

Accessibility of the subliminal mind: Transcendence vs. immanence

TAO JIANG

*Department of Religion, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, USA
(E-mail: tjiang999@hotmail.com)*

Abstract. It has long been taken for granted in modern psychology that access to the unconscious is indirectly gained through the interpretation of a trained psychoanalyst, evident in theories of Freud, Jung and others. However, my essay problematizes this very indirectness of access by bringing in a Yogācāra Buddhist formulation of the subliminal mind that offers a direct access. By probing into the philosophical significance of the subliminal mind along the bias of its access, I will argue that the different views of the subliminal consciousness correspond to different models of “transcendence” and “immanence.” We will see that the involvement of the transcendence principle in Freud’s and Jung’s conceptualizations of the unconscious results in the denial of direct access to the unconscious; only the Buddhist immanence-based formulation provides direct access. This East-West comparative approach is an attempt to examine how different models of reasoning, vis-à-vis transcendence and immanence, can lead to drastically different theories as well as the practices they instruct.

The notion of the unconscious,¹ since it was made known by Sigmund Freud in the early 20th century, has been thoroughly studied and critiqued from perspectives of various disciplines within the Western intellectual world. Interestingly, however, the issue concerning access to the unconscious has somehow managed to evade the scholarly attention. The indirect access to the unconscious of a patient provided by the interpretation of a trained psychoanalyst has been taken for granted. My essay problematizes this very indirectness of access by bringing together three radically different formulations of the subliminal mind that offer different modes of access. The three conceptualizations are represented by modern psychologists Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung and the 7th century Chinese Buddhist philosopher Xuan Zang, respectively. The first two formulations of the unconscious offer an indirect access whereas the Buddhist formulation provides a direct access to the subliminal mind.

The primary objective of this essay, however, is not just to reveal these different modes of access to the subliminal mental activities provided in three formulations of the subliminal consciousness. More importantly, we will use these different modes of access as a clue to expose underlying ways of reasoning these theories of the subliminal mind employ and embody. In other words, our assumption here is that different ways of reasoning have a major impact on the content of a theory, and this becomes all the more compelling when we juxtapose together several theories that deal with a similar subject matter

but are radically different from one another. More specifically, by probing into the philosophical significance of the subliminal mind along the bias of its access, I will argue that these three different formulations correspond to different models of “transcendence” and “immanence.”

Let us be clear about what we mean by transcendence and immanence in this discussion. Here transcendence is defined broadly as “that (A) to which reference can be made only by denying that the referent lies within the boundaries of the world of phenomena (B) but to which (A) the explanation of the world of phenomena (B) has to resort, not vice versa.”² In other words, A is a transcendence with respect to B if A is outside of B but explains B. Plato’s conceptualization of form in relationship to matter is a prototype of transcendence. To apply this definition to our discussion of the subliminal mind, when it is claimed to be a transcendence, this should be understood as saying that the subliminal mind lies outside the boundary of consciousness which is the world of phenomena in the mental region and that our conscious life is explained by resorting to the subliminal mental activities. Immanence is the opposite of transcendence, defined as that to which reference can be made by allowing the referent to lie within the boundaries of the world of phenomena wherein a two-way or reciprocal dependency exists between them. Therefore, when the subliminal mind is said to be an immanence, this should be understood as meaning that it lies within the boundary of consciousness and that they explain each other.

Therefore, the main objective of our study here is to reveal the *modus operandi* of the three theories, respectively, the underlying principles operative in the theorizations *a la* transcendence and immanence, by problematizing the access to the subliminal mental activities. My argument is that a major portion of Jung’s formulation of the subliminal mind resorts to the principle of transcendence, Freud’s to both immanence and transcendence, and Xuan Zang’s to immanence. Transcendence, represented by Jung’s formulation of the collective unconscious, has been the dominant mode of reasoning in the mainstream Western intellectual tradition and Freud’s formulation, which blurs the boundary between transcendence and immanence, is a challenge to that, whereas immanence characterizes the mode of reasoning in the mainstream Buddhist tradition. Let us begin our inquiry with Freud’s formulation of the unconscious which has made the concept well known.

Transcendence/Immanence in Freud’s conceptualization of the unconscious

Freud’s theories of the unconscious undergo a series of major revisions, hence it is difficult to present one single picture of them. However, without being

distracted by the historical vicissitudes of his theories, for the purpose of this essay we will be concerned with his concept of the unconscious in the two major systems that he established in the course of his effort to explain human subjectivity; these are known as the topographical system and the structural system. The topographical system is laid out in his monumental work, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, first published in late 1899, wherein the mind is stratified into the unconscious, preconscious, and conscious. The structural system represents a major shift in Freud's theoretical endeavor in the 1920's; it is best summarized in his *The Ego and the Id*, published in 1923, wherein the mind is structured into id, ego, and superego. Let us first examine the topographical system.

The Interpretation of Dreams is the foundational text of the movement of psychoanalysis launched by Freud. The significance of the work lies in its revolutionary way of interpreting patients' dreams, which led to Freud's "discovery"³ of the existence of a dynamic subliminal mental process; in Freud's own words, "*The interpretation of dreams is the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind*" [original italics] (Freud, 1965, 647). The central theme of this work is that a dream is a fulfillment of an unrecognized wish.

In order to explain this unrecognizability of the wish expressed by dreams, Freud comes up with a topographical formulation which schematizes three subsystems within the human mind, namely consciousness, the preconscious and the unconscious. The preconscious is postulated as a filter, as it were, that lies between consciousness and the unconscious. Therefore, by definition, the unconscious cannot become consciousness: the unconscious "has no access to consciousness *except via the preconscious*, in passing through which its excitatory process is obliged to submit to modifications" (1965, 580, original italics). The unconscious that "enters" consciousness is already modified by the preconscious. By resorting to such a framework, Freud is able to explain that a dream is a fulfillment of a wish due to the activities of the unconscious and that the unrecognizability of such a wish is due to the censoring function of the preconscious.

To claim that a dream expresses a wish is to assign meaning to the dream. Such a meaning, veiled by the modifying activities of the preconscious, is not readily available to the dreamer herself. The wish becomes recognizable only through the methods of interpretation prescribed by Freud's psychoanalysis. The ideal scenario is to have a psychoanalyst who is trained in Freud's theory to interpret the dream. The unrecognizability of the wish that a dream or the unconscious expresses means that there is no direct access to the unconscious, and psychoanalysis provides the only access, albeit an indirect one.

Such a lack of direct access to the realm of the unconscious will be carried into Freud's later structural formulation which divides the human mind into three regions, namely id, ego, and superego. Here the ego is envisioned as part of the id. This means that the ego grows out of the id or that the id is the ground of the ego. This marks a fundamental shift in Freud's conceptualization of the unconscious. In Freud's earlier topographical system, the unconscious is deemed an epiphenomenon of consciousness, since the genesis of the former is the result of the repressive function of the latter. However, to view the ego as an entity that grows out of the id means that the unconscious (the id here) is more than what was previously conscious and that the unconscious is not just the result of repression, forgetting and neglecting, all of which are ego-centered activities. That is, in the structural system, the id is more fundamental than the ego in that the latter grows out of the former; in the topographical system, however, consciousness is more primary than the unconscious in that the latter is the result of the repressive function of the former. To put differently such a shift of primacy from consciousness to the unconscious in Freud's thought, consciousness in the structural system has to presuppose the unconscious, instead of the other way around as is the case in the topographical system. The significance of such a shift becomes even clearer when it is seen from the perspective of the change of the modes of reasoning the shift represents. Therefore let us take a look at how the modes of reasoning a la transcendence and immanence operative in Freud's formulations of the subliminal mind have impacted the way the relationship between consciousness and the unconscious is conceptualized in his two systems.

Freud is ambiguous with respect to the role transcendence and immanence play in his formulation. First of all, the principle of immanence is obviously involved in Freud's formulation of the unconscious, whether in his earlier topographical system or the later structural system. That is, in both systems there is a mutual dependency between consciousness and the unconscious. They define each other: the unconscious stores the forgotten or repressed contents of consciousness while consciousness is heavily influenced by unconscious activities, most of which are out of the control of consciousness. In other words, the relationship between the two is reciprocal, instead of a one-way dependency which would be indicative of the operation of transcendence.

What makes Freud's conceptualization of the unconscious challenging, however, is that it also involves the transcendence principle. This is manifested in the lack of direct access, *in principle*, to the unconscious as such in Freud's formulation which renders the unconscious outside the realm of consciousness. As noted previously, according to Freud, there is no direct access to the unconscious. "*The interpretation of dreams is the royal road*

to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind” [original italics] (1965, 647). In other words, access to the unconscious is gained only through interpretation. This is tantamount to claiming that access to the unconscious is achieved through reasoning only. If access to the unconscious is achieved only through interpretation and analysis, it renders the unconscious a product of rational postulation or hypothesis, not unlike the Platonic form, *eidos*, in *this* regard. Thus conceived, the unconscious is clearly a transcendence with respect to consciousness: it is outside of the realm of consciousness but explains our conscious life. However, the crucial difference between Plato’s form/matter relationship and Freud’s unconscious/consciousness relationship is that in Plato’s case the relationship between form and matter is that of one-way dependency with the latter depending on the former, a normative scenario of transcendence; on the other hand, Freud’s unconscious is not a simple transcendence with respect to consciousness, but also an immanence in the sense that the relationship between the unconscious and consciousness is a reciprocal dependency.

There is, however, a subtle but important difference between Freud’s earlier topographical system and his later structural system with respect to the roles played by transcendence and immanence principles in them. Even though both systems deny direct access to the unconscious, the relationship between consciousness and the unconscious would change and the significance of this change will be better appreciated when seen in light of the involvement of the principles of transcendence and immanence. That is, Freud is leaning more towards the transcendence principle in his structural – compared with his topographical – formulation of the unconscious.

The mutual dependency between consciousness and the unconscious in Freud’s earlier topographical system is more pronounced than that between ego and id in his later structural system – I will deal with the superego later. To be more specific, in the topographical system, the unconscious stores the repressed or forgotten content of what used to be in consciousness but it also influences the activities of consciousness. The content of the unconscious as the repressed or forgotten conscious materials was known, indicative of the dependency of the unconscious on consciousness in the acquisition of the unconscious content, even though there is no direct access to such content once it sinks into the unconscious, due to the censoring function of the preconscious. However, in the structural system, the ego grows out of the id. Even as they influence each other, some part of the id may never be known since the id always contains something that was never present in the ego. This means that certain part of the id becomes independent of the ego. It is therefore clear that the id is a stronger transcendence with respect to the ego in Freud’s structural system, compared with the transcendence

of the unconscious with respect to consciousness in his topographical system.

To recap what we have discussed so far, the lack of direct access to the unconscious points to its transcendent nature in both the topographical and the structural systems; on the other hand, the reciprocal relationship between consciousness and the unconscious in both systems is also indicative of the operation of the immanence principle. This means that transcendence and immanence in Freud's both systems are rather peculiar. To wit, the unconscious is not strictly immanent with respect to consciousness, due to the lack of direct access to the unconscious in principle; neither is the unconscious strictly transcendent with respect to consciousness due to the mutual dependence between the two. In fact the line between transcendence and immanence is blurred in Freud's theories.

Let us call the relationship between consciousness and the unconscious in Freud's topographical system a case of "asymmetrical immanence": on the one hand, the basic relationship between the unconscious and consciousness in the topographical system is that of immanence, in the sense that the unconscious stores the forgotten or repressed contents of consciousness while consciousness is heavily influenced by subliminal mental activities, most of which are out of the control of consciousness; on the other hand, the unconscious cannot be accessed directly by consciousness, rendering the former a transcendence with respect to the latter.

Let us call the relationship between id and ego in his structural system "asymmetrical transcendence," since here Freud is clearly appealing more to transcendence in his formulation of the unconscious, or id here; however, it is asymmetrical due to the fact that the ego still retains its impact on the id, even though such an impact is significantly diminished when compared with the impact consciousness exerts on the unconscious in his topographical system. In a word, "asymmetrical" is used to indicate the presence of the other principle within the dominant orientation. That is, asymmetrical immanence indicates the presence of transcendence in the predominantly immanence-oriented conceptualization, whereas asymmetrical transcendence denotes the presence of immanence in the predominantly transcendence-oriented conceptualization.

The operative principle behind Freud's conceptualization of the collective unconscious, the superego, in his structural system, is also consistent with the mode of reasoning in the conceptualization of the id, namely asymmetrical transcendence. For Freud, the formation of the superego results from the internalization of parental authority. When the external restraint is internalized, "the super-ego takes the place of the parental agency and observes, directs and threatens the ego in exactly the same way as earlier the parents did with the child" (Freud, 1964, 77). Furthermore,

a child's super-ego is in fact constructed on the model not of its parents but of its parents' super-ego; the contents which fill it are the same and it becomes the vehicle of tradition and of all the time-resisting judgments of value which have propagated themselves in this manner from generation to generation. (*ibid.*, 84)

This means that the superego represents the vehicle of tradition, and tradition in this case specifically refers to the moral and religious values of a society and culture that are the achievement of human civilization.

The relationship between the superego vis-à-vis tradition and the ego vis-à-vis an individual is that of asymmetrical transcendence, since the former shapes and defines the latter while the latter exerts very little impact on the former, save for those individuals who are able to reshape the received tradition. Given the very possibility for a tradition being reshaped by certain powerful individuals and to a much lesser extent by average people, the transcendence of tradition is not an absolute one, but an asymmetrical one in the sense defined above.

This is in sharp contrast with Jung's formulation of the collective unconscious. As we will see presently, Freud's earlier asymmetrical immanence and later asymmetrical transcendence would evolve into a full-blown transcendence in certain prominent aspects of Jung's psychology, especially in his formulation of the collective unconscious vis-à-vis archetype. It will be apparent to us that transcendence, to the exclusion of immanence, dictates Jung's conceptualization of archetype. Since it is where the contrast between Freud and Jung becomes the sharpest and is most relevant to our discussion here, I will focus on the concept of archetype according to Jung's formulation.

Transcendence in Jung's conceptualization of the collective unconscious

Jung's psychology is known for its schematization of the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious. There is a significant overlap between Jung and Freud in their formulations of the unconscious due to their common interest and their professional and personal ties.

The personal unconscious consists firstly of all those contents that became unconscious either because they lost their intensity and were forgotten or because consciousness was withdrawn from them (repression), and secondly of contents, some of them sense-impressions, which never had sufficient intensity to reach consciousness but have somehow entered the psyche. The collective unconscious, however, as the ancestral heritage of possibilities of representation, is not individual but common to all men, and perhaps even to all animals, and is the true basis of the individual psyche. (Jung, 1969b, 153–154)⁴

To put it briefly, the personal unconscious includes forgotten or repressed conscious materials and residues of sense-impressions.⁵ The collective unconscious is not related to the experience of the individual but is rather the totality of inherited possibilities of representation and it is the basis of the individual psyche. Eventually, Jung comes to the view that the personal unconscious consists of feeling-toned complexes (Jung, 1969a, 42) while the collective unconscious consists of instincts and archetypes (Jung, 1969b, 133–134).

A complex is defined by Jung as the phenomenon of the “feeling-toned groups of representations” in the unconscious (Jacobi, 6) which are of “an intrapsychic nature and originate in a realm which is beyond the objective control of the conscious mind and which manifests itself only when the threshold of attention is lowered” (*ibid.*, 7).⁶ In other words, a complex is a psychic phenomenon originated in the personal unconscious and manifested in the consciousness when the attention level is lowered. The keys to understanding the concept of a complex are its uncontrollability by the conscious mind and its origin in the unconscious.

Jung’s formulation of the personal unconscious, as consisting of feeling-toned complexes (Jung, 1969a, 42), is a clear case of asymmetrical transcendence. The core of a complex has a high degree of autonomy and independence from the ego consciousness whereas its associated elements are more receptive to influence from the ego consciousness (Jacobi, 8–9). This means that transcendence dominates Jung’s conceptualization of the personal unconscious while immanence retains some lingering influence, a typical case of asymmetrical transcendence, as we saw previously in Freud’s structural system.

If Jung’s formulation of the personal unconscious resorts to asymmetrical transcendence, we will see in the following that his theory of the collective unconscious is a case of full-blown transcendence. It is with the conceptualization of collective unconscious and other related ideas that Jung took a wide turn away from Freud and made his mark on the study of the unconscious. Since Jung devoted much of his creative energy to the notion of collective unconscious, especially the notion of archetype, and it is what Jung is particularly known for, we will look into this part of his theory in some detail. Our focus will be on the way Jung constructs his system, examining the role played by the principle of transcendence in his conceptualization of the archetype. By focusing on the concept of archetype in Jung’s psychology, I am trying to draw our attention to the part of his psychology which is drastically different from Freud’s. In highlighting their differences, I will show that Jung’s formulation of the collective unconscious follows decidedly the principle of transcendence. That is, in Jung’s formulation of the collective unconscious *qua* archetype, transcendence plays an exclusive role, as contrasted with its more ambiguous involvement in Freud’s theories of the unconscious.

In Jung's mature theory, the collective unconscious consists of instincts and archetypes (Jung, 1969b, 133–134). According to Jung, instincts and archetypes determine each other (Jung, 1969a, 134): "*Instincts are typical modes of action*" (*ibid.*, 135, original italics); "*Archetypes are typical modes of apprehension*" (*ibid.*, 137, original italics); and "the archetypes are simply the forms which the instincts assume" (*ibid.*, 157). However, gradually the archetype takes over the role previously assigned to the instinct. Jung eventually comes to the view that it is the archetypes that are constitutive of the collective unconscious (1969a, 42; 1969b, 4), making archetypes the forms "representing merely the possibility of a certain type of *perception* and *action*" (1969b, 48, my italics). In other words, the concept of instinct is subsumed under the concept of archetype: "the archetype consists of both – form and energy" (Jung, 1969b, 102).

As *a priori* forms in the unconscious, archetypes are "factors and motifs that arrange the psychic elements into certain images, characterized as archetypal, but in such a way that *they can be recognized only from the effect they produce*. They exist preconsciously, and presumably they form the structural dominants of the psyche in general" (original italics, quoted in Jacobi, 31). They "are not disseminated only by tradition, language, and migration, but . . . they can release spontaneously, at any time, at any place, and without any outside influence" (Jung, 1969b, 79). They are forms that pre-exist individuals, inherited by individuals. Jung is rather unabashedly univocal about the operation of the transcendence principle in his conceptualization of the archetype.

In order to stress the *a priori* nature of the archetype, Jung compares it to the Platonic idea, *eidos* (1969b, 75), and the Kantian categories (1969a, 136).⁷ This is indicative of his oscillation between a metaphysical position (Platonic) and a transcendental position (Kantian) in the conceptualization of archetype.⁸ He also insists that "the concept of the collective unconscious is neither a speculative nor a philosophical but an empirical matter" (1969b, 44).⁹

However, Jung's notion of archetype is closer to Platonic forms than to the Kantian categories in an important sense. The ultimate Platonic forms, of the true, the good and the beautiful, are teleological, representing the perfection towards which all natural beings strive; by contrast, the Kantian categories, of causality, etc, are the descriptive forms that constitute the limits of rationality. Jung postulates the notion of archetype, as the form of the collective unconscious, in order to explain the spiritual development, what he calls "individuation." The teleological orientation of archetypes echoes that of the Platonic forms.

Jung emphatically insists that archetypes are only formal and are empty of contents, hence archetypes per se can never be known as such; they can only

be recognized through what Jung calls archetypal images which are pictorial representations of archetypes. Therefore, he draws a distinction between an archetype *per se* and an archetypal image. By making such a distinction, Jung hopes to achieve two goals: retaining the hereditary nature of archetypes while accounting for the inevitable differences in our experience of the same archetypes from individual to individual and from group to group. That is, only archetypes are inherited, but archetypal images, which are what we actually experience in encountering archetypes, vary among individuals as well as groups.¹⁰ The positing of archetypal images is apparently an attempt to bridge the gap between the empirical and the metaphysical in his system.

Jung's postulation of archetype represents a transcendent "turn," as it were, in his psychology, and as a result, the concept of archetype, key to his theory, becomes a decidedly metaphysical notion, echoing Plato's *eidos*, despite his disclaimer that an archetype is not speculative nor philosophical but empirical. The archetype is formal; it transcends the realm of personal experiences. Hence an archetype *per se* is not accessible, *by definition*. Nevertheless, it is both that which governs our mental life and that towards which our mental life is oriented.¹¹ The relationship between archetypes and our mental life is that of one-way dependency, with the latter dependent upon the former, but not vice versa. The transcendent nature of the archetype cannot be more pronounced.

To sum up, our study of Freud and Jung has demonstrated the changing roles transcendence and immanence play in their respective systems. Between the early Freud, the later Freud, and the matured Jung we can clearly see an increasing reliance on transcendence in their theoretical efforts, from asymmetrical immanence in early Freud to asymmetrical transcendence in later Freud and in Jung's theorization of the personal unconscious, and eventually culminating in the exclusive operation of the transcendence principle in Jung's formulation of archetype. This increasing reliance on transcendence in the conceptualization of the unconscious renders the unconscious less and less accessible by consciousness. However, the reliance on transcendence is not shared by the Buddhist conceptualization of the subliminal mind, to which we now turn.

Immanence in Xuan Zang's conception of the storehouse consciousness

If the mode of reasoning governs the mode of access in the formulation of the subliminal consciousness, the involvement of the transcendence principle in Freud and Jung makes direct access impossible within their systems. Instead, only indirect access, i.e., through interpretation and analysis, is allowed. In

this section, I will argue that Xuan Zang's Yogācāra Buddhist formulation of the subliminal consciousness, the so-called "the storehouse consciousness" (*ālayavijñāna*), is achieved by appealing to the principle of immanence alone and we will look into how the operation of the immanence principle renders possible direct access to the subliminal consciousness in Xuan Zang's system. We will use his formulation of *ālayavijñāna* in the celebrated *Cheng Weishi Lun (Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi-śāstra: The Treatise on the Doctrine of Consciousness-Only, hereafter CWSL)*.¹²

Yogācāra Buddhism is one of the two major philosophical schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism, well known within the Buddhist tradition for its systematic and meticulous analysis of our mental life. The postulation of *ālayavijñāna* is a major contribution by the Yogācāra Buddhists to the Buddhist theory of mind. It is posited as a subliminal form of consciousness which provides the crucial continuity from delusion to awakening without resorting to any form of reification or substantialization.

The earlier Buddhist model of consciousness consists of five senses, namely, visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory and tactile, and the mind whose objects are mental. The Yogācāra theory of consciousness revises and expands this traditional model.¹³ What it has done is to split the mind in the traditional model into two: *manovijñāna* and *manas*.

Manovijñāna is called sense-centered consciousness, and it works in conjunction with the five senses. These six, namely *manovijñāna* and the five senses, constitute one kind of consciousness which "appropriates crude objects" (Xuan Zang, 96). This means that the objects of this group of consciousnesses are external objects. Any perception of external objects requires the co-presence of "such factors as the act of attention of *manovijñāna*, the sense-organs, (whose attention is directed in accordance with *manovijñāna*), the external objects towards which this attention is directed" (Wei Tat, 479). In other words, the role of *manovijñāna* is to direct the attention of sense organs towards their objects in order to produce *clear* perceptions of those objects. *Manovijñāna* also has a cogitative or deliberative function, but such a function is crude and unstable and it might be interrupted in certain states.¹⁴

The uninterrupted mind is called *manas*, which "is related to the view of the existence of self" (Xuan Zang, 314). This means that *manas* is responsible for the genesis of the idea of personhood, the essence of a person. Its function is intellection and cogitation: "It is called 'cogitation' or 'deliberation' because it cogitates or deliberates at all times without interruption in contradistinction to the sixth consciousness (*manovijñāna*), which is subject to interruption" (Wei Tat, 97). Compared with *manovijñāna*, *manas* is fine and subtle in its activities (Xuan Zang, 478). Hence the delusion it generates, namely the idea of personhood, is much more resistant to being transformed in

order to reach enlightenment. *Manovijñāna* works with the five senses in cognizing external physical objects; *manas* works with another consciousness, which is for the first time postulated by the Yogācāra Buddhists, storehouse consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) or the eighth consciousness, and *manas* attaches itself to *ālayavijñāna* as the inner self (Xuan Zang, 104).

The conceptualization of the storehouse consciousness, *ālayavijñāna*, is an attempt by the Yogācāra Buddhists to account for the sense of the self and the continuity of our experience, given the orthodox Buddhist position against any notion of substance, including a substantive self. The storehouse consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) is also known as the ripening consciousness or the root consciousness. “It is the eighth consciousness, the maturing or retributive consciousness because it has many seeds that are of the nature of ripening in varied ways” (Xuan Zang, 96). This consciousness is meant to account for the karmic retribution within the doctrinal boundary of Buddhism in that it stores karmic seeds till their fruition. This is a subtle and subliminal kind of consciousness whose activities surface only when conditions allow, that is, when karmic retribution is fulfilled.

Ālayavijñāna is a different form of consciousness from those in the traditional model in that the traditional forms of consciousness are strictly causal, meaning they are object-dependent in their cognitive activities. *Ālayavijñāna*, by contrast, does not depend upon any specific object and it works with the other seven consciousnesses. It is constituted by what are known as the “seeds.”

The seeds refer to the dispositional tendencies resulting from previous experiences. It is also called habitual energy or perfuming energy and Xuan Zang lists three sources of this energy, namely “image, name, and discriminating influence” (136). The image and discriminating influence refer to the objective and the subjective poles of our cognitive activities, respectively, thus pointing to the inherently dualistic structure of our cognitive activities. Name refers to the linguistic activities which involve naming and conceptualizing.¹⁵ Xuan Zang sums them up in explaining seeds as the potential proceeding from the two apprehensions and the potential producing the two apprehensions (580). The two apprehensions refer to the two aspects of the discriminatory function of the mind, the grasping and the grasped. This means that all of our conscious activities, be they perceptual, conceptual or linguistic, share the same dualistic structure, the grasping and the grasped. Such a discriminatory function of our mental activities is that which produces the seeds, and the seeds thus produced also perpetuate this discriminatory function, dragging us back into the realm of transmigration. Hence we find the *CWSL* declaring that “the wheel of life and death turns by *karma* and the two apprehensions. None of them are separate from consciousness, because they are, by nature, objects of consciousness and its concomitant activities” (582). In this way, the realm

of transmigration, i.e., the karmic world, is encapsulated by consciousness rooted in *ālayavijñāna*. According to the *CWSL*, *manas* takes *ālayavijñāna* as its object and misidentifies as the self, but *ālayavijñāna* is a homogeneous continuum even though it appears as eternal and one (Xuan Zang, 282).

In order to establish that *ālayavijñāna* is not a substratum of some sort, the *CWSL* makes its activities abide by the rule of dependent origination: “To be neither impermanent nor permanent: this is the principle of dependent origination. Hence it is said that this consciousness is in perpetual transformation like a torrent” (Xuan Zang, 172). It is not permanent, in the sense that it is itself an activity, not a substance; it is not impermanent, in the sense that the activity is a continuous and uninterrupted process.

Dependent origination is taught by the Buddha in order to strike a middle path between what he calls eternalism and annihilationism, or essentialism and nihilism. That is, beings in the world are neither eternal nor non-existent, neither substantive nor illusory. They come in and out of existence due to the confluence of conditions.¹⁶ Xuan Zang appeals to this Buddhist doctrine to explain the regularity of our mental life. That is, through the postulation of *ālayavijñāna*, the Yogācāra Buddhists can explain away the substance of the self and substitute it with the continuity of *ālayavijñāna*. The positing of *ālayavijñāna* is a Yogācāra attempt to explain continuity without substance. In this way, Xuan Zang proves that *ālayavijñāna* is not some permanent dwelling place for seeds or permanent ground for our experiences but rather is itself a continuum of activities.

In delusion, sentient beings misconstrue *ālayavijñāna* as a substance, namely, the substantive self, whereas it is only a continuum of activities. Hence the orthodox Buddhist doctrine of no-self, *anātman*, is upheld. Indeed, it can be argued that prior to the postulation of *ālayavijñāna* the Buddhists did not really have a convincing explanation of the apparent sense of a self we possess. We can clearly see the significance of *ālayavijñāna* in the Yogācāra system, given the “signature” doctrine of no-self in Buddhism.

In light of our discussion of Freud and Jung, we must ask the following question: can there be a direct access to the storehouse consciousness as Xuan Zang conceptualizes it? The answer to that is yes. As he clearly states in the *CWSL*,

The Bodhisattvas, who have embarked upon the path of insight and have achieved true vision, are called “superior Bodhisattvas.” They can reach *ālayavijñāna* and understand it. (192–194)

This means that an accomplished Yogācāra practitioner, a Bodhisattva, who has achieved an unimpeded penetration into reality in her meditation practice

is able to access the storehouse consciousness herself directly. Let us have a closer look at how the direct access to the subliminal consciousness in Xuan Zang's Yogācāra system is made possible by the operation of the immanence principle.

There is a clear reciprocity between *ālayavijñāna* and the other forms of consciousness in the Yogācāra theory. The eight consciousnesses in the Yogācāra scheme can be viewed in terms of a threefold process: the retribution process, the self-cogitation process and the cognition of objects other than the self (Xuan Zang, 96). The retribution process refers to the subliminal activities of the storehouse consciousness; the self-cogitation process takes the storehouse consciousness as its inner self and cogitates on the ground of such a "self," and the process of cognition of "external" objects refers to the activities of the first six consciousnesses – the five sensory consciousnesses and the sense-centered consciousness that coordinates the activities of the five.

According to the *CWSL*, the three processes are simultaneous and intricately intertwined with one another:

The eight consciousnesses cannot, in their essential natures, be said to be definitely one (i.e., forming a single whole). This is because their modes of activity, the conditioning causes on which they depend, and their associated qualities are different. . . . At the same time they are not definitely different (i.e., being separate units), for, as is noted in the sūtra (*Laṅkāvatāra*), the eight consciousness are like the waves which cannot be differentiated from the water. This is because, if they were definitely different, they could not be as cause and effect to one another. (Wei Tat, 499)

This is a crucial observation with respect to the relationship amongst the eight consciousnesses: they cannot be separated from one another, or as Brian Brown puts it, the relationship between the storehouse consciousness and the other seven consciousnesses is that of "the differentiated identity" (209). Such an inseparability, or differentiated identity, between them is a clear indication that no form of consciousness is outside of, therefore transcendent to, the others; the nature of their relationship is that of immanence, and as such they require each other to explain themselves.

The relationship amongst the eight consciousnesses in the Yogācāra system is governed by four kinds of conditions: condition *qua* cause, condition *qua* antecedent, condition *qua* perceived object, condition *qua* contributory factor. Condition *qua* cause is defined by Xuan Zang as the condition under which "the conditioned entities themselves produce their own effects" (Xuan Zang, 534). This refers to the condition by which the eight consciousnesses give rise to each other within the same moment, an intra-moment relationship.

Condition *qua* antecedent means that “the eight consciousnesses and their concomitant mental activities form a group in the preceding moment and pass into the succeeding group of similar kinds without any mediation” (Xuan Zang, 536). It deals with the relationship between the eight consciousnesses as a group at one moment and the succeeding moment, an inter-moment relationship. Condition *qua* perceived object refers to “the entities upon which the mind and its concomitant activities, which perceive those entities as such, depend” (Xuan Zang, 542). This condition accounts for the objective grounding of our cognition and it holds the key to the success or failure of Xuan Zang’s effort to explain the adequacy of cognition by appealing to the transformation of consciousness alone. Condition *qua* contributory factor is defined as “a real *dharma* (conditioned or unconditioned, as opposed to imaginary *dharmas*), possessing potent energy and capable of promoting (first nine *hetus*) or counteracting (tenth *hetu*) the evolution of another *dharma*” (Wei Tat, 547). The real *dharmas* here refer to the eight consciousnesses, and this means that the eight consciousnesses are conditions *qua* contributory factors to one another (Xuan Zang, 570). This conditioning factor addresses the subjective aspect of conditioning, which involves the support of sense organs as the perceiving aspect in the structure of our cognition. The relationship between the storehouse consciousness and the other seven consciousnesses is clearly reciprocal. This is an unequivocal case of immanence in operation.

Theoretically, direct access to the subliminal consciousness becomes a problem only when the subliminal consciousness is regarded as that which is outside the domain of consciousness – in the more restricted sense of the term here – due to the involvement of the transcendence principle. This means that, to some extent, the problematic of access is created by the way the unconscious is defined by Freud and Jung involving the principle of transcendence. If the subliminal consciousness is not so defined, direct access to it would no longer be a problem, since the subliminal consciousness, thus conceived, is no longer considered as a separate mental region to begin with.

On the other hand, the immanence-based formulation of the mind does not divide up our mental activities into separate regions or realms, with a blocking mechanism lying between them, thus rendering the subliminal consciousness transcendent to, or outside of, the region of consciousness. Rather, the immanence-based conception of the mind regards our mental life as an integrated domain with varying degrees of awareness of various aspects of its activities. The question for the Yogācāra Buddhists is how to increase the level of awareness and realization of various activities in our mind. Put simply, access to the subliminal consciousness for Xuan Zang means an experiential access vis-à-vis the increasing level of awareness and realization of the mental activities undetected within everyday mode of experience. Such access is

direct, unlike the indirect access through interpretation and analysis provided in Freud and Jung.

As Brian Brown¹⁷ aptly puts it, in the Yogācāra conception “[h]uman consciousness is by nature the processive advance to an ever more perfect *self-consciousness* in which it finally awakens to the plenitude of its identity with the *Ālayavijñāna*” (225–226). Except for the somewhat Hegelian undertone in his take on *ālayavijñāna*, Brown’s interpretation of the Yogācāra enlightenment process as the increasing awareness of *ālayavijñāna* and the ultimate realization of the consciousness-only nature of reality brought about by such an awareness offers some valuable insights into the immanent character of Xuan Zang’s formulation of the storehouse consciousness. According to the *CWSL*, this increasing awareness and realization of the storehouse consciousness, namely the direct experiential access to the storehouse consciousness, is accomplished through the Yogācāra Buddhist meditation practice.

Yogācāra Buddhist philosophy is particularly known, even within the Buddhist meditation tradition, for its overwhelming preoccupation with the possibility of awakening and liberation through vigorous meditation practices. In fact, the very origination of the concept of *ālayavijñāna* is closely related to the theoretical necessity of accounting for certain aspects of Buddhist meditation (Schmithausen, 18–19). Therefore, it is only natural for Xuan Zang to appeal to the experience of meditation to provide direct access to the storehouse consciousness.¹⁸ Since the discussion of Yogācāra meditation in the *CWSL* involves many technical and doctrinal considerations which have little relevance to our purpose here, I will briefly summarize the meditation process without going into the minute details.

According to the *CWSL*, in order to transform ignorance to enlightenment, a Yogācāra practitioner needs to go through five stages in her meditation practice; they are: moral provisioning, intensified effort, unimpeded penetrating understanding, exercising cultivation and the final attainment or ultimate realization (664). In the stage of moral provisioning, the practitioner acquires and accumulates right knowledge pertaining to the nature of characteristics of consciousness, cultivating a deep faith and understanding of such knowledge (666). In the stage of intensified effort, the practitioner is able to overcome the belief in subject/object duality, thus developing a genuine view of non-dual reality (*ibid.*). In the stage of unimpeded penetrating understanding, the practitioner can penetrate and comprehend such a non-dual reality in her meditation experience (*ibid.*). In the stage of exercising cultivation, she continues to cultivate what she has accomplished in the previous stage, while gradually cleansing the remaining two mental barriers, the barrier of vexing passions (*kleśāvaraṇa*) and the barrier hindering supreme knowledge and enlightenment (*jñeyāvaraṇa*) (*ibid.*) – I will explain the two barriers in the following. In

the last stage, the final attainment or ultimate realization, she has completely overcome the two barriers and has reached complete enlightenment and is able to strive for the enlightenment of all sentient beings (*ibid.*).

In a nutshell, the first stage is the preparatory stage for a practitioner to acquire the necessary knowledge and cultivate the moral requirements for the practice; in the second stage she starts to put her knowledge into practice by embodying the knowledge; in the third stage, she experiences the non-dual reality in her meditation, verifying the knowledge she has acquired; in the fourth stage, the meditative experience deepens with the sustained effort on her part to overcome the residue of the two barriers; and the last stage is the complete overcoming of the two barriers and the final enlightenment. The third stage marks the critical point in the practitioner's meditation since it is at this stage she has come to an experiential awakening to reality, and the last two stages serve to deepen such an experience. It is also at the third stage that she realizes *ālayavijñāna*.

The Yogācāra meditation practice is essentially a process of gradually overcoming two mental barriers that obstruct the non-dual reality and thus transforming ignorance into enlightenment. Of the two mental barriers, the barrier of vexing passions (*kleśāvaraṇa*) is given rise to by the belief in the reality of an independent, autonomous ego. The barrier hindering supreme knowledge and enlightenment (*jñeyāvaraṇa*) stems from adherence to the notion of discrete, self-subsistent entities or things; it is "any moment of empirical consciousness that fails to perceive the mutual interdependence of all phenomena in their ultimate dependence as the forms of absolute consciousness (*Ālayavijñāna*)" (Brown 213). As Xuan Zang points out, "Karma, the two apprehensions (the grasping and the grasped), transmigratory existences, none of these is separated from consciousness because they are, in their nature, mind and its concomitant activities" (582). It is very clear that these two mental barriers, generated by the attachment of an independent self and subsistent entities, are the very cause of the wheel of suffering and the obstruction to enlightenment.

It is important to point out, however, that the two barriers mentioned here are not structural in nature. Rather they refer to the defiled activities of the mind that can be purified or transformed in course of the meditation practice. In fact, the term *varaṇa*, translated as barrier, means concealing, obscuring, hiding and veiling, and this points to the process nature of the barrier, the activities of mental defilement in this connection. More specifically, such defilements refer to the dualistic activities of consciousness that assert an independent and autonomous self on the one hand and discrete and self-subsistent entities on the other. Dualism gives rise to attachment, which is the primary cause of suffering according to the orthodox Buddhist teaching, since attachment operates under the illusion that there is a real self that is attached to real entities.

Therefore, in the Yogācāra teaching, meditation practice is a form of purification of the defilements that is geared towards overcoming this pernicious dualism underlying all of pre-enlightenment experience. In this consideration, the two barriers, which are the causes of subject/object dualism, are dispositional, not structural, and as such are subject to being purified and transformed. Otherwise, if the barriers are structural, like the Freudian preconscious, which can never be overcome *in principle*, the storehouse consciousness would have been rendered a transcendent entity or process. There is no concept of a structural barrier that blocks the entrance to the storehouse consciousness. It is just a lack of awareness of the subtlety of the mental process which characterizes the storehouse consciousness. Meditation is essentially a practice that is designed to help the practitioner overcome the dispositional defilements which characterize our everyday consciousness and transform everyday consciousness to an enlightened mind by removing the two barriers, the root of which is subject/object dualism. Put simply, meditation clears the mind in a way that renders possible access to the non-dual reality that is “veiled” by the dispersing activities of the everyday mind.

Furthermore, we should be reminded that, in Xuan Zang’s account, the storehouse consciousness would cease to exist *as ālayavijñāna* once the practitioner reaches enlightenment. However, the Yogācāra enlightenment must not be understood as something that exists separate from everyday mental life. Rather it should be interpreted as a *new way* to experience the world, that is, non-dualistically, when the two mental barriers are removed through vigorous meditation practice. In other words, enlightenment is the very transformation of the way we experience the world, from the dual mode to the non-dual mode. I will leave the detailed exposition of Xuan Zang’s understanding of enlightenment for another occasion.

Concluding remarks

To sum up, in this essay we have problematized the issue concerning the accessibility of the subliminal mind by examining three different formulations of the subliminal mind, represented by Freud, Jung, and Xuan Zang. The focus of our comparative inquiry are what kind of access to the subliminal consciousness each theory provides and how such access is dictated by the mode of reasoning vis-à-vis transcendence/immanence operative within it. We have argued that Freud and Jung provide only an indirect access to the subliminal consciousness whereas Xuan Zang offers a direct access. We have used the indirectness of access in Freud and Jung as a clue to reveal the involvement of the transcendence principle in their conceptualizations of the

unconscious. We have seen that, by contrast, Xuan Zang's immanence-based formulation of the subliminal consciousness makes a direct access possible within his framework.

In a way, it is necessary for Freud and Jung to deny direct access to the unconscious, thus saving the critical space for their own theories to be appealed to in interpreting the unconscious. More importantly, the indirectness of the access leaves room for the mediating and assisting role played by an analyst/doctor in both theories which is essential in the eventual cure of mental disorders. As Gay Watson observes, "All contemporary psychotherapies concur in the importance of the presence of the therapist and see the relationship with the client as central to the healing process" (250). By contrast, for Xuan Zang, direct access is crucial in a Buddhist practitioner's *own* effort to realize the source of ignorance and delusion which characterize our everyday mental life, to transform such a ground of ignorance and delusion, and hence to reach the Buddhist awakening. Of course, this does not preclude a teacher from pointing a disciple in the right direction. Nevertheless, it is the practitioner's own immediate experience that counts in reaching awakening, not anybody else's interpretation.

It is important for us to recognize the implicit modes of reasoning vis-à-vis the principles of transcendence and immanence the theorists resort to in fulfilling their different intents as to how the theories should be employed. If the study of the subliminal mind has so far tended to focus on how our experience informs our reasoning, it is my hope that this essay has helped to expose to what extent our experience is shaped by our reasoning.

Notes

1. In this essay, the subliminal mind will be used more generically whereas the unconscious more technically as Freud and Jung use it.
2. This is my definition of transcendence by combining those given by David Hall and Roger Ames (13) and their critic Robert Neville (151), in their exchanges on the problematic of transcendence in mainstream Western philosophy as well as in the traditional Confucian philosophy. I will not get into that debate as it has no relevance to our discussion here, although it was an inspiration for my approach to the subliminal consciousness.
3. Freud himself did not, rightly, credit himself with the discovery of the unconscious but he is undoubtedly the one who made the unconscious the center of his psychoanalytic theory and practice, and he is the one instrumental in popularizing it. As Peter Gay puts it, "His particular contribution was to take a shadowy, as it were poetic, notion, lend it precision, and make it into the foundation of a psychology by specifying the origins and contents of the unconscious and its imperious ways of pressing toward expression. 'Psychoanalysis was forced, through the study of pathological repression,' Freud observed later, to 'take the concept of the 'unconscious' seriously'" (128).

4. This is from Jung's essay "The Structure of the Psyche" collected in Vol. 8 of the collected works *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*.
5. Many Jungian scholars insist that the personal unconscious correlates with Freud's notion of the unconscious as an equivalent to the repressed and only an epiphenomenon of consciousness (Franz, 1998, 6; Yuasa, 1989, 145). It seems to me that this prevailing view amongst Jungians about Freud's notion of the unconscious primarily focuses on Freud's topographical system since in his structural system the unconscious becomes a quality of a mental process and not a mental region, as the Jungian personal unconscious is. Such a view is hardly justified when Freud's structural system is taken into consideration. The id and the superego are largely unconscious; they cannot be regarded as epiphenomena of consciousness; rather they are independent mental regions that have autonomous functions in themselves. It is important to distinguish the three ways Freud uses the term "unconscious" in his two systems. Freud explicitly points out in his structural system that phylogenetically the id is prior to the emergence of the ego, resulting from the id's contact with the external world. This means that the unconscious of the id is a necessary precondition for the emergence of the consciousness of the ego – of course, the ego can also be unconscious as we have seen.
6. Even though Jacobi insists that "according to Jung, it is not dreams (as Freud believed) but complexes that provide the royal road to the unconscious" (6), this observation seems to be more of a partisan move intended to highlight the differences between Jung and Freud, since this only points to Jung's experiments with word association in his early career. It is doubtful, at least according to my reading of Jung, that after he became associated with Freud Jung still relied more on complexes than on dreams in approaching the unconscious.
7. In fact he claims that philosophical and rational concepts are archetypes in disguise (Jung, 1969a, 136).
8. Jung's theoretical ambiguity reveals a tension that resembles the dispute between rationalism and empiricism that faced Kant, namely, whether our knowledge comes from reason or experience. Jung's solution in certain ways echoes Kant's approach. That is, Jung shares Kant's view that "though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience" (B1). One might point out that Kant's focus differs from the knowledge Jung is concerned with, namely unconscious apprehension: "Just as conscious apprehension gives our actions form and direction, so unconscious apprehension through the archetype determines the form and direction of instinct" (Jung, 1969a, 137). The Kantian categories are obviously concerned with the forms of conscious cognition, although Kant did not think in these terms; on the other hand the Jungian archetypes are forms of the collective unconscious, even though he sometimes blurs the distinction between the concept of collective unconscious to which the Jungian archetypes are applied and the concept of collective consciousness to which the Kantian categories are more applicable. For Kant, knowledge requires cooperation between the two faculties of the mind: intuition and understanding. For Jung, the archetypes are forms of unconscious representation just like the categories are forms of conscious cognition.
9. Even though Jung claims that he is an empiricist (1969b, 75), his formulation of the concept of archetype is sufficient to put such a label in question, to say the least. I would categorize him as a transcendental idealist with empiricist inclinations.
10. Jung has tried to defend himself against accusations that he regards ideas as hereditary in his concept of archetype: "It is not . . . a question of inherited *ideas* but of inherited *possibilities* of ideas" (1969b, 66). "The archetype in itself is empty and purely formal, . . . a possibility of representation which is given *a priori*. The representations themselves

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are not inherited, only the forms, and in that respect they correspond in every way to the instincts, which are also determined in form only” (*ibid.*, 79).

11. These two purposes of Jung’s archetype are not fully compatible. There is no need to bring up that argument here as it is not immediately relevant to our discussion.
12. Unless noted otherwise, the *CWSL* texts cited in this essay are my own renditions. The only complete English translation of the *CWSL* is done by Wei Tat, from which I have benefited a great deal. However, Wei Tat’s translation, as impressive as it is, has made many interpretative insertions into the text which are helpful for the understanding of the text but might be too liberal as a translation. The paginations of my translations are from the Chinese portion of Wei Tat’s translation of the *CWSL* for those readers who might want to check both the original Chinese text and Wei Tat’s translation as well as his interpretation. Occasionally Wei Tat’s interpretative translations are used due to the terseness, and therefore vagueness, of Xuan Zang’s text. In other words, this essay treats Wei Tat’s work more as an interpretation rather than a strict translation. Those cases are marked as Wei Tat’s work.
13. “Some *sūtras* say that there are six consciousnesses and we should know that this is only an expedient way of explanation. They pronounce six consciousnesses on the ground of six sense-organs, but the actual categories of consciousnesses are eight” (Xuan Zang, 336).
14. Xuan Zang lists five states in which *manovijñāna* is lacking: birth among *asañjñidevas*, two meditation states (*asamjñisamāpatti* and *nirodhasamāpatti*), mindless stupor (*middha*) and unconscious (*mūrcchā*) (480–492).
15. *CWSL* lists two kinds of *nāma*: “One are those which express meanings: they can explain the differences in meanings and sounds; the other are those which reveal their objects: they are the mind and its concomitant activities that perceive their objects” (582).
16. David Kalupahana’s *Causality: The Central Philosophy of Buddhism* (University of Hawaii Press, 1975) is a comprehensive treatment of dependent origination.
17. Brian Brown’s work, *The Buddha Nature: A Study of the Tathāgatagarbha and Ālayavijñāna*, is an important contribution to the modern scholarship on Xuan Zang’s conceptualization of *ālayavijñāna*. However, I have several important disagreements with Brown, despite sharing some of his understanding of Xuan Zang. Firstly, I disagree with his interpretation of Xuan Zang’s *CWSL* as a case of absolute or metaphysical idealism. It should be understood as qualified metaphysical idealism. It is a form of metaphysical idealism in the sense that it holds the view that the realm of consciousness *is* the world; it is qualified in the sense that any existence outside the realm of consciousness is neither affirmed nor denied. Secondly, I disagree with his interpretation of Xuan Zang’s formulation of *ālayavijñāna* as the universal consciousness, “as that integral wholeness of reality, the processive self-determination of substance to subject” (273) which is the demonstration of “the principle of active self-emergence from latent, abstract universality to perfect self-explicit awareness of” (*ibid.*). As the author himself reveals in the conclusion of his book, the interpretation shows too strong an influence from the Hegelian Absolute Spirit which is primarily historical and social.
18. It is, however, not my intention to claim that Xuan Zang’s conception of *ālayavijñāna* is purely a description of the meditative experience. The conceptualization of *ālayavijñāna* is very much doctrinally oriented. That is, Xuan Zang’s effort to formulate *ālayavijñāna* is restricted by various orthodox Buddhist doctrines. The point I am trying to make here is that, given the prominent role meditation plays in the theorization of *ālayavijñāna*, it is natural for Xuan Zang to turn to meditation to solve the problem of access.

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