Women and Buddhist Philosophy

Engaging Zen Master Kim Iryŏp

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A Study of the
International Center for Korean Studies
at the
Research Institute of Korean Studies,
Korea University

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University of Hawai'i Press
Honolulu

Printed in the United States of America
22 21 20 19 18 17 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Park, Jin Y., author.
Title: Women and Buddhist philosophy : engaging Zen master Kim Iryŏp / Jin Y. Park.
Description: Honolulu : University of Hawai‘i Press, [2017] | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2016034603 | ISBN 9780824858780 (hardcover ; alk. paper)
Subjects: LCSH: Kim, Iryŏp, 1896–1971. | Buddhist nuns—Korea—Biography. | Zen Buddhists—Korea—Biography. | Zen Buddhism—Philosophy. | Women in Buddhism. | Women—Religious aspects—Buddhism.
Classification: LCC BQ968.I45 P37 2017 | DDC 294.3/927092 [B]—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2016034603

This book is published with generous support from the International Center for Korean Studies, Korea University's center for research, publication, and development in Korean studies. The center was established in 2003 to underwrite scholarship and exploration of Korea in the humanities and social sciences and to promote new research in Korean studies to a broad, international audience.

University of Hawai‘i Press books are printed on acid-free paper and meet the guidelines for permanence and durability of the Council on Library Resources.

For my mother,
Young Ja Park

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PART TWO

Acknowledgments

Many people and institutions helped me during the long labor of conceiving and producing this book. I want to thank the Academy of Korean Studies for its grant, funded by the Korean Government (MOE) (AKS-2012-AAZ-104), in support of this project; Professor Jeson Woo for including me in the project; Korea University's International Center for Korean Studies and Professor Sungtaek Cho for their support and for including this book in their series; and the Academy of Korean Studies for its Competitive Research Grant (AKS2014-R29), which enabled me to complete the manuscript. Professor Philip J. Ivanhoe at the City University of Hong Kong Center for East Asian and Comparative Philosophy accepted me as a visiting fellow at the center as I wrote the final draft of this work.

Hanmaum Seon Center invited me to the April 2004 international conference on Korean Buddhist nuns at which I presented a paper on Kim Iryŏp and which inspired me to write a book about her. Professor Robert E. Buswell, Jr., has been a strong supporter of my research on Kim Iryŏp throughout the project and included my translation of her book *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun* (also available from the University of Hawai'i Press) in the Korean Classics Library. Wŏlsong sŭnim, Kyŏngwan sŭnim, Tanhŏ sŭnim, Namo sŭnim, and other nuns at Hwanhuidae at Sudŏk Monastery offered help whenever I needed it. Stephanie Chun of the University of Hawai'i Press helped me throughout the process of preparing this book for publication.

I also want to thank reviewers of the manuscript for their helpful feedback. Douglas Berger offered insightful comments on the manuscript and believed in the importance of this project. Students in my seminar on philosophy and modernity in East Asia, in which we read my translation of Kim Iryŏp's book, inspired me with their enthusiasm and fresh ideas about her life and philosophy. The College of Arts and Sciences at American University supported this project in various ways. Many other people also helped me during the more than ten years that I worked on this manuscript. I humbly thank them for enabling me to complete this book so that I can now share with readers my ideas on women and Buddhist philosophy through the life and thoughts of Kim Iryŏp.

Introduction

How and why do women engage with Buddhism? This is the fundamental question that *Women and Buddhist Philosophy: Engaging Zen Master Kim Iryŏp* proposes to answer through discussions of Kim Iryŏp's (金一葉 1896–1971) life and philosophy. With her Christian background and feminist activist perspective, Kim Iryŏp offers a creative interpretation of how Buddhism as a philosophy and a religion can engage with lived experience. Her awareness of gender discrimination, suffering, and discontent in the secular world led Iryŏp to explore the Buddhist teaching of absolute equality, which conceives of individuals as free beings with infinite capability. She also employs Buddhism to answer existential questions regarding the scope of an individual's identity, the meaning of being human, and the ultimate value of existence. Moving beyond current Buddhist scholarship on gender, *Women and Buddhist Philosophy* asks whether women's way of engaging with Buddhist philosophy in particular and with philosophy in general differs essentially from the familiar patriarchal mode of philosophizing. I claim that this difference is visible in Iryŏp's engagement with Buddhism and can be identified through her narrative philosophy and her use of lived experience, and I contrast them with more common philosophical tools of abstraction and theorization. This distinction, I suggest, is also applicable to the difference between Asian and Western philosophies.

When I started this book, my intention was to explore modern Korean Buddhist philosophy by examining Kim Iryŏp's Buddhism. Many years passed before I changed the book to its current format. The reader now has the entire book to explore who Kim Iryŏp was and who she could have been. In brief, she was the daughter of Christian parents and part of the first generation of Korean feminists known as the New Women as well as the first generation of female writers in modern Korea. Additionally she was a Zen master who has had a significant impact on both monastic and nonmonastic Korean women, particularly during the mid-twentieth century. Kim was her family name and Iryŏp her pen name, which she continued to use after she became a Buddhist nun. I will mostly use Iryŏp to refer to her, following the East Asian custom of using an author's dharma name or pen-name instead of his or her last name.

Iryŏp led a wide-ranging life. Meaningfully contextualizing each of its different phases would require different modes of scholarship and different types of writing. In addition to the eventful life that she led, the nature and style of Iryŏp's writings and philosophy challenges scholarly attempts to neatly pack her works into an existing academic field. As I was exploring the optimal way to present her life and ideas, I realized that I should let Iryŏp's life and works speak for themselves, without being bound by existing academic and philosophical categories. My solution was to follow the steps of her life from its beginning until its end, and the result is an eclectic investigation of different issues. In adopting a biographical format for this book, I focused as much on the themes that Iryŏp's life and philosophy inspire us to think about as on the individual events in her life. In that sense, this book is an experiment in helping the reader to think *with* Kim Iryŏp as much as *about* her.

Iryŏp's life contained seemingly contradictory phases. However, as I have pointed out in my previous publications on Iryŏp,[1] common themes can be seen running through the diversity of topics that Iryŏp discussed in her works. I broadly identify those themes as the search for the self and for freedom. As a New Woman, Iryŏp's searches for the self and for freedom led her to become a social activist. She initially tried to accomplish her goal by challenging the gender discrimination inherent in her society. Soon, however, Iryŏp turned her eyes to the deeper sources that constrain freedom, allowing her to explore the existential dimensions of life through her engagement with Buddhism.

The questions that Iryŏp raised as a New Woman and as a Buddhist nun were not related exclusively to Iryŏp as an individual, however. Contemporary Buddhist and comparative philosophers have engaged with her questions, which together constitute major themes in existential "life philosophy." I take up these issues one after another in the different chapters of this book.

Women and Buddhist Philosophy

Since the mid-1980s, discussions about women in Buddhism (and other world religions) have gradually gained scholars' attention. The first wave of this investigation examined women's images and position in Buddhist history.[2] All of the world's major religious traditions demonstrate a gendered history; women have not only been placed in marginal positions, but have also been treated as a source of humanity's downfall.[3] Buddhism is no exception to this trend. Buddhist tradition, however, contains unique dimensions in understanding gender. First, the Buddhist worldview claims that nothing in the world has a permanent and unchanging essence; if that is the case, in theory, essentialist

views of gender discrimination defy Buddhism's fundamental worldview. Second, even though the tradition treated male and female practitioners differently from its outset by positioning women lower than men, it is also true that Buddhism opened its door to women soon after the Buddha founded the religion. Buddhist women throughout history were able to lead the life of religious practitioners, liberated from domesticity.[4] As scholarship on women in Buddhism evolves, moreover, a more positive relationship between the genders has begun to emerge, and examples of disturbing discrimination—both in theory and in history—continue to be examined. The process of what Rita Gross called the "revalorization" of Buddhism in relation to gender remains an important topic in the study of Buddhism and today's scholars and practitioners continue to explore how Buddhism has engaged with the issue of gender.[5]

In claiming a representative theme of this book as "women and Buddhist philosophy," I wanted to add yet another dimension to the investigation of women's relationship with Buddhism by exploring what women and Buddhism share in how they produce the meanings and values of their existence. I believe that Buddhism proffers a unique way to produce existential meaning and value as well as distinctive methods for women (and men) to invigorate the Buddhist vision of meaning and value by living that vision in their daily existence.

One biographer of Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), the well-known French philosopher, wrote that the young Derrida admired texts that were "soaked through with the life of their authors" and that these writings were soaked with "their tears."[6] These authors included St. Augustine, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Friedrich Nietzsche, all of whom wrote in a confessional style in which they combined questions about who they were with queries about the nature of the world and human existence. When discussing Buddhism and its meaning in our lives, it is obvious that Kim Iryŏp's writing style is comparable to that of these authors: confessional and soaked through with her own experiences. For Iryŏp, personal queries about her inner self were deeply intertwined with her quest for the meaning of life and with her philosophy in general.

As we follow Iryŏp throughout her life and her writings, we come to realize how the same events and the same theories can have significantly different nuances and implications depending on how we contextualize them. In examining life events, including ideas, as "lived experience," we challenge the judgmental mode of thinking and instead develop a life-based understanding of our lives. A life needs to be lived and understood before being judged by the existing norms of our community. Scholarship about Kim Iryŏp's life has mostly focused on her role as a New Woman and her liberal lifestyle before

she joined the monastery. The sensationalism generated by such studies has created stereotyped images of Kim Iryŏp and other New Women.

By following Kim Iryŏp's life events and engaging with the issues that those events present to us about our existence, *Women and Buddhist Philosophy* examines how we come to create meanings in our lives. A person's daily existence consists of different and seemingly unrelated events. More often than not, it is not clear how we find meaning in individual events, and it is even more difficult to decide how to draw a unified vision out of the collection of distinctive life events. Iryŏp's publications, especially her final three books that were published during the last phase of her life, tell us that the meaning and value of our lives are not given to us. Rather, we create them as we live and make efforts to make sense of our existence.

Lived Experience, Buddhist Philosophy, and East-West Comparative Philosophy

The primacy of lived experience and our efforts to give coherent meaning to life characterize the Buddhist approach to what we call "philosophy." Some scholars have claimed that the Buddha was against philosophy. One source of such a claim is what is known as the ten answered questions in which the Buddha allegedly refused to discuss "metaphysical" issues such as whether or not the universe is eternal. The Buddha claimed that the sole purpose of Buddhist practice is to save people from "suffering" and that speculative theorization, therefore, is not relevant to Buddhism.

The Buddha's refusal to engage in metaphysical discourse and theorization does not amount to denying the value of philosophizing. Instead, it is a critique of a certain form of philosophy and a claim of support for a different way of philosophizing. The Buddha's philosophy shows at least two basic orientations. The first is a nonsubstantial mode of understanding the world and being. In this paradigm, no being has a sustaining essence, and existence is a result of the coordinated work of causes and conditions. The second characteristic of Buddhist philosophy is related to the first: it argues that philosophy should draw on lived experience, and the fluctuating reality of human existence instead of static theorization.

Philosophy has a tendency to distinguish itself from "life-world" and "stories" by exploring ideas and aiming to uncover universalities hidden in our existence instead of concerning itself with the details and distinct events of daily life. Philosophy claims that it is the search for truth (logos), which is the opposite of "story" (mythos), since truth should be unchanging and universal,

whereas lived experiences are always fluctuating. The Western philosophical tradition has long identified philosophy as logos in opposition to mythos. However, as Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe asked in his book *The Subject of Philosophy* (*Le sujet de la philosophie,* 1979/1993), "What if logos is mythos?" What if logos is mythos in the sense that logos is a myth, while, at the same time, mythos contains truth (logos)?[7]

Just as life-world and stories have been treated in the past as unqualified for philosophy, women and non-Western philosophies and religions, including Buddhism, have also experienced this discrimination. Philosophy is one of the most male-dominated disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, and non-Western philosophies and religions have had difficulty being accepted as "philosophies" or "religions" in the Western academic world.

In addressing this, *Women and Buddhist Philosophy* proposes to revisit centuries-old presuppositions about what should and should not qualify as "philosophy," including which topics are fit for philosophical debate and which regions in the world and which genders are capable of philosophizing. By doing so, *Women and Buddhist Philosophy* hopes to demonstrate how lived experience, narrative, women, and Asia not only offer rich sources for philosophical thought, but also provide new dimensions in our philosophizing and understanding of ourselves.

As early as 1945, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a French philosopher, made this point clear. Writing an introduction to an anthology on famous philosophers, Merleau-Ponty wrote, "Philosophy's center is everywhere, its circumference nowhere."[8] That is because, according to Merleau-Ponty, "there exists no one philosophy that contains all the philosophies."[9] Merleau-Ponty was aware that cultural differences might make it difficult for us to understand a philosophy that is rooted in traditions that are not our own. However, Merleau-Ponty contended that, if philosophy is always about our existence, cultural differences should not hamper our understanding of different philosophies. Instead, the lived experiences of people in different cultures should offer us "a variant of man's relationship with being which would clarify our understanding of ourselves."[10] Asian philosophy might prove difficult for Westerners to understand or vice versa with regard to Western philosophy for non-Western readers. However, if we approach the unfamiliar traditions from the perspective that philosophy is a human effort to understand the meaning and values of our existence, and if this effort should base itself on our lived experience, then different modes of philosophizing should show us different ways to understand our existence and generate meaning and values in our lives. The basic idea here is that, as Pierre Hadot, a scholar of ancient philosophy, stated, "Philosophical

discourse . . . originates in a choice of life and an existential option—not vice versa."[11] In this context, Kim Iryŏp's life and philosophy offer us a paradigmatic example of how life experience and philosophy can be woven together for the generation of meaning and values. This is demonstrated throughout Iryŏp's life and writings.

Taking this into account, *Women and Buddhist Philosophy* proposes several different layers of issues to consider. At its first level, it is a critical biography of Kim Iryŏp, a first-generation Korean feminist, writer, and Zen Buddhist nun. The chapters in the book develop chronologically, each chapter discussing the evolution of her thoughts and life stories. At another level, *Women and Buddhist Philosophy* deals with how we construct identity, meaning, and values from our life experiences. Most of Iryŏp's writings take personal experiences into account in that she frequently offers details of her life events. Because of this, as we follow her stories, we can investigate how each of us generates meanings out of the bare experiences that we call our daily lives. And on yet another level, this book is an effort to demonstrate that women's ways of doing philosophy sometimes take a format that is different from the familiar, patriarchal format of doing philosophy. I identify this mode of philosophizing as narrative philosophy: a philosophy that deeply engages itself with the narrative discourse of our daily experiences instead of relying heavily on theorization and abstraction. In that context, at its deepest level, this book is an exercise in the production of meaning, an inquiry into how we create meaning out of the repeated routines of daily existence. Meaning and production are not usually considered together, the assumption being that meaning is given instead of produced. We should, however, reconsider the "givenness" assumption of meaning; instead we should examine how we "produce" meaning for our existence and try to define the conditions and requirements for this production.

Structure of the Book and How to Customize Reading

Women and Buddhist Philosophy is divided into two parts. Part one covers Iryŏp's life before she joined the monastery in 1933. During this period, Iryŏp was born of Christian parents and educated in Korea and Japan. She grew up to be a leading figure in the New Women's movement, the first generation of Korean feminists. She published her writings in literary magazines and later in a Buddhist journal. Regarding her religious beliefs, she gradually lost her faith in Christianity and began practicing Buddhism.

Part two deals with Iryŏp's life from 1933 when she joined the monastery until her death in 1971. During this period, she became a leading figure in the

Korean Buddhist nuns' community. During the first two decades after she joined the monastery, following the advice of her teacher, Zen Master Man'gong, she withdrew from the literary world. In the 1960s, she returned to the literary world and published three books on her life and Buddhist philosophy. While part one primarily explores Iryŏp's work through the lenses of literary criticism, women's studies, history, and Asian studies, offering informative details about her life as well as various figures, events, and issues that were part of her life, part two deals with Iryŏp's Buddhism both as a philosophy and religion.

In the following, I offer a synopsis of each chapter as a guide for readers so that they can gauge what to expect from this book. Readers in different disciplines and with different interests can use this guide to find the chapter(s) that might be most relevant to their interests and understand how other chapters relate to their core areas of focus.

Chapter 1, "Between Light and Darkness (1896–1920)," deals with Kim Iryŏp's childhood and young adult life as they are reflected in works published later in her life. Iryŏp's legacy is one of historic influence on progressive women in Korea and on early twentieth-century Korean society as a whole. Her communicative abilities as an intellectual writer and storyteller carried her influence throughout Korea, and even to Koreans in Japan. But in contrast to her glamorous life as a prominent public figure is the shadow life of Kim Iryŏp. Her success and legacy are laid against the backdrop of the misfortune and tragedy in her life. As reflected in her poems, short stories, and essays, the nature of impermanence and the absurdity of death influenced her worldview and informed her relationships and involvement in social reform.

Coming from a Christian home and having the benefit of her mother's progressive ideals regarding women's education, Iryŏp would lead a learned life, but one wrought with heartbreak. She would endure death after death in her family, including that of an infant brother and toddler sisters whom she cared for at early years of life. Her reflections on the deaths of all of her family members are seen in her works and so is the heavy guilt associated with them. From these works we lend insight into the Iryŏp who exists somewhere between the sophisticated public reformer and the tragic victim of the absurdity of life.

Iryŏp was at the forefront of the women's liberation movement in Korea. With encouragement from Japanese intellectuals and with the financial support of her husband, she founded the journal *New Women* in 1920. Though it is debatable whether or not the journal had great influence beyond the "elite class," it remains a significant representation of progressive Korean civil society in the early twentieth century. Iryŏp gained fame with her published works, empowering her female readers to think for themselves and to reject

some of the ideological constraints of traditional gender roles. The New Women's movement was dynamic, with three notable perspectives represented in this chapter: the liberalists, of which Iryŏp was a part, emphasized individualism in women's freedom; the socialists were influenced by Marxist social theory; and the nationalists emphasized conservative values that placed the welfare of the Korean nation above individual ambition. Iryŏp and most New Women sought equality, recognition, some degree of autonomy, and an end to gender discrimination.

Whereas chapter 1 introduces readers to Kim Iryŏp and the New Women, a progressive movement calling for gender equality at the beginning of the twentieth century, chapter 2, "To See and Be Seen (1918–1927)," presents the lives of three particularly notable liberalist Korean New Women and investigates how they were perceived. This chapter also places their common goals and actions in a global context. The journal *New Women* launched Kim Iryŏp onto the national stage as an intellectual and a writer, but she was, ironically, still dependent on her husband for finances and security. It was Iryŏp's husband who funded the journal, which was discontinued when he found the financial burden beyond his capacity.

One of the important themes for Iryŏp at this stage was what she termed her New Theory of Chastity. Iryŏp's attitude toward chastity and maidenhood did not maintain that the traditional concepts of chastity and maidenhood should be completely ignored, but that women should be active advocates of femininity instead of passive receivers of the values imposed on them. Iryŏp was exposing and ridiculing the age-old double standard regarding sexual freedom in which men were allowed to do as they pleased, while women were shamed if they embraced their sexuality. Iryŏp contended that this double standard was a visible form of gender discrimination. Although Iryŏp's New Theory of Chastity was more about self-determination, autonomy, and equality than promiscuity, the idea was ahead of its time and became a target of severe criticism from Korean society, which maintained conservative values.

The lives of the New Women were turbulent, as they deliberately set out to counter tradition. Chapter 2 compares the plights of three liberalist New Women in Korea: Kim Iryŏp, Na Hyesŏk (a painter), and Kim Myŏngsun (the first female modern-style writer in Korea). All three women engaged in extramarital affairs; all three were divorced or otherwise estranged from their lovers; and all three were left with financial hardships and emotional damage. One may be tempted to point to their liberated behavior as the cause of their misfortune. The tragic lives and deaths of the liberalist New Women were seen as a result of their unruly lifestyles and sexual license, and they were ridiculed by

the conservative Korean society. However, their efforts to achieve liberation were symptomatic of the patriarchal society in which they lived. They were victims of a patriarchal construction that systematically disparaged them and marginalized their attempts at independence.

The rise of the New Women was not isolated to Korea but was a worldwide phenomenon. Kim Iryŏp was clearly influenced by women in Japan, for instance, and the movement was influential in the United States as well. Iryŏp organized a feminist group named after the Japanese *Seitō,* a radical feminist magazine. In the United States, the painter Charles Dana Gibson portrayed women who did not conform to traditional roles but who were defiant of patriarchy and independent. The iconic "Gibson Girl" extols how different the situation in the United States was from the plight of progressive women in Korea. In the United States the New Women reflected the progressive society of the new world. In Korea, mainstream society still clung to old traditions, and the New Women were criticized as unruly.

Every rebellion harbors its opposite side. Once a revolution has settled down, it becomes the status quo and part of the social structure. As Iryŏp lived the life of a New Woman and challenged the centuries-old traditional gender ideology, she began to realize the limits of her social revolt. Chapter 3, "Sense and Nonsense of Revolt (1924–1927)," deals with Iryŏp's transition from social rebellion to existential Buddhism.

In order to understand the philosophical background of Kim Iryŏp's ideas and the practices of New Women, one must consider the impact of Swedish feminist Ellen Key (1849–1926). Key was a major influence on the New Women in the United States, Japan, and Korea, during the 1880s, 1910s, and 1920s as they formulated their visions of women's liberation and women's rights with respect to marriage, sexuality, and love, as well as maternity and child-rearing. Endorsing both social Darwinism and the idea of individual freedom, Key claimed that marriage cannot be reduced to an institution the only function of which is to enable reproduction; rather, it should be a union of two people who love each other. She contended that maintaining a marriage without love is not only unethical but also harmful to the human species insofar as it fosters an environment detrimental to the education of children. Korean New Women, including Kim Iryŏp, did not embrace social Darwinism. Most significant for their purposes were the concepts of "free love" and "free divorce," which Korean New Women both promoted as representative of women's liberation and lived themselves.

Despite such philosophical foundations, Iryŏp began to feel the limitations of women's movements and to seek a new way to express her identity and

freedom. When one can no longer reconcile personal identity with group mentality and when the ethics of the individual can no longer exist in harmony with those of society, one must break free and claim one's right to self-determination. Having become dissatisfied with society's expectations of women, she encouraged the New Women to embrace what she calls "new individualism." She says that as opposed to group consciousness that creates impure instincts in us, individual awareness of one's own solitude is absolutely pure; by focusing on and developing the self, one need not feel alienated within a group but can conform to one's true self.

In a radical move, Iryŏp declared that she would separate herself from any and all environments in which she had previously existed. The emphasis on individualism is a paradigmatic shift in Iryŏp's thought with regard to women's liberation and her search for freedom. It also marks a transition in her worldview from the social and secular to the religious.

The two phases of Kim Iryŏp's life—as a writer and activist for women's freedom and as a Zen Buddhist nun—reveal a consistent theme: a search for freedom. Breaking a silence of nearly thirty years after she joined a Zen monastery, her book *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun* (1960) recounts this search.

To explain her journey from activism to a leading Buddhist thinker, chapter 4, "I Who Have Lost Me (1927–1935)," discusses Kim Iryŏp's encounter with Buddhism and gives a brief history of Korean Buddhism itself. The history is important for understanding the context of her work as a Zen Buddhist nun, for this history and the characteristics of Korean Sŏn/Zen Buddhism explain the types of Buddhist practice that she was familiar with. The status of women in Korean Buddhism also demonstrates the role that Iryŏp played when Korean Buddhism began to establish a monastic education and practice for Buddhist nuns. Modern Buddhist reform movements in Korea show how a lay practitioner like Kim Iryŏp could deepen her practice and eventually become a major figure in a Korean Buddhist community.

Iryŏp's encounter with Buddhism can be dated to as early as 1923, when she was said to have been deeply impressed by a dharma talk given by Zen Master Man'gong (1871–1946). If she did attend the talk, no details on the encounter are available. Her involvement with the journal *Buddhism* represents the unambiguous beginning of Iryŏp's initiation to Buddhism. By meeting actual Buddhist practitioners and intellectuals, she rid herself of Christian prejudices against a religion she once believed to be heretical and false. As she began to understand what Buddhism was truly about, she felt that its teaching "could save not only me as an individual but the entire world, and the entire universe as well."[12]

During this period, Iryŏp met two people in particular who either motivated her to become interested in Buddhism or helped her to study it: Paek Sŏnguk (1897–1981), the president of the Buddhist Newspaper Company; and Ha Yunsil, a non-celibate monk connected to the journal *Buddhism*. She became romantically involved with Paek; and she married Ha Yunsil. As an elite monk with profound knowledge of Buddhism, Paek seems to have helped Iryŏp establish a foundation for understanding the core principles of Buddhist philosophy and its meaning as a religion, enabling her to compare it to Christianity and find common ground with that religion. During her marriage to Ha, Iryŏp seems to have thought that practicing Buddhism as a laywoman was possible; but she eventually joined the monastery.

As a nun, Kim Iryŏp practiced *hwadu* meditation, a major Zen Buddhist practice in Korea established by Pojo Chinul (1158–1210) in the thirteenth century. In *hwadu* meditation, the practitioner holds onto the *hwadu*, which is one critical phrase. Until the practitioner gets through that *hwadu*, the practice does not come to an end. There is no step-by-step check-up with the masters, as in the case of the Japanese *kōan* tradition.

Kyŏnghŏ Sŏngu (1849–1912) is considered to be the major revivalist of the Zen tradition in modern Korea. Although Iryŏp never mentioned Kyŏnghŏ, his life story directly influenced her own as a Buddhist nun in at least two ways. Her *hwadu* practice as a Buddhist nun was a tradition that had been revived by Kyŏnghŏ in the nineteenth century. And Iryŏp's dharma teacher, Song Man'gong, was Kyŏnghŏ's disciple.

Iryŏp recalled the urgency she had felt when joining the monastery, the urgent need to "survive," survival in this case having a rather existential meaning. Her desperate desire to survive through Buddhist practice led her to focus on the Buddhist theory of the non-self. In Buddhism, the self is in fact non-self in the sense that what we call self is contingent and provisional. In Buddhism, what we call self is constituted through the combination and working together of various factors; nobody possesses an unchanging and independent essence. Through the idea of new individualism, Iryŏp sought for the identity not bound by externally imposed meanings; in the Buddhist idea of non-self, Iryŏp found an advanced form of liberated selfhood.

Chapter 5, "Time for Reconciliation: *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun* (1955–1960)," explores Iryŏp's interpretations of Buddhism in the book *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun* (1960). In western philosophy, contradiction is a logical conundrum that needs to be resolved. In our daily existence as well, contradictions are obstacles to be removed. By contrast, Iryŏp tells us that contradiction is the principle of our existence and of the universe. Day and night

are opposite sides of daily existence; so are life and death. But they do not exclude each other. Rather, they coexist and are mutually inclusive aspects of our existence. When we are born into this world, death is the only certainty in the changing reality of our existence. Life incorporates death; death is part of life. Simultaneously, it is also true that life and death are not the same. Buddhism calls this identity of opposites incorporated in each individual identity the "middle path." The concept of the middle path is the Buddhist way of understanding the identity of the self.

Accepting this idea, Iryŏp distinguishes between the "small self" and the "great self." The former is the self which is limited by the idea that individuals have a fixed identity. The great self is the self which realizes that it has no self-sufficient essence. Buddhism calls this self "non-self"; Iryŏp calls it "the great self." For her, one value of the great self is that it liberates us from socially constructed identity, including gender identity. The great self is an unbounded self. By opening up the boundary of what is conventionally called "me," the Buddhist self invites practitioners to experience the open self, the self in relation to all other things in the world.

Iryŏp uses the terms "creativity" and "culture" to characterize the Buddhist worldview. She regards the Buddha as the "great person of culture." She regards monastic life as the means of training to be a person of culture.

The idea that contradiction is the principle of existence grounds both her critique of Christianity and her reconciliation with it. As a Buddhist, Iryŏp primarily criticizes her former religion for its duality: God as creator and humans as creatures, good and evil, heaven and hell. For she now understands that neither exists without the other. Existence is always and necessarily a combination of opposites. The Buddha, she claims, should be the combination of the Buddha and the demon, and so should be God. At this stage, God, for Iryŏp, is not a creator, but like the Buddha, the being who fully exercises the capacity we call creativity with which all beings are equipped.

Thus, Iryŏp in *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun* reinterprets Christianity from a Buddhist perspective. Her interpretation of the ideas of God, good and evil, and heaven and hell, and her analysis of religion and religious practice offer us a way to understand how different visions of the philosophy of religion—different religious traditions, especially in the East and the West—alternatively conceptualize the ultimate being, a human's relation to that being, and the meaning and strategy of religious practice. Her philosophy of religion is comparable to that of other thinkers of her time and chapter 5 places her ideas in the context of philosophy and religion as they emerged in East Asia at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. A comparative

study of Iryŏp and two Japanese thinkers, Inoue Enryō and Tanabe Hajime, provides an East Asian vision of philosophy of religion.

Two distinctive aspects of her life—Kim Iryŏp as a new woman and Kim Iryŏp as a Buddhist nun—are not always understood as a seamless evolution of her life. Some scholars consider them to be two distinct and unrelated phases, so that, for them, her choice to devote herself to Buddhism represents the crossing of a dividing line. Other scholars believe that by joining the monastery, Iryŏp deserted her commitment to women's issues—actually betrayed the mission she had pursued as a New Woman in her pre-monastic life. Such criticism raises the question of Zen Buddhism's potential for social engagement.

Chapter 6, "At the End of the Journey: *In Between Happiness and Misfortune* (1960–1971)," responds to Iryŏp's critics and considers the relationship between Buddhism and society and the relationship between the sacred and the secular. Contemporary Western Buddhist scholarship has been sensitive to Zen Buddhism's individualistic focus on meditation at the expense of its social responsibility. "Engaged Buddhism" emerged as a response to such concern for responsibilities of Buddhists as members of society. Modern Korean Buddhism also developed a form of an engaged Buddhism as its practitioners confronted the modern problems of colonialism, military dictatorship, and the side effects of rapid economic development. By offering a blueprint for Buddhist responses to these problems, Korean Buddhism sought to emphasize its relevance to the modern world.

Even conceding that Buddhism has not always been the most socially engaged of religions, we may observe that the criticism of Iryŏp for abandoning her commitment to women's issues as a Buddhist nun in part reflects how the values of religious practice and of the sacred have been lost in our secular world. For the most part, one's social commitment is measured only insofar as it takes visible and tangible form. I contend that whether Iryŏp was aware of it or not, her position on women's issues and thus her response to her critics has already been given in the books she published in the 1960s.

By the time Iryŏp published those books, she was a respected Zen master in the community of Korean nuns and a renowned public figure in Korean society. Through her publications, she was trying to teach Buddhism to her readers. In part, this entailed straightforward discussions of Buddhist doctrines or religious practice. Most of the time, though, her discussions of Buddhism are embedded in autobiographical storytelling, much of which recounts intimate relationships with her former romantic partners. How often do we hear a well-established Buddhist nun relate the story of her romantic relationships, her problems with other religions, her loneliness, her despair?

In chapter 6, we learn how Iryŏp's unique way of doing philosophy is integrated with what I have called narrative philosophy. Her writings are her way of remembering existence in words; an act of searching for meaning and for the self. By telling her life stories in these books, she makes a woman's life visible, bearing witness both to her own life and the lives of other women, offering a statement that a woman's life is not a disposable and forgettable component of a patriarchal society. Her writings are her way of becoming engaged with women's issues and remembering our lives and existence. They represent her testimony about what it means to live as an independent being. *In Between Happiness and Misfortune*, which would be her final book, effectively demonstrates how women's lives, their struggles, and Buddhist teaching interact.

Women and Buddhist philosophy: what do they have in common? What philosophical paradigm explains their relationship and Iryŏp's engagement with Buddhism? By answering these questions, chapter 7, "A Life Lived: Women and Buddhist Philosophy," gives us the chance to ponder the legacy of Iryŏp's life at the juncture of gender, narrative, Buddhism, philosophy, and the creation of meaning.

The marginalized position of Asian philosophy in Western academia is no secret. Neither is the position of women in patriarchal systems in or out of academia. When we put them together, women and Buddhist philosophy, we find a double-minority position. Gender discrimination combined with philosophical discrimination is a reality for women who practice Buddhist philosophy in both academic and personal spheres. Their marginalized position reminds us of the power structure related to our philosophizing.

Jacques Derrida once located a genesis of his philosophy in his experience of exclusion as an eleven-year-old. Philosophical tradition tends to assume that philosophy represents a search for the universal truth and therefore particularities of our individual lives cannot be a source of our philosophizing. Derrida's philosophy shows how philosophy does and should draw on our lived experience. If that experience is to be expressed, a new mode of philosophy must be created.

Derrida revealed a new mode of philosophy through the practice of deconstruction. Iryŏp's Buddhism demonstrated how women can employ Buddhism to argue that patriarchal gender identity is ungrounded. Her approach to Buddhism also points us to the varying dimensions in which women encounter its ideas. The experiential dimension of Iryŏp's philosophy is an aspect that women (in a patriarchal society) and Buddhist philosophy (in the academic discipline of philosophy dominated by the Western philosophical tradition) share. The priority of lived experience for both women and Buddhist

philosophy affects how we understand and present our experience. In Iryŏp's writings, unlike other writings in modern Korean Buddhism, autobiographical storytelling became a primary mode of philosophizing. In all three of her books published in the 1960s, she tells the story of her life and her friends, discussing Buddhist philosophy in that context, and creating a new way of approaching Buddhism to make sense of her life.

By examining Kim Iryŏp's life and philosophy, we consider how women engage with Buddhism and with philosophy. I have identified them as a narrative philosophy and a philosophy of life. Women's philosophy and Buddhist philosophy open up different ways of philosophizing, ways sensitive to the power structures involved in our modes of thinking and of existence and in the institutionalized forms of presenting these modes that we call philosophy.

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

Between Light and Darkness
(1896–1920)

When spring comes with the budding sprouts,
If you could wake up again,
I would always carry you on my back,
And never would I, your sister, go away
Without you.
—Kim Iryŏp, "Death of My Sister"

Sister, Oh My Sister

MEMORIES OF CHILDHOOD

A young woman in a rickshaw looks restless. The rickshaw man seems oblivious. He drives her through bare fields that must have been green in summer, red and yellow in fall, blanketed with crystal white in winter. It must be warm outside, but the woman does not seem to feel it. As the rickshaw stops and the driver signals that they have arrived at the destination, the woman tries to calm herself. She could have jumped out, but her body does not seem to respond the way she wants it to; instead there is reluctance, resistance, combined with a kind of fear. She takes a deep breath. This is the moment at which the past and present become still, as if overlapping each other.

As the woman finally emerges from the rickshaw, she sees a face before her: a familiar one, but also forlorn, like that of a phantom from the past. The face of the woman standing in front of her shamelessly reveals the pain, poverty, and loneliness of life. That must have been the life of her stepmother, raising her only daughter after the girl's father had passed away. Overwhelmed by the sorrow that has devoured her, her stepmother can barely greet the young woman. Without responding in kind, the young woman merely asks: "How is she?" The old woman's voice is filled with despair: "She is dying." The other swallows, as if struggling to digest the sentence that has just issued from her stepmother's mouth, and enters a tiny room to face the reality of the near-death of her half-sister.

This is a scene we can visualize as we read the short essay "Death of My Sister" (Tongsaeng ŭi chugŭm 동생의 죽음, 1920) by Kim Wŏnju, better known as Kim Iryŏp. Iryŏp begins this essay by expressing the apprehension she felt upon receiving a letter from her stepmother. "I have a strong preconception that news from my natal home is always something ominous."[1] She discovers that she was right. "My parents have passed away," Iryŏp writes. "My siblings are all dead as well. The only family I have left is a stepmother who has been leading a difficult life with my half-sister."[2]

The letter informs her that her half-sister is on her deathbed. Distraught, Iryŏp leaves Seoul to head for her hometown in the northern part of Korea. As she arrives, villagers gather around her, for it is her first homecoming in a long time. But this is no occasion for celebration. In the front yard of the house she meets her stepmother, who looks hopeless. "How is she?" Iryŏp asks. "She is on her deathbed," her stepmother responds. Iryŏp rushes into the room where her sister is lying. "The dusky room was filled with a strange odor and the ambience was gloomy and desolate," Iryŏp writes. "My sister's body was covered with a comforter, and only her face with black hairs resting on a pillow was visible. I yanked back the comforter and looked at her body. Nothing could have made me feel more shocked and miserable. Her body was so wasted, my eyes could not bear to see it. Is this my sister's face that I am looking at?"[3]

Confronting the haggard shape of her six-year-old sister, who looks like "a skeleton in a biology book," Iryŏp wonders, "What kind of sin could this young, weak, and innocent six-year-old girl could have committed to be in this appalling and dreadful state?"[4]

Her sister died that night. The funeral service, presided over by a Christian pastor, was held the following day. As soon as it was over, Iryŏp headed back to Seoul, leaving behind her stepmother, now all alone in her poverty. On her way to the train station, Iryŏp lamented: "Why is the world so biased and unfair? Other people have parents and siblings; they help, love, and comfort each other. My half-sister was my only sibling yet living, and I've been dreaming of exchanging sisterly affection with her. . . . Is this my fate? Is this my destiny? How could life be so cruel and pitiless to me? I no longer have anyone to miss in my hometown; nor do I have anyone to long for or to think about there."[5]

With the death of her half-sister, the last of her immediate family, Iryŏp was now utterly alone in the world. The sense of loneliness expressed in this essay would recur in her writings for a long time to come.

Kim Wŏnju (金元周)—as she was known before adopting the pen name Iryŏp, which was also her dharma name when she became a Buddhist nun—was

born in P'yŏngnam Province in northern Korea, on June 9, 1896. She was the daughter of a Christian pastor and his wife. According to Iryŏp, her grandfather belonged to a powerful family in Kaesŏng, Hwanghae Province, located in the northern part of the Korean Peninsula. When the family's fortunes began to decline, Iryŏp's grandfather moved to P'yŏngnam Province, north of Kaesŏng. The family had a history of being short-lived, and Iryop's grandfather also died young. As a scion of a respected, learned family, Iryŏp's father was well respected by the villagers. Iryŏp remembers him as a genius who had memorized a first-entry Classical Chinese text at the age of six. Though learned, her father had financial difficulty. He married when only fourteen, but lost his wife by the time he was twenty-two. Iryŏp's mother, Yi Madae, from a well-off family, became her father's second wife, when she was seventeen. Yi Madae was not a traditional Korean woman: she was not much interested in typical women's work like sewing or cooking but showed talent in business. Iryŏp recalls that "she did not bother to teach me about womanly virtue or the things a woman ought to take care of. My mother did not treat me like a girl, but, without abiding by any particular standard, wished to raise me as the most excellent, mannish woman in the world, so that she would not have to envy someone who had ten sons."[6]

Iryŏp's parents had an unusual zeal for education. In Korea, educating a woman was not a common or accepted practice at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. But her mother was undiscouraged when villagers criticized her for sending her daughter to school, and she assured young Kim Wŏnju that she would be educated like any boy.[7] As a disciple of Kim Iryŏp, Wŏlsong, recalls, Iryŏp was aware that her mother's untraditional attitude toward the education of girls and family affairs generally had a significant influence on the construction of her own worldview.[8] Iryŏp attributes her mother's advanced view on the education of women to Christianity: "Because she attended a Christian church, my mother was rather enlightened compared to others. In those days, when most people couldn't even imagine that girls needed schooling, she sent me to school and gave me the experience of feeling pride at being called 'girl student!'"[9] Under the influence of her father, a Christian pastor with strong religious conviction, Kim Wŏnju also grew up as a faithful Christian. As early as eight, she imagined a future as a missionary delivering God's words to the nonbelievers and saving them from the fires of hell.[10]

In 1904, Kim Iryŏp entered Salvation School (Kuse Hakkyo);[11] sometime around 1906, the family moved to Chinnamp'o and she entered Chinnamp'o Normal School.[12] Having completed the normal school, she moved to Seoul to attend Ewha Hakdang (1913–1915), an equivalent of high school. In 1915,

she advanced to Ewha Hakdang Chunghak kwa, now Ewha Womans University. She completed her education there in 1918.

As the oldest child in a family without many financial resources, Iryŏp was obliged to take care of her two baby sisters when her parents went to the fields for the day's work. One sister was born when Iryop was seven, the other, a couple of years later.

> I had two baby sisters. One had just been born and the other was just about to take her first steps. After my mother went to the fields, I had to play with my sisters; and when I got bored, I wanted to go out. Since I had to lock the house, which had to be done from inside, [after locking the door] I would sneak out through a small hole, carrying my baby sister on my back. This was not an easy task. Once outside, I would spend time under a big tree that is at the west side of the village. It was really a hard job to babysit all day under a tree. Sometimes the baby sister began to cry and the older one followed suit; and, exhausted in my efforts to soothe two crying sisters, I eventually ended up crying with them.[13]

Iryŏp's babysitting came to an abrupt end one day in 1907, when one of her sisters (I could find no record indicating which one) developed a fever and died. Iryŏp offers few details of the circumstances, but the tragedy is the occasion of her first poem, "Death of My Sister" (Tongsaeng ŭi chugŭm 동생의 죽음):

> People say that under the ground
> it is not cold even in the wintertime, but,
> Oh, my poor sister!
> Are you crying in your dream,
> Trying to catch me,
> As I go out without taking you with me?
>
> When spring comes with the budding sprouts,
> If you could wake up again,
> I would always carry you on my back,
> And never would I, your sister, go away
> Without you.[14]

Written in 1907 when she was eleven, this poem is probably the earliest literary work of Kim Iryŏp. Some argue that it is the first modern-style poem in Korean, challenging the more commonly accepted view that a poem by

Ch'oi Namsŏn (崔南善 1890–1957), "From the Sea to a Boy" (Hae egesŏ sonyŏn ege 海에게서 少年 에게), published in 1908, has the honor. Given the fact that Iryŏp's poem did not appear until 1920, whether hers is the first modern-style poem written in Korea can be questioned. We will not dwell on this issue, since our main interest in this poem has to do with the context that led her to write this poem.

IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH

The guilt, regret, and hopelessness the eleven-year-old Iryŏp expressed in this poem lived in her heart for a long time afterward, reappearing in an essay written as late as 1933. In "Hometown Hill Where My Siblings Were Buried: The Place I Miss When Spring Comes" (Tongsaeng mudŭn twit tongsan—Pomnal i omyŏn kŭriun kŭ kot 동생 묻은 뒷동산—봄날이 오면 그리운 그곳), Iryŏp remembers a hill in the village she frequented with her sisters when their parents were at work. The memory of the hill gives her both joy and sorrow—joy in remembering her childhood and hometown, but sorrow that the hill she and her sisters played on is now the hill on which they are buried. Her guilt over not having taken better care of her sisters brought Iryŏp dreams of them. In one dream, her sisters were still alive and playing with Iryŏp on that hill. She writes: "Because of my two sisters, I wasn't free to go to where I wanted, and because of that, I didn't always treat them well. When I think of that, my heart fills with sorrow and regret. I left that village soon after their deaths, but for several years my regret and sorrow brought them to my dreams. In those dreams, in which my sisters were still alive, I took them to the same hill and we played together."[15]

Iryŏp regrets not treating her younger sisters better, even though she was only a child of ten or eleven years of age.[16] The sense of loss she experienced at their deaths traumatized her, intensified, and remained deep inside her like sediment.

A series of deaths in her family colored Iryŏp's life consistently through to her young adulthood. One sister died in 1907, and the other some time after. I have not been able to find the date of the second death, nor the cause of either one. Iryŏp's mother had tuberculosis, which worsened after childbirth, and in 1909 she died after giving birth. The newborn was the boy the couple had long wished for, but he died too, three days after his mother.

Iryŏp's father died in 1915 when she was seventeen and attending Ewha Hakdang in Seoul.[17] He had remarried after Iryŏp's mother died, and had a daughter from that marriage. Iryŏp's stepmother does not seem to have treated

her well: she recounts that when she came home from Seoul during school breaks, she pretended not to mind her stepmother's treatment of her, but her father felt sorry for her. After her father died, Iryŏp's half-sister was her only remaining immediate family member, but she too died, in 1919 at age six.[18] As we discussed earlier, in the autobiographical essay "Death of My Sister" (1920)—the same title as the poem she wrote in memory of her younger sister's death in 1907—Iryŏp describes the circumstances of her sister's death.

The essay "Death of My Sister" appeared in the third issue of *New Women* (Sinyŏja 新女子), a journal for which Iryŏp served as editor-in-chief. *New Women* was also her first major publication venue. Its inaugural issue, which appeared in March 1920, contained Iryŏp's autobiographical essay "At the Graveside of My Mother" (Ŏmŏni ŭi mudŏm 어머니의 무덤), the short story "Revelation" (Kyesi 啓示), and "Opening Statement" (Ch'anggansa 創刊辭). Both the autobiographical essay and the short story dealt with deaths in her family. The essays Iryŏp published in the inaugural issue are suggestive of her state of mind at the time.

The short story "Revelation" deals with the death of a little boy named Inwŏn and his mother's despair over it. In the story, Inwŏn suddenly falls sick with gastritis. His mother, Ms. Kim, is devastated; she lost her eldest son, T'aewŏn, three years earlier, and Inwŏn is only seven. When T'aewŏn was sick, Ms. Kim wasted her money seeking help from a shaman and a blind fortuneteller. After T'aewŏn's death, she became a devout Christian, and she and Inwŏn attended church every Sunday for three years without fail. When Inwŏn becomes sick, church members visit the house to pray for him, but he does not recover. On his deathbed, Inwŏn tells his mother: "When I get better, would you please buy me the Bible with the black leather cover with gold-embossed letters on it? . . . Poktong has that beautiful Bible, and I wanted to take a look at it, but he wouldn't let me. I would like to."[19] Then Inwŏn dies. His mother's despair is boundless. Iryŏp describes the scene as follows:

> "Fa . . . Fa . . . Father in Heaven, please accept the soul of little Inwŏn."
>
> For a while, the uncontrollable engulfing tears fell in drops on the childish face of Inwŏn, who had lost his life.
>
> Relentless death had taken the life of Inwŏn without compassion. The lips of little Inwŏn shivered for the last time, and his life like a thread was cut off.
>
> Outside the window it was drizzling quietly and the entire world fell into deep sleep.[20]

The death of a child, the mother's absolute helplessness before the existential reality of human beings, and the indifference of the world around her dominate the ambience of the story. Iryŏp ends the story with a description of the normalcy of the world and everyday existence, which refuses to be disturbed either by the death of a little boy or the indescribable sorrow and despair of a mother who has lost her young son: "The next day, the sun moves from the east to the west, as if it were watching what is going on in the world."[21]

The story was written in February of 1920, several months after the death of her half-sister. It is not difficult to perceive images and sensibilities in this passage that mirror those that Iryŏp must have experienced during her visit to her sister on her deathbed. In her essay "At the Graveside of My Mother," which appeared in the same issue of *New Women* as "Revelation," Iryŏp recollects her mother crying out in despair when she was ill as a child. Iryŏp writes: "Once I was very sick when I was a child, and Mother, you were sitting next to the medicine burner and desperately wailing toward the sky, 'If this child dies, I too die with her.' Mother, such a heartfelt image of you had planted the seed of sorrow that would never disappear from the heart of a young child, and all that is left of you now is a lonely grave amidst grass-tumbles."[22]

Any mother would feel the way Iryŏp's mother felt when her child was seriously ill. Many children would cherish in their hearts the touching images of their mothers who were as devoted to them as Iryŏp's mother was to her. However, only after a child's experience of motherly devotion was reinforced by traumatic experiences would the child keep the memory of the mother wailing at her child's sickness deep down in her heart as Iryŏp did. The image of Iryŏp's mother beside the young Iryŏp during her sickness would become the image of Iryŏp herself, wailing, like her mother, at the death of her baby sisters, of her mother, and eventually, of her father.

Unlike the occasions of the deaths of her sisters, for which Iryŏp composed a poem and a short story, Iryŏp did not write about the death of her mother or father until much later. Were the experiences too traumatic to put in words? The essay "At the Graveside of My Mother" was the first occasion that she devoted her writing to the memory of her mother, who, "when the whole village frowned on her for sending a girl to a school, would defy them, saying, 'If well educated, a girl also could be a great person.' "[23] Iryŏp was only thirteen when her mother died, and perhaps she did not have enough time to develop a relationship with her other than that of a child depending on her mother.

Iryŏp's relationship with her father was different. During the time when Iryŏp attended Ewha Hakdang, Iryŏp's father had remarried and had already

lost three children from his marriage to Iryŏp's mother. Iryŏp was the only child left from that marriage, and perhaps for that reason, he seems to have had special feelings for her as a father. In "In Memory of My Father" (Abŏnim yŏngjŏn e 아버님 靈前에), Iryŏp recollects how during her school days, she would restlessly wait for a letter from her father while living in the dormitory. Iryŏp writes: "At that time, to receive a letter from you, Father, was the happiest thing for me. . . . If I think of the most beautiful moments in my life, they were when I read those letters. I have not received any letter that made me so happy since you died."[24] She remembers her father lamenting, "You are the only child left to me."[25] This statement of her father, instead of awakening a sense of loneliness in Iryŏp, gave her a sense of security that there was somebody who still cared about her. She felt that her father was the only witness to her existence, writing, "Father, your words are always, always alive in my heart. They have been like moonbeams on a quiet night that reveal the reality of something unreal; they have offered boundless consolation to me, who has been overburdened with sorrow."[26] When alive, her father was her source of consolation for her sorrow and the witness to her existence. Twelve years after his death, as Iryŏp writes in his memory, she would ask once again for his guidance about her life in this essay.

The essay was her confession to her deceased father, a silent dialogue with him, as Iryŏp was trying to find the meaning of life, the meaning of the way life treated her, and how she should react to the unfathomable ambiguity called life. Iryŏp had deep respect for her father, whom she described as "the most earnest and lofty believer" in Korea.[27] She even stated, "Father, I believe that you are the only one who truthfully believed in Jesus and behaved as he said."[28] Groping through the memories of her father, she lamented, "As the only child left to you, I was your favorite. If you knew that I received criticisms from the indifferent world and, worse, if you knew that misfortunes have tailed me, how sad would you be, my father? I will survive this hardship and the sufferings it causes for me."[29]

In her essay "At the Graveside of My Mother," published in 1920, Iryŏp revealed that she was now married and leading a happy life. In her essay published in 1925, Iryŏp repeatedly describes misfortunes that had followed her for several years. What had happened to her between 1920 and 1925? No details are offered in this essay. We can only reconstruct her life events retroactively, as will be done later in this book. Or, was Iryŏp's sense of despair more related to human existential reality? This possibility will be addressed shortly. Whatever the cause, by 1925, Iryŏp was trying in her own way to face the

unfairness and misfortunes of life. She writes, "Dear Father, I don't think happiness in life can be decided by a third person. Now I think I understand the great happiness of a poor poet who, having no lamp, has to use the shining moonbeams to write a poem; the happiness of a homeless person who seeks a little warmth and enjoys the dazzling sunshine on the warm rice straws; and the happiness of a person who, even though lonely in his heart, still trusts others as if they were in his own heart and thus loves them."[30]

Was this Iryŏp's reconciliation with the life that she felt was unfair—the life that had made her a lonely being in the world, having lost all other members of her family to untimely deaths?

In "A Child Who Appears Only in My Dreams" (Kkumgil roman onŭn ŏrini 꿈길로만 오는 어린이, 1929), Iryŏp remembers the occasion of her sister's death in 1907 and writes, "As an orphan who lost parents in my childhood, I've had countless painful experiences. But the saddest memory is my sister's death. At that time, as a child, I felt as if the regrets and misery had ripped out my heart."[31] Iryŏp's sense of sorrow and loneliness appears in her writings published as late as 1960. In the preface to her book, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun* (Ŏnŭ sudoin ŭi hoesang 어느 修道人의 回想), Iryŏp describes herself as the one "who has lost both father and mother while young," and who "has a name that is fully charged with cosmic loneliness and sentimentalism." Her pen name, Iryŏp, literally means "one petal."[32] Yi Kwangsu (李光洙, 1892–1950), a well-known writer and public intellectual in modern Korea, gave her the name Iryŏp when she studied in Japan. Iryŏp further describes herself as "a woman whose heart is fully occupied with loneliness, even when she talks about love with her mouth, holding a poetry book in her hand."[33]

In contrast to the devastating sense of isolation Iryŏp expresses in her poems and essays, the image of the Kim Iryŏp people knew and Korean society entertained was rather glamorous. After all, she was in the first generation of Korean women who benefited from the newly introduced Western-style public education. She had studied abroad, was chief editor of a journal, and was a female intellectual who had the talent to express her ideas to her society through her writings. Somewhere in the contrasts between the existential alienation Iryŏp experienced during her childhood and young adult life, and the high-profile and prestigious position she occupied in Korean society as a young intellectual social figure, might have been hidden a secret of Iryŏp's existence that was inscribed deep in her soul, though it failed to make itself visible, even to Kim Iryŏp herself.

One Petal, Higuchi Ichiyō of Korea

BEING A NEW WOMAN

In March 1920, Kim Iryŏp launched the journal *New Women*. The idea of creating a women's journal had been with her for a few years. Her writings do not reveal how the idea evolved, but according to one source, she expressed the wish to found a journal when she married Yi Noik in 1918.[34] The same source indicates that during her stay in Japan in 1919, she was determined to carry out the idea and asked advice of Korean intellectuals in Tokyo. Among them was Yi Kwangsu, a renowned writer and intellectual. Yi encouraged Iryŏp's idea and agreed that the time was ripe to address the issue of gender in Korea. Yi also recognized Iryŏp's talent as a writer. Yi encouraged her to become a Higuchi Ichiyō (樋口 一葉, 1872–1896) of Korea and suggested that she take "Iryŏp" as a pen name. She used this name, together with her real name Kim Wŏnju, for her publications in *New Women*.

"Higuchi Ichiyō" is the pen name of Higuchi Natch (樋口奈津), the first female professional writer in modern Japanese literature. She started writing when she was twenty and died of tuberculosis at twenty-four. Although her life as a writer was brief, her novellas were successful, and her influence on Japanese people and culture has been a lasting one.[35] Since 2004, Higuchi Ichiyō has been on the 5000 yen banknote. She is only the third Japanese woman to appear on the country's banknote.

The Chinese characters that make up "Iryŏp" in the Korean pronunciation, or "Ichiyō" in the Japanese pronunciation, mean "one petal." Like Kim Iryŏp, Higuchi Ichiyō experienced deaths in her family when she was young. At fifteen, she lost her brother, and soon afterward her father died. It is an irony that both women carrying the pen name, "one petal," became the one petal in their own families after losing their family members very early.

Kim Iryŏp returned to Seoul from Tokyo in 1920, still inspired by the idea of starting a journal, and consulted intellectuals in Korea. One was Pang Chŏnghwan (方定煥, 1899–1931), a writer of children's literature. Iryŏp's intention to "enlighten" Korean women through a journal also earned the support of a group of young intellectuals. Funding, however, came exclusively from Iryŏp's husband Yi Noik (1878?–?), who was a professor of biology at Yŏnhŭi Chŏnmun (currently Yonsei University). Yi was about twenty years older than Kim Iryŏp. He studied in the United States and started teaching at Yonhŭi Chŏnmun in 1915. Iryŏp met him through a blind date arranged by the owner of his boarding house, and they married in 1918.[36] Kim Iryŏp does not describe

Yi's family background or the source of his income other than his teaching salary. But whatever its source, Yi must have been very well off. As soon as Iryŏp agreed to marry him, he bought a house and started preparing it for them. From the beginning, he was supportive of Iryŏp's intellectual and professional activities and voluntarily promised her financial support for whatever projects she engaged in for her literary career.

New Women is considered to be the first journal published in Korea by women for the purpose of promoting the position of women in society. The 1920s saw a boom of new journals in Korea for a number of social and political reasons. According to one source, in the 1910s there were about forty journals in Korea, and in the 1920s, that number surpassed two hundred.[37] *Women's World* (Yŏjagye 女子界, December 1917–June 1920) was launched in 1917, with the purpose of promoting women's awareness of gender, but because it was published in Japan, *New Women* should be considered the first Korean journal seriously devoted to women's issues.[38]

If Iryŏp had an idea for starting a women's journal before she went to Japan, it must have been in a very raw form. It is more likely that she was influenced by *Women's World* during her stay there and only then began to develop a concrete idea for a similar journal in Korea. This speculation is based on the following facts: The inaugural issue of *Women's World* was printed in July 1917, and the journal continued until its fifth issue in June 1920. From its second issue onward, it was published by female Korean students in Tokyo. Among the active members of the editorial staff were Kim Tŏksŏng (金德成), who was studying home economics in Japan; Hŏ Yŏngsuk (許英肅, 1897–1975) and Hwang Aesidŏk (黃愛施德, 1892–1971), who were studying medicine; and Na Hyesŏk (羅蕙錫, 1896–1948), a painting student. The advisory board were Chŏn Yŏngt'aek (田榮澤, 1894–1968), a male writer, and Yi Kwangsu.[39]

Given that Iryŏp was in Japan from 1919 to 1920, Hŏ Yŏngsuk was a close friend of hers, and she also came to know Yi Kwangsu during her stay in Japan, it is quite possible that *Women's World* and its staff members had an impact on her. Iryŏp also became a close friend of Na Hyesŏk who later contributed to *New Women*, which further indicates Iryŏp's involvement with the group behind *Women's World*. *New Women* continued until its fourth issue, and then closed down because of financial problems. But despite its short life, the journal's impact on Iryŏp's career as a writer and New Woman is undeniable. In it she found a venue to express her ideas and earned recognition as an intellectual of her time. Japanese New Women, especially those who were involved with the Seitō (Bluestockings 青鞜) group and the journal *Seitō* must have had

a significant influence on the creation of *New Women*. We will discuss this in detail in chapter 2.

NEW WOMEN, MODERN WOMEN, AND FRIVOLOUS WOMEN

In the "Opening Statement" (Ch'anggansa 創刊辭) of the inaugural issue of *New Women,* Iryŏp unequivocally declares two goals that the journal seeks to achieve: "reformation" (*kaejo* 改造) and "emancipation" (*haebang* 解放). In the provocative tone of a person demanding change, she writes:

> What is the first thing that needs reformation?
>
> Without exception, the entire society needs reformation. In order to reform a society, the family, which is the basic unit of society, needs to first be reformed. To reform the family, the women, who are the hostesses of the family, need to be liberated.
>
> If we wish to lead a life like others, if we wish not to fall behind, if we wish for a total reformation, women need to be liberated first.[40]

The vision that Iryŏp proposes here is lofty, its tone, exhorting.

Another essay in the same issue "On the Social Responsibilities of the New Women" (Sinyŏja ŭi sahoe e taehan ch'aegim ŭl nonham 新女子의 社會에 對한 責任을 論함) further clarifies *New Women*'s priorities for addressing women's issues. The essay ran without a byline, but because Iryŏp was the editor, we can assume that she wrote it or at least agreed with the ideas that it expressed. The essay says that the journal was named *New Women* in order to underline the importance and urgency of women's liberation and to emphasize the responsibilities of the New Women for social change. In terms of *New Women*'s objectives for women's liberation and social change, it proposes a twofold goal: to improve the quality of women's lives and to promote women's education. It acknowledges that other issues are important in this context, including issues related to women's positions in society, the family, children's education, gender equality, care for widows, chastity, and marriage, but it is noteworthy that the essay clearly affirms that addressing these is not among the journal's priorities. Some scholars argue that *New Women* could not have had a strong influence on women in Korea at the time because it was published by and aimed at elite women instead of the general public.[41] The priorities proposed in this essay do support such a claim.

The essay outlines two kinds of actions that individuals can carry out to achieve social change: active and passive action. For passive action, the essay

advises: (1) Do not fall for extravagance and vanity and (2) do not be arrogant. On the active side, it advises: (1) Be frugal, (2) maintain propriety in action, (3) follow the men, and (4) practice knowledge in real life.[42] All six of these prescriptions offer rather modest proposals for change. The directive to "follow the men" even sounds contradictory to the image of the New Women that was entertained by later generations.

The origin of the expression "New Women" is still debatable; however, by the time *New Women* was published, the term had begun to refer to a particular group of women in Korean society. Yi Paeyong, a Korean professor of history, notes that the publication of *New Women* was essential in creating the identity of the New Women as a specific group. The emergence of this group was visible by 1920, but it did not develop a clear group identity until the appearance of the journal.[43]

In its simplest definition, "New Women" referred to those women who had received or were receiving the newly introduced Western-style public education. Ewha Hakdang, the first higher education institution for women in Korea, was established in 1886. For the next three decades, however, the school was barely populated. By the 1920s, the situation had changed, and female students were often seen on the streets of Seoul.[44]

In addition to referring to educational status, the expression "New Women" was used to describe women who had become "aware of gender equality, who possessed determination that was much stronger than Old Women, and whose capacity to carry out their determination was outstanding."[45] New Women were also characterized as women "who were aware of the value of their existence and their historical responsibilities as women and who tried to realize them."[46] Unlike the traditional image of women in Korea, which emphasized their roles as mothers and wives, the ideal female image proposed by the New Women emphasized social and political involvement. In summary, in comparison to Old Women (a phrase that emerged in contrast to the expression "New Women"), New Women valued "first, economic independence; second, the rationalization and simplification of the family system; third, the rejection of male-dominated traditional thinking; fourth, a call for stronger awareness of women's responsibility and duties; fifth, campaigns by women's organizations and female students for Old Women so that they could become aware of various women's issues, including those involving health and children's education."[47]

Despite these commonly shared aspects of new womanhood, the New Women were not strictly a homogeneous group. Different emphases in approaches to women's issues generated at least three distinct branches of New

Women in Korea. Inoue Kazue explains the three groups as follows.[48] The first group was the liberal New Women who were most active during the early 1920s. They emphasized liberal interpersonal relationships and paid close attention to the gender politics of feminine sexuality. Kim Iryŏp was considered to be a member of this group. The second group developed a socialist approach that prioritized the social revolution and was critical of the liberal women's movement. The group was influenced by the introduction of Marxist social theory to Korean society during the 1920s and became active during the late 1920s and early 1930s. The third group was comprised of the nationalist New Women and took a perspective that was common among male intellectuals. From this viewpoint, the goal of women's liberation should not be to liberate individual women, but rather to generate newly educated women who would be good mothers and dedicate their lives to the liberation of Korea. This nationalist women's theory consolidated the New Women's ideas into the conservative idea that a woman should be a "wise mother and good wife" (*hyŏnmo yangch'ŏ* 賢母良妻); it was prevalent in the 1930s.[49]

The image of the New Women in Korean society rapidly changed during the 1920s and 1930s. To consider the New Women of the 1920s and those of the 1930s as a homogeneous group would be misleading. It would neglect the challenges and limitations that the New Women faced in Korean society. The journal *New Women* made the New Women visible to Korean society, but this visibility brought disadvantages as well as benefits to them. As soon as the group identity became evident, the New Women were subject to a measure of social control, and Korean society wanted to reshape them according to its norms.

Women's attitudes toward life and their educational status were the marking elements for the emergence of the New Women as a group and a movement. However, the idea of the New Women soon became externalized in Korean society, and New Women came to be characterized by how they looked rather than how they thought. In this popular interpretation, the phrase represented those who wore a short, modern hairstyle, a modified version of traditional Korean clothes with longer tops and shortened skirts, and Western-style high heels.[50] In Korea, women's clothes and hairstyles were initially modernized for reasons of functionality and practicality; when these changes were associated with the New Women, however, their original meaning disappeared, and Korean society understood the modernization of women's clothes as a manifestation of frivolous female vanity. In the 1930s, the expression "modern girls" (*modŏn kŏl* 모던걸) frequently replaced the expression "New Women."[51] Accordingly, the image of New Women as a group that demanded gender equality

and woman's liberation became overshadowed by the image of New Women as consumers of the newly introduced "modern" and Western-style clothes, cosmetics, and shoes.

The controlling mechanism of patriarchal society played a significant role in generating the contrasting images of New Women as gender activists versus consumers of modern commodities. As time went by, the gap between what the New Women wanted to see and what their society saw in them became wider. In the midst of this transition, a prevailing conservative logic began to encourage the New Woman to be characterized as a "wise mother and good wife" who managed her household, and those who deviated from this role came to be criticized as "bad" women who indulged in materialistic and sensual pleasure.[52] The "modern" began to mean "frivolous"[53]; as such, the phrase "modern girls" highlighted their extravagant tastes and vanity.

Iryŏp was known as one of the three main representatives of the liberal New Women, the other two being Kim Myŏngsun (金明淳, 1896–1951), the first Korean woman who succeeded in modern-style writing and acting, and Na Hyesŏk, the first Korean female painter to produce Western-style paintings. All three of these women had received a modern education in Korea and studied in Japan, and all three, like the liberal New Women in general, were frequently characterized as taking a liberal position on love and sexuality. Whether this idea represents the core of their perspective on women's issues or whether it resulted from the voyeurism of the patriarchal system combined with the human taste for sensationalism deserves our perusal.

CHAPTER TWO

To See and Be Seen
(1918–1927)

The New Women: Their Lives and Their Deaths

MARRIAGE: OLD AND NEW

The launching of the women's journal was critical for Kim Iryŏp to make herself known to the intellectual world in Korea. Her writings were first published in *New Women,* and her publications were well received for a time. *New Women* was her gateway to the world of writers and intellectuals and the path to their approval. From 1920 until 1935, Iryŏp contributed to major newspapers and journals of the time.

Shortly after graduating from Ewha Hakdang, Iryŏp married Yi Noik, a professor at Yŏnhŭi Chŏnmun (now Yonsei University). By that time, Iryŏp's parents and siblings had all died. She was twenty-two and Yi Noik was forty when they married in 1918. He had earned his degree in the United States and was staying at a boarding house in Seoul. Iryŏp met him through its owner.[1] According to a biographical fiction about Iryŏp, Yi Noik mentioned in their first meeting that he had disability: a problem with one leg.[2] He also proposed to her in that first meeting. Iryŏp hesitated a moment, but it did not take her long to make up her mind. After all, he was educated, wealthy, and genuinely supported her efforts to be a writer. During that initial conversation, Iryŏp expressed her desire to pursue a writing career, and Yi not only welcomed the idea, he told Iryŏp he would do everything he could to help her realize her dream.

Both financially and intellectually, Yi acted as a guardian for Iryŏp and this affected another aspect of their relationship. From the first time she met Yi, Iryŏp felt him to be more a father figure than a spouse.[3] The age difference between them probably contributed to this, but it might not have been the only reason. The financial and intellectual support that Yi Noik offered Iryŏp so unreservedly might have also reminded her of her own father, for whom she had a special respect and whom she had lost at a young age.

Soon they were busy planning their wedding. Yi bought a house for their new life in Songwŏl-tong, near the West Gate (Sŏdaemun). With her husband's

financial support, Iryŏp was able to study in Japan (1919–1920) and to start the journal *New Women* upon her return to Korea. *New Women* shut down in June of 1920 after its fourth issue, most likely due to financial problems. Yi Noik was the sole financial resource for the journal, which produced no profits, and he found the financial burden too heavy.

Around the time that *New Women* closed down, Yi Noik received an invitation to the United States. The details of the invitation are not known, but it was an opportunity for him to expand his scholarship. Initially, however, he did not want to take the trip, if it meant living in separation from his wife. He would have been willing to sacrifice the opportunity, if not for the fact that he also now had doubts about his marriage. It felt loveless to him and he thought this might be an opportunity to bring change to the relationship. In the end, he decided to go to the United States and suggested that Iryŏp visit Japan for a couple of months to have a change of scenery during his absence. They traveled together to Japan, and then Yi departed for the United States.[4] While they traveled together, the couple seem to have renewed their relationship and thought that they could save their marriage.

In Japan, Iryŏp reacquainted herself with the Korean intellectuals in Tokyo. She was no longer an unknown would-be writer. People recognized her name through her journal, read her publications, and appreciated her inspiring thoughts. Iryŏp felt exalted.

One of her close acquaintances here was the writer Im Changhwa, better known by his pen name Im Nowŏl. Iryŏp met him together with other Korean writers in Tokyo, and eventually their relationship developed to the point that Iryŏp felt she should end her marriage. She wrote to Yi Noik telling him as much. He received the letter with shock and rushed back to Japan, but Iryŏp was serious, and they eventually agreed to divorce.[5]

Im Nowŏl (임노월 ?–?, active 1920–1925), for whom Iryŏp ended her marriage, came from a village called Chinnamp'o, in northern Korea. This was the village where Iryŏp had attended middle school. Im was the son of a wealthy family who owned a substantial orchard, and his father wanted him to take it over instead of being a writer. Im had been resisting his father's demands that he return home when he met Iryŏp in 1920.

Im had a relatively short life as a writer. His first published work was in *Maeil Daily News* in January 1920, and his last was in *Dong-a Daily News* in 1925. Little is known about his life before or after; even his dates of birth and death have not been confirmed. In this five-year period, he published twenty-five poems, seven works of fiction, five pieces of literary criticism, and three essays.[6] His literary works were known for a tendency toward "art for art's sake,"

in the style of Oscar Wilde, and this earned Im the nickname "the poet of the school of the devil."[7] However, his work received little attention in Korean letters for a long time, and he was better known for his love affair with Kim Iryŏp. Only recently has his output begun to be reevaluated. The new view is that his "art for art's sake" approach earned him a poor reception because of the social and historical character of Korea in the 1920s, when socialist literature had begun to attract the attention.[8]

Im Nowŏl left Japan before Iryŏp did, and for a time after returning to Seoul, she had no news from him. Now divorced, she took work as a high school teacher,[9] but was restless. One day, Im appeared at her house. He excused himself, saying that he had been in his hometown and that his father was once again insisting that he move back and take over the family orchard business.

They lived together for a while, but that life came to an end in an unexpected way. Im had not told Iryŏp that he already had a wife and children in his hometown. Many men in Korea at the time were in situations like Im's. They married young through arrangements by their parents, then, they traveled to other cities, usually to pursue advanced education in Seoul or Tokyo, leaving their wife and children behind. Once in a city, they would start a relationship with another woman without revealing their marital status. In her short story "Awakening" (Chagak 自覺), Iryŏp deals with a relationship like this.

FAITHFULNESS AND WOMEN'S IDENTITY

According to a version of Iryŏp's biography, Im Nowŏl's marriage was revealed to Iryŏp through a letter from Im's father addressed to his son. In that letter, which Iryŏp opened without knowing what might be in it, Im's father urged his son to put an end to the relationship with the woman he was living with and come back to his hometown to his wife and children. His father threatened that if Im were to refuse the order, he would no longer consider Im as his son.[10] Completely stunned, Iryŏp demanded an explanation from Im. Im excused himself by saying that he had nothing in common with his wife and that his father had arranged the marriage. He emphasized that he loved Iryŏp and was willing to give up everything for her. Im's promise of love, however, did not have much power beside his father's threat that he would cut off all financial support if Im continued to live with Iryŏp. The final blow came from Im's wife. Having tried to reach Im repeatedly without success, she came to Seoul with no knowledge of his whereabouts. In Seoul, she went to the office of a daily newspaper in which Im's writings had been published and was

informed of his address, where he lived with Iryŏp. Im's wife demanded that Iryŏp return her husband. Iryŏp felt ashamed. She felt that she'd hurt someone, even though she didn't do it intentionally. She realized that she had ruined someone else's happiness. For Iryŏp, that was the end of her relationship with Im.

Im Nowŏl had a different idea. He insisted to Iryŏp that he could not live with his wife, and he took his wife and children back to his hometown. When he returned to Iryŏp, he had two packs of heroin, and he asked Iryŏp to commit a double suicide in the name of love. Iryŏp offered a detailed description of this incident in her essay "The Way to Learn the No-Mind: A Letter to Mr. R" (Musim ŭl paeunŭn kil: al ssi ege 無心을 배우는 길, R氏에게, 1958), which appears in her 1960 publication *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun* and her 1962 publication *Having Burned Away My Youth*. According to Iryŏp's description in the essay, to carry out a double suicide, Im brought two pills with white powder inside from the hospital where his brother worked. Iryŏp did not want to die, but neither did she want him to think that she didn't love him enough to die with him. She eventually came up with the idea of replacing the powder inside the capsules with baking soda. Even though the capsules looked clearly different to Iryŏp when they were filled with baking soda, Im did not notice. The couple took the pseudo heroin pills that night and failed to die. Iryŏp does not say how they eventually separated, but their failed double suicide must have been the anticlimax of their relationship.[11]

Iryŏp's exact whereabouts during several time periods cannot be clearly ascertained. One such period was from late 1920 to late 1923. During this time, she went to Japan, came back to Korea, divorced Yi Noik, and lived with and separated from Im Nowŏl. The chronology of Iryŏp's life events attached at the end of *Until the Future World Comes to an End and Even Afterwards* (Miraese ka tahago namdorok 미래세가 다하고 남도록) reports 1920 as follows:

> Completed courses at Eiwa (英和)[12] school in Tokyo; returned to Korea; in April, started a women's journal, *New Women;* published the journal until its fourth issue as the editor in chief or as an editor; participated in the women's movement; also worked as a high school teacher at Sŏngbuk High School (resigned on October 30); in October, delivered a talk on "Women's Education and Social Issues" at the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association). After this, it seems that she went to Japan.

The next entry in the chronology jumps to September 1923, leaving almost three years from October 1920 to September 1923 unaccounted for. From

June 1920, when the last issue of *New Women* came out, until January 1923, Iryŏp seems to have published only two essays, one short story, and one epistolary essay: the February 24, 1921, issue of *Dong-a Daily News* ran Iryŏp's essay "Concerning the Issue of Love Affairs in Recent Times: Views of a Young Female Writer" (Kŭllae ŭi yŏnae munje—Sinjin yŏryu ŭi kiyŏm 近來의 戀愛問題: 新進女流의 氣焰). In June 1921, Iryŏp published a short story, "Hyewŏn (蕙媛)," in the literary journal, *Public Opinions of the New People* (Sinmin kongron). During September 10–14, 1921, she published a polemic regarding women's customs, "Views on the Modification of Women's Clothes" (Puin ŭibok kaeryang e taehan ŭigyŏn 婦人衣服 改良에 대한 意見) in the *Dong-a Daily News*. In 1923, she published one epistolary essay, "To Miss L" (L yang egye L양 에게), in the January issue of *Eastern Light* (Tongmyŏng).

The short story "Hyewŏn" describes a Sunday in the life of a young woman in her early twenties named Hyewŏn. That day Hyewŏn took her baby sister Hyesun for a day's strolling at a park. At the beginning of the story, Hyewŏn describes the generational conflict between her and her mother regarding her marriage. Her mother wanted her daughter to accept a proposal by a rich man whom her mother considered a perfect spouse for her daughter. Hyewŏn on the other hand was not interested in marriage, and from Hyewŏn's perspective, her mother was too traditional to understand her. Hyewŏn graduated from a women's college with highest honors. She had a talent for writing and was capable of financially supporting her mother and her younger sister. Hyewŏn soon confesses to the reader that she had just ended a relationship with a man, who was also a writer and whom she had loved dearly. The man, however, had left her and married a wealthy woman. Hyewŏn writes: "The power of love was conquered by the power of wealth."[13] Hyewŏn reflects in desperation,: "What are feelings? And what is love? Feelings change morning and evening. Love can surge at any time. One cannot trust people in the world and there is nothing in the world that one should get attached to."[14] Even in such a desperate situation, Hyewŏn expresses her determination regarding her belief on how a life should be lived for a woman:

> With such talents and personality, if Hyewŏn were to search for love combined with wealth, not only would she not have to suffer so painfully from the hardships of life, she would be able to lead a life of ease and luxury. However, Hyewŏn knew that if a woman's personality is ignored, she is deprived of freedom, and thus if a woman is treated as nothing but an ignorant accessory or a pet from whom people expect docile submission like a slave or a machine,

> even if the woman can lead a life with expensive clothes and good food, leading such a life in this free world would be worse than that of a beggar.[15]

Hyewŏn is determined to ignore her feelings and fully dedicate her life to her writing. At the end of the story, Hyewŏn sees a happy-looking young couple in the crowds at the zoo and realizes that they are none other than her ex-boyfriend and his wife. The story ends with a statement by the narrator: "Hyewŏn let herself be led by her sister Hyesun, who seemed worried about her sister, not knowing what was happening to her; Hyewŏn's eyes were shining with strange luster."[16] On the surface, the story deals with the complex state of mind of a young woman suffering from a separation from her lover, who left her for a wealthier partner. Her suffering becomes intensified by her desire to maintain her freedom and her determination to live a humane life whatever the cost. Her wish to maintain her freedom and lead a humane life is constantly being challenged by the institution of marriage and the gender role imposed on her by society. The ending of the story is rather unusual in Iryŏp's writing. The strange luster shining through Hyewŏn's eyes is suggestive of Hyewŏn's anger and even her desire for revenge. When Iryŏp raised her voice for women's issues, she was strong and determined, but rarely did her voice reflect rage or resentment. Was Hyewŏn's reaction allusive of a change in Iryŏp's attitude toward the unpleasant events in her personal life?

A CLAIM: *SONGS OF RAHULA YEARNING FOR HIS MOTHER*

Kim Iryŏp published only one piece of writing in 1922. The main source of speculation about what she might have done from 1921 to 1923 is an autobiographical story by Kim T'aesin, her alleged son. In this book, *Songs of Rahula Yearning for His Mother* (Rahula ŭi samogok 라훌라의 思母曲), published in 1991, Kim T'aesin claimed that he was the son to whom Kim Iryŏp gave birth in Japan in consequence of her relationship with a Japanese man named Ota Seijo (太田清藏). Kim T'aesin stated that he was born in September 1922. According to him, Iryŏp first met Ota Seijo on an express train to Tokyo in mid-January 1921. Here is a summary of Kim T'aesin's description of the meeting: Ota Seijo was a second-year law school student at Kyushu Imperial University, and was to spend time in Tokyo for his winter vacation. When the train stopped at Shimonoseki Station, a woman with a large suitcase got on board. She checked her seat number, which happened to be next to that of Ota Seijo. He helped her store her suitcase. Having settled down, they exchanged names. Ota

Seijo knew that Kim was a Korean last name. From the moment he first saw Kim Iryŏp, he felt a strange attraction for her. By the time the train reached Tokyo, they had exchanged ideas about the political situation of Korea and Japan, and Ota Seijo had also raised the question of whether it was possible for a Korean woman and a Japanese man to have a relationship given the political situation of the time.

Ota Seijo stayed in Tokyo for a week. On the afternoon of the day before he returned to Kyushu, he went to Hibiya Park just to spend time after having lunch with a friend of his. There he unexpectedly saw Kim Iryŏp sitting on a bench with a friend whom Iryŏp introduced as Na Hyesŏk. The three young people had tea together. Ota Seijo asked for Iryŏp's address so that he could write to her, but she refused, instead, asking for his address and saying that she would write to him. She never did. By the spring, Ota Seijo had grown restless, having had no news from Iryŏp. One spring day, he took the same express train to Tokyo in search for Iryŏp, whose whereabouts he did not know. But he had an idea. He thought that if she could afford to come to Japan to study as a Korean woman, some of his Korean friends must have heard of her. Ota Seijo sent a letter to Song Kisu, with whom he had attended middle school and who had gone back to Korea. As expected, Song Kisu sent Ota Seijo the information he sought: Kim Iryŏp had been born in the northern part of Korea, as had Song Kisu himself; she was a writer and activist for the women's movement; she had a liberal view on sexuality; she had been married and was now divorced.[17] Having gained the information he wanted, Ota Seijo sent a letter to Kim Iryŏp at Eiwa School,[18] saying that he would come to see her at the school if she did not come to an appointed place to meet him. In order to prevent such an event, she went to meet him. And so the relationship between Ota Seijo, scion of a wealthy Japanese family, and Kim Iryŏp, a Korean woman, began. Kim T'aesin was born, according to his autobiographical story, in Tokyo, in the house of Shinto Arakia, a friend of Ota Seijo. Kim Iryŏp left the newborn baby with Ota Seijo with a letter explaining why she could not marry him and must return to Korea.

The authenticity of Kim T'aesin's claim to be Iryŏp's son is still debated. Whether he is or not, though, we should recognize that his book more often resembles a fictional portrayal of Kim Iryŏp's life than a factual one. And it is riddled with errors. To give just a few examples:

> The letter from Ota Seijo's friend states that Kim Iryŏp wrote a poem called "Death of Sister," which was written one year earlier than Ch'oe Namsŏn's "From the Sea to a Boy," marking the beginning of modern-

style poetry in Korea. This cannot be true. Even if Iryŏp did write the poem in 1913, she did not publish it until much later. When exactly she published it is uncertain, but there is almost no possibility that the poem was known to the world in early 1921 when Song Kisu wrote this letter to Ota Seijo.

The letter also mentions that Iryŏp had published "New Theory of Chastity," and Song Kisu explains the details of this New Theory. However, "New Theory of Chastity" was not published until 1927. Moreover, Iryŏp's idea of New Theory of Chastity was unavailable in any published form before 1924, when she published the essay "Our Ideals." She apparently mentioned the idea in 1920 at the meetings of The Blue Tower Society (Ch'ŏngt'aphoe 靑塔會), but even this fact appears in written form only many years later in a reflection on her life.

Song Kisu's letter states that Iryŏp had been deceived because she had not known about Yi Noik's disability. The letter further states that this deception was the cause of her divorce. But Iryŏp never claimed that she had been deceived by Yi Noik. She had known about his disability when she had decided to marry him. What she had not known was the psychological effect that the artificial limb would have on her, an effect described in her essays.

Kim T'aesin does not identify the source of his information about the first encounter of Kim Iryŏp and Ota Seijo and their subsequent relationship.

In an interview I conducted in 2007 with Wŏlsong, a disciple of Iryŏp who had served Iryŏp during the last ten years of her life, I asked about the official position of Iryŏp's disciples on Kim T'aesin's claim to be the son of Kim Iryŏp. Wŏlsong told me that when Iryŏp was still alive, a person claiming to be her son tried to sell cheap copies of his story. It is unclear whether that person was Kim T'aesin himself. Wŏlsong recalled: "When the incident happened, the monastic community told Master Iryŏp that she should stop him. Master Iryŏp neither confirmed nor denied the person's claim that he was her son. Instead, she said that if he could benefit from the story, she did not feel it necessary to stop him. He would have his own karma."[19] Kim T'aesin's claim thus remains unconfirmed. Other than his book and several publications, few other sources of information exist about Iryŏp's whereabouts and activities between late 1920 and 1923.

Her book *Having Burned Away My Youth* (Ch'ŏngch'un ŭl pulsarŭgo 靑春을 불사르고, 1962) contains a preface by the Korean writer Kim P'albong (金八峰, 1903–1985), in which he recalls that he first met Iryŏp while studying

in Japan sometime around the fall of 1922. He was introduced to her by R (Im Nowŏl). Kim P'albong says that he visited Kim Iryŏp several times in Japan, regarding her as an elder sister; they talked about literature.[20] I tentatively conclude that Iryŏp was in Japan and Korea from late 1920 to late 1923, during which time she had a relationship with Im Nowŏl.

IF I WERE A MAN

If Iryŏp stayed in Japan during this time, how did she support herself financially? Her first trip to Japan, which took place from 1919 to 1920, was supported by her husband. If she did make a trip to Japan in 1922, she was already divorced. What was her financial source at that time? In one of her essays, Iryŏp describes her maternal grandmother as the financial supporter for her education in Japan. Iryŏp writes: "My maternal grandmother, who was over seventy years old at the time, shed tears whenever she saw me and lamented, 'If your mother had raised another daughter before she died, you would have someone to call sister, but you are like something springing out of a chasm between two rocks; you are like a radish uprooted from the soil. How could I bear to see you drifting all alone in this vast world?' With the financial support of my grandmother, I was able to study in Japan for several years."[21]

This could be a clue to how Iryŏp supported herself during her stay in Japan from 1921 to 1923, if she was actually in Japan during that time. In 1896, when Iryŏp was born, her father was twenty-eight years old and her mother was twenty-three.[22] In 1909, when Iryŏp was fourteen, her mother died at the age of thirty-seven,[23] and her father died at forty-seven in 1915 when Iryŏp was nineteen. It is possible that Iryŏp's grandmother was still alive in 1921 and offered her financial support at that point. Even though Iryŏp's paternal side had lost the family fortune in her grandfather's generation, her maternal side seems to have been well off.

During the period of 1921–1923, Iryŏp published two essays. The essay published in the February 24, 1921, issue of *Dong-a Daily News* deals with the trend at the time of young married men having extramarital relationships with New Women. In the essay "Concerning the issue of love affairs in recent times: Views of a young female writer," Iryŏp supported validity of the trend. Iryŏp submitted that, since most people in Korea at the time were subject to marriages arranged by their parents, there was nothing strange in a young married man, when encountering a woman of his interest, being attracted to that person. If such a man did not reveal his marital status, Iryŏp argued, it was not because he wanted to deceive the woman, but instead because his affection

for her was stronger than his awareness of his own marital status. Iryŏp even argued that, if the man in such a case could not get a divorce from his wife because his parents or the wife refuse it, the other woman should trust the man's love all the more and console him about his pitiful situation.[24] Given Iryŏp's relationship with Im Nowŏl at the time, it is interesting to read her position on the issue.

The only publication by Iryŏp in 1922 that I was able to confirm was a very short essay published in the January 3 issue of *Tong-a Daily News*, "If I Were a Man" (Sanahi ro t'aeŏ natsŭmyŏn 사나히로 태어났으면). Here is the essay in its entirety:

> If I were a man, first of all, I would be one who understands and encourages the women's talents. If my wife were a public figure, I would do all I could to help her succeed in her field, be that religion, social work, writing, or whatever other area, even if that meant that I should have to take care of the household chores.
>
> If she would rather be a housewife, I would all the same help her enjoy her housework, love her, and yield to her so that she could be the queen of the house. However, men in Chosŏn [Korea] nowadays believe that a woman should always be confined to the home, as if she were a sinner. This is why I feel so keenly that, were I a man, I would not behave this way.
>
> Second of all, if I were a man, I would do something significant for society. Look! Even though Chosŏn has fallen far behind other countries, its men have still had many more opportunities than its women. Consider the example of Korean students in Tokyo. It has been more than thirty or forty years since Koreans began to study in Tokyo, but until today, not one respectable scholar has been produced out of them. Isn't this evidence of how incapable [Korean] men are?
>
> If we women had been given more opportunities, we would not have led Chosŏn to such a devastating state. Anyway, if I were a man, I would be an affectionate person who is humane and sensitive; at the same time, I would be a strong person who would not be deceived by others or fall behind them.[25]

Short as it may be, this essay succinctly demonstrates Iryŏp's major concerns at the time. Three themes in the essay attract our attention. At the beginning, Iryŏp characterizes offering support for a woman's career as an important quality of being a man. Having said that, Iryŏp emphasizes the privileged position of men in Korean society and also underlines Korean men's lack of suitability for the roles they were supposed to play in society. Eventually,

however Iryŏp summarizes her ideal vision of a man as an "affectionate person who is humane and sensitive" and who is strong enough that he "would not be deceived by others." This concluding statement might reflect a certain sentiment that Iryŏp held at the time.

The January 1923 issue of *Eastern Light* (Tongmyŏng 東明) ran Iryŏp's essay "To Miss L." *Eastern Light* was a weekly magazine created in September of 1922 with Ch'oe Namsŏn as its editor in chief. The magazine focused on current issues together with articles on the arts and sciences. Iryŏp's essay takes the form of a letter to Miss L, a bosom friend of the narrator, and its tone is one of the saddest that can be found among Iryŏp's writings. The narrator expresses her extreme sense of loneliness to Miss L, who, in stark contrast, is in a state of the utmost happiness. The emotional turmoil of the narrator is extreme, but the narrator refuses to give any definite cause for her depression. Instead, she simply describes her state of mind as follows:

> Early today at your home, I again shed vain tears. Right now, once again, tears pour down beyond my control for no specific reason. Perhaps the amount of tears of a person who is sorrowful by nature supersedes the amount of laughter of a person of happiness. As you know, my friend, when I was a child running here and there, I rarely shed tears. However, now that I have become a lonely person who has no possessions and nobody around, who has to walk all alone in this heartless world in which nothing but strong winds blow even the sound of leaves falling makes my eyes become wet.[26]

Throughout the essay, the narrator does not identify the source of her extremely stressful situation, but repeatedly declares her loneliness and laments that she is all alone in the world, even crying out loud: "Ah! It's so true that I am a lonely person. I am alone. I am all alone."[27] As we discussed earlier, in her 1921 essay, Iryŏp expressed her support for extramarital relationships and subtitled the essay "An Outcry of a Young Female Writer," indicating her strong support for the idea. In the 1922 essay, however, honesty became the most important quality of an ideal man for Iryŏp. In the 1921 essay, Iryŏp had justified her support for an extramarital affair by denigrating the Confucian tradition of arranged marriage and was sympathetic to the sincerity of men engaged in extramarital affairs. In the 1923 essay, by contrast, she shows herself completely distraught. Loneliness was marked as the only reality of her existence, for which there was no other competitor.

FROM SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY TO FEMININE SEXUALITY

The year 1924 marked a turning point in the evolution of Iryŏp's thinking. After publishing "To Miss L" with a narrator in extreme emotional agony for no identified reasons, in July Iryŏp published the essay "Our Ideals" (Uri ŭi isang 우리의 理想). In this piece, she proposes three new ideal visions that New Women should pursue as their own: New Theory of Chastity (sin chŏngjoron 新貞操論), a new theory of personality; and an idea about the ideal spouse. The essay's tone gives the impression that Iryŏp was looking for something new to distinguish the New Women's vision of life from the lives of traditional Korean women. The search for something new was at the heart of Iryŏp's thought at this time, as the repeated expression "the new" in her theories of chastity and personality indicates.

The theory of chastity Iryŏp proposed here and elaborated on in her 1927 essay, "My View on Chastity" (Na ŭi chŏngjo kwan 나의 貞操觀), became for a long time the focal point of evaluation not only of Iryŏp's thinking at this time but often of her entire life. In discussing Iryŏp's theory, both scholars and the general public have tended to pay attention just to the unconventional aspects of her idea of "chastity" and failed to see what she might have meant to underline with this idea of "newness." Iryŏp describes her views on chastity as follows: "Without love, there cannot be chastity. Chastity does not mean morality toward one's lover that can be imposed from outside: it is the passion that represents maximal harmony of affection and imagination for one's lover. It is a feeling related to one's original instinct that cannot be demanded without love. . . . Chastity, then, is not something fixed . . . but something fluid that can be renewed. Chastity can never be defined by morality. It is the optimum state of one's sense of affection."[28]

"Our Ideals" was the first essay in which Iryŏp explicitly discussed how chastity should be understood in modern society. The idea that a woman should be faithful to one man has a long history in Confucian Korean society. Since the beginning of the Confucian tradition, a woman's virtue had been clearly defined. As early as the third century BCE, the Confucian philosopher Mencius (Mengzi 孟子, 372–289 BCE) stated, "When a girl marries, her mother gives her advice and accompanies her to the door with these cautionary words, 'When you go to your new home, you must be respectful and circumspect. Do not disobey your husband.' It is the way of a wife or concubine to consider obedience and docility the norm."[29] The idea of women's subordination to men has long shaped women's lives in East Asia. An extreme development of it can be found in a frequently quoted passage on women's chastity: for a wife, "to

die by starvation is a small matter, but to lose one's chastity is a great one."[30] Chastity was considered more important for women than their lives, something that must be kept at all costs. Kim Iryŏp and the New Women were keenly aware of gender politics, the way Korean society controls women by controlling feminine sexuality in the name of chastity and virginity. But instead of jettisoning the idea of chastity, Iryŏp redefined it as an expression of the ultimate state of affection between two people in their relationship.

When Iryŏp founded *New Women,* she also created a forum called the Blue Tower Society (Ch'ŏngt'aphoe 靑塔會), a gathering of women aimed at generating awareness of women's issues in Korean society. The name of the group unambiguously reflects the Blue Stockings Society (Seitōsha 靑鞜社), an organization of Japanese New Women begun by Hiratsuka Raichō (平塚 らいてう, 1886–1971). "Ch'ŏngt'ap" is the Korean pronunciation of the kanji that is pronounced as *seitō* in Japanese, but Iryŏp used a different character, and the Korean version with the same pronunciation came to mean "blue tower" instead of "blue stockings." "Blue stockings," in turn, referred to an eighteenth-century feminist group in Great Britain.

Iryŏp recalled first mentioning her New Theory of Chastity at a meeting of the Blue Tower Society in 1920.[31] There she said, "Human beings are free from the time they are born. The freedom to love, the freedom to get married, and the freedom to get divorced are all sacred. To prohibit this freedom is a bad custom of an underdeveloped society."[32] But no other discussion or even mention of the theory of chastity appears in her other publications before "Our Ideals." If she had indeed formulated her New Theory of Chastity by 1920 and discussed it at meetings of the Blue Tower Society, it seems strange that she did not mention it in her essays for *New Women*. And if she did have an initial conception of her theory in 1920, it would not have meshed well with the ideas she expressed in *New Women*. There she was firm in her demand for social change and women's liberation, but her main concerns were women's education and women's awareness of gender discrimination in Korean society. No mention of women's sexuality appears, and indeed Iryŏp modestly proposes that women should follow men.

When Iryŏp discussed the New Women's social responsibilities in the first issue of her journal, she emphasized "propriety in behavior" as one of four active approaches the New Women should follow to achieve social changes and women's liberation. In explanation, she wrote: "Serious readers might consider this demand an insult to the entire community of New Women and might be angry. But, if just one of the ten thousand New Women behaves badly, our society will make all the New Women responsible for such a behavior, and the

occasion will be used as justification by those who oppose the education of women. This is why one should be meticulously careful and a good model for future generations."[33] When we compare this statement from 1920, with the remarks from "Our Ideals" of 1924, we find that Iryŏp's thoughts on gender equality changed radically during those four years.

NEW THEORY OF CHASTITY

Iryŏp consolidated her ideas on love and sexuality and published them in a newspaper article, "My View on Chastity" (Na ŭi chŏngjo kwan 나의 貞操觀) in January 1927. She openly criticized the centuries-old double standard of demanding chastity from women, and announced a "New Theory of Chastity." She argued that the traditional idea of chastity taught women to be faithful to one man, but left men free to be with several partners, and that this view of female sexuality was one of the most visible realities of gender discrimination in Korean society. Iryŏp wrote,

> In the traditional concept of chastity, it was treated as a material possession, so a woman with a past was treated as if she were stale and had no freshness. In other words, when a woman had a sexual relationship with a man, she was treated as if her chastity had been contaminated and she was a lost woman. Chastity, in this case, was viewed like a container made of jewels: once broken, it cannot function.
>
> However, chastity is not such a static entity.
>
> Chastity exists only for the time when love exists.
>
> When a person feels that her love for her lover has come to an end, her responsibility to chastity comes to an end as well. Chastity, like the feelings of love, is fluid and capable of being refreshed.
>
> Chastity is not a morality that can be imposed by others; it is a passion at the extreme harmony of emotion and imagination; it is an instinctive feeling that cannot be found unless a person is in love.
>
> That being the case, even when a person has had affairs with several lovers in the past, if that person has a healthy mind, can completely clean from the memory whatever happened in the past, and is capable of creating a new life by fully devoting himself or herself to a new lover, that man or woman possesses chastity that cannot be broken.[34]

Later in the same essay, Iryŏp emphasizes the importance of the new concept of chastity for the creation of a new woman, a new man, and eventually

a new history: "We, new women and new men, who want to do away with all the conventions, traditions, and concepts, and who are determined to bring attention to a new and fresh concept of life, cannot but strongly resist, among other things, the traditional morality of sex, which has ignored our personalities as well as our individual characteristics."[35]

These passages sound radical, given the patriarchal nature of Confucian Korean society at the time. However, Iryŏp's message in this essay and in its earlier version, "Our Ideals," might not be what scholars and the general public in Korea have understood it to be. We can consider this issue by asking two questions. First, why did Iryŏp suddenly focus on the issue of sexuality in 1924, when she had emphasized modesty and propriety for the New Women in her earlier essays? Does this indicate substantial changes in her thoughts? Second, does the idea of sexual liberalism in the two essays from 1924 and 1927 in fact suggest radical sexual liberation as it has generally been interpreted, or is there something else that we can discern from this new theme in Iryŏp's philosophy?

Korean society has interpreted Iryŏp's New Theory of Chastity as a declaration of radical sexual freedom. When she issued a challenge to the traditional morality of sex and gender, what exactly was she suggesting? She claimed that instead of blindly following the received concept of virtue, women "should have absolute pride in their chastity and female virtue" and maintain maidenhood. But what does it mean to "maintain maidenhood"? Iryŏp answered this too: "We should have boundless pride in chastity and should never lose the spirit of maidenhood. Maidenhood does not mean the foolish idea that a woman should lower her face or be shy when encountering members of the other sex. It means believing in the absolute power of one's virtue; that is to say, convincing oneself that one is the owner of a pure body and soul that can be renewed anytime."[36]

Iryŏp is not advising women to altogether ignore chastity and maidenhood. She is urging them to be active advocates of femininity rather than passive recipients of the moralistic interpretation of the female body that her society and tradition imposed on women in the name of chastity. Advocating feminine sexuality as the source of women's pride and the power to be independent means women must recover their agency in their encounters with themselves and with others, including men. In this sense, chastity and feminine virtue become tools for women to exercise their independence instead of a controlling mechanism used against women, as they had been in Korea for centuries.

Iryŏp published only two articles on her New Theory of Chastity, but her views on women's issues have been understood almost exclusively through a

superficial reading of the New Theory of Chastity. This sort of evaluation became the basis of claims for the lawlessness of her personal life and, by its extension, the inauthenticity of the visions she proposed on women's issues. This tendency was also directed to two other figures who were categorized as "liberal" New Women along with Iryŏp: Na Hyesŏk, the first female painter of Western-style paintings in Korea, and Kim Myŏngsun, Korea's first modern-style female writer.

A STORY OF A FEMALE PAINTER AND A FEMALE WRITER: NA HYESŎK AND KIM MYŎNGSUN

Na Hyesŏk grew up in an environment quite different from that of Kim Iryŏp. Iryŏp was almost an orphan by the time she graduated from Ewha Hakdang. Na was born into an affluent family. Her two brothers both studied in Japan, proof of the high status of her family in Korean society. Na was educated in her home village, and then at Chinmyŏng Women's High School in Seoul, from which she graduated in 1913. Right after that, she enrolled at a private women's art school in Tokyo, as arranged by her oldest brother. She soon became a well-known figure among the Korean students studying in Japan by virtue of her unique position as a female painter and a writer. While in Japan, Na fell in love with a young poet named Ch'oe Sŭnggu. Unfortunately, Ch'oe died of tuberculosis in 1916, devastating Na.

In 1918, Na Hyesŏk returned to Korea and became involved in various social activities. Meanwhile, she was being courted by Kim Uyŏng (金雨英, 1886–1958), a friend of Na's brother who had earned a law degree from Kyoto Imperial University and who promised to fully support her artistic endeavors. Na finally succumbed, and they were married in 1920. Their Western-style wedding ceremony was held in a Christian church in Seoul, making the occasion a notable one in Korean high society. Over the next several years, the couple had four children, and Kim's job took them around the world. They lived in Manchuria in 1923 and toured Europe and the United States from 1927 to 1929. When they were in Europe, Na's husband studied mostly in Germany and England, and Na visited various museums in Paris. It was in that city that Na met and had an affair with a man named Ch'oe Rin (崔麟, 1878–1958), a leader of a Korea-born religion called Ch'ŏndogyo. Ch'oe was on a business tour to Europe.[37]

After Na and her husband returned to Korea, Na's husband found out about her affair with Ch'oe Rin and demanded a divorce, threatening to sue her for adultery if she would not agree. She signed the divorce papers. Now

free from daily obligations, for a brief period, Na seems to have felt liberated. Soon, however, she had to contend with destitution and the indifference of society. The pressure began to weaken body and soul, and she suffered a nervous breakdown and paralysis. According to hospital records in Seoul, she died on December 10, 1948.

The story of Kim Myŏngsun, another first-generation liberal New Woman, differs from those of both Kim Iryŏp and Na Hyesŏk. Kim Myŏngsun's father was a wealthy man and her mother had been his concubine. She was an illegitimate child and had to struggle against the stigma of illegitimacy throughout her life. She was educated first in Korea, and then in Japan from 1913 to 1915. During that period, she began submitting her writings to literary journals, and leading members of the Korean literary circle quickly recognized her talent. She was invited to join the literary magazine *Creation* (Ch'angjo 創造). She returned to Korea, studied at Sungmyŏng Women's High School from 1916 to 1917, and returned to Japan in the 1920s to study music.[38] By 1925, she was a reporter for the *Daily News* (Maeil sinmun 每日新聞) and some of her literary works had been published. Beginning in 1927, she appeared in several movies.

Ch'oe Hyesil, a scholar of Korean literature, writes that Kim Myŏngsun's diverse love affairs would serve as arch examples of the wages of sin for critics who disparaged the New Women as love-supremacists or sluts.[39] Kim Myŏngsun had an affair with Kim Ch'angyong, an artist, and then with Im Nowŏl, who would later live with Kim Iryŏp. Around 1924, she gave birth to a child in a rural area. She claimed that Im Nowŏl was the child's father, but Im strongly denied it. The denial was a shocking blow to Kim, a blow that contributed to the mental disease that eventually came to severely hamper her activities.

A more significant event in her relationships with men took place earlier in life. Around 1915, she had an intimate relationship with an army lieutenant.[40] The details are unknown, but it has been depicted as a "rape" because the lieutenant did not intend to marry her, whereas Kim Myŏngsun had assumed that they would marry. When their relationship deteriorated, Kim attempted suicide. The incident was publicized in Korea, and Kim's father, extremely angry at her behavior, cut off all financial support. She was twenty years old. Her relationships with the lieutenant and then with Im Nowŏl were in fact doomed to fail, for she was an illegitimate child whom no man from a decent family would marry. Like Na, Kim Myŏngsun suffered from severe financial problems. From around 1942 until her death in 1951, she was homeless, sometimes managing a living by selling peanuts and gums on the street. She died at Aoyama Neurological Hospital in Japan.

The lives of these three liberal New Women have primarily been understood in terms of the most sensational events of those lives. Their "tragic" deaths were interpreted as "natural" results of unruly lifestyles and sexual license. Their critics would say that they had brought tragedy on themselves by refusing to follow social norms. As their lives became objects of scorn and came to be portrayed in terms of social and sexual license, their relationships were interpreted as "mere" love affairs. They had failed in their marriages; so their lives as a whole were "failures." Underlying such a decisive and judgmental evaluation of a New Woman's life is a complex interplay of love, the institution called marriage, and social power dominated by a patriarchal system. The society to which these New Women belonged insisted on seeing only one layer of "love" in their lives. But the loves for which they were punished, and the love from which they suffered, were far more complex than they looked.

LOVE WHICH IS NOT ONE

At the first and most visible layer of love in the lives of the New Women, we find romantic love, the only layer of love that their society saw in their lives. Behind that, however, we find the second layer of love, which has to do with the historicity of romantic love and love affairs and with the institution called marriage. Virginia Woolf could have had these women in mind when she declared that the prerequisites of a woman's independence are "money and a room of one's own." The love and marriages of all three women—and their lives after their relationships ended—were significantly influenced by the social and economic structure of their society, including the institution of marriage. Kim Iryŏp's marriage to Yi Noik was partly motivated by her difficult financial situation. With no parents or siblings to rely on, she was completely alone and had to take care of herself after finishing her education, as she states: "Even before I had a sense of the other sex or of what love is, I was destined to marry a man who was old enough to be my father."[41] But that man offered her financial security and it was his financial support that enabled her to study in Japan and create the journal *New Women*.

The plight of Na Hyesŏk was similar. Her marriage, an event known all over Seoul, marked the first Western-style wedding in Korea. But Kim Uyŏng was ten years older than she was and had a child from his previous marriage, which had ended with the death of his wife. When they negotiated their divorce, Na Hyesŏk insisted that the family assets be divided evenly. But Kim Uyŏng refused, and Na had to sign a divorce agreement awarding her only a small alimony. Her eventual breakdown was caused mostly by financial

problems. As for Kim Myŏngsun, because of her status as an illegitimate child, she was not even allowed to attempt a marriage.

The third layer of love—again, mostly ignored by the public, but an important part of the psychological reality of these women—was maternal love. Although all three women had difficulty showing maternal love in a "normal" way, the imperatives of maternal love became part of their pain both implicitly and explicitly. The most obvious case was that of Na Hyesŏk, who had four children with Kim Uyŏng. Under the terms of their divorce, she was deprived of all rights as a mother, and her ex-husband was determined to prevent her from having any contact with their children. Despite her ex-husband's strict prohibition, she covertly visited her children at their schools to see them. When her husband eventually found out about it, he had her arrested. Still, Na had to give up the idea of going to Paris, for she could not bear the thought of not seeing her children for years.[42]

Kim Iryŏp recorded Na's desperate efforts to see her children: "Na said that she was going to lose her mind with the memories of the images of her children appearing in front of her eyes, and the phantom of her husband. . . . . When she saw children the same age as her own, she had to turn her eyes away."[43] Iryŏp added that she had told Na, "Once you transcend the norms of the time, you should follow though on your decision with determination. Why are you not considering what will happen to you in the future? You need to continue your life, free from family and children."[44] One might assume that Iryŏp could offer such advice to Na only because she herself had no children. That may have been true in a superficial way, but Iryŏp's perspective on maternity is more nuanced than such an assumption would imply.

Her short story "Awakening" (Chagak 自覺, 1926) seems to reflect her advice to Na. It tells of a woman named Im Sunsil whose husband, having gone to Japan to study, meets another woman there and demands a divorce. His wife is stunned by the news. In accordance with the social tradition of the time, she has been taking care of the in-laws during her husband's absence. And she is eight months pregnant when she gets his letter. Eventually however, the woman recovers her presence of mind and writes back to her husband:

> I clearly understand the meaning of your letter. I'm glad that you beat me to it. I have long grieved at the misfortune of my extraordinary suffering caused by a miserable married life with you, who are not my ideal type of husband. Yet being a woman, I couldn't release myself from this wretched bond. I will send you the child upon its birth, regardless of whether it is a boy or a girl, as I believe the responsibility of raising the child would hamper my effort to

> make my own way through life. But please remind the child that there is another person who wishes its happiness more than anyone else in this world.[45]

Perhaps raising a child as a divorced woman was not an ideal option in the Korea of the 1920s. Iryŏp does not mention what legal issues might have affected child-rearing after a divorce. Still, Im Sunsil's attitude toward her unborn child gives us a pause. Her main concern is not the child, but her own need to establish herself and she regards the divorce as a liberation from the marriage. Her determination to lead an independent life is strong, and later in the story, she does, in fact succeed in obtaining an education. But although adamant about establishing an independent life for herself, she cannot put the child out of her thoughts and expresses a desperate desire to see him:

> Whenever I hear about my child, I get a lump in my throat. He is now four years old and I hear that he is bright, good-looking and quick at words. Sometimes I miss him so much so that I feel like sneaking up to the gate of my ex-husband's house to steal a quick look at him, but I control myself. I guess the human heart is such that if I were to see my child once, I would want to see him again, and then more and more often, until I would want to have him with me for good.[46]

Sunsil relentlessly rejects what a mother's natural love for her child beckons her to do. "I cannot sacrifice my whole life for the love of my child. That is absolutely out of the question. I cannot allow myself to get mixed up with my child's life and get lost in between."[47] In the Korean Confucian society, motherhood is a woman's primary role, but Iryŏp's heroine unambiguously challenges this norm in search of a life as an authentic human being. She characterizes life with her in-laws as one of "cruel slavery" and will not risk becoming entangled with them again. What is important now is transforming herself into an independent person, not fulfilling the traditional role of a mother. And she makes this choice so that she will no longer be subject to the unfair treatment from either husband or in-laws. Sunsil confirms her determination at the end of the story, saying, "Now that I have escaped from a life of cruel slavery, I have the choice to be a full human being, leading a worthy and meaningful life. And I am going to look for a person who will take me as such."[48]

Here Sunsil represents the dilemma of the New Women, and of many other women since the beginning of the women's liberation movement: should a woman follow the tradition that prioritizes her role as a mother, or should she

challenge social norms and put the path to living as a human being ahead of her family obligations? In the face of conflicting priorities like those Sunsil faces, one will eventually make a decision based on one's view of life. This does not mean, however, that one's human psyche will always follow this decision, even when it was made voluntarily.

The rather strange essay "A Child Who Appears Only in My Dreams" (Kkumgil roman onŭn ŏrini) seems to reflect the gap between Iryŏp's determination to pursue a life as an independent woman and a certain psychological inner life, the nature of which does not seem to have been clear even to Iryŏp herself. In the essay, she talks about a child who repeatedly appears in her dreams. She wonders whether it is her sister, who died at the age of four. She asks, "I am already past the age of being a mother; is this the exertion of subconscious maternity? It happened in a dream, but still who is this child who gives me such an anxious feeling of love and who occupies my entire mind? If the child is destined to be born of my womb and grown in my arms, for what reason has the child failed to be born to me and remained lost in my dreams?"[49] Na Hyesŏk's maternal love was addressed explicitly and it tore her life apart at its final stage. Even though Iryŏp did not have a child, the maternal love she might have wanted to exercise still demonstrated itself in a hidden form in her dreams.

Kim Myŏngsun offers yet another story of maternal love. Beginning around 1936, she wrote a series of short pieces about orphans and orphanages based on her experience working at Ichigaya Orphanage in Tokyo.[50] Kim adopted a child from this orphanage whom she raised until her death. Ch'oe Hyesil pointed out that even during Kim's final years, when she was homeless, she never gave up the child.[51] Ch'oe interpreted Kim's attachment to this child as an expression of her guilt for having deserted her own child in 1924. Kim Yusŏn, another Korean scholar, noted that people criticized Kim Myŏngsun for her seemingly reckless sexual relationships with men, but the expression "lover" almost never appears in her poems; "mother" is the most frequent subject of them.[52] But this is an image of her own mother, rather than a portrayal of herself as a mother. Because she was an illegitimate child, legitimate motherhood was denied to Kim Myŏngsun, as no man from a decent family would take her as a wife. Her pain over deserting the child she bore out of wedlock was doubled when she realized that she had handed on the misfortune of the illegitimacy to the next generation.

All three women suffered in different ways from maternal love. Their suffering, however, does not mean that maternal love is another kind of love, as we are frequently led to believe. It is not another form of love but a different

dimension of heterosexual love, as childbearing is a consequence of that activity. Love does not exist just as a love affair, even when it is considered only as such. Love as a concept, a love affair as a reality, marriage as an institution to secure love, and childbearing as a consequence of love all exist within social, biological, and historical environments.

Evaluations of the New Women in Korea have long been dominated by the convention of scandalizing their private lives. This trend involves stigmatizing the New Women with names like "play girls" and "high-society madams."[53] As Inoue Kazue pointed out, the ideology of nationalism in Korea hampered research on the New Women until the 1990s.[54] This means that the lives and even the deaths of the New Women were judged by the patriarchal ideology. The selective memories about their lives became the foundation of the judgments made about their thoughts, and for that reason the New Women's philosophy has failed to attract the attention it deserves.

French philosopher Jacques Derrida said, "Philosophy is psychology and biography together, a movement of the living psychē, and thus of individual life and the strategy of this life, insofar as it assembles all the philosophemes and all the ruses of truth."[55] Biography and psychology in reference to the New Women have failed to be lifted up into philosophy, when the stories of their lives continue to be sources of entertainment and gossip in tabloid papers. We will discuss the issue of philosophy, biography, and gender in connection with Buddhist philosophy in chapter 7. In chapter 3, we will reconstruct the social and historical psychē of the New Women's—including Kim Iryŏp's—philosophy of love. We will try to understand their lives and even deaths in the broader context of the socio-historical evolution of societal values. These values were generated by the synergy of the new concepts of love, marriage, and gender equality and the search for freedom, as individuals in a modernizing society began to breathe these ideas and make them part of their existence.

Body That Matters: The *Seitō* and the Gibson Girls

WHO WERE THE NEW WOMEN?

When we try to understand the New Women's lives, we realize that different views on their lives conflict. The New Women claimed that their love lives were a challenge to the gender discrimination of a patriarchal society, whereas unsympathetic evaluators found their lifestyles sexually licentious and morally delinquent. The New Women's demand for sexual freedom was a radical challenge to social norms even by current standards in Korean society. How was it

possible that the New Women raised their voices so strongly, if only for a brief period, at the beginning of the twentieth century, when women's position in Korean society was more bound by tradition than it is now? The radical nature of their challenge may have caused the premature death of their vision by inviting the conservative spirit to resist and control this newly growing group of women. Their society labeled them with terms of disgrace and charged them with debauchery. Were the New Women a social anomaly of Korean society, or did similar movements exist in other societies?

The phenomenon of the New Women was not an isolated incident that happened in Korea but was a historical event that took place from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries in many parts of the world. We arrive at a better understanding of the agenda and formation of the New Women of Korea by placing them in the broader context of the women's movement at the turn of the twentieth century and comparing them with the New Women of Japan and the United States.

HIRATSUKA RAICHŌ, THE SEITŌSHA, AND JAPANESE NEW WOMEN

The relationship between the women's movement in Korea in the 1920s and the 1930s and its Japanese counterpart is still debatable.[56] In the case of Kim Iryŏp, however, it is clear that she was influenced by the women's movement in Japan. One piece of evidence for this claim is the title Ch'ŏngt'aphoe (Blue Tower Society), a feminist group Iryŏp organized during her editorship of the journal *New Women*. As mentioned earlier, the name of the group, Ch'ŏngt'ap, is the Korean pronunciation of the Japanese name *Seitō*, a feminist magazine in Japan.[57] Iryŏp replaced one of the Chinese characters of *Seitō* and created a homophone; hence, Seitō means blue stockings whereas Ch'ŏngt'ap means blue tower.

The expression "New Women" (atarashii onna 新しい女) began to appear in Japan in the early 1900s. According to Hiratsuka Raichō (平塚らいてう, 1886–1971), a leading figure in the Japanese New Women's movement, Tsubouchi Shōyō (坪内逍遥, 1859–1935) used the expression as the title of his lecture at Waseda University in 1910. Tsubouchi later published the lecture in the book *The So-Called New Women* (Iwayuru atarashii onna, 所謂新シイ女).[58] The term became popularly associated with the activities of the writers related to *Seitō*, a literary magazine published by the Seitōsha (Blue Stockings Society) and created in 1911 by Raichō. The history of the women's movement in modern Japan did not begin with *Seitō*. The first women's magazine in Japan appeared in 1885,[59] and the women's movement became active alongside the

civil rights movement during the 1880s.[60] Korean scholar of Japanese literature Lee Ji Sook noted that female civil rights activists of the 1880s paved the way for the creation of *Seitō* and the activities of the Japanese New Women at the beginning of the twentieth century. The activists of the 1880s were critical of traditional women's roles as wives and mothers and made a claim for gender equality,[61] providing the foundation of the women's movement.

Raichō's essay, "In the Beginning, Woman Was the Sun," appeared in the inaugural issue of *Seitō*. At the outset, Raichō declared:

> In the beginning, woman was truly the sun. An authentic person.
>
> Now she is the moon, a wan and sickly moon, dependent on another, reflecting another's brilliance.
>
> *Seitō* herewith announces its birth.
>
> Created by the brains and hands of Japanese women today, it raises its cry like a newborn child.[62]

As Raichō states here, a common imagery for woman is the moon. Raichō claims that before the woman took an ambiguous position like a waning moon, the woman was the sun, an authentic person. Raichō envisions that each and every woman has hidden genius, and the goal of a woman's liberation is to recover this hidden genius. Raichō writes: "Each and every woman possesses hidden genius, the potential for genius. And I have no doubt that this potential will soon become a reality. It would be deplorable, indeed, if this tremendous potential were to remain untapped and unfulfilled for lack of spiritual concentration."[63]

How did Raichō conceive the idea of woman as the sun? One possible source is the Japanese foundation myth as found in the *Records of Ancient Things* (Kojiki, 古事記), compiled in 712. According to the *Kojiki*, the oldest record of ancient Japan, the land of Japan was created by a male god, Izanagi (イザナギ), and a female goddess, Izanami (イザナミ). After the creation, Izanagi and Izanami populated the land with various deities, and these deities became venerated by Japanese people in the indigenous Japanese religion known as Shinto (神道), meaning the "way of the gods." Among the deities created by Izanagi and Izanami was sun-goddess Amaterasu (Sun's Brilliance 天照). Shinto envisions Japanese emperors as Amaterasu's direct descendants.[64] As the blood ancestress of the Japanese royal house, Amaterasu worship began in Japan as early as the fifth century. Note here that Amaterasu is the sun "goddess," not the sun "god," as Raichō declares woman's original position to be the brilliant sun.

As opposed to the original state of the sun, women's current situation is deplorable. Raichō writes:

> Today, whatever a woman does invites scornful laughter.
>
> I know full well what lurks behind this scornful laughter.
>
> Yet I do not fear in the least.
>
> But then, I ask, what are we to do about the pitiful lot of women who persist in heaping shame and disgrace on themselves?
>
> Is woman so worthless that she brings on only nausea?
>
> No! An authentic person is not.[65]

The gap between the original state of woman and the reality of women in her time made the birth of *Seitō* both possible and necessary. What does it entail to be an authentic person? Raichō claims that "the lack of spiritual concentration" veils women's authentic self. For that self to be revealed and activated, women need passion, and spiritual cultivation is a gateway to the authentic self. Raichō writes:

> Nor shall I ignore the fact that *Seitō,* born amid the scorching summer heat, possesses a passion so intense that it destroys the most extreme heat.
>
> Passion! Passion! We live by this and nothing else.
>
> Passion is the power of prayer. The power of will. The power of Zen meditation. The power of the way of the gods. Passion, in other words, is the power of spiritual concentration.
>
> And spiritual concentration is the one and only gateway to the realm of mystery and wonder. . . .
>
> I shall search for the genius to be found in the very center of this spiritual concentration.[66]

For Raichō, freedom and liberation for women become possible only through "sweeping, self-liberating spiritual revolution,"[67] and spiritual revolution in turn was possible only by giving up the self. Raichō states: "Only when we cut ourselves loose from the self, will we reveal our genius. For the sake of our hidden genius, we must sacrifice this self."[68] What kind of self does she demand that women give up? The women's movement exhorts the women to find their lost selves. The women in a patriarchal society have long been a nameless multitude. Recovering their names, and thus their identities, is the first step in finding themselves and thus attaining equal standing with men. Contrary to such basic feminist notions, Raichō claims that to recover their hidden genius,

women must give up the self. "Our savior is the genius within us," she contends. "We no longer seek our savior in temples or churches, in the Buddha or God. We no longer wait for divine revelation. By our own efforts, we shall lay bare the secrets of nature within us. We shall be our own divine revelation."[69] In Raichō's search for the authentic self we find a strong influence of Zen Buddhism in that, for her, the genius of women is retrievable through spiritual cultivation, and the freedom attained by meditation enables women to express their creativity. By giving up the limited self, women will attain a liberated and amplified self.

A practitioner of meditation, Raichō emphasizes the importance of inner spiritual revolution as the basis of women's liberation, reporting that if she had "not followed the path of Zen, the essay ['In the Beginning, Woman Was the Sun'] would certainly have been far different."[70] She compares the experience of meditation to the philosophy of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900): "Nietzsche's thoughts about life and creativity seemed to have much in common with the insights gained from zazen [seated meditation]."[71] And she asks: "What would Nietzsche have written, I often wondered, if he had known about East Asian thought, that is to say, Zen?"[72]

Raichō did not further develop her ideas on the relationship between Nietzsche's philosophy and Zen Buddhism. But, she was ahead of time in this regard. Later students of Buddhism have documented similarities between the two bodies of thought.[73] For Raichō, Nietzsche's affirmation of life and creativity links him to both Zen Buddhist practice and women's movements. She regards the liberation of women as flowing from the revelation of the true quality of each individual, a quality that is both life affirming and unconventional: once a woman is aware of her inner genius and exploits it, she will begin to creatively engage with life, inevitably challenging social norms in the process. And Raichō sees Nietzsche's challenge to the social morality of his day as paralleling the challenge represented by women's movement and Zen practice.

Raichō did not join the monastery and remained a lay practitioner of Buddhism. But in her emphasis of the principle that Buddhist spiritual cultivation should be the basis of women's liberation, she has much in common with Kim Iryŏp's view of the relationship of women's liberation and Buddhism. As it does for Raichō, creativity and affirmation of life constitute the core of Iryŏp's understanding of Buddhist philosophy and practice.

Raichō's essay on the rise of the women's movement in Japan criticizes the Meiji Restoration for its male-centeredness and blind acceptance of Western civilization. She indicts the women's movement of her time as "superficial," stating that the ethos of the day stressed "the freedom and popular rights

movement,"[74] which was not comprehensive enough to deal with women's issues. Most women, she felt, were not yet awake to the reality of their situation. With Higuchi Ichiyō (1872–1896), Japanese women did begin to express themselves, Raichō believed; but the situation of women in Japan was still far from satisfactory. She writes:

> Around 1894 or 1895, beginning with Higuchi Ichiyō, young talented women appeared in the literary world, but here again they did little more than imitate men to show that women, too, were able to write novels on a par with them. To be sure, some women wrote about their own experiences and feelings in order to vent the suffering and despair of the life they had resigned themselves to. But what was lacking in this writing was a fighting spirit to undo this state of affairs and better it through new ideals.[75]

Raichō criticized the traditional image of women and argued that societal change is essential if any genuine liberation of women was to take place. Raichō also demanded a change in the direction of the women's movement: instead of a gendered movement, the women's movement must become a movement for all beings: "We have now advanced from self-awareness as human beings to self-awareness as women. . . . The focus of feminist thought has shifted from equality of the sexes, equal rights, and opportunity, to issues that concern both men and women (that is to say, love and marriage), motherhood, and children. In other words, feminism has shifted from the individual to the group, from self-interest to altruism."[76]

Like the New Women in Korea, most members of *Seitō* were college-educated and from upper-class families.[77] Their privileged status became subject to the same kind of criticism that the Korean New Women encountered. According to Japanese scholars Yoneda Sayoko and Ishizaki Shouko, "*Seitō* was considered to be a 'literary movement' by middle-class women who 'had no difficulties in life,' and thus the rapport between *Seitō* and the social reality of the women at the time failed to attract attention."[78]

Several controversies seriously affected the future of *Seitō*. One was the "five-colored liquor" (J. *goshiki no sake* 五色の酒) incident of 1912. A member of the Seitōsha named Otake Kōkichi (尾竹紅吉, 1893–1966) visited a famous hangout for writers and artists, Swan's Nest Café, where the proprietor offered her and her companions five-colored liquor. Fascinated by its color, Kōkichi would evoke the image in her writings.[79] This gave the public the impression that the New Women represented intoxication and such unwomanly behavior as visiting an old boys' club like the Swan's Nest Café. Another incident,

even more transgressive, occurred during the same period. Kōkichi, Raichō, and another member of the Seitōsha spent a night in the Yoshiwara, a red-light district in Tokyo, customly reserved for men. Kōkichi's uncle had arranged the trip. Dina Lowy, a scholar of the Japanese New Women, describes what happened: "According to Raichō, first they were taken to a teahouse and then on to the highest ranked brothel in the quarter. They spent the evening speaking with the high-ranked courtesan Eizan, and the three women stayed the night with her while the uncle slept separately. They left the Yoshiwara the following morning."[80] Needless to say, the Japanese public and media were scandalized by the "unwomanly" nature of this behavior. In addition, the short story "The Letter" (Tegami 手紙), by Araki Ikuko (荒木郁子, 1888–1943), which describes an affair between a married woman and an unmarried younger male, led to the banning of the April 1912 issue of *Seitō*. The story describes the woman's loveless marriage as "suffocating," and celebrated the adulterous love affair.

According to Lowy, Japanese society did not uniformly view the New Women as "bad women" in response to such provocations. Some did attack them for their "frivolous" behavior and liberal attitude toward sex. But they were also viewed, if only occasionally, as people paving the way for a new beginning for women and enriching social diversity.[81]

Barbara Sato, a historian of modern Japan, divides the women who emerged in Japan in the 1920s into three categories: "the bobbed-haired, short-skirted modern girl (modan gāru); the self-motivated housewife (shufu); and the rational, extroverted professional working woman (shokugyō fujin)."[82] It had been the New Women of 1910s, she argues, who set the stage for the emergence of a new outlook for women in the next decade in Japan. This evolution of the Japanese New Women of the 1910s into three vibrant classes is comparable to the case of Korea.

AMERICAN NEW WOMEN AND THE GIBSON GIRL

According to the American historian Ruth Bordin, the English expression "New Women" was originally coined by Henry James to characterize "American expatriates living in Europe: women of affluence and sensitivity, who despite or perhaps because of their wealth exhibited an independent spirit and were accustomed to acting on their own."[83] Bordin notes that when the term was used for the first time in the United States, "it was attached to the new American professional women emerging in increasing numbers in the last two decades of the nineteenth century."[84] The New Women in the United States,

like the New Women in Korea, were primarily the first generation of college-educated women in their families and were characterized by their independence from male control. The American New Women showed a strong desire to be recognized as individual human beings before being recognized according to any other roles they might play. Borden wrote:

> The New Woman departs from earlier nineteenth-century female innovators, especially social reformers, in her emphasis on taking responsibility for her own life and her independence from male control. As Nancy Cott has said, the New Woman "stood for self-development as contrasted to self-sacrifice or submergence in the family." It is this emphasis on independence that makes her truly new. She is more than a good mother, a good wife, a good daughter. In fact, she need be none of those because she can stand independently.[85]

Yet again, as in the case of the Korean New Women, the concept of the New Women changed in the United States between the 1890s and the 1920s. During the 1890s, the New Women were defined by their "economic independence and professionalism." During the first decade of the twentieth century, "the term New Woman was used to describe all innovators: reformers, athletes, scientists, Marxists, Bohemians, and aviators." Yet during the 1920s, the term was used to refer to a woman who was more interested in "sexual and personal freedoms and taking charge of her life in terms of manners and morals, the right to drink or wear short skirts, for example, than a vocation."[86]

In a similar context, art historian Ellen Todd describes the image of the New Women as a group in the United States during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth as follows: "Since the end of the nineteenth century the phrase 'New Woman' had been the focal point for an ideological discourse on gender difference and the changing social order. . . . Around the turn of the century, for example, the New Woman had a college education, campaigned for the vote, became a social worker in the spirit of Progressive Era reform, and frequently remained single."[87]

The first generation of American New Women was born from the 1850s to the 1860s into middle- or upper-middle-class families. They received college educations in the 1870s to 1880s, held professional jobs, and participated in the suffrage movement. Most of them bypassed marriage and maintained independence in their economic situations and in their relationships with male partners. Their careers and financial independence were determining factors in terms of their identities, but they maintained traditional morals. The New

Women of the middle or upper-middle class who possessed financial independence, however, contrasted with the women from the lower class who needed to work for survival. For example, immigrant women held low-paying clerical jobs and expanded their traditional boundary of heterosexual relationships, but they were rarely called "New Women."[88]

The second generation of American New Women held a different position from their predecessors with regard to sexual morality. Beginning in 1910, with the second generation of New Women, the word "feminism" began to appear, taking the place of previous expressions such as "women's movement," "women's rights," or "the cause of women."[89] Ellen Todd notes that feminism "emerged from the ideological Left," which was sympathetic to the socialist movement in the sense that it perceived the exploitation of the working class as comparable to the exploitation of women in traditional patriarchal societies.

The image of the New Women, who were educated and independent and who challenged male partners in professional and other realms of life, was portrayed in the visual image created by painter Charles Dana Gibson (1867–1944). Known as "the Gibson Girl," the New Woman in his drawing was portrayed as "dressed in a shorter skirt and comfortable walking shoes, and tanned from exercise in the sun, [and she] has dropped in on the steel engraving lady before meeting her male companion on the golf course."[90] This image of the New Woman is a strong contrast to the traditional woman who "sits at her embroidery frame, tending hearth and home and awaiting Reginald, the man who adores his 'lady love' and places fair womanhood on a pedestal."[91] The change of outfit and appearance of the New Women as compared to the Old Women was also noticeable in Korea. However, there is a major difference in the acceptance of New Women in the two societies. Homer Fort describes the meaning of the Gibson Girl in American society as follows:

> His [Gibson's] pen has caught the true inspiration and he embodies in one composite picture the vivacity, the independence and hauteur, the condescending amiability, the grace and the catholic spirit of the daughter of this great Republic. You like this woman, whether in a magazine or in life and you instantly know she is neither English, French, nor German. Instinctively you say: "This is the American woman."[92]

This short passage effectively demonstrates the different situations that the New Women in Korea and in the United States faced in their social and historical contexts. In the United States, the newly emerged group of New Women represented the spirit of the New World as opposed to that of Old Europe. As

Henry James used the phrase "New Women" to refer to the "American" New Women in the Old World (i.e., Europe), the New Women represented the American spirit. In Korea, the situation was completely opposite. The New Women were understood as a threat to the Korean traditions and values that were still a source of power in Korean society.

This does not mean that the New Women and their demands for independence and equality were accepted in American society without resistance. Nor does this indicate that Gibson was a supporter of the cause of the New Women. As Todd pointed out, "Neither the Gibson girl nor her creator, Charles Dana Gibson, was a radical figure. Gibson mistrusted organized feminism, fearing it would make women too masculine. He deplored the extreme tactics of radical suffragists and, until his own wife served as a Democratic committeewoman, had reservations about women's political role."[93] Still, the acceptance of the image of the New Women as the "potential" image of women representing the American spirit was a luxury that New Women in Korea never had.

With the success of the suffrage movement and the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1920, the women's movement in the United States enacted lasting change. Along with these changes, the image of the New Women in the United States underwent a transformation. The Gibson Girl gave way to a new generation, the Jazz Age, from which the flapper emerged, wearing a short skirt and bobbed hair, demanding women's right to smoke, drink, and embrace sexual liberalism. In 1927, *Current History*'s "Symposium on the New Woman" reflected the efforts to redefine the concept of the women during the late 1920s. Todd described the frontispiece of the conference, *The New Woman Emerging Out of the Past,* as follows:

> The figure could be comfortably situated between the Gibson girl and the flapper. Youthful, she wears contemporary fashions, having traded in her flat heels for high ones. She has not yet bobbed her hair—it is drawn back neatly from her attractive but not heavily made up face. Her stance is firm, but stable rather than aggressive. Attributes of past and present accomplishments surround her: a pen, a globe, and books suggest her education and her cultural preoccupations; a T-square, and architectural plan, and scientific instruments her recent professional pursuits. Women's past and present roles are represented in a tapestry: wife-mother, spinner, pioneer woman, and turn-of-the-century athlete. Old and new remain inseparable.[94]

The image of the women in the conference proceedings did not necessarily reflect the reality of the New Women. However, we can at least assume that

those concerned with the New Women used that image to define these women. Even though the frontispiece of the conference was strongly positive, the conference was not exclusively for the supporters of the new role of women. Supporters and detractors both participated in the conference, debating pros and cons and demonstrating the ambivalent responses from society about women's changing roles and images. The fact that such a forum was possible should be counted as part of its value, which was another luxury that the New Women in Korea did not have. The Korean New Women had no opportunity to reflect upon the meaning of being New Women collectively before they were overwhelmed by the conservative power of Korean society.[95] The lack of collective reflection on the meaning of being New Women could place increased burden on an individual woman, as each New Woman faced the gendered reality of her society. Such a time for self-reflection arrived for Kim Iryŏp rather soon after the heyday of her life as a liberal New Woman.

CHAPTER THREE

Sense and Nonsense of Revolt
(1924–1927)

Ethics of Marriage, Ethics of Freedom

ELLEN KEY AND SOCIAL DARWINISM FOR LOVE AND MARRIAGE

In examining the demands and lives of the liberal New Women in Korea and the Seitōsha group in Japan, I came to wonder what inspired them to be so bold as to explicitly deal with feminine sexuality, a taboo in traditional Confucian society. And what encouraged them to live their lives according to their beliefs, radically challenging the traditional social norms of East Asia? Where did their vision come from? Who was the source of their inspiration? A Swedish feminist, Ellen Key (1849–1926), stands out as one potential source of influence. Ellen Key is a relatively unknown figure in contemporary feminist discourse. However, in the writings of the New Women in Korea, Japan, and even in the United States during the 1910s and 1920s, we frequently find echoes of Key's philosophy on marriage, sexuality, and love, together with some references to her ideas on maternity and child-rearing.

Ellen Key's works were translated into eleven European languages,[1] including English, during the first decade of the twentieth century.[2] Some of her writings were also translated into Japanese in the 1910s. In the case of Korea, her work was first introduced in 1921 in a journal essay discussing her pioneering role in the women's movement.[3] In her publications, especially in *Love and Marriage* (1911) and *Love and Ethics* (1912), Key developed a philosophy of love, challenging the Lutheran concept of marriage. Key wrote:

> There are to be found younger men who maintain that love—not merely the formula about love in the marriage-service—must be present if the marriage is to be regarded as a moral one. And probably these neo-Lutheran prophets of love use their influence to prevent a number of repulsive marriages. But it does not occur either to them or to their congregation to treat with contempt a couple who have been married for the most despicable reasons. . . . And if a person who is unhappy in a loveless marriage frees himself and establishes a new home on "personal love, the moral ground of marriage," then the

churchmen hasten to substitute for "the moral ground of marriage" that of duty.[4]

Key claimed that marriage should not be reduced to an institution for reproduction and that society should not force an individual to remain in a marriage if the marriage is not based on love. For an individual to remain in a marriage without love, Key contended, is not only unethical but detrimental to the betterment of the human species, because it would foster an environment that would be harmful for the education of children. Key also argued for "free divorce," contending that remaining in a marriage without love had been used to justify adultery. Key was aware of the potential abuse of the concepts of "free love" and "free divorce," but she still considered that taking such a risk would be better than supporting the hypocrisy of pretentious marriage without love. Key wrote: "Whatever abuses free divorce may involve, they cannot often be worse than those which marriage has produced and still produces—marriage, which is degraded to the coarsest sexual habits, the most shameless traffic, the most agonizing soul-murders, the most inhuman cruelties, and the grossest infringements of liberty that any department of modern life can show."[5]

Key warned that we should not confuse free love or free divorce with licentious behavior and suggested that "instead of defending 'free love,' which is a much-abused term capable of many interpretations, we ought to strive for the freedom of love; for while the former has come to imply freedom for any sort of love, the latter must only mean freedom for a feeling which is worthy the name of love."[6] In *Love and Marriage,* Key unambiguously criticized the concept of marriage as a social or communal duty, and she also opposed monogamy on the ground that monogamy justified adultery. As she condemned the practice of sex and marriage in her society, she celebrated the importance of love and affection in heterosexual relationships.

In *Love and Ethics,* however, Key stepped back. To clarify her position, she explains that in *Love and Marriage* she was emphasizing love over marital obligation and encouraged citizens to contribute to society as much as possible. Key cautiously made her case by adopting social Darwinism to reinterpret her endorsement of the freedom of love and divorce. Individual freedom and social Darwinism may seem to contradict each other, but the combination of these two concepts constitutes the philosophy of education for which Key has been best known. In *Love and Ethics,* Key wrote: "The basic idea of 'Love and Marriage' was not that *the individual must obtain the highest measure of happiness in the love relation,* but that *society must be so adjusted as to make the happiness*

of the individual subserve the betterment of the species" (italics original).[7] Key further elaborated on the issue:

> I maintained in "Love and Marriage" that the modern sex problem consists in finding the proper equilibrium between, on the one hand, the requirements for the improvement of the species and, on the other hand, the increased demands of the individual to be happy in love; whereas formerly the problem was only between society's demands for fixed marriage forms and the individual's demands to satisfy his sex life in any form. The sex ethics that proceeds from this new equilibrium will be the only true ethics. It will effect an upliftment of life in both the species and the individual.[8]

In this manner, Key was able to validate the "ethical" grounds of her claims for free love and divorce put forward in *Love and Marriage* through the social Darwinist interpretation in *Love and Ethics*. In sum, Key stated: "in love *humanity has found the form of selection most conducive to the ennoblement of the species*" (italics original).[9] Was the social Darwinism that Key so strongly advocated in *Love and Ethics* her reaction to the cold reception of her radical theories of sexuality, love, and marriage in *Love and Marriage?* Or was she actually more interested in the "betterment of species" than individual freedom at this stage, although she contended that they were interrelated? We can only wonder. However, it is not difficult to see the influence of Key's theory of love, marriage, and ethics on Iryŏp's philosophy of love and chastity.

Iryŏp and other liberal New Women in Korea did not incorporate social Darwinism into their philosophy of love. The Korean New Women also did not adopt Key's theory of child education. This can probably be attributed to the fact that neither Kim Iryŏp nor Kim Myŏngsun was able to fully develop their maternal lives, as discussed in chapter 2. Even Na Hyesŏk, who suffered enormously from her separation from her children after her divorce, refused to adopt Key's theory that marriage without love has a bad influence on children. When Na's husband demanded a divorce, Na faltered, primarily because of her children's future. Na's brother tried to reason with her by using Key's theory of the education of children to convince her to accept the divorce. He told Na, "Ellen Key said that children would be better off being raised in a new family created after divorce instead of being raised by parents who are not in a good relationship." Na responded, "That is nothing but theory. Mother's love is precious and great. It is tragic if a mother has to lose her motherly love; so is it, if a child were not raised by a loving mother. Since I am aware of this, I cannot

agree to divorce. Please be an arbitrator for me."[10] That Na's brother cited Key in such a critical situation is a good indication of the popularity of Ellen Key among Korean intellectuals at that time.

The Korean New Women's silence on social Darwinism and maternity in Key's writings contrasts with the situation of the Japanese New Women. Hiratsuka Raichō was known as an advocate of Key's theory on maternity, and her debate on the topic with Yosano Akiko is well known.[11]

NEW WOMEN AND THEIR IDEALS

The New Theory of Chastity has been a trademark of Kim Iryŏp for the general public in Korea as well as in many scholarly works on Kim Iryŏp. However, as discussed previously, this idea did not appear until 1924, when she published her article "Our Ideals." There exists only one other article that deals with her New Theory of Chastity, published in 1927 under the title "My View on Chastity." Iryŏp mentioned that she had discussed this idea at the meeting of the Blue Tower Society in 1920,[12] but the idea did not appear in published form until 1924. Before the publication of "Our Ideals," Iryŏp was mainly interested in women's education and the promotion of women's awareness of gender discrimination. All the polemics on women that Iryŏp published in the journal *New Women* were limited in scope to modest demands for gender equality, and sexual freedom was not addressed at all. Looking back, we can safely say that the sensationalism regarding Iryŏp's view on female sexuality has not only distorted the meaning of the New Theory of Chastity but also inflated the value of this idea in understanding Iryŏp as a thinker and New Woman.

In "Our Ideals," the new concept of chastity was only one of the three new ideals Iryŏp proposed for the New Women, the other two being "new personalism" (*sinsŏnggyŏk chuŭi* 新性格主義), and a new standard for the ideal spouse for women. In this essay, Iryŏp distinguished three types of personality—sentimental, realistic, and romantic—and proposed a combination of the realist, whose views are focused on the present, and the romantic, who knows how to dream about the future, as the ideal personality, which she defined as the "new personalism."[13] She also suggested that an artist or a thinker is an ideal candidate for a spouse of a New Woman, reasoning that they had advanced ideas and thus would be willing to listen to how a New Woman would like to live her life. While proposing this new vision for a New Woman, Iryŏp also warned that to realize such ideals would inevitably require a collision with the existing norms and codes of behavior in society.[14]

The discussion of the New Theory of Chastity in this essay became fully developed in the 1927 article. It is not difficult to see the influence of Ellen Key's ethics of love, marriage, and freedom in Iryŏp's theory of chastity and love as expressed in both essays. Another influence evident here is Hiratsuka Raichō, who in 1915 penned an essay on feminine sexuality entitled "The Value of Virginity" (Shojo no shinka, 処女の真価). In it, Raichō questioned the validity of the value that her society had assigned to female virginity, arguing that it was being imposed for no clear reason; and she offered her own idea of the value of a woman's virginity and the right time to lose it: "A virgin should preserve her virginity, which is hers to keep as she wishes, until the best time to lose it comes around. To throw it away at the wrong time is a waste, but so is not to lose it at the right moment. . . . The most fitting time to lose one's virginity is when sensual desires arise out of a romantic love grounded in a spiritual attraction to the beloved, when the union of two persons can be felt intimately and deeply."[15]

Just as Key believed that society should not force people to maintain a marriage without love, so Raichō believed that it was morally wrong for a woman to give up her virginity for any reasons but love for her partner: "The loss of virginity in formally arranged marriages, which today's society endorses and conventional morality champions, seems to me often something ugly, even criminal. For a woman to forfeit her virginity for security in life, as a temporary escape, out of simple vanity, or for the sake of her parents or family is a crime."[16]

When Kim Iryŏp turned her attention to the issue of virginity and chastity, she offered a similar argument. In "Our Ideals," she wrote: "We women who try to stay far away from all the existing systems and traditions and thus revive a new pure meaning of life cannot but radically revolt against, among others, the reigning morality on sex, which ignores our character and personality. I believe that many awakened women will appear among us who follow as their absolute credo the thoughts of Ibsen or Hellen Keller."[17]

In her 1927 essay on the New Theory of Chastity, Iryŏp expressed her claim even more boldly. At the same time, she realized that the idea of new chastity was not an issue relevant only to women, that it had broader implications for human liberation. "We, new women and new men, who want to do away with all the conventions, traditions, and concepts and who are determined to bring attention to a new and fresh concept of life cannot but strongly resist, among other things, the traditional morality on sex, which has ignored our personalities as well as our individual characteristics."[18] She further claims that human beings "are free from the time they were born. The freedom of love, of mar-

riage, and of divorce are all sacred; to prohibit this freedom is a bad custom of an underdeveloped society."[19]

In this discussion of sexual morality one finds an echo of Ellen Key's philosophy of love, marriage, and freedom. Key understood the potential for backlash against her views that marriage without love was immoral and that people should be free to love, marry, and divorce as they chose. In self-defense, she stressed that her idea was not a sanction of reckless love affairs, and she elaborated her conception of liberal sexual morality in light of her social Darwinist position on child education. To cling to a marriage without love must be harmful to children, she argued, and was therefore incompatible with the goal of bettering the human race. Iryŏp must have found the theory appealing. But she did not accept Key's focus on social Darwinism or the proposed connection between sexual freedom and the education of children. As a result, Iryŏp's challenge to the sexual morality of Korean society was vulnerable to the charge that she was warranting sexual license. She had no weapons to support her ideas other than the goal of women's liberation itself, a liberation that Korean society was not fully ready for.

On the surface, Iryŏp raised a strong voice in her challenge of conventional sexual morality. But she does not seem fully convinced of her own claims. The 1927 essay ends with her promise to reflect further on the issues of sexual morality and women's liberation: "At any rate, it is true that we should deny the traditional morality on sex and refuse the concept of chastity. This, however, does not mean that we accept reckless sexual relationships born out of curiosity or carnal desire. I believe that we should strive to consistently maintain our purity while at the same time creating a new morality on chastity. In any case, I will further think about this new approach to chastity."[20]

Iryŏp did not "further think about" her New Theory of Chastity, however. After publishing "My View on Chastity," she returned to her usual theme of the importance of women's awareness of gender discrimination. The next work in which she mentioned anything about female chastity would be her 1932 essay "Get Rid of the Concepts of Virgin or Non-virgin Woman" (Ch'ŏnyŏ pich'ŏnyŏ ŭi kwannyŏm ŭl yanggi hara 處女. 非處女 의 觀念을 揚棄하라). It had long been taboo for women to remarry in Confucian Korean society. By now, though, whether remarriage should be allowed was for Iryŏp a settled question. Since marriage is natural, so is remarriage, for any woman who faces the possibility. She argued that the problem lay in Korean society's dual standard about remarriage, at the root of which she found that society's view of women's chastity. But Iryŏp also protested the willingness of some women to remarry as a solution to financial woes: "If a New Woman in our time is to be serious,

she should be ready to take care of financial issues on her own. Even after marriage, she should not idle away without working simply because her husband has sufficient assets or income."[21]

After "My View on Chastity," Iryŏp focused more and more on the importance of finding the self and identity. In a short newspaper essay published in January 1933, "Three Admonitions to My Female Friends on the First Day of 1933" (1933 nyŏn ch'ŏnnal yŏsŏng ch'in'gu dŭl ege se kaji ch'unggo 1933 년 새해 첫날 여성 친구들에게 세가지 충고), she proposed three ideas on what women should pursue in the new year: "First, no matter what situation, do not forget yourself; whoever your partner might be, do not fall in love to the extent that you forget yourself. . . . Second, make sure to be your own self all of the time. Make sure to be the owner of your life and to make your choices on your own. . . . Third, remember that without a firm religious faith, life is as dangerous as a ship without an oar or without a helm."[22]

In an essay written in March that year, she offered five pieces of advice to girls graduating from school and entering society: first, be passionate about learning and make learning a habit; second, learn about your own country Korea; third, learn about the economic realities of Korea; fourth, don't make marriage your job; fifth, learn about yourself.[23] Her stress was again on the importance of finding identity. The change of focus in the work that followed "My View on Chastity" invites us to wonder whether there was a turning point in Iryŏp's thinking after 1927. But a closer reading of her work reveals that the change had taken place earlier.

Individualism: Old and New

OLD INDIVIDUALISM, GROUP CONSCIOUSNESS, AND SOCIAL COERCION

While overly fixating on Iryŏp's idea of new chastity, scholars have failed to understand the different dimensions of Iryŏp's writings in the 1920s that reveal the coming changes in her life. As early as 1924, when she first demanded a new approach to the concept of female chastity, Iryŏp was seriously searching for a way to control her own life, freeing herself from being controlled by other people's views of her. In her essay "Regarding the Development of One's Character" (In'gyŏk ch'angjo e 인격 창조에, 1924), Iryŏp assumes a reflective mood, asking herself what she had learned over the past year. She summarizes these revelations in three points: "First, I have awakened myself to be a person of character; second, I am awakened to maternal love; and third I became more appreciative of the artistic life."[24] Putting the three points together, Iryŏp

states: "I have purified my character."[25] All three developments are rather new in Iryŏp's thinking and are visibly different from the sexual freedom for which she raised her voice in "Our Ideals." The three issues Iryŏp mentions in this essay would have lasting influence on the evolution of her ideas, whereas the sexual morality discussed in "Our Ideals" would appear only one more time in "My View on Chastity" before fading away from Iryŏp's writings.

In this context, the idea of "new individualism" (*sin kaein chuŭi* 新個人主義), which Iryŏp characterized as core to her understanding of being awakened to become a person of character, is worthy of our attention. Iryŏp writes: "Being aware of one's character means to make new individualism (which is different from the old individualism developed by the bourgeoisie) as the foundation of life. The group consciousness stirs up all the impure instincts in us, but the individual's awareness of solitude is absolutely pure. I therefore thought that I should leave all the constraints of human society that transmit a group consciousness and should first of all become a human as a single individual."[26]

Iryŏp contrasts new individualism with the old variety, characterizing the former as an individual's sense of solitude and the latter as a group consciousness. Group consciousness, Iryŏp contends, functions as the "constraints of society," and it does so by stirring up "all the impure instincts in us." New individualism, on the other hand, leads individuals to "become a human as a single individual," Iryŏp reasons. While she would use the expression "new individualism" only one more time in her writings,[27] her idea of new individualism offers us a glimpse of a turning point in her thinking that would appear later in her Buddhist writings. By turning away from societal endorsement and appreciating the value of an individual's search for identity as a standard for her life, Iryŏp was paving new ground in her understanding of herself and her values for her life. Iryŏp described her state of mind when she practiced new individualism as follows:

> [As I tried to be a human as a single individual] I felt closer to my soul and I felt like I was finally able to find equilibrium in my mind. I preferred thinking by myself and feeling happy by myself, contacting the outside world as little as possible. . . .
>
> For the past year, I led my life with a new awareness of a complete individualism. Each and every moment, I examined myself, and if there was even a little bit of something not straightforward, I would make efforts to correct it. . . . My mind gradually became quiet. Even if my body were to be showered by the most soiled water in the world, I would be completely undisturbed. . . .

> Prior to being a wife of someone, I wanted first to refine my mind so that I could possess the pure heart and be completely satisfied with myself. I made such efforts not for the sake of the outside world, nor was it for my husband. My idea had its source in absolute individualism that demanded for me to do it for myself. Before I become a wife, I should first be a perfect individual—this is the awakening that I had earned for the past year.[28]

Iryŏp's determination that she should find confidence in herself before being a wife or a member of a society begins to take root in this essay.

New individualism was a new topic in Iryŏp's writings, but not completely unexpected. The second entry of her three points—that is, her awakening to the importance of maternal love—was a rather unexpected and unusual theme for Iryŏp. As Iryŏp strived to be an individual human being, she became aware of the reality of being a woman. Being a wife, and upholding the associated moral values, can mean embodying a social construction. However, being a woman is an existential condition, and Iryŏp became aware that maternal love is an undeniable part of femininity. Obligations as a wife change depending on time period and society, but maternal love and obligations are more constant. Iryŏp argues that independence is an individual's inborn right, and so is to be awakened to motherly love as a woman. Maternal love in this case should be read symbolically, rather than literally, as representing a quality of being a woman.[29] Iryŏp describes the characteristics of maternal love as feminine qualities of purity, humility, piety, and generosity, which she also identifies as shared with artistic qualities, stating: "As I was thinking that first, I should be a human being, and second, a woman, I was wondering what would be the best way to exercise the beauty of maternal love. It came to my mind that first I should lead a pious life that reflects the feminine qualities, which are elegance, purity, and humility. As I was thinking about practicing them, I felt my heart become boundlessly soft and gentle."[30]

The awareness that she should appreciate the artistic life is related to her awareness of the nature of femininity. She claims that "woman and the arts cannot be separated," and that was because art is a "creation of beauty, love and spirit," for which women are most qualified. The "art" referred to here does not have to signify a concrete work of art. Instead, the artistic nature of everyday existence, such as preparing a new dish in order to feel renewed in the midst of daily routine, was something to which Iryŏp paid attention. Iryŏp further emphasized the importance of finding "wonder" in daily routine as a way to refresh the mind and thoughts. Iryŏp's idea about artistic ability in

daily life would see its full development in her Buddhist philosophy when she identifies one of the characteristics of the Buddhist state of mind as "creativity."[31]

Group identity is fundamental to social existence. However, when a group identity fails to reflect the identity of an individual within the group, the individual realizes the limits of the group identity and feels alienated from the group. The individual would then consider withdrawal from the group in search of a personal identity that is separate from the values of the group. Iryŏp calls this "new individualism." The New Women worked to make their cases by challenging the dominant norms of society. In that effort, they went through a process of participating in and withdrawing from their society, which Iryŏp identified as a movement from old to new individualism.

In Kim Myŏngsun as well, we find a sentiment similar to that of Kim Iryŏp, as she declared her separation from her group. Kim Myŏngsun, however, had to overcome another major barrier in addition to gender discrimination. She was an illegitimate child in a society that only let legitimate children enjoy membership. In her essay-poem "For Myself Only" (Ne chasin ŭi ue 네 自身의 [sic] 우에), Kim Myŏngsun deplored the fact that she could not be a part of her society and her country, however hard she tried. She asked herself whether there was a way to connect herself to her own community, despite her birth stigma, but she found her efforts were vain. In the face of the impossibility of claiming belongingness to this group, she declared her independence instead. Addressing herself as T'ansil, and speaking to her own society and her country Korea—or Chosŏn, the name of a Korean dynasty in the premodern period—she wrote:

> You will then go to a certain city and acquire knowledge that is good only for yourself.
>
> Ah, however, you, T'ansil, who are leaving, and you, Chosŏn [Korea], who are letting her go, can't you two get together one more time and talk about it? Why can't you even be friends for a chat? Are there no human beings? Why don't you have enough feelings to embrace that which you gave birth to? How can you not even shed tears when this weak woman is about to leave for a long journey?
>
> Ah, is it because her value is even less than that of a prostitute? You are relentless.
>
> T'ansil, you're leaving. You are leaving in order to acquire knowledge that is good only for yourself. And you will keep silence.

> Ah, T'ansil, T'ansil.
> You are leaving to resolve a problem that is only your own.[32]

Kim Myŏngsun repeatedly emphasized that her problem belonged to her alone, because her society would not acknowledge it as a problem, and so would not embrace her as its member. With this declaration, Kim Myŏngsun isolated herself completely from her environment. Ch'oe Hyesil, a scholar of Korean literature, says that this double isolation, of expulsion from her own country combined with her own self-exile from it, was Kim Myŏngsun's way of protecting herself. Ch'oe wrote:

> As a citizen of Korea, she went to a distant foreign country, where she studied for her country and resisted the Japanese. She identified herself as a Korean and opposed Japan, which was the other [of her own country]. In Korea, however, she herself was the other, expelled from society because of her status as an illegitimate child; she was doubly isolated. She now decided to live only for herself. She would build her own castle and confine herself inside: the beginning of an attempt to protect herself from the gazes of others.[33]

Kim Iryŏp's declaration of a new individualism shares a mood of alienation and self-exile with Kim Myŏngsun's double exile. But Iryŏp's exile led her to a different world from Kim Myŏngsun's.

NEW INDIVIDUALISM, SELF-EXILE, AND A SEARCH FOR THE SELF

When Iryŏp discussed new individualism in her 1924 essay, she was calm. But ten years later, when she used the term in another essay, she was visibly disturbed by society's judgment of her personal life, and her arguments frequently took a reactionary turn. In the 1934 essay, her use of the term "new individualism" is close to Kim Myŏngsun's declaration of self-isolation and confinement. Iryŏp's essay "Having Cut Off All the Secular Desires" (Ilch'e ŭi seyok ŭl tanha'go 一切의 世欲을 斷하고) was published in November 1934, one year after she joined the monastery. It was one of the few essays she published before going two decades without publishing, on the advice of her teacher, Zen Master Man'gong. In this piece, she defends her position on her divorce from Ha Yunsil in 1933. She was visibly disappointed by the society's reaction and defended herself against critics. She also criticized them as hypocrites who supported new ideas in theory but were unwilling to accept someone actually living according to them.

Disillusioned, Iryŏp declared her separation from such "pseudo" intellectualism, and in so doing she reconfirmed her determination to follow the new individualism. She wrote: "I am now completely free of regrets and vanities about life. I have left the socialist group that claimed to destroy all traditional thoughts, and thus, I thought, would defend my positions. I have become an earnest individualist. Individualism! What a beautiful and decent concept it is. Only the new individualism will keep me alive and let me complete myself, from now on."[34] Later in the same essay, she declared, "I should remember that I am solely this single body of mine. I should declare a separation from any and all inhuman personalities that treat me as their victim or their plaything. The best way to save my human dignity for now is to declare a separation from anybody and everybody."[35]

If Iryŏp had remained in this state of resentment, her new individualism might not have had a significant impact on her thinking.[36] However, she did not merely indulge herself in bitterness but moved on to a different world, the expression of which we find in her Buddhist writings. One might wonder about the source of Iryŏp's idea of new individualism. How did she move so suddenly from the old to the new individualism? But the turning point was not as abrupt as it looks. There seems to have been a slow change in her worldview, beginning around 1924. The idea of the new individualism was new, and we can say that Im Nowŏl, with whom she had a relationship in the early 1920s, was a major influence on her development of it.[37]

NEW INDIVIDUALISM AND SOCIALISM: IM NOWŎL

In the July 1923 issue of *Opening of the World* (Kyebyŏk 開闢), Im Nowŏl published an essay titled "Socialism and Art, Claiming for the Construction of New Individualism" (Sahoe chuŭi wa yesul, sin kaein chuŭi ŭi kŏnsŏl ŭl ch'angham 社會主義와 藝術, 新個人主義의 建設을 唱 함). In it, Im offered an intriguing view on socialism and its relation to art. Im claimed that the goal of socialism in connection with art was to advocate individualism and allow individuals to express themselves in liberation from the problem of private property, the basis of the capitalist system. Im claimed that art should be a realm in which social class, such as the bourgeoisie or proletariat, could be forgotten, in order for artists to be freed from the constraints created by the social system. In this context, Im argued that socialism in his time, as represented by the Soviet Union, had denied its goal in relation to art by practicing totalitarian control of the people. Im criticized the Soviet Union for practicing a totalitarian socialism and failing to support the practice of art. He contended, "We should

abolish totalitarian society. We should construct a new individualism that will promote boundless individual freedom."[38] Im argued that materialistic socialism was the greatest enemy of an artist's free spirit, saying: "New individualism! This is the place where we can be safe."[39] While the totalitarian socialism of the Soviet Union suppressed the individual's freedom, however, Im contended that life under capitalism was all about "having" instead of "being." For Im, the capitalist practice of owning private property had stifled individuals' creative capacity. Im still supported socialism in its refutation of private possession and thought it as the hope for the artist for that reason, but ideal socialism for Im was not the totalitarian socialism practiced in the Soviet Union. Im proposed art as a remedy for the drastic situation of socialism in his day, as he argued that the people (*minjung* 民衆) would be saved if they forsook society and nationalism and instead relied on art.[40]

Pang Minho, a scholar of Korean literature, noted that Im's interpretation of the function of socialism with regard to art distinguishes him from other major literary trends in Korea at the time. Pang outlined the three major trends in Korean literature in the mid-1920s as follows: (1) the group supporting the idea of literature for life; (2) socialist literary theory that supported social change based on Marxism and the proletariat movement; and (3) the group emphasizing sociocultural movements in literature.[41] Im's theory of literature exclusively focused on the liberation of the individual based on the idea of art for art's sake, at the same time, however, Im related this to socialism. However, as Pang stated, what was important to Im "was not social change, but the realization of the individual's unique characteristics and creative personality, and this was to be accomplished not through societal struggle but in an ivory tower of art that was completely disconnected from society."[42]

It is not difficult to imagine how Im's contemporary Korean intellectuals of the 1920s received his absolute individualism. Immediately after the publication of his article, the following issue of *Opening of the World* (August 1923) ran a response by a person named Yi Chonggi in a short essay, "Replying to Im Nowŏl Who Discussed Socialism and Art" (Sahoe chuŭi wa yesul ŭl malhasin Im Nowŏl ssi ege mutgojŏ 社會主義와 藝術을 말하신 林蘆月씨에게 묻고저). Yi Chonggi challenged Im by saying that artistic production in their time did not produce "sacred and highly valued works of art," but instead, "commodities" for the bourgeoisie.[43] From Yi's perspective, Im's claim for absolute individual freedom as a goal for a work of art was naïve and ignorant of the reality of art's position within bourgeois society. The limitations of Im's vision seem clear, especially when seen from a socialist perspective. Marxist socialism begins with the criticism of private property, the capital that inevitably generates a

class society. In Marxist socialism, the material condition can be changed through class struggle and social revolution. If one is to deny the value of social movements as Im did, and instead disconnect the realm of the individual from society, socialist projects cannot work. All the same, Im believed that a socialist challenge to private property would offer a vision to liberate people from economic constraints and the mode of existence in capitalist society that focused on "having" rather than allowing people to simply "be."

Declaring this new individualism as a new ethos of his time, Im especially underlined two issues: the creation of unique individual characteristics and the completion of one's personality. These accord with Iryŏp's vision of new individualism. However, the socialist context that was the basis of Im's argument on new individualism did not appeal to Iryŏp. Iryŏp's male colleagues, furthermore, were not sympathetic to her version of new individualism. Kim Kijin, a writer and literary critic, derided Iryŏp's pursuit of new individualism and wrote: "How much did Kim Iryŏp understand of new individualism? Even if Im Nowŏl, the very creator of new individualism, guaranteed her understanding, I wouldn't believe it."[44] Kim Kijin's derogative statement about Iryŏp's new individualism appears to be symptomatic of patriarchal society, particularly of how women in this context are often evaluated by the men they are associated with rather than for their own merits. As Pang Minho pointed out, Kim Kijin's deprecation of Kim Iryŏp and later of Kim Myŏngsun was in fact intended to challenge Im Nowŏl, not to discuss Kim Iryŏp's or Kim Myŏngsun's ideas.[45]

Im Nowŏl did not survive the criticism of his contemporaries. Im disappeared from the Korean literary world after the publication of "No Title" (Muje 無題), in *Dong-a Daily News* on January 1, 1925.

PART TWO

CHAPTER FOUR

I Who Have Lost Me
(1927–1935)

Encountering Buddhism

A PASTOR'S DAUGHTER MEETS BUDDHISM

"Life, madness, and words"—these are the words, thoughts, or metaphors that contemporary feminist thinker Julia Kristeva identified as the vehicles three genius women of the twentieth century relied on to make their worlds known.[1] Kristeva's heroines attained recognition in their fields as a thinker, a psychoanalyst, and a writer.[2] Unlike them, Kim Iryŏp has taken up ambiguous space in the history of modern Korean Buddhism despite her position as a major contributor to the history of Korean Buddhist nuns. The combination of acknowledgment and ambiguity attests to women's position in Korean society. Society typically acknowledges women's contributions at a minimal level in order to avoid disturbing the existing social, political, and hermeneutical structure that is centered on men's visions, desires, and will. The ambiguity of Iryŏp's position reflects the specific dimension of the hermeneutics of modern Korean Buddhism and its canonized interpretation of life and religion.

Kim Iryŏp's position in modern Korean Buddhism has not been very visible, but the creative way that she engaged with Buddhism and the depth of her Buddhist philosophy are uniquely her own. Scholarship on Kim Iryŏp has been limited in scope. Earlier studies of Iryŏp focused on her as a writer, examining her literary works,[3] and comparing her to Higuchi Ichiyō of Japan or discussing the feminine identity of her writing.[4] With the expansion of the study of the New Women in Korea that took place in the 1990s, scholarship grew attentive to her identity as a New Woman.[5] The influence of Christianity on Iryŏp and other New Women also became a topic of research.[6] Investigations of Kim Iryŏp as a Buddhist nun and her Buddhist thoughts, however, are still missing from academic scholarship.[7] In understanding Iryŏp through the three themes of being a writer, a New Woman, and a Zen Buddhist nun, some have claimed that Iryŏp's life before becoming a Buddhist nun is irreconcilable with her life afterward;[8] others find that the two stages are more connected.[9] I have proposed in other places that the two phases of her life reveal

a consistent theme, which I identified as a search for freedom: freedom from gendered social identity in her premonastic life and freedom from the limitations of human existence after she joined the monastery.[10]

Iryŏp's introduction to Buddhism occurred around 1927 when she became involved with the Buddhist journal *Buddhism* (Pulgyo 佛教). According to a biographical fiction of Iryŏp's life, Pang In'gŭn (1899–1975), a fiction writer, introduced Iryŏp to the journal.[11] Pang In'gŭn was the husband of a close friend of Iryŏp from Ewha Hakdang. Iryŏp began her contributions to the journal in 1927, and these contributions continued until 1932. The chronology of Iryŏp's life in *Until the Future World Comes to an End and Even Afterwards* shows that Iryŏp first encountered Buddhism in 1923 when she was deeply inspired by Zen Master Man'gong's (1871–1946) dharma talk. I could not identify the source of this information. Even if this initial encounter with Buddhism did indeed happen, that does not seem to have had much influence on Iryŏp's understanding of Buddhism. Even in 1927, when Iryŏp began her contributions to the journal, she was still not very knowledgeable about Buddhism. Recollecting those days, Iryŏp wrote that, at the time, she "was not interested at all in Buddhism and did not read sections on Buddhist doctrine published in the journal."[12]

In February 1930, Iryŏp published the essay "At the Second Anniversary of Being a Buddhist" (Pulmun t'ujok i chunyŏn e 佛門 投足 二 周年에). The title confirms that Iryŏp had identified herself as a Buddhist practitioner since 1928, when she received lay precepts. In the essay, Iryŏp explains that she began to learn about Buddhism through people who were involved with *Buddhism*. In 1928, Pang In'gŭn started a journal titled *Suchness* (Yŏsi 如是). Its inaugural issue, which was also its last issue, was published in June of that year. The offices of *Suchness* and *Buddhism* were on the same floor of the same building, so this naturally allowed Iryŏp to make the acquaintance of people at *Buddhism*. As she began to associate with people who were working for *Buddhism*, she soon observed that these Buddhist practitioners of their teachings were very different from what she had heard about the religion. Iryŏp wrote: "Since my father was a Christian pastor, I had believed in Jesus since I was a child. Christians told me that Buddhism is a superstitious and heretic religion and that Buddhists vow to wooden statues and gilded images. I was also told that people following this religion are deceived into paying money to monks who pray on their behalf."[13] As she learned more about Buddhism, Iryŏp began to change her opinions on it. She wrote: "Ceremonies held at Buddhist temples were deeply solemn and invoked a sense of the sacred. I felt peaceful. That was odd, given what people had told me about the religion."[14] Iryŏp also remembered that people had said bad things about Buddhist monks, mocking their

immoral behaviors, but she thought that the people who worked for *Buddhism* were modest and reasonable. To improve her knowledge of Classical Chinese, Iryŏp began to read Buddhist scriptures with Kwŏn Sangno, the editor-in-chief of *Buddhism*, which might have offered her an occasion to learn Buddhist doctrines. Iryŏp does not mention which texts she read with Kwŏn.

Kwŏn Sangno (權相老, 1879–1965) was the editor of *Buddhism* from its inaugural issue published on July 15, 1924, until October 1931, when Manhae Han Yongun (萬海 韓龍雲, 1879–1944) took over the editorship until February 1937. Since Iryŏp regularly contributed to the journal until 1932, she must have contacted Kwŏn Sangno on a regular basis, but not much mention of him appears in her writings. Nor does she mention him in the essay describing her initial encounter with Buddhist thought, other than that she studied Buddhist scriptures with him. From her first exposure to Buddhist doctrines, Buddhism fascinated Iryŏp. She described her impression as follows:

> I cannot say that I understood Buddhist teaching at that time, which is both ordinary and profound, but I could at least feel clearly that Buddhism is definitely good. I also believed that Buddhist teaching was something comprehensive that could save not only me as an individual, but the entire world, and the entire universe as well. My heart was filled with a desire to learn, but I was not even sure what I should know, what I wanted to know, or what I should ask of whom regarding Buddhism, but all the same, the idea that I should let other people learn about Buddhism became urgent.[15]

In the years to come, Iryŏp would make various efforts to make Buddhist teachings available to the general public.

BUDDHIST REFORM MOVEMENTS IN MODERN KOREA

By the late 1920s, Buddhist reformers in Korea had already declared that propagation, education, and bringing Buddhism to the general public from the secluded mountainsides were the most urgent issues for the survival and revival of Buddhism in the changing environment. Starting in 1912 and continuing to the late 1930s, a series of treatises proposed the renovation of Korean Buddhism. Kwŏn Sangno was the first to publish a treatise in this context, one which appeared in the journal *Korean Buddhism Monthly* (Chosŏn Pulgyo wŏlbo 朝鮮佛教月報) as a series that was published from its third issue (April 1912) to its eighteenth issue (July 1913) under the title "Treatise on the Reformation of Korean Buddhism" (Chosŏn Pulgyo kyehyŏk ron 朝鮮佛教改革論).[16] Han

Yongun's "Treatise on the Revitalization of Korean Buddhism" (Chosŏn Pulgyo yusillon 朝鮮佛教維新論), the best-known among this group of essays on Buddhist reform, was published in 1913.[17] Additionally in the 1920s, Yi Yŏngjae (李英宰, 1900–1927), a young Buddhist scholar studying in Japan, published "Reformation of Korean Buddhism" (Chosŏn Pulgyo hyŏksillon 朝鮮佛教革新論) in the *Chosŏn Daily News* (Chosŏn ilbo) from November to December of 1922 in twenty-seven installations.[18]

There is no indication in Iryŏp's writings whether she read any of these treatises or whether she was aware of the Buddhist reform movement. Her analysis of the situation of Buddhism at the time seems to be based more on her experiences as a Christian than as a Buddhist. Iryŏp noticed that the voice of Christianity was getting louder and wondered why Buddhists were not actively propagating their religion like the Christians were. She worried that only a small number of people, most of whom were women, were attending Buddhist temples and questioned whether those who did come to Buddhist temples knew anything about Buddhist doctrine. Iryŏp also pointed out a lack of networking among Buddhists and underlined a need for closer engagement among the members of Buddhist organizations. Saying that she would like to ameliorate the situation, Iryŏp wrote that she might propose the idea to several other officials in the Youth Committee to host a regular meeting to read Buddhist scriptures and study the religion. Iryŏp also expressed her wish to spread Buddhism to those who had had not yet had opportunity to encounter it.[19] I could not find information about whether she did make this proposal, and, if so, whether the study group achieved the goal she set. However, her observations of Buddhism after just two years' exposure to the religion were rather accurate and dealt with the issues that were at the core of the Buddhist reform agenda of the time.

The propagation of Buddhism and general education were essential parts of the Korean Buddhist reform agenda during the 1910s and 1920s. In her three books published in the 1960s, Iryŏp emphasized that her publications aimed to spread the religion. Iryŏp might not have been aware of the Buddhist reform movements in the 1920s, but her encounter with Buddhism during that period was, in a sense, facilitated by the reformist effort to popularize Buddhism among the general public. The appearance of Buddhist journals during the 1910s and 1920s was symbolic of Korean Buddhism's modernization. Starting in 1910 and continuing into the mid-1920s when *Buddhism* was published, more than ten Buddhist journals appeared in Korea. Among these were *Korean Buddhism Monthly* (Chosŏn Pulgyo wŏlbo 朝鮮佛教月報, 1912–1913), *Journal of Eastern Buddhism* (Haedong Pulgyo 海東佛教, 1913–1914), *Society for the*

Advancement of Buddhism Monthly (Pulgyo chinhŭnghoe wŏlbo 佛教振興會月報, March 1915–December 1915), and *Comprehensive Journal of Korean Buddhism* (Chosŏn Pulgyo ch'ongbo 朝鮮佛教總譜, March 1917–January 1921).

Kwŏn Sangno was the editor-in-chief of *Korean Buddhist Monthly* and *Buddhism* (1924–1931). Other major contributors to these journals included Pak Hanyŏng (朴漢永, 1870–1949), Yi Nŭnghwa (李能和, 1869–1943), Paek Yongsŏng (白龍城 1864–1940), Yi Yŏngjae, and Han Yongun. As Henrik H. Sørensen, a scholar of Korean Buddhism, pointed out in his short essay on Korean Buddhist journals of the 1910s, these journals witnessed the emergence of Buddhist scholars, including monks and lay people; thus, they heralded the emergence of Buddhist scholarship in modern Korea.[20] Articles in these journals discussed not only Buddhist scriptures but also those topics that were emerging as seminal issues within Korean society as the influence of Western culture and Japanese scholarship became increasingly visible.

The journal *Buddhism* played a central role in Iryŏp's engagement with Buddhism, and that is a telling indicator of the state of Korean Buddhism at the time. A scholar of Korean literature, Pang Minho, argued that the Korean Buddhist effort to popularize Buddhism made it possible for an outsider to the religion such as Kim Iryŏp to become part of the Buddhist world and contribute to a Buddhist journal without feeling isolated.[21] Pang's claim is also relevant to the state of Buddhism, Buddhist practice, and Buddhist scholarship in the modern period. Unlike the premodern period, in which the monastic community was the main source for Buddhist exegesis, modern times have seen the emergence of "secular" scholars of Buddhism who are not monks or nuns and who claim to approach Buddhism as a subject of study.[22]

Changes in Iryŏp's personal life are also noticeable during the years 1927–1928, her initial period as a Buddhist practitioner. During this period, Iryŏp met two people who played a significant role in inspiring her and helping her to study Buddhism. The first of these was Paek Sŏnguk (1897–1981), who was the president of the Buddhist Newspaper Company (Pulgyo Sinmunsa) at the time Iryŏp met him; the other was Ha Yunsil, a noncelibate monk who also worked for the journal *Buddhism*.

LEARNING BUDDHISM FROM AN ELITE MONK: KIM IRYŎP AND PAEK SŎNGUK

Paek Sŏnguk (白性郁, 1897–1981) might be best known as a former president of Dongguk University (July 1953–July 1961), a prominent Buddhist university in Korea. He is also known for his teaching at the Kŭmganggyŏng Toksonghoe

(Diamond Sūtra Recitation Group), a Buddhist group that he created in 1975. Some remember him for his political career as the minister of Interior Affairs (February 1950–July 1950). He was also a candidate for the vice presidency in South Korea (in 1952 and 1956). Others might even remember him as a successful businessperson. Amidst the visibility of Paek's activities as a politician and businessperson, however, scholars have yet to pay attention to Paek as a philosopher and his contribution to modern Korean Buddhist philosophy.

Paek Sŏnguk is unique in his academic training among Korean Buddhist figures in the early twentieth century. Most Korean Buddhists at the time studied in Japan, whereas Paek chose to study in Europe. Korean scholars recognize him as the first Korean to earn a philosophy degree in Germany,[23] but have yet to fully explore his philosophical writings, including the doctoral dissertation in which he offered a comparative study of Buddhist and Western philosophies.[24] Why has his Buddhist philosophy been ignored for so long in Korea?[25] The nature of the modernization process in Korea might be responsible for this phenomenon, in addition to the direction of Korean Buddhism, Korean Buddhist scholarship, and the particularities of the field of philosophy itself in Korea.[26] However, Paek's Buddhist ideas had a significant impact on Kim Iryŏp in her initial encounter with Buddhism, as we will see when we discuss Iryŏp's Buddhism in chapter 5. Before that, I will offer a brief discussion on Paek's life and his philosophy.

Paek Sŏnguk was born in Seoul. He lost his father at the age of ten and his mother the following year.[27] His maternal grandparents raised him and supported him financially during his study in Europe.[28] In 1910, he joined the Pongguk Monastery under Ch'oe Haong, about whom we do not have much information. Paek finished his study at Kyŏngsŏng Pulgyo Chungang Hangnim in 1919 and went to Shanghai, intending to take part in the Korean independence movement through the Shanghai Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea. In Shanghai, Paek met Rhee Seungman (1875–1965), the future president of the Republic of Korea. Rhee suggested that Paek study in Europe,[29] and Paek followed his advice. In 1920, Paek journeyed to France and studied at a school in Beauvais, a city seventy kilometers north of Paris. He studied German and Latin in Beauvais,[30] in 1922, however, he moved to Würzburg University in Germany and finished his dissertation on "Buddhistische Metaphysik" (Buddhist metaphysics) in 1925.[31] *Dong-a Daily News,* a major Korean newspaper, reported his homecoming, an indication that Paek was already a public figure at the time.[32] While Paek was completing his degree in Germany, moreover, he was contributing articles to the journal *Buddhism.* The letters he sent in the end of 1924 and January 1925 to Kwŏn Sangno, the editor-

in-chief of the journal, show a glimpse of Paek's concerns at the time. In a letter to Kwŏn, Paek expressed his admiration for the European scholars of Asia (known as "Orientalists") and their solid scholarship. Paek mentioned that these European scholars were fluent in the Buddhist languages of Pāli and Sanskrit as well as the Western languages of English, French, and German. In this discussion, Paek emphasized the importance of studying Buddhist texts in their original language, and the need to create a publishing company. He wrote to Kwŏn, "If we monastics are to keep up with the [European] Asianists, we need to equip ourselves with the same qualities they have, and for that to happen, it is critical to have a 'publishing company.'"[33]

Upon returning to Korea in September of 1925, Paek taught at Chungang Pulgyo Chŏnmun Hakkyo and served as president of the Buddhist Newspaper Company. In 1928, he went to Mt. Kŭmgang to focus on his practice. His life on Mt. Kŭmgang continued until around 1938, when the pressure of the colonial government forced him to leave the mountain.

Paek Sŏnguk's interpretation of Buddhism reflects his educational background. In his publications in the 1920s, Paek interpreted Buddhism in comparison to Western philosophical traditions. One such example is his interpretation of "I." In his essay "My Faith and Feelings" (Na ŭi sinang kwa nŭtkim 나의 신앙과 늣김) published in the January 1926 issue of *Buddhism,* Paek emphasized the importance of maximizing the capacity of "I." Paek argued that people led unsatisfactory lives because they were not aware of the "I," contending that a clear understanding of the "I" and of its capacity in every aspect of life should enable people to be satisfied with their lives.[34] Paek's discussion of the importance of understanding "I" and exercising its capacity of "I" had a significant influence on Iryŏp, for whom the issues of her identity as a woman, a Christian, a nonbeliever, and a Buddhist were lifelong topics to explore.

Kim Iryŏp met Paek Sŏnguk for the first time when she visited the office of the Buddhist Newspaper Company sometime in 1927. Her essay "To Mr. B" (B ssi ege B 氏에게) in *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun,* published in 1960, offers details of her relationship with Paek. According to Iryŏp, both Iryŏp and Paek fell for each other at their first meeting. When they met in Paek's office, Paek offered Iryŏp Korean tea from Hwaŏm Monastery in the Chŏlla Province. Enjoying the delicate taste of the tea, Iryŏp said, "This is really a high-quality tea. It seems that the people from [the] Chŏlla province, as the saying goes, have a dual personality. I know from my experiences with a couple of them . . . Chŏlla people seem two-faced, but there are many high-quality products that come from that province, like this tea, mats with flower designs, window blinds, trays, fans, paper, and other things."[35] Only after making these derogatory

remarks about the people of the Chŏlla region did she learn that Paek was originally from that province. Iryŏp was at a loss. Without showing displeasure about her comments, Paek asked her, "And your hometown is?" Still unable to recover from her faux pas, Iryŏp answered curtly, "From Pyŏngnam province." Amidst the efforts to recover from her blunder, Iryŏp still felt a mysterious attraction to Paek. This is how she described her feelings at the time of the encounter: "Looking at my blushing face, you asked in a low voice, 'And your hometown is?' The suggestive tone in your voice as you asked me that question was divinely mysterious. I wouldn't describe it as soft or affectionate; your voice was like a poem that resonated at the deepest level of my heart and moved me more than any beautiful music could."[36] After that, Iryŏp had to leave his office because he had other visitors. Before long, however, Paek visited Iryŏp in turn.

In fact, Paek visited Iryŏp regularly and the two soon became close. Paek's educational background ranged from traditional Asian beliefs to Christianity and Western philosophies, and he was eager to share his knowledge with Iryŏp. One memorable occasion occurred when Paek gave Iryŏp a lecture on Buddhist doctrine in comparison to Christianity.[37] Iryŏp stated that, by the time she met Paek in 1927, she had become an atheist, having completely lost her faith in Christianity. We will examine Iryŏp's discussion of Christianity in the next chapter.

Paek and Iryŏp's relationship ended just as quickly as their attraction began, terminating within less than a year when Paek disappeared, leaving Iryŏp a letter. In this letter, Paek stated, "Since the causes and conditions for our relationship have come to an end, I should now say goodbye to you."[38] He did not inform Iryŏp of his whereabouts, and only later did she learn that he had gone to Mt. Kŭmgang, allegedly to practice Buddhism.

COURAGE FOR LIFE, OR PRACTICING BUDDHISM

After Paek left, Iryŏp continued her studies of Buddhism. One person who helped her in this endeavor was a household monk named Ha Yunsil who was working for *Buddhism* at the time. Iryŏp eventually married him in 1929,[39] having been divorced since 1921. From her initial encounter with Buddhism in 1927 until when she joined the monastery in 1933, Iryŏp practiced Buddhism in diverse ways. During this period, she considered it possible to practice Buddhism as a lay practitioner. In her essay "Buddhist Practice and My Family" (Sin Pul kwa na ŭi kajŏng 信佛과 나의 家庭, 1931), Iryŏp described her married life with the noncelibate monk as a way of practicing Buddhism. She considered

joining the monastery when she became a Buddhist, but did not have confidence in her capacity to completely cut off all desires and feelings as demanded in a monastic life. Her solution was to marry a noncelibate monk so that she could practice Buddhism for a long time.[40] Iryŏp stated that she did not perform any Buddhist rituals, but instead focused her practice on chanting in order to attain a state of concentration (*yŏmpul sammae* 念佛 三昧). She also said that she read introductory books on Buddhism.[41] At the end of this essay, she expressed her wish that she would be able to practice meditation later in her life.[42]

Iryŏp's idea of practicing Buddhism as a lay practitioner eventually changed, and she joined the monastery in 1933 when she was thirty-eight years old. After this point, her activities as a writer diminished, until she completely stopped publishing her writings in 1935.[43] "Practicing Buddhism" (Puldo rŭl taggŭmyŏ 佛道를 닦으며), which appeared in the journal *Three Thousand Li* (Samch'ŏlli 三千里) in January of 1935, was possibly Iryŏp's last publication until she resumed publishing her works in the late 1950s. In "Practicing Buddhism," Iryŏp wrote, "The master [Man'gong] told me that I should avoid writing songs, poems, or fictions. The master also told me that I'd better not read newspapers or magazines published in the secular world and that I should not socialize with people outside the monastery."[44] Man'gong had mentioned the issue of "no writing" during his first meeting with Iryŏp, and here Iryŏp reconfirmed her resolution to follow Man'gong's instruction. At their first meeting, Man'gong gave her the following advice:

> I know you were known as a female poet in the secular world. The poems you have written so far were nothing but a bird's singing. Poesy by a human power can be written only after he or she has become a human being. It is true, though, that you write poetry and other literary works because you were trained in that field over many previous lives. It would be very difficult to eradicate that karma. Do you think you can completely give up reading and writing? One cannot fill a bowl, if the bowl is already full.[45]

Iryŏp responded that she had already emptied her bowl, meaning that she had put away her practices of writing and reading.[46] Iryŏp said that after that meeting, she devoted herself only to practice; she never went to bed before ten in the evening, and got up without fail before two in the morning. In the 1960 edition of her essay "In Memory of Great Master Man'gong" (Man'gong taehwasang ŭl ch'umo hayŏ 滿空大和尙을 追慕하여), Iryŏp stated that she stopped reading and writing "for ten-some years" after the master advised her

to do so.[47] In the 1962 version of the same essay that appeared in *Having Burned Away My Youth* (Ch'ŏngch'un ŭl pulsarŭgo 靑春을 불사르고), she was more specific about the dates and stated that she had stopped reading and writing "for eighteen years."[48] Based on these dates, we can assume that she resumed writing around 1951. During the 1950s, she began publishing her writings, and her first book, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun,* was published in 1960.

From the time of her reception with the novice precepts in 1933 until her full ordination in 1935, Iryŏp practiced in several different places. She mentioned that she practiced at Chikji Monastery in Kimch'ŏn, Kyŏngbuk Province, Sŏbong-am and Mahayŏn on Mt. Kŭmgang, and then at Sŏnhak-wŏn in Seoul. Iryŏp also said that she stayed for about three months in one place before moving on to the next.[49] Iryŏp took summer retreats in the meditation hall at Sudŏk Monastery and after 1935 she stayed there for the rest of her life.

Iryŏp's tonsure was the talk of the town. At the time, society would not seriously accept Iryŏp's decision to enter a monastery and tried to interpret it as a reactionary measure. An interview in the January 1935 issue of the literary journal *Opening of the World* (Kyebyŏk 開闢) reveals people's curiosity about why Kim Iryŏp became a nun. Their speculation was that Iryŏp had left the secular world to escape scandalous incidents in her life:

> REPORTER: It looked like you were leading a happy life in Sŏngbuk-dong. How did you end up getting a divorce?
> IRYŎP: I did so to devote myself to the Buddha-dharma.
> REPORTER: Do you mean that there was no problem between you and your ex-husband?
> IRYŎP: There was absolutely nothing like that. Our marriage was very satisfactory. We were very happy.
> REPORTER: How then was a divorce possible? Did you divorce then, as you mentioned earlier, to perfect the Buddha-dharma?
> IRYŎP: Yes, that was so.[50]

The public of the time might not have been convinced of Iryŏp's determination to devote her life to practicing Buddhism, but Iryŏp's autobiographical essays tell us that Iryŏp was suffering a deep existential crisis. As a writer, giving up writing must have been very hard for her to do. The self-training at the monastery was even more difficult. In her essay, "In Memory of Great Master Man'gong," Iryŏp described her sentiments during the first three years at the monastery:

> A full three years passed, and I was able to enter the state of the "samadhi of the doubting mind" (which is the nothingness that is not bound by time or

space) quite a number of times. My wisdom increased, and from time to time I was able to answer the master's dharma questions. That diminished my doubts, but whenever I gave an answer with confidence, the master reproached me. Contrary to my expectations, I was not to quickly attain buddhahood. Meanwhile, time flowed by ceaselessly, and restlessness overwhelmed me. Attaining buddhahood is a must for setting a plan and calculating a budget for life; that is, traveling the right path in life. It did not seem, however, that I would be able to attain that buddhahood. What would happen if time passed by like this, with no preparation for death, and suddenly death were to happen! The future looked so hopeless, and that hopelessness was truly terrifying!

I wished I could dismiss the whole thing and say, "To hell with buddhahood!" And I wished I knew how to just put an end to my life. When I was in the secular world, I had thought that there was a final destination: the escape called death. However, I came to learn that there was no way to evade life and that however we might wish, we could not put an end to life. That there is no end of life is the principle of the universe. Because attaining buddhahood did not look like it would happen in the foreseeable future, my despair reached its apex. I do not recall ever despairing that deeply when I was in the secular world. I had thought that there were no tears in the life of a nun; I had no idea that I would be in a situation as a nun where I would shed tears without end.[51]

Iryŏp compared her situation to a helpless sprout in the winter that has an "agonizing courage for life" as it tries to survive between two rocks covered in ice.[52] The essay above was written on the fifteenth anniversary of Man'gong's death, which places its date sometime in the 1950s. The deep existential crisis that Iryŏp expressed in these passages was new to her writing. In her premonastic writings, we frequently encounter sentimental complaints about the loneliness of her life, the unfairness of the social structure, and the deception of the intellectuals in her society. Now, by contrast, the prominent themes of Iryŏp's thoughts were the fundamental dimensions of human existence: her existential agony demanded her a "courage for life."

Kim Iryŏp and Zen Buddhism in Korea

A STORY OF KOREAN BUDDHISM

When Iryŏp first encountered Buddhism, she was interested in learning Buddhist doctrines and was concerned about the propagation of Buddhism. By the time she joined the monastery, she was focusing solely on meditation, and the

form of meditation she practiced was *hwadu* (C. *huatou* 話頭, or a critical phrase) meditation. In the aforementioned interview with *Opening of the World* in November 1934, when asked whether she studied Buddhist scriptures, Iryŏp replied that she did not. She confirmed that she exclusively practiced *hwadu* meditation, which she said was like "resolving one big doubt." She added: "This is a practice of focusing one's mind on a single thought."[53]

Hwadu meditation is a branch of Zen Buddhism originally developed by the twelfth-century Chinese Chan Master, Dahui Zhonggao (大慧宗杲, 1089–1163). Pojo Chinul (普照知訥, 1158–1210) first introduced the practice to Korean Buddhism in the thirteenth century. The meditation practice attained full attention under his successor, Chin'gak Hyesim (眞覺慧諶, 1178–1234). From that time to the present, *hwadu* meditation has been considered the most dominant form of Zen Buddhism in Korea.

Buddhism had been introduced to Korea from China between the fourth to sixth centuries, with the dates of entry varying by region. Three tribal kingdoms occupied the Korean peninsula at the time: Koguryŏ (37 BCE–618 CE), in the northern part of the peninsula; Paekche (18 BCE–660 CE), in the southwest; and Silla (57 BCE–925 CE) in the southeast. Extant sources[54] indicate that Koguryŏ was the first to receive Buddhism, around 372 CE. A Chinese monk named Shundao (順道) was sent from King Fujian (符堅, r. 357–385) of the Former Qin (前秦, 351–385).[55] The same source indicates that an Indian monk from the Eastern Jin (東晉, 317–420) named Mālānanda (摩羅難陀) brought Buddhism to the kingdom of Paekche around 384 CE.[56] Silla was introduced to Buddhism somewhat later, around 528, since the kingdom was located in the southern part of the peninsula. In all three kingdoms, royal families received Buddhism upon its arrival. Buddhism was brought to Koguryŏ as part of the diplomatic exchanges between Koguryŏ and the Former Qin. Shundao arrived with diplomats and soon became a teacher in the royal family. Within three years, King Sosurim (r. 371–384) of Koguryŏ had two Buddhist temples constructed. In Paekche, the missionary monk was eagerly received by the royal family, and a Buddhist temple was under construction within two years. In the Kingdom of Silla, there was a brief period of resistance to Buddhism; but after the martyrdom of Ich'adon (異次頓, 506–527), a loyal minister, the ruling class began to embrace it.[57] After this ordeal, Buddhism was recognized as a national religion in 527 by King Pŏphŭng (法興王, r. 514–540), who soon prohibited killing (529 CE).[58] Buddhism flourished in Unified Silla (統一新羅, 668–935)[59] and the Koryŏ Dynasty (高麗, 918–1392).[60]

Pojo Chinul of the thirteenth century is most responsible for the Korean Zen Buddhist tradition as we know it today.[61] Chinul's Buddhism is grounded

in the fundamental Zen Buddhist claim that sentient beings are already buddhas, just as they are. Chinul teaches that the goal of Buddhism is to eliminate suffering, and to avoid suffering, one should find the buddha; if one wishes to find the buddha, one should look inside and realize that one's own mind is the buddha. Learning about one's own mind is the core of Chinul's Buddhist philosophy and teaching in his earlier career. At the beginning of his essay "Secrets of Cultivating the Mind" (Susim kyŏl 修心訣), Chinul stated: "It is tragic. People have been deluded for so long. They do not recognize that their own natures are the true dharma."[62] Chinul's claim that the Buddha exists right here in the present moment in the body and the mind of the sentient being represents the fundamental Zen Buddhist position about human existence. Attaining enlightenment and becoming a buddha is commonly understood to be a linear, temporal, and thus teleological process. According to this temporal understanding of the process of Buddhist cultivation and enlightenment, practitioners spend a certain amount of time and eventually proceed toward a completion of the cultivation. Zen Buddhism challenges such a linear and temporal concept of practice and claims that sentient beings are already buddhas. The oxymoronic claim that the sentient being is the buddha has various ramifications for Zen Buddhist philosophy and practice.

The claim echoes the fundamental Buddhist doctrine that things lack permanent and independent essence and exist by the interactive functioning of multilayered causes and conditions. In the Buddhist world, no transcendental being exists to play the role of the grand master of the world or of an individual. This claim also suggests that there exists no single essence that controls our existence, be it thinking, reasoning, or emotions. Whom do Buddhists revere and to whom do they pray then? What is the mind with which Chinul identified the Buddha? Different Buddhist traditions have different definitions of the Buddha. In Theravāda Buddhism, the Buddha refers to the historical Buddha, Gautama Siddhartha, who lived in the fifth century BCE, attained enlightenment at the age of thirty-five, delivered sermons to people, and entered nirvana at the age of eighty. Mahāyāna Buddhism has developed the idea that the Buddha is not just the historical figure who appeared in India in the fifth century BCE. The historical Buddha is one example of those who have realized buddhahood, the nature of being in the state of enlightenment. "Buddha" means "the awakened being"; hence, anyone who is awakened to the reality of existence is a buddha. The questions to ask are: what does it mean to become awakened? What do we need to do to experience the awakening? A buddha is one who is awakened to the reality of the world and of his or her existence. And the reality is that nothing in the world exists through

self-sufficient, unchanging, and permanent elements. This reality of existence is the same for sentient beings, and for a buddha. The difference between the two is that the former are not aware of this, and the latter is. Here we encounter a rather complex situation. A buddha and sentient beings are the same when we consider the basis for their existence, but sentient beings are not a buddha. The former are yet to become awakened while the latter already has been.

The irony of "the same and yet different" relationship between a buddha and sentient beings is one reason that—in the view of Zen Buddhism—doctrinal Buddhism should give way to the practice of Zen Buddhism. This transition constitutes the basis of the superiority of Zen Buddhism over the doctrinal schools, especially in the context of Korean Buddhism. Zen Buddhism claims that its goal is not to elaborate on the Buddhist doctrines but to help people attain enlightenment. From its perspective, doctrinal schools may *discuss* Buddhist doctrines for their own purposes, but sentient beings need to learn how to *embody* Buddhist teachings in their existence. The goal of Zen Buddhist practice is to facilitate the embodiment of the teachings offered in various Buddhist scriptures and by Buddhist masters. Chinul introduced *hwadu* meditation as the best way to awaken practitioners to the reality of existence, and this is the meditation practiced by Kim Iryŏp.

KOREAN ZEN BUDDHISM: *HWADU* MEDITATION, OR QUESTIONING MEDITATION

Ever since Pojo Chinul incorporated *hwadu* meditation into Korean Buddhism in the thirteenth century, Korean Zen Buddhism has claimed that Kanhwa Zen or *hwadu* meditation is integral to the identity of Korean Zen Buddhism. *Hwadu* meditation is a branch of Zen Buddhist practice known as *gongan* (*kongan*, 公案; J. *kōan*). To better understand the Zen Buddhism that Iryŏp practiced, a brief explanation is in order of the difference between *gongan* and *hwadu* as well as how *gongans* are practiced differently in the Chinese, Korean, and Japanese traditions. A *gongan* is a dialogue between a Zen master and a student. Literally, the term means "public case," but in English it is frequently translated as "encounter dialogue," which refers to the context of how these phrases came into being.

The masters involved in these dialogues lived during the Tang period (618–907) in China and mostly from the eighth to ninth centuries. The dialogues are supposed to be spontaneous responses of Zen masters, acting in an enlightened state.[63] During the Song Dynasty (1127–1279), the encounter dialogues began to be compiled and written down. The two best known texts are the

Gateless Gate (Wumen guan 無門關) and *The Blue Cliff Record* (Biyan lu 碧巖錄). The *Gateless Gate* was compiled by Wumen Huikai (無門慧開, 1183–1260) and contains forty-nine *gongans,* or case stories. Yuanwu Keqi (圜悟克勤, 1063–1135) compiled *The Blue Cliff Record,* which contains one hundred case stories. In Korea, Chinul's disciple Chin'gak Hyesim (眞覺慧諶, 1178–1234) compiled 1,125 *kongans* in his *Collection of Cases and Verses of the Sŏn School* (Sŏnmun yŏmsong chip 禪門拈頌集, 1226).[64] The compilation of the *gongan* stories generated the tradition known as Gongan Chan.

The use of *gongans* or encounter dialogues for practice takes different forms. The Japanese Zen Buddhist tradition developed a *kōan* Zen tradition.[65] Fully developed by Hakuin Ekaku (白隱 慧鶴, 1686–1768), the tradition employs a step-by-step practice using *kōans*. Practitioners have daily encounter dialogues with Zen masters who judge the progress of students' practice based on their answers to the questions posed by the masters. At the end of the stages, students compose a short poem, or capping phrases, to demonstrate their awakening.[66]

Although also related to *gongans,* Kanhwa Sŏn (or Kanhua Chan 看話禪), or *hwadu* meditation, is distinct from the Gongan Chan tradition. On one level, it differs from the *gongan* tradition in that *hwadu* meditation focuses on *hwadu,* or a critical phrase, not on the entire encounter episode (or *gongan*). There are other differences between the two traditions. Dahui Zhonggao initiated Kanhua Chan mostly to teach lay practitioners.[67] In Korea, Chinul's *Treatise on Resolving Doubts about* Hwadu *Meditation* (Kanhwa kyŏrŭi ron 看話決疑論) introduced this new meditation technique to Korean Buddhism and further endorsed it as the fastest way to attain enlightenment.[68] In this treatise, Chinul repeatedly emphasizes that Zen Buddhism does not offer any new interpretations of the Buddha's teaching; and Buddhist teachings were already well articulated, especially by Huayan Buddhism, which had developed a comprehensive system to explain Buddhist doctrines. Why then do we need Zen Buddhism? Chinul states that all Buddhist schools other than Zen Buddhism teach Buddhism from the position of those who have already become enlightened, whereas the goal of Zen Buddhism is to lead unenlightened people to awakening. Zen Buddhism claims that the direction of its approach differs from that of other Buddhist schools. When Buddhism is explained from the perspective of those who have attained enlightenment, the discourse relies on the perfected state of existence. But when Buddhism is explained from the position of an unenlightened being, the concern is how to lead individuals from one state of mind to another. The former is the self-centered, egoistic perspective of the sentient, unenlightened being. In the

transformed state of the mind, an individual realizes that the boundary of the self is not as solid as she or he has imagined, but rather that the self is a liquid reality, having a provisional boundary. Realizing the provisional nature of the self is a gateway to liberation, and Kim Iryŏp made this liberating nature of Zen Buddhist practice a core part of her own Buddhist philosophy and practice.

In the *hwadu* meditation of Korean Buddhism, the practitioner holds on to the *hwadu*, the one critical phrase, and unless the practitioner gets through that *hwadu*, there is no progress in the practitioner's spiritual cultivation. Practitioners do not have a step-by-step check-in with the masters, as is done in the Japanese *kōan* tradition. Korean Zen Buddhism places ultimate value on the revolutionary power of *hwadu* meditation. Whether it is physical or mental, revolution requires a fundamental change in the status quo; Zen Buddhism claims that enlightenment facilitates a quantum leap in one's way of understanding the world, one's own existential reality, and one's relationship with others. The sudden-versus-gradual debate (tonjŏmron 頓漸論) that dominated Korean Buddhism during the 1980s and 1990s was an effort to consider this subitist claim of Zen awakening in the context of Zen practice.[69]

Practice, by definition, is a temporal concept; it requires duration. Zen Buddhism claims that simple duration of practice does not necessarily guarantee maturation. Repeated activities can lead a practitioner to perfect a certain action, but can also render the practitioner blind to the meaning of practice and thus a slave of the goal to be achieved. The Zennist is certain that this is the case with doctrinal teachings of Buddhism. Zen Buddhism argues that learning Buddhist scriptures and acquiring knowledge of Buddhism for a long period of time can lead the practitioner to forget the meaning of practice, which is to change one's inner self and thus one's way of dealing with life. Repetition instills a sense of permanence and creates a comfort zone. Zen Buddhism warns that being an expert of Buddhist teaching can blind practitioners to the fact that Buddhist teachings are still theories that have yet to become the reality of the practitioner. From the Zennist perspective, this insight renders Zen superiority to doctrinal schools. With such considerations in mind, Zen Master Man'gong prohibited Iryŏp from reading or writing after she joined the monastery.

The life story of Kyŏnghŏ Sŏngu (鏡虛惺牛, 1849–1912), the founder of the modern Korean Zen Buddhism, is a good example of the hierarchical evaluation of doctrinal Buddhism versus Zen Buddhism in modern Korean Buddhism. A brief summary of the historical development of Korean Buddhism since the time of Chinul will help us understand Kyŏnghŏ's story. Buddhism flourished

and enjoyed privileges during the Koryŏ Dynasty (918–1392). Toward the end of the Koryŏ Dynasty, the rising neo-Confucian literati launched harsh anti-Buddhist polemics, criticizing the philosophical foundation of Buddhism and condemning its allegedly damaging effects on the economy and social ethics.[70]

The rulers of the Chosŏn Dynasty (1392–1897) systematically suppressed Buddhism by abolishing or restructuring most of the Buddhist schools. Less than forty years after the beginning of the Chosŏn Dynasty, six doctrinal schools and five meditational schools had been consolidated into the two generic schools of meditation and doctrine (*Sŏn kyo yangjong* 禪敎兩宗), effectively obliterating the sectarian identity of Korean Buddhism. The Buddhism during the middle and late Chosŏn Dynasty is known as Mountain Buddhism and had no sectarian identity. The suppression of Buddhism officially came to an end in 1893 with the lifting of the ban on clerics' entering the capital city, but this official ending had only a limited meaning. The long period of suppression had left Korean Buddhism in a devastated state in terms of the number of Buddhist clerics and the condition of Buddhist monasteries. Modernization of Korean society was one issue that Korean Buddhism had to deal with urgently. Modernity and modernization were frequently understood in Korea as being contrary to tradition. With its history of more than a thousand years in Korea, perhaps Buddhism was the tradition that Koreans needed to overcome if they were to advance to a modern society. To counter this assumption and demonstrate its relevance to modern times, Korean Buddhism felt it necessary to launch a radical transformation. Christianity and the activities of Christian missionaries were another challenge it faced. As one group of Buddhists worked to renovate Korean Buddhism, another worked to revive Zen monastic training. Kyŏnghŏ Sŏngu set up a foundation for Zen revivalism, and Iryŏp's teacher Man'gong was one of his principal disciples.

FOUNDER OF MODERN KOREAN ZEN BUDDHISM: KYŎNGHŎ SŎNGU

Kyŏnghŏ Sŏngu is known as a revitalizer of the Zen tradition in modern Korea. In several ways, his life story resembles that of the seventh-century Korean monk-scholar Wŏnhyo (元曉, 617–686 CE).[71] In East Asian Buddhist tradition, monks' biographies have long served as a symbolic articulation of Buddhist teachings.[72] Kyŏnghŏ's case is not an exception for this. His biography provides a dramatic story of a young monk who attained enlightenment by transforming himself from a teacher of Buddhist scriptures to a Zen practitioner.

Kyŏnghŏ's monastic training began at age nine when he joined Ch'ŏnggye Monastery in 1857.[73] The abbot of the monastery, Kyehŏ, recognized Kyŏnghŏ's

potential and Kyŏnghŏ's mother, who was making a living by herself after the death of her husband, thought that a monastery would be a better place for her son to grow up than a market place. Kyŏnghŏ received the novice precepts (*samigye* 沙彌戒) at age fourteen in 1862. Later that year, Kyŏnghŏ's teacher Kyehŏ disrobed and sent Kyŏnghŏ to Master Manhwa at Tonghak Monastery, where the young practitioner was to spend the next eighteen years.

Kyŏnghŏ's new teacher, Master Manhwa (萬化普善, ?–?), was a well-known lecturer of Buddhist scriptures. After Manhwa recognized Kyŏnghŏ's talent and accepted him as his disciple, Kyŏnghŏ quickly absorbed Buddhism; within months, he was discussing Buddhist teachings with his teacher. Han Yongun, a representative modern Korean monk/scholar, states in his "Brief Report [on Zen Master Kyŏnghŏ]" (Yakpo 略譜) that Kyŏnghŏ exceeded other practitioners a hundredfold during this time. With his comprehensive knowledge of Buddhist scriptures, in fact, he soon became known to all on the Korean Peninsula.[74]

In 1871, Kyŏnghŏ was appointed as a lecturer of Buddhist scriptures. It was a singular honor to be granted such a prestigious position at the young age of twenty-three. People came to listen to his lectures from various parts of Korea, and his fame as a sutra-lecturer grew. The situation changed, however, when a dramatic incident led Kyŏnghŏ to realize the vanity of his reputation as a sutra-lecturer and to completely renounce the validity of textual approaches to Buddhism. This incident took place in 1879, when Kyŏnghŏ was attempting a trip to Seoul. He wanted to visit his former teacher, Kyehŏ, after a decade-long separation. On the way there, however, he passed through a village that had suffered a cholera outbreak. Kyŏnghŏ's disciple, Pang Hanam, described the incident as follows:

> One day, Kyŏnghŏ thought about his former teacher Kyeho, who took care of him as if he were his own child. Kyŏnghŏ wanted to visit him. After informing the monastery members of this plan, he went on his way. In the middle of the journey, Kyŏnghŏ was caught in a rainstorm. Hurriedly he tried to take shelter from the rain under the eaves of a nearby house. But the owner of the house hurriedly drove him out, and he tried another without success. Dozens of houses in the village treated him in the same manner. As they sent him away, they shouted in rage: "The village is contaminated by a contagious disease that spares no living soul. Why would you want to come to such a deadly place?"[75]

Kyŏnghŏ felt cold sweat running over his body. He felt dizzy all over, as if he were already caught by death. The difference between life and death seemed

only one breath, and with that thought, everything in the world suddenly looked unreal. The experience marked a turning point not only in Kyŏnghŏ's personal life, but also in the history of modern Korean Buddhism. Instead of continuing his journey to Seoul, Kyŏnghŏ turned around and returned to the monastery. He made a vow to himself: "I pledge that even though I have to remain a fool in this life, I will not be constrained by letters. I will seek the path for the [Sŏn] masters and their students."[76]

Hanam's description of the incident is rather succinct, and we might wonder whether Kyŏnghŏ was too quick in renouncing doctrinal teachings and turning to Zen training. The fact that the decision was made quickly, however, only emphasizes the urgency that Kyŏnghŏ experienced that night in facing death. Standing in the middle of a cholera-stricken village on the night of a rainstorm, Kyŏnghŏ could not simply be a spectator to the death that was rampaging through the townsfolk. Both physically and mentally, Kyŏnghŏ was living the death of the victims of the disease and experiencing the fact that he could easily become one of them. A simple, but frequently forgotten fact became his reality: that he would die like anyone else. At that point, he realized that he had no way to defend himself against his demise.

Yi Hŭngu, a scholar of Korean religions, provides a more vivid description of the incident in his biography of Kyŏnghŏ. According to Yi, on the night of the incident, Kyŏnghŏ could not find a place to avoid the rainstorm. Shattered by the death that had slaughtered the village people, Kyŏnghŏ hurriedly walked to the outskirts of the village and took shelter under a tree. The rain was pouring like mad as the wind shook the boughs and leaves, and he was all wet and hungry. He sat under the tree, gazing at the rain, and the image of himself as a confident Buddhist lecturer appeared and scattered into the air. The eminent lecturer of Tonghak Monastery, who knew every line of Buddhist scriptures, had no answer to the simple fact that death exists. A shiver ran through him and he felt feverish. "Have I been caught by cholera?" the young lecturer asked himself. Fear overwhelmed him. "What should I do?" he asked. He was only thirty-one years old, too young to succumb to death, but he realized that all of his Buddhist talks at the monastery had been in vain since not a single word of them could save him from death. Facing this reality, Kyŏnghŏ felt helpless.[77] That night, Kyŏnghŏ's conviction that "words cannot save one from death"[78] was so strong that it changed the entire direction of his future. Kyŏnghŏ declared that Zen meditation would be his practice from then on.

After this incident, Kyŏnghŏ returned to Tonghak Monastery and dismissed those who were assembled there to hear him lecture. Rejecting the validity of the theoretical study of Buddhism, Kyŏnghŏ gave his last words to them: "I bid you farewell; please find your path according to your karma. My

intentions and wishes do not lie in [studying Buddhist scriptures]."[79] Kyŏnghŏ found his "intentions and wishes" in the *hwadu* meditation of Zen Buddhism. He was resolute that he would be a "fool" rather than a decipherer of Buddhist scriptures. In this manner, the centuries-old conflict between the doctrinal and meditational schools in Korean Buddhism was repeated in the life of the founder of modern Korean Zen Buddhism.

Armed with the spirit of the *hwadu* practice, Kyŏnghŏ began to concentrate on meditation. Try as hard as he may, he could not easily remove the habits of doctrinal training. Because of his convention of analyzing and interpreting *hwadus*, the *hwadus* did not function as he now intended them to. Finally, he encountered a phrase by Master Lingyun Zhiqin (靈雲志勤, ?–866) of the Tang Dynasty, that came from a dialogue in which a Zen practitioner asked Lingyun: "What is the great meaning of the Buddhist teaching?" and Lingyun replied: "The work of a donkey is yet to be done; the work of a horse has already arrived" (驢事未去 馬事到來).[80] For some reason, this *hwadu* was like "a silver mountain and iron wall" to Kyŏnghŏ.[81] He could not understand its meaning, nor could he find a clue to interpret the phrase. This was the *hwadu* for him. Holding onto this *hwadu*, Kyŏnghŏ locked himself inside.

Months went by while Kyŏnghŏ struggled with the *hwadu*. When sleep threatened, he would prick his thigh with a gimlet. He also kept himself awake by keeping a sharpened knife below his chin. After three months of this passed, a breakthrough was about to occur. One day, a monk at the monastery came to Kyŏnghŏ and asked him the meaning of a passage that the lay Buddhist Yi had told him in the village: "A monk might become a cow, but he would have no nostrils."[82] Upon hearing this passage, Kyŏnghŏ felt that the entire world had changed. Hanam describes the incident as follows:

> When the monk mentioned the cow without nostrils, Master Kyŏnghŏ's expression changed. It was as if a message from the time before the Buddha's birth was suddenly revealed to him. The earth flattened, as subject and object were both forgotten. Kyŏnghŏ had arrived at the state which the ancient masters called the land of great rest. A hundred or a thousand dharma talks, and inconceivable and mysterious truths, opened themselves as if a layer of ice had been broken or a tile cracked. This happened on the fifteenth day of November in the Year of the Rabbit [1879], the sixteenth year of King Kojong's reign.[83]

The sudden awakening that Kyŏnghŏ experienced is comparable to those of other patriarchs in the Zen Buddhist tradition. The Sixth Patriarch of Zen

Buddhism, Huineng (慧能, 638–718), immediately attained awakening upon hearing a line from the *Diamond Sutra* recited in the marketplace. Shuiliao (洪州 水潦, ?–?) suddenly attained enlightenment at the moment of being kicked by Mazu (馬祖道一, 709–788).[84] In describing the experience of awakening through *hwadu* meditation in his "Resolving Doubts about *Hwadu* Meditation," Chinul says that students should concentrate on the critical phrase (or *hwadu*) without trying to interpret it or analyze it; this continues until "all of a sudden, the flavorless and groundless *hwadu* explodes as if shaking the earth and the dharmadhātu [the world of reality] becomes utterly clear."[85] As a continuation of this tradition, Kyŏnghŏ's awakening revived the popularity of *hwadu* meditation in modern Korean Buddhism. Kyŏnghŏ composed "Song of Enlightenment" (Odoga 悟道歌) several months after his awakening, in which he wrote:

> Upon hearing that there are no nostrils,
> I realized that the entire world is my home;
> On the path under Yŏnam Mountain in June,
> People in the field enjoy their time, singing a song of good harvest.[86]

Iryŏp never mentioned Kyŏnghŏ in her writings, but Kyŏnghŏ's life story had a direct influence on Iryŏp's life as a Buddhist nun in at least two ways. First, the *hwadu* meditation that she practiced was the tradition that Chinul introduced in the thirteenth century and that Kyŏnghŏ revived in the nineteenth century. Second, Iryŏp's dharma teacher, Song Man'gong, was Kyŏnghŏ's first disciple. The revival of the *hwadu* meditation was Kyŏnghŏ's main contribution to modern Korean Buddhism, but another aspect of Kyŏnghŏ's legacy was that his disciples played a major role in modern Korean Buddhism. Song Man'gong was a leading Zen master during the first half of the twentieth century. He was also well known for his support and training of nuns, and Iryŏp was one of the beneficiaries of this tradition.[87] Another of Kyŏnghŏ's disciples, Pang Hanam (方漢岩, 1876–1951), became the first patriarch of the Jogye Order (曹溪宗), the largest Buddhist order in contemporary Korea.[88] Suwŏl (水月音觀, 1855–1928) and Hyewŏl (慧月慧明, 1862–1927) also made contributions to the establishment of the Zen Buddhist tradition in modern Korea.

There is a more seminal connection between Kyŏnghŏ's life story and Iryŏp's Buddhism than the historical background just discussed. After undergoing his pseudo-death experience, Kyŏnghŏ made a radical change in his approach to Buddhism. This change might have been exaggerated and might have contributed to Zen Buddhism's myth-making, which later became

an object of criticism of the school.[89] Kyŏnghŏ's life story might be a result of a hagiographical endeavor of Korean Buddhism to promote *hwadu* meditation. My concern here is not whether *hwadu* meditation is actually the most efficient way of attaining enlightenment; neither am I asking whether *hwadu* meditation is, in fact, a representative form of Korean Buddhism. Instead, Kyŏnghŏ's life can show us what is at the core of Zen *hwadu* meditation in particular and of the Zen Buddhist tradition in general. The urgency that Kyŏnghŏ experienced on that rainy night in the cholera-stricken village was the very urgency that Iryŏp described as her state of mind when she joined the monastery, as we will discuss in more detail later. The question of the basic condition of human existence is the basis of religious practice. The existential anxiety that Kyŏnghŏ awakened to in the face of death made him turn to *hwadu* meditation, and the same can be said of Iryŏp's Buddhism. The Korean Buddhist nun-scholar Inkyung described the *hwadu* as an "urgent existential question that demands answer directly from the practitioner."[90] In keeping with this interpretation, both Kyŏnghŏ and Iryŏp relied on *hwadu* meditation to question and answer their existential urgency.

BUDDHIST NUNS IN MODERN KOREA

Before we discuss Iryŏp's Buddhist world, a brief overview is in order of the history of Korean Buddhist nuns and the state of training of Buddhist nuns in Korea at the time Iryŏp joined the monastery.[91]

The first known Buddhist nun in the history of Korean Buddhism was Lady Sa (Sassi 史氏), who lived during the sixth century.[92] She was a sister of the person named Morok who helped Master Ado (阿道) to spread Buddhism in the Kingdom of Silla. Lady Sa was the first person ordained in Silla, where the nuns' monastic community later developed to such an extent that it would require a separate position to oversee it. As early as the late sixth century, Korean nuns also traveled to Japan to spread Buddhism.[93] Among the ordained Buddhist nuns at the time were women from royal families and the upper class, as well as courtesans and commoners. Women in premodern Korea joined the monastery for different reasons. One notable reason was to maintain chastity after the death of one's husband.[94] Another was to have a place to live late in her life.[95]

National support for Buddhism increased during the Koryŏ period (918–1392), and so did the activities of nuns. By the thirteenth century, their names began to appear on the epitaphs of renowned monks, suggesting that nuns as a social subclass had gained a higher status in Korean society. At this time,

the practice of nuns consisted mostly of chanting and reading of scriptures. But records show that Zen masters, especially Chin'gak Hyesim and Naong Hyegŭn (懶翁惠勤, 1320–1376), encouraged nuns to practice *hwadu* meditation. Memorial inscriptions on the tombs of upper-class women indicate that chanting, scripture-reading, and performing Buddhist rituals on the occasions of diverse life events were popular among lay practitioners.

During the Chosŏn Dynasty (1392–1910), Buddhism suffered from persecution and anti-Buddhist policies and that inevitably affected Buddhist nuns.[96] The neo-Confucian government prohibited women from visiting monasteries in 1404, justifying the ban as necessary to protect women's chastity.[97] In 1413, the government ordered all nuns from good families who had become nuns as virgins to be laicized and married. In 1428, it prohibited women from attending the Lantern Festival. Finally, in 1451, nuns and monks were prohibited from entering the capital city.

Despite the hostility toward Buddhism in the Chosŏn Dynasty, some Chosŏn Buddhist women persisted in their devotion. Support of Buddhism by female members of the royal family was crucial for the survival of the tradition. Royal and upper-class women avidly patronized the Buddhist arts during this time[98] and prayed for the safety and prosperity of their families and the nation.[99]

Buddhist nuns in contemporary Korea are trained in two ways: basic education, received at the seminary (*kangwŏn* 講院); and meditation, practiced in the meditation hall (*sŏnwŏn* 禪院).[100] Until the modern era, nuns were excluded from education at the seminaries. Along with the flow of Western civilization into Korea at the end of the nineteenth century, education emerged as an essential driver of social change, an influence also visible in the world of Korean Buddhism. Monks began to leave the traditional seminaries in order to study under the newly introduced Western educational system, and rooms were created for nuns at the seminaries that had been deserted by monks.[101]

At first, nuns simply audited lectures at the monks' seminaries, or attended lectures for nuns at hermitages near those seminaries. Exactly when the first seminaries for nuns opened is still unclear. Korean scholar Su'gyŏng proposed that Kugil hermitage (國一庵) at Haein Monastery (海印寺) had a certain form of a seminary for nuns around 1913; by 1918, Okryŏn hermitage at T'ongdo Monastery also offered education for nuns.[102] Either Kugil hermitage or Okryŏn hermitage can be considered the first seminary for nuns in Korea. However, they both still followed the format of traditional training. If we consider the modern-style education as a model for determining which seminary for nuns was truly the first, then the seminary at Pomun Monastery (普門寺) in Seoul,

which opened in 1936, should be accorded the honor. During the first half of the twentieth century, there were only four seminaries for nuns: Kugil hermitage, Okryŏn hermitage, Pomun Monastery, and Namchang Monastery.[103] During the second half of the twentieth century, seventeen seminaries for nuns opened. Most noteworthy is the opening of the seminary for nuns at Tonghak Monastery in 1954.[104]

The first meditation hall for nuns was Kyŏnsŏng hermitage (見性庵) at Sudŏk Monastery, which opened in 1928. As soon as it opened, Kyŏnsŏng hermitage began to play a significant role in revitalizing the Zen tradition among Korean nuns, and today it continues to produce leading female Zen teachers.[105] With the opening of seminaries and meditation halls for nuns, the Zen dharma lineage for nuns began to take shape. Myori Pŏphŭi (妙理 法喜, 1887–1975) is credited with pioneering the Zen lineage of Korean nuns in modern time.[106] Kim Iryŏp belongs to this first generation of modern Korean Zen Buddhist nuns.

For her first two decades as a Zen Buddhist, Iryŏp practiced at Kyŏnsŏng hermitage. During the last ten years of her life, she moved to a small site called Hwanhŭi-dae (歡喜臺 Delightful Terrace). Hwanhŭi-dae had been known as the "secret garden" of Mt. Tŏksung. When Master Man'gong reached this spot, he was so pleased by its ambience that he named it Delightful Terrace. A simple tethered house was built there in October 1927, and three nuns began practicing there. Later, Wŏlsong renovated it into the space for practice where Iryŏp would spend her final years.

After joining the monastery, Iryŏp served as the head nun (*ipsŭng* 立繩) for almost thirty years, until she moved to Hwanhŭi-dae due to age-related illness. In Korean meditation halls, the head nun is in charge of the meditation practice, signaling the start and end of meditation with a bamboo clapper. She maintains the regularity of the meditation hall and makes judgments about how to practice correct Buddhist teaching.

Although daily life at Kyŏnsŏng hermitage in Iryŏp's time could not have been conducted exactly as it is now, the contemporary routine of the hermitage does give us a glimpse into her life.[107] Practitioners rise at 3:00 a.m.; morning prayers and meditation follow. Breakfast is served at 6:00 a.m. After the morning meal, practitioners clean and have free time. At 10:00 a.m., morning offerings to the Buddha (*sasi maji* 巳時摩旨) are performed, which includes about an hour of prayer. Lunch is served at 11:00 a.m. and dinner at 5:00 p.m. In between, practitioners have free time to devote to study or to doing chores for the temple. At 6:30 p.m., the evening service is performed for half an hour, after which, some may continue to pray to the Buddha until about

7:30 p.m. During the evening study time, it is up to practitioners whether to meditate, study Buddhist texts, or perform some other practice. Between 9:00 and 10:00 p.m., they go to bed. Between the 3:00 a.m. wake-up time and the 9:00 p.m. bedtime, time is devoted primarily to meditation at Kyŏnsŏng hermitage, whereas at Hwanhŭi-dae, the time is divided between meditation, sutra studying, and various chores and errands to help manage the place. Iryŏp returned to Kyŏnsŏng hermitage in 1970, expressing her wish to spend the rest of her life at the meditation hall practicing with other Zen Buddhist nuns.

CHAPTER FIVE

Time for Reconciliation

Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun (1955–1960)

Kim Iryŏp's Buddhism

CONTRADICTION OR THE PRINCIPLE OF EXISTENCE

In her introduction to *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun,* Kim Iryŏp states that she was astounded three times after joining the monastery: first, when she realized that she had lost her self; second, when she realized that "the entire world consists of people who have lost their selves"; finally, when she realized that "even though the entire world is populated by people who have lost their selves, they are not aware of it and instead delude themselves into believing that they are smart and know everything."[1] Defining her generation as the one of lost-self, Iryŏp calls our attention to a fundamental aspect of human existence: the self and self-identity. What is the basis for her diagnosis that people in her time had lost their selves? What is the state of lost-self and what is the evidence of it? Iryŏp states: "People act, but they do not even try to think about what it is that makes them act."[2] Behind this judgment lie her questions: How do we create meaning? How do values arise in our actions? What are the bases of our value judgment?

The Middle Path, the Two Levels of Truth, and the Self Life consists of a series of activities, whether daily routines like getting out of bed, taking a shower, eating breakfast, and going to work, or more intellectual activities like making decisions, interacting with others, and searching for the meaning of existence. The actions of our minds and bodies constitute what we call life. As we perform these daily actions, can we assume the existence of an essence that enables us to perform them? Philosophy and religion have long searched for the foundation of our existence and endeavored to prove the reality of such a basis. It seems that without such a foundation, we feel that our activities and our existence can have only arbitrary values and no ultimate meaning. Imagine that each and every action we take has only a temporary meaning, without being connected to a more comprehensive and permanent structure of meaning. In that case, contingency would be the basic rule of human existence.

An alternative proposal is that our actions have meaning by virtue of their roles in a larger design. The architect responsible for building such a structure frequently takes the form of the transcendental being, or a being whose capacity surpasses that of humans. The first case, in which we understand phenomena only through their one-time surface value, represent a naturalist and/or materialist perspective; the second represents an idealist and/or transcendentalist perspective.[3] This reminds us of a well-known dialogue that the Buddha had with one of his followers, which appears in an early Buddhist discourse.

In the dialogue known as "Kaccānagotta" in *Saṃyutta-nikāya,* the Buddha teaches the nature of existence as follows: "'All exist': Kaccāna, this is one extreme. 'All does not exist': this is the second extreme. Without veering towards either of these extremes, the Tathāgata teaches the Dhamma by the middle."[4]

The Buddhist middle does not indicate a middle point between two ends; instead, the middle is a comprehensive point that subsumes *both* ends and, thus, negates the independence of either. Imagine the spectrum of a color bar with black at one end and white at the other. A commonly understood middle point would be gray—a mixture of black and white. As the Buddha attempted to explain to Kaccāna, the Buddhist middle would include this gray, but the Buddhist understanding of the identity of and the relationship among, black, white, and gray is different from what people usually assume. When we think about the three colors black, white, and gray, we understand them as independent colors. This is a commonsense understanding of these colors, and our idea of their individual identity usually stops there. Buddhism calls this an understanding at the conventional level and encourages us to further consider how each color attains its identity. Since the color white does not have its own "essence" of whiteness, white does not exist apart from other colors, including black and gray. Buddhism acknowledges that white and gray (and in this sense, any other colors in our color spectrum) are all independent and different colors at one level (which Buddhism calls a conventional level). Even though they are all independent colors, they have different standings in our value judgment. We consider black and white to be "pure" colors, but gray to be a mixed one. On this basis, we also assign different values to different colors, an evaluation process that is much informed by the norms of our society: white has a positive connotation, black a negative one. And gray, one might say, is the color of indecision.

The Buddha's logic of the middle path demands that we see individual identities and their values from a different perspective. It tells us that the

notion of "the middle" in the middle path applies not only to gray but to black, to white, and to any other color. That is so because there is no pure whiteness that defines the identity of the color white. Within the color white, in fact, black is included, and by the same token, gray is in there too. Huineng (慧能, 638–713), the sixth patriarch of Chan Buddhism, made this point clear in a statement to his disciples: "Darkness is not darkness by itself; because there is light there is darkness. Darkness is not darkness by itself; with light darkness changes, and with darkness light is revealed. Each mutually causes the other."[5] This is the Buddha's notion of the middle: the middle is a symbolic expression of all that is in the color bar with black at one end, white at the other end, and everything in between. Black is the "middle" and white is the "middle," just as much as gray is the "middle." The problems of this mode of thinking seem immediately obvious. If black, white, and gray are all identified as the "middle," they should all be the same color. Yet, they are not. How do we distinguish one from the other? By posing this question, we are pointing to a linguistic problem: if all three colors are the "middle," they should not have the three different names of white, black, and gray. There is also a logical problem here, since if the identity of black is the same as the identity of white, we are saying that black *is* white. If black is the same as nonblack (white), this violates the law of identity that is at the base of logic: for the statement is a contradiction. The Buddhist tradition was well aware of the seeming conundrum that the Buddha's notion of the "middle" might cause for our understanding of things, our use of language, and logical thinking. The third-century Buddhist thinker Nāgārjuna (龍樹 ca. 150–250) explained this logical challenge through the notion of the "two levels of truth" in his writing on the Middle Path. Nāgārjuna states:

> The Buddha's teaching of the Dharma
> Is based on two truths:
> A truth of worldly convention
> And an ultimate truth.[6]

Applying this idea, we can say that in our example of the colors black, white, and gray, the separate identity of each color is accepted at the level of conventional truth. The middle, on the other hand, tells us the identity with regard to the mode of existence of each color, and thus understands the identity at the level of ultimate truth. A further elaboration on the three expressions—conventional, ultimate, and truth—will help us understand the Buddha's worldview and Iryŏp's as well. "Convention" (*saṁvṛti*), as in conventional truth

(Skt. saṃvṛti-satya, 俗諦), means "mutually dependent"; "they do not essentially have the ability to stand on their own."[7] Gray does not have grayness that can be defined independently of black and white; neither can black or white be defined independently of other colors; hence, the phenomena of gray, black, or white and their nominal reality are conventional truth. The "conventional" in the "conventional truth" also means "concealment."[8] The phenomenon and name of the color "gray" conceals the true, or ultimate, reality that gray is a compounded existence. The conventional truth, however, is still "truth" in the sense that black, white, and gray each does exist as an independent color at the conventional level. They are not distorted images caused by defects in the eye of the subject. As Jay Garfield, a Buddhist scholar, aptly states in his discussion of the Tibetan thinker Tsongkhapa's (1357–1419) understanding of the two truths, "Conventional phenomena are deceptive not because they appear to be real but are not, but because they appear to be ultimately real, but are not."[9]

An individual exists, in this sense, as a conventional truth, but the conventional truth conceals its ultimate nature from the eyes of those who are not awakened. As Iryŏp states, "People act, but they do not even try to think about what it is that makes them act." We all exist as individuals at the conventional level. This individual self gets up in the morning, eats breakfast, and lives out the day, interacting with others and making decisions and judgments. On the surface, individuals do all of these things, thinking that they are independent actors capable of controlling these activities and making independent decisions. The Buddhist logic, however, adds a new dimension to this commonsense assumption about our existence. From Iryŏp's perspective, people have lost their selves because they fail to see what the conventional level conceals about their identities and the nature of their existence. According to Buddhism and to Iryŏp, a revelation of that which is concealed will open up a new understanding of the self's capacity. What does our encounter with the ultimate reality reveal? The "unconcealment" in this case is the revelation of the structure of existence as Buddhism envisions it, and this structure is called "dependent co-arising" (*pratītya-samutpāda* 緣起). The nature of things in the world of dependent co-arising is characterized by emptiness (*śūnyatā* 空), or a lack of an independent and permanent essence. A being exists through a web of causes and conditions and thus lacks any independent and permanent essence to distinguish it from other beings. This nonsubstantial view of Buddhism has produced multilayered consequences. Among them was the negative evaluation of Buddhism by the Western world when Buddhism encountered it during the nineteenth century.

European thinkers interpreted the Buddhist negation of a permanent, independent self as a case of the "annihilation" of the self.[10] From the perspective of a tradition in which the self plays a principal role in understanding existence and the world, the idea of non-selfhood was nothing but a destruction of the self. From the Buddhist perspective, however, there is no self to destroy or annihilate to begin with. The self is not a fixed and permanent entity in Buddhism; rather, it is constantly created through interactions. From the Buddhist perspective, the tendency of imbuing the self with a fixed identity limits its capacity, since a self with a fixed identity is confined within the boundaries of that identity. The Buddhist idea of "non-self" (*anātman* 無我) declares the impossibility of identifying one permanent essence in a being. Since no specific identity can limit a being from this perspective, that being is infinite. Buddhist non-self then, instead of being a pessimistic vision of existence, opens up the limitations of a being that is bound by the concept of a definitive self. Iryŏp discussed the differences between the two modes of understanding the self in her analysis of the notion of the "I":

> When we say "I," this "I" has meaning only when the "I" is capable of being completely in charge of his or her life. By the same token, only the "I" who is free to handle life can be considered to be living the "life of a human being." In our lives, however, the "I," or the self, is far from free. Why, then, do we still refer to "I" and pretend that that "I" belongs to us? The answer does not require any investigation into the meaning of the expressions "I" or "myself." Even a child knows that to say something is "mine" means that I am in charge of that thing. If we are not the owners of our lives, can we still be considered to be living as a human being? Can we still say that we have the mind of a human in such a life? Because we are alive, we desperately claim freedom and peace as absolute necessities. If we are really free beings, how can there be any complaints or dissatisfaction? Freedom and peace belong to us as individuals; so why do we try to find them in something external to us?[11]

The gap between the self's claim for autonomy and its illusory reality Iryŏp criticizes in her diagnosis of the status of the "I" explains various phenomena in our daily existence. One example of these phenomena is the problem of the consumer society in which we live, even though Iryŏp did not experience the full scope of late capitalism in her lifetime. Consumption has become one of the major activities of our society. We buy things as much because we want them as we need them for our existence. This craving is closely related to the expansion of power, and consumer society sustains itself through the logic of

desire. Desire is a structure of relationship between at least two existents: a desiring subject and a desired object. The subject's desire is directed toward the desired object. The subject satisfies the desire through possessing the desired object, and with that satisfaction comes a sense of power. The subject believes that she or he has power over that which she or he possesses.

This logic of consumption is illusory. The subject's satisfaction and sense of power soon give way to more desire to possess other goods or objects, and there is no end to this process. The subject will always feel a sense of lack, since there are always objects external to the subject that the subject needs to conquer to possess. The logic of dualism feeds this mode of thinking, since we do not desire what we already have; in order for desire to arise and eventually be satisfied, the object of desire should exist outside of the subject. This fundamental structure of desire reveals the impossibility of satisfying it on a permanent level, and this is also the logic of consumerism. The subject consumes the object of desire, but since the object is outside of the subject, and since there is always an outside, no matter how much money one spends and no matter how many products one buys, there is always more to buy. The subject continues to perform the act of consumption under the belief that the accumulation of material goods will expand his or her capacity and power. The result of this consumerism, however, is the opposite of what the subject expects: the subject will be in a constant process of acquiring the objects existing outside of the self. Trapped in the endless process of challenging, conflicting with, and finally enslaving the objects of the self's desire, the self becomes a slave to the act of consumption. Since there always exists the object that the self desires, the self feels discontent and is never free. Iryŏp's realization that she has been leading the life of a lost self reflects an awareness that the self's effort to empower itself by relying on external objects is doomed to fail. These external objects could be material objects, societal fame and recognition by other people, or even love, viewed through an immature understanding. In what sense, then, do we say that the self is infinite and possesses unbounded power? Iryŏp explains this through the logic of contradiction, which she identifies as the structure of the universe and of our existence.

Contradiction and Nothingness "Existence by nature contains contradiction," Iryŏp wrote in an essay reflecting upon her twenty-five years at the monastery.[12] In this essay, Iryŏp explains existence as "an eternal continuation of the unchanging process of arising and ceasing."[13] Nature runs through the repletion of four seasons; spring comes, annulling the season before it, and so do summer, fall, and winter. Day comes with its bright light, which eventually

gives way to the darkness of the night. The birth of a child occurs with a celebration, but birth inevitably invokes death. Day and night, summer and winter, and life and death are commonly considered to be opposite concepts. When we say that two opposite ideas manifest the same nature, we take it as contradiction, a logical incompatibility. Another common extension of this idea is that the resolution of contradiction confirms individual identity, and the separation between the two opposites is an inevitable result of such an understanding of identity formation. Day and night are conceived of as two separate periods in a day, summer and winter are two individual seasons in a year, and life and death are unrelated aspects of existence; thus, we celebrate life and mourn death. Buddhist logic does not negate this idea. However, it also tells us that each of these entities' identities is made possible by the involvement of its opposite. As Huineng stated earlier, light is light because of darkness; without darkness, light cannot exist. Iryŏp proposed a comprehensive whole beneath this polarization at the surface level and called it the "one" (*hana* 하나). The "one" in this case is not the one in a series of two, three, four, and so on; instead, it is the one with no other numbers attached. Iryŏp states:

> The root of all existence is "one," and this "one" is just a name we assign out of necessity. Once we talk about "one," "two" will emerge. When we claim this root (*ppuri*) [of existence] and that root [of existence], different roots will create a distinction between "my" root and "your" root. Establishment of "one" becomes the cause of conflict. This root I call "oneness" is the root of non-being (*mujŏk ppuri*), the state of existence that comes before we call the name of the Buddha or God and before the creation of the universe.[14]

The "one," then, does not have its own separate identity other than being the comprehensive whole. Traditional Buddhism characterizes this comprehensive whole with the notion of "emptiness" (*kong* 空; Skt. *śūnyatā*). In referring to this "one"—the basis of existence, the root of being—Iryŏp frequently used the expression "non-being" or "nothing" (*mu* 無), as we can read in the expression "the root called nothing" (*mujŏk ppuri* 無的 뿌리).

Kim Iryŏp was not the only thinker in her time who paid attention to nothing as the foundation of existence and being. The Japanese philosophers known as the Kyoto School extensively utilized the notion of nothingness in their philosophizing. James Heisig, a scholar of the Kyoto School, identified them as "the philosophers of nothingness."[15] Heisig's elaboration on the meaning of nothingness in the Kyoto School thinkers' philosophy in particular, and Asian philosophy in general, gives an ironic twist to the initial reaction

of European philosophers and Buddhist scholars to Buddhism, which was to identify it as "the cult of nothingness."[16] The nineteenth-century German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831) discussed Buddhism in his three lectures (1824, 1827, 1831) on the philosophy of religion and defined it as a religion of annihilation, with its goal of Buddhism as "annihilating" the self.[17] Eugène Burnouf (1801–1852), one of the first generation of European Buddhologists, also translated *nirvāṇa* as "annihilation," stating, "Nirvāṇa, that is to say, in a general way, liberation or salvation, is the supreme aim that the founder of Buddhism proposed for the efforts of man. But what is this liberation and what is the nature of this salvation? If we consult the etymology, it will respond to us that it is annihilation, extinction."[18] Finding this interpretation of nirvāṇa insufficient, Burnouf wondered about the nature of its liberation, tentatively concluding, "nirvāṇa is for the theists the absorption of individual life into God and for the atheists the absorption of this individual life into nothingness. But for both, nirvāṇa is liberation, it is supreme freedom."[19] What would it mean, though, to be absorbed into nothingness? Burnouf did not follow up on this idea. Following Burnouf's lead, his student Max Müller (1823–1900) characterized nirvāṇa as "absolute nothing." Roger-Pol Droit, the author of *The Cult of Nothingness: The Philosophers and the Buddha,* states that Burnouf was cautious in identifying nirvāṇa, the ultimate goal of Buddhism, with nothingness. Despite the caution, Burnouf's discussion of nirvāṇa as a state of nothingness and destruction contributed to solidifying the Europeans' negative impression of Buddhism. Droit also offers a detailed discussion of how the political, cultural, and religious situation of Europe at the time played a role in these negative evaluations. The positioning of nirvāṇa as absorption into nothingness was, as Droit argues, just another way of criticizing the atheistic nature of Buddhism, in that nothingness was seen by the European philosophers as an amoral state, the opposite of God.[20]

The Continental European intellectual trend of the nineteenth century interpreted "nothingness" as an utterly negative concept. Contrary to that, East Asian philosophy has had a long history of conceiving nothingness or non-being as an openness of being. By nature, any being is bounded, which enables that being's identity. In East Asian intellectual history, the opposite of being is non-being, or nothingness, which is conceived of as the infinite abyss, the whole, the ineffable, and the one.

Nishida Kitarō (西田幾多郎, 1870–1945), the founder of the Kyoto School, offers us a compelling examination of how nothingness contributes to our concept of self-identity and also to our religious worldview. Regarding the relationship between the relative and the absolute, as well as the nature of

self-identity, Nishida states, "A true absolute must possess itself through self-negation."[21] In other words, the self defines itself by imposing boundaries on it. When I identify myself as a "woman" and an "Asian," I distinguish myself from men and non-Asians. Women, however, are not a homogeneous group, and neither are Asians. The definitions and characterizations of "Asian" are an accumulation of features that are commonly shared by the group called Asians, to which I belong, but I also distinguish myself by my differences from other people within the group. As much as my identity describes me as an individual, I am an "I" by my own challenges to and rebellions against my familial, social, educational, and biological backgrounds, norms, notions, and languages. If this is the case, I can be "me" only through self-negation, the negation of the formally accepted notion of the identity as a woman, Asian, scholar, professor, and so on. Nishida calls this "absolute contradictory self-identity" (*zettai mujun-teki jiko dōitsu* 絶対矛盾的自己同一). When this absolute contradictory self-identity is extended to its maximum, one reaches the universal, since the universal, by definition, should be comprehensive and include contradictions. This universal, for Nishida, is nothingness: unlike being, which is bounded, nothingness is boundless; it is absolute openness and all-comprehensive.

Nothingness is the universal and noumenal aspect of the particular individual being; however, individuals frequently fail to see their nature from the viewpoint of contradiction. Iryŏp gives an example of waves and the ocean to explain this point. Waves appear and disappear, but the ocean is always there as their source. Waves are not the same as the ocean and have their individual identities as waves, but, at the same time, cannot be separated from the ocean. This basis of existence, for Iryŏp and Nishida, is characterized as "contradictions." Encompassing all contradictions is possible only when the boundaries of an identity are open instead of closed, a state which these thinkers assign to "non-being" or "nothingness."[22]

Nothingness, in Zen Buddhist tradition, is more related to the issue of unboundedness and freeing oneself from mental fixation than to "annihilation." Huineng, in his *Platform Sūtra*, defined his core teaching as "no-thought" (*wúniàn* 無念). "No-thought" does not mean a lack or absence of thought. Huineng explained it as follows: "'No' is the 'no' of what? 'Thought'—what is this? 'No' is the separation from the dualism of all activities. True Suchness is the body of thought; thought is the function of True Suchness. If one's nature gives rise to thoughts, even when one sees, hears, and realizes it, one is not constrained by outside conditions and thus is always free."[23]

True suchness, or *tathatā,* refers to the state of things as they are. Our understanding of daily existence is mostly dominated by subjective perspectives, which means that we perceive things that are transformed through the environments in which they exist and through our own perceptual frames. For example, when we see flowers in a vase, we already see them with a perspective influenced by their shape, color, and smell. We assume that the shape of flowers that we see, the color that we recognize, and the scent that we smell must be the true reality of those particular flowers, and the combined result of these elements offers us an experience of pleasure, contentment, and even happiness. Our understanding and experiences of flowers, in most cases, stop there. In that context, and at that stage, flowers are representatives of beauty and messengers of positive emotions. However, if we think further and contemplate what flowers are in their entirety, we realize that no flowers are born in that beautiful state. Whether they grow from seeds like annual plants, from roots like perennial plants, or even from trees that sustain themselves for longer periods, diverse contributors are necessary for flowers to exist, including soil, water, sunshine, fertilizer, and so on. These contributors are all parts of the manifestation of a flower.

The post-blooming life of a flower is another story. As flowers in a vase begin to wither, the stems start losing their fibers, mixing with water, and generating a repulsive odor. The state of decomposition and its uninviting smell are part of a flower's life as much as its eye-catching beauty. Buddhist tradition explains this lifespan of things through the four stages of arising, sustaining, changing, and ceasing. A flower grows to bloom (arising); the flower bloom stays for a while (sustaining); the withering process begins sometime after that (changing); and eventually, the flower exists no longer (ceasing). Human beings go through the same stages of birth, growing, aging, and death. Nature runs its course in the same manner daily (through the cycle of morning, afternoon, evening, and night) and yearly (through the cycle of spring, summer, fall, and winter).

Flower-lovers do not refuse to be allured by flowers in bloom just because they will eventually wither and give out a foul odor as they decompose. Can we tell which stage is the true reality of the flower's life? Phenomenal reality seems to support that we should distinguish flowers from the soil out of which they grow, the water they need, and the sunshine they absorb, as well as from the foul water and repulsive odor resulting from their decomposition. Obviously, flowers are not the soil, nor the water, nor the smell. We see all of these elements in separation. Linguistic convention weighs into this separationist

understanding of reality, since individualized existence and its naming constitutes our understanding of the phenomenal world. Buddhism calls this the "conventional truth." The name "flower," however, does not refer to any identifiable essence, but instead to a compound being that is made of diverse factors: Buddhism calls this the "ultimate truth." Since no one factor defines a flower, Buddhism characterizes it as being "empty"; that is, it is empty of a single defining essence. For Iryŏp, understanding these two aspects of existence—conventional individuality and ultimate emptiness—had a significant importance in allowing an individual to realize his or her real capacity and, therefore, learn how to exercise freedom. Iryŏp examines this idea in her discussion of the "I."

IN SEARCH OF THE SELF

Precious Human Rebirth: Karma and Transmigration Reflecting upon the time when she joined the monastery, Iryŏp stated that she felt a sense of urgency. She described this urgency as the "need to survive." Like Kyŏnghŏ, who experienced existential crisis and urgency on a rainy night as he faced the reality of death, Iryŏp was facing a dead-end situation regarding life and human existence. Her dharma master's teachings only intensified her sense of crisis, in that Man'gong told Iryŏp: "When one leaves the secular world and joins a monastery, the study for the person is 'to survive.'"[24] The existential urgency expressed by Man'gong as a basis for Buddhist practice must have deeply touched Iryŏp at the time. *Salgoboja* (살고보자), the Korean expression that I translated as "to survive," implies the subject's determination to employ extreme measures to overcome the predicament at hand. In this scenario, the subject will take actions that he or she would not dare consider possible in a normal situation, at whatever cost. Resolving the current problem has priority, and all of the consequences will be set aside until the subject does so. The Korean expression for joining the monastery is "leaving the family" (*ch'ulka* 出家). If an individual takes the radical action of joining a monastery, leaving everything in the secular world behind, the level of the crisis that the individual feels must be deep. Man'gong's description of existential urgency in Buddhist practice echoes Iryŏp's own. In an essay in which Iryŏp expresses her debt to Man'gong, she recalls her profound despair during the earlier stages of her monastic life, when the effort to "survive" did not render visible results.[25] Despite her despair and disappointment at her tardy progress, however, Iryŏp did not regret having joined the monastery stating, "I realized that had I never encoun-

tered this unsurpassable teaching of discovering one's nature and thus attaining buddhahood, I would have completely wasted this precious life of being a human."[26] The awareness that death is not the end of existence and that human existence is most precious among beings led Iryŏp to the question of what it actually means to live a human being's life. This question became a main concern of her first book, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*.

In the traditional Buddhist cosmology, humans occupy a unique position. Buddhism identifies the six realms in which sentient beings transmigrate through lives as the Six Realms of Transmigration (*yukto yunhoe* 六道輪廻).[27] The realms of divinities (Skt. *Deva;* 天), of demigods or titans (Skt. *asura*; 阿修羅), and of humans (Skt. *manuṣya*; 人) constitute the three upper realms, and the realms of animals (Skt. *tiryak*; 畜生), ghosts (Skt. *preta*; 餓鬼), and hell denizens (Skt. *nāraka*; 地獄) make up the lower three realms. Among them, the human realm is the only one in which enlightenment is possible. Human existence, therefore, is frequently characterized as the precious human rebirth. Some might think that the realm of divinities should be a more desirable destination of rebirth for humans, but Buddhists have a different idea.[28] In the realm of divinities, happiness dominates, which deprives the beings in that realm of the motivation for religious practice. Unlike beings in the divine realm, humans experience both suffering and happiness. As a result, they are aware of the impermanence and motivated to engage in spiritual cultivation to overcome the transmigration.

The cyclic reality of human existence, known as saṃsāra, is sustained through "karma" (*ŏp* 業), literally meaning "action." A simple definition of karma is moral causation. Intentional actions generate karmic energy and influence a person's forthcoming actions and lives. The nature of an action determines whether its impact is negative or positive. Theories of karma and transmigration have long been problematic to Buddhist scholars. Buddhism claims that there is no permanent self; if so, what or who receives the impact of an action, and who or what transmigrates? Rebirth is evidence that a being still has negative karmic energy that needs to be paid off. If nothing has its own independent essence, however, how are good or bad actions defined?[29] These perennial questions have pestered Buddhist scholars throughout the history of Buddhism. More practical questions have troubled many Buddhists. If one's life is decided by good or bad karma, does karma represent a Buddhist theory of universal justice? In that case, how does this cosmic justice theory of karma explain various tragedies and problems in human life and society, such as natural disasters, war, infant mortality, social discrimination, and

hierarchical social systems? For example, does the theory of karma suggest that the victims of natural disaster deserved the tragedy since their current lives are a result of the karma of their previous lives?

Karma is not a concept created by Buddhism; it existed in the Indian tradition long before Buddhism's emergence. Scholars have noted the different concepts of karma in the pre-Buddhist usage of the term as well as in Buddhist usages. Peter Harvey, a scholar of Buddhist ethics, for example, notes that the concept of karma in pre-Buddhist India, as it appeared in the Hindu tradition, had more to do with "ritually right" actions than "ethically right" ones.[30] Surveying the emergence and evolution of the concept of karma in Indian tradition, Johannes Bronkhorst, a scholar of early Buddhism, points out that "Buddhism psychologized the notion of karmic retribution."[31] He explained that the Hindu and Jainist concept of karma was related to actions, whereas Buddhists emphasized "desire" and the "intention" of actions. Whether karma underlies actual actions, or the intention behind them, its basis is that actions have consequences and virtue is rewarded while vice is punished.

Values, Action, and Choice Theories of karma and transmigration have met many challenges as Buddhism faced the modern and Western worlds. People have reasoned that, if an individual's previous karma dominates his or her current situation, he or she would have no one but himself or herself to blame for that current state. Understood in this manner, Buddhism is a status quo–supporting tradition and even a fatalistic one, which is problematic for many people. As scholars have tried to demonstrate, however, it is possible to make different interpretations of karma, without subjecting the notion to a fatalist position and without making it a foil for universal justice. One such interpretation is to understand karma with a focus on the Buddhist notion of interconnectedness and the importance of choice in action.

Buddhists see the world through the lens of multilayered causality. Both the "causes and conditions" of each action need to be understood in order to see the full spectrum of its results. For example, consider the following: Suppose I added a spoonful of salt to the water in my coffee mug. I would not have difficulty in recognizing that the water becomes saltier as a result of this action. Now consider that I did the same action of adding a spoonful of salt, but this time to the Pacific Ocean. The ocean must become saltier as a result of my action, but it would be impossible for any human palate to recognize this. The same action—the cause—could reap such different results—the effect—based on the conditions in which it takes place. No action in our life takes place in a vacuum. "Conditions" are the ecology of our actions and cannot be

fully quantified. This makes "intention" an important aspect in understanding the results of an action. If a person acts with the intention of adding salt to the water, then the actor will broadly be aware of the result, but the result's exact scope will not be computable.

There also exists another important aspect of karma (action) and "intention" (Skt. *cetanā*): that human actions have both transitive and intransitive impacts. If I said something bad to my friend, on the surface my friend would be harmed by my bad behavior. I am the offender, and my friend is the victim. Buddhists tell us that the impacts of our actions function both internally and externally. I would not be able to say something bad without being in a bad mood, and this negative mood and psychology before and after my action must have an impact on my other actions. Hence, I am the victim of my own action as much as my friend, the outward victim, is. This is another way of explaining that karmic theory is not based on a mechanical calculation of good or bad actions and merit-harming or merit-rewarding consequences. Instead, karmic theory underlines the importance of choice and responsibility in our actions. Since all actions have consequences on both the agent and others who become involved in the action implicitly or explicitly, karmic theory recommends that the practitioners be cautious and reflective in performing any action.

If the same action can have different consequences, and if the nature of consequences is not quantifiable, what would be the Buddhist guideline for action? The consequences of actions have a varying range, but actions are not totally free of value. In evaluating an action, Buddhist tradition uses the notions of the "wholesome" (Skt. *kuśala*; *sŏn* 善) and "unwholesome" (Skt. *akuśala*; *pulsŏn* 不善). As the Buddha clarified in his sermons, the Buddha's teaching is, at bottom, to help sentient beings remove suffering. Defining the nature of an action in Buddhism also follows this goal of the removal of suffering. An action is wholesome if it is conducive to the removal of suffering for the self and others, and an action is unwholesome if it causes suffering to the self and others. Wholesome actions are therefore recommended, whereas unwholesome actions should be avoided.

Through its cosmology, in which the human realm is understood as the most fortunate rebirth, together with the theories of karma and transmigration, Buddhism imagines a world in which "values-action-choice" is at the center of human existence. Iryŏp repeatedly lamented the possibility of wasting her time in this "precious life of being a human." Behind that despairing sensitivity lies Iryŏp's idea that life as a human being means searching for value in human existence, that this search always happens in the form of action, and

that individuals are fully responsible for their choice of actions. Actions, in this case, are not limited to physical movements of the body. Buddhism defines three ways of creating karma: that is, humans make actions through body, mind, and mouth, as we act by moving our bodies (*sinŏp* 身業), by thinking (*ŭiŏp* 意業), and by verbalizing our thoughts (*kuŏp* 口業). These actions are, in turn, based on our moral choices, which Buddhism explains as "intentional action" that creates karma.

The Buddhist idea of "fortunate human rebirth" was Iryŏp's confirmation of the value of her current life as a human being and of her struggle to realize that value by taking full advantage of it. The realization of the ultimate values of human existence was a fundamental goal of Iryŏp's life. As a New Woman, Iryŏp challenged the social norms of patriarchal society, reasoning that the gendered role Korean society imposed on her limited her capacity to be a full human. In her transition from a social activist to a Buddhist nun, Iryŏp began to address the issue from a more existential perspective. She realized that the limitations she had experienced in life must have had deeper origin than social construction and that her discontent with a patriarchal system was only one aspect of deeper problems. Iryŏp's examination of the source of her discontent with life led her to question the basis of existence, asking questions like: What would it mean to be the real "I"? How do we find the real "I"? With these queries, a new quest to find the self had begun for Iryŏp.

Human Existence Iryŏp characterized her time as one of a lost self, and this evaluation reflects the importance of finding the real "I" in Iryŏp's thoughts. At the beginning of the essay "Life" (Insaeng 人生), which appears in her book *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun,* Iryŏp addresses this fundamental problem of the lost self by asking the meaning of being a human; in doing so, she states, "The standards regarding the values of existence are determined according to whether we are beings capable of controlling our lives. A being who lives an independent life is one whose life is of utmost value. Who, then, is this being, the being we call 'I'?"[32] Iryŏp answers this question by reflecting upon the conditions of human existence and meaning of being fully human.

Buddhism considers "unsatisfactoriness" or "discontent" as a pervasive state of human existence. Commonly translated as "suffering" (Skt. *duḥkha; ko* 苦), the first noble truth of Buddhism is an existential environment of unenlightened beings. Most of us experience various types of dissatisfaction in our daily existence. Buddhism evaluates this as evidence that we are not the owners of our lives but, instead, are beings controlled by the conditions and contexts of our existence. A limited being cannot be the owner of the "I"

because the subject of an action should, by nature, be fully in charge of that action. Iryŏp defines the "self" that constantly feels compelled by external conditions as "the small-I" (*soa* 小我). Opposite to the small-I, the "great-I" (*taea* 大我) is free to act on its own. Iryŏp compares the small-I, which is the everyday "I" in *saṃsāra*, to the ripples in the ocean. Ripples exist in the context of the ocean and cannot be separated from it, but at the same time, the ripples and the ocean are not the same thing. When we only notice the ripples and fail to see their source, which is the ocean, we confine ourselves in the small-I. "The Buddha," to Iryŏp, is another name for this ocean in which the small-I opens its eyes to see the entirety of his or her existence. Iryŏp thus characterizes "the Buddha" as "the unity of phenomena in the universe (after a thought arises) and that which is before the creation of this reality (before a thought arises)."[33] Iryŏp clarifies:

> The Buddha is the unification of this and that, yesterday and today, you and I, the unified self. The Buddha is another name for one's self.
>
> The universe is the original body of one's self, and all the things in the world are one's self. Only the being that is all-capable can exert the full value of its existence. Each of us is entitled to absolute equality, and thus whatever position we might take or in whatever body we have, if we are capable of leading an independent life, we become a being of the highest value.[34]

Iryŏp's distinction between the ripples and the ocean might be interpreted as subscribing to dualism. She was making an opposite claim, however: that the ripples and the ocean are not the same, but not completely separate, either. Buddhism explains this reality of "neither the same nor different" through the notion of nonduality (*puli* 不二), which characterizes a Buddhist mode of understanding phenomenal reality.[35] We can summarize her vision of nonduality as follows. First, each of us exists as an individual on the phenomenal level. The fragmentary realities that we focus on in our daily life, however, are not just fragmentary activities. If we study the structure of our existence, we realize that what looks like a fragmentary and individualized being or event has in fact become possible through the contributions of diverse causes and conditions. A being, or event, therefore, occurs in a web of relations with others. Second, our fragmentary understanding of daily existence tends to cause suffering because we evaluate it from the perspective of the subject. However, once we begin to see it from a broader perspective, it not only relieves us from the burden of a limited view focused on the self, it also liberates us from suffering and discontentment. At that stage, we realize that the boundary

called the self, the very cause of suffering, is only provisional. Third, the underlying structure of existence is the same for all beings, whether for a human being or for a piece of cracked tile. They all exist in consequence of diverse causes and conditions. Since humans and a piece of a broken tile exist on the basis of the same existential logic, they are metaphysically equal.

Iryŏp used several different expressions to designate this fundamental equality of existence, including creativity, the original spirit (*ponjŏngsin* 본정신), the self-identity (*cha'a* 自我), the Buddha-nature (*Pulsŏng* 佛性), the truth, and the original heart (*ponmaŭm* 본마음). She contended that only when we preserve this original spirit can we lead the life of a human being: "Only when each of us finds the original mind of a human being, which is the 'existence of nothingness' (*mujŏk chonjae* 無적 存在), and is capable of putting it at our own disposal, does the human being's life open up. When that happens, we become independent beings no longer susceptible to being manipulated by the environment. Once a person reaches this state, whenever, wherever, and whatever kind of life he leads, no matter the shape of his body, he finds nirvana."[36]

To Iryŏp, the meaning of Buddhist teaching lies in liberating the self from the boundaries imposed on it. The source of the bondage may be social or biological, or it may be merely illusory. Buddhist practice is a way to find the self that is aware of these bonds and to liberate itself from them. Iryŏp thus declares: "To take refuge in the Buddha is to take refuge in one's self."[37]

BUDDHISM, CULTURE, AND CREATIVITY

Culture and No-Thought One concept that Iryŏp frequently uses to characterize the great-I is "culture" (*munhwa* 文化). Characterizing Buddhist practice as a type of culture is a unique interpretation of the tradition. The English expression "culture" is related to "to cultivate." Originating from the Latin word of "colere," it later became "to cultivate" in English or "cultiver" in French, meaning to cultivate the land.[38] The image the word evokes is organic and agricultural; its primary meaning pertains to "tending of something, basically crops or animals."[39] This English word "culture" is translated as *munhwa* in Korean. The Chinese characters of *munhwa* do not explicitly reflect the agricultural association of "culture," but the second Chinese character, *hwa*, in *munhwa* does reflect transformation and change. Whether or not Iryŏp was aware of the philological history of this term, her use of it aptly reflects the concepts of cultivation and transformation.

To Iryŏp, the term "culture" designates the totality of creative human activities. Creativity is a human function that is possible only when the agent is

free. But being free, in this context, does not necessarily presuppose physical freedom, since a person in a confined space can still exercise creativity. Various prison diaries and other writings produced while the authors were physically confined attest to this aspect of creativity. Iryŏp's concept of creativity has more to do with the way we look at the world. When a person is attached to a phenomenon as a fragmentary reality, creativity fails to function. Borrowing the words of her teacher Man'gong, Iryŏp characterizes "the Buddha" as "the complete person who unifies the 'I' who is thinking and the 'I' before thinking, which is creativity. This creativity is the other side of thinking, which is no-thinking, because it is what is earned when one completely transforms thinking."[40] Iryŏp almost never refers to Buddhist texts when discussing Buddhism. However, in her description of "the Buddha," the influence of Zen Buddhism is unmistakable. For her, "the Buddha," does not refer exclusively to the historical Buddha but rather represents a being in which thinking and no-thinking become one. However, like the concept of "nothingness," some find the concept of no-thought, or no-thinking, which appears frequently in Zen Buddhist discourse, to be counterintuitive. What could no-thought or no-thinking be? Could it mean not thinking? Is it possible to not think at all?

Huineng, the sixth patriarch of Zen Buddhism, had a clear concept of no-thought. Thinking is generally understood as a characteristic activity of human beings. Thinking is also an activity "by" and "of" the subject. The Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), described the state of our thoughts before the intervention of a linguistic system by using an image of an undivided stream of water, or "shapeless masses."[41] Out of the undivided streams, when our thoughts "arise," we reorganize them by using linguistic structure, our individual preferences, and personal views. Our thinking is already marked by subjective thoughts and subjective ways of looking at an event. No-thought, or no-thinking, is the state of affairs before our individual subjective interpretation reformulates them. In daily experience, we usually are not aware that our understanding and experience of events are the results of screening thoughts according to our preferences. The unscreened state of an event is what is called "no-thought" or "not-thinking." The state of no-thought, or not-thinking, is a value-neutral state. Although we are unaware of this state most of the time, on occasion, we do get a glimpse of it, as when we reflect upon what has happened in the past.

Thinking and no-thought are in opposite positions in our engagement with the world. Thinking refers to the subjective way of understanding the self and the self's environments, whereas no-thought is the subject's creative engagement with the world. Since, in this case, the subject is not biased by his

or her fixed mentality, the subject is free. The liberated state of no-thought also explains why Iryŏp characterized awakening as creativity: "No-thought is the state of both fullness and emptiness and also the state of absolute completeness. The world of culture attained in that state is the true world of culture, a state of oneness of the object and the mind; this is a state of peace in which culture and non-culture become one."[42] No-thought, therefore, is a state of creative engagement with environments, whether natural, social, or interpersonal.[43]

As an extension of the idea of Buddhism as culture, Iryŏp uses the expression "a person of culture" (*munhwain* 文化人) and describes the Buddha as "the great person of culture" (*tae munhwain* 大文化人): "I was aware that to be a person of culture meant to be a direct disciple of the Buddha, who is the 'great person of culture,' and that was why I joined the monastery."[44] She elaborates: "The determination to be a person of culture means to be a free individual relieved of the constraints of karma, living as the controller of her original mind, of which she is the master."[45] The person of culture attains freedom by liberating herself from dualism. Dualism creates separation between the self and others, which, from Iryŏp's perspective, generates two fatal effects on individuals. The first is a false concept of identity. With the awareness of the separation between the self and others, the concept of individual identity appears, fostering the idea that the "I" is independent of "non-I," and, further, a tendency of the "I" to be in charge of others. The separation between the self and others, however, in fact demonstrates the limits of the self. Since the self is limited by the existence of others, the self is constantly at war to secure space for the "I" as against the others. In both its philosophical and cultural manifestations, modernity in Western culture began by consolidating the identity of this "I" in terms of the rational capacity of human beings. Iryŏp's logic of the interplay of the self and others challenges this view of the self. For her, the "I" attains power not by creating a hierarchical relationship between the self and others but by realizing the source of its existence, which is the unity of the self and others. "This 'I'," she asserts, "is a being of absolute freedom in whom the self and others are one and who does not need an idol, be it the Buddha or God, or an institution called Buddhism or Christianity."[46] Understanding a phenomenon as a unity of thinking (individualized understanding) and no-thought (the totality of the possibility of an event before it is interpreted by an individual) gives us a new perspective on why equality should be viewed as the intrinsic nature of all beings in the world.

The Buddha and the Demon The surging and ebbing of our thoughts are two aspects of our mental life, like high and low tides in the ocean or daytime

and nighttime. A goal of Buddhist practice is frequently identified as detachment. It is said that Buddhists should control themselves by detaching themselves from the various events and emotions of their daily existence. This approach to Buddhism advises that when a thought or an emotion arises, we should separate ourselves from it. However, the goal of Buddhism is not to stop the arising of thoughts, but to see the unity of the arising and ceasing aspects of our thoughts. When thoughts arise, beings exist as independent entities: this is a world of phenomena. Buddhism tells us that the individual entities we see in the phenomenal world are only their appearances and that no being is self-sufficient, which means that our existence is not just an individual event but an event that requires diverse contributors. Iryŏp calls this the state before a thought arises, further identifying the state as "creativity": "Humans are beings with thoughts that are constantly arising and ceasing. The arising of thoughts constitutes the factual reality, whereas the cessation of thoughts constitutes the inner reality of the self, which is creativity."[47]

The unity of opposites in Iryŏp's interpretation of Buddhist teachings reaches its apex when she defines "the Buddha" as the one in whom all opposites become united. Iryŏp states: "The Buddha as the completed 'I' unifies within himself both a demon and a buddha."[48] This is a counterintuitive statement. In the world of commonsense, a buddha—an enlightened being—and a demon (*ma* 魔)—an evil being that needs to be avoided or destroyed—cannot be on the same level. Iryŏp not only places them on the same level, but also declares that "the Buddha" after all means the one who contains both. Iryŏp further elaborates on the topic by explaining, "A demon is the external aspect (the entirety of the reality of thought), and the Buddha is its inner aspect (nothingness, which is the inner essence of daily reality), but relying only on the Buddha is demonic as well. The unity of a demon and the Buddha comprises the attainment of buddhahood (wholesome being)."[49]

What are the external and internal aspects of our existence? Iryŏp is not proposing a dualistic concept of inner soul and external body. The external aspect is the phenomenal world in which each individual being exists as a separate entity. When we examine how they exist, we find that the nature of their existence is the same for all beings. Things exist through causes and conditions and thus lack a permanent independent essence. The notion of nothingness expresses the state of nonexistence of a permanent independent essence in a being. A demon is not a moral concept here: it refers to the appearance of our existence. When our vision is limited to see only appearance, that vision becomes demonic, as is also the case when we exclusively value "the Buddha."

However counterintuitive this idea might sound, Iryŏp believes that the reconciliation of opposites is something that ordinary individuals can accomplish. Iryŏp asserts, "Attaining Buddhahood means attaining humanhood."[50] To Iryŏp, Buddhism is humanism, but this humanism is antihumanism or inhuman, in the sense that her conception of being a human does not imply a human-centered world. French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard observed a similar notion of humanism in his discussion of the postmodern world.[51] Being a full human requires overcoming not only an ego-centric but also a human-centric worldview. Iryŏp states that "Even a drop of water, which is a fragment of one's thought, is equipped with all the elements of existence."[52] And so are all other beings. "All the elements of existence" are what Iryŏp repeatedly identified as emptiness and nothingness. Emptiness and nothingness are the basis of individual existence, and also the basis for her argument for the freedom and fundamental equality of all beings.

Beyond Good and Evil: Reflections on Christianity

RELIGION AND THE PROBLEM OF UNINFORMED RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

Born to Christian parents, Kim Iryŏp was deeply influenced by Christianity in her childhood, both as a religion and through its cultural manifestations, including the educational system in Korea. Iryŏp received a Christian formal education from middle school onward.[53] She credited Christianity for her mother's modern ideas about educating a female child at a time when formal education for girls was a foreign thought to most Korean people. With regard to her religious beliefs, Iryŏp was influenced by her father, whom she described as the most faithful Christian in Korea, saying that his faith was like a rock and that he would praise God even on his deathbed. It is not clear exactly when Iryŏp turned away from Christianity. She claimed to have become a Buddhist about five years before she entered a monastery, which puts the conversion sometime around 1927–1928, when she began to contribute her writings to *Buddhism*. Iryŏp also wrote that she had not had a religion for about ten years before she joined Buddhism.[54] Hence, we can assume that she gave up Christianity as her religion around 1918. Iryŏp began to talk about her relationship with Christianity only later in her life. *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun* was the first major publication in which Iryŏp openly addressed the issue of Christianity. Until then, Iryŏp's mentioning of Christianity was limited to factual issues such as that she was born into a Christian family and that her father was a pastor with unwavering belief. In *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, we

find Iryŏp seriously engaging with diverse questions regarding Christian theology. In response to a friend showing concern about Iryŏp having left Christianity, she openly stated that her father's exclusivist Christian evangelicalism had significantly contributed to her loss of Christian faith.

It is indisputable that Iryŏp's father tried to mold his daughter into a woman of deep Christian faith. When Iryŏp showed a hint of doubt about Christianity, he would shudder at the thought that she might become a sinner before his God. Iryŏp wrote:

> When I was about to ask a question about God, he [my father] stopped me and told me that I should not use such inappropriate words toward God; he advised me that I should repent, pray, and ask for sacred faith. If there had been a fire in our house and our home and all the possessions in it had been destroyed but our family members were all safe, my father would have thanked God for saving his family; if all other family members were killed, he would have thanked God for saving him; and if everybody had been killed, he would have thanked God even more for taking him to heaven. This was my father's faith. Even though he did not know the Buddhist teachings, his faith might have enabled him to experience a complete awakening to his own self. But even on his deathbed he sang gospels with a happy mind, and then he went to heaven. I only hope that he listened to God's dharma talk and achieved liberation.[55]

However strong Iryŏp's doubts about Christian theology might have been, they were questions that any Christian could have had at certain points in his or her religious life. Iryŏp's problem was not so much that she had those questions, as that her father's strict evangelicalism allowed no room for doubts, which took a toll on his daughter's religious life. As Iryŏp states: "I could not get help in finding answers to these questions [on Christian doctrine] from my father or other Christians; they only scolded me for my lack of faith in having such wavering thoughts and advised me to pray with a repentant heart. There was no way to find answers for my doubts."[56]

One of Iryŏp's early short stories, published in the inaugural issue (March 1920) of *New Women,* gives us a hint of Iryŏp's frustration with religious life that does not include a real understanding of religious practice. On the surface, her short story "Revelation" (Kyesi 啓示) deals with a mother who desperately tries to save her dying son through religious practice and devoting herself to Christianity.[57] When her first child became ill, Mrs. Kim, the mother, goes to a shaman for a cure and wastes a sizable sum of money; eventually, her

son dies. While she is still mourning his death, however, a missionary woman happens to visit Mrs. Kim and tells her that shamanic rituals cannot save lives; instead she should believe in God and repent if she wishes for salvation. When Inwŏn, her second son, falls ill, Mrs. Kim is determined to save him through her devotion to God. After the encounter with the missionary woman, Mrs. Kim had become a devout Christian, and for the three years before Inwŏn fell sick, never once did she miss the Sunday service. This time, she does not even consider getting help from a shaman; she is now a faithful Christian. A number of fellow Christians from her church visit her to pray together for Inwŏn's recovery and tell Mrs. Kim that her faith should save her son. Despite all of these efforts, though, Inwŏn dies at the end of the story while longing for a new Bible with a leather cover.

The devotion to Christianity that can be found in the surface structure of the story is defeated in its deep structure, which tells us that no religious devotion can save a child from death. This dual structure of the story makes the reader ponder about the author's message. In the "Editor's Postscript," Iryŏp states that the story is about the "uninformed concept of religion of ignorant people and how the inevitable death relentlessly separates the mother and the son."[58] Despite the consoling words of the mother's fellow believers that faith in God should save the ailing child, the story reveals the absolute facelessness of death as an inevitable reality of human existence over which no religious practice seems to hold power. The believers, including Mrs. Kim and the dying child, believe that faith and prayer should have the power to change the uncompromising reality of death; despite that, death relentlessly ignores the human desire to keep the child alive. The sharp contrast displays Iryŏp's view on the visible gap between religious practice and the reality of human mortality. However, Iryŏp did not completely deny the role of religion or the nature of religious practice in the story. As stated, the "uninformed concept" of religion was the target that the story problematized, not all forms of religious practice. What, then, would an "informed" practice of religion look like to Iryŏp? The question reveals the juncture at which Iryŏp's Buddhism met her Christianity, as she reinterpreted the Christian concepts of God and humans, good and evil, and heaven and hell in connection with the Buddhist idea of nonduality.

GOD AND THE BUDDHA

Reflecting upon the time when her Christian faith began to falter, Iryŏp identified the existence of evil as one of the questions that had disturbed her faith

in God. If God was the creator of the world, Iryŏp reasoned, He should be responsible for the existence of evil. By the same token, if God created humans, God should be held accountable for human failure, including that of Adam and Eve. In that sense, humans could be seen as innocent victims of problems that God created. Iryŏp asks: If a sinner who is suffering in hell tells God that he did not ask to be created, but God did so and is now making him suffer in hell, could God defend Himself? If those who are in heaven could see their family members suffering in hell, could heaven still be a blissful place to stay? At the bottom of Iryŏp's questions on basic Christian theology lies the issue of dualism. The binary postulations of good and evil, of God as creator and humans as created and of heaven and hell, were not sustainable to her, since the one seemed to inevitably require the other. Iryŏp argued that heaven could not exist without hell, and that the notion of good could not arise without its opposite. Iryŏp wrote: "God gave Adam and Eve the forbidden fruit so that He could plant the seed of faith in them and make them part of Him, but they betrayed God and became sinners. Followers of God say that He allowed freedom to Adam and Eve. That argument, however, lacks common sense: Even if God had actually wanted to give Adam and Eve freedom, he must have known that humans, with their greed, would undoubtedly eat the fruit."[59]

In her epistolary essay "Having Burned Away My Youth: To Mr. B," Iryŏp further elaborated her problem with Christianity:

> It is said that God is omnipotent; why, then, did he keep the tree of good and evil in Eden and give freedom to humans? If eating of the apple from the tree of good and evil was the cause of the fall, why didn't the creator just make Adam and Eve to be good people instead of occupying himself with sending his only child to be crucified? Shouldn't Jesus, if he were a real savior, be able to save both good and evil worlds? Nothing is impossible for Jesus, so why can't he make all the people in the world believe in him? It is said that God exists in the mind. Does he exist, then, in the good mind or in the evil mind? Since God has a mind of equality, he should exist in both the minds of the good and the evil; and if so, why doesn't everyone's mind become the mind of God instead of remaining good and evil minds?[60]

Iryŏp's inquiry of Adam and Eve is not just about why God allowed them to commit sin instead of exercising His omnipotent power to prevent their fall. A more fundamental issue is the dualistic ontology in which God, the creator, and humans, the created, are distinctly separate and valued hierarchically. The creator is the truth, the good, independent, and all-powerful, whereas its

opposite is fallible and dependent. God remains as the omnipotent creator only if God is the first cause, the being whose existence depends on itself. How is it possible that a being generates itself independently? Iryŏp challenged the basis of Christian ontology by turning it against itself, arguing that, if God is the creator of the world, He should be responsible for the existence of evil and all of the world's troubles. Therefore, Iryŏp contended that calling God the creator was an insult to God.

Iryŏp's Buddhism contends that no ontological difference exists between the creator and the created. For Iryŏp, whatever was one-sided—be it good or evil—was an idol, a fixation, created by a narrow mind, that should not be an object of religious practice. Binary opposites and their accompanying value judgments arise, Iryŏp argued, when the oneness of life is broken into fragments. This oneness takes many shapes in the phenomenal world in that dualistic opposites like birth and death, arising and ceasing, and day and night, are not mutually exclusive; they are different phases of the same existence. A being that is understood through binary logic is isolated and fragmented; its capacity is limited because of the boundaries created for the construction of an independent identity. Iryŏp understood this viewpoint as the fundamental source of constraints on freedom. For her, Buddhist practice, and in that sense religious practice in general, is a way to re-envision the dualistic value structure and learn the totality of existence in order to recover one's full capacity and freedom. For Iryŏp, the being that had fully recovered the self's capacity is called "the Buddha." "The Buddha" for her does not exemplify pure goodness; instead, "the Buddha" is the source of both good and of evil. As Iryŏp began to find her own voice in understanding Buddhism, she started to reinterpret Christianity accordingly. Unlike the notion of God that she questioned during her Christian childhood, she re-envisioned God as a being who, like the Buddha, completely and freely exercised the full capacity of being. For Iryŏp, the difference between God/the Buddha and unenlightened sentient beings did not lie in their ontological differences; God and the Buddha were the ones who were fully aware of and exercising their capacity, whereas unenlightened beings are ignorant of their capacity and thus fail to fully utilize it. For Iryŏp, in this sense, "The Buddha and God originate from the same seed."[61] Iryŏp reasoned that the Buddha was awakened to the basis of existence, which is one; he reached the realization that the bounded state that one experiences in life is not permanent and a being's capacity is in fact limitless. In Iryŏp's conception, God is not completely separate from humans, nor should God become the object of worship. Instead, God and the Buddha are model figures or evidence that a being is, in its ultimate sense, whole, and the purpose of reli-

gion is to teach this wholeness so that each individual can see his or her existence with a broadened scope. For Iryŏp, God the creator had meaning only in the sense that God embodied the creativity with which each one of us is born. Iryŏp states:

> You also said: God is a creator; that is, a being who has grasped and utilized all-capable self-identity. However, God was also created. For that reason, God cannot take full responsibility for everything. All of the beings have created themselves. It is not that God is in one's mind: God *is* the mind. This mind that feels happiness and sorrow is one's own mind. It is also God of God, and it is the Creator that created all things, including God. This is the mind that everybody possesses. When one has not yet found this mind, one should at least know that one has not yet become a complete human being.[62]

Here, Iryŏp's concept of the creator transforms from the Christian idea of God the creator to that of a being who fully understands and utilizes its creative nature. Iryŏp, in this sense, combines the idea of God the creator with the idea of the mind in Zen Buddhism. The mind is the source of all delusions, and, at the same time, of all freedom. Both the Buddha and God are creators only in the sense that they are free beings that are capable of fully utilizing their creative capacity. Iryŏp writes: "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 (*taemunhwain*) capable of creating a work of art out of their bodies and minds as well as of [the bodies and minds of] others. To live as a creator, one must practice religion (which is a comprehensive education)."[63]

Existence is a creative engagement with our selves and our environments. Social and cultural milieus sometime function as obstacles to our encounters with the self and our environments. However, they are the conditions of our existence, which we cannot simply remove. A creative engagement is a first step for an authentic existence, if individuals do not want to be overwhelmed and controlled by their environments. For Iryŏp, religion is an education to awaken each individual to his or her original capacity. By realizing that capacity, an individual overcomes suffering and lives life freely. Iryŏp emphasizes the importance of faith and religious practice by stating, "The mind that makes efforts to follow this teaching is called the religious mind, without which we are like a tree that is uprooted: We lose our hold on the existential life code. The religious mind is not limited to the belief in God or in the Buddha. Whoever it

might be, if one sincerely serves the person as one's teacher, or whatever one might do, if one does it, devoting all one's mind and body, that is what is called the religious mind. This is religious practice."[64]

THE *LOTUS SUTRA*, ETERNAL BUDDHA, AND SKILLFUL MEANS

In several of her writings, Iryŏp expressed an unusually close relationship with her father.[65] She also showed strong respect for her father's unwavering faith. In reflecting on her parents' Christianity and religious practice, however, Iryŏp also expressed her regrets:

> My father, who was simple and faithful, thought that heaven and hell were opposites and did not know that even heaven was part of the material realm. He thought that if only one entered God's heaven, all problems without exception would be solved. He thus always prayed to God that I would be a faithful follower of Jesus, and my mother prayed to God that her only daughter would grow up to be an important figure in the world so that she would have no envy for people who had sons.[66]

Iryŏp's resistance to her father's unquestioned faith and prayer and her doubts about Christian theology did not necessarily have to lead to abandoning faith or religion. Serious religious practitioners typically undergo a stage of doubts. A twentieth-century Japanese thinker, Nishitani Keiji (西谷 啓治, 1900–1990) explained the stage of the "great doubt" as a passage that a religious practitioner travels through in order to anchor his or her belief on solid ground. This stage of the "great doubt" is inevitable, given that religion primarily deals with the relationship between a finite human being and an infinite being, be it God in Christianity or the Buddha in Buddhism.[67] The gap between the two makes religion both necessary and possible, and faith is a path to closing this gap. The Christian existential philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), described this religious act of faith as "great leap whereby I pass over into infinity."[68] There being no logical theory to explain the path from the finite to the infinite, religious practice inevitably contains a "leap," and this leap is a leap taken blindfolded.

One might think that Buddhism does not require a "religious leap" because a buddha is not "wholly other," but instead is a human being like any other practitioner.[69] The nondual worldview of Buddhism makes the theoretical aspects of Buddhist practice rather complex and even oxymoronic at times. Zen Buddhism champions these contradictions. The basic tenet of Zen Buddhism

dictates that everybody is already a Buddha and that everybody is already enlightened because a buddha (an enlightened being) and a sentient being (an unenlightened person) are nondual. This theoretical assumption is the basis of the paradoxical Zen statement: "'I' am a buddha, but, at the same time, 'I' am not." Faith is a key to cracking open this dual nature of being. To attain the state of awakening, the practitioner needs faith that, even though "I" behave like an unenlightened person, "I" am, in fact, the same as the Buddha. In this context, one Korean Buddhist scholar, Sung Bae Park, emphasized the importance of "faith" in Buddhist practice,[70] claiming that faith represents the practitioner's relationship with the ultimate reality. It is an engagement with and commitment to the teachings of the religion that the practitioner follows. To have faith in something cannot mean that we blindly follow the object of our faith; instead, it is an act of commitment, a covenant with the religion that we practice, a promise that we will live life according to its teachings.

The Buddha is not God, and "the Buddha" and God are not objects of worship in Iryŏp's understanding. However, Buddhist scriptures frequently describe the Buddha as a transcendental being, a savior of Buddhist practitioners. We can find such descriptions of the Buddha in Iryŏp's writings as well. The following passage in her essay "Life" is a good example of this:

> Wherever and whenever, whether our position is high or low, the great teacher, the Buddha will guide us by means of the law of nondiscrimination. This, however, happens only if we seek the Buddha with a mind of utmost sincerity.
>
> That Buddha is eternal. He teaches us the seed of infinity that enables us to live in freedom. This is possible by realizing the absolute "I"; this is what the Buddha meant when he declared when he was born into this world: "In the entire world, only I am precious."[71]

Is the image of "the Buddha" in this description distinctly different from the image of the omniscient being held by theocentric religion? Is Iryŏp contradicting herself in her approach to "the Buddha"? A discussion of a Buddhist scripture, the *Lotus Sutra,* will give us an answer to this question.

The *Lotus Sutra,* a Mahāyāna Buddhist text, has been cherished for centuries by East Asian Buddhists. One of the scripture's main themes is the death of Śakyamuni Buddha, the founder of Buddhism. As a mortal being, the Buddha faced death at the age of eighty. As his death approached, the Buddha's disciples wailed, fearful for the future of the Buddha's teaching. After the Buddha's death, they bemoaned: Who would correct them if they distorted their

teacher's teachings? However, to the great relief of these despairing disciples, the Buddha in the *Lotus Sutra* tells them that he is actually eternal and not bound by time and space. The Buddha says that he has pretended to be mortal because if his disciples had known of his immortality, they might not have understood the urgency of Buddhist practice. At this point, the Eternal Buddha in the *Lotus Sutra* shows his concern for his disciples, whom he calls his sons. The father-son relationship between the Buddha and his disciples thus becomes one of the dominant images in the *Lotus Sutra,* which Buddhist scholar Alan Cole discussed in his book *Text as Father.*[72] The *Sūtra*'s "Eternal Buddha"—which Cole describes as "paternal seduction—has contributed to the scripture's fame in the tradition of devotional Buddhism.[73]

Some might wonder how this image of the Buddha as the father or "transcendental eternal being" accords with Buddhist doctrines, including the theories of the no-self, the impermanence of all things, and the claim of the nonduality of the Buddha and the sentient being. One answer to this is that the concept and image of "the Buddha" differ significantly in different Buddhist schools. That is especially the case when we compare Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Another well-known message of the *Lotus Sutra* is the notion of "skillful means" (*pangp'yŏn* 方便; Ch. *fāngbiàn;* Skt. *upāya*).[74] Also translated into English as "skill-in-means" or "expedient means," *upāya* means employing different methods according to the hearer's capacity and depending on the circumstances. *Upāya* also indicates that language cannot fully explain the Buddha's teaching, so various methods are required to make the Buddha's teaching known. In the evolution of Buddhism, different traditions used *upāya* in different ways.

The Eternal Buddha is an *upāya* to show that the Buddha's teaching does not lie in his physical body, which was limited by the temporal and special environments in which it existed. Contrary to the Buddha's existence as corporeal reality, the *Sūtra* claims that the Buddha's teachings are eternal and also apply equally to all beings, in that everybody will eventually attain awakening. In this sense, universal salvation is another major theme of the *Lotus Sutra.* Chapter 5 of the *Sutra,* "The Parable of the Herbs," delivers a story of rain falling on all the things in the world. In this story, rain falls down from big clouds to wet trees, herbs, and bushes of different sizes and shapes. The rain pours down on them all equally, but each plant absorbs it in its own way. Likewise, the Buddha's teaching is one, but it functions differently for different beings, and they absorb it differently. The *Lotus Sutra* describes universal salvation through the image of the Cosmic Buddha, who "sent forth a ray from the [circle of] white hair between his eyebrows."[75] Enlightenment is

not an event that exclusively concerns the individual who attains it. The existence of an enlightened being—the Buddha—beams throughout the world like the ray coming from the Buddha's forehead; it becomes the model of existence for those who are on the path to live better and more meaningful lives. By virtue of an enlightened being, the unenlightened are one step closer to the state of awakening. Hence, Iryŏp defines "the Buddha" as follows:

> The Buddha is the pronoun for all existence, an alias for the universe as well as the real name for each of us. Each and every thing in the entire world, both inside and outside, can be represented by this one letter, Buddha (*Pul*). Phenomenal reality, within the limits of human speculation and divided sensory capacity, is the external aspect of the Buddha. Its internal aspect is existence before a thought arises, before even the name of God or the Buddha begins to appear. The Buddha is the omnipotent self of all beings, equipped, as part of its internal nature, with creativity and all the necessary elements in the universe.[76]

Iryŏp's doubts about Christian theology explain her challenge to the dualist worldview. Her questions regarding God's omnipotence and the human exercise of free will and subsequent fall, sin and punishment, heaven and hell, and the creator and the created are fundamentally summed up by the problem of dualism. An ontological point of view separates the creator and the created and situates good and evil at opposite ends of the moral spectrum. Here we find that Iryŏp's position on religion is connected with her challenge to social norms on gender. As a New Woman, Iryŏp challenged the socially constructed gender roles that were based on the binary postulations of male and female. At the bottom of Iryŏp's questioning and subsequent challenge to the gendered system of her society was her conviction that such a fixed value system constrained the individual's freedom. By reinterpreting the relationship between God and humans, and good and evil, Iryŏp paved a path for herself to reconcile with Christianity.

Kim Iryŏp and the Philosophy of Religion

DEFINING PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION: INOUE ENRYŌ

Iryŏp's discussions of God, good and evil, and the meaning of religious practice inspire us to think about the dimensions of religions other than familiar Judeo-Christian ones. In this section, I place Iryŏp's religious thoughts in the

context of the emergence of philosophy and religion in East Asia and contextualize her ideas with two Japanese thinkers in order to consider an East Asian philosophy of religion. In the Western philosophical tradition, the philosophy of religion has a long history as a branch of philosophical inquiry. The field was born and grew in the specific contexts of Western intellectual history. The Western origin of the philosophy of religion partly explains why the Western academia finds it difficult to categorize Eastern traditions, including Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism, as either philosophies or religions.

Religion has been one of the perennial human attempts to make sense of existence. For many people, it offers the meaning of life and guidelines for values. East Asia has its own intellectual and spiritual traditions that have played such a role. However, the word "religion" (*chonggyo* 宗敎; J. *shūkyō;* Ch. *zōngjiào*), in the Western sense, was introduced to the East Asian world only in the mid-nineteenth century in the process of translating letters from American President Millard Fillmore (1800–1874, president 1850–1853) and Commodore Matthew Perry (1794–1858).[77]

On July 8, 1853, American warships appeared off the coast of Japan. Commodore Matthew Perry, the commander of the squadron visiting Japan, was carrying a letter from President Fillmore to the Japanese emperor. The president's letter read: "The constitution and laws of the United States forbid all interference with the religious or political concerns of other nations."[78] Commodore Perry's letter to the emperor also contained a passage on religion in a tone similar to the president's. Perry wrote: "The United States are connected with no government in Europe, and that their laws do not interfere with the religion of their own citizens, much less with that of other nations."[79] Both letters wanted to assure the Japanese that the United States had no intention of interfering with an individual citizen's or the nation's religious concerns. The Americans must have felt it necessary to confirm, at the outset, that individuals and nation-states have the right to pursue their own religious practices. They must have been aware that religion could be a source of conflict in establishing a diplomatic relationship with Japan. In that sense, the expression "religion" was already charged with social and political implications.

The introduction of a vocabulary inevitably inherits the traditions of its source language. In discussing the emergence of the category of "religion" in Japan, a scholar of Japanese religion, Gerard Clinton Godart, pointed out that once the category "religion" was introduced, "religions in East and South-East Asia adopted and applied Protestant models of 'religion' to their own traditions. As a result, emphasis was placed more on beliefs than on practices, as religions started to identify with their foundational texts and founders."[80] Godart's eval-

uation of the phenomenon of religion in East and Southeast Asia as an adaptation of the Protestant model of religious practice describes well what happened in the religious scene of Asia as Western influence grew.

Like that of "religion," the East Asian vocabulary for "philosophy" (*ch'ŏrhak* 哲學; J. *testugaku;* Ch. *zhéxué*) came into existence in the late nineteenth century. The Japanese philosopher Nishi Amane (西周, 1829–1897) introduced the expression in his book *Hyakuichi shinron* (A new theory of the unity of one hundred ideas 百一新論, 1874).[81] Nishi created a number of philosophical terms that are still in use in East Asia, including reason (理性), morality (道德), consciousness (意識), intuition (直觀), and emotion (情緒). Translation, in this case, is not merely a transition from one language into another. A comparison of the meanings of the Chinese characters (or Japanese kanji) for these "new" vocabularies with those of their English counterparts shows us delicate differences in the connotations of these words. These differences reflect different modes of philosophizing and different ways of approaching lived experience.

As "philosophy" and "religion" emerged as distinctive fields of study, East Asian thinkers began to explore the unique nature of each and tried to classify their traditions according to these new categories. They asked whether specific East Asian traditions such as Buddhism could or should be categorized as a philosophy or a religion. One of the first thinkers who took up this project in modern Japan was Inoue Enryō (井上円了, 1858–1919). In his essay, "Buddhist Philosophy" (Bukkyō tetsugaku 仏教哲学), Enryō says: "One of the questions currently facing us is whether Buddhism is a philosophy or a religion."[82] Why was this such an important question to Enryō? Enryō was not the only East Asian thinker who found this issue of categorization to be a fundamental problem that modern East Asians needed to address. As I discussed in other places, the encounter of the Western genres of philosophy and religion and the East Asian tradition of Buddhism was the ecology in which "philosophy" was born in East Asia. As such, the power structure between these two worlds dictated that the Western tradition provide the norms for the definitions of philosophy and religion, while East Asian thinkers had to agonize about how to align their different traditions with those default forms.

In addressing this issue, Enryō characterizes philosophy and religion as follows: (1) "philosophy goes from the knowable to the unknowable, and religion begins from the unknowable and proceeds to the knowable";[83] (2) "philosophy admits the unknowable, whereas religion tries to explain its existence";[84] (3) philosophy is based on the "function of the intellect [*kokoronochiryoku* 心の知力], whereas religion is based on the functions of the feelings and emotions";[85] (4)

philosophy is active, whereas feelings are passive; (5) philosophy is related to "thought," whereas religion is related to "faith"; and (6) philosophy leads to the principle (J. *dōri* 道理) of the world, whereas religion leads to the revelation.

In this process, Enryō found that the philosophical interpretation of religion was itself a paradox, saying, "How does philosophy, which is based on the intellect, come to know anything outside human intellect?"[86] By definition, the unknowable—the fundamental element that enables religious acts—is not accessible to the human mind: "The unknowable is the unknowable precisely because I cannot know it."[87] Philosophy can infer about the unknowable through reason, but all philosophers eventually "circle around it without ever getting inside of it."[88] Enryō, however, does not completely deny the possibility of getting to know the unknowable, though he asserts that access to the unknowable is not granted by applying the logic of the knowable to it. Enryō argues that, as the intellect tries to approach the unknowable, it can get to the proximity of the absolute.[89] In the ultimate sense, however, the unknowable is ineffable.

One way of understanding this seemingly abstruse notion of ineffability and the Buddhist concept of nonduality is through Huayan (華嚴) Buddhism. A Huayan adage states, "A particle of dust contains the entire universe."[90] How can the smallest unit in the world encompass the biggest one? The Chinese Huayan thinker Fazang (法藏, 643–712) employs a numeric system as an example to explain this counterintuitive claim. Imagine that the numbers one to ten are the entire numeric system and consider how each number in that system attains its identity. The number two is not the number three or the number four, so it has its own unique identity. However, the number two functions as the number two because of the other nine numbers. Without the other nine numbers, the number two does not mean anything. In this sense, the number two (the small; a particular) includes all of the other numbers in the numeric system (the big; the universal) within itself. This logic explains the Huayan statement that a particle of dust (considered to be the smallest unit in the world) contains the entire universe (the biggest unit). Since the number two (a particular) contains in it the entire numeric system (the universal), the ultimate identity of the number two cannot be described in words: it is ineffable. Enryō explains the idea of the nonduality between the particular and the universal through the "theory of mutual containment" (相含の理).[91] The number two and the entire numeric system in this sense are not separate, even though each maintains its separate name: they are nondual. Following the same logic, Buddhism teaches that the unenlightened being (a particular) and the Buddha (the one who has realized the universal) are separate, but also nondual.

The Buddhist notion of nondualism has direct impacts on its concepts of the transcendent and of logic. In Buddhism, the transcendent, or the unknowable in Enryō's term, does not exist as the "wholly other" as Rudolf Otto puts it in his *Idea of the Holy*. The Buddha is the awakened being, which means that the unenlightened being can be the Buddha by attaining awakening; this is very unlike the clear dualism of the creator and created that is held by some other religions. The idea of the nonduality between the Buddha and the sentient being can be deceptive, since the logic makes it sound easy to transform oneself from the latter to the former, which is not the case. All the same, it is notable that Buddhism's stance regarding the status of the transcendent proposes a worldview that is very different from those of the dualistic religious traditions.

When a particular and the universal are understood as nondual, what type of logic does Buddhism employ? As discussed, the number two is unique as the number two, but it is also not the number two in the sense that the other numbers make the number two possible. The logic then goes: "A" is A because of its "non-A" components. With this understanding, Enryō proposes that "contradiction is truth."[92] As a different example, think about the relationship between light and darkness. At the relative level, light and darkness have distinct identities; when we consider their modes of existence (on the ultimate level), however, we could say that light is light because of darkness; the identity of the light is defined by darkness (nonlight). Enryō's discussion of the logic of the "contradiction" and "mutually contained identity" reminds us of Iryŏp's claim that contradiction is the principle of the universe. The logic of contradiction and mutually contained identity was the ground on which Iryŏp built her notion of the "small-I" and the "great-I."

The Buddhist notion of nondualism and its logical manifestation that A is A because A contains non-A partly explains why it was an urgent issue to modern East Asian thinkers like Inoue Enryō to define Buddhism's position regarding philosophy and religion. Buddhism contains aspects of both philosophy and religion, but satisfies neither qualification exclusively. From the perspective of Western philosophy, Buddhist logic defies its basic logic and thus cannot be qualified as philosophy; the Buddhist concept of nondualism fails to properly offer a concept of the transcendent, a primary quality for all religions from the Western intellectual tradition. After examining Buddhism along with the qualities of Western philosophy and religion, Enryō concluded that Buddhism is both a philosophy and a religion, which is its strong point.[93] Tanabe Hajime's discussion of Buddhism further develops this idea.

REPENTANCE AND NOTHINGNESS: TANABE HAJIME

The Fallibility of the Reason Reason has had a supreme role in many Western philosophical discourses, which privilege reason on the assumption that rational thinking leads us to objective and universal truth. The tradition has held that emotions and faith are subjective and thus fallible, whereas rational thinking and logic enables humans to carry out objective investigations that lead them to the infallible truth.

Modern Western rationalist philosophers claimed that philosophical inquiry should include the phenomenon of religion and thus the proof of the existence of God. A rationalist approach to religion marked the beginning of the field of philosophy of religion. Rene Descartes (1596–1650) claimed that it is the work of the philosopher not the theologian to prove the existence of God. Hegel (1770–1831) began lecturing on the philosophy of religion in 1821 and did so again in 1824, 1827, and 1831. He offered a grand scheme of the evolution of religions, assigning Asian religions to a primitive stage of that evolution and Christianity to its culminating stage. Regarding religious phenomena as "homogeneous," he did not consider the possibility that different notions of the ultimate being, or of a human's relationship to it, are an expression not of a religion's relative primitiveness or maturity but only of different perspectives about the world and being.

Enryō challenges the basic assumption of Western modernist philosophy by claiming that philosophy requires faith as much as religion does. Iryŏp argues that the difference between the ultimate being, such as "the Buddha" or God, and the common practitioners of religion, is not an ontological one. "The Buddha" or God is a being that is fully exercising its capacity and freedom. For Iryŏp, this fully recovered capacity encompasses both extremes of the binary opposites. With this idea, she submits a fresh perspective for our moral imagination. An extreme, when it reaches its ultimate, turns toward its opposite, so that even the Buddha is the combination of a buddha and a demon.

The understanding that things inevitably contain both extremes within themselves becomes the basis of an "absolute critique" of reason for the Kyoto School thinker Tanabe Hajime (田辺 元, 1885–1962). The situation of post–World War II Japan sets the stage for his philosophy of religion. In *Philosophy as Metanoetics* (Zangedō tositeno testugaku 懺悔道としての哲学), Tanabe confesses that he was wrong to support Japanese imperialism during World War II and asks whether philosophy is still possible after such experiences. Philosophy claims to be a search for the truth. When it becomes blind to the right or wrong of historical reality, can we still say that philosophy is possible?[94]

Tanabe proposes "repentance" as a philosophy that goes beyond the venerability of the reason. And he does so by embracing the Other Power (*tariki* 他力) of Pure Land Buddhism. The philosophy of self-power relies on the reason and inevitably faces limitations because "the reason it presupposes as its basis is bound to fall into antinomies in the encounter with actual reality."[95] To overcome the fallibility of human reason, Tanabe proposes submitting the self to the Other Power, through which the self undergoes transformations.

Challenging the privileged position of reason in modern Western philosophical tradition, Tanabe contends that the rationalist claim of philosophy "amounts to no more than an ideal that can never be fulfilled completely so long as we maintain the position of self-power."[96] Only by completely submitting oneself to the Other Power, he argues, can philosophy overcome the impotence of reason and fulfill its role of exploring the absolute. In this process, faith becomes a necessary ingredient of philosophical inquiry, for it is the ground of the self's submission to the Other Power. For Tanabe, "Philosophy and faith are . . . independent of each other and at the same time correspond to each other."[97]

Nothingness and the Act of Religion Tanabe explains the process of the subject's self-negation through what he calls "metanoetics," or "repentance," in Japanese *zangedō* (懺悔道). By definition, metanoetics is that which transcends noetic experience. He argues that the cognitive process (*noesis*) through which we perceive the external object (*noema*) is always troubled by fallibility because we are limited beings. Rationality as a faculty of the subject cannot escape the subjectivity if rationality remains in the realm of the subject's consciousness. For Tanabe, the absolute critique of human faculty is possible not through consciousness or intellectual activities but through transcending reason and conscious rational thinking. "Repentance," or "metanoesis," refers to the subject's complete surrender to the Other Power, which Tanabe identifies as nothingness: "In its radical mediation, nothingness brings into being the death-and-resurrection of being: 'being as upāya' (*hōbentekisonzai*) or emptiness (*śūnyatā*). . . . Nothingness is brought to awareness subjectively as the free and 'selfless' self and is symbolized objectively as emptiness. That is, actual reality is transfigured into emptiness as a symbol of nothingness, thus mediating freedom and revealing its divine nature."[98]

As is true for Iryŏp, for Tanabe nothingness is the ground of human freedom in the sense that being is bounded, whereas nothingness is not:

> It is not being, then, but nothingness that provides a foundation in the human for freedom, a locus at which the will is constituted. The main problem with

> theories of freedom is the usual tendency to pass over the whole question of nothingness. Nothingness is not something to which immediate experience can attest; whatever can be experienced immediately, or intuited in objective terms belongs to being, not to nothingness. To suppose therefore that the freedom is capable of being grasped in an act of comprehensive intuition is tantamount to turning it into being and thus depriving it of its essential nature as nothingness.[99]

Tanabe identifies freedom as "creative action initiated in nothingness."[100] Like other thinkers of the Kyoto School, he heavily relies on Continental philosophers including Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche in developing his ideas. But these ideas also unmistakably rely on the Buddhist theory of the non-self and the idea of nothingness. Like Iryŏp, Tanabe found nothingness to be the ground for releasing the bounded relative self from constraints. Through the mediation of nothingness, the self expands itself into the great self.

Tanabe employs Pure Land Buddhism and its emphasis on Other Power as the ground of his discussion. In Pure Land Buddhism, chanting the name "Amita Buddha" facilitates stages by which the practitioner transforms himself or herself into a new being. Although some might believe that relying on the Other Power risks lapsing into worship of the Other Power as an idol, Tanabe does not share this concern. He believes that submitting oneself to the power of Amita Buddha cannot turn into idol worship, since the Other Power in this case is not the power of any being but of absolute nothingness. Nothingness by definition does not exist and thus cannot become an idol.

For Tanabe, reason must break down in order for reason to function, and this breakdown should happen through the absolute transformative power of absolute nothingness.[101] Here we once again see the importance of thinking through "nothing" instead of "being" in the East Asian religio-philosophical tradition. Iryŏp, too, postulated that the basis of being is "nothingness." For her, to become awakened to this root of being is a fundamental way to freedom.

"Self-reflection" is an important element in the self's transformation through the Other Power. Tanabe explains the process of metanoetics through the three stages of "action-faith-witness" (*gyōshinshō* 行信証). Action in this triple stage refers to religious practice; faith refers to the practitioner's belief in this process. And this action-faith should be confirmed by the practitioner's own experience, by embodying this process in his or her own life,

which he calls "witness." In explicating the process, Tanabe employs the idea of *genjōkōan* (現成公案), or "manifesting the suchness," by Dōgen, the twelfth century Japanese Zen master: he proposes that "the whole world of actual realities can become a kōan because of its structural contradiction of being determined by the past and shaped by the future."[102] Reality itself is based on contradiction, and the paradox that *gongan* stories invoke represents the contradiction of existence. For both Iryŏp and Tanabe, nothingness means embracing that paradox and is an occasion for transcending subjectivity and creatively engaging with the world in the concrete reality of everyday existence.

NOTHINGNESS AND TRANSFORMATION OF THE SELF

A fundamental premise of modernity is to acknowledge an independent self. This premise, however, is also modernity's burden. The independent self is a phenomenal self and, as Tanabe states, a relative one. By claiming independence, the modern self is forced to accept its own boundaries. As much as it wants to declare its independence, it comes to realize the necessity of overcoming its finite reality. How does the self claim its independence while also expanding its power to overcome its limitations? In his book *Modern Japan and Buddhism* (Kindai Nihon to Bukkyō 近代日本と仏教), the scholar of Japanese philosophy Sueki Fumihiko (末木文美士) proposes two developments in modern Japanese thought that answer this challenge of modernity: nationalism and nothingness. In nationalism, the "I" attempts to overcome its limits by imagining itself as part of a nation. A discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this book, but other scholars have paid attention to the nationalism that deeply permeates the philosophy of the Kyoto School thinkers.[103]

Nothingness, as another way to overcome the independent but fragmented modern self, demonstrates a distinctively Asian approach to the nature of being. In this paradigm, the fragmented "I" needs to be transformed and reborn in order to overcome its limited condition. In the works of both Iryŏp and Tanabe, this perennial religious theme of death and rebirth is envisioned through the mediation of nothingness instead of through an ultimate being. Nothingness is posited as that space in which the transformation from the limited self to the boundless self takes place. Iryŏp explains this process as a transformation from the small-I to the great-I. Both Iryŏp and Tanabe, moreover, submit that this transformation takes place not through the subject's rational thinking, but through self-negation that releases the self from its limitations.

In the case of Iryŏp, this transformation through nothingness liberates individuals from the limits of gender; for Tanabe, the individual is liberated from the limits of rational thinking.

In the process of transformation via nothingness, the ethical gives way to the religious. For both Iryŏp and Tanabe, the ethical always contained antinomies, whereas in the religious, contradictions could be understood as a principle of the universe. The ultimate being was not one who championed any specific quality, be it considered positive or negative in the world of rational moral deliberation. Instead, the ultimate being was aware of the inevitable polarization of things and beings at the phenomenal level and of the ultimate emptiness and lack of grounding substance behind those phenomena. For Iryŏp and Tanabe, philosophy and religion were comprised of the act of being awakened to this reality of existence.

The challenge that East Asian thinkers pose to rational thinking and reason, especially in connection with the "act" of religion, proposes that *both* philosophy and religion need to go beyond the limits of reason. This "beyond" does not indicate a return to the power of a transcendental being. Instead, this "beyond" is a state in which the subject releases itself from the limitations of subjectivity via constant self-renewal through nothingness. Nothingness is a placeholder, a space in which continued self-transformation occurs.[104]

CHAPTER SIX

At the End of the Journey

In Between Happiness and Misfortune (1960–1971)

The Critics: Between the Secular and the Sacred

Kim Iryŏp led a wide-ranging life that sometimes contained conflicting ideas and ideals. She was a devoted Christian who later became a Buddhist nun; she was a New Woman who demanded sexual liberation in her premonastic period, but afterward lived a life of celibacy. She was a writer who willingly suspended writing (or suspended the publication of her writings) for almost two decades. The multifaceted aspects of Iryŏp's life have raised many questions. Her position in the women's movement has been one of the most frequently asked topics of debate, with observers wondering what happened to her engagement with women's liberation after she joined the monastery. This question is not unexpected, given Iryŏp's high-profile life as a New Woman before she became a nun. Scholarship on the New Women became active in Korea in the 1990s, and Iryŏp's position within the contemporary women's movements naturally attracted more scholarly attention in that context.

One of Iryŏp's earliest comments on this issue was made in the interview, "An Interview with Kim Iryŏp in a Nun's Costume and Tonsured" (Sakpal hago sŭngbok ibŭn Kim Iryŏp yŏsa hoegyŏn'gi 삭발하고 승복입은 김일엽 여사 회견기), which appeared in the January 1935 issue of the journal *Opening of the World* (Kyebyŏk). The title indicates people's curiosity about changes in Iryŏp's life, although this curiosity seems more focused on changes in her appearance than to her inner world. Iryŏp married a lay Buddhist monk named Ha Yunsil in 1929, and the public thought that she was leading a happy life with him. Several of her essays described her married life with Ha as peaceful and satisfying and expressed her affection and appreciation for her husband. Because of this, people assumed that Iryŏp was finally settling down and leading a normal married life. In the interview, however, the reporter asked, "What will happen to your engagement with the women's movement [now that you have joined the monastery]?" Iryŏp replied, "That is nothing but a temporary measure. That cannot be the eternal and unchanging truth."[1] Neither the reporter nor Iryŏp further elaborated on this issue. Obviously, neither of them anticipated how this flat dismissal of the women's movement might look to the generations

of feminists and scholars of women's issues more than half a century later. To many, Iryŏp's answer in this interview sent a message that, not only had Iryŏp abandoned the women's movement after joining the monastery, she considered her former commitment to it unimportant. This raises a larger question: does leading a monastic life necessarily mean that one needs to disengage from social issues?

Concerns for Iryŏp's position on women's freedom and liberation after she joined the monastery reflect issues that have recently attracted attention from many Buddhist scholars, especially in Western Buddhist scholarship. I will address two issues that Iryŏp's case can shed light on: Buddhism's social engagement and the topic of Buddhism and gender. Both have generated a significant amount of scholarship since the late twentieth century as part of an effort to explore Buddhism's relevance in our time.

IS ZEN BUDDHIST SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT POSSIBLE?

The recent Western Buddhist scholarship has challenged Zen Buddhism's capacity for social engagement. One reason for this comes from the apparently individualistic and even idealistic tendencies of Zen meditation. Such an evaluation claims that, when a Zen practitioner sets aside secular affairs and practices meditation in a secluded environment, that practitioner's awakening takes priority over mundane issues: existential and ontological urgency justifies the Zennist negligence of problems in the secular world. A scholar of Japanese Buddhism, Christopher Ives, described the situation as follows:

> Zen Buddhists usually treat the "universal" religious predicament in virtual isolation from particular social situations. They tend to speak in ideal terms, usually arguing that a human being can awaken in any time and place, regardless of the circumstances. This emphasis on the possibility of awakening in any time or place drives a wedge between the overarching religious concern and specific social concerns. As a result, social suffering is either ignored or, if considered by Zen, relegated to a distant secondary position. Historically, monastic Zen has not studied, analyzed, or responded self-critically to the full range of suffering in the social world. This lack of a critical spirit has contributed to problematical support of the status quo, whether the aristocracy, samurai dictators, militarists, or certain large corporations.[2]

From Ives's perspective, the exclusive focus of Zen Buddhism on an individual's enlightenment has created an ironic negation of the pervasive suffering at

the societal and daily levels of existence in favor of the universality of ontological or existential suffering. Ives is not alone in expressing frustration about Zen Buddhism's incompetence in dealing with social issues. The increasing awareness of the importance of Buddhism's social engagement has led to a movement of socially engaged Buddhism. The Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh coined the expression "socially engaged Buddhism,"[3] claiming that all Buddhism is fundamentally engaged. His claim shows two basic emphases: (1) that Buddhism should address all of the sources of suffering in the human realm, whether they are existential, societal, or political. This idea has led to the creation of what is known as "humanist Buddhism" (Ch. *rénjiān fójiào* 人間佛教), especially in Taiwan; (2) that socially engaged Buddhist movements should express the belief that mental and spiritual change has a fundamental impact on a person's engagement with society. We do not live as lonely individuals in a vacuum state; instead we exist in a network of beings and events.

Despite scholars' doubts about the Zen Buddhist capacity for social engagement, Zen tradition does not completely lack discussion on this issue. An example of this discussion is the *Ten Ox-Herding Pictures* (*sibudo* 十牛圖), ten illustrations depicting the process of Zen Buddhist cultivation, the best known of which are those made by Puming (普明, ?–?) and Kuo'an Shiyuan (廓庵師遠) during the Song Dynasty in China. In Korea, Kuo'an's version is most popular.[4] In these pictures, the enlightened state, in which the practitioner dwells quietly and blissfully, comes at the eighth stage. Contrary to the common understanding that the goal of Zen practice is to achieve individual awakening and that enlightenment should be a state of calm detachment from the secular world, the *Ox-Herding Pictures* propose that there are two more stages that come "after" the experience of awakening. "Returning to the Sources" is the caption for the ninth illustration, and "Entering the Marketplace with Bliss-Bestowing Hand" for the final tenth illustration.[5] These pictures appear to recognize the importance of the dual practice of wisdom and compassion, the two wings of Buddhism. The compassionate activities, such as helping others in the marketplace, should be the result of the wisdom attained through awakening. In contemporary American Buddhist scholarship, the *Ox-Herding Pictures* have only a marginal, if any, significance in interpreting the nature of Zen Buddhism. However, the symbolic statement made by these illustrations deserves more attention, especially as a reminder of Zen Buddhism's relation to society.

It is debatable whether the final two stages actually indicate Zen Buddhist social awareness. The original Daoist *Ox-Herding Pictures* contain only the

eight stages, and Kuo'an added the final two stages. It is possible that we can interpret the final two stages as another example of the Zen rhetoric emphasizing how the final stage of enlightenment is not different from the daily existence in which everybody is already enlightened. Kyŏnghŏ Sŏngu offers commentaries on these pictures in his "Song of Searching for Ox" (Simuga 尋牛歌) and begins by saying, "Originally it has not been lost; what is the use of suddenly searching for it?"[6] And, about the tenth stage, Kyŏnghŏ writes, "Is this state the same as or different from the state in which you were looking for an ox in the bush the other day?"[7] Kyŏnghŏ's interpretation can be a confirmation that after all, the *Ox-Herding Pictures* do not prove Zen Buddhism's social concerns. Even in that case, we can still revalorize the tradition and consider the meaning of compassion and wisdom in Zen Buddhist practice.

BUDDHIST SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT IN MODERN KOREA: MANHAE HAN YONGUN

At the dawn of the twentieth century, the relationship of Buddhism to society and the general public became a major concern for reform-minded Korean Buddhists. Buddhism for the masses (Minjung Pulgyo 民衆佛敎) represented Korean Buddhist efforts to bring Buddhism to the milieu of daily life for the general public. Manhae Han Yongun (滿海 韓龍雲, 1879–1944) was a leading figure early in the century who envisioned a socially engaged Buddhism. He emphasized a balance between modernity and tradition, and between the religious practice of meditation and social salvation. In his efforts to connect Zen meditation and Buddhist teaching with social reform, he proposed a new interpretation of the relationship between Zen meditation (Sŏn 禪) and the doctrinal teaching of Buddhism (Kyo 敎).[8]

Manhae rebuked Buddhism for its failure to deal with the social changes of his time and called for Buddhism's active social engagement:

> What happens when a temple locates itself on a mountain? First of all, progressive thoughts will disappear. . . . And adventurous ideas will vanish. . . . Then a liberating element will evaporate. . . . And then a resistant spirit will cease to exist. . . . Located on secluded mountains, [Buddhist] temples do not recognize upheavals in the world. As a result, although anti-religious sounds of drums and trumpets disturb the earth, Buddhism never wages war against them. Nor does it console the defeated warriors. Despite the commanding banners in the Buddhist castle, the religion is so helpless and powerless that it cannot raise a flag of resistance.[9]

Manhae also indicted Buddhism for failing to understand the lives of the general public. Korean Buddhists had tended to side with the royal family and the state rather than with the suffering populace. He confronted the centuries-old tradition of "Buddhism for nation protection" (*hoguk Pulgyo* 護國佛敎) and stated: "Does Buddhism reside in monasteries? No. Does Buddhism reside in clerics? Not there, either. Does Buddhism reside in its canons? The answer is again 'no.' Buddhism resides indeed in every individual's mental awareness. There are many ways to recognize the dignity and insight of each person. I sincerely hope that Buddhism will reflect this great truth and make connections with the *minjung* and live with the *minjung*."[10]

These premises enabled Manhae to introduce Buddhism for the masses (民衆佛敎), which enjoins Buddhists to focus on serving the public. He wrote, "First, make [Buddhist] doctrine adoptable by the people, its texts understandable by them. Second, create systems for the people, and use Buddhist assets for them."[11] Two aspects of Buddhism grounded his theory of Buddhist social engagement: the principle of equality (*p'yŏngdŭng chuŭi* 平等主義) and the principle of saving the world (*kuse chuŭi* 救世主義). The former refers to the absolute aspects of the Buddhist worldview; and the latter refers to its application to the life in the secular world.

Mahāyāna Buddhism claims that all beings, both sentient and insentient, have the Buddha nature and thus are equal. We have already noted that Iryŏp's emphasis on absolute equality—as expressed in her statement that even a piece of cracked tile has the same freedom as a human being—derives from the Buddhist doctrine. Combining this idea of equality with the Buddhist concept of compassion, Manhae developed the principle of saving the world. He stressed that the idea of equality does not automatically translate into the reality of equality. If the Buddhist notion of equality is to become the reality of daily existence, it is necessary to grapple with mundane issues. "Buddhism is a way of transcending this world," he agreed, "but it teaches us to transcend the world by entering the world, not by avoiding it."[12] He believed that individual salvation and a full-scale engagement in worldly affairs should take place simultaneously.

Manhae also reformulated the concepts of the meditation (Sŏn/Zen 禪) and doctrinal approach (Kyo 敎) in Korean Buddhism. The tradition of Korean Buddhism tends to see meditation and doctrines as conflicting approaches to Buddhism. The Sŏn school claims that it is not relying on language, whereas the doctrinal school bases its teachings on scriptural studies. For Manhae, although meditation and doctrinal studies are in a dialectical tension, together they constitute a complementary whole: Zen represents an individual's

spiritual practice; the doctrinal studies provide concrete instruction on how to engage with oneself, with others, and with society. He thus contends that active social engagement is a concrete manifestation of an individual's existential freedom.

Recognizing that social engagement can blind the practitioner to the religious dimensions of practice if he or she overindulges in the issues at hand, Manhae suggested that Zen meditation was a practice that prevented such unwelcome effects. In a recent publication, the Korean Christian activist-scholar, Kyeongil Jung, discussed a similar idea in the context of Buddhist-Christian dialogue, from the perspective of a Christian activist.[13] Because social activism deals with the unpleasant realities of human existence, an activist can easily fall prey to anger and other negative emotions. When that happens, Zen meditation can help to control the negative and potentially destructive emotions. At the same time, sensitivity to social issues should awaken Zen Buddhism from the potential stagnation of meditation that in its calmness and placidity is isolated from the reality of people's lives. Jung's idea of the mutual engagement of Zen meditation and social activism illuminates a distinction that Manhae draws between two types of Zen: "live Zen/Sŏn" (*hwalsŏn* 活禪) and "dead Zen/Sŏn" (*sasŏn* 死禪).[14] This distinction is reminiscent of Pojo Chinul's notions of the "live word" (*hwalgu* 活句) and the "dead word" (*sagu* 死句). A scholar of Korean Buddhism, Pori Park, thus observed that for Manhae, "Social salvation needed to be in harmony with the existential salvation of the Buddhist tradition."[15] By connecting these, Manhae hoped to "ameliorate Buddhist lack of social concern and thus their lack of passion for social engagement."[16]

MINJUNG BUDDHISM (OR BUDDHISM FOR THE PEOPLE)

Manhae's call for Buddhist social engagement took a more concrete form in Minjung Buddhism. This form of Buddhism was active in the 1970s and 1980s in Korea,[17] when Korean society was suffering from a military dictatorship and the side effects of rapid industrialization. A group of Buddhist thinkers responded to these social problems by reviving the idea of Buddhism's social responsibility and created a movement known as Minjung Buddhism. Minjung Buddhism claimed that the goal of Buddhist practice is to eliminate suffering, and that Buddhism should deal with all of the sources of suffering, including social, economic, and political, as well as mental and psychological ones. Pŏpsŏng, a leading figure of the movement, claimed that Buddhist freedom could not be attained without

freedom from the sufferings imposed by political dictatorship, economic exploitation, and social discrimination and that Buddhists should therefore engage in social activism.

Yŏ Ikku (1946–2012), another thinker of Minjung Buddhism, contended that Zen Buddhism as well as Tiantai (天台) and Huayan (華嚴) Buddhism interpreted Buddhist teachings through the lens of subjective idealism and thus overemphasized the mind and its emptiness. As a result, they became indifferent to the social and political realities of the general public and failed to address the public's suffering.[18] Yŏ still believed that Zen Buddhism's radical rejection of authority could serve as a strong force to liberate people from the suffering caused by social malfunctions. If Zen Buddhism was to serve that purpose, Yŏ argued, it needed to come out of the secluded shelter of subjective idealism and become engaged with society.

Pŏpsŏng joined Yŏ in his critique of the subjectivist position of Zen Buddhism and interpreted *hwadu* practice as a form of Zen social activism. He defined Buddhist awakening as a "sudden liberation of all the essentialist views regarding one's consciousness and existence, self and the world."[19] Pŏpsŏng claimed that cultivation of awakening is basically social practice and that "taking meditation and social engagement as two separate issues betrays the very nature of Buddhist philosophy."[20] One of Pŏpsŏng's underlining arguments was that *hwadu* practice was not an individual's encounter with an "internal spiritual mystery"; instead, it was an activity through which one "negates the reification of conceptions and absolutization of being-in-itself."[21] When we understand the *hwadu* practice in this manner, it becomes, as Pŏpsŏng describes, "a thinking-activity that opposes falsity and fantasy and a creative historical movement through which the practitioner realizes independence in spite of situational contradictions. The *hwadu* practice is not a training that makes one a perfect and holy self, as many idealist Zen masters have claimed. . . . It is a question-in-action that one asks oneself with regard to the situation at hand."[22] In this manner, Minjung Buddhism offers us a sophisticated reinterpretation of Buddhism and of Zen *hwadu* practice in the context of Buddhism's social engagement. As a movement, however, Minjung Buddhism faded out after Korea became democratized and was gradually replaced by other forms of Buddhist social engagement, including the Buddhist ecological movement.

On the other hand, two predominant issues have raised scholars' doubts about the possibility of Zen Buddhist social engagement. The first is whether Zen Buddhist practice and spiritual cultivation in general require a secluded

space away from society. Second, does spiritual cultivation necessarily lead to the awareness of social problems? In the case of Iryŏp, both questions are relevant, and they take a concrete form in Iryŏp's position on women's liberation.

BUDDHISM AND WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS

Did Iryŏp retreat to the realm of personal salvation, ignoring the reality of the social problem—that is, gender discrimination—about which she had raised a strong voice during her premonastic life? Scholarship on Kim Iryŏp has mostly focused on her premonastic life as a New Woman and a writer. A scholar of Na Hyesŏk compared Iryŏp with Na and harshly criticized Iryŏp's position on the women's issues. Na was a contributor to *New Women* and a close friend of Iryŏp. When Iryŏp was still an active public figure, the two women engaged in open debates on women's issues in newspapers. Recognized as the first female Korean artist of the Western style of painting, Na shared with Iryŏp a number of thoughts regarding gender discrimination in Korean society. After completing high school in Korea, Na traveled to Japan to study Western paintings. While studying in Tokyo from 1913 to 1918, Na published her essays in a journal put out by Korean students in Japan. Na's first published essay, titled "Ideal Women" (Isangjŏk pu'in 理想的婦人), appeared in *The Scholars' Light* (Hakchigwang 學之光) in 1914 and reflects the influence of Hiratsuka Raichō, the leading figure of the New Women movement, on the nineteen-year-old Na. In this essay, Na listed five female figures, including Raichō, as ideal women and challenged the socially endorsed ideal image of ideal femininity at the time, which defined an ideal woman's life as that of a "good wife and wise mother" (*yangch'ŏ hyŏnmo* 良妻賢母):

> We need to acquire all the strengths we can muster and elevate our consciousness daily. By doing so, we can progress toward the best ideal. We cannot say that a woman has achieved an ideal if she is a moral woman by virtue of habit alone, or by merely fulfilling her secular duties. I believe that she has to go one step further and prepare herself to fulfill future ideals. I also believe that it is not wise to only pursue the customary ideal of "good wife, wise mother" (*yangch'ŏ hyŏnmo*).[23]

Na's vision of an ideal woman in this essay reappears in her "Happiness of Not Forgetting Oneself" (Na rŭl itchi annŭn haengbok 나를 잊지 않는 행복, 1924). By the time she wrote this essay, Na was married with two children. In the

essay, Na says, "From the past to the present, we all have lived life while forgetting about ourselves."[24] Na underscored the act of not forgetting oneself as the foundation of "women's liberation, freedom and equality." Not forgetting oneself, Na argued, was also the basis of love, living a reformed life, and financial independence. Na contended that happiness found by indulging in the luxuries and comforts of daily life was not real happiness: it was an insult to life. Na's criticism of superficial happiness and her determination to find her real identity seem analogous to the spirit that Iryŏp so strongly expressed in her essays in *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*. A search for the authentic identity and, thus, authentic life, was a main driving force for both Na and Iryŏp in their activities as New Women.

As we discussed earlier, Na's divorce in 1930 turned her life upside-down and caused her to suffer from emotional and financial difficulties.[25] By 1937, she was completely devastated and went to see Iryŏp at Sudŏk Monastery. It is not clear whether she was actually considering joining the monastery at the time. According to her biographer, Chŏng Kyu'ung, by then, Na was utterly broke financially, and her ex-husband was thwarting her desperate attempts to see her children. Chŏng wrote, "It was only natural that Na Hyesŏk thought of a monastery, and that brought her the thought of Kim Iryŏp. What was at stake was not whether she should or should not join the monastery. Rather, Na must have thought that, at the moment, a monastery and Kim Iryŏp were the only resorts she could turn to, the only place and person to accept her."[26] Na sold off whatever belongings she still possessed and headed to Sudŏk Monastery. Before 1937, Na's only connection with Buddhism had been holding an exhibition at a Buddhist center in her hometown, Suwŏn, in 1929. The exhibition included paintings produced during her visits to Europe and the United States and those she collected on the same trip.[27] Despite this previous lack of a relationship with Buddhism, however, Iryŏp stated that Na visited her at the monastery with the intention of joining it.[28] She introduced Na to Zen Master Man'gong, who gave Na the dharma name Kogŭn (Old Roots 古根).[29] After the meeting with Man'gong, though, Na hesitated and decided not to become a nun.

All the same, she stayed at Sudŏk Inn near the monastery for several years until 1944. The only exception to this was that Iryŏp made arrangements for Na to visit Haein Monastery for a change in 1938. Na stayed there from the spring to the fall of that year and wrote about the experience in her essay, "Sceneries of Haein Monastery" (Haeinsa ŭi p'unggwang 海印寺의 風光), her last published work before her death. Her last paintings known to the public, "The Stone Tower of Haein Monastery" (Haeinsa ŭi sŏkt'ap 海印寺의 石塔)

and "A Scene of Haein Monastery" (Haeinsa ŭi p'unggyŏng 海印寺의 風景), were also painted during this period.

The art critic Yun Pŏmmo has claimed that Na lived a life of no-possession (*musoyu* 無所有) when she stayed at Sudŏk Inn. Yun challenges the dominant view that Na lived tragically in her last years and interprets her life instead as one of "nonobstruction" (*muae* 無碍),[30] using the Buddhist idea of not being bound by either material or mental limitations. It seems like overstretching to interpret Na's life during this period as one of no-possession and nonobstruction in the Buddhist sense of the terms. However, Yun's interpretation of Na can provide a new horizon in understanding Na's life as well as those of other New Women.

Korean society has frequently described the lives of the three representative Korean New Women—Kim Iryŏp, Na Hyesŏk, and Kim Myŏngsun—as "failures." Their critics argue that Na's life was a failure because she had a tragic ending and died on the street; that Kim Myŏngsun's life was a failure because she died with a mental disease after having suffered from financial bankruptcy and emotional devastation, and that Kim Iryŏp's life was a failure because she joined a monastery. Such an assessment of these New Women raises the question of what factors we should use to evaluate our lives. What categories should we apply in order to conclude whether a person's life was a success or a failure? What is the meaning of evaluating a person's life using these judgmental categories? To judge a life as either a "success" or a "failure" indicates that we already have fixed ideas by which a life is measured. Life, however, is not a fixed entity. In the course of life, we go through different stages, and at each stage, we face challenges. When we take those challenges, we know that we cannot predict the exact outcomes of our actions but we still act in accordance with the values that we believe worth pursuing. The lives of the three New Women that we have discussed defy the mentality that judges life according to a standardized value chart. The richness of their lives outshines the poverty of using one-word expressions—"failure" and "success"—to evaluate them.

Yi Sanggyŏng, a Na Hyesŏk scholar, interpreted Na's refusal to join the monastery as a concrete manifestation of her resolution to live the "happiness of not forgetting oneself." Yi claimed that Na's determination not to submit herself to Buddhism so that she could maintain the "happiness of not forgetting oneself" was a good contrast to Iryŏp, who yielded herself to Buddhism. For Yi, Iryŏp's joining the monastery meant that she had given up herself. Yi contended that, as Iryŏp faced the harsh realities of patriarchal Korean society, she was not able to sustain the position on women's liberation that she

had written about; therefore, she joined the monastery as an escape. Yi further claimed that Iryŏp's tonsure was evidence of her failure as a New Woman, and that her life as a nun was a pretense born of her refusal to accept the failure of her feminist activities. Contrasting Iryŏp's life with Na's, Yi criticized Iryŏp as the one "who, without fully realizing the reality of Korean women, vainly followed theories from abroad and was boosted by the praise that she was a courageous practitioner of those theories. But when she realized how strong the suppression of women [in her society] was, she stepped back without even trying to fight against it. Even in retreating, [Kim Iryŏp] justified herself with the fresh idea that she was pursuing the path to Buddhahood."[31]

Yi argued that, contrary to Iryŏp, Na Hyesŏk sustained her will to maintain her independent identity until the end of her life. Yi's criticism, then, not only challenges Iryŏp's activities as a New Woman, but also the authenticity of her life as a Buddhist nun. This is a grave claim to make; it also ignores the role Iryŏp played and the contributions she made to the lives of Korean nuns, Buddhist practitioners, and other women in Korea. Yi's evaluation of Iryŏp as a Buddhist nun partly reflects the views of Korean people regarding the popular image of Buddhist nuns and the common understanding of women's motivations for joining monasteries.

WHY DESIRE THE SACRED IN THIS SECULAR AGE?

In *Zen Monastic Experience*, a book based on his life as a Buddhist monk in Korea, Robert E. Buswell, a scholar of Korean Buddhism, identified three reasons for Korean men to join the monastery in the 1970s. The first group was comprised of Vietnamese War veterans who felt alienated after returning home from the war. Buswell wrote, "For many such men, the monastery functioned as kind of a 'halfway house' between the disciplined, stable environment of the army and the uncertainties of civilian life, or as an attractive alternative to the assembly lines of the metropolitan factories."[32] The second group became monks, Buswell states, as "a nativistic reaction to the increasing influence that Western civilization and culture was having in Asia."[33] Buswell said that this type of monk had studied Western philosophy and then turned to Eastern religions and philosophies. They showed more interest in "learning Buddhist doctrine and practicing meditation than did their associates," Buswell wrote, and they were "considerably less provincial and more reform-minded than the majority of monks."[34] These two groups reflected the social and historical situation of Korea in the 1970s. In contrast to this, Buswell identified the third group as joining the monastery for a more traditional reason:

"the desire of Buddhist families to have one son enter the monastery in order to make merit for the family."[35] This traditional idea conflicts with the reality in which sons are expected to support their parents and families. Also, Buswell noted that, regardless of the most common motivations for joining a monastery, "Most Korean families—and even some Buddhist ones—look upon the monk's life as a decidedly inferior calling for their sons and are adamantly opposed to their children's ordination."[36] He further added, "In all monasteries, there can be found examples of monks who have ordained for the two reasons that the average Korean presumes most common: failure in love or laziness."[37] This brief review of the Korean people's impression of the motivations for joining a monastery gives us some sense of the negative reaction that Iryŏp's tonsure caused to the people around her. Yi Sanggyŏng seems to have joined them by evaluating Iryŏp's Buddhist life as a "failure," be it a failure in love, in her activities as a New Woman, or in life in general. Would Iryŏp and the monastic community agree with such an evaluation of her life?

Iryŏp's disciple Wŏlsong served Iryŏp during her last years until her death. She helped Iryŏp prepare the manuscript of the book *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun,* which contains a short essay by Wŏlsong in honor of her teacher. In this essay, Wŏlsong says, "There are people in the secular world who feel pity for nuns, but I feel sorry for those people. My mother wailed when she learned that her daughter was to become a nun. My father, brother, and even my younger sibling felt pity for me, and tears fell from their eyes. My friends also pitied me."[38] Wŏlsong lamented that their imaginings of a Buddhist practitioner's life fell far short of understanding what the practitioner had in mind when he or she joined the monastery, adding, "The images of them shedding tears all seem futile to me. If there were feelings hidden deep down inside me, even they stir no longer, for which I can only thank my teacher's powerful and great teachings. It was not a matter of getting rid of feelings that are considered human but more to do with making myself a disciple of the Buddha."[39] Wŏlsong's description demonstrates the different values that are pursued by those who live in the secular world and those who fully devote themselves to religious life.

Modern society has been characterized as a secular one in which the meaning of religion and religious practice has gradually diminished. A Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor asks in his book *A Secular Age,* "Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?"[40] In the religious worldview, he tells us, "Human agents are embedded in society, soci-

ety in the cosmos, and the cosmos incorporates the divine."[41] The holistic vision of totality has gradually disintegrated in the modern world as the standard of values has become secularized and individuals have developed a human-centered worldview as an alternative to the traditional theocentric world—the world in which the transcendental divine figure functions as a source of meaning and values in human life. The religious world is the world in which people experience "a boundless awe" and "boundless wonders," according to German theologian Rudolf Otto (1869–1937).[42] This awe and wonder about life and the transcendental being constitute the basis of the religious worldview. But in a secular age, the awe-and-wonder-generating source of our existence is no longer an essential part of our meaning and value system. The negative reaction in Korean society to people's joining the monastery, and even Yi Sanggyŏng's criticism of Iryŏp's tonsure as an "escape," show how common is suspicion of the value of religious practice.[43]

In our time, the term "religion" began to have a negative connotation in part because it is now understood in the context of institutionalized religion in which the authority, conventions, and rituals of religious institutions mar, rather than encourage, religious practice. But the challenge to institutionalized religion does not erase the need for religion in the human mind. In lieu of institutional religion, religiosity or spirituality begins to represent the "content" of religious practice, freed from the power play performed by religious institutions. Iryŏp repeatedly emphasized the importance of religious education in her writings. She regarded religious education and religious practice as enabling individuals to realize the fundamental meaning of existence. The existential strain in her understanding of religion demands a separation of religion from moral implications: "Religious education is not about making us do good things. It is about helping us recover the mind that knows how to erase the discriminating judgment of good and evil—that is, the original mind of human beings—so that we can live not by following fixed rules but by relating to the contexts in which we find ourselves. Good and evil are the creations of humans. Heaven and hell are one stop in the process of existence and will continue without end in future lives."[44] Secular education helps us attain knowledge, whereas, for Iryŏp, religious education helps us to "attain awakening." Being awake means "you have established the foundation of your thought and are not manipulated by your circumstances. You form clear decisions about your projects and make consistent efforts to accomplish them."[45] Religion and religious education do not mean religious institution, authority, or moral education. Religion is a way to discover the basis of human existence, and religious education enables us to be fully in charge of ourselves.

Iryŏp's discussion of religion and religious education is her way of responding to her critics regarding her position on the women's movement without explicitly applying her discussion to women's issues. As a New Woman, she sought a way to live as a free individual by challenging socially imposed gender identity. Joining the monastery was an extension of her search for liberated self, and she regarded religious education and practice as another name for an individual's search for meaning and freedom. The relationship between women's issues and Buddhist philosophy in Iryŏp's life and philosophy becomes clearer in her last book, *In Between Happiness and Misfortune*.

Life, This Invincible Source of Existence

INSCRIBING LIFE: LOVE STORIES

In Between Happiness and Misfortune begins with a discussion of love. "Love is the most enchanting activity in human life," Iryŏp declares. "I will tell you how to overcome love from now on and turn it into something you can use at your discretion."[46] On the surface, the book seems like love counseling. This is not entirely wrong, since in the first half of the book, the author recounts the love stories of five women, including her own. But that is not all. In the second half, she changes her tone and extensively discusses Buddhist teachings, in two sections: "The mind leaning toward the Buddha" (Pul ŭl hyangha nŭn maŭm 佛을 向하는 마음) and "Sitting face to face with the joy of Buddhist teaching" (Pŏpyŏl kwaŭi taehwa 法悅과의 對話). The book is evenly divided between stories of love and discussions of Buddhism, indicative of how the different stages of Iryŏp's life, as well as her commitment to the women's movement, have in the end come together.

Iryŏp begins this book by retelling the story of her relationship with Paek Sŏnguk. She had already discussed it in her essay "Having Burned Away My Youth," which was included in *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun* and reprinted in *Having Burned Away My Youth*. Only four years intervened between the publications of *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun* and that of *In Between Happiness and Misfortune*, but in that time Iryŏp's attitude toward this event changed. In *In Between Happiness and Misfortune,* she offers a previously unreported story of her relationship with Paek. In "Having Burned Away My Youth," she detailed how devastated she had been when Paek left her. Her desperate struggle to make sense of the separation constituted the core of this long essay. Paek had left Iryŏp in 1928, and it seems that it took her three decades to finally be

at peace with that event in her life. In this memoir, Iryŏp shared with her readers not only her relationship with Paek but also her life story, beginning with her Christian background. She told us how her father and mother had raised her as a faithful Christian, how close she had been with her pastor father, and how she had begun to doubt Christian doctrine as his evangelicalism silenced her and eventually contributed to her loss of faith. Iryŏp provided a second perspective on the fundamental doctrines of Christianity that she had learned from her father, reinterpreting them in her own way as her understanding of Buddhism matured.

"Having Burned Away My Youth," in this sense, was her effort to reconcile not only with the lover who had deserted her but with her own life. It was a reconciliation with her father, to whom she was unusually close but whose Christianity and religious practice she could not embrace. It was also reconciliation with her past life, in which she was both a renowned public figure and a lonely woman who had lost all her immediate family members when she was young. She concluded the essay with a determination that, from then on, she would concentrate on her Buddhist practice, until the future came to an end and even afterward, in order to find herself as a free being. Despite the sensationalism this essay caused, mainly because it was read as a love story of a well-known former-New-Woman-who-became-a-Buddhist-nun, "Having Burned Away My Youth" is a story of transformation, and this transformation took place at multiple levels.

At the beginning of the essay, Iryŏp is a woman in absolute despair after her separation from her lover, and the events in her life make no sense to her. At the end of her confession, however, she emerges with a firm conviction to "devote all of my energy to the teachings [of the Buddha] to discover myself, which is the true reality of one's mind. Once I decided to follow this path, the universe was one with me. It became so clear at this point that the phenomenal world is my body and that its inner reality, which is not visible in the phenomenal world, is my mind."[47] In the course of this transformation from a woman "standing at the edge of the cliff, with no one to rely on" to a woman determined to find her true self, both Christianity and Buddhism played a significant role. Christianity was the religion Iryŏp had faithfully followed in her childhood; it was also the religion that had provided her with the opportunity to engage with questions about the meaning of the absolute being, the beginning of the world, the values of good and evil, creation, and the meaning of religious practice. Iryŏp went through a period in which she had lost faith in Christianity, but "Having Burned Away My Youth" demonstrates that her engagement with Christianity had a significant influence on her Buddhism.

The idea of a simple "conversion" from one to the other does not fully explain how the two religions interacted in her life and thoughts.

For Iryŏp, Christianity represented the religion and life of her father, and being critical of Christianity meant being critical of him. In this essay, she reconciles with her father and Christianity by connecting her understanding of God and of good and evil to Buddhism. Christianity, like Buddhism, was a medium for Iryŏp to understand herself and to find the freedom she yearned for as a New Woman. At the end of "Having Burned Away My Youth," Iryŏp describes her state of mind at time as follows:

> I sing a song;
> At my song, the numbers called time and the limitation called space melt down;
> In order to give absolute freedom to my song,
> I have refused to confine my song to the beautiful bindings of high and low of melody and long and short of rhythm;
> I sing my song out loud, in whatever manner I like;
> My song is not a lyric that embraces sorrow and enriches joy;
> Nor is it a didactic phrase that encourages the good and discourages the bad;
> Nor is it the lofty words of the beings in heaven, nor the screams of suffering of the beings in hell;
> If there were someone who praised my song or who claimed to understand it, that would do nothing but denigrate it;
> Am I trying to explain the principle of the universe, which even Śakyamuni Buddha could not tell? I wouldn't dare have such an idea;
> I just hum a hundred, or a thousand marvelous phrases that both sentient and insentient beings speak every day as they are;
> That is why even a rotten pile of soil or a dried wood stump would respond to my song; the pressing sense of empty air makes the rain stop its cry and the wind its laughter;
> Waves unceasingly in motion stop their pressing pace, and even the flat earth, the idler of the universe, moves its ass;[48]

The free style of her song, bound by no conventions, be they the rules of rhyme or of melody, is her declaration that she is now a free being. No dualism can bind her any longer, whether that of joy and sorrow or that of heaven and hell. Dualistic judgment, Iryŏp suggests, prevents individuals from being who they

are. Her song is simply the sound that comes from every being in the world when it exists as it is. She even denies that her song has anything to do with delivering the teachings of the Buddha. Because she is singing the song of things as they are, all the beings in the world, sentient and insentient, respond to her song: she is one with the world. One cannot help but be reminded at this point of the chapter on "Making All Things Equal" (Qí wù lùn 齊物論), a well-known section in *Zhuangzi* by Zhuangzi (莊子, 369–286 BCE), a Chinese Daoist thinker. In this chapter, Zhuangzi demonstrates that differences are the fundamental mode of existence, and that each being makes its own sound and, thus, exists in its own way, which he calls "the piping of heaven" (Ch. *tiānlài* 天籟).

Iryŏp raised her voice in search of freedom during her premonastic life as a public intellectual. For the same cause, she challenged the gender discrimination in Korean society. And after more than three decades of practicing Buddhism, she declared that she had attained that freedom. If this was true, does this mean that Iryŏp had given up her position in women's liberation? Was the freedom she attained through Buddhist practice unrelated to the cause of the women's movement? I have suggested in other places that the two aspects of Iryŏp's life—Kim Iryŏp as a new woman and Kim Iryŏp as a Zen Buddhist nun—are connected through her search for freedom.[49] We can take this claim one step further and consider the fact that Iryŏp's confessional writings in *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun* and in her last book, *In Between Happiness and Misfortune,* are her declaration of women's freedom and of an identity that is independent of the one given to women in patriarchal Korean society. By inscribing the lives of women, herself included, in her writings, Iryŏp gave voices to them and made them visible. Women's lives are no longer an invisible, disposable, and forgettable existence in society. One might ask whether writing about women's lives suffices to challenge the patriarchal reality and gender discrimination. Can the imprinting of a life in writing suffice to challenge the hard reality of gender discrimination in society? Can writing even be considered an act of revolt? We will soon consider these issues in more depth, but first I would like to draw attention to the manner in which she inscribed the lives of women: love stories.

In presenting the lives of women, Iryŏp focused on their love lives. There are reasons for that. The stories of love she described in *In Between Happiness and Misfortune* were not simply stories about love affairs. A story about love, for her, is a story about one's self. Being in a relationship requires more than one individual: it is the self's encountering of an other, and a loving relationship is one of the most intense encounters—most intensely positive and

potentially negative—with a self-which-is-not-me. In such a relationship, the self voluntarily submits itself to the other self and thus wishes to be as close as possible to the other. This desire for union makes a loving relationship one of the most dangerous events in the life of the self, since the self now faces the risk of losing its independence. The paradox of desiring a union with another while also maintaining the independence of the self is the challenge that a love relationship presents to its participants. Iryŏp's self-analysis of her relationship with Paek and the love lives of four other women in *In Between Happiness and Misfortune* illuminate this very nature of love. Critically assessing her relationship with Paek, Iryŏp reasons that, when she was in love with him, she was consumed by love and was unaware that to love entailed finding and maintaining her self. She concluded that only when love is based on a clear understanding of the self is an authentic relationship between two individuals possible.

At the beginning of *In Between Happiness and Misfortune,* Iryŏp declared that she would offer advice to young people who have despaired at the precipice of love. The love she discussed in this book, however, was not limited to the romantic love of a couple; it had a multilayered meaning. Iryŏp experienced different kinds of love over the course of her life, and her perspective on love also changed over that course. As a New Woman, she demanded her *right* to love, and in *In Between Happiness and Misfortune,* she argued for *awakening* to the love that exists in all forms of beings in the world.

> Nuclear weapons harm only the material world; but love shakes up both the world and the inner soul. . . . It [love] is the totality of the universe, which is the origin of that which exists even before we feel the Buddha, the God, or all the life-spirits that existed before the beginning of the world. The love I mentioned is the totality of the universe and the most important issue for humans, on which the life and death of the original nature of life-spirit depends. When we are enchanted by love, not only do we lose the life-force, but the very origin of our life is cut off. . . . Even a crazy person, or a leper, does not lose the mind-capacity to love. People in our time whose minds are confused give priority to the suffering of immediate love instead of paying attention to whether their life-energy is alive or dead.[50]

Love, for Iryŏp, is the origin of all things in the world; it is the original force and the totality of the universe. She also identifies love as that which disturbs individuals and even smothers them. It is a capacity with which everybody is equipped but which they do not always exercise. People in her time,

she lamented, failed to exercise this quality of their existence. The conflicting images of love in the above passage indicate different layers of love. In the following passage, she symbolically expressed the relationship between the differing layers of love as she conceived it:

> I think that the symbol of love is flowers. Flowers are most kindhearted and most soft. They are also generous. Flowers receive stinging bees and even gadflies with a smile. Love is more powerful than flowers, more generous and more beautiful than flowers.
>
> Love is the symbol of culture and a representative of the true heart. Murderers, burglars, and those people of no-culture may hate flowers, but they, too, love someone or something. Love exists even in the heart of those who are in hell; but love's representative, the flowers, cannot bloom in hell. Flowers cannot survive fire.[51]

Flowers, Iryŏp explains, are visible manifestations, if only symbolic, of love, which is both visible and invisible. Manifestations are concrete realities, which limits the boundless nature of love. A manifestation can be recognized and appreciated or it can be misunderstood and rejected. The rejection of a manifestation, however, does not imply that what the symbol manifests is also rejected. Iryŏp contends that love exists, even in the worst possible situations, as in hell, but that it cannot manifest itself in such hellish situations.

For Iryŏp, all human beings have the capacity for love. Love is the original energy that makes possible the existence of a being. As her concept of love evolves from the erotic love of a couple to the quality pervading our existence, the scope of beings that she sees as possessing this capacity for love also expands from human to sentient nonhuman life forms, and later to insentient beings. Erotic love is one manifestation of love. When we understand the manifestation in only a fragmentary manner and fail to see the boundless energy that is its source, the manifested love causes pain and suffering. Since love is the material for all existence, for Iryŏp, to awaken to the nature of love is to recover our humanity. Iryŏp identifies the Buddha as the exemplary individual who accomplished this goal of humanity. She therefore declares: "Attaining buddhahood means attaining humanhood."[52] As her concept of love expands from the erotic and romantic love of two individuals to the life energy that constitutes the foundation of all forms of existence, her worldview evolves accordingly from a perspective of a social activist to that of a religious practitioner.

LOVE TO DIE: YUN SIMDŎK AND NA HYESŎK

To love and to die are two opposite ideas in our lives. We pursue love at all costs and try to avoid death by any means. Love and death, however, may not be totally separate events in life. For some people, the ironic coupling of love and death is more visible and dramatic than it is for others. Iryŏp narrated two love stories that ended with tragic death: the stories of her old friends Na Hyesŏk and Yun Simdŏk. Na Hyesŏk led a stressful life in her later years, due to financial and emotional devastation after her divorce. Yun Simdŏk (尹心悳, 1897–1926), a soprano singer and actress, committed suicide along with her lover, a rich, married man and actor named Kim Ujin (金祐鎭, 1897–1926). She was only thirty-nine.

Iryŏp's reasons for telling the story of these two women had less to do with what had happened in their lives than with how they had reacted to their situations and what had motivated those reactions. Iryŏp neither approved nor disapproved of Na's affair with Ch'oe Rin. Instead, Iryŏp regretted that Na had failed to realize her full capacity as a human being. Iryŏp reasoned that if she could have collected herself and become aware that, as a human being, she was equipped with an infinite capacity to develop herself, Na should have been able to survive even the very desperate situation she faced after her divorce. With respect to the double suicide of Yun and her lover, Iryŏp admitted that, if its purpose had in fact been to make their love eternal as Yun had wished, such a death should also be meaningful. But Iryŏp was not convinced that Yun's death could have immortalized her love, despite her wish to do so. Yun's most popular song was "Celebration of Death" (Sa ŭa ch'an me 死의 讚美). According to the lyrics, "If life is like aimless running in an open field, then what kind of meaning or value can life have?" The skepticism pervading the song made Iryŏp wonder whether her friend's death had indeed been a hopeful act to pursue eternal love—a love transcending human mortality.

With Na Hyesŏk and Yun Simdŏk, Iryŏp had shared her ideas on women's liberation at a young age. Reflecting on their lives and her own relationship with Paek, Iryŏp concluded that if women are to attain freedom, they must first be aware of the nature of existence and the nature of the self. The New Women regarded love as an expression of their freedom and as a challenge to the traditional patriarchal society. But Iryŏp believed that if women were unaware of the true nature of the self and of the love, love would consume rather than liberate them.[53]

Iryŏp also tells us stories of two other women named Chang Aeryŏn and Yi Hyangsil, who are most likely fictional figures. In these anecdotes, their male

partners deceive, cruelly humiliate, and eventually desert them. Iryŏp offers these accounts not only as stories of particular individuals, but as stories that are similar to those of many Korean women at the time, when male unfaithfulness was an epidemic practice in Korean society. As a New Woman in the 1920s, Iryŏp reacted to the centuries-old practice of male infidelity in Korean society by proposing a New Theory of Chastity. In it, Iryŏp suggested that women should be aware of the reality of gender discrimination and its concrete reality in the ubiquitous phenomenon of men's sexual betrayal; in reaction to this awareness, Iryŏp proposed that women should claim sexual freedom for themselves. Four decades later, as a renowned Zen master, Iryŏp did not forget the despair and tragedy male sexual violence had caused in women's lives. In *In Between Happiness and Misfortune,* Iryŏp offers different advice: that women should find their selves and maintain them. In this paradigm, sexual freedom is a part of women realizing their independence and activating the infinite capacity of the self as a human being; however, if a woman fails to find her self, she will be consumed by love that was the basis for the claim of sexual freedom. For Iryŏp, Na and Yun were examples of lives being consumed by love, whereas Chang Aeryŏn and Yi Hyangsil maintained their independence.

How, then, should a woman find her self and sustain it as an independent being? In both stories, Chang Aeryŏn and Yi Hyangsil encounter Buddhism and eventually join a monastery. Iryŏp described how Chang Aeryŏn finds a new life through Buddhism after her failed suicide attempt leads her to join a monastery. In doing so, Iryŏp cautioned the reader that Aeryŏn's tonsure is not just an example of a woman with a tragic past hiding in a monastery; instead, her tonsure means a "rebirth," a new beginning. Iryŏp added that many women experience situations similar to Aeryŏn's, even though the details might vary.[54] In this manner, Iryŏp had already responded to the questions and criticism raised by future generations regarding her position on women's liberation. Life is not a one-way path. Different individuals live different lives, and different situations encountered within different stages enable us to consider life in diverse ways. We make new contributions to the causes that are dear to us, and for Iryŏp, the women's movement was not an exception for this. Some people explicitly write about women's liberation, as Iryŏp did as a New Woman in the 1920s, while others participate in street demonstrations, and still others make their contributions by living full lives.

Was Iryŏp suggesting that Buddhist teachings and joining a monastery were the only answers to the problems that her female contemporaries experienced in patriarchal Korean society? I would contend that Iryŏp's vision was broader than that, even though Iryŏp seemed to believe that Buddhist

practice would be one of the best ways to accomplish the goal for women to find their true selves. It is true that, at times, Iryŏp's attitude toward Buddhism was contradictory: on the one hand, she maintained a radical Zen attitude regarding the lack of a need for an idol called God or the Buddha in realizing one's self; at other times, she claimed that Buddhism was "the" only solution.[55] I would not dismiss this conflict in Iryŏp's thinking, but would leave the contradiction as it is. Instead, I would like to focus on what I consider the final word that Iryŏp has left us with in *In Between Happiness and Misfortune:* life (*saengmyŏng* 生命). I would turn to that topic as a way to respond to Iryŏp's critics and examine the final stage in the evolution of Kim Iryŏp's philosophy.

AT THE END OF THE JOURNEY

"Life" is the title of the preface to *In Between Happiness and Misfortune*. At the beginning of the preface, Iryŏp writes:

> The original life is the life before we feel it as life.
> Life is activities.
> And the activities of life are thoughts.
> Thoughts further raise diverse stunning thoughts. Since life is the source of thoughts and of all the things in the world, those who have life can realize without exception all the things they can think of.[56]

It is noteworthy that, as Iryŏp made her journey from socially engaged intellectual to religious thinker and practitioner, the main concerns in her thoughts also changed. As a New Woman, the social dimensions of life occupied her thoughts. As a religious practitioner, Iryŏp began to pay attention to the meaning of human existence (*insaeng* 人生). At the final stage of her life, Iryŏp's thoughts traveled deeper into a being's existential reality and focused on the life energy that pervades everything that exists in the world.

Iryŏp attributes her idea of "life energy" to the teaching of Man'gong.[57] She says that her teacher Man'gong saw that people in his time existed like fragmented parts of a machine and failed to connect with other beings. A fragmented being fosters fragmented thoughts and, as a result, deters the development of cognitive and affective capacities. Underdeveloped cognition leads the subject to hold biased viewpoints, since the subjective perspective limits the subject's vision. A deformed affective capacity hinders the subject from feel-

ing compassion with others, because his or her emotive world centers on his or her own feelings and emotions without considering those of others. Evaluating this phenomenon as the dominance of a mechanical mindset over life, Man'gong called for the "recovery of the total life energy" if human beings wished to lead humane lives.

Buddhism tells us that the consequence of such a life is *duḥkha*, suffering or unsatisfactoriness (*ko* 苦), which Iryŏp repeatedly discusses in *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*. Since the subject's vision is limited to subjective perspectives, the subject feels a lack or is unsatisfied with his or her experiences with others and the world. Fragmentation inevitably creates gaps between the subject and the world. Without somehow resolving the problem caused by this gap, the subject is doomed to continue to experience suffering and unsatisfactoriness in life. Two opposite directions have been practiced in dealing with this gap. The first is to try to bring the world into the subject's domain, which is the basis of a totalitarian world. The second is to recognize the mutual indebtedness between the subject and the world and thus create connections that are beneficial to both.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961), a French philosopher, described his proposal for handling this gap through the idea of "chiasm," like the letter "X" (which in Greek is read "chi"). Merleau-Ponty contended that the subject's relationship with the world is not like two vertically parallel lines in which the subject and the object exist in separation;[58] nor is it like two horizontal lines in which either one—be it the subject or the world—dominates the other. Instead, Merleau-Ponty took the relationship as two crossing lines, like "X," in which the subject and the world (or others) have to meet each other and their roles are always reversible.

Merleau-Ponty explained our experience of perception by using this relation of crossing. In a commonsense world, a person might say, "I am looking at a tree." But Merleau-Ponty tells us that, in fact, our perception of a tree also requires a reverse perception, which is the tree's perception of the person. Does a tree have sense organs to see this person, or does it have consciousness to perceive and recognize him or her? These are legitimate responses to Merleau-Ponty's proposal, but his philosophy of perception points us to the experiential dimension beyond its literal meaning. Think about Merleau-Ponty's example of your right hand touching your left hand. Which one is touching and which is being touched? The right hand is touching the left hand while also being touched by it; the same is the case with the left hand.[59] When I see a tree, I am seeing the tree, but I am also being seen by the tree, if I pursue an authentic understanding of the tree. In this case, I am both the subject (who sees the

tree) and the object (that is being seen by the tree). My perception is not possible without engaging with others, the objects of my perception.

Classical Indian Buddhism explains this process of the interaction between the subject and the object through the notion of the eighteen elements or *dhātu* (kye 界). The eighteen *dhātu* consist of the following: (1) the six sense organs—eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind; (2) the six corresponding sense objects—forms, sounds, smells, tastes, textures, and mental objects; and (3) the results of the contacts between them—eye (visual) consciousness, ear (auditory) consciousness, nose (olfactory) consciousness, tongue (gustatory) consciousness, body (tactile) consciousness, and mind (mental) consciousness. Note that the Buddhist tradition includes "the mind" (*manodhātu*) in the same category with the other five sense organs instead of separating the mind and body into two different dimensions of our existence. An important point to note here is that these elements work in cooperation, and none of them can function in isolation; this means that we cannot separate the subjective sides—the six sense organs—from their objects. The phenomenon of "seeing," or visibility, for example, happens through the function of the eye organs in their meeting the objects of vision, which results in visual consciousness. In this manner, as Akira Hirakawa, a Japanese scholar of Indian Buddhism, notes, the eighteen-*dhātu* theory demonstrates the "conditioned" reality of existence: "Dependent origination . . . is identical with *dhātu*."[60]

Here we notice the vision shared by Merleau-Ponty and Buddhist practitioners in their understanding of the subject-object relationship.[61] We need to make a distinction, however, between Merleau-Ponty's chiasmic reversibility in his phenomenological understanding of perception and the Buddhist idea of dependent origination and *dhātu*, even though both concepts share the idea of the mutual commitment of the subject and the object in the understanding of the subject, the world, and others. Merleau-Ponty's position is to debunk the modernist subjective idealism in which the subject constitutes the world and in which objects take meaning only through the subject's construction. As a critic of subjectivist philosophy, Merleau-Ponty declares, "The tree sees me as much as I see the tree." However, Merleau-Ponty does not challenge the material construction of the tree itself. As a phenomenologist, he is interested in understanding the way that we perceive the world, and he claims that we perceive the world through chiasmic intertwining of the subject and the object, not through a one-way path that travels from subject to object. Buddhists are interested in more than perceptual fields. They understand that the intertwining of the subject and the object in the perceptual field is the way we exist and the way our existence is constructed. A well-known Viet-

namese Buddhist activist, Thich Nhat Hanh, demonstrates this difference well in the opening statement of his commentary on the *Heart Sutra*:

> If you are a poet, you will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper. Without a cloud, there will be no rain; without rain, the trees cannot grow; and without trees, we cannot make paper. The cloud is essential for the paper to exist. If the cloud is not here, the sheet of paper cannot be here either. So we can say that the cloud and the paper inter-are. "Inter-being" is a word that is not in the dictionary yet, but if we combine the prefix "inter-" with the verb "to be," we have a new verb, inter-be. Without a cloud, we cannot have paper, so we can say that the cloud and the sheet of paper inter-are.[62]

The interconnectedness between "me" and a tree in this case is not limited to my perception. For Thich Nhat Hanh, it is an ontological and existential reality of my existence. I do not have a certain element that can claim to be an essence of me, and neither does the tree or anything else in the world. As Thich Nhat Hanh says,

> If we look into this sheet of paper even more deeply, we can see the sunshine in it. If the sunshine is not there, the forest cannot grow. In fact, nothing can grow. Even we cannot grow without sunshine. And so, we know that the sunshine is also in this sheet of paper. The paper and the sunshine inter-are. And if we continue to look, we can see the logger who cut the tree and brought it to the mill to be transformed into paper. And we see the wheat. We know the logger cannot exist without his daily bread, and therefore the wheat that became his bread is also in this sheet of paper. And the logger's father and mother are in it too. When we look in this way, we see that without all of these things, this sheet of paper cannot exist.[63]

The idea of intertwining and inter-being that Thich Nhat Hanh introduced here is also well-articulated in the Huayan Buddhist symbol of Indra's Net, a symbolic description of the Huayan understanding of the individual's identity and its relation to others. Dushun (杜順, 557–640), the retroactively assigned first patriarch of Chinese Huayan Buddhism, explained Indra's Net as follows:

> The celestial jewel net of . . . Indra, Emperor of Gods, is called the net of Indra. This imperial net is made all of jewels: because the jewels are clear, they reflect each other's images, appearing in each other's reflections upon

> reflections, ad infinitum, all appearing at once in one jewel. . . . Now for the moment let us turn to the southwest direction and pick a jewel and check it. This jewel can show the reflections of all the jewels all at once—and just as this is so of this jewel, so it is of every other jewel: the reflection is multiplied and remultiplied over and over endlessly. These infinitely multiplying jewel reflections are all in one jewel and show clearly—the others do not hinder this. . . . Since in one jewel you go into all the jewels without leaving this one jewel, so in all jewels you enter one jewel without leaving this one jewel.[64]

Huayan Buddhism envisions individuals as analogous to each jewel in Indra's Net, in which each jewel exists as an independent entity, but its identity, in fact, is constituted of the combination of all the jewels in the net. Thich Nhat Hanh explains this through the notion of inter-being, and Iryŏp's expression for this is the "one." This one is empty (*kong* 空) and is also called "life" or "life-energy."

The second half of Iryŏp's *In Between Happiness and Misfortune* presents her reflections on the self, the one, emptiness, and life. The Buddhist notion of emptiness is significantly different from the one we use in daily communication. When a cup is half filled with water, we say that the cup is half empty. In this case, being empty means lacking water. Buddhism, on the other hand, says the cup is empty in the sense that the cup lacks or is empty of its own independent essence. If it does not have its own cup-ness, though, how does it exist? It exists through an orchestrated work of different elements that make contributions to the existence of the cup: hence, the cup is empty. By the same token, water is empty, and the self is empty too. Emptiness refers to the nonsubstantial reality of the world and being. Since beings exist through conditioned reality rather than through their own independent essence, beings are empty. Iryŏp says that emptiness is "the internal essence of all the things in the world; it is the original body of life-spirit, the great resting place for the soul, the 'I' that makes my thoughts possible, and the creator of the universe."[65] As Thich Nhat Hanh explains, following the Zen Buddhist tradition, emptiness is fullness, since a lack of independent essence means the fullness of everything else. The idea of emptiness as existential reality led Iryŏp to realize that existence is movement, or fluctuation and that this fluctuation is the basis of our "life." Life is one, in the sense that there is no division, and to realize this oneness of our existence is to realize our "great-I" as opposed to the fragmented self, which Iryŏp called the "small-I."

Iryŏp did not explicitly develop an ethical theory in her writings. However, it is not difficult to find ethical dimensions within Iryŏp's Buddhism. As

a New Woman, she pointed out that social morality was immoral when moral codes were based on a double standard between the different genders. Iryŏp's Buddhist philosophy of oneness and emptiness proposes an ethics of togetherness. The principle of oneness does not change whether one is a male or a female, human or nonhuman, or sentient or insentient. For Iryŏp, to realize this belonging-togetherness of existence, to borrow a Heideggerian term, is the beginning point of authentic existence. This realization leads us away from the small-I to the great-I.

This act of recovering the great-I has a communal dimension. Being enslaved by the small-self, individuals continue to suffer and experience unsatisfactoriness in life. The great-self, that is liberated from a fragmented understanding of existence, empowers a being to lead a creative life. For Iryŏp, one exemplary figure who lived such a life was the Buddha. Liberation, however, is not an event that affects only an individual's life. A single jewel in Indra's Net reflects all the other jewels in the net. One liberated jewel will be reflected in all other jewels, like the light coming out of the Buddha's forehead in the *Lotus Sutra.* As a New Woman, Iryŏp emphasized the New Women's responsibility to awaken those who were not aware of the gender problem in society. She was also adamant about women's responsibility in bringing about social change to deal with gender discrimination. In her Buddhist phase, Iryŏp expanded the scope of this responsibility to the existential realm, reminding us that the foremost and fundamental duty of a human being is to be responsible for its existence. For Iryŏp, taking this responsibility means that we should be awakened to the nature of our existence, the oneness of life, and emptiness. Failure to do so will have impacts on both us and others:

> Human beings are the universe itself. Humans are pieces of the universe. Human responsibilities are what we humans have already attained. The word "responsibility" fits its meaning very well. But the idea of responsibility has become common, worn out, and coarse. People just let it float around and are not aware of how precious it is. People do not know that they are false or that they are leading fake lives; they are not even aware that they have lost their selves. Since they do not know that they have lost their selves, they do not try to recover what has been lost.[66]

How should this responsibility be exercised? Would the liberation from the small-self be possible without social change? Social theory was not a strong point in Iryŏp's Buddhism, and as we visit the issue of the responsibility of being human beings, the question of Buddhism and its social role comes back into play.

On her seventy-fifth birthday, Iryŏp composed a poem. That was less than a year before her death. The poem is titled "Today Does Not Repeat in This Life" (Ilsaeng pul jaerae kŭmil 一生不再來今日).

> Today does not repeat in this life;
> This body is difficult to obtain even in the period of eternal eons of time;
> Since birth, through dangerous paths, I have reached this mountain;
> Today I suddenly forget the worries of the past.[67]

With this poem, Iryŏp's reconciliation was complete. Iryŏp never claimed that she had attained enlightenment, but she did say that she had reached a certain level in her spiritual cultivation. And the declaration in this poem adequately describes Iryŏp's state of the mind at the final stage in her life: she was a free being.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A Life Lived
Women and Buddhist Philosophy

Writing, Buddhist Practice, and the Production of Meaning

Why did Kim Iryŏp suddenly feel it necessary to break more than two decades of silence and resume publishing her writings? This question has been one of the most frequently asked questions about Iryŏp's life, together with her reason for converting to Buddhism and her position on women's movements after she became a Buddhist nun. The answer to this question, however, was already indicated in her early publications. In her 1935 essay "Practicing Buddhism," Iryŏp was clear about her determination to follow her teacher's advice that she should not read or write. She was also clear about what it meant to her and why she had the determination to carry out the discipline of no writing and no reading. In "Practicing Buddhism," Iryŏp wrote:

> The greatest writers like Tolstoy or Goethe must have achieved the great awakening my teacher mentioned; I believe that truly great art is possible only when one has attained a clear idea about the meaning of life. A work written without having already awakened to the meaning of life will disappear like morning dew. . . . If I wish to be a great writer, I believe that I should learn all about life and about the universe, and only then should I begin to write again. Looking back, I am ashamed of all the writings that I have done in the past. Only shame overwhelms me.[1]

Iryŏp declared that she would stop writing, but her desire for writing did not die out, nor did she intend to completely give writing up. Her disciple Wŏlsong remembered that Iryŏp had written in the darkness of the night on any available blank piece of paper.[2]

Her interview with the journal *Opening of the World* (Kyebyŏk) offers us another occasion to see Iryŏp's attitude about writing. Asked whether she was still doing her writing at the monastery, Iryŏp responded that she should not try to write when she was not fully ready for it. The reporter further asked whether she intended to open up a new horizon in her writing when her practice became mature, and Iryŏp replied, "Yes, like Śākyamuni Buddha. . . ."[3]

Iryŏp came back to the world of letters in the 1960s and wrote productively until her death in 1971. She also explicitly declared that she became a Buddhist nun to find sources for her writing so that she could write more appealing works.[4] She identified the Buddha as a great writer who attained awakening.

In "Buddhism and Culture," Iryŏp was critical of writers and artists in her time. To her, real art meant art that was created with creativity. There might not be anything new in thinking about creativity as a source of inspiration for a writer or an artist, but as discussed in the previous chapter, creativity for Iryŏp means more than the usual concept of creativity as an imaginative engagement with the world. Iryŏp identified creativity as the source of existence; it contains activities of life force and engagement with life energy. When a work of art is created with creativity, whether it be a painting, a sculpture, or a text, it reveals "life," existence itself. The concrete reality of life force or creativity, for Iryŏp, was culture.

Iryŏp lamented that the artists in her time were not aware of this spiritual dimension of a work of art, saying, "People in our time are unaware of the real meaning of culture and try to learn to think through the manipulation of material objects. By so doing, they fail to produce a work of art that is alive. . . . People claim to be persons of culture when they do not know that to be a master in the arts means to be one with the universe."[5] Iryŏp gave an ultimatum to those who wished to be great writers: "For a creative writer, the most effective creativity is not one hundred years' thinking about the structure of one's writing or a thousand years of writing practice; it is a one-minute experience of no-thought."[6]

Writing is a meaning-giving act. Out of seemingly unrelated events in life, writers create narratives, arranging life events into a plausible meaning structure. Without insights that transcend the commonsense understanding of daily existence, it would be difficult for a writer to see beyond the taken-for-granted attitude of ordinary life. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Viktor Shklovsky (1893–1984), a Russian literary critic, described the transformation that takes place in a work of art as "defamiliarization": "The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged."[7]

According to Shklovsky, defamiliarization enables people to "recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony."[8] Shklovsky's idea of defamiliarization might seem to be underlining the "tech-

nical" aspect of literary language, but that is a deceptive aspect of Russian formalist literary theory, to which he belongs. We will not go into the political dimensions of Russian formalist literary theory, but it should suffice to say that the expression "technical" aims to challenge any attempt to employ literature for political propaganda.

Zen Buddhist tradition was especially sensitive to the transformative power of linguistic expressions. The *gongan* practice and *hwadu* meditation in Korean Buddhist tradition underscore the importance of defamiliarization in our meaning-giving activities. For Zen Buddhists, the experience of defamiliarization has a spiritual goal.[9] Meaning-searching activities are mostly buried in our familiarized and habituated daily existence. Edmund Husserl, a twentieth-century German phenomenologist, called this everyday attitude before critical questioning the "natural attitude" (*die natürliche Einstellung*). This is related to Iryŏp's belief that a writer is the one who challenges the habit of the mind, which becomes possible through the "experience of no-thought" or that of "one with the universe."

In our daily lives, we take for granted the existence of the external objects we encounter, saying, here is our house, here is a tree in front of the house, here is a car, and here are people who pass by every day. We assume that we understand those objects, but, if we pause and think about their meanings, complexity arises. Who/what are they, and what does it mean that they exist? Does our understanding of them correctly capture who/what they are? Once our minds stumble and begin to question the nature of external objects, at a certain point, the questions change direction, and we ourselves as much as the objects outside of us become the subject of the inquiry. Who/what are we? What does it mean that we exist? Iryŏp's Buddhist philosophy is built on her questions regarding "I." What does it mean that I am "I"? What does it entail? How does it relate itself to those that are non-I?

The naïve acceptance of the world (natural attitude) at this point faces challenges. Once we follow our questioning minds, we are forced to restart our understanding of external objects and ourselves. Husserl called this reflective approach the "philosophical attitude," contrasting it with a naïve acceptance of the world. This questioning that takes place in an individual with the philosophical attitude is not a nihilistic doubt about life, but an inquiry into its true meaning, which is yet clear to us.

As a way to understand experience beyond the natural attitude, Husserl proposed a method known as "epochē," or bracketing. In this method, we put our immediate understanding of the object in parentheses and pause to understand experience through "nonpositioning." Our experience of external

objects and also of ourselves is mostly the result of reinterpretation through our individual preferences. Husserl's phenomenological bracketing asks us to put in parentheses our taken-for-granted attitude that became habitual through the daily routine. In that sense, bracketing is reminiscent of the Zen Buddhist idea of "no" in "no-thought."[10]

Bracketing requires the subject to put in parentheses a "subjective" position so that the subject meets the object through nonpositioning. We might think that it is not difficult to imagine us exercising a nonposition and understanding others objectively. This easy solution, however, is not what Zen Buddhism aims at in emphasizing "awakening" to the reality of existence. As Iryŏp said, emphasizing only the goodness of the Buddha, while excluding evil or promoting only the heaven without considering hell, is a biased view, since neither one of a pair of binary opposites can exist without the other.

Experience is not a fixed, static entity. As events unfold in our daily existence, the object of our experience changes. How does this bracketing function in a series of changing experiences in our daily existence? Another phenomenologist, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, criticized Husserl's distinctive separation of the natural attitude and the philosophical attitude, asserting that they coexist.[11] In Merleau-Ponty's view, phenomenological bracketing risks two dangers: first, of distorting experience by freezing it; second, of creating a transcendental world separated from reality.

Let us admit these risks. However, if we abstain from bracketing, we lose a glimpse of reality; we allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by the habituated experience, which is in turn manipulated by our individual preferences and self-centered worldview. Merleau-Ponty thus proposes that the habitual naturalistic world and the experience of the world enabled by phenomenological bracketing coexist. Buddhism explains this coexistence with the idea of two levels of truth: the ultimate level and the conventional level. As we encounter reality, we constantly project subjective views. But our personal views should be mediated by an awakened view of the world that constantly readjusts how we understand life and objects and ourselves.

Writing is a bridge between experience in the bracketed state and that of daily life. Writing emerges from the understanding of null-perspective views of existence and brings them back to the individual's meaning-giving activity. I began this chapter by asking why Iryŏp had decided to resume her writing and to publish her works after over two decades of silence. My answer was that she had already responded to that question by her determination to be a good writer. But now, I repeat it: Why indeed did she publish her books, and why did she write her books the way she did?

By 1960, Iryŏp was a well-known and influential Zen master. We cannot suggest that writing a book to teach Buddhism was inappropriate at that stage. But why did she choose to write about Buddhism by revealing details of her life, including her revolt against her father's Christianity, the deaths of her family members and the loneliness from which she suffered, and her intimate relationships with her former romantic partners? In the preface to *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun,* Iryŏp explained that she was mixing her life story with Buddhist teachings because most people in her time are uninterested in religion or serious matters. To attract their attention, she was offering a *bibimbap,* or "rice-bowl with mixed vegetables." Was this the only reason for revisiting her life? We may find diverse layers of meaning in the act of narrative in Iryŏp's life and philosophy in particular and, more broadly, in the way we connect our lived experience with the meaning-giving act of philosophy.

Experience and Narrative Identity: The Logic of Exclusion

Every day, we live our life: we rise, shower, have a cup of coffee, share breakfast with loved ones, go to work, and so on. A sequence of activities, usually familiar ones, constitutes our daily existence. We have repeated them many times since first learning them. In these often-repeated activities, how do we find meaning? Or, rather, how is meaning constructed? How do we distinguish between those actions which have or should have a meaning in our existence, and those which deserve to be forgotten and so may be ignored and disposed of? Can meaning arise from a single action, or only from a series of actions? How do actions hang together to create meaning? What is the glue that makes separate actions stick together so that they can emerge as different units of meaning in our life?

In her biographical writing on Hannah Arendt (1906–1975), Julia Kristeva asserts: "We must tell the story of our life . . . before we can ascribe meaning to it."[12] We tend to think that meaning exists before we create it through our actions or linguistic expressions. We assume that a story is a tool to deliver the meaning or message we wish to send. But meaning is not a fixed entity that we can carry like cargo. If it were—if it could be transported like a trunk on a train from an event to the subject experiencing that event—it would not matter whether we took the subject's position in understanding others or tried to understand others through an objective, balanced, and nonpositioning perspective. The fixed meaning would be out there, imperturbable, immune to the subject's bias even when the subject fails to fully grasp that self-subsisting meaning. In that case, we could soon discover our error; the lapse would be

only epistemological. But meaning is not a fixed entity available to the inspection of any conscientious observer. It is produced through the interaction of the subject and the event. How we approach an event and how we experience it are what phenomenologists like Husserl or Merleau-Ponty or a Buddhist like Kim Iryŏp investigate. Struggling to make sense of her existence in the final stage of her life, Iryŏp maximized her capacity as a writer, thus making of her writing an ultimate meaning-giving act, an act of reconciliation, and even of meditation.

Explaining the genesis of his philosophy of "deconstruction," Jacques Derrida said that he had needed to create a philosophical structure in order to make sense of experience in his life. At the center of this experience was something that happened in 1942 when he was twelve years old. Derrida was an Algerian-born French Jew living in Algiers. One day, a school official called him to his office and said, "You are going to go home, my little friend, your parents will get a note."[13] This was how Derrida was expelled from his school, with no explanation. He had yet to understand what anti-Semitism meant. Reflecting upon the incident, Derrida asked: "At the moment I understood nothing, but since?"[14] Failing to grasp the reality of anti-Semitism as an eleven-year-old boy is a simple lack of knowledge that can be easily remedied. To make sense of a system that allowed anti-Semitism, however, meant confronting the entire history of Western philosophy: "1942 for me denotes a fracture or a trauma. An unconscious sedimentation formed, hardened in me at that time, but also, no less unconsciously, an intellectual determination." The fracture, or trauma, inflicted by the simple act of being expelled from school showed Derrida the abyss that lay behind it. After being expelled, he was sent to a Jewish lyceum, which he did not like. He skipped school for a year. Remembering the incident, Derrida said, "to really do something more than just tell stories about what went on at that time, it would be necessary to find new categories."[15]

The new categories that he developed to explain the trauma of his exclusion and sense of alienation from his own culture became seminal aspects of his philosophy. At the center of this search for new categories was the problem of identity. Those who expelled the twelve-year-old "Jackie" were not Germans occupying French territory, but the French, people of his own country. Considering the issue of language in light of this alienation, Derrida said: "French is the only mother tongue I have, but while still a child I had a vague sensation that this language was not really my own."[16] That was because, as he explained, proper French was not merely the French spoken in France as a whole (as op-

posed to the French spoken in Algeria), but the French spoken in Paris. Proper French was the language of the center.

Derrida's experience of exclusion is a paradigmatic example that the identity we advocate as our own is, in fact, a moveable one. As much as our identity is moveable, it is subject to the control of the power structure in our society that decides the legitimacy of the categories through which meaning and values occur in our life. Just as the young Derrida was expelled from school based on the norms of a society that supported anti-Semitism, the New Women in Korea were expelled from a society that supported the patriarchal system. Their language to claim women's liberation was treated as an inappropriate way of addressing their ideas, and their discourse for sexual freedom was condemned as unruly and licentious. In Iryŏp's case, this visible societal discrimination was combined with the betrayal of her colleagues, the intellectuals who supported the idea of women's liberation in theory, but who ridiculed the New Women as they lived the idea in their lives. The problem of exclusion reached an even higher level as Iryŏp's concerns deepened beyond the societal level to predicaments of human existence. Death, after all, is an extreme form of exclusion: exclusion from life.

The logic of exclusion is based on the identity principle, and identity, in this case, is not limited to self-identity; instead, it includes ethnic identity, gender identity, sexual orientation, nationality, or even life itself. If my country expels me, or my society tells me that the language I speak is not a proper way of speaking it, how should I respond? A common reaction is to blame oneself: I would think this condemnation is my fault and try to teach myself appropriate behaviors and proper language skills so that I could fit the norms of society. Evaluations of actions, based on the identity principle, lead us to a binary postulation of right and wrong. Derrida's deconstruction introduced new categories that challenged the notion of the identity principle by rigorously demonstrating that the two sides of binary opposites are—always—already interconnected. A center is a center because of its margins. To make his point, Derrida stated: "The outside is the inside," with the verb "is" crossed out.[17] Not only are the "inside" (or those who are at the center, with privilege) and the "outside" (those who are expelled based on the rules of the inside) mutually dependent, their existence is moveable, and they cannot be stabilized with the verb "to be." Inside is, but also is not, since inside is outside, in the sense that there is no inside without outside and vice versa.

Buddhist philosophy has employed this logic of both "is" and "is not" in various formats throughout the evolution of the tradition. They range from

Nāgārjuna's tetralemma, or four-cornered logic,[18] to the logic of the *Diamond Sutra,* which Shigenori Nagatomo, a scholar of Buddhist philosophy, identified as "A is not A, therefore it is A."[19] We could also once again refer to Huineng's statement that "Darkness is not darkness by itself; because there is light there is darkness. Darkness is not darkness by itself; with light darkness changes, and with darkness light is revealed. Each mutually causes the other."[20]

As members of a community, we try to convince ourselves that there exists a correct way to behave so that we will not be expelled again. There should be a right way of speaking our language; therefore, we learn by heart the language of the center, whether that center is Paris, Seoul, or Washington, D.C. Where does the power of the center come from? Who or what legitimatizes who expels whom? Which language should be the language of the center? In the well-known article "Can the Subaltern Speak?," Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a scholar of comparative literature and postcolonialism, asked whether postcolonial subjects can, in fact, create their own worlds that are free from the colonialist culture once they are liberated from the colonizer. The reconstruction of society in the postcolonial period is mostly accomplished through assimilation to the colonizer's culture; thus, colonialism continues in postcolonial history. Spivak ended this essay with the statement: "Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly affected. . . . If in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow."[21]

Just as colonial reality and gender discrimination doubly marginalized a subaltern woman, so did the political reality of Korea intensify the marginalization of Iryŏp and the New Women. In twentieth-century postcolonial Korea, modernization and economic development were the core agenda for nation-building. Seungsook Moon, a sociologist, discussed in her book *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea* how modern Korean nation-building generated a gendered approach to citizenship that was based on the "disciplinary" nature of citizenship.[22] Due to the ideology of nation-building, the women's issues that the New Women fought to address during the earlier part of the twentieth century did not have room in the national and academic discourse of Korea.

The postcolonial subjects speak, but their languages are already charged with the colonizer's culture; women speak, but their languages are charged with the norms and values of the patriarchal system. Creating new categories, as Derrida declared, is nothing other than creating a new language—a new writ-

ing style and new logic. For Derrida, creating new categories to make sense of his experience—the experiences of exclusion and of speaking from the margin—did not indicate that he could completely eliminate the languages and categories of the center that allowed this exclusion. For Derrida, metaphysics is a philosophy that is based on the identity principle that allowed the exclusion of the marginalized. No matter how problematic a metaphysical thinking is, it cannot be completely erased, since the language that we utilize in our attempts to erase metaphysics is already colored by values supported by metaphysics. Derrida's strategy was to use the existing languages and categories against themselves. Through a close analysis of philosophical or literary texts, Derrida demonstrated how a text always contained self-contradiction in claiming coherent ideas. Self-contradiction in a philosophical text does not indicate that the text has errors or that the arguments in the text are not mature enough. Contradictions are an inevitable reality when we express our ideas through language. Derrida's point was not that we should remove contradictions and create more coherent claims; instead, by pointing out intrinsic contradictions in an argument, Derrida demonstrated the provisional nature of a coherent thought system. As Iryŏp claimed—along with the Kyoto School thinkers, including Tanabe and Nishida—contradiction is the principle of the universe as much as of identity. That the inside is dependent on the outside indicates a contradictory identity of the inside, since the inside is the outside. This contradiction does not negate that the inside is the inside, but it does indicate that the inside is only provisionally the inside. Textual analysis, which constitutes a fundamental mode of Derridean philosophizing, is a claim that philosophy cannot be done in an abstract format without engaging the context in which an event takes place. For Derrida, the "text" is not limited to a philosophical text; it includes any written materials. At the ultimate level, the world is the text.

For Iryŏp, the text was her life story. The storytelling that dominates her three books is her way of demonstrating that our philosophy is inevitably embedded within our experiences. Iryŏp's autobiographical writing in her three books tells us a specific way through which Iryŏp sought and conveyed the meaning of her existence. Writing an autobiography is an attempt to humanize life events by restoring them to the contexts in which they occurred. By restoring the narrative to the context of a person's life, which even the person herself might not have been able to see clearly at the time of the events' occurrence, autobiographical writings highlight our engagement with life through our philosophizing.

Women and Buddhist Philosophy

Women, Buddhism, and philosophy—what do they have in common? Scholarship on the images and treatment of women in the Buddhist tradition has produced a sizable number of publications since the late 1980s, offering both critical and constructive discussions on the issue. This book took a direction different from the existing scholarship and explored the ways women engage with Buddhist philosophy. How and why do women engage with Buddhist philosophy? By answering this question, this book aimed to identify the nature of women's Buddhist philosophy, which also marks the limits of male-dominated and Western-centered philosophizing.

The marginalized position of Asian philosophy in Western academia is not a secret. The same applies to women's positions in patriarchal systems both inside and outside of the academic world. When we combine women and Buddhist philosophy, we find a double-minority position. Gender discrimination in company with philosophical discrimination characterizes the reality of women's engagement with Buddhist philosophy in both the academic and personal spheres. Iryŏp's Buddhism demonstrated how a woman could employ Buddhism to argue that patriarchal gender identities are not only ungrounded, but also generate mistaken identities, causing suffering for those who uncritically accept that identity construction.

Iryŏp's approach to Buddhism also directs us to the different dimensions in which women encounter Buddhist philosophy. As a New Woman, Iryŏp lived the claim of gender equality—a claim for which she had to pay a high price. As a Buddhist nun, she also lived the Buddhist philosophy that she wrote and taught. Reflecting on the relationship between Buddhism and feminism in her *Buddhism after Patriarchy,* Rita Gross, a feminist Buddhist scholar, identified an emphasis on lived experience as one important shared aspect of Buddhism and feminism, stating that "both Buddhism and feminism begin with experience, stress experiential understanding . . . , and move from experience to theory, which becomes the expression of experience."[23] The experiential dimension of Iryŏp's philosophy is an aspect that women (in a patriarchal society) and Buddhist philosophy (in academic philosophy dominated by the Western philosophical tradition) share. The priority of lived experience for both women and Buddhist philosophy has an impact on the way in which experience is understood and presented. In this context, narratives and storytelling became Iryŏp's primary modes of philosophizing.

The books Iryŏp published as a Buddhist nun are distinctive from other modern Korean Buddhist writings in that she employed a biographical format

to discuss Buddhist philosophy. Through narrative, she created meanings out of her own eventful life, which contained seemingly contradictory factors. A narrative has limitations if we understand it as a story created by a specific author—a story with a center. However, if we understand that the author is part of the fluctuating narrative, a narrative understanding of life manifests openness to the interpretation of our lived experience.

Over the priority of logic and rationality dominating the modern Western philosophical tradition, women's philosophy and Buddhist philosophy show the potential to create philosophy from lived experience and to philosophize about that experience through narrative. Narrative philosophy, or the philosophy of life, reveals the production of meaning as *experience* rather than a process of molding our life experiences through preconstructed concepts or structures. In this sense, women's philosophy, Buddhist philosophy, and women's Buddhist philosophy all demonstrate the limitations of the dominant philosophical trends that are based on rigid logic and rationality. I have drawn stark contrasts between the Eastern and the Western modes of philosophizing as well as female and male ones and identified narrative and lived experience as opposite to logic and rationality. However, the Western philosophical traditions do not lack philosophers who emphasize that lived experience and narrative are the paths philosophy should follow.[24]

Using lived experience and narrative to convey philosophy inevitably indicates that a biography is significantly related to philosophizing. Allow me once again to refer to Derrida's understanding of philosophy, which he defined as "psychology and biography together, a movement of the living *psychē*, and thus of individual life and the strategy of this life, insofar as it assembles all the philosophemes and all the ruses of truth."[25] Defining philosophy as an offshoot of biography and psychology is not a commonly accepted view in the Western philosophical tradition.[26] However, as Theodore Kisiel, a Heidegger scholar, mentioned in his discussion of Heidegger's view of biography, "Acknowledging one's own hermeneutic situation as the proper matter of philosophy and the proper arena of philosophical concept formation makes a considerable step beyond ordinary unthinking life. It in facts marks a transition into the more intense life of thought."[27]

The exclusion of the philosopher's life story, by contrast, presupposes that the values and truths for which philosophy searches are context-free and thus are not influenced by the contingencies of daily existence. This exclusion is directly related to the power structures in which we do philosophize. I have grouped together women and Buddhist philosophy, as representatives of underprivileged gender and marginalized philosophical traditions. Scholars who

work in these fields have proved that my grouping is not completely idiosyncratic. Mark Siderits, a scholar of Buddhist philosophy, began his book *Buddhism as Philosophy* (2007) by analyzing the discipline of philosophy. Siderits distinguished Buddhist philosophy from religion, stating that Buddhist philosophy is not concerned about "soteriology," "faith," or "theistic reality," and instead focusing on attaining the ultimate goal of liberation through "rational investigation of the nature of the world."[28] Whether Buddhism, even in its philosophical dimension, is not related to soteriology, faith, or theistic reality is debatable. Earlier, we noted Inoue Enryō's claim that both philosophy and religion required faith. I also discussed Tanabe Hajime's claim that philosophy needed to go beyond human rationality. Kim Iryŏp interpreted the traditional theistic being such as God not as a creator, but as a being who fully exercised its creative power. Siderits' effort to present Buddhism as philosophy, ironically, indicates that Buddhism has yet to be fully accepted as a philosophy in the Western philosophical scene. In order to claim that Buddhism is a philosophy, Siderits had to impose on Buddhism the characteristics of the traditional Western philosophical categories.

Jay Garfield's *Engaging Buddhism* (2015) underscores the political and moral dimensions involved in the issue of "Buddhism as philosophy." For Garfield, philosophy's tendency to treat its history as exclusively Western demonstrates an impairment that is "not a merely intellectual disability," but "has a moral dimension" as well. This is because "the Western colonial enterprise, and the racism and blindness to non-Western ideas it enshrines, is as much a part of our intellectual heritage as are Plato, Augustine, and Galileo."[29] Garfield also notes that the tendency to consider Western philosophy as the "default" mode of philosophizing has led us to the habit of adding a "marker" to denote *Asian* philosophy, or *African* philosophy, or *Buddhist* philosophy, whereas "philosophy" indicates *Western* philosophy. The same applies to *women's* philosophy. There is no counterpart expression—"men's philosophy"—since men's philosophy is considered the default.

Doing philosophy without relying on existing philosophical categories and philosophical languages is as impossible as it is desirable, although we are aware of the power imbalances between Western and Eastern and men's and women's philosophy. By claiming that women's and Buddhist philosophy have natures that are distinct from male-dominated Western philosophical tradition and by identifying lived experience, narrative identity, and the philosophy of life as their major characteristics, we are not trying to essentialize these philosophies, nor should we consider that this demarcation is firm or impenetrable. By examining Kim Iryŏp's life and philosophy as a paradigmatic example of women's

philosophy in connection with Buddhism, we brought our attention to the way that women engage with Buddhism and philosophy. It opened discourse regarding different ways to engage with philosophizing that are sensitive to the power structures involved in our modes of thinking and being as well as these modes' institutionalized forms of presentation, which are called philosophy.

Abbreviations

Ch'ŏngch'un	Kim Iryŏp, *Ch'ŏngch'un ŭl pulsarŭgo* 靑春을 불사르고
Haengpok kwa pulhaeng	Kim Iryŏp, *Haengpok kwa pulhaeng ŭi kalp'i esŏ* 幸福과 不幸의 갈피에서
Miraese	Kim Iryŏp, *Miraese ka tahago namdorok* 미래세가 다하고 남도록
Sudoin	Kim Iryŏp, *Ŏnŭ sudoin ŭi hoesang* 어느 修道人의 回想
T	*Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經

Notes

Introduction

This work was supported by the Academy of Korean Studies (KSPS) Grant funded by the Korean Government (MOE) (AKS-2012-AAZ-104).

1. See Jin Y. Park, "Gendered Response to Modernity"; Park, "Translators' Introduction," *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun.*

2. One of the first books in this context is Sharma, *Women in World Religions.* Also valuable is Peach, *Women and World Religions.* These volumes include chapters on the world's major religious traditions. The 1980s, however, was not the first time that women and Buddhism were discussed. As early as 1927, we see literature like Law's *Women in Buddhist Literature.* But it was not until the 1980s that major publications on women and Buddhism appeared. Paul and Wilson's 1985 volume, *Women in Buddhism,* was one of the representative publications in this regard. I believe Rita Gross's *Buddhism after Patriarchy* set a new tone and direction in engaging gender with world's religions including Buddhism, by pointing out the need to "revalorize" traditions instead of merely being critical of patriarchal nature of religious traditions.

3. One exception is Daoism. The Daoist awareness of value paradox rejects a hierarchical understanding of genders and envisions femininity as the source of life. For discussions on Daoism and women, see Despeaux and Kohn, *Women in Daoism,* and Laughlin and Wong, "Feminism and/in Taoism."

4. The emergence of Buddhism in the fifth century BCE was considered a revolutionary turning point for women at the time. The fundamental doctrine of Buddhism declares the nonsubstantiality of the nature of beings. Be it sentient beings, like humans, or insentient beings, like rocks or trees, a being, from the Buddhist perspective, is always a result of the contribution of causes and conditions. Given that a major problem in gender discrimination has its source in the essentialist perspective that attributes to gender an unchanging essence and ascribes a hierarchical position to the seeming essence of different genders, Buddhism's nonsubstantial approach toward the world and being could offer a new vision for gender problems.

The history of Buddhism, however, does not match well with our expectation when it comes to the gender issue. From the earliest records of tradition, Buddhism displayed a noticeable gender discrimination. Examples are ample: The *Jātaka* tales, which contain stories of the Buddha's previous lives, tell us the eight buddha-making

qualifications, and they are not gender-blind. Among the eight is included a gender-specific condition that states one should be *"of the male sex"* to become a buddha (Fausböll, *Buddhist Birth Stories or Jātaka Tales,* 52–53).

The Buddha's reluctance to create a *saṃgha,* or monastic community, for women, is another example of Buddhism's gender discrimination. After the Buddhist community for monks had been created, women practitioners asked the Buddha for an establishment of a monastic order for female practitioners. The Buddha's foster mother and aunt, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, was one of the ardent practitioners and petitioners for the creation of a women's monastic community. The Buddha was recorded as being reluctant to create a nuns' community. The Buddha's disciple, *Ānanda*, made appeals repeatedly to the Buddha on behalf of the female practitioners, and then, the Buddha agreed to do so, but only after creating special rules for women practitioners known as the Eight Chief Rules (*p'algyŏnggye* 八敬戒; Ch. *bā jìngjiè*). According to these rules, a nun (Skt. *bhikṣuṇī;* Pāli *Bhikkhunī; piguni* 比丘尼) should always situate herself in a position lower than a monk (Skt. *bhikṣu;* Pāli *bhikkhu; pigu* 比丘). Regardless of seniority of the nun with regard to the length of practice, a nun is in a position lower than a monk who was just admitted to the monastery that day. Nuns are also required to ask for permission of monks in various aspects of their activities at the monastic community and decision-making. (For the list of eight rules, see Bancroft, "Women in Buddhism," 83–85.)

The Buddha was also recorded to have expressed his disappointment and worries as he opened the door of the Buddhist community to womankind. The record states: "If, Ananda, women had not received permission to go out from the household life and enter the homeless state, under the doctrine and discipline proclaimed by the Tathāgata, then would the pure religion, Ananda, have lasted long, the good law would have stood fast for a thousand years. But since, Ananda, women have now received that permission the pure religion, Ananda, will not last so long, the good law will now stand fast for only five hundred years" (Bancroft, "Women in Buddhism," 82).

What is the justification for this low evaluation of woman in Buddhism? The traditional interpretation of women's conundrum and low position in Buddhism is to make karma accountable for the gender difference. Women had accumulated bad karma in their previous lives and thus deserved a position lower than men. The theory of karma as a justification of Buddhist discrimination of women has its limitation and becomes more problematic as Buddhism develops into Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition. (See discussions on karma in chapter 5.)

A teaching of Mahāyāna Buddhism claims that everybody has the nature to be a buddha, which is called the "Buddha nature." If everybody has the Buddha nature, this should not exclude women's possibility of attaining awakening. Mahāyāna Buddhism seems to have been aware of this problem and thus considers the issue in several scriptures in stories known as a body transformation discourse. This literature asks whether women can attain enlightenment in a female body, and the focal point of the question leads to the nature of the female body. In the *Lotus Sutra,* one of the major texts

in Mahāyāna Buddhism, a dragon king's eight-year-old-daughter is challenged by Śāriputra about the authenticity of her claim that she has attained enlightenment. The sole ground of the challenge lies in the femaleness of her body. Śāriputra states that "the body of a woman is filthy and not a vessel of the Law," making a reference to a seemingly accepted idea in his time that "a woman by her body still has five hindrances." The hindrances included that a woman cannot become a buddha (Katō, *The Threefold Lotus Sutra,* 135).

The authenticity of her awakening being questioned on the grounds of her "female body," the dragon girl changes her body into a male and asks Śāriputra whether he can now accept her awakening. The dragon daughter's performance of changing her body into a male form, however, leaves an ambiguous message: can woman attain awakening in her body, or should she need to change to a male? (See Peach, "Social Responsibility, Sex Change, and Salvation"; Levering, "Is the Lotus Sutra 'Good News' for Women?")

The *Vimalakīrti Sutra,* another well-known Mahāyāna scripture, also contains a story of a female body transformation. In the story, Śāriputra again expresses doubt about the possibility for a woman to attain enlightenment, reminding the goddess that a woman's body is contaminated. Like the dragon girl, the goddess changes her body into a male body upon hearing Śāriputra's doubt; however this time, the goddess also changes him into a female form, demonstrating that this body is not an unchanging essence. (Thurman, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti,* 61–63.) If the *Lotus Sutra* was not clear enough about the issue of whether a woman can attain enlightenment, the *Vimalakīrti Sutra* seems to demonstrate well that gender, and this body that is a visible manifestation of the gender, are only provisional indicators.

Contemporary Buddhist scholars employ the body transformation literature as an indicator of Buddhism's position on women. However, a question remains whether any of the body transformation literature has, in fact, made a contribution to gender equality, either within Buddhist tradition or in a society in which Buddhism had historically played a pivotal role. In other words, was the body transformation literature actually addressing gender issues as we read it today?

Zen Buddhism added another problem to Buddhist patriarchism. Despite a seeming claim of equality of all beings, regardless of social class and the state of one's education, Zen Buddhism has employed a visibly male-dominated rhetoric, as Miriam Levering has demonstrated in her essay (see "Lin-chi (Rinzai) Ch'an and Gender").

5. Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy,* 3.

6. Powell, *Jacques Derrida,* 17.

7. Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Subject of Philosophy* (*Le sujet de la philosophie,* 1979/1993). See chapter 1, "The Fable."

8. Merleau-Ponty, *Signes,* 207; Merleau-Ponty, *Signs,* 128.

9. Merleau-Ponty, *Signes,* 207; Merleau-Ponty, *Signs,* 128.

10. Merleau-Ponty, *Signes,* 226; Merleau-Ponty, *Signs,* 139.

11. Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?,* 3. A Buddhist scholar, James Apple interprets the Buddhist tradition of self-cultivation according to Pierre Hadot's distinction between the "philosophical discourse" and the "philosophical way of life." See Apple, "Can Buddhist Thought Be Construed as a Philosophia, or a Way of Life?"

12. Kim Iryŏp, "Pulmun t'vjok i chunyŏn e," 155.

Chapter One: Between Light and Darkness

1. Kim Iryŏp, "Tongsaeng ŭi chugŭm," 390. All the translations from Korean in this book are mine, unless marked otherwise. Furthermore, Korean terms were romanized without identification, whereas other Asian languages have been identified.

2. Ibid., 390–391.

3. Ibid., 394.

4. Ibid., 394.

5. Ibid., 397.

6. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin,* 89; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun,* 145.

7. Bhikṣuṇī Wŏlsong stated that Kim Iryŏp's Buddhist thought was influenced by the idea of enlightenment (*kyemong* 啓蒙), which in turn was influenced by her mother.

8. Personal interview with Wŏlsong sŭnim, June 29, 2007, Seoul, Korea.

9. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin,* 89; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun,* 45.

10. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin,* 44; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun,* 78. For Iryŏp's discussions on Christianity, see chapter 5 of this book.

11. Kim Iryŏp, "Chilli rŭl morŭmnida," 274.

12. Ibid., 274.

13. Ibid., 273–274.

14. Kim Iryŏp, "Tongsaeng ŭi chugŭm," 397.

15. Kim Iryŏp, "Tongsaeng mudŭn twit tongsan," 404–405.

16. In this essay, Iryŏp wrote that she was six or seven when that happened ("Tongsaeng mudŭn twit tongsan," 404), but this does not seem correct. Her first younger sister was born when Iryŏp was six, and the second sister, about two years later, so Iryŏp would have been about eight years old, and one sister died in 1907, when Iryŏp was twelve years old.

17. Kim Iryŏp, "Chilli rŭl morŭmnida," 277.

18. Kim Iryŏp, "Tongsaeng ŭi chugŭm," 390–398.

19. Kim Iryŏp, "Kyesi," 103.

20. Ibid., 104.

21. Ibid., 104.

22. Kim Iryŏp, "Ŏmŏni ŭi mudŏm," 131–132.

23. Ibid., 131.

24. Kim Iryŏp, "Abŏnim yŏngjŏn e," 97.

25. Ibid., 97.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid., 96.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Kim Iryŏp, "Kkumgil roman onŭn ŏrini,"152.
32. Kim Iryŏp, *Ch'ŏngch'un,* 9. Yi Kwangsu stated that Kim Wŏnju should be the Higuchi Ichiyō of Korea. Kim Iryŏp kept her pen name after she joined a monastery and used it as her dharma name because the name now is interpreted as related to Bodhidharma (fifth or sixth century CE), the alleged founder of Zen Buddhism. According to the legend, Bodhidharma reached China riding on a boat-made-of-one-petal (*iryŏp p'yŏnchu* 一葉片舟). (Kyŏngwan, "Iryŏp sŏnsa ŭi ch'ulga wa suhaeng," 230.)
33. Kim Iryŏp, *Ch'ŏngch'un,* 10.
34. Kim Hangmyŏng et al., *Yŏngwŏnhan salmŭl ch'aja,* 36. This is a fictional version of Kim Iryŏp's life based on a television drama broadcast in Korea. It is not clear how many details of this version are based on facts and reliable sources.
35. For a comparison of Higuchi Ichiyō and Kim Iryŏp, see No Mirim, "Higutchi Itchiyo wa Kim Iryŏp ŭi yŏsŏngsŏng taejo." For an English source on Higuchi Ichiyō's life, see Danly, *In the Shade of Spring Leaves.*
36. Pang Minho, "Kim Iryŏp munhak ŭi sasangjŏk pyŏnmo," 360.
37. Kim Kŏnsu, *Han'guk chapjisa,* 56. Cited in Yu Chinwŏl, *Kim Iryŏp ŭi Sinyŏja yŏn'gu,* 30.
38. Yu, *Kim Iryŏp ŭi Sinyŏja yŏn'gu,* 30; Yŏn'gu konggan suyu + nŏmŏ, ed. *Sinyŏsŏng,* appendix 01 (no pagination).
39. Yi Sanggyŏng, *Na nŭn in'gan ŭro salgo sipta,* 126.
40. Kim Iryŏp, "Ch'anggansa," 103.
41. Yŏn'gu konggan suyu + nŏmŏ, ed., *Sinyŏsŏng,* appendix 01.
42. Kim Iryŏp, "Sinyŏja ŭi sahoe e taehan ch'aegim ŭl nonham," 107–108.
43. Yi Paeyong, "Ilche sigi sinyŏsŏng ŭi yŏksajŏk sŏnggyŏk," 21.
44. Yŏn'gu konggan suyu + nŏmŏ, ed., *Sinyŏsŏng,* 13.
45. Yi Paeyong, "Ilche sigi sinyŏsŏng ŭi yŏksajŏk sŏnggyŏk," 22.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid., 23.
48. Inoue Kazue, "Chosŏn sinyŏsŏng ŭi yŏnaegwan," 156–157.
49. See Chŏn Kyŏngok et al., *Han'guk yŏsŏng muhwasa,* 1:135–163.
50. Ibid., 71.
51. Ibid., 72. A word-play was also at work here. The Korean pronunciation of the English expression "modern" is "modan." By using two Chinese characters to represent "mo" (hair) and "dan" (cut), "modan" also came to mean a short hairstyle.
52. See Chŏn Kyŏngok et al., *Han'guk yŏsŏng muhwasa,* 1:72–76. The authors of this book criticized the male writers of the time, including Yi Kwangsu, Kim Tongin, Hyŏn Chin'gŏn, and Yŏm Sangsŏp. The authors claimed that the male writers portrayed the New Women (or schoolgirls) as doing nothing but indulging in fantasy

and luxury and thus were responsible for promoting a negative image of the New Women.

53. Yŏn'gu konggan suyu + nŏmŏ, ed., *Sinyŏsŏng,* 27.

Chapter Two: To See and Be Seen

1. Yi Myŏngon, *Hŭllŏ kan yŏinsang,* 128, in Ch'oe Hyesil, *Sinyŏsŏngdŭl,* 269n224.
2. Kim Hangmyŏng et al., *Yŏngwŏnhan salmŭl ch'aja,* 26.
3. Ibid., 136–137.
4. Ibid., 111–113.
5. No Mirim, "Higutchi Itchiyo wa Kim Iryŏp ŭi yŏsŏngsŏng taejo," 156–157.
6. Im Nowŏl, introduction to *Im Nowŏl chakp'umjip,* xxx.
7. Ch'oe Hyesil, *Sinyŏsŏngdŭl,* 354. New interest in Im Nowŏl's literature has recently appeared. See Pang Minho, "Sarang kwa chŏlmang"; Park Jeong-sou, "Im Nowŏl, 20 yŏndae angmajŏk modŏnisŭtŭ"; Yi Heejong, "1920 yŏndae ch'ogi ŭi yŏnae tamnon kwa Im Nowŏl munhak"; Yu Munsŏn, "Im Nowŏl munhak pip'yŏng yŏn'gu."
8. See the n. 7.
9. Kim Hangmyŏng et al. states she was a teacher at Ahyŏn High School (*Yŏngwŏnhan salmŭl ch'aja,* 163) and in *Miraese,* vol. 1, states that Iryŏp was a teacher at a high school in Sŏngbuk dong (Kim Iryŏp, *Miraese,* 1:497).
10. Kim Hangmyŏng et al., *Yŏngwŏnhan salmŭl ch'aja,* 168.
11. Other than the essay "To Mr. R" the only source I could find for details of Kim Iryŏp's relationship with Im Nowŏl was a biographical fiction, *Yongwŏnhan salmŭl ch'aja* (119–185). Since this is a fictional version of Iryŏp's life, we cannot tell how much of the description is reliable.
12. Tōyō Eiwa Jogakkō (東洋英和女学校).
13. Kim Iryŏp, "Hyewŏn," 145.
14. Ibid., 145–146.
15. Ibid., 146.
16. Ibid., 149.
17. As I discuss later, regardless of the truth about whether Kim T'aesin was Kim Iryŏp's son or not, Kim T'aesin's story was full of wrong information. If Kim Iryŏp was divorced by this time (1921), she must have been with Im Nowŏl and could not have been with Ota Seiji and given birth to a child.
18. Kim Iryŏp attended Eiwa School during her first visit to Japan in 1919–1920. No other information confirms that Iryŏp attended this school in 1921.
19. The interview took place in Seoul, in 2007.
20. Kim P'albong, in *Ch'ŏngch'un,* 1.
21. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin,* 89; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun,* 145.
22. Kim Iryŏp, "Chilli rŭl morŭmnida," 269.
23. Ibid., 275. We should be somewhat flexible here in matching the age of a person with the calendar year because of the different ways of counting age in Korea and

in the West. In Korea, in the year a child is born, the baby is one year old. That is, if a baby was born November 1, 2009, in January 2010, the baby would be already two years old because age counting is based on the calendar year not on one's birth date. This means that there could be a maximum of almost a two-year difference between the way Kim Iryŏp counted people's age in her writings and the actual age of the people calculated in the Western way.

24. Kim Iryŏp, "Kŭllae ŭi yŏnae munje," 184.
25. Kim Iryŏp, "Sanahi ro t'aeŏ natsŭmyŏn."
26. Kim Iryŏp, "L yang ege," 150.
27. Ibid., 153.
28. Kim Iryŏp, "Uri ŭi isang," 82.
29. Mengzi, *Mengzi,* Tengwengong, II-2; Lau, *Mencius*, 127.
30. Cited in Li, "The Confucianism Concept of *Jen* and Feminist Ethics of Care," 35.
31. Kim Iryŏp, "Chilli rŭl morŭmnida," 298.
32. Ibid.
33. Kim Iryŏp, "Sinyŏja ŭi sahoe e taehan ch'aegim ŭl nonham," 108.
34. Kim Iryŏp, "Na ŭi chŏngjo kwan," 117.
35. Ibid., 119.
36. Kim Iryŏp, "Uri ŭi isang," 83.
37. For a detailed discussion of Na and Ch'oe Rin, see Lee Yongch'ang, "Na Hyesŏk kwa Ch'oe Rin P'ari ŭi chauin." For a critical evaluation of Na's feminism and its relation to her marriage, see Song Myung He, "Na Hyesŏk ŭi kŭpchinjŏk peminijŭm kwa kaebang kyŏlhon mot'ibŭ." For the conflicting nature of modernity in Na, see Kim Eunsil, "Chosŏn singminji chisigin Na Hyesŏk ŭi kŭndaesŏng ŭl chilmun handa."
38. Ch'oe Hyesil, *Sinyŏsŏngdŭl,* 349–351.
39. Ibid., 352.
40. Ch'oe Hyesil describes this event as a "rape," but her use of the expression "rape" is also symbolic as it indicates that Kim Myŏngsun had a sexual relationship with the lieutenant against her will. The rape that Ch'oe describes is not limited to a rape by her lover. Kim was raped by her men because they were unwilling to have a "normal" relationship with her because she was an illegitimate child; she was, however, also raped by her society as a woman and a child born out of wedlock, and she was raped by her country, which denied her as a member of the community. See Ch'oe Hyesil, *Sinyŏsŏngdŭl,* 356–374.
41. Kim Iryŏp, "Puldo rŭl taggŭmyŏ," 210.
42. Na Hyesŏk, *Na Hyesŏk chŏnjip,* 695.
43. Kim Iryŏp, *Haengbok kwa pulhaeng,* 115.
44. Ibid.
45. Kim Iryŏp, "Chagak"; Yong-Hee Kim, *Questioning Minds,* 63.
46. Kim Iryŏp, "Chagak," 171–172; Kim, *Questioning Minds,* 64.
47. Kim Iryŏp, "Chagak," 172. For a different translation, see Kim, *Questioning Minds,* 64.

48. Kim Iryŏp, "Chagak"; Kim, *Questioning Minds,* 65.

49. Kim Iryŏp, "Kkumgil roman onŭn ŏrini," 153.

50. Ch'oe Hyesil, *Sinyŏsŏngdŭl,* 356. Ch'oe does not document the source of this information, nor does she offer the source of Kim's works on orphans.

51. Ch'oe Hyesil, *Sinyŏsŏngdŭl,* 356.

52. Kim Yusŏn, "Kim Myŏngsun si ŭi kŭndaejŏk yongmang kwa mosŏngsŏng," 444.

53. Yu Chinwŏl, *Kim Iryŏp ŭi Sinyŏja yŏn'gu,* 19.

54. Inoue Kazue, "Chosŏn sinyŏsŏng ŭi yŏnaegwan kwa kyŏlhonkwan ŭi pyŏnhyŏk," 158.

55. Derrida, "I Have a Taste for the Secret," 35.

56. For a discussion on the issue, see Mun Okp'yo, *Sinyŏsŏng.*

57. Kim Iryŏp, "Chilli rŭl morŭmnida," 298.

58. Hiratsuka, *In the Beginning, Woman Was the Sun,* 178. Also see Lowy, *The Japanese "New Woman,"* 8–9; Lee Ji Sook, "1910 nyŏndae Ilbon sinyŏsŏng munhak," 166n18.

59. Lee Ji Sook, "1910 nyŏndae Ilbon sinyŏsŏng munhak," 160.

60. Ibid., 162.

61. Ibid., 171.

62. Hiratsuka, *Genshi josei wa taiyō de atta,* 1:328. English translation, Hiratsuka, *In the Beginning, Woman Was the Sun,* 157.

63. Hiratsuka, *Genshi josei wa taiyō de atta,* 1:328; Hiratsuka, *In the Beginning, Woman Was the Sun,* 158.

64. For the relationship of Shinto and Nationalism along with the Meiji Restoration, see Hardacre, *Shintō and the State.*

65. Hiratsuka, *Genshi josei wa taiyō de atta,* 1:328; Hiratsuka, *In the Beginning, Woman Was the Sun,* 157.

66. Hiratsuka, *Genshi josei wa taiyō de atta,* 1:329; English translation, Hiratsuka, *In the Beginning, Woman Was the Sun,* 157–158.

67. Hiratsuka, *Genshi josei wa taiyō de atta,* 1:333; Hiratsuka, *In the Beginning, Woman Was the Sun,* 160.

68. Hiratsuka, *In the Beginning, Woman Was the Sun,* 159.

69. Ibid.

70. Hiratsuka, *Genshi josei wa taiyō de atta,* 1:335; Hiratsuka, *In the Beginning, Woman Was the Sun,* 161.

71. Hiratsuka, *Genshi josei wa taiyō de atta,* 1:335; Hiratsuka, *In the Beginning, Woman Was the Sun,* 161.

72. Hiratsuka, *Genshi josei wa taiyō de atta,* 1:335; Hiratsuka, *In the Beginning, Woman Was the Sun,* 161.

73. In a recent publication on Nietzsche and Buddhism, Antoine Panaioti discussed the relevance of Nietzschean affirmation of life to Buddhism. See Panaioti, *Nietzsche and Buddhist Philosophy.* Another relevant study on Nietzsche and Zen practice and their ethi-

cal implication is Braak, *Nietzsche and Zen*. Earlier publications on Nietzsche and Buddhism include Mistry, *Nietzsche and Buddhism,* and Morrison, *Nietzsche and Buddhism*.

74. Hiratsuka, "Hiratsuka Raichō," 1151.
75. Ibid., 1151–1152.
76. Ibid., 1150.
77. Lee Ji Sook, "1910 nyŏndae Ilbon sinyŏsŏng munhak," 171.
78. Mun Okp'yo, *Sinyŏsŏng,* 285.
79. Lowy, *The Japanese "New Woman,"* 61.
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid., 64–78.
82. Sato, *The New Japanese Woman,* 7.
83. Bordin, *Alice Freeman Palmer,* 2. Bordin also notes that "in England the invention in 1894 of the term New Woman is attributed to the feminist novelist, Sara Grand" (n. 1 to the introduction).
84. Ibid.
85. Ibid. The quote was from Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism,* 39.
86. Bordin, *Alice Freeman Palmer,* 3.
87. Todd, *The "New Woman" Revised,* xxvi–xxvii.
88. Ibid., 2.
89. Ibid., 3.
90. Ibid., 7.
91. Ibid.
92. Cited in Downey, *Portrait of an Era as Drawn by C. D. Gibson,* 196.
93. Todd, *The "New Woman" Revised,* 8.
94. Ibid., 34–35.
95. In the United States as well, the women's movement in general and the New Women in particular went through conservative phases during the 1930s and 1940s, until the return of interest in demanding gender equality during the 1950s revived the agenda of the women's movement. See Freedman, "The New Woman."

Chapter Three: Sense and Nonsense of Revolt

1. De Angelis, "Ellen Key," 1.
2. During 1909–1912, five of Ellen Key's works appeared in English: *The Century of the Child* (1900), *Woman Movement* (1909), *The Education of the Child* (1910), *Love and Marriage* (1911), and *Love and Ethics* (1912). Hiratsuka Raichō translated two of Ellen Key's works. For a complete biography of Ellen Key, see De Angelis, "Ellen Key."
3. See No Chayŏng, "Yŏsŏng undong ŭi che 1-inja Ellen Kei."
4. Key, *Love and Marriage,* 14–15.
5. Ibid., 290.
6. Ibid., 129.
7. Key, *Love and Ethics,* 11.

8. Ibid., 19–20.
9. Ibid., 21.
10. Na Hyesŏk, *Na Hyesŏk chŏnjip,* 411.
11. Mun Okp'yo, *Simyŏsŏng,* 286–292.
12. Kim Iryŏp, "Chilli rŭl morŭmnida," 298.
13. Kim Iryŏp, "Uri ŭi isang," 84–85.
14. Ibid., 86.
15. Hiratsuka, "Shojo no shinka," 57; Hiratsuka, "Hiratsuka Raichō," 1158.
16. Hiratsuka, "Shojo no shinka," 57; Hiratsuka, "Hiratsuka Raichō," 1158.
17. Kim Iryŏp, "Uri ŭi isang," 81. The identity of "Hellen Keller" mentioned in this passage together with Ibsen is not clear. Almost the same passage appears at the end of her 1927 essay "My View on Chastity," as follows: "We women who try to stay far away from all the existing systems and traditions and thus revive a new pure meaning of life cannot but radically revolt against, among others, the existing morality on sex that ignores our character and personality. That is why, even though it is now a bit outdated, I cannot but sympathize with the ideas by Ibsen and Hellen Key" (Kim Iryŏp, "Na ŭi chŏngjo kwan," 119). Hellen Keller in the 1924 essay is now replaced with Hellen Key in the 1927 essay. Hellen Keller has nothing to do with the challenge to the sexual morality, and there is no figure named Hellen Key who had a strong influence on this issue. It seems the case that in 1924, Kim Iryŏp confused Ellen Key with Hellen Keller, and in the 1927 version, she mixed the name Hellen Keller with Ellen Key and used the name Hellen Key.
18. Kim Iryŏp, "Na ŭi chŏngjo kwan," 119.
19. Kim Iryŏp, "Chilli rŭl morŭmnida," 298.
20. Kim Iryŏp, "Na ŭi chŏngjo kwan," 119.
21. Kim Iryŏp, "Ch'ŏnyŏ pich'ŏnyŏ," 194.
22. Kim Iryŏp, "1933 nyŏn ch'ŏnnal," 189–190.
23. Kim Iryŏp, "Hakch'ang ŭl ttŏnanŭn yŏsŏng ege," 200–202.
24. Kim Iryŏp, "In'gyŏk ch'angjo e," 87.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. The expression "new individualism" appears again in her essay published in November 1934.
28. Kim Iryŏp, "In'gyŏk ch'angjo e," 88.
29. Some scholars interpret Iryŏp's claim for maternal love in this essay as evidence of Kim T'aesin being her son. As I discussed in chapter 2, Kim T'aesin's being Iryŏp's son is questionable, and given that Kim Iryŏp never claimed that she had a child, I would leave the issue of maternal love as a symbolic interpretation, instead of using guesswork. The next passage that I cited supports my claim that Iryŏp was taking maternal love as a quality of being a woman, and her discussion of maternal love does not support the claim that she gave a birth to a child.
30. Kim Iryŏp, "In'gyŏk ch'angjo e," 89.

31. For a further discussion on creativity, see chapter 5.

32. Kim Myŏngsun, "Ne chasin ŭi ue," in *Saengmyŏng ŭi kwasil*, 76–77.

33. Ch'oe Hyesil, *Sinyŏsŏngdŭl*, 361–362.

34. Kim Iryŏp, "Ilch'e ŭi seyok ŭl tanha'go," 466.

35. Ibid., 469.

36. Also, if Kim Iryŏp remained in the state that she described in her 1934 essay, then her critics who criticized Kim Iryŏp's tonsure as escapism after her failure to realize her feminist thoughts in Korean society will gain much justification.

37. For a discussion of Iryŏp's relationship with Im, see chapter 2.

38. Im Nowŏl, "Sahŭi chuŭi wa yesul," 23.

39. Ibid., 24.

40. Ibid., 28.

41. Pang Minho, "Sarang kwa chŏlmang kwa top'i ŭi romangsŭ," 159.

42. Ibid., 160.

43. Yi Chonggi, "Sahoe chuŭi wa yesul ŭl malhasin Im Nowŏl ssi ege mutgojŏ," 27.

44. Kim Kijin, "Kim Wŏnju ssi e taehan konggaejang," 164.

45. Pang Minho, "Sarang kwa chŏlmang kwa top'i ŭi romangsŭ," 162.

Chapter Four: I Who Have Lost Me

1. Julia Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt*, xix.

2. English translation. *Hannah Arendt* is the first volume of Julia Kristeva's trilogy, *Le Génie féminin*. In this trilogy, Kristeva discusses the lives and works of three female "geniuses" of her selection: German political theorist Hannah Arendt (1906–1975), Austrian-British psychoanalyst Melanie Klein (1882–1960), and French novelist Colette (1873–1954).

3. Sung Rak-Hi, "Kim Iryŏp munhang ron"; Chŏng Yŏngja, "Kim Iryŏp munhak yŏn'gu."

4. No Mirim, "Higutchi Itchiyo wa Kim Iryŏp ŭi yŏsŏngsŏng taejo."

5. Yu Chinwŏl, *Kim Iryŏp ŭi Sinyŏja yŏn'gu*; Yi Hwahyŏng and Yu Chinwŏl, "Sinyŏja wa kŭndae yŏsŏng tamron ŭi hyŏngsŏng."

6. Kim Miyŏng, "1920 nyŏndae sinyŏsŏng kwa kitoggyo e kwanhan koch'al"; Yoo, "A Study of the Relationship between Christianity and Modern Korean Female Writers."

7. The first publication in English devoted to this issue is Jin Y. Park, "Gendered Response to Modernity."

8. Bonnie B. C. Oh, "Kim Iryŏp's Conflicting Worlds."

9. Park, "Gendered Response to Modernity"; Pang Minho, "Kim Iryŏp munhak ŭi sasangjŏk pyŏnmo kwajŏng kwa Pulgyo sŏnt'aek ŭi ŭimi."

10. Park, "Gendered Response to Modernity"; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 1–26.

11. Kim Hangmyŏng et al., *Yŏngwŏnhan salmŭl ch'aja*, 221.

12. Kim Iryŏp, "Pulmun t'ujok i chunyŏn e," 154.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 155.
16. For discussion on Kwŏn Sangro's reform movement and its meaning in modern Korean Buddhism, see Yi Chaehŏn, *Yi Nŭnghwa wa kŭndae Pulgyo hak;* Kim Jongin, "Kwŏn Sangno ŭi Chosŏn Pulgyo Hyŏngmyŏng ron"; Kim Kyŏngjip, *Han'guk kŭndae Pulgyo sa.*
17. For a discussion on Han Yongun's reform movement in the context of Korean Buddhism during the first half of the twentieth century, see Pori Park, *Trial and Error in Modernist Reforms.*
18. For a discussion on Yi Yŏngjae, see Kim Kyŏngjip, *Han'guk kŭndae Pulgyo sa;* Kim Kwangsik, "Yi Yŏngjae."
19. Kim Iryŏp, "Pulmun t'ujok i chunyŏn e," 157.
20. Sørensen, "Korean Buddhist Journals during Early Japanese Colonial Rule," 19.
21. See Pang Minho, "Kim Iryŏp munhak ŭi sasangjŏk pyŏnmo."
22. For discussion on Buddhist modernism, see McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism.*
23. Yi Chungp'yo, "Han'guk Pulgyo ch'ŏrhak," 541.
24. A discussion of Paek's biography and Buddhism can be found in Kim Yŏngjin, "Kŭnhyŏndae Pulgyo inmul t'amgu."
25. Research on modern Korean Buddhism has a relatively short history not only in the English-speaking world, but in Korea as well. At the end of the 1990s, publications on modern Buddhism suddenly flourished in Korea, a trend that has continued to the present day.
26. For a discussion of Paek's Buddhist philosophy in the context of East-West encounter and the formation of Korean Buddhist philosophy, see Jin Y. Park, "Philosophizing and Power" and "Burdens of Modernity."
27. Kim Wŏnsu, *Pudta ka toesin Yesu,* 16.
28. Ibid.; Paek Sŏnguk, *Paek Sŏnguk paksa munjip,* 400. Paek stated that some of his friends helped him financially for his studies in Paris and his study in Germany (378).
29. Kim Wŏnsu, *Pudta ka toesin Yesu,* 17.
30. Paek Sŏnguk, *Paek Sŏnguk paksa munjip,* 3.
31. Yi Chungp'yo, "Han'guk Pulgyo ch'ŏrhak," 541.
32. *Dong-a ilbo,* "Tongyang ch'ŏrhak paksa Paek Sŏnguk ssi kwiguk," 3.
33. Paek Sŏnguk, *Paek Sŏnguk paksa munjip,* 373.
34. Paek Sŏnguk, "Na ŭi sinang kwa nŭtkim," 12.
35. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin,* 101; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun,* 158.
36. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin,* 101–102; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun,* 158–159.
37. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin,* 91; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun,* 147.

38. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 84; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 140.

39. In "Yonggang onch'ŏn haeng" (To Yonggang hot spring 龍岡溫泉行), published in the October 1931 issue of *Buddhism,* Iryŏp described a trip as "Going home two years after marriage." She compared her feelings at the time with how she had felt two years ago when she went to Taegu, her husband's hometown, for their wedding. This indicates that she married Ha Yunsil in 1929. (Kim Iryŏp, "Yonggang onch'ŏn haeng," 417).

40. Kim Iryŏp, "Sin Pul kwa na ŭi kajŏng," 430.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., 431.

43. Kim Iryŏp's essay "Kaŭl sori rŭl tŭru myŏnsŏ" appeared in 1937 in *Hakhae,* which seems an exceptional occasion. Also, the content of the essay is questionable. The essay begins with Iryŏp's reflection on her feelings about the autumn of the year 1937, the third year of her life as a nun. After the initial reflection, Iryŏp stated that she was in her hometown Yonggang during her husband's summer vacation to strengthen her husband's health (480). This does not make sense, since she was at the monastery at the time, divorced from Ha Yunsil. The trip to Yonggang took place in 1931 as described in her essay "Yonggang onch'ŏn haeng." Given these problems, even though "Kaŭl sori rŭl tŭrŭ myŏnsŏ" was published in 1937, the reliability of this material is doubtful.

44. Kim Iryŏp, "Puldo rŭl taggŭmyŏ," 212.

45. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 33; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 65.

46. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 33; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 65.

47. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 33; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 65.

48. Kim Iryŏp, *Ch'ŏngch'un*, 258.

49. Reporter B, "Sakpal hago changsam ibŭn Kim Iryŏp yŏsa ŭi hoegyŏn'gi," 15.

50. Ibid., 13–14.

51. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 34; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 66–67.

52. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 34–35; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 67.

53. Reporter B, "Sakpal ha'go changsam ibŭn Kim Iryŏp yŏsa ŭi hoegyŏn'gi," 16.

54. The major textual sources about the initial encounters of Buddhism with Korean society include *Saguk saki* (The historical records of the Three Kingdoms 三國史記), compiled in 1145 CE by the Confucian scholar Kim Pusik (金富軾, 1075–1151); *Haedong kosŭng chŏn* (History of high monks in Korea 海東高僧傳), compiled in 1215 by Kakhun (覺訓, ?–?), and the *Samguk yusa* (The bequeathed history of the Three Kingdoms 三國遺事), written during 1281–1289 by the Buddhist monk Iryŏn (一然, 1206–1289). All three texts were written between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, far later than the initial arrival of Buddhism in Korea in the fifth century.

55. Kim Pusik, *Saguk saki,* 1:346.

56. Ibid., 2:37.

57. Ibid., 1:76–78.

58. It is noteworthy that before Korean Buddhists familiarized themselves with the sophisticated philosophy of Buddhism, Buddhism won the hearts of both the

common people and the ruling class with its material culture. Buddhist images provided them with an object for religious devotion in a manner that was not available from the indigenous religious tradition of shamanism. In worshiping the images of the Maitreya Buddha brought by Sundo, people prayed for both their families and their nation. For the people of Koguryŏ, the belief that the Buddhist practice would bring prosperity to their families and peace to the nation was the immediate appeal of Buddhism. The Unified Silla period witnessed the flourishing of Buddhism. Great dharma hall buildings at Buddhist monasteries, Buddha statues, and pagodas were visible material culture that demonstrated the power of Buddhism. The power of the visible material culture of Buddhism is well described in Iryŏp's discussion of Buddhist architecture. Iryŏp considered the Three Kingdoms period as the highlight of Korean culture when Buddhism was most alive. She considered the dharma hall at the Sudŏk Monastery one of the most valuable cultural assets in Korea. For Iryŏp, such cultural assets represented the spirit of the Buddhist teachings.

59. The best known Buddhist figures during the Silla period include Wŏnhyo (元曉, 618–686), a great synthesizer, and Ŭisang (義湘, 625–702), the founder of Korean Huayan (Hwaŏm 華嚴) Buddhism. For an English translation of Wŏnhyo's work, see Muller, *Wŏnhyo: Selected Works*. For Ŭisang's works, see McBride, *Hwaŏm*, and Odin, *Process Metaphysics and Hua-Yen Buddhism*. For a good discussion of the Silla Buddhism, see McBride, *Domesticating the Dharma*.

60. For a discussion of Koryŏ Buddhism, see Vermeersch, *The Power of the Buddhas*.

61. By the mid-seventh century, Korean monks also became exposed to a new form of Buddhism that developed in China called Sŏn (Ch. Chan). The first record of Chinese Chan Buddhism in Korea, where it is pronounced Sŏn, appeared in connection with the Silla monk Pŏmnang (active 632–646), who studied with Daoxin (道信, 580–651), the fourth patriarch of Chinese Chan Buddhism. For the next two centuries, Korean monks continued to travel to China to learn this new form of Buddhism, eventually developing what has been known as the Nine Mountains School of Sŏn Buddhism (Kusan sŏnmun 九山禪門). The Nine Mountains School of Sŏn does not denote nine different schools of Sŏn Buddhism but rather the nine sites of Sŏn Buddhism located in the nine mountains and created by the nine pioneers of Korean Sŏn Buddhism, all of whom studied in China. Although Sinhaeng brought with him the Northern School of Chan, all but one of the founders of the Nine Mountains School studied with disciples of Mazu Daoyi (馬祖道一 707–786), who was the founder of the most subitist Chinese Chan sect, known as the Hongzhou sect (洪州宗) of the Southern School.

The Nine Mountains School of Sŏn developed over a period of a century. Toŭi (active 821), who returned from China in the early ninth century and founded the Kaji Mountain School of Sŏn, is credited as the first patriarch of Korean Sŏn Buddhism. The first record of the Nine Mountains School, however, is dated in the late eleventh century (1084), suggesting that the formation of the Nine Mountains School

might have been later than the end of the Unified Silla period (668–935), as scholars have speculated. For a discussion in English of the Nine Mountains School of Sŏn and evolution of Sŏn Buddhism before Chinul, see Buswell, *Collected Works of Chinul,* 9–17.

62. Chinul, "Susim kyŏl," 708b. Buswell, *Tracing Back the Radiance,* 140.

63. Scholars have extensively discussed this issue concerning the nature of the encounter dialogue. The questions addressed include whether spontaneity as a core of the Zen *gongan* practice is a rhetorical issue (see Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy* and *Chan Insights and Oversights*); whether there exists a state beyond language that the practitioner can reach through the *gongan* practice; and whether *gongan* is a type of a language game. In this context, Dale Wright claimed that *gongan* is a part of a Zen monastic language game ("Rethinking Transcendence"). See also McRae, *Seeing through Zen;* Park, "Zen and Zen Philosophy of Language"); Park, "Zen Language in Our Time."

64. For an English translation of the 100 cases from Hyesim's collection, see Hyesim, *Gongan Collections I* and *Gongan Collections II.*

65. For discussion on this, see Miura and Sasaki, *The Zen Koan.* For discussions on various aspects of *gongan,* see Heine and Wright, *The Kōan.*

66. For a discussion on Zen capping phrases, see Hori, *Zen Sand.*

67. Hsieh, "A Study of the Evolution of k'an-hua Ch'an in Sung China"; Levering, "Ch'an Enlightenment for Layman."

68. For a discussion of Chinul's *hwadu* meditation, see Buswell, "The 'Short-Cut' Approach of K'an-hua Meditation"; Buswell, "Chinul's Systematization of Chinese Meditative Techniques in Korean Sŏn Buddhism"; Park, "Zen Language in Our Time."

69. Zen Master T'oeong Sŏngch'ŏl was at the heart of this debate. For my discussion on this, see Park, "T'oe'ong Sŏngch'ŏl ŭi Pulgyo haesŏkhak kwa Sŏn Pulgyo yulli."

70. For a Buddhist-Confucian debate at the beginning of the Chosŏn Dynasty, see Muller, trans. *Korea's Great Buddhist-Confucian Debate.*

71. For my discussion on this, see Park, "Wŏnhyo's Writings on Bodhisattva Precepts and the Philosophical Ground of Mahayana Ethics."

72. *Song gaoseng chuan* (宋高僧傳, 988) and *Haedong kosŭng chon* (海東高僧傳, 1215) have long served that purpose. Recent articles have attempted to explore a deeper relation between a monk's biography and its symbolic meaning. For example, see Buswell, "Wŏnhyo as Cultural and Religious Archetype"; Faure, "Random Thoughts."

73. For Kyŏnghŏ's biography, see Kyŏnghŏ, *Kyŏnghŏ chip,* 406–426. For an English translation, see Park, "A Crazy Drunken Monk." Also see Yi Hŭngu, *Kyŏnghŏ Sŏnsa;* Ch'oe Inho, *Kyŏnghŏ;* Han Chunggwang, *Kyŏnghŏ;* Hyŏndam, *Kyŏnghŏ Sŏnsa iltaegi.* For a discussion of Kyŏnghŏ's Zen Buddhism in English, see Sørensen, "Mirror of Emptiness."

74. Kyŏnghŏ, *Kyŏnghŏ chip,* 422/424. (Dual numbering of the citations from Kyŏnghŏ chip indicates the page number of the text in classical Chinese/page number of the text in Korean.)

75. Ibid., 400/408–409; English translation, Park, "A Crazy Drunken Monk," 134–135.

76. Kyŏnghŏ, *Kyŏnghŏ chip,* 400/409; Park, "A Crazy Drunken Monk," 135.

77. Yi Hŭngu, *Kyŏnghŏ Sŏnsa,* 60–61.

78. Kyŏnghŏ, *Kyŏnghŏ chip,* 422/424.

79. Kyŏnghŏ, *Kyŏnghŏ chip,* 400/409; Park, "A Crazy Drunken Monk," 135.

80. *Lian denghui yao*, book 24.

81. Kyŏnghŏ, *Kyŏnghŏ chip,* 401/409; Park, "A Crazy Drunken Monk," 135.

82. Hanam recorded the incident as follows in his "An Account of Sŏn Master Kyŏnghŏ's Activities" (Sŏnsa Kyŏnghŏ hwasang haengjang 禪師 鏡虛和尙 行狀):

> One acolyte who attended Kyŏnghŏ had a father, whose family name was Yi, who was known to have attained a degree of realization after having practiced meditation for several years. People called the father Layman Yi. An occasion came when the acolyte's dharma master went to visit Layman Yi at home. During their conversation, Layman Yi stated: "A monk will eventually become a cow." The acolyte's teacher responded, paraphrasing the remark: "If a monk fails to enlighten his mind and does nothing but receives almsgivings from believers, he will definitely become a cow and thereby repay the gratitude of alms-givings in that manner." Layman Yi rebuked the monk: "How can a monk's response be so inappropriate?" The monk responded: "I am not well versed in the teachings of Sŏn. How else should I have interpreted what you said?" Layman Yi said: "You should have said that a monk might become a cow, but he would have no nostrils."
>
> Without responding further, the monk left Layman Yi. When he returned, he told the acolyte: "Your father told me such and such but I cannot understand what he means." The acolyte said: "The Abbot [Kyŏnghŏ] has lost sleep and skipped meals in practicing meditation. The Master must understand what my father meant. Dear teacher, why don't you go ask the Abbot about what my father said?" The monk cheerfully went to see Kyongho, paid his respects and sat down. He told Kyongho about the conversation with Layman Yi.

Kyŏnghŏ, *Kyŏnghŏ chip,* 401/409; Park, "A Crazy Drunken Monk," 136.

83. Kyŏnghŏ, *Kyŏnghŏ chip,* 401/409; Park, "A Crazy Drunken Monk," 136.

84. Daoyun, *Jingde chuandeng lu, T 51,* no. 2076: 262c.

85. Chinul, "Kanhwa kyŏrŭi ron," 735a. For a different English translation, see Buswell, *Chinul,* 336.

86. Kyŏnghŏ, *Kyŏnghŏ chip,* 340/343; Park, "A Crazy Drunken Monk," 136.

87. For an English language discussion on Man'gong, see Mu Seong, "Sŏn Master Man'gong and Cogitations of a Colonized Religion." For selected primary materials on Korean Zen Buddhism, see Mu Seong, *Thousand Peaks.*

88. For a discussion on Pang Hanam, see Uhlmann, "Sŏn Master Pang Hanam."

89. See, for example, Faure, *Rhetoric of Immediacy,* and *Chan Insights and Oversight*. For a discussion of the issue in the context of Korean Buddhism, see Pak Chaehyŏn, *Kkaedarŭm ŭi sinhwa*.

90. See Inkyung, "Kongan Sŏn kwa Kanhwa Sŏn."

91. For a historical survey of Korean Buddhist nuns, see Cho, "Female Buddhist Practice in Korea—A Historical Account."

92. Kim Yŏngmi, "Samguk, Koryŏ sidae piguni ŭi salm kwa suhaeng," 79.

93. Ibid., 79–80.

94. Ibid., 85.

95. Ibid., 87.

96. See Yi Hyangsun, "Chosŏn sidae pi'gu'ni ŭi salm kwa suhaeng."

97. Jorgensen, "Marginalized and Silenced," 120–121.

98. Kang Hee-jung, "Chosŏn chŏn'gi Pulgyo wa yŏsŏng ŭi yŏkhal"; Yi Hyangsun, "Chosŏn sidae pi'gu'ni ŭi salm kwa suhaeng."

99. For discussions on Korean women in the Confucian Chosŏn Dynasty, see Kim and Pettid, *Women and Confucianism in Chosŏn*.

100. For a discussion of Buddhist nunneries in contemporary Korea, see Pori Park, "The Establishment of Buddhist Nunneries in Contemporary Korea."

101. Su'gyŏng, "Han'guk piguni kangwŏn paltalsa," 19–20.

102. Ibid., 25.

103. Ibid., 33.

104. Ibid., 35.

105. Chŏn'guk Pigunihoe, *Han'guk piguni ŭi suhaeng kwa salm,* 132.

106. Pŏphŭi was born in the southern part of Korea. Her father died when she was three, and the next year, her grandmother sent her to Mita hermitage at Tonghak Monastery. (Hyot'an, "Piguni Sŏnp'ung ŭi chunghŭngja, Myori Pŏphŭi sŏnsa," 201.) Her mother also joined the monastery the following year. Mother and daughter stayed at Mita hermitage for about a year together, but then Pŏphŭi's mother moved to Kap Monastery, believing that to stay with her daughter would be an obstacle to her practice. Her mother died when Pŏphŭi was eight. (Ha Ch'unsaeng, *Kkadarŭm ŭi kkot,* 1:30.) Pŏphŭi received the *sramana* precepts in 1901 and the full precepts in 1910 at Haein Monastery when she was twenty-three years old. She studied Buddhist scriptures with the lecturer Manu at Tonghak Monastery and studied the *Lotus Sutra* with Zen Master Kobong at Ch'ŏngam Monastery. Zen Master Kobong advised Myori Pŏphŭi to practice Zen meditation with Zen Master Man'gong (1871–1946) at Sudŏk Monastery, which Pŏphŭi did.

Under Zen Master Man'gong, Pŏphŭi practiced with the *hwadu,* "All things return to one and to where does the one return?" (Manpŏp kwiil kwiil hach'ŏ 萬法歸一歸一何處). After five years of practice, Pŏphŭi attained awakening and received recognition from Man'gong, who gave her the dharma alias Myori. Myori Pŏphŭi means "Since the mysterious principle is all understood, the happiness of Buddhist teaching is complete." Not many records of Myori Pŏphŭi's awakening or activities

remain. Myori Pŏphŭi did not leave behind any record of her awakening experiences or of her practice; nor did her disciples make such records. Pŏphŭi, however, has been recognized as the founder of the nuns' Zen tradition in modern Korean Buddhism.

107. The information about the daily schedule at Hwanŭi-dae is based on an interview at Hwanhŭi-dae with nun Tanho (旦皓) on July 29, 2011.

Chapter Five: Time for Reconciliation

1. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 1; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 29.

2. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 1; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 29.

3. Whether Buddhism belongs to the former or the latter is not as simple as it looks. As we will discuss with the case of Kaccāna, traditionally, Buddhism has been known as rejecting any philosophical discourse. However, as I have argued in other places, Buddha's refusal to discuss the eternity of the universe or the eternal life of the Buddha was not his renunciation of philosophical discourse. The Buddha was renouncing certain forms of philosophizing (see Park, *Buddhism and Postmodernity*, chap. 1). Renouncing any transcendental grounding or nonmaterialist tendency in Buddhism, Owen Flanagan proposes a naturalized Buddhism, which he conceives as "an ancient comprehensive philosophy like Buddhism, subtract the hocus pocus, and have a worthwhile philosophy for twenty-first-century scientifically informed secular thinkers" (*The Bodhisattva's Brain*, xi). What he meant by "the hocus pocus" is the elements of Buddhism that Flanagan considers unable to be confirmed from the naturalist perspective, including karma and transmigration.

4. *Saṃyutta-nikāya*, II:17. English translation, Edelglass and Garfield, *Buddhist Philosophy*, 16.

5. Huineng, *Nanzong dunjiao zuishang dasheng mahe panruo bolou mijing*, 343c.

6. Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 24:8. English translation, Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*.

7. Garfield, "Understanding the Two Truths," 227.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., 225.

10. I discussed this issue of negative reception of Buddhism in nineteenth-century Europe in my book, *Buddhism and Postmodernity*, see chapters 1 and 2.

11. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 4; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 33.

12. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 47; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 81.

13. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 47; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 81.

14. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 6; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 35.

15. Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness*. In this book, Heisig offers a comprehensive discussion of three Kyoto School thinkers: Nishita Kitarō (1870–1945), Tanabe Hajime (1885–1962), and Nishitani Keiji (1900–1990).

16. See Droit, *Le culte du néant*; Droit, *The Cult of Nothingness*.

17. For a discussion of Hegel's interpretation of Buddhism in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, see Park, *Buddhism and Postmodernity*, chapter 2, "Hegel and Buddhism." For a Korean version of my discussion of Hegel's Buddhism, see Park, "Hegel chonggyo ch'ŏrhak kangŭi wa Pulgyo."

18. Burnouf, *Introduction à l'histoire du Buddhisme Indien*, 16; English translation, Buffetrille and Lopez, *Introduction to the History of Indian Buddhism*, 68.

19. Burnouf, *Introduction à l'histoire du Buddhisme Indien*, 17; English translation, Buffetrille and Lopez, *Introduction to the History of Indian Buddhism*, 69.

20. Droit, *Le culte du néant*, 114–115; Droit, *The Cult of Nothingness*, 78–79.

21. Nishida, *Last Writings*, 69.

22. The nineteenth-century European scholars and philosophers had an almost opposite understanding of nothingness to that of East Asian thinkers, which is indicative of the different modes of thinking in the West and the East. The Kyoto School thinkers had in-depth knowledge of Western philosophy and in general were well aware that there existed significant differences in the understanding of nothingness in the Western and Asian philosophical traditions. The valorization of nothingness in Kyoto School thinkers' philosophy was a result of the joint effect: first, the introduction of the Western philosophy of "being" instead of "nothing" to the East Asian intellectual world; and second, the Kyoto School thinkers' familiarity with the Buddhist tradition. The mélange of the two historically generated environments for philosophers produced a philosophical discourse that made heavy investment in the meaning of nothingness.

Even though I discussed Iryŏp in connection with the Kyoto School thinkers, I am not claiming that Iryŏp was aware of any of their writings. Nishida Kitarō published his first book in 1911 and actively produced his works until his death in 1945; Tanabe Hajime's seminal work, *Philosophy as Metanoetics* (懺悔道としての哲学), was published in 1946. Although Iryŏp's book *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun* was published in 1960, there is no indication that she was aware of other East Asian thinkers' works. Iryŏp mentioned in her works Western thinkers including Karl Marx, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Johann Fichte. During her stay in Japan in the early 1920s, she absorbed the theory of the New Women and discourses on the women's movement.

23. Huineng, *Nanzong dunjiao zuishang dasheng mahe panruo bolou mijing*, 338.03c. For Yampolsky's translation, see *The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch*, 139.

24. Kim Iryŏp, *Haengbok kwa pulhaeng*, 30.

25. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 34; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 66–67.

26. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 34; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 67.

27. The Six Realms of Transmigration (*yukto yunhoe* 六道輪廻) is a general scheme of the realm of transmigration in the Korean and East Asian Buddhist tradition. There were, however, different projections on how many realms are in the cycle of transmigration, depending on which Buddhist traditions are examined.

28. For a discussion on Buddhist cosmology, see Sadakata, *Buddhist Cosmology*. For a succinct discussion, see Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*.

29. A classic discussion on these issues appears in *Milindapañha* (Questions of Milanda), which dates to approximately 100 BCE. The text records the conversations of the arhat Nāgasena and the Bactrian-Greek king Milinda (Menander) on Buddhist doctrines. (See Lopez and Buswell, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*.) For an abridged English version, see Pesala, *The Debate of King Milinda*.

30. Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, 15.

31. Bronkhorst, *Karma*, 21. For various reflections on the problem of karma, see Prebish et al., *Revisioning Karma*.

32. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 4; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 33.

33. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 156; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 92.

34. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 156; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 92.

35. The Buddhist worldview in this context could be understood as a kind of phenomenology. Recent Buddhist scholarship has paid attention to this aspect of Buddhism. See Lusthaus, *Buddhist Phenomenology;* Park and Kopf, *Merleau-Ponty and Buddhism;* Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism*.

36. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 5; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 34.

37. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 30; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 61.

38. For a discussion of the meaning of "culture," see "Culture" in Williams, *Keywords*.

39. Williams, *Keywords*, 87.

40. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 34; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 66.

41. Saussure et al., *Course in General Linguistics*, 112. Here Saussure wrote:

> The characteristic role of language with respect to thought is not to create a material phonic means for expressing ideas but to serve as a link between thought and sound, under conditions that of necessity bring about the reciprocal delimitations of units. Thought, chaotic by nature, has to become ordered in the process of its decomposition. Neither are thoughts given material form nor are sounds transformed into mental entities; the somewhat mysterious fact is rather that "thought-sound" implies division, and that language works out its units while taking shape between two shapeless masses. Visualize the air in contact with a sheet of water; if the atmospheric pressure changes, the surface of the water will be broken up into a series of divisions, waves; the waves resemble the union or coupling of thought with phonic substance.

Saussure's concern was to address an arbitrary relationship between thought and sound (linguistic expression), but this idea can also apply to our discussion that when our thoughts are formulated about an event, those thoughts are already our interpretations of the situation.

42. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 22; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 53.

43. A scholar of Buddhism and environmental philosophy, Simon James, discusses how Zen Buddhism teaches us the importance of living with nature. See chapter 3 of James, *Zen Buddhism and Environmental Ethics*.

44. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 47; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 81.
45. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 22; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 54.
46. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 17; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 47.
47. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 27; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 42.
48. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 12; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 42.
49. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 82; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 108.
50. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 13; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 42.
51. The twentieth-century French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard characterized the postmodern as "inhuman." Lyotard writes: "What if human beings, in humanism's sense, were in the process of, constrained into, becoming inhuman . . . ? And . . . what if what is 'proper' to humankind were to be inhabited by the inhuman?" (*The Inhuman,* 2.) Unlike the common understanding of the inhuman as being purely negative, Lyotard here distinguishes two types of the inhuman. The first refers to dehumanizing situations in which human beings are treated as a means for supporting a system, whether an economic system in the name of development or a political system in the name of freedom and democracy. The second meaning of the inhuman is opposite of the first. Lyotard clarifies this distinction as follows: "The inhumanity of the system which is currently being consolidated under the name of development (among others) must not be confused with the infinitely secret one of which the soul is hostage" (2). For a discussion of the concept of inhuman in connection with Buddhism, see Jin Y. Park, "The Visible and the Invisible."
52. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 11; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 41.
53. Kim Iryŏp, "Chilli rŭl morŭmnida," 274.
54. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 45; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 79.
55. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 93; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 149–150.
56. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 90; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 146–147.
57. "Revelation" was also discussed in chapter 1, in the context of Iryŏp's sensitivity to death.
58. Editor, "P'yŏnjipindŭl i yŏtchumnŭn malssŭm," 188.
59. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 15; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 46.
60. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 90; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 143.
61. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 59; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 96.
62. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 91; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 148.
63. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 7–8; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 37.
64. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 29; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 61.
65. For example, Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin,* 95; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun,* 152.
66. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 95–96; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 152.
67. See Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness,* 13–22.
68. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling,* 30.
69. For the expression, "wholly other," see Otto, *The Idea of the Holy.*
70. See Sung Bae Park, *Buddhist Faith and Sudden Enlightenment,* especially part one: "Faith."

71. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin*, 14; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun*, 44.

72. Cole, *Text as Father.*

73. *The Lotus Sutra* has been the foundational teaching of Buddhist schools from the premodern to the modern period, as in the case of Chinese Tiantai (天台) Buddhism founded by Zhiyi (智顗, 538–597) and Japanese Tendai established by Saichō (最澄, 779–822). New religions in the twentieth century also took the *Lotus Sutra* as their foundational teaching, as in Reiyūkai Kyōdan (霊友会教団 established in 1920) and Risshōkōseikai (立正校正会, established in 1938), both of which are lay Buddhist groups. (See Hardacre, "The Lotus Sūtra in Modern Japan.") For a discussion of Buddhist schools and practice related to the *Lotus Sutra,* see Teiser and Stone, "Interpreting the Lotus Sūtra."

74. For a discussion of the skillful means, see Schroeder, *Skillful Means.*

75. *Miaofa lianhua jing,* 32c. English translation, Katō et al., *The Threefold Lotus Sūtra,* 125.

76. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin,* 15; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun,* 45.

77. For discussions of this, see Isomae, *Kindai nihon no shūkyō gensetsu to sono keifu;* Godart, "'Philosophy' or 'Religion'?"; Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan.*

78. Fillmore, "Letter of the President of the United States to the Emperor of Japan," 220.

79. Cited in Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan,* 265n3. Josephson pointed out that even though both President Fillmore and Commodore Perry had assured the emperor that the United States had no intention of interfering with the religions of the Japanese and of Japan as a nation, what happened was, in fact, the opposite. Perry's later letter confirmed that "Christianization of Japan" came second only to the trade in the goal of Perry's expedition to Japan. Josephson cites Perry in this context: "To Christianize [*sic*] a strange people, the first important step should be to gain their confidence and respect by means practically honest and in every way consistent with the precepts of our holy religion" (266n4).

80. Godart, "'Philosophy' or "Religion'?," 73–74.

81. Nishi Amane studied in the Netherlands from 1862 to 1865. Before he went to the Netherlands, he was already teaching philosophy in Japan. *Hyakuichi shinron* is based on his philosophy lectures. Kang Yŏngan, *Uri ege ch'ŏrhak ŭn muŏt in'ga?,* 216–217.

82. Inoue, *Inoue Enryō senshū,* 7:107; Heisig et al., "Inoue Enryō," 619.

83. Inoue, *Inoue Enryō senshū,* 7:109; Heisig et al., "Inoue Enryō," 621.

84. Inoue, *Inoue Enryō senshū,* 7:109; Heisig et al., "Inoue Enryō," 621, translation modified.

85. Inoue, *Inoue Enryō senshū,* 7:109; Heisig et al., "Inoue Enryō," 621.

86. Inoue, *Inoue Enryō shenshū,* 7:110; Heisig et al., "Inoue Enryō," 622.

87. Inoue, *Inoue Enryō shenshū,* 7:110; Heisig et al., "Inoue Enryō," 622.

88. Inoue, *Inoue Enryō shenshū,* 7:110; Heisig et al., "Inoue Enryō," 622.

89. William James characterized passivity as an element of a religious experience, especially of mysticism (James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 415). In discuss-

ing mysticism, James identified four characteristics of mystic experience: (1) ineffability—it is not possible to give a concrete verbal description of what one experienced in a mystic encounter; (2) noetic quality–mystic experiences offer an insight into the deep reality; (3) transiency—mystic experiences last at most for half an hour or a maximum of one or two hours; and (4) passivity—we cannot create certain environments for mystic experience (414–415).

90. A Korean Huayan/Hwaŏm monk/thinker Ŭisang (義湘, 625–702) explained this mutual containment and inclusion in his diagram known as "Pŏpsŏng kye" (Diagram of dharma nature, 法性偈) or "Hwaŏm ilsŭng pŏpkyedo" (華嚴一乘法界圖). Ŭisang, "Hwaŏm ilsŭng pŏpkye to," 1. English translation, Odin, *Process Metaphysics and Hua-Yen Buddhism,* 13–21.

91. Inoue, *Inoue Enryō shenshū,* 2:238; Heisig et al., "Inoue Enryō," 625.

92. Inoue, *Inoue Enryō shenshū,* 2:239; Heisig, et al, "Inoue Enryō," 626.

93. For discussions of the issues of Buddhism and its genre at the beginning of modern East Asian philosophy, see Jin Y. Park, "Burdens of Modernity"; Park, "Philosophizing and Power."

94. American scholars examined nationalism, militarism, and imperialism related to the Kyoto School thinkers. See for example, Heisig and Maraldo, *Rude Awakenings.*

95. Tanabe, *Philosophy as Metanoetics*, lvi.

96. Ibid., 26.

97. Ibid., 29.

98. Ibid., 122.

99. Ibid., 118.

100. Ibid., 118.

101. Ibid., 39.

102. Ibid., 126.

103. See for example, n. 28.

104. Fred Dallmayr, a political philosopher, in this context connected nothingness with democracy. Dallmayr claimed that a true democracy is possible through its capacity for self-renewal. In order for a democracy to function, it should be able to go through transformation according to changing realities, and this is what distinguishes democracy from monarchy. Dallmayr interprets nothingness as a mediator that facilitates such changes ("Democracy as Creatio Continua: Whitehead, Tillich, Panikkar").

Chapter Six: At the End of the Journey

1. Reporter B, "Sakpal hago changsam ibŭn Kim Iryŏp yŏsa ŭi hoegyŏn'gi," 15.

2. Ives, *Zen Awakening and Society,* 103–104.

3. For a discussion of Thich Nhat Hanh, see King, "Thich Nhat Hanh and the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam." For discussions of socially engaged Buddhism, see King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism;* King, *Being Benevolence;* Queen and King, *Engaged Buddhism.*

4. It is noteworthy that D. T. Suzuki used a fifteenth-century Japanese version of the *Ten Ox-Herding Pictures* in his *Manual of Zen Buddhism*. In this version, the final stage of ox-herding is depicted as enlightenment, represented by a circle, or emptiness.

5. The ten stages are "(1) searching for the ox; (2) seeing its footprints; (3) finding the ox; (4) catching the ox; (5) taming the ox; (6) riding the ox home; (7) ox forgotten, but not the person; (8) person and ox both forgotten; (9) returning to the origin and going back to the fount; and (10) entering the marketplace to bestow gifts" (Lopez and Buswell, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*).

6. Kyŏnghŏ, *Kyŏnghŏ chip,* 344.

7. Ibid., 350.

8. For discussions on Manhae, see Pori Park, *Trial and Error in Modernist Reforms;* Pori Park, "A Korean Buddhist Response to Modernity."

9. Han Yongun, *Han Yongun chŏnjip,* 2:133.

10. Ibid. For a discussion of Manhae's reformation, see Park, "A Korean Buddhist Response to Modernity."

11. Han Yongun, *Han Yongun chŏnjip,* 2:133.

12. Ibid., 167.

13. Jung, "Liberating Zen."

14. Han Yongun, *Han Yongun chŏnjip,* 2:317.

15. Park, "A Korean Buddhist Response to Modernity," 56.

16. Ibid.

17. For a detailed discussion of the evolution and philosophy of Minjung Buddhism, see Jorgensen, "Minjung Buddhism."

18. Yŏ Ikku, *Minjung Pulgyo ch'ŏrhak,* 123–127.

19. Pŏpsŏng, "Kkaedarŭm ŭi ilsangsŏng kwa hyŏngmyŏngsŏng," 334.

20. Ibid., 339.

21. Pŏpsŏng, "Minjung Pulgyo undong ŭi silch'ŏnjŏk ipchang," 223.

22. Ibid., 223–224.

23. Na Hyesŏk, "Isangjŏk puin,"184. English translation, Choi, *New Women in Colonial Korea,* 28–29.

24. Na Hyesŏk, "Na rŭl itchi annŭn haengbok," 263.

25. To recap the situation, in 1927, Na left Korea with her husband to travel to Europe and the United States. That summer and fall, while her husband studied in Berlin, Na stayed in Paris, working on her painting. In October, Na met a Catholic leader named Ch'oe Lin, and they fell for each other. Na and her husband returned to Korea in 1929, and, in 1930, the story of Na's affair with Ch'oe Lin became known in Korea. Na's husband demanded a divorce, telling Na that if she refused, he would sue her for adultery. Na signed the divorce papers in November 1930. For more details, see chapter 2.

26. Chŏng Kyu'ung, *Na Hyesŏk p'yŏngjŏn,* 283–284.

27. Na Hyesŏk, *Na Hyesŏk chŏnjip,* 692.
28. Kim Iryŏp, *Haengbok kwa pulhaeng,* 114.
29. Chŏng Kyuung, *Na Hyesŏk p'yŏngjŏn,* 285.
30. Yun Pŏmmo, *Hwaga Na Hyesŏk.*
31. Yi Sanggyŏng, *Na nŭn ingan ŭro salgo sipta,* 455.
32. Buswell, *The Zen Monastic Experience,* 71.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., 74.
35. Ibid., 74–75.
36. Ibid., 75.
37. Ibid., 76.
38. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin,* 200; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun,* 217.
39. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin,* 200; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun,* 217.
40. Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 25.
41. Ibid., 152.
42. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy,* 41.
43. Contemporary Korea has witnessed an unprecedented growth in the numbers of Christians, and in this context, claiming a wholesale rejection of a religious worldview in explaining Buddhism might not seem fit. The contrast between the tradition (Buddhism) and modernity (Western influence) explains the phenomena of rapid increase of the "religious" dimension in Koreans' life through Christianity on the one hand and negative interpretation of Buddhist monastics on the other. For a discussion of this, see my introduction in Jin Y. Park, *Makers of Modern Korean Buddhism.*
44. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin,* 162; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun,* 111.
45. Kim Iryŏp, *Haengbok kwa pulhaeng,* 196; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun,* 222.
46. Kim Iryŏp, *Haengbok kwa pulhaeng,* 12.
47. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin,* 134–135; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun,* 192.
48. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin,* 135–136; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun,* 193–194.
49. Park, "Gendered Response to Modernity."
50. Kim Iryŏp, *Haengbok kwa pulhaeng,* 12.
51. Ibid., 20.
52. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin,* 13; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun,* 42.
53. I have discussed the limitations of the liberal New Women's concept of love in my essay "Gendered Response to Modernity."
54. Kim Iryŏp, *Haengbok kwa pulhaeng,* 137.
55. This contradiction is visible especially in her essay "To Mr. C.," addressed to Ch'oe Namsŏn, after his conversion to Catholicism. In her discussion of Buddhism and religious practice, Iryŏp emphasized the importance of the religious practitioner's attitude. She condemned an idol worship and institutionalized religion. If she was to

maintain such a position, Ch'oe's conversion should not be a target of criticism as she expressed in this essay. Another issue is her position on Buddhist purification movements. During the 1950 and 1960s, a purification movement engulfed the Korean monastic community, as the celibate monks and nuns challenged the married monks. In her essay, "Why Has Buddhism Launched a Purification Movement," included in *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun,* Iryŏp claimed that because there was impurity in Buddhism, the Buddhist purification movement was launched. A core of Iryŏp's Buddhist philosophy is nondualism of the opposites. Light and darkness, good and evil, and even the Buddha and demon coexist. If this is the case, why is impurity such a grave issue to her, and what does this impurity in the Buddhist monastic system entail? Iryŏp in this sense contradicts the basis of her philosophy in her position on conversion and the Buddhist purification movement. In 1955, Iryŏp published an essay, "Man'gong Sŏnsa wa Pulgyo chŏnghwa" (Zen Master Man'gong and Buddhist purification). And again in 1959, Iryŏp published in three installations an essay on the issue under the title "Pulgyo chŏnghwa ŭi kin'gŭp munje" (The urgent issue of the Buddhist purification).

56. Kim Iryŏp, *Haengbok kwa pulhaeng,* 5.

57. Ibid., 30.

58. See Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'invisible,* chapter 4; Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible,* chapter 4.

59. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* 105.

60. Hirakawa, "The Relationship between Paticcasamuppada and Dhatu," 107.

61. For a comparative philosophy of Merleau-Ponty and Buddhism, see Park and Kopf, *Merleau-Ponty and Buddhism.*

62. Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of Understanding,* 1.

63. Ibid.

64. Dushun, *Huayan Wujiao Jiguan,* 513a–513b. English translation, Clearly and Clearly, *Entry into the Inconceivable,* 66–67. For Huayan thought in English, see Cook, *Hua-Yen Buddhism;* Chang, *The Buddhist Teaching of Totality.*

65. Kim Iryŏp, *Haengbok kwa pulhaeng,* 191.

66. Kim Iryŏp, "Yŏngsaeng ŭl sanŭn kil," 140; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun,* 233.

67. Kim Iryŏp, *Miraese,* 1:98.

Chapter Seven: A Life Lived

1. Kim Iryŏp, "Puldo rŭl taggŭmyŏ," 212.
2. My interview with Wŏlsong was conducted June 29, 2007, in Seoul, Korea.
3. Reporter B, "Sakpal hago changsam ibŭn Kim Iryŏp yŏsa ŭi hoegyŏn'gi," 16.
4. Kim Iryŏp, "Hanjari ŭi toep'uri," 486.
5. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin,* 21; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun,* 53.
6. Kim Iryŏp, *Sudoin,* 21; Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun,* 53.

7. Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," 16.

8. Ibid.

9. In a similar context, I have discussed the transformative function of *hwadu* language in connection with Julia Kristeva's idea of the revolution in poetic language. See Jin Y. Park, "Zen Language in Our Time."

10. For a comparative study of Husserl's phenomenology and Zen Buddhism, see Park Sunyŏng, "Hutsŏl saenghwal segye kwannyŏm e taehan Sŏn Pulgyo chŏk ihae"; Chŏng Ŭnhae, "Ch'ogi Sŏn Pulgyo sŏnjongnon kwa hutsŏl sigannon haemyŏng."

11. For a succinct discussion of the phenomenological bracket and its meaning in connection with Buddhist philosophy, see Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism,* chapter 6, "Phenomenology."

12. Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt,* 69.

13. Derrida, *The Post Card,* 87.

14. Ibid.

15. Derrida, "I Have a Taste for the Secret," 38.

16. Ibid.

17. Derrida, *De la grammatologie,* 65; Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* 44.

18. For a comparative discussion of the tetralemma and Derrida's philosophy, see Jin Y. Park, *Buddhisms and Deconstructions.*

19. Nagatomo, "The Logic of the *Diamond Sūtra.*"

20. Huineng, *Nanzong dunjiao zuishang dasheng mahe panruo bolou mijing,* 343c.

21. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," 308.

22. Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea.*

23. Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy,* 130.

24. To discuss this in detail is beyond the scope of this book, but an emphasis on the lived experience to overcome metaphysical abstraction is not limited to women's philosophy. In the continental philosophical tradition as well, philosophers have made efforts to underline lived experience as the source of philosophy of life. For a discussion on the issue, see Nelson, "Dilthey and Carnap." Lived experience is one of major avenues of a philosophical inquiry in phenomenology, and Merleau-Ponty tirelessly emphasized its value. See especially his works, *Phenomenology of Perception* and *The Visible and the Invisible.*

25. Derrida, "I Have a Taste for the Secret," 35.

26. On the other side of the view on biography and philosophy, we find the well-known passage by Marin Heidegger in which Heidegger flatly dismissed a philosopher's biography as being irrelevant to our philosophizing. On the opening day of his seminar on Aristotle, Heidegger made a remark: "As for the personality of a philosopher, our only interest is that he was born at a certain time, that he worked, and that he died. The character of the philosopher, and issues of that sort, will not be addressed here" (cited in Kisiel, "Heidegger and the Question of Biography," 15).

27. Kisiel, "Heidegger and the Question of Biography," 17.

28. Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy,* 7.

29. Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism,* ix. For a discussion of the problem of the Western origin of philosophy, see Nelson, "Heidegger, Misch, and the Origins of Philosophy."

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Women and Buddhist Philosophy: Engaging Zen Master Kim Iryŏp
by Jin Y. Park, 2017
In Search of Korean Traditional Opera: Discourses of Ch'anggŭk
by Andrew Killick, 2010