

On Translating Wonhyo

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On Translating Wŏnhyo

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Translating a corpus of works as voluminous and varied as that of Wŏnhyo presents a unique set of challenges to the scholar. Between eighty-six and 106 works are attributed to Wŏnhyo in Buddhist catalogues, of which some twenty-five are still extant. These works cover virtually the entire gamut of East Asian Buddhist materials available during his time, from the flower Garland (Hwaŏm) to the Mere-Representation (Yusik), to the Pure Land(Chŏngt'o) traditions. Given this huge corpus and range of material a multi-author project such as is being planned through Dongguk University is the only viable approach to the translation. In this brief talk, I seek to raise a few issues relevant to translating Wŏnhyo, in particular, as well as to the project, in general.

Many of Wŏnhyo's works are exegetical commentaries to scriptures and treatises important in East Asian Buddhism. There is probably no religious literature that is so deceptively simple, yet in fact so utterly prolix than is the commentarial literature of East Asian Buddhism, including that of Korea. Commentarial literature may seem relatively straightforward to the first-time reader. Typically the scholiast will include a brief introduction outlining the significance of the scripture that is the object of exegesis and the broad structure of the commentary. This introduction will be followed by passages of the scripture, followed by the exegete's comments, which will often include a line-by-line, or even word-by-word, exegesis. But this simple style masks what is often an immensely complex hermeneutical structure that is superimposed over the commentarial sections. This massive interpretative schema challenges the resources of any translator. Wŏnhyo's commentaries are typical of this East Asian commentarial style. His *kŭmgang sammaegyŏng non* (Exposition of the Adamantine Absorption Scripture), for example, uses a fourfold structure to explicate the scripture: a narration of its principal ideas, an analysis of its

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theme, an explanation of the title, and finally an explication of the text. The first three sections are essentially introductory, lasting only three Taishō pages, while the last goes on for some forty-five Taishō pages. In several typically complex sections of this fourth section, Wōnhyo's commentary includes five levels of subheading in its explication. It is absolutely crucial when translating this dense commentarial literature that this hermeneutical structure be carefully detailed, otherwise the train of Wōnhyo's argument will be virtually inaccessible to the reader. Wōnhyo's commentarial style is difficult but not intractable and it is up to the translator to clarify the argument for the reader by providing an adequate outline of the sections. In addition, it will be absolutely crucial to orient readers to the material before they begin to read the translation itself. An extensive introduction outlining the significance and contribution of the text, as well as an overview of its structure and style, should be an integral part of each translation. In addition, extensive annotation will be necessary in order to clarify the nuances of Wōnhyo's writing, ferret out his own cryptic references and allusions to Buddhist scriptural literature, and to detail the frequent numerical lists that pepper all of Buddhist exegetical writing. Without such scholarly apparatus, even the most dedicated of readers will be apt to throw up their hands in despair when trying to work through these densely-packed translations.

Wōnhyo's use of the East Asian commentarial style offers an important lesson as well about the broader context of his work: when translating Wōnhyo, scholars must keep always in mind the Sinitic, or perhaps better, the East Asian, context of his writing. Wōnhyo was not writing only for fellow Silla exegetes and adherents of Buddhism, but was addressing a range of scholarship that harkens back to China and, ultimately, even to India itself. Wōnhyo's work, we know, was influential throughout the East Asian region. Wōnhyo's commentary on the *Awakening of Faith*, for example, was vitally important in Fa-tsang's own work on this seminal text of the East Asian Buddhist tradition. Wōnhyo's writings on Pure Land topics are of crucial importance for developing an indigenous Japanese tradition of Pure land Buddhism. These intersections between Wōnhyo's works and emerging scholarly and praxis trends throughout East Asian must be explored and delineated in the introductions and annotation to the translations.

But knowing only classical Chinese and the Chinese Buddhist tradition will not, I fear, be sufficient to the task of rendering many of Wōnhyo's works. Ideally, all those involved in the translation project should have

substantial familiarity with the Silla Buddhist milieu, including doctrinal, praxis, social, and political contexts, as well as access to the extensive secondary scholarship by contemporary Korean scholars on Wŏnhyo's writings. Let me give two examples. As I have tried previously to show in one of my own books, the true import of a text like the *Adamantine Absorption Scripture* only emerges when we take into account intrasectarian rivalries within the Buddhist traditions of the time, especially between earlier exegetes of Hwaŏm and practitioners of the nascent Ch'an tradition. Such intrasectarian and social tensions are reflected in Wŏnhyo's own biography, as in the blatant attempts by unnamed elders to keep Wŏnhyo from lecturing on the *Adamantine Absorption Scripture*. Important nuances of Wŏnhyo's work may be missed without understanding Wŏnhyo's place within the Buddhist church of his day.

Access to modern Korean and Japanese scholarship is also crucial in dealing with issues of authenticity and the fragmentary nature of some of the works. Etani Ryūkai ("Shiragi gangyō no Yushin anrakudō wa gisaku ka?") has made persuasive arguments against attributing to Wŏnhyo authorship of the *Yusim allak to*, one of his major works on Pure Land Buddhism. Among the five principal reasons for his suspicions are the dearth of catalogue entries for the text until the Kamakura period, its quotation of passages from two works not translated until after 713 (twenty-seven years after Wŏnhyo's death), and the similarities between its first half and another of Wŏnhyo's work, the *Muryang su chongyo* (Thematic Essentials of *Amitābha Sūtra*). Etani therefore suspects that the *Yusim allak to* is actually a collection of excerpts from Wŏnhyo's *Thematic Essentials* compiled in Japan. For other texts where only fragments are extant, such as the *Simmun hwajaeng non* (Ten Approaches to the Reconciliation of Doctrinal Controversy) and *Chinyŏk Hwaŏmgyŏng so* (Commentary to the Chin Translation of Flower Garland Scripture), no adequate translation is possible without referring to the extensive Korean scholarship that attempts to detail the complete form of the texts. For the *Simmun hwajaeng non*, for example, Yi Chongik in 1977 attempted to reconstruct the arguments that may have characterized each of the ten approaches (*Wŏnhyo ūk kŭnbon sasang: Simmun hwajaeng non yŏn'gu*). An adequate treatment of those fragments will have to discuss what might have been the original form of the text and the place of the extant sections within the putative framework of the text as a whole. Without such a treatment, the tremendous significance of this text as the quintessential statement of Wŏnhyo's *hwajaeng sasang* (syncretic philosophy) will be lost on the reader. The introduction should also be able to make

reference to some of the epigraphical evidence discovered in recent years that proves how important the *Simmum hwajaeng non* was to Wŏnhyo's near contemporaries. The *Kosŏ-sa Sŏdang hwasang t'appi* (Stele Inscription to Master Sŏang [viz. Wŏnhyo] of Kosŏn-sa), the earliest extant account of Wŏnhyo's life, composed approximately 100 years after his death, mentions only two works of Wŏnhyo's: the *Simmum hwajaeng non* and (if my reading is correct) the *Hwaŏm chongyo* (Thematic Essentials of the flower Garland Scripture)(Cho Myŏggi, ed, *Wahyo taesa chŏjip*, p. 661, lines 10, 13). To Wŏnhyo's Silla contemporaries, these two works must have represented the quintessence of his thought: the *Hwaŏm chongyo*, because the thought of that scripture dominated philosophical speculation during the period; and the *Simmun hwajaeng non*, for its outline of the syncretic philosophy that was Wŏnhyo's major contribution to Korean Buddhist thought. The two works for which Wŏnhyo is best known today (his commentaries to the *Awakening of Faith* and the *Adamantine Absorption Scripture*) are not mentioned at all.

Some knowledge of Korean would also be helpful in translating certain of Wŏnhyo's works that may have been composed originally in vernacular Korean, as edifying tracts or popular songs. Wŏnhyo's *Palsim suhaeng chang*, which I have translated in *Sourcebook of Korean Civilization*, is one such text. Syntactically, the text is highly idiosyncratic as literary Chinese. It looks to me to have been composed originally in some incipient form of *hyangch'al* or *idu* (Wŏnhyo's son, Sŏl Ch'ong, is said to have been the inventor of the *idu*), two early systems of transcribing the vernacular language, and subsequently translated into literary Chinese, perhaps not even by Wŏnhyo himself such a hypothesis would account for the peculiar transposition of verb and object found throughout the text, a transposition that is quite ungrammatical in literary Chinese but would be perfectly grammatical in vernacular Korean. Iryŏn tells us in his *Samguk yusa* biography of Wŏnhyo that Wŏnhyo used to "sing and dance his way through thousands of villages and myriads of hamlets, touring while proselytizing in song. He encouraged all classes of people to recognize the name 'buddha'." The *Palsim suhaeng chang* looks to be exactly the type of edifying tract that Wŏnhyo would have used on these excursions into the countryside preaching to potential converts.

Let me conclude by making two important pleas. First, if truly critical editions of Wŏnhyo's works will not be made as part of the project, I urge the translation committee to use the editions of Wŏnhyo's works included in the *Han'guk Pulgyo chŏsŏ* (Complete Works of Korean Buddhism) as the bases for the translations. This collection, compiled at Dongguk University, is impeccably produced and deserves recognition in the West as the

standard edition for Korean indigenous Buddhist writings. For ease of reference, however, I recommend that page numbers in both the Taishō and HPC editions of the text be cited in the translations. Second, if this massive enterprise of translating all of Wŏnhyo's works is to be truly influential outside Korea, it is absolutely imperative that an appropriate publication venue be found in the West for the translations, preferably through a major university press. If the translations are published only in Korea, they will never receive widespread recognition outside Korea and the efforts of the translation team might be for naught. Perhaps best would be a co-publication arrangement, so that the volumes could appear simultaneously in both Korea and the West. The publication standards expected in scholarly translations by major university presses in the West ought also to be adhered to, including thorough annotation to the translation, extensive introductions to the scholarly importance of the translated work, and peer review of the manuscript given the massive amounts of time, labor, and money necessary to put together such a major translation project, these translations may be expected to be the only such a major translation project, these translations may be expected to be the only such renderings that will be made for the next thirty to forty years. We all share the awesome responsibility of ensuring that our translations will be able to stand the test of time.