

## PANAATM LIVES!

*Kwok Pui-lan and Rachel A. R. Bundang*

On October 5, 1984, thirteen women, predominantly Asian graduate students in theological institutions and several working in ministry in the United States, gathered at the home of Professor Letty Russell. The meeting was convened by the Women's Theological Center in Boston and the Ad Hoc Group on Racism, Sexism, and Classism in New York. Out of this small gathering the network called Asian Women Theologians, Northeast U.S. Group, was formed. Within a year, a small group of Asian American women were added to the group from the West Coast, who had been affiliated with PACTS (the Pacific and Asian Center for Theology and Strategy). The first annual conference of the Asian Women Theologians, Northeast U.S. Group, was held February 22–23, 1985, in Madison, Connecticut. During the initial years, local small groups would meet in Boston; New Haven; New York; Princeton; Madison, New Jersey; and Claremont, and the annual conferences were held in the Northeast. To connect with theological movements spearheaded by women of color, representatives from womanist and *mujerista* theology were invited to early meetings. The support of Katie Cannon, Ada María Isasi-Díaz, and Elsa Tamez was invaluable. As the network expanded, seminarians, faculty, graduate students, and clergymen in other cities, including Atlanta, Toronto, Chicago, and Berkeley, took turns to host the conferences. The name of the network has undergone several changes; the group adopted its current name, Pacific, Asian, and North American Asian Women in Theology and Ministry (PANAATM), in 1996.

As a grassroots movement, PANAATM has grown from a primarily academic supportive network for theological students to include issues and concerns of those preparing for church and social ministries. Letty Russell and Shannon Clarkson assumed the tasks of fund-raising and managing the business side of the network for many years. When a significant number of the early members had earned their doctorates and become faculties and adminis-

trators in theological education and religious studies, they assumed the responsibilities of faculty advisers, raising funds and working with local groups to host the annual conference. As new advisers have been added periodically, the board of faculty advisers has grown to consist of women from a wide range of denominations and academic backgrounds, including biblical studies, theology, religious education, Asian traditions, Asian American religion, ethnic studies, and sociology of religion. To make the network more visible, a Web site was created in the summer of 2004 (<http://www.panaawtm.org/>).

### **What Is in a Name?**

After the group's inception, as the membership and concerns of the network broadened, its name became longer and more inclusive to recognize and call attention to the complex historical, cultural, linguistic, and class backgrounds of members. Early on, we became keenly aware that the issues and struggles of Asian and Asian American women are very different, though we may look similar from the outside.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the name of the group was expanded to become Asian and Asian American Women Theologians in 1986. We have found that whereas Asian women identify primarily with their countries of origin, nationalities, languages, and cultural backgrounds, Asian American women speak of their hyphenated identities and their marginal positions situated on the boundaries of different groups. Though both groups have to fight sexism and classism, Asian American women are concerned about racism and issues of peace and social justice, whereas their Asian counterparts point to colonialism, neocolonialism, dictatorship, violence, and militarism as root causes for their marginalization. Their divergent social locations and sets of priorities were clearly reflected in the essays in a special section on Asian and Asian American women and religion in an early issue of *JFSR*.<sup>2</sup>

In an essay in that special section, Naomi Southard and Rita Nakashima Brock point out that Asian women who have a home in Asian countries have a community to speak with and for; but "Asian American women live in tension between several 'worlds'—between Asia and the United States, between tradition and contemporary life, between religious institutions and secular society. . . . Our perspectives place each of us on the boundaries between these and other 'worlds,' reflecting our efforts to balance pressures created by living in several worlds at once."<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Southard and Brock articulate the dif-

<sup>1</sup> See Kwok Pui-lan, "Diversity within Us: The Challenge of Community among Asian and Asian-American Women," *In God's Image* 15, no. 1 (1996): 51–53.

<sup>2</sup> See the special section on Asian and Asian American women, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 3, no. 2 (Fall 1987): 103–50.

<sup>3</sup> Naomi Southard and Rita Nakashima Brock, "The Other Half of the Basket: Asian American Women and the Search for a Theological Home," in *ibid.*, 137.

ferent responses toward feminism between the two groups. Most of the Asian group, they surmise, are more recently educated and benefit from the surge in feminist scholarship, which has much to offer in raising the consciousness of Asian women when critically adapted to the Asian contexts. Asian American women, however, maintain a more ambivalent attitude toward feminism because of the experiences of racism by and cultural insensitivity of many white feminists and of the invisibility of Asian American women in feminist dialogues.<sup>4</sup>

The distinct experience of the two groups is further compounded by the fact that white America treats Asians and Asian Americans quite differently. Women with an Asian appearance are constantly bombarded with the question, "Where are you from?" One receives different treatments if the answer is California or Korea, China, or India. Many white people tend to be more hospitable to Asian women because of the stereotypical impression that these gentle souls are from poor and ultrapatriarchal countries and therefore command their compassion. But those from San Francisco, Chicago, or other North American cities are here to stay, and they are often treated as second-class citizens competing for scarce resources and opportunities. It is easier to deal with issues farther away than with racism at home. Even as we were wrestling with the tension between the labels "Asian" and "Asian American," the increase of Asian Canadian members brought to the surface the fact that the social construct of race and the treatment of Asian immigrants are quite different in Canada than in the United States. Because of the hegemony of the United States, "Asian American" often refers to Asians in the United States, whereas Asian Canadians remain invisible. Responding to this challenge, the group changed its name in 1996, from Asian and Asian American Women in Theology and Ministry, to Pacific, Asian, and North American Asian Women in Theology and Ministry. ("Ministry" had been added in 1991 to signify that not all members are theological students or intend to pursue a theological career, and that a significant number work in churches and social ministries.)

The discussion of the different shapes of meaning of "Asia" and "Asian" intensified in the mid-1990s, partly because of the critique of essentialism in feminist theory and partly because of the challenge of postcolonial criticism.<sup>5</sup> We found out that there is no common definition of "Asia," as its meaning can be traced to very different settings and genealogies. As a geographical designation, the term has been constructed vis-à-vis the West and carries much

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 147–48.

<sup>5</sup> See the discussion in Kwok Pui-lan, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-biblical World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 24–28; Wong Wai Ching, "Negotiating for a Postcolonial Identity: Theology of 'the Poor Woman' in Asia," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 16, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 5–23; and Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 34–36.

colonial baggage. During the cold-war era, “Asia” was constituted as a region of study for strategic purposes in the newly created area studies in American universities. But for those who had been involved in contextual theology in Asia since the 1970s, the name “Asian theology” signified a collective consciousness to search for cultural and theological autonomy against Western hegemony. This history is underscored by the fact that 2005 is the fiftieth anniversary of the Bandung Conference in Indonesia, in which Asian and African nations met for the first time without the white gaze and adopted the term “third world” to signify their anti-imperial stance. But for Koreans who have been under not Western but Japanese colonial domination, the construct of “Pan-Asianism” was deployed in the early twentieth century as part of Japan’s colonial ideology to rule over other Asian countries. Given this painful colonial history, Nami Kim questions the continued practice of constructing identity “in terms of continents” in feminist theology and religious discourse, which risks reinscribing the nationalist rhetoric.<sup>6</sup>

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 (a small minority in the United States) came to call themselves “Asian Americans” over against the earlier terms used to describe them, such as “Jap,” “Chink,” “yellow,” and “Oriental.” As a social construct, the term “Asian American” arose out of a particular historical moment to signify a visible racial group and had profound political implications. Asian Americans have been subjected to very contrasting stereotypes in popular imagination. On the one hand, we have been seen as the “yellow peril” and subjected to anti-Asian laws, lynching, and racial discrimination. On the other hand, during the black power movement, we became the “model minority” who overcame racism and succeeded in climbing the social ladder through discipline, hard work, and submission to authority. Yet “Asia” still invokes much of the same old orientalism in people’s minds. As an adjective to designate identity and difference, Rita Nakashima Brock has observed that “Asian” and “black” conjure different meanings in white imagination. The term “black” reminds white people of American racism, slavery, and guilt, whereas “Asian” refers to foreigners and often conjures exoticism, danger, and hypersexuality.<sup>7</sup>

These different genealogies of the meaning of “Asia” clearly demonstrate that any essentialized notion of “Asia” is doomed. The diversity within PANAAWTM reminds us to hold these various shades of meaning in creative

<sup>6</sup> Nami Kim, response to the roundtable discussion “Feminist Studies in Religion and Theology In-Between Nationalism and Globalization,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 137–41, and her article in this issue.

<sup>7</sup> Rita Nakashima Brock shared this at the PANAAWTM annual conference, Norcross, GA, April 8, 2005.

tension and points to the need for understanding the social and political constructions of "Asia" and their deployment in particular historical and political contexts. As the twenty-first century has been labeled as the "Pacific century," we must scrutinize how globalization has affected the region politically and economically and influenced religious experience and cultural production from transnational and transpacific perspectives.<sup>8</sup>

### Creating a New Field

During the 2001 PANAAWTM annual conference, in Chicago, Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite introduced the opening panel by saying that the women in the group had created a new field. When the group was formed, in 1985, no one dreamed that the group would have survived after twenty years; then, "the field" was nowhere on the horizon. In hindsight, we see that members of PANAAWTM have contributed to this new discourse on Asian and Asian North American feminist theology and religious studies through research and publishing, the creation of institutional spaces and public forums, and mentoring the upcoming generation.

Over the years, PANAAWTM has encouraged its members to share their theological reflections and results of their research with the public. Members have published essays for both the faith communities and the academy in the Asian women's journal *In God's Image*, in *JFSR*, and in other theological and religious journals. The publications of PANAAWTM members as well as several bibliographies can be found on its Web site. In addition, some of the annual conference papers have been published,<sup>9</sup> and members have collaborated on the special issue "Asian and Asian American Women's Voices" of the *Journal of Asian and Asian American Theology*.<sup>10</sup> To celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the group, an anthology documenting the history, critical issues, and future trends of scholarship will be published in the near future.

The annual conferences of PANAAWTM have created a public forum and have provided support for members and local grassroots leaders to try out their ideas. The themes of the annual conferences have varied and included a broad range of topics, such as solidarity among Asian and Asian American women;

<sup>8</sup> See Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC Duke University Press, 1996), and Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship The Cultural Logic of Transnationality* (Durham, NC Duke University Press, 1999)

<sup>9</sup> See Nantawan Boonprasat Lewis, ed., *An Ocean with Many Shores Asian Women Making Connections in Theology and Ministry* (Boston: Asian Women Theologians, Northeast U.S. Group, n.d.), and the papers in *In God's Image* 4, no. 16 (1997). Rachel Bundang was instrumental in gathering the papers for publication.

<sup>10</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, ed., "Asian and Asian American Women's Voices," special issue, *Journal of Asian and Asian American Theology* 2, no. 1 (Summer 1997)

Asian women and the body; healing women and healing the earth; religious texts and interpretation; being Asian and women, and the resulting implications for the church and ministry; and embodying the spirit through interfaith perspectives. Since its inception, PANAAWTM has sought to participate actively in theological conversations in the United States and Canada and to affect the academy, where much of the theological curriculum is still defined by white, male, and Eurocentric norms to the exclusion of other voices. PANAAWTM members were responsible for organizing the first panel on Asian women's theology as part of the Women and Religion Section at the American Academy of Religion (AAR) annual conference, in Anaheim, California, in November 1985. This program then led to the first panel by Asian American women at the AAR conference in San Francisco, California, in 1992, in which several PANAAWTM members took part and addressed the theme of resources for justice and wholeness. As a result of this panel, the Asian North American Religion, Society, and Culture Group was formed as an ongoing program unit of the AAR. To highlight the diversity among Asian and Asian American women, PANAAWTM was instrumental in organizing the 1994 Chicago, Illinois, AAR panel "The Impact of National Histories on the Politics of Identity."<sup>11</sup>

PANAAWTM members recognized the need to create institutional spaces and connections with other groups to promote cross-fertilization of ideas and scholarship. Rita Nakashima Brock played a key role in organizing the first Consultation on Asian North American Theologies, held at the 2002 annual meeting of the AAR, in Toronto, Ontario. Jane Naomi Iwamura was instrumental in starting the Asian Pacific Americans and Religion Research Institute (APARRI). PANAAWTM members also maintained contacts with other theological networks and institutions, such as the Institute for Leadership Development and Study of Pacific and Asian North American Religion (PANA) at the Pacific School of Religion, the Congress of Asian Theologians, and the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT). Jung Ha Kim currently serves as the coordinator of the U.S.-minorities group of EATWOT.

For the development of PANAAWTM, we recognized early on the need to mentor the next generation. As there were a growing number of doctoral students whose schools did not have faculty advisers who knew about Asian or Asian North American cultures and histories, we began to offer, in 1997, a doctoral seminar concurrent with the annual conference. In these seminars students shared their dissertation proposals and works in progress and received feedback. We also discussed issues such as choosing and working with advisers, writing strategies, presenting papers at academic conferences, publication, job interviews, career development, self-care, and networking. Such mentoring

<sup>11</sup> The papers from this panel can be found in *ibid.*, 95–118.

was invaluable in helping these doctoral students to finish their programs, and a few then became faculty advisers to give back to the network that had nurtured them. According to statistics from the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), the percentage of Asian and Asian American or Asian Canadian faculty, including both males and females, is about 3 to 4 percent.<sup>12</sup> The majority of these faculty teach in institutions that are predominantly white; in most cases they are the sole Asian or Asian North American member on the whole faculty. To explore institutional isolation and constraints and to promote critical dialogues on creative instructional strategies, PANAATM applied for funding to conduct research on the teaching of Asian and Asian American or Asian Canadian women's theologies. The resulting 1999 report was distributed to Asian and Asian North American faculty, as well as to member schools of the ATS.<sup>13</sup>

### PANAATM Theology

As PANAATM prepared for the celebration of its twentieth anniversary, Rita Nakashima Brock, Kwok Pui-lan, and Seung-Ai Yang coauthored a paper on the future of PANAATM theology and identified several clusters of issues.<sup>14</sup> First, PANAATM theology will need to develop paradigms for theology and religious studies that affirm our multicultural and multireligious contexts. Because of the legacy of colonialism, many of us have been taught to devalue our heritages to the extent that our Asian religious and cultural resources have not been emphasized in doing theology. When these cultural resources are made available to Asian North Americans, they are often mediated through white scholarship and heavily influenced by racism and orientalism, especially that of the cold-war era. When Asian male theologians have broken from the grid of colonialism to indigenize theology in Asia, their focus has been on elite male cultures to the exclusion of women's contributions. Postcolonial theories have pointed to the danger of orientalism, as well as the danger of a nativist approach that tends to create a homogeneous national culture, often based on the reification of one religious tradition, interpreted androcentrically. Furthermore, the colonial legacies of defining "religion" based on Western history and conceptualizing "religious studies" using Christianity as a prototype

<sup>12</sup> These statistics can be found at <http://www.ats.edu/>.

<sup>13</sup> Rita Nakashima Brock et al., "Developing Teaching Materials and Instructional Strategies for Teaching Asian and Asian American/Canadian Women's Theologies in North America," found at <http://www.panaawtm.org/>.

<sup>14</sup> This section of the article is based on Rita Nakashima Brock, Kwok Pui-lan, and Seung-Ai Yang, "The Future of PANAATM Theology," found at <http://www.panaawtm.org/>. Quotations are from this essay.

have failed to account for the lived experiences and multireligious realities of Asian societies. The authors affirm that,

[t]hroughout its [Christianity's] history, Christian thinkers and leaders have adopted and assimilated cultures and values of their own and of their neighbors. While we recognize the colonial legacy of Christianity in Asia in shaping our Christian feminist scholarship, we are also cognizant of our own backgrounds, interrogating not only Western Christianity but also constructions of gender and power in Asian religions and in Asian North America.

The second cluster of issues relates to a construction of theological anthropology and understandings of religious life that takes serious consideration of the complexities of gender, race, culture, colonial history, class, and sexual orientation. Specifically this requires debunking the autonomous, masculine, and transcendental subject in much of Western theology and articulating "a fluid and relational social self, a communal understanding of existence, and an embodied way of knowing as well as practicing religious life." From such a multiple subject position, we can begin to imagine a multilayered and multiaxial biblical and theological hermeneutics that will do justice to the multilayered experiences inscribed in both the written texts and oral traditions and to lift up the suppressed and silenced voices. In developing this inclusive theological anthropology, we need to be in dialogue with other theological movements, including those among racial minorities and in the third world, that are sensitive to power, identity, and their imbrications with theology.

Third, we recognize that many of the racialized stereotypes and fantasies are linked to the objectification of the body and sexuality. Sexuality and sexual norms are intimately tied with economics, politics, race, and power. And although we have discussed the impact of sexual exploitation of women and children, sex tourism, and orientalized stereotypes of Asian women, we have just begun conversations on a sexual theology based on a broad range of understanding of embodiment and sexuality. Even though we had offered workshops on Asian women's body and sexuality, it was not until 2004 that we devoted a substantial amount of time to discuss sexual orientation through the lens of multiple religious traditions. Sexuality, still a taboo subject in Asian communities, is often relegated to the private and familial realms. During the debate on same-sex marriage in the United States, some of the leaders of Asian evangelical churches displayed homophobic attitudes based on their conservative reading of the Bible. A healthy sexual theology from the Asian and Asian North American faith community must examine the interplay of colonialism, racism, and homophobia, and must integrate elements of more diverse and celebratory understandings of sexuality in Asian traditions. Hence, "our theologies of sexuality will maintain a dialogue with Asian wisdoms, sexual stories, and experi-

ences about the dangers and wonders of embodied life. In addition, this sexual theology will examine the relation between the private and the public in the construction of sexuality in our communities.”

Fourth, PANAAWTM must develop diverse and interdisciplinary methodologies that honor the rich experiences and generational differences among us. Such theology will destabilize the entrenched patterns of binary either/or, white/other constructs and will speak from the in-between, hybridized spaces, remaining open to redefinition and negotiation. We want to dialogue with pro-feminist men in developing new ideas about social selves, possibilities for new religious communities and healthy gender relations, and harmonious living with nature. To be able to do this, our theology must keep abreast of and be open to insights from other disciplines that are challenging the white academy, such as ethnic studies, cultural studies, and postcolonial theories.

Fifth, in many Asian cultures religion is not a separate domain; rather, it pervades the culture and is grounded in day-to-day rituals and spiritual practices. One of the highlights of PANAAWTM conferences has been the rituals and worship services that celebrate the gift of life and bind us together. PANAAWTM theology is rooted in the myriad cultural and ritual forms that sustain us and offer us courage and hope to face life’s circumstances. It involves not only a spirituality of struggle and perseverance but also a spirituality of letting go, of accepting what Buddhists have taught about impermanence and the fragility of life. It is only through reconnecting with the spiritual wisdom and resources of our ancestors that our theology can be a life-giving source for our religious communities and ourselves.

### Theological Dialogue between Generations

If our Latina/o colleagues cross lines of national origin and Christian denomination to speak of doing theology *latinamente* and *en conjunto*, the development of PANAAWTM religious scholarship analogously feels like a family project. And it involves not just a nuclear family, with parents and children alone, but also the extended clan, with aunts, uncles, and cousins several times removed. This is in part because of the multiplicity and vastness of subjects and issues we want to include: immigrant versus native; alien versus citizen; native speaker versus English-only speaker; racialized ethnic versus automatically (Anglo-)American; “full-blooded” versus *hapa* (mixed-race); Christian versus Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, or something else. Our thinking and theorizing about the nature of the divine, our ritual practices, and our experiences of living with the sacred all *make* and *reflect* these worlds.

Given this diversity, a strong focus on the particular will continue, for there is still so much of value to be learned and recovered from distinct communities and traditions, for so much is still unknown. But, as Asian North American

communities make homes here—settling, acculturating, and redefining themselves in new contexts—we must consider how we connect with each other and the wider world. Religions, cultures, and communities that are uprooted and replanted do not survive in new ground if they cannot adapt to local soil. Related to this issue is generational difference as the movement develops. The first stages of liberation movements—in theology and in others—lift up the stories of the silenced, the forgotten, the dispossessed. But, rich as they may be, autobiography and storytelling cannot be made holy grails, cannot be ends in themselves. For a movement to survive and to make sense from one generation to the next, it is vital to look beyond our immediate selves, our autobiographies, to create something more flexible and nuanced, more porous and firm, more textured and inclusive. This in turn means that analysis and critical reflection are essential. Lived experience, teaching, history, and memory all have to serve as checks on each other—what do we know, and how do we come to know it—and it is from this sifting and refining that theory is born. Such theory provides the point of connection from the particular to the universal, from the inwardly turned enclave to the expanse of the world. The particular will continue to shape and define close to home, but the greater, eventual, and more necessary challenge is to understand the home within a bigger whole.

A generation, of course, does not solely mean a set range of ages or dates of birth. It must be understood more broadly, more metaphorically, to encompass our shared experiences and questions, our scholarly vintages and formations, our waves of immigration, and what we call home and how long we have been here. So approaching Christian theology and ethics—let alone religious studies more broadly—with sensitivity to generational hallmarks, shifts, questions, and commitments takes on a special significance among PANAAWTM women who choose to invest themselves in unraveling the thick knots of identity and belonging. One can liken this community of discourse to trees in the rain forest, the ones that seem to grow in all directions at once. We root down into the earth, feeding deeply on our past. We shoot up toward the light, piercing the canopy, striving to taste the world. And as we age, our trunks and branches thicken, growing with the weight of experience.

On one level, we younger scholars engage in the work of teaching, knowledge production, and reflection like our predecessors. But we have learned from the previous generation of women scholars the value and necessity of widening the canon, redefining what is worth studying, and asking new and different questions. For us, the expansion is a given already. The academy demands that we be unflinching in our critique of others' works, including the works of the generation before us, whereas personal lives and commitments demand that we represent with care these lives and the agency they demonstrate. That means honoring secrets and boundaries, keeping some things private and silent, just as much as it does drawing the veil aside.

Another ongoing tension is how to embrace critically, lovingly, and respectfully the resources and debates within one's own faith tradition. It is not just a locus of colonial domination, it is also a holding space for decolonization. For some of us, the faith community provides a respite from the intensely racializing tendency of the academy, allowing us to hold our multiple identities and commitments together even when they conflict. It may be one of the few places where we can be most ourselves, with all the different parts in tension and contradiction. It allows us the breathing room of "both/and" and preserves those precious "interstitial integrities."<sup>15</sup> It also gives us a place to claim our spiritual authority and leadership, and to be held accountable.

In a sense, younger scholars must engage in the art of improvising in the unknown as we take root to grow and change, to forge new intellectual, social, and spiritual ground. This means living at the intersection of imagination and discernment. The notions of home, authenticity, and alienation versus belonging, as well as the values and abuses of silence, will continue to engage us in the years to come. For women of Asian and Pacific descent living and working in diaspora, we are quite likely at the edge of imagining our multiple communities into interreligious and interethnic/panethnic realities and futures—with seemingly endless menus of choices and possibilities—that our parents may never have imagined. In our commitment to finding and developing our theological voices, we are driven to cross lines to get whatever we need. This includes cultivating networks, friendships, and mentoring relationships across racial/ethnic, disciplinary, denominational, and generational lines.

Among the younger scholars who are engaged in the development and articulation of feminist theology and ethics, the hermeneutic of suspicion is alive and well. Taking stock of our particularities of race, ethnicity, culture, and history, we unleash that suspicion on the traditions we have been fed—not just the classics of the church fathers and their ilk but also the work of thinkers in the newer, more contemporary, supposedly more inclusive canon. We turn that gaze on our broader sphere of experience and knowledge as well as on the academy. Especially as we shift from the second to the third wave and beyond, we face the unenviable but necessary and sticky task of questioning what (we think) we know and how (we think) we have come to know it, deciding whether to save, discard, or shelve and revisit it later. To keep the stream of ideas flowing, we play equal parts magpie, improviser, and *bricoleur*, performing the triple task of retrieval, (re)examination, and (re)construction.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Rita Nakashima Brock, "Interstitial Integrity: Reflections toward an Asian American Woman's Theology," in *Introduction to Christian Theology: Contemporary North American Perspectives*, ed. Roger Badham (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 183–96.

<sup>16</sup> Jane Naomi Iwamura, "Homage to Ancestors: Exploring the Horizons of Asian American Religious Identity," *Amerasia Journal* 22, no. 1 (1996): 165–66.

As this community of discourse continues to settle, change, and grow, the overarching challenge is to see more clearly and navigate more deftly the entanglements among religion, culture, and empire. This means continuing the inquiry on two fronts. On one hand, there are external movements, trends, and drives, such as decolonization, orientalism, and panethnicity, that continue to play out and must be addressed intellectually. These affect not only how we think but also, and more important, how our communities live and see themselves socially and spiritually. How can our scholarship help them thrive and live most fully? On the other hand, we need to deal with internal issues and subject ourselves to the same critical scrutiny we would levy on others. These issues include examining and addressing power relations within our own tribe, the Eurocentrism and androcentrism of our home communities and faiths, the replication and perpetuation of negative feminisms at the expense of liberative ones, and the next generation's need and push to articulate itself. How can Asian and Asian North American women scholars—racialized as we are—best find some sort of integration, learn to talk with each other, and be true colleagues? Where does the accountability of our feminist project lie, and how do we keep our work honest?

Intergenerational dialogue in feminist theology and ethics, as in religious studies of any stripe, is not new at all. The stream and tradition of these discourses is such that we evolve by engaging the ideas of those who have come before us, those who are our colleagues in reflection and praxis, and ultimately those who provided our source materials. Simply put, however we are inspired, our ideas arise and take shape through our work. PANAAWTM women in this field are poised to claim intellectual and public spaces in which to engage these discourses and each other.



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