

*Jin Y. Park in Conversation with Erin McCarthy, Leah Kalmanson, Douglas L. Berger, and Mark A. Nathan**

Kim Iryōp: Buddhist Feminist?

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As Jin Y. Park suggests in the introduction to her translation of Kim Iryōp's (born Kim Wōnju, 1896–1971) *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*,¹ Iryōp's life before and after becoming a monastic are not necessarily unrelated. A major figure in the Korean New Woman² movement of the 1920s before becoming a Zen Buddhist nun, Iryōp did not simply leave her feminist concerns at the door of the hermitage. As Park writes, her “creative activities as a writer, social rebellion as a new woman, and religious practice as a Zen Buddhist nun were paths toward the single goal of how to be fully human and thus to live as an absolutely free being with unlimited capacity” (2). Arguably, this is precisely the goal of feminism—to live fully human and free.

In the following discussion of Iryōp's work as translated and analyzed by Park in this recent volume, I examine Kim Iryōp's place as a woman in Buddhism and further explore the relationship between her feminism and her Buddhism. I pay particular attention to the relationship between Iryōp's work and that of Hiratsuka Raichō (1886–1971), the Japanese feminist thinker who in part influenced and inspired Iryōp's work. In addition, I hold that while Iryōp's Buddhist writings may not address feminist concerns directly, a closer analysis of some of the texts translated by Park both in this volume and elsewhere³ reveal that Iryōp's Buddhist philosophy is, in fact, related to her previously held fundamentally feminist concerns, such as freedom and a search for authentic selfhood.

Writers on Buddhism and feminism today note that for women to enter a *zendo* and be told to lose their “self” or kill their ego, they first need to have one. As feminist philosophy has demonstrated, for many women even today, this sense of one's own subjectivity has been lacking.⁴ As Sharon Suh says: “You need to be able to have a self before you can actually be selfless” (hooks et al. 2008: 70).⁵ Western feminist philosophers argue that women have often not had an identity of their own, but have been defined, as Simone De Beauvoir put it, as “not-man,” as the other, as a lack, and we find this theme present in Iryōp's work. The trajectory of both Kim Iryōp's feminism and her Buddhism makes perfect sense in light of this analysis. It was not until Iryōp established her own identity as a subject that she could move to a fully engaged Zen practice and then move beyond

* These essays engage Jin Y. Park's recent translation of the work of Kim Iryōp (1896–1971), a Buddhist nun and public intellectual in early twentieth-century Korea. Park's translation of Iryōp's *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014) was the subject of two book panels at recent conferences: the first a plenary session at the annual meeting of the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy (Monterey, California, 2015) and the second at the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association on a group program session sponsored by the International Society for Buddhist Philosophy (Washington, D.C., 2016). This exchange also includes a response from Park.

her subject identity, or her particular identity as a woman, to something beyond gender. Ignoring the question of gender in Buddhism and simply moving to the claim of “oneness” is spiritual bypass. If we do not pay attention to whose body is doing the sitting, and assume homogeneity of bodies and experiences, something important on the path to enlightenment gets left out. As Dōgen wrote: “To study the buddha way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things. When actualized by myriad things, your body and mind as well as the bodies and minds of others drop away. No trace of realization remains, and this no-trace continues endlessly” (Dōgen 1985: 70).⁶ Dōgen recognized that we must start with the study of our own self—with examining our own subjectivity, which includes our own particular embodied form—before we can move to oneness. If we ignore the particularities of the embodied self, then we cannot truly study it. Of course, as Grace Schireson explains in her book *Zen Women: Beyond Tea Ladies, Iron Maidens and Macho Masters*,⁷ “Doubtless there is the One. [However] It shows itself as rocks, mountains, and rivers—and as men and women. Or, as stated in the Zen literature, ‘To understand that all is one is not enough.’ The One reveals itself through myriad unique formations—even men and women” (Schireson 2009: xi–xii). In this light, then, we can read Iryōp’s early feminist work as laying the foundation for her spiritual awakening and her later Buddhist writing.

While in Japan in 1919 and 1920, Kim Iryōp met Korean intellectual Na Hyesōk (1896–1948), “the first female to paint in the Western style in Korea” (Park 2010: 4),⁸ with whom she would develop an enduring intellectual relationship. According to Park, Na was influenced by Hiratsuka Raichō during her time in Japan, and we know that Iryōp was influenced by Raichō as well, partly through her relationship with Na, for the two (Iryōp and Na) shared “their intellectual lives for years” (Park 2010: 4).

Raichō is the pen name of Hiratsuka Haru (1886–1971) (Yusa and Kalmanson 2014: 1).⁹ While Raichō is well known for founding the Bluestocking Society or *Seitōsha* and the journal *Seitō* in Japan in the early twentieth century, perhaps less well known, as Michiko Yusa notes, is that Raichō’s “impetus for social action” was intimately linked to her practice of Zen Buddhism and specifically her *kensho* experience (Yusa and Kalmanson 2014: 1). Iryōp, we know, turned to Buddhism *after* her feminism developed, whereas for Raichō the two developed hand in hand, and her *kensho* experience was, we might say, the underpinning of her vision of the New Woman in Japan. As Yusa puts it: “Her habit of independent thinking nurtured by her Zen practice liberated her from the yoke of hackneyed conventional concepts and ready-made ideas. Her development as a critical thinker was sustained by her religious awareness of the place of the ego in view of the boundlessness of life” (Yusa and Kalmanson 2014: 3–4). This view of the boundless potential of self permeated Raichō’s feminism and gives it a distinctively Zen flavor. In her famous *Seitō* manifesto “In the Beginning, Woman Was the Sun,” Raichō writes:

Genius in itself embodies mystery. The authentic person.

Genius is neither male nor female.

Categories like ‘Man’ and ‘Woman’, which describe sexual differences, belong to a self that has reached only the middle or even the lower stratum in the hierarchy of spiritual concentration. They belong to a false self, a mortal self destined to perish. It is utterly impossible for such categories to exist as part of the self of the highest stratum, the true self that does not die, that never will perish.” (Bardsley 2007: 95)¹⁰

Here we see clearly the influence of Zen in her thought—the idea of moving beyond gender to the nondualism of the oneness mentioned above. This same idea, although perhaps not as directly as in Raicho’s work, also appears in Iryōp’s Buddhist writings.

Like Iryōp, Raichō’s feminism embraced both the pragmatic and the metaphysical. For example, she was definitely concerned with the practical elements of women’s liberation, particularly the ability to direct one’s own life. As she put it, “I have always claimed the right to be the master of myself, content to be a free, self-governing person” (Bardsley 2007: 96). She was an advocate for better education, relief from the drudgery of housework, and relief from bearing the sole responsibility for family. But according to Jan Bardsley, her more fundamental goals for women’s liberation were metaphysical: “Since Raichō imagines liberation in a metaphysical sense, what she most wants for women is the time for meditation—not career opportunities, not the vote, not the mundane advantages of this world that would put women on a par with their brothers, but the passionate desire to look deep within for a genuine self, a self that transcends gender boundaries altogether” (Bardsley 2007: 89–90). Raichō and Iryōp share this desire even though their trajectories are different, even opposite—i.e., one moving from Buddhism to feminism and the other from feminism to Buddhism. Nevertheless, both agree that women need an identity of their own in order to be awakened—either as feminists or as Buddhists—and argue passionately that the oppression of women needs to be ended: “Raichō speaks in colorful language of how debilitated she felt when she realized that she was ‘woman’, and how confining gender roles are. They are of a ‘lower stratum.’ They are a ‘death’ to the limitless extensions of a person” (Bardsley 2007: 90). In other words, not giving women full status as persons precludes the possibility of any kind of awakening whatsoever.

Early on in her own feminist awakening, like Raichō, Kim Iryōp realized that women were not considered subjects in their own right. In 1920, in the third volume of *Sin yoja*, (*New Woman*), the journal founded by Kim Iryōp and inspired by Raichō’s *Seitō*, she writes, “Women have lost their rights as human beings. It has become a woman’s second nature to think of herself as incapable and weak, so that she yields all of her rights to man and endures the unspeakable brutality of oppression” (Kim Wōnju 2013a: 30). She points out that only men had access to education and that this is “counter to the inclusiveness of humanity. [...] In principle, woman’s life should be equal to man’s life, and the goal of woman’s life should be equal to that of man” (Kim Wōnju 2013a: 31). She continues: “From now on we must take off the yoke men have placed on us and be prepared to play a role as human beings in the truest sense. We are [rightful] members of human society and the family. If any one of us does not achieve self-awakening, it is as if human society is losing one of its own” (Kim Wōnju 2013a: 31).

In the previous issue of the journal she called women to reform, in order that “women can be awakened as human beings and pursue their self-development. [...] We desire to pursue all that life has to offer by cultivating ourselves with freedom, the rights, the duties, the labor and the pleasure that equality provides” (Kim Wōnju 2013b: 198.) An aspect of pleasure in equality that Iryōp and the other women in the movement wanted to claim, against the oppressive bonds of Confucian Korean society, was to love freely.

One of Kim Iryōp’s most famous essays and contributions to the idea of the New Woman in Korea was her revolutionary new theory of chastity. Its significance here is its emphasis on, as Park puts it, “the relationship between the new concept of chastity and the recognition of individual identity, in this case, with the individual meant to include both sexes. In asserting chastity as the highest expression of one’s love and thereby of one’s individual being, she hoped to connect it as intrinsic to the creation of a new world and new values” (Park 2014: 6). Part of this new world, of course, is the valuing of women as subjects in their own right, and for the New Woman movement

in Korea, this became linked to the development of “liberal love.” As Park explains in her contribution to the anthology *Makers of Modern Korean Buddhism* to help contextualize the importance of this aspect of the movement: “The right of a human being to make decisions as an independent individual has been emphasized in various aspects of modernity. Liberal love that was understood as an expression of an individual’s feelings toward another individual emerged as one major venue for the New Women in Korea to declare their individuality” (Park 2010: 112). And of course, there is a direct link between love and freedom for women of the time. To quote Park again, for the New Women in Korea, “liberal love affairs are manifestations of individuals’ freedom and, thus, of women’s liberation, which is further characterized as a feature of a modernized and civilized society” (Park 2010: 112).

It is clear then, that the movement in Iryōp’s writing is toward a new female subjectivity. Her writings on religion, which begin to appear in 1927, can also be understood in this light. While her family was progressive in their understanding of equality between men and women, Christianity, particularly at the time, was firmly entrenched in a patriarchal structure, and so her struggle to understand her position as an independent subject within such a framework fits with her struggle for the valuing of women as subjects in their own right in other areas of society.

When we read Iryōp’s work with this in mind, it is clear that her feminist writings and her Buddhist writings are on a continuum; this concern for the freedom to determine one’s own life—a concern shared, as we saw above, by Raichō—never left her writing or the way she lived her life. As Iryōp writes in the preface of *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, “The value of one’s existence is measured by whether one stands as an independent being, leading one’s life according to one’s own will. When we say ‘I,’ this ‘I’ has meaning only when we are fully in charge of ourselves” (Kim Iryōp 2014: 29).

In 1933 she joined the monastery, after having married a non-celibate lay Buddhist monk in 1929 and practicing as a lay practitioner up to this point. In 1935 she ceased publishing her writings until 1950. She was “one of the first generation of nuns in modern Korean Buddhism to pursue their practice at Kyonsong Hermitage” (Park 2014: 12) (the first meditation hall for nuns in Korea), where she basically stayed until her death. At the heart of Iryōp’s Buddhist practice, as Park points out—and, I propose, present in her feminism as well—is the theory of non-self, understood for Iryōp in particular as a source of freedom and equality. These values of freedom and equality are, of course, the very same values that were so central to her in the period in which she was part of the New Woman movement in Korea. With her turn to Buddhism, Iryōp further expands the meaning of the terms.

Iryōp’s Buddhism seems to have begun with an existential turn. According to Park, “Iryōp explains this awareness of existential reality as a desperate desire to become a ‘human being.’ To become a human being, to her, is to find the real self, the real ‘I’” (Park 2014: 14). I maintain that it was only her development of herself as a New Woman, an independent female subject, that allowed her to first, as she herself puts it in her preface to *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, “lose herself” and then find herself again, a much expanded sense of self, in the later part of her life in Buddhism. In fact, there were two moments of finding herself, I believe—the first as a New Woman, a female subject with the freedom to direct her own life, and then as the expanded self she experienced through her Buddhism. Park explains the sense of expanded self in Iryōp’s Buddhism this way:

The purpose of Buddhist practice for Iryōp is to enable the self to realize its true nature and thus liberate itself from its bound state. Iryōp asserts that this realization is absolutely necessary for at least two reasons. First, without this realization of the Buddhist teachings, we

believe that our being is limited to the boundary of our physical reality when in truth we are unbound beings with limitless capacity. Our existence is constrained by the limits created not only by our physical reality but also by our limited mental capacity. Second, without this realization, we cannot recognize the source of our suffering. Iryōp tells us that suffering in this life is caused by a failure to see the reality of one's self, which then becomes the cause for further suffering in future lives in the cycle of transmigration. With the realization of the limitless capacity of oneself comes the freedom of an open self. Iryōp calls this self the "great self" (*taea*). (Park 2014: 14)

On this view, the lack of contradiction between Iryōp's feminism and her Buddhism are clear. The mental state of oppression can be both from without and within, and we see the precursor to this idea in her feminist writings. In *Sin Yoja*, for example, she writes: "We believe that surrendering one's mentality is equivalent to surrendering one's body. If we want to free our minds, we must obtain freedom in a physical sense as well. The desire for physical freedom is first fed by the desire for mental freedom" (Kim Wōnju 2013b: 198). And then, in "Buddhism and Culture," she writes: "When an individual's life is at her or his disposal, there is no cause for complaint or discontent. That is because the person now has become free and peaceful. Freedom and peace are different names for one's own self. Searching for freedom and peace outside ourselves is like fire making a journey in search of fire" (Kim Iryōp 2014: 47). While Iryōp's work began with a search that might be characterized as a search outside of herself—fighting the patriarchal structure of Korean society at the time, demanding equality—the New Woman movement always maintained the thread of the inner search for authenticity, the inner search for self.

Despite a long period of silence in her writing, when she reemerged and began publishing her Buddhist writings, the same thread of a search for the "I" was still present. As Park so astutely observes: "The importance of Buddhist teaching to Kim Iryōp, then, lies not so much in the removal of the self as in liberating the self from the boundaries imposed on it, be they social, biological, or merely illusory" (Park 2010: 119).

I am grateful to Jin Y. Park for her translation and commentary on the work of Kim Iryōp, both in this volume, as well as her other publications. I hope here to have drawn the connection between Raicho's feminism and Buddhism and the work of Iryōp, as well as Iryōp's own feminism and Buddhism. What I have not had time to address here, and what Park's commentary and translations have inspired, is how we can use Iryōp's work to inspire the feminist Buddhism of today. Park's translations make this exciting and enriching avenue of research possible.

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- ¹ Jin Y. Park, “Translator’s Introduction: Kim Iryōp, Her Life and Thought,” in Kim Iryōp, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, trans. Jin Y. Park (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2014), 1–26.
- ² As explained by Jin Y. Park, the term “New Women,” in addition to being the title of the journal founded by Kim Iryōp in 1920, “referred to those women who had received or were receiving the newly introduced Western-style public education” (Park 2017: 31). The term also referred to women who were concerned with issues such as gender equality, economic independence, rejection of male domination, and the education of “Old Women”—those who did not receive a western-style education and who were not aware of these issues. It was not a homogeneous group, and there were at least three distinct “branches” of New Women: 1) liberal New Women (most active during the early 1920s) concerned with female sexuality and interpersonal relationships; 2) a group, influenced by Marxist social theory, that critiqued the liberal women’s movement and was active in the late 1920s and early 1930s; and 3) the nationalist New Women, whose approach was influenced by male intellectuals. This group, prevalent in the 1930s, did not focus on the liberation of individual women, but rather consolidated into promoting a view of women as “wise mother and good wife” who worked for the liberation of Korea (Park 2017: 31–2).
- ³ See Wōnju Kim, “The Self-Awakening of Women,” in *New Women in Colonial Korea*, ed. Hyaewool Choi (London and New York: Routledge, 2013a), 30–31; and “Women’s Demands and Arguments,” in *New Women in Colonial Korea*, ed. Hyaewool Choi (London and New York: Routledge, 2013b), 197–99.
- ⁴ For more on Buddhism and feminism, see Erin McCarthy, “A Zen Master Meets Contemporary Feminism: Reading Dōgen as a Resource for Feminist Philosophy,” in *Buddhist Responses to Globalization*, ed. Leah Kalmanson and James Mark Shields (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), 131–48; and “Embodying Change: Buddhism and Feminist Philosophy” in *Buddhist Philosophy: A Comparative Approach*, ed. Steven M. Emmanuel (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 189–203.
- ⁵ bell hooks, Sharon Suh, Karma Lekshe Tsomo, and Susanne Mrozik, “Women Changing Buddhism: Feminist Perspectives” in *Women Practicing Buddhism: American Experiences*, ed. Peter N. Gregory and Susanne Mrozik (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2008), 67–90.
- ⁶ Dōgen, “Actualizing the Fundamental Point” [Genjō kōan], in *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dōgen*, trans. Robert Aitken and Kazuaki Tanahashi, ed. Kazuaki Tanahashi (New York: North Point Press, 1985), 69–73.
- ⁷ Grace Schireson, *Zen Women: Beyond Tea Ladies, Iron Maidens and Macho Masters* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2009).
- ⁸ Jin.Y. Park, “Gendered Response to Modernity: Kim Iryōp and Buddhism,” in *Makers of Modern Korean Buddhism*, ed. Jin Y. Park (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010), 109–30.
- ⁹ Michiko Yusa and Leah Kalmanson, “Raichō: Zen and the Female Body in the Development of Japanese Feminist Philosophy,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Japanese Philosophy*, ed. Bret W. Davis (online version, 2014).
- ¹⁰ Jan Bardsley, *The Bluestockings of Japan: New Woman Essays and Fiction from Seito, 1911-1916* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007).

The Personal, the Political: Zen Practice and Feminist Critique

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As I was reading Jin Y. Park's introduction to and translation of Kim Iryōp's reflections, I was reminded of the classic feminist slogan, "the personal is political." On the one hand, this slogan means that what happens in the home, or what happens in private, is a reflection of the larger society. On the other hand, the expression speaks to the possibility of resistance—that is, the possibility that changes in personal behaviors can have social and political consequences. This latter possibility can be difficult to articulate or envision, especially in areas of continental feminism and critical theory that tend to emphasize the dominance of social power. In this sense, the slogan "the personal is political" has come to mean, "the personal disappears into the political," or "the personal is political through and through, with no remainder." The individual subject is the *effect* of social power and political institutions, and there is no subject to be found outside of these structures. I have long been interested in how this deflationary account of the individual maps onto the Buddhist doctrine of no-self. And, related to that interest, I have tended to read the Buddhist doctrine of no-self in a fairly straightforward way—that is, the self is empty of own-being; it is relational through and through, with no remainder.

However, the more I engage with Park's presentation of Iryōp's work, the more I see remainders of self in Buddhist thought. In some cases, these remainders of self cycle through different lifetimes until they reach final nirvāṇa. In other cases, these remainders of self enter the Pure Land after physical death. In almost all cases, these remainders of self are enmeshed in a karmic economy, often bogged down with karmic debts, but also capable of generating karmic merit and donating it to other selves.

Many popular accounts of Buddhism aimed at a western audience tend to write these remainders of self out of the picture. The general trend is to de-mythologize Buddhism, to erase not only remainders of self but also any aspect of the supernatural, and to make Buddhism seem as humanistic and science-friendly as possible. And, of course, Buddhism *is* humanistic and science-friendly—but that is not the full picture. Buddhism also concerns, as Iryōp teaches it, not only observable everyday life but "the next life" and "the innumerable chapters that are the lives and deaths to come" (35). Park frames Kim Iryōp's philosophy in terms of a confrontation between traditional and modern Korea (Park 2014: 1),¹ and I think we see this confrontation with modernity in Iryōp's engagement with Buddhism, as she balances the humanistic and science-friendly with the miraculous and supernatural. What she gives us, as I hope to show in this brief commentary, is an inspiring account of the political potency of Buddhist practice.

1 Remainders of Self

Kim Iryōp speaks frequently of the self—the true self, the whole self, the "I" that exists before and after the arising of thought, which is the union of self and other, human and divine, animate and inanimate, good and bad. As Iryōp says in her Preface:

We must give up everything to possess everything. This is the principle of the universe. Therefore, when self and others become one, when a demon and the Buddha become

unified, when time, space, inside, and outside make a unity, this self is the complete ‘myself.’ Unless everything becomes one’s self, one cannot control one’s own life, and when one is not the master of one’s life, there cannot be freedom or peace (30).

Iryōp speaks with great urgency about the necessity of every single human being realizing this true self—those of us who have not realized the true self have, quite literally, lost our minds. Iryōp observes people around her who live in this state of having lost their minds, and she frequently compares them to “dolls” (e.g., 35, 37, 46, and elsewhere). They are like robots or zombies; they go through the motions of doing and acting, but they do not *truly* do anything, because they are neither free nor in control of themselves.

Iryōp is clear that there can be no social change in a society of mindless dolls. She says: “How, then, do we find the complete self? This is the big issue. Only when this urgent issue is resolved do we finally become human beings; only when we become human beings does the life of a human being begin; and only then will we be able to think about family life, social responsibilities, and so on” (30). As Park comments, “When she became a Buddhist practitioner and then a Buddhist nun, Iryōp’s attention gradually shifted from social conditions to existential reality” (Park 2014: 20). Iryōp spoke less about the responsibility to work for social change and more about the responsibility to realize the true self. Park continues: “The question that she does not address in her writings in this context is whether it is possible to carry out that responsibility without actually changing social structures, or whether an individual’s mental transformation through religious practice is sufficient” (Park 2014: 21).

This brings us back to the question of structural change and how we understand the place of the personal within the political. I want to avoid a naïve focus on individual agency—i.e., the claim that if we all become better people, then we will have a better society. After all, no matter how good a single individual becomes, she is not absolved of her complicity in oppressive social power structures. This reflects the structure-level approach to the question of social justice that I appreciate in contemporary continental philosophy, critical theory, and a good portion of feminist discourse. However, thinkers such as Kim Iryōp push us to think again about the question of personal transformation—it seems that, in any instance of structural change, some sort of personal transformation must also be at stake. But what is the person? What is “personal” for the person? And what sort of transformation do we mean? These are the questions that Kim Iryōp asks us to reconsider.

Firstly, what is the person? At times Iryōp’s description of the true self sounds like some sort of mystical monism, as when she says, “The Buddha is the pronoun for all of existence, an alias for the universe as well as the real name for each of us” (45). But a closer reading reveals the characteristically Buddhist side of her conception of the person. As she says, unlike other religions such as Protestantism and Catholicism, “The Buddha taught the law of causality, the understanding of which leads one to the path of independence” (38). The Buddhist law of causality explains the basic mechanisms by which the self both falls prey to and becomes free from suffering. A series of causal links has led us to this situation where we now find ourselves, in which we have lost our minds, and the undoing of these causal links will free us.

This law of causality operates in humans at the most basic level. As Iryōp says, “Human beings primarily consist of the material mind that senses joy and sorrow” (34). This is the mind that acts and reacts, that negates and affirms, that feels desire and repulsion. When we blindly chase our desires down the corridors of this mind, we become lost in our own attachments, through which we build up a limited but coherent sense of self. Iryōp says: “Being attached to the fragments of our

own thoughts, we have lost the universal ‘I’ and mistake the ‘I’ that is as small as a particle of dust for the great ‘I’” (40–1). The process of thinking, and reflecting on thinking, and constantly attributing all this thinking to the limited self, sustains the ego and contributes to its suffering. In contrast, says Iryōp, “Only when we live according to the ‘mind of nothingness’ [...] which is the thought before a thought arises, does life as a human being begin” (34). The unity of this original mind, the mind of nothingness, exists both before and after the fragmentary thoughts that we have stitched together into our small selves.

So, given this structure of the small self and the great self, what is “personal” for Kim Iryōp’s person? In one sense, we might simply state that the great self is most personal. Or, as Iryōp says, “The arising of thoughts constitutes the factual reality, whereas the cessation of thoughts constitutes the inner reality of the self, which is creativity” (42). As we know from Iryōp’s comments elsewhere, this inner reality is synonymous with the mind of nothingness, the original mind, and the non-thought that exists before and after the arising of fragmentary thoughts. But other synonyms complicate Iryōp’s portrayal of the personal—for example, as she says above, the inner reality of the self is “creativity.” Or, as she says in another passage, “Action is the other side of thought; this action is the thought before a thought arises” (38). This reminds us that, unlike those dolls who have lost their minds, the true self is the only self capable of true action, i.e., capable of acting freely and efficaciously. Thus, contrary to any sort of monism, we can see that the true self has *not* melted into some mystical cosmic nothingness; rather the true self is creative and dynamic. At times Iryōp sounds almost Nietzschean in her descriptions of the creativity, power, will, and self-control that the true self possesses.

In this context, the question of what is personal becomes: “What does this true self create, and why?” That is the context in which I want to explore the last topic, i.e., the nature of transformation. The transformation that I am interested in is not the transformation from the small self to the great self. I think that we can fairly quickly guess what the Buddhist answer here will be—it is some sort of enlightenment experience, or an awakening of compassion, or a realization of emptiness, and so forth. The other transformations I am interested in are the ways that the true self continues to creatively transform itself and its world after this initial awakening experience.

2 The Practice of Politics and the Politics of Practice

My hypothesis is that Iryōp is claiming that the true self can transform karmic conditions. In other words, personal transformation is at once the transformation of the karmic conditions in which all beings are located, because of the basic truth of non-duality to which Iryōp adheres. The functioning of karma is what links personal transformation to structural change. Let me explain why I think the invocation of karma here is a better understanding of Iryōp’s politics than what I will call the simplistic understanding.

A simplistic account of Iryōp’s politics would run like this: She spends the first half of her life working for social change. Then, at a key turning point, she realizes that social change is not possible until after our existential dilemmas have been addressed. After this point, she retreats to a monastery and works on her own existential liberation—the regaining of her original mind. After a period of many years, she emerges with some new writings, exhorting everyone to follow her lead. In other words, she advises that we must all work privately toward existential liberation first, and only after that can we come together again and work toward social change.

There is certainly evidence in Iryöp's writings that this account might be correct. For example, she says, "an ordained person completes her education at a monastery and thus learns how to fully utilize the independent mind. [...] Having realized the independent mind, she can return to the secular world and live free from the dualities [...]" (93). Elsewhere, she says, "What is urgent at this point is to build meditation halls everywhere, to provide places to practice. [...] World peace and human freedom will be accomplished when each nation makes the effort to see that each individual becomes a true human being" (90). Such passages do seem to indicate that Iryöp is instructing people to work on their existential liberation first, before working for social change.

However, as Park makes clear, we should question this bifurcated account of Iryöp's life (Park 2014: 1–2). For one, the simplistic account runs counter to some of the basic Buddhist doctrines that Iryöp consistently upholds. In particular, this narrative assumes that human beings are separate atomistic entities, and that society is a collection of separate individuals—accordingly, if you gather a lot of mindless dolls into a social group, then you will have an unhealthy society; in contrast, if you gather together a group of true human beings, then you will have an enlightened society. But nothing in Iryöp's writings suggests that this is how she believes either individuals or social groups function. She says over and over that the arising of a single thought is the arising of the entire universe, a single grain of sand is "the very unity composing the entire body of the universe" (38), and a single person is "the whole of the embodiment of the universe" (38). Her idea of the non-duality of self and other runs counter to the idea that separate individuals *first* come together and *then* form a unity. Rather, we are already embedded in each other, as it were. Here, Iryöp's picture of the non-duality of self and other reminds us of Huayan teachings on the interpenetration of all phenomena. This is the sort of radical non-duality that informs Iryöp's understanding of people, societies, and social change.

A more complicated account of Iryöp's politics will reflect this non-duality. In a more complicated account, when Iryöp retreats to the monastery, she is not taking a break from politics or setting aside her commitment to the women's liberation movement. Rather, her monastic practice is itself a force for social change. This statement makes sense if we take into consideration the fact that, in Buddhism, monastic practices are karmically efficacious, both in terms of generating karmic merit, and also in terms of facilitating liberation from karma altogether. Iryöp says: "a free individual [is] relieved of the constraints of karma, living as the controller of her original mind, of which she is the master" (54). This person can act without generating karma, because he or she acts selflessly, that is, with the "mind of nothingness."

A person who acts in this way can affect the entire karmic network that shapes present conditions. She exists in the karmically conditioned world, but she acts freely, and thus her actions, rather than being subsumed within the existing karmic order, instead have the potential to change it, hence opening up a path toward liberation for others as well.

This sense of our interconnectedness seems crucial to understanding Iryöp's later writings on "life energy" in the final chapters of the collection. There, she says: "The existential value of a living organism lies in its capacity to attain life energy and utilize that energy at its will" (217). In these passages, Iryöp uses this term "life energy" where she was earlier using terms such as "great self" or "complete person" or "original mind." Invoking a tree metaphor, she says that life energy, although formless, is the root and trunk of all life. In contrast, the stems and branches on the tree have forms, which are shaped through the accumulation of karma: "a group of sentient beings whose karma is similar in nature comprise a stem and live in the same universe" (218). On this metaphor, to change karmic conditions quite directly affects the very form that life energy has taken—it is structural change on a universal scale.

In this metaphor, on the one hand, we see the Mahāyāna interplay between emptiness and form: life energy, which is synonymous with emptiness, is the formless root of all life, and life, in the form that we know it and live it, is shaped by karmic conditions. On the other hand, we see what I take to be a non-typical description of emptiness as a kind of energy or force that can be utilized to creatively transform one's self and one's world. Iryōp says:

Emptiness is the foundation of all things; hence, once you attain emptiness, there is nothing you cannot do. A being is more properly called a beast who does not know that emptiness is the self [...] and thus fails to utilize this emptiness. A great artisan knows how to mold things [...] likewise the Buddha or God refers to the being that is capable of fully grasping emptiness and utilizing it to its utmost. To take refuge in the Buddha or God [...] is thus to live as the artist-creator of the universe (22).

What we see here, then, is a person who can quite literally transform the conditions around her, who can transform her life and the lives of others, through the radical creativity of emptiness.

Meditation is the practice that enables this power by cultivating the creativity that affects both self and other. Iryōp says: "The only answer is meditation (meditation means cultivation, and cultivation is a way to recover one's self, which is the original mind of each individual, which is creativity, and which is the self in which self and others are united" (89). This is why I said earlier that, for Iryōp, meditation is not a break from politics but is itself a force for social change. As we see, meditation does not just affect the single self who meditates—rather, it conducts a potent energy that reaches out and transforms the karmic conditions in which many selves are united. For Iryōp, we might say not that "the personal is political" but rather that "practice is political."

Now, we could conclude, somewhat cynically, that this all sounds like magic, this utilization of emptiness as a force that changes the world around us. And, indeed, Iryōp does say: "What people call supernatural powers or miracles are activities of those who have attained true humanhood and thus utilize their full capacities" (234). This takes us back to Park's comments about the conflict between modernity and tradition. Our modern sensibilities might encourage us to dismiss Iryōp's ideas about superhuman powers and pervasive life-energies. But I am interested in taking Iryōp seriously; that is, taking seriously this idea that self-realization is a transformative social practice. What if structural change, in the socio-political sense, does demand of us radical personal transformation? What if the power to shape the conditions around us does require a dedicated and life-consuming practice such as Iryōp's monasticism? I am not sure whether Iryōp's ideas can exist outside of the karmic environment that informs her understanding of the efficacy of meditation, but she has inspired me to imagine structural change on new levels—even, at the risk of seeming un-modern, on the level of the miraculous.

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Exercise in Comparative Philosophy of Religion with Tim Knepper (Springer, 2017), and *Buddhist Responses to Globalization* with James Mark Shields (Lexington, 2014). She currently serves on the editorial team at the *Journal of Japanese Philosophy* (SUNY).

¹ Jin Y. Park, “Translator’s Introduction: Kim Iryōp, Her Life and Thought,” in Kim Iryōp, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, trans. by Jin Y. Park, (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2014), 1–26.

Reconciling Buddhism and Bringing It to Life: The Value of Kim Iryōp's Philosophy

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The reasons why we value Kim Iryōp's philosophy, in both the forms of her pre-monastic feminism and her monastic philosophy of religion, are many. Her participation in the broader general East Asian and the particular Korean flourishings of feminism at the beginning of the twentieth century made her into a significant figure in her early life. Her representations of the meaningfulness of Buddhist thought and practice in the decades after her tonsure, as has been pointed out in the scholarship of Jin Y. Park, were not a radical break from the reflections that occupied her as a youth, but were instead a reworking of those concerns through the application of Buddhist teachings and experiences, particularly as these illuminated the trials of her personal life (Park 2017: 11–2).¹ In this short essay, I would like to focus, however, on two specific respects in which Kim's writings intensify the significance of Buddhism, particularly for scholars like us who can easily lose sight of the forest for the trees in the complexity of this ancient and multi-cultural tradition. The first involves what I will call a reconciling of the large historical themes of discovery and recovery as motifs of Buddhist awakening. The second I will dub Kim's insistence that Buddhism, through application to the challenges and issues of everyday modern and post-modern life, should be for us, in the idiomatic sense of the English word here, "real."

Beginning with the first theme, the distinction that I make between the motifs of awakening as discovery and recovery is a broad one meant to track basic differences between classical South Asian and East Asian manifestations of Buddhism. The overarching orientation in South Asian traditions of Buddhism is to view human life as a cosmically unique opportunity to break the bonds of afflicted attachment that chain embodied beings to desire for the world. Being born entails that one is still karmically fettered, and it is only through the stores of karmic merit and pure psychic seeds built up through many lifetimes, or through the help of bodhisattvas, that one may acquire the capacity to experience awakening. In this "acquisition model" of practice and realization, the culminating illumination of our awareness is an achievement, a discovery. However, at certain crucial moments in the fifth- and sixth-century transmission of Buddhist ideas to the cultural complexes of East Asia, via notions such as the translator and commentator Paramārtha's "untainted cognition" and "Buddha nature," it became widely accepted that awakening was not a fundamental transformation of human nature, but instead a return to its most genuine source (Berger 2015: 92–3).² Once this acceptance had taken hold in a number of mainstream schools, awakening was conceived as a recovery, a realization based not on what we not yet were, but on what we most immanently are. Of course, certain accommodations had to be made to the foregoing discovery model, as practice was still acknowledged to be necessary to re-attaining our innermost nature, and so good teachers, de-habitation tools like *koans*, and proper pedagogical lineages were thought crucial to a Buddhist life. All the same, these stubbornly contrary idealizations of enlightenment as discovery and recovery that came to typify South and East Asian approaches to Buddhism have proven challenging for philosophers to reconcile, from ancient times until today.

Kim Iryōp's works seem to me to hold fast to both approaches to Buddhist awakening, seeking not so much to erect a bridge of logical consistency between them, but rather to show how both discovery and recovery are intertwined in experience and praxis. In her 1950s commemorative essay on Master Man'gong, Kim speaks to the doubts about her ability to achieve awakening that pervaded her early *dharma*-question encounters (66–7). She turned to the established practice of

hwadu meditation, which had been promulgated by the thirteenth century Son philosopher Pojo Chinul. In Chinul's thought, thoroughly influenced by the "recovery" representation of awakening, though sentient beings are in terms of their existence the same as Buddha-nature, practice is still necessary because their realization must take place in time. *Hwadu*, which forces the practitioner to struggle with doubt on one word or phrase from a classical Son exchange between "guest" and "host," itself confronts us with this very paradox of discovery and recovery, with, that is, the combination of a struggle to resolve a great existential doubt with the realization that one already possesses the answer in one's own existence. Furthermore, Kim's formulation of the relationship between the "small I" (*soa*) and the "great I" (*taea*) also has relevance here. It is the small self that feels driven to certain actions and commitments by external circumstances and forces, while the great self, which is the master of its own actions and meaning, though already present is what is being sought. In one sense, then, the Buddhist practitioner, in their pursuit of awakening, is attempting to discover the meaning of their existence as the small self, but from the perspective of the great self, nothing new is gained in this pursuit, as the practitioner was the great self all along. However, in putting the matter of practice in these terms, we must remember that the "great I" is not, in Kim Iryŏp's thought, some atomic being that exercises autonomy in opposition to other beings or its environment. Rather, as she puts it, "the universe is the original body of one's self," and "the Buddha is the unification of this and that, yesterday and today, you and I, the unified self" (92). The recovery of the self is therefore the recovery of the workings of all things as they are. But Kim Iryŏp does not attempt to completely dissolve the small self into the great self, or explain the great self in terms of the small self; instead she reveals how both are ever at work in our experience. Praxis entails then not a resolution of the tension between discovery and recovery in Buddhist life, but instead a reconciliation between them in terms of their ongoing interdependence.

In a certain sense, the motifs of discovery and recovery in Buddhist awakening map onto the way Kim Iryŏp negotiates the fluid boundaries of the external and the internal in our experience, and in the fashion in which she triangulates notions of "Buddha," "demon," and "human being." It sometimes appears, from Kim's insistence that the genuine self is one not compelled by external forces, that she unambiguously favors the recovery model of awakening. Indeed, she characterizes the desirous pursuit of or psychological reliance on putatively "external" things, including the Buddha himself, as "demonic." Discovery, the attempt to acquire a realization or knowledge of which one is not yet in possession, must by definition be a kind of pursuit. Complete independence would seem to entail that nothing really needs to be discovered, and independence of the self is repeatedly emphasized in Kim's works. However, Kim also dramatically states that "the unity of a demon and the Buddha comprises the attainment of Buddhahood (wholesome being)" (108). The process of doubting, struggle, human feeling, and the pursuit of meaning is not simply shunted aside as inessential to the consummate realization of unity, but is instead what facilitates that realization, and what that realization incorporates into its wholeness. Indeed, this unity of Buddha and demon in awakening is rooted in the human experience, and this is precisely what lies at the heart of Kim's conviction that attaining Buddhahood means attaining humanhood.

This last point allows us to turn to the second topic of this short paper. I would like to elaborate on Kim's remarkable ability to make Buddhism precisely about our lives, about our reality in the world. The degree to which Iryŏp disclosed the sensitive nature of her personal relationships and the challenges of her childhood in *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun* is a testament to how strongly she believed the Buddhist *dharma* is written within the narrative of human experience. It is not at all insignificant that Kim's Buddhist praxis and convictions are set within the historical conflict between doctrinal Buddhism and the traditions of meditation that had been so crucial to Buddhism's

development in the Korean context. But this conflict in Korean Buddhism does not merely represent a hermeneutic fact necessary to our consideration of Kim Iryŏp's philosophy. It also reminds us of our own situatedness as academics and scholars of Buddhist thought. It is all too easy for many of us to implant ourselves within the vocabulary, abstractions, subtleties, and arguments that have punctuated the history of Buddhist philosophy in classical times as well as in the present debates and dialogues between Buddhism and modern and post-modern western thought. We stake our claims and make our reputations on our own professionalized forms of doctrinal expertise coupled with whatever interpretive tools and philosophical novelties we can offer to our work. And there is value in this scholarly activity, to be sure. But there are also perils associated with it. One of those perils is precisely to fall for the temptation to distance Buddhist insights from the unfolding of our own lives, and thus to dilute the potential significance that they may have for us. Such a danger is hardly unique to the study of Buddhism, by any means—it can happen with any philosopher or tradition that is fetched into the coils of academic analysis. Nor does making this point imply that we should all strive to be monastics. It merely highlights the fact that attending to the works of Kim Iryŏp affords us the chance to remind ourselves that Buddhist life is very much about personal transformation and the social goings-on of our existence in the world. Buddhism contributed a very great deal to Kim's understanding of her relationships, of her family's inherited religiosity, of her foregoing participation of the movement of "New Women," of the crisis of modernity in Korea. Buddhist praxis then is not merely about philosophical nuances and tricky conversations between teachers and students in lecture halls that took place centuries ago. It is about our lives, and all their attendant contingencies, here today.

Kim's willingness to be transparent about all of the ways Buddhist teachings impacted her understanding of her personal life, sometimes in painful detail, in her writings of the 1950s and after was of course, as she herself admitted, an attempt to popularize Buddhism. But what was the assumption behind the belief that writing about Buddhism and life in the ways she did would work? It was the assumption that what Buddhism had to say about selfhood, desire, interdependence, and compassion has a bearing on the daily struggles in which we find ourselves. Such a bearing is easy to forget during those heated moments of life when we are caught in the throes of conflict, passion, political difficulties, and rhetoric, and have to make choices about which persons we will trust and which persons we will oppose. It was also the assumption, stated above, that Buddhahood is about humanhood. Instead of writing, so to speak, a hagiography about herself, Kim in *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun* speaks about her struggles, her failures, her pain, her misgivings both about others and about her own capacities to make progress on the path to awakening. This kind of "confessional" approach makes Buddhism meaningful for all of us who undergo similar trials. If Kim Iryŏp is correct in believing that the "great self" is the interconnectedness of all persons, creatures, and things in the world, then writing about Buddhism in a first-person voice is to write about Buddhism as it may touch us all in our living, embodied existences. And such first-person, "confessional" talk is not merely popularization, but is philosophically significant, if, that is, philosophy should help us to comprehend and properly orient our lives. And that is precisely what we ought to expect of philosophy. In terms of her genre and significance, therefore, it seems to me that what figures such as Augustine and Kierkegaard did for the history of Christian philosophy in their most widely read and timeless works Kim Iryŏp does for us in her works on Buddhism. For as undeniably prescient as the vocabulary of "emptiness" and "nothingness" is in Buddhist philosophy, Kim Iryŏp helps us to keep Buddhism, in the idiomatic sense of the English word here, "real."

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- ¹ Jin Y. Park, *Women and Buddhist Philosophy: Engaging with Zen Master Kim Iryōp*, Korea University Studies Series (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2017).
- ² Douglas L. Berger, *Encounters of Mind: Luminosity and Personhood in Indian and Chinese Thought*, SUNY Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture (Albany: SUNY Press, 2015).

On Becoming Fully Human: Creativity and Self in Kim Iryōp's Buddhist Philosophy

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Jin Park's translation of Kim Iryōp's post-ordination writing is a welcome addition to the limited source material on modern Korean Buddhism available in English. Recent initiatives undertaken to address this paucity, such as the series through which this translation was produced, the Korean Classics Library: Philosophy and Religion, tend to focus heavily on the writings of monks, so the fact that this translation provides wider access to the rich philosophical thought and Buddhist outlook of a twentieth-century Korean Buddhist nun is especially appreciated. Because Kim Iryōp's original Korean text, as well as the set of translations that appear in Jin Park's *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, consists of heterogeneous material composed over many years, rather than being written as a single philosophical treatise, the ideas expressed can sometimes seem repetitive. Iryōp indicates in her introduction, however, that this feature was actually intentional. It was done, she claims, in order to reach a broader audience, particularly people who might otherwise be uninterested in books and who are unlikely to read past the first chapter of the ones that they do start (31). Nevertheless, the ideas expressed in this text possess a consistency that enables us to discern some common threads in Iryōp's philosophy and worldview.

One of these threads is her concept of creativity, which she identifies as the ground of existence and the essence of human freedom. These ideas are intertwined with the closely related concepts of self, original mind, and what Iryōp calls being a "person of culture" (*munhwa'in*). Creativity (*ch'angjosŏng*) is a concept that appears consistently throughout Iryōp's writings to express a fundamental characteristic of human existence, or what it means to be fully human. In purely East Asian Buddhist terms, it seems roughly equivalent with the Buddha nature or perhaps the *tathāgatagarbha*, meaning the womb or embryo of the Tathāgata (Buddha). Creativity, however, is not limited to human existence. As Iryōp states, "A creator is not a special being. Even an insect can be a creator if it recovers its original mind (creativity)" (83). Creativity and original mind are in some sense interchangeable terms for the same underlying reality. As Jin Park explains, "This creativity is for Iryōp each individual's original mind (*pon ma'im*), a mind that is absolutely open and the source of one's existence. An individual who realizes original mind becomes a 'complete being' (*wanin*), a being whose existence embraces the entire universe" (Park 2014: 15).¹

The unity of the individual or self with the entire universe is a recurrent theme in Iryōp's writing. She talks at great length about the self in *Reflections*, frequently contrasting people's fragmented sense of self or partial self (small-self or the ego) with the great self (the self before a thought arises), the latter of which is equated with the entire universe. Not comprehending the unity of self and all things, Iryōp says that "humans have become betrayers of the universe" and that "the earth is a ghetto of lost selves" (92). Park explains in her notes, "To discover and learn the true nature of oneself, or of 'I', is the beginning and end of Iryōp's Buddhist philosophy" (261). Discovering one's true nature means, for Iryōp, nothing less than attaining salvation and liberation, and this can only be done by destroying the egoistic self or small self and becoming one with the universe, which is equal to the great self:

When the small self is extinguished and the person is united with the great self, he has attained the state of absolute salvation. This is the time when he recovers his complete self.

This is absolute oneness. This complete self is a complete entity that is at one with even a piece of shit or a handful of dirt (106).

Someone who has recovered his or her great self is designated a “person of culture.” What exactly Iryöp means by this expression requires some explication. “Iryöp’s use of the expression ‘culture’ is unique in her discussion of Buddhism,” Jin Park points out. “Culture to her is an expression of the totality of human beings’ creative activities” (Park 2014: 22). A person of culture is someone who is totally free and in full command of her creativity or original mind, which is to say an awakened being. Iryöp calls this person “one who has freed herself from material constraints and attained liberation” (Kim Iryöp 2014: 52).

Culture is most commonly viewed as a collective or social phenomenon that gets transmitted to each individual, who then possesses the relevant cultural knowledge through socialization and contributes in his or her own way to creative modifications of the shared culture passed down to future generations. But this does not appear the definition that Iryöp has in mind, which makes the word “culture” an interesting choice as a modifier for an individual who has achieved freedom and liberation in the Buddhist sense of awakening. It is important to understand that, much like a person’s basic humanity or self, individuals can be cut off from culture (or at least authentic culture) in Iryöp’s thinking. She clearly believes that culture is disappearing or has already disappeared in today’s world. As she plainly states, “Ours is a time when all of the authentic cultures have disappeared” (50). And yet, even in a world where culture is disappearing, the commitment to “our cultural mind” must remain firm in her view. Iryöp calls this “our life code,” which is “eternal and the fundamental entity of all the cultural assets that comprise cultural identity; it is the true identity of one’s self and the creativity of all beings” (54). It resides, in other words, at the very core of human nature, as well as our Buddha nature.

To become fully human, therefore, means to become a person of culture, which can only be accomplished by breaking free from the small self (ego) and unifying with the great self (the entire universe beyond subject-object distinctions) and recovering our innate creativity (original mind). Another name for this person of culture or complete person is Buddha, for as Iryöp maintains, “attaining buddhahood means attaining humanhood” (42). If this is the case, however, we might ask why she prefers the word creativity instead of more standard Buddhist terminology, such as Buddha nature, the One Mind, suchness, no-thought, or perhaps most appropriately, emptiness? The answer lies, I believe, not only in her personal experience as a writer and her familiarity with the creative process before becoming a nun, although that likely influenced her the most, but also in her stated reason for writing and her intended audience. It is important to remember that Iryöp had stopped writing after her ordination as a nun in deference to her master, Man’gong (1871–1946), who was an iconoclastic promoter of traditional Korean Sōn (Zen) meditative practices in the early twentieth century and a staunch supporter of Korean Buddhist nuns.

She spells out clearly her intention in the preface: “This book is a subtle attempt at proselytizing Buddhist teachings to help readers come to the realization that, having lost ourselves, we need to find and know our real selves so that we can become real human beings” (31). The use of this word ‘creativity’ instead of a Buddhist technical term makes the process of becoming fully human seem less arcane to those who might not be philosophically inclined, thus allowing Iryöp to connect it to the everyday struggles people face: “The problems of life can be easily resolved if everyone unfailingly makes the effort to find his or her original ground of existence, which is creativity, and continues to pursue that path” (36). Less obvious, though, is the way in which this emphasis on creativity as the original ground of existence and the source of human freedom allows

Iryŏp to talk about Christianity, which she does quite often in this book, and to try to subordinate its doctrines to the Buddhist teachings.

The root of the Korean word “creativity” (*ch’angjosŏng*) is “creation” (*ch’angjo*), much as it is in English, and Iryŏp was quite familiar with the latter term from her Christian education and upbringing because of its use in the (Korean-language) Bible to refer to God’s act of creation. While the reasons for Christianity’s success attracting converts in modern Korea are many and complex, the idea of God as the creator of the universe, in my opinion, has had a particularly powerful appeal. Protestant Christian polemical works denouncing Buddhism in the early twentieth century relied heavily on this doctrine in order to draw sharp contrasts between the supposed omnipotence of the Christian God as creator and the comparatively limited power of the Buddha. This helps explain why the defenders of Buddhist teachings, such as Paek Yongsŏng (1864–1940), frequently discussed cosmogony and creation stories in their writings. For instance, numerous critiques of the Christian account of creation, along with stories from the Book of Genesis, can be found in Yongsŏng’s treatise *Kwinŏn chŏngjong* (*Returning to the Source of Correct Doctrines*), which was written in 1910—but not published until 1913—in response to both Christian and Confucian attacks on Buddhism at the time.

I find it intriguing, therefore, that Iryŏp often uses this notion of creativity as a way to directly address this very question, and to subvert the argument to some degree. As Iryŏp explains: “It is a misunderstanding to think that God or the Buddha is the creator. They are the ones who were aware of their own creativity and utilized it; they are the great people of culture (*taemunhwa’in*) capable of creating a work of art out of their bodies and minds as well as of others” (37). God and the Buddha are no different than anyone else in the sense that they possess the same creative capacities that all sentient beings do. They merely understand it and utilize it more completely or perfectly, thereby making them *great* people of culture. Whereas God and the Buddha have already learned the truth of the original mind, which is creativity, humans are mostly ignorant of their true nature and great selves and are losing (or have already lost?) their culture:

The Buddha and God originate from the same seed. They are the ones who found and utilized the purified seeds of their selves. Why can’t we sentient beings be like them and find the seeds that are our own selves and freely utilize those selves? Once we become aware of this problem, we cannot but practice with all our hearts (96).

Iryŏp also discusses at length some of the problems, such as theodicy and dependence on an external power, that arise from thinking that God is the creator of the world. Further proof, however, that creation (*ch’angjo*) was central to her own ideas about the relationship between Christianity and Buddhism, and may even have influenced her choice of creativity as one of the core concepts around which her philosophy was constructed, comes from chapter 11 of *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun* under the title “Having Burned Away My Youth: A Letter to Mr. B.” At nearly sixty pages long, this is by far the longest chapter in the book. It also contains the most personal and intimate subject matter, as it takes the form of a letter to Paek Sŏng’uk (1897–1981), a man with whom she had a brief but intense romantic relationship in the years leading up to her decision to join the monastery. Her recollection of doubts about the Christian account of creation and God as creator, followed by his unsolicited remarks critiquing the very same issues from a Buddhist perspective, are presented as a seminal moment in her turn away from Christianity and toward the Buddhist teachings. This becomes part of her conversion story, if you will, wrapped in a torrid love affair, the abrupt and painful ending of which eventually led to her decision to become a nun.

Finally, let me conclude by asking a pair of questions concerning the practical implications of Iryōp's philosophical positions. The first is: Does someone have to be a Buddhist practitioner in order to become fully human or, in her words, a "real human being"? In other words, can Christians also utilize their creativity, or is it limited to the Buddhist path? Iryōp's thoughts on Christianity, the religion in which she was raised, are one of the most fascinating elements of this book for me, with two chapters almost entirely devoted to this topic and numerous discussions of it scattered throughout. Her open letter to Ch'oe Namsōn upon learning of his conversion to Christianity is particularly revealing. This chapter more than any other suggests that turning your back on Buddhism is akin to turning your back on the path to becoming fully human and squandering your own creativity—for that is precisely what Ch'oe, in her view, has done. But the forcefulness of her tone and the harshness of her words suggest another concern that relates to the stated aim of the book: to propagate Buddhism. She seems worried that the conversion of such a high-profile public figure and well-known intellectual will lead others to follow his example, which perhaps explains why she calls the Buddha "the supreme person of culture capable of creating all things at will" (108) and asserts:

Only the Buddhist person of culture can hold on to his or her proper mind in a life of ups and downs, pain and pleasure, life and death. The concrete realization of culture should be limited to Buddhist culture because Buddhist culture is the unity of culture and non-culture (109).

The answer to the first question, on this basis alone, should be an unequivocal "yes." We should bear in mind, though, that her opinion on these matters likely changed and evolved over time, with different parts written at different times with a very different audience in mind. In the last chapter of the book, for example, which was written near the end of her life, she talks about life energy more often than creativity when discussing Christianity and God as creator and adopts a much less strident tone. Nevertheless, in my reading of Iryōp, it does not seem possible for people who believe in the Christian concept of God (at least as Iryōp imagines that belief) to ever recover their original mind. As long as they see themselves as distinct from God and are dependent on God as separate from the self, then they cannot become true persons of culture or fully human.

The second question extends this line of inquiry, but in a different direction: Does someone need to "leave home" (*ch'ulga*)—that is, to join the monastic community—in order to reclaim her true humanity and become a "person of culture"? What is her view of the lay-monastic distinction when it comes to putting these philosophical ideas into practice? Iryōp at one point redefines what it means to be a renouncer or to "leave home" (*ch'ulga*). Insisting that it is not limited to "joining a monastery and pursuing a practice," she refocuses it on the dedication and effort of the individual who tries "to remove material desire and the egoistic mind" (43). She calls these people "household monks" (*chaega ch'ulga*), combining the traditional terms for laypeople and monastics into a single expression.

On the other hand, insofar as meditation is the one true path to utilizing your own creativity, joining the monastery (or a "meditation center" specifically) provides the ideal setting to engage in this practice. She says in her comments on the purification movement: "Practicing Buddhism when you have only yourself to worry about is difficult enough. When you have obligations to a wife and children and must make a living for them, you cannot fully devote yourself to practice" (95). At the same time, Iryōp does not paint an idealized image of what it means to be a nun or monk who has left home. In her reflections upon reaching her twenty-fifth year as a nun (ch. 5), it becomes clear

that she has no regrets about her decision to join the monastery. But she does not shy away from expressing the difficulties—the pain, anguish, and despair—that she felt at times. Although she may be eager for her readers to recognize in the Buddhist teachings answers to their own existential questions and thus take up the practice of Buddhism, she is not promoting ordination as a Buddhist monk or nun as the answer to life's problems. And yet, this would be the path that most likely leads to recovery of one's humanity and original mind. So the answer to the second question seems to be a more ambivalent “no.”

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¹ Jin Y. Park, “Translator’s Introduction: Kim Iryōp, Her Life and Thought,” in Kim Iryōp, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2014), 1–26.

An Examined Life: Women, Buddhism, and Philosophy in Kim Iryōp

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The four reviews collected here are the result of two author-meets-critics panels on my translated volume *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun* (Ŏnŭ sudoin ũi hoesang 어느 修道人の 回想). The first panel was held at the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy's annual meeting in October 2015, and the second panel was held at the International Society for Buddhist Philosophy's group meeting at the Eastern Division American Philosophical Association meeting in January 2016. I would like to thank those who organized and participated in these panels. The reviewers addressed different aspects of Kim Iryōp's life and philosophy, which demonstrates the richness of her life and thought.

Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun is the translation of Kim Iryōp's (金一葉 1896–1971) book published in Korean in 1960. At the time, Iryōp was a Zen/Sōn master, a well-known figure not only to Korean Buddhist nuns and lay practitioners but also more broadly to the general public in Korea. Iryōp's fame was not solely based on her position as a Zen master. Before she joined the monastery, she was a provocative female writer and a leading figure in Korean women's movement in the 1920s. Around the late 1920s, Iryōp began to practice meditation and eventually joined the monastery in 1933. She was in her late thirties at the time.

As I was translating Iryōp's book, I asked myself a question: How and why do women engage with Buddhist philosophy? To put it differently: Women, Buddhism, and philosophy—how and where do they meet? This topic became a major theme in my monograph *Women and Buddhist Philosophy: Engaging Zen Master Kim Iryōp*, published in 2017. Inquiry on gender in world religions emerged as an important topic among religious scholars starting around the mid-1980s. The *Women and World Religions* series that was published in the 1980s examined the images and treatment of women in the world's major religious traditions, including Buddhism. However, when gender was discussed in the context of Buddhism, the examination was usually limited to the context of religious tradition, and gender in Buddhist philosophy has not yet been seriously and critically explored. The division between religion and philosophy has western roots, and East Asian thought-traditions, including Buddhism, usually contain both religious and philosophical dimensions. Still, I think that Iryōp offers us an exemplary case to explore the philosophical dimensions of women's engagement with Buddhism.

Philosophy has been one of the most male-dominated disciplines in the humanities. Asian philosophy, including Buddhist philosophy, is still at the margin of philosophy in western academia. Bringing the two marginal positions of gender and Buddhist philosophy together exposes issues and questions that we might not usually find in our discussion of women in the context of western philosophy.

1 Women and Buddhist Philosophy

Iryōp's position on the women's movement after she joined the monastery has been one of the questions Iryōp's critics have consistently asked. In her pre-monastic life, Iryōp was an active member of the New Women movement, the first-generation Korean feminist movement that demanded women's freedom and gender equality. Did Iryōp give up her idea of gender equality after she joined the monastery?

In this context, Erin McCarthy points out an important and seemingly controversial issue of the relationship between Buddhism and feminism. The Buddhist concept of self is known as “no-self,” which teaches that one should let go of the self, since the self we cling to is illusory and becomes a source of suffering. Feminism claims that patriarchal society deprives women of their identities, portraying them as a nameless existence living in the shadows of men. For women to liberate themselves from such an invisible position and live the lives they deserve, the first step from a feminist perspective is for women to gain a clear sense of identity, instead of realizing that the sense of self is illusory as Buddhism teaches. Some might argue that one needs to find the self before letting it go. In her review, McCarthy discusses Iryōp’s position on women’s issues side by side with that by Hiratsuka Raichō (平塚 らいちょう 1886–1971), a representative Japanese New Woman who must have had a significant influence on Iryōp’s work. McCarthy argues that the problem of women’s identity in patriarchal society is not that women do not have an identity. The problem arises from the anonymity of their existence. Namelessness is itself women’s identity, and that is why it is illusory.

The Buddhist no-self theory enabled both Iryōp and Raichō to find the real self, and they did so not by consolidating the self before letting it go but by realizing that the socially imposed and marginalized self was not their real identity. Iryōp called it the small self (*soa* 小我) and encouraged both men and women to embrace the no-self, which Iryōp called the great self (*taea* 大我). Raichō emphasized the importance of spiritual concentration in women’s search for the authentic self that she believed every woman has inside, as she beautifully described in her essay in the inaugural issue of the *Seito* (青鞜), “In the Beginning, Woman Was the Sun” (Genshi, josei wa taiyōdeatta 元始、女性は太陽であった). For both Iryōp and Raichō, meditation facilitated the path to the authentic self. Against the claim that Iryōp distanced herself from women’s issues after she joined the monastery, McCarthy states, “we can read Iryōp’s early feminist work as laying the foundation for her spiritual awakening and her later Buddhist writing” (McCarthy 2020: 156).¹ For Raichō, Zen meditation was essential not only for the process of finding the self but also for social engagement. She observed, “Had I not practiced Zen, I would have led a life utterly unrelated to social activism” (cited in Yusa and Kalmanson 2014: 613).² McCarthy evaluates that Raichō’s urge for women’s liberation through meditation was rather metaphysical, whereas Iryōp’s was more existential.

Leah Kalmanson raises another seminal question regarding the relationship between women and Buddhism. In her nuanced analysis of Iryōp’s Buddhism, Kalmanson connects Buddhist self-cultivation with the classic feminist slogan, “The personal is political.” Kalmanson asks where we should locate the personal when subjectivity is always already the effect of social power and shaped by political institutions.

As much as each of us is a product of our biological, social, and political environments, we are also individuals. The environment produces each of us, but the suffering we experience is our own as well. One can feel empathy for other people’s suffering and pain, but we are the ones who have to deal with our own: our suffering is personal. This is so true, but if our thinking stops there, we become the prisoners of our own world, and solipsism will be the condition of our existence. Buddhism proposes a different path. From the Buddhist perspective, one’s suffering is one’s own on the surface. However, if one gives serious thought to the causes of the suffering, the person will not be able to pin down a single exclusive cause of the suffering. To use a Buddhist expression, suffering is empty. This is why Buddhism teaches the four levels of understanding suffering, known as the Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths teach us that “I” might feel dying pains as an individual in my own situation, but those pains do not have an essence or independent identity. From the Buddhist perspective, a positive response to and overcoming of “my” pains and “my” suffering is

possible when one realizes that this “mine-ness” of “my” pain explains only a fragment of the suffering one deals with.

We need to be careful about the claim of an individual’s suffering as illusion. The proposition that one’s pains are illusory does not negate the actual existence of pain. Instead, it offers a path to deal with the pain and turn the current predicament into an experience of awakening to the human existential condition. This is also what gives meaning and power to the autobiographical narrative that Iryōp employed in her writings. One’s life story is personal, but in our effort to find meaning in the raw material called life, we realize that what we considered personal does not remain personal but is always intertwined with various domains that connect the individual with others and the world.

In this context, Kalmanson asks what a “person” means to Iryōp and notes that for Iryōp, a person was understood as a being with “creative and dynamic” power (Kalmanson 2020: 163). Kalmanson connects Iryōp’s concept of a person with the idea of transformation. Buddhist practice has heavily invested on the importance of the transformation of the self. If any change is to take place in the self or the world, the epistemic self needs to change his or her way of looking at the world. Kalmanson rightly points out that meditation, which is at the core of the Buddhist experience of self-transformation, is never an individual act. Instead, as she observes, “meditation is not a break from politics but is itself a force for social change” since “meditation does not just affect the single self who meditates” (Kalmanson 2020: 165). In her recent publication *Cross-Cultural Existentialism*, Kalmanson further observes, “meditation is not simply a private experience but an efficacious practice that conducts the transformative energy into the surrounding world” (Kalmanson 2020: 81).³ In this sense, Kalmanson sees the “political potency of Buddhist practice” to the extent of declaring, “Practice is political” (Kalmanson 2020: 165).⁴

Tanabe Hajime (田辺 元 1885–1962), a Kyoto school thinker, mentioned that solipsism is not possible because the world and the self from the beginning cannot be separated from each other. Seen from the Buddhist perspective, beings do not exist as isolated islands, but their existence is possible because they exist in the web of connections with other beings. To be aware means to be aware of something, which means that one cannot isolate one’s thinking and stay within it. Knowing the self already means knowing the self in the midst of the world. Once one realizes the interconnected nature of one’s existence, one should be able to see one’s self not just as a being with a boundary drawn by one’s physical reality but as a being with others. Iryōp describes this transformed self as “the great self,” the “complete person,” or the “original mind.” This self is the one that fully exercises “life energy,” and its mode of existence is characterized by qualities such as “creativity” or “culture.” In Kalmanson’s understanding of Iryōp’s life and philosophy, one notices that the seemingly binary postulations of tradition versus modernity, personal versus political, and private meditation versus social change come together, revealing the very synergy of our existence, which Buddhism calls dependent co-arising.

2 Kim Iryōp’s Buddhism, Christianity, and Recovery/Discovery of the Self

Mark Nathan connects Iryōp’s transformed self with her Christian background. In her discussion of Buddhism, Iryōp repeatedly emphasizes that one should become fully human, and becoming fully human for Iryōp meant living as a free being. Before joining the monastery, Iryōp devoted her time to challenging gendered social structures, believing that social change will bring about a way for her to regain freedom from the gender discrimination in her society. As she further considered the

human condition, Iryōp realized that gender discrimination was only one aspect of the existential conundrum. Iryōp's realization of human existential conditions led her to Buddhism, through which her focus changed from a feminist social activist perspective to that of a religious practitioner.

"Creativity" and "culture" are the words with which Iryōp characterizes the state of freedom. Nathan asks why Iryōp used these expressions instead of more traditional Buddhist ones, such as "Buddha nature," "suchness," "tathāgatagarbha," or "no-thought." His answer is to examine Iryōp's Christian background. I believe that this is a viable path of inquiry. Iryōp's relationship to Christianity is more complex than the story of a simple conversion from Christianity to Buddhism. On the surface, Iryōp was a Christian until her young adulthood and then became a Buddhist nun. Based on this fact, we can rightly say that Iryōp converted from Christianity to Buddhism. But changes in our lives do not happen as a linear movement from one island to another. In his book *The Nature of Doctrine*, George Lindbeck, a theologian, proposes that we should understand religious doctrine not as an exclusive truth claim but more like a language.⁵ Religious teachings structure our thoughts and construct our worldview. Questioning which religion is right or wrong is like asking whether French is right or wrong. As Nathan pointed out, in Iryōp's interpretation of Buddhism and later in her interpretation of Christianity, we see mutual influences of Buddhism and Christianity in the construction of her worldview and also her understanding of these two traditions.

In *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, Iryōp reinterpreted Christianity based on her Buddhism. God, for Iryōp, is a creator, not in the sense that God created the world, but in the sense that God is the being who fully exercises the capacity of free being and engaging with life without constraint, which Iryōp calls creativity. This is the capacity that Iryōp claims every being possesses. Iryōp even claims that God and the Buddha come from the same seed. Nathan makes a refreshing connection between Iryōp's use of the expression "creativity" and the Christian creation myth. When Protestantism came to Korea at the end of the nineteenth century, many Koreans were intrigued by the theory of creation, and as Nathan pointed out, Buddhist intellectuals like Paek Yongsōng (白龍城 1864-1940) envisioned a Buddhist version of the creation story, not in the form of a creation myth but by creating a Buddhist cosmogony.

Iryōp's interpretation of Christianity, God, the Buddha, and their relationship to human beings also offers us a new way of engaging with the philosophy of religion, as I have discussed elsewhere (Park 2018).⁶ A philosophy of religion drawn from Buddhism offers different ways to conceptualize the traditional themes of the western philosophy of religion, including the transcendental being, human beings' relationship to it, and the idea of good and evil.

In connection with Iryōp's treatment of Christianity, Nathan asks whether Buddhism is the only way, for Iryōp, for one to become fully human. This is a challenging question that reveals Iryōp's ambivalent attitude toward Buddhism. She claims that God or the Buddha is not an object of our worship and that we all have the capacity to be like them. She also says that people do not need Buddhist temples to practice Buddhism. Iryōp was envisioning Buddhism and religious practice beyond institutional limits. On the other hand, she severely criticized Ch'oe Namsōn (崔南善 1890-1957), a Korean celebrity intellectual and historian, when he converted to Catholicism. If Iryōp was proposing religious practice beyond institutional boundaries, why should one's religious affiliation be an issue of any significance? One cannot but say that she was contradicting herself on this issue. Nathan also asks whether monasticism, for Iryōp, would be the only way to be fully human. Iryōp does not offer a clear answer to this.

I should admit that both questions reveal the limitations of Iryōp's position with regard to inter-religious dialogue and Buddhism's capacity for openness. Despite her claim that one does not need a temple or a church to practice Buddhism or Christianity, it seems that she is implying that

Buddhism should be the religion that one must practice to become fully human and joining the monastery is the path one must follow in that effort.

Douglas Berger places Iryöp's Buddhist practice in a broad spectrum of the evolution of Buddhist ideas about enlightenment. Berger asks whether awakening is a discovery of the existing self or the recovery of the original self. Zen Buddhist tradition claims that the sentient being is already Buddha, and in that sense Zen practice is a way to discover one's self as it is. Faithful to that tradition, Iryöp constantly emphasized that we are all free beings of infinite capacity, and that when we realize this truth about our existence, we realize the great self, as opposed to the small self of our daily lives.

But it is also a recovery, as Berger demonstrates well in his review. The original self—the great self—must be recovered while we are immersed in the small self. The important point of Iryöp's Buddhism, according to Berger, is that discovery and recovery are not in tension but interdependent. In the environment where we live our lives, we constantly make mistakes and still make efforts to overcome them and be like the Buddha, which according to Buddhism is our original face. Berger observes that this is why Buddha, for Iryöp, is the combination of Buddha and demon, and Buddhahood is humanhood through and through. In this sense, Berger points out, Iryöp's philosophy “reminds us of our own situatedness as academics and scholars of Buddhist thought” (Berger 2020: 169).⁷ In practicing Buddhism without isolating it from the reality of human existence, Iryöp recorded both beauty and ugliness, and success and failure, in her own life and others. As Berger states, “Instead of writing, so to speak, a hagiography about herself, Kim in *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun* speaks about her struggles, her failures, her pain, her misgivings both about others and about her own capacities to make progress on the path to awakening” (Berger 2020: 169).

In *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, Iryöp offers a creative interpretation of Buddhist philosophy and practice. One distinctive aspect of the book is her use of her own life stories to discuss Buddhist philosophy. These stories involve the lives and deaths of her family members, her relationship with Christianity, the meaning of the Buddha, and her own intimate relationships. These diverse topics, together with Iryöp's unique way of interpreting Buddhism, mark her book as an alternative way of philosophizing and understanding Buddhism in the milieu of daily existence.

3 Buddhism, Modernity, and Existential Search

The four reviewers presented here aptly answer the core of my previous question: Why and how do women engage with Buddhism? The essays collected in *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun* contain more than just Iryöp's writings on her life and practice. In it, and in her last book, *In Between Happiness and Misfortune* (Haengbok kwa pulhaeng üi kap'i esö 행복과不幸의 갈피에서), Iryöp combined her life stories and those of her friends with her discussion of Buddhist philosophy. Her writings were a way of remembering her existence in words. By retelling her own and her friends' stories, Iryöp made women's lives visible. Her narratives are witnesses to her life and the lives of other women. This was her way of engaging with women's issues. Remembrance is testimony, and Iryöp's writing is her testimony about what it means to live as an independent being, challenging the limitations imposed on women by patriarchal society.

Because Iryöp presented these stories in the context of Buddhist philosophy, a new form of philosophy also emerges through them. That is a philosophy that gives priority to lived experience. In *Women and Buddhist Philosophy*, I identified this mode of philosophizing as a narrative philosophy, a

philosophy that is deeply engaged with the narrative discourse of our daily experiences instead of heavily relying on theorization and abstraction.⁸ Philosophy has a tendency to distinguish itself from the life world and stories by claiming to be the search for truth (logos), which is the opposite of story (mythos), as truth should be unchanging whereas lived experience is always fluctuating.

The binary postulation of philosophy as search for truth and of literature (storytelling) as a fictional endeavor has played a significant role in philosophy's self-defined identity in western philosophical tradition. Are philosophy and storytelling mutually exclusive concepts? Can we understand our lives in that manner? Despite a long tradition of conceptualizing philosophy as logos and of storytelling as lying outside its realm, twentieth-century French philosopher Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe asks in *The Subject of Philosophy* (*Le sujet de la philosophie*, 1979): What if logos is mythos and mythos is logos? Logos is mythos in the sense that it is a myth we created, and mythos is logos in the sense that storytelling contains its own truth. For Lacoue-Labarthe, "neither is more true (or more false, deceptive, fictional, etc.) than the other" (Lacoue-Labarthe 1979: 17; 1993: 7).⁹

By restoring the story of life to the context of a person's lived experience, biographical and autobiographical writing reveals truths that even that person might not have been able to recognize at the time events took place. Such writings also highlight our engagement with life through philosophizing. The primacy of lived experience and our efforts to give coherent meaning to life also reflect Buddhism's attitude toward what we call philosophy. The Buddha's rejection of systematic philosophizing is articulated in various early discourses of Buddhism. However, the Buddha did not reject philosophy in its entirety. Through his warning against certain forms of philosophizing, the Buddha refused the philosophy that is alienated from people's reality, especially the reality of suffering. In this context, we can say that Iryōp's Buddhism shows a deeply existential focus on the meaning of one's self, on leading a good life, and on how to deal with the pain and suffering of daily existence.

Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun affords us a multi-layered structure of storytelling and the production of meaning. At the basic level, we hear a story of a woman named Kim Iryōp, a first-generation Korean feminist, writer, and Zen Buddhist nun. On another level, the book deals with how we construct our identities, meanings, and values from our life experiences. At yet another level, Iryōp's writings are an effort to demonstrate how women's practice of philosophy sometimes takes a different format from the familiar, patriarchal mode of philosophizing. Finally, Iryōp's life and Buddhism tell us how the tradition was rewritten by an individual through her life and thoughts in the face of modernity, which brought her new ideas of the self, gender equality, and individual freedom in the milieu of the perennial question of the conundrum of human existence and suffering.

In the introduction to a 1945 anthology of world philosophy that included both Indian and Chinese philosophy, Merleau-Ponty asked whether cultural differences between the west and China or India make it difficult for westerners to understand these philosophies. He contended that if philosophy is about our existence, cultural differences should not hamper our understanding of it. Instead, the lived experiences of people of different cultures should offer us "a variant of man's relationship with being which would clarify our understanding of ourselves" (Merleau-Ponty 1960: 226; 1964: 139).¹⁰ Asian philosophy, including Buddhism, might pose difficulties for westerners. By the same token, women's philosophy might not look like philosophy from the point of view of the traditional patriarchal model. However, if we approach different philosophical traditions from the perspective that philosophy is a human effort to understand the meaning and values of our existence and that such an effort should be based on our lived experience, different modes of philosophizing should tell us about the different ways that humans understand our existence and generate meaning

and value in our lives. Iryōp's Buddhism demonstrates well the fundamental function of philosophizing.

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- ¹ Erin McCarthy, “Kim Iryōp: Buddhist Feminist?” *Journal of World Philosophies* 5, vol. 2 (2020): 155-60.
 - ² Michiko Yusa, and Leah Kalmanson, “Raichō: Zen and the Female Body in the Development of Japanese Feminist Philosophy,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Japanese Philosophy*, ed. Bret W. Davis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 613-30.
 - ³ Leah Kalmanson, *Cross-Cultural Existentialism: On the Meaning of Life in Asian and Western Thought* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).
 - ⁴ Leah Kalmanson, “The Personal, the Political: Zen Practice and the Feminist Critique,” *Journal of World Philosophies* 5, vol. 2 (2020): 161-6.
 - ⁵ George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1984).
 - ⁶ Jin Y. Park, “Religion Beyond the Limits of Reason: Inoue Enryō, Kim Iryōp, Tanabe Hajime on Philosophy of Religion,” in *Reconfiguring Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Jim Kanaris (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018), 131-50.
 - ⁷ Douglas L. Berger, “Reconciling Buddhism and Bringing It to Life: The Value of Kim Iryōp's Philosophy,” *Journal of World Philosophies* 5, vol. 2 (2020): 167-70.
 - ⁸ Jin Y. Park, *Women and Buddhist Philosophy* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press 2017).
 - ⁹ Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Le sujet de la philosophie* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979) and *The Subject of Philosophy*, transl. Thomas Trezise (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
 - ¹⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960) and *Signs* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964).