

Wŏnhyo's Interpretation of the Hindrances

Charles Muller

I . Introduction

To start with, I would like to briefly say that as a result of my work in translating one of Wŏnhyo's major extant texts, I have come away with a greatly deepened appreciation of two aspects of his work: ① the remarkable level of impartiality of the treatment that he gave to the wide range of Buddhist doctrine, and ② the incredible degree of thoroughness with which he pursued his inquiries. But since these are points already well known to all of our colleagues here today, I will not spend any further time elaborating on them. Instead, I would like to focus more specifically on the special contributions that Wŏnhyo made toward apprehending the intertwined discourses of the incoming Indian Buddhological currents that attempted to offer systematic accounts of the nature and function of human consciousness.

I am speaking here of the broad spectrum of positions subsumed within the two streams of discourse that we usually label as *tathāgatagarbha* and *Yogācāra*, but which also subsume such variants as *Di-lun*, Northern and Southern *She-lun*(which are also categorized as

Charles Muller is a Professor of Buddhist Studies at Toyo Gakuen University

International Journal of Buddhist Thought & Culture February 2003, Vol. 2, pp. 135~146.
© 2003 International Association for Buddhist Thought & Culture

various strains of "Paramārthan"), along with the disciples of Xuan-zang, such as Kui-ji and Weonchuk (well known for their differences of opinion), as well as the Huayan masters. All of the scholars in this broad group participated in the promulgation of comprehensive and systematic theories on the nature and function of human consciousness, paying special attention to the questions of the respective origins of evil and goodness, ignorance and wisdom, and how it is possible to achieve liberation from conditions of entrenchment in delusion.

II. The Two Hindrances

The "two hindrances" as originally explained in the *Yogācāra* texts, are the *afflictive hindrances* (煩惱障 *kleśa-āvaraṇa*) and *cognitive hindrances* (所知障 *jñeya-āvaraṇa*), which together constitute a way of categorizing, into two general tendencies, the broad range of phenomena that engender suffering, impel continuity of the cycle of rebirth, impede the attainment of liberation, and obstruct the ability to see reality as it is. These two hindrances subsume all factors associated with ignorance, delusion, affliction, suffering, anxiety, and so forth.

Although the basic relationship between the hindrances is as described above, thinkers who formed the disparate sub-streams within *Yogācāra* differed in terms of understanding precisely what constituted the various manifestations of the hindrances; to what levels in the depths of consciousness the various forms of the hindrances extended, and what kinds of practices could serve as antidotes, at what stages, and so forth. Thus the understanding of the hindrances is deeply bound up with theories regarding the degrees of defilement/non-defilement of the *ālaya*, definitions of the *Yogācāra* paths, bodhisattva *bhūmis*, and so forth. While the *Yogācāra* tradition itself already contained a plethora of its own disagreements on these matters, those who are familiar with the positions of the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* [AMF] will not be surprised to know that treatise's presentation of the two hindrances creates a whole new set of problems.

It is obvious that Wōnhyo had an intimate knowledge of the

hindrances as they were explained in the *Yogācārabhīmi* and related texts even at the time of his earlier commentary on the AMF, the *Byeolgi*(別記, "Expository Notes"). He thus readily recognized, when arriving to the passage on the "two obstructions" taught in the AMF, that the implications of the new pair are radically and purposefully different from those taught in the *Yogācāra* school of Vasubandhu. These differences provide a telling perspective on the fundamental variances in approach between Faxiang(法藏) and Paramārthan(眞諦) understandings of the mind. In fact, the difference is so radical that it was too much for Wŏnhyo to deal with in his earlier commentary on the AMF, where he makes offers only the minimum in the way of explication.

But it is apparent that leaving the matter unexplained like this bothered him (in a way that only Wŏnhyo could be bothered) since during the time before he returned to the AMF to write his famous later commentary (the *Gisinnon so*), he embarked on research project on the hindrances in the course of which he not only combed through every relevant passage contained in the *Yogācāra* corpus, but also the passages in other major Mahāyāna texts, such as the *Huayan-jing*(華嚴經), *Nirvāna Sūtra*(涅槃經), that define ignorance, delusion, and affliction and so forth. The result of this project, the *Ijangeui* (Doctrine of the Two Hindrances), ends up being a unique document in the entire field of Buddhist studies, since there is, as far as I have yet been able to determine, no single text, or even chapter, in the entire known Buddhist corpora (including those of India and Tibet) was ever written in which the hindrances themselves are treated as a main topic in a comprehensive manner.

The *Ijangeui* operates on two levels of discourse throughout. The first is the basic treatment of variations on the understandings of delusion and affliction along with their removal, in the basic *Yogācāra* system. The second is the analysis of their ramifications through the radically different approach of the AMF.¹ Of course, since this is

1 The *Ijangeui* is organized into five main sections, around the following topics: (1) Analysis of how the various texts explain the hindrances as being constituted, especially in terms of such *Yogācāra* categories as retributive moral quality; the distribution (or lack thereof) of the

Wōnhyo we are talking about, there will also be significant energy devoted in exploring ways that these two approaches may be juxtaposed with each other. He is not simply a *pan-jiao*(判教) scholar who compartmentalizes differences and leaves them like that. But given the limitations of a single presentation, I will here leave out discussion of the various problems between the positions of the masters considered to be part of *Yogācāra* proper, and just focus on the problems connected with the passage in the AMF.

III. The AMF's Passage on the Hindrances

Let us now look at the original passage in the AMF that drew Wōnhyo's attention. The text reads:

Furthermore, the aspect of defiled mind is called the afflictive obstructions² because they are able to obstruct the intrinsic wisdom of suchness. The aspect of ignorance is called the obstructions of wisdom, as they is able to obstruct mundane natural karmic wisdom. (T.32, 1666, 577c20-22)

afflictions throughout eight consciousnesses; their conditions of manifest activity and latency; their function in the situation of seeds, habit energies, and perfumation; their categorization in terms of *Yogācāra* dharma-theory, etc. (2) Enumeration of their various functions, broadly subsumed in the two categories of producing karma and bringing rebirth. (3) Explanation of the rationale behind the various types of arrangements of the hindrances, including their groupings into 128, 104, and ninety-eight; the perspective of the eight kinds of deluded conceptualization; the three kinds of afflictions, and the two categories of hypostatic and arisen. (4) An account of the *Yogācāra* paths for the elimination of the hindrances. This section turns out to be one of the most concentrated and complete accounts of *Yogācāra* path theory available anywhere. While all five paths are discussed, the primary focus is placed on what exactly occurs within the two supramundane paths of insight and cultivation. Tied into this discussion are matters of the relative virulence and subtlety of different types of afflictions, how the paths are actually applied in the circumstances of the two lesser vehicles and bodhisattva vehicles, and so on. (5) A final chapter that treats discrepancies in interpretation between Mahāyāna/Hinayāna, and between various Mahāyāna scriptures and commentators. Although *Yogācāra* is relatively systematic, there was no shortage of disagreements on subtle points regarding issues such as how perception occurs, and the degree to which defilement permeates the human consciousnesses.

2 The AMF uses a different Chinese character to designate these obstructions *ai*(礙) instead of *zhang*(障). These are synonyms, so there is nothing special indicated in this. But for clarity's sake, I translate *ai* as "obstructions" to indicate that they are from the AMF, and *zhang* as "hindrances" to indicate that they are from the Vasubhandu *Yogācāra* system.

There are problems with the definitions of both kinds of obstructions. First, the afflictive obstructions, rather than being characterized in the standard manner as obstructing liberation, are said to impede the *intrinsic wisdom that cognizes suchness* nothing less than the most fundamental manifestation of enlightened awareness. This kind of obstruction, in the *Yogācāra* context, could not but be categorized as a cognitive hindrance. Furthermore, rather than being constituted by the standard six primary and twenty secondary afflictions, with the reification of a self at their head, the afflictive obstructions are identified as the six stages of defiled mental states³ - a description of a sequential corruption of mind that has connotations unique to the AMF, and which cannot readily be correlated to the way that the afflictive hindrances are constituted in the *Yogācārabhūmi*, etc.

Coming to the second sentence, we find the *cognitive obstructions* defined as ignorance. However, the ignorance being introduced here, rather than being a form of nescience that obstructs the fundamental apprehension of *tathatā*, is instead something that obscures the functioning of the karmic, phenomenal, discriminating wisdom that one uses for everyday worldly activities. While this impediment does fall under the purview of cognitive functioning and thus is not incorrectly categorized, it would seem to be, at least on the basis of the brief description provided here, a relatively derivative, or secondary problem, which might be seen as having an opposite kind of relationship to the afflictions as posited in the roots-and-branches framework seen in the *Yogācāra* structure. The author of the AMF is well aware of the differences between his account of the hindrances and the standard *Yogācāra* version, and is hence moved to qualify. First, regarding the afflictive obstructions:

What does this mean? Since, depending upon the defiled mind, one is able to see, manifest, and deludedly grasp to objects, the mental function is contrary to the equal nature of suchness.

Regarding the cognitive obstructions, Wōnhyo says:

³ For an explanation of these six, see the Digital Dictionary of Buddhism [DDB] at <http://www.acmuller.net>.

Taking all dharmas to be eternally quiescent and lacking the marks of arising, ignorant non-enlightenment is deluded and one apprehends phenomena incorrectly. Thus one has no access to the wisdom regarding particular phenomena that is applied to the myriad objects of the container world. (T.32, 1666, 577c23-25)

Beyond the difficulty of trying to establish a relative fundamentality or superficiality that might be correlated the *Yogācāra* structure, there is also the difference seen in the fact that both kinds of obstructions in the AMF are *cognitive* in character. There is no mention of the traditional six primary or twenty secondary afflictions, nor even a mention of the traditional *origin* of these the reification of the views of "I" and "mine," etc. Instead, the afflictive obstructions are seen as consisting in a fundamental inability to apprehend the equal character of existence suchness. According to the AMF, this will result in the first motion of the mind, and that motion will lead to a series of attachments, and eventually, agitation. Regarding the obstructions to wisdom, the author of the AMF has given us only one line of explanation, which indicates that the problem lies in an inability to properly apprehend the phenomena of the world.

When Wōnhyo comes across this passage in his earlier commentary, the *Expository Notes*, he first introduces the standard *Yogācāra* scheme of the hindrances as follows:

There are two general approaches for explaining the two hindrances. The first interpretation is that in which adherents of the two vehicles are pervasively hindered by the ten afflictions, which cause them to transmigrate, and hinder their attainment of Nirvāṇa. These are called the 'afflictive hindrances.' Bodhisattvas, however, are subject to special hindrances, such as the various delusions of attachment to phenomena, etc., which lead to misapprehension of the knowable objective realm, which in turn obstruct their realization of enlightenment. These are called the 'cognitive hindrances.' This is the [standard] interpretation that is given in other scriptures and treatises. (HPC, 1-765a07-11)

He next introduces the new approach that he has encountered in

the AMF.

In the second interpretation, all kinds of mental states of moving thought and attachment to characteristics function contrarily to the quiescent nature of the wisdom that cognizes suchness. These are called the 'afflictive obstructions.' The dark unawareness of intrinsic (fundamental) ignorance acts contrary to the function of detailed examination by conventional wisdom. These are called the 'obstructions to discriminating wisdom.' (HPC, 1-765a11)

Having taken note of this difference, he further indicates that the AMF's version of the hindrances is at least non-standard, and perhaps even opposite to what one would expect.

Now this treatise addresses the hindrances from this latter perspective, and therefore it says that the six kinds of defiled mind are called obstacles due to affliction, and calls the hypostases of ignorance (無明住地) the obstacles to discriminating wisdom. But would it not be more reasonable to say that ignorance should hinder the wisdom that cognizes suchness, and the defiled states of mind hinder conventional [discriminating] wisdom? (HPC, 1-765a14-17)

Wouldn't it, indeed. It would seem that they are reversed here, as it would be more systematic to say that the direct recipient of the contrary effects of intrinsic ignorance is intrinsic wisdom, and that the manifestly functioning hindrances obscure manifestly functioning wisdom. Why, according to Wōnhyo, is this not the case?

Because it is not yet necessary. The meaning of "not necessary" is like the treatise itself explains. (HPC, 1-764a18)

The AMF itself does not have an explanation of the phrase "not necessary," so we are left to figure this out for ourselves. I interpret "not yet necessary" to mean that it is not yet necessary to resort to a secondary-level explanation of the hindrances, since the present explanation is being carried out in the context of a more fundamental level of the operation of cognitive function than that treated in the standard *Yogācāra* context. The AMF's focus is on giving an account of the course of the mind through its very first movements the so-called

three subtle and six coarse marks, which also play a direct role in the explanation of the six kinds of defiled mind. In any case, this is all Wŏnhyo has to say on the matter in the earlier commentary. But we know for certain that he was personally not satisfied with leaving it like this, since sometime after the completion of this commentary, Wŏnhyo embarks on this rather extensive two hindrances research project, and sometime after the completion of this project, returns to the AMF to write the commentary that would make him one of the most respected scholars in all of East Asian Buddhist history.

When, in the subsequent commentary, he arrives to the same passage, Wŏnhyo writes:

The sixth section is a clarification of the meaning of the two obstructions. In their *exoteric* interpretation(顯了門) they are called the two hindrances; in their *esoteric* interpretation(隱蜜門) they are called the two obstructions. These connotations have received full treatment in [my treatise] the *Ijangeui*. The explanation in this text (the AMF) is that according to the esoteric interpretation.

The meaning of "the aspect of defiled states of mind," refers to the six kinds of defiled mind. "Intrinsic wisdom," refers to quiescent luminous wisdom (i.e. the wisdom that cognizes suchness). [Since the defiled states of mind] act contrary to quiescence, they are called "obstacles of affliction."

The meaning of "ignorance," is that of intrinsic ignorance. The meaning of the phrase, "mundane karmic wisdom," is the same as "subsequently attained wisdom (*pr̥stha-labdha-jñāna*, 後得智)." Ignorance darkens [perception] such that nothing can be discriminated. Therefore it acts contrary to the wisdom that discriminates the conventional world. Due to this connotation, it is called "the obstacle to discriminating wisdom." (HPC, 1-764c14-23)

A telling evaluative statement has been made here, with the *Yogācāra* version of the hindrances being interpreted as "exoteric" in contrast to the "esoteric" hindrances of the AMF. Wŏnhyo also now tells his readers that if they really want to understand this point, they should go and read the *Ijangeui*.

If we based our understanding on the line in the AMF that

explains the obstructions to wisdom only as impediments to discriminating knowledge, we might be inclined to take it as a secondary-level impediment, a kind of derivative effect of the operation of the afflictive obstructions, or the six defiled minds. But as Wōnhyo explains in the *ljangeui*, a full grasp of the ramifications of the term "intrinsic ignorance(根本無明)" as it is used in *tathāgatagarbha*-oriented texts such as the AMF, *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*, *Ōrīmālā-sūtra* etc., shows us that it is at the same time the factor acting at the most fundamental level, that which sets the six defiled mental states into motion. Therefore, it is simultaneously anterior and posterior to the afflictive obstructions, their basis as well as their outcome. In the *ljangeui*, Wōnhyo says:

Intrinsic ignorance, *the basis upon which the six defiled mental states are established*, is the most extremely subtle form of darkness and non-awareness. Confused in regard to the oneness and equality of the nature [of living beings] within, one is unable to face outside and grasp the distinctions in characteristics. Therefore one lacks the ability to grasp to objectively distinguished differences, not to mention the difference between them and true wisdom. Since the characteristics [of suchness] are the things most near, this ignorance is the most distant thing from them. It is like the nearness of the lowest acolyte to the head monk. Within all of birth-and-death there is not a single thing that is more subtle than ignorance and which serves as a basis. Only with this as a basis [does thought] suddenly appear. Therefore it is called "beginningless ignorance." (HPC, 1-795a11-14, emphasis mine)

We can understand that obstructions to wisdom, then, to have their basis in the error of seeing *only* unity/equality an incorrect, or attached view of suchness, which results in the inability to interact with the world. Furthermore, the problem of being absorbed in suchness and thus being unable to deal with the world is an issue primarily concerning those who have had an experience with enlightenment. Nonetheless, it is an enlightenment that falls short of a complete "transmutation of the basis." With one's enlightenment experience being incomplete, one tends to see things from the perspective of emptiness,

or the second *dharmadhātu* in the Hua-yen scheme, and is thus unable to go out and teach effectively in the world. Thus it is an obstruction that would mainly affect bodhisattvas. And in fact, the next time that the topic of the two hindrances is taken up seriously in a scripture, in the *Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment*(圓覺經), their meaning will be defined and further elaborated precisely in terms of incomplete religious experience, referring specifically to "newly awakened bodhisattvas."⁴

Although it was his reading of the AMF that opened his eyes to this new approach to the hindrances, the esoteric interpretation of the hindrances is not limited in its sources to the AMF, as Wōnhyo will find evidence of this approach in earlier Indian works, most prominently the *Śrīmālā-sūtra*, where Wōnhyo finds the esoteric aspect of the hindrances to have relevance as an approach to understanding the most fundamental bases or "hypostases" of ignorance and affliction.

IV. The Esoteric Aspect of the Afflictive Obstructions

This interpretation of the afflictive obstructions reflects the basic thematic structure of the AMF, as its point of departure is that of the One Mind which has the two aspects of *suchness*(真如門) and *arising-and-ceasing*(生滅門). An important aim of the AMF was to trace the first series of mental moments that lead the mind in its departure from suchness. This occurs starting with the first movement of mind produced by ignorance and then proceeds through the sequence of the six defiled mental states. Passing through these six states of "descent," one arrives to the state where the mind is associated with attachment (the coarsest of the six defilements, third of the six coarse marks). One then continues down through the last three of the six coarse marks, i.e. ④ the coarse mark of defining names(計名字相, assigning names to the sensations). ⑤ the coarse mark of producing karma(起業相, performing good and evil activities based on attachment to the sensations), and ⑥

4 The hindrances in the *Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment* are first introduced in its fifth chapter. The cognitive hindrances understood specifically as the after-effects of incomplete enlightenment experiences are explained in the sixth and ninth chapters.

the coarse mark of the suffering produced by karma (業繫苦相).

From this perspective then, affliction has *movement* as its most basic characteristic. Specifically, the first movement of thought is the telling step away from the original perfect equanimity as suchness. After that, it's all downhill, so to speak, to the point where one experiences the suffering of karmic retribution. As Wōnhyo points out, the cognitive hindrances in the original *Yogācāra* system, no matter how subtle, would by definition be subsumed in this category.⁵

Having read through the sections related to these passages in a number of the major commentaries to the AMF, as well as a modern treatments of the text, I am surprised not to have found anyone who picks up on what seems to be the one of the more obvious ways of approaching the hindrances in the AMF. That is the readily-made correlation between the afflictive/wisdom obstructions with the pair of meditative techniques known as *samatha* and *vipāśyana* pair that is discussed in some depth in the latter portion of the AMF. In this context, the afflictive obstructions, which concern movement and agitation, would be a direct impediment to *samatha* (calm abiding), while the inability to make proper distinctions would interfere with the function of *vipāśyana* (clear observation). With this being the case, we can also make the observation that the author of the AMF is applying the hindrances directly to in their role in obstructing the practice of meditation.

Abbreviations

T=*Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*

[Japanese Edition of the Buddhist Canon] (1924-35). Tokyo: Daizōkyōkai.

HPC=*Han'guk pulgyo chōnsō* [The Collected Texts of Korean Buddhism] (1984). Seoul: Dongguk University Press.

5 In terms of the profound influence the AMF held on the development of later forms of Mahāyāna Buddhism, and especially Chan, we can see how this strong emphasis on the pitfalls in the first movement of the mind could have had influence on the development of no-mind(無心) doctrines.

References

- Classical Texts Cheng-wei-shi-lun* 成唯識論
(*Establishing Consciousness Only*). T.31, no.1585, 1a-59a.
- Da-nie-pan-jing* 大涅槃經. *Mahāparinirvāna-sūtra*. T.12, no.374, 365c-603c.
- Daeseung gisinnon sogi heobon* 大乘起信論疏記會本
Combined Commentaries on the Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith. HPC, 1-733-789.
- Daesung gisinnon byeolgi* 大乘起信論別記. *Expository Notes on the Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith*. T.44, no.1845, 226a-240c.
- Da-sheng-qi-xin-lun* 大乘起信論. *Treatise on Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith*
(Attributed to Aśvaghōṣa). T.32, no.1665, 575b-583b.
- Gishinnon so* 起信論疏. *Commentary on the Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith*. T.44, no.1844, 202a-226a.
- Huayan-jing* 華嚴經. *Avatamsaka-sūtra*. T.9, no.278, 395a-788b.
- Ijangeui* 二障義. *Doctrine of the Two Hindrances* (by Wōnhyo). HPC, 1,789c-814b.
- Ren-wang-jing* 仁王經. *Sutra for Humane Kings*. T.8, no.245, 825a-834.
- Sheng-man-jing* 勝鬘經. *Śrīmālā-sūtra*. T.12, no.353, 217a-223b.
- Yuan-jue-jing* 圓覺經. *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*. T.17, no.842, 913a-922a.
- Yuan-jue-jing-da-shu* 圓覺經大疏. *Great Commentary on the Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* (by Zongmi). Z.9, no.243, 324a-418b.
- Muller, A. Charles *The Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment: Korean Buddhism's*
1999 *Guide to Meditation*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Wayman, Alex, and *The Lion's Roar of Queen Śrīmālā*
Hideko Wayman,trans New York: Columbia University Press.
1974