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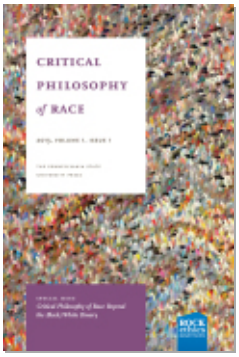
Why Asian Female Stereotypes Matter to All: Beyond Black and White, East and West



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Critical Philosophy of Race, Volume 1, Issue 1, 2013, pp. 86-103 (Article)

Published by Penn State University Press

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[18.191.21.86] Project MUSE (2024-04-25 13:18 GMT)

WHY ASIAN FEMALE STEREOTYPES MATTER TO ALL

Beyond Black and White, East and West

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CRITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF RACE, VOL. 1, NO. 1, 2013
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Abstract

Gender, race, ethnicity, class, religion, culture, etc., etc., etc. . . . How are we to rearticulate and retool those kaleidoscopic "problems" of social categories and identities each time differently, with different productivity, even as different "products"?—this capital, frontal *problema*, this "sufficient" bodily evidence in and of reality, "*in front of you*" and me <https://webmail.psu.edu/webmail/blank.html#_edn1>. Such is the broad philosophical force, background and foreground, of the questions I dwell on here if only briefly. What interests me in particular, just as an example if not exemplar, concerns the "Asian female" question, with which I happen to have some auto-ethnographical familiarity: the material specificity as well as translatability of some of the stereotypical identity markers of it categorically isolatable as such—I also show why a categorically responsive reflection matters, as my ultimate aim here is to advance a case for the social ontological centrality of this issue of Asian gender stereotypes to feminist and critical race theories.

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Your Problem: Quotables?

> Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? They say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or, I fought at Mechanicsvile; or, Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word.[1]

"How does it feel to be a problem?" The voice of W. E. B. Du Bois, writing at the turn of the twentieth century, remains vibrant today. That line, often quoted, still evokes those "unasked" questions—of the law of identity or more precisely identification. It is, shall we say, a soulful question, a question, indeed, of our "spiritual strivings, "as he puts it: not just "what" is a problem, or "where"? But *how* a problem is embodied, becomes sticky, at times too obvious to name.

So again: how does it "feel," for instance, "to be a colored me," when "thrown against a sharp white background"?—a la Hurston, "Beside the waters of the Hudson" "feeling my (her) race."[2] Or more recently, "how does it feel to be stopped?"—a la Ahmed at an airport, clutching her British passport, "who feel(s) like adding, 'Can't you read. I was born in Salford,' but I (she) stop (stops) myself."[3] Again, "how does it feel to be a problem?" today—a la Bayoumi, the reteller of stories of Muslim youths in the United States today in Brooklyn, New York, those who have become daily and random targets of Islamophobic attacks in post-9/11 New York.[4] So what is your problem, again?

What does it mean, "feeling being a problem"? Not feeling or being a problem but "feeling being" one. I find myself doubly captivated by such an intercategorical fusion, rather than distanced by its reflexive complication. Those philosophers, writers, theorists converging around that question, time and again, are not detaching themselves or feeling from such issues thus brought home. On the contrary, they are intensifying and multiplying them through an engaged self-theorization thus provoked. A feeling of be(com)ing a problem, of auto-implication, arises when one feels

arrested—objectified, framed, and staged—by forces and conditions that one also objectively recognizes as problematic. Here, I also recall Simone de Beauvoir's "irritation" over and "hesitation" around the question not just of woman but of being a woman (philosopher), noted at the very beginning of *The Second Sex*: "I hesitated a long time before writing a book on woman. The subject is irritating, especially for women; and it is not new."[5] In such a book about problems associated with being a woman written by a woman for whom such troubles are—or become—her own concerns, not unlike Heidegger's reflexive experience of being in time, what keeps the theoretical forces doubly alive is the very presence of such embodied voices, of double visions, remaining open to translation including transition; I think because I am pushed to think, not simply wish to. Something causes Du Bois to "smile," to smile a smile of double consciousness, at that moment "reduced to a simmer," further distilled into this zero-degree question of how it feels to be a problem; something, of that minoritarian order of being, has been thought through de Beauvoir, and when the thinker responds to that feeling by theoretically documenting it, we see a feminist classic emerging. The auto-ethnographical textuality of philosophic thinking, when discerned this way, becomes a source of intersubjective imperatives as well as inspirations. The "I" of I feel becomes the "we" of we must think, however contingent, constrained or contentious such a "we" remains in its solidarity or solitude. Activating such a call for co-feeling, performing this multilingual fugue for quotidian justice, these thinkers are departing from their own respective situations, onto the ontopology (ontology and topology) of such "personal" problems that outlive and outlast the person, "your problem" that ain't just your problem, the sort that is to be ascribed, addressed, analyzed collaboratively, to be made a part of the question that needs asking, some part touchingly "unasked," needing to be unmasked.

So we have all sorts of "touchy" issues, to be sure, but the challenge, again, is to feel them, to begin with. I see your pain, you say; but that may not be enough, as pain is not exactly or entirely visible, as we all know. But I mean I feel your pain, you protest: sure, better than nothing, but that is not what I am asking you to do either: "Music. The great blobs of purple and red emotion have not touched him. He has only heard what I felt. . . . He is so pale with his whiteness then and I am *so* colored."[6] It is as if, as Toni Morrison[7] noted, the colored body existed so that whiteness (too) could be felt, played out in the dark. If whiteness,

for instance, as observed by Morrison, signals certain (an)aestheticized privileges that are enjoyed but unacknowledged by those who outsource feelings by racialized mimetic deflection, the problem is the numbness itself that prefigures the socially sanctioned ignorance and the superiority complex ignored as such. One might ask further, how does it feel to inhabit the problem of social identities without having to acknowledge it? How does it feel not to feel? Who knows: such problems of social blockage and affective zoning, of the lines drawn by "color," "gender," "class," "culture," etc., so-contrasted, so-ignored, so-used, tend to be "felt" frontmost and foremost, registered feelingly first, especially by those readily sliced and shuffled by those persistent, problematic categories.

Gender, sexuality, class, race, ethnicity, age, culture, religion ... how are we to rearticulate and retool those kaleidoscopic "problems" of social categories and identities each time differently, with different kind of productivity, even as different 'products,' while keeping the intersubjective momentum of situated questioning?—this capital, frontal *problema*, this "sufficient" bodily evidence in and of reality, "*in front of you*"[8] and me. Problem is bodily, irreducibly, interstitially; even zeno's paradox of infinite distance, namely the infinity of spacing, however ethereal and mental, could be a shortcut to the point I am making here. To borrow Jacques Derrida's formulation in part: a problem, in front of me, of "'being me," of being embodied as me, is what evokes the responsorial "passions" in me, driving forward and multiplying such questions of embodied identities; such passions become an intellectual duty, a scholar's passion, rather than a scholastic or egotistical exercise in self-understanding. This points to a sort of situationalist or socially inflected moment of the cogito, when the implicit question everyone asks of himself or herself—"who am I?"—returns to the subject in the form of the more theoretical question "what are you?" addressed to itself, at which point the subject then, instantly becoming an inter-subject in self-dialogue, bears the burden of reiterating answers as well as questions. Hence, the issue and rather ghostly phenomenon of "feeling being a problem" dually addressed as such: it is a sense of suddenly being at once implicated into and distanced from an objectified embodiment of all these problematic inter-categories. At this moment of affective cogitation, the ego is reduced to a feeling of being not right, being not that but at that.

Such is the broad philosophical and more specifically rhetorico-phenomenological force, background and foreground, of the questions

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I would like to dwell on here if only briefly, as I still think it bears repeating also for the reasons I will continue to unpack. An example that interests me, not an exemplar, concerns the "Asian female (or woman)" question, with which I, too, happen to experience some of that auto-ethnographical "irritation" or disorientation, uncanny doubling. I set out to describe the Asian woman-ness as "a problem," as distinct although not entirely different from, say, the "white European" woman-ness of the second sex, which seems to remain a secondary concern for de Beauvoir, or African American womanhood under multiple appropriative oppressions, as powerfully focalized by Morrison on the layered legacies of slavery in U.S. history as traceable in literary moments, figures, and voids. What I am presenting is not, however, a systematic study, as this piece, started and installed here as part of a much longer and complex (her)story, simply represents a snapshot of how I would—or one could—set out to explore the social ontology of the "Asian woman," a figure in the background.

Advanced below is, in brief, a note toward a case for the social ontological centrality of this issue of Asian gender stereotypes to feminist and critical race theories, especially in the transnational U.S. social imaginary: the double intersections of the black/white binary on the one hand, and the gendered rhetoric of East-meets-West, on the other hand, the very point that tends to get crossed out in the form of invisibility or hypervisbility. By situating this auto-ethnogendered question in a broader, theoretical reflection on the material specificity as well as translatability of some of the stereotypical identity markers, I hope to show, conclusively, why and how a trans-categorically responsive reflection on sociopolitical ontopology, ontotypology in particular, matters to all, across the board, regardless our respective positions and persuasions: why should one, whoever that is, care about the moral and political harm of Asian Female stereotypes, among others? Again, how are we all implicated, black or white, Eastern or Western, yellow or not?

How Does It Feel to Be (Visibly) Replaceable and Relayable?

Somehow, I feel I had already started piecing together material for this piece a few years ago.

An inspiration comes from this rather usual, yet vividly remembered, (non)encounter I had during a job interview as a lucky finalist

for a tenure-track professorial position at a highly respected university: an elderly Caucasian man, a potential senior colleague, spotted me at a hallway outside his office and so came out to greet me. *How welcoming*. As I was about to introduce myself, he asked me where in China I was from; no "hello," no "how do you do" or "what do you do," not even a "wonderful weather." Nothing, and nothing but China. Come to think of it, that might be the first time for anyone to skip the usual first stage of inquiry: the "you Chinese/China (or Japanese/Japan or Korean/Korea or something)?" I semi-answered it anyway, as I certainly can look Chinese. His response: "Oh great, you can be a good replacement for the other Asian woman who's just left." Appreciating that he might have gotten at least my gender right, I registered the fact that he did not know or call my name; he did not bother to ask mine or remember hers. Obviously, he was just glad to see an Asian womanly face floating by, also to imagine he might perhaps see one again, if not necessarily that—so I mean, this—one. He then scudded off, wishing me good luck—for what and which me exactly?

What exactly is it that was seen there, albeit in passing? What, or who, started that serial thinking? What precedes this scene of quasi-familial (mis/over/under/non/quasi-)identification? In what name or figure did this body ("*problema* in front of you") exist at that moment in that balding man's imaginary?—regardless of who I was or how I looked. I also recall recalling then, left there standing smaller than I already am, Derrida on performing "oblique passions" in the name of the other, a scholar's duty to think across, around and onward. At the heart of such institutionalized mechanism of indistinct individuation or affirmation, as embodied by this routinized micro-misdemeanor, is a kind of psycho-political cookie-cutting, serialized indifference to the singularity of beings, including human beings thus thing-ified, metonymically itemized.

"China Doll," "Dragon Lady," "Geisha Girl," "Lotus Flower," "Madame Butterfly," etc., etc., etc. . . . let me then start with some of those Orientalized Asian female stereotypes materializing in readymade nicknames or metonyms, "altered names." Given here are some stereotypes, "solid-mark-of-a-blow, printing from a metal plate," interconnected sets of traits assigned to particular groups of beings; in this case, Asian females demographically marked as such. When Asian femaleness or femininity is metaphorically matched with such composite images and codified by such compound words, revealed there is a set of preconceptions or embedded perceptions guiding

such an impression, the "stereo" part, the linguistic re-inscription of which practically precludes other forms or possibilities of representational associations or significatory chains. As with cliché ("print"), stereotype is therefore past oriented, inferentially regressive or restorative rather than progressively creative and forward-looking: X is as it was and it will be as it is. Stereotyping as an inscriptive act of temporal deprivation or imaginary desiccation is not only metaphysically delimiting but psychically damaging. Take such hackneyed images as "the blonde (+) bimbo," "the angry (+) black woman," "the hot-tempered (+) Latina," "the desperate (+) housewife," "the queen bee (+) dominatrix," etc., where certain attributes are not simply added but characteristically highlighted as practically inseparable from the subject/object in question. Although "the angry black woman" is a descriptive phrase, and "China doll" a compound and therefore one level higher in terms of compositional fixity and rigidity, what is shared between them structurally is a certain linguistic fate: the attributes associated with them, "anger" and "doll-like-ness," become identity markers, as in "Chinatown," not Chinese town, which is even more tightly "closed" and compounded also in its unbreakable linguistic brokenness. Once an X, an x forever, so says stereotype; President Obama's demeanor is professorial, and jazzy, as he *was* a professor and *is* black.

So, in stereotypical thinking, those itemized marks, "anger, temper, desperation, domination," are fixedly assigned and tightly joined to those particular groups of anthropomorphized beings thus individuated and incorporated. Stereotypes, as intergroup perceptions focally formed around sedimented biases toward/for/against "the (group-able) other," narrow down various descriptive possibilities to definitive or definitional qualities. So this (black) woman becomes almost, by definition, angry in the way that, by definition, "'this (liquid) is water'; 'this (animal) is a tiger'; 'this (fruit) is a lemon.'"[9] According to this logic of kind-of-naturalization or naturalization of the natural "kind," as in when "'this *kind* of boy' doesn't fit in 'this kind of private prep school,'"[10] a black woman who is not angry may not *be* a black woman; or a non-angry black woman would be considered meta-angry, meta-angrily busy countering such a "stereotype threat," i.e., "being at risk of confirming, as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one's group."[11] That "fear that (one) might confirm the stereotype that others hold,"[12] as it is a fear, remains a trap, an effect of psychical incarceration; a black woman who seems un-angry will then have to fit into the other kind/side of stereotypes, the "mammy" figure, for instance, which is not exactly or necessarily positive. In the land of stereotypes, no one escapes "her/himself."

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Once caught in the psychic grid and grip of the forecasting typecaster, there is practically no way out. There seems no exit from this globe of double whammy sealed by the inner contradictions of the privileged stereotyper, although it does not mean there is no excuse for the socially sanctioned absence of self-questioning: such is precisely the social privilege, not having to be challenged or altered. While minority-majority stereotyping can be structurally reciprocal, it does not necessarily mean that the power dynamic is symmetrically balanced or fluidly harmonized. On the contrary, especially if you are in the position of being perceived as such, whatever suchness you are supposed to embody, you are, as a holder of minority double consciousness, often, typically, the one expected to activate or validate the majority assumptions about a group of which you are a projected member. For example, here, just the usual script: a(n Italian) woman is a virgin Maria/whore, an Asian (American) woman a China doll/Dragon lady (with often "No Joy, No Luck")[13], an Asian man, sexless/perverse,[14] and so on. Now, many a subject perceived to belong to such demographics negotiates his or her own way through such impossible and impossibly diverse territories. Those majorly minor characters tend to live inside the centrifugal heads of the monolingual storytellers and their reproducers, not outside. Those are, however, not just "you people" I can size up at my narrative disposal, but real people, people with quirks, desires, passions and sentiments, all intriguing living and thinking beings with singular histories and herstories. We, (the) people, every member, we must remember, remain uncontainable by stock (exchangeable) images such as screaming/submissive Korean grocers, screaming/scheming Japanese sex addict, smart/sinister Jews, the European Orientals, etc:

> "Like being mugged by a metaphor" is a way to describe what it means to be at the mercy of racist, sexist, hetereosexist, and global capitalist constructions of meaning of skin color on a daily basis. Like a mugging, this attack involves an exchange of assets: some aspect of the social order is enriched domestically and internationally by virtue of material inequities stabilized and narrativized by race oppression and I lose symbolically and monetarily. Further, I am physically traumatized and psychologically assaulted by an operation that is mystified. It goes on in the dark, so to speak—in the dark of a power that never admits its own existence.[15]

The sociopolitical vicissitudes of stereotyping are sustained by this linguistic economy described above, quite aptly, as "mugging by metaphor," which seems to capture the typical mechanism by which dynamic attributes of a reality, extracted and extrapolated into a set of properties, end up replacing that reality summarily, in the name of cognitive economy. If a cliché is a dead metaphor, stereotype is a dead metonym; both are dead in the sense that the meanings produced and exchanged there are trapped in the economy of inert, self-same, self-serving repetitions, to the point where, perversely enough, what "survives" in the end would be such clichés and metaphors—even if "the Asian American is on the doorstep of extinction," as Frank Chin puts it; "either you're foreign in this country, or you're an honorary white."[16] The simplicity of this either-or grammar is, in social political terms, equivalent to that of categorical violence, mindlessly exclusionary practices, whether psychical or practical. Similarly, as Trinh T. Minh-ha astutely points out, reissuing Roland Barthes's warning against the literary destructiveness of stereotypical thinking:

> Nothing, indeed, stands more acutely in opposition to the poetic than the stereotype, which is not necessarily a false, but rather an arrested representation of a shifting reality. The constant challenge faced in dealing with stereotypes is precisely that of assuming representation without being limited to it.[17]

Being typecast means to be deprived of a freedom to be otherwise; being typecast means becoming part of the instant architecture of assumptions, whether it is enabling or debilitating. Such is the associative logic and self-reinforcing force of stereotyping generalization, which leaves practically no room for other free associations or alternative perceptions but some "essentially strategic" values for the minoritarian or subalternized subject, to use a Spivakian notion. Where the imagination fails, an army of clichés, stolen corps of perceptions and cheap quotes, kicks in. What I have been highlighting in addition is how such "mugging by a metaphor" becomes error-free by the unbreakable monologue of the mugger, how its internal contradictions become insulated and empowered by a sense of narrative agency knitted into the dominant discourse. Privileged are those who can make up stories, freely, at no cost of their own. That is, stereotypically ethno-gendered thinking uses its own schizo-paranoid

tendencies for a tautological cushion, if and when contradictions arise, necessitating dyadic code-switching on the part of the generalizing picker. Such an immediate move of generalization, quite familiar to most of us as a daily perpetrator or victim, is not just hasty but automatic, and automatically wounding. It is never simply abstracting insofar as it emerges from specific contexts, carries material forces and produces political effects, micro- of macro-, individual or collective, often beyond individual control. Stereotypical thinking as an equalizing, self-stabilizing impulse of the mind is "activated" or "suppressed"[18] in water-tight reciprocity and highly coordinated seasonal randomness, not unlike those fluctuating graphs mobilizing the New York Stock Exchange.

Now, for a change of scenery, imagine this (minority) woman going out of (her) business, venturing into an international philosophy conference:

> When writers from oppressed races and nationalities have insisted that all writing is political the claim has been dismissed as foolish or grounded in *ressentiment* or it is simply ignored; when prestigious European philosophers say that all writing is political it is taken up as a new and original "truth."[19]

The stereotyping mind is a stereotyped mine, where truth arrives too early or too late. Space can tell—again, almost infinitely.

Imagine farther. You are a Twenty-first Century American Continental philosopher summering abroad, away from all such talks, all such clamoring Anglo-European theoretical scenes as above, and so—still out of professional habit or courtesy—you begin to cogitate, instead, on a Vietnamese prostitute you have just (de)toured into. Or imagine, you are a celebrated nineteenth-century southern American writer in Hawaii "voyeuristically focusing on the ... underdressed and over-perfumed"[20] women there. In either case, there would be indeed no end to this "paranoia you construct for yourself," if you allowed yourself to get caught up in that unfathomable monologue:

> Does she want to trap me by getting pregnant? ... Is she aiming for some kind of triumph in seducing a white man, one of the colonial race? Is it because the GIs were here during the Vietnam war that the local morality broke down and women started going to bed with foreign strangers? Then: what do her parents think of her and me, and

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> what does her society think? ... Another circle. And what about me? Is this a serious affair, which I will have to explain to my wife when I get back? Or is it a secret affair, which means something only to me? Another circle. . . . What will it mean when I go back to post as a university professor—will I miss this detour into exoticism? What will it mean when I teach ethics to young people, I who am harboring this secret life? Another circle. There is no end. This is how you construct a paranoia for yourself.[21]

And my point, again, is this: it is one thing to be self-deprecating, surgically self-exploratory even, and yet another to be duplicitously or blindly self-affirming of that vicious circle of social injustice and political imbalance, precisely of yet "another circle" globalized as such, literally or metaphorically. If, as incisively observed, "this is how you construct a paranoia for yourself," that is also how paranoia gets scripted through you, that particular way rather than some other ways. Watch that material specificity and narrative linearity, accentuated by the cloistered perspective here. In that kind of travelogue of a brooding globe-trotter, whatever colorful or dull stereotypes the reader would project into the voice of that journal, there is a thin but clear line between exquisite self-mockery and expansive self-indulgence, and what makes the latter stand out is the material historicity of the story, among others. Put simply, suffice to note that some of us still *are* or live like that "colonial race in the Third World" happily cocooned in that bubble:

> Ever since I got a job in academia I have spent all the time off in another country. . . . I do not make myself at home there, most of the time not knowing the language. But I pretty much do there what I do back in my home state: get up with the sun, write all morning, have lunch and go for a walk or a ride, read in the evening. [. . .] (F) or a good thirty years I have gone to Third World countries, it is even cheaper than staying in the U.S.[22]

"Even cheaper": here is a certain temptation, I confess, to see the portrait of an established thinker.

As Hilary Putnam observes, stereotype becomes not only a perceptual component but also a criteriological enabler, a narrative condition, for "description."[23] As colorfully and repeatedly illustrated above, it can blur

the very distinction between definition and description. This is when description gets "circularly"[24] built into definition and vice versa, and so description becomes no longer or more than accidental or peripheral. Quite clearly, Putnam's intention is to retain the categorical distinction and hierarchy between the two, as he seeks to contain stereotype as a kind of description but not definition, as "a standardized description of features of the kind that are typical, or 'normal'"[25] within his semantically holistic world. Again however, my own interest is in what Putnam later notes, although in passing, as "the extreme cases," the hyper-normalization or naturalization of stereotype, where "the stereotype may be *just* the marker: the stereotype of molybdenum might be just that molybdenum is *a metal*" (emphases in the original).[26] The cases we have been discussing *are* ones where a description does morph into something like a definition. Again, such hyperbolic overdeterminations and shortcuts in typecast cognitions in pedestrian thinking, illustrate how stereotype comes to functions as a pragmatic if not analytic[27] condition for linguistically codified and coordinated thinking, where, for example, "this (butt) is Brazilian" is not just a random composition. That pronouncement is not just an effect of one of hundred-something computational possibilities, e.g., British, Burmese, Nigerian, etc. Rather, it originates from and feeds back into the near-exclusive, para-figurative link between "butt" and "Brazil" as in "this (is a big, boosted) Brazilian butt," which is a familiar scene not only in the pornographic market but also throughout plastic surgery clinics and fitness centers across the Globe: this→Brazil→butt→Brazil→this is circuitous, indexically, reciprocally. It is almost as if Brazil itself were *inter alia* a derrière in such a psycho-culturally remapped, rewired zone of significations, around which various other smaller clichés would stick and swirl; similarly, as Richard Fung points out through his queer theorizing of racialized Asian masculinities, "Asian and anus are conflated,"[28] gone global, already three-dimensional.

How Is the Brazilian Butt Linked to Suzy Wong?

With this proleptic Brazilian detour, this (Asian lady) amateur philosopher is heading back to our starting point, a look at the naturalized—"extremely" normalized—epistemology of stereotyping, whereby stereotyped perceptions are cartographically crystallized and metonymically diffused into a networked series of altered names, improper names,

quasi-names; "this (Asian woman) is a China Doll, Dragon Lady, Geisha Girl, Lotus Flower, Madame Butterfly," etc., exchangeable and replaceable randomly at will. Stereotype can be (1) that specific, saliently strange, and context-bound; (2) that global, extensive, mutually damaging and impoverishing; and that, I am trying to say, (3) matters across the board, no matter what, and wherever and whoever you are.

Specificity remains local, while relevance is structurally expansive and intricate. If as Linda Alcoff says, "One cannot simply look at the location of the speaker or her credentials to speak; nor can one look merely at the propositional content of the speech; one must also look at where the speech goes and what it does there."[29] I am suggesting, in a similar vein, that we also look around what we are looking at. This goes back to the bifocalized task of "feeling being (part of) a problem," feeling with the intimate distance of a theorist on the go. This would mean to observe speech acts seriously philosophically. This would mean analyzing the behavioral patterns, including rhetorical tricks, of the language mobilized in nick-naming and quick-naming, as they often provide a micro-window into brute realities of social political frictions, distortions and injustices. Rather than just zooming in on some localized or isolatable episodes in "Third World" or "transnational" feminism, the historico-cultural dictates and deeply-rooted specifics of Asian female stereotypes along with effects of their rhetorical traffic are or should become a key issue in especially socio-cultural ontology and the feminist philosophy of language, let alone in critical race theory. When "feeling being a problem," when becoming part of those deadly alive words & images hurled around and through us, what we need to dig into, more broadly pointedly as it were, is the discursive space between them, namely, networks of significations:

> We should not define stereotypes in terms of their target group, their accuracy or inaccuracy, or whether they have or have not been produced by the larger culture. Such things may be true of some or most stereotypes, but to define stereotypes in terms of these features softens our focus on the more central features.[30]

So how do we articulate that nerve-center of stereotyping as a codified perceptual act? By shifting the focus of analysis from the "*content* of stereotypes to the *processes* of"[31] stereotypical thinking, to something like "a cognitive structure containing the perceiver's knowledge, beliefs and expectations about some human social group."[32] We should look dynamically at the very

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narrative interaction between what is being perceptually processed and how the process unfolds: the sociocultural inflection of perceptions. Given such a discursive complexity, as well as eventual fixity, of stereotype-formation, David Schneider's procedure-oriented, contextual account of stereotypes as "qualities *perceived to be* associated with particular groups or categories of people"[33] (emphasis added) is especially instructive. Again, what interests me philosophically is that apodictic, passive or passing "being," *being* perceived, to *be* associated, *as* a China doll as well as a Dragon lady—often at once. In brief, stereotyping, an act of flash-freezing one's own perceptions into one and only one at a time, indexicalizes its own ontological irresolution in the face of seemingly incompatible specificities, particularities, pluralities.

Who are these flat folks, supposed to live such associated and dissociative live simultaneously?—where and how *are* they clustered and circulated? And again, why do they matter? Because they materialize—through various figures of the woman of "color" who, framed and staged as such, would perform[34] their colored-ness, including Oriental yellow, just to pick one color out of "color," not colors. That is, the lack or absence of organic manifoldness in the world of stereotypical thinking does not necessarily entail that stereotype has no temporal agency of its own, although, it does remain monotonous and mono-colored as in, again, a woman of "color." The ghostly narrative and historiographical complexity of stereotype formation can be showcased through a woman of (Asian) color materializing, or machinizing herself, in the following way.

Entering *Suzie Wong* today, the red-lanterned Saki Lounge in New York City (547 27th Street), where you can sample cocktails such as The Geisha, Madame Butterfly, Ying-Yang, and so on, you are bound to meet a cast of Suzie Wongs reproduced from the seminal character in Richard Mason's 1957 novel, *The World of Suzie Wong*. There, Robert Lomax, a young British painter living in Hong Kong in search of inspiration, meets Suzie Wong, a Chinese prostitute specializing in colonial mistressing a la Madam Butterfly, whose golden heart Mason found irresistible; at least the Brit took her in eventually as a legitimate girlfriend, whereas Pinkerton, the Yankee, didn't, so goes the story. Three years later, 1960, this same old story, of Boy-Meets-Girl-and-East-Meets-West, with a new twist was then cinematized by another Robert (Quine) in the United State, where "Suzie Wong" went viral. This trans-Continental arrival, adoption and assimilation of Suzy Wong was a commercial success, but the other side of the matter

remains dark and messy; this postwar daughter of Madama Butterfly with a universal Oriental accent has been reproduced, circulated and consumed in the theatre near you as well as the under-world of porn industry, mail bride industry, global sex trafficking, etc., to the point where Suzie Wong still functions as a virtual name attached to any yellow(-looking/sounding/tasting/smelling) women allegedly touched, if not completely altered, by the modern West.

At once caught up in and generating this loose but robust system of associative referrals or strategic deferrals, "Suzie Wong" drawn from the fictional character, itself a historically layered construct, has become an enabling device for identifying, indexicalizing, naturalizing, Suzie Wong; recall Putnam on "extreme" cases of stereotyping, which, seen this way, seems not that extreme. The capital basis for this fantasy business might be phantasmagoric, and its business, normal or normalized "at any rate," but its harm remains literal, and its reach, global, as King-Kok Cheung points out, citing Elaine Kim:

> The stereotype of Asian women as submissive and dainty sex objects has given rise to an "enormous demand for X-rated films featuring Asian women and the emphasis on bondage in pornographic materials about Asian women," and that "the popular image of alluring and exotic 'dream girls of the mysterious East' has created a demand for 'Oriental' bath house workers in American cities as well as a booming business in mail order marriages."[35]

Again: stereotyping, this "mugging by metaphor," can be as literal as marrying a butterfly; also to the extent that the butterfly has to allow you to marry her in order to survive.

To fast-forward: how does Suzie Wong un-become, un-do, *Suzie Wong*?—or does she? Besides, with a name like that, *Wong*, could she ever become a Betty Friedan or a bell hooks?—maybe in an American-Obamaian dream? From where does she draw a sense of social agency as well as political urgency and futurity? In the year 2012, can we imagine Suzie Wong the post-Orientalist feminist critic or else action hero, for instance? When one is not born but *becomes* an Asiatic woman, she comes to belong to something other/less/more than the second sex, the female, the woman, the feminine subject, of and through which Simone de Beauvoir speaks in *The Second Sex*. Rather again, the Asiatic woman, still and often existing in

ominous caricatures, in their second names, appears to embody and enact something like the third sex a la and contra Beauvoir: the second sex of the Third World, the secondary second sex.[36]

Such sedimented layers and ghettoized directions of that ghostly third at work are embodied and embedded in the on-going complex lives of "Suzy Wong," named and responded to as such, the metonymically axiomatized figures of "the woman of color (=) the Third World woman," often constructed "under Western eyes,"[37] as Chandra Monhanty put it, already almost a generation ago. My suggestion, not so much new as more networked as it were, is then we approach Suzie Wong, this third woman, from at least a three dimensional intersection of feminism and critical race theory—the idea being that this "third," the post-Beauvoirean second, also beyond the black/white binary as well as male/female, could function as a kind of formal metonym for another dimension yet to be discovered from within and alongside any gendered, raced, and class-bound thoughts. Let there be the fourth dimension in a three dimensional world, the fifth in a four, and so on ... then perhaps we could all go, at least, beyond the *One-dimensional Man*[38] placated by the techno-mutation of oppositional dialectic, and away from the *One-dimensional Woman*[39] (Power 2009) consumed by self-deceptive positivism and utopian fantasy today.

NOTES

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3. Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 207), 140.
4. Moustafa Bayoumi, *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?: Being Young and Arab in America* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008).
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11. Claude M. Steele and Joshua Aronson, "Stereotype Threat and the Intellectual Test-Performance of African-Americans," *Journal of personality and Social Psychology* 69, no. 5 (1995): 797–811.
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16. Cited in Trinh Minh-ha, Trinh T., *Elsewhere, Within Here*: Immigration, Refugeeism and the Boundary Event (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2011), 36.
17. Ibid., 93.
18. David Schneider, *The Psychology of Stereotyping* (New York: Guilford Press, 2004), 426.
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21. Alphonso Lingis, "Language and Persecution," in *Between Deleuze and Derrida*, ed. Paul Patton and John Protevi (London: Continuum, 2003), 175–76.
22. Alphonoso Lingis, "The Steppe," *Naked Punch* 5 (2005): 59–70, 62–63.
23. Putnam, "The Meaning of 'Meaning,'" 229–30.
24. Robert K. Shope, *The Nature of Meaningfulness: Representing, Powers, and Meaning* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 168.
25. Putnam, "The Meaning of 'Meaning,'" 230.
26. Ibid., 229–30.
27. Ibid., 230.
28. Richard Fung, "Looking for My Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay Video Porn," in *How Do I Look? Queer Film & Video*, ed. Bad Object-Choices (Organization) (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), 153.
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30. Schneider, *The Psychology of Stereotyping*, 24.
31. Ibid., 12.
32. C. Neil Macrae, Charles Stangor, and Miles Hewstone, *Stereotypes and Stereotyping* (New York: Guilford Press, 1996), 42.

33. Schneider, *The Psychology of Stereotyping*, 24
34. Josephine Lee, *Performing Asian America: Race and Ethnicity on the Contemporary Stage* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1997); especially chapter 4, "The Seduction of the Stereotype," 89–135.
35. King-Kok Cheung, "The Woman Warrior Versus the Chinaman Pacific: Must a Chinese American Critic Choose between Feminism and Heroism?," in *Conflicts in Feminism*, ed. Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller (New York: Routledge, 1990), 235.
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