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Book Review

Buddhist Responses to Globalization

Edited by Leah Kalmanson and James Mark Shields. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014. xv + 167 pages, ISBN 978-0-73918054-9 (hardcover), $80.00; ISBN 978-0-73918055-6 (eBook), $79.99.

Reviewed by Ronald S. Green, *Coastal Carolina University*

Buddhist Responses to Globalization is a volume of collected essays by scholars. Since a part of the study involves the interaction between Buddhism and other worldviews, it is appropriate that many of the contributors are specialists in comparative philosophy. The book is divided into two sections, each comprised of four articles. These sections are titled (1) Globalization as Spatial, Cultural, and Economic Deterritorialization and (2) Normative Responses to Globalization. Before you do a double take at the title of the first section as I did, "Deterritorialization" is correct. It's a word that means what it looks like it would, getting rid of previously established territories. You should also be forewarned that this is just the first of a number of words that may strike you as unfamiliar, including "womanist" and "glocalization," as taken up below. The following summarizes the eight articles based on what struck me as most interesting about each.

The opening essay is "Squaring Freedom with Equality: Challenging the Karma of the Globalization of Choice" written by Peter D. Hershock of the University of Hawai'i. This article is well placed in the book because it introduces what the author sees as Buddhism's long historical involvement in globalization. Accordingly, Buddhism began with increasing urbanization and trade in South Asia and spread by the silk routes to East Asia and across Eurasia. Over time, Buddhism expanded as a part of lifestyle changes of people moving away from village communities and their authorities. Hershock argues that Buddhism provided ideological basis for avoiding conflict and taught that people should not act as selfish individuals, lessons he believes are needed still today.

Hershock next looks at current problems and how Buddhism can help. He begins by examining the historical development of the modern idea of freedom. He agrees with British sociologist Anthony Giddens that certain problems arise when modernization pressures individuals to question socially learned standards, including those surrounding work, family, gender, and personal identity. He writes, "In sum, global dynamics have come to be structured in a way that is conducive to a gradual and apparently ineluctable blurring of the line between *freedom of choice* and *compulsions to*

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choose" (6). At the same time, there has been a widening of the gaps between income, wealth, risk, and opportunities. According to what Hershock calls a popular "neoliberal view," with which he does not agree, the way to readdress these problems is to offer more choices to an even greater number of people. As an alternative to this way of thinking, the author suggests applying the Buddhist teachings of interdependence and karma. He says that Buddhist freedom engages with others. Likewise, the way we deal with others is also tied to karma, which is itself linked to freedom: freedom to change our karma. That being the said, Hershock suggests that it would be beneficial for us to rethink the ideas of freedom and equality by considering Buddhist perspectives, to apply Buddhist practices of *upaya* (skill-in-means of helping others), and *kuśala* (wholesomeness in actions). He sees this as necessary to correct the inequalities we are collectively generating in the globalized world.

Chapter two is "Alice Walker, the Grand Mother, and a Buddhist-Womanist Response to Globalization" by Carolyn M. Jones Medine of University of Georgia. When I read this intriguing if enigmatic title, I had two immediate questions: what is a womanist and is Alice Walker a Buddhist. I should have also wondered where grandmother fit in. After reading the article, I realized that my very confusion about "womanist" is central to the use of the word, which intentionally defies certain types of definitions that have become standard. At the risk of violating this principle and with an advance apology for doing so, I want to summarize several points that were important to me in this article. In short, the article connects Walker's definition of a womanist to her idea of a revolutionary artist by looking as some of her works.

The author gives us Alice Walker's "four-part definition of womanist," which is actually a list of qualities of a womanist, including one who pays attention to self, other, and community and who has a love of music, dance, and struggle. For more of what we conventionally call a definition, we may refer to the editors' introduction to this book which states "Womanism is a vibrant and growing field focusing on the diverse intellectual, spiritual, and religious experience of woman of color, especially as such experiences relate to issues of social and political concern. The term was coined by Alice Walker to demarcate a discourse independent of those feminist studies dominated by white, middle-to upper class perspectives" (ix). Jones Medine quotes Walker from *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1984) saying, "Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender" (19). She also says that consideration of the term "womanism" begins with rethinking the received definition of "woman," reconstructing, for example, what it is to be "womanish."

As for whether Alice Walker is a Buddhist, we learn in the article that her Buddhist practice started even before she had heard the words of the Buddha. Jones Medine tells us it is connected to African Americans' path to freedom and Walker's own uneasiness with Christianity, received in the midst of oppression. However, the author writes, "she does not want to be a 'Christian' or a 'Buddhist'. Rather she seeks awakening: to be a Buddha or a Christ…" (24). She pursues this by confronting suffering and embracing struggle.

Chapter three is “Religious Change as Glocalization: The Case of Shin Buddhism in Honolulu” by Ugo Dessì of the University of Leipzig. It should first be noted that “Glocalization” is not a typo; the “c” is correct. Glocalization is the interaction of the global and the local (46). The chapter is a case study in this, looking at how Shin Buddhism in Honolulu has incorporated practices not traditionally a part of Shin, to accommodate the needs and interests of its affiliates. The author summarizes this history as follows. At first, in the late 1800s, Shin served the Asian emigrant community in Hawaiʻi. Its activities were terminated during WWII and afterward Shin could not function as a traditional ethnic religion. Also, plantations closed in the 1980s, leading to more of a shrinkage in membership. Americans generally are unaware that Shin Buddhists have rejected the kinds of meditative practices found in Zen and elsewhere as grounded in a false and egotistical belief about self and that such practices are ineffectual in the current degenerative age of the world (*mappō*). However, Americans are increasingly interested in such practices and, since the 2000s, Hawaiian Shin has attracted non-Asian members by offering Tai Chi (taiji) and quiet sitting sessions for contemplation. Recently it has expanding to vipassana practice incorporating the *nenbutsu*.

Chapter four is “From *Topos* to Utopia: Critical Buddhism, Globalization, and Ideological Criticism” by James Mark Shields of Bucknell University. Those familiar with the works of Shields, who is one of the editors of this volume, may have read his recent book *Critical Buddhism: Engaging with Modern Japanese Buddhist Thought* (London: Ashgate, 2011). This article expands that study.

In the 1980s, a group of intellectuals associated with Japanese Zen emerged, calling themselves “Critical Buddhists.” The group challenged the East Asian Buddhist establishment, including that of their own tradition, as perpetuating social discrimination in their version of Buddhist theory and in their actions supportive of governmental and other authoritarian power. While the group has been criticized by other scholars of Buddhism, most recently by Shields, as presenting inadequate arguments and sometimes misinformation, here Shields argues that their idea was valuable and should be revamped as a tool to fight the woes of globalization through Buddhism. In his book and in this article, he takes up this issue by beginning with “*topos*” that is, actually existing social orders, and contrasts this to ideologies, which indicates images wished for related to false consciousness. In terms of revolutionary potential to fight the injustices of the existing order, one problem with ideologies is that they can easily be co-opted by the establishment and incorporated into those existing orders. In contrast, Shields argues, via classical sociologist Karl Mannheim, that utopias, such as liberation theology, may yield revolutionary products that challenge existing authorities. In short, Shields suggests “reimagining (critical) Buddhism as utopia,” which is a subheading for this article. As precedents, he provides a number of historical examples of how people challenged the dominant social structure by incorporating Buddhism, including the White Lotus Society in China, the *ikkō-ikki* peasant revolts in Japan, and Nichiren’s use of the *Lotus Sūtra* as *upaya* for social transformation.

The second half of the book, Normative Responses to Globalization, opens with chapter five, “An Inexhaustible Storehouse for an Insurmountable Debt: A Buddhist Reading of

Reparations" by Leah Kalmanson of Drake University, coeditor of this volume. This chapter concerns how Buddhist principles can help in reparations to victims of the systemic oppression of colonialism and its legacy, including efforts to help heal and restore the effected communities. As her model, Kalmanson points to the story of Xinxing (540-95 CE) and his "inexhaustible storehouse" that was a Buddhist lending institution before it was eventually shut down by the government. According to the story, Xinxing believed that we are in the third age of Buddhism, the age of decline, and in this age it is impossible to repay our massive karmic debt accrued by boundless past misdeeds. While acknowledging that throwing money at people is inadequate for alleviating suffering, Xinxing suggested that, even in this age, one who gives rise to the inexhaustible storehouse need no longer fear the debt master, karma. Kalmanson says that the phrase "inexhaustible storehouse" refers to the Mahāyāna tradition of a Bodhisattva's boundless compassion. The lending institution called the "inexhaustible storehouse" was a charitable organization that operated until the 700s. It was independent of the government and provided no-strings-attached lending that did not simply support the monastery as other efforts had. Because of the networking nature of the institution, individual Bodhisattvas were able to pool their efforts to create a greater impact. The article suggests that this way of framing reparation helps us think of it in terms of Buddhist practices, such as those encouraged by Dōgen in Japan, rather than strictly in terms of policy. Kalmanson uses Dōgen's idea of practice liberation, "indicating a sustained change of habit" (93), applying it to reparation in the modern globalized world.

Chapter six is "Engaged Buddhism and Liberation Theologies: Fierce Compassion as a mode of Justice" by Melanie L. Harris, a womanist social ethicist and teacher. It is by far the shortest contribution to the volume, but one the editors rightly found worth including. In addition to providing readers with a brief history of how womanism has been applied to issues in Islam and Christianity, Harris "invites you into a collaborative discussion" about applying the values of compassion and justice (99). It is clear in this that the discussion is not merely academic but meant to inspire acts of "fierce compassion" in terms of Buddhist social engagement. She points to the examples of Milarepa and Marpa's "wrathful compassion," saying that such wrath can be a powerful tool and helps us rethink approaches to justice. She contrasts wrath with anger, which is self-centered. In some ways I wish this article had appeared in the book before the one by Jones Medine. I also realize that that feeling arises from my insecurity about not finding the type of definition I am used to. I likewise see some, though maybe not complete, justification for placing this article in the Normative Responses half of the book, rather than the Spatial, Cultural, and Economic Deterritorialization section.

Chapter seven is "World, Nothing, and Globalization in Nishida and Nancy" by John W. M. Krummel of Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York. In it, the author suggests value in finding intersections between the work of the Japanese philosopher Nishida Kitarō (1870 -1945) and contemporary French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy. Nishida was the founder of the Kyoto School of philosophy, famous for attempted syntheses of European philosophy and Buddhism. It is because Nishida's philosophy is said to have had no practical social applications that Krummel suggests merging it with

Nancy's ideas. Krummel sees the two as dealing with similar issues of place and the world. Nancy finds "a nothing at the ground of the world" (108), Nishida viewed the world in terms of *kū* (emptiness) and *mu* (nothing). Both describe the world as dynamic and changing and find the force driving the change to be "nothing." While they see the world as being indeterminate, it gives rise to meaning "belonging to a social-historical collective of people" (113). Krummel is particularly interested in the globalization of previously bounded groups and the growing multiplicities of "truths" being made increasingly accessible. For him, the convergence of the ideas of the two thinkers holds a potential for opening the space for coexistence of a multiplicity of meanings.

As the editors skillfully chose an apt opening essay, so did they find a wonderful ending piece. Chapter eight is "A Zen Master Meets Contemporary Feminism: Reading Dōgen as a Resource for Feminist Philosophy." It was written by Erin McCarthy, professor of Philosophy and Asian Studies at St. Lawrence University. I have known the author as a dedicated board member and editor for the ASIANetwork and its journal, and one committed to integrating contemplative practices with academic study. This chapter is exemplary of these things. It therefore provides a fitting conclusion to this book as well as an invitation to expand the study. McCarthy begins by pointing out that "Dōgen's views on the equality of men and woman were not only radical for his times but for ours" (131). The article describes the potential application of Dōgen's non-dualism to the work of contemporary feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray. In particular, she highlights the following aspects of Dōgen's thought.

Dōgen was committed to practice and wrote at length on practice-enlightenment, as mentioned in Leah Kalmanson's chapter. His teachings emphasized being kind and his view that meditation is not a complete practice. That is, for Dōgen, praxis off the meditation cushion is an essential part of Buddhism. This extends to acting justly and thinking rightly regardless of whether social consensus is to the contrary. To demonstrate this, McCarthy quotes various works by Dōgen wherein he expresses the idea that one should be concerned with the merits of a teacher, not whether that person is male or female. She also points to various writings in which Dōgen rejects institutional prohibitions on women, such as on their entering certain places. She shows where Dōgen gives examples to support the equality of women and men as dharma teachers and where he seems to go as far as encouraging laypeople to ridicule those who do not see that equality. In the end, McCarthy returns to how these and other examples she provides can be applied to contemporary feminist work. In particular she points to how it may inform criticisms that tend to split body and mind.

A few places in the book, I wondered if the authors were not trying to take on a bit too much. This might be natural in that it is a beginning effort to open a much larger discussion. For example, while I enjoyed reading the chapter by Leah Kalmanson, I wondered if her reference to Dōgen strengthened her argument about Xinxing and his inexhaustible storehouse or made it more scattered. Mentioning Dōgen did tie her chapter to McCarthy's, but Xinxing's and Dōgen's circumstances were quite different. Of course, this may be one of her unstated points, that the idea is widely applicable across borders and centuries. I also wondered if James Mark Shields needed to mention *topos* in his chapter or if it was potentially confusing. He treated *topos* in much greater detail in

his book on Critical Buddhism and applying Mannhiem's classical theory to globalization seems to me a large enough task for a chapter without further attempt to synthesize the ideas of various philosophers. Apart for such small caveats, which are not really concerns, I feel the book is a coherent study that should be welcomed by those interested in socially engaged Buddhism and globalization.