Introduction

Roger T. Ames

Self as Person in Asian Theory and Practice is our sequel volume to *Self as Body in Asian Theory and Practice* (SUNY, 1992) and anticipates a third volume in the "self" series, *Self and Image in Asian Theory and Practice*, which is now in press. This present volume continues our cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary exploration of various notions of self that ground alternative cultural traditions.

This SUNY Press series of anthologies on self emerges out of a project initiated and organized at the East-West Center in Honolulu by Wimal Dissanayake, a research associate at the center. Over the past few years, relatively small seminars—approximately twenty scholars on each occasion—have been convened at the center to bring experts representing different cultures and different disciplinary perspectives into conversation. Most of the articles included here were selected from papers presented and discussed in this forum. A major criterion in the selection process was to find a balance between reflection on those specific practices that define cultural differences, and the application of emergent theories once shaped and abstracted as instruments of explanation for cultural practices.

The perhaps uncontroversial starting point of the investigation of self is that different cultural experiences have produced importantly different conceptions of self and that these different conceptions of self need to be factored into any responsible evaluation of contemporary issues and problems. To actively address seemingly global issues as diverse as the promotion of human rights or the resolution of sexism in ways that avoid the familiar though often inadvertent lapse into cultural chauvinism, alternative cultural perspectives that begin from

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differing conceptions of self and self-realization must be fully articulated and respected.

Although the recognition that alternative cultural experiences produce different notions of self and hence different expectations for self-fulfillment might be uncontroversial, the question of what value we give this difference still remains. A. N. Whitehead in *Modes of Thought* makes a distinction between "matters-of-fact" and "importance."[1] This distinction can be best understood by illustration. We might, for example, ask the question, Is formal logical reasoning a universal characteristic of high cultures? The answer is not simple. Cultures are rich and diverse, and where it is indisputably a *matter-of-fact* that in the later Mohist canons of the Chinese tradition, for example, we can find some commitment to formalized logic, we must ask the further question, What is the *importance* of formal logic to the development of the Chinese philosophic tradition as a whole? If the answer to this second question is that logic has had at best only an incidental influence on Chinese philosophy, it can change the value of the assertion that formal logic developed in China from a clear demonstration of universality to a demonstration that what we, as a tradition, have taken as a necessary condition for responsible philosophical evidence has had only passing notice in one of humanity's most developed cultures. In other words, the relative unimportance of logic for China, far from encouraging claims of sameness, underscores the radical degree of difference that obtains among cultural traditions. In this case, the exception proves the rule.

In exploring alternative conceptions of 'self', what value do we give to universal assumptions about 'humanity' that will guarantee at least the necessary minimum of cross-cultural respect and, with it, the very possibility of comparison; and what value do we give to radical claims about difference that will hold cultural reductionism at bay and preserve the richness and diversity of competing cultures? In recent times, among those of us who take it upon ourselves to investigate other peoples, there seem to be two very different temperaments and agendas. Some students of alternative cultures are inclined to believe that, when all is said and done, human beings are pretty much alike; others do not. Some believe that behind all of the divergences, there surely must be universal problems that transcend cultural differences; others believe that behind the more obvious and uninteresting physiological and other apparently acultural similarities—one head, two ears, and so on—there are profound and exotic differences that derive from culture-bound ways of thinking and living.[2] Some believe that failing to regard the commonality as most important is to deny the alternative cultures their humanity; others believe that to assert such an essential commonality is to deny alternative cultures their unique-

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ness. While the contributors to this volume certainly line up on both sides of the distinction between an emphasis on sameness and an emphasis on difference, those authors representing non-Western traditions would argue that a different degree of emphasis on sameness and difference is itself a distinguishing characteristic among cultures. At the same time, there has been a sea change occurring within the Western academy, beginning at its philosophic center, which has brought strident universalistic claims about methodologies and architectonic orders under careful scrutiny and revived an interest in the currents and swells of particular histories and cultures.

It is because this tension between sameness and difference remains unresolved among cultures and within the Western tradition itself that we have divided the editorial tasks in such a way as to allow for full diversity of opinion. Each of the three editors has different areas of cultural specialization—Wimal Dissanayake (South Asia), Thomas P. Kasulis (Japan), and Roger T. Ames (China)—and each has accepted responsibility for editing and introducing those chapters within his geographical region. This division of labor guarantees not only a plurality of cultural perspectives on broad themes but also a plurality of individual perspectives on the more specific issues rehearsed in a collection of very different essays. These introductions are a further opportunity to lift the architecture of each section to the surface and compare themes shared among the various authors.

Although all three editors have participated fully in the major editorial decisions resulting in the compilation of this anthology, it was decided that Ames would be first editor and would be responsible for the overall coherence of this effort. To this end, Ames has introduced the opening section that brings Western and the non-Western traditions into discussion. It is in the effort to contextualize the particular philosophical explorations that further opportunities for philosophizing emerge.

Mattison Mines's essay, "Conceptualizing the Person," is being reproduced by permission of the American Anthropological Association from *American Anthropologist* 90, no. 3 (1988).

NOTES

1. A. N. Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (New York: Free Press, 1938): 1–19.

2. A. C. Graham makes this point in his review of Benjamin J. Schwartz's *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), *Times Literary Supplement*, July 18, 1986. Schwartz is a relatively clear and accomplished example of the former category.

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PART ONE

A Basis for Engagement

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INTRODUCTION TO PART ONE

Roger T. Ames

Robert C. Solomon, in the opening essay of this anthology, provides the reader with a necessary context for considering the concepts of 'self' and 'self-realization' in some of the non-Western traditions. He rehearses the history of personal identity as this cluster of problems has been framed within the Western philosophic dialectic, providing an overview of the various generations of formulation and response that the disparate notions of self have generated, from Descartes's "thinking substance" and the "transcendental ego" of German idealism to the "brain-in-the-vat" excursus of contemporary analytic philosophy. In sketching out the contribution of major European philosophers in the process through which theories of self have gradually taken on their conceptual shape and content, Solomon worries over the tension between acknowledging cultural specificity and the predilection of systematic philosophy to brandish universalistic claims.

Solomon is impatient with the irrelevancies of professional philosophy and its self-indulgent "puzzles"; at the same time he is anxious to underscore the centrality of questions concerning personal identity in every moment of ordinary life. What is at stake for most of the modern philosophers taken within the context of the Enlightenment project is nothing less than the defense of individual autonomy and moral responsibility.

Against the background of a historical introduction to the conceptual vocabulary and major themes of the anthology, Solomon dwells on several issues which have some promise for cross-cultural engagement. He emphasizes, for example, the irreducibly social aspect of self: Sartre's "Being-for-others" where self, dependent upon status, requires recognition. He then turns to the question of "character" as it is embedded in virtue ethics: How is character inscribed? Is personal identity reducible to a set of manifest character traits, and if so, what

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becomes of free will? What does it mean to be "in character" and "out of character"? Again, with death being a boundary condition of some sort on self, why is such disproportionate weight given to the way in which one exits this world in defining one's personal identity?

Using Nietzsche to challenge assumptions about the "unity of virtues," and by extension, the "unitary self" that must be addressed by virtue ethicists, Solomon anticipates both Amélie Rorty's contribution in setting a direction for contemporary Western philosophic reflection on personal identity, and several of the Asian traditions that are inclined toward a "field of selves" notion of self.

In service to the multicultural dimensions of this anthology, Solomon turns to the underlying assumption of most of our authors, namely, that the construction of 'self' is a cultural product. He sees the movement toward cultural and epochal specificity as a welcome opportunity for philosophic reflection, both enriching the Western discussion by importing alternative models of self, and, in the comparison, bringing the diverse Western conceptions into clearer focus. At the same time, there are power differentials that can have catastrophic effects on world cultures. In his discussion of the ongoing encounter and exchange between European civilization and the Maoris (and alternative examples to the Maori situation are legion), he identifies the problem of forced redefinition as an impoverishing consequence of these same bicultural interactions.

This volume properly continues with an essay by Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, a scholar who has been at the center of recent philosophical discussions on the self within the Western tradition and who has written extensively on this subject.[1] Rorty is a philosophical archaeologist, and her essay here, like most of her work, is deeply concerned with exposing the layers of philosophical history. Her commitment to the history of an idea makes two important contributions to our project. First, her historical excavation discloses the richness and radical diversity of particular strata within the Western philosophic dialectic and, in so doing, registers a caution to those comparativists who, with broad sweeps, would caricature Western philosophy by defining it too narrowly in service to superficial and facile comparisons with other cultures. Second, in pursuing her own philosophical credo—a sustained commitment to the primacy of the particular—Rorty sounds a warning against the familiar problem of equivocation—philosophers talking past one another because of uncritical assumptions about vocabulary and conceptual content. In tracing out careful distinctions among passions, emotions, and sentiments from Aristotle to Rousseau, Rorty seeks to describe dramatic shifts and transitions in what the West as a cultural tradition has meant by a conception of

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self—both individuated, autonomous self, and civil self. Rorty concludes, again as is signatory of her work, by pointing out directions for continued exploration. Rather than decrying the seeming failure of Rousseau and modern philosophy to resolve into unity the sorely divided and conflicted "autonomous citizen," which, against the best instincts of the tradition, philosophical reflection over time had inadvertently constructed, Rorty reflects on and celebrates this unresolved and unresolvable complexity as a defining condition of any robust conception of self. In her own words, "the truth of the matter is that we are multiple selves: we are wild animal creatures; we long for, and are committed to identifying ourselves with a universalized rational autonomy. And even in the best of politics, we are also social subjects defined by the particular affectional relations that carry the dialectics of power relations in their wake."[2]

John C. Maraldo, a comparative philosopher whose research has focused primarily on contemporary Japanese philosophy, provides a first link between Rorty's historical reflections on modern conceptions of self and notions of self predominating in non-Western cultures. The starting point for Maraldo's study is the claim by Shimazaki Tōson, an early twentieth-century Japanese novelist, that a reading of Rousseau was the occasion for him to discover a 'self', an entity of which he had previously been unaware. The question then, is, Does Tōson discover Rousseau's 'self'?

Maraldo, like Rorty, begins by distinguishing the objective and superordinate "self-conscious self" of Descartes and Locke from the subsequent and much more subjective "self-consciousness" of Rousseau. What still makes Rousseau's sense of self resolutely Western and modern, however, is that it assumes an inner, isolated interiority accessible only through one's own reflexive consciousness. In an effort to uncover the full historical and cultural texture of Tōson's newly discovered self, Maraldo then compares the notions of self and, by extension, self-revelation, found in Rousseau's *Confessions*, with the Confucian Arai Hakuseki's *Told Round a Brushwood Fire* (*Oritaku shiba no ki*). Ostensibly both works are autobiographical, but where the *Confessions* probes into "delicate matters" to reveal Rousseau's "secrets of the soul," *Told Round a Brushwood Fire* provides a more sociological account of Hakuseki's life almost entirely devoid of the details of a psychic interior. Personal meaning for Hakuseki is manifest in a person's interactions with others, not in the private self of introspection. Maraldo attributes these differences in autobiographical focus to a contrast between the strong influence the Reformation's exaltation of the individual's inner life had on Rousseau, and the social expectations placed on the individual that were expressed by Hakuseki's work.

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But Hakuseki's assumptions about self constitutes only one model among many available within the Japanese tradition. To illustrate the plurality and range of such models, Maraldo selects Hakuin's personal story in *Wild Ivy* (*Itsumadegusa*) of his own impassioned development from a "fear-obsessed child to a fearless teacher." The story line of Hakuin's autobiographical *Wild Ivy*, reminiscent of Rousseau in its personal detail and emotion, is extended by reference to his subsequent works, illustrating both the role of practice and the open-endedness of the Zen conception of True Self. Like Rousseau, Hakuin expresses those inner feelings recollected from the critical periods of his life. The purpose of these recollections, however, is not the same as Rousseau's. Hakuin views those inner dynamics not as his true self but as turmoils through which he has had to pass in order to achieve enlightenment. For Hakuin the True Self is not an object for self-reflection but a process of expression.

The self that Tōson claims to have discovered is like Hakuin's in its search for inner freedom, like Hakuseki's in its desire for moral justification, and like Rousseau's in its expression of conscience. But in the end, as an ambivalent self narrated into existence through Tōson's particular writing, it contrasts with all three. Given the distinct models of self that are created through different narrative practices, autobiography must be considered a pluralistic genre.

Maraldo concludes his exploration with a tension between particular selves and universal paradigms of self: while self in any tradition is unquestionably shaped by historically and culturally conditioned life-activity, each of these thinkers, from East and West, is seeking to express a more universal model of what it is to be human, one that reaches beyond their own times and circumstances. For Maraldo, this universality is most fully revealed only when the self remains unabstracted and is articulated within its appropriate life practices.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, ed., *The Identities of Persons* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976); Brian P. McLaughlin and Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, *Perspectives on Self-Deception* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988); Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, *Mind in Action* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988).

2. See below, p. 0000.

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