

The Chittamatra School – An Overview

The Chittamatra School

1. Founder: Asanga (an Indian master). His brother was Vasubandhu. Founded in 400 A.D.
2. Two names of school:
 - (a) *Chittamatra* (Mind Only) – rejects the existence of reality of objects beyond the mind that knows them
 - (b) *Yogachara (Practice of Yoga)* – masters justified their reasoning by referring to insights gained in meditation
3. Two divisions:
 - (a) *Followers of Scripture* – used Asanga's works
 - (b) *Followers of Reason* – used Dignaga and Vasubandhu

Three "Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma" in Mahayana

1. Phenomena exist from their own side. (E.g. *Four Noble Truths Sutra* – pragmatic approach focusing on suffering and how to work with it)
2. Phenomena have no intrinsic nature.
3. Contradiction between #1 and #2 addressed. (E.g. Sutras used by the Chittamatra school)

External Objects

1. Vaibhashika and Sautrantika schools: Matter is formed by *partless* particles (substantial, independent, fundamental atoms of existence). They exist independent of the mind observing them – real objects apprehended by perception. Object and consciousness are two different entities – and a causal relationship exists between them.
2. Chittamatra school: Refutes the existence of external objects that are *independent* of consciousness. External phenomena *and* the mind perceiving them are not two separate entities. They are two aspects of the same entity. There is no causal sequential relationship.

The Three Natures

All phenomena have three natures:

1. Dependent nature: An object is the result of causes and conditions; it is "other-powered".
2. Imputed nature: The false distinction of subject and object that is superimposed onto the object by the mind. Imputing properties and values onto an object that it does not have.
3. Perfect nature: Seeing that no subject-object duality exists. This non-duality is the perfect, or thoroughly established, nature of the object.

Three Main Chittamatra Sutras

1. *Buddha Nature Sutra*
2. *Sutra Unravelling the Thought*
3. *Descent into Lanka Sutra*

Commentaries on Chittamatra

1. *Ornament of the Great Vehicle Sutras* (Maitreya)
2. *Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes* (Maitreya)
3. *Compendium of Higher Knowledge* (Asanga)
4. *Levels of the Mind of Integrated Practice* (Asanga)
5. *Thirty Stanzas* (Vasubandhu)
6. *Twenty Verses on Cognition* (Vasubandhu)
7. *Compendium on Valid Cognition* (Dignaga)
8. *Ascertainment of Reasoning* (Dharmakirti)
9. *Ocean of Eloquence* (Lama Tsongkhapa)
10. *Essence of True Eloquence* (Lama Tsongkhapa)

Base, Path, and Result

1. Base:
 - (a) All existent things are divided into three natures – *dependent*, *perfect*, and *imputed*. All three are aspects of any single phenomenon.
 - (b) Consciousnesses – 5 sense, 1 mental, and 2 others (*mind-basis-of-all* and *afflictive mental consciousness*)
2. Path:
 - (a) Two types of selflessness or emptiness – of persons and phenomena (non-duality of subject and object)
 - (b) 37 aspects of the path to enlightenment, the mind of enlightenment (*bodhichitta*, Skt.), and the 6 perfections (*paramitas*, Skt.)
3. Result:
 - (a) Full enlightenment (not just liberation from cyclic existence). Practitioner attains the two bodies of a buddha – form body (Skt. *rupakaya*) and truth body (Skt. *dharmakaya*)
 - (b) Form body = enjoyment body (Skt. *sambhogakaya*) and emanation body (Skt. *nirmanakaya*)
 - (c) Truth body = wisdom truth body (Skt. *jnanakaya*) and natural truth body (Skt. *svabhavikakaya*)

Source: Tsering, Geshe Tashi. *Relative Truth, Ultimate Truth* (The Foundation of Buddhist Thought, Volume 2). Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2008. (Pages 75-97.)

© 2014 Alexander Peck