

PROF. JENS SCHLIETER

## PANPSYCHISM AND THE POWER OF THE MIND: ESOTERIC VIEWS OF CONSCIOUSNESS AND REALITY IN MAHĀYĀNA BUDDHISM AND THE WEST

Since its origins, Buddhism has maintained that certain individuals can develop extraordinary mental abilities (abhijñā)—described as higher knowledge or psychic powers arising through meditative practice. These include psychic powers (ṛddhi), mind-reading or telepathy, recollection of past lives, and clairvoyance (perceiving karmic destinies). How do Buddhist practitioners and philosophers, both historical and contemporary, explain the existence of these powers? Indian Yogācāra philosophers such as Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, along with their Tibetan and East Asian successors, endorsed a trans-individual “consciousness-only” view (citta-mātra, vijñapti-mātra). This school holds that what we experience as external reality—including its apparent boundaries and limitations—is actually a projection of consciousness itself. While consciousness ordinarily creates subject-object duality, advanced practitioners can recognize and transcend these constructed limitations. This presentation explores how the Yogācāra perspective differs from contemporary Western debates on “panpsychism”—the philosophical thesis that consciousness or some form of mentality is a fundamental and ubiquitous feature of reality, present at all levels of physical organization. Also addressed are current discussions concerning “extended minds” and the possibility that consciousness operates beyond individual brains. Finally, I examine how these philosophical views relate to the Western concept of “esotericism” and what insights a comparison of these perspectives might offer for discussions of alternative rationalities.



Prof. Jens Schlieter studied Philosophy, Comparative Religion, Tibetology, and Buddhist Studies (including Sanskrit and Pali) in Bonn and Vienna. He worked as a research associate at the Universities of Munich (LMU) and Bonn before serving as Assistant Professor at the Institute for the Study of Religion from 2005 to 2009. Since June 2009, he has been Associate Professor of Systematic Study of Religion.



**Date:**  
**Tuesday - 02 December 2025**



**Time:**  
**6.15 - 7.45 PM**

Location: Big Seminar room,  
Hartmannstr. 14, Building D1, Erlangen

Link for virtual attendance: <https://fau.zoom-x.de/j/62556506187>



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