

# Examining Gender in Philosophy:

The reach and the risk of teaching canonical philosophy

Sydney Morrow, PhD  
Gender Forum 2019

Recent proliferation of concern over appropriate use of (proliferating) gendered/non-gendered pronouns

1	2	3	4	5
((/oe	((/oer	((/oer	((/oers	((/oerself
e/ey	em	eir	eirs	eirself
he	him	his	his	himself
per	per	pers	pers	perself
she	her	her	hers	herself
they	them	their	theirs	themself
ve	ver	vis	vis	verself
xe	xem	xyr	xyrs	xemself
ze/zio	hir	hir	hirs	hirself

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee LGBT Resource Center

**CONCEPTS**  
Pronoun use can effectively remonstrate with an academic discipline with a vivid history of sexism and misogyny.

**QUESTIONS**  
Should interpreters and translators change masculine pronouns to feminine/neuter in historical works?  
How should educators today introduce and teach (phallogocentric?) philosophy?  
Comparative gender analysis creates inclusive spaces for cultures and traditions forging their own understanding of gender in their contemporary contexts.

## Philosophy has a gender problem

1. Works written by and for men

historically & canonically

2. Underrepresentation in the discipline

historically & currently

3. Dominance of "Western" Philosophy

one type of gendered narrative

### He Yin Zhen (1884-1920)

Late Qing dynasty anarcho-feminist



ardent critic of "political" Confucianism that presumed male superiority

The salient differences between men and women are not "natural" but societal/political/material/historical.

deeply suspicious of the importation of Western ideas, including "so-called women's liberation"

He Yin lambasted the Confucian orthodox tendency to "cosmologize" contrasting aspects of the human experience.

yangyin 陽陰



nannü 男女

now translated as "gender"

"On the basis of "men first, women last," such other deviant teachings as "yang initiates, yin harmonizes," or "men act, women follow," were concocted to restrict women's freedom... The relationship between men and women thus became one of absolute inequality [through cosmic abstraction]. I cannot but sigh at this."

According to He Yin, this made equality and advancement of women impossible.

"Inclined toward despotism, Confucian scholarship has enabled men to cater to their self-interest. It comes as no surprise that polygamy and female chastity are both heralded by Confucianism."



How women are represented, the contexts in which they appear, and the (moral) expectations placed upon them form the crux of this strand of Chinese feminism.

Putting these two feminist traditions in conversation with one another offsets the tendency to speak of the movement toward gender equality as one phenomenon.

As feminisms continue to emerge onto the world stage, different engagements with particular histories spark new insights.

This opens up space to speak about the tradition and future of feminism/gender issues in our institutions, Kazakhstan, Central Asia...

Does this ease the feeling that importing social justice ideas/movements is a little tricky for us?

# Examining Gender in Philosophy:

The reach and the risk of  
teaching canonical philosophy

Sydney Morrow, PhD

Gender Forum 2019

# Philosophy has a gender problem

1. Works written by and for men

historically & canonically

2. Underrepresentation in the discipline

historically & currently

3. Dominance of "Western" Philosophy

one type of gendered narrative

# Recent proliferation of concern over appropriate use of (proliferating) gendered/non-gendered pronouns

1	2	3	4	5
(f)ae	(f)aer	(f)aer	(f)aers	(f)aerself
e/ey	em	eir	eirs	eirself
he	him	his	his	himself
per	per	pers	pers	perself
she	her	her	hers	herself
they	them	their	theirs	themself
ve	ver	vis	vis	verself
xe	xem	xyr	xyrs	xemself
ze/zie	hir	hir	hirs	hirself



Pronoun use **can** effectively remonstrate with an academic discipline with a vivid history of sexism and misogyny.

Should interpreters and translators change masculine pronouns to feminine/neuter in historical works?

How should educators today introduce and teach (phallogocentric?) philosophy?

Comparative gender analysis creates inclusive spaces for cultures and traditions forging their own understanding of gender in their contemporary contexts.

My experience engaging with students while teaching philosophy in Kazakhstan:

All masculine pronouns All the time!

1. EFL texts use (dated) generic masculine standard?

2. Traditional/conservative/patriarchal cultural relic/reality?

3. Russian language presumption of masculine-unless-otherwise-specified...

How to engage with contemporary gender issues in philosophy in a philosophical, critical way?

The "Western" narrative is (likely) not visceral, phenomenologically relatable, (and risks a unique sort of imperialism).

But the importance of gender representation is certainly felt.

Comparing and contrasting feminisms that give way to gender expression and visibility in different cultures.

# Western feminism's push for gender representation:

arises from concerns about equality in a liberal democracy

takes for granted certain modes of historical/material/economic development

criticizes certain religious precepts that bestow patriarchal privilege.

responds to certain presumptions about women, generally...

But the emergence of gender concerns is not confined to these catalytic conditions.

"Innumerable women have had the leisure and the liberty and the apparatus to become philosophers, but the world has not discovered a woman-philosopher whom it could honestly place hundredth after the first ninety-nine philosophers of the other sex.



...it is a question of an overwhelming and constitutional difference, a difference which stupendously remains after every allowance has been made for inequality of opportunity. Therefore I am inclined to think that no amount of education and liberty of action will sensibly alter it."

Arnold Bennett "Our Women: Chapters on the Sex Disord" 1920



Prezi

"Innumerable women have had the leisure and the liberty and the apparatus to become philosophers, but the world has not discovered a woman-philosopher whom it could honestly place hundredth after the first ninety-nine philosophers of the other sex.



...it is a question of an overwhelming and constitutional difference, a difference which stupendously remains after every allowance has been made for inequality of opportunity. Therefore I am inclined to think that no amount of education and liberty of action will sensibly alter it."

Arnold Bennet "Our Women:  
Chapters on the Sex Discord" 1920

# Western feminism's push for gender representation:

arises from concerns about equality in a liberal democracy

takes for granted certain modes of historical/material/economic development

criticizes certain religious precepts that bestow patriarchal privilege.

responds to certain presumptions about women, generally...

But the emergence of gender concerns is not confined to these catalytic conditions.

"Innumerable women have had the leisure and the liberty and the apparatus to become philosophers, but the world has not discovered a woman-philosopher whom it could honestly place hundredth after the first ninety-nine philosophers of the other sex.



...it is a question of an overwhelming and constitutional difference, a difference which stupendously remains after every allowance has been made for inequality of opportunity. Therefore I am inclined to think that no amount of education and liberty of action will sensibly alter it."

Arnold Bennett "Our Women: Chapters on the Sex Disord" 1930



Pronoun use **can** effectively remonstrate with an academic discipline with a vivid history of sexism and misogyny.

Should interpreters and translators change masculine pronouns to feminine/neuter in historical works?

How should educators today introduce and teach (phallogocentric?) philosophy?

Comparative gender analysis creates inclusive spaces for cultures and traditions forging their own understanding of gender in their contemporary contexts.

He Yin Zhen (1884-1920)

Late Qing dynasty anarcho-feminist

ardent critic of "political" Confucianism that presumed male superiority

The salient differences between men and women are not "natural" but societal/political/material/historical.

deeply suspicious of the importation of Western ideas, including "so-called women's liberation"



He Yin lambasted the Confucian orthodox tendency to "cosmologize" contrasting aspects of the human experience.

yangyin 陽陰



nannü 男女

now translated as "gender"

"On the basis of "men first, women last," such other deviant teachings as "yang initiates, yin harmonizes," or "men act, women follow," were concocted to restrict women's freedom... The relationship between men and women thus became one of absolute inequality [through cosmic abstraction]. I cannot but sigh at this."

According to He Yin, this made equality and advancement of women impossible.

"Inclined toward despotism, Confucian scholarship has enabled men to cater to their self-interest. It comes as no surprise that polygyny and female chastity are both heralded by Confucianism."



How women are represented, the contexts in which they appear, and the (moral) expectations placed upon them form the crux of this strand of Chinese feminism.

Putting these two feminist traditions in conversation with one another offsets the tendency to speak of the movement toward gender equality as one phenomenon.

As feminisms continue to emerge onto the world stage, different engagements with particular histories spark new insights.

This opens up space to speak about the tradition and future of feminism/gender issues in our institutions, Kazakhstan, Central Asia...

Does this ease the feeling that importing social justice ideas/movements is a little tricky for us?