606.743c26), the terms 大性 and 小性 similarly do not appeal to any essence (cf. T 31.1605.663b19 ff.).

³³ The words *vijñāna/vijñapti* have not much in common with the connotations of either *psyche* or *sophia* which form the basis for Lusthaus's neologism.

³⁴ In the paradigmatic *ti-yong* 體用 pair the *yong* is the “functioning” of the *ti*, while the *ti* is not at the same time its agent.

³⁵ The speculation on *pariṇāma* and *sandhi*, with its suggestion of linguistic distortions as original sin, is misleading. *Sandhi* does not mean that “two adjoining letters are replaced by a single letter” (432), but is a matter of euphonic rules. *Ātma-lābha* (428) only very literally means “self-appropriation.”

³⁶ *Jie shenmi jing* (T 16.0676.0699c19).

³⁷ T 16.676.699c17; also cf. *Abhidharma-samuccaya* (T 31.1605.666a20).

³⁸ *Xiayang shengjiao lun* (T 1601.0535c17).

³⁹ Cf. W. Rahula, *Abhidharma-samuccaya. The Compendium of the Higher Teaching (Philosophy)*, trans. from the French by S. Boin-Webb (Fremont, 2001), 20, 49.

⁴⁰ *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha* (T 31.1594.0149c03); E. Lamotte, *La Somme du Grand Véhicule d'Asaṅga* (Louvain, 1973), 277; cf. Vasubandhu in T 31.1597.0371c18; Asvabhāva in T 31.1598.0438a03.

⁴¹ Lusthaus seems to conceive of his book as “transformative” (531).