

## A CONVERSATION WITH DR. FANG LEI: YOU TEACH, I ENGAGE

Interviewed by Riane Eisler, JD, PhD(hon)

### Abstract

Riane Eisler interviews Dr. Fang Lei, the new Managing Editor of the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies* and an Assistant Professor at School of Nursing at the University of Minnesota.

Keywords: Balance, China, Equality, Partnership, Power

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**Riane Eisler:** Fang, I want to welcome you as the new Managing Editor of the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies*, or *IJPS*. In this interview, I would like to start with the question of what in your life drew you to become the Managing Editor of *IJPS*?

**Fang Lei:** I got to know *IJPS* from Dr. Teddie Potter [Executive Editor of *IJPS* and a Clinical Professor in the School of Nursing at the University of Minnesota]. She made an announcement in our School of Nursing faculty and staff email list about recruiting a volunteer managing editor for *IJPS* last October. It caught my attention with the journal's vision and mission, which emphasizes cultural transformation and partnership, with the focus on mutual respect, social and economic justice, gender equality, and environmental balance. This aligns with my personal philosophy and individual experience, which drew my interest to be part of *IJPS*.

**Eisler:** You came to the US from your native China. Please tell us a little more about that.

**Lei:** This is the 8th year I have been in the US - I came here in 2016. I never thought that I would stay in the US until I got the acceptance letter for the PhD program in nursing at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). I never thought that I would be abroad by myself without family members accompanying me.

The story goes back to my childhood. I was born in a small town in China, to a traditional Chinese family. I was admitted to the nursing program at Wuhan University when I was 18. After I graduated with my bachelor's degree in nursing, I was selected from more than 100 candidates, to work as a Registered Nurse in one of the top ten hospitals in China. In my work as a nurse, I found there was clearly a power imbalance between physicians and nurses. Nurses were treated as inferiors and subordinates to physicians, and as servants to patients, sometimes without respect. This experience urged me to pursue a career abroad.

I passed the National Council Licensure Exam [NCLEX] in 2014 in Hong Kong when I was studying for my Master of Public Health [MPH] degree. When I received my MPH in 2016, I got the letter notifying me of my admission into the PhD in nursing program at UCLA. Although I was already a mom of one child at that time and I knew my future was unpredictable, I went to the US with my daughter, without knowing anybody in this foreign country. I clearly remember the day we arrived - it was my daughter's 5th birthday.

**Eisler:** You received your bachelor's degree in nursing from Wuhan University, your master's degree in public health from the University of South China, and then another master's degree in nursing from UCLA, where you also received your doctoral degree in nursing. This is a formidable education; tell us about it, and the differences you found in these various settings and how they affected you.

**Lei:** I really appreciate that my parents were brave and fair enough to support me in pursuing my higher education needs. I was born in the 1980s in a rural area of China. It is well known that parents in China value boys more than girls, especially in rural areas. Girls were treated by their parents as someone who would eventually get married and belong to their husbands' families, not to their own. So, lots of girls didn't have the opportunity to go to school to be educated. Instead, they needed to go to work at a very young age to support their brothers' education and to relieve the family's financial burden. Luckily, my parents were open-minded enough to treat me fairly and offer me the opportunity to go to school.

I have been educated in China and in the US. The most obvious differences I observed between Chinese and American classrooms were in the power differential between teachers and students. Chinese classrooms tend to be very quiet. The pattern is usually, "You teach, I listen." Students tend not to ask questions, and to always follow what their teachers tell them to do, without doubt. This may be related to the traditional Chinese classroom culture: Asking too many or too challenging questions would be viewed as offensive to teachers.

However, in the US, the classroom dynamics are more active. Students are encouraged to ask questions, with a teaching pattern of "You teach, I engage" emphasized. Having education experiences in both China and the US has broadened my view towards the world. Also, it has deepened my understanding of partnership. Growing up in a country that has several different forms of domination and having experienced them as a member of that society, I value the central ideas of collaboration, equality, and inclusiveness presented by partnership theory. Equipped with the partnership philosophy, I believe that I, though I am as small as "nothing in the universe," can be as strong as possible, and overcome any difficulties in my life.

**Eisler:** You are teaching nursing at the University of Minnesota and focusing on cancer as well as health care in Chinese and other populations. Can you tell us about your work, and how it relates to the partnership system and therefore to *IJPS*?

**Lei:** Last year, I graduated from the PhD program in nursing at UCLA and joined the University of Minnesota School of Nursing as a faculty member. This semester, I am working with undergraduate students in their nursing theory and research course and PhD students in their intensive Doctor of Nursing Philosophy Immersive Experience [DIVE] week seminar. I am also mentoring two Doctor of Nursing Practice [DNP] students and one interprofessional education [IPE] student scholar. My current research areas of interest are cancer prevention and care, cross-cultural research, and instrument development.

In my work, I tend to use partnership theory to guide my actions. I created an inclusive and equitable classroom environment to manage the power imbalance between myself and my students, and I did sufficient self-reflexivity to balance the power differential between myself and research participants. I hope to be a helper in my students' career journeys and an insider in my research participants' situations.

The experiences with my students and research participants further deepened my view towards partnership, and eventually increased my sense of belonging to *IJPS*. I am lucky to be a part of *IJPS* and to be the first one to see the different opinions coming to our journal in the articles, to see the influence of partnership on the world.

**Eisler:** These are wonderful answers, and I am so happy that partnership theory is useful to you in action. How can readers of *IJPS* support our work of moving to a more equitable, sustainable, and gender-balanced partnership system?

**Lei:** As the Managing Editor of *IJPS*, I first want to thank our readers for their continuous support, which makes our journal sustainable and influential. Second, I want to thank all our Editorial Board members for their volunteer work, which makes it possible for our journal to publish articles open access with no processing fee for authors and a free resource to all our readers. Finally, as always, our readers can be our potential authors and peer reviewers to support *IJPS*. We would love to see opinions from different cultural backgrounds, and to hear about our readers' special experiences with the

partnership philosophy. With everyone engaged, the world would be more equitable, sustainable, and gender balanced.

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Fang Lei, PhD, MPH, RN, is the Managing Editor of the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies*, and an Assistant Professor at School of Nursing, University of Minnesota. Her highest degree is Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing from the University of California Los Angeles. Fang's research areas of interest are cancer prevention and care, cross-cultural research, and instrument development. Fang has worked with several journals as a reviewer and guest editor. She has published more than 40 research articles as the first author, and is the author of a chapter and a reviewer for other chapters in *Fundamentals of Nursing* (S. Miner, Ed.).

Riane Eisler, JD, PhD(h), is President of the Center for Partnership Systems, and Editor-in-Chief of the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies*.

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