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From the Guest Editor

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In February of this year, the Committee on Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies hosted a panel at the APA's Central Division meeting in Chicago. The focus of the panel concerned the intersections of Asian philosophies and feminism. While the essays and commentary delivered for the panel reflected the specific academic research foci of our participants, there are of course many ways to understand how Asian philosophies and feminism intersect, or fail to intersect. Consequently, this section of the *Newsletter* aspires to expand on the discussions of our panel, as well as to explore additional territory. For it, some of our panel participants and several other scholars working in Asian philosophy reflect on a variety of related subjects. These include, for example, the search for affinities between feminist concerns and the concerns found in Asian materials; the state of the field of Asian philosophy as it pertains to incorporating feminist consciousness; the personal experiences of feminist scholars who seek to enliven their work with both historical sensitivity and feminist commitments; and the capacity of feminist readings of Asian philosophies to foster scholarly development and political progress. As the work presented here illustrates, there are many ways to frame and understand the import of feminism for Asian philosophies.

Articles

Chinese Philosophy and Woman: Is Reconciliation Possible?

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Can Chinese philosophy and feminist philosophy come together and enrich one another? Due to the gender oppressive social practice of Chinese society in the past (e.g., foot-binding, female infanticide, forced contraception, etc.), the answer to this question may be an obvious "No." The preoccupation with this issue in contemporary perceptions of Chinese culture among the general American public cannot be easily overstated. In my experience teaching Chinese philosophy and as a guest speaker at various occasions, this is a question that is inevitably raised by students and audiences. Nonetheless, my own experience growing up in a Taiwanese-Chinese society seems to suggest a more complex view. This complexity is what made me first become interested in the intersection of Chinese philosophy and feminist philosophy in my mid-teaching-career.

As a young girl growing up in Taiwan in the 1970s, my parents always honored the Confucian sayings: "in education, there should be no distinction" (*Analects* 15:28) and "by nature, humans are similar to one another; by nurture, people are far apart" (*Analects*, 17:18). It is due to these Confucian beliefs that they always encouraged me, my younger brother, and my younger sister to pursue education as far as our ability allowed. They sacrificed equally for all three of us regardless of our genders; we were always afforded equal opportunities. Throughout my primary, secondary, and college education, I had also learned of many virtuous women and heroines from the past three thousand years of Chinese Civilization through literature, poetry, and history that have inspired so many women and men in their shared historical reality. Nevertheless, I also noticed that although some of my female friends were sharing the good fortune of equal education opportunities, there were also many others who were discouraged by their families from pursuing a post-bachelor graduate degree for fear of societal sanction. After all, a too highly educated woman would not make a good wife.

During my search for an answer to the complex, sometimes puzzling, relation between Confucianism and women in Chinese society, I was also trying to find ways to bridge an East-West dialogue in my comparative philosophy course. By happy coincidence, I came across Karen Warren's "Feminism and Ecology: Making Connections" and Chenyang Li's "The Confucian Concept of *Jen* and the Feminist Ethics of Care: A Comparative Study."[1] They became the two groundbreaking works for my own philosophical thinking on this subject. It is through Warren's article that I began to see that the dualistic, "either-or" exclusive thinking that dichotomizes reason and emotion, form and matter, and human and Nature may not only be a main cause of human subjugation of nature, but may also contribute to the subtle tendency to subjugate the voice of Eastern Philosophy under the Western model. At the same time, Li's article enabled me to see how Confucian philosophy can weigh in on important contemporary philosophical debate on key topics. With their differences carefully noted, I came to see how Confucian ethics could strengthen feminist care ethics' argument in its attempt to reform modern liberal and contractarian ethics.

Nonetheless, in my own wrestling with the issues of feminist philosophy, as a Chinese-woman and a philosopher, I often felt not-at-home with the western liberal approach to these problems. The divergent historical reality of women and the philosophical differences in these two traditions, particularly their differing complementary-vs.-dualistic emphasis, is often ignored in the liberal gender-critique of Chinese philosophy. However, it has been proven time and again in history that any enduring social reform in a society must be empowered

since the phallocentric linguistic construct is too deeply embedded in the very core of philosophical discourse. Or, second, I can transcend the facticity of masculine discourse in philosophy. It is a human fact that men wrote most of what has been passed down to us and did so from men's own viewpoint. There is nothing that I, as a woman and as a late comer, can do about it. Whether I read Kant today, tomorrow, or ten years hence, Kant says the same thing about the inability of women to be active citizens and women's skin deep intellect. But, as a philosopher and as a feminist, I can choose to suspend the phallocentric linguistic presentation of ideas and extract useful ideas to further the cause of women's liberatory movement. The first choice of abandonment seems awfully depressing to me as a philosopher who is used to my own disembodiment in order to blend into the wonderful world of (male) philosophical discourse. Yet, as a feminist, I cannot help but constantly be reminded of the impossible weight of my corporeality and gender. The only way out, as I see it, is the second choice of transcendence so that I can be both a philosopher and a feminist.

The choice of transcending the facticity of masculine discourse shouldn't be limited to the Western canon but open to all, including Asian philosophy. One can dwell on the fact that most of what Confucius, Mencius, or Xunzi says has nothing to do with women's liberation, or well-being per se, or one can choose to suspend that limitation and extract the relevance of the ideas of *ren*, reciprocity, and relationality to a more wholesome vision of human society where gender oppression is a historical past, not an ongoing struggle. Much of the prejudice against the incorporation of, or just a sheer neglect of, the relevance of Asian philosophy to feminism in the West has been centered on the explicit sexist references found in the tradition. But this facticity of masculine discourse is common to all traditions, be they East, West, North, or South, so my question would be this: Why selectively exclude non-Western canons in feminist discourse? As an Asian American, I cannot help but constantly be afflicted by the cultural inferiority complex in the discourse of gender. Is it possible to be a Confucian and a feminist at the same time? Or, as far as gender is considered, must one be either/or? Again, the choice of transcendence instead of exclusion seems more appealing to me. As Confucius' disciple, Zixia, says to Sima Niu who laments the fact that only he has no brother, within the four seas, all are one's brothers (*Analects* 12.5). In the same spirit, I am making (masculine) philosophy feminist in accord with a feminist's image of herself. So, in the end, I have lived up to Nietzsche's dictum of becoming who I am: a woman, a philosopher, a feminist, and a Confucian.

Why Feminist Comparative Philosophy?

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Our first musings on the connections between Asian philosophy and feminism began about ten years go when we were both Master's students in philosophy at the University of Hawaii–Manoa. As nascent feminist philosophers, we were particularly attracted to the well-established comparative, East-West philosophical methodology that the Hawaii department is known for. It seemed obvious to us at the time that the guiding principles of the comparative methodology that we were being trained in are methodological principles that are also necessary to any rigorous feminist philosophy. For example, one of the primary aims of comparative methodology is to expose the latent and truth-obscuring assumptions inherent in our traditions of origin. Raimundo Panikkar succinctly expresses this self-reflective and self-critical orientation when he writes that comparative philosophy "saves us from the fallacy that all others live in myths except us" (1988, 135). In this way, comparative philosophy helps us to realize that "we are not the only source of (self-) understanding" (Panikkar 1988, 128). In a similar vein, Daya Krishna suggests that this aspect of comparative philosophy facilitates a kind of liberation: "comparative philosophy has the chance to function as a mutual liberator of each philosophical tradition from the limitations imposed up on it by its own past" (1988, 83). Comparative philosophy teaches us that philosophical problems could be (and have been) framed and solved differently. In doing so, it "frees [our] conceptual imagination" and asks us to step out of our own narrow philosophical perspectives, both of which spark a level of philosophical creativity that is rarely attained within tradition-specific approaches. In short, diversity (of traditions, worldviews, ideas, and so on) is a hallmark of a comparative methodology, just as it is (or should be) for feminist philosophy.

In addition to the self-reflective and pluralistic orientations of comparative methodology, Eliot Deutsch writes of the creative and transformative nature of comparative practice that comes from engagement with a wide array of perspectives. According to Deutsch, we should not study the insights of other cultures merely for the sake of acquiring more resources or bolstering our own positions; we should instead practice comparative philosophy because it changes our intellectual constitution for the better. Deutsch argues against a grand synthesis of world thought that marked the earliest attempts at comparative philosophy. Instead, he advocates a coming together of fruits of the widest possible human experience. Insofar as philosophical theories attempt to describe human experience, the consideration of a more diverse array of human experience in the course of theory-construction will more likely produce a theory that is representative of human experience as a whole—and this is especially the case for any theory that aspires to universal applicability. The comparativist learns by "being ready to undergo the different philosophical experiences of other people," and he or she enhances the validity of his or her philosophical insights by "systematically taking into account the universal range of human experience inasmuch as it is possible to do so in any concrete situation" (Panikkar 1988, 128-129).

As we can see from this brief discussion of comparative methodology, comparative philosophy develops as a result of philosophical diversity, depends upon a broad range of human experience from which to theorize, and finds creative impetus in continuously scrutinizing (one's own) philosophical assumptions. However, despite its willingness to engage with philosophical difference and ideas on the margins of the discipline, we did find that comparative philosophy seemed to repeat wider disciplinary attitudes in regard to its lack of sustained attention to women's lives, experiences, and voices. And, in doing so, comparative methodology rejects in practice the ideals that it holds in theory. This lack of feminist analysis was quite apparent to us during our early philosophical training, particularly when we studied feminist philosophy one semester and comparative methodologies the next. As students who had a foot in each terrain, so to speak, we could see the similarities between the two philosophical approaches clearly, as well as the ways in which the content of one field overlapped with the other and vice versa. And yet, comparative philosophy and feminist philosophy were taught to us as two distinct philosophical areas. For example, at the time gender was

never explored as a valid site of comparison in our comparative courses; what was most philosophically interesting was "cross-cultural comparison." The implicit assumption here was that men and women who inhabited the same geographical regions shared the same "culture" and, therefore, the same philosophical assumptions and worldviews. On this account, if you are reading a man's account of his culture, then practicing rigorous comparative methodology would not demand that you also read a woman's account of that culture in order to ensure the widest possible account of human experience. Our material reality as women students of comparative philosophy reinforced this unexamined idea, since we rarely (if ever) read women philosophers in our comparative and Asian courses, seldom had the companionship of other women in our classes, and the "great comparativists" who taught us and whose work we studied were all men. There is a sense in which this way of practicing and teaching comparative philosophy suggests that either a male philosophical voice automatically includes (or, is identical to) a woman's or that hers is inessential.

Given the supposed openness and sensitivity to diversity inherent in comparative methodology, the lack of feminist analysis and consideration of the interplay between gender and culture was frustrating—though perhaps not surprising (as we now know) given the predominance of male philosophers across all traditions and within the discipline itself. We find gender analysis to be an invaluable addition to philosophical thinking and an essential way of expressing the guiding values of comparative methodology. In its most basic form, feminist theorizing begins from the experience of women and considers alternative constructions of traditional ways of seeing, experiencing, cognizing, feeling, and embodying our everyday realities and truths. Just as Asian philosophy has helped expand Westerners' worldviews by presenting reasonable alternatives to metaphysical, epistemological, aesthetic, and ethical assumptions, so too does feminist philosophy challenge the very foundations of taken-for-granted theories. Therefore, given the absence of considerations of gender in comparative philosophy—an absence that was starkly visible from our location as women students of Asian philosophy and as feminists—we began to construct a robustly pluralistic methodology that could engage with a wider breadth of human experience than did earlier articulations of comparative methodology. It is at this pivotal time that our vision of feminist comparative philosophy began to take shape.

We see feminist comparative philosophy as a natural outgrowth of both comparative philosophy and feminist philosophy. East-West comparative philosophy and feminist philosophy already share much in terms of methodology: a hermeneutic of openness and respect for difference, a crossing of philosophical boundaries and traditions, a rejection of the dichotomy of theory and practice, and the pursuit of new ways of looking at the world. In our work, we seek to show how bringing diverse philosophical traditions into dialogue with each other can provide fresh insights on questions of specific interest to feminists and global theorists generally. We believe that what distinguishes feminist comparative philosophy from transnational/global/postcolonial feminist theories is that feminist comparative methodology engages an analysis of original and primary *philosophical* sources from the tradition in question. Most importantly, we wish to emphasize that feminist comparative methodology fosters the development of original, creative concepts and ideas that may not have emerged had the philosopher been thinking within the confines of one tradition only.

To demonstrate the breadth and sophistication of emerging work in feminist comparative philosophy and to give greater definition to the aims, content, and scope of this new philosophical field, we are currently editing a volume of essays at this exciting crossroads: *Liberating Traditions: Essays in Feminist Comparative Philosophy*. The essays in this collection span a variety of philosophical locations that are each tied to specific geographical, linguistic, temporal, historical, religious, social, economic, and political positions, and yet they each integrate these various perspectives in innovative ways while being mindful of the unique particularity of each perspective in question. We hope that Asian and comparative philosophers and feminist philosophers alike will find fresh insights on topics that are at the center of their fields of study, such as embodiment, sexual difference, the constraints of agency, non-dualistic metaphysics, the transformation of consciousness, cultivation of ethical relationships, examinations of alterity and difference, and cross-cultural hermeneutics. In addition to the breadth and depth of these philosophical conversations, with this volume we also hope to show how our own philosophical traditions of origin can be liberated from their narrow confines and brought into dialogue for both the advancement of our philosophical projects and our shared lives together. We believe that feminist comparative philosophy demonstrates the practice of pluralistic philosophy *par excellence* and will be instrumental not only in correcting some shortcomings of current philosophical methodology, but also in moving the discipline of philosophy another step forward in our generation.

References

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Feminism and/in Asian Philosophies

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Feminism has much to gain from a close reading of Asian philosophies. Stereotypical views of Asian cultures as irretrievably misogynist obscure both the constructive and deconstructive contributions Asian philosophies can make to feminist discourse. I will briefly outline doctrines found in key schools that can support and further feminist aims: 1) Daoism's radical reassessment of the "feminine" (Yin), 2) Confucianism's advocacy of the universal potential for self-cultivation, and 3) Mahayana Buddhism's deconstruction of sexism as one among many forms of discrimination. Since I have already discussed points two and three elsewhere, my main focus here will be Daoism.

Throughout the discussion I maintain a distinction between women and social constructs of the "feminine." The same distinction applies to men and "masculine" constructs. Hence, I am assuming that women are not hard-wired to be stereotypically feminine, nor men to be stereotypically masculine. Values, assumptions, and behavior patterns designated as feminine or masculine can and do apply to both men or women.[1] We come from the same planet and are members of the same species.