Jennifer McWeeny and Ashby Butnor, eds., *Asian and Feminist Philosophies in Dialogue: Liberating Traditions*

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THIS IS AN UNEVEN collection of works put together in an attempt to start a discursive dialogue on what the editors call the field of feminist comparative philosophy or methodology. However, the approaches and methodologies applied in each chapter are not new, but more or less standard practices of feminist interventions of various philosophical or religious traditions. Of course, bringing modern feminist theorists such as Judith Butler, Sandra Harding, and María Lugones into dialogue with the Asian male masters seems rather novel, but it is also where all the good intentions of this volume fail somewhat badly. The fresh attempt of this volume, though, is to bring various feminist works on Asian traditions together and to undertake a theorization of such works under the disciplinary title of feminist comparative philosophy. How the editors attempt to do this—the circumstances, needs, and rationale—is laid out in the introduction.

By browsing the table of contents readers would easily recognize that the traditions discussed in this volume are Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, and Hinduism. Chapters 1 and 4 go directly to the teachings of the Buddha (for example, on *kamma* and *anātman*); chapters 5 and 10 turn to Japanese Zen Buddhism (Zen Master Hakuin, and Dōgen, the founder of the Sōtō school); chapters 3 and 8 are

on Korean and Chinese Confucianism; chapters 2 and 6 are on Daoism (*Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi*); chapter 7 is on Hindu spirituality and the ways in which it is used in environmental movements in India; chapter 9 is on two male Japanese modern thinkers, Watsuji Tetsurō (1889–1960) and Yuasa Yasuo (1925–2005); and the final chapter is a standalone piece.

As can be seen from the way the chapters are matched above, they are not grouped into traditions, but are thematically organized. Part one, *Gender and Potentiality* (chapters 1 to 3), is about the theories of the gendered self. Part two, *Raising Consciousness* (chapters 4 and 5), is about furthering feminist awareness by appropriating Asian practices. Part three, *Places of Knowing* (chapters 6 and 7), tackles the issues of universalist and objectivist claims of knowledge. Part four, *Cultivating Ethical Selves* (chapters 8 and 10), discusses feminist ethics and moral cultivation. Part five, *Transforming Discourses* (chapter 11), is "the first meta-analysis of the feminist comparative project" (25).

The grouping of chapters into such thematic parts, however, is not so neat and many overlap in their themes, aims, and methods. Other than those chapters—chapters two, three, seven, and eight—that apply a critical feminist analysis to the text or the tradition itself, a lot of the "comparative" works in this volume seem to be trapped in the typical "Western" view of the "East" in which one graciously looks to the "East" (Asian philosophies) to amend for what is allegedly missing or lacking in the "West" (feminism). For example, in chapter 4, Keya Maitra argues that although mindfulness is not something that is "intrinsically Buddhist," because "Buddhist discussion does enable us to highlight an ability of the mind, namely, mindful attending" (119), its "technique becomes relevant to the development of feminist self-consciousness in helping us enhance the self-centering aspects of self-consciousness" (112). Likewise, Jennifer McWeeny in chapter 5 argues how Hakuin's Buddhist account of anger that leads to enlightenment can help solve a feminist problem of explaining the knowing self. While such appropriation in itself may not be a problem, what is worrying is the peculiar invisibility of the Asian women who are part of such traditions in terms of race, culture, location, and nationality.

A case in point is Erin McCarthy's attempt to find feminist implications in Watsuji and Yuasa. While her discussions on these Japanese male thinkers' theory of nondualistic subjectivity may be informative, McCarthy seems to ignore the fact that the subjectivity under discussion is not gender neutral but is inseparable from male bodies. In other words, just because these thinkers espouse nondualism, it does not mean that it can be readily applied to actual women, at least not to Asian women. This chapter is a typical example of what Japanese feminist theorist Ueno Chizuko referred to as the feminized Oriental men and their doubly feminized Oriental women. Chizuko claims, "This double feminization complicates the situation of Oriental women when they struggle against

their own men, for their femininity has already been appropriated by men themselves" (Ueno 2005, 226). With no Asian women in sight, McCarthy is hopeful that comparative feminist philosophy will work, because French feminist Luce Irigaray is finally taking into account the Asian values that resonate with Asian men such as Yuasa.

The success of this volume would have relied much on how the authors responded to the issue raised in the introduction. Quoting from Yoko Arisaka, the editors state, "rarely do comparativists take up Asian or Asian American identities in the ways that black or Latino identities are discussed in philosophy; comparativists are more likely to be interested in the hermeneutics of reading classical Asian texts than in showing how the categories Asian or Asian American foster the oppression of individuals belonging to these groups" (Arisaka 2000, 209) (7). It is an issue that naturally raises the question of why. While the nature of the traditions themselves may have played an important part in shaping the above disciplines in the way they are today, what may have played an even larger part is the different (colonial) histories of the non-Western worlds, including the history of African Americans. Thus, Namita Goswami aptly argues in the "first meta-analysis of the feminist comparative project" that, without due attention to historical differences, the philosophical work of comparative methodology will remain a failed task sustaining the cultural prejudices it set out to undo (264). Interestingly, read in light of this "first meta-analysis," a number of works in this volume do what Goswami suggests should not be done. What then unites such discrepant works is the title "liberating," a title that feminists still believe unites them, and a title to which Goswami refers to as "the ostensibly liberating notion of free will," which makes different feminisms compatible as it preserves cultural prejudice that may be on the verge of slipping into culturalism (264).

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