

# Female Philosophers in Contemporary Taiwan and the Problem of Women in Chinese Thought



# Female Philosophers in Contemporary Taiwan and the Problem of Women in Chinese Thought

By

Jana S. Rošker

**Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing**



Female Philosophers in Contemporary Taiwan and the Problem  
of Women in Chinese Thought

By Jana S. Rošker

This book first published 2021

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Translations of Slovenian texts: Nils Rošker

Copyright © 2021 by Jana S. Rošker

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced,  
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,  
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without  
the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-7384-2

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-7384-0

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments .....	viii
Foreword .....	ix
Chapter 1 .....	1
Introduction: Women in philosophy—a problem <i>sui generis</i> ?	
Chapter 2 .....	8
Women and Chinese philosophy	
2.1 Patriarchal tradition.....	9
2.2 The female aspects of Chinese philosophy: the complementarity of <i>Yinyang</i> , the immortal spirit of the vagina and the ethics of care ....	16
2.3 Ban Zhao (49–120), the first female thinker in the history of Chinese philosophy .....	40
2.4 The female master Sun Bu'er (1119–1182) and the binary nature of the vital creativity ( <i>qi</i> ) and the spirit ( <i>shen</i> ) .....	43
2.5 He Zhen (ca 1884–1920): The shaking up of anarcho-feminist theory .....	51
Chapter 3 .....	62
The importance of Taiwan for Chinese philosophy in the second half of the 20th century	
3.1 The specific political and intellectual situation of Taiwan after 1949 and the maintaining of continuity in the research into traditional philosophy.....	63
3.2 Philosophical currents and key figures .....	69
3.3 Modern Confucianism ( <i>Xin ruxue</i> ) as the main intellectual movement of the preservation of Chinese tradition.....	73
3.4 Theoretical and methodological contributions of modern Taiwanese Daoism ( <i>Xin daoja</i> ) .....	76
3.5 Significance .....	80

Chapter 4 .....	81
Teachers	
4.1 Mou Zongsan (1909–1995) and the new Taiwanese moral metaphysics .....	81
4.2 Chen Guying: <i>Enfant terrible</i> of contemporary Taiwanese philosophy .....	90
Chapter 5 .....	96
Lin Yueh-hui	
5.1 Life, work and relationship with Mou Zongsan .....	96
5.2 Theoretical work and methodology .....	106
5.3 Modern reinterpretations of Neo-Confucianism, and the significance of Confucian thought for the modern world .....	114
5.4 The significance of an East Asian research perspective and the relation with the mainland research .....	119
5.5 Korean Confucianism .....	127
5.6 Western and Chinese philosophy and the relation between Confucianism and Christianity .....	138
5.7 Discrimination against women in Taiwanese philosophy .....	150
Chapter 6 .....	154
Wu Hui-Ling	
6.1 From natural sciences to philosophy, from Plato to Zhuangzi ....	154
6.2 The methodological problems of Chinese philosophy .....	157
6.3 Women and philosophy .....	164
6.4 Professional development: teacher and researcher .....	168
6.5 Theoretical contents .....	170
6.6 Chen Guying's influence .....	173
6.7 Publications and plans for the future .....	177
Chapter 7 .....	181
Conclusion	
Summary .....	183
Sources and Literature .....	186
Index of special terms and proper names .....	196

Appendix 1 .....	205
Transcript of the interview with Lin Yueh-hui, December 2017	
Appendix 2 .....	264
Transcript of the interview with Wu Hui-Ling, August 18, 2018	
Index .....	297

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research work for this book was supported by the Taiwanese Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation. The author also acknowledges the financial support from the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS) in the framework of the research core funding *Asian Languages and Cultures* (P6-0243) and in the scope of the research project N6-0161 (Complementary scheme) *Humanism in Intercultural Perspective: Europe and China*.



## FOREWORD

This book on female Chinese philosophers has been on my mind for many years. But its actual writing was always put on hold and pushed into the background of my other research work. Other topics always seemed more important, more urgent and more topical. Being a female expert in Chinese philosophy myself, this belittling attitude regarding the importance of female philosophers is somehow ironic, and it is certainly symptomatic of the way the topic treated in this work has usually been approached. But finally, I made it, and I wrote the book through the lens of two problems. Both are linked to a philosophical work that is—entirely unjustifiably—pushed to the very margins of dominant discourses. Firstly, this book deals with problems pertaining to the question of gender discrimination in the field of general philosophy, and particularly in the field of Chinese philosophy. It deals with this discrimination on many different levels, starting with the multifarious expressions of misogyny in the very contents and structures of these discourses, and trying then to reveal why and in which ways such views still influence the precarious relation between female gender and philosophy to the present day. All these theoretical endeavors have been exemplified and concretized by several problems, specifically pertaining to Chinese philosophy. This latter task also included introductions of the life and work of several more or less forgotten Chinese female philosophers, who always remained in the shadow of their male colleagues, teachers and colleagues—regardless of the historical time and

geographical place in which they lived and worked, and in spite of their talent and the actual value of their theoretical work. The second aspect that aroused my interest in this framework of the discrimination-related questions within (Chinese) philosophy was connected to the problem of the role and the contribution of Taiwanese philosophy in maintaining the continuity of research in the Chinese intellectual tradition during the second half of the 20th century, which was in mainland Chinese philosophy primarily defined by discourses of Maoist ideologies and by the Sinicization of Marxism. The book brings together both of these aspects, representing a kind of a narrow, but solid bridge between them. At a first glance, discrimination against female philosophical theorists on the one hand, and the repudiation of Taiwan's important contribution to the development of contemporary Chinese philosophical theory on the other, have little in common. In fact, however, both issues are connected through a common problem, which is rooted in the underlying, and mutually comparable, discourses of negation arising from the historical, political, and social disparities associated with existing power structures.

The central part of the book introduces two Taiwanese female philosophers whose life and work are related to both issues mentioned above. Firstly, they are both women, i.e. belonging to the gender which is still severely marginalized in all philosophical disciplines. Secondly, they are both Taiwanese, and hence, working in the "marginal segment" of Chinese philosophy. In this sense, both phenomena—namely the "female" as well as the "Taiwanese" philosophy—belong to a theoretical periphery, to the furthest, most obscure, and almost unexpectedly existing edges of philosophical production.

For the exploration of the questions outlined above, I have chosen two female Taiwanese scholars of Chinese philosophy, namely Lin Yueh-hui

and Wu Hui-Ling. There are several reasons for this choice. First of all, they are—in spite of the many aforementioned similarities—very different. These differences fundamentally determine two different theoretical paths of development in modern and contemporary Taiwanese philosophy. While the former is a representative of the older generation, the latter stands at the beginning of her academic career. Besides, Professor Lin is a Confucian scholar and a student of Mou Zongsan, probably the most influential thinker of the second generation of Modern Confucianism.

Assistant Professor Wu, on the other hand, is researching, analyzing and re-interpreting classical Daoist philosophy, following the enthusiastic inspiration of her Neo-Daoist teacher, Professor Chen Guying. History will show whether these two female philosophers will eventually liberate themselves from the shadow of their great masters, together with numerous other female scholars who are trying to find their way through the dense and difficult jungles of past and present philosophical theories. And since we now find ourselves at the threshold of the third decade of the 21st century, in which the Enlightenment values of equality, autonomy, subjectivity and human dignity should already belong to the long-secured heritage of humankind, we should have good reason to hope that their (and our own) life in the twilight of the idols will finally come to an end. Moreover, I can only hope that this book will be one of the many small, initial steps towards a more egalitarian future in philosophical theory.



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION: WOMEN IN PHILOSOPHY— A PROBLEM *SUI GENERIS*?

In his book *Distant Observation* (守望的距离) the respected contemporary Chinese philosopher Zhou Guoping wrote:

Women participating in philosophy causes great harm both to philosophy and to women.

女人搞哲学，对于女人和哲学两方面都是一项损失。(Zhou Guoping 2003, 325)

This quote has become rather famous over the last few years, and spread across the world of Chinese academia in general. Quite a few Chinese women who write their own work and are working in the field of philosophical research are often met with the relaxed smiles of male colleagues who wink at them and quote Zhou Guoping, instead of engaging in a theoretical debate with them and their ideas.

This sort of patriarchal discourse of male theorists is, of course, based upon good intentions, since it is clear that philosophy is a male domain precisely because it uses a rigid terminological apparatus, complex concepts and intellectual puzzles which harm what lies at the very core of every

“normal” woman: Her femininity (read: weakness), loveliness (read: naivety) and beauty (read: objectness).

Zhou Guoping himself justified his opposition to women engaging in philosophy by saying:

Whenever I see a smart woman drowning in the labyrinth of conceptual speculations and speaking incomprehensible sentences, I cannot help but become sad. My heart hurts when I see a bright girl climbing to the peaks of metaphysics and shedding tears over its depth. Bad philosophy upsets us and good philosophy shocks us. Neither is good for female beauty. The fact that I am against women participating in philosophy actually derives from my regret of their loss of subtle eroticism and tantalizing beauty. 看到一个聪慧的女子陷入概念思辩的迷宫，说着费解的话，我不免心酸。看到一个可爱的女子登上形而上学的悬崖，对着深渊落泪，我不禁心疼。坏的哲学使人枯燥，好的哲学使人痛苦，两者都损害女性的美。我反对女人搞哲学，实出于一种怜香惜玉之心。(Ibid., 327)

The young Chinese female theorist Jia Cuixiang has written that women working in this field naturally become shaken, as Zhou's tone of reminds one of the silent, yet unmercifully serious threats of the dark, hidden guards, who attentively watch the gates that lead into the opulent palace of philosophical thought, and protect it from women, who are inherently profane and are therefore strictly forbidden from entering (Jia 2004, 2). Jia continues and warns of the close connection between such points of view and the patriarchal tradition of China:

We encounter many problems when applying a more thorough analysis of such value judgments. Firstly, this is about the poisonous influence of feudal

doctrines,<sup>1</sup> which have reigned long in Chinese tradition. In accordance with this tradition, a woman was truly a woman only when she respected womanly virtues and acted according to them. Morals dictated that women should view being uneducated and untalented as strengths and should abide by appropriate regulations: “Do not show your teeth when smiling, when walking your skirt should stand still.” Secondly, these viewpoints are a reflection of the image of a woman created by a man within a patriarchal society. Since the end of matrilinear tribes, there is a dominance of patrilinear social order in which men take up the central and primary position. That is why the decision on what a woman should be like is always made by men. Nonetheless, most men are still of the opinion that a woman should be gentle, loving and humble. A lot of women still inhibit their potential and repress their talents. No wonder we became a second-grade gender and we still are neither equal nor independent. We are still subjugated by and belong to the first-grade gender, men. We are defined by the roles of mothers, daughters and wives. And yet these are roles acquired in societies created by men. This also undoubtedly holds true.

事实上，仔细分析一下对女人的这种价值判断，就会发现有許多问题。第一，当然是中国封建礼教的长期遗毒的影响。什么“女子无才便是德”，女人要遵守妇道和妇德，要坐有坐样，走有走样，“笑不露齿，行不动裙”，这样才象一个女人。其次，是父权社会中男性对女性的塑造。自母系氏族社会解体以来，人类社会就一直是以男性为中心地位的父亲社会。女人应该怎样，这取决于男性的价值判断。在大多数男人的眼里，女人应该是温柔的、可爱的、娇小的等。女人为了博

---

<sup>1</sup> The traditional Chinese socio-economic system in most cases is not feudal. The only time a system which could be compared to feudalism prevailed in Chinese society was in the period of the Western Zhou Dynasty (around 1046–771 BCE). However, contemporary Chinese intellectuals mostly still equate the traditional Chinese societal system arrangement with a feudal society. This is a case of the unreflective adoption of Marxist categories, which were established in accordance with the development of European societies.

得男人的欣赏和欢心，也会努力地把自已的天性压抑住，塑造成男性喜欢的样子。所以波伏瓦才会说，女性是第二性的，她从来没有取得过与男性独立、平等的地位，她从来都附属于第一性——男性。女人的母性、女儿性、妻性等都是后天的、被男性社会所塑造出来的。此话有一定的道理。(Ibid., 3)

All of these factors naturally contribute to the fact that only a few women decide to study philosophy. This is because the prevailing opinion in modern society is still that philosophy is not suitable for women.

We often hear people advising women to pursue the study of Chinese literature and culture, foreign languages, marketing or law. These are supposed to be good subjects which are suitable for women, since they adhere to feminine tenderness and vitality. The decision to study philosophy is seen as unwise, or even frightening.

常听人们谈到，作为一个女孩最好去学中文、外语、贸易、法律等专业。专业好又具有女孩子气，似乎这些专业更适合女性温柔、灵活的气质。而学哲学则被看作是一个不明智的，甚至是可怕的选择。(Ibid.)

Of course, the view set out by Zhou Guoping is also a reflection of conservatism, which has been spreading across the whole of China in the last two decades. Nevertheless, China is no exception in this regard, as the proportion of women in philosophy remains low even in the most advanced societies of the West.

Even in Europe, for example, the number of women who work in the field of philosophy is “alarmingly low” (Anderl 2013, 1), and the situation is similar in other parts of the “developed world”. The American sociologist Kieran Healy investigated the ratio of women who received doctorates in



different disciplines in the United States in 2009, and the results showed that the least women received their doctorates in the field of philosophy. It turned out that the percentage of women with doctorates in philosophy is even smaller than the percentage of their colleagues in other subjects traditionally considered as being “for men”, such as math, chemistry or astrophysics. This inequality is also reflected in the amount of academic employment. Only 21% of philosophers in the USA are female, and the same goes for the UK. To put this in context, just under half of all university professors in America are female, and thus they are strongly underrepresented in philosophy.

What are the reasons why it is harder for women to gain recognition in the field of philosophical research? While there are several answers to this question, they remain at the level of speculation.

One supposition, according to which women think differently than men, as supported by philosophers such as Hegel or Schopenhauer (and which is, by the way, also supported by many feminist theoreticians, albeit on a value-neutral level), cannot be empirically proven. On the other hand, there are a number of well-grounded psychological studies which imply the existence of implicit prejudices and stereotypes, such as, for example, the notion of “subtle incompetence”.

Such ideas are extraordinarily powerful in science and philosophy, and recent studies have shown that members of certain social groups in which such prejudices prevail display less efficiency, as their knowledge of these prejudices influences their concrete actions in the sense that they become self-fulfilling prophecies.

Perhaps it is not too unrealistic to expect that this sort of uncertainty influences women who work in the field of philosophy as well, as it is run by white, heterosexual and able-bodied men. The effect of such psychological

phenomena is perhaps one of the reasons for the fact that there are many discrepancies between the genders when it comes to the publication of philosophical articles in the most prestigious academic journals. The female philosopher Sally Haslanger compared the number of female and male authors who published an article in one of the five most important philosophical journals in 2008. She found that 95.5% of articles published in the leading philosophical journal *Mind* were written by male authors. Only in one of the five journals was the number of female authors comparable to the number of women employed in departments and institutes of philosophy. If we put the assumption that women are naturally worse at creating good theories aside, there can remain two possible reasons for such numbers. Women are either publishing fewer articles, or it is due to the reviewers being victims of (unconscious?) gender prejudices, as Haslanger found that the review processes for such papers are far from being completely anonymous.

Haslanger also found that the number of women working in the humanities is continually growing, and that the imbalances between genders in such subjects are already a lot smaller than in the natural sciences, with one exception: philosophy. The Swiss Association of Women in Philosophy came to the same conclusion with regard to the situation in Switzerland (Altanian 2018, 2). Its president, the philosopher Melanie Altanian, also believes that the main reason for this is a widely accepted biologicistic prejudice according to which women are more emotional and men more rationally analytical.

It is thus no wonder that many women in philosophy work in the field of feminist philosophy, which has introduced many innovative foundations, concepts and theories into an academic field that remains dominated by men. Most of these female philosophers bring new feminist insights into the

framework of traditional Western philosophical disciplines, including their analytical, continental and pragmatic traditions.

These new insights are often radical, as they include many interventions into the common ways of philosophical reasoning. By influencing traditional fields of theoretical work, which stretch from metaphysics, ethics, logic, phenomenology to epistemology and ontology, these female philosophers are introducing new concepts, perspectives and dimensions to them. In this way, they are not only changing the sub-disciplines in question, but also widening the horizons of philosophy itself. They touch upon themes which have hitherto belonged to the margins of philosophy, without being treated by anybody.

Some examples of such new approaches are linked to the concept of the body, to discrepancies between social classes, to the division of labor, disability, family, reproduction, the self, sexual work, human trafficking and sexuality. They also bring a specific, feminist outlook to the discussion of questions regarding the problems of science, globalization, human rights, popular culture, race and racism.

All this sheds a different light on the main topic of this book, in which we mostly talk about two female philosophers from Taiwan, who both create their work in Chinese. Against this background, it becomes clear that they are not only limited by the sexual prejudices of their own, Chinese culture, but also by those prejudices which have wider global dimensions. Despite this, it is mainly the traditional Chinese patriarchy which defines and conditions most of their activities. In the following parts of this book, I will therefore first introduce the culturally conditioned features of this specific form of patriarchal order, and explore the role of women in the Chinese philosophical tradition.

## CHAPTER 2

### WOMEN AND CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

If we think of all the infamous manifestations of the oppression of women, such as foot-binding or concubinage, one might think that female philosophy would be an impossibility in premodern China. However, the question of the connection between the female gender and Chinese philosophy is far more complex. While the pre-Qin classics (including Confucianism, as the most recent studies and interpretations show) actually supported the ideas of gender equality and promoted equal opportunities for education, many later periods brought restrictions and increasingly rigid limitations to women's access to learning.

Quite a few contemporary researchers believe that the long-lasting presumption of the inherent sexism of classical Confucianism was simplified and outdated at the same time (e.g. Pang-White 2009, 1–2). The opinion that Western feminist theories are not an appropriate tool to understand the structures of sexual relationships and the value of women in classical Chinese discourse is also widespread (Kim 2014, 396–397). Instead, most theoreticians promote a more culturally sensitive approach, which would connect textual analyses with actual and comprehensive knowledge of the historical and social contexts in which these discourses were placed.

If we accept the assumption of Simone de Beauvoir, according to which a woman is not born but becomes one, then we first have to understand the symbolic and societal meaning attached to the term “Chinese woman”, in the sense of a sexual as well as a cultural being. If we assume that every culture is vital and that the social construction of gender is both social as well as cultural, then it becomes clear that the collective view of the foreign “Other” through the lens of Western frameworks is not only an inappropriate tool, but also leads to the elimination of the essence of the subject we wish to research. What is even worse is that by accepting this approach, we automatically accept the alleged superiority of Western culture, as it would serve as a kind of umbrella norm under which it is possible to conceptually subsume all other cultures regardless of their local and empirical particularities (Rosenlee 2006, 3).

## 2.1 Patriarchal tradition

In the Confucian *Analects*, for example, there are no sexist statements. The only quote which could be interpreted as an expression of belittling women, and is therefore cited wherever there is a need to “prove” the patriarchal nature of original Confucianism, reads as follows:

The Master said: “Girls and servants are the most difficult to get along with. If you are too familiar with them, they lose their humility. But if you maintain a distance towards them, they become offended.” (*Lunyu* s.d., Yang Huo: 25)

Recent etymological and hermeneutical research shows that this passage is actually not about women or girls, but more likely about male and female servants, about farmhands and maids (e.g. Kinney 2017, 149–150). Such an

interpretation implies that this statement does not have any sexist and patriarchal connotations.

Most scholars, however, agree that there was less sexual equality in later periods of Chinese history, the fault of which they attribute to Confucianism and Confucian ethics. Although this assumption is true to some degree, it is misleading. We must not forget the many differences between Confucianism as philosophy and Confucianism as a mainstream normative ethics. This differentiation was already established in the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), when the state ideologists under the leadership of Dong Zhongshu formed a new doctrine in which they took the teachings of original Confucianism, which were rather progressive for their time, and merged them with the despotic ideology of Legalism. In this way, the originally egalitarian Confucian teachings became a dogmatic Confucian state doctrine, and the philosophical questions of this once proto-democratic discourse got replaced by rigid state formed dogmas, which emphasized hierarchical differences between people and increased the authority of those in power. After the blossoming of the so-called Neo-Confucianism during the Song (960–1279) and Ming (1368–1644) Dynasties, the legitimization of oppression—and with it, of course, the increasingly difficult position of women in Chinese society—were almost continuously strengthened.

Larger mass rebellions of women and their progressive male colleagues against (among other things) such gender inequality and patriarchal Confucian ethics arose only much later, at the dawn of the modern age. These uprisings came into existence in the scope of the new cultural renovation, which mostly drew its potential from the Western mindset, and manifested itself most clearly in 1919, within the so-called May 4th Movement.

Before we take a closer look at what role women's philosophy had in this context, we need to return to the period of the beginning of the creation of patriarchal ideology, to the time of the Han Dynasty and the periods that followed. The element of hierarchy in social positions, which was placed at the forefront of Confucian teachings by Dong Zhongshu, after the Han Dynasty served as the basis of the state ideology, which was supposed to guarantee order and peace in the new society of early medieval prosperity.

As is well known, the relationship between a man and woman or the (superior) husband and (subordinated) wife was one of the five fundamental, rigidly hierarchical relationships within these teachings. During the Han Dynasty, that is, during the period of the consolidation of a new social system which was based upon a linkage of political and economic power, the position of women was still relatively strong. It was not until the Song Dynasty and the second reform of Confucianism that the prevailing morality began to exclude women from education and to bind their feet.

Therefore, it is not surprising that during the Han Dynasty we can still find a woman (Ban Zhao, 45–116) whose intellect was so extraordinary that it was even recorded in the official Confucian historiography, which normally ignored any intellectual achievements of her gender. In all likelihood, however, this is not so much due to the greatness of her intellect, as due to the fact that this woman knew how to use it for the benefit of the new, rigid Confucianism and, ultimately, also in favor of the emerging patriarchy. This becomes clear already in the very title of her most famous work, *Lessons for Women* (*Nü jie*).

In contrast to the official Confucian doctrine, which propagated a strict, patriarchal social hierarchy, Daoism based itself in incomparably more egalitarian assumptions. The equality of men and women is also one of the more notable peculiarities of the Daoist religion. Because of these

characteristics, its theological system differed greatly not only from the state doctrines and corresponding ideologies, but also from all other influential religious systems:

In many worldwide religions, we see a tendency to devalue or even exclude women. Daoism, however, has treated women with respect; and that is one of its most obvious peculiarities, which distinguishes it from most other religions. Daoist practice and theories offered women a key to spiritual transcendence and independent decision making over their fate. Women in Daoism had completely the same opportunities for education as men. Therefore, in Daoism, women could also become “enlightened masters”. (Li Suping 2004, 3)

A lot of women engaged in Daoist theory and practice in different periods of Chinese tradition, and many of them left numerous written works, although they have mostly been forgotten. Since we cannot (especially from the Daoist titles) determine the gender of authors whose biographies we do not have, there are probably a lot more female Daoist authors than the official intellectual history of Chinese tradition leads us to believe. As Li Suping (2004, 4) wrote about traditional China: “Many women have studied and practiced Daoism, but their theories have not been systematically researched as of yet.”

Of course, these female Daoists also focused on writing classics that were specifically meant for women, which—unlike the earliest sacred texts of folk Daoism—acknowledged the differences in Daoist theory and practice defined by gender. Here, we cannot forget the female Daoist master Sun Bu’er (1119–1182).

Since the possibility to achieve enlightenment is given both to men and women, many such works discuss the peculiarities of a female practice of



the Way. Works such as *Nü jin dan* (*The Golden Female Principle*), *Kun yuan jing* (*The Classic of Female Oneness*), *Kundao gongfu cidi shi* (*Philosophical Poetry for Achieving the Spirit of the Womanly Dao*), *Sun Bu'er er yuanjun fayu* (*Quotes of the Honorable Master Sun Bu'er*) and many others. These works focused on the specific conditions of women and took into account their physical and mental characteristics.

Here we also have to mention the work of Wei Huacun (252–334), one of the most famous female Daoist masters from the period of the Six Dynasties, in spite of the fact that her works were only stored in the closed archives of Daoist temples, and thus difficult for the public to access. However, for now let us mention a few more names of some other influential female Daoist masters of this period: Wu Cailuan, Fan Yunqiao, Cui Shaoxuan, Tang Guangzhen, Zhou Xuanjing (see Cleary 1989, 12). Most of them are not famous only for their theological writings (such as were written by Wei Huacun), but also for their philosophical and cosmogonic poetry, such as found in Laozi's *The Book of the Way* (*Dao de jing*).

The period at the beginning of the development of the Neo-Confucian doctrine was responsible for many practices that were harmful and hateful towards women. However, even though such practices as foot-binding existed in this period, we can still find many creative as well as influential female scholars and thinkers from this time.

Although Neo-Confucianism was undoubtedly the main discourse which prevailed in official ideational history after the Song period, there were also many Buddhist and Daoist writings by women in this time in China. However, they stayed in the shadows of official historiography. Mostly these philosophical works were elaborating upon classical and popular Daoism and its syntheses with Buddhist influences. In the field of

the development and specific upgrades of Confucian ethics, it is also important to note the work of the following three of the female authors: Song Ruoshen (768–820), Song Ruozhao (761–828) and Empress Xu (1362–1407) of the Ming Dynasty.

The feminist questioning of the traditional patriarchal society in China, as well as everywhere else in the world, began in a more organized and systematic sense only at the beginning of the modern age. Individual, quite influential feminist thinkers, such as the progressive female writer and activist Qiu Jin (1875–1907), wrote on many important feminist issues. She warned of oppression and criticized the unequal status of women as early as in the 19th century.

Together with Xu Zihua (1873–1935) she founded the journal *Chinese Women's News* (*Zhongguo nü bao*). She was involved in the organization of many revolts and rebellions against the corrupt Qing Dynasty, and championed equal rights to education and employment. She was sentenced to death and shot because of her activities against the state in 1907.

A significant role in the raising of awareness regarding gender conditioned discrimination against women was played by Lu Xun, one of the greatest progressive writers of the modern age. The liberation of women represented one of the important goals of the May 4th Movement (1919), which some scholars equate with the beginning of the Chinese Enlightenment. Another important fighter for women's rights was the female anarchist He Zhen (1884–ca. 1920), the life of whom we will take a closer look at next.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China (1949), the women's movement became integrated into the framework of the Chinese Women's Association (*Zhonghua quanguo funü lianhe hui*), which—of course in accordance with state decrees—worked for the promotion of state policies on women and family, while at the same time protected the rights

of women within the governmental institutions. Although in practice the related decrees mostly still reproduced the dominant position of men, we can find in this period several female writers who tried to approach the analysis of gender-based inequality through the lens of serious philosophical questions. Here we have to mention the case of Xiaojiang (born in 1951), a female Marxist theorist, who worked on the history of women's theory from the perspective of historical materialism. She is also known as the founder of women's studies and women's philosophy in modern China. Alongside her work concerning the historical analysis of women's movements, she also became famous as one of the first female feminist philosophers who strove for the illumination of the specific characteristics of women's position in China, and for the creation of new paradigms based on the differentiation between the achievements as well as needs of Western and Chinese feminism. As such, in many of her works she revealed that in traditional China the social construction of genders was already seen as a self-evident, natural fact. She also showed that in many respects Chinese women were less radically discriminated against than women in the West. Among other ways, she showed this with a philological analysis of Chinese characters that designate the different genders.

In contemporary China, many feminist groups are active within non-governmental organizations, and also within lesbian groups, which work within the Chinese LGBT Association. However, all such organizations still operate under a lot of pressure from the government and its policies, which in recent years further increased its efforts to make clear that the "real" liberation of women was their fulfilment within harmonious family life.

In recent years, the idea of a woman as an autonomous political subject has being more strikingly developed in Taiwan. However, the philosophical dimensions of such female autonomous subjects are even there—as we will

see later in this book—met with the prejudices of Chinese patriarchal tradition.

For a better understanding of the specific features of the Chinese-style patriarchy and the particular characteristics of the resistance against it, let us first take a look at some surprisingly “female” aspects of Chinese philosophy in general, and then turn our attention to the work and significance of three female thinkers, who we mentioned earlier in this chapter, for they represent paradigmatic cases of women’s philosophical creativity in Chinese history. The first of them is the famous Confucian intellectual Ban Zhao (45–116). The second is the female Daoist master Sun Bu’er (1119–1182), whose work is evidence for the existence of a specific female philosophy within Chinese tradition, and the last is one of the first fighters for women’s rights on the brink of the modern age, namely the female anarchist He Zhen (1884–ca. 1920).

## **2.2 The female aspects of Chinese philosophy: the complementarity of *Yinyang*, the immortal spirit of the vagina and the ethics of care**

Classical and traditional Chinese philosophies are holistic, which does not mean that their discourses are ones in which all the factors would be connected in a fashion that would not permit analytical separation between them, thus also preventing logical processing of the content of these discourses.

On the contrary – referential frames, specifically those of Chinese philosophy, are based on the paradigms of binary categories. This means that its methodology works in coherence with binary orders, which manifest themselves in a few conceptual prototypes, with the help of which it is possible to analytically process the foundational attributes, relations,

functions and communicativeness of the main notions and concepts which characterize its basic referential frames.

In this way, every subject and every occurrence can be analyzed from the perspective of its shape, content or property through the lens of two contradictory ideas or poles. The most common pair of such mutually oppositional notions, which has in the last few decades—in a very simplified form—become well known outside of China as well, is of course *Yinyang*. *Yin* and *Yang* represent the symbols of femininity and masculinity. However, this is only one of the many connotations which can be described by this category. Originally *Yin* meant shadowy or dim, while *Yang* represented the sunny or bright side of the mountain. In a metaphorical way, the sun and the shadow are of course symbols of clarity and mystery, the manifest and the latent.

These basic attributes of *Yin* and *Yang* are closely connected to a specifically Chinese logic as well as to the Chinese theory of knowledge. The history of Chinese dialectical thought has its origin precisely in the concept of *Yinyang*. This is the way Liu Changlin describes the close connection between the principle of complementarity and Chinese epistemology:

陰陽之間的相互反映, 相互包涵. 你中有我, 我中有你. 故有陰可以見陽, 故有陽可以見陰. 陰陽返照的特性來源于陰陽的 相互作用. 由于相互作用各自把自己的信息傳給對方, 同時又成為 對方信息的接受者和貯存者. 通過陰陽返照關 來認識事物, 才是充分顯示中國特色的認識論。

*Yin* and *Yang* are mutually a part of each other. I am part of you, you are part of me. That is why the complementary attribute of *Yinyang* is connected to the complimentary interaction of both poles. Because of this, both poles transfer their information to their opposite, while at the same time storing

the information received. Making discoveries through such a complementary (correlative) relationship between *Yin* and *Yang* is the essence of the Chinese theory of knowledge. (Liu Changlin 1991, 291)

The list of binary categories similar to *Yinyang* is very long. For example, it includes the conceptual pair *benmo* (literally meaning root and branch), which deals with the relationship between cause and effect or between general and particular, and even between deduction and induction. Another pair is *tiyong* (literally meaning body and usage), with the help of which we can study the relationships between substance and function, between the fundamental and coincidental or between content and application.

Dialectic interaction is typical for all counterpoles that form binary categories. However, the dialectical process which derives from these categories is not based on the statistically dualistic Cartesian model, which has dominated the history of modern and contemporary Euro-American philosophy, but is defined by the principle of mutual complementarity. The distinctiveness of this principle is particularly evident if we compare it to Hegel's dialectics.

In this model, a thesis is negated by an antithesis. The thesis and antithesis are mutually exclusive. This means the counterpoles within the dualistic model are not only in mutual opposition but also in contradiction. The tension created in this contradiction triggers a sublation or, to use the German term, *Aufhebung*, which makes the synthesis of the thesis and antithesis possible. Thus the sublation works in all three conceptual connotations encompassed in *Aufhebung*, namely elimination, preservation, and ascent. This means that both the thesis and antithesis become eliminated in synthesis, while at the same time preserving certain positive elements of both counterpoles.