

Yogachara

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Yogachara (IAST: *Yogācāra*; literally “yoga practice”; “one whose practice is yoga”) is an influential school of Buddhist philosophy and psychology emphasizing phenomenology and ontology through the interior lens of meditative and yogic practices. It was associated with Indian Mahayana Buddhism in about the fourth century, but also included non-Mahayana practitioners of the Dārṣāntika school.

Yogācāra discourse explains how our human experience is constructed by the mind.

Yogacara is “meant to be an explanation of experience, rather than a system of ontology”. It uses various concepts in providing this explanation: representation-only, the eight consciousnesses, the three natures, emptiness. They form a complex system, and each can be taken as a point of departure for understanding Yogacara:

[I]n the vast and complex system that is known as Yogācāra, all of these different approaches and categories are ultimately tied into each other, and thus, starting with any one of them, one can eventually enter into all of the rest.”

Yogacara is usually treated as a philosophical system, but it is a school of practice as well:

[Yogācāra] attaches importance to the religious practice of yoga as a means for attaining final emancipation from the bondage of the phenomenal world. The stages of yoga are systematically set forth in the treatises associated with this tradition.

Yogācārins developed an Abhidharma literature set within a Mahāyāna framework. John Keenan, who has translated the *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra* into English, writes:

The Yogācāra masters inherited the mystical approach of the Prajñāpāramitā texts. However, they did not reject the validity of theoretical Abhidharma. Rather they attempted to construct a critical understanding of the consciousness that underlies all meaning, both mystical and theoretical. Their focus was on doctrine, but as it flowed from the practice of meditative centering (*yoga*), rather than as it was understood in acts of conceptual apprehension.

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