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Interview with Dr. Li-hsiang Lisa Rosenlee.

Intro:

Aloha and welcome to all our listeners. I'm Christa, I'm Justin, and I'm Carlton. We at Blue Studios aim to explore the minds of distinguished humanists here at the University of Hawai'i - West O'ahu. Today we are joined with philosophy professor, Dr. Li-hsiang Lisa Rosenlee.

Background:

Christa: Can you give us a little bit of background about yourself? Rosenlee: I was born and raised in Taipei, Taiwan and then came here for college and got all the way through PhD and then got a job in Virginia and taught there for five years. My husband is from here so we wanted to come back and this job opened up so here we are. Christa: Nice! Why did you choose humanities?

Rosenlee: Actually, I started out as a political scientist and my BA was in Poli-Sci. And in a way you go to college and you take different classes and I took logic in philosophy and I was really impressed by the professor and that kind of drew me into philosophy. And I love it. I love the switch and obviously it's my calling now, so that's how I got into it.

Christa: How has your background and upbringing shaped your current beliefs within the humanities?

Rosenlee: Oh! I grew up with seven brothers, so you can see why I got into feminism. So, yup! So that was part of the background for gender equity, And I also grew up doing martial laws in Taiwan so that's why my interests in politics was also embedded.

Christa: How would you describe yourself as a humanist? What issues do you like to focus on?

Rosenlee: My focus is on feminism, on gender, and lately I'm kind of drawn to the topic of race a lot more deeper than I thought I would.

Crisis in Philosophy:

Carlton: So in some of your work, you describe a significant crisis in philosophy stemming from a severe lack of diversity. Can you tell us more about this crisis regarding Western vs. non-western philosophy?

Rosenlee: Right, so in the reading that you guys have been assigned to read, it really just detailed the severe disparity between the course offering western philosophy and non-western philosophy which is to a lot greater extent than other humanities subjects, say like history or English. So that's something that we need to correct. Philosophy has a long tradition of only offering western philosophy, and not just in our school which we are actually really fortunate. In our campus, we actually routinely offer non-western philosophy but that's not so nation-wide actually. So in that sense we are much more ahead of the curve than other institutions.

Carlton: Just this particular campus?

Rosenlee: Manoa, as well. Right, so UH system we have a lot more conscientious effort made to leveling the field and that's also good for the students to kind of broaden their sphere of knowledge of other different kinds of philosophical traditions, so they don't equivocate philosophy with western thoughts. As if the west is the only civilization that has philosophy

Carlton: You mentioned in your book review that the racial superiority plays into that a lot, especially from Kant's readings, his work. I think in your book review you mention that a lot of people who even study Kant don't know about the racial superiority part. Why do you think that

is? Is it because it's selective in what we teach? We just pick and choose, you know, stuff like that.

Rosenlee: Right, it's a narrative that's being handed down right

Carlton: And we just go with it.

Rosenlee: We just kind of went with that, and it has to, kind of with the mixture of the racial/race theory that's being given to us. So we kind of accept that sort of

unconsciously. And the problem with philosophy is that we are not talking about race and gender enough, by virtue of the makeup of the people in the discipline. You see right, so in the review we talk about how 86% of the recipients of grad recipients are white, and most majority are men. So you see that disparity in the makeup of the student body as well as the degree holders . So naturally the topic of race and gender are not being carefully considered and therefore philosophers' own writing on this topic are not being studied.

Contact Zones:

Justin: So while studying the humanities, we've been heavily focused on the importance of contact zones. We've defined contact zones as platforms where multiple cultures either observe, interact and/or leave an impression on one another. How would you interpret this definition of contact zones?

Rosenlee: Okay in my discipline this would be comparative philosophy right. So comparative philosophy, by its name is considered to be intellectual traditions so studying two different intellectual traditions, you understand the different backgrounds and assumptions and then you reflect on what kind of assumptions that you hold for all this time while you're studying.

Justin: I see, so how important do you think it is to recognize like these contact zones?

Rosenlee: Well by trade, this is what I do. But within the philosophy discipline, comparative philosophy is a really marginalized field. Just by the reviews you see only 15% of the top 50 graduate schools actually teach Chinese philosophy. Only 10% of the all graduate schools teach non-western philosophy so you're talking about 90% of the Philosophy degree holders have no idea of other intellectual traditions in the philosophical sense, we're not talking about ethnic studies or religious studies, we're not talking about that, or literature, we are talking about philosophy and that's sort of a crisis as we relay back to the beginning. So it is important for students to be exposed to non-western philosophy which fortunately at West Oahu we have a regular offering of those philosophy courses.

Justin: Are you conscious of any contact zones within your own work?

Rosenlee: I do that every day, that's what I do. Every scholarship I write it's comparative philosophy with a focus on gender and now I also branch out to race as well.

Justin: Obviously you have experienced the contact zones, so how do you think these contact zones shaped you?

Rosenlee: I started out as a political scientist and then I branched into philosophy then switched into philosophy. But for the majority of my graduate training, I was trained in western philosophy. And my interest in Confucianism came pretty late, so it's something I'm still working on to kinda educate myself. But by grounding in western philosophy, I understand what kind of assumptions people are making and that kinda helped me engage in this field.

Christa: I saw in your work you used the term "Confucian feminist" or "Confucian feminism". Could that be considered a contact zone or comparative philosophy in itself?

Rosenlee: Right, I think being a feminist, again the assumption is you have to ground yourself theoretically in western philosophy and I think itself, again it's a terrible assumption. Just like we assume the history of philosophy is western, so when I throw a label like that people are usually taken aback because they have their assumption on what Confucianism is or what kind of person, what feminism should be like. And so itself already invokes kinda a reflection these two categories the assumption people implicitly have about these two categories.

Outro: Christa: So to close off, is there anything you would like to ask us?

Rosenlee: No, I think this is a great project. I think this is probably, I don't know you tell me, but I think it's a lot better interaction between the students and professor than the larger class presentation but you tell me if that's the case.

Christa: No, I agree (yeah, definitely). Once again, thank you Dr. Rosenlee for meeting with us and we look forward to the work you continue to contribute to the humanities and philosophy community.

Rosenlee: Thank you.