

Encounter with the Imagined Other: A Yogacara-Buddhist Critique

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Abstract

The pressing of the philosophical problem of otherness and difference is now evidenced in all minority discourses. For the oppressed subjects in a long history, such as woman, Jews, subaltern, (post-)colonial cultures, and so on, the time has come to rewrite and re(dis)cover their own identities. However, in their efforts to do so, they are inevitably trapped in a paradoxical situation: Their search for a new identity through reversing the relationship between master and slave, as Hegel suggests, would not escape the dominating desire embedded in the same centric logic. The reclamation of subjectivity is always done at the expense of distorting the previous other. The political ambiguity (and guilt) as the result of constructing a reversed other therefore never stops hunting the souls who long for liberation. For this reason, the questions need to be readdressed for those who consider "encounter" to be the task free from distortion and domination: What is other? Is the other reducible? How could the other be properly understood and confronted? As an Oriental response to these questions, this paper deliberately takes a Buddhist stance, particularly that of the Yogacara school, to see how other is viewed in the Yogacara tradition.

This paper concludes that, in gazing at the face of other, the Yogacara Buddhists are directed inwards to the psycho-linguistic intertextuality and inter-conditionality which determines our ways of gazing and acting. For them, the others we encounter in mundane experience are mere object-images hypostatized from the psycho-linguistic factors which are embedded in the storehouse-consciousness. They argue that the other and its reverse side, subject, are psycho-linguistically fabricated. To disclose the psycho-linguisticity of other is the tantamount to the same disclosure of subject, and hence gazing at other is the same as gazing at self.