

Are the Eighth *Vijnana*'s Seeds and Entity Identical or Different? —A Study Based on “Two Truths with Four Layered Statements” and A Comment on Yinshun's View

Chang Chihcheng

Research Associate,
Buddhist Institute of True Enlightenment

Abstract

The eighth *vijnana* (Alayavijnana) is the basis for the doctrine study of the Yogacara school of Buddhism. Since ancient times, there have been many different viewpoints concerning the entity-function and nature-appearance of the eighth *vijnana*; the reason behind the different theories is whether one has actual enlightenment or not. The proposition about “seeds and the *vijnana* being identical or different”—the relationship between the mind-entity of the eighth *vijnana* and its stored seeds—is one of the topics of debate. Is the eighth *vijnana* a term nominally established or an entity of real existence that can be personally realized? This topic is closely related to the practice and realization of Buddhism and its core doctrines.

This article opines that, according to the *Treatise on the Stages of Yoga Practice*, Kuiji established the principle of “two truths with four layered statements,” which is a perfect, commonly acceptable methodology for examining the Buddhist theory of mind and whether the relationship between dharmas is “identical or different.” Based on Kuiji's principle, the author finds that in the *Mahayanasamgraha-Sastra*, the relationship between the eighth *vijnana* and seeds is “neither identical nor different.” According to the same principle, the *Treatise on the Establishment of Vijnana-Only* interprets in detail why and how the eighth *vijnana* and seeds are “neither identical nor different”; namely, on the levels of the second, the third, and the fourth mundane (or the first, the second, and the third supreme) “nominal truths,” the eighth *vijnana* and seeds are distinguishable (non-identical); however, their relationship is likened to “the whole” (the *vijnana* entity having the four aspects [*bhagas*], including the self-corroboratory aspect [*samvittibhaga*], etc.) and “the part” (the objective aspect [*nimittabhaga*]), or “entity” and “function,” and therefore the two are also “non-different.” In contrast, Yinshun restricts this topic to the level of “whether the eighth *vijnana* and seeds are the same entity or different entities” and expresses his viewpoint as follows: “The original meaning of Asanga and Vasubandhu is that ‘seeds and the *vijnana* are identical,’ or ‘one seed-aggregate with seven manifesting *vijnanas*’—the whole of the eighth *vijnana* is precisely the aggregate of seeds; the other seven changing *vijnanas*, but not the eighth *vijnana* itself, are manifestly functioning; instead, the *Treatise on the Establishment of Vijnana-Only*

holds that ‘seeds and the *viñāna* are non-identical’ or ‘all the eight *viñānas* are manifestly functioning’—the eighth *viñāna* is manifestly functioning and seeds are only a part of the manifestly functioning *viñāna*; like a model of mechanical separation, such a theory is stubbornly irrational, and it deviates from the original meaning of Asanga and Vasubandhu.”

From the perspective of “Positivist Buddhism,” this article points out: “Whether one has actually realized the eighth *viñāna*” explains the difference between Yinshun’s view and that of the *Treatise on the Establishment of Viñāna-Only*; the difference is also reflected in the following two questions, “whether the eighth *viñāna* has its own intrinsic natures” and “whether the eighth *viñāna* is manifestly functioning if it has its own intrinsic natures.” Based on the actual realization of the eighth *viñāna*, the *Treatise on the Establishment of Viñāna-Only* proves, with evidence from five sutras and by ten logical reasonings, that the eighth *viñāna* has its own intrinsic natures, and it formulates “the theory of eight *viñānas*,” in which each *viñāna* is different; “the theory of four aspects [*bhāgas*]” is also proposed, indicating that the subjective aspect [*darsanabhāga*] of the eighth *viñāna* is manifestly functioning to discern the objective aspect [*nimittabhāga*], which consists of the physical body, the non-sentient world, and seeds. Hence it supports the theory that “the eight *viñānas* are manifestly functioning.” In contrast, Yinshun holds the academic viewpoint that “the Buddhist thoughts are evolutionary” and takes “Prasangika Madhyamika” as the definitive teaching; therefore, he tends to view the eighth *viñāna* as “merely a nominal term without real existence” or a term representing “emptiness devoid of intrinsic natures.” With this presupposition, Yinshun misinterprets the doctrines of *viñāna*-only sutras and treatises. Therefore, based on his false belief, he distorts or wrongly interprets the original meaning of sutras and treatises, and intends to lead the readers to believe the theory of six *viñānas* of Prasangika Madhyamika rather than the theory of eight *viñānas*. With evidence from sutras and by logical reasonings, this article refutes the Yinshun’s viewpoint that “the original meaning of Asanga and Vasubandhu is one seed-aggregate with seven manifesting *viñānas*,” and we prove that the original meaning of these two masters’ theory is “the eight *viñānas* being manifestly functioning.”

Lastly, using Three Valid Cognitions as a guiding principle and from the perspectives of “Buddha-nature,” “the state which the defiled Manas clings to,” “the support for the Manas,” and “the bodily sensations after *samādhi* and other states,” this article proves that the theory of “one seed-aggregate with seven manifesting *viñānas*” does not conform to the principle of Three Valid Cognitions, whereas the theory of “the eight *viñānas* being manifestly functioning” by Dharmapala, Xuanzang, Kuiji, etc. is in accord with the ultimate reality of the dharma-realm.

Keywords: the eighth *viñāna*, Alayavijñāna, seeds, seeds and the *viñāna* being identical or different,

第八識「種識一異」論題之抉擇

——以「四重二諦」為本的考察兼評印順的說法

seeds and the *viñāna* being identical, seeds and the *viñāna* being non-identical, one seed-aggregate with seven manifesting *viñānas*, the eight *viñānas* being manifestly functioning, two truths with four layered statements, *Mahāyānasamgraha-Sāstra*, *Treatise on the Establishment of Viñāna-Only*, Xuanzang, Kuiji, Yinshun, Positivist Buddhism, theory of eight *viñānas*, theory of six *viñānas*, manifestly functioning Alaya, seed-Alaya