Liberation Theologies in the United States

An Introduction

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Asian American Feminist Theology

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Historical Backdrop

Asian American women's theology is nascent and emerges in the aftermath of Christianity's involvement in colonialism, which altered the spirit of Asian American women in many ways. This political and cultural configuration made these women deny their own traditions and regard their multireligious traditions and wisdom as demonic. It also devalued their physical appearance and forced them to accept Western notions of "beauty" as superior. Hence, Asian cultural resources have often been written with the gaze of colonialism, "orientalism," and racism.[1]

Maxine Hong Kingston's story "No Name Woman" in her book *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* illustrates how quickly a woman's life and existence can be eliminated from our memory and consciousness. The narrator tells the story of her aunt, who committed suicide after giving birth to a girl, conceived not with her husband who was away at Gold Mountain but with another man. This aunt, this "no name woman," like all other "no name women," existed on the margins of a patriarchal Asian culture that held that "it was better to raise geese than girls." Even in death she was punished by being deliberately forgotten, unconnected to the living—the descent line—and became a "wandering ghost," who was "always hungry, always needing," begging or stealing food from other ghosts, who had living kin to give them gifts of food and money. This no name woman was expunged from the family record, "as if she had never been born," and even her name was erased from memory, like all the countless other no name women who fail to appear in the pages of history books "as if they had never been born." Her illegitimate child, who died with her, could not have been included within the circle of kin, because she posed a severe critique of male dominance, having been conceived out of either rape or defiance of "female chastity."[2] This story is a reminder of a recurring event within a patriarchal society as women's actions are interpreted by men and, in turn, their consequences are defined and determined by men. Like the no name woman, there are countless other women whose identity and existence have been extinguished.

During Korea's Yi dynasty (1392–1910), women had no names of their own and were identified relative to men: so-and-so's daughter, so-and-so's wife, and so-and-so's mother. When she married, only her family name was entered into her husband's family registry, and her name was removed from her own family registry, where only the name of her husband was recorded.[3] Having no name thus meant being defined in relation to men, and having no name meant erasure and ostracism. This omission served to bolster a system of male dominance, a system of privilege and oppression.[4] Some remnants of this practice still exist as many Asian women's names are not used after they are married. They are only referred to by their marital status with children or by their nonmarital status. It is this sociocultural history that Asian American women have come to bear and inherit. They are primarily viewed as childbearers who will continue the husband's family line by bearing a son. Many women who wanted to be free from this burden sought to leave Asia and go to America, where they believed they would have a better life outside of a patriarchal society. However, as women left their Asian context and moved to the West, further barriers and burdens came their way.

Since the early 19th century, Asians have been migrating worldwide but especially to the United States and Canada. At the height of the westward expansion in the United States (across the American Indian lands and Mexican territory to a new Pacific frontier) and the building of its economy, Asians provided cheap and abundant labor. Their first area of destination was Hawaii, and over 300,000 Asians entered the islands between 1850 and 1920. The U.S. government and private companies ordered Asian labor as if it was a commodity, and the Chinese were among the first as they worked in the sugar industry in Hawaii. These laborers helped transform the sugar industry into a "King" industry and earned income, while at the same time displacing Native Hawaiian laborers.[5]

The annexation of California in 1848 opened the floodgates for Asian laborers. Aaron Palmer, a U.S. policy maker, recommended the importation of Chinese labor for the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad with the idea of cultivating the fertile lands of California and making San Francisco the "great emporium of our commerce on the Pacific."[6] Other Asians also arrived in response to the need for laborers to build America: Japanese (1880s), Filipinos (1900), Koreans (1903), and Indians (1907).

Korean immigration patterns were not the same as other Asian groups as many Koreans initially did not want to immigrate to the United States. Missionaries played an active role, and Koreans eventually overcame the initial resistance to the idea of immigration. A number of missionaries persuaded members of their congregations to go to Hawaii, a Christian land. As a result of the active role missionaries played, an estimated 40% of the seven thousand emigrants who left the country between December 1902 and May 1905 were converts. Moreover, unlike the Chinese and Japanese who came from geographically confined areas, Korean emigrants originated from many places, especially seaports and their vicinities. Furthermore, fewer of the Korean emigrants than Chinese or Japanese came from agricultural backgrounds. Of the seven thousand Koreans taken to Hawaii, about one thousand eventually returned home, and another one thousand continued on to the U.S. mainland.[7]

Asian women's immigration to the United States was at times prompted by a desire for freedom, and often their migration was induced and orchestrated by men for profit and exploitation.[8] Many women were misinformed about their expectations and life in the United States. Many were not ready for the hardships that immigrant life was going to deliver. Once they arrived, there was little chance of returning to their country of origin. They had to live in the United States and attend to work daily while raising their children.

On the plantations of Hawaii and on the farms of the western United States, these women cooked, washed, and cleaned, not only for their own families; often, for a small fee, they did these chores for bachelors and married men who had come without their wives. Those who cooked for the unattached men had to get up at 3 or 4 A.M. to cook breakfast for as many as forty persons and to pack an equal number of lunch boxes in primitive kitchens with no modern conveniences.[9] Others who worked in the fields for wages spent a full day under the sun, sometimes with babies strapped to their backs, before returning home to fix supper. In the evenings, they washed, ironed, and mended. Those who bore children did all this work even while pregnant.[10]

In addition to the physical hardships, Asian American women experienced psychological and legal hardships in the form of racism, prejudice, and discrimination. Beginning in the 1850s, a series of restrictive laws against Asians were enacted. In 1870, Congress passed a law that made Asian immigrants the only racial group barred from naturalization. In 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed. This suspended the immigration of Chinese laborers for ten years, but this was later extended indefinitely, eventually being lifted only in 1943. The 1917 Immigration Act further limited Asian immigration, banning immigration from all countries in the Asia-Pacific Triangle except for the Philippines (a U.S. territory) and Japan. Japanese immigration, however, was subsequently limited by the 1924 Exclusionary Immigration Act, which literally halted new immigration from Asia. In addition, Asians were segregated in public facilities including schools, were heavily taxed, were prohibited from owning land and from intermarriage with whites, and so on. The most visible incident in the country's history of discrimination against Asian Americans was probably the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.[11] It was not until the passage of sweeping civil rights legislation in 1965 that state-supported discrimination ended.

Description

Theology never occurs in a vacuum but always within a specific context. Thus one needs to carefully examine the different historical, social, and political contexts within which we are developing our theology. Theology that intentionally relates itself to a particular time and place has been given the name "contextual theology." Contextual theology has its social roots in the experience of third world Christians as they recognized that the theology they received was not a-historical, a-social, or a-cultural but was "contextual" in an unconscious way. In considering the relationship of context to theology, these third world Christians realized it was not that one's theological conclusions were necessarily different from place to place but, rather, that the context determined the kinds of questions to be raised.[12] Contextuality (as distinct from contemporaneity) means the discovery of the place-dimension of the human condition.[13]

This means that Asian American women's context will bring forth expectations and understandings of theology that are distinct from those of the majority in both North America and Asia. That is, their context of patriarchy, prejudice, and hardship gave birth to the need for Asian American women to examine the questions of theology and to further develop theology that frees them to a more meaningful and liberating life.

It is important to recognize that the terms "Asian" and "Asian American" are social and cultural constructs, arising out of particular historical stages of political struggles.[14] These terms have been useful for creating a space for theological discourse and should not be essentialized or homogenized so as to hinder critical reflections on diversity within the community.[15] When Asian theologians call themselves Asian, the term signifies the consciousness of belonging to the history of particular groups of people. It means that they are inheriting the myths, languages, and cuisines of certain cultures. Use of that designation also encompasses a commitment to looking at the world and themselves from particular vantage points. In addition, identification as an *Asian* theologian suggests solidarity with the struggles and destiny of specific peoples.

In a word, the term "Asian" has an identifiable set of meanings: shared colonial history, multiple religious traditions, rich and diverse cultures, immense suffering and poverty, and a long history of patriarchal control and present political struggles. Therefore, one must keep all these identifiable sets in mind as one engages in Asian American women's theology as "Asian" is an integral part of the development and emergence of this theology.[16] Asian American women theologians need to lift up the multivocal nature of Asian traditions and begin new lines of theological inquiry by rearticulating theology through the liberating language of myths, stories, and the rituals of women.[17]

Asian American feminist theologians join other Asian theologians in their tendency to highlight the effect of entrenched cultural myths, rituals, and traditions on women's roles in society and the cultural and religious dimensions of oppression that result. They are interested in assessing Christianity's role in supporting colonialism and patriarchy because political independence for many of them happened only a generation ago.[18]

Theology that is not in touch with their life experience cannot be a living theology.[19] Chung Hyun Kyung suggests that Asian women's theology is a "cry, plea and invocation" to God in search of justice and healing.[20] It is an embodied and critical reflection on Asian American women's experiences, and it is aimed at bringing about a community of harmony, peace, and love.

Sources

Wisdom

The concept of wisdom deeply affects the lives of Asian women through their various religious and cultural traditions. Wisdom is an important concept in Buddhism, in that it manifests hope and liberation. It is generally believed that wisdom is the absolute knowledge through which enlightenment is attained. Since absolute knowledge is compassionate in its nature, the Enlightened One (Buddha) leads people to their emancipation. It is the essential virtue without which no being may claim to be an Enlightened One (Buddha).[21]

Wisdom is also central to Confucianism, and links can be made here also to biblical wisdom. Wisdom is closely related to the "Way" to live, a concept found in most religions, including the three Semitic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Confucianism views wisdom mainly through sageliness or sagehood.[22] Confucianists held that the learning of human ethical relations was the true "orthodox" learning and that acquiring moral purity is the way to become a sage. The Confucianist emphasis on wisdom as essential to practical, moral life closely resembles the Hokmah of biblical wisdom, especially as found in Proverbs.

When comparing these various wisdom figures, it is important to note the many similarities in deed and character to biblical wisdom. Wisdom in the Old Testament is portrayed as a feminine image with feminine characteristics and roles; these attributes are then carried into the New Testament and linked with Christ, which consequently provides a feminine understanding of God.[23] It is possible to syncretize these various wisdom figures into a Christian understanding of wisdom to develop a hybrid wisdom Christology.

As we turn to pneumatology and examine the role and understanding of the Holy Spirit within the church, an inculturated perspective of spirit from the Asian concept of *chi* is a helpful tool for Asian American women. The Chinese character *chi* originated in the concept of cloud or vapor, which was regarded as the primordial vitality for prosperity and productivity. Western-language translations of *chi* include air, wind, vapor, breath, gas, vital spirit, anger, appearance, intelligence, vital fluid, energy, material force, vital force, and subtle spirits.[24] *Chi* is what makes one alive, as it is the life force energy that makes one a living being. Every living thing has *chi*. It is the central, animating element of our overall energy system, giving power and strength.[25] It is a vital, dynamic, original power that permeates the entire universe and leads to an ultimate unity.[26] The Spirit becomes the essence of all things as all things exist because of the Spirit as *chi*. *Chi* is the ultimate reality and is immanent in all things; and all things in the universe consist of *chi*, which means no being can exist apart from *chi*.[27] This notion of the Spirit as *chi* assists us in reaffirming the idea of divine immanence or Immanuel, God is with us.[28] This makes one move toward a panentheistic understanding of God: God is in all things.[29]

The Old Testament *ruach* and the New Testament *pneuma* carry the same ambiguity of multiple meanings, as *chi* does, such as breath, air, wind, or soul. The word *ruach* has its etymological origin in air, which manifests itself in two distinctive forms: that of wind in nature and that of breath in living things. Because God as the Spirit manifests herself as wind or *ruach*, she is also chi. Wind symbolizes the power of life in nature, while breath symbolizes the power of life in the living. Without chi, life does not exist;[30] similarly, if there is no Spirit, nothing living can exist. God as the life-giving spirit is the proper source of life and strength; in a derivative sense, *ruach* also denotes the life force of the individual (Judges 15:19) and of the group (Numbers 16:22).[31]

Hence, Spirit/*chi*[32] is essentially what keeps humanity alive as it is the life-giving force within us that sustains and keeps us in harmony with nature and the world. Spirit/*chi* embraces life and makes it full. Spirit/*chi* is crucial to Asian American women's theology as it emphasizes the Spirit/*chi* power within all of us to make a difference in this world. Spirit/*chi* is salvific and negotiates a space to save those who are living in the liminal spaces between us.

Context/Experience

Asian American feminist theology is inductive, and it does not begin with the Bible or Christian doctrines but with the stories of women: "The text of God's revelation was, is, will be written in our bodies and our peoples' everyday struggle for survival and liberation."[33] Therefore, it is necessary to listen to the women's stories and experiences to begin to do theology as they come to know God through experience. This is a dynamic and experiential way of doing theology much closer to the Bible, in which people did not come to know God by discussion or argument but by experiencing God.[34] This is an alternative to a typical Western method based on analysis and debate.[35]

Regarding the nature of experience, Koreans have articulated *han* as a mode of responding to the tragic situation of the oppressed. In terms of its etymology, *han* is a psychological term that denotes repressed feelings of suffering through the oppression of others or through natural calamities or illness. Sometimes translated as "just indignation," *han* is deep spiritual pain that rises out of the unjust experience of the people. *Han* appears inevitably in the biographies of Asian American women in their stories. Asian American people embody this *han* as they experience oppression and suffering in their daily lives.[36] *Han* is "the suppressed, amassed and condensed experience of oppression caused by mischief or misfortune, so that it forms a kind of 'lump' in one's spirit."[37]

Han is the brokenheartedness but also the raw energy for the struggle for liberation. Because Asian American women face issues of prejudice, discrimination, alienation, exclusion, and shame in this society, their experiences can be called *han*—the deep pain of a victim. *Han* has emotive and transrational aspects and is quite a useful term for theological discourse.[38] *Han* has three levels: individual, collective, and structural. At its individual level, *han* is the will to avenge, the will to resign, bitterness, and helplessness; it is a reaction to individualistic oppression, which is often connected to collective and structural oppression. At its collective level, *han* is the collective consciousness and unconsciousness of victims such as the ethos of cultural inferiority complex, racial melancholy, racial resentment, the sense of physical inadequacy, and national shame. At the structural level, sin is unjust and evil systems that perpetuate racism, sexism, exclusiveness, and monopolistic capitalism.[39]

Therefore, if it is to have any impact on their lives, Asian American women's theology needs to work toward this goal of releasing *han*. There needs to be a praxis component within their theology to help release this *han*, which can be destructive and damaging if it is left to sit within them. But many Asian American women do not have the public channels that men have to express their *han*, which has led to a sense of helplessness in their lives. They have been enclosed within the home to take care of the family and household. Women have been discouraged from taking on leadership positions and play only a minimal role in society.[40] Thus a major goal of doing theology is to release this *han* in the sense of *won-han*. *Won-han* is the refusal to accept *han* as their being but to fight it so that they can actively work toward releasing it. The process that untangles and resolves accumulated *han* is called *han-pu-ri*. The term originally came from the Korean shamanistic tradition as the shamans played the role of the priest/ess of *han-pu-ri* in his or her community.[41]

One group that lives with *han* is the *minjung*. *Minjung* means oppressed, alienated, exploited, and despised "people of God." *Min* means "people," and *jung* signifies "the mass." Hence *minjung* literally means "the mass of people."[42] In Korean, women are the *minjung* of the *minjung*. The concept of *minjung* is opposite to the concept of power and different from the middle-class intelligent strata. Political power originates from addressing the concerns of *minjung*. As political power becomes institutionalized, it changes into the oppression of *minjung*. In the process of history, *minjung* rebelled against this power by returning it to its original place and restoring public righteousness. Kim Chi-Ha argues that when the powerful betray justice and become anti-*minjung*, it is righteous to take the side of the *minjung* and unrighteous to take the side of the power.[43] As Asian American women struggle to exorcise the evils of imperialism, globalization, racism, and patriarchy, their *han* needs to be realized to prevent them from embodying the life of a *minjung*.

Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

There is concern among theologians about the interpretation of the Bible, and some turn to "context" to help them understand the meaning of particular passages for "here and now." Biblical texts will make sense only if they are read with insight into the social, political, and religious context of their own time.[44] Due to the patriarchal bias, one needs to read the biblical words with a critical eye and be aware of their origin and intent.

Multifaith hermeneutics can be described as the task of relating Christian biblical interpretation positively to other religious texts and traditions. Multifaith hermeneutics assumes the willingness to look at one's own traditions from other perspectives, the maturity to discern both similarities and differences in various traditions, and the humility to learn from other partners in the conversation. Multifaith hermeneutics requires us to affirm that other religious traditions have as much right to exist as Christianity.[45] The interaction between Asian scriptures and Christian scriptures is not meant to prove that they are compatible, or incompatible, but aims at a "wider intertextuality" and a fruitful and continuous cross-cultural dialogue.[46]

Kwok Pui Lan suggests that a "dialogical imagination" must become operative in biblical interpretation. This approach invites more dialogue partners by shifting the emphasis from one scripture (the Bible) to many scriptures, from responding to one religious narrative to many possible narratives. It shifts from a single-axis framework of analysis to a multiaxial interpretation, taking into serious consideration the issues of race, class, gender, culture, and history. Dialogical imagination uses Asian cultural and religious traditions and sacred texts as dialogical partners in biblical reflection and "the social biography of the people" as hermeneutical keys for biblical interpretation.[47]

Asian cultural roots are embedded in nondualistic metaphysics and religions that express their understandings of life and reality in terms of fluidity, flexibility, and multiplicity. The sacred is embedded in life's ambiguities, and the margins and centers shift constantly. An understanding of reality as fluid, transitional, and impermanent connects meaningfully with many Asian American women's struggles to live a transcultural, and marginalized existence.[48] Their impermanent location leads to a hybrid identity that seeks to find a home in between realities.

The term "hybridity" needs further elaboration and is an essential tool that Asian American feminist theologians are turning to to help describe this situation of instability and create new spaces and places of discourse. Essentially, hybridization is a mixture of two things as it brings together and fuses but also maintains separation. Hybridity makes difference into sameness and sameness into difference, but in a way that makes the same no longer the same, the different no longer simply different.[49] Hybridity is a way to conceptualize porous religious, ethnic, and cultural boundaries. What hybridity does is shift the conceptualization of identity in that identity is no longer a stable reference point. Hybridity is not about the dissolution of differences but about renegotiating the structure of power built on difference.[50]

Ongoing Issues

Asian American feminist theology is growing and changing. In this section, I explore continuing concerns within this form of liberation theology. I am interested in providing readers with a sense of future direction of this theological approach by presenting the experiential framework that must be addressed. Recalling the link between experience and theology, readers will see how this approach corresponds with a sense of ongoing issues.

Sexuality

There is much concern about footbinding in China as it was painful, oppressive, and inhumane. This practice, among certain classes and ethnicities of Chinese women, secured their dependence on men and served to confine them within the household gates. Although Chinese men depicted Chinese woman as weak, timid, and sexually available, they also saw them as dangerous, powerful, and sexually insatiable. The cults of footbinding, chastity, and virginity and the rules that oppressed women were the reactions of men to women's resistance.[51]

Men are socialized into and reinforced in their behaviors and attitudes through the cult of hypermasculine culture. Men are concentrated away from women for periods of time and taught appropriate masculine behavior, which usually includes some form of control of the body and repression of sexuality through celibacy or the periodic sexual exploitation of women. Women are objectified and eroticized, and men are expected to fit into a power hierarchy that stresses obedience and loyalty to higher authorities. Throughout these systems, women are forced to be the "gatekeepers" of male sexual activity even as they are exploited by it and demonized by the sexual projections and obsessions of men. The sexual use of women is tied to men's power to control and dominate those with less power. This sense of entitlement extends to those perceived as vulnerable to domination such as younger males and children. In an extension of this sense of entitlement, men may molest girls and boys. Legal and religious systems categorize women and children as under male authority and ownership. Nowhere in this system of male entitlement is a woman fully human, nor is there an understanding of the basic bodily integrity and right to safety of women and children.[52]

Orientalism: The Other

Unlike Europeans, who can assimilate after they lose any trace of a foreign accent, Asian Americans continue to be regarded as "exotic" foreigners. The dominant North American culture continues to think Asian Americans are interchangeable with Asians, whose cultures may be as unfamiliar to Asian Americans as European cultures are to many white Americans. Some Americans view Asian Americans through the lens of exoticized, colonialist constructions of race and gender, captured by the term "Oriental."[53]

Orientalism has been used by Europeans and North Americans as a way of dominating the East and having self-ascribed authority over it. European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self.[54] Furthermore, the Orient has become feminized by Europeans as the Orient is viewed as the weaker, the exotic, and the less intelligent.[55] Europe's feminization of Asia was preceded and paralleled by Asian men's subjugation of Asian women. Europe's intellect and vigor in contrast to Asia's sensuality and softness were the counterparts of the Asian "yang" or male attributes of light, strength, agency, and the endowments of the "firm nature of heaven," as opposed to "yin" or female traits of dark, weak, passive, and the "yielding nature of the earth."[56]

As objects and people become feminized, a natural progression of domination occurs as women have generally been understood to be dominated by men. As a place becomes feminized, the entire concept becomes romanticized and understood as the subject who exists for the master. Thus with the notion of Orientalism came many adversities that Asia had to overcome. The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, in varying degrees of a complex hegemony. The Orient was Orientalized not only because it was discovered to be "Oriental" in all those ways considered commonplace by an average 19th-century European but also because it could be made Oriental.[57] Orientalism is constructed by white Euro-American power over the Orient. Edward Said's *Orientalism* has opened a space for many thinkers, for it talks back to the Western authorities by demystifying their cultural representations of the Orient.[58]

There are certainly power differentials between Asian immigrant and nonimmigrant women. It is important to recognize this unequal power and conflicting interests while not giving up on community or solidarity or sisterhood.[59] As Asian American women experience oppression through racism, discrimination, and multiculturalism, they also have to endure the consequences of Orientalism and the experience of being treated as the Other. While Asian feminist theology has successfully established itself as a countermovement to the prevalent dominance of Western Christian traditions, Asian feminist theologians are being caught in the polemics of East versus West, and they "allow" Asia to remain as "Other" to the West.[60] In many ways, Asian women immigrants have become the Other. The Other is viewed as inferior and powerless. The Other is weaker, less intelligent, or a nuisance to society. Furthermore, the Other has become essentialized as they are imagined to possess inherently "Oriental" characteristics and traits that are supposedly universally valid but in fact are not. One of the central consequences of the essentialization of the Other is that the Other becomes an object for manipulation.[61] If the Other becomes an object, it is easily dominated or is open to domination.

The Other never becomes equal to but is incorporated as marginal and as such fulfills a useful role.[62] European culture has gained strength by setting itself against the Other. In characterizing and defining the Other, the West has characterized and defined itself as a superior culture in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures.[63] Therefore the Other is a necessary and useful commodity for those who are the majority and the dominators; we need to dispel the category of the Other and continue to dialogue so that Asian American women are not placed in that role.

In striving to use multicultural, interdisciplinary methods, the myriad forms of knowledge being created by new voices attuned to power, identity, history, and liberatory ideas and practices need to be embraced.[64] Asian American women's theological journey involves construction of a fluid and relational social self, a communal understanding of existence, and an embodied way of knowing and practicing religious life. Asian American women's identity involves interstitial integrity and hybridity. It is important to note that interstitial integrity deals with the complex cross-cultural identities that include subordination and draws from fluid, multilayered, and transversal experiences. It is not passive, an acceptance of abuse, but is how Asian American women cope with marginality and struggle to live amid transcultural forces in that it allows the making of meaning out of multiple worlds. And it does so by holding in creative tension the various spaces or worlds of meaning that Asian American women occupy rather than forcing them to restrict themselves to one set of social relationships and arrangements. It allows space for the multiple social locations of identity in a multicultural context. Asian American women live in the interstices and should engage in solidarity with others who also live there.[65] In short, through the use of the interstitial concept in theology, Asian American women consciously and carefully seek to hybridize religious commitments, practices, and beliefs with those of the "reluctant other."[66]

Racism

Racism promotes domination of the vulnerable by a privileged group in the economic, social, cultural, and intellectual spheres.[67] We live in a society in which racism has been internalized and institutionalized and is woven deeply into a culture from whose inception racial discrimination has been a regulative force for maintaining stability and growth and for maximizing other cultural values. Racism is the manifestation of the deeply entrenched determination to maintain the existing dominant culture and group. Only a full awareness of this disturbing reality leads to a new insight into what is possible: "The nation cannot redeem what has not been established."[68]

Asian American women's lives intersect with racism. Racism is prejudice and discrimination and is the *han* of our communities. Asian American women need to challenge and transform the structure of the *han* of racism in the society.[69] Assimilation into the dominant culture has been seen as a source both of alienation from Asian identity and of freedom from the constraints of traditional culture.[70] There appears to be an invisible boundary that prevents Asian American women from becoming part of the mainstream white culture. Problems of racism and culturism have set up walls that Asian American women cannot seem to climb. This has become a constant struggle and will remain one as long as racism and culturism persists. Therefore it is necessary to work toward removing these barriers.

Marginality

Asian immigrants experience a betwixt-and-between predicament, which, while a source of much soul-searching and suffering, can also serve as an incentive and resource for a creative rethinking of cultural traditions, the native and the foreign. Being in-between is being neither this nor that but also being both this and that. Immigrants belong fully to neither their native culture nor to the host culture. They belong to both, though not fully. Since they dwell in the interstices between the two cultures, they are in a position to see more clearly and to appreciate more objectively.[71] Socially to be in-between is to be part of a minority, a member of a marginalized group. Culturally, it means not being fully integrated into and accepted by either cultural system, being a mestizo, a member of a marginalized group. Psychologically and spiritually, the person does not possess a well-defined and secure self-identity and is often marked with excessive impressionableness, rootlessness, and an inordinate desire for belonging.[72] Therefore there are many limitations to those living in-between two groups and cultures.[73]

These ongoing issues of sexuality, being the Other, racism, and marginality are crucial and need to be addressed daily and seriously as they affect the means of survival. These pressing issues encompass the being of Asian American women and, in turn, affect how they perceive themselves and the divine. As Asian American women work to liberate themselves from sexism, Orientalism, racism, and marginality, they will continue to work toward building a theology that is truly authentic to their being and liberating to their souls.

NOTES

1. Rita Nakashima Brock, "Pacific and Asian Women's Theologies," in *Feminist Theologies: Legacy and Prospect*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 46.

2. Gary Y. Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asian in American History and Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 64, 65.

3. Grace Ji-Sun Kim, *The Grace of Sophia: A Korean North American Women's Christology* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2002), 55.

4. Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams*, 64, 65.

5. Eleazar S. Fernandez, "American from the Hearts of a Diasporized People," in *Realizing the America of Our Hearts: Theological Voices of Asian Americans*, ed. Fumitaka Matsuoka and Eleazar S. Fernandez (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2003), 256.

6. Quoted in Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Penguin, 1989), 22.

7. Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (New York: Twayne, 1991), 15.

8. Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams*, 77.

9. Kim, *Grace of Sophia*, 66.

10. Mary Paik Lee, *Quiet Odyssey: A Pioneer Korean Woman in America*, ed. and intro. Sucheng Chan (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), lvi, lvii. There are many painful stories of Asian immigrant women's lives as they struggled to survive as laborers, cooks, and domestic workers. A second-generation Korean American woman recalls her childhood experience in Hawaii: "My mother had many maids in Korea, but at Kipahulu [*sic*] plantation she worked in the canefields with my older brother and his wife. I remember her hands, so blistered and raw that she had to wrap them in clothes [*sic*]. One morn-

ing she overslept and failed to hear the work whistle. We were all asleep—my brother and his wife, my older sister and myself. I was seven years old at the time. Suddenly the door swung open, and a big burly luna burst in, screaming and cursing, 'Get up, get to work.' The luna ran around the room, ripping off the covers, not caring whether my family was dressed or not. I'll never forget it." Quoted in Fumitaka Matsuoka, *The Color of Faith: Building Community in a Multiracial Society* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1998), 14.

11. Seung Ai Yang, "Asian Americans," in *Handbook of U.S. Theologies of Liberation*, ed. Miguel A. De La Torre (St. Louis, MO: Chalice) (2004), 174.

12. Christopher J. L. Lind, "An Invitation to Canadian Theology," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 1 (1985): 17.

13. Douglas Hall, "On Contextuality in Christian Theology," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 1 (1985): 10.

14. The term "Asia" has different and complex trajectories in North America. During the civil rights era, in order to indicate inter-Asian group relationships, to identify this growing hybridity, and to mobilize a political movement for justice, people of Asian descent came to call themselves "Asian Americans." Thus the term "Asian American" arose out of a particular historical moment to signify a visible racial group and had profound political implications. Kwok Pui Lan and Rachel A. R. Bundang, "PANAAWTM Lives!" *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 21 no. 2 (2005): 149.

15. Kwok Pui Lan, Seung Ai Yang, and Rita Nakashima Brock, "The Future of PANAAWTM Theology," July 2004, available at www.panaawtm.org, as cited by Rita Nakashima Brock, "Pacific and Asian Women's Theologies," in *Feminist Theologies: Legacy and Prospect*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 46. There is an overarching question of what it means to be an Asian woman living across the ocean from her motherland in a multicultural society. Certainly, not all women share the same experience of "being a woman." Even if all women are oppressed by sexism, we cannot automatically conclude that the sexism all women experience is the same. Elizabeth Spelman, *Inessential Women: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon, 1988), 14. This is a significant realization that undermines any reductionist, essentializing definition of "women's oppression" as a universal female experience. Ien Ang, "I'm a Feminist but . . . 'Other' women and Postnational Feminism," in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Reina Lewis and Sara Mills (New York: Routledge, 2003), 191.

16. Kwok Pui Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 24.

17. Kwok Pui Lan, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2000), 35.

18. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 152.

19. Jung Young Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress , 1995), 1.

20. Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991).

21. Genryu Tsutsumi, "Karuna (Compassion) and Prajna (Wisdom): A Note of Seizan-Sect Doctrine," *Japanese Religions* 4 (1966): 45, 46. Wisdom can be found in almost every culture and religion. Wisdom appears in the Christian scriptures as Hokmah (Hebrew) and Sophia (Greek), both clearly feminine. It also appears in Buddhism as *prajna*, which is a grammatically feminine noun in Sanskrit. Wisdom (sagehood) can also be found in the Confucian tradition. Wisdom is very much a part of Asian religion, culture, and society.

22. Leonard Swidler, "A Christian Historical Perspective on Wisdom as a Basis for Dialogue with Judaism and Chinese Religion," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 33 (1996): 558, 559.

23. Old Testament: Solomon 7:7–12; and Proverbs 1:20–21; 3:18, 8:1–4, 9:1–5. New Testament: I Corinthians 1:17, 1:23–24, 3:19, 10:1–4; and Matthew 11:1–14:13a, 11:28–30. For further and Old Testament and New Testament references to Jesus as wisdom, see Kim, *Grace of Sophia.*

24. Lee Rainey, 'The Concept of *Ch'i* in the Thought of Wang Ch'ung," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 19 (1992): 263.

25. Sue Benton and Drew Denbaum, *Chi Fitness: A Workout for Body, Mind, and Spirit* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 1, 11.

26. Hans Kung and Julia Ching, *Christianity and Chinese Religions* (London: SCM, 1988), 266.

27. Jumsik Ahn, "Korean Contextual Theology as Related to Ch'i: An Assessment on the Theology of Jung Young Lee," Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, MI, 2002, 162, 305.

28. Jung Young Lee, *The Trinity in Asian Perspective* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 98.

29. Rob Cook, "Alternative and Complementary Theologies: The Case of Cosmic Energy with Special reference to Chi," *Studies in World Christianity* 6 (2000): 182.

30. Lee, *Trinity in Asian Perspective,* 96, 97.

31. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 26.

32. Due to the similarity between chi and Spirit, it seems appropriate to combine the words to write Spirit/chi.

33. Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again,* 111.

34. Masao Takenaka, *God Is Rice: Asian Cultures and Christian Faith* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986), 9.

35. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "A Mapping of Asian Liberative Theology in Quest for the Mystery of God amidst the Minjung Reality and World Religions," in *Asian Contextual Theology for the Third Millennium: Theology of Minjung in Fourth-Eye Formation,* ed. Paul S. Chung, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, and Kim Kyoung Jae (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2007), 109.

36. Kim, *Grace of Sophia,* 56.

37. Chung Hyun Kyung, "Han-pu-ri: Doing Theology from Korean Women's Perspective," cited inKim, *Grace of Sophia,* 57.

38. The early Christians used cultural terms and words to help in theological discourse, and it is only appropriate for Asian American women theologians to do likewise. For example, although the synoptic gospel authors did not employ the term "Logos" in describing Jesus' incarnation or mission, the Johannine author adopted this Greek term to help the people of the Hellenistic civilization understand the nature of Jesus' coming. The gospel of John turned the Jewish concept of wisdom into the Greek notion of logos. Had the Johannine author lived in Asia, he or she would have used the term "Tao" instead of Logos for his or her apologetic work. Andrew Sung Park, "A Theology of Tao (Way): Han, Sin and Evil," in *Realizing the America of Our Hearts: Theological Voices of Asian Americans,* ed. Fumitaka Matsuoka and Eleazar S. Fernandez (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2003), 41, 43.

39. Andrew Sung Park, "Sin," in *Handbook of U.S. Theologies of Liberation,* ed. Miguel A. De La Torre (St. Louis, MO: Chalice) (2004), 116.

40. Chung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again*, 39.

41. Kim, *Grace of Sophia*, 60.

42. Koo D. Yun, "Minjung and Asian Pentecostals," in *Asian Contextual Theology for the Third Millennium: Theology of Minjung in Fourth-Eye Formation*, ed. Paul S. Chung, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, and Kim Kyoung Jae (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2007), 87.

43. Quoted in Suh Nam-Dong, "Missio Dei and Two Stories in Coalescence," in *Asian Contextual Theology for the Third Millennium: Theology of Minjung in Fourth-Eye Formation*, ed. Paul S. Chung, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, and Kim Kyoung Jae (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2007), 51.

44. Letty M. Russell, "Exploring the Context of Our Faith," in *Changing Contexts of Our Faith*, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 22.

45. Kwok Pui Lan, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 57, 58.

46. Ibid., 63.

47. Ibid., 36.

48. Rita Nakashima Brock, "Interstitial Integrity: Reflections toward an Asian American Women's Theology," in *Introduction to Christian Theology*, ed. Roger Badham (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 188.

49. Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), 22, 26.

50. R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), 125, 126.

51. Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams*, 70.

52. Rita Nakashima Brock, "Facing Sexual Exploitation: Understanding Prostitution in Asia and the United States," *Journal of Asian and Asian American Theology* 2 (1997): 13.

53. Brock, "Interstitial Integrity," 185.

54. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 3.

55. Edward W. Said, *Power, Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage, 2001), 217. Feminization is a key to legitimize domination. Nature has been feminized, and thus nature can be dominated. Horrific acts of domination have been and will continue to be committed against nature.

56. Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams*, 68.

57. Said, *Orientalism*, 5. Parts of this section on "Orientalism: The Other" are excerpts from Grace Ji-Sun Kim, "What Forms Us: Multiculturalism, the Other and Theology," in *Feminist Theology with a Canadian Accent: Canadian Perspectives on Contextual Theology*, ed. Mary Ann Beavis, Elaine Guillemin, and Barbara Pell (Ottawa: Novalis, 2008), 78–99.

58. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 3.

59. Jan Pettman, *Living in the Margins* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1992), 158.

60. Wong Wai-Ching, "Asian Theologians between East and West: A Postcolonial Self-Understanding," *Jian Dao* 8 (1997): 91.

61. Bain-Selbo, "Understanding the Other: The Challenge of Post-Colonial Theory to the Comparative Study of Religion," *Religious Studies and Theology* 1 (1999): 64.

62. Marcella María Althaus-Reid, "Grace and the Other: A Postcolonial Reflection on Ideology and Doctrinal Systems," in *The Bright Side of Life*, ed. Ellen van Wolde (London: SCM, 2000), 67.

63. R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 102.

64. Brock, "Pacific and Asian Women's Theologies," 47.

65. Brock, "Interstitial Integrity," 190, 192.

66. Tinu Ruparell, "The Dialogue Party: Dialogue, Hybridity, and the Reluctant Other," in *Theology and the Religions: A Dialogue*, ed. Viggo Mortensen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 244.

67. Fumitaka Matsuoka, *The Color of Faith: Building Community in a Multiracial Society* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1998), 3.

68. Ibid., 95.

69. Andrew Sung Park, "Church and Theology: My Theological Journey," in *Journeys at the Margin: Toward an Autobiographical Theology in American-Asian Perspective*, ed. Peter C. Phan and Jung Young Lee (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1999), 171.

70. Brock, "Interstitial Integrity,"189.

71. Peter C. Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003), 9.

72. Peter C. Phan, "The Dragon and the Eagle: Toward a Vietnamese American Theology," in *Realizing the America of Our Hearts: Theological Voices of Asian Americans*, ed. Fumitaka Matsuoka and Eleazar S. Fernandez (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2003), 165.

73. Yang, "Asian Americans," 176.

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