

JIABS

Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies

Volume 27 Number 1 2004

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THE YOGĀCĀRA TWO HINDRANCES AND THEIR REINTERPRETATIONS IN EAST ASIA

CHARLES MULLER

1. The Basic Yogācāra Teaching of the Hindrances

The “two hindrances” are the *afflictive hindrances* (煩惱障 *kleśa-āvaraṇa*) and *cognitive hindrances* (所知障 *jñeya-āvaraṇa*). These two categories subsume 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.

In their standard interpretation, the *afflictive hindrances* include all the various forms of mental disturbances enumerated in the classical Yogācāra texts, starting with the six primary afflictions that arise based on the reification of an imagined self (我見, 身見; *satkāya-dṛṣṭi*). These six afflictions serve as the basis for the twenty secondary afflictions, and such further derivative sets as the ninety-eight, 104, and 128 afflictions. These afflictions furthermore exist in actively manifest form, latent form, debilitating form, seed form, as habit energies, and in a range of sub-varieties of strength and weakness, coarseness and subtlety, and intermixture. Generally speaking, they are *karmic* — viz., in addition to being the direct causes and manifestations of suffering, they enmesh sentient beings in perpetual rebirth, and thus, by definition, obstruct the attainment of liberation. This type of hindrance is named based on its role as the *agent* (rather than object) of obstruction.

The cognitive hindrances are subtler obstructions of awareness that are characterized by mistaken imputation and discrimination. In the normative Yogācāra explanation, all cognitive hindrances are ultimately produced from the imputation of selfhood to phenomena (法我). The Sanskrit *jñeya*, which can be interpreted as “the knowable(s),” or “all that can be known” was usually rendered into Chinese as *suozhi* 所知 — “that which is known,” or “objects of cognition,” etc. The orientation for the

naming of the cognitive hindrances is more complex than that of the afflictive hindrances, since, depending on how one looks at it, cognition can be seen as either the recipient, or the agent of obscuration. The standard Yogācāra explanation tells us that it is the things that should be known (reality, suchness, the noble truths, correctly apprehended phenomena, etc.) that are *subject to* obstruction, rather than being the obstructing agents. Yet reflection on the matter is going to suggest that it is that which we erroneously impute — thus, “know” — that obstructs correct cognition, whether in the sense of the fundamental imputation of a self onto discreet phenomena, the secondary imputation of a self in our bodies (*satkāya-dṛṣṭi* — the basis of the afflictive hindrances), or, in the reification of and attachment to our own opinions. Simply put, that which we hold to be real and true is exactly what obstructs us from seeing things as they are.

Although this latter approach, wherein 所知 is identified as both the agent and recipient of obstruction, can be suggested by the literal interpretation of both the Sanskrit and Chinese terms (*jñeya-āvaraṇa* and *suozhi*), it is not explicitly identified as such in the first teaching of the hindrances we will encounter in this paper — that given in the original Yogācāra texts. Nonetheless, this is clearly a point that is open to interpretation in such works as the *Yogācārabhūmi*.¹ Once we get to the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith*² [AMF] however, this becomes a moot point, as the cognitive obstructions in that text are explicitly defined, not as any sort of object (thus, the character 所 is dropped in their naming) but as a one-sided habit of seeing only the suchness aspect of things. When we arrive to our third text under discussion in this paper, the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*, we

¹ As Paul Swanson showed in his 1983 article on this topic, the question of the *tat-puruṣa* status of the cognitive hindrances considerably sparked the interest of Zhiyi, who discussed it at some length in his *Mohezhi guan*.

² In rendering the title of the *Dasheng qixin lun* as “Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith,” rather than Hakeda’s “Awakening of Faith in Mahāyāna” I am following the perspicacious argument made by Sung Bae Park in Chapter Four of his book *Buddhist Faith and Sudden Enlightenment*. There he shows that the inner discourse of the text itself, along with the basic understanding of the meaning of *mahāyāna* in the East Asian Buddhist tradition does not work according to a Western theological “faith in...” subject-object construction, but rather according to an indigenous East Asian essence-function model. Thus, *mahāyāna* should not be read as a noun-object, but as a modifier, which characterizes the type of faith.

will find an even more explicit argument for the known itself being the obstructions.

To simplify our approach to the hindrances for the time being, it suffices to say that it is the afflictive hindrances that directly bring about karmic suffering and rebirth in the three realms, and it is the cognitive hindrances that keep sentient beings in a state of misapprehension of reality that leads them to continue making the errors that allow for, at best, the non-elimination of mental disturbances, and at worst, the creation of new ones.

The most extensive elaboration of the hindrances in their normative Yogācāra interpretation is found scattered in various sections of the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*, and the basic framework taught there is used, with minor variations, in other Indian Yogācāra texts. Discussions of the hindrances are also found in the works of the East Asian circle of Yogācāra studies that developed around Xuanzang (玄奘 600-664), most importantly, in the *Cheng weishi lun* 成唯識論, where Xuanzang attempted to present a compact and systematic overview of the Yogācāra system as he understood it. The *Cheng weishi lun* contains a section that summarizes the hindrances (more or less) according to their basic Yogācāra framework. There we read:

What are the afflictive hindrances? Led by attachment to an imagined real self, they consist of the one hundred twenty-eight fundamental afflictions and the various secondary afflictions that are derived from them. These all torment and vex sentient beings in mind and body and obstruct nirvana. Thus they are called the afflictive hindrances. What are the cognitive hindrances? Led by attachment to imagined real phenomena they are constituted by views, doubt, ignorance, craving, hatred, pride, etc.³ They obscure the undis-

³ There are already problems here, since the *Cheng weishi lun* has identified craving and hatred here as contributing to the constitution of the cognitive hindrances. In most of the Yogācāra texts, these are considered to be subsumed in the category of the afflictive hindrances. As Weonhyo says in the early part of his *Doctrine of the Two Hindrances*:

Led by the attachment to person, the [six] fundamental afflictions and the [twenty] secondary afflictions, such as anger, resentment, concealing and so forth constitute the nature of the afflictive hindrances. If we take into account the other phenomena that are associated with these afflictions, including attendant factors, the karma they produce, as well as the karmic retribution that is experienced, all can be seen as playing a role constituting the afflictive hindrances. What constitutes the cognitive hindrances? Led by attachment to phenomena, they have as their substance deluded con-

torted nature of knowable objects and are able to obstruct *bodhi*. Thus they are called the cognitive hindrances.

The cognitive hindrances necessarily reside within the afflictive hindrances, because the afflictive hindrances take the cognitive hindrances as their support. Although they do not differ in terms of essence, their functions are different. [Adherents of] the two vehicles can only eliminate the afflictive hindrances; the bodhisattvas eliminate both. Only the supramundane practices are capable of *permanently eliminating* both kinds, but the *quelling*⁴ of the two in their active state can also occur within contaminated practices. (T 1585.31.48c6-29) [emphasis mine]

The basic relationship between the hindrances presented in the *Cheng weishi lun* (which roughly summarizes the system established in the *Yogācārabhūmi* and related texts) is one that has a well-organized roots-to-branches structure. The cognitive hindrances, as subtler errors of imputation, serve as the basis of the afflictive hindrances. They are usually not karmic, since they occur prior to the point of intention, thus do not have any morally qualitative imprint associated with their function. The afflictive hindrances, on the other hand, are behavioral habits that always carry karmic imprint to some degree, and usually bring undesirable consequences.

When the two hindrances are discussed in the context of the Yogācāra paths by which they are removed (mainly in the paths of “insight” [*darśana-mārga* 見道] and “cultivation,” [*bhāvanā-mārga* 修道], or the ten *bhūmis*) the afflictive hindrances are generally said to be removed earlier by both bodhisattvas and adherents of the two vehicles (who rely on self-salvifically oriented practices) while the cognitive hindrances are generally understood to be removed later, by bodhisattvas only, through practices grounded in emptiness and compassion.⁵

ceptualization and discrimination, along with attachment to the teachings, pride, ignorance and so forth. Taking into account the secondary phenomena that can be included as cognitive afflictions, there are also the attendant factors and their marks that are attached to. (HBJ 1.790a16-23)

⁴ The important distinction between “quelling” (or “subduing”) and “permanent elimination” is discussed below in note 22.

⁵ As Weonhyo explains in his treatise on the hindrances, this common distinction made between the bodhisattvas and “*hīnayāna*” practitioners in terms of the hindrances is only true in a general sense, as certain types of cognitive hindrances are actually removable by *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*, and there are certain situations (such as that where the sal-

Although the hindrances are mentioned with regularity throughout the Yogācāra classics, there is no single text, in which the hindrances themselves are treated as a main topic in a comprehensive and systematic manner.⁶ We invariably find them interspersed in the discussion of other related Yogācāra issues, such as the extent to which defilement penetrates the *ālaya*; how the practices of the various paths are distinguished; the relationship between certain kinds of afflictions, or views, and ignorance; the function by which affliction perfumes mental states, and so forth.

When one reads these various descriptions, although they generally fit into the basic model described above, there are discrepancies at the level of fine interpretation. For example: At any given level of spiritual attainment, which disturbances are fully eliminated, and which are only temporarily suppressed? By what kinds of practices is correction successfully accomplished? At what layer(s) of consciousness do the various antidotes (*pratipakṣa*) have their effectiveness? What kinds of (natures of) practitioners are able to carry out which kinds of practices? What kinds of results are produced? And so on. When one seeks the answers to these questions, even if one is lucky enough to find a sustained discussion of the topic, it will often be the case that the account given in another text will differ on one point or another. Thus, it is hard to know, without some serious investigation, to what degree the various interpretations of the hindrances in the Yogācāra texts actually concur with each other.

2. Weonhyo's Research on the Two Hindrances

The Korean scholar-monk Weonhyo (元曉 617-686), known in East Asia for his insightful and extensive commentarial work on a wide range of Mahāyāna texts, and most notably for his influential work on the *Awakening of Faith* and *Nirvana Sutra*, is, as far as we can tell, the only scholar in the history of Buddhism to publish a full-length study on the two hin-

vation of other sentient beings is at stake) where bodhisattvas are more proficient than the practitioners of the two vehicles at the removal of the afflictive hindrances.

⁶ The *Madhyānta-vibhāga* contains a chapter entitled "articulating the hindrances" (see T 1600.31.466b-468b), but this is a somewhat idiosyncratic piece that does not shed much light on the internal relationship of the hindrances in terms of their correlation of self-views.

drances. In the course of this project he investigated the explanations of the hindrances throughout some fifty Mahāyāna texts, the results of which were written up in a treatise entitled the *Ijangui* (二障義 *Doctrine of the Two Hindrances*).⁷ At the center of this inquiry were the Indian Yogācāra texts and their commentaries, but he also located passages germane to hindrance theory from the *Nirvana Sutra*, *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, *Sutra for Humane Kings*, and many other works not strictly classified as Yogācāra, since all of these works, even if not specifically using two hindrances terminology, do have something to say about the presence and removal of affliction and ignorance. The *Ijangui* is organized into five main sections:

- (1) *An 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 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) *An enumeration of their various functions*, broadly subsumed in the two categories of those afflictions that produce karma and those that bring rebirth.
- (3) *An explanation of the rationale behind the various types of arrangements of the hindrances*, including the groupings of afflictions 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*.

While all five paths are discussed, the primary focus is placed on

⁷ I completed an annotated translation of this work for the international Weonhyo translation project in August, 2002, which is expected to be published by a major academic press in the near future. Although the source text is not unduly long (about 25 pages in the *HBJ*), it is an extremely difficult text, with the difficulties being compounded by the extensive corruption of the source versions in our possession. Based on research — immeasurably aided by the availability of digital versions of the Taishō, I did extensive editing of the source text, and have made this edited version available on my web site at <http://www.hm.tyg.jp/~acmuller/digitexts.htm>. In the event of a change in URL, please search for “two hindrances.”

what exactly occurs within the two supramundane paths of insight and cultivation. This includes analyses of the relative virulence and subtlety of different types of mental disturbances, 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/Hīnayāna, and between various Mahāyāna scriptures and commentators.

The overall discourse of each of these five sections is broadly structured by a distinction between two hermeneutic approaches. That is, in each section, Weonhyo will first discuss the topic in terms of standard Yogācāra interpretations, which he calls the “exoteric approach” (顯了門). He then follows by looking at it from the “esoteric approach” (隱密門). What is the meaning of “esoteric” in this case? Since the establishment of this category occurs as a direct result of Weonhyo’s work with the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith*, we need to look at the pivotal role that text played in stimulating the composition of the *Ijangui*.

3. The Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith

It is a fairly well known fact that the *AMF* ended up being Weonhyo’s favorite text,⁸ and since the central concern of the *AMF* is with issues pertaining to the origins of and removal of affliction and ignorance in the effort of attaining liberation, it is not surprising that the hindrances are discussed within it. Yet the explanation that the *AMF* provides for the hindrances departs radically from the generic Yogācāra presentation that

⁸ Weonhyo called the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* [AMF] “the patriarchal teaching of all treatises,” and called its author “the chief arbiter of all controversies.” 是謂諸論之祖宗、羣諍之評主. (T 1845.44.226b5-12). He commented on the *AMF* eight times — far more than he did on any other work. Among these commentaries, two are extant. The earlier commentary, entitled *Daeseung gisinnon byeolgi* (*Expository Notes on the Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* 大乘起信論別記) was written prior to the composition of the *Ijangui*, and the latter work, the *Daeseung gisinnon so* (*Commentary on the Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith*) was written afterwards. These are contained in Taishō, and were also redacted together with the treatise itself to create the *Combined Version of Weonhyo’s Commentaries on the Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith*. A translation of this combined version by Sung Bae Park is to be released as part of the international Weonhyo translation project.

we have articulated up to this point. With Weonhyo obviously being well-studied in the standard Yogācāra structure of the hindrances, we can understand the puzzlement he must have felt upon his first encounter the following passage in the *AMF*:

Furthermore, the aspect of defiled mental states is called the afflictive obstructions,⁹ because they are able to hinder the intrinsic wisdom [that cognizes] suchness. The aspect of ignorance is called the obstructions of wisdom...¹⁰ (T 1666.32.577c20-22)

The phrase that says “the aspect of defiled mental states is called the afflictive obstructions” is not, taken alone, problematic in the context of the generic Yogācāra definition. But in the latter half of the first sentence cited above, the afflictive obstructions, rather than being presented in the standard manner as “obstructing liberation,” are said to impede the *intrinsic wisdom that cognizes suchness* — viz., they obstruct nothing less than the most fundamental manifestation of enlightened awareness. This kind of impedimentary function is not discussed in the context of the *Yogācārabhūmi* and other Indian Yogācāra texts, and if it were, it would probably be categorized as a cognitive hindrance. Furthermore, the first part of this phrase, while not seeming problematic at first glance, does present difficulties upon further examination. Rather than being constituted by the six primary and twenty secondary afflictions, with the reification of a self at their head, the afflictive obstructions are identified as the *AMF*’s six defiled mental states¹¹ — a description of a sequential corruption of

⁹ 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 as a way of making distinctions in this paper, *ai* will be translated as “obstructions” to indicate that they are from the *AMF*, and *zhang* as “hindrances” to indicate that they are from the “orthodox” Yogācāra system.

¹⁰ In the context of Yogācāra works, the Chinese logograph 智 does not necessarily indicate its more standard Chinese connotation of “wisdom” (i.e. *prajñā*). It is often used to translate the Sanskrit *jñāna* (or *jñeya*, etc.) “cognition,” and is thus synonymous with 知. However, in the context of the explanation that is given in the *AMF*, as well as in Weonhyo’s commentary, where the obstruction is said to hinder the cognitive function of sages, the rendering as wisdom is not inappropriate. Nonetheless, the polysemy should be kept in mind.

¹¹ The six defiled mental states are: (1) Defilement in which the mind is associated with attachment; (third of the six coarse marks). (2) Defilement in which the mind is associated with non-interruption; (second of the six coarse marks — mark of continuity). (3) Defilement in which the mind is associated with discriminating knowledge; (first of the six coarse marks). (4) Defilement in which the mind is not associated with manifest

mind that has connotations unique to the *AMF*, and which cannot readily be correlated to the way that the afflictive hindrances are understood as being constituted in the *Yogācārabhūmi*, etc. We will discuss this further below.

Coming to the second sentence, we find the *wisdom (cognitive) obstructions* defined as “ignorance.” This identification would not in itself be problematic, if not for the fact that the ignorance being introduced here is not a form of nescience that obstructs the fundamental apprehension of *tathatā*. Instead, it blurs the functioning of the karmic, phenomenal, discriminating wisdom that one uses for everyday activities. While this impediment *does* fall under the domain of cognitive functioning, it would seem to be a secondary-level problem, which makes it difficult to reconcile with the systematic roots-and-branches framework implicit in the “Vasubandhan” Yogācāra structure. The relative priority of the two hindrances in the traditional Yogācāra approach and those offered in the *AMF* seem here to be reversed in terms of fundamental and derivative, since the *AMF*’s afflictive obstructions obscure cognition of *tathatā*, and the obstructions of wisdom impede a relatively external phenomena-oriented form of awareness. The author of the *AMF* is aware of the problems that would arise in trying to correlate his account of the hindrances with the normative Yogācāra version, and feels obliged to clarify:

[What is the meaning of the afflictive obstructions?] 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. [What is the meaning of the wisdom obstructions?] 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 all objects of the container world. (T 1666.32.577c23-25)

form; (mark of the objective realm; third of the three subtle marks). (5) Defilement in which the mind is not associated with the subjectively viewing mind, (mark of the subjective perceiver; second of the three subtle marks). (6) Defilement in which the mind is not directly associated with fundamental karma. (mark of karma, which is moved by ignorance; the first of the three subtle marks) The six are listed in order of increasing subtlety, and thus it is said that the first two reside in the sixth consciousness; the third resides in the seventh consciousness and the last three reside in the eighth consciousness. As shown, these six are analogous to the first six of the nine marks of the arising of suffering, including the three subtle marks, and the first three of the six coarse marks.

Rather than being defined in terms of the traditional six primary or twenty secondary afflictions, the afflictive obstructions are seen as consisting in a fundamental inability to perceive the *equal nature of existence*. According to the *AMF*, this will be the precondition for the first motion of the mind, and that motion will lead to a series of attachments, and eventually, agitation. On the other hand, the obstructions to wisdom have their basis in the opposite error of being absorbed in a one-dimensional vision of only undifferentiated suchness, which results in an inability to interact with the world.

My study of this topic through these three texts by Weonhyo — the *Ijangui*, along with the earlier and later commentaries on the *AMF*, has brought me to the firm conclusion that it was precisely Weonhyo's puzzlement with this passage in the *AMF* that stimulated him to enter into his extensive study of the hindrances. In his earlier *AMF* commentary he acknowledges the fact that there seems to be a problem, but does not fully explain it — probably because he is not yet prepared to do so. He then embarks on his two hindrances research project, and after finishing that, writes his latter commentary. In that commentary the matter is explained clearly and concisely, including a recommendation for interested readers to “take a look at my book on the topic.”

Let us now follow Weonhyo in his first-time treatment of the passage in his earlier commentary on the *AMF*, the *Expository Notes*. He first introduces the standard Yogācāra definition of the hindrances:

There are two general approaches to explaining the two hindrances. The first interpretation is that in which adherents of the two vehicles are pervasively hindered by the ten afflictions,¹² which cause them to transmigrate, and hinder their attainment of nirvana. 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. (HBJ 1.765a7-11)¹³

¹² The ten afflictions are: desire, ill-will, ignorance, pride, doubt, view of self, extreme view, evil view, view of attachment to views, and extreme views in regard to discipline. The first five affect those of lower spiritual development while the second five affect those of greater spiritual development.

¹³ The reader may want to take note, regarding the cognitive hindrances, of the difference between this basic description and that given above in the citation from the *Cheng*

Weonhyo next introduces the new approach that he has encountered in the *AMF*.

In the second interpretation, all kinds of states of moving thought and attachment to characteristics function contrarily to the quiescent nature of the wisdom that cognizes suchness. These are called the “obstructions of affliction.” The dark unawareness of intrinsic ignorance acts contrary to the function of detailed examination by conventional wisdom. This is called the “obstruction to discriminating wisdom.” (HBJ 1.765a11-13)

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

Now [the *AMF*] addresses the hindrances from this latter perspective, and therefore it says that the six kinds of defiled mental states are called “obstructions due to affliction,” and calls the hypostases of ignorance¹⁴ the “obstructions to discriminating wisdom.” But would it not be more reasonable to say that ignorance should hinder the wisdom that cognizes suchness, and the defiled mental states hinder conventional (discriminating) wisdom? (HBJ 1.765a14-17)

Wouldn’t it, indeed. Why are they not reversed? It would certainly seem 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 Weonhyo, is this not the case?

Because it is not yet necessary for it to be this way. The meaning of “not yet necessary” is like the treatise itself explains. (HBJ 1.764a18)

weishi lun. That text lists pride, doubt and so forth under the cognitive hindrances, whereas Weonhyo has listed them under the afflictive hindrances. Since Weonhyo’s categorization agrees with the explanations given in the *Yogācārabhūmi* and all related texts that I have seen, one has to wonder as to whether Xuanzang simply got it wrong here, if there was a corruption of the text, or he was deliberately offering a different interpretation. This is not a minor point, since the way one interprets the functions of the hindrances reflects one’s overall understanding of consciousness theory.

¹⁴ 無明住地 The *Ijangui* contains an extensive discussion regarding the role of these hypostases and the hindrances which is a bit too complicated to broach in this paper. This topic is treated in my forthcoming translation of that text. Please also see the information on this term in the online *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism* at [http://www.acmuller.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?71.xml+id\('b7121-660e-4f4f-5730'\)](http://www.acmuller.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?71.xml+id('b7121-660e-4f4f-5730')). (log in as “guest”).

The *AMF* itself does not have an explanation of the phrase “not yet necessary,” so we are left to figure this out for ourselves. One possible way to understand this is to assume that it is not yet necessary to resort to a secondary-level explanation of the hindrances, since Weonhyo understands that the *AMF*’s 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 deluded mental states.

At this point in his treatment of the hindrances, Weonhyo was far from satisfied, since sometime after the completion of this commentary he embarked on his two hindrances research project, after which he returned to the *AMF* to write his final commentary — the commentary that would serve to spread his fame as a scholar across East Asia. What does he have to say, after doing this extensive investigation? Returning to the same passage, where the author of the *AMF* has just given his idiosyncratic description of the hindrances, Weonhyo writes with the assuredness of someone who has studied the matter thoroughly:

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

The meaning of “the aspect of defiled mental states,” refers to the six kinds of defiled mental states. “Intrinsic wisdom,” refers to quiescent luminous wisdom [i.e. the wisdom that cognizes suchness]. [Since the defiled mental states] act contrary to quiescence, they are called “obstructions 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.” 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 obstruction to discriminating wisdom.” (HBJ 1.764c14-23) [emphasis mine]

The Yogācāra version of the hindrances has now been labeled by Weonhyo as “exoteric” in contrast to the “esoteric” hindrances of the *AMF*. He has also added a significant qualification to the meaning of “mundane

karmic wisdom” in associating it with “subsequently attained wisdom,” originally a translation of the Sanskrit *pr̥ṣṭha-labdha-jñāna*, which is a technical term denoting the special correct discriminative power used by sages after their enlightenment, for the purpose of teaching others. Weonhyo then recommends interested readers to have a look at his recently-written treatise on the topic, the *Ijangui*. Not only is the matter explained there at great length — the entire monograph has been structured according to this esoteric/exoteric framework derived from his reading of this passage in the *AMF*. Moreover, Weonhyo will find evidence of this esoteric approach in earlier Indian works, most prominently the *Śrīmālā-sūtra*, where he finds the esoteric aspect of the hindrances to have relevance as an approach to explaining the most fundamental bases or “hypostases” of ignorance and affliction.

4. The Esoteric Aspect of the Hindrances in the *Ijangui*

Weonhyo adumbrates the discussion of the esoteric hindrances in the *Ijangui* by repeating the basic definition given in the *AMF* — that the afflictive obstructions are constituted by the six defiled mental states, while the obstructions to wisdom are constituted by intrinsic ignorance. This interpretation of the afflictive obstructions reflects a basic thematic component of the *AMF*, as its point of departure is that of the One Mind which has the two aspects of *suchness* and *arising-and-ceasing*. An important aim of the *AMF* was to trace the first series of mental moments in arising-and-ceasing 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 (assigning names to sensations). (5) the coarse mark of producing karma 起業相 (performing good and evil activities based on attachment to the sensations), and (6) 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 of suchness. After that, it's all downhill, so to speak, to the point where one experiences the suffering of karmic retribution. Here, moreover, Weonhyo states that every type of hindrance in the Yogācāra system, whether active or latent, afflictive or cognitive, can be explained within the context of these six mental states. In terms of constitution, we can readily see how the standard primary and secondary Yogācāra afflictions could be included within the transformations of the six defiled mental states. But the emphasis in the *AMF* is more on the actual sequence of events that occur in the mind of each person who drifts away from awareness of *tathatā*. Here we can apply some more meaningful characterization to the distinction between the Yogācāra “exoteric” and *AMF* “esoteric” by noting that this is not a distinction being made in terms of *scrutability*, such as is intimated by the distinction between *neyārtha* and *nītārtha*, but one of *mode*. The original Yogācāra approach to the hindrances is one of schematizing them and articulating their constitution, pinpointing them in the vast map of consciousness. The *AMF* instead attempts to describe how the hindrances actually operate in the mind of a practitioner — what their concrete effects are. Its emphasis is *functional* in character.

As for the cognitive obstructions in the *AMF*, it is *discriminating wisdom* that is obscured. Like the Yogācāra cognitive hindrances, the wisdom obstructions are concerned with incorrect apprehension of phenomena, but in the case of Yogācāra, one is fixated on the *selfhood of things*. In the case of the *AMF*'s wisdom obstructions, one is instead understood to be absorbed in the *apprehension of suchness*, and is thus incapable of making proper distinctions in regard to phenomena. What is being obstructed, as we have noted above, is “subsequently attained wisdom,” the correct discrimination used by sages after they have completed the path of insight. While both obstructions can be seen as being extremely subtle, the obstructions to wisdom would tend to be defined in the context of their activity in the minds of those who have already had some transformative experience with correct awareness. Thus the wisdom obstructions affect advanced practitioners who need to be skillful in the handling of mundane circumstances for the purpose of teaching — bodhisattvas. We can here again in the case of the cognitive obstructions characterize the distinction between the exoteric/esoteric approaches by say-

ing that those from the original Yogācāra system are more schematic in their charting of the constitution of the hindrances, while the *AMF* explains them functionally — in terms of the actual impedimentary effects they engender.

Weonhyo winds up the explanation of the cognitive obstructions by linking them back around through the concept of intrinsic ignorance to the hypostases of ignorance 無明住地 taught in the *Śrīmālā-sūtra*. In so doing, he absorbs the cognitive aspects of *both* of the *AMF*'s obstructions into "intrinsic ignorance." While intrinsic ignorance functions to blur phenomenal distinctions, it is at the same time the primary factor in that allows the six defiled mental states to slip into their chain reaction. Thus, the most fundamental form of ignorance is simultaneously anterior and posterior to the afflictive obstructions, their initial condition as well as their outcome. Weonhyo 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 correct cognition. 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." (HBJ 1.795a11-14)

To reiterate, the original Yogācāra explanation of the two hindrances tends to be schematic in its emphasis, describing precisely where the hindrances fit into the intricate map of consciousness, while the *AMF*'s description has a functional orientation. It tells us that the afflictive obstructions would affect beginning-to-advanced practitioners who are yet unable to control the movement of their thoughts, while the wisdom obstructions affect advanced practitioners who have already succeeded in stabilizing their thoughts, but who still get stuck in one-pointed absorption in *tathatā*. We can here make the obvious connection between the *AMF*'s afflictive/wisdom obstructions and the pair of meditative techniques known as *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* — to which a portion of the *AMF* is allotted for

discussion. The afflictive obstructions, which have movement and agitation as their basic character, would be an impediment to *śamatha* (calm abiding), while the tendency to be absorbed in suchness and the inability to make proper distinctions would interfere with the function of *vipaśyanā* (analytical meditation).¹⁵ Thus, again, a practice orientation.

5. The Two Hindrances in the Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment

The next major reworking of the hindrances is found in the influential East Asian apocryphon, the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* [*SPE*] (*Yuanjue jing* 圓覺經) the epitomic “original enlightenment” text that grew out of the nascent Chan/Huayan nexus, taking the soteriological schemes developed by the *AMF* as its basis, expressing these even more directly into the realm of practical application.¹⁶

The standard characterization made by modern scholars regarding the Chan/Huayan/Tiantai attitude toward the branch of East Asian Yogācāra known as Faxiang has been to maintain that the East Asians were on the whole unreceptive to Faxiang’s unwieldy technical categories, to the notion of rigidly predetermined religious capacities, and to the requirement of three incalculable eons for the attainment of Buddhahood.¹⁷ While most specialists in this area would probably still acknowledge that there is some measure of truth contained in this general observation, it should be taken in counterbalance with an awareness of the extent to which, on the other hand, the East Asian tradition actually had little recourse but to adopt a significant amount of Yogācāra technical language to establish the foundations of East Asian Buddhist systems of psychology, epistemology, and soteriology. Such fundamental Yogācāra concepts as the eight consciousnesses, eighteen realms, three natures, karmic seeds and habit energies, two hindrances, and so on, became basic vocabulary for East Asian doctrinal schools such as Tiantai and Huayan, and can be shown to have

¹⁵ Interestingly, as obvious as this correlation seems, I have not seen it made in either the classical commentaries on the *AMF* or in modern studies.

¹⁶ For an annotated translation of this sutra, please see my book, *The Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment: Korean Buddhism’s Guide to Meditation*.

¹⁷ See for example, Kenneth Ch’en’s *Buddhism in China*, p. 325, and Wing-Tsit Chan’s *Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, p. 373.

their influences in Chan as well. But while seeking to ground themselves in Indian doctrinal foundations, the founders of the indigenous East Asian schools were equally determined to present something that would resonate well enough with indigenous metaphysical and soteriological intuitions that it could be put into practice. Thus, while they sometimes used Yogācāra and other Indian Buddhist concepts intending a close approximation of their original meaning, they just as often drastically reworked them for application to their own models of practice and enlightenment.

A significant part of the new articulation of Buddhist doctrines came in the form of the composition of new scriptures¹⁸ such as the *SPE*, and the most common denominator shared by East Asian indigenous works connected with the formation of indigenous Chinese schools was a logic based in the East Asian essence-function (*tiyong* 體用) paradigm, along with a special concern for the notion of sudden enlightenment.¹⁹ With the watershed text for this essence-function transformation of Buddhism being the *AMF*, *tiyong*-oriented and sudden enlightenment-attentive teachings appeared one after the other in the form of such scriptures as the *Jingang sanmei jing* (金剛三昧經), the *Platform Sutra* (*Liuzu tanjing* 六祖壇經), the *SPE*, along with various other commentaries produced within the emerging Huayan and Chan traditions. The *SPE* is exemplary as an East Asian composition that appropriates a number of seminal Indian teachings, reinterpreting these for application into its own system of practice.²⁰

The *SPE*'s formal discussion of the two hindrances comes in its fifth chapter (Chapter of the bodhisattva Maitreya), the chapter that carries out the most extensive appropriation of Yogācāra structures. Here, in response to Maitreya's request for a set of criteria by which to distinguish practitioners according to level, the Buddha answers by arranging practitioners

¹⁸ For a full volume treatment of the phenomenon of East Asian apocrypha, see Robert Buswell's *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*.

¹⁹ See the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*, p. 10-14.

²⁰ One of the most prominent examples of this adaptation can be seen when the author of the *SPE* explains the traditional Indian meditation methods of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*, but then introduces a wholly new, third type of practice called *chan'na* (*dhyāna* 禪那, which later becomes shortened to *chan*) that is understood to subsume and transcend the prior two.

into five groups, which he calls the “five natures” — a direct reference to the five natures of Faxiang.²¹

In contrast to the Faxiang model of the five natures, which was created for the purpose of making clear distinctions between practitioners in terms of their predetermined soteric capacities, the *SPE*'s “natures of practitioners” are fluid levels on the path of religious awareness that are attainable by anyone. Rather than being firm predilections, these “natures” refer instead to the quality of one's present attainment, judged according to the degree to which one has eliminated various types of obstructions to liberation and correct awareness. The *SPE* further alters the original Yogācāra scheme by actually presenting not five, but six kinds of practitioners, with the re-interpretation of the Yogācāra *icchantika* category into two different types of characters, who are listed below as number one and number six.

The six are: (1) those who have not achieved any actualization whatsoever of their buddhahood (but this, like the others, is not a fixed limitation, and therefore practitioners at this level are encouraged to move ahead by eliminating their own coarse hindrances to liberation.); (2) those who have attained to the level of the two vehicles; (3) those who have attained to the level of bodhisattva; (4) those who have attained to the level of buddhahood. Number five (5) is the “indeterminate” nature, which is appropriated in the *SPE* to express the Chan belief in the possibility of the immediate attainment of enlightenment by anyone. (6) Those who in their self-delusion believe themselves to be enlightened, and hence deem themselves qualified to serve as spiritual guides to others. As we will see below, this category is of special importance to our present discussion, as it represents an important component of the distinctive interpretation applied to the cognitive hindrances in the *SPE*. The criteria by which these “five” natures are distinguished is none other than the two kinds of hindrances. The sutra reads:

²¹ In Faxiang, these were five predispositions that practitioners were believed to possess in terms of their potential for attainment of liberation. They included (1) and (2) the two lesser vehicle practitioners (*arhats* and *pratyekabuddhas*), (3) great vehicle practitioners (bodhisattvas), (4) those whose nature is not determined, and (5) *icchantikas* — persons so depraved that they are incapable of attaining liberation, no matter what they do.

Good sons: due to their inherent desire, sentient beings generate ignorance and manifest the distinctions and inequalities of the five natures. Based on the two kinds of hindrances they manifest deep and shallow [resistance to liberation]. What are the two kinds of hindrances? The first are the hindrances of principle, which obstruct correct awareness; the second are the phenomenal hindrances, which impel the continuation of *saṃsāra*.

What are the five natures? Good sons, if sentient beings have not yet been able to eliminate the two kinds of hindrances, this is called “non-consummation of one’s Buddhahood.” If sentient beings permanently discard desire, then they have succeeded in removing the phenomenal hindrances, but have not yet eliminated the hindrances of principle. They are able to awaken in the way of *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas* but are not able to manifest and dwell in the state of the bodhisattva.

Good sons, if all sentient beings of the degenerate age desire to float on the great ocean of the Tathāgata’s Perfect Enlightenment, they should first arouse the determination to eliminate the two kinds of hindrances. Once the two kinds of hindrances are quelled,²² one can awaken and enter the state of the bodhisattva.

After permanently eliminating the hindrances of phenomena and principle, one is able to enter the sublime Perfect Enlightenment of the Tathāgata, and able to fully accomplish *bodhi* and great nirvana.

Good sons, all sentient beings without exception actualize Perfect Enlightenment. When you meet a Genuine Teacher, rely on the dharma-practice of the causal stage that he sets up for you. When you follow this practice, both sudden and gradual will be included. If you come upon the correct path of practice of the unsurpassed *bodhi* of the Tathāgatas, then there are no “supe-

²² “Elimination” (斷) and “quelling” (伏) are technical terms with specific application in two hindrances discourse. In Yogācāra path theory, the main portion of the afflictive hindrances proper (i.e., leaving out the categories of seeds, habit energies and some subtle cognitive hindrances) are first “quelled” in the Path of Insight, and then “eliminated” in the Path of Cultivation, or the Ultimate Path. Quelling refers to a subjugation of the hindrances, where their activity has been stopped, but they still exist in latent form. Elimination means final, complete eradication, which Weonhyo compares to uprooting, and then burning, the roots of a plant. We can see from this phrase that *entry* into the realm of the bodhisattvas is characterized by quelling of both, but at this stage there is not yet elimination. Weonhyo devotes an extensive section in the *Ijangui* to the matter of “distinctions in elimination and quelling.” In this section in the *Ijangui*, the variations in quelling and elimination according to the type of practice, according to the text and so forth, are far more complex than those presented here in the *SPE*. For example, “entry into the realm of the bodhisattva” would have to be clearly defined in terms of a precise stage, and as to whether one started out on the bodhisattva path from the beginning, or, to borrow a phrase from Jan Nattier, “merged left” from a two-vehicle pathway.

rior” or “inferior” abilities of people: all accomplish buddhahood. (T 842. 17.916b20-c7; HBJ 7.146a; Muller, *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*, pp. 144-146.)

While we know that the author of the *SPE* had both the Yogācāra and *AMF* models of the hindrances in mind while composing the sutra,²³ when it comes to introducing them, he starts by distancing himself from these prior models by abandoning their translated Chinese nomenclature. For “cognitive hindrances/obstructions to wisdom” (所知障 / 智礙) he uses “hindrances of principle 理障,” and for afflictive hindrances/obstructions (煩惱障 / 惑礙), he uses “hindrances of phenomena 事障.” This is a reference to *li* and *shi* as they are established in the Huayan commentarial tradition, where *li* refers to enlightenment at the level of the apprehension of the empty character of existence, wherein the practitioner perceives suchness. *Shi* refers to the ordinary discriminating consciousness. The *li-shi* pair is also one of the many East Asian analogs to the *tiyong* paradigm, being the predominant Buddhist *tiyong* variant starting from the Tang period. Given this context, we would assume the hindrances of phenomena to be related to obstructions derived from the unenlightened discriminating consciousness, whereas hindrances of principle would be impediments that are concerned in some way with insight into the empty nature of existence. One question that would arise based on the interpretations of the hindrances that we have encountered thus far is whether “principle” is understood as acting as an agent of obstruction, or if it is insight *into* principle that is being obstructed — or both. This question will be treated below.

While the utilization of the five natures theory here only has a very general correspondence with the original Yogācāra categories, when it comes to the hindrances, the author intends a much closer correlation. The initial definition resonates with the Yogācāra model by: (1) Arranging the two from the perspective of the hindrances of principle being impedimentary with regard to correct apprehension of reality (thus, cognition), and the hindrances of phenomena (affliction) being the force propelling the continuity of *samsāra*, and (2) Arranging them according to the gen-

²³ One hint of confirmation of the author’s awareness of both definitions of the hindrances is that in labeling them, he uses both of the Chinese characters used by Xuanzang and the *AMF* respectively to render the meaning of the hindrances/obstructions: *zhang* 障 from the Xuanzang translations, and *ai* 礙 from the *AMF*.

eral distinction made between the respective abilities to *quell* and *eliminate* demonstrated by unenlightened practitioners, adherents of the two vehicles, bodhisattvas, and buddhas. The Yogācāra analysis of the distinctions of levels of practitioners in terms of their success in quelling or eliminating specific types of hindrances — treated in detail in the *Ijangui* — matches this (being articulated, of course, in infinitely greater detail).

While the *SPE*'s hindrances, based on this brief explanation, can be correlated to the normative Yogācāra/Faxiang hindrances in terms of their priority and the respective domains of their impedimentary function, there are problems to be seen if we scrutinize the way the hindrances are named and defined. In Faxiang, the cognitive hindrances are defined as the imputation of self onto *objective phenomena*, which is inverse in connotation to the *SPE*'s term, "hindrances of principle." There are similar problems with correlating the *SPE*'s hindrances of principle with the wisdom obstructions of the *AMF* (Weonhyo's "esoteric" hindrances), since in the *AMF*, the obstructions to wisdom are defined in their role of *obfuscation of phenomenal wisdom*, which is again, opposite in connotation from the "principle" terminology of the *SPE*.

Analogous problems arise in trying to reconcile the afflictive obstructions of the *AMF* (which are impedimentary toward the effort of perceiving suchness) with the *SPE*'s hindrances of "phenomena." We will examine options for resolving these problems below.

6. Zongmi's Analysis of the Hindrances

Having at length arrived at a modicum of understanding of the difficulties involved here based on my own analysis of these texts, I became curious as to whether any classical scholars had attempted to grapple with the complex relationship among these three models of the hindrances. The most obvious candidate here would be the Chan/Huayan patriarch Zongmi (宗密 780-841), since, in addition to being the principal commentator on the *SPE*,²⁴ he also did extensive work on the *AMF*, and was

²⁴ Zongmi wrote seven commentaries on the sutra, the most comprehensive of which was called the *Great Commentary on the Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* (圓覺經大疏). He also wrote two commentaries on the *AMF*, a fact that is not surprising, given the close relationship between the two texts. Peter Gregory, in his study of Zongmi, devotes much

well-versed in Faxiang phenomenology. In investigating Zongmi's commentary on this "five natures" passage in his *Great Commentary*, I was more than pleased to find out that he perceived precisely the same problems that I have raised here in reconciling both the naming and ostensive content of the *SPE*'s hindrances with those of Yogācāra and the *AMF*. (In fact, I found Zongmi's discussion to be such a useful overview of the various problems involved in arriving at an integral understanding of the three approaches that I went straight ahead and translated the entire section, but after realizing that it would be a bit cumbersome to include it here, placed it on my web site.)²⁵ From here, I will summarize the main points of Zongmi's analysis.

Zongmi starts by explaining the original Yogācāra connotations of the hindrances and shows how, broadly speaking, the Yogācāra pair of afflictive/cognitive hindrances are to be mapped to the *SPE*'s phenomenal/principle hindrances. The definition of the phenomenal hindrances as being mental disturbances that impel the continuity of birth and death is classic Yogācāra. The hindrances of principle are to be understood as equivalent to the cognitive hindrances, in the context of the Yogācāra understanding that the knowables in themselves are not the hindrances.

Zongmi then follows Weonhyo (although he doesn't cite him) by making a parallel hermeneutic distinction between the hindrances found in Yogācāra (which he calls their "formal" 義 approach — equivalent to Weonhyo's "exoteric" approach), and those taught in the *Awakening of Faith* (which he calls the "essential" 體 approach — equivalent to Weonhyo's "esoteric" approach). The reader should recall now that the afflictive obstructions of the *AMF* exhibited both an afflictive and a cognitive character. Zongmi states this explicitly, distinguishing the defiled mental states (afflictive obstructions) according to the *AMF*'s own hermeneutic principle of the two kinds of aspects: (1) the aspect of non-enlightenment and (2) the aspect of continuity of rebirth. He associates the aspect of the continuity of rebirth, as we might expect, with the *SPE*'s phenomenal hindrances, and takes the aspect of non-enlightenment and places

space to explaining Zongmi's relationship with the *SPE*. See *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism*.

²⁵ See <http://www.hm.tyg.jp/~acmuller/digitexts.htm>, and in the event of a change of URL, please search for "Zongmi on the Two Hindrances". This passage covers Z 243.9.333-334.

it together with the *AMF*'s wisdom obstructions in the category of the *SPE*'s hindrances of principle. In this way, the hindrances of principle have come, from the perspective of the *AMF*, to be virtually identical with "intrinsic ignorance."

His discussion of the *AMF*'s obstructions to wisdom follows the treatment given in Weonhyo's latter commentary. He says: "[I]gnorance has the function of blurring, such that things are not properly distinguished. Since this opposes the function of [discriminating] wisdom, it is called the obstruction to wisdom." (Z 243.9.333b9) He goes on to say that even though the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* attributes this kind of "blurring" activity to the hindrances of principle, in fact they operate within both the hindrances of principle and phenomena in the *SPE*. In this sense, the implications are closer to normative Yogācāra than to the *AMF*, since in the *AMF*, the blurring function is limited to the domain of wisdom obstructions. In the original Yogācāra model, although the cognitive hindrances are defined differently in terms of function and priority, they are understood as operating inseparably from the afflictive hindrances.

Zongmi is also attentive to the confusion that arises based on the fact that the description of the *AMF*'s obstructions of the wisdom of suchness (afflictive obstructions) seem to match conceptually with the *SPE*'s hindrances of principle (given the similarity in connotation between the notions of principle 理 and suchness 如), while the *AMF*'s hindrances to karmic wisdom seem to match with the *SPE*'s phenomenal hindrances. Such a mapping would of course controvert the intentions of the *SPE*'s author. Zongmi says:

Since, in the case of the *Awakening of Faith*, it is opposites that obstruct each other, the six defiled mental states obstruct the wisdom of suchness, and ignorance obstructs the wisdom that discriminates the world. It is precisely because this relationship seems contradictory that the author of that treatise saw the need to clarify himself, saying "what does this mean?"

Zongmi settles this by declaring that the confusion arises due to an attachment to the literal meaning of the words, which obscures the general purpose of the passage — which is to distinguish the basic implications of the concepts of "ignorance" and "affliction." He says:

If we approach the two hindrances of principle and phenomena in a general sense, then anything that obstructs the principle and [discriminating] wisdom,

causing them not to be clearly manifest, can be collectively called “ignorance.” And that which prevents mental functioning from attaining liberation, can be collectively called “affliction.” Since the emphasis of the teaching in the *SPE* is on principle *and* [discriminating] wisdom, both of the hindrances taught in the *AMF* can be generally subsumed under the category of hindrances of principle taught in the *SPE*. (Z 243.9.333a7-11)

In other words, the two obstructions to both kinds of cognition — that which perceives suchness and that which carries out correct discrimination — are together subsumed in the category of “obfuscation of correct awareness,” again, equivalent to the *AMF*’s intrinsic ignorance.

We can now summarize the connotations of the hindrances of the *SPE* by saying that they are intended, as much as possible, to subsume both of the prior models. They are expected to be understood according to the basic afflictive/cognitive distinction in the Yogācāra model, but they also follow the function-oriented shift of the *AMF* by widening the definition of the cognitive to include both subjectively and objectively oriented hindrances. There is also the overriding correlation of the arrangement of the hindrances according to the level of the practitioners. For example, all three versions of the cognitive/wisdom/principle hindrances are understood to be particularly impedimentary to bodhisattvas. In the Yogācāra explanation, the removal of the cognitive hindrances is the focus of the practice of the bodhisattvas. In Weonhyo’s commentary to the *AMF*, they are the obstructions that affect bodhisattvas. In the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*, bodhisattvahood is evaluated in terms of the degree to which the hindrances of principle have been eliminated.

Taking note that the prioritization of the cognitive aspect was a prominent dimension of the *AMF*, we can observe that the *SPE* takes the prioritization of the cognitive to an almost exclusive level. This point is well attended by Zongmi, who wraps up his discussion of the hindrances by saying:

I will next give a special interpretation to the [meaning of] the hindrances of principle. When, in the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*, there is something that is obstructed, consciousness [rather than objects] must necessarily be the basis [of the problem]. The sutra initially says “hindrances of principle,” but this is a term applied to the obstruction of correct awareness, which is in fact a matter that transcends such categories as essence and characteristics. This is because this sutra takes *correct awareness* as its cardinal principle. (Z 243.9.333a11-13) [emphasis mine]

Those who have done serious study of the *SPE* will sense that there is more to this shift than simply an enhanced tendency to focus on cognitive, rather than affective problems. A new dimension to the cognitive will be broached that was never explicitly stated in the context of the Yogācāra texts or the *AMF*, which is the increasingly subjective and practical indication of the function of cognitive hindrances as being entrapment in the views one has constructed based on some sort of limited experience of awakening. While this tendency is sharply distinguished from the Yogācāra perspective, which focuses more precisely on the imputation of selfhood onto entities, we can glean the beginnings of such an approach in the discussion of the wisdom obstructions in the *AMF*, where awareness is obscured by one's absorption in a view of suchness. But the *SPE* goes one step beyond this, turning the warning against becoming attached to incomplete experiences of enlightenment into its central theme in the latter portions of the text.

The real expansion of the meaning of the hindrances of principle in their role as errors in regard to the reification of transmundane insights takes place mainly in chapters six (Pure Wisdom Bodhisattva) and nine (Purifier of All Karmic Hindrances Bodhisattva). In those chapters we find the focus to be especially on the reification of experiences of religious insight as the most dangerous kinds of obstacles to liberation. The *SPE* warns that since these experiences almost invariably fall short of perfect realization, rather than eliminating hindrances, they serve instead to create newer, subtler obstacles that lie dormant in the *ālaya* consciousness, awaiting the appropriate causes and conditions for their re-manifestation. The worst thing that one can do then, for example, based on an experience of "kenshō," is to assume that one has attained a significant level of realization and to start playing the role of guru. The sutra says:

Good sons, these sentient beings of the degenerate age who are practicing *bodhi* regard the ego's infinitesimal perception as their own purity, and are therefore unable to penetrate to the root of the self-trace. If someone praises their [mistaken] dharma, then they will be overjoyed and immediately try to save him. But if someone criticizes their attainments, they will be filled with anger and resentment. Hence, you can know that the trace of self is being firmly held to; it is concealed in the store consciousness and is playing freely throughout the faculties without interruption. (T 842.17.919c23; *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*, p. 212.)

Unless enlightenment is complete and final — “perfect” — it reverts to an understanding, and becomes a hindrance.²⁶ This theme is summed up most succinctly in the chapter of the bodhisattva Pure Wisdom:

Good sons, all bodhisattvas see their understanding as an obstruction. But even if they eliminate the “understanding-obstruction,” they still abide in a view of enlightenment. This “enlightenment-obstruction” becomes a hindrance and they are not perfectly free. (T 842.17.917a21; *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*, p. 160.)

7. Conclusions

We have seen a series of progressive moves made here with the hindrances here that have parallels with other aspects of the absorption and adaptation of Indian Buddhist paradigms into East Asia. Especially where Yogācāra concepts are concerned, the transformation that occurred in the process of assimilation of Buddhism into China is usually characterized as “reductionism.”²⁷ For example, in this case, the intricate and complex framework of the Yogācāra hindrances — through the five paths, hundred dharmas, various arrays of afflictions, delusions — both latent and active — is subsumed into the six defiled minds and obstruction of subsequently-attained wisdom in the *AMF*. In the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*, these are further reduced in the fifth chapter to two categories of the *li-shi* paradigm, and as Zongmi shows, ultimately reduced to the singular blindness of our misapprehensions of enlightenment.

While later “classical Chan” discourse drops the usage of the technical terms “cognitive hindrance” or “hindrance of principle,” Chan practice, especially the form of Chan practice that includes direct interaction between teacher and student, becomes focused almost exclusively on the removal of cognitive hindrances in the broad sense taught in the *SPE*, as

²⁶ Concern with this problem has direct bearing on the naming of the title of the sutra, with emphasis being placed on the fact that unless enlightenment is total, or “perfect,” it is really not enlightenment at all. The Chan/Zen school has, down to modern times, placed emphasis on the attainment of insight experiences. This sutra warns against deceiving oneself in regard to these experiences.

²⁷ A theme discussed, for example, in Robert Buswell’s *Formation of Ch’an Ideology* and Dan Lusthaus’ more recent *Buddhist Phenomenology*, although these two scholars have significantly different takes on the process of Sinification.

the Chan masters were (and still are) expected to identify in their students the prejudices, presuppositions, and most importantly, attachment to incomplete enlightenment experiences, which become nothing but a new form of delusion.

From a perspective of Buddhist historical/textual scholarship that focuses on the precise maintenance of certain forms of discourse, there is a tendency to see this reductionism in a mostly disparaging light — especially where it has tended toward the kind of essentialism associated with the “original enlightenment” thought despised by Critical Buddhists. I would suggest, as an alternative, that such “streamlining,” to be properly understood, must be seen in the full context of the needs of those who carried it out. Starting with the transition to the *AMF*, the central concern is about the ability to *apply* these Yogācāra concepts to the situation of actual practice. Although the original meaning of “yogācāra” is ostensibly “yoga practice,” it is apparent that an elaborate understanding of the subtle permutations of the meaning of the hindrances in that system is not going to be of much use in the context of actual contemplation practice for most people. It would be unwieldy, and perhaps even a distraction in the context of meditation. Thus the transformations of Indian teaching in such texts as the *AMF* and *SPE* are perhaps not so much for the purpose of creating a match with East Asian philosophical paradigms for merely conceptual purposes, but to allow the doctrine to have some relevance for application in actual practice.

Acknowledgments

An early draft of this paper was presented at the Yogācāra Seminar of the American Academy of Religion at the 2001 Annual Meeting in Denver, and the input from Seminar members toward its further development has been invaluable. I would like to specially thank Cuong Nguyen, my volume editor in the Weonhyo translation project, and Dan Lusthaus, who took an interest in this paper from an early point in time. The time I have spent in discussion and debate with both of these excellent scholars over the finer interpretations of the hindrances and related Yogācāra issues has contributed much to the depth of this paper — although it still leaves much to be desired in providing a truly comprehensive and accurate dis-

cussion of this topic. I would also like to thank the members of the Tokyo Buddhist Discussion Group for their input on various parts of this paper that I presented in our meetings in Gene Reeves' living room in Nakano Fujimi-cho. Finally, I would like to convey my appreciation to the anonymous peer-review reader, whose comments were pivotal in the reorganization of this paper.

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- Yuanjuejing dashu* (圓覺經大疏) (Great Commentary on the Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment). Zongmi. Z 243.9.324a-418b

Abbreviations

- HBJ *Hanguk bulgyo jeonseo* [The Collected Texts of Korean Buddhism] (1984).
 Seoul: Dongguk University Press.
- T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* [Japanese Edition of the Buddhist Canon] (1924-35).
 Tokyo: Daizōkyōkai.
- Z *Zokuzōkyō* [*Dai nihon zokuzōkyō*] (1905-1912). Kyoto: Zōkyō shoin.