

Across East and West: Third Wave Feminism as a Traveling Theory

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Abstract

Originated in the U.S. context, third wave feminism has traveled in different communities of practices and cultural locations. I am interested in exploring the production, distribution, and reception of third wave feminism in different sites of knowledge production such as academic publishing practices, conferences, and classrooms as it travels across geopolitical borders, and more specifically, between East and West. Therefore, this paper will first interrogate the processes through which “third wave feminism” is formed and disseminated within a cross-cultural framework. Second, the paper will analyze how third wave feminism is brought into friction and dialogue with local experiences so as to enable identifications and disidentifications. In other words, this paper will examine how the meanings, expressions, and implications of “third wave feminism” have intersected and diverged for women in various global locations. Ultimately this paper will explore the possibilities and limits of third wave feminism as a new form of transnational alliance in a world of increasing cross-border movements and cross-cultural contacts.

Key words

Third wave feminism, traveling theory, cross-border movement,
feminist knowledge production

Introduction

The metaphor of “traveling theory” was initially conjured up by Edward Said (1983) and James Clifford (1989), who studied the translation and dissemination of theories as embedded in other cultural practices, historical contexts, and power struggles. Since then, it became a traveling metaphor taken up by many other theorists who attempt to

analyze the circumstances shaping the constitution of knowledge formations through the exchange of ideas and concepts, including the changing conditions of traveling in increasingly globalized yet unequal world economies and academic markets. Though disagreeing with Said's tendency to see an origin to theories and look at mutations of them as compromises to them, feminists such as Kathy Davis, Katie King, and Inge E. Boer also extend Said's argument by asking how feminism as a traveling theory operates in shaping knowledge production and the relationship between feminists in the so-called First and Third Worlds. Interested in untangling the complex and often disjunctive connections among feminisms in different geographical locations, these feminists treat theory as what Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (1994) call an "object of exchange," part of the transnational cultural flows in an increasingly globalized world. In the view of Kathy Davis and Allaine Cerwonka (2008), feminism functions as a traveling discourse that circulates globally and yet is always rearticulated and transformed in very particular, localized ways. As Davis points out, "feminist ideas have a long and uneven history of being taken up and rearticulated in different locations across the globe through history, producing hybrid cultural formations that may bear only a passing resemblance to U.S. feminism in late modernity" (Davis, 2007, p. 7).

Following their methodology, I will examine how third wave feminism, a phenomenon that became increasingly discernible in the 1990s, continues to spread globally following the turn of the new century. The emergence of third wave feminism offers us an opportunity to rethink the context of knowledge production and the mediums through which we disseminate our feminist work. Originated in the U.S. context, third wave feminism has traveled in different communities of practices and cultural locations. I am interested in exploring the production, distribution, and reception of third wave feminism in different sites of knowledge production such as academic publishing practices, conferences, and classrooms as it travels across geopolitical borders, and more specifically, between East and West. Therefore, this paper will first interrogate the processes through which "third wave feminism" is formed and disseminated within a cross-cultural framework. Second, the paper will analyze how third wave feminism is brought into friction and dialogue with local experiences so as to enable identifications and

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The Rise of Third Wave Feminism

In the United States, third wave feminism, a phenomenon that became increasingly discernible in the 1990s, continues to spread following the turn of the new century. It is now widely acknowledged that Rebecca Walker’s article “Becoming the Third Wave,” published in *Ms. Magazine*, announced the appearance of third wave feminism. Walker’s reclamation of feminism was significant because it challenged the idea that women of the so-called “postfeminist generation” were apolitical and uninterested in furthering the gains made by the second wave of the women’s movement. It suggested that a new generation of women wanted to work together to change the world (Dicker, 2003, p. 118). Walker has been identified and marked with the status of “leader” by the feminist establishment and by mainstream U.S. media. Indeed, Third Wave Direct Action Corporation is a young feminist organization she and Shannon Liss founded shortly after Walker’s article was published. Feminist critics often link Barbara Findlen’s (1995) *Listen Up: Voices from the Next Feminist Generation* with Walker’s (1995) edited anthology *to be real* as the exemplars of third wave feminism. And it becomes clear that third wave feminism has captured the imagination of many contemporary feminist scholars.

The past two decades have marked an enormous upsurge of interdisciplinary interest in third wave feminism both in academia and feminist organizations. The academy serves as the most important locale for the production, circulation, and reception of third wave feminism. Conferences on third wave feminism abound and no annual meeting in women’s studies would be complete without at least one session devoted to young women. There has been an explosion of academic texts attempting to define third wave feminism as a new feminist discourse. A whole series of third wave feminist publications has emerged with ti-

tles like *Third Wave Agenda* appearing as the first academic collection (Heywood, 1997), followed by *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century* (Dicker & Piepmeier, 2003), *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration* (Gillis, 2004), *Not My Mother's Sister: Generational Conflict and Third Wave Feminism* (Henry, 2004), and, summing up and providing a canon for third wave literature, *The Women's Movement Today: An Encyclopedia of Third-Wave Feminism* (Heywood, 2006). Although the discourse of third wave feminism has raised a lot of controversy and is viewed with considerable suspicion in the U.S., women from a wide variety of locales and hyphenated national origins have responded enthusiastically to the call. They have adopted, modified, extended, or challenged the works done by mainstream feminist theorists. Dozen of theses and dissertations are written and special issues on third wave feminism are published to participate in such feminist knowledge production. The proliferation of third wave feminist discourse has also affected curriculum or teaching practices. Third wave feminism has been included in feminist theory or introduction to women's studies courses in a gesture of inclusion or as a corrective to mainstream feminism.

So, what is third wave feminism? What issues are of central importance to third wavers? According to Leisle Heywood, the Third Wave is "self-described as multiracial, multicultural, multiethnic, multisexual, and containing members with various religious orientations." It "was the first organization to articulate the views and concerns of a new demographic with identities that could not easily be broken down into opposing categories such as black/white, gay/straight, female/male. The ideas they forwarded addressed these complexities and the need for new forms of social justice that could address this kind of hybridity within individual identity" (Heywood, 2006, p. xvii). Many followers have attempted to clarify some of the confusions raised in the discussion of third wave texts, and further expand some of its original trajectories. Reading the generational language in third wave literature, such feminists as Amber Kinser, Astrid Henry, Jennifer Baumgardner, and Amy Richards regard third-wave feminism as a generational cohort, seeking a new version of feminism that practices young feminist activities. Others, including Leisle Heywood, read third wave feminist writing as a discursive site that celebrates difference and multiplicity, and embraces contradiction and individual freedom of choice. Most feminist critics agree that third wave

feminism arose as a response to the backlash against feminism, as a revision of mainstream feminist narrative, and as an ongoing engagement with unfinished second-wave works. Aware of the totalizing and homogenizing tendencies of mainstream feminism, Jenny Reese, in her definitions of third wave feminism, has questioned its universalistic assumptions and “essentialist” definition of womanhood. The critics thus claim that third-wave feminism “allows women to define feminism for themselves by incorporating their own identities into the belief system of what feminism is and what it can become through one’s own perspective” (Reese, 2011, p. 25).

In an attempt to give an overview of the major themes of third-wave feminism, R. Claire Snyder indicates that third wave tends to illustrate a “multiperspectival version of feminism,” to embrace “multivocality over synthesis and action over theoretical justification,” and to emphasize an “inclusive and nonjudgmental approach” (Snyder, 2008, p. 175). Though acknowledging the critical possibilities of third wave feminism, Snyder foregrounds its provincialism rather than values its potential for transnational coalition: “third-wave feminism focuses almost exclusively on American feminism, often prioritizing issues that at best do not resonate internationally and at worst undermine the possibility of transnational coalitions” (Snyder, 2008, p. 192). Yet, to regard third wave feminism as “distinctively American” is to ignore the interplay of local and global influences in the development of feminist discourse. As Friedman argues, “Feminism seldom arises in purely indigenous forms, but, like culture itself, develops syncretistically out of a transcultural interaction with others” (Friedman, 1998, p. 5). Ednie Kaeh Garrison, affirming Friedman’s point, foregrounds Chela Sandoval’s articulation that the recognition of a “differential consciousness is vital to the generation of a next ‘third wave’ women’s movement” (Garrison, 2007, p. 250). Third wave feminism is thus a movement fundamentally indebted to the feminist critique articulated by women of color. This understanding is echoed by Baumgardner and Richards, who also argue that “the third wave was born into the diversity realized by the latter part of the second wave,” a diversity represented by works of African American and Chicana feminists, third world feminists of color and U.S. third world feminists (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000, p. 77).

The Politics of Location in Third Wave Feminism

Although third wave feminism was initially manifested as a specific local form of activism expressing the activists' own particular needs and priorities, many later followers are increasingly aware of its place in a globalized world, and even reveal the need for a transnational activist focus. During times of increasing movement of people, goods, and information across national borders, Winifred Woodhull draws attention to how third wave feminism must shake off its parochialism—rooted as it is in the global north—and embrace the “internationalism” which she cites as having characterized the “second wave” (Woodhull, 2004, p. 156-157). As Amanda D. Lotz further claims, “More than a first world phenomenon, third wave feminism has both important local and global dimensions.” Within the U.S., “third-wave theory developed in response to the limitations of essentialist understandings of women that narrowed the relevance of some features of second-wave activism, and its attention to the diverse experiences of women aids in understanding not only the U.S. context, but the varied realities for women around the globe” (Lotz, 2003, p. 3). In this sense, third wave feminism should not be limited to a discussion of regional or even national politics. Some third wavers even highlight the potentiality of a “third wave” to open up a space for broader transnational dialogues among feminist movements. In her attempt to build a bridge between Arab and western feminism, Susan Muaddi Darraj suggests, “The third wave is a global wave, but it must sweep through and carry back messages from women all over the world—and those messages should, in their own words, articulate their visions, their concerns, and their histories” (Darraj, 2003, p. 203).

Indeed, the politics of location in the third wave juxtaposes some recent articulations of contemporary feminist theory, which recognizes how the importance of location shapes feminist knowledge production and practices. Given the inequalities between first and third world locations, it is usually assumed that American liberal feminism, for instance, is a product of Anglo-American influence alone and has spread to people in other parts of the world who passively adopt it. When looking more closely at how the U.S. feminist movement has been shaped by the presence of other cultural forces, Claudia de Lima Costa sees that “US feminist theories have been deeply informed by other currents as

well, making its genealogy far more complex than initially recognized” (Costa, 2006, p. 73). Costa’s remarks aptly echo some theoretical expressions of third wave feminists. As Leisle Heywood and Jennifer Drake acknowledge, “The definitional moment of third-wave feminism has been theorized as proceeding from critiques of the white women’s movement that were initiated by women of color, as well as from the many instances of coalition work undertaken by U.S. third World feminists” (Heywood & Drake, 2002, p. 6-7). Boer also asserts, “Western feminism can hardly be seen as a unified theory; it is rather a disparate set of critical aims and theoretical approaches, varied in forms and situated in different sociopolitical and cultural contexts” (Boer, 1996, p. 1468). In alignment with her argument, I do not mean to suggest that third wave feminism shares a singular perspective; rather, an understanding of the heterogeneous character of third wave feminism is an indispensable step toward a critical exchange between feminists in the United States and other nations.

Third Wave Feminism in the West

While some of the boldest discursive articulations of third wave feminism have appeared in the U.S., the production and impact of third wave Feminism has not been limited to the United States. From its inception, it has been taken up, and adapted by feminists in different parts of the globe. By 2005, it had already appeared in many Western countries, as well as Asian ones including Australia, the Philippines, and Taiwan. Not surprisingly, as the neighbor closest to the U.S. with similar cultural backgrounds, Canada and its young women eagerly join the third-wave feminist discussion. Appearing as the first academic response to third wave feminism in Canada, *Turbo Chicks: Talking Young Feminisms* is compiled by a diverse team of writers from across Canada. Allyson Mitchell, one of the editors, tells how the book project was inspired by the young women’s writings in *Listen Up*, one of the popular American third-wave anthologies. Young Canadian women were especially receptive because third wave feminism reached them at a time when they also wanted to understand their relationship to established feminism. As Lisa Bryn Rundle, another editor, asks, “What does it mean to have grown up in Canada after the women’s movement’s influence of the

1970s?” (Mitchell, Rundle, & Karaian, 2001, p. 19). Adopting similar rhetorical strategies, the contributors to *Turbo Chicks* point to generational difference and reflect the issues and experiences of young Canadian women regarding third-wave feminism. Not only do they explore how differences in sexual orientation, race, and class mediate young women’s relationships to feminism, but they also attempt to counteract the idea of a monolithic feminism. Yet, they are aware of the limits of their version of feminism in other social contexts, for they acknowledge the collection is “still pretty urban and tied to universities” (Mitchell, Rundle, & Karaian, 2001, p. 19). As one of the contributors describes her encounter with a group of single mothers in Honduras, the group’s leader bluntly questions her feminism: “I don’t care what you call it, I just want to feed my babies and maybe someday shit in a toilet” (Mitchell, Rundle, & Karaian, 2001, p. 55).

When third wave feminism travels to Europe, while some local feminist scholars share similar interests by joining the third wave discussion, others have called into question the applicability of a temporal move from a second to a third wave to non Anglo-American contexts. *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration* appears to be one of the earliest advocates in England. In their introduction, Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie, and Rebecca Munford address the need to bridge “the cultural economies of third-wave feminism” and “the epistemologies of contemporary academic feminism” (Gillis, Howie, & Munford, 2004, p. 3). Jonathan Dean further points out the contested meanings of the “third wave” in British context: “the ‘third wave’ is an essentially contestable signifier that may be taken up and used by feminist academics and activists in a plurality of different ways” (Dean, 2009, p. 335). Although some British activists have claimed that the “third wave” is essentially an American import that has been adopted uncritically in the British context, despite the existence of potential problems relating to the transferability of concepts between the American and British contexts, Dean, in his analysis of how third wave feminism is appropriated in British feminist politics, recognizes the need to build a constructive dialogue between women’s studies and third wave feminism (Dean, 2009, p. 345).

Third wave feminist discourse was met with some ambivalence when it reached eastern European countries. In an essay detailing aspects of contemporary Polish feminism, Agnieszka Graff describes the conditions

surrounding her reception of third wave feminism. Given Poland's national history as well as its political present, generational rhetoric is not applicable to the development of Polish feminism. Graff notes that Polish feminism is a "peculiar mixture of second wave feminist goals and third wave feminist themes and tactics" (Graff, 2007, p. 143). Although Polish feminism is engaged with second wave concerns, it also partakes in third-wave feminism's preoccupation with pop culture. Both British and Polish cases have questioned the applicability of feminist theory to European contexts. While they limit their focus to how third wave feminism is received in Europe, their examples illustrate the complexity of how feminist ideas are selected and received when they travel. As King reminds us, feminist theories, discourses, and practices travel across different communities of practices. What is considered "theory" in one community may not be seen as "theory" in another, so there are different meanings attached to this term (King, 2001, p. 94-95).

Third Wave Feminism in Asian Context

Having discussed third wave feminism's development in the Western academic circumstances, I would like to turn attention to responses of some feminist scholars to third wave feminism in the Asian context. There has been a variegated web of transnational relations between Western feminism and Asian women.¹ While third wave feminism is considered an identifiable political entity in U.S., there is a debate over whether a separate third wave of feminism happens in Asia. When third wave feminist ideas reached Asia, while some feminists kept their distance from them, others have maintained a dialogue and sought possibilities of integrating them with their own pre-existing practices. Rather than simply adopting the language of third wave feminism, several Asian feminists have offered analyses of it specific to the region that prompt us to see complications and new dimensions of existing theoretical concepts and concerns. Since there have been differences in emphasis and focus in the development of the women's movement during the past

¹ I am aware that "Western feminism" and "Asian women" are heterogeneous collectives and problematic categories. For analytical purposes, these terms are used in order to point out the feminist geopolitical perspective of third wave feminism.

decade in Asian contexts, Asian women may also reflect generational differences in their intellectual networks with Western academics. In addition, the shifts in the discursive landscape in Asia were not a simple matter of one-way transmission from the West and passive absorption in the East, but reflected significant departures from North American models. The relationship of Asian feminisms to third wave feminism is neither a matter of simple imposition of alien conceptions nor one of totally autonomous local innovation. Rather, it is an ongoing process of negotiation within a distinctive moment (Thayer, 2000, p. 208).

In Australia, there are some proponents of young feminism, including Rosamund Else-Mitchell and Naomi Flutter's (1998) *Talking Up* and Kathy Bail's (1996) *DIY Feminism*. According to Anita Harris (2011), debate over the next wave has contributed to particular representations of young women and their relations to feminism in ways that have framed "competing discourses about young feminists as "power feminists" fighting "victim feminism," girl-powered Do-It-Yourselfes developing a new style of sassy, in-your-face feminism, or the "third wave" simply taking the baton from the previous generation. Aware of a closed category such as "next wave," Harris observes some interesting parallels with "between the waves" Australian feminism: "In Australia at least, we are perhaps seeing some kind of hearkening back to the forgotten feminism between the wars that was heavily concentrated on Aboriginal rights, ideas of nation, citizenship and equality, union issues and migrant labor debates" (Harris, 2011, p. 1). Interestingly, the concerns of the younger generation of activists intersect at times with those of earlier generations of feminists.

The ideas of third wave feminism reached Korea sometime in 2004. But rather than borrowing the discourses and practices directly from third wave feminism, the local feminists selectively appropriated third wave feminism, rearticulating them as an activist discourse "empowering young women." The occasion of the Women's World 2005 conference in Seoul provided an important site to observe how third wave feminism is received in Asia. While preparing for the conference, the Asian Center for Women's Studies attempted to promote young women's voices and thought of using the occasion to support young women. The feminist mothers hoped that young women would be inspired to take this opportunity to develop a new movement on gender issues by net-

working with fellow scholars and activists from other Asian countries. In November 2004, graduate students and activists from various non-governmental organizations including the Unninetwork, WAS, and Beautiful Store gathered to develop an independent subtheme that focused on the thoughts of the rising generation. Consisting of five panel sessions and one workshop, the “Young Feminists’ Forum” at WW05 successfully gathered many emerging feminists from Japan, China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. They dealt with problems and questions that many young women encounter. Displaying little of the generational tension between second wavers and third wavers that exists in the U.S., their experiences in Seoul show how eager the feminist foremothers are to pass on their feminist legacy and to bridge the gap.

It was not long before third wave feminism traveled to the Philippines, where Angeli R. Diaz (2003) reveals similarities and disparities between postcolonial theory and some third wave feminist writings. Following Hegde’s position that postcolonial feminist theorizing should reflect local-global intersections, Diaz contextualizes Filipino women’s identities vis-a-vis Filipino experiences of Spanish and American colonial projects and the continuing Filipino-American post-colonial relationship. This contextualization becomes the basis for her critiquing third wave feminism. Interestingly, as an attempt to challenge third wave feminism, her essay appears in *Women and Language*, one of the American academic journals. Her example shows us how, in different parts of the globe, discursive and theoretical travel has a dislocated quality, sometimes traveling in a reverse direction rather than developing lineally from the center to the periphery. Just as other feminists transposed third wave feminism in their own contexts, I have done my best to transpose third wave feminist ideas in mine. In 2009, *Asian Journal of Women’s Studies*, one of the most representative journals featuring studies of Asian women, published my essay on third wave feminism from a transnational perspective. In that essay, I offered my observations on Asian feminists’ responses to third wave feminism, arguing that it can be regarded not only as a method of resisting the binary opposition between western and Asian feminisms but also as one going beyond the dualisms of global/local and theory/practice (Yu, 2009).

However, the term’s application and currency in Taiwan has been comparatively limited. In her discussion of third wave feminism, appear-

ing in the *Journal of Women's and Gender Studies*, the most important Taiwanese feminist journal, Tzuhsiu Chiu points out that after "Martial Law was lifted in 1987, many scholars with PhDs returned from overseas to Taiwan to teach and [thus] transplanted the used-to-be banned radical and liberal feminisms of the second wave and the new feminist theories of the third wave. Consequently, during the end of the 20th century, the development of feminist criticism in Taiwan appeared to synchronize with the tempo of global movements of feminist thoughts and criticism" (Chiu, 2010, p. 271-272). Taiwanese feminist historians such as Ku have also tried to divide the development of the Taiwanese women's movement into three major stages: the pioneering period, the awakening period, and the post-martial-law period. In the early 1970s, Lu Hsiu-lien, known as Annette Lu in the West, began questioning gender roles in Taiwan society and raising issues concerning women in various forums and especially in newspapers and magazines. In her groundbreaking book, Lu introduced "New Feminism" to her Taiwanese readers: "New Feminism' is a thought, belief and strength." Although Lu witnessed the rise of the women's movement in the United States during the late 1960s when she was a student there, "New Feminism," as Lu Hsiu-lien stressed, was not simply a duplication of Western feminism (Lu, 1990, p. 214). "New Feminism," as Lu emphasized, "is not imported goods; it is a local product" (Lu, 1990, p. 151). Although Lu was later sentenced to twelve years in prison after a political protest (the Kaohsiung Incident on December 10, 1979)² and although her approach to her feminist ideas had been considered as somewhat radical, her efforts and vision nonetheless allowed later feminist groups, such as *Awakening*, to emerge with greater ease and with less resistance.

It was not until the early 1980s that the voice of feminist resistance was once again heard in public. A small group of professional women met irregularly in Taipei to exchange professional knowledge and personal experiences. In response to the situation in which many women's

² The Kaohsiung Incident was also known as the Formosa Incident, a pro-democracy demonstration in Taiwan that took place on December 10, 1979. The incident occurred during a period when the ruling party, the Kuomintang, used this protest as an excuse to arrest the main leaders of the political opposition. The event, however, had the effect of galvanizing the Taiwanese community into political actions. Today, it is regarded as one of the important events that eventually led to democracy in Taiwan.

publications still propagated traditional women's virtues, these women decided in 1982 to publish a monthly magazine – the *Awakening* (Fu Nu Hsin Chih) – as an avenue to raise female consciousness, to support women, to encourage women's self-realization, to voice feminist opinions, and to work toward an equal gender relationship. In the early 1980s, however, rallies and public demonstrations were considered illegal according to the emergency decree that had activated martial law. Therefore, the Awakening group simply covered gender-related issues in its monthly magazine, and organized seminars and panel discussions for its members and interested people. Between 1982 and 1987, the Awakening monthly strengthened its movement by introducing works from Western feminists, including Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir. It examined both Chinese and Western literature and cinema from a feminist perspective as well as reported worldwide gender-related news. Yen-lin Ku notes that “while continuing to advocate gender equality, *Awakening* had to assume a lower profile, concentrating its attention on women's issues only and remaining politically independent [from any political party]” (Ku, 1989, p. 22). In fact, most of these activities were carried out in a way that would not appear directly threatening to dominant gender ideology and values, but they laid the groundwork for diverse women's NGOs to sprout in the late 1980s.

Since the lifting of Martial Law in 1987, the women's movement has become pluralistic and action-oriented. In recent years, Taiwan has further witnessed the proliferation of diverse strains of feminist discourse. Various women's organizations and associations have emerged, and each of them begins to focus on gender concerns from different perspectives; more women work actively in civil society organizations and have become active participants in politics and decision-making processes. This puts pressure on states and forces them to formulate policies to protect women's rights and reduce discrimination against women. Even though these women's groups might have different interests and some of them might be closely attached to different political parties, they work together on issues aiming to help disadvantaged women and to achieve increased opportunities for Taiwanese women. Like their Western counterparts, they have brought up issues common to second wave feminism such as fighting against sexual harassment and domestic violence against women. As American feminism started to acknowledge plurality in the

understanding of the “woman” question with the rise of alternative perspectives of women of color, Taiwanese feminists encountered various challenges to different conceptualizations of the “woman” question and the politics of identity/difference.

Although the development of the Taiwanese women’s movement has some parallels with the three waves of American feminism, I would not readily impose a simplistic third wave framework onto the development of Taiwanese feminism, for it has been closely related to the political changes in the country as well as with globalization. When applied to Taiwanese realities, concepts in feminist theory must be reexamined rather than assumed. In fact, the history of the Taiwanese women’s movement takes a different form, one that is often disrupted and fragmented because of social and political changes. Still, one cannot deny that there are both divergences and congruencies that arise between Taiwanese concerns and those of the contemporary West. Sometimes, the second wave concerns coexist with the issues raised by the third wavers in the same historical period. From my own experiences teaching third wave feminism in Taiwan since 2005, I have found that the discussion of third wave feminism does enable us not only to become more aware of the current relationship between young women and feminism, but also to examine the impact of feminism on the life of the next generation. Young Taiwanese women who came to feminism in the twenty-first century have experienced the world in a manner strikingly different from the experience of previous generations. When young Taiwanese, whether women or men, enjoy some feminist gains, most of them are unaware how hard their feminist predecessors had fought for them. Like their western counterparts, they seem to experience an ambivalent relationship with feminism because of the backlash against it. Many college students nowadays are either uninterested in or fearful of feminist labels. Nevertheless, third-wave feminist ideas become useful reference points for young people who want to think about how they have misunderstood feminism. In this sense, third wave feminism is not merely a theory, but has become a useful pedagogical tool for pondering how we can pass on the feminist legacy despite the backlash.

Conclusion

This paper traced a series of responses to third wave feminism. Feminists in various countries across East and West contribute different kinds of knowledge production to third wave feminism. In a global context, the travels of third wave feminism have implications for how we think about the circulation of feminist knowledge and politics. For one thing, they were not simply transported from the “West to the rest” or imposed as a kind of feminist cultural imperialism. The international trajectory of third wave feminism suggests that the circulation of feminist knowledge is much more complicated and contradictory. When feminist knowledge moves from place to place, it is reworked and rearticulated, allowing new configurations of the original to emerge. As Edward Said argued in his seminal essay on traveling theory, what happens to a theory when it travels is at least as interesting as the “original” for what it can tell us about the limitations and problems, but also the possibilities, of the original (Davis, 2007, p. 207). Thus, while third wave feminism emerged initially in the United States, its flows were not unidirectional. The traveling of third wave feminism in various feminist communities underscores how ideas travel in multiple directions. As a consequence of specific historical circumstances and political aims, people engage in a selective use of third wave feminist ideas. Still, third wave feminism is promoted as a “mobile cohabitation of alliances.” As Anastasia Valassopoulos writes, “Whilst we all cannot help but work within particular contexts, and whilst our work is inflected by our own locality and interests, the concept of the third wave may be a meeting point rather than an end point” (Valassopoulos, 2004, p. 200).

In a world of increasing cross-border movements and cross-cultural contacts, the experience of third wave feminism enables feminists to scrutinize the complex circuits by which feminist ideas and influence travel. We need to recognize the traveling character of ideas and the way in which ideas are transformed in specific locations. As the reception and distribution of third wave feminism clearly shows, feminist theories and discourses are selectively appropriated and implemented in the context of new institutional configurations. While crossing borders, third wave feminism is continuously transformed by its local readings. Sometimes, it becomes accessible, relevant, and useful for women in its

specific locality. Sometimes, it encounters suspicions and challenges. Local women's differing negotiations with third wave feminism illuminate many of the possibilities and difficulties in thinking about feminism as a traveling theory. We can, however, take its trajectory within and outside the United States as an occasion to think critically about its politics of knowledge and its status as a transnational feminist project. Such cross-cultural feminist interactions could also be a useful corrective to relativistic moves that look upon "East" and "West" as unconnected entities. As Sherin Saadallah suggests, the third wave of feminism might enable us to find a way out of the binary oppositions between Western and non-Western feminism (Saadallah, 2004, p. 224). To make the most of its subversive potential for ourselves, we may ask under what circumstances might third wave feminist ideas mutually inform and intersect in ways that they may be transformative. As an increasing number of young feminists these days concern themselves with a constructive dialogue between feminists, third wave feminism holds much potential for us to imagine feminist futures.

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