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NEWSLETTER ON ASIAN AND ASIAN-AMERICAN PHILOSOPHERS AND PHILOSOPHY

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Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies

Gary Mar, Editor

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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

from *within* (what I would call a “grass root” approach) rather than imposed from outside. Such an approach would require re-examining local customs, re-appropriating the traditions, dropping those social practices that are contradictory to its essential philosophical ideas, and re-discovering inherent cultural resources that can welcome new hermeneutic interpretation so as to meet the needs of today. Dorothy Ko’s, Sin Yee Chan’s, and Lisa Li-Hsiang Rosenlee’s inspiring works have demonstrated how essential Confucian philosophical ideas can be, and how they should be separated from social impositions later added to the tradition.² Even certain perceived gender oppressive social practices (e.g., voluntary widowhood, or even foot-binding), in fact, paradoxically, had some unexpected historical significance that was taken by women as a means of asserting autonomy and rectitude (both Confucian values).³ Of course, this is not to exonerate Confucianism from its sometimes inegalitarian impact on traditional Chinese social practice. But it does demonstrate that Confucianism’s relation with the historical reality of Chinese people is more complex than it is often perceived to be. What is at stake here is not to preemptively or prematurely abandon Confucianism altogether, but to reinvestigate it closely. Considering the criticisms that transnational and global feminism have received in the past two decades and to avoid the charge of a neo-colonial mentality, the construction of Confucian feminism would do better to reconsider Chinese philosophy’s own cultural, philosophical, and historical possibilities. This enlarged humanist circle would also enrich western feminist discourse through a genuinely multicultural approach to a universal issue.

Of course, by default, feminist philosophy is not, cannot, and should not be limited only to the theoretical. After its initial clearing away of old misconceptions, Confucian feminism must move beyond pure theorizing to practical, social, and political reform. There remains a gap between the theoretical study and the practical work that awaits many of us who are touched by, or are concerned with, this subject matter. But I am hopeful that as time goes on, there will be more works done in this area.

Endnotes

1. See Karen Warren, “Feminism and Ecology: Making Connections,” *Environmental Ethics* 9 (1987): 3-20; Chenyang Li, “The Confucian Concept of *Jen* and the Feminist Ethics of Care: A Comparative Study,” in *The Sage and the Second Sex: Confucianism, Ethics, and Gender*, edited by Chenyang Li (Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Course, 2000), 23-42.
2. See Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994); Sin Yee Chan, “The Confucian Conception of Gender in the Twenty-First Century,” in *Confucianism for the Modern World*, edited by Daniel A. Bell and Chaibong Hahm (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 312-33; Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee, *Confucianism and Women: A Philosophical Interpretation* (Albany: State University of New York, 2006).
3. See, for example, Chapter Six of *Confucianism and Women*, where Rosenlee discusses that, in pre-modern China, it was common for sonless widows to remarry and was often encouraged or even forced by parents, older brothers, and in-laws. Voluntary widowhood, thus, requires women to assert their own autonomy and rectitude to override the more senior family members’ advice to remarry. Foot-binding practice survived several imperial prohibitions in both the Ming and the Qing Dynasty and was perceived by participants as a symbol of Han civility, of wealth, and more importantly as women’s means in resisting the foreign Manchu rule.

Feminism, Chinese Philosophy, and History

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I would like, very briefly, to juxtapose three intellectual threads that do not usually intersect. The first, familiar to all here, is the question of how feminism should be integrated into philosophy, and specifically into the study of Chinese and comparative philosophy.

In her article on feminist approaches to philosophy (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Internet edition, 2004), Nancy Tuana notes that between 1980 and 2002, citations of feminist philosophy in the *Philosopher’s Index* rose from 109 to over 2,000. Among the possible reasons for this increase she identifies are the engagement of American philosophers in social justice movements and the impact of women on the sexism of academic philosophy in the 1970s. But at its inception, feminist philosophy did not exist as an option for academic philosophical training. So, feminist philosophers used the philosophical tools they considered most familiar and most promising and, as a result, feminist philosophy arose from all the dominant traditions of philosophy. Thus, what is distinctive about feminist philosophical scholarship is not its methods but rather its premise that gender is an important focus for analysis.

Within the context of Chinese philosophy, a great deal of energy has gone toward feminist approaches to Confucianism. Some studies argue that Confucianism is feminist, or more feminist than Western philosophy or some particular subset of it. Other approaches are less friendly. It has been argued that Confucian notions of moral autonomy are applied to only part of the population of pre-Han China. It has been questioned whether they apply to women at all. Roger Ames has even suggested that the operative polarity of early Chinese philosophical literature (or even the language of Classical Chinese) is between “female (nü) and “person” (ren).¹ Is the Chinese autonomous self gendered male? Until very recently, leading contemporary Confucian scholars have been practically silent on these questions. The problem is that philosophical sources, considered in isolation, present almost no evidence of women forming intentions, acting on them, or practicing self-cultivation as active agents in social and political life. It is arguable whether we can find any positive evidence in early Confucian philosophical works that women were even considered capable of self-cultivation.

This point brings me to my second thread. We need not rely on a small number of canonical philosophical texts as transparent reflections of actual Warring States and Han attitudes. Historical narratives present a very different picture, and reflect the mores of a period before the establishment of Confucian teachings and values over the course of the Han dynasty. Such texts suggest that at least some women (members of the elite with education and opportunity) were concerned with self-cultivation. Where do we find them? In historical narratives, including the *Zuozhuan*, the *Lienüzhuan*, the *Shiji*, in dynastic histories, and even in the table of morally ranked individuals in the *Hanshu* (*Hanshu* 20). In these texts, the same aptitudes for moral reasoning and its attendant intellectual abilities are clearly attributed to both men and women. In other words, we find them by reading history, and specifically by not confining our study of the Chinese past to the Masters texts we are told constitute philosophy. We might ask: Is this problem peculiarly Chinese? I would say that, while the situation I have described may be relevant to philosophy in general, it is

particularly acute in ancient philosophy, Chinese or otherwise, where we have correspondingly less context.

But there are two problems here. The first is the simple (simple?) one that this kind of study requires a substantial learning curve in both language and historical context. Suddenly there is much more to read, more genres to read it in, and the whole project becomes that much more demanding. But there is a second problem. The engagement with history, as distinct from philosophy, is frowned on by not a few philosophers. Studies such as Stephen Toulmin's *Wittgenstein's Vienna* are still the exception. In this sense, for the study of Chinese materials, Tuana's observation that feminist philosophy emerged from the dominant traditions of philosophy represents a problem. Because philosophers study philosophy, not history, and only philosophy departments can train philosophers.

I am deeply indebted to Donald Munro, who many years ago asked me whether I considered myself a philosopher or a historian. I replied that I was too much a historian for most philosophers and too much a philosopher for most historians. I am much more comfortable with this viewpoint now than I was then.

But if, arguing, one decides that yes, I must read history too, what then? Then one lands smack in the middle of another debate, between the intellectual and social historians. Social history, especially the social history of late imperial China, is a wonderfully rich source of both empirical and theoretical studies that bear on gender in multiple ways. But the history of early China, intellectual or social, is a different story. A growing literature of articles, books, and dissertations concerns itself explicitly with gender. But a much larger dominant literature still barely acknowledges its existence as an aspect of history of any concern to the non-specialist. It remains amazing to me how many colleagues are content with histories of Chinese men, as distinct from either Chinese history or even "women in China" and other ghettos. It is as if we have gone back to the square one confronted by feminist philosophers in the 1970s. Not so much to a field that is actively sexist, but one that has historically been and remains dominated by men and little concerned with the issues of social justice that motivated the rise of feminist philosophy in the 1970s.

The history, intellectual and social, of early China is a fantastically rich field for the philosopher, nowadays so much more so because of the ongoing evidence of excavated texts. But there is a certain sense of déjà vu.

Endnotes

1. Roger T. Ames. "Chinese Sexism." In *Thinking From the Han: Self, Truth, and Transcendence in China and the West*, edited by David Hall and Roger T. Ames (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), 294n18.

What is the Use of Philosophy in General and Asian Philosophy in Particular to Feminism?

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As the economic recession deepens, the question of utility often comes up as a way to reflect on and justify the value of one's work and the sort of contribution that one has made or should be making to society at large. So, naturally, as a philosopher specializing in the areas of comparative philosophy and feminist ethics, I am asking myself what my work is worth and whether it matters at all outside the narrow circle

of specialists. Most of my published works, I would imagine, are probably sitting in the dusty book shelves of university libraries somewhere. As this is the eighth year into my full-time teaching career, I am wondering whether I have become one of those institutionalized intellectuals who occasionally publish interesting works that excite a handful of academia but rest of the time are merely taking up space and sucking up oxygen to reiterate the same old stuff to a whole bunch of wide-eyed eighteen- and nineteen-year-olds. Don't get me wrong; I love what I do and I love philosophy. But my personal enjoyment of what I do does not by itself constitute the value of my work, just as a psychopath's sadistic enjoyment of torturing others does not by itself lend value to torture. Hence, my worry here is three-fold: Is philosophy useful? Why study Asian philosophy? What do all these have to do with feminism?

As all of us who have taught introductory courses to philosophy know, there is plenty of ink being spilled on the value of philosophy. *Think* (2000), for instance, of Simon Blackburn and Edward Craig's *Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* (2002). But in every semester and in every opening session, I always feel like a second-rate salesperson who tries desperately to package the product I sell so as to justify my being here, standing by the podium and pretending having something profound to say. Regardless of how many rationales I can come up with to lure students to stay in philosophy, there is always a lingering doubt in the back of my mind that the top reason students should study philosophy is because philosophy is what I do. Obviously, finding value in philosophy directly ties into the value of my very own existence in the institutional setting and subsequently in society at large. I would imagine this is true for every academic discipline. For instance, a psychologist, historian, political scientist, or artist probably would be able to cite countless reasons why her discipline should be mandatory for every college student, just as the way a philosopher would argue for the value of philosophy. So I am afraid that, at the end of the day, philosophy, just as other perceived "useless" disciplines, really derives its value from its institutionalized existence.

To be fair, there is a wonderful world of ideas in philosophy, as we all are familiar with and fascinated by. I can easily lose myself in Plato's *Republic* or Confucius' *Analects* regardless of how many times I have taught the texts. A new layer of meaning and connection to other texts often discloses itself during the course of my teaching and reading of the same text. But, as a woman and a feminist, most of the time, the study of philosophy requires me to suspend my gender and my corporeality. Much of the writings were crafted by men and for men. A phallogocentric viewpoint defines most of the philosophical traditions. A woman reader, during the course of her study, must either ignore the obvious phallogocentric linguistic construct throughout, or learn to disembodied herself, to discard her corporeality, as if she were a gender-neutral Cartesian "I" that fits right into this historical and ongoing fascinating philosophical discourse amongst men. Ultimately, every woman philosopher learns to talk like a (man) philosopher who discounts the importance of social matrix revealed in plain language and to get on board with the (masculine) philosophical discourse. As Nietzsche declares, "Thou goest to women? Remember thy whip!" (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*). Or, as Confucius would say, women who are without a sense of propriety are hard to provide for (*Analects* 17.25). Every (man/woman) philosopher eventually learns to repeat that.

So what exactly is the use of this phallo-infected discipline of philosophy, whether it is East or West, to feminism? As a feminist, I see there are two choices open to me. First, I can discard the whole of our historical writings within the discipline

since the phallogocentric 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 phallogocentric 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 ago 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.

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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.

I. Daoism: A Radical Reassessment of the “Feminine” (Yin)

In large part, the problems confronted by women are grounded in the long-standing denigration of stereotypically feminine values and behavior, perceived as both less competent than masculine counterparts and ultimately ineffective. A woman is seen “as” a woman, inheriting all that is assumed to entail—emotionality, instability, fragility, etc. Hence, the problem lies not with women, but with what they have come to represent—a challenge to the patriarchal status quo. More precisely, the lifestyle that has been identified with women across cultures is devalued, and women along with it. As the Other, the Second Sex, our role is viewed as merely a complement to and supporter of the “default” masculine values. Hence arises the ideal of the nurturing, empathetic, selfless mother. In relation to sexuality, however, woman more often is cast as a necessary evil that needs to be controlled, circumscribed, and confined. Recall the Nazi marginalization of women under the heading of *Kinder, Küche, und Kirche*.² Other examples include the cultural enforcements of footbinding, the *burqu*, and *pardah*.

Although gender roles have been rearranged, the damaging dialectic remains intact. Rather than expecting women to simply repudiate the feminine stereotype, we must expose the “masculine” values that are responsible for rejecting the “feminine.” To do so we need to think outside the patriarchal box that has drawn these constrictive gender-based parameters. Medical standards for such conditions as heart disease and sexual dysfunction, once based almost exclusively on data drawn from male subjects, are now being supplemented by data on women. Correspondingly, our understanding of human behavior must be expanded without privileging masculine assumptions. However, attempts by some feminists to simply invert the power hierarchy by privileging women over men, amount to a form of reverse sexism.

In Daoist philosophy this tension is discussed in terms of Yin (feminine) and Yang (masculine). While Yin is associated with “the dark female” or Dao as mother, its values are not the exclusive prerogative of women. Rather, the Daoist Sage is said to emulate Yin-oriented Dao. To liberate women from the feminine stereotype, we must first liberate both the stereotyped Yin values and Yang misidentification. From a Daoist perspective Yang values derive from a limited view of reality, representing an artificial, anthropocentric approach. They are predicated on *wei* assertiveness, the desire to control, manipulate, and exploit. Yang then erroneously casts Yin as its opposite, an absence of action, passivity, a simple negation (*bu*) of *wei—bu wei*.

The Daoist position, as stated in the *Dao De Jing* (DDJ) (traditionally attributed to Lao Zi in the sixth century B.C.E.), is much more nuanced, advocating *wei-wu-wei*. This crucial term is often mistakenly translated as non-action, conflating it with the passivity of *bu wei*. In fact, it is a form of action (*wei*) that avoids (*wu*) interference with the natural flow of reality (*zi-ran*). Rather than the extremes of acting upon the world or being acted upon, Lao Zi advises interaction. Supple softness (*rou-ruo*) has survival value by being aligned with life, while the hard stiffness of Yang is aligned with death.

Symbols of Dao include the valley, water, and “the profoundly dark (*xuan-pin*) female.” The either/or dialectic disappears in the both/and continuum of the One without an Other. Since all things, not just humans, are the children of Mother Dao, we may revert to this primal realization inclusive of both Yang and Yin. The ideal mother is neither neglectful (*bu wei*) nor smothering (*wei*), but interactive, nurturing, supportive, and non-discriminating. The ideal infant of such a mother is distinguished by its deep virtuosity. “It does not know the union of male and female” (DDJ, 55). It has not yet been

conditioned to discriminate. Because it has not been infected by either/or dualism, the problem of sexism is not solved, but dis-solved.

In order to harmonize with Dao, it is important that one “knows the male, \Yet holds fast to the female” (DDJ, 28). The cunning intellect spawned by Yang is the agent of misidentification. It represents intellect that has crossed over the line from being informative to being dysfunctional. The problem begins when intellect becomes distracted by what is obvious, flashy—the flower that seduces our eyes. This leads us to selectively edit our sense experience such that we fail to see the whole reality. We neglect the fruit, the end of which the flower is the mere means, that is able to nourish our true needs, the stomach (DDJ, 12, 38). The very structure of the *Dao De Jing* text guides us from careful observations of natural conditions to reveal valuable insights into viable functioning by harmonizing with Dao, the way things are, rather than attempting to rearrange reality in accordance with ultimately dysfunctional human desires.

A concrete image might be helpful here. Although it is not actually applied by ancient Daoists it is consistent with the *Dao De Jing*’s image-laden style of argumentation. Imagine a massive iceberg in the frigid ocean. What we see on the surface is approximately 10 percent of the total mass. However, the cunning intellect fixates on the mere tip of the iceberg, the narrow anthropocentric view of reality. Accordingly, values and behaviors are myopically interpreted in terms of human experience and artificial desires alone. Hence Daoists criticize the Confucian moral system for exalting the virtue of *ren*, the quality of humaneness or humankindness, the character for which illustrates a person flanked by the number two (what occurs when two humans interact). The morally “superior,” micromanaging Confucian Profound Person, enthralled by hierarchy, thereby smothers natural spontaneity. Yet morality itself arises from the abandonment of Dao, just as knowledge gives rise to hypocrisy, and disharmonious relationships lead us to talk of piety and parental love (DDJ, 18).

A human-dependent lifestyle focuses on will, purpose, ambition; artificial desire rather than natural want, intent on artificial priorities (such as wealth, diamonds, an adrenaline rush). The cunning intellect turns our natural sex drive into the porn industry; the medicinal use of coca leaves into addiction to crack cocaine. Even our most primal need for water is perverted to yield a realm of designer labels and environmentally destructive plastic bottles. These distorted, excessive behaviors result in the dysfunctional assertiveness that is aligned with death.

Under the surface of the water the reality of the iceberg expands exponentially. This is the grounding of Yin, without which there would be no Yang. Hence, one must know the male, but hold fast to the female. Such full-blown access to reality does not privilege the human perspective, as does cunning intellect. The *bu-ren* impartiality of the Daoist Sage emulates the impartiality of Heaven and Earth (DDJ, 5). A Dao-dependent lifestyle has no will but a way (Dao). It is characterized by purposelessness, desirelessness (without rejecting natural needs), and survival priorities aligned with life. Thus one accomplishes the task.

Daoism’s radical reassessment of the feminine can benefit women by removing the stigma of guilt by association with an “ineffective” way of being in the world. If implemented, supple softness is revealed as life-affirming. Such a philosophy would radically change social goals and behaviors. A case in point involves the Japanese Zen Master Ikkyu Sojun (1394-1481). His Red Thread Zen challenged the Yang forces of the surrounding warrior culture while promoting Yin’s life alignment. His

message—make love not war! He lived the message by going down from the mountain of the Zen temple (“the world of the Buddha”) to everyday life (“the world of the devil”). Yet, his famous poem on this momentous decision proclaims: “It is easy to enter the world of the Buddha, it is hard to enter the world of the devil.” For Ikkyu Red Thread Zen represented natural passion, spontaneous sexual needs, and the inevitable link to procreation. A staunch supporter of women’s equality in and out of the Sangha, Ikkyu has been hailed for his feminist views and for infusing “Zen for the first time with a feminine element that it had long missed.”³

We cannot deny the existence of the tip of the iceberg; however, to assume only the tip exists is a mistake. “Not to know the enduring is to blindly invite disaster” (DDJ, 16). The experience of the Titanic should serve as a warning to anticipate danger from what is not apparent, from the deeper reality. Having been “astray for a long time” (DDJ, 58), humankind is confined within the self-imposed box built and sustained by social conditioning, the rituals and mores of cunning intellect’s civilization. Cunning intellect is difficult to convert. In the first century C.E. a northerner’s assessment of Lao Zi’s southern culture faults the Yin proclivities of the state of Chu, concluding, “the people are apathetic and weak-willed, so there is no population increase. They do just enough for food and shelter, so there are no wealthy families.”⁴ A proponent of Yang is more ambitious, oblivious to the looming dangers of over population and economic disparities.

Once we have become estranged from our Mother Dao, we misidentify ourselves. The resulting confusion has had dire consequences, allowing dysfunctional Yang values to run rampant. Greed and ambition give rise to exploitive rulers, then social unrest, violence, and devastating wars of mass destruction. Thus, it is essential that the Daoist Sage initiate rule using *wei-wu-wei*, “the teaching of no-words,” supporting the people without being possessive or expecting gratitude (DDJ, 2). It is not assumed that Yang energy will be obliterated, only disempowered. Under the leadership of the Daoist Sage “the cunning dare not act” (DDJ, 3). Dysfunctional values and behavior will not be condoned much less encouraged. Harmony with Dao will be restored by means of Yin (aka feminine) philosophy, once competition has been exorcized, along with egotistical motivations to acquire power. Most importantly, as the *Dao De Jing* repeatedly assures us, the task will be accomplished.

Water is perhaps the premier symbol of Dao—the source and sustainer of life, the universal dissolver, the consummately receptive. Its power to overcome the seemingly strongest element (stone) constitutes the virtuosity of Dao, made possible by suppleness and softness.

In the world, nothing is more supple and soft than water,

Yet for attacking the hard and strong nothing can match it.

Hence, there is no substitute for it.

That the supple overcomes the strong,

And that the soft overcomes the hard—

None in the world does not know,

Yet none can put it into practice. (DDJ, 78)

Scientists also recognize the unique qualities of water, including its “fluid forbearance.” The penetrating power of the elixir

of life allows fetuses to survive during months of gestation. Once born humans can only survive for three days without water, and 60 percent of the human body is composed of water molecules. Water, like Dao, harmonizes all things: “in an aqueous environment, all molecules are able to feel the structure of all the other molecules that are present, so they can work as whole rather than as individuals.”⁵

Just as water seeks the lowest point while eroding even the seemingly strongest elements, the *Dao De Jing*’s philosophy of diplomacy includes taking the lowly, female position, and hence subduing the male “by tranquility,” just as water. The hard and stiff Yang energy eventually will be expended, while the tranquil Yin energy never wears out. States both large and small can learn from these life lessons. By practicing the Dao of going under the large attracts the small, for states do not fear being aligned with non-competitive powers; the small also attracts the large by being non-threatening. But, most importantly, “a large state should take the lowly position” (DDJ, 61).

Such Yin qualities are not confined to women. Derided by proponents of Yang, they represent a viable leadership style, the only viable or doable approach according to the *Dao De Jing*. Abraham Lincoln is an interesting case in point, cast as Yin to his successor’s Yang. Lincoln’s own party members struggled to come to terms with his death on Good Friday, just as his Civil War strategy had been vindicated: “Trying to explain why a rational Providence had permitted Lincoln to die, they decided that the savior of the nation had proved himself too Christ-like, too softhearted, too ‘womanly,’ for the necessarily punitive [masculine?] job of ‘reconstructing’ the postwar South. God in his wisdom had put Andrew Johnson in place for the messy task of enacting justice.”⁶ Lincoln himself observed, “I destroy my enemies by making them my friends” and “The ballot is stronger than the bullet.” Since President Barack Obama is often compared to Lincoln, it is not surprising that his critics have repeatedly attempted to undermine him by characterizing his leadership style as soft and ineffective. His strategy of listening rather than dictating to world leaders, both friend and foe, has drawn the fire of conservatives who dismiss it as naïve. Yet his style has accomplished the task of raising the image of the United States in the world today.

II. Confucianism: Universal Potential for Self-Cultivation

Although Confucian philosophy has been associated with the suppression of women, such charges more accurately apply to much later, mutated forms of Neo-Confucianism that arose in the Song Dynasty. Thus, Lin Yutang has denounced “the puritanico-sadistic background created by the Confucian scholars from the tenth century onward.”⁷ Once again Yin is misidentified as a way to bolster the valuation of Yang. However, the meritocracy advocated by primal Confucian philosophy is theoretically conducive to feminist agendas. Given the universal mandate for self-cultivation issued in the *Da Xue* (Great Learning/Adult Education)—from “the Son of Heaven to the common people”—it seems counterproductive to exclude half of humanity from this key task.⁸

Confucius (Kong Zi, Master Kong) had in fact called for a cultural revolution, in the etymological sense of re-volving or going back to the roots of the then waning Zhou Dynasty. The Duke of Zhou was the ultimate role model here, a man who embodied the Confucian ideal of public service. By his own choice he served only as regent for his young nephew, never allowing personal ambition to tempt him to seize the throne for himself—a choice worthy of a self-effacing Daoist Sage.

It seems significant that the two philosophical founders of the Confucian school—Confucius and Mencius (Meng Zi,

Master Meng)—were products of single-parent households. Lacking a father to provide access to male networking, each of their young and disadvantaged mothers instead instilled a love of education as a means of social mobility. The military background of Confucius' father would normally have sent him on a similar career. However, being outside the Yang sphere of influence, the general's son advocated social and moral stability over warfare. By challenging the status quo of his turbulent times Confucius set the stage for an enduring hierarchy in Chinese society that elevated scholar-officials to the place of prominence as upholders of the cultural heritage, followed by the farmers who provided material sustenance. Artisans came in third for their contributions to quality of life. Merchants, who produced nothing and lived off the productivity of others, were ranked at the bottom. The military was a necessary evil in times when the ruler failed to maintain harmony. Even imposing generals such as Cao Cao were lauded for their cultural achievements, such as poetic composition prior to a battle.

III. Mahayana Buddhism: Deconstructing Discrimination

From its inception, Buddhist philosophers have demonstrated a flair for deconstruction as a means to the end of unpacking the delusions that prevent a clear view of reality. This epistemological process also exposes the discriminations grounded in dialectical approaches, thereby allowing us to transcend the dualistic obsessions that result in myriad self/other bifurcations, inclusive of those based on gender. The tensions that exist between stereotypical perceptions of feminine and masculine, between conflicting ideologies of feminism and male chauvinism, are dissolved through Buddhist nondualism. Buddhist philosophers skillfully deconstruct our deluded constructs, thereby allowing liberation from limited and limiting views of reality.

A Trans-Gender Turning of the Dharma Wheel is supported by Buddhist literature. In Vajrayana Tibetan troubadour of the Buddha-mind, Milarepa, empowers all beings to perceive self and other as equally capable of realizing buddhahood. Similarly, in the Mahayana canon a woman's potential for enlightenment is expertly defended against even highly advanced, but prejudiced, practitioners. A dragon king's daughter deftly takes on this role in the *Lotus Sutra* while a goddess provides an impressive lesson in nondualism in the *Vimalakirti Nirdesa Sutra*.⁹

Conclusion: Unleashing Yin Philosophy

A careful delving of the potentials of Yin philosophy can liberate women as well as the field of philosophy itself. It is an important step in the ongoing process of truly globalizing philosophy and ensuring its survival. Women philosophers and Yin philosophers share a common experience of marginalization by the forces of Yang. The Daoist Sage may "look as if left out./Oh, mine is a fool's mind" (DDJ, 20). Zen Master Ryokan (1758-1831) acquired the Dharma name Taigu (Great Fool). Krishnamurti was described as "extremely dim-witted...vacant and inattentive."¹⁰ The Dalai Lama has been disparaged as "not exactly the brightest bulb in the room."¹¹ And yet we all endure.

Yin philosophy is a viable alternative to the Yang philosophy that touts itself as "boxing with words, a slugfest of minds."¹² Philosophy is the love of wisdom, the love (*philia*) of wisdom (*sophia*, embodied as a goddess), but must love be an extreme sport hyped by the cunning intellect? Should we not instead listen to the invitation of Sufi philosopher-poet Rumi?

If you want what the visible reality can give, you're an employee.

If you want the unseen world you're not living your truth.

Both wishes are foolish,
but you'll be forgiven for forgetting
that what you really want is
love's confusing joy.¹³

Endnotes

1. The argument for feminine and masculine philosophy is detailed in my book, *The Undercurrent of 'Feminine' Philosophy in Eastern and Western Thought* (University Press of America, 1981).
2. See Naomi Weisstein, *Kinder, Küche, Kirche as Scientific Law: Psychology Constructs the Female* (New England Free Press: Boston, 1967).
3. Perle Besserman and Manfred Steger. "Ikkyu: The Emperor of Renegades." In *Crazy Clouds: Zen Radicals & Reformers* (Boston: Shambhala, 1991), 72, 80. Other Zen Masters, such as Hakuin and Ryokan, were equally egalitarian in their interactions with women.
4. Ban Gu. *The Geographical Records of the History of the Former Han*, Han Dynasty (first century C.E.), quoted by Wang Jichao, "The Kingdom of Chu—North and South, the Dragon and the Phoenix," in *Ringling Thunder: Tomb Treasures from Ancient China*, edited by Caron Smith and Sung Yu (San Diego: San Diego Museum of Art, 1999), 19.
5. Martin Chapman, professor of applied science, London South Bank University, cited by Natalie Angier, "Small, Yes, But Mighty: The Molecule Called Water," *New York Times* (July 10, 2007): D2.
6. Richard Wightman Fox. "The President Who Died for Us." *New York Times* (April 14, 2006): A23.
7. Lin Yutang. *The Importance of Living* (New York: John Day, 1937), 36.
8. See Sandra A. Wawrytko, "Kong Zi as Feminist: Confucian Self-cultivation in a Contemporary Context," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 27:2 (2000): 171-86.
9. See Sandra A. Wawrytko, "Buddhism: Philosophy Beyond Gender," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, special issue on Femininity and Feminism: Chinese and Contemporary 36:2 (June 2009): 293-312.
10. Descriptions of the young Krishnamurti quoted by Mary Lutyens, *Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux: 1975), 21.
11. Unnamed journalist quoted by Pico Iyer in his work, *Open Road: The Global Journey of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 72-73.
12. Terry McDermott. "No Limits Hinder UC Thinker." *Los Angeles Times* (December 29, 1999): A23; writing about John Searles, "the Sugar Ray Robinson of philosophers."
13. Coleman Barks trans. *Rumi the Book of Love: Poems of Ecstasy and Longing* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003), 13.

Contemporary Feminism vs. Chinese Thought? A Metaphysical Inquiry¹

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There seems an irony in phrases such as "feminism and Chinese thought," "feminism and Chinese women," etc. These highly hypothetical presumptions automatically affirm that there is a distinctive contrast between contemporary feminism and Chinese tradition and that they belong to two

separate traditions or two divisions of thinking. Is this so? My answer is negative.

It is true to say that “Chinese thought” or “Chinese philosophy” usually refers to its classic form, and it is also true to say that feminism generally is understood as a modern form. However, it is not true to simply assume they are two contrast traditions or compare them as two distinctively different bodies of thought. My following argument shall set up an intercultural dialogue between process feminism and Chinese cosmology, through which I shall articulate how an ancient form such as Chinese thinking has a contribution to make to Western feminism and vice versa, how the latter has any connection to the former. My conclusion shall propose that process feminism and Chinese cosmology have a shared ground: creative harmony of multi-connectivity. And both aim at how interconnection replaces disconnection, how togetherness displaces differentiation, and how men and women walk along with each other towards a common destination.

I. God and *Tian* as Masculinity

W. B. Yeats remarks: “...after all our subtle colour and nervous rhythm, after the faint mixed tints...what more is possible? After us the Savage God.”² This God is the most ineffable deity in the monotheism of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; beyond time and change, He³ is the sole reality and infinite perfection among us, regardless of the fact that He is abstract, shadowy, distant, and physically unknown. Genesis reminds us: “...God created the heavens and earth”⁴ and “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”⁵ Without the absolute sense of orthodox vision in classical theism, the world would seem to lose the eternal truth and our lives would be led without purposes. Most remarkably, this singular, pompous, and arrogant image seems particularly androcentric and traumatic towards womanhood, for from the first day He is already personified into the male divine to “[l]et a woman learn quietly with complete submission” to Him.⁶ Hence, after *us* the Savage God; after *her* the Savage Him.⁷

However, interestingly but ironically, as God is a portrayal of masculine lord in classical Christianity, in Confucian classics, *Tian* (the cosmic heaven⁸) is defined and developed into a patriarchal morality that represents masculine excellence. In the poignancy of *Tian*, Confucian women are taught and expected and praised by the virtue of enduring and subordinating their life to “*fate (ming)*,” namely, a “pre-determined (by *Tian*)” life journey. In the Confucian *fude* (goodness of a woman), *her* moral perfection is beatified by a valuable world under a husband’s (as well as the dominant male group’s) leadership, because this man is an exemplary icon who bears cosmic heaven’s will (*tianzhi*) and intention (*tianyi*), and comprehensively he represents the four principal excellences of a gentleman: *ren* (benevolence), *yi* (righteousness), *li* (propriety), and *zhi* (wisdom in distinguishing good from bad).⁹

Inasmuch as traditional Christianity or classical Confucianism clings to the masculine force of God or *Tian*, my question is: Can we find a reformed theory in which such patriarchal captivity can be broken? My answer is positive. But how may we affirm it? No doubt that neither the patriarchal sacralization of God or the heavenly sage-hood of *Tian* suffices for such restorative transformation. A brand new vision is needed. It should call forth a theory of interrelating, reconnecting, and mutual-integrating. This is a demanding and challenging endeavor as it is to evoke the connection between the divine and the world, between *Tian* and humanity, and between masculinity and femininity. To achieve the above aim, I have come to see that both process philosophy and Chinese cosmology may provide a promising hope to fulfill such a goal. These two alternative worldviews, as discussed below, explore a creative connectivity which

is able to alleviate controlling monopoly and inharmonious boundaries.

II. Process God in Connecting Masculinity and Femininity

According to the process view, God’s power is to be understood as persuasive and never oppressive: “...God transcends the World, as that the World transcends God. ...God creates the World, as that the World creates God.”¹⁰ There is a harmonious affiliation here: God intends to persuade humans and all creatures, but He does not control or savagely compel any created beings to depend on his will. Although such Whiteheadian theology has not in mind a particular feminist theory on God, its process interpretation rejects the traditional stereotypical masculine image of the divine. From this approach, Whitehead portrays God as one of men *and* women, and thus He delivers persuasive love, tender feeling, and compassionate sharing. These are grounds which have shaped Whiteheadian metaphysical empathy and balance, and they have shifted the traditional masculine attributes to the traditional feminine attributes.

One of the frontier process feminists, Catherine Keller, clarifies and simultaneously warns: while process feminists attribute their appeal to connection instead of separation or distance or difference, their vision is not to be mistaken as sheer emotion, namely, a radical switch from one God to one Goddess.¹¹ For Keller, the mistaken view contributes nothing helpful but directs to an opposite dead extreme that persists in identifying God in gendered terms. Therefore, Keller judges that this extreme emotion abandons or destroys the male God, and it does not resolve the problem and instead binds itself with another particular mode of simplistic authority. Process feminism should guide and explore a mutual-reaching, pluralistic-becoming, and inter-weaving network. This is not an annihilating process but an endless and multiply connecting endeavor of netting “one” to “many” and “many” to “one.”

This is a Whiteheadian web, and when weaving into it, Keller questions the extreme feminist approach to selfhood, which identifies the self as separate from its surroundings. This yields freedom in name only and retains estrangement from the relational realm. It is true that the complex relations in which we are enmeshed do generate boundaries between a self and others. However, for Keller and process feminism, our sensibility of being a true self does not necessarily mean to choose arriving at separation against connection. Keller insightfully targets a fundamentally problematic issue of modern culture, which not only assumes a single view of separation but heads to a biased vision: sexism. She points out that neither “separation” or “sexism” functions as a help to the world of men *or* that of women, and she does not believe in seeking an empowered center either in a man or in a woman.¹² Keller requires her alternative thinking to go beyond a limited array such as selfhood or gender identity or relational community in order to obtain a farther reach to ideas, feelings, souls, lives.

Meanwhile, for her, this is not a step to escape from our concerns with the time-honored confusion about masculine or feminine selfhood, but to think collectively and feel intrinsically in a deep affinity rooted in “connective and fluid selves.”¹³ With Keller, we realize that God as The Masculinity is broken into multiplicity. A particular individual man or woman is only one rhythm of the pulses of the connective stream, and each such single effort can only be activated in a complex synthesis of massive feelings. To feel and to understand and to relate one another take two or numerous partners. To connect means to merge into other feelings and only can such a two or multi-way street be hopeful in choreographing the

feeler to feel whilst feelings to be felt. Without this process of “conrescence,” no subjective selfhood can be created, nor can any diverse objectivity turn into a new subjective oneness. This metaphysical connection certainly helps to bridge the gap between masculinity and femininity, and thus can definitely enlighten all men and women in making a collective self.¹⁴

III. Creative *Tian* in Harmonizing *Qian* and *Kun*

There is a problem with the process perspective of connectivity. In the pattern of Whiteheadian connectivity, the tensions, contradictions, and disjunctions in process growth are made possible by the becoming in its philosophy of organism. We cannot but notice that the world of Whitehead ultimately implies a realization of organic connection and relation. Such a course takes place through an organic evolution rather than an autonomous practicality like that signifies Chinese philosophy. For Whitehead, the whole point of weaving a connective web has less to do with how oneness is susceptible to deconstructing the monolithic divinity of God and how an androcentric ego is dissolved by connecting to other humans. A cosmology such as this has not expanded the life of organic “occasions” and creatures further to a practical theory of actual humanism or the humanistic extent of our life. Nor has such a philosophy of organism answered how interconnection replaces disconnection and how togetherness displaces differentiation in our rational or social or emotional activities. These distinctive characteristics ultimately and fundamentally distinguish Whiteheadian cosmology from Chinese cosmology, and the latter reveals a broadened and deepened interconnection from the perspective of a concrete and immediate level of human cultural, social, and virtuous practicality. Therefore, the cosmological harmony in Chinese thought no doubt contributes a more plausible, actual, and particular direction to contemporary feminism in general and process feminism specifically. Below I shall introduce a rough analysis of such.

The prominent *Yijing* scholar Chung-ying Cheng has a fundamental interpretation for the above Chinese humanistic cosmology, which characterizes the relation between separation and connection as that between disharmony and harmony:

The world...is a process of change and development. ...there may appear variation, difference, divergence, tension, opposition, and antagonism in the world...the overall tendency of cosmic and social processes as well as individual life conduces to unity and harmony. ...Reality...which encompasses Heaven, Earth, humans and the myriad things, in both a process of change and an ordered structure.¹⁵

In Chinese cosmology, *Tian*, as we stated above, the cosmic heaven or the *yang* force of the nature, is identified with the paternal symbol of *qian* (the creative originativity). Whilst opposed and yet connected to *Tian*, *Di*, the cosmic earth or the *yin* force of the nature, is embodied in the maternal image of *kun* (the creative productivity). The essential principle of the *Yijing* philosophy lies in the succinct characterization of harmony between *Tian* and *Di* and the human world.

Whilst God can be a changeable and improvable deity in Whitehead—He is divine and creative but also personal and emotional—primordial *Tian* in Chinese cosmology is not a “savage” metaphor of masculinity as later elaborated in the mainstream of Confucianism. For the *Yijing*, *Tian*, in the paternal form of *qian*, spurs the *yang* energy of creativity; *Di*, in the maternal form of *kun*, nurtures the *yin* energy of productivity. *Tian* and *Di*, as well as *qian* and *kun*, are to be observed as a co-creating process in production and reproduction, and they are integrated with each other to constitute one totality of polarities and multiplicities. This is what the magnum opus, the *Yijing*,

advocates: *dayi* (the great change) and *shengsheng*. Cheng again elaborates the Chinese connectivity as both harmony and creativity:

...change is nothing but the continuous production and generation of life (*sheng-sheng*). The process of continuous generation of life is conceived in terms of the *yin-yang* metaphysics, *yin* and *yang* are universally observed and experienced as qualities of things and forces of happenings. They stand for two aspects, two sides, and two polarities of reality. ...they are dynamically one. ...The totality of things forms the context in which such change will take place.¹⁶

“The continuous production and generation of life (*shengsheng*)” can also be interpreted as “creative creation” or “creatively creative” or “creative creativity.” *The Yizhuan* (The Commentary of the *Yijing*) writes: “*Shengsheng zhiwei yi* (Creatively creating is what is meant by *yi*).”¹⁷ This creativity, which is contributed to by, and indebted to, the dynamic harmony of *yin* and *yang*, satisfies the mutual changes and multiple interchanges in the universe and human life. *Tian* is subject to such restless change, aroused and stimulated by *yin* and *yang*. In addition, Cheng points out: “...the whole world of things is conceived of as resulting from the same source of life, which is Heaven. ...The original Confucian concept of Heaven gives place to the idea of change.”¹⁸

However, it should be noted, the traditional Confucian interpretation has gone far to shape ideas of a credible power of *Tian* and promotes it as a controlling creativity. In Confucian virtue theories, as mentioned above, *Tian*, though being conceived to attach internally to and inseparably from *Di*, becomes enlarged as an independent source in orthodox Confucianism, as implied in Cheng. The natural law and order of the cosmic heaven are conceptualized as moral principles *tianli*. Such Confucian ideas of *Tian* almost mirror the image of God in the biblical tradition, which identifies God as the sole creator and dominant oneness of the world. With this interpretation, the Confucian heavenly creativity substituted a social, moral, and cultural bondage of Chinese femininity in a monumentally long history. In order to rediscover the metaphysical implication of the *Yijing*, most of all *Tian* should be recognized as a harmonious persona. As a potential creativity, *Tian* should respond to the productivity of *Di*, in the everlasting and perpetual changes of the *yin* and *yang* movements. To accomplish a creative creation, the *yang* energy of *Tian* cannot stand and act alone, if there is no *Di* to complement and equally supply the *yin* creativity. The *Yizhuan* says, “*Yi yin yi yang zhiwei dao* (The natural way or cosmic law is composed by one *yin* and one *yang*).”¹⁹

Harmony does not equate with singularity or oneness, just as when Whitehead proposes that the pre-established harmony in God is potentially made possible by God’s dipolar natures/poles. As much as God should be given with both masculine divinity and feminine divinity as Carl G. Jung suggested,²⁰ *Tian* or *qian*, as the source of the created world, is to be enriched and manifolded by *Di* or *kun*. The *Yijing* tells us:

Da zai qian yuan! Wanwu zishi... (The great *qian* and the great beginning! Ten thousands of things are richly created and originated from here...)²¹ and “*Zhi zai kun yuan, wanwu zisheng...* (The ultimate *kun* and the ultimate beginning, ten thousands of things were produced and flourished and manifested...)²²

Tian or *qian* is the origin of all things and life and forms in the world; however, without *Di* or *kun* as the productive and nurturing co-creator, we may find nothing can be brought to existence at all! If God’s creation is the co-creative and

co-productive process of “emotional (physical) feeling” and “conceptual (mental) feeling,” *Tian* and *Di* each imparts a harmonious unity. Nonetheless, in Chinese cosmology *Tian* has no divine implications, but Whitehead continues to characterize God as a divine image.²³ But this is not the project here to be completed.

In a brief conclusion, Chinese cosmology has deepened the Whiteheadian philosophy of organism and raised it up to the level of practical humanism and actual human anticipation. (We may discern clearly such detailed practical level in each school of Chinese philosophy, and it is not to be expanded in this scarce space.) Therefore, the theory of humanistic connectivity in the *Yijing* philosophy has challenges for contemporary feminism: how process philosophy or process feminism respond to the practical humanism and actual practicality in the particular and mutual connection between one man and one woman, and how the creative and internal change between *yin* and *yang*, disharmony and harmony are realized in a practical theory on femininity and feminism.

Endnotes

1. This is a modified version of my publication titled “Waiting for Godot? Contemporaneity, Feminism, Creativity,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 36, no. 2 (2009): 313-33.
2. A. Alvarez. *The Savage God: A Study of Suicide* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), 245.
3. I choose to use the conventional masculine pronoun in capital to serve the purpose of the present discussion.
4. Genesis, 1:1.
5. *Ibid.*, 1:27.
6. Timothy, 3:11. (For its standard classical works, the *Journal* decides not to include full source).
7. Hereby I am not confusing “him” with an individual male person.
8. The common translation of *Tian* as “heaven” can be confused with that in Christianity. My usage of “cosmic heaven” bears the original meaning of it in Chinese cosmology.
9. Chung-ying Cheng. *New Dimensions of Confucian and Neo-Confucian Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 69.
10. Alfred North Whitehead. *Process and Reality*, edited by David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne, corrected edition (London / New York: The Free Press, 1978), 349.
11. Catherine Keller. *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism, and Self* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986).
12. *Ibid.*, 2.
13. *Ibid.*, 6.
14. Carl G. Jung describes such a collective individuality through discussing “collective unconsciousness” in *The Essential Jung: Selected Writings*, selected and introduced by Anthony Storr (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).
15. Chung-ying Cheng. “Toward Constructing a Dialectics of Harmonization: Harmony and Conflict in Chinese Philosophy,” *Journal Supplement Series to Journal of Chinese Philosophy* (Oxford / Boston: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 28.
16. Cheng, *New Dimensions of Confucian and Neo-Confucian Philosophy*, 95.
17. Huang Shouqi and Zhang Shanwen, interpretation and commentary. *Zhouyi Yizhu* (The Interpretation and Commentary of the *Zhouyi*). (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Press), 538.
18. Cheng, *New Dimensions of Confucian and Neo-Confucian Philosophy*, 95.
19. Huang and Zhang, 588.
20. John B. Cobb, Jr. and David Ray Griffin. *Process Theology: an Introductory Exposition* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 134.
21. Huang and Zhang, 5.
22. *Ibid.*, 25.
23. I agree with Julia Ching that China never produced a personal deity as God in the Jewish-Christianity, whilst I do not simply agree with her notion of the cult of Heaven or her implication of a transpersonal deity in Chinese religions. Specifically refer to her *Chinese Religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 2.