

Synkrētīc



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Filipino Philosophy?*

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Inspired by Martin Heidegger's *What is Philosophy?*, the question 'what is Filipino philosophy?' entails the logical presumption that there is a Filipino philosophy. But is there really?

Undeniably, philosophy is fundamentally Greek. The Greek mathematician Pythagoras coined the term *philosophia* from the words *philos* or *philia* and *sophos* or *sophia*. Their nominal meanings are associated with "love, passion, or friend" and "wisdom" respectively. But it is not only by way of etymology that philosophy is said to be Greek, for the Western tradition claims that philosophy itself started in Greece. The father of philosophy, Socrates, was Greek and the first philosophers were Greeks.

The term 'Greek philosophy' is therefore a tautology.¹ It is tautological because philosophy is Greek by its very nature. For this reason, even 'Western philosophy' is practically redundant. As a necessary consequence, 'philosophy' implies that it is precisely Greek and Western. So, to speak of 'Western philosophy' or 'Greek philosophy' is to fall into the logic of redundancy. I will make use of wine as an analogy. By definition, 'wine' results from the fermentation of grapes. 'Grape wine', then, is a tautology.

The word 'logic' was coined by a Greek thinker, Parmenides, from the Greek word *logos*, which may mean reason or discourse.² If

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philosophy is ‘love of wisdom’ and we search for wisdom using logic, then logic is the tool of every philosophical inquiry. Even the tool of philosophy is Greek. How is it possible to argue that there is non-Greek logic if logic originated in Greece and was systematically developed by a Greek thinker, Aristotle, who is regarded as the father of logic?³

This is the reason why ‘Chinese philosophy’, ‘Indian philosophy’, and all other ‘Eastern philosophies’ are not acknowledged as legitimate philosophies because they are non-Greek, i.e. non-Western. In short, to classify them as philosophies is an error. To classify certain products as ‘strawberry wine’, ‘rice wine’, etc., is similarly an error as ‘wine’ is the product of fermented grapes.

For these reasons, there can be no Filipino philosophy, properly speaking. How could there be a Filipino philosophy when, as Alfred North Whitehead famously concluded in *Process and Reality*, the ‘safest general characterization of philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato?’⁴

Still, some thinkers claim and insist that Filipino philosophy exists on the grounds that a philosophy is Filipino if the author’s language, citizenship, or categories are Filipino.

The first argument is problematic. Merely translating Plato’s texts from Greek to Filipino neither makes his philosophy Filipino, nor alters the identity of philosophy itself.

Secondly, the philosopher’s citizenship is not a sufficient condition either. I would not consider Plato’s philosophy Filipino even if, hypothetically, he became a naturalised Filipino citizen.

Lastly, it is even harder to establish a Filipino philosophy based on the categories used. Which categories could be agreed to be

authentic Filipino? Their claimed cultural purity would in most cases be highly dubious.

Despite the impossibility of there being a Filipino philosophy, there can still be Filipino philosophers. Although philosophy is Greek, we can distinguish a German from a French, American, or Filipino philosopher. Each uses their own vernacular to philosophise in originally Greek categories, so to speak.

A philosopher is not identified by their citizenship but by their nationality.⁵ Paulo Freire⁶ is a Brazilian philosopher because his nationality is Brazilian, even if he changed citizenship. Yet, we cannot say that Paulo Freire's philosophy is a, let alone the, Brazilian philosophy.

In like manner, we cannot generalise about German philosophy on basis of Martin Heidegger's works. Nor do Jacques Derrida's works give us a privileged insight into something called French philosophy. Nationality, therefore, is prefixed to a philosopher's name not for the purposes of induction or generalisation but of identification.

As Fr. Ranhilio Aquino argued, the idea of a purely Filipino philosophy is no less absurd than that of a British physics, a German mathematics, or a Greek geometry. If it 'is in the nature of science in fact to be no respecter of national boundaries,' as he asked, 'should that be less true of philosophy?'⁷

Who, then, is a Filipino philosopher?

One is said to be a Filipino philosopher if, despite the cultural Greekness of philosophy's methods, one is rooted to the Filipino historical experience. But because the discipline of philosophy is a system of references, rules, and standards imposed by the West, one is only crowned with the title of philosopher for playing its game.

Whenever we talk about Filipino philosophy, we are using the West's standards as a yardstick to measure and judge non-western systems of thought.

Notes

1. Martin Heidegger, *What is Philosophy?* (Washington: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 1956), 109.

2. Ed. – See Robert Sherrick Brumbaugh, *The philosophers of Greece* (New York: SUNY Press, 1981), 50.

3. Ed. – For an introduction to Aristotle's logic, a collection of works known as the *Organon*, see Robin Smith, 'Aristotle's Logic', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), available at: <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/aristotle-logic/>>.

4. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1969), 39.

5. 'The philosopher must be a citizen of no country'. Michael Walzer quoting Ludwig Wittgenstein, 'Philosophy and Democracy', in *Political Theory*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (August 1981): 379.

6. Ed. – Paulo Freire was an influential philosopher of education who founded the critical pedagogy movement. See *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Penguin, 1985).

7. Fr. Ranhilio C. Aquino, 'Filipino Philosophy?', in *The Manila Times*, 19 June 2019, available at: <<https://bit.ly/3pu9VB7>>.