

Helen Han Wei Luo

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Areas of specialization: Ethics, Classical Chinese Philosophy

Areas of Competence: Epistemology, Social & Political Philosophy

Education

Columbia University Ph.D. – Philosophy 2022 - 2027 (anticipated)

- ❖ Dissertation: “Etiquette as Ethics: The Search for Multicultural Standards of Civility”
- ❖ Committee: Katja Vogt (advisor), Michele Moody-Adams, P. J. Ivanhoe (Georgetown)

University of British Columbia M.A. Philosophy 2022

Simon Fraser University B.A., First Class Honors with Distinction 2020

- ❖ Major in Philosophy and Political Science, French Cohort Program graduate with Extended Minor in French

Research Grants/ Fellowships

\$120,000 SSHRC Doctoral Fellowship

\$17,500 SSHRC CGS-M Grant

\$5000 Columbia Heyman/Center Society of Fellows Graduate Fellowship

Incite Columbia Fellowship

Academic Publications

[Review of “Goodness and Tradition” by Irene Liu](#) (Routledge, 2026) *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 24.5–6

Select Non- Academic Publications

Public Philosophy

“[Forgiving the Man with the Machete](#)” *Southeast Review* 44.1, 2026, forthcoming December 2026 print and online

“[Why Women Should Rethink their Love of Gay Male Manga](#)” *Aesthetics for Birds*, February 2025

Prose

“Art Lessons with Tony” – *Alaska Quarterly Review*, forthcoming

“[The Pilgrimage](#)” *Witness Magazine* 39.1, 2026, print

“[Beasts of Burden](#)” *Folk Magazine* 5.1, 2025, print and online

“[A compendium of humble creatures](#)” selections, *PEN Canada New Voices*, 2025, online

“[Eel Broth for Growing Children](#)” *CBC Literary Awards*, 2023, online print

“[The Stone Man’s Harem](#)” *The Plentitudes Journal* 14.1, 2024, online

Poetry

“[Consider the Peony](#)” *PRISM International* 59.4, reprinted in *Best of Canadian Poetry* 2023

“[Two poems](#)” *Sam-Fifty-Four* 3

Book Reviews

“[Review of Antoine Volodine’s *The Monroe Girls*](#) (translation by Alyson Waters; Archipelago Books) *LA Review*, September 2026

Academic Works in Progress

“Understanding Partialism: The Distinction Between Role-Based and Relationship-Based Duties” *under review*

“What Ought to be Done about Rudeness?” *under review*

“Knowledge Appropriation as Cultural Appropriation” *co-authored with Amogha Sahu*

“At the Heart of Politeness: Mengzi and Hume on custom and social virtue”

Select Academic Awards

At Columbia (Ph.D.)

Jonathan Lieberman Memorial Prize (2025)

Columbia Philosophy Department Graduate Essay Prize \$1000

Columbia University five-year tuition and fellowship (2022)

At University of British Columbia (M.A.)

Paul Tang Graduate Philosophy Award (2021)

Philosophy MA student with best performance in seminars \$1000

At Simon Fraser University (B.A.)

Undergraduate Open Scholarship (2017-2020)

Academic excellence based on GPA \$12,000

Robert C. Brown Convocation Award (2020)

Academic achievement and leadership prize for graduating arts student \$1000

Student Service Award (2020)

Volunteer service in university and community \$2000

Dr. Grazia Merler Scholarship in French or Italian (2019)

Top senior French or Italian student \$1000

Somjee Undergraduate Scholarship in Political Science (2019, 2020)

Top senior political science student \$2600

SFU Alumni Scholarship (2018)

Academic performance \$1000

Diamond Family International Mobility Award (2018)

For foreign language exchange study \$2000

Academic Excellence Entrance Scholarship (2016)

Academic performance \$5000

Select Literary Awards

[Southeast Review Non-Fiction Prize](#), Winner (2026)

[Witness Magazine Literary Awards](#), Second Place (2026)

[PEN Canada New Voices Award](#), Finalist (2025)

[Yolk Literary Short Fiction Prize](#), Third Place (2025)

[Fiddlehead Fiction Prize](#), Shortlist (2025)

[The Plentitudes Fiction Contest](#), Second Place (2024)

[CBC Literary Awards Fiction](#) Finalist (2023)

[BC Federation of Writers Short Prose Contest](#) Longlist (2022)

[CBC Literary Awards Fiction Contest](#), Longlist (2020)

[CBC Literary Awards Non-Fiction Contest](#), Longlist (2016)

Conferences

Select Presentations

* = Refereed

† = Invited

- At the Heart of Politeness: Mengzi and Hume on custom and social virtue”
Yale Global Philosophy Working Group, *October 2026* †
- “Understanding Partialism: The Distinction Between Role-Based and Relationship-Based Duties”
Columbia end of summer workshop, *August 2025*
Columbia graduate workshop, *September 2025*
Columbia graduate-faculty workshop, *February 2026*
- “Character and Culture in Confucianism”
Pacific APA (ACPA), *April 2026**
- “Polite Politics”
Toronto Graduate Conference, *October 2024**
- “Knowledge Appropriation as Cultural Appropriation” – *with Amogha Sahu*
Eastern APA Symposium (Main Program), *January 2025**
- Harvard-MIT Graduate Conference, *April 2024**
- Philadelphia Normative Philosophy Conference, *October 2023**
- “What kind of metaethics must the presentist have?”
Eastern APA Colloquium (Main Program), *January 2024**
- “Gendered Material Objects”
Pacific APA Colloquium (Main Program), *April 2023**
- International Social Ontology Society Conference, *August 2023**
- “When the Sprouts Wither: on the Mengzi-Xunzi Disagreement on Human Nature”
Easter APA (ACPA), *January 2023**
- “The Harms of Mere Belief”
Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress (Poster), *August 2022**
- “The Problem of Forgotten Moral Truths”
USC Rightness, Ignorance, Certainty and Praise Workshop, *July 2022**
- Pacific APA Colloquium (Main Program), *January 2022**

Comments

- Mingyan Yang “A Novel Case-Based Argument Against Pragmatic Encroachment on Knowledge” Columbia-NYU Graduate Conference 2025
- Dana Grabelsky, “Intra-group disagreement and social identity group ontology” CUNY Center for Global Ethics and Politics Workshop 2025
- Levy Wang “Hopeful Suspension” Columbia-NYU Graduate Conference 2025
- Laura Soter - “Reframing Epistemic Partiality” Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress 2022

Service University Service

- Columbia Senator (2024-2026)
- Chair of Senate Diversity Commission (2025-2026)
 - Vice Chair of Senate Student Affairs Committee (2025-2026)
 - Member of Senate Executive Committee (2025-2026)

Department Service

- Philosophy Department Representative at Columbia Arts and Sciences Graduate Council (ASGC) (2023-2026)
- Philosophy Department Graduate Representative (2024)
- Mentor for Columbia Minorities and Philosophy (2024)
- Columbia Non-Western Philosophy Reading Group Organizer (2023-2025)

Professional & Community Service

- Ethics Bowl Canada – Coach and Case Development Committee Member (2021-2027)
- New York City Corrupt the Youth Instructor (2024)
- Vice President and Coach – Simon Fraser University Debate Society (2017-2020)
- Reviewer – *Nous*
- Conference Organization - *Columbia-NYU Graduate Conference* (2023)

Teaching

As Sole Instructor

Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy” (Spring 2027) *Columbia*
Competitively selected from GSAS Teaching Scholar Program

PIKSI-Boston Teaching Fellow (Summer 2023) *MIT*

Teaching seminar titled “Confucius and Politeness Norms”; mentoring underrepresented students; program organization and candidate selection

As Teaching Assistant * = with discussion section

At Columbia

History of Philosophy – Pre-Socratics to Augustine (2026)*

Introduction to Epistemology x2 (2024, 2025)*

Introduction to Ethics (2024)*

Topics in Ethics: Responsibility’s Conditions, Scope, and Limits (2023)

At University of British Columbia

Business Ethics (2022)

Contemporary Moral Problems (2022)

Philosophy of Law (2022)

Introduction to Logic(2021)

Introduction to Epistemology (2021) x3 – once with discussion section

Biomedical Ethics (2020)

Other Employment

At Columbia

Teaching Assessment Fellow, Center for Teaching and Learning (2024-2025)

Rapporteur for Comparative Philosophy Seminar Series (2024-2027)

At University of British Columbia

Essay Clinic Instructor in Philosophy department (2022)

At Simon Fraser University

Writing Instructor at Student Learning Commons (2019-2020)

Research Assistant to Prof. Jennifer Wang (2019)

International Study and Summer Programs

Athena in Action *Mentorship program, summer 2024*

Central European University *Study program, summer 2023*

National University of Rwanda *Research term, summer 2023*

Université de Strasbourg *Exchange term, fall 2018*

NATO Defense College *Field school, summer 2018*

Select Interviews & Featured Articles

[“Etiquette as Ethics”](#) *Philosopher’s Nest*, February 2025

[“Interview with Columbia Senator”](#) *The Eye*, March 2026

[“Columbia Releases Report on “Institutional Failures” Enabling Hadden’s Abuse”](#)

Spectator, March 2026

[“Defying Trustees, Senate Rules Committee Continue Revisions to Protest and Discipline Policies”](#) *Spectator*, March 2026

[“Amid Dodge Overcrowding, Columbia Launches Off-Campus Gym Memberships”](#)

Spectator, February 2026

[“Columbia Quietly Changes Rules Governing Protests”](#) *Spectator*, October 2025

[“Student Senators Raise Concern with NYPD and Public Safety Force on Campus”](#)

Spectator, June 2025

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Etiquette as Ethics: The Search For Multicultural Standards of Civility

Helen Han Wei Luo

Although often dismissed as trivial or arbitrary, etiquette norms reflect ethical concerns about interpersonal conduct are important and distinct from moral concerns about harm, violations of universal principles, or even vices of character. A guest's unexplained refusal to eat a host's carefully prepared meal, for example, may be deeply rude without reflecting any particular *moral* mistake. Drawing on the Confucian virtue of ritual propriety (禮, *li*), my dissertation develops an account of etiquette's distinctive normativity, the sources of its value, and the process by which we arrive at etiquette norms best suited to the democratic and egalitarian principles of contemporary cosmopolitan societies. On my view, a successful set of etiquette norms will both uphold human dignity in line with the ideals of such a society, and describe part of its constitutive ends.

The first chapter, "*What ought to be done about rudeness?*" defends the impermissibility, from etiquette's point of view, of responding to rudeness with rudeness. Where it comes to appropriate responses to misbehavior, etiquette and morality disagree: while etiquette prohibits rudeness absolutely, morality may sometimes justify rudeness under rationales for informal punitive action aimed at retribution or reformation. A person who harasses their coworkers, for example, seems to morally merit rude treatment proportionate to the righteous blame and resentment of the victim and others. When punitive rudeness is both morally justified and prohibited by etiquette, morality and etiquette enter a substantive conflict which I argue involves incommensurable values, where the all-things-considered right course of action may be neither decidedly the moral response nor the polite response. This upshot is significant, as it rejects a widely held conception of etiquette as a merely formal or trivial normative system which is *trumped* by morality.

The second chapter, "*At the Heart of Politeness: Mengzi and Hume on Social Virtues*" examines a disagreement between Hume and the Confucian thinker Mengzi on whether human beings are 'naturally' motivated towards social virtues like politeness. Although both thinkers proposed that some virtuous dispositions emerge from unreflected emotional and affective responses (a position known as *moral sentimentalism*), they disagreed on whether adherence to *social norms* was similarly motivated. While Mengzi regarded natural feelings of deference as the 'sprout' of ritual propriety (禮), Hume treated social virtues as 'artificial virtues' which cannot garner the necessary sentiments of approval or disapproval prior to the existence of the conventions upon which they depend. For Hume, virtues like politeness thus lack the internal motives of the natural virtues. Although this disagreement appears *prima facie* as concerning a moral psychological question on the kinds of impulses with which a person is naturally endowed, I argue that the deeper tension centers a metaethical dispute over what social virtues like politeness are *good for*.

The third chapter, "*Etiquette for cosmopolitan societies*" approaches relativistic issues in etiquette norms and examines how differing or even conflicting cultural norms of ordinary interaction may ideally co-exist in cosmopolitan societies. The traditional challenge of *political pluralism* asks how a theory may endorse or permit a wide-range of interactive norms and values without thereby endorsing morally pernicious ones. In etiquette's case, many norms of civility reflect oppressive and outdated traditional values, and must be duly rejected all while preserving traditional practices as a legitimate source of value. I argue this is best achieved through metarules of *norm negotiation*, in which some of etiquette's obligations are settled through individual interactions where each participant expresses preferences for interpersonal treatment and must in good faith consider preferences from others. Polite negotiations in cosmopolitan societies must proceed under democratic and egalitarian principles, where each person's contribution is considered *without regard* to hierarchies of class, race, and gender. The content of the contributions themselves, however, need not (and cannot) be divorced from such inequities.