

Asian Women: Invisibility, Locations, and Claims to Philosophy

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Introduction

“Asian women” is an ambiguous category; it seems to indicate a racial as well as a cultural designation. The number of articles or books on being Asian or Asian-American is on the rise in other disciplines, but in comparison to the material on black or Hispanic identities, Asians are largely missing from the field of philosophy of race. Things Asian in philosophy are generally reserved for those who study Asian philosophy or comparative philosophy, but that focus usually excludes reflections on Asian identities as such. This lack in the literature prompted me to start my own reflection with such questions as: Why do Asians not take an active interest in discourse on race? What does the category “Asian” designate? What contributes to their invisibility in general? Is this a stereotype? Are they simply “white-identified?” Are Asians responsible for their own invisibility, or is there some other factor? What is the relation between Asian philosophy and being Asian, if any? Is there any interesting connection between being Asian and feminism? As a Japanese woman philosopher who is also interested in feminism, these questions seemed natural. This paper is an attempt to clarify some of these issues in the light of my experience working in the profession of academic philosophy.

I begin by analyzing the possible contributing factors of Asian invisibility as a cultural phenomenon in the first three sections. In section 1, I dissect the category “Asian” and show that it does not work well as a basis for an identity because of its inherently fragmented meaning. The first contributing factor to invisibility is thus the very category of “Asian” itself. However, beyond fragmentation, the term “Asian” does seem to indicate a set of certain cultural characteristics which is often stereotyped. Thus in section 2, I focus on the cultural elements within the Confucian tradition. I have chosen Confucianism not only because that is the tradition I am familiar with, but also because I believe that if anything is responsible for the *cultural* stereotype of being Asian, Confucianism plays a major role in a way that exacerbates the problem of invisibility, especially for women. Section 3 discusses the broader historical context of Eurocentrism and Orientalism which further contribute to the problem of invisibility. Both moves objectify the “Asian” as the “other,” thereby rendering it inessential. Combined with the

Confucian virtues which favor passivity, service, and harmony, Asian *women* are thus *doubly feminized*.

Following these discussions on the various aspects of the problem of invisibility, in section 4 I analyze how these ideas relate to the academic discipline of philosophy, in particular the claims regarding what counts as “real” philosophy, since it is in this context that the question of being Asian, or Asian philosophy, often becomes an issue. I analyze the rather common contradiction in the discipline between a broad self-conception (“metaphysics, ethics, epistemology, etc., are all proper philosophical inquiries”) and the simultaneous exclusion of particular schools of thought (e.g., “Asian philosophy is not really philosophy”), even though these schools manifestly engage in the proper inquiries. I relate the possible grounds of such exclusionary claims to the positioning of Asian philosophy in the discipline. In section 5, the concluding section, I address the issue of “including Asian women” in the context of multiculturalism, feminism, and philosophy.

1. “Asian” as a Category?

Asia covers a vast geographical area encompassing the following: In the north and the northeast, Mongolia, parts of Russia, Korea, Japan, China, and Taiwan; in the south and the southeast, the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Singapore, and Myanmar (Burma); and the Indian subcontinent and the surrounding countries of Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet, Pakistan and Afghanistan.¹ It includes numerous languages, ethnic traditions, and religious practices, and national historiographies. Some of these traditions share very little, others have been in direct conflict with one another for centuries. There are vast differences in the degree to which the regions are Westernized or modernized. Sometimes the intra-Asian differences are greater than the so-called East-West differences.² Needless to say, there is little unity; the only thing which brings any of these cultural traditions together is the fact that they are located in certain parts of the Earth.

If by “Asian” we mean individuals from any of these regions or nations, then the use of the term is perhaps not too controversial as a description. However, that is usually not the sense in which the category is used or understood. “Asian” is supposed to be a racial, ethnic, or cultural category indicating in some vague sense “non-white.” (The color of choice is yellow or brown, to which are added physical features involving short stature, slanted eyes, and straight, black hair.)³ Asian is also “non-Christian,” which may mean innocuously Buddhist or Hindu. But often, Asian means “heathen,” “barbaric,” or “evil.” Asian is also “non-Western,” which is to say Eastern or Oriental (with the sense of distance, opacity, insignificance, or at best, exoticism). The connotations of the category “Asian” are often used in combination, and they are often problematic, especially when used in conjunction with “women.”

¹ The Association for Asian Studies (founded in 1941) established four elective area Councils in 1970: South Asia, Southeast Asia, China and Inner Asia, and Northeast Asia, in order to guarantee each area constituency its own representation and a proportionate voice on the Board of Directors.

² For a further analysis on the outdated duality of “East and West” in the reality of globalism, see David Loy, “Transcending East and West,” *Man and World* 26:4 (1993), 403-427.

³ By “race” I mean a socially constructed sense in which the term yields demarcations; I do not use it as a biological category. On the pragmatic significance of the category of “race,” see Naomi Zack, “Race and Philosophic Meaning,” in Naomi Zack (ed), *Race/Sex* (1997), New York: Routledge, Chapter 2.

When Asian-Americans are classified together with those who are from Asia (the first-generation Asians or Asian-Asians) under the category of “Asian,” then the term is used predominantly to indicate a racial grouping.⁴ People are often classified in terms of racial appearance and grouped together by its perceived similarity. This is why, for instance, many people might assume that a first-generation white-Argentinean immigrant is more American at first sight than a third-generation Chinese-American, although the opposite is likely to be true. There might be nothing in common between a 19-year-old third-generation Korean-American woman growing up in the suburbs of Los Angeles listening to hip-hop and a 60-year-old Malaysian woman who has lived in the U.S. for three months, but they are both Asian females. Many Asian-Americans speak only English, especially if they are third- or fourth- generations, and have little knowledge of Asia. They often learn about Asia in the same way other American children learn about it. Those who come from Asia, on the other hand, learn English as a second language, experience America as a foreign country (often with the expectation that it is the “best in the West”) and struggle to make sense of it as immigrants, long-term residents, or visitors. To this extent, “Asian” and “Asian-American” are indeed distinct categories, although often they are conflated because of the supposed racial unity implied by the term.⁵

The sense of Asian as “non-Christian” is perhaps outdated today, but it is a part of racist cultural experience of the United States. For instance, Chandra Mohanty notes that during the era of yellow peril, the “morality of Asian women” was used as a basis of exclusion under U. S. immigration policies.⁶ The ideology of yellow peril was of course used extensively during W.W.II, the Korean and Vietnam Wars, and in the 1970s U. S. relation to China before Nixon reestablished diplomatic relations. The depiction of “sneaky, evil Orientals” in the early 1960s James Bond movies (“Dr. No”) portray them as immoral technocrats out to destroy the world.⁷ Such a depiction preyed on xenophobia

⁴ David Kim offers a philosophical account of racial identity and the unity and fragmentation within Asian-American identity in “Asian American Identities,” Linda Martin Alcoff (ed), *Constellations* (forthcoming).

⁵ I wish to thank David Kim and Rebecca Chiyoko King for raising the following point: Politically speaking, “Asian-Americans” came together as a group, not because of racial commonality but because they share the common experience of Orientalist racism that has been endemic to American culture for centuries. Kim notes that borrowing from DuBois, such a self-understanding has served as a basis for “Asian-American double consciousness.”

⁶ One of the U.S. Exclusion Acts in the late 1800’s, “An Act to Prevent the Kidnapping and Importation of Mongolian, Chinese, and Japanese Females for Criminal and Demoralizing Purposes” (meaning prostitution) gave U. S. immigration officers the power to determine whether the emigrating “Oriental women” were “persons of correct habits and good character.” Chandra Mohanty, “Introduction: Cartographies of Struggle,” C. Mohanty, A. Russo, and L. Torres (eds), *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (1991), Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 25. This assumes a Judaeo-Christian understanding of prostitution as *morally* corrupt on the part of the women involved, but this is not a presupposition shared by, for instance, many in Japan. The “evilness” of prostitution may be analyzed in terms of victimization, capitalism, or sexism, but such analyses may be distinct from a moral one in which the notions of “baseness” and “impurity” are assigned to the women involved. For a cultural and historical comparison on prostitution, see Laurie Shrage, *Moral Dilemmas of Feminism: Prostitution, Adultery, and Abortion* (1994). New York: Routledge, Chapters 5 and 6.

⁷ For an analysis of latent racism in 1960’s “dystopian” science fiction and film, see Andrew Feenberg, *Alternative Modernity: The Technical Turn in Philosophy and Social Theory* (1995), Berkeley: University of California Press, 60-65.

about “Godless” ones, and while it often targeted Communism, there was something especially menacing about the Asian version.

Asian women today continue to be stereotyped as sex slaves, man-pleasers or playthings, who are passive and lacking moral character. For many American servicemen who served in the Pacific War, Korean War, or in Vietnam, their first or only exposure to women in Asia was in the context of prostitution near overseas bases.⁸ These associations of Asian women with sexual pleasure as corrupt or morally dangerous are often made by those who have puritan sensibilities.⁹ The sense that Asia is definitely the uncivilized “other” is often rooted in the fact that except for the Philippines and to some extent Korea,¹⁰ the dominant cultures in Asia are not Judaeo-Christian. That is a cause of suspicion in cultures which conflate moral sensibilities with religious beliefs.

When the term “Asian” is used in conjunction with a broader historical, cultural, or intellectual category, as in Asian philosophy, Asian religion, Asian art or Asian food, then often “Asian” is supposed to indicate one of the “non-Western” elements on the multicultural map; in this sense the connotation usually excludes “Asian-American.” At first sight this use of the term may appear rather neutral as in the case of designating a geographical region, but it raises a threefold problem. First, when the term is combined with a further classification such as philosophy, religion, art, or food, then there are as many philosophies, religions, arts, and kinds of food as there are varied traditions and practices all over Asia, even within a seemingly unified region such as Japan. One really would have to specify a particular kind of philosophy, food, etc., and the general designation of “Asian” becomes rather empty. Second, be it literature, food or religion, the broad category of “Asian,” when displayed alongside other ethnic categories such as “African,” “Hispanic,” or “Native American,” it gives people the false sense that they have understood something about Asia, when in fact no such category is adequate. This is a version of the trap which Stanley Fish calls “boutique multiculturalism.”¹¹ Diversity is for the consumption of those who feel they should be knowledgeable about “other cultures” -- though superficially -- much as they enjoy ethnic restaurants. Third, and most seriously, the notion of “non-Western” is often not neutral but heavily normative in a way that favors being Western as the measure of legitimacy. So, if “Asian” is supposed to mean “non-Western,” then it is not an innocent designation. This is the problem of Eurocentrism, and it is this use of the term which becomes problematic in the understanding of Asian philosophy. I will return to this point.

⁸ When I lived near Camp Pendleton, a Marine base in northern San Diego, there were many occasions when people would ask me, “when and where did you meet your husband?” I was a student, neither married nor had anything to do with the base, but the assumption was that I came to the U. S. because I married a serviceman abroad. The hidden assumption in the question often seemed to have been to determine whether I “worked in a bar near the base.”

⁹ In this sense, Asian women are also the target of racialized sex objectification in the sense black and Hispanic women are sexualized. Unlike the “savage” image of black woman, however, the Asian woman is represented as “exotic,” “super-feminine” and “hyper-hetero-sensual,” to borrow Shrage’s adjectives. See her discussion, 151-158.

¹⁰ Nearly 25% of South Korean population is Protestant.

¹¹ Stanley Fish, “Boutique Multiculturalism,” A. Melzer, J. Weinberger, and M. R. Zinman (eds), *Multiculturalism and American Democracy* (1998), Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, Chapter 4.

In sum, upon examination, the category of “Asian” is often either racist or it simply falls apart, much like other essentializing categories such as “woman,” “Hispanic,” or “poor people.” “Asian” does not cover a politically unified racial platform, culture, linguistic group, class, or tradition. Most immigrants from Asia tend to identify themselves with particular national identities (“I am Taiwanese”) or ethnic groups (Hmongs or Sherpas). Many Asian-Americans tend to identify themselves with a specific ethnic background to the exclusion of others (“I am *Chinese*-American, not Japanese!”). Moreover, intra-Asia conflicts, such as between Korea and Japan, Tibet and China, or Indonesia and East Timor, are often so hostile that the idea of being put together in one group may be passionately resisted. This fragmentation results in the invisibility of the category of “Asian,” especially among the immigrants. In fact, “Asian” is often not a category at all in the discourse on race, which is most visibly demarcated in terms of black/white.¹²

Yet, the term has practical or political applications, such as establishing academic departments (Asian Studies) and forming a group for strategic purposes such as economic empowerment (pan-Asian organizations) or fighting against racism. Moreover, most people, including people from Asia as well as Asian-Americans, do have a sense that the term has some vaguely unified cultural meaning. But beyond vague generalizations, is there any recognizable content? And if so, how does it operate in our social consciousness?

2. Cultural Elements

The stereotype of Asians (in whichever sense one may take it) includes the idea that they are docile, withdrawn, and happily resigned to the status quo, never challenging or demanding anything. As a result, although racism against people of Asian descent is an unending reality, politically they are often either ignored, unrecognized, or worse, praised as the well-assimilating model minority. The so-called positive stereotyping of Asians exacerbates the problem; they are studious, smart, cooperative, hard-working, and therefore do not require protection. Many of them are middle-class, have access to education (sometimes better than that of whites) and are in other respects privileged. They are perceived to be doing just fine without receiving special attention, just like all the other middle-class Americans. If they are assimilated, they are invisible as a group in the dominant culture as well as to the oppositional, racial minority cultures.

There are other cultural factors which contribute to invisibility. Some of these are psychological (or “internal”) and these are especially pertinent to women. Others are sociological (or “external”).¹³ In addition to the complexity of being Asian, the category of “woman” or “women” has its own history of contested meanings. I need not review here the history of feminist thought, but there is one relevant way in which the category of

¹² The difficulty is illustrated in Brian Locke’s “‘Top Dog,’ ‘Black Threat,’ and ‘Japanese Cats’: The Impact of the White-Black Binary on Asian American Identity,” *Radical Philosophy Review* 1:2 (1998), 98-125.

¹³ Esther Ngan-Ling Chow analyzes cultural barriers Asian-American women face in their political activism and lists several “internal” and “external” barriers. See her essay, “The Feminist Movement: Where Are All the Asian American Women?” in A. Jagger and P. Rothenberg (eds), *Feminist Frameworks: Alternative Theoretical Accounts of the Relations between Women and Men, Third Edition* (1993), New York: McCraw-Hill, 212-219.

“Asian women” is stereotyped, which is related to the connotation and use of the term “Asian” in general and contributes especially to the invisibility of Asian women.

Let me focus on the Confucian tradition to illustrate how it has helped form the Asian stereotype, especially with respect to women. This is the dominant cultural tradition in countries such as Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, and among Chinese immigrants who often become the dominant class in other parts of Asia and elsewhere. For both men and women, the ideals of Confucian virtue include obeying authority, yielding to others, always making sure the others’ needs are met first, never calling attention to yourself, one should always know one’s place, and “he who speaks out destroys the harmony.” In addition to these general human virtues of *jen*, or “humanity,” Confucianism designates gendered virtues (such as a wife’s duty to her husband, a son’s duty to his parents) in explicitly patriarchal ways.¹⁴ These ideals are very much a part of the culture in these countries, in the same sense that Christianity or individualism is a part of the culture in the U. S., permeating through gender, class and race. For the sake of brevity and for my purposes, let me use the term “Asian” in the remainder of this section as designating “those whose living culture is based on the Confucian tradition.”

The images of obedience, respect, and orderliness, when combined with women’s position in the tradition, contribute to the stereotype of Asian women as docile, obedient, quiet, intuitive, or timid. Asian female stereotype is either characters exhibiting passivity or the sexualized, exotic image (there is no middle ground). In other words, the designations of the traditional notions of femininity and Asianness more or less coincide; an outspoken, aggressive, independent Asian woman (or a man) is often seen as an unwelcome exception, so “un-Asian,” even a threat or embarrassment, among many women themselves in Confucian Asia.¹⁵

For instance, for many women in Japan even today, maintaining Confucian virtues of “self-effacement,” “harmony with others,” and “enjoying the presence of silence and quietude” is an ethical as well as aesthetic way of life, often regarded even as an ideal in the sense used in virtue ethics.¹⁶ Throughout the educational system children are taught

¹⁴ For an interesting essay on the negative views of women in Confucianism, see Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women* (1986), New York: Marion Boyars Publishers, especially the chapter on “Confucius--An Eater of Women,” 66-99.

¹⁵ Some of my relatives and personal friends in Japan, for instance, regard me with slight disdain because I have abandoned “high culture and grace” in the name of what they perceive as a “coarse” sensibility of American feminism. “Being Americanized” is a derogatory term indicating too much assertiveness, self-indulgence, and disruptive behavior, and as such, it directly contradicts what it means to be “feminine.” I should add that the expectation of “assimilation” is strongly gendered. If the assimilation into the American culture is supposed to indicate “independence” and “self-confidence,” then it is in general somewhat favored for males. But it is hardly ever the case that such assimilation is considered a good for females.

¹⁶ Such a depiction may be criticized as a stereotype and myth, and indeed, there are of course many powerful women (including mothers) who do not fit these descriptions at all, and the feminist scenes in Japan are changing rapidly. However, it is nevertheless true that I do in fact have many friends who endorse and embody these almost mythically feminine qualities. For more details on the reality of Japanese women, the following books may be helpful: Sandra Buckley (ed), *Broken Silence: Voices of Japanese Feminism* (1997), Berkeley: University of California Press; Anne Imamura (ed), *Re-Imaging Japanese Women* (1996), Berkeley: University of California Press; Kumiko Fujimura-Fanselow and Atsuko Kameda (eds), *Japanese Women: New Feminist Perspectives on the Past, Present, and Future*

that calling attention to oneself is a form of self-indulgence. It may be false consciousness (as I often try to point out), but the ideology nevertheless functions as a strong psychological component internally enforced by the women themselves.¹⁷ In a culture where “repose” and “respect for others” amount to the same thing, the last thing they would want would be visibility, especially if it were perceived to come from their own agency; that is “too undignified” (as my aunt might point out). Note also that in a cultural setting where the majority of the people speak softly and pay much attention to others to begin with, one does not need to raise one’s voice or act in such a way as to call attention to oneself. One is already visible enough.

The conflation of femininity and Asianness applies even for males in that “Asian male” remains a feminized category; even if they are “martial arts experts” (another stereotype) their nimbleness and skillfulness make them much more feminine than, say, an American football player, who is archtypically masculine. This is not to mention another stereotype of “those Asian engineer nerds” who will be good workers because they will yield and obey orders. So the problem of the feminization of the non-Western, so-called colonized peoples raised in the feminist literature¹⁸ applies especially to the category of “Asian.” It is not only a reality in the practical sense but also an explicit ideology of choice among those in the Confucian tradition themselves; *not* to have an independent or critical voice is not just a female virtue, but a virtue of cultivated personhood. In this context, it becomes almost impossible for a woman to speak up without feeling extremely awkward about her sense of place and her own self-worth as a person of integrity and cultivation.¹⁹ An Asian woman is in this way *doubly submissive* in Western contexts, first as a woman, and second as an Asian. Yet, the very category of “submissiveness,” if it is meant to have a negative connotation, escapes her own consciousness; she is simply being her mature self.

Sociologically the invested drive to fit in and “be a part of the whole” is often closely associated with the phenomenon of Asian assimilation among immigrants from

(1995), New York: The Feminist Press; Sumiko Iwao, *The Japanese Woman: Traditional Image and Changing Reality* (1993), Cambridge: Harvard University Press; and Takie Sugiyama Lebra, *Japanese Women: Constraint and Fulfillment* (1984), Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

¹⁷ Although it is widely reported recently that Tokyo finally has a woman mayor (for the first time in history) and that women are demanding more political equality all over Japan, my perception is that many women, even the politically enlightened ones, still would maintain that characteristics such as compassion, sympathy, and meeting others’ needs are “feminine” virtues one should not abandon.

¹⁸ For instance, Sara Lucia Hoagland writes: “Colonizers depict the colonized as passive, as wanting and needing protection (domination), as being taken care of ‘for their own good.’ Anyone who resists domination will be sorted out as abnormal and attacked as a danger to society (‘civilization’) or called insane and put away in the name of protection (their own or society’s).” “Moral Revolution: From Antagonism to Cooperation,” Nancy Tuana and Rosemary Tong (eds), *Feminism and Philosophy: Essential Readings in Theory, Reinterpretation, and Application* (1995), Boulder: Westview Press, 177.

¹⁹ This is a problem I often face in my dealings with international students from Asia, male or female; on the one hand, I would like them to participate actively in discussions, but on the other hand, I thoroughly understand the difficulty and dread they experience in any setting in which they are expected to speak up. The problem is not simply that they are “shy”; it has to do with a contradiction at the fundamental level of selfhood. However innocent, “speaking up” in itself produces the discomfort, albeit unconsciously, of exhibiting to others how uncultivated they are as persons. If they speak up, then they often feel embarrassed and in other respects inadequate; if they don’t speak up, then they feel like a failure in class.

Asia into the dominant white middle-class American culture (especially into the value system of puritan work ethic). The first thing many of the immigrant parents do is force their children to learn English, then to excel in school, and get a profession. This almost non-negotiable drive for upward mobility requires diligent assimilation. Self-pity, victim consciousness, and separationist self-consciousness are deadly to the process toward success. Not only are they excessively self-indulgent, but they are also a waste of time and energy, and therefore not allowed. As a result, many children of immigrant parents from Confucian Asia explicitly reject their own identity as Asian or Asian-American, or member of a “minority culture,” contributing further to the invisibility problem. In their view in fact, invisibility is not a problem at all; if anything, it is a sign of success. Being white-identified is not a bad idea, if it leads to a more prosperous lifestyle. It is not unusual to see such assimilated Asians developing racism against blacks and Hispanics, adopting exactly the racism prevalent in white middle-class culture. The irony of course is that they are often targets of such racism themselves, yet they continue to think of themselves as being lucky that they are still “more white” than the other groups. They come to believe that what they have to do is to further separate themselves from other minority groups, as if they could be tainted by association with darker color. Here the invisibility problem takes a pernicious turn--the dominant discourse of racism has won all the way, obliterating the last remnants of resistance through assimilation.

3. Localizing the Asian: Modernity, Eurocentrism, and Orientalism

I would like to turn now to the issue of “Asia” in a broader historical context in order to examine the third contributing factor to invisibility. The assimilationist ideology of white-identification among Asians has another important source, and that is the problem of colonialism. In the 19th-Century European consciousness, it was taken for granted that the West represented the “universal.” For instance, European philosophers have always raised the question of truth about *the* human mind. As exemplified by Hegel, history was a linear temporal progress, from the premodern past to the modern present, culminating in the techno-scientific culture of Europe and America. Since both systematic philosophy and science developed primarily in Europe, the notions of “truth,” “universality,” “modernity,” and “being Western” came to be conflated in the minds of intellectuals. In this framework, thought that was “non-Western”-- a geopolitical designation -- was either simply “false” or conceptualized as “backwards” in the temporal progression.²⁰ The assumption was that once “primitive” cultures developed, they would begin to manifest the European forms of culture and consciousness. The place of legitimate culture was Europe; though “exotic,” Asia, Africa, South America, and anywhere else untouched by European modernity were culturally marginal and insignificant. It is worth noting, however, that this form of Eurocentrism was not so prevalent before the period of European expansion. Even in philosophy, Leibniz, for instance, studied Chinese thought and valued it highly.²¹ The influence of Hinduism on Schopenhauer is also well documented.

²⁰ I explore Japanese philosophy’s reaction to this problem in “Beyond ‘East and West’: Nishida’s Universalism and Postcolonial Critique,” *The Review of Politics* 59:3 (1997), 541-560.

²¹ Given their intellectual involvement with these materials, their interests seem more than a case of mere curiosity, which is a form of Orientalism. See, for instance, G. W. Leibniz, *Writings on China* (1994), D. Cook and H. Rosemont, trans. Chicago: Open Court.

The extent and type of the actual European colonization in Asia varied, but the idea that Europe was the center of modern civilization became a kind of pervasive cultural understanding in most of the Asian countries since the late 1800's. These cultures were colonized to the extent that the legitimate point of cultural reference was taken to be European civilization.²² In Japan, for instance, the terms "Westernization" and "modernization" were often used synonymously; for the past 100 years, viewing the world in terms of "West vs. East," which amounts to "modern vs. traditional," became a cultural paradigm, affecting everything from politics, educational reform, fashion, and the idea of what should be valued. In this dualistic paradigm, the West represented what is new, advanced, and forward-looking; the traditional, on the other hand, was old, backward, primitive.²³ Since the Europeans and Americans who came to Japan around the turn of the century were Caucasians, the perception of "white people" was associated with "modern civilization." To be modern, then, would be to act and "be" like white people: sit on a chair rather than a mat on the floor; use silver instead of chopsticks; wear blouses and skirts rather than kimonos; eat bread and meat instead of rice and fish;²⁴ don't get too much tan or else your skin will become dark. Although today the culture in Japan is a hybrid of Japanese, American, European, and other Asian influences, the "West vs. East" paradigm in which the "white West" symbolizes advancement is far from forgotten.

In this context, even within the consciousness of those in Asia, "Asia" became the "other" of Europe. This is the problem of self-alienation and internal oppression in colonized consciousness, but with respect to Asia, in particular, it is a part of the problem of "Orientalism."²⁵ Since its publication in 1978, Edward Said's *Orientalism* profoundly changed the way in which the issues related to East and West are discussed.²⁶ Said's main thesis is that the very category of the "Orient," a sweeping category applied to all Asiatic cultures, was a European invention produced in order to "contain difference" in the era of colonial expansion. Either by way of rejection or exoticism, the category of the "Orient" served as a representational tool for Europeans to bring the "unknown" under control; it was by definition an aspect of European imperialism. The category of "Asia" or the "Far East" (east of Europe, of course) was a part of this Orientalist discourse; the region was

²² The contributing factors were often Western medicine and technology, both practical applications of science; other factors, such as democracy and Christianity, were slower to be accepted.

²³ One might argue that this dualism of "new vs. traditional" exists within the West itself, in terms of its own historical reflection ("post-Enlightenment vs. the Middle Ages") or degrees of urbanization ("city vs. the country"). To this extent, it could be said that the West itself was colonized by its own notion of modernity and still continues to be under its grip, especially in terms of technological development.

²⁴ Beef-eating, for instance, was "officially" approved; local authorities issued a public notice "recommending this unorthodox diet on the ground that it would create energy for the performance of patriotic duties and strengthen the national physique." This and other anecdotal accounts are found in G. B. Samsom, *The Western World and Japan* (1984) Tokyo: Charles Tuttle Co, 383.

²⁵ The examination of the problem of colonized self-consciousness was made explicit in the late 1950's and early 1960's with Franz Fanon. The theoretical analyses on Asia, especially India, began fully around 1982 with a group of Indian intellectuals who established the journal, *Subaltern Studies*, and theorized their colonized consciousness vis-à-vis their colonizer, Great Britain. For a brief history of *Subaltern Studies*, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts?" *Representations* 37: 25.

²⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978), New York: Routledge, 1-28. For a critique, see Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory* (1992), New York: Verso.

“so different,” mysteriously far, opaque and insubstantial. When such representations are adopted by those who are in the “Orient,” they produce a self-alienated, colonized consciousness.

In India in the early part of this century, many Indians themselves came to believe that it was “for their own good” that the British ruled them, since modernity, the culture of the British, would ultimately liberate them from the premodern past.²⁷ Many Indians came to see their own culture as obscure and backwards, and the “new” and European lifestyle and values as better and more cosmopolitan. In reality, of course, despite its “good intentions” of modernizing India, the colonial administration systematically advanced a particular imperialist agenda. The real power of colonization is the ability to achieve this willing participation by transforming the colonized subjects’ own point of reference from the native culture to the Western one. The point of a “postcolonial critique,” as well as Said’s idea of a solution, is to abandon the very categories of “Orient” and “Occident” altogether and to expose the inherent forms of domination and subjugation.

The ultimate irony is that the methodology of critique as well as the theories themselves are basically European in origin.²⁸ The very idea of “theoretical empowerment” for fighting oppression, which privileges knowledge, is often alien to the real victims of this whole process--women and ethnic minorities in these Asian countries who have virtually no access to education nor political power to begin with.²⁹ Those who can speak on their behalf are speaking, but the experience ultimately remains alienated and the promise of a good life seems unreal. In East Asia, moreover, the historical situation was complicated by the fact that the history of colonialism did not neatly fit into the “Europe vs. Asia” paradigm because Japan was itself a colonial power over Korea, China, the Philippines and parts of Indonesia.³⁰ The “colonized women” in Korea, for example, endured a three-fold oppression--Japanese imperialism, the West, and their own patriarchal system.³¹ This history contributes to today’s fragmentation of the category of “Asians,” as mentioned above.

However, despite such complexity, to most of the European as well as American intellectuals Asia still remains one localized “other” in the Far East or “on the other side of the Pacific.” Despite the fact that in American academia the critique of Eurocentrism is by now a near-standard procedure and dominant discourse in some departments, Eurocentrism, or in the case of philosophy, Anglo-centrism, does remain a persistent

²⁷ See Chakrabarty and also Gyan Prakash, “Writing Post-Colonialist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32 (1990): 383-408.

²⁸ Postcolonial critique often uses analyses borrowed from poststructuralism, deconstruction, and an analysis of power based on Foucault.

²⁹ Similar points are discussed in Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” *Sister Outsider* (1984), New York: The Crossing Press Feminist Series, 110-113.

³⁰ For a collection of essays on postcolonialism in East Asia, see Tani Barlow (ed), *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia* (1997), Durham: Duke University Press.

³¹ See Chungmoo Choi (ed), *positions: east asia culture critique* 5:1 (1997), a special issue on “comfort women,” for a collection of critical essays from a postcolonialist perspective. See also George L. Hicks, *The Comfort Women: Japan’s Brutal Regime of Enforced Prostitution in the Second World War* (1997), New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

reality, both in the U. S. and elsewhere in the West as well as the non-West. As Dipesh Chakrabarty laments, “That Europe works as a silent referent in historical knowledge itself becomes obvious in a highly ordinary way...Third-world historians feel a need to refer to works in European history; historians of Europe do not feel any need to reciprocate.”³² Needless to say, in philosophy the case is similar, if not worse. The study of philosophy often excludes anything outside of Western philosophy, and this is true even if one studies philosophy in Asia. In Japan, the academic discipline of philosophy (*tetsugaku*) generally does not include Japanese philosophy nor any other Asian thought; “philosophy” means, as a subject, the study of thought from the pre-Socratics, the Greeks, medieval thought, the modern period, the Enlightenment, 18th- and 19th-Century European thought, then contemporary European philosophy including postmodernism, and analytic or Anglo-American philosophy.³³ In other words, in Japan the conception of philosophy is thoroughly Eurocentric; what is called “Asian philosophy” in the West is studied in Japan under Eastern thought (*toyo shiso*), often a separate discipline altogether.

Thus, the problem of invisibility with respect to Asian thought is aggravated not only by the Eurocentrism and Orientalism of most of the European and the majority of American intellectuals, but also by Asians themselves. In addition to the already-existing Confucian ideology of “fitting in” and “not making a case for oneself” -- a particularly feminine mode of having a self -- the Asian colonized consciousness which adopted Eurocentrism/Orientalism as its own culture, compounds the problem further by identifying the point of legitimacy outside itself, thereby making itself even more invisible and *acknowledging* that invisibility is the way it ought to be.

In sum, Asians are invisible as a category because of the following reasons. First, upon close examination the category itself tends toward fragmentation rather than coherence. Second, the Confucian cultural influence, especially for women, promotes invisibility, as it is idealized as an ethical or aesthetic end. Third, Eurocentrism and Orientalism contribute not only to the European or American ignorance toward Asia, but also to produce the self-alienated colonized consciousness among Asians, which shifts the reference point of self-understanding to that of European consciousness. This self-alienation and assimilation render the “Asian self-consciousness” invisible even to Asians themselves. I would like to turn now to some of the specific problems in philosophy as an academic discipline in the light of these contributing factors to invisibility.

4. Claims of Philosophy

The discipline of philosophy can itself be an object of critical analysis. What are its boundaries, and how should that understanding be reflected in the curriculum? Apart from politics and turf wars, there seems to me to be a variety of conceptions about what philosophers regard as the proper topic and method of philosophy as a discipline.

From broader to narrower conceptions, here are some of the ways in which “philosophy” seems to have been defined by academic philosophers:

1. Philosophy as defined by the type of questions it asks which define the subdiscipline within philosophy. Examples are: “What is a good life?” “What is reality?”

³² Chakrabarty, 25.

³³ The term “*tetsugaku*” (“philosophy”) was coined in the early 1860s by two Japanese intellectuals, Amane Nishi and Mamichi Tsuda, who went to Holland and brought back Comte and Mill’s utilitarianism.

“What is knowledge?” “What is the ‘self?’” These are all philosophical questions to the extent that they are considered legitimate questions about basic human reality and beyond. This broad conception often includes the notion of philosophy as reflection, contemplation, and analysis about the human condition.³⁴ Sometimes material from literature or other disciplines are used to articulate a point of view. Often introductory philosophy textbooks are organized around such questions and it is not unusual today to see some inclusions of writings from other disciplines.

2. Philosophy as a rational system of thought, as opposed to mythic storytelling or in contrast to other endeavors in the humanities or social sciences. Apart from literature, religion, psychology, sociology, anthropology, etc., philosophy in this sense takes a meta-position with respect to the production of knowledge itself and concerns itself with theory-building about the fundamental questions such as reality, justice, and personhood.

3. Philosophy as the history of Western philosophy. This is the conception mentioned above--the study of thought from pre-Socratics to contemporary European or Anglo-American thought. By definition, anything outside of this tradition is not philosophy proper.

4. Philosophy as a critical method of argumentation. In this conception philosophy is strictly about constructing sound arguments and effective counter-arguments. The methodology adopts a “scientific method” of weeding out the propositions which are falsified. This is often a presupposition in analytic philosophy. In this view contemporary European philosophy is “not philosophy” because “it doesn’t have arguments” or contains propositions which can be neither true nor false. By the same token, any form of thought, if it does not have arguments of the kind studied by these philosophers, is not philosophy proper. At its narrowest conception, this approach may exclude not only contemporary European philosophy but also philosophies of any other tradition, ancient and medieval philosophy, feminism, environmental ethics, and many others which do not belong to the parameters of contemporary Anglo-American philosophy.

Often, Asian philosophy or comparative philosophy is included in the discipline under 1, the broadest conception. Many of the multicultural philosophy textbooks include not only Asian thought but also the philosophies of other traditions. Certainly, all of these philosophical questions have been asked and analyzed in detail in Asia over the past 2500 years, if not longer, and various systems or coherent schemes have been produced. Conception 2 could certainly include some Indian philosophical systems,³⁵ Buddhist metaphysics, or aspects of Japanese philosophy (e.g., Nishida’s theory of “place”),³⁶ but

³⁴ For a wonderful example of a “philosophical reflection” in this vein, see Henry Bugbee, *The Inward Morning: A Philosophical Exploration in Journal Form* (1999), Atlanta: University of Georgia Press.

³⁵ For example, some of the classical or “orthodox” Hindu philosophical schools from the early centuries A.D. have been classified as “logical realism” (the Nyaya system), “realistic pluralism” (the Vaisesika system), and “evolutionary dualism” (the Samkhya system). For more discussions of Indian philosophy, see Stephen H. Philips, *Classical Indian Metaphysics* (1995), Chicago: Open Court, and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles Moore, *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy* (1971), Princeton: Princeton University Press.

³⁶ For a discussion of Nishida’s theory of “place,” see Andrew Feenberg and Yoko Arisaka, “Experiential Ontology: The Origins of the Nishida Philosophy in the Doctrine of Pure Experience,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 30:2 (1990), 173-205, and Masao Abe, “Nishida’s Philosophy of ‘Place,’” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 28:4 (1988), 355-371.

perhaps not others, such as Taoist thought. Conception 3 excludes Asian philosophy because it is outside the Western tradition. Conception 4 again should accept some forms of Indian metaphysics or Buddhist dialectic, such as the *Middle Way* of the Madhyamika school which is highly technical in its logicism, but in common practice the particular conception of argumentation in question (and therefore the notion of philosophy) often must be based on the “scientific method” of the Anglo-American analytic tradition, so anything outside this tradition is excluded. If one’s field of specialization includes Asian philosophy, one is always nervous because she or he must be prepared to explain why anything Asian should be considered philosophy at all, sometimes to a rather unsympathetic audience which subscribes to conceptions 3, 4 or even 2. This kind of experience is also all too familiar with anyone specializing in feminist thought in philosophy.

But in fact even those who narrowly conceive of philosophy as 2, 3, and 4 all *agree* that conception 1 is indeed a legitimate way to understand philosophy as a discipline. So yes, on the one hand, Asian philosophy belongs to philosophy to the extent that proper questions are being asked, but no, on the other hand, it’s not really philosophy because the questions are not being analyzed or answered in the proper way. Often the inquisitor is unaware of the fact that he or she has switched meanings. But *if* one grants conception 1 as the legitimate subject-matter of philosophy, as most people in the field of philosophy indeed do, then endorsing 2, 3, and 4, while *at the same time* excluding Asian philosophy, requires a further justification. This is where the sticky questions of legitimacy, prejudice, exclusion, and power claims enter in.

One such prejudice is indeed Eurocentrism and the associated problems discussed above. For those who hold conception 3, it is a matter of definition that there is no such thing as a “non-Western philosophy.” But if so, they must be claiming either that other traditions do not ask questions such as “what is a good life” or “what is reality,” or that only the Western versions of those questions and answers are legitimate. The former proposition is empirically false; the latter position is ethnocentric (in this case Eurocentric, but in essence no different from other cultures claiming that theirs is the measure of truth). Why should the philosophical answers arising out of a particular geopolitical history claim monopoly on the world’s philosophical insights? Or on any group, including one’s own, for that matter?

However, the source of Eurocentrism is deeper; it is not that Europe as such is privileged (ethnocentrism), but rather that this privilege is justified--that this intellectual history contains in itself something which is universal and true, by which other traditions may be judged. This is what drives conceptions 2 and 4. The measure of truth is scientific thinking broadly conceived; it is an Enlightenment, “modern” methodology which employs critical thinking, verification and accurate abstraction, as opposed to simply relying on beliefs or authority, a “pre-modern” ways of thinking. It may be that European thought is just as contingently related to the “universal” as non-European thought, but it was nevertheless in Europe that science first flourished and technology was first developed on a large scale. This is why, so it is believed, Europe enjoys the culture of modernity which is defined by the triumph of rationalism over mythic or religious beliefs, and universalistic thinking over local knowledge. So properly speaking, this form of Eurocentrism is a kind of “scientism” or “modernism,” and not only is this method used to critique non-European

forms of thought, but even within Europe it is used in order to critique its own “dark ages,” for instance.³⁷

Subscribing to the belief that scientific modernism has merits is in itself not Eurocentric, nor is it automatically scientific. The belief that Europeans are *superior* because they developed this culture is Eurocentrism, and the claim that anything that does not fit the criteria of scientific method is not knowledge or false knowledge, is scientism. Asian philosophy is often excluded on both accounts, either because it is already deemed inferior or too foreign, i.e., not made by Europeans, or because it is prejudged to lack the right criteria of knowledge. Exclusion based on Eurocentrism is prejudice, a version of Orientalism. The scientism objection is trickier (apart from the bigger question of whether the very method of science is ethnocentric, universally justified, or objective). Even if one grants its framework, and the formal features of science or methods of critical thinking can be abstracted from European intellectual history, scientific thinking can still be employed to understand ideas from other cultures, or by people in such cultures themselves. If it is universal, then by definition it is not a property of Europe and there is no justification for exclusion *prior* to a scientific investigation of non-Western thought.³⁸ So exclusion without serious investigation is also prejudice; as noted, there are systems in Asian thought which fit the description of “scientific” if one is patient enough to go through different modes of presentation (as in Indian or Buddhist metaphysical texts).³⁹ The critique of scientism itself is a separate discussion developed in postmodern literature and science studies. (I do not have the room to elaborate on it here.⁴⁰)

5. Including Asian Women

Finally, there is a more subtle form of exclusion which actually appears within the language of multicultural inclusion, often addressed as the problem of tokenizing and ghettoizing. This is where the stereotyping of Asian women becomes a practical issue. I grant that the language of multicultural inclusion is a big step in the right direction, but it still has a long way to go. Often, scholars from India or China are proud of their own long tradition and philosophy and believe that they can make some contribution to philosophy

³⁷ Again, a parallel may be drawn here to a feminist critique of the “maleness” of rationality, mind, and universality against the “femaleness” of emotion, body, and particularity. See Nancy Tuana, *Woman and the History of Philosophy* (1992), New York: Paragon Issues in Philosophy.

³⁸ One might argue that my whole analysis is indeed “Western” to the extent that I am using a critical method developed in Western philosophy as opposed to some other method developed within Asia. But I am claiming that a critical method per se is not necessarily European nor should it be monopolized by Western philosophy. To judge other traditions as *inferior* because they lack critical thinking would be Eurocentric, but obviously that is not my position.

³⁹ The modes of presentation from ancient India may indeed be quite alien to a modern reader, but it is perhaps no more alien than pre-Socratic or Greek philosophy. I am not saying that only the “scientific” kind of Asian writing should be considered worthwhile from the perspective of those who subscribe to scientism. There are of course rich traditions of what in the West would be called ethics, metaphysics, epistemology, and aesthetics in Asia and they should be appreciated in their content, regardless of form. However, this is still independent of whether one should apply some critical consciousness in assessing their content, and this is not in itself an “East-West” question.

⁴⁰ For instance, for a feminist and postcolonialist critique, see Sandra Harding, *Is Science Multicultural?* (1998), Bloomington: Indiana University Press. For a collection of essays in science studies, see P. Galison and D. Stump (eds), *The Disunity of Science: Boundaries, Contexts, and Power* (1996), Stanford: Stanford University Press.

in the West. However, much to their disappointment, they discover that their “inclusion” is not in itself a sign of *engagement* from outside their own group.⁴¹ They are ghettoized, with no apparent connection to the rest of the academic community.⁴² Often the only way the engagement might occur is if they conform to the methods of Western philosophy, using European or Anglo philosophy as a framework to explain their own ideas, thereby enforcing the Eurocentrism that discredits them in the first place.

Women and minorities are “included” for the sake of diversity, but anyone who is a woman or a minority philosopher knows very well the experience that her ideas may not actually be taken all that seriously or that her merit appears already to be in question. Because of the racial sense in which the term “Asian” is used, if one is from Asia or is an Asian-American, almost without exception one is expected to know something about Asian thought and is thereby given some authority. An Asian woman may feel especially that she should indeed study Asian philosophy, so as to be able to offer some kind of a “bridge to the mainstream.” Or she may expect that her outsider status is only natural, that it is “her place” to be doing some “non-mainstream” philosophy, due to her colonized consciousness and her self-understanding that she should not be presumptuous. Yet at the same time she may feel disqualified because the whole field is marginalized. This is a case of triple-marginalization--being Asian, woman, and teaching or doing research in a field which remains invisible.⁴³ Asians are in this way often tokenized to do Asian philosophy in the same way women are somehow expected to include feminism as one of their areas of competence, only to find themselves located outside the “mainstream.”

An Asian woman may face a further obstacle. The particularly feminized characteristics of being an Asian woman may pose a problem within the feminist discourse itself, especially in the United States where the standard of respectability is strongly tied to the notions of autonomy and independence. Apart perhaps from feminist ethics, traditional feminist consciousness has focused predominantly on the notions of oppression, subversion, and revolutionary change. Across the variety, the notion of oppositional agency (to patriarchy, capitalism, male-domination, injustice, disempowerment) is an essential component of the feminist movement.⁴⁴ This confrontational model is indeed quite alien to many of the women in Asia, especially among the strongly Confucian countries. An immigrant woman from Taiwan may feel that her cultural self is not only unappreciated, but even cast in a negative light as a victim of false consciousness (and therefore patronized as being “in need of help”).⁴⁵ Worse, she may be labeled “anti-

⁴¹ One obvious problem is a lack of translated material. However, even if there were, it is not clear to me that the problem would then be solved.

⁴² For a philosophical as well as psychological analysis, see David Kim, “Contempt and Ordinary Inequality,” Susan Babbitt and Sue Campbell (eds), *Philosophy and Racism* (1999), Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

⁴³ I wish to thank Eileen Fung for this observation.

⁴⁴ In this sense, Asian-Americans too have generally adopted an explicit self-consciousness of oppositional agency against racism; this is the “American” part of “Asian-American identity.”

⁴⁵ Resisting Western imperialism, even in feminism, has become a standard procedure among Asian feminists: “Today, any attempt on the part of Western observers, including feminists, to impose ethnocentric notions of a ‘superior’ understanding or a better moral solution is increasingly rebuffed by Asian feminists, academics, and activists, who are battling not only their indigenous patriarchal institutions, but also the universalist assumptions of Western scholars claiming to represent women outside their own cultures.” Maria Jaschok and Suzanne Miers (eds), *Women and Chinese Patriarchy:*

feminist” to the extent that she may be perceived as actually willingly seeking the passive, dominated status. She may thus come to feel condemned and ashamed in the eyes of “liberated women,” that her own “backward” culture “denigrates women.”⁴⁶ She may struggle to be more liberated, more American by forcing herself to be more aggressive, only to worsen the experience of self-alienation in the process of assimilation.⁴⁷ Yet, an Asian woman also may be well aware of the fact that Confucian patriarchy has done much damage to the women in this culture and wishes for a change.⁴⁸ This is a catch-22, a doubly-alienated self-consciousness.

Further problems may include the fact that calling attention to his or her “Asianness” may be the last thing a particular person from Asia might want -- a student from Asia may be seriously interested in studying Aristotle.⁴⁹ Or, the personal experience of being Asian may be quite alien to an assimilated fourth-generation Chinese-American person. The contradiction again is that, whether first- or fourth-generation, one is often expected to express Asian ideas, but only through “legitimate” Anglo-American or European means and with the result of finding oneself thereby further alienated.

In addition, despite formal inclusion, the whole attempt at inclusion may have little to do with genuine interest; it may be for the sake of endorsing the political ideology of multiculturalism, which may be a very localized agenda of particular departments or individuals. Because the discourses of race and diversity are distinctly American, most scholars from abroad -- even Europe -- find “foreign” the very idea of politicizing academic discourse in that way. This is why many of the scholars from Asia either specialize in Confucianism, Indian philosophy, or comparative philosophy, with little political interest on race, or else they forgo any scholarship on culture or politics

Submission, Servitude and Escape (1994), London and New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd and Hong Kong University Press, 15.

⁴⁶ Uma Narayan discusses the danger of hastily condemning another culture’s unfamiliar customs as “anti-women.” See her essay, “Cross-Cultural Connections, Border-Crossings, and ‘Death by Culture,’” *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism* (1997), New York: Routledge, 81-117.

⁴⁷ I was already quite independent by the time I came to the United States at age 19, but still it took me over 10 years of conscious self-reflection and transformation to negotiate this kind of issue regarding feminist agency vs. the cultural self which may oppose it directly. I remain sympathetic to any woman who has to deal with this struggle. I have spoken with many international students from Japan who explicitly state that “trying to be more aggressive like an American woman” in fact produces *more* anxiety, confusion, and internal oppression than working with men in Japan despite the patriarchal conditions which even these women regard as “oppressive.” Even despite the less-than-ideal working conditions, they claim that at least they can relax more because they don’t have to “act like someone else.”

⁴⁸ For critical essays on the oppression of women under the “contemporary legacy” of Confucian patriarchy, see Maria Jaschok and Suzanne Miers. Although the essays are not explicitly critiques of Confucianism, the general patriarchal culture first emerged in Confucianism and continued to thrive through neo-Confucian periods into the present. However, this is not to say that *all* oppressive practices against women in China are Confucian. Economic growth and colonialism are also heavily responsible for the degraded treatments of women.

⁴⁹ Again how this tokenizing works becomes obvious in a rather ordinary way: Suppose there is a position opening for Kantian ethics, and there are Chinese-American candidate as well as others from the U. S. or Germany. The perceived qualification immediately favors either the American or German candidates. Or suppose the opening is for Asian philosophy.

altogether and specialize narrowly in logic, epistemology, or metaphysics. If the former, then ghettoization is a problem. If the latter, then they are perceived to be assimilated and therefore invisible qua Asian. Granted that often the “privileged access” to the consciousness of women, minorities, immigrants, etc., is actually appreciated and the interest in this access is genuine, but one should be vigilant about the latent exclusionary move -- the stamp of “otherness” which makes Asians, especially Asian women, invisible within the inclusive language itself.

If philosophy as practice has a role to play in this issue, it should, at a minimum, critique its own assumptions and methodology and eliminate claims which are unfounded -- such as automatic prejudice against any non-Western thought -- so that a critical investigation and reflection on these issues can move forward and a path for real engagement and understanding can be articulated.⁵⁰

What I had hoped to accomplish in this paper was to provide one perspective on being an Asian woman in philosophy. In sum, the difficulties she may face are several. First, given the culture in which the norms of behavior does not particularly encourage visibility, oppositional agency, and subversive action, an Asian woman may miss the very vehicle which may be necessary for exposing injustice and creating change. Yet at the same time, even if she were to become conscious of the need for visibility and agency, the transformation of her own consciousness to such a stance may produce self-alienation. Second, if she were to become “visible,” because of her perceived Asianness, she must then face the further problem of Eurocentrism or Orientalism and the associated prejudice. Third, there is a doubling, tripling, or even quadrupling of the cultural negotiation problems in that not only an Asian woman faced with the problem of being a woman, but also the problem that the Asians are feminized to begin with. In addition, she may further face the problem of feeling internally compelled to take up the already-marginalized field of Asian philosophy (or feminism, or whatever else she may perceive as “more appropriate” in terms of the idea of service to the discipline) and she may face problems even within feminism due to the often negative connotation given to the “feminized.” Including Asian women, then, involves a multi-layered task: one is called to be self-critical of one’s possible prejudices against Asians, women, non-European or American thought, and ways of being a woman other than those set by Euro-American standards.

In conclusion, let me say that I would, however, resist the categorization of philosophy as such as by definition Eurocentric and “white-male.” Although these crude mind-sets do exist rather commonly and should be resisted, philosophy’s critical method should not be abandoned because it is what makes critique possible in the first place. Resistance and vigilance should always be there to expose illegitimate grounds for dominance and marginalization, regardless of where it occurs. Claims to legitimacy must

⁵⁰ The engagement should be in the spirit of what Maria C. Lugones and Elizabeth V. Spelman call “friendship”: such a stance “requires that you make a real space for our articulating, interpreting, theorizing, and reflecting about the connections among them--a real space must be a non-coerced space--and/or that you follow us into our world out of friendship.” “Have We Got a Theory for You! Feminist Theory, Cultural Imperialism and the Demand for ‘The Woman’s Voice,’” N. Tuana and R. Tong, 499.

always involve a self-critique of its own foundation, and our inquiry must be guided by a genuine spirit of understanding.⁵¹

⁵¹ I wish to thank Andrew Feenberg, Eileen Fung, David Kim, Rebecca Chiyoko King, Jeff Thompson, Rowena Tomaneng-Matsunari, Irene Wei, and Naomi Zack for their helpful comments and suggestions.