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Xuanzang and the Three Types of Wisdom: Learning, Reasoning, and Cultivating in *Yogācāra* Thought

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Abstract: Xuanzang (602–664) is famous for his legendary life, his important translation works, and also his *Discourse on the Realisation of Consciousness-Only* (*Vijñapti-mātratā-siddhi*, 成唯識論). This text, which is considered as a synthesis of *Yogācāra* thought, has been diversely interpreted by modern scholars and is still discussed, in particular about the status of external things. Nevertheless, this issue seems to be of little interest for *Yogācāra* thinkers compared to other topics such as the Noble Path, or else the three types of wisdom (*trividhā prajñā*, 三慧): learning (*śruta*, 聞), reasoning (*cintā*, 思), and cultivating (*bhāvanā*, 修). As emphasized in recent research, this topic represents a major issue for Buddhist practitioners. In an attempt to analyse it in Xuanzang's *Discourse*, and more generally in *Yogācāra* thought, this paper will first discuss Asaṅga's and Vasubandhu's thought on the three types of wisdom. Secondly, since it is important to replace the three types of wisdom in the general argumentation of Xuanzang's *Discourse*, we will present the structure of his text which is modelled on a "path" leading progressively to Supreme Awakening. Then, we will present the main elements of the Noble Path and situate the three types of wisdom into it. Finally, we will explain that Xuanzang follows Asaṅga's and Vasubandhu's conceptions and eventually confirm the importance of the three types of wisdom in *Yogācāra* thought.

Keywords: Buddhism; Noble Path; wisdom; practice; awakening; *Yogācāra*; Xuanzang; Asaṅga; Vasubandhu



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1. Introduction

The *Yogācāra* School seems to have appeared in the 1st or 2nd century. Nevertheless, it is only in the 4th century that it was presented in a systematic way. Its purpose was to pursue previous reflections on Buddhist psycho-physiological practices. This mental training, which was supposed to be put into practice in every aspect of (monastery) daily life, was elaborated as a thorough analysis of mental functions and activities that usually result in ignorance, delusion, and pain, in order to achieve their suppression. In other words, the *Yogācāra* School considers the understanding of cognitive functions and activities as a way to attain Buddhahood.

What characterized *Yogācāra* scriptures was the complexity of their doctrines, which included explanations on "Consciousness-Only" (an idealistic¹ standpoint that explains why we misunderstand the nature of things), "the eight [regions of] consciousness" (that result, among others, in a misunderstanding of the nature of the self), the doctrine of the "three natures" (which is central to explain the idealistic nature of things as "Consciousness-Only") and the "transmutation of the support" (which refers to the transformation of the "store consciousness" (Skt. *ālayavijñāna*, Chin. 阿賴耶識—藏識)², the destruction of seeds of delusion, and the nourishment of seeds of enlightenment).

The conceptual approach and the profound insights that characterized *Yogācāra* thought are some of the elements that explain the interest of scholars from diverse backgrounds. If a philological approach was at first a necessity to present, describe, and translate such Buddhist scriptures³, an important part of current research deals with psychology⁴ or philosophy⁵. Actually, the philosophical interest induced by *Yogācāra* thought is nothing

new. For instance, in the 20th century, Japanese authors like Yamauchi Tokuryū 山内得立 (1890–1982)⁶ and Izutsu Toshihiko 井筒俊彦 (1914–1993)⁷ already referred to *Yogācāra* thought in order to discuss philosophical issues.

Recently, a debate emerged between two distinctive hermeneutical approaches concerning *Yogācāra* thought. One of the questions raised concerns the status of external things: according to this approach, do things exist outside of the mind or are they nothing else than “seeds” located in the mind? If things also exist outside of the mind, then *Yogācāra* Buddhism may have something to do with Western modern phenomenology; if they do not, it is nothing else than a radical idealistic approach of the mind. According to Buddhologist Dan Lusthaus, *Yogācāra* Buddhism should be considered as a “Buddhist Phenomenology” similar, in many ways, to Husserl’s and Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenologies (Lusthaus 2002). To support his thesis, he refers to some important texts from *Yogācāra* scriptures, and essentially to Xuanzang’s (玄奘, 602–664) *Discourse on the Realization of Consciousness-Only* (*Vijñapti-mātratā-siddhi*, 成唯識論).

Lusthaus’ understanding has been criticized from a philological and linguistic standpoint by another Buddhologist, Lambert Schmithausen, who aims to demonstrate that Lusthaus does not perfectly render *Yogācāra* scriptures into English (Schmithausen 2015)⁸. Lusthaus’ and Schmithausen’s works are important and discuss one of *Yogācāra*’s major issues in modern scholarly context. The readers of Xuanzang’s seminal work could wonder whether the status of things in his thought, and more generally in *Yogācāra* doctrines, is truly something that we could consider as a metaphysical matter. Even if the questions discussed by Buddhist thought can interest contemporary philosophy, it is a hermeneutical jump to assume that Buddhist thinkers themselves aim to establish a metaphysical standpoint. Such an approach could be considered as disrespectful towards the particularities of Buddhist thought and, more generally, towards the Buddhist quest itself⁹.

Recent research on Buddhist studies highlights the importance, notably in Indian and Tibetan traditions, of the “three [types of] wisdom” (*trividhā prajñā*, 三慧)—which are learning (*śruta*, 聞), reasoning (*cintā*, 思), and cultivating (*bhāvanā*, 修)—in Buddhist discourse. Some authors insist on the fact that such conceptions may be considered as both a key to interpret any other Buddhist conception and an efficient way to compare Buddhist thought with Western philosophy (Kapstein 2001; Fiordalis 2018; Deroche 2019).

For instance, in his paper entitled “Learning, Reasoning, Cultivating: The Practice of Wisdom and the *Treasury of Abhidharma*”, Fiordalis offers a clear analysis of the three types of wisdom in some of Vasubandhu’s texts and *Yogācāra* scriptures (Fiordalis 2018). Fiordalis’ study focuses on the *Abhidharmakośakārikā* 阿毘達磨俱舍論本頌 and its commentary—the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 阿毘達磨俱舍論—, the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* 大乘莊嚴經論, and the *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra* 解深密經. However, only the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* and the *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra* are considered as representative of *Yogācāra* thought and, thus, we can ask ourselves if these explanations allow us to give an exhaustive analysis of the three types of wisdom as they are presented in *Yogācāra* thought.

Xuanzang’s *Discourse on the Realization of Consciousness-Only* was written in Chinese in the 7th century to sum up *Yogācāra* conceptions. This text, which comments on Vasubandhu’s *Thirty Verses on Consciousness-Only* (*Triṃśikā-vijñapti-mātratā*, 唯識三十頌), is considered by specialists as one of the most important works of *Yogācāra* Buddhism. Since it was well known in ancient times in Korea and Japan, it can prove to be invaluable to understand the influence of *Yogācāra* Buddhism on Chinese, Korean, and Japanese Buddhist Schools.

Even if Xuanzang’s *Discourse* is a Chinese text which is not a “canonical scripture” (*sūtra*, 經), we personally consider it as an outstanding synthesis of *Yogācāra* thought. The fact that this text, which constitutes a global “commentary” (論) of Vasubandhu’s *Thirty Verses* based on ten commentaries from other authors, was written in Chinese is of importance. Indeed, in order to write it in this language, Xuanzang must have deepened—through a conceptual analysis aiming to render *Yogācāra* Sanskrit terminology into Chinese—his own reflection about *Yogācāra* thought.

If Xuanzang's *Discourse* is without any doubt an important scripture of *Yogācāra* thought, it is also clear that he wanted at first to restore in China the core teaching and practice of Indian Buddhism, considered by him as more original than Buddhism as it had developed and evolved in China. He focused an important part of his work on *Yogācāra* scriptures with this aim. Xuanzang's work on *Yogācāra* thought follows Asaṅga's and Vasubandhu's works, and the elucidation of his thought must be done comparatively with, and to a certain extent referring to, these previous *Yogācāra* thinkers.

This paper will explore Xuanzang's thought—and more generally *Yogācāra* thought—about the three types of wisdom based on his *Discourse*, but also on Asaṅga's and Vasubandhu's scriptures. We will first analyse Asaṅga's and Vasubandhu's scriptures to understand the meaning, function, and link between the three types of wisdom as described in their texts, as this will give us valuable guidance for the study of the three types of wisdom in Xuanzang's *Discourse*. After that, we will try to put this topic in the context of the general argumentation of Xuanzang's *Discourse*. That is why we will secondly present the structure of Xuanzang's *Discourse* and explain that this structure, which follows the one of Vasubandhu's *Thirty Verses*, represents a “path” that starts with the question of the nature of both the self and phenomena, and progressively leads to Supreme Awakening. Then, we will present what probably constitutes, for a Buddhist practitioner like Xuanzang, the major development of the *Discourse*: the description of the Noble Path¹⁰. In this part, we will learn that despite the fact that the expression “three types of wisdom” 三慧 is not common in Xuanzang's *Discourse*, this topic represents an important element of the Noble Path and a structural condition to attain Awakening¹¹. Then, we will elucidate the meaning, function, and link between the three types of wisdom in Xuanzang's *Discourse*¹².

2. The Three Types of Wisdom in Asaṅga's and Vasubandhu's Thoughts

The three types of wisdom have been discussed in Buddhist scriptures long before Xuanzang's work; among the *Yogācāra* scriptures, the highest number of references to “learning, reasoning, and cultivating” 聞思修 appears in the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* 瑜伽師地論—one of the major scriptures of *Yogācāra* Buddhism. The attribution of this scripture, associated with the name of both the bodhisattva Maitreya and the monk Asaṅga—Vasubandhu's older brother—remains unclear. It is commonly considered by modern scholars as a composite work. Xuanzang, who seemed to consider it as a “*Yogācāra* encyclopedia” (Lusthaus 2002, p. 557), translated this text and re-used some of its explanations in his *Discourse*. His translation was based on a Sanskrit version that has been partially lost. The influence of the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* in the following *Mahāyāna* scriptures, especially in India, East-Asia, and Tibet, has been well-documented (Kragh 2013).

In this scripture, the three types of wisdom—learning, reasoning, and cultivating—are analyzed separately in specific sections. However, considered as a whole, one of the first interesting developments concerns the “contemplation of characteristics” 觀相. It is explained that the contemplation of characteristics refers to the action of thinking about the “characteristics of diverse phenomena” 諸法相 based on “the wisdoms of learning, reasoning, and cultivating” 聞思修慧¹³. Besides, the Chinese 諸法—translated as “diverse phenomena” in the present paper—means “every phenomena” in a Buddhist context. Thus, “learning, reasoning, and cultivating wisdom” seems to constitute a way to think about the characteristics of any phenomenon. This suggests that the function of the three types of wisdom is to be a fundamental way to help grasp reality in a supreme sense. It also strengthens the idea that the three types of wisdom represent a fundamental educational approach in *Yogācāra* Buddhism.

In another section of the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*, it is suggested that the implementation of the three types of wisdom, that consists of the development of “learning, reasoning, and cultivating”, needs to be practiced with “assiduity” 精進 to be completely fruitful¹⁴. Such a position implies that “learning, reasoning, and cultivating” do not necessarily constitute three kinds of wisdom. They are, for human beings, capabilities that must be developed. In this context, these capabilities seem to be considered as wisdoms (*prajñā*, 慧) with two

different meanings: (1) They are metaphorically called wisdoms as a wise method that must be developed and implemented in daily life to progress on the Buddhist Path. (2) They are called wisdoms with the true and plenary meaning of *prajñā* when their implementation is complete, and it remains no obstacle to disturb the progression of the practitioner¹⁵. In other words, for Asaṅga, “learning, reasoning, and cultivating” are human capabilities that need to be developed with “assiduity” to become full-fledged wisdom¹⁶.

However, there is another complementary requirement to achieve the correct implementation of “learning, reasoning, and cultivating”. Indeed, later in the *Yogācārabhūmiśāstra*, it is hinted that “wisdom” 智慧 is engendered through the correct practice of “learning, reasoning, and cultivating” 聞思修 with “no guilt” 無罪¹⁷. Consequently, the moral and psychological dimensions that encompass guilt seem to represent an obstacle to the correct practice of learning, reasoning, and cultivating that is needed in order to become full-fledged wisdom. To sum up, bad behaviors imply the apparition of bad karmic seeds in consciousness. On the contrary, when there is no guilt, the moral and psychological dimensions constitute the favorable ground that supports and makes learning, reasoning, and cultivating effective. Thus, the practitioner needs at first to practice moral restraints and, on this basis, learning, reasoning, and cultivating can be developed and become effective as full-fledged wisdom.

Moreover, when the three types of wisdom are discussed separately, they are usually comprehended as “learning” 聞 first, then “reasoning” 思, and finally “cultivating” 修¹⁸. This tends to confirm the progressing aspects of the three types of wisdom. Such an analysis allows us to grasp the three types of wisdom as a pyramidal process. This process starts with moral restraints, continues through learning, reasoning, and cultivating practiced with assiduity, and progressively leads to Supreme Awakening. Of course, such a pyramidal description does not mean that the practitioner experiences a linear progression from learning to cultivating. Based on moral restraints, his training is composed of different phases¹⁹. These phases alternate between learning, reasoning, and cultivating, depending on his needs. They allow him to progress and help him reach Supreme Awakening²⁰.

The three types of wisdom were discussed in Buddhist scriptures during a long time, even after Asaṅga’s work. For instance, Fiordalis’ study demonstrates that the three types of wisdom constitute a recurrent topic in Vasubandhu’s scriptures (Fiordalis 2018). His analysis, which consists of studying the “deployment” and the “usefulness” of the three types of wisdom, focuses on Vasubandhu’s texts, such as the *Abhidharmakośakārikā*, and its commentary, the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*. Fiordalis also comments on the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* and the *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*. Based on these scriptures, he was able to explain the links between the three types of wisdom as they are usually described by Vasubandhu and, to a certain extent, in *Yogācāra* thought.

For instance, he notes that in the second paragraph of the *Abhidharmakośakārikā*, Vasubandhu defines the concept of *abhidharma* as “pure wisdom (*amalā prajñā*), along with its accompaniments”²¹. In an attempt to explain this statement, Fiordalis naturally discusses the term of *prajñā*. He shows that Vasubandhu understands *prajñā* as the discernment of *dharma*s and refers to the meaning of *abhidharma* in its ultimate sense, mostly synonymous with Supreme Awakening; as such, there are many steps to take before *abhidharma*.

The first ones relate to “conventional wisdom or discernment”, which can emerge from “three interrelated processes or stages of practice”: learning, reasoning, and cultivating. These processes are “generated through practice” (*prayogajā*). Fiordalis mentions the existence of ten practices—as explained in the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*—“associated with the Dharma”: copying (*lekhanā*), worshipping (*pūjanā*), gifting (*dānam*), hearing (*śravaṇam*), speaking (*vācanam*), memorizing (*udgrahaṇam*), clarifying (*prakāśanā*), reciting (*svādhyāyanam*), reflecting (*cintanā*), and cultivating (*bhāvanā*). This list is explicitly linked to the three types of wisdom in the *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*. According to Fiordalis, it suggests that the list of ten practices may have been elaborated based on the list of the three types of wisdom.

Fiordalis also shows that in the *Samḍhinirmocana-sūtra*, Vasubandhu insists on the need of practicing, at first, “moral restraints” (*sīla*); this constitutes a prerequisite to wisdom. Such an analysis is in line with Asaṅga’s explanation in the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*. Furthermore, in Fiordalis’ analysis—which follows Vasubandhu’s explanation—the three types of wisdom are also described in a pyramidal way²². Moral restraints and the three types of wisdom are ultimately the ground to attain the ultimate truth, and eventually, Supreme Awakening. On this basis, we can consider Asaṅga’s and Vasubandhu’s understandings of the three types of wisdom—learning, reasoning, and cultivating—as globally equivalent.

Among the scriptures mobilized by Fiordalis, only the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* and the *Samḍhinirmocana-sūtra* are considered as representative of *Yogācāra* thought. Thus, we can ask ourselves if these explanations are able to render exhaustively the meaning, function, and link between the three types of wisdom in *Yogācāra* thought. Xuanzang’s *Discourse* constitutes another major *Yogācāra* scripture, written a few centuries after Asaṅga’s and Vasubandhu’s works. By analyzing Asaṅga’s and Vasubandhu’s views about the three types of wisdom as they are presented in Xuanzang’s *Discourse*, it may be possible to confirm to what extent Xuanzang is referring to the same conceptions. It may also help us highlight the relationship between the three types of wisdom and the Noble Path in *Yogācāra* thought.

3. The Structure of Xuanzang’s *Discourse on the Realisation of Consciousness-Only*

Xuanzang’s *Discourse* presents a detailed analysis of Vasubandhu’s *Thirty Verses*. This analysis is notably based on ten of its commentaries written by Dharmapāla, Sthiramati, Nanda, Citrabhānu, Guṇamati, Jñānamitra, Jñānacandra, Bandhuśrī, Śuddhacandra, and Jinaputra. The writing of the *Discourse* must be placed in the context of Xuanzang’s life and understood as a major contribution to his lifework.

Xuanzang was born in China in 602. He began to study the *Classic of Filial Piety* 孝經 when he was ten and recited Buddhist scriptures, such as the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra* 維摩經 or *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra* 法華經, at the age of eleven. As a Buddhist monk, he was reportedly unsatisfied with Buddhist doctrine as it was presented in China and made the decision to travel into India. His journey started in 629; he visited numerous temples and monasteries from mainstream and *Mahāyāna* Buddhism. In 633, he entered the Buddhist University of Nālandā to learn *Yogācāra* Buddhism from Śīlabhadra (529–645). There, Xuanzang found Vasubandhu’s *Thirty Verses*, as well as its ten commentaries. Back in China in 645, he started to write his famous *Discourse*²³.

According to Frédéric Girard, Xuanzang appeared in the history of Buddhist ideas when a debate emerged about the existence (or non-existence) of an absolute nature—supposed by concepts such as “immaculate consciousness” (*amalavijñāna*, 阿摩羅識) and “embryo of *tathāgata*” (*tathāgatagarbha*, 如來藏)—which completes the Buddhist analysis of the mind in different regions of consciousness. On this basis, he considers that Xuanzang’s research can be understood as a will to address this issue by putting an emphasis on the Buddhist notion of emptiness (Girard 2016, p. 114).

This presumption seems like a key to understand Xuanzang’s decision to begin his *Discourse* with the following explanation (attributed to Sthiramati): Vasubandhu’s *Thirty Verses* were aimed at the people who have an erroneous understanding of the “two [kinds of] emptinesses” 二空, namely, the “emptiness of ego” 我空 and the “emptiness of phenomena” 法空. The purpose of the *Discourse* was to convince Buddhist practitioners about the accuracy of a fundamental Buddhist idea: both ego and phenomena are, in themselves, empty. They result from some activities of the mind that tend to objectify all things, and eventually, conduct to misleadingly grasp ego and phenomena as objective beings. In other words, ego and phenomena are, according to *Yogācāra* thought, nothing else than unexamined mental constructions²⁴.

Nevertheless, why does it seem so important to teach Buddhist practitioners the two emptinesses? The reason is presented just after the mention of the two emptinesses in the beginning of Xuanzang’s *Discourse*. The goal is to obtain a correct understanding of

the nature of both the self and phenomena, which is needed to eliminate the two “heavy obstacles” or “heavy barriers” 重障. These two heavy obstacles are the “obstacle of passions” 煩惱障 and the “obstacle of the known” 所知障. The first one has to be eliminated to stop rebirth and the second one to attain the “Great Awakening” 大菩提.

Consequently, it is necessary to understand the two emptinesses, which means the empty nature of the self and phenomena, to attain Buddhahood itself; Xuanzang’s *Discourse*, as well as Vasubandhu’s *Thirty Verses*, aim to present the *Yogācāra* approach for this purpose.

After this explanation borrowed from Sthiramati, the introduction to the *Discourse* mentions the purpose of Vasubandhu’s *Thirty Verses* according, notably, to Citrabhānu. In line with this interpretation, Xuanzang insists that this text was written to help understand the two emptinesses, as well as to provide a better understanding of the central idea of “Consciousness-Only” 唯識 (*vijñapti-mātra*).

In order to define the meaning of this idea, Xuanzang refers to Dharmapāla’s interpretation of Vasubandhu’s *Thirty Verses*. It allows Xuanzang to reject four types of doctrinal interpretations:

1. The doctrines that consider “external objects” 外境 as “not nonbeing” 非無 (which means understanding them similarly to consciousness).
2. The doctrines that consider “internal consciousness” 內識 as “not being” 非有 (which means understanding it similarly to external objects).
3. The doctrines that grasp “different [regions of] consciousness” 諸識 as being the same in “substance” 體.
4. The doctrines that consider that there are no separate “mental functions” 心所 apart from the “mind” 心.

Starting from that, the reader is invited to understand that Consciousness-Only means that external objects are “not being”, contrary to internal consciousness which “is”²⁵. Moreover, consciousness is composed of regions that must be distinguished.

The introduction emphasizes two linked ideas: the concept of emptiness and the notion of Consciousness-Only. After this explanation, Xuanzang’s *Discourse* focuses on how main *Yogācāra* conceptions have been falsely interpreted and should be understood. He criticizes the attachment to the concepts of the “self” 我 and “phenomena” 法 (a criticism which also puts the emphasis on the two emptinesses).

Then, the body of the text is divided into successive parts that describe the “modifications of consciousness” 變識, the eight regions of consciousness (starting from the “store consciousness”), the idea of “Consciousness-Only”, the “conditions” 緣 and “causes” 因 of consciousness, the “habitual forces” 習氣 that ensure the continuity of the existence despite transmigration, and the “three natures” 三性 (or 三自性, which describe the perspective from which objects are grasped).

The overwhelming majority of modern studies conducted on the *Discourse* mainly focus on these conceptual developments that constitute the core ideas of the text. The importance of these conceptions in the history of Buddhist ideas explains scholars’ interest in such topics. This conceptual ground also represents a tool to help practitioners attain Buddhahood. That is why Xuanzang continues his explanations, addressing the issue of the “Noble Path” 聖道. Following the structure of Vasubandhu’s *Thirty Verses*, he places his commentary into a practical Buddhist perspective²⁶. The *Discourse* also offers an explanation about the aim of *Yogācāra* thought and practices, namely, “*Nirvāṇa*” 涅槃.

From a general viewpoint, it seems possible to understand the *Discourse* as reflecting the three types of wisdom: learning, reasoning, and cultivating. Indeed, Xuanzang’s major text offers a series of Buddhist doctrines that the practitioner can helpfully learn. These explanations contain numerous concepts that lead him to wonder about himself, his surrounding world, and the Buddhist Path. Then, he can start cultivating a state of mind and a set of practices that will allow him to grasp the profound meaning of Consciousness-Only’s theories, and to progress further on the Buddhist Path. Such an explanation also suggests that understanding learning, reasoning, and cultivating should be grasped as a pyramidal process. Of course, as explained above, such a pyramidal description does not

mean that the practitioner experiences a linear progression from learning to cultivating. During phases of cultivation, he can stop his practice to read again some extracts of Xuanzang's *Discourse* and think about their meaning. When he returns to the cultivation phases, he can repeat the learning and reasoning phases as many times as necessary; thus, he can progress in his quest.

Finally, the conclusion of Xuanzang's *Discourse* is composed of verses that remind the reader of the goal of the text, which is to help practitioners attain "Supreme Awakening" 無上覺:

Based on the Noble Teaching and Correct Reasoning,

The meaning of the nature and characteristics of Consciousness-Only have been distinguished.

The merit I have acquired is provided for all living beings.

*May that together, we shall rapidly attain Supreme Awakening.*²⁷

4. The Noble Path and the Three Types of Wisdom in Xuanzang's *Discourse*

For a Buddhist practitioner, the three types of wisdom represent invaluable human capabilities that must be developed to progress on the Noble Path, which aim to attain the end of ignorance, delusion, and pain. In this respect, learning, reasoning, and cultivating are mentioned by Xuanzang in his explanation about the different stages of the Noble Path. In order to identify the placement of the three types of wisdom on the Noble Path, it is useful to describe these stages.

The first sentence of Xuanzang's description concerning the Noble Path constitutes an emphasis on the fact that the conceptual clarification offered by the *Discourse* aims to express the "characteristics" 相 and "nature" 性 of "Consciousness-Only" 唯識, which is understood as the way to attain Buddhahood. In other words, it seems that for Xuanzang, a perfect understanding and practice of Consciousness-Only leads to "Supreme Awakening".

According to the *Discourse*, Consciousness-Only can be understood by those who are endowed with "two kinds of seeds" 二種種姓: the "innate seeds" 本性住種姓 (which refers to the seeds that are in the "store consciousness" from birth as the result of the activities of their prior lives) and the "seeds developed by habits" 習所成種姓 (which refers to the seeds that are cultivated during their current lives). Understanding Consciousness-Only does not mean that one grasps it in an exclusive and theoretical way; rather, it means that one understands it theoretically and practices it effectively. Thus, in line with Buddhist scriptures, Xuanzang distinguishes five stages in the practice of Consciousness-Only:

1. The stage of accumulation 資糧位 (*saṃbhārāvasthā*). To explain it, Xuanzang comments on Vasubandhu's *Thirty Verses* (stanza 26):

As long as I have not attained the [level of] consciousness

Which seeks to abide in the nature of Consciousness-Only,

*I am still into the latencies of the twofold grasping*²⁸

*And I am still not yet able to subdue and eliminate them.*²⁹

At this stage, the practitioner has a profound faith in Buddhism. He cultivates mundane virtue and increases his understanding of consciousness. A better understanding of consciousness can lead to a reduction or disappearance of suffering for the practitioner. As he accumulates both merits and knowledge, he progressively gets close to the "path of seeing" 見道. Nevertheless, he does not fully master the profound meaning of the two emptinesses and his understanding of Consciousness-Only is incomplete.

2. The stage of applied practice 加行位 (*prayogāvasthā*). To explain it, Xuanzang comments on Vasubandhu's *Thirty Verses* (stanza 27):

When before me is standing a little thing,

Saying that this is the nature of Consciousness-Only

Because there is still something that is acquired [grasped],

*I am not really abiding in Consciousness-Only.*³⁰

At this stage, the practitioner is able to gradually understand, control, and suppress his attachment to the “grasped” 所取 and to the “grasper” 能取—the twofold grasping—in other words to the object and subject of cognition. We can consider that the stage of applied practice consists of the exercising of the two emptinesses, notably through meditation practices. Nevertheless, this practice seems incomplete since the practitioner does not fully understand the nature of Consciousness-Only.

3. The stage of proficiency 通達位 (*prativedhāvasthā*). To explain it, Xuanzang comments on Vasubandhu’s *Thirty Verses* (stanza 28):

*Whenever, regarding among the conditioned objects,
Knowledge is completely devoid of something acquired [grasped].
Then, I am abiding in Consciousness-Only,
Because separated from the characteristics of the twofold grasping.*³¹

At this stage, the practitioner attains a level of insight similar to “Bodhisattva” 菩薩. Such a practitioner completely understands both the attachment to the twofold grasping and the nature of Consciousness-Only. Since he knows that both the grasped and the grasper result from the activity of imagination, he was able to free himself from his attachment to them. Thus, the practitioner understands the illusory nature of the “discursive thought” 戲論. The stage of proficiency is also called the “path of seeing” 見道.

Two kinds of “path of seeing” can be distinguished: the “path of seeing the truth” 眞見道 and the “path of seeing the characteristics” 相見道. The path of seeing the truth consists of the complete understanding of the “nature” 性 of Consciousness-Only; whereas the path of seeing the characteristics refers to the complete understanding of the “characteristics” 相 of Consciousness-Only.

4. The stage of cultivation 修習位 (*bhāvanāvasthā*). To explain it, Xuanzang comments on Vasubandhu’s *Thirty Verses* (stanza 29):

*Not obtained and not conceived,
There is knowledge beyond this mundane world.
As a result of throwing the two obstacles,
Is directly acquired the transformation of the support.*³²

At this stage, the practitioner has a level of practice similar to a Bodhisattva. Since he has a complete understanding and an effective practice of Consciousness-Only, he progressively eliminates the remaining obstacles; thus, he can get rid of the whole “obstacle of passions” 煩惱障 and the whole “obstacle of the known” 所知障. Since it consists of a “non-distinctive knowledge” 無分別智, it is free from any attachment to the twofold grasping. It is a “supramundane non-distinctive knowledge” 出世間無分別智.

As a result, the support of all accumulated seeds—namely, the “store consciousness”—changes. Such a modification is called the “transformation of the support” 轉依. It is composed of two dimensions: the elimination of the obstacle of passions, which paves the way to the “Great Awakening” 大涅槃, and the elimination of the obstacles of the known, which leads to “Supreme Awakening” 無上覺.

The resulting knowledge is described as “non-obtention” 無得 because it is free from the illusion that constitutes the “discursive thought” 戲論. The resulting knowledge is also said to be “non-conception” 不思議 because its “sublime function” 妙用 is difficult to fathom.

5. The stage of culmination 究竟位 (*niṣṭhāvasthā*). To explain it, Xuanzang comments on Vasubandhu’s *Thirty Verses* (stanza 30):

*It is the untainted dimension,
Unconceivable, good, permanent,
Blissful and body of liberation,*

*Which in the Great Sage is named the Law.*³³

At this stage, the practitioner attains the highest level of practice. There are no remaining obstacles. He has attained the “Supreme level of Awakening” 無上正等菩提 and has a complete understanding of both the characteristics and the nature of Consciousness-Only. In other words, there is no possibility for further improvement.

The stage of culmination represents the highest point in the transformation of the support. The “untainted dimension” 無漏界 refers to a perfectly untainted “store consciousness”. It is said to be “untainted” because it is completely and definitively free from impurity, from impure seeds. It is defined as “unconceivable” because it transcends the possibilities of understanding based on thought or discursive practices. It is called the “body of liberation” 解脫身 because, as a result of the transformation of the support, it is free from the two obstacles. In such a context, the word “Great Sage” 大牟尼 refers to the “Great-Awakened-World-Honored[-One]” 大覺世尊 (Śākyamuni).

Xuanzang’s explanation about the five stages refers to various levels of knowledge and practice, and raises the question of the three types of wisdom. However, the direct reference to the three types of wisdom is not common in Xuanzang’s *Discourse*, and the Chinese word 三慧 only appears twice in his explanation about the stage of cultivation.

At first, Xuanzang states that “there are three [kinds of] learning [through] wisdom” 慧學³⁴. This expression refers, according to the Buddhist tradition, to the third element that composes the “three studies” 三學: (1) “learning [through] moral precepts” 戒學, (2) “learning [through] meditative concentration” 定學, and (3) “learning [through] wisdom” 慧學. According to Xuanzang, the three kinds of “learning [through] wisdom” 慧學 are: “applied non-discriminating wisdom” 加行無分別慧, “fundamental non-discriminating wisdom” 根本無分別慧, and “post-awakening non-discriminating wisdom” 後得無分別慧. Also, he refers to these three kinds of “learning [through] wisdom” with the Chinese word 三慧, which suggests the polysemy of this expression in Chinese Buddhist scriptures.

The second occurrence of the Chinese word 三慧 is directly linked to the topic of “learning, reasoning, and cultivating”. As explained before, Buddhist practice, which consists of “learning, reasoning, and cultivating” 聞思修, contributes to overcoming the obstacles to Awakening³⁵. However, this practice can be disturbed by the “obstacle of dullness” 闇鈍障—which is one constituent of the “obstacle of the known” 所知障—and leads to “forgetting” 忘 and “losing” 失 the benefits of Buddhist teaching acquired by the very practice of “learning, reasoning, and cultivating”³⁶. Thus, even if learning, reasoning, and cultivating are three complementary activities that could contribute to overcome both the “obstacle of passions” and the “obstacle of the known”, and correlatively, the “obstacle of dullness”, the effects of these activities can be disturbed by dullness itself. To overcome such a difficulty and successfully progress on the Buddhist Path, a positive and voluntary mindset is needed.

Moreover, in line with this explanation, it seems that the practice and development of “learning, reasoning, and cultivating” apply to the first three stages of the Noble Path: the stage of accumulation, the stage of applied practice, and the stage of proficiency. The practice of these capabilities can always be disturbed by the obstacles to Awakening, and it is only after the complete elimination of these obstacles—during the stage of cultivation—that “learning, reasoning, and cultivating” become full-fledged wisdom. Before this elimination, assiduity is necessary. Whereas from the fourth stage (the stage of cultivation), since all the obstacles to Awakening are suppressed, the three types of wisdom become full-fledged wisdom. This point explains why these explanations appeared in Xuanzang’s *Discourse* after his presentation of the fourth stage and before his exposition of the fifth one.

The three types of wisdom are based on moral restraints³⁷. Learning, reasoning, and cultivating—which are human capabilities—appear as essential on the Noble Path. They help the practitioner progress in his journey, and when they become full-fledged wisdom, the characteristics and nature of Consciousness-Only are elucidated, and Supreme Awakening eventually appears as attainable.

According to Xuanzang's *Discourse*, the Buddhist Path consists of clarifying the idea of Consciousness-Only with the aim to help practitioners attain a level of consciousness free from impurity, free from anything that constitutes a representation—even a representation of external things or matters—and could prevent them from attaining Supreme Awakening. Xuanzang explains in the conclusion of his *Discourse*: "Therefore, it is named *Discourse on the Realisation of Consciousness-Only*, but we also refer to it by the name of *Purification of Consciousness-Only*, because by revealing the principle of Consciousness-Only, it becomes extremely clear and pure"³⁸. During this process, the role of learning, reasoning, and cultivating appears as essential. Indeed, these phases constitute educational practices that are efficient to master the principle of Consciousness-Only and help the practitioner purify his consciousness. On such a basis, he will progress on the Noble Path, and even may be able to reach Supreme Awakening.

5. Conclusions

In line with previous Buddhist doctrines, the "three [types of] wisdom" (*trividhā prajñā*, 三慧)—which are defined as learning (*śruta*, 聞), reasoning (*cintā*, 思), and cultivating (*bhāvanā*, 修)—constitute in *Yogācāra* Buddhism an educational basis for the practitioner engaged with the Path. In this respect, *Yogācāra* Buddhism is conceptualized as a way to attain Supreme Awakening in accordance with previous Buddhist Schools on many aspects.

From Asaṅga to Xuanzang, the three types of wisdom are described in a pyramidal way, starting from moral restraints, and progressively leading to Supreme Awakening. If learning, reasoning, and cultivating are essential in Buddhist practice, they do not necessarily constitute three kinds of wisdom. They require assiduity to be developed into full-fledged wisdom.

In other words, learning, reasoning, and cultivating are human capabilities. Humans can use them to progress in many practices that encompass both theoretical and practical dimensions, even in activities that are not related to the Buddhist quest. Mobilized in the context of the Buddhist Path, these capabilities seem to be considered as wisdoms (*prajñā*, 慧) with two different meanings. (1) They are metaphorically called wisdoms as a wise method that must be developed and implemented in daily life to progress on the Buddhist Path. (2) They are called wisdoms with the true and plenary meaning of *prajñā* when their implementation is complete, and it remains no obstacle to disturb the progression of the practitioner.

Thus, according to Xuanzang's *Discourse*, the three types of wisdom seem to constitute full-fledged wisdom from the fourth stage of the Noble Path: the stage of cultivation. For him, to practice the three types of wisdom in accordance with the precepts of the *Yogācāra* School means to progress in the understanding and practice of both the characteristics and the nature of Consciousness-Only; eventually, this will open the door to Supreme Awakening.

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Notes

- 1 The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* indicates that “idealism” can refer to “two fundamental conceptions”: (1) “something mental (mind, spirit, reason, will) is the ultimate foundation of all reality, or even exhaustive of reality”; and (2) “although the existence of something independent of the mind is conceded, everything that we can know about this mind-independent ‘reality’ is held to be so permeated by the creative, formative, or constructive activities of the mind (of some kind or other) that all claims to knowledge must be considered, in some sense, to be a form of self-knowledge” (Guyer and Horstmann 2021). Even if the idealistic aspect of *Yogācāra* thought is debated, it could seem difficult to deny the idealistic dimension, at least according to the second definition mentioned by Guyer and Horstmann, of the concept of “Consciousness-Only”, which represents the core concept of Xuanzang’s *Discourse*.
- 2 To obtain more information about this topic, one can read, for instance: Waldron (2003).
- 3 The French philologist school largely contributed to the research about *Yogācāra* with the work of scholars such as Louis de La Vallée Poussin (1869–1938), Sylvain Lévi (1863–1935), and Étienne Lamotte (1903–1983).
- 4 To obtain more information about this topic, one can read, for instance: Jiang (2006).
- 5 See notably: Lusthaus (2002).
- 6 In his major book published in 1974, *Logos and Lemma* 『ロゴスとレナマ』, Yamauchi commented on various Buddhist thinkers and used some *Yogācāra* conceptions from a philosophical point of view (Yamauchi 1974). This book has never been translated into English, but a French translation was published in 2020. See: Yamauchi (2020).
- 7 One can consult (in English) Izutsu’s collected papers from his “Eranos lectures”: Izutsu (2008).
- 8 This whole study from Schmithausen constitutes a criticism of Lusthaus’ interpretation.
- 9 Schmithausen refrains from discussing Lusthaus’ philosophical approach, with the argument that he is not a philosopher, and decides to keep a philological analysis (Schmithausen 2015, p. 11). The contradictory aspect of an expression such as “Buddhist philosophy” has been explained by Matthew T. Kapstein, who seems to be aware of both the difficulty and the opportunity resulting from such philosophical, metaphysical, or logical approaches (Kapstein 2001).
- 10 The tradition used to divide Xuanzang’s *Discourse* into 10 “books”. The “Noble Path” is mainly explained in books 9 and 10.
- 11 The expression “three types of wisdom” 三慧 only appears twice in Xuanzang’s *Discourse*. It does not mean that it is a topic of little importance for him. As we will see in this paper, the three types of wisdom constitute the fundamental educational process of *Yogācāra* Buddhism. We consider that Xuanzang does not need to refer more explicitly to the three types of wisdom because they represent an obvious educational process for any *Yogācāra* practitioner. Our point seems confirmed by the fact that Xuanzang sometimes uses expressions such as “hearing et cetera” 聞等. See for instance: T1579_31.0028a22, T1579_31.0041b16 and T1579_31.0055b23.
- 12 We consulted diverse studies and commentaries during the writing of this paper: Cook (1999), Deroche (2019, 2021), Girard (2016), Katō et al. (1989 Or. 1935), La Vallée Poussin (La Vallée Poussin 1928–1929), Lévi (1932), Nagasawa (1998), Ōta (1977, 2005), Saigusa (2004), Takasaki (2018), Takemura (2009), and Yokoyama (1979). We also referred to the following dictionaries: Girard (2008), Buswell and Lopez (2014), and Nakamura et al. (2014).
- 13 T1579_30.0334c19: 云何觀相 謂聞思修慧所思惟諸法相。
- 14 T1579_30.0485b23-24: 若依精進習聞思修所成三慧。
- 15 The authors of *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* give a definition of the three types of wisdom that seems compatible with our views when they explain: “Three specific types of wisdom are set forth, including the wisdom generated by learning (ŚRUTAMAYĪPRAJÑĀ), an intellectual understanding gained through listening to teachings or reading texts; the wisdom generated by reflection (CINTĀMAYĪPRAJÑĀ), which includes conceptual insights derived from one’s own personal reflection on those teachings and from meditation at a low level of concentration; and the wisdom generated by cultivation (BHĀVANĀMAYĪPRAJÑĀ), which is a product of more advanced stages in meditation” (Buswell and Lopez 2014, p. 655).
- 16 In the intellectual history, there are many examples of capabilities considered as common to every human, but of which the accurate practice is not. One of the most famous examples in European philosophy is probably Descartes’ “good sense” (*bon sens*). At the beginning of his *Discours de la méthode*, he explains that the good sense—which is the capacity to distinguish the true from the false—is the most evenly distributed thing in the world, but that the most important thing—and the difficulty—is to apply it correctly. See: Descartes (2009, pp. 81–82; AT VI: 1–2).
- 17 T1579_30.0653b24: 受用無罪正聞思修所成智慧。
- 18 We explained above that, in the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*, the three types of wisdom are analyzed separately in three distinguished sections. These sections appear in the following order: (1) learning 聞; (2) reasoning 思; (3) cultivating 修。
- 19 In the present paper, we refer to “practitioners” through masculine pronouns. Historically, practitioners were (mostly) male monastics. Of course, notably through the development of the Buddhist practice outside Asia, the situation has changed. The use of masculine pronouns reflects a historical reality. It does not mean that Buddhist practice is or should be restricted to males.
- 20 The shift from one phase to another takes place depending on the needs of a practitioner’s practice. Deroche suggests a model in which the practitioner can, for instance, return to a theoretical study after practicing. Furthermore, once a practitioner masters the

three types of wisdom, he can teach and, by this mean, help other practitioners in their own progressions. For these reasons, Deroche talks about an “intergenerational transmission of wisdom” (Deroche 2021, p. 22).

21 Concerning the definition of *abidharma* as “pure wisdom, along with its accompaniments”, Xuanzang’s Chinese translation is noted in T1558_29.0001b02: 淨慧隨行.

22 Fiordalis does not use such an expression, but it may help the reader understand the link between the three types of wisdom. Based on Vasubandhu’s scriptures, he writes: “Vasubandhu affirms the sequence of the three types of wisdom and their dependence upon one another. Each proceeds in reliance upon the previous one; all of them depend upon the foundation of moral restraint; and their goal is seeing the truths” (Fiordalis 2018, p. 271). Such a description suggests that for Vasubandhu, learning constitutes a prerequisite to reasoning and reasoning a prerequisite to cultivating. Indeed, for him, the three types of wisdom appear as a progressive way according to which it would not make sense for the practitioner to try to “cultivate” something that was not learnt or thought of. In this respect, cultivating appears as an upper level of implementation compared with learning and reasoning. Nevertheless, it does not necessary mean that the practitioner does not have to return to the phases of learning and reasoning from time to time, if only to reactivate what he has previously learnt and thought of.

23 This summary of Xuanzang’s early life and long travel is based on: Nagasawa (1998, pp. 279–317) and Girard (2016, pp. 112–13).
24 These unexamined mental constructions consist of compulsive identifications.

25 In this explanation, Xuanzang opposes two words: 非有 and 非無. We decided to translate them “not being” and “not nonbeing”. The translation of such expressions represents an important philosophical issue. Translations such as “not existent” and “not non-existent” also seem possible. But from a philosophical standpoint, the term “existence” mainly refers to the being of a limited kind of individual, such as human beings. Other translations such as “not something” and “not nothing” could be possible too, but the word “thing” encompasses many connotations—for instance, a material aspect—that are also problematic. Since Xuanzang’s explanations concern “internal consciousness” and “external object”, it seems clearer to render 非有 and 非無 as “not being” and “not nonbeing”.

26 This does not mean that the conceptions in relation to the “Noble Path” (*ārya mārga* 聖道) were absent in the previous parts of the *Discourse*, but rather that this new development represents a turning point in the general structure of the text.

27 T1585_31.0059a22-23: 已依聖教及正理/分別唯識性相義/所獲功德施群生/願共速登無上覺.

28 The “twofold grasping” refers to the attachment to the “grasped” 所取 and to the “grasper” 能取.

29 T1585_31.0048b22-23: 乃至未起識/求住唯識性/於二取隨眠/猶未能伏滅.

30 T1585_31.0049a23-24: 現前立少物/謂是唯識性/以有所得故/非實住唯識.

31 T1585_31.0049c16-17: 若時於所緣/智都無所得/爾時住唯識/離二取相故.

32 T1585_31.0050c19-20: 無得不思議/是出世間智/捨二塵重故/便證得轉依.

33 T1585_31.0057a11-12: 此即無漏界/不思議善常/安樂解脫身/大牟尼名法.

34 T1585_31.0052a18-19: 慧學有三.

35 As we explained before, the obstacles to Awakening are the “obstacle of passions” 煩惱障 and the “obstacle of the known” 所知障.

36 We deduced these elements from T1585_31.0052c27-29.

37 Like Vasubandhu, Xuanzang insists on the importance of moral restraints in many parts of his *Discourse*.

38 T1585_31.0059a18-19: 是故說為成唯識論/亦說此論名淨唯識/顯唯識理極明淨故.

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