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Women and Buddhist Philosophy: Engaging Zen Master Kim Iryōp by Jin Y. Park (review)

Jungshim Lee

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social and historical conditions and domestic political configurations will affect the patterns of Internet activism.

Overall, *Igniting the Internet* provides an interesting and insightful perspective on the emergence and development of youth activism in Korea over the last ten years. Scholars interested in collective action and social movements, new media, and Korean politics will find this book a valuable addition to the field.

Myungji Yang
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Women and Buddhist Philosophy: Engaging Zen Master Kim Iryöp, by Jin Y. Park. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017. 262 pages. \$65.00 hardcover.

Jin Y. Park's book presents new horizons for the study of women and Buddhism through the life and thoughts of a Korean Zen Buddhist nun, Kim Iryöp (1896–1971). Women's role and participation in Buddhism have been subjected to biases and distortions in society, with the move to religion often being labeled as failure or escapism. The Buddhist community and scholarship have also neglected women as the agents of history. This skewed perception has been partly corrected by recent studies of Buddhist nuns, but nuns' pre-monastic lives in society are still seen as holding little value. Against this backdrop, Park transforms the dissonances between women and Buddhism into strings of resonance, interaction, and synergy. It is her philosophical perspective that explores "how and why women engage with Buddhism" (pp. 1 and 184) and highlights how their meaningful interactions open up new modes of philosophy termed as "a narrative philosophy and a philosophy of life" (p. 15). Her effort shifts women and Buddhism from the margin to center stage, ultimately challenging the male/Western-dominated academic philosophy.

It is no coincidence that Park adopts a format of biography, instead of the usual abstract and theory-based framework of philosophy, as the best way to explore the distinctiveness of Kim Iryöp's life- and narrative philosophies. The first half of her book pays attention to Kim's early life as a writer and activist for the women's liberation movement, whereas the second half delves into Kim's late Buddhist thought and practice as a Korean Zen Buddhist nun. Although her discussion is divided into two parts, this does not mean separation and opposition between Kim's early

(women-centered) and late (Buddhism-centered) lives. She argues for Kim's life-long interest in and quest for "searching for the self and freedom" (pp. 2, 72, 84, and 108) shared by both early and late lives. Her main concern is also to trace the formation, evolution, and completion of this existential philosophy along Kim's move from feminism to Buddhism.

According to Park, Kim's existential philosophy starts with her childhood experience of the deaths of her family. The impermanence and ambiguity of life and death and the ensuing sense of loss, loneliness, and misfortune are seen to have traumatized her and cast a shadow over her life (Chapter 1). Existential philosophy evolved into her feminist philosophy as a liberalist New Woman preached and practiced, which especially emphasizes "individualism in women's liberation" (p. 8). Kim's New Theory of Chastity is discussed as an important text in which she claimed women's personality, agenthood, and independence, challenging the traditional concept of chastity and redefining feminine sexuality for women's sake (Chapter 2).

Park argues, however, that Kim "felt the limitations of women's movements and sought a new way to express her identity and freedom" (pp. 9–10)—Korean Zen Buddhism. The *hwadu* meditation that Kim concentrated herself on as a Zen Buddhist nun is seen to have led her to focus on the Buddhist theory of the non-self. With this notion, Park argues, she finally found an advanced form of liberated selfhood, which was to liberate herself from the small self (according to Park, socially constructed identity, daily existence, and a false concept of identity) and to become the great self (according to Park, the unbounded self, existence in its entirety, and an individual liberated from dualism) (Chapter 5). Kim's journey in search of self and freedom is seen to have been completed with Buddhism.

The most remarkable aspect of Park's discussion is her effort to place Kim's life and Buddhist philosophy in the broad contexts of the global New Women phenomenon, on the one hand, and of Korean Zen Buddhism, on the other. To understand the philosophical background of Kim's feminist life, Park considers two more liberalist Korean New Women, Na Hyesök and Kim Myöngsun, and further examines the formation of Korean New Women under the influence of Japanese radical feminists of the *Seitō* and its leader Hiratsuka Raichō, the American Gibson Girls, and Swedish feminist Ellen Key (Chapters 2 and 3).

As the background of Kim's Buddhist philosophy, Park describes basic Buddhist doctrines, a history of Korean Buddhism, the characteristics of Korean Zen Buddhism, the life story of modern Zen revivalist Kyōnghō, the Buddhist reform movement, and Minjung Buddhism as Buddhist

social engagement, in both brief and lengthy ways (Chapters 4 and 6). The most intriguing is her attempt to provide an East Asian vision of the philosophy of religion through her comparison of Kim with two Japanese thinkers, Inoue Enryō and Tanabe Hajime (Chapter 5, pp. 137–146). She highlights how Buddhism's core of no-thinking and non-self creates a different way of philosophizing that keeps its distance from modern Western philosophy and its principles of reason, rational thinking, and dualism.

This is the first attempt ever to achieve a comprehensive understanding of Kim Iryōp's entire life and thoughts. Yet Park's book does not merely feature Kim's personal stories; rather, it provides a fascinating case of how the personal story can be interwoven with the broad history as summed up above. This book appeals to a wide range of readers while offering rich, extensive background stories regarding the twentieth-century feminist movement and Korean Buddhism. However, such an attempt can run the risk, too, of distracting readers from the main purpose of the book: to illustrate new modes of philosophy through women and Buddhism. Some of the background stories are not really new to experts in Korean feminism and Buddhism and, thus, their introduction here may prove counterproductive.

Several questions still remain, particularly in regard to Buddhist philosophy. There is no one singular or monolithic way of perceiving Buddhism, but essentialist explanations such as "Buddhism tells us," "Buddhist tradition explains," "It is said that Buddhists should . . ." and "From the Buddhist perspective" are pervasive in this book, in particular, in its presentation of Kim's Buddhist thoughts and comparisons of Asian and Western philosophies. This essentialist conception of religion tends to be eschewed in recent religious studies. It also contradicts Park's own intention to explore the "creative way in which Kim engaged with Buddhism" (p. 83) and further blinds her to male-dominated Buddhist tradition. Buddhism not only addresses gender equality, as Park states elsewhere (p. 184), but also has a gender-discriminatory tradition, certainly in Kim's days. A question to consider is how Kim reacted to the latter when she espoused Korean Zen Buddhism. Finally, it is imperative to know how Kim's thoughts resonate with the voices of nuns scattered throughout Asia. Understanding this will allow a more fruitful discussion about women and Buddhist philosophy.

Jungshim Lee
Columbia University