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The Cognitive Journey in *The Apocalypse Hotel* (Ho Anh Thai's) from the Perspective of The Trisvabhāva in The *Yogācārabhūmi-Śāstra*

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Abstract: Ho Anh Thai's *The Apocalypse Hotel* (2002) reflects post-war spiritual crisis and globalization in contemporary Vietnamese literature, probing perception, reality, and salvation through a Yogācāra lens from the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*. This study fills the unexplored gap by applying Trisvabhāva as an epistemological framework and Buddhist criticism, treating literature as meditative contemplation. It analyzes the novel's artistic world, characters, and cognitive structure via cultural-sociological, structural-semiotic, and meditative-phenomenological methods grounded in the three Trisvabhāva hypotheses. Findings reveal consciousness transformation: from parikalpita (delusive self-grasping), through paratantra (dependent arising and karmic flux), to pariniṣpanna (non-dual emptiness realization); the shifting bell—from compassionate guidance to apocalyptic wrath—mirrors cognitive reversal. The study proposes a Trisvabhāva – Three Tiers of Cognition framework and Buddhist criticism for Vietnamese prose, extensible cross-culturally to East Asian authors toward a universal theory.

Keywords: Trisvabhāva, *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*, *The Apocalypse Hotel*, Buddhist criticism, cognitive journey.

Introduction

Ho Anh Thai's prose plays a distinctive role in contemporary Vietnamese literature by bridging postmodern thought and Buddhist philosophy. The novel *The Apocalypse Hotel* (2002), emerging in the post-war and globalization era, confronts Vietnamese people with crises of spirit, values, and cognition. It poses fundamental questions about the nature of perception, reality, and spiritual salvation – strikingly resonant with the core tenets of Yogācāra in the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*. To date, studies of Ho Anh Thai's novel have examined postmodern language and tone, existential philosophy, and religious symbolism, yet none have



applied the Trisvabhāva system (parikalpita, paratantra, pariniṣpanna) to decode the characters' cognitive and soteriological journey through Buddhist criticism.

This article addresses that theoretical gap, adopting a Buddhist philosophical framework to illuminate modern human cognition and literature's role as meditative practice. The research object is the cognitive journey; the scope encompasses the novel's artistic world, characters, and cognitive structure. It analyzes these under the Trisvabhāva lens in the *Yogācārabhūmi-sāstra* to clarify the progression from delusion to enlightenment, validate Trisvabhāva's applicability to Vietnamese literary criticism, and contribute to establishing modern Buddhist criticism in contemporary Vietnamese prose studies.

Studies on Ho Anh Thai to date have primarily explored ironic narration as a narrative strategy for creating cognitive distance (Tran Thi My Hong, *Nhung dac sac cua giong dieu tran thuat trong van xuoai Ho Anh Thai* 2012), and Buddhist elements at the level of cultural symbolism (Nguyen Thi Thu Suong, *Sang tac Ho Anh Thai – Tu goc nhin van hoa Phat giao* 2022); however, a gap remains in the absence of a Buddhist epistemological framework – specifically Yogacara Trisvabhava—to analyze the apocalyptic world as a process of consciousness transformation from delusion to awakening, rather than merely existential or social metaphor. Thus, the question arises: is the apocalyptic world in *The Apocalypse Hotel* a product of collective delusion? Hypothesis H.1 is formed – “human realm” is precisely the manifestation of Parikalpita– a reality constructed entirely from collective erroneous cognition, where all phenomena are mere illusions erected by ego-clinging consciousness.

Buddhist studies in Vietnamese literature affirm the deep permeation of Buddhist thought into national culture but have not yet elucidated Yogacara cognitive mechanisms in novelistic structures, including Pham Van Hoa in *Some Manifestations...* (2021) analyzing manifestations such as karmic retribution, merit accumulation, other lives, and hell influencing content and artistic form in legendary tales; Le Si Na in *Anh huong cua tinh than Phat giao den mot so tieu thuyet Viet Nam duong dai* (2022) comparing Ho Anh Thai guiding readers to ancient Indian Buddhism:

Ancient Indian Buddhism, or Theravāda, remains largely unfamiliar territory for Vietnamese readers, which is why Ho Anh Thai's novel can be considered selective in its audience. (Le Si Na 96)



The gap lies in the fact that no study has yet exploited the laws of dependent arising and karma as a structural cognitive mechanism in character journeys. Thus, the question arises: do the characters operate according to the laws of dependent arising and karma? From this, hypothesis H.2 is formed – the work reflects the law of Paratantra – humans and the world interdependently arise within karmic cycles, not existing independently but only as a continuum of conditions.

Studies on the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* and cognitive philosophy – from *Ch'eng Wei-shih lun* with the system of eight consciousnesses and basis-transformation, the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* as an encyclopedia of cognitive practice, *Buddhist Phenomenology* by Dan Lusthaus (2002, Routledge, trans. Thich Nhuan Chau) refuting misunderstandings of metaphysical idealism by prioritizing Indian epistemology, to interdisciplinary analyses by Nguyen Thanh Trung such as “The Power of Sexual Discourse...” (2014) and Sartre–Yogacara comparisons in Nausea (2021, *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*) – all consolidate a solid philosophical foundation for the cognitive process from delusion (ignorance, ego-clinging) to awakening (Pariniṣpanna), focusing on core Yogacara principles and deploying cognitive philosophy as a therapeutic means for karmic affliction. However, a clear research gap still exists, specifically in interpreting literary metaphorical motifs such as “Apocalypse” in Ho Anh Thai’s *The Apocalypse Hotel* – where collapse is not physical annihilation but cognitive crisis, karmic loops, and the need for spiritual awakening – which has not been fully explored through the lens of Trisvabhāva or the consciousness system, revealing potential to expand Buddhist criticism into modern Vietnamese literature. Accordingly, hypothesis H3 is posed – “Apocalypse” is a metaphor demanding liberation – cessation of delusion; a path close to meditation).

Studies on the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* and cognitive philosophy – including *Ch'eng Wei-shih lun's* eight consciousnesses and basis-transformation, the śāstra as a cognitive practice encyclopedia, Dan Lusthaus's *Buddhist Phenomenology* (2002, Routledge; trans. Thich Nhuan Chau) refuting idealism via Indian epistemology, and Nguyen Thanh Trung's interdisciplinary works like “The Power of Sexual Discourse...” (2014) and Sartre–Yogacara comparisons in Nausea (2021) – establish a foundation for the delusion-to-awakening process (from ignorance/ego-clinging to Pariniṣpanna), using Yogacara principles and cognitive philosophy therapeutically against karmic affliction. Yet, a research gap persists in applying Trisvabhāva or the consciousness system to literary motifs like “Apocalypse” in Ho Anh Thai’s *The Apocalypse Hotel*, where



collapse signifies cognitive crisis, karmic loops, and spiritual awakening needs. Hypothesis H3 thus proposes: “Apocalypse” metaphorically demands liberation – delusion cessation via meditation-like paths.

Methodology

Employing a Buddhist criticism approach, this article integrates three specialized methods: cultural-sociological, structural-semiotic, and meditative-phenomenological.

First, the cultural-sociological method (corresponding to Parikalpita), in *Culture and Society: 1780–1950* (1958), Raymond Williams first systematized the reading of English literature from 1780 to 1950 as a manifestation of “structure of feeling” – “The mood of England in the Industrial Revolution is a mood of contrasts” reflecting value crises amid industrialization and post-World War II, particularly through British thinkers redefining “culture” and “society” to counter class division and collective loss of faith. This method’s strengths include broad historical context, easy integration of empirical data, and enhanced interdisciplinarity; its weaknesses lie in potential reduction of texts to social products, overlooking metaphysical depth. The method is applied to post-war Vietnamese context, used in the introduction to clarify the bell-ringing motif as critique of modern societal cognitive error.

Second, corresponding to Paratantra, the structural-semiotic method initiated by Ferdinand de Saussure in *Course in General Linguistics* (1916) with semiotics theory, distinguishing “signifier” (signifiant) and “signified” (signifié), laying the foundation for analyzing intrinsic textual structures as interdependent relational systems independent of subjective consciousness – “Language is a system of interdependent terms in which the value of each term results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others...” (Saussure 114). This method’s strengths are scientific rigor, objectivity, and ease in diagramming dependent arising; however, its weaknesses include mechanicity, lack of emotional depth, and difficulty with non-linear texts. The method is applied to analyze narrative loops, illustrating the cognitive journey as a dependent network.

Third, corresponding to Parinīṣpanna, the meditative-phenomenological method proposed by Edmund Husserl in *Logical Investigations* (1900–1901) as “to the things themselves” (zu den Sachen selbst), bracketing all presuppositions to describe pure conscious experience, establishing phenomenology as a science of inner phenomena: “This phenomenology, like the more inclusive *pure phenomenology of experiences in general*, has, as its exclusive concern, experiences intuitively seizable and analysable in the

pure generality of their essence” (Husserl 166). This method’s strengths lie in philosophical depth, experiential verification, and alignment with Buddhist meditation; its weaknesses include risk of extreme subjectivism, lack of scientific verifiability, and high meditative proficiency requirement. The method is used to synthesize character journeys and Trisvabhāva through experiential logs as a meditative process.

Based on research hypotheses, approach, methods, the research model is summarized in the following table:

Table 1. Research Model of the Article

Research Hypothesis	Approach	Methods	Analyzed Aspects
H1. The chaotic world is a product of delusion (Parikalpita)	Buddhist Criticism	Cultural-Sociological	Context, ironic tone, illusory perception
H2. Humans in dependent arising and karmic accumulation (Paratantra)		Structural-Semiotic	Plot structure, character system, bell symbol
H3. Enlightenment through relinquishment (Pariniṣpanna)		Meditative-Phenomenological	Philosophical language, narrator’s viewpoint,

The Trisvabhāva Doctrine in the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*

The Trisvabhāva doctrine, the core philosophical foundation of the Yogācāra school, is systematized in the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* – a work recorded by Asaṅga and expounded by Vasubandhu – not only describing the structure of reality but also constituting a cognitive journey guiding practitioners from delusion to insight. The Trisvabhāva doctrine in particular, and the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* in general, emerged to address the risk of nihilism in the Madhyamaka school, which negated inherent nature without constructing a path of practice, leading Theravāda to criticize it as non-Buddhist and externalists (Sāṃkhya) to deem Mahāyāna void. Specifically, parikalpita-svabhāva is the layer of delusive cognition constructed by discrimination (vikalpa) and ego-grasping (ātmagrāha), manifesting as “illusion” (māyā) superimposed by discriminating consciousness onto reality (e.g., the “imagined snake” on a rope), encompassing all dualistic concepts and corresponding in literature to the collective illusory layer of characters and society; it simultaneously reveals the world’s nature as constructed by delusion—an illusion of ego-clinging consciousness:

What is called dual is existence and non-existence. Here, what truly exists is the falsely established self-nature, the object of worldly clinging over long periods, and the basis of all worldly discursive distinctions. (Maitreya–Asaṅga 248)

Second, paratantra-svabhāva is the layer of dependent arising (pratītyasamutpāda), where all phenomena exist only through the convergence of causes and conditions, lacking independent self-nature, representing relative reality (like waves inseparable from water but not yet the water's essence), and in textual analysis, this layer corresponds to intrinsic causal structures (characters, symbols, plot). Finally, pariniṣpanna-svabhāva is thusness (tathatā), emptiness (śūnyatā), non-self (anātman) – absolute reality, revealed only when practitioners perform basis-transformation (āśrayaparāvṛtti), converting Ālaya consciousness into great perfect mirror-wisdom, attaining insight (prajñā) and complete awakening:

Both existence and non-existence are transcended because dharmic characteristics are encompassed in true nature. This is called non-dual. Due to non-duality, it is the Middle Way, transcending extremes and called supreme. The wisdom of the World-Honored Buddha reveals the path of learning regarding this truth. (Maitreya–Asaṅga 250)

These three natures constitute both the world's structure and the cognitive progression from delusion to insight. Through the Trisvabhāva doctrine, the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* supports Mahāyāna Buddhism's development into a soteriology of the enlightenment path, with specific methods across three meditative stages transforming cognition into wisdom; completing the progression from ontology, through epistemology, to soteriology, modelable as follows:

Table 2. The Path from Ontology through Epistemology to Soteriology in the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*

	Parikalpita (Illusion)	Paratantra (Dependent Arising)	Pariniṣpanna (Thusness)
Subject	Ego-grasping (<i>ātma-grāha</i>)	Flux of consciousness (<i>pravṛtti-vijñāna</i>)	Non-self wisdom (<i>nairātmya-jñāna</i>)
Object	World of “inherent nature”	Interdependent phenomena (<i>pratītyasamutpāda</i>)	Manifest emptiness (<i>śūnyatā-prativedha</i>)
Cognition	Discriminative delusion (<i>vikalpa</i>)	Dependent-arising cognition (<i>paratantra-darśana</i>)	Consummate realization (<i>pariniṣpanna-prajñā</i>)

Buddhist Criticism Approach

Buddhist criticism is a novel approach in literary studies applying principles of impermanence, dependent arising, and meditative contemplation from Buddhist teachings alongside specialized methods such as biographical, reception, and intertextual comparison to investigate literature. Beyond interpretive tool, Buddhist criticism employs Buddhist scriptures as an intrinsic lens, expanding the scope of traditional

criticism, repositioning cultural identities of literary traditions within globalization, and transforming literature into a dialogic space between ethics and art, awakening and language.

Buddhist criticism flexibly uses interdisciplinary methods to turn scriptures into interpretive frameworks: D.T. Suzuki (1963) employs meditative contemplation for no-mind; Nguyen Thanh Trung & Phramaha Chakrapol (2022) apply cultural correlation via Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra as non-dual metaphor for local identity; François Martin (2009) uses diachronic analysis of Wei-Jin Buddhist-literary intersections; Nguyen Thanh Trung (2024) combines biographical criticism to reframe Hsuan Tsang's journey as non-self-dependent-arising; and in 2025, reception theory with post-colonial compassion-equality for Ambedkar's *The Buddha And His Dhamma*. These meditative, correlative, diachronic, biographical, and receptive techniques transform texts into cognitive mandalas dissolving language into wordless truth. Such criticism deepens doctrine's spiritual and universal value in exploring inner conflict, while avoiding dogmatism to preserve aesthetics. Applied to Ho Anh Thai's *The Apocalypse Hotel* via Trisvabhāva in *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*, the apocalypse motif illuminates the journey from ignorance to awakening as collapse of illusion, creating a modern cognitive mandala aligning inner path with Buddhist realization.

Application of Trisvabhāva to Textual Analysis

The process of applying Trisvabhāva theory to analyzing Ho Anh Thai's *The Apocalypse Hotel* is summarized in the following table:

Table 3. Application of Trisvabhāva to *The Apocalypse Hotel*

Sanskrit	Meaning	Manifestation in the Novel
Parikalpita-svabhāva	World constructed by delusion; erroneous human cognition due to ego- and dharma-grasping.	Characters dominated by illusion, ego, and prejudice.
Paratantra-svabhāva	Cognition dependent on arising, karma, circumstances; world as a network of conditions.	Characters begin recognizing their dependence on circumstances, karmic force, society.
Pariniṣpanna-svabhāva	Wisdom of awakening – clearly seeing phenomena's emptiness, transcending duality, attaining spiritual freedom.	Characters awaken, transcend illusion, attain enlightened view of life and self.

Table 3 presents Trisvabhāva in the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* as three cognitive layers structuring the character journey from Parikalpita-svabhāva signifying delusive cognition dominated by ego-grasping, dharma-grasping, and erroneous prejudices; Paratantra-svabhāva embodying dependent-arising cognition recognizing

the world as a network of conditions, karma, and circumstances; Pariniṣpanna-svabhāva achieving consummate perception, transcending duality, realizing non-dual truth. The transformation follows the sequence from delusion, to dependent arising, and finally consummate realization. Accordingly, in Ho Anh Thai’s *The Apocalypse Hotel*, the “apocalypse” motif is reinterpreted as the collapse of Parikalpita-svabhāva, opening the path to awakening, thereby transforming the text into a modern cognitive mandala where the inner journey coincides with the Buddhist path of realization.

Detailed Analysis According to the Three Natures

From the Parikalpita perspective, *The Apocalypse Hotel* portrays a chaotic modern world of collective delusion, dominated by desire, possession, and violence—“brimming with desire, brimming with vitality” (Ho Anh Thai 97)—seen as paths to glory or energy release. Characters dwell in hallucination, desire, violence, and fear; Bop finds pleasure in violence, Coc seizes women’s bodies, and humanity objectifies the environment, leaving the sea “gasping fitfully like a virgin after a gang rape” (Ho Anh Thai 15). This images a spiritually adrift society where individuals build prejudiced, infatuated “cognitive worlds.” As the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* states, worldly beings falsely establish phenomena: “Suffering is merely suffering, not pleasure... Pleasure is merely pleasure, not suffering... this is as it is, not otherwise” (Maitreya–Asaṅga 247). Yogācāra psychology thus reveals the world as a projection of collectively defiled consciousness, not objective reality.

Second, viewed from Paratantra, the dependent arising of all phenomena emerges clearly. The four conditions outlined in the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* explain causal relationships within and between characters, as detailed in the following table.

Table 4. Application of the Four Conditions from the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* to Character Analysis in *The Apocalypse Hotel*

Four Conditions	Role	Character in the Novel
1. Causal Condition (Hetu-pratyaya)	Seeds, core causes capable of producing effects .	Seeds of Greed and Violent Desire: Coc manifests aggressive nature, habitual bodily seizure, and attachment to sensual pleasure.
2. Immediately Preceding Condition (Samanantara-pratyaya)	Prior mental factors conditioning subsequent ones .	Malicious intent transforming into assault: The moment Coc “gradually pushed her down in a tilting position”... “now his hands were operating where her lower body would become a tender Eve” (Ho Anh Thai 23).

3. Object Condition (Ālambana-pratyaya)	Object upon which consciousness relies to arise.	Retributive Power: Mai Trung is the object of violent desire. She bears the “mission to punish evil” (Ho Anh Thai 227).
4. Dominant Condition (Adhipati-pratyaya)	External supportive conditions, auxiliary influences	Complicity and Environment: Friends – Phu and Bop – “complicitly drifted to either side. As if standing guard” (Ho Anh Thai 22), creating social facilitation for Cốc’s violence

Thus, in *The Apocalypse Hotel*, characters gradually recognize karmic force and conditions governing life; events cease to be random, becoming consequences of consciousness and action, leading to transformation from ego-clinging to causal cognition. This embodies Yogācāra dependent-arising theory in the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*: mind as root, phenomena follow mind’s transformation – humans commence Yogācāra practice: cognizing, contemplating, and deconstructing reality from delusion to the continuum of dependent arising.

Third, viewed from Parinīṣṭhana, the work’s journey for the captain character and reader constitutes the path of awakening upon perceiving life’s true nature. Awakening occurs when characters self-reflect, discerning the emptiness of desire and power: “Wisdom, having eradicated affliction obstacles, completely departs from all defilements; no afflictions remain to bind.” (Maitreya–Asaṅga 308).

In *The Apocalypse Hotel*, true awakening blooms only upon reaching Parinīṣṭhana – perceiving the consummate fullness of all dharmas. Previously, though Mai Trung tears the karmic thread to return as an ordinary girl, awakening remains at the Paratantra threshold – understanding conditions and karmic fruition without realizing nature. Only after Mai Trung beseeches her parents for release from punitive mission, sitting silently by the window gazing at the blue sky, does she perceive consummate fullness in the three youths’ deaths, temple bell, Captain’s pain – all neither arising nor ceasing, neither defiled nor pure. This is the pinnacle consciousness-to-wisdom transformation in the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*: compassion-wisdom in tandem, non-self tranquility, like a bright mirror retaining no dust – only then is consummate awakening, where reality manifests full and complete, neither adding nor subtracting.

The Trisvabhāva Structure – Three Layers of Meaning in the Work

Applying the Trisvabhāva theory from the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*, the novel *The Apocalypse Hotel* gains depth through layers of meaning tied to prominent characters and symbols, summarized in the following table:

Table 5. System of Meaning Layers, Characters, and Symbols in *The Apocalypse Hotel*

Nature Layer	Literary Meaning Layer	Representative Characters	Central Symbol
Parikalpita	Chaotic, illusory world	Intellectuals, fanatics, soldiers	City, media, false knowledge
Paratantra	Interdependence and karmic fruition	Characters mirroring one another	Chain of conditions, life cycle, karmic force
Pariniṣpanna	Awakening and liberation	Narrator, awakened characters	Bell – symbol of enlightenment

Applying Yogācāra Trisvabhāva to *The Apocalypse Hotel* structures it as a three-tiered philosophical journey: Parikalpita unveils a chaotic illusory world of intellectuals, fanatics, and soldiers trapped in city, media, and false knowledge, exposing delusive meaninglessness; Paratantra reveals interdependence and karmic fruition, with characters mirroring one another in conditional chains, life cycles, and societal collapse; Pariniṣpanna offers awakening and liberation, as the narrator and enlightened figures, guided by the enlightenment symbol, escape illusion to attain thusness vision and renewal amid ashes. Trisvabhāva thus frames the novel as an epistemological path from delusion through dependent arising to thusness, manifested in literature's truth-revealing nature. The bell symbolizes Buddhist compassion—"The sound was like a mountain of shattered glass fragments pouring down... building a tomb for a soul that died suddenly and unjustly" (Ho Anh Thai 233)—yet warns of degeneration and apocalypse: "The bell rang in panic... This time it was the clanging rain of iron and steel shards" (233). As unchanging paratantra dharma arising dependently from temples in post-war conditions and serving as objective human warning, the bell shifts from initial compassionate invitation (Pariniṣpanna) to apocalyptic fury, reflecting inverted cognition: from thusness back to karmic Paratantra, then egoic Parikalpita. The bell itself never alters—only hearing consciousness does: thusness hears compassion, karma hears warning, ego hears apocalypse—posing Ho Anh Thai's Yogācāra kōan: what are people hearing in the bell of the age?

Aesthetic and Philosophical Significance

First, viewing the novel through Trisvabhāva offers an opportunity to perceive the aesthetics of ignorance and awakening. In the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*, the ordinary mind is obscured by delusion (Parikalpita) – clinging to a real "self," "other," "good," "evil." When practitioners cultivate Yogācāra,



realizing mind is merely “consciousness” without self-nature, ignorance is gradually transformed into enlightened wisdom. This process is described as “transforming consciousness into wisdom,” the key characteristic of the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*. In *The Apocalypse Hotel*, Ho Anh Thai initially employs ironic, satirical tone – depicting a chaotic, deceptive, desire-filled world – manifesting the collective ignorance layer, Parikalpita: “After several years, public intellect had risen, meaning the Viewer suddenly realized he had long been treated like a child by video films. After that childlike startle upon reaching adulthood, Coc already had capital of several hundred million.” (Ho Anh Thai 10). Gradually, the tone becomes calm, contemplative, oriented toward spiritual awakening – when characters (and readers) begin to see life’s illusory nature:

One must witness with one’s own eyes, hold the dead in one’s arms, shroud a corpse... only then does one truly understand life, people, existence. Once death is understood, one becomes calm and confident in observing those who do not understand death. Then one realizes the need to live.” (Ho Anh Thai 157)

The linguistic shift from irony to contemplation is the aesthetic expression of consciousness-to-wisdom transformation, the inner cultivation process, the aesthetics of ignorance and awakening. Thus, the text operates as a self-awakening consciousness – from delusion to enlightenment, from illusion to true recognition.

Trisvabhāva rejects absolute good–evil or true–false oppositions, emphasizing interdependence. The *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* states all phenomena are paratantra—reliant on each other, without self-existence; good/evil, ignorance/awakening, true/false are aspects of the same dependent consciousness. This "dependent arising without self" underpins Yogācāra aesthetics. In *The Apocalypse Hotel*, characters blend good and evil; sanity and madness overlap; sinners become deep contemplators, the lucid hallucinate. Ho Anh Thai builds an interdependent world where minor acts spark vast causal chains in Paratantra's spirit—e.g., the engineer's flashlight misdirects the compass, sinking the ship (117); the captain quits sea voyages, runs the hotel, and enters tragedy: Coc's wink signals disaster's start with his death (21). Dependent arising means "apocalypse" transforms humanity via cognitive rebirth, not destruction.

Finally, *The Apocalypse Hotel* manifests an aesthetics of emptiness through textual self-awareness, where language serves as a vehicle for awakening. In *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*, Pariniṣpanna-svabhāva – the



highest cognition – reveals the emptiness of all dharmas: the world is mere consciousness in operation, devoid of self yet not nihilistic. Here, language and concepts are skillful means (upāya), not truth itself. Ho Anh Thai disrupts linear narrative, exposing characters – including the narrator – as linguistic constructs. Protagonists lack real names, defined instead by nicknames reflecting essence or karmic burden: Cong becomes Coc (Cock), evoking both rooster and phallus (Ho Anh Thai 21); Ta Đuc Phu becomes Phu; Bac becomes Bop (Bob), tied to choking violence. The mysterious girl, Nguyen Thi Mai Trung, is named by her mother’s dying wish: “When you grow up, you will punish the wicked” (Ho Anh Thai 178). Language thus assigns mission and destiny. Discourse shapes reality: “Rumors can change things far greater than gender” (Ho Anh Thai 6); value is word-created – “the cook doesn’t know, the eater doesn’t know, then it’s genuine bird’s nest” (Ho Anh Thai 44). This exposes the fictionality of text, life, and self, guiding readers to Parinīṣpanna – illuminating reality’s empty nature without negation. Ultimately, language transcends narration to become dharma practice, a meditative tool opening consciousness to impermanence and non-self.

“I am thirty-five years old. That was the age the Buddha attained enlightenment. Many pass thirty-five without ever awakening. Some awakened before thirty-five. Early or late, all are pitiable.” (Ho Anh Thai 247).

Discussion

First, regarding humanity and cognition, Yogācāra reveals that humans are not independent entities but aggregates of dependently arisen consciousness. Ho Anh Thai presents a decentered postmodern human image – one that Trisvabhāva explicates with greater soteriological direction than psychoanalysis or existentialism. Rather than cognition mirroring reality, the work manifests cognition constructing reality – aligned with the “mind-only manifestation” idealism of the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*. Thus, the bell symbol is awakening, the Buddha’s abode, a refuge... yet becomes an obstacle when clung to: “Now the bell is gone. The bell weighs dozens of tons, hundreds of years old. It had stood there witnessing generations born on the sandbar and returning to wind-blown sand. It witnessed generations of elder monks succeeding as abbots. It had rung countless times over the archipelago for people lost in darkness and delusion.” (Ho Anh Thai 245). The bell vanishes, yet the mind complete with its sound remains; hence the elder monk feels no regret, characters harbor no regret, and the aimless wandering of the postmodern novel concludes.



The Apocalypse Hotel excels literarily through ironic tone, using parikalpita-svabhāva as a self-negating device to transform postmodern irony into a dharma tool that shatters delusion. Absurd details (fake media, hollow knowledge, paradoxical violence) are illusions of ego-clinging consciousness, turning the novel into a Zen kōan: readers enter illusion, then realize they inhabit it. Reading becomes epistemic, expanding consciousness via escalating events—from three deaths (Coc, Bop, Phu) to retribution (Gieng’s death) and destruction (abandoned vengeance, Toyota explosion). The protagonist’s journey from delusion to awakening maps Yogācāra’s Eight Consciousnesses (*Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*): Five Senses as desire gates (eye entranced by Mai Trung, ear hearing the bell, body in pain); Sixth planning evil then repenting; Seventh as ego-arrogance (Coc’s “Cock,” Phu’s wealth, The’s rank) leading to self-destruction; Eighth as karmic storehouse (death chain, Mai Trung’s vow). Through seed purification (Mai Trung severs karmic thread, captain discards poison), crime and hatred transmute into non-self awakening—a modern soteriological novel where the bell heralds apocalypse and enlightenment of the storehouse consciousness.

Thus, Buddhist criticism is not mere textual exegesis but textual meditation, transforming reading into self-verification whereby readers discern their own delusion structures and consciousness mechanisms. This critical model introduces three innovations: (1) active epistemology – text as consciousness mirror, no longer passive object; (2) explicit soteriology – aim not explanation but basis-transformation, from discrimination to thusness; (3) personal reflexivity – critic simultaneously practitioner, converting analysis into realization.

Conclusion

The Apocalypse Hotel enacts a cognitive journey from delusion to awakening, precisely mapping the Trisvabhāva system in *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*: parikalpita as the chaotic, illusory post-war world of ego-clinging intellectuals, soldiers, and fanatics; paratantra as interdependent social-karmic webs and life cycles; pariniṣpanna as protagonists’ realization of thusness amid ruins. Verified through an integrated cultural-structural-meditative method – analyzing post-1975 Vietnam, reflecting character chains, and contemplating text as consciousness meditation – the novel transcends social reflection to transform readers: from identifying discriminative delusion, to grasping dependent arising via causal-karmic cycles, to realizing thusness as malice and vengeance dissolve. Thus, it becomes a soteriological space, guiding basis-transformation from defiled to pure consciousness. This study proposes a novel “Trisvabhāva – Three Tiers of Cognition”

framework for Vietnamese prose, inaugurating meditative Buddhist criticism (a branch of Buddhist phenomenological criticism). Limitation: single-work scope. Future directions: expand comparative analysis to East Asian authors with analogous awakening structures (e.g., Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore*, Hesse's *Siddhartha*) toward a global, intercultural Buddhist critical theory.

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