SANS 30100, 40100: 
Third-year, Fourth-year, and Advanced Sanskrit

Winter term, 2017
Foster 209, M-W, 1:30-2:50

Instructor: Dan Arnold (d-arnold@uchicago.edu)
Office hours: Swift 401A, Thursdays, 3:00-5:00pm (or by arrangement with instructor); sign-up sheet is kept by Julia Ivory-Woods (773-702-7049) in the Martin Marty Center

Text: This term we’ll be reading the Vimsākā (also called Vimsatikā) of Vasubandhu (fl. c. 360 CE), in the edition of Sylvain Lévi; this was published in Lévi’s Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi: Deux Traités de Vasubandhu: Vimsatikā (La Vingtaine), Accompagnée d’une Explication en Prose, et Trīṃśikā (La Trentaine) avec le Commentaire de Śthiramati, pp.1-11 (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1925). This edition should be used together with corrections Lévi subsequently published in light of manuscripts found in Nepal after 1925: “Corrections au Texte Sanscrit,” in Lévi’s Matériaux Pour l’Étude du Système Vijñaptimātra, pp.175-79 (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1932).

Additional resources: Lévi’s edition of the text (together with the subsequently published corrections) is available as a PDF online at <chalk.uchicago.edu>, where it can be downloaded from the section on “Library Course Reserves.” While our text is generally written in classical Sanskrit, it is advisable occasionally to consult Franklin Edgerton’s Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary (available online at <http://tinyurl.com/hxqfmmn>, among other places). Also of interest and/or value may be some of the following sources:

Jonathan Gold, Paving the Great Way: Vasubandhu’s Unifying Buddhist Philosophy, New York: Columbia University Press, 2014. A recently published book (by a graduate of the Divinity School’s program in Philosophy of Religions) that argues for the basic conceptual unity of Vasubandhu’s expansive corpus. Does a particularly good job of emphasizing the always hermeneutical context of Vasubandhu’s thought.

Paul Griffiths, On Being Mindless: Buddhist Meditation and the Mind-body Problem. LaSalle, IL: Open Court Press, 1986. Though focused chiefly on the conceptual problems occasioned by the meditative “attainment of cessation” (nīrodhasamāpatti) – problems that figure centrally in the theorization of the Yogācāra concept of ālayavijñāna – this book represents, for my money, one of the best scholarly works on the whole nexus of Sanskrit Abhidharma literature and Yogācāra. Among other things, the book has an outstanding bibliography of works (including a good deal of Japanese scholarship) relevant to the study of these traditions.

Sonam Kachru, “Minds and Worlds: A Philosophical Commentary on the Twenty Verses of Vasubandhu,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 2015. While its excessive length is not among this dissertation’s virtues (it weighs in at 645 pages), this is an excellent and profoundly insightful reading of our text, here interpreted with extensive reference to Vasubandhu’s other works.

Birgit Kellner and John Taber, “Studies in Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda idealism I: The interpretation of Vasubandhu's Vimśikā,” Asia 68/3 (2014), pp.709-756. While Kellner and Taber’s particular focus on the significance of inferences based on drṣyānupalabdhi is debatable, this is a generally excellent attempt to make sense of our text as a whole.


Louis de La Vallée Poussin, trans., Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi: La Siddhi de Hsüan-tsang. Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1925-28. (2 vols, published as continuously paginated fascicles of Buddhica: Documents et Travaux Pour L’Etude du Bouddhisme, Publiés sous la Direction de Jean Przyluski, vols.1-2.) This characteristically monumental work of scholarship by the great Belgian scholar Louis de La Vallée Poussin is an annotated translation, from the Chinese of Hsüan-tsang, of the *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhiśāstra. This work (=Taishō 1585) was the Chinese translator Hsüan-tsang’s massive distillation of ten Indian commentaries on Vasubandhu’s Trīṃśikā – e.g., those of Sthiramati, Dharmapāla, Gunamati, etc. – all presented as a super-commentary on the Trīṃśikā. Hsüan-tsang’s massive work also includes extracts from numerous treatises of Asaṅga, Dignāga, and Vasubandhu, and also from sūtra literature. La Vallée Poussin’s French translation from the Chinese thus makes indirectly available a wealth of Indian commentarial literature as read by Hsüan-tsang, the figure most important to the propagation of “Vijñaptimātratā” in East Asia.


Mark Siderits, Buddhism as Philosophy: An Introduction. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007. This is an uncommonly clear and accessible philosophical account of major Buddhist traditions of thought. The book’s eighth chapter – “Yogācāra: Impressions-Only and the Denial of Physical Objects” (pp.146-179) – is structured almost entirely as a close reading of our text.

Requirements: In addition to regular participation in class, students will be required to take a final exam that will be given on a date to be determined. Instead of the exam, students in (or beyond) their fourth year of Sanskrit may choose to write a paper consisting (e.g.) in a translation and/or study of other materials, preferably such as overlap somehow with what we will have read in class.