

CHAPTER 29

RAICHŌ: ZEN AND THE FEMALE BODY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF JAPANESE FEMINIST PHILOSOPHY

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PART I: ZEN-FEMINIST RAICHŌ IN THE CONTEXT OF MEIJI SPIRITUALITY (BY MICHIKO YUSA)

THE elegant and colorful figure of Hiratsuka Haru, better known by her pen name of Raichō (1886–1971), has been familiar to Western scholars of feminism for some time now. She initiated a venue for multiple, often competing, female and feminist voices in the early twentieth century by establishing the Bluestocking Society or Seitōsha in 1911 (the 44th year of the Meiji period, 1868–1912). In the post-World War II period, she became actively involved in the call for the removal of American military bases in Japan, as well as for the banning of the manufacture and deployment of nuclear weapons.¹ Through her lifelong engagement in social concerns, she came to earn wide public respect as a critic to be reckoned with. What is relatively unknown, however, is that her impetus for social engagement came from her Zen practice and her *kenshō* experience, which profoundly shaped her life and thought.² She

remarked in her very last years: “Had I not practiced Zen, I would have led a life utterly unrelated to social activism.”³

The question of how “Zen practice” led to her social activism and the formation of her original thought touches on how contemplation is related to action and to philosophy, a question shared by many Kyoto School thinkers. Raichō’s original thinking, buttressed by her conviction of the fundamental importance of discovering one’s “spiritual identity,” contains a message relevant to contemporary feminism. In her case, the mental and spiritual flexibility she gained through her Zen practice enabled her to look deeply into the predicament of women in a critical manner, and spurred her along on the path of independent thinking concerning women’s subjectivity, all with an open-mindedness that characterized her thought. Her philosophical view evolved as her life experience expanded—from that of an inexperienced young woman to that of a woman capable of love as a wife and a mother. She came to view herself as a *sexed body* and not merely a conceptual abstract person devoid of physical reality, and in this way her analysis of life deepened as her life unfolded. She faced an inner conflict that was taking place between her ego and the self—the self belonging to a larger life transcending her ego—and out of this struggle she gained a deeper understanding and appreciation of dynamic ever-unfolding *life*.

Zen Awakening as the Source of Insight and Action

Raichō initially turned to Zen when she was about twenty years old. In those days, the young Meiji students, both male and female, were typically engrossed in the question of their spirituality (which was directly tied to their self-understanding and sense of self-identity in a period of transition from old Japan to new). Accounts by Tsunashima Ryōsen (né Tsunashima Eiichirō, 1873–1907) of his mystical experience drew wide attention.⁴ A well-known scholar and religious seeker in his time, in July 1904 Ryōsen had an experience of “his self melting into the divine,” which he also described as “seeing God” in the depths of his inner self. The young men and women of his day

enthusiastically read Ryōsen's account.⁵ Because Ryōsen's writings are hard to find today, let us quote this account in full from one of Raichō's essays:

If I were to describe the state of my consciousness [at the very moment of my mystical experience], it was something like this: I was working on my essay with a writing brush in my hand. In the next moment, lo! this "I" was profoundly tucked into the bosom of heaven and earth. "I," the ego, disappeared, and God was actually holding the brush. I intuited this moment as absolute, transcendent, and utterly astonishing. I don't know any other way to describe my state of consciousness of that experience. I saw God in this way; I encountered God in this way. But to put it in terms of "seeing" or "encountering" is still superficial and external, and does not sufficiently convey my spiritual state of that moment. It is the meeting and fusing of my ego into God (*jinga no yūkai* 神我融会), the two becoming one (*gōitsu* 合一). At that instant, I had melted into God's presence. I became God.⁶

Ryōsen was familiar with both Buddhism and Christianity, and he freely drew from both traditions as they shaped his religious experience.

His words remained in Raichō's consciousness as she set about looking deeply into her own ego so that she could find God.⁷ She wrote:

By reading the account of Tsunashima Ryōsen's religious experience, I came to understand that the exploration of my ego (*jiga no tankyū* 自我の探求) is the surest way to "seeing God" (*ken shin* 見神). I no longer doubted. God is at the foundation of my self, and it is not a mere God of concept I began my *zazen*, with the hunch that what Zen masters speak of as "awakening to the true nature of the self, and attaining enlightenment" (*ken shō gonyū* 見性悟入) is the same thing as the experience of "seeing God."⁸

Raichō began her formal Zen practice in 1906 under Shaku Sōkatsu (1870–1951), who was a dharma heir of Shaku Sōen (1859–1919). The *kōan* that Master Sōkatsu gave Raichō was: "What is your original face before your father and mother were yet to be born?"⁹ She was to meditate on this mind-boggling "homework" not only while she sat in meditation (*zazen*), but at all times. The "solution" to this question is not found in any book but by each student coming up

with his or her own answer in and through their *zazen* meditation practice. Raichō first needed to clear her mental slate by discarding all the preconceived ideas that she had accumulated. Through *kōan* study and *zazen*, she came to discover her body not only as the *instrument* but also the very *faculty* of thinking and understanding. After about six months of intensive *zazen* practice, in July 1906, she had the breakthrough experience known as *kenshō* (見性), in which her conceptual barriers totally broke down, bringing her directly to the reality of pulsating life (*inochi* いのち).

At that crucial moment of her spiritual awakening, the following hymn by Hakuin, known as *Zazen wasan*, touched her so profoundly that she broke into uncontrollable tears:

Sentient beings are originally Buddha.

It is like ice and water.

Apart from water, there is no ice,

And apart from sentient beings, there is no Buddha

At this moment, what is there more for you to seek, with *nirvāna* itself manifest before you?

This very place, this is the Land of Lotus (*rengokoku* 蓮華国); this very body, this is Buddha.¹⁰

She clearly saw that life, the stuff the real “self” is made up of, was God, and that this divine reality extended far beyond the confines of the limited ego. This recognition constituted her *kenshō* experience, in which Zen students come to grasp the spiritual reality of the “self” as life itself, beyond concepts and ideas. What makes Raichō a thinker and not just a student of Zen is that she reflected on the content of her *kenshō* experience to explain it in a language that would make sense to ordinary people who may have never practiced Zen. Years later, addressing a young readership, she spoke about her understanding of the deep unity of life, self, and God—the experience that had come to her in a flash of intuition—as follows:

You may think that your young beautiful body is “you.” But in fact, you already know that your body is just an “organ” created and animated by life (*inochi*). And this life is actually the real “you.” . . . This “you”—life—lives on without fatigue, old age, or death, regardless of what happens to your organ. It was there even before your body appeared from the womb of your mother; and even after your body will have perished and only bones remain, life will continue to be. Life freely creates another body and gives birth to it. “You” are this eternal life—you are God.¹¹

Human beings are born of eternal life, but we habitually attribute “divinity” to an objectified notion of Buddha or God.

Raichō’s *kenshō* experience liberated her from the conventions that had earlier bound her and worked deeply on her psyche to spur her into action. However, she had to learn how to channel this newly discovered exuberant energy that was unleashed in the wake of her *kenshō*. Her youthful inexperience caused her to equate the real self or “no-self” (*muga* 無我) with an abstractly conceptualized self that transcended the distinction of male and female. This led to her reckless action in 1908; she participated in the experiment of “love suicide” with a male writer who was anxious to realize his literary ideals. They were safely rescued in the snowy mountains near Shiobara and taken into custody by the local police. This happening was widely publicized by the media, which made her a kind of “celebrity.”¹² Many young women of her generation secretly admired her courage and became her fans. A Jungian analyst would say that without the audacity to be playful, one does not fully savor life.¹³ From her dealings with the insatiable appetite of a curious press, Raichō learned that it was best to make her personal life an open book. Moreover, she perceived that an authentic person is a “public” person, for private affairs essentially are the expressions of a universally human experience. Therefore she wrote about her personal affairs and offered them to the public readership. This culminated in the autobiography compiled in her last years.

Raichō’s *kenshō* experience galvanized her into action with a hitherto untapped energy, both physical and mental, and directed her to social activism. But Zen practice alone would not produce a social activist or a philosopher. In Raichō’s case, it was the combination of her rather unique modern upbringing,¹⁴ her native intelligence, her

poetic imagination, a certain psychic makeup, and her desire for learning that made her a “perfect vessel, in which the explosion, the unleashing, of women’s life force, which had been suppressed and pent-up for many generations in a society controlled by men, could take place.”¹⁵ Lest her message be narrowly construed by the public, she deliberately did not foreground the influence of Zen in her writings, but she remained convinced of its essential power to liberate and transform women. She wrote:

By a pure karmic connection I took up *zazen*, underwent the spiritual experience called “*kenshō*,” and entered the world of Zen. But because I believe that different spiritual approaches eventually lead to the same endpoint, I consciously avoided the mention of the word “Zen” so that the reader would not misconstrue my words narrowly Women . . . over time had lost, or at least weakened, this power of spiritual concentration, and became dispirited spineless creatures. But we must not give up I had great hopes and expectations for the future of women, and advocated that each and every woman undergo her inner transformation.¹⁶

From Zen Practice to the Life of Social Activism

As mentioned above, in 1911 together with like-minded female colleagues, Raichō established the Bluestocking Society, which started out as a platform to showcase contemporary women’s creative writings, but which soon turned into a forum for early Japanese feminists to criticize the perceptions of women in the past and present and to debate various new possibilities. The society’s journal, *Seitō*, running from 1911 to 1916, published frank discussions of topics ranging from the protection of mothers and children to sexuality, abortion, and the abolition of prostitution.¹⁷ The notoriety that Raichō inadvertently gained following the “Shiobara Incident” helped to bring the Society’s journal to public attention and contributed to its robust sales.

As Raichō became progressively involved in the running of *Seitōsha*, she gradually left behind her formal Zen practice. But she continued to “sit” in meditation, whenever she found herself in a tight situation.¹⁸ Her habit of independent thinking nurtured by her Zen practice liberated her from the yoke of hackneyed conventional

concepts and ready-made ideas. Her development as a critical thinker was sustained by her religious awareness of the reality of the ego in view of the boundlessness of life. This explains, for instance, Raichō's negative response to Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, which was translated into Japanese and staged in Tokyo in 1911 to wide public acclaim. Her colleagues of the Seitōsha generally expressed their approval of the female protagonist Nora, hailing her as exemplifying new possibilities for women.¹⁹ But to Raichō, it appeared that Nora's actions were rash, hasty, and juvenile, and that both Nora and her husband needed to surmount serious spiritual questions before they could become truly authentic persons.²⁰

Raichō's Philosophy of the Sexed Body

Raichō developed her philosophical reflection on the full reality of the human body as sexed. As we saw earlier, she first viewed the true self in abstract terms by overlooking the presence of the sexed body. But later on, as she responded to her life's experiences of falling in love, sharing the life of love with her husband, and becoming a mother of two children, she came to embrace the richer and concrete reality woven out of the body as sexed. At first, facing her reality of being a woman was for her the source of a struggle between her drive to preserve her self-identity as her ego and her willingness to accept forces beyond her control, which eventually opened up a new interrelational horizon of human existence. Her path of discovery may be sketched in three phases or stages.

Phase 1: The Universal View of the Sexes

Raichō's early view on the sexed body is found in her celebrated 1911 manifesto in the inaugural issue of *Seitō*.²¹ Therein, she proclaims her unbridled belief in women's "hidden genius" by emphasizing "heaven-given talent" (*tensai* 天才, which in today's Japanese means "genius," but for Raichō meant "a talent bestowed by heaven") as follows:

In the beginning, woman was truly the sun, an authentic person (*shinsei no hito* 真正の人).

Now she is the moon, a pale and sickly moon, dependent on another, reflecting another's brilliance

Together with all women, I want to believe in women's hidden heaven-given talent. I want to place my trust in this unique potential and rejoice in our good fortune of being born a woman. Our savior is the heaven-given talent within us.²²

As she goes on, evidence of her spiritual convictions comes to the fore. She brushes off the sexual distinction between male and female as insignificant in the larger scheme of "universal spirituality," and, accordingly, she relegates sexual difference to the lower rungs of consciousness:

I shall seek genius through spiritual concentration.

Heaven-given talent is mystery; it is the authentic person.

Heaven-given talent has nothing to do with one's being a male or a female.

Male or female—this sexual distinction belongs to the level of intermediate or lower rung of the "self," the tentative "ego," which ought to die and perish. This distinction of male and female does not exist at the highest level of the "self," of the "true ego" (*shinga* 真我) that is immortal and imperishable.²³

In this manifesto, we notice already a variety of positions on gender—at times advocating the overcoming of constructed gender identities and at times celebrating the uniqueness of women's spiritual potential. It also must be added that Raichō in this early period harbored prejudice against men as a vestige of her negative experience regarding the Shiobara Incident.²⁴ By elevating the "true self" beyond all gender distinctions, she in fact refused to see any positive value in the sexed body, either male or female. She was not yet ready to see herself in the particular, and she stuck to the dimension of the universal. In Buddhist parlance, she privileged the aspect of universality (*byōdō* 平等) over that of particularity (*shabetsu* 差別).

Phase 2: "Encounter" with Ellen Key and Sexual Difference

This all was to change when, in August 1912, Raichō encountered her future husband, Okumura Hiroshi, a painter five years her junior. Around this time, Raichō was reading *Love and Marriage*, just published in 1911 by the Swedish feminist Ellen Key (1848–1926).²⁵ In this book, Key treated the controversial topic of the complex sexual and spiritual aspects of love, criticizing the traditional institution of marriage in favor of marriage based on love, which was still a novel idea around the turn of the twentieth century in many northern European countries.²⁶ The timing of the encounter with Key's work was "providential" to Raichō,²⁷ because it opened her eyes to "women's issues" for the first time and made her think about "many things and raise many questions."²⁸ Well-bred young Japanese women of the Meiji period were so sheltered that they were provided with almost no knowledge of sexuality or sexual relations. So, for Raichō, Key became a guide through the unfamiliar terrain of love and partnership.

Key, today a mostly forgotten figure even in her native land, was quite well known in Europe during her lifetime, even dubbed as "a humane, practical, female counterpart of Nietzsche."²⁹ She advocated the individual's happiness as "the most important condition" in life, where happiness is understood as the free and voluntary formation of one's own moral values (and not as "wanton promiscuity," as her opponents were wont to depict it).³⁰ Key's position on women's liberation was different from that of the universal suffrage movement of her time, and for that she was viciously attacked by the proponents of the latter.³¹ Key questioned the premise of the suffragist movement, which in her view tacitly accepted androcentric values as the measure over against which women's worth was evaluated. Key's position aimed at *more* than mere equality of the sexes and was directed toward the liberation of women *qua* women. By nurturing their nature and participating in the betterment of society, women would help create a more peaceful and egalitarian community. In Key's eyes, the suffragists tended to obscure women's uniqueness in their slogans advocating the equality of the sexes, which even tended to "masculinize women." Havelock Ellis, in agreement with Key, succinctly clarified the latter's

unique position: “it was not enough to claim woman’s place as a human being—especially in an age when man was regarded as the human being par excellence, but it also became necessary to claim woman’s place in the world as a woman. That was not, as it might at first seem, a narrower but a wider claim.”³²

Key called for the social protection of motherhood by maintaining that the state ought to recognize the significance of the work of mothering as the source of creating domestic happiness, which becomes the building block of a good society. For Raichō, this intersection of the personal and the public, so persuasively articulated by Key, became essential to her reassessment of the sexed body and its social role.

Phase 3: Transition from the Universal to the Particular

Feeling the need to build for herself a solid philosophical foundation concerning women’s issues, Raichō took Key’s *Love and Marriage* as her textbook. In order to understand Key’s position better, she decided to translate it into Japanese and published it in installments in *Seitō*.³³ In her introduction to the first installment of her translation, she frankly admitted the conflict between the new ideas appearing on the horizon of her thinking and her earlier position: “When I engage in thinking or writing, and even when I am in romantic love, my awareness as a woman is hardly present. I only have the awareness of my ego (*jiga*), and I am aware of this ego’s fundamental desire . . . to live fully by developing and expanding my energy in the world of higher reality.”³⁴ Nevertheless, Key’s influence on Raichō turned out to be “quite fundamental, along with the influence of *kenshō* through *zazen*—although not as profound a transformation for me as *kenshō* effected,” she admitted.³⁵ While working on her translation of Key’s book, Raichō’s love for Okumura grew significant and serious. Also, Key’s philosophy convinced her to accept marriage and bear children. After half a year of courtship, the two lovers moved into the arrangement of “common living,” as opposed to officially getting married. Until 1947, according to the old civil code, married women in Japan had no legal property rights or financial independence, and the wife was treated as the possession

of the husband. In defiance of this civil code, Raichō established a branch of the Hiratsuka family and registered herself as its head, and she willingly bore the humiliation of registering their children “born out of wedlock” or “bastard.”

After moving in with Okumura, her view of romantic love and the sexed body underwent a further transformation:

Romantic love became something solemn and significant that I had to look at with completely different eyes. I had to think long and hard about what it means to live as a woman and what value there is for a woman to live a life of love In the process I came to see *the need to liberate women not only as human persons but also as sexed women*. This was a totally new philosophical problem for me. My guide and moral support at the time, my source of ideas and hints as to how to proceed, was the book by Ellen Key [*Love and Marriage*]. During these two years of living with Okumura, I have slowly awakened to myself as a mature, integrated woman. At the same time, my life of love conflicted with my inner life—with my eagerness to continue to work, and the cry of my soul for solitude.³⁶

Raichō’s need for solitude—time for contemplation and writing about it—was further challenged during her first pregnancy, which forced her to face a serious existential quandary. She wondered: “Could I attain equilibrium between my life, in which I try to develop my personality, and the life of a mother? — these uncertainties aroused fear in me.”³⁷

She described this inner conflict as a battle between the preservation of her “ego” and the instinct for altruism and self-sacrifice occasioned by her becoming a mother. The latter, she saw, was issuing from the “imperative power of life,” the transcendent force of nature that was operating inside her. Raichō now saw that self-liberation was taking place enabled not by an abstract genderless self, but by a concrete sexed body that is always connected to others through physical, mental, emotional and spiritual bonds. About five months into her pregnancy, she reflected:

Recently, I came to recognize that the desire to have my own baby and to be a mother are both latent in me How could I deny a baby, which is the creation of love—of that love that I affirmed when I entered into a life of love? . . . In this way, the fleeting idea that crossed my mind about aborting the fetus vanished completely. Although I am filled with fear and anxiety, along with an immense sense of responsibility, as I approach this unfamiliar world step by step, I am also beginning to experience a certain attachment, unexpected hope, and even joy. Not only that, the bond between my lover and me has grown deeper and more sincere, and our commitment to each other has strengthened.³⁸

The birth of a baby girl in December 1914 sharpened Raichō's reflection on motherhood. She wondered, "Where did that strange new strength well up inside me, the strength that so easily overcame my egoism, which was inveterately rooted within me, and that made me want to raise the baby, regardless of all possible difficulties and sacrifices I may have to make, and despite all the contradicting feelings within me?"³⁹ Even then, the sense of being a mother and her love for the child did not come to her right away, but "only after the baby began to laugh, and recognized me as the mother and started to seek me out."⁴⁰

Her motherly instinct, however, did not completely eradicate the pull of egoism, which remained in her as the dissatisfaction with having been thrown into the life of a mother and the many sacrifices it required of her. In this "constant battle between her egoism (or individualism) and altruism (her love for others)," a larger horizon of her life's meaning emerged:

I affirmed my romantic love initially in order to assert my individual identity and develop it. But love rooted in self-affirmation and self-development turned out to be gateway to the love of others, the other side of life. In no time the whole panorama of love of the other unfolded in front of me, first through the love I bore my lover, and then through my love for my child. I ended up experiencing all sorts of contradictions in my life, but I can no longer dismiss them as merely "life's contradictions." I have rather come to think of them as gateways that open out into a wider, larger, and deeper life. And the real harmonization of these two orientations may well be the subtle and ultimate flavor of life itself.⁴¹

The truth of the matter is that Raichō continued to struggle with these contradictions until her two children reached the age of independence. Nonetheless, we discern in Raichō's personal conflicts a movement of philosophical development: from a disembodied abstract self to a sexed self, and then to the integrated personal and social self bonded by love and respect. All the while, her need for contemplation and critical and honest inner reflection—a habit she cultivated through her *zazen* and *kōan* practice—continued to mature and sustain her life of social activism.

PART II: RAICHŌ IN THE WIDER CONTEXT OF FEMINIST PHILOSOPHY (BY LEAH KALMANSON)

In [Part I](#), we highlighted the importance of Zen practice to Raichō's life and work; in [Part II](#), we elaborate on the significance of her ideas in the larger context of feminist philosophy. Many of the central concerns of Raichō and other early Japanese feminists overlap considerably with issues still relevant for feminism today. Raichō and her colleagues faced two interrelated problems: (1) Are the categories of gender and sexual identity purely constructed, or are they at least partly rooted in biology or an innate nature? (2) Are members of the women's movement working toward a new understanding of both humanity and equality that cuts across, or possibly transcends, gender and sex distinctions? Or, are they working at least in part to showcase women's uniqueness, and hence to develop a vision of equality that prioritizes gender particularity?⁴²

In navigating these dilemmas, Raichō's Zen practice invites the insight that women's liberation, or any liberation, is as much *from* the self as it is *for* the self. In other words, while Raichō prioritizes greater autonomy for women and hence liberation *for* women's self-directed pursuits, she also acknowledges a sense of spiritual liberation *from* the limitations of the ego.

As both her writing and her actions show, liberation is not freedom for a generic subject; a deeper sense of liberation empowers the particular, embodied person and enables the capacity to work actively on behalf of others in society. This commitment is seen across a spectrum of feminist voices in Japan, both in Raichō's lifetime and today.

Raichō and Feminist Discourse in Japan

In Raichō's day, questions of motherhood, women's social roles, and the construction of women's identities divided the feminist movement while at the same time providing a rich source of debate and discussion. Of note is a series of exchanges in 1918 between Raichō and her contemporary Yosano Akiko (1878–1942). In the background of this debate is Raichō's own experience of raising her first baby alone while her husband—a painter with no steady income—was recovering from tuberculosis. During this time, Raichō was, in effect, a single mother who wrote essays and short novels to earn a living for the entire family. Hence she questioned Yosano's opposition to state aid for mothers and determination to accept nothing short of total financial independence for women. Raichō worried that Yosano's vision of equality obscured gender differences and devalued the unique contributions to society of women's work as mothers. Raichō was supported in this debate by fellow feminist Yamada Waka, who was also a reader of Ellen Key. Another important voice in the discussion, Yamakawa Kikue, linked the underprivileged status of women to other economic disparities, holding that only a systemic change from capitalism to socialism would address the root of women's problems.⁴³

Despite differences among all of these thinkers, they do share a common conviction that liberation for a given woman does not mean simply greater personal freedom but also greater personal responsibility within a community. Of course, the fight for women's rights is on the agenda for feminists in Japan as elsewhere, but many voices in Raichō's time converge on the key point that women are fighting for their *duties* as much as for their *rights*. For example,

when Yosano declares five conditions for reform, the fourth is “the principle of classless solidarity in taking responsibility for humanity at large.” She explains: “When it comes to the creation of cultural life, all human beings bear the responsibility to act in solidarity. As women, we desire an equal share in this responsibility.”⁴⁴ For Yosano, as well as for Raichō, freedom is not the pursuit of egotistical desires but the unhindered capacity to fulfill meaningful responsibilities and to participate fully in community life. Likewise, although Yamakawa joins Yosano in rejecting the idealization of motherhood, she, too, echoes Raichō’s general insight that liberation for the self is liberation *from* petty individualism *for* greater social responsibilities. She writes: “Rather than companions or subsidiaries, women are peers of men it is only proper that they should work diligently towards the construction of an autonomous culture. It is as much a duty as it is a right for women.”⁴⁵ Yamakawa goes on to emphasize that the women’s movement must not be sidetracked by fighting for economic access to a privileged leisure class in the guise of the fight for equal rights.⁴⁶

In more recent years, these questions of women’s identity and the meaning of equality are seen, for example, in a well-known disagreement between cultural critic Aoki Yayoi and influential sociologist Ueno Chizuko. Aoki is associated with an eco-feminism that embraces the female principle as a powerful force in nature and society, to which Ueno responds with concerns about overly romanticizing the feminine. Yet, neither woman’s position is simplistic or easily classifiable. For example, Aoki’s understanding of the feminine principle is not reducible to a naïve, socially constructed femininity. She writes:

if all [feminism] achieves is the right of passage of women into the existing male social structures and practices, I don’t know that we have achieved very much I don’t believe we can achieve any real liberation for women until we have some vision of an alternative lifestyle, some other way of existing, not just between man and woman but between humans and the environment.⁴⁷

Ueno herself notes that she, too, values the importance of the “maternal function” while qualifying this statement with the idea that

both men and women can learn to be effective nurturers.⁴⁸ Moreover, both Aoki and Ueno would agree that studies of female identity in Japan today cannot be divorced from the history of Japan's encounters with various imperialisms, including its own emperor system, as well as deep-rooted relations with China and more recent relations with the United States and Europe. In particular, Ueno notes that arguments once deployed to define Japanese uniqueness against Chinese cultural hegemony are now deployed to undermine the influence of feminist critique as one more imperialist importation from the West.

Ueno resists this move, saying: "Japanese feminism has its own *raison d'être*, its own history, and its own voice, and the charge of being an import was created to attack feminism by reducing it to mere Western influence."⁴⁹ In particular, Ueno characterizes American feminism as being overly focused on the language of individual rights and at times undervaluing domestic work as an important social function. She expresses admiration for Japanese feminism's historical engagement with issues of maternity and femininity, noting emphatically that all notions of "freedom" need not be cast in a Western mold: "Asian women do have significant power, although it is not a form of power recognized by non-Asian feminists It is possible for Asian women to develop a feminism that is the product of their own cultural context and meaningful to them."⁵⁰

We look back to the early twentieth-century Japanese feminists as setting the stage for a reading of "liberation" that accommodates the personal as much as the interpersonal and that thereby recognizes forms of power and freedom beyond liberal individualism. Here, we see the potential of Raichō's work to contribute to contemporary discourses surrounding the meaning of liberalism for feminist ethics and politics.

Raichō and Feminist Discourse in Western Scholarship

Feminism in Western scholarship is divided over the values of liberal individualism, such as autonomy, equality, and freedom, which are widespread in moral theory at large. On the one hand, many feminists advocate these values as central to obtaining and sustaining rights for women in society. For example, Martha Nussbaum, one of the most well known feminists of the liberal tradition, writes:

Personhood, autonomy, rights, dignity, self-respect: These are the terms of the liberal Enlightenment. Women are using them, and teaching other women to use them when they did not use them before. They treat these terms as though they matter, as though they are the best terms in which to conduct a radical critique of society, as though using them is crucial to women's quality of life.⁵¹

On the other hand, despite the successes of liberalism in gaining political rights for women across the globe, some feminists question liberal values for being overly individualistic, indebted to a traditionally patriarchal picture of the subject, or reflective of Western hegemony. For example, Eva Feder Kittay argues that liberalism “fosters a fiction that the incapacity to function as a fully cooperating societal member is an exception in human life, not a normal variation.”⁵² Kittay counters that periods of dependency—as in childhood, old age, and extended illness—are inevitable and normal. Liberalism, she continues, not only obscures the normalcy of dependency but also devalues the work of those caretakers in charge of dependents, relegating such work to the private sphere and hence shielding it from political critique. Kittay is associated with a field of feminist theory known as “care ethics,” which argues for an understanding of personhood at odds with the rational, independent, self-interested subject of liberalism. As Virginia Held writes: “It is characteristic of the ethics of care to view persons as relational and as interdependent [T]o many care theorists, persons are at least partly constituted by their social ties.”⁵³ Nussbaum criticizes care ethics for romanticizing women's social roles and privileging motherly devotion over self-determination, a point that recalls similar objections to Ellen Key's work several generations earlier.

Although there is little (if any) direct influence of Ellen Key on contemporary care ethics, they do share similar concerns about the undervalued status of women's work in the family and the home. These similarities situate Raichō fruitfully within contemporary feminist discourses surrounding liberalism, especially her frank reflections on the tensions between what she called her "egoism" and her "altruism." As we have seen, she acknowledges that the body has a life and power of its own, one that frustrates the agency of her ego while at the same time providing a source of liberation and creativity. Similarly, society and family relations at times stand in her way while also providing her with a larger sense of self. Although Raichō's work gives no easy answers to the problems of identity and autonomy that she raises, the influence of Buddhism on her understanding of liberation is instructive. Feminists, not only in care ethics, but in other areas of moral theory and philosophy, critique the individualistic, substantive, or overly rational ego of the Cartesian tradition; yet, at times, they also struggle to articulate a vision of autonomy or empowerment suitable for the post-Cartesian subject. How might Raichō's political as well as spiritual insights be relevant to this articulation?

Perhaps recent work in Womanist–Buddhist dialogue has already begun answering this question.⁵⁴ For example, social ethicist Melanie Harris comments on the relevance of Buddhist practices for black women, in words that recall Raichō:

The imagined path from Womanism to the Gospel of Mary into the gardens of Buddhism suggests that self-love is part of the process of coming to know the self, of realizing the "inner deity" that merges the boundary lines between being human and divine. These two gifts of Buddhism, building confidence and meditation upon the divine self, echo calls that Womanists also answer, to reestablish a sense of wholeness in black women.⁵⁵

Following on the work of pioneering black feminist and Buddhist practitioner Jan Willis, Harris recommends Buddhist meditation as a healing practice that not only sustains personal well-being but also enables the ongoing work of social justice.

For thinkers such as Harris, spiritual reflection is not merely passive and contemplative—rather, it is a call to compassionate

action and a foundation for social activism. Such progressive voices undoubtedly find a supportive ally in a figure such as Raichō. Her commitment to both spiritual and political liberation for women conveys a powerful message that brings added perspective to ongoing concerns in feminism today.

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¹ Hiratsuka 2006, 314.

² Hiroko Tomida's study of Raichō, however, dismisses the essential significance of her Zen practice, concluding that Raichō's "religious leanings" were inconsistent at best. See Tomida Hiroko, *Hiratsuka Raichō and Early Japanese Feminism* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004), 373.

³ Recorded by Kobayashi Tomie, who assisted Raichō's project of writing her autobiography. See Kobayashi, "Postscript" to Hiratsuka 1971–73, 3:310.

¹⁰ Hiratsuka 1983–84, 7:21. The last four lines are quoted in Hiratsuka Raichō 2006, 92.

¹¹ "Anata jishin o shire" [Know thyself] (1947), Hiratsuka 1983–84, 7:20.

¹² On the "Shiobara Incident," see Hiratsuka Raichō 2006, 104–18.

¹³ Cf. Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Golden Ass of Apuleius: The Liberation of the Feminine in Man* (Boston & London: Shambhala, 1992), 39.

¹⁴ Her father was sent to Germany by the Meiji government to study the new method of accounting; he gave his two daughters the highest education available to young women.

¹⁵ Hiratsuka 1971–73, 3:300–1.

¹⁶ Hiratsuka 1971–73, 1:336.

⁴ See Itō Tomonobu, “Tsunashima Ryōsen,” in *Kindai nihon tetsugaku shisōka jiten* [Dictionary of Modern Japanese Philosophers and Thinkers], edited by Nakamura Hajime and Takeda Kiyoko (Tokyo: Tokyo Shoseki, 1982), 370–2.

⁵ Nishida Kitarō was among those who enthusiastically read Ryōsen’s essays. See diary of February 17, 1905, “I read Mr. Tsunashima’s ‘Religious Rapture’ (*Shūkyōjō no kōyō* 宗教上の光耀), which spoke to me”; and March 2, 1905, “Today I read Mr. Tsunajima’s essay published in the *Taiyō*. Deeply touched.” *Nishida Kitarō zenshū* [Collected Works of Nishida Kitarō], vol. 17 (Tokyo, Iwanami Shoten, 1980), 135–36. Unless otherwise noted, translations in this chapter are by Michiko Yusa.

⁶ Qtd. in Hiratsuka 1983–84, 6:24–5. The original essay by Tsunashima Ryōsen, “*Yo ga kenshin no jikken*” [The Experiment of My Seeing God], is compiled in his *Byōkanroku* [Records of My Illness and Convalescence].

⁷ Like Tsunashima, Raichō expresses an openness to various paths of religious faith as equally authentic. When her daughter chose to become a Christian, Raichō spoke these words of assurance: “You need not worry about the fact that your faith is something different from that of your family members. The fact that it is gradually becoming a non-issue for you shows that you are spiritually maturing. It may seem funny and strange to you that your mother recites a *norito* (Shintō prayer) in front of the family altar that enshrines Shintō gods, and chants a *sutra* in front of the Buddhist altar. But in my mind, I see no contradiction whatsoever in my action, just as I can accept your Christian faith without any sense of contradiction. Christianity, Buddhism, and Shintō may still appear to be different to you, but for a person who sees the truth of life (the ‘great way’ *daidō* 大道), they are one.” Hiratsuka 1983–84, 6:33.

⁸ Hiratsuka 1983–84, 7:25.

⁹ On the *kōan* she was given, see Hiratsuka 1983–84, 6:27.

¹⁷ For a sample of works available in English see Bardsley 2007.

¹⁸ Hiratsuka 1983–84, 5:274–76.

¹⁹ For the special section on *A Doll’s House* see the journal *Seitō* 2.1 (January 1912). See also the collection of *Seitō* essays in Horiba 1991, 31–79.

²⁰ Horiba 1991, 62–9. The original is Hiratsuka Raichō’s “*Nora-san ni*” [To Miss Nora], *Seitō* 2.1 (January 1912), 133–41. Cf. *Seitō sōmokuji-sakuin* [The complete table of contents and indices of *Seitō*] (Tokyo: Ryūkei Shosha, 1980). It is interesting that Nishida Kitarō made a similar remark a few years earlier on this play by Ibsen: “Nora has abandoned her home, and now what kind of life is she

going to seek? If she is to have another ‘awakening,’ I have the feeling that she has to come back home.” See Letter no. 75 to Tanabe Ryūji, March 14, 1908, *Nishida Kitarō zenshū*, 18:95.

²¹ Hiratsuka 1987, 9–24.

²² Hiratsuka 2006, 157 and 159.

²³ Hiratsuka 1987, 11, emphasis added.

²⁴ See Raichō’s discussion of the Shiobara Incident and her feelings surrounding men and sexuality in Hiratsuka Raichō 2006, 104–29. She came to acknowledge that this prejudice hindered her from squarely facing women’s issues.

²⁵ Hiratsuka 1971–73, 2:491.

²⁶ Ellen Key, *Love and Marriage*, trans. A. Chater (New York and London: G. P. Putnam, 1911), 15: “The doctrine that love is the moral ground of sexual relations is thus as yet only an unendorsed sequence of words.” There was the traditional view that “marriage and love were mutually exclusive” (*ibid.*, 23).

²⁷ Hiratsuka 1971–73, 2:491.

²⁸ Hiratsuka 1971–73, 1:179.

²⁹ Quoted by Berenice A. Carroll, in her introduction to Ellen Key, *War, Peace, and the Future*, trans. Hildegard Norberg (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1972), 6. This work by Ellen Key was originally published in America in 1916.

³⁰ Ellen Key, *Love and Marriage*, 55. See also Louise Nyström-Hamilton, *Ellen Key: Her Life and Her Works*, trans. A. E. B. Fries (New York and London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1913), 102.

³¹ Louise Nyström-Hamilton, *Ellen Key: Her Life and Her Works*, esp. 106–9.

³² Havelock Ellis, “Introduction,” *Love and Marriage* by Ellen Key, xiii–xiv.

³³ Dina Lowy criticizes Raichō for using Key’s eugenic arguments “to promote legislation [that] appealed to a state increasingly concerned with national pride and racial purity” and “made strategic use of them [i.e., Key’s ideas of love, marriage, and motherhood] and converted Key’s universal ideas into nationalist terms.” See Lowy, “Love and Marriage: Ellen Key and Hiratsuka Raichō Explore Alternatives,” *Women’s Studies* 33 (2004), 370 and 377. However, no textual substantiation can be found in Raichō’s writings for this criticism.

³⁴ Hiratsuka 1983–84, 1:178–79.

³⁵ Hiratsuka 1971–73, 2:492–93.

³⁶ Hiratsuka, 1983–84, 2:49–51; also Yusa 2011, 1125. Emphasis added.

³⁷ Hiratsuka 1971–73, 2:557.

³⁸ Hiratsuka 1983–84, 2:49–51. See also Yusa 2011, 1124–25.

³⁹ Hiratsuka 1983–84, 2:268.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 274–275. See also Yusa 2011, 1125–26.

⁴² Written works on these topics are too numerous to list, but for a good overview of some fairly recent material, see Barbara S. Andrew, Jean Keller, and Lisa H. Schwartzman, eds., *Feminist Interventions in Ethics and Politics* (Oxford: Roman and Littlefield, 2005).

⁴³ Yusa 2011, 1123.

⁴⁴ Yosano 2011, 1144.

⁴⁵ Yamakawa 2011, 1160.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 1162.

⁴⁷ Buckley, ed. 1997, 15.

⁴⁸ Buckley, ed. 1997, 281–83.

⁴⁹ Ueno 2005, 232.

⁵⁰ Buckley, ed. 1997, 278.

⁵¹ Martha Nussbaum, *Sex and Social Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 56.

⁵² Eva Feder Kittay, *Love's Labor* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 92.

⁵³ Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 46. Beyond care ethics, the idea of a relational or a “social self” is popular in other areas of feminist moral theory that are critical of liberal individualism. See Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, eds., *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁵⁴ The Womanist-Buddhist Consultations, which ran from 2009 to 2011 at Harvard Divinity School, University of Georgia, and Texas Christian University, gathered a variety of Womanist scholars together to read and discuss Buddhist texts. See Wakoh Shannon Hickey, “Editor’s Introduction,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 32.1 (2102): vi–viii.

⁵⁵ Melanie Harris, “Buddhist Meditation for the Recovery of the Womanist Self, or Sitting on the Mat Self-Love Realized,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 32 (2012): 70.