

Ann A. Pang-White, editor  
*The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Chinese Philosophy and Gender*  
London: Bloomsbury Press, 2016 (ISBN: 978-1-4725-6985-1)

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In the recently published *Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Chinese Philosophy and Gender*, editor Ann A. Pang-White has put together a significant and robust contribution to the field. The anthology features eighteen chapters and a substantial introduction, organized into four main sections: ancient and medieval Confucian approaches, modern and contemporary Confucian approaches, Daoist approaches, and Buddhist approaches. The volume has contributions from new and established authors from the United States, Europe, Australia, and East Asia, and contributions that range across a number of disciplinary fields such as philosophy, gender studies, anthropology, Chinese studies, and religious studies. As a detailed review of so many different essays is impossible in this format, in what follows I begin by discussing Pang-White's introduction, then give a brief overview of the text, and conclude with my thoughts on the text's contributions to feminist philosophy.

Pang-White's introduction speaks both to scholars engaged in and with (predominantly Western) feminist discourses, but who may not be particularly familiar with Chinese philosophical contexts, and to scholars of Chinese philosophy who may not be familiar with contemporary feminist concerns. She begins by seeking to complicate contemporary notions of gender on the basis of five features of Chinese philosophy: absence of excessive dualisms, presence of at least three divergent traditions, development over three thousand years, fluid conception of gender based in yin-yang, and a less dichotomized sense of self and other (2). On the basis of these and other features, she argues that Chinese philosophy has much to add to gender discourses. In addition, however, she notes that "as a living tradition and as an active participant in the global

community, Chinese philosophy has a responsibility to engage in the global discourse of 'questioning,' 'thinking-through,' and 'thinking-with' the world community on these important subjects" (2).

Her introduction continues with a brief overview of the history of feminist thought and a discussion of the three waves of feminist movements. She then critiques Susan M. Okin's claim that multiculturalism is harmful to women, arguing that "It is essential for the future health of the feminist movement to recognize the interconnectedness of human existence, the multilayered identity of a woman through her lived experience (including her cultural identity), and the fact that any sustainable social change must come from within, beginning at the home front" (6). Pang-White identifies (at least) five avenues for scholarly action for the Chinese philosophical home front: "re-appropriating influential canonical texts; re-examining historical, social, political, and religious contexts; removing unjustified practices/laws/policies; uncovering hidden exemplary historical women figures; and re-imagining the conceptual and practical possibilities of these resources" (6). These five avenues are clearly represented in the chapters that make up the volume.

The last section of the introduction prior to the chapter summaries is a brief description of the history of gender discourse in Chinese culture and thought. For those unfamiliar with Chinese traditions or language, this is crucial to read before continuing on to the rest of the text, as Pang-White highlights the key features of gender in a Chinese context that are relevantly different from ambient assumptions about gender in a primarily Western context. She discusses *yin-yang* cosmology, the ungendered "human" in classical Chinese (*ren* 人), and the inner-outer distinction, among other central, organizing concepts concerning gender.

The organization of the volume parallels the common description of Chinese philosophical traditions as *sanjiao* 三教, or three teachings: Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. The volume itself ranges across time, from the ancient to the contemporary world, across methodologies, across gender concerns, including LGBT issues, and across the Chinese cultural region, which includes not only present-day China, but in this case Taiwan and Korea as well. Part I, "Confucian Approaches: Ancient and Medieval" consists of four chapters: Paul R. Goldin, "Women and Moral Dilemmas in Early Chinese Narrative," Tak-Ling Terry Woo, "Discourses on Women from the Classical Period to the Song: An Integrated Approach," Ann A. Pang-White, "Neo-Confucians and Zhu Xi on Family and Women," and Hye-Kyung Kim, "The Dream of Sagehood: A Re-Examination of Queen Sohae's *Naehoon*." These chapters share a broadly historical and text-oriented methodology.

Part II is more explicitly comparative than part I, as is fitting for the section focused on modern and contemporary Confucian approaches. Many of the chapters in this part put a Confucian element into conversation with non-Confucian philosophies from relatively recent times. The "modern and contemporary" aspect of this part is not, in particular, that the Confucian philosophers referenced are themselves from the last few hundred years, or that gender from more recent times in China is being examined, but rather that the philosophical conversations are engaged with or intervening in modern or contemporary concerns. This part features chapters by Karyn Lai, "Close Personal Relationships and the Situated Self: The Confucian *Analects* and Feminist Philosophy," Chenyang Li, "Care and Justice: Reading Mencius, Kant, and Gilligan

Comparatively," Ellie Hua Wang, "Moral Reasoning: The Female Way and the Xunzian Way," Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee, "Multiculturalism and Feminism Revisited: A Hybridized Confucian Care Ethics," and Sin-Yee Chan, "Would Confucianism Allow Two Men to Share a Peach? Compatibility between Ancient Confucianism and Homosexuality."

The volume shifts from the Confucian focus in parts I and II to "Daoist Approaches" in part III. The chapters in this section range from engagement with classical texts such as *Dao De Jing* (*Laozi*), *Zhuangzi*, *Huangdi Neijing*, and *Yijing* to interventions in contemporary Western feminisms, the idea of motherhood, ecofeminism and environmental ethics, and a Daoist critique of anti-LGBT moralizing. Contributions in this section include Robin R. Wang, "Yinyang Gender Dynamics: Lived Bodies, Rhythmical Changes, and Cultural Performances," Lin Ma, "On the *Dao* of *Ci* 雌 (Feminine/Female) in the *Daodejing* «道德經»," Galia Patt-Shamir, "To Beget and to Forget: On the Transformative Power of the Two Feminine Images of *Dao* in the *Laozi*," Eric S. Nelson and Liu Yang, "The *Yijing*, Gender, and the Ethics of Nature," and Susan Scheibler, "Daoism and the LBGT Community."

The final section of the volume, part IV, focuses on Buddhist approaches to gender. As with the other parts of the text, part IV includes material both historical and contemporary, concerns about gender from both theoretical and practical Buddhist perspectives, and reflections on the convergence of Buddhist and LGBT concerns. This section also directs significant attention to women's and feminists' Buddhist activities in twentieth- and twenty-first-century Taiwan. This section features Sandra A. Wawrytko, "Buddhist Nondualism: Deconstructing Gender and Other Delusions of the Discriminating Mind through Awareness," Ann A. Pang-White, "Non-Self, Agency, and Women: Buddhism's Modern Transformation," Hwei-Syin Lu, "'The Bodhisattva's Path' as Gender-Neutral Practices: A Case Study of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Community in Taiwan," and Hsiao-Lan Hu, "Bhikṣuṇī Chao-Hwei's Buddhist-Feminist Social Ethics."

In contemporary philosophical discourse, Western philosophers have tended strongly to assume a monolithic China with respect to gender. Many who do not know much about China know about practices of footbinding and concubinage, for example, and so assume that Chinese traditions are deeply and irredeemably patriarchal. One of the things this volume does particularly well is to disrupt this illusion of a Chinese monolith by illustrating not only the diversity in theoretical resources from Chinese traditions that can be brought to bear on issues of gender, but the genuine diversity in women's lived experiences in China (and the Chinese cultural region) in the context of the religio-philosophical traditions present.

This volume is situated in the emerging field of feminist-comparative philosophy, alongside volumes such as *Asian and Feminist Philosophies in Dialogue* (ed. McWeeny and Butnor, 2014), *Caring to Know: Comparative Care Ethics, Feminist Epistemology, and the Mahabharata* (Dalimya, 2016), and *Feminist Encounters with Confucius* (ed. Tan and Foust, 2016). In particular, there has been limited (Western) feminist engagement with Chinese philosophy for several decades. However, as groundbreaking as that work was, it tended to be what Kwong-loi Shun has recently described as "asymmetrical": "while we see frequent deployment of Western philosophical frameworks in the study of Chinese thought, we rarely encounter the reverse phenomenon, namely, the deployment of Chinese philosophical frameworks in the study of Western thought" (Shun 2009, 457). Early feminist-comparative work, for instance, often

focused on whether Confucian ethics could be described as a kind of care ethics--in itself not a problematic project *per se*, but what Shun observed is a larger tendency in the field toward asymmetrical philosophical engagement, where the framework remains consistently Western. In their previous work, contributors to this volume, such as Robin Wang and Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee, have set the stage for this volume's more symmetrical conversations and critiques between Chinese philosophies and gender discourses.

However, some things that I thought might be present in this volume were not significantly addressed, for example, issues concerning transgender identity. Although several chapters in the volume address LGBT concerns in light of Chinese traditions, they do so primarily in the context of sexuality and homosexuality. There is little discussion of the ways in which Chinese traditions might engage the complex issues of gender identity surrounding transgender persons, either historically in China or in the contemporary context. In addition, I was somewhat surprised to find very little engagement with twentieth-century Chinese philosophy, either in the form of recognized philosophers from China and the Chinese cultural region, such as Mou Zongsan (1909-1995), Zhang Dongsun (1886-1973), Xiong Shili (1885-1968), or Tang Junyi (1909-1978), or in the form of Chinese feminists like He Xiangning (1878-1972), Zheng Yuxiu (1891-1959), He-Yin Zhen (1884-1920), Li Yinhe (b. 1952), Deng Yingchao (1904-1992), and Li Xiaojiang (b. 1951), among others. In addition, although the volume does represent many different methodologies and perspectives, one that is not significantly present is post/de-colonial philosophy; some of the work from that field is directly applicable to the concerns raised in the text. I also think the volume could have benefited from additional engagement with gender and philosophy in China outside of the *sanjiao* model--in the Huizu Muslim community, for instance. All this said, however, the volume already has eighteen chapters, and I am not sure how much more could usefully fit and still remain coherent. So perhaps these comments are more a gesture toward possible future work in line with this text than critical commentary.

Finally, I want to address the significant contribution this volume makes to feminist philosophy. Contributors in this volume draw directly on a variety of established feminist philosophers who may be familiar to those outside of the field of Chinese philosophy, including Linda Alcoff, Susan Okin, Carol Gilligan, Virginia Held, Eva Feder Kittay, Dorothy Ko, Chandra Mohanty, Luce Irigaray, Lorraine Code, and others, not to mention the established figures dealing with Chinese and feminist philosophies who are themselves contributors to the volume. Thus the chapters in this volume are engaged directly in conversations central to feminist philosophy.

That this volume contributes significantly to Chinese philosophy should be evident--in covering so much historical and intellectual territory, the volume makes it nearly impossible for anyone to suggest that Chinese philosophy doesn't have much to say about gender. This volume has broadened and enriched Chinese philosophy, and in doing so, has also broadened and enriched feminist philosophy. If provincializing white, middle-class, American women is one of the central tasks of third-wave feminism, then robust resources are needed for enacting that provincialization, and for the fertile conversations that follow such a de-centering. This volume is full of resources for thinking about the diverse lived experiences of Chinese women, for reconceptualizing contemporary categories and concepts, and for complicating conversations concerning the intersections of gender, culture, and philosophy.

## ***Reference***

Shun, Kwong-loi. 2009. Studying confucian and comparative ethics: Methodological Reflections. *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 36 (3): 455-78.