Rita M. GROSS, *Buddhism after Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993. x + 365 pp. Softcover, $14.95. ISBN 0–7914–1404–3.

Buddhism after Patriarchy is a product of Rita Gross's long years of scholarly and spiritual engagement with Buddhist teachings. Like many other female Buddhists, Gross poses the question: How is it possible that a religion founded by a man who abandoned his wife and baby child serves women's spiritual needs? Gross answers this question in a positive way.

More than fifteen years ago Gross edited *Beyond Androcentrism* (1977), one of the earlier, if not the earliest, works on religion and gender. *Buddhism after Patriarchy* continues with some of the same issues, contending that Buddhism is beyond androcentrism when its central teachings are correctly understood (see also GROSS 1992). She identifies herself as the first feminist historian of religion who is simultaneously an engaged Buddhist theologian. In her understanding, Buddhism espouses neither explicitly androcentric doctrines nor misogyny in the strict sense of the term (see pp. 22, 223). According to Gross:

> Quite frankly, I checked very carefully, using feminist criteria, before committing my energies to Buddhist practice. I was not interested in another trip through a religion so sexist in its symbol system or hierarchical structure that I would inevitably be damaged by it. Somewhat warily, I committed [myself], but I fully expected feminism and Buddhism to be two separate and parallel tracks in my life. (p. 133)

Gross sees similarities between her reconstruction of Buddhist theology and the Christian feminist reconstruction of Christian theology. Both share the task of repositioning at the center of their belief system the liberating and egalitarian core symbols that have been submerged by patriarchal cultural practices and biases. Gross distinguishes between two levels of Buddhism, institutional and doctrinal, and holds that while Buddhism on the former level may be riddled with male dominance, Buddhism on the latter level mandates gender equality (p. 153). The dharma is neither male nor female, and if one is faithful to Buddhist insights there is no room for sexism and patriarchy (p. 116). In this regard there is a reciprocal relationship between Buddhism and feminism that generates an internal dialogue: each contributes to a significant and productive critique of the other.

There is enough continuity between conventional Buddhism and the post-patriarchal Buddhism visioned by Gross to permit the two to be grouped under the same name. Our task, says Gross, is to reinstate those feminist positions that have always been present in the Buddhist tradition. In order to fit the post-patriarchal vision, Buddhism must include the following feminist concerns.

First, it must seek a world- and life-affirming spirituality. In Gross's opinion, the world-denying aspect of Buddhism has been mistakenly overemphasized. Borrowing Rosemary Ruether's critique of patriarchal religion, Gross writes that the otherworldly mode of spirituality tends to become misogynist and patriarchal and to reinforce sexual polarization (p. 147). Therefore post-patriarchal Buddhism must embody a path to freedom *within* the world process, not a path to freedom *from* the world process.

Gross spells out the relationship between post-patriarchal Buddhism and this-worldly existence: Feminist Buddhists must revalorize those experiences conventionally deemed domestic and infuse everyday life with spiritual significance.[1] She states:

> The traditional hierarchy between the spiritual and the ordinary is being erased and the lines between them become blurred. Housework vs. meditation, business vs. study, child care vs. retreat, marriage vs. celibacy, all the dichotomies and hierarchies that once seemed so clear vanish. Such a reevaluation enormously enlarges the canon of Buddhist concern. (p. 272)

Our everyday life would take on a sacred outlook if done with the proper spiritual attitude. Gross seems to imply that a reevaluation of domestic activity is particularly important since women are largely responsible for these activities.[2]

[1] Gross's proposals here are somewhat similar to those regarding the domesticization and feminization of Buddhism recently advanced by ŌMURA Eishō (1993). By the "feminization of Buddhism" Ōmura seems to mean the sanctification of family and everyday life.

[2] However, one might anticipate the counterargument that Gross's revalorization of everyday life could and would be used as rhetoric to keep women at home. See, for example, SWANSON's discussion of *hongaku shisō* and Japanese feminism (1993, p. 141).

Second, post-patriarchal Buddhism must be founded on an androgynous model of humanity. By *androgyny* Gross means affirmation of both maleness and femaleness, not sex neutrality. Androgyny is contrasted with androcentrism, in which femaleness is degraded. Androgyny also differs from sex-neutral models in which femaleness is not recognized as a genuine human norm. In short, androgyny is "both male and female," but never "neither male nor female" (p. 222). This two-sexed model of humanity, which Gross defines as the "co-humanity" of women and men, is necessary in order to institutionalize gender equality in Buddhism (p. 128). For this reason she is skeptical of feminist spirituality movements founded on goddess worship because of their overemphasis on the female principle and downplay of the male principle (p. 202).

Third, post-patriarchal Buddhism must recognize the crucial relationship between community (sangha) and spirituality. In Gross's understanding, supportive and comforting human relationships are central to the androgynous reconceptualization of Buddhism because such values as friendship and communion are seen by feminism as a distinctive part of female culture. She writes:

> My suggested reconceptualization is simply to fill the profound and provocative category "sangha" with the feminist values of community, nurturance, communication, relationship and friendship. To emphasize these values is to recognize how critical they are, and always have been as matrix and container for emulation of the Buddha and for meditative or philosophical pursuits of *the dharma.* (p. 265)

In post-patriarchal Buddhism, therefore, the path to enlightenment is no longer a lonely journey.

Gross divides her rich argument into three sections: the first section discussing Buddhist history; the second offering an analysis of key Buddhist concepts; and the third offering a future vision of Buddhism. She has, in addition, two methodological appendices that help us understand her framework as a feminist historian of religion. My only reservations about the book concern the ideas expressed in the last section of the book. As mentioned above, Gross, while maintaining that *the dharma* is beyond gender differences, holds that the ideal model of humanity, and the ideal mode of consciousness, are not sex-neutral but androgynous, with both maleness and femaleness affirmed (pp. 178, 222). She furthermore states that *the sangha* must be based on and filled with "female" values. "Femaleness," as opposed to "maleness," occupies a central place in Gross's reconceptualization of Buddhism. She believes, for example, that there are profound differences between male and female culture, and that the values of female culture should become more normative and universal (p. 223). Gross has little to say, however, about how we might discern "femaleness" from "maleness." How are the differences between the two categories to be defined?

Obviously Gross does not look to a biological essentialism for such a definition, as she states clearly that the differences are neither inevitable nor biologically based (p. 264). Instead, she simply asserts that there must be a

call for "feminist evaluation of stereotypical feminine values and women's culture" (p. 265). Here I wish she had spent more time discussing, in theoretical terms, the construction and definition of gender differences.

Last but not least, I wish to question Gross's view of Asian Buddhist women. Gross makes several statements implying that the carriers of post-patriarchal Buddhism are Western Buddhists, and that Western Buddhism is the single most promising ground in which feminist Buddhist theology might blossom. This is because, according to Gross, Western Buddhism is "the only form of Buddhism subject to significant feminist influence" (p. 271). I am troubled by such assertions, especially when she makes statements such as:

> I am fortunate to have received what I have received. As a Western, feminist woman, I have been far more thoroughly trained in Buddhist thought and meditation than was possible for the vast majority of Asian Buddhist women throughout most of Buddhist history. In many cases, they still do not have available to them, simply because they are women, what has become available to me.
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> (pp. 205–206)

It would be easy to suggest here, in a condescending manner, that her enthusiasm results from exotization and romanticization of Buddhism based on her experience of "having grown up female in a culture without powerful and positive female religious symbols and spiritual models" (p. 204). I will only say, though, that I wish she had shown more sympathy and sensitivity toward female Buddhists in Asia and their religious experience before she made the hasty remark that "many of the most significant and necessary developments in Buddhism regarding gender issues will first be articulated by Western Buddhists" (p. 25). This is not necessarily the case. Paula ARAI's account (1993) of Japanese Sōtō nuns, for example, shows how women are trained as authentic carriers of the Buddhist tradition within an order for nuns independent of the order for monks. Another example is the *Kenkyūkai: Nihon no josei to bukkyō* 研究会：日本の女性と仏教 (A study group for women and Buddhism in Japan), which since its founding in 1984 by Japanese historians has been producing works of major significance in the field of Buddhism and women.

Despite these reservations, I feel that the book's insights are rich enough to stimulate and encourage both female and male Buddhists in Asia, as well as in the West, who are engaged in the reconstruction of Buddhist theology.

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