11-1-2008

Resisting and Transforming: Pastoral Theology and Care of Korean Military Wives

Bocheol Chang
University of Denver

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd

Part of the Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons, and the Social Psychology Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd/119

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies at Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact jennifer.cox@du.edu,dig-commons@du.edu.
RESISTING AND TRANSFORMING: PASTORAL THEOLOGY AND CARE OF KOREAN MILITARY WIVES

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the University of Denver and the Iliff School of Theology Joint PhD Program

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Bocheol Chang

November 2008

Advisor: Dr. Carrie Doehring
ABSTRACT

Korean military wives have been symbolized as “dirty,” “nothing,” and “evil” by Koreans, Korean Americans, and their American families. They also experience same level of oppression and discrimination within Korean American congregations. In Korea, the women suffered poverty, sexual violence, and Confucian gender discrimination. They have also experienced racial and sexual oppression, intercultural familial conflicts and violence, and identity crisis in America. All of those experiences are caused the sense of not belonging of Korean military wives.

The sense of not belonging and desperation can be explained well by Andrew Sung Park’s theology of han. The theology of han shows the han of the women can be resolved only as the offender are willing to stand in the solidarity with Korean military wives. Asian feminist theologians point out that Asian women experience God as life-giving power and ultimately seek to the full humanity in the image of God. Meanwhile, liberation psychology focuses on the socio-political aspects of human psychology. It argues that the primary purpose of psychology in Latin America should make Latin Americans critically confront of the oppressive and dominant social and political realities.

Conscientization plays a critical role in developing my thesis. To practice of resistance and transformation, the process of conscientization is essential both to Korean American congregations and to Korean military wives. To Korean American
congregations, they need to critically reflect upon their privilege, power, and unjust socio-cultural and religious structures. Korean military wives need to confront their *han*ful life realities and proclaim their full humanity in the image of God.

Under the communal contextual approach of pastoral theology and care, I propose three pastoral strategies of Korean military wives: (1) Korean American congregations should be authentic resisting and transforming community, which is grounded in God’s justice and life-giving power. (2) Korean American congregations need the power of *de-powering* and *de-centering* of power systems toward converting power abuse into creative power. Korean military wives also need to rediscover and develop pre-existing but unnoticed power or capacity within themselves. (3) Korean American congregations work together with Korean military wives to resist social injustice through transforming actions.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation is about Korean military wives' physical, psychological, and spiritual suffering and struggles for liberation by resisting and transforming the oppressive and dominative contexts that they have experienced over a long period of time. I first met them at Korean Baptist church in 2000, which was located in Virginia. At that time, I heard their hanful stories and discovered that they sought for new hope through God's life giving love and justice. I felt it was my burden to help them transform their sorrowful tear into joyful tear. I am very glad to take off the sense of heavy responsibility toward them.

First of all, I would like to express my deep appreciation to Korean military wives to whom I ministered. They shared their broken heart with me, and challenged me to write this dissertation. I am very grateful for the support of my committee members: Carrie Doehring, Larry Graham, and Richard Clemmer-Smith. They read my manuscripts and gave great insights. Especially, I am deeply thankful to my advisor Carrie Doehring for her patience and steadfast encouragement.

Finally, I would like to express my love and appreciation to my wife, Sujin Kim and my son, Daniel Chang. They are great gifts from God and co-authors of this dissertation. They have sacrificed their energy, time, and plan. I also give thanks my parents and parents-in-law for their financial and spiritual support for my study and family. Ultimately, I dedicate this dissertation to God who gives me life, breath, wisdom, courage. God heals my wounded heart, guides my life, sustains me, and empowers me to take creative risks to confront oppression, discrimination, and injustice in the name of God's justice and compassionate anger.

iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ..............................................................................................................................1
Statement of the Problem .................................................................................................................................1
Thesis and Scope ................................................................................................................................................5
Methodology ....................................................................................................................................................7
Significance and Contribution ..........................................................................................................................11
Definition of Terms ..........................................................................................................................................13
Limitations of the Study ..................................................................................................................................16
Chapter Outline ................................................................................................................................................17

CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS OF KOREAN MILITARY WIVES ........................................20
Birth of Suffering and Struggle .........................................................................................................................22
War and Suffering of Korean Military Wives ....................................................................................................22
Poverty and Suffering of Korean Military Wives .............................................................................................28
Gender Ideology, Family, and Suffering of Korean Military Wives .................................................................32
The Lives of Korean Military Wives in America:
Ongoing Suffering and Struggle .......................................................................................................................35
Survival and Struggle: America Culture and Self Identity ................................................................................37
Sense of Not Belonging ....................................................................................................................................41
False Consciousness and Yearning for Solidarity ..............................................................................................47
Summary ............................................................................................................................................................51

CHAPTER 3: THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR PASTORAL THEOLOGY OF KOREAN MILITARY WIVES ..........52
Doing Theology Contextually .............................................................................................................................53
God is Black ....................................................................................................................................................58
God is Rice ......................................................................................................................................................59
Andrew Sung Park’s Asian American Liberation Theology:
Theology of Han ...............................................................................................................................................60
Han, Unfathomable Wounded Heart of the Oppressed ......................................................................................61
Han and Sin ....................................................................................................................................................67
Resolution of Han ...........................................................................................................................................69
Asian Feminist Theology ..................................................................................................................................73
White Feminist Theology, Black Womanist Theology and Asian Feminist Theology ........................................74
Historical and Social Contexts of Asian Feminist Theology ............................................................................77
Asian Feminist Theology as “Very Asian” and “Very Women” ........................................................................79
New Interpretation of God in Asian Feminist Theology ....................................................................................84
Summary ............................................................................................................................................................88
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

From 2000 to 2002, I had the opportunity to minister in a congregation made up almost wholly of Korean military wives, who had immigrated to the United States after marrying men in the United States Armed Forces. I worked with them very closely during weekly worship service, Bible study, choir, and other church activities, and through these experiences I heard about their lives and faith stories. I became aware of their difficulties assimilating into both the Korean immigrant community and American society. These difficulties made their lives full of misery. My pastoral experiences with them led me to want to explore the unique dimensions of their lives of suffering as Korean military wives. I hope in this dissertation to find ways for pastoral caregivers to help Korean military wives resist oppression and transform their lives.

Chung Hyun Kyung demonstrates the significance of Asian women’s tearful life experiences in doing theology by Asian women: “Asian women’s theology was born out of Asian women’s tears and sighs and from their burning desire for liberation and wholeness.”\(^1\) As Asian women, Korean military wives living in the United States\(^2\) are

\(^1\) Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again* (Maryknoll, NY: Books, 1993), 22.

\(^2\) For this dissertation, I will use this term for Korean women who married American military soldiers in Korea. They are called by several names; for example, Yanggongju (Western princess), Yangsaeki (Western bride), Yanggalbo (Western
yearning for liberation and wholeness. The suffering they have experienced has been compounded by their rejection from Korean society, Korean American society, and American society, and their lives are full of suffering, tears, discrimination, oppression, and struggle. A poignant illustration of how these women have suffered is provided by a Korean military wife speaking about one of the fellow camptown women:

I discovered there were many women selling their bodies to support families. One woman supported her younger brother through school and eventually became a member of the National Assembly. He then denounced her as a dirty woman and cut off all ties. She killed herself. I learned that only the women bear sorrow.4

As a matter of fact, not all Korean military wives worked as military prostitutes. There are no statistics about how many Korean military wives worked as prostitutes because many of them are reluctant to be subjects of research. Ji-Yeon Yuh states,

whore), international or intercultural marriage women, and so on. The first three denote the shame and contempt of Korean society toward these women. The terms international or intercultural marriage women do not convey the unique life contexts of these Korean women. In this sense, I think that the term Korean military bride, used by Ji-Yeon Yuh, describes their historical and social contexts. However, the word bride implies they have just married. So, I will use the term Korean military wives. By using the term, readers will not confuse them with Korean women who married Americans who are not members of the military.

3 Other terms for camptown are base town or GI town. It can be defined as a town which is developed near a military base. There are many camptowns in Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. Military prostitutions develop around camptown. In this sense, camptowns are regarded as a necessary evil; that is, camptowns contribute to economic development; however, they give rise to social problems such as prostitutions.

4 Ji-Yeon Yuh, Beyond the Shadow of Camptown (New York and London: New York University Press, 2003), 60. Yuh worked at a Presbyterian church in which Korean military wives participated. These experiences led her to do research with these women. She interviewed sixteen Korean military wives from the fall of 1993 through the end of 1996. The women’s ages ranged from 40 to 65 years, with the oldest coming to the United States in 1951.
“Although no reliable statistics are available regarding the number of camptown women who married American GIs, the existing literature still concludes that the majority of Korean women-American GI marriages involve camptown women.”

There are several reasons why Korean military wives work at military camp as military prostitutes or camp service workers. Yuh describes poverty and other socio-economic contextual factors during and after the Korean War that played significant roles in their being camptown women:

Over the years, camptown women generally have had low levels of formal education, have come from poor families with either one or both parents missing, have often been financially responsible for the upbringing of siblings or the care of sick or unemployed parents, and in many cases have been the victims of rape, incest, or irresponsible and/or abusive boyfriends or husbands.

Regardless of the reasons for being Korean military wives, they all suffered as a result of patriarchy, racism, and sexism. Their identities are shaped by these interlocking systems of oppression. Korean military wives also suffered within inter-racial and inter-cultural marriages in which their racial and cultural identities were disparaged. Yuh illustrates such marital experiences of racism: “She [a Korean military wife] was singing a Korean lullaby to her newborn daughter when her husband suddenly shouted, ‘No Korean! She’s an American!’ That’s when she realized, she said, that her child was an American.”

What then can Korean American churches do in response to the suffering of Korean military wives? Until now, Korean American churches have played important

---

5 Ibid., 12.
6 Ibid., 30.
7 Ibid., 100.
roles as religious, social, and cultural institutions for pastorally responding to Korean Americans’ hardships. Unfortunately, Korean Americans churches are not regarded as safe and authentic caring communities where Korean military wives are welcomed without hesitation by other fellow Korean Christians. Yuh points out, “The ostracism of military brides is so severe that it carries over even into Korean churches, where they are shunned by their fellow congregant…. But in general, other Koreans do not allow military brides to participate in church activities.”

Given this situation, the purpose of this dissertation is to explore new and appropriate functions of pastoral theology and care for Korean military wives, and to challenge Korean immigrant churches to practice adequate pastoral care strategies for these women. Seward Hiltner described healing, sustaining, and guiding as primary functions of pastoral theology and care. Later, pastoral theologians added other contextually meaningful functions; for example, reconciling and nurturing. Some African American pastoral theologians have emphasized liberating and empowering functions. Although African American scholars emphasize the role of “resistance” in

---

8 Ibid., 185.


11 Howard Clinebell, Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1984).

their contexts, they did not include it as a function of pastoral care. However, this
dissertation will articulate resisting and transforming as critical functions of pastoral care
for the Korean military wives.

Finally, what I mean by the term resistance is the capability of Korean military
wives (1) to challenge all kinds of social, cultural and political oppression, prejudice,
exploitation, and discrimination toward them and (2) to assert their existential power to
define themselves and to be subjects of their lives. By transforming, I mean (1) how they
deconstruct socially, culturally, politically, and religiously dominant norms and values
which dehumanize them and (2) how they continuously engage in the liberating and
healing process of social, political, and religious practical activities.\footnote{13}

\textbf{Thesis and Scope}

The thesis of this dissertation is that resistance and transformation are critical
functions of pastoral theology and care for Korean military wives. I will draw upon
theological and psychological perspectives to construct a pastoral theology that will guide
pastoral and congregational practice in order to help Korean military wives resist and
transform dehumanizing identities and social conditions ascribed to them by Korean and
American society. Yuh says, “Military brides are struggling to move beyond resistance –

against both Americans and Korean prejudices – toward transformation.”

The dissertation argues that pastoral caregivers should care for Korean military wives by helping them resist oppressive social and cultural prejudices, and transform unjust social and cultural structures and systems. The resisting and transforming functions of pastoral theology and care aim to liberate them from distorted relationality between human beings and God, and human beings and human beings. This dissertation will conclude with implications for communal care practiced by Korean American ministers and Korean American churches. Thus, a crucial theme of this dissertation is that Korean military wives’ suffering can be healed by Korean American churches which practice resistant and transformative pastoral care.

The primary subjects of this dissertation are Korean military wives living in the United States, who married from the time of the Korean War, onwards. Primary sources for this dissertation are the stories told by Korean military wives to researchers and Korean American pastors sensitized to their suffering. I used stories about Korean military wives that were available in the literature on this population and two documentaries depicting their experiences. In addition, I interviewed Korean American ministers and Korean military wives to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and perspectives.

14 Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown*, 220.


16 The documentary, *The Song of Peageon* (1999, CineFamily), describes how the Association of Korean military wives was formed. In this film, Korean male and female American pastors and Korean military wives describe the significance of the association.
pastors with extensive experience working with this population from January, 2008 to April, 2008. While Korean military wives and other Korean American women both experience patriarchy, sexism, and racism in America and Korean society, there are huge differences between their experiences such that we cannot generalize findings and outcomes of the dissertation to other Korean American women.

**Methodology**

This dissertation uses a pastoral theological method to examine the suffering of Korean military wives. Pastoral theology is defined as ongoing critical theological reflection practiced by pastors working with the suffering of people. Such critical reflection engages theology and the human sciences including psychology, sociology, and philosophy, bringing them into dialogue in order to develop strategies for resistance and the transformation of suffering. In my definition of pastoral theology, the focus is on the sufferings of Korean military wives and the prophetic functions of pastoral care, through which the suffering of Korean military wives is understood in terms of communal and cultural systems of oppression that dehumanized them.

The communal contextual paradigm of pastoral theology is the most meaningful way to frame the pastoral care of Korean military wives. John Patton first identified the
to empower the women to resist and transform the deep-rooted prejudices and oppressive life conditions. Another documentary, *The Hometown of Two plus One* (1999, CineFamily) describes events leading up to the purchasing of land for the Peace House, which is a collection of buildings, including a conference center and chapel where Korean military wives can gather. In the documentation, many Korean military wives and Korean pastors describe the caring and healing role of the Peace House.

17 I selected Korean American pastors whose congregation is mainly composed of Korean military wives.
communal contextual paradigm. Unlike the classical and clinical pastoral paradigms, the communal contextual paradigm primarily focuses on the active role of faith community of clergy and laity, and calls attention to contextual factors. Here, context mainly means “cultural and political contexts shaping person’s lives.” Many pastoral theologians and caregivers describe the communal contextual paradigm in pastoral theology and care by using various terms; for example, the metaphor of web, the living human web, and the psychosystems approach. All of these pastoral theologians emphasize “the structures and ideologies of a wider public context.” The communal contextual paradigm is the most adequate for exploring complex and multifaceted social contexts today. It has special relevance for my study because Korean military wives have

18 Even though it was Patton who first used the term “communal contextual” in pastoral care, a major paradigm shift from the individually-oriented clinical paradigm was also described by Bonnie Miller-McLemore. She used the image of “living human web” to emphasize the importance of public policies and practices in pastoral theology. See Nancy Ramsay, ed., Pastoral Care and Counseling: Redefining the Paradigms (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), 10.

19 John Patton, Pastoral Care in Context: An Introduction to Pastoral Care (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 4-5.


23 Larry Graham, Care of Persons, Care of World: A Psychosystemic Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992).

24 Ibid., 51.
been oppressed and dehumanized by unequal social structures and ideologies of
patriarchy, racism, classism, and sexism.

Within a communal contextual paradigm, this dissertation will utilize contextual
theology and liberation psychology. First, this dissertation will explore Andrew Sung
Park’s Asian American liberation theology. Particularly, his concept of *han*,\(^{25}\) describing
the wound of victims, explains how much social, political, cultural, racial, and economic
structures influence the suffering and pain of individuals and groups of people. In
addition, Asian feminist theology\(^{26}\) will be also employed. Chung states, “Asian feminist
theology has emerged from Asian women’s cries and screams, from the extreme
suffering in their everyday lives.”\(^{27}\) As Chung’s statement shows, Asian feminist
theology focuses on Asian women’s context of suffering. That is, Asian feminist
theology is an adequate theological perspective for exploring the intolerable suffering
that is part of the life experiences of Korean military wives. This dissertation will
elaborate how Asian feminist theology contributes to constructing a pastoral theology of
resistance and transformation for Korean military wives.

\(^{25}\) *Han* is defined as “internalized collective memory of victims generated by
patriarchal tyranny, racial discrimination, economic exploitation, ethnic cleansing,
massacre, foreign occupation, state-sponsored terrorism, and unjust war.” See Andrew

\(^{26}\) Compared to feminist theology, Womanist theology shows more powerfully
African women’s social, economic, and political oppressed reality. Like Black Womanist
theology, Asian feminist theology critically reflects on Asian women’s specific and
unique life realities. Some Asian feminist theologians tend to use it interchangeably with
Asian Womanist theology.

\(^{27}\) Chung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again*, 22.
For psychological exploration, this dissertation will draw upon several crucial concepts of liberation psychology developed by Ignacio Martin-Baro, and defined as “a branch of social psychology emphasizing (1) the standpoint of the lives of Latin Americans’ sufferings, aspirations, and struggles (2) ultimately liberation of Latin Americans.” I choose liberation psychology because its focus on living contexts of suffering and oppressed people and liberation-oriented work is applicable to constructing resisting and transforming functions of pastoral theology and care for Korean military wives. Particularly, the concept of conscientization and the psychological study of social trauma and will be drawn upon. I will use the concept of conscientization to describe: 1) how Korean American pastors authentically engage in the suffering of Korean military wives; 2) how Korean military wives may be able critically to realize and confront their individual lives, social structures, and dominant ideology. I will also draw upon the psychology of social trauma to focus both on the traumatic and social aspects of these women’s suffering.

The dissertation will also explore Christie C. Neuger’s feminist pastoral counseling approach and Carroll Watkins Ali’s survival and liberation perspectives. As a white feminist pastoral theologian, Neuger challenges women to resist and transform the dominant patriarchal systems, and reclaim their voice against the contexts of violence, stereotypes, and unequal human relationality. Watkins Ali examines the intersection of racism and sexism in the lives of African American women. By critical reflection on the historical and social contexts of African Americans, Watkins Ali demonstrates that

survival and liberation should be the very real tasks for pastoral theology with African Americans. Her approaches are challenging to Korean American pastoral theologians because the suffering of African Americans from White racism shares some features with the oppression of Korean Americans. By discussing their arguments, the dissertation will illuminate what kinds of strategies of pastoral care will be demanded of Korean churches for caring for Korean military wives.

Finally, Margaret Kornfeld’s theory of community and community care will be employed. In her book *Cultivating Wholeness*, Kornfeld analyzes the nature of pseudo and real community. To Kornfeld, “community is not just the place where healing occurs, it is a means through which it happens.”

In many cases, Korean Americans, particularly Korean military wives, experience alienation, oppression, separation, and prejudice even in the Korean American Church. This dissertation will describe the communal caring practices of Korean American congregations that may be employed for helping Korean military wives resist and transform the unjust socio-cultural systems. I will take NAICFM, which is a national inter-cultural women’s organization, as a good example showing what community is meaningful to Korean military wives.

**Significance and Contributions**

This dissertation develops a communal contextual paradigm of pastoral theology, and elaborates the prophetic function of pastoral care by using resources such as theology of *han*, Asian feminist theology, and liberation psychology in Korean military wives’ contexts. Paradigms and methods of pastoral theology and care have been developed

---

from individual therapeutic to communal contextual to intercultural paradigms. And the
primary functions of pastoral care have also been broadened by those originally proposed
by Hiltner, and then Clebsch and Jaekle, and still later by Clinebell, and then Lartey.

Where, then, should Korean military wives pastoral theology be placed among the
traditional and present methods and paradigms of pastoral theology? What theological
and psychological resources are most appropriate for constructing pastoral theology in
response to the situation of Korean military wives? Traditional and contemporary
paradigms and methods of pastoral theology have been formulated and developed by
European Americans within their cultural contexts. And African American pastoral
theologians and pastoral caregivers continually develop methods of pastoral theology and
care by using their own life experiences and African American resources. Thus far, the
experiences of Korean and Asian Americans have usually been formulated within
multicultural or intercultural approaches of pastoral care and counseling. I believe that
Korean and Asian Americans must be dealt with as independent subjects of pastoral
theology and care as Watkins Ali differentiated African American women’s experiences
from those of White women and even African American males’ realities.

In this vein, this dissertation has significance in that (1) it demonstrates new ways
of doing pastoral theology and care by using literatures of Koreans, Korean Americans,
and other Asian scholars and practitioners; (2) it posits that resisting and transforming are
new functions of pastoral care for Korean military wives. Furthermore, the communal
contextual paradigm and resources from many pastoral theologians and systemic
theologians who come from marginalized groups like Korea, other Asian countries, and
Latin America will be utilized to develop authentic practices of pastoral care of Korean
military wives. It is time for pastoral theologians and pastoral caregivers who are from marginalized racial groups to draw upon what is relevant from European American perspectives of pastoral theology and care, and to construct pastoral theologies and strategies of care that are relevant in their own contexts.

**Definition of Terms**

*Korean Military Wives*

This term will refer to Korean women who married American military servicemen in Korea during and after the Korean War. One should not assume that all were prostitutes although some indeed were. Several were former military office workers and former employees of the sex-industry. Others met their husbands in non-military contexts, such as English tutoring or church activities.

There are as many different education levels, races of husbands, and levels of familial support as there are varied stories and experiences. Notwithstanding, all have suffered, been cursed, endured persecution, and dealt with exclusion simply by being “Korean military wives” married to American soldiers. By virtue of this, this dissertation will regard Korean military wives as a group, emphasizing those common characteristics. For this reason, it is not relevant to divide them according to age, time spent in America, or other contextual variables.

*Theology of Han*

In this paper, han will refer to a specific theological interpretation of human suffering, pain, and struggle. Han is conceived not only as *individual* psychological, spiritual, and physical pain and suffering, but also as the *collective and communal*
experience of suffering, pain, struggles, shamefulness, and anger. This dissertation will employ the latter definition. Koreans unconsciously and consciously perceive the concept of han. Consequently, when Koreans hear han from other Koreans, they know what the persons feel within their hearts. Han is long-term, unresolved, repetitive, and abysmal suffering. As such, the term han will be used to describe the life-long suffering and struggles of Korean military wives.

Asian Feminist Theology

This term will encompass the theological examination of Asian women’s specific historical contexts of dehumanization, gender inequity, poverty, exclusion, and oppression. Asian feminist theology, which is sometimes also called Asian women’s theology, originated and was developed by Asian women who struggle for everyday existence. It is contextual theology as well as liberation theology. As contextual theology, it posits the very unique and specific historical experiences of Asian women as starting points in its theology. As liberation theology, it resists all kinds of oppression, discrimination, and injustice.

The most significant theological theme of Asian feminist theology is that God is a life giving power. The phrase life giving power indicates that we can assume that Asian women see their contexts as lifeless, hopeless, and breathless horrible realities. Consequently, the primary purpose of pastoral care is to help women resist patriarchal social, cultural, religious, and political norms, values, and customs; and to recover their full humanity in the image of God.
Liberation Theology

Liberation theology is an action-based contextual theology that arises out of the oppressed and marginalized context of the poor, and focuses on the liberating power of God for them. It is rooted in the very specific social, cultural, economic, and political realities of the oppressed, and constructs contextual truth claims from within this multifaceted context. In this sense, it is a praxis-based theological inquiry. The theological approach is often a source of authority within communal and contextual pastoral care and the counseling paradigm because the both paradigm emphasizes the social, cultural, and political location and have as their goals resistance to dominant power, and hegemony, and justice.

Liberation Psychology

Liberation psychology is a psychological theory which Ignacio Martin-Baro, a Latin American psychologist, first elaborated by drawing upon liberation theology. Liberation psychology focuses on the colonized and oppressed social and political contexts of Latin America and the correlation between these oppressive contexts and the mental health of Latin Americans. That is, it sees the mental health problems and disorders of the people of Latin America as byproducts of political repression and military dictatorship. In this sense, the primary purpose of this psychology is not to build psychological theories and methods, but rather to help Latin Americans resist their oppressive social and political realities, and engage in a transformation of the dehumanizing and colonized societies. Conscientization is one of the important concepts of liberation psychology, which means the process of critical consciousness. In this
dissertation, it will play a crucial role in constructing pastoral care strategies for Korean American congregations.

*Korean American Pastors*

Korean American pastors who are ministering to Korean immigrant churches in the United States, regardless of their denomination or religious tradition, will be referred to as Korean American pastors. It will specifically refer to males since Korean women living in the United States could not be ordained until 2006. When referring to female Korean American pastors, this dissertation will employ “female Korean pastors” to prevent the reader from confusing the two groups. Both groups exclusively encompass first–generation Korean Americans who were born in Korea, and immigrated to the United States, generally between the ages 30 and 60.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study has several limitations. First, there simply is very little research about Korean military wives and their experiences within Korean American churches. Most of the research on this population examines their experiences from spiritual or religious perspective, without examining theological and sociopolitical issues. Some Korean American social and religious institutions working with these women want to protect the privacy of these women’s lives. Very literally, Korean military wives do not want to be the subject of academic research.

Another limitation of this study is its research methodology. This study predominantly relies on written literature, without engaging in qualitative or quantitative research with this population. It does draw upon interviews with Korean American
pastors who ministered or are ministering to Korean military wives. The reason for
selecting Korean American pastors as primary interviewees relates closely to the two
purposes of this dissertation: 1) to discuss how Asian theology of han and Asian feminist
theology challenge us to acknowledge the suffering of Korean military wives; 2) to
elaborate how Korean American pastors and congregations, under the communal and
contextual paradigm, can practice resisting and transforming functions of pastoral care of
the suffering of Korean military wives. More practically, there were time constraints
against doing actual interviews with Korean military wives. It would take six months or
one year to gather information about the women and to request and undertake interviews.

Chapter Outline

In Chapter 2, I will examine the specific historical contexts of the suffering of
Korean military wives. I will first begin with the experiences of oppression and
discrimination of Korean military wives in Korea. In particular, I will discuss how the
Korean War and Confucianism influenced the suffering and struggle of the women. In
the second part of this chapter, I will describe the ongoing suffering of Korean military
wives in the United States. This part will show the multifaceted subordinate positions of
women in Korean American societies, churches, and intercultural families, which
contributes to the suffering of Korean military wives became worse and eventually makes
it unendurable.

Chapter 3 will deal with theological issues for developing a pastoral theology of
Korean military wives. I will argue that contextual theology and subaltern hermeneutics
are the important relevant theologies for analyzing the marginalized contexts of the
women. In terms of contextual theology, I will utilize Andrew Sung Park’s theology of *han* and Asian feminist theology. This chapter will demonstrate that why Western-originated theology is not an adequate theological method to explain the suffering of Korean military wives. It will also describe the main ideas and concepts of theology of *han* and Asian feminist theology.

After dealing with theological aspects of the suffering of Korean military wives, I will present psychological perspectives in Chapter 4. Chapter 4 will begin by describing the limitations of multicultural psychology, and explore liberation psychology as the most adequate psychological theory to help Korean American pastors and caregivers understand cultural and political dimensions of the psychological suffering of Korean military wives. In particular, I will utilize the concept of *conscientization* in order to develop my thought. This chapter will argue that *conscientization* is the most crucial psychological process for Korean American pastors, Korean American congregations, and Korean military wives to go through together in order to be able to practice resistant and transforming actions against the oppressive socio-cultural and political contexts.

In Chapter 5, I will describe the communal contextual paradigm of pastoral care and use it to address the suffering of Korean military wives. Chapter 5 will build upon all of the theories I have presented in previous chapters, and will describe how Korean American congregations can be transformed into a community that stands in solidarity with Korean military wives. This chapter will fully implement a Korean American communal contextual orientation to pastoral care whose ultimate goal is relational justice. Emphasizing on *conscientization* and relational justice, I will describe the liberating role
of Korean American congregations as active caring agents sustaining Korean military wives as they resist oppression.

I will propose specific pastoral strategies for addressing the suffering of Korean military wives in Chapter 6. All of the strategies will be developed using a communal contextual approach to pastoral care. The three pastoral strategies will be: 1) Becoming caring community, 2) Empowerment Korean American congregations and Korean military wives, 3) Working together for social transformation. After elaborating these three strategies, I will challenge the metaphor of the living human web, which has been regarded as the most adequate metaphor for describing the significance of relationality in human suffering. I will proclaim the metaphor of the living human cell as a more useful metaphor than the living human web to describe the dynamic and life giving aspects of human relationality and suffering.
“Women’s experience is a complex of events, feelings and struggles which are shared by women in various circumstances of life.”1 As Grant points out, an integrative examination of the multiple dimensions of women’s lives is an indispensable process for interpreting women’s life experiences because “women’s experience has been consumed by generic (male) experiences and camouflaged by generic (male) language regarding that universal (male) experience.”2 Brock and Thistlethwaite also recognize the intertwined relationships between the female body and socio-cultural context: “Attitudes toward the body, women, and sexuality form and are formed by the structures of a culture, its laws, economic practices, familial relationships, religions, and political processes.”3

Like ordinary women, the lives of the women who become wives of military personnel have been shaped through interactions with various social, political, and military environments. As Doreen Drewry Lehr notes,

The women we call military wives are individual and diverse, and their experiences in this extremely gendered society are shaped by many variables,

---


2 Ibid., 12.

such as husband’s branch of service, his rank and/or position, the women’s nationality/race/ethnicity, command of the language, age, and educational background.  

Even though the women’s lives are dynamic and unique, their varied experiences have not been studied in any depth. Lehr describes the lack of attention given to them: “[T]hese women have been absent from academic literature, marginal in military policy, and invisible to the American public.” Lehr’s statement is especially true for Korean military wives; the experiences of Korean military wives are not same as those of Anglo military wives. Their suffering has occurred in the specific social, economic, and political circumstances of Korea, Asia, and America.

A primary purpose of this chapter is to investigate the historical and social background of Korean military wives. In this chapter, Korean military wives’ unique social, cultural, economic, and political contexts will be reviewed by focusing on their hardship, suffering, and struggle. Ji-Yeon Yuh summarizes Korean military wives’ experiences of suffering and struggle in relation to everyday resistance and survival:

It [resistance] is part of a struggle for survival that goes beyond physical survival to include emotional and cultural survival as well, the survival of the whole self, intact with dignity, history, and self-respect. It is a struggle fought on many fronts, for the women are isolated from both Korean and American societies and from their own relatives and within their own families as well. They also face various kinds of disapproval, discrimination, and humiliations from all these sources, as well as various pressures to change and conform to American ways and minimize, even erase, their Korean identity.

---


5 Ibid., 118.

This chapter will describe the specific and unique life experiences of Korean military wives, looking at their experiences in Korea and then in the United States. Even though Korean military wives have experienced oppression, discrimination, and exclusion throughout their whole lives, these two contexts are not the same. The first section will describe several important aspects of their suffering and struggle in Korea: the history of war in Korea, poverty, and Confucian gender ideology. After exploring the women’s suffering in the context of Korea, the latter part of the chapter will investigate the more dynamic and complex aspects of their suffering in the United States. Racial and sexual discrimination, intercultural familial conflicts and identity crises, a pervasive sense of not belonging, and solidarity among the women will be explored.

**Birth of Suffering and Struggle**

**War and Suffering of Korean Military Wives**

As their name indicates, Korean military wives’ stories begin with the history of the Korean War. We cannot explain modern Korean history without describing its

---


7 This section will not review the details of the Korean War. Rather, it will focus on sufferings of Korean military wives who are also called camptown women.

history of war, especially the effects of Japanese colonialism and the Korean War, which caused psychological, physical, social, and national pain and trauma in various ways. To begin with, Japanese colonialism left shameful and irrevocable pain and deep stigma within the body and the heart of Korean women. Many Korean women, who were called military comfort women,9 had to serve Japanese military men as sexual slaves during the Pacific War. The Japanese colonizers utilized their male body as a symbol of their political and military dominance over Koreans, the colonized. Brock and Thistlethwaite powerfully describe how those in colonial power deliberately use sexual exploitation of women of the colonized as a military strategy:

The sexual exploitation of women is an integral part of the military construction of masculinity and aggression against enemies that places dehumanizing pressures and projects rapacious sexual stereotypes on military men. The bodies of women become another means by which men can prove their dominance over the enemy, especially if his most prized, respectable women are defiled. The sexual defilement of enemy women is often one aspect of military conquest.10

In a website which was made by the Silence Broken Foundation,11 Yun Doo Ri,

---


10 Brock and Thistlethwaite, 71-72.

11 According to the website, “The foundation, inspired by Dai Sil’s work on comfort women, was conceived to support research and education related to a variety of social issues stemming from a world largely divided between the oppressors and the oppressed, between the rich and the poor, between the powerful and the powerless. The foundation is dedicated to exploring gender discrimination, racism, poverty and class struggle around the world, more specifically in the inner cities, toward the hope of treating human beings as equals and establishing social justice in which human freedom and dignity emerge triumphant.” See http://www.twotigers.org/main/foundation.asp
one of the military comfort women, describes the dehumanization and objectification experienced by adolescent women forced into sexual slavery:

When my cuts and bruises had healed slightly, they put me back into the same room. Another officer was waiting for me. They must have warned him about me. He did not wait and did not give me a moment even to think of protesting. He swiftly knocked me down, and started pushing his thing inside of me. It happened all so fast. I found myself bleeding. I wasn’t even sure where the blood was coming from. I only felt pain. Something in my body was torn apart. I put my teeth into his cheek. Now we were both bleeding, he from his face and I, somewhere below … I was fifteen.12

When the Pacific War was over in 1945, the military comfort women who survived the inhumane horror and violence returned to their hometowns and families. Their families and country, Korea, however, did not welcome the women. They were forced to conceal what they experienced during the Pacific War. In other words, they had to live without revealing their dreadful stories. In her interviews with a military comfort woman, Hyunah Yang quotes from a confession of a woman who survived her experiences as a military comfort woman:

I have looked forward only to death, without telling anybody my story. My tribulations remain buried deep in my heart. Now I have reported to the Korean Council and I take part in their various activities. But I am anxious in case anyone recognizes me. I have a husband and children, so I cannot bewail my life and be so resentful in public. If, by any chance, my children’s spouses and their families discover I was a comfort woman, what would become of them? … Who would be able to guess what inner agony I suffer with this awful story buried in my heart? My story, as hidden as it is from those around me, will follow to my grave.13

It is clear from this story that military comfort women need assistance from

their families, societies, and government in order to gather the courage to speak out about their painful and inhumane experiences without fear. In this sense, individual healing and therapy are not in themselves adequate counseling methods for such women whose struggle mainly comes from the broader socio-cultural structures and historical context. Caregivers need to focus on assisting them to resist huge pressures on them to keep silent; the ultimate goal of hearing their stories is the transformation of oppressive socio-cultural and political norms and prejudices.

While the military comfort women are symptoms of the colonial relationships between Korea and Japan, Korean military wives can be described in terms of the neo-imperial relationships between Korean and the United States. It does not mean the presence of American soldiers in Korea is exactly same as the colonial occupation by Japan. Yuh describes how the use of Korean women by those in the American military is part of a pattern:

America is not the first country, of course, to use Korean women for the entertainment of its soldiers. The sexual exploitation of women by the military, particularly the exploitation of a subjugated country’s women by the conquering country’s men, has gone hand in hand through the history. Indeed, the history of prostitution in Korea is intimately linked to Korea’s political and military subjugation by foreign countries, first Japan and then the United States.14

As we see from Yuh’s statement, the sexual exploitation committed by the military of Japan and the United States symbolizes the political and economic subjugation of Korea, characterized as female, by Japan and the United States, which are cast in the role of the dominant male force. As Yuh points out,

The relationship between Korea and the United States is itself gendered, with Korea inscribed as the feminine other in need of protection and the United States

14 Yuh, Beyond the Shadow of Camptown, 17.
playing the role of the masculine superior and guardian. This gendered context of neoimperialism is a major factor in the skewed gender profile of intermarriages between Koreans and Americans, the overwhelming majority of which are between American men and Korean women.15

What then was the Korean government’s role in producing and managing the military camptowns and camptown women? Katherine H. S. Moon criticizes the Korean government for not taking full responsibility for the unhealthy situation of the military camptown and camptown women and for considering camptown prostitution primarily a matter between individual American soldiers and Korean prostitutes.16 Moon argues that the Korean government took advantage of camptown prostitutes to enhance its relationship with the United States:

From the Korean government’s perspective, the women [Korean prostitutes] were instrumental to improving the daily life of U.S. soldiers stationed in Korea and in meeting the demands of the USFK [U.S. Forces Korea] for increased camptown control. Then President Park Chung Hee17 made the U.S. soldiers’ quality of life a priority in U. S. –Korea relations.18

Moon also criticizes that Korean government for the way it “tolerated, even encouraged, the growth of military prostitution”:19

15 Ibid., 10.


17 During the Park Chung Hee government, American military assistance was very important to Korea’s national security; that is, to defend from North Korea’s military attack. In this sense, camptown women were regarded as patriots. In other words, camptown women “were performing the supreme sacrifice for the good of their country” (Yuh, Beyond the Shadow of Camptown, 27).

18 Moon, 152.

It [military prostitution] was seen as inevitable, and governmental officials as well as the public believed that prostitutes ‘protected’ the rest of the female population from the degradations of soldiers. As in occupied Japan, Korean sex workers were encouraged to see themselves as sacrificing themselves for the nation. In the end, the Korean government and fellow Koreans cannot avoid being responsible for the suffering of Korean military wives. Camptown women were sometimes victims of United States soldiers’ physical violence; at the same time, they were victimized by the Korean government’s irresponsible policies and fellow Koreans’ condemnation. They were sacrificed as scapegoats by the Korean government and their fellow Koreans.

From the history of military camptowns and camptown women, we become aware that the presence of the United States military engendered many social and cultural malfunctions in Korean society. In relation to Korean military wives, the formation of camptowns and militarized prostitution is one of the worst byproducts of the military presence of the United States. Korean military wives are the victims of tragic socio-cultural systems and economic-political structures that formed during the Korean War. Sang-Dawn Lee points out, “In considering America’s influence on Korean women’s lives, we cannot overlook the issue of the Korean women who sold their bodies to American soldiers.” Yuh describes the socio-cultural and economic effects of the presence of the American military base in Korea:

The American presence not only creates the physical context – military bases and nearby camptowns, towns that revolve economically around the bases and which contained red-light districts catering to U.S. soldiers, where the town meet – but it also helps create the social and cultural contexts – militarized prostitution, local

---

20 Ibid., 157.

civilian employment on military bases, and the lure of America – that make marriage to U.S. soldiers an appealing option for Korean women.\textsuperscript{22}

The camptown women worked as prostitutes or “hostesses” for their survival, but the women acknowledged that they had to sacrifice their bodies and their human dignity. Consequently, how to survive and how to escape from the camptown were the daily concerns of most camptown women. Within oppressive and violent life conditions, Korean military wives sought a safe place. They believed that they, like other fellow Koreans, had human rights as ordinary human beings. They also insisted that they should not be condemned because of their social status. One Korean military prostitute says, “Not all the people in this business are bad. Just because people are in prostitution doesn’t mean that they are bad people. They are here because of their family circumstance.”\textsuperscript{23} They yearned for a normal life as normal Korean women. That is, the camptown women wanted to be wives as well as mothers. Because it was very hard to achieve their desires due to Korean society’s ostracization of camptown women and the extremes of patriarchal domination, Korean military wives had to seek other options. And finally they found that marrying American soldiers seemed like the best choice they could make in these circumstances.

The Poverty and Suffering Experienced by Korean Military Wives

To Korean military wives, war played a crucial role in their experience. The previous section focused on the political dynamics occurring during the Korean War.

\textsuperscript{22}Yuh, \textit{Beyond the Shadow of Camptown}, 9.

What was the most important factor which forced Korean women to work at camptowns?

Economic survival is one of the critical motivators for many Asian women becoming prostitutes or prostitute-related workers in Korea, Philippines, Guam, Japan, and Thailand.

Jennifer Butler describes women’s victimization during the period of war:

> During the war women and young girls who are displaced from land and family support are often forced to sell their bodies to survive or to support their families. Sometimes they are the victims of rape during war and deemed unworthy of the protections of marriage by a patriarchal culture. They are often uneducated because of poverty or because they are female and barred from the jobs that pay a living wage.\(^{24}\)

After the Korea War, there were many social disorders in Korea. Between the 1950s and the 1970s, Koreans experienced socio-political and economic unrest. Many Koreans were left unemployed. Therefore, women from poor families who had low levels of formal education could not get regular jobs. In this social and economic context, the camptowns were a major source of income for these women. Yuh points out,

> Because U.S. bases were one of the few, if not the only, sources of income in the poverty-stricken years of the 1940s through the 1970s, the camptowns attracted not only poor women, including war widows and orphans seeking to make a living, but also entrepreneurs and criminals.\(^{25}\)

Yuh recognizes that poverty was a crucial motivator for becoming a camptown woman, and played a key role in developing camptown prostitution. Lee also describes relationships between poverty and prostitution:

> Rural poverty dumped country girls into cities, where the lucky ones served as domestics or factory laborers, and the unlucky ones rented their bodies to domestic or foreign men. Women who sold their bodies were considered outside

---


\(^{25}\) Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown*, 22.
society, especially the prostitutes for American soldiers, who were called
_yanggalbo_ (westerners’ whore) or _yanggongju_ (western princess) – sarcastically,
not euphemistically.\(^{26}\)

One camptown woman testifies to the painful journey of her life:

I actually worked in four places. I worked at a restaurant as the housekeeper. I
also worked for a man as a housekeeper. I would do cleaning jobs at different
(dancing/drinking) halls and hotels. And I sold my body. It’s not easy to
sacrifice your body. I was earning quite a bit. I sent the money to my mother. I
worked even though I had flu. I thought: ‘What the hell, what is life if I live it
one way or another way. I might as well help my mom. How long would she live
if I didn’t?’ When she needed money, she would call.\(^{27}\)

And extreme poor economic conditions contributed to increased conflict among family
members. As this woman continues,

It wasn’t too good between my mother and father. There were a lot of fights. I
often heard him cussing mother out. I didn’t see father beating mother very
much; but mother told me that when she was younger, he used to beat her a lot.
There wasn’t much interaction between father and the children. He was there,
and he wasn’t there. Perhaps it would have been better if he had not been there.\(^{28}\)

In such desperate situations, many camptown women dreamed of becoming
brides of American soldiers. That was the only way for these women to escape dreadful
poverty. Poverty was intermingled with their longing for what they imagined would be a
luxurious American life. One camptown woman says,

When I watched TV and the movies during my youth, I wanted to go live in
America. When I was a little older, I wanted to have some luxuries, but that was
impossible in our poor household. So I came to the camptown to meet Americans
and earn lots of money. But once I got here, I found that many things were
different from what I had expected. I never imagined that I would have to do this

\(^{26}\) Sang-Dawn Lee, 103.

\(^{27}\) Sturdevant and Stolzfus, 190.

\(^{28}\) Ibid., 181.
kind of work. And it doesn’t even earn lots of money. If I had known that it was this kind of place, I would never have come.  

It is a fact that poverty motivated many women to marry American soldiers. And they were tempted by the imagined wealth of the American forces and American soldiers. 

Amy Lee and Joseph Tse-Hei Lee describe these dynamics:

Throughout the difficult years of the 1950s to 1970s, the United States military presence in South Korea created a context that made marriage to American servicemen an attractive option for [some] Korean women. The camp-towns revealed a contrast between the wealth and bravado of the American forces and a Korean society deep in crisis. The wealth, strength, and arrogance of American soldiers were displayed in the camp-towns as opposed to the misery of ordinary Koreans in a war-torn society. 

Meanwhile, not all the Korean women who were from poor families resorted to this kind of work. That is, many Korean women managed their lives without becoming camptown women. Because they made different choices, they tended to believe that Korean military wives should be despised, shamed, and vilified because Korean military wives lost their chastity, and did not adhere to the Korean tradition of maintaining racial homogeneity. Nevertheless, it is simplistic to judge Korean military wives as individuals who were economically motivated to become camptown women. In other words, many of the women had unique reasons for working at the camptowns. When we judge Korean military wives from an individualistic viewpoint, it is easy to blame them for the choices they made. We should remember that they were also victims of the Korean War; in other words, “the women were often war widows or orphans, and some may have been former prostitutes during the Japanese colonial period, and some were victims of rape by United

---

29 Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown*, 33.
Nations or United States forces.”31 We cannot underestimate the miserable and tragic social, political, and economical circumstances experienced by Korean women during and after the Korean War. Next, Koreans’ ideology of gender and gender roles and the role they play in the suffering of Korean military wives will be analyzed.

Gender Ideology, Family, and Suffering of Korean Military Wives

Poverty is obviously a major factor in the suffering experienced by women who became Korean military wives, but Korean military wives’ struggle cannot be explained in terms of economic factors alone. In other words, we need to reflect on other socio-cultural and ideological aspects of their suffering, particularly, the male-centered sexism in and among Korean society and Koreans. In a sense, the life stories of Korean military wives are only a part of the history of Korean women’s victimization from Koreans’ deep-rooted patriarchal social and cultural systems.32

The social identities of Korean women have been shaped by the patriarchal cultural codes, ethics, and norms of Confucian Korean society. Korean women are not judged individually, but categorically by the hierarchical moral principles of Confucianism. There are five moral principles in Confucianism.33 Among them, the principle called *bubuyubyeol* signifies gender discrimination; this principle is closely


33 *Gunsinyuui* (righteousness between ruler and subjects); *jangyuyuseo* (order between the younger and the old); *bujayuchin* (intimacy between father and son); *bunguyusin* (faithfulness between friends); *bubuyubyeol* (role differentiation between spouses).
related to the famous Korean maxim, *namjonyeobi* (man is high, and women is low). All of the five moral principles emphasize the superior social locations and roles of man over woman. These Confucian principles and traditional customs of Korean society determined the subordinate social and family roles of Korean women for a long period of time. Elizabeth Choi examines how patriarchal Confucian principles still determine
Korean women’s location in contemporary Korean society:

[Korean] women’s status is not static but dynamic. It has been influenced by historical, cultural social, political, and economic forces within the society. Since World War II, the ROK [Republic of Korea] has undergone rapid industrialization and modernization. As part of societal change, women’s status has changed, yet inequality has been maintained. Inequality in women’s opportunities are [is] maintained through elaborate system of role relationships that are rooted in and rationalized by Confucian customs; they are socially mandated and often legally condoned. The ROK [Republic of Korea] is recognized as the nation with the strictest adherence to the Confucian ethical heritage.^{34}

The suffering of Korean military wives was partly generated by the fact that these women failed to maintain Confucian customs. Under the enormous influence of Confucianism, Korean women’s identities were determined by three roles: daughter, wife, and mother. As with many Asian women, Korean women’s basic social unit was the family. It is very common for Korean women to be identified simply as someone’s daughter, wife, and mother. Korean women sought value only through the web of family relations. Even though Korea experienced phenomenal economic growth in the 1970s, and Korea society was transformed in many ways since 1945, the social, political, and legal status of Korean women did not change very much. The male-dominated social,

---

^{34} Choi,190. We need to remember that such attitudes toward Korean women are no longer applicable now. However, between 1960s and 1980s, most Korean women were oppressed and suffered from the deep-seated sexism of Korean patriarchal social, cultural, and educational systems.
political, and economic systems and structures were too entrenched in Confucianism to change. In the male-dominated social and family systems, the primary roles of women were child-bearing, child-rearing, and homemaking. Sexism and paternalism determined the lives of Korean women during the time of the Korean War.\(^{35}\)

In this patriarchal context, Korean military wives are the most conspicuous victims of the sexism of Koreans. That is, it was very shameful that many camptown women (particularly prostitutes) did not adhere to the three roles of women prescribed by Confucianism. Most Korean military wives were disconnected from their parents, siblings, and relatives. Korean military wives lost the familial relationships that could give them legitimate social and cultural identities. Yuh points out that the lives of Korean military wives were not recognized within traditional Korean ethical, cultural, and social norms and standards:

As women, they have been shaped by Korean gender ideology to view marriage and motherhood as the ultimate feminine goals. But as women who have married non-Koreans and as women who --- regardless of their social background --- are stained by presumed association with U.S. military camptowns and prostitution simply because they married an American soldier, they are left standing out side the bounds of both respectable Korean womanhood and authentic Koreaness. Thus military brides are constantly defending their respectability as well as their Korean identity.\(^{36}\)

As Yuh’s statement shows, Korean military wives were victimized by double social and cultural oppression, that is, sexism and national homogeneity. They were Korean and women; however, their identity was devalued by fellow Koreans and

\(^{35}\) The social, political, economical, and cultural status of Korean women has radically changed since 1990. Many of the social and familial phenomena of Korea society which are portrayed here have gone. In relation to the experiences of Korean military wives, this dissertation focuses on the periods of between 1945 and 1980.

\(^{36}\) Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown*, 4.
particularly by Korean women in traditional gender roles. They found that it was impossible for them to have normal lives due to Korean society’s ostracization of camptown women as well as the abusive experiences many of them had: “[T]he negative experiences that many camptown women have had with Korean men – abusive relationships, experiences with pimps, sexual assaults, and the like – often lead women to believe that all Korean men are untrustworthy and do not treat women well.”37 Yuh’s research indicates that their experience of being abused by Korean men was another reason military Korean wives chose to marry American servicemen, and move to the United States. They hoped to find their human dignity and better lives through marrying American soldiers.

The Lives of Korean Military Wives in America: Ongoing Struggle and Suffering

As I explored in an earlier section, Korean military wives experienced oppression, prejudice, poverty, and discrimination. They recognized that they could not live as normal Korean women in Korea. Yuh describes their desire for a better life: “They [Korean military wives] sought a new start in America, the fabled land of plenty. Their hopes for a better life were shaped by war, poverty, Korean patriarchy, Japan colonialism, and American imperialism.”38

When Korean military wives married American soldiers and left Korea, they had to disconnect from their families. Even though Korean military wives promised their

37 Ibid., 39.

38 Ibid., 42.
families that they would meet again, they rarely did. In Yuh’s interviews with Korean military wives, one Korean military wife recalls:

With this body, I could never get married to a Korean man. And it wasn’t like I had lots of money and could live enjoying the power of money. So, since they said that if you go to America, you can just pick up money off the ground, well, since my body is ruined anyway, let’s earn some money. Let’s go to America. So I said to my mother, ‘Mom, if I go to America, only three years. Just wait, only three years until I get my citizenship. When I get my citizenship, then Mom, come to America and we can live together, in America. Because they say you can just pick money off the ground. So let’s wait for just three years.’ That’s how I came to Korea, telling her that. But not even three years, within one year she died, of cancer. I couldn’t go to Korea, of course, all I could do was stamp my feet in grief and cry, in America. I couldn’t go to Korea.  

Like other immigrants, Korean military wives regarded America as the land of opportunity. But, their lives in America were not easy. Once Korean military wives came to the United States, they experienced deep disappointment, dislocation, and despair. Yuh points out that Korean military wives had to struggle with poverty, sexism, racism, divorce, and loneliness in America:

As immigrant women of color, as non-native speakers of English, as interculturally and interracially married women, as workers in the lower tiers of the economy, they found themselves consistently faced with a wide variety of demands, indignities, and humiliations inflicted by both society at large and the people closest to them.  

As Yuh notes, Korean military wives had to learn how to survive in the society and culture of the United States. They could not afford to enjoy the American dream because they had no economic, socio-cultural, personal, or linguistic power. Their dependence on others resulted in continual humiliation, degradation, and marginalization. In this

39 Ibid., 65.
40 Ibid., 84.
following section, I will describe their cultural and familial struggles, their sense of non-belonging, and their yearning for solidarity.

Survival and Struggle: America Culture and Self Identity

Like other immigrants, one of the difficult challenges for Korean military wives was to encounter and overcome the differences between American culture and Korean culture. Before they left Korea, Korean military wives expected to find wealth, freedom, opportunity, and close family relationships in America. However, they soon discovered that “they left familiar hardships in Korea for hardships they never imagined they would find in America, including poverty, sexism, racism, divorce, and intense loneliness.”\(^{41}\) In order to survive, they chose to work in camptowns or near military bases, and then they married American military servicemen. After arriving in America, they recognized that survival was going to be an ongoing struggle throughout their whole life. Yuh describes what this struggle was like: “Their struggle has been not only for physical survival but for emotional and cultural survival as well. It is a struggle for the survival of the whole self, intact with dignity, history, and self-respect.”\(^{42}\) They endured all kinds of demands, indignities and humiliations. One Korean military wife says,

If someone saw me since I’m Asian, they might say that they saw an Asian woman just leaving her groceries in the street. So because I was afraid that people might say this, I would grit my teeth and carry it all home. The minute I closed my door behind me, the tears would just come and I would think, why did I come to America only to work so hard and freeze my hands off and to live this?

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 84.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 84.
And the tears would threaten. So on those days I would make myself a good meal.  

They also experienced frustrations, discrimination, and oppression in their homes. They came to America as wives of American soldiers, and this meant that they had to become Americanized in order to function as wives, mothers, and family members. Korean military wives were soon aware that their American husbands and biracial children did not regard them as equals. In other words, they acknowledged that they were cultural and racial outsiders within their America families where they experienced racism, sexism, violence, discrimination, and humiliation. A one Korean military wife says,

I want to raise the children Korean-style, but if I try to do that my husband says I can’t. It’s America, he says, so don’t keep doing that to the children. So… most of the time, I just give up. If I keep insisting on that, you know, in the end it just becomes a family fight. So now I guess I’ve become a little wise. When I think that way, it’s easier to understand the children, and as my husband says, this is America. And my husband grew up that way, so what he sees the, maybe he thinks I’m wrong. So there are many times when I give up.

In American society and culture, Korean military wives had to follow American customs of rearing children. Even though their families were composed of American husbands, Korean wives, and biracial children, they were not recognized as inter or multicultural families; the family as a whole was identified with the race of the father. Furthermore, many of their husbands forced their Korean wives to be authentic Americans. Yuh describes this process as follows:

They [Korean military wives] were told not to associate with other Koreans and to “renounce” their cultural past. Unless the husband supports his wife, which

---

43 Ibid., 91.
44 Ibid., 102.
seems to be rare, the women are often alone in their struggle to express their Korean identity. But husbands generally expect wives to participate building American families, as defined by the husband. In most cases, this meant minimal acknowledgement of the Korean culture and identity of the woman. Many husbands frowned on things Korean, insisting that their Korean wives raise “all-American” children and stick to “all-American” lifestyles.45

Korean military wives were very frustrated and angry within these constraints. Min Kwon, a Korean American pastor who has ministered to Korean military wives, says, “In their multicultural families, Korean military wives experience emotional and cultural disconnection with their spouse and children, and they are living in the condition of severe loneliness.”46 The emotional and cultural disconnection in their families contributed to psychological anxiety of Korean military wives. Another Korean American pastor, Chul Song, who has ministered to Korean military wives for five years says,

They cannot share their suffering and struggle with their husbands at home because of their language and cultural difference. Their children are more tied to their American fathers, not Korean mothers. Consequently, their social lives are deeply connected to their fellow Korean military wives and they often feel psychological loneliness. And the psychological loneliness develops into psychological anxiety.47

Along with these familial issues, they also struggled with issues related to their self and national identity. Many Korean military wives were still proud of being Korean and they resisted having their cultural identities erased:

It’s just, I’m Korean. I still have pride in being Korean [because I love Korea]. Why should I, why should a Korean become an American citizen? I have that

45 Ibid., 98.

46 Email interview by author, January 30, 2008. All interviews were confidential; the real names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

47 Email interview by author, March 3, 2008.
kind of negative reaction, so I didn’t. If I had wanted to, I would have already done it. But I still think that Korea is the best, isn’t that right? Think about it. Why should I become an American citizen? Isn’t that so?\(^{48}\)

Some Korean military wives tried to negotiate their identity. One of them says,

> You know, and I am not shamed to say I’m Korean. I’m proud to say I’m Korean. [Meanwhile] Feels like, this [America] is my home. Feels like I was born here, I live here so long, you know. Well, everybody live here is American, you know, maybe that’s what they mean.\(^{49}\)

Others defined themselves as wanderers, “We’re not completely adjusted to American culture, and yet we are losing touch with Korean culture. We are like strangers, wanderers, just like wanderers, people who are drifting.”\(^{50}\) The other Korean military wives intentionally chose limited relationship with the other Koreans. One of them insists,

> They [Korean military wives] say that life was good in Korea and they came here for nothing. Then I tell them to go. Why are you here, go back to your country, that’s what I say. We married Americans and came here, so this is our country and we live here, but if you prefer Korea, then go back. Why do you criticize someone else’s country? Just go. That’s what I tell them.\(^{51}\)

As we see above, Korean military wives can survive among American families and societies only if they become assimilated by giving up their Korean identity.

Furthermore, their identity struggles are related to their sense of not belonging, which will be the main topic of the next section.

\(^{48}\) Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown*, 123.

\(^{49}\) Ibid., 124.

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 124-5.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 174.
Sense of Not Belonging

Many Korean military wives are afraid of their disconnection from other Korean Americans, and the sense of abandonment acts as the primary obstacle of their difficulty in keeping relationships with other Korean Americans. I see that they sometimes experience deep despair because they feel spiritually that their relationship with God has been broken.\(^\text{52}\)

In the above statement, Kwon, a Korean American pastor, describes relational disconnection as a core issue of the psychological and spiritual suffering of Korean military wives. As pastor Kwon describes, many Korean military wives living in America experience a sense of not belonging. That is, they are not welcomed either by the Korean American communities and churches or by the cultures represented by their husbands. As it were, Korean American societies, American society, and their intercultural families were not places that supported them.

As I said earlier, Korean military wives faced the struggle of formulating their identities with their husbands and children in their American family. The husband, the biracial children, and the family are American, while Korean military wives see themselves as Korean. In this situation, “American in-laws and husbands were told not to associate with other Koreans and to “renounce” their cultural past.”\(^\text{53}\) Korean military wives were outsiders even in the Korean American societies. They had difficulty associating with other Koreans. There was a feeling of distance and separation between the Korean military wives and other Korean Americans. Korean American churches, which play a crucial role in Korean American societies, were also places where the Korean military wives experienced estrangement. Yuh argues,

\(^{52}\) Email interview by author, January 30, 2008.

\(^{53}\) Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown*, 98.
Nearly all [of the Korean military brides she interviewed] said that even when other Koreans are friendly, it was superficial. Other Koreans would associate with them [Korean military brides] at church or similar public spaces, but would never invite them to private gatherings, family events such as weddings, or to other social occasions that might lead to the development of a friendship.54

Many Korean military wives complain that Korean immigrant churches are not interested in their psychological, social and spiritual suffering. Some of them attended American churches because they hoped to experience less prejudice and discrimination than they experienced in Korean immigrant churches. They were often disappointed. Korean military wives also experienced racial and cultural barriers at racially white American churches. Furthermore, they missed the group-oriented fellowship with other Korean Christians.55

Korean military wives wanted to be recognized by fellow Koreans as respectable Korean women. Yet it was very hard for Koreans to recognize and set aside deep-rooted prejudices toward Korean military wives. As Yuh notes, “Koreans seems to think that Korean military wives are tainted, or polluted, by their intimate association with foreigners. To mix bodies and mix blood with non-Koreans is dirty.”56 Koreans have seemingly incurable stereotypes of Korean military wives. They tend to regard all Korean military wives as former prostitutes. That is the major reason why Korean military wives cannot experience close relationships with other Korean immigrants.

In the meantime, rejections, discriminations, and oppression from their American husbands and American society are deeply related to racism. Many Korean Americans

54 Ibid., 173.


56 Yuh, Beyond the Shadow of Camptown, 161.
were aware of American racism when they lived in Korea, particularly as they watched news reports of the racial desegregation policies of the United States during the 1950s and 1960s. In Nadia Kim’s interview with Korean Americans, Mr. Roh describes his experience of racism of white Americans at United States military bases in the 1960s in Korea:

When I was in Korea, I felt that whites were really cold to Koreans . . . Well, when a white person and a black person got in a car, the black person always drove the care and the white person never drove. And they used separate restrooms: there was a restroom for whites and a restroom for blacks at the base. So, ever since the Korean War, I realized that white Americans tended to discriminate against races a lot and that they were cold-hearted.57

Racial discrimination is shaped by the historical context, and not by a single person’s good will or actions; it exists before his or her arrival or birth. Fumitaka Matsuoka describes the systemic nature of racism:

Racism is oppressive not because people of a dominant group have prejudicial feelings about others, but because it is a system that promotes the domination and subjugation of certain racial and ethnic groups. It is the intentional or unintentional use of power on the part of those who are in the position of power culturally, politically, and economically to isolate, separate, and exploit those who are less powerful and vulnerable.58

For instance, some American husbands of Korean military women loved and cared for their Korean spouses. Nevertheless, the kindness and caring of individual husbands did not negate the unjust social, economic, and political structures of America that


58 Fumitaka Matsuoka, Out of Silence (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1995), 85-86.
discriminated against racial and ethnic minority groups. In Yuh’s interview with Korean military wives, a Korean military wife recalls,

> Back then in the 1950s, it was very, really, very difficult to see Asian person, very far in between. Only in Chinese restaurant, few Chinese people, otherwise there were no Asians at all. So, when Americans see an Asian, well, they stare and stare as if, what, they look at you like you out of the space. That’s how extreme it was, extreme, they stare at you. They, oh, it was just incredible.59

Another Korean military wife remembers,

> Between Kansas City and Chicago, it was racial discrimination. When I asked (for the restroom) at the gas station, they told me to go to the restaurant; when I asked at the restaurant, they told me to go to the gas station. So I went back and forth, back and forth, like a yo-yo. After about two times, I realized, aha, that is what they call racial discrimination. I woke up to this, and next time I had my husband ask and find it for me. So he would go and ask and find it, and then tell me, and then I would enter and go to the restroom without bothering to ask the workers there. So there was racial discrimination, and it wasn’t good feeling.60

But Korean military wives were not the sole racial group that experienced oppression. Nearly all Asians and other non-Western immigrant people were victims of American racism. Lee Sang Hyun, a Korean American systemic theologian, describes how white racism contributed to the marginalization of Asian Americans:

> [W]hite racism functions as the barrier that pushed Asian Americans out of the center of the American society and keeps them at the edges of that society . . . . Asian American women suffer from a double marginalization because of the sexism that exists both in the white American society and also within their own Asian American communities. Without diminishing the significance of these other determinants of Asian Americans’ marginalization, it is still true, I believe, to say that white racism is the most universal determinant – a factor that applies to all Asian Americans’ marginalization.61

59 Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown*, 87.

60 Ibid., 89.

It is ironic that those who are victimized from the dominant people in turn marginalize members of their own culture through abuse power. As I noted earlier, fellow Korean Americans reject Korean military wives. One Korean military wife says,

What I really want to say is this: if you marry a foreigner, you live with your husband. If you marry a fellow Korean, you live with your husband. So why do people emphasize that you married a foreigner? Don’t women who marry foreigners eat kimchi? Do only those who marry fellow Koreans eat kimchi? No. We are all Koreans, the same people, all of us. The women who married foreigners, we are all the same Koreans. Don’t look down on us.62 We need to observe that the oppressive attitudes of Korean American society toward Korean military wives are deeply influenced by Confucian thought. As I described earlier, Confucianism is an ancient Chinese religion and philosophy that has hierarchical structures. That is, it divides social classes into yangban (aristocrat) and sangnom (servant class men); it also teaches that women have to obey men. Even though Korean Americans live in the United States, they are still influenced by such the hierarchical values and philosophy of Confucianism. Angela Son describes how Korean American women experience conflicts with the traditional submissive role of women and their sense of shame:

Korean American women are also at more of a risk of being subject to shame due to their increased independence which conflicts with the traditional submissive role of women. Korean American women’s gain in economic roles puts them in conflict with traditional dominant-submissive relationship dynamic between men and women.63

In relation to Korean military wives, Korean Americans have racist attitudes to Korean military wives, especially those who married African American military

62 Yuh, Beyond the Shadow of Camptown, 177-78.

personnel. Korean Americans saw the low social status of African American in America society, and emulated Anglo-American’s deep-seated racial prejudice toward African American people. Even though Koreans were also oppressed and colonized by Americans, they internalized the unjustifiable racial hierarchy they experienced in America society. Yuh says,

They [Korean military wives whose husbands are African American] are more likely to be treated as former camptown women than women whose husbands are white. Several Korean immigrants, upon learning of my research, confidently told me that I would find a few refined [Korean] women among the wives of whites, but that the wives of blacks were all from the camptowns.64

Lee and Lee describe the effects of the segregation policy of the United States on Koreans’ formation of negative images of African Americans:

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, a practice of racial segregation existed in the [United States] between black and white soldiers. Bars were segregated. White soldiers would not go to the bars where black soldiers socialized and vice versa. Witnessing the discrimination towards African American soldiers and their poor standard of living, Koreans internalized the racial prejudices that existed in American society and developed their own bias and stereotypes. It was common for the camptown prostitutes to be segregated according to the color of the men they slept with.65

From the above examples, we know that it is difficult for Korean Americans to overcome racist stereotypes of African Americans. In conclusion, the experience of not belonging of Korean military wives is mainly caused by racial prejudice that perpetuates the power, prestige, privilege, and ideology of dominant racial groups. And it is very

---

64 Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown*, 160.

65 Lee and Lee, 460.
easy for Korean Americans to overlook the fact that they are also victims of racism.\textsuperscript{66}

Freire points out,

As the oppressors dehumanize others and violate their rights, they themselves also become dehumanized. As the oppressed, fighting to be human, take away the oppressors’ power to dominate and suppress, they restore to the oppressors the humanity they had lost in the exercise of oppression.\textsuperscript{67}

In this sense, all human beings suffer from the vicious cycle of oppression and dehumanization, and they must resist the destructive power of racism.

False Consciousness and Yearning for Solidarity

As we have seen, Korean military wives suffered not only from racially oppressive social, economic, and political environments but also from false images projected upon them. In a sense, the suffering that results from this projection of false images is much more intolerable than physical hardships. That is, the images of being labeled as “dirty,” “impure,” and “nothing” were carved in their heart like the letter displayed on Hester Prynne’s clothing in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s novel \textit{The Scarlet Letter}. In Yuh’s interviews with Korean military wives, a Korean military wife attests,

Those internationally married women, that’s what other people are going to say. Those internationally married women were all yankee whores, they’ve never been educated. A bunch of ignorant and crass women got together, what else can you expect from them? Of course they break up. That’s how Korean society sees us,

\textsuperscript{66} Other fellow Koreans tend to show off their superiority to Korean military wives. But they are also victimized by White American society and culture. Furthermore, many ethnic minority groups have a tendency to oppress other ethnic minority groups. Even among European white groups, we can see that there are also marginalized groups such as woman, children, the age, homosexual and transsexual people, and the poor.

that’s their perspective. They do, of course they do. So in the end, I became the president [of Korean American Wives Association] and we enjoyed quite a boom.68

Kwon, a Korean American pastor, points out that most Korean military wives experienced unendurable insults and prejudice from other Korean Americans, and it made Korean military wives avoid Korean American communities. Many Korean military wives also found employment with fellow Korean immigrants, so they struggled against a sense of inferiority in the workplace.69 Song, another Korean American pastor, says,

Generally speaking, most Korean immigrants run their own business, and they hire Korean military wives as employees. Under this circumstance, Korean military wives experience the sense of inferiority psychologically and economically. Some of them are used to getting into trouble with other Korean military wives and Korean immigrants. To resolve such conflicts, they seclude themselves from Korean immigrant society, or form a group of Korean military wives.70

Lee and Lee also describe the negative image of ‘internationally married women’:

In South Korea, the term ‘internationally married women’ (kukche kyorhon yosong) refers to women who marry non-Koreans . . . Korean often regard military brides as racially and culturally impure. Underlying this bias is the idea that the Korean identity of these military brides was compromised as they became Americanized in interracial marriages.71

In these situations, Korean military wives resist the imposition of these false images, and want to construct more positive image toward them. In Yuh’s study, another Korean military wife says,

68 Yuh, Beyond the Shadow of Camptown, 198.
69 Email interview by author, January 30, 2008.
70 Email interview by author, March 3, 2008.
71 Lee and Lee, 464.
We [Korean military wives] showed them [Koreans and Americans] the reality of military brides in a grand way, we showed them that there were these fine women. … They think that we are all Korean women who did, you know, and then married foreigners, that we are all uneducated. But we showed them that we military brides are really [something].

Korean American pastors also point out that to construct a positive self image is one of the important issues that Korean military wives face now. For example, a Korean American pastor, Su Kim, says, “Korean military wives have to get rid of their deep sense of shamefulness and rediscover self-divinity as God’s creatures.” And Song another Korean American pastor says, “The crucial task of Korean military wives is to restore emotional and psychological stability and self-respect.”

Brock and Thistlethwaite critique the stereotypes of prostitution and the existent dominant ideology, and describe the importance of the practice of deconstructing false images toward prostitutes. They use the metaphor of ideological blindness to describe the false consciousness that makes women unable to discern the ways dominant ideologies project false images on them. According to Brock and Thistlethwaite, “False consciousness is essentially dangerous when ideologies maintain the suffering and

---


73 Email interview by author, March 5, 2008.

74 Email interview by author, March 3, 2008.

75 Brock and Thistlethwaite delineate ideological blindness in this way: “One lacks a consciousness to critique mythological and intellectual ideas because one holds a particular ideology to be unassailably true and unalterable.” (Brock and Thistlethwaite, 1996, 210).
oppression of particular groups of people and protects the status and power of the oppressor.”

How then can Korean military wives as subordinate people resist and transform the dominant ideology and false consciousness? In response to these circumstances, Korean military wives discovered that they need to become agents who realize their desire to resist and transform all forms of oppression and exclusion. They yearned to create relationships and communities where they can define themselves and their world and can share their sufferings. Yuh describes these yearnings as follows, “In imaging themselves into community, military brides have created a space of their own. This creation emphasizes that while they may be multiply connected to multiple communities, they are not split among these communities, but rooted in their own community.”

In this sense, being able to create their own community represents the fulfillment of Korean military wives’ lifelong dream of survival, hope, inclusion, and acceptance. They were no longer isolated individuals; instead, they felt a strong sense of solidarity. Korean military wives can begin to find their own voice first through participation in their own communities, and not in other communities. A founding member of a regional Korean military wives organization describes this need:

> It’s hard to associate with Americans, they call us *Oriental Oriental girl* and this and that, but if we try to get involved in Korean communities, then they label us as internationally married women and say this and that about us, so there’s no place for us to go. So that’s why this group started.

The significance of community for Korean military wives will be explored in Chapter 6.

---

76 Ibid., 210-11.

77 Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown*, 221.

78 Ibid., 197.
Summary

So far, I have examined the historical and social context of Korean military wives. As we saw in this chapter, the suffering of Korean military wives is shaped by the interacting patriarchal socio-cultural structures, military-capitalist systems, and their inherent levels of racism. It is not surprising that these women experience physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual hardships. Korean military wives suffered as a result of the distorted power relations between Korean military wives and other Koreans and Americans. They were forced to accept these dominant ideologies, and to believe that their situations were fixed and unchangeable. That is, the dominant ideology persuades Korean military wives to internalize and believe in the values that explain and justify their own subordination. In such historical circumstances, Korean military wives have had a hard time resisting these dominant ideologies, stereotypes, and their subordinated life locations. In spite of these cultural dynamics, these women have finally taken steps to become liberated since 80’s. That is, they have tried to recover a sense of their own agency to define their suffering life experiences by using their own voice and community. Furthermore, the experiences of Korean military wives show us how God’s justice and love can work through human suffering, pain, and struggle. In the following chapter, theological perspectives for interpreting the suffering of Korean military wives will be examined.
CHAPTER 3
THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR PASTORAL THEOLOGY
OF KOREAN MILITARY WIVES

As we reviewed in Chapter 2, it is not a simple task to analyze the suffering of
Korean military wives because their life experiences are varied and complex. Without
full understanding of their contexts, it will be almost senseless and meaningless to discuss
their suffering and healing. When we have a contextual understanding of their suffering,
we can construct more appropriate theories of pastoral theology and care for Korean
military wives and provide adequate pastoral intervention. The dissertation continues to
assert that we need critical reflection on the personal, social, and historical context of
their suffering in order to be able to address the suffering, grief, and struggles of
discriminated and excluded social groups like Korean military wives. This dissertation
defines context as personal, cultural, social, and historical locations of human experience.
In other words, the realities of Korean military wives are constructed and mediated in the
context of the cultural, historical, and social structures the women experienced.¹ In the
next section, contextual theology, theology of han, and Asian feminist theology will be
examined.

¹ Bevans demonstrates the significance of one’s location, cultural historical
realities and individual and communal stories. He describes five aspects of context as
follows: personal and communal experiences; the context of culture, which makes
personal or communal experiences possible; the significance of a person’s or a
community’s social location; finally experiences of social change within culture. See
Stephen B. Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books,
2002), 5-6.
“There is no such thing as ‘theology’; there is only contextual theology: feminist theology, black theology, liberation theology, Filipino theology, Asian-American theology, African theology, and so forth.”² Bevans’s statement demonstrates powerfully the necessity of doing theology within specific and unique realities and contexts. The contextualization of theology attempts to understand Christian faith in terms of a particular context. In contextual theology, specific human experience is considered a valid source for theological reflection, along with scripture and tradition. That is, contextual theology attempts to discover God’s justice and liberating power not only by reading the Bible and engaging in traditional religious rituals but also by critically exploring human experiences and realities. For instance, feminist theologians are interested in reading and understanding the Bible in terms of the role of women in its historical context. For example, Sharon Ringe notes that,

Their [The individual authors of the Bible] expressions of necessity fit their particular historical, social, and cultural contexts, for otherwise those formulations would have been both without meaning for those who heard them and without power to order or transform life. Whatever is of eternal validity in the biblical documents must be discerned by taking into account the particularity of their contexts and the influence of those contexts on the texts that emerged.³

Contextual theology was initially proclaimed by theologians from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and marginal groups within dominant Western culture; for example, African American theologians and feminist scholars. Consequently, it was unavoidable

---


that contextual theology included deep and critical reflection on local circumstances like “the burden of poverty and oppression, the struggle to create a new identity after a colonial past, or how to meet the challenge of modernization and the commodification of the economy in traditional culture and village life.” ⁴ In this sense, contextual theology was born to resist Western theologies that acted as universal theologies. Many theologians from non-Western contexts critically acknowledged that they did not need to become Westerners in order to become Christians or theologians. On the contrary, they proclaimed that for them any theology that emerged primarily from the dominant class was not likely to be life giving theology. They ascertained that life giving theology was more likely to originate from a critical analysis of their unique human experiences.

In addition, we need to consider contextual theology in relation to indigenization. Many Asian scholars have used the concept of indigenization in order to emphasize their own traditional Asian culture, and draw upon it in articulating their identities and formulating methodologies for doing theology, cultural studies, and philosophy. Shoki Coe, a Taiwanese theologian, argues that indigenization is a dated and static concept of culture; that is, it does not reflect the dynamic and changing nature of the living experiences in Asia. Coe stresses that the recent paradigm shift from indigenization to contextualization offers a more meaningful process for reflecting the historical situation and recent social changes in Asia. He points out that “contextualization conveys all that is implied in indigenization, yet seeks to press beyond for a more dynamic concept which is

open to change and which is also future-oriented.”

This dissertation also uses the concept of contextualization in an inclusive way. That is, it respects the traditional norms, values, and customs of Asia; at the same time, it also recognizes the rapid social change going on in Asia.

What hermeneutical method should be employed for interpreting scripture and religious tradition within Asia contexts? Considering the emphasis of contextual theology on the life experiences of the oppressed, subaltern hermeneutics can be an adequate method of interpretation for contextual theology. The term subaltern refers to a social position in which one is regarded as inferior or marginal, and one is oppressed and discriminated against. Consequently, subaltern hermeneutics “emerges from out of the lowly, inferiorly or marginally placed situation of any group in society.”

In subaltern hermeneutics, the standpoint of the interpreter is very critical, so, it is very crucial to ask the questions: Who is the interpreter? Can only experts or those with authority be interpreters for others? Subaltern hermeneutics resist the belief that there are always experts who interpret religious traditions and realities. Subaltern hermeneutics argue that subalterns must be interpreters of religious traditions on the basis of their own social and historical life realities and experiences. Subalterns should engage in the task of deconstructing and reconstructing their religious traditions through critical reflection on their condition of being marginalized and discriminated against. Subaltern

---


hermeneutics share many assumptions and strategies with contextual theology. Bevans emphasizes the limited role of the nonparticipant in doing contextual theology for others:

We can state that issue of the nonparticipant’s ability to do authentic theology in even more concrete terms: Can a non-Ghanaian do Ghanaian theology? Can a white U.S. American do black theology? Can a North American contribute to Latin American theological reflection on God’s liberating action in history? Can a male do feminist theology? We must answer, from one point of view, with a firm no. As Emerson seems to imply, a person who does not fully share one’s experience is not to be fully trusted to speak of God in that person’s context. 7

How can theologians explore different cultures, faith traditions, and religious beliefs? The more we understand the complexity and interconnectedness of culture and society today, the greater the challenge for those with social advantages who endeavor to interpret the experiences of those without these same advantages. Bevans proposes several limited ways that people from the outside can contribute to the development of a contextual theology for the other. One of his strategies is particularly appropriate for constructing theologies in pastoral care situations. He articulates this strategy as follows: “[B]y his or her own honesty in presenting his or her theological position the nonparticipant can stimulate people from the culture or situation to do their own theological thinking.” 8 One of the goals of this dissertation is to contribute to constructions of theologies arising out of the experiences of Korean military wives, in ways that will support these women in articulating their theologies.

Finally, contextual theology and subaltern hermeneutics use unique and specific social locations and situations of the alienated and suffered as primary tools for interpreting human experiences. In this sense, those who are alienated and suffering could be a source of inspiration for theological reflection.

7 Bevans, 18.

8 Ibid., 20.
interpret their experiences differently from many historic and Western theologies. That is, contextual theology and subaltern hermeneutics examine cultural and historical contexts of the marginal in order to construct their intrinsically meaningful understandings of God and expressions of their faith. As Wilfred notes, “Subaltern hermeneutics is not simply one more field of hermeneutical enterprise, nor is it simply a completion or corrective to the dominant hermeneutical project. It is a hermeneutics, so to say, ‘from below.’”

Ultimately, contextual theology and subaltern hermeneutics emerged as a reaction to Western theologies that claimed to be comprehensive and universal. Western theologies focused on the so-called universal needs and perspectives of all humanity. Furthermore, Western theologies were mainly made by male, Western, and socially and ecclesiastically privileged theologians. Ansalem Kyongsuk Min writes,

[I]t is also true that Western theology not only did not include but deliberately excluded the voices of others, those who are different in class, ethnicity, and gender, from the constitutive concerns and perspectives of theology making itself guilty of the many forms of historical oppression of the other. It is not only reasonable but also compelling that the oppressed, excluded, and marginalized others of history should claim their rightful places in theology as well.

Two brief examples will illuminate the significance of contextual theology and subaltern hermeneutics in interpreting the life experiences and histories of the socially disadvantage. African American and Japanese theologians understand God and faith on the basis of their own suffering within their cultural and historical contexts. James Cone, an African American theologian, describes God as black, and Masao Takenaka, a Japanese theologian, uses the metaphor of rice to describe God as a life-giving reality.

---

9 Felix Wilfred, 145.

And then, Andrew Sung Park’s theology of *han* and Asian feminist theology, which will be primary theological resources for exploring the suffering of Korean military wives, will be examined.

**God is Black**

“I began to write about a Black theology of liberation, endeavoring to show that the real meaning of the gospel of Jesus is found in the concrete struggles of the poor for freedom and not in the abstract theological jargon.”\(^{11}\) In this statement, Cone powerfully shows the significance of doing theology from the margin. That is, his theology germinates from critical reflection on very ‘specific’ and ‘concrete’ contexts of African American. In this sense, his theology is from the context to the text, not vice versa. Based on critical reflections on African Americans’ suffering and struggles, Cone proclaims,

‘God is Black.’ When he proclaims it, he believes that God reveals Godself to the suffering poor people who yearn for survival, justice and liberation. And he emphasizes God’s life-giving power to the oppressed by saying, “God is that life-giving power who enables the victims of injustice to survive in the midst of misery and to fight until freedom comes.”\(^{12}\)

Cone also looks beyond African American communities, and insists that all other oppressive and poor communities need God’s liberating power. He says, “God is

---


\(^{12}\) Ibid., 103.
mother,’ ‘rice,’ ‘red,’ and a host of other things that give life to those whom society condemns to death.”

God is Rice

Masao Takenaka, one of the best-known ecumenical theologians in Asia, also constructs theology by deeply exploring his Japanese cultural context. In his book *God is Rice*, he differentiates Japanese theology from Western theology. Takenaka classifies much of Western theology as *ya-yah* theology, which emphasizes rational argumentation and confrontation rather than mutual sharing. Meanwhile Japanese theology utilizes what he calls a *Ha-hah* approach. According to him, a *Ha-hah* approach is the approach “of personal appreciation and mutual acknowledgement of what’s going on in the living reality of life.” Like Cone, Takenaka portrays God as a living reality. That is, theology or discussions about faith should work “to awaken the minds of people to the living reality of God and God’s work in the world.”

Takenaka symbolizes God as rice as a way of describing God’s living reality and Christian faith communities in Asian settings because rice is the daily food of Asia. He quotes a well-known Korean poem,

Heaven is rice  
As we cannot go to heaven alone  
We should share rice with one another  
As all share the light of the heavenly stars  
We should share and eat rice together  
Heaven is rice  
When we eat and swallow rice

---

13 Ibid., 103.


15 Ibid., 10.
Heaven dwells in our body  
Rice is heaven  
Yes, rice is the matter  
We should eat together.\(^{16}\)

This poem illuminates Korean, Japan, and other Asian ways of understanding God and faith. Cakenaka says “It [The poem] certainly reminds us of the holy communion, which is the occasion to share our daily food together with all people as the symbol of eternal life. This has a social implication as well as a spiritual meaning.”\(^ {17}\)

**Andrew Sung Park’s Asian American Liberation Theology:**  
**Theology of Han**

The suffering of Korean military wives cannot be fully explained using individualistic perspectives. Even though all Korean military wives have different life stories, they need to be interpreted collectively because their life experiences have a common cultural background. In other words, our focus must be more on the complex social, cultural, political, and historical contexts which gave birth to the women’s suffering. In this sense, it is very important for us to recognize the social and cultural locations of Asians, Asian Americans and Asian women living in United States. Therefore, the issues of Korean military wives do not simply relate to other fellow Korean immigrants, but their stories also reflect the sufferings of other Asians, Asian Americans, and Asian women. As long as we understand the contexts of Asians, Asian Americans, and Asian women, we can understand Korean military wives’ suffering and struggle more deeply.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 18.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 18.
Andrew Sung Park’s Asian American liberation theology, with its focus on *han*, is especially relevant for examining the experience of Asians. He describes Asian Americans and Korean Americans living in the United States as wounded people, who are victimized by neocolonialism, hierarchical social structures, racism, sexism, and Western capitalism. Park’s Asian American liberation theology seeks liberation from the domination of the oppressors. Park uses the notion of *han*, a Korean and Asian concept, to portray the deep wounded heart of victims. The concept of *han* plays a key role in Park’s Asian American liberation theology. *Han* is nearly ideal as a concept that expresses the life-long sufferings of Korean military wives. Meanwhile, he uses *han* of the oppressed in relation to sin of the oppressor. To begin with, the meaning of *han* and socio-cultural, economic, and political roots of *han* will be treated.

*Han*, Unfathomable Wounded Heart of the Oppressed

Korean people often say, “U-ri-nun- *han*-man-eun- min-jok-i-da.”¹⁸ Koreans tend to believe that their national history is full of *han*, and they define themselves not as only Korean people but also as *han*-ridden people. What then is *han*? What is the definition of *han*? What are the primary roots of *han* in Korean history and Korean American community?

First of all, *han* can be defined in a number of different ways. As it is usually used to portray complex psychological, physical, and spiritual trauma and sufferings, the actual quality and severity of suffering can vary from person to person, and context to context. Even among Koreans, there are different definitions of *han*. Suh Nam-Dong, a

¹⁸ “We are *han*-ridden people.”
Korean minjung theologian, defines han as “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.”

Another Korean minjung theologian, Hyun Young-Hak, describes han as,

A sense unresolved resentment against injustice suffered, a sense of helplessness because of the overwhelming odds against [oneself], a feeling of total abandon (‘Why hast thou forsaken me?’), a feeling of acute pain of sorrow in one’s guts and bowels making the whole body writhe . . . and an obstinate urge to take ‘revenge’ and to right the wrong . . .

Andrew Sung Park, who has written extensively on the subject, names han as “internalized collective memory of victims generated by patriarchal tyranny, racial discrimination, economic exploitation, ethnic cleansing, massacre, foreign occupation, state-sponsored terrorism, and unjust war.” Compared to other definitions, Park’s definition highlights the complex relationships between han and the socio-cultural, econo-political, and historical contexts in which it is experienced. His definition alludes

---

19 Chung Hyun Kyung, “‘Han-Pu-Ri: Doing Theology from Korean Women’s Perspective,”” in We Dare to Dream: Doing Theology as Asian Women, ed. Virginia Fabella and Sun Ai Lee Park (Hong Kong and Philippines: Asian Women’s Resource Centre for Culture and Theology and The EATWOT Women’s Commission in Asia, 1989), 135-50.

20 Ibid., 55.

21 Andrew Sung Park, From Hurt to Healing: A Theology of the Wounded (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), 15. Park elaborates the individual and collective level of han (한, 恨). He says, “At its (Han) individual level, it is the will to revenge, resignation, regret, diffuseness, absence, bitterness, and helplessness, reacting to a private oppression. At its collective level, han is the corporate will to revolt, collective despair, communal wrath, group discontent, racial resentment, and racial lamentation. The collective dimension of han includes its structural level that involves chronic and systemic exploitation and injustice.”
to the role that war and imperialism play in developing and accumulating *han* into the heart of Koreans and Korean Americans, which Park calls the *han* of war.

Actually, the *han* of war permeates deep within the hearts of Koreans over a long period of time; in the past century this period of time includes Japanese colonialism and the Korean War. Koreans’ concept of *han* cannot be explained without taking into account these two unforgettable national upheavals. From 1910 to 1945, Japan colonized Korea by forcing Korea to sign the Protective Treaty. In the period of Japanese occupation, Koreans lost their land, language, identity, and national spirit and religion. Park describes this experience:

In 1910 Japan annexed Korea. For the next thirty-six years Korea suffered under the iron rule of Japan. Such a disgrace as the loss of its national sovereignty had never happened before in the five-thousand-year history of Korea. The deep pain and disgrace of the Koreans were increased when the Japanese imperialists forced them to use Japanese rather than their own language and to change their names into Japanese. For Koreans, their language and the act of naming were the core of their soul.22

In the meanwhile, the representative group that experienced the bitterest *han* of the war during the Japanese occupation was the so-called Korean comfort women who were conscripted and forced to become sexual objects for Japanese soldiers during the Pacific war. As I described in Chapter 2, the comfort women were harshly beaten and brutally raped everyday and some were tortured and killed. The Japanese provided the women with only small meals, but no medical care. Many of them chose suicide rather than becoming sex slaves. Park quotes from several women’s testaments:

> I was returning home one day when Japanese and Korean men forced me onto a ship headed for Southeast Asia. There I spent four unbearable years.

---

On weekends, soldiers waited in a long line of a few hundred meters…. A woman from Bo-Joo contracted venereal disease, was beaten everyday and died eventually.

I remember the Japanese soldiers cutting off one of a woman’s breasts when they caught a group of us attempting to escape. This atrocity was meant to horrify us.23

It was an unforgettable, unforgivable, and unbearable nightmare.

Another miserable outcome of Japanese colonialism was the division of Korea. Korea became a lamb of sacrifice for the sake of the two superpower nations – the Soviet Union and the United States. In the name of “world peace” and “freedom” they forced Koreans to bear the division, and the division of Korea finally became the primary cause of the Korean War.

The Korean War left incurable han for most Koreans. Most Koreans lost their fathers, mothers, siblings, properties, and homes. Many Koreans who lived in the northern area of Korea came down to the southern area during the Korean War. Some of them moved back to their hometowns after the Korean War, but many of them never went back to their home. Koreans call them Sil-Hyang-Min, which means people who lost their homeland. This feeling of being lost left deep han within their hearts and memories for more than fifty years.24

Another group of people who suffered a deep sense of han as a result of the Korean War is Korean military wives, who are the primary subjects of this dissertation.

23 Ibid., 14-15.

24 Dramatically, very few people found their mothers, fathers, and siblings. And some of Sil-Hyang-Min had a chance to revisit their homeland temporarily since 1990. However, there are many Sil-Hyang-Min who died without reencountering and revisiting their families and homelands.
In relation to the han of the Korean war, Korean military wives were discarded and forgotten beings. Park describes one Korean military wife’s experience of han:

“It is all over. I want to die. Before my death, however, I’d like to share my han-ridden story to fellow Korean-Americans,” said the woman to a counselor. She trod the stony road of han in Korea as well as in this country. A stepmother who had become a widow during the Korean War raised her. In order to escape poverty, she married an American soldier. She yearned for and worked hard to create a warm and happy home. For eighteen years she married to him. They had two sons, currently seventeen and thirteen years old. When they moved to the States, their marriage began to crumble. Her husband frequently had extramarital affairs and harassed her, repeatedly saying that he regretted marrying a Korean woman. Finally, he filed divorce papers. Incited by their father, her children openly persecuted her for her poor English and her Korean background. The older son said, “Mom, get out of this house as soon as possible.”

This story strongly shows the deep wounded heart of Korean military wives. Park summarizes the hanful life realities of the woman he described above: “Her existence was full of han from being born in Korea as poor, female, and parentless. By bearing the han of Korea imposed by the Cold War of the superpowers, which caused the Korean War, she carried the sin of the world as its sacrificial lamb.”

Korean military wives, like Korean immigrants to the United States, experience the han of deep-rooted racism toward any group of people who are not racially identified as Caucasians. In fact, racial discrimination in the United States is not a recent issue, and it is not just a matter of Korean Americans. All ethnic minority groups, for instance, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanic Americans experience racial and cultural discrimination everyday. In his article A Life In-Between: A Korean-American Journey, Jung Young Lee shared his hanful story:

25 Park, Racial Conflict and Healing, 18.

26 Ibid., 19.
[The chairman of the board said:] We definitely think that you have met all the requirements for ordination and full membership in our conference. You have attended a Methodist seminary and done quite well. You were ordained a deacon a year ago and served the Methodist church as an associate minister for two years. You also answered all the questions we asked you. As far as we are concerned, you met all the qualifications for full membership in our conference. However, you must know that, once you have been admitted to our conference, the bishop is responsible for appointing you to a local church, and unfortunately, no congregation in our conference wants you as their pastor. You know what we mean.  

Instead of becoming a parish minister, he finally was offered a janitorial job in a large university church, which he rejected. Of course, this story happened in the 1970s. Yet many ethnic minority groups are still discriminated against socio-economically, politically, and culturally. When they are forced to give up a better future because of the different color of their faces, their broken hearts and the feelings of despair accumulate and finally become the han of racism.

Asian women including Korean women have to overcome one more obstacle: patriarchy. Asian women suffered from the oppressive, exploitative and distorted patriarchal human relationships for more than two thousand years in the name of Confucianism. To Asian women, patriarchy is a more influential system of oppression than racism. Asian women became easy targets of patriarchal violence committed by their fathers, husbands, brothers, and male religious leaders and neighbors. They did not define their social and cultural identity for themselves, but they just obeyed man-made social and ethical norms, customs, and rules. A particularly painful aspect of patriarchy

---

is when women make other women victims by using patriarchal power. That is, women tend to resolve their *han* of patriarchy through persecuting other women. Park says,

Negative han, unconsciously accumulated for a long time often explodes toward the wrong people. Women who have been oppressed in turn victimize their powerless, defenseless daughters and daughters-in-law. They have no intention of doing so, but they are often caught up in the unconscious power of patriarchy. Unless we work through individual and collective unconsciousness of the patriarchal value system, patriarchal expressions of oppression will continuously emerge in different forms.28

Having defined *han* and described its roots, I will describe *han* using the theological concept of sin and then I will outline a theological understanding of overcoming *han*.

*Han and Sin*

Park describes the relationship between *han* and sin. Even though the two terms have different meanings, they are interconnected with each other. Park elaborates, “The victim of sin developed the deep agonizing pain of *han*. They bear excruciating agony and humiliation caused by oppression, abuse, mistreatment, and violence. If their situations do not change, their *han* will only deepen.”29 Unresolved and chronic *han* creates another sin, which we can see in the case of Korean military wives’ sufferings. The suffering of Korean military wives is caused not only by white males and females but also by Korean males and fellow Korean females. In a sense, the fellow Korean women who experience *han* as a result of patriarchy inflict suffering on Korean military wives. Park describes the vicious cycle of sin and *han*, “Unresolved *han* or superficial

---


treatments of han continually produce sin, violence, and tragedies, thus perpetuating the eruption of han by generating yet more han.”

In this vein, Park insists that repentance of sin is an insufficient means of resolving han. He challenges the unilateral concept of sin formulated within traditional Christian theology, which moves from sin to repentance, and then to forgiveness. He elaborates this concept: “By listening and responding to the assuring Word of God, the sinner’s sin is forgiven and his or her guilt is removed. These concepts of sin and salvation are of limited utility in addressing the problems of human evil and suffering.”

Park criticizes that the classical Western theological perspectives of sin and salvation pay little attention to the reality of the han of the sinned-against, which must be resolved for the authentic reconciliation with the sinned and the sinned-against, and God and the sinner.

Park’s understanding of han and sin offers pastoral caregivers and counselors valuable insights. By paying attention to the painful experiences of those who are sinned against, Park reminds us of the mutual responsibilities that exist between victims and offenders in caring and counseling processes. That is, pastoral caregivers and counselors should critically engage in the suffering, grief, and struggle of the victims and the sin of the offenders at the same time. In other words, confrontation of the sufferings of victims

30 Ibid., 33.

31 Park examines the dynamics and complexity of sin, salvation, and han through his numerous publications. His arguments are very persuasive and radical, but it is not a primary goal for this dissertation to exhaust his arguments of sin. In this section, I highlight aspects of his work most relevant to the experiences of Korean military wives.

should be practiced not only by the sinned against but also the sinner. Within the
communal contextual paradigm of pastoral care and counseling, Park’s theology is
relevant and meaningful, because he focuses on the relationship between offenders and
victims, and the social and religious context in which this relationship occurs. Similarly,
Brock and Thistlethwaite elaborate this understanding of sin:

The concept of sin has often been used to blame victims for the tragedy that
strikes them and to ignore the responsibility of those in power for perpetuating
oppression and abuse. This use revictimizes those in pain, and [its individualistic
focus obfuscates the human structures and uses of power that cause suffering.] The way we traditionally understand sin perpetuates greater sins – a point well
made by liberation theologians.  

How then can victims heal their wounded heart? Park suggests three ways in which
healing occurs:

Healing includes three aspects. First, it occurs when victims allow the healing
stream of the Spirit to flow through them. By letting the Spirit work through them,
victims become cleansed from han and experience healing, a gift of God. This in
turn [transforms] them into agents of grace in healing others. Second, healing
occurs through self-denial. This involves denying distorted self-images and
restoring the image of God in them. Third, as wounded healers they partake in
[transforming] the collective or structural levels of han, making the fragmentary
world whole.  

Resolution of Han

Han of the victims should be healed and resolved. As we already saw, authentic
repentance and forgiveness for offenders cannot be realized without healing and
resolution of the han of the victim. How then can the han of the victims be resolved?

33 Rita Nakashima Brock and Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, 272.

34 Park, The Wounded Heart of God, 132.
According to Park, there are two ways to unravel *han* – one is negative and the other is positive:

To unravel *han*, we need to comprehend its nature. Han is frozen energy that can be unraveled either negatively or positively. If it explodes negatively, the *han*-ridden person may seek revenge, sometimes killing oppressors. If *han* implodes negatively, the *han*-ful person can slip into a fatalism that might develop into mental disorders or suicide. If *han* is unraveled positively, it can be converted into the fuel for transforming the social injustice which causes *han* in the first place and for building up a new community.35

But, how can *han*-ridden persons unravel their *han* in a positive way? First of all, Park demonstrates that the *han*-ridden need to awake to the reality of their own *han* and the causes of *han*. To become aware of *han* and the deep pain of suffering is not a matter of simply acknowledging that *han* is in one’s body, psyche, and spirit. It is important to know that, but it is not enough. *Han*-ridden persons need to reflect deeply upon the dehumanizing situations that induce *han*. They also have to deconstruct and reconstruct the painful, unendurable, and horrible memories associated with *han*. Without going through this process, their efforts to resolve their *han* will have little effect.

Park also suggests that we need a new worldview to resolve *han* in the world, “one which will reform the systems that have produced *han* in the world.”36 He proposes a cosmic way of thinking, which emphasizes the principle of interpenetration. The principle of interpenetration can be contrasted with individualistic ways of thinking and hierarchical attitudes. It stresses the significance of the interconnectedness of all things:


36 Ibid., 147.
“The parts are so closely interconnected that their very characteristics emerged from the connections, and thus one can only understand the universe by seeing it as a whole.”37

In particular, the principle of interpenetration is very crucial in analyzing and resolving the han of Korean Americans. As was noted earlier, Koreans’ han was generated in part from unequal and oppressive socio-cultural and economic-political contexts. The more we understand the interconnectedness of human relationships, the more easily we can recognize the collective and contextual nature of han. Park points out,

The realization of interconnectedness is pivotal in resolving the han of the world. In the realization that others’ han is our han and vice versa, we enter into a new dimension of true human nature. In fact, we know little of our han unless we know the han of others. If we realize our indivisible interconnectedness, all, including the oppressors, can cooperate to dissolve the han of the oppressed.38

By acknowledging the complex characteristics of sociopolitical and economic systems, Park points out that the church has to contribute to the realization of a new global order. He insists, “The church must take a leadership role in this exploited and confused world where capital and profit become gods due to the code of the wild: survival of the fittest.”39 The church should endeavor to heal the wounded people and challenge them to encounter their oppressed socio-cultural and econo-political structures. More specifically, Park advocates that the church must be a community of economic democracy, of global social responsibility, and of corporate political power. And he finally points out that the church must work for preserving sound ecology.

37 Ibid., 149.
38 Ibid., 151.
39 Ibid., 154.
The final way to resolve han is compassionate confrontation. Park elaborates: “Confrontation with the heart of compassion for the oppressors will genuinely change their heart through creative tensions.” And compassionate confrontation must be initiated by the hanful persons because the oppressors rarely see their realities. The oppressors’ hearts are filled with prejudice, discrimination, prestige, and selfishness. Furthermore, the oppressors tend to defend and disguise their own sinful behaviors. In this sense, the oppressed can assist the oppressors to see their own blindness and the destructive outcomes of their wrongdoings. The ultimate goal of compassionate confrontation is not only to transform victims but also to transmute the sin of their offenders.

How then can the oppressor be compassionately confronted with the suffering of the hanful persons? In the contemporary complex societies, how can hanful persons and the oppressors create new common visions? In what ways do oppressors become aware of their privilege, prejudice, and abuse of power? For these questions, Park asserts that these processes of compassionate confrontation and true reconciliation can be realized through God’s community. He proclaims, “Victims can transmute their negative energy of han into a positive one for constructing the community of God; their offenders can cease afflicting others and participate in the establishment of God’s community.” In this sense, the church is regarded as a prophetic community for resisting and transforming han-causing elements. And the church needs to practice its prophetic function both

---

40 Ibid., 171.

41 Ibid., 172.
through victims’ forgiveness and through perpetrators’ repentance. In Chapter 5 and 6, I will explore this issue further.

**Asian Feminist Theology**

Korean military wives became victims of the interacting systems of patriarchy, sexism, racism, colonialism, and Confucianism over a long period of time. They were forced to follow traditional, male-centered social and cultural norms and customs. Consequently, the theology of *han* helps us understand the *han*-ful stories of Korean women carved in their body, heart, and spirit. Meanwhile, Korean military wives’ suffering should be treated in relation to other Asian women’s stories of oppression and discrimination. That is, they were also victims of the male-centered Asian philosophies, the Pacific War, and American military power. To put it another way, the *han*-ful life contexts of other poor Asian women were also not much different from those of Korean women. Without a doubt, the theology of *han* is reflected in Asian feminist theology. Asian women regard their theology as an embodied practice rather than a pure abstract theology. Chung Hyun Kyung describes the embodied nature of Asian feminist theology:

Asian women’s theology is “a cry, a plea, and an invocation” to God. It is a sound of *han* bursting out from women’s despair and impasse. It is their tearful yearning for God’s justice when there is no justice in Asian women’s lives. It is also their prayer for God’s healing presence in this war-making, people-killing, and nature-destroying world. Asian women’s theology may not have an adequate systemic structure or the proper academic terminology in the traditional sense, but it arises out of women’s experience of encountering God in their gut, feeling God in their heart, and communicating with God in their soul.42

---
42 Chung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again*, 99.
Asian feminist theology can be distinguished from western feminist theology and even womanist theology. Western feminist theology emerged from critical reflections on male-centered theology, which was regarded as the dominant theology. Womanist theology focused on the interaction of racism, sexism, and classism. In addition to these systems of oppression, Asian feminist theology critically challenges Western colonialism. Asian feminist theology describes Asian women’s historical and cultural situation as invisible and marginal, and attempts to interpret Asian women’s experiences with their own voices. To begin with, this chapter will start with reviewing the differences among these three theologies.

White Feminist Theology, Black Womanist Theology and Asian Feminist Theology

All of the three theologies of White feminist, Black womanist, and Asian feminist theology emphasize women’s unique past and present experiences. As feminism emerged and developed from resistance to male violence, feminist theology was born from resistance to male-centered interpretation of human history, Bible stories, and theological doctrines. Feminist theology can be classified as contextual theology in that it critically considers women’s unique social, cultural, and historical locations as authentic sources of theology. Rosemary Radford Ruether clearly points out this fact, “The uniqueness of feminist theology lies not in its use of the criterion of experience but rather in its use of women’s experience, which has been almost entirely shut out of theological reflection in the past.” Ruether demonstrates that all theological

---

hermeneutics should be based on the specific human experiences of self, others, world, and God.

At this point, critical concern is placed on what kind of contexts or female experiences would be sources of White feminist theology, Black womanist theology, and Asian feminist theology. We don’t need to assume that all women’s experiences are the same. In other words, women experience oppression, domination, discrimination, and power imbalances differently according to their social, cultural, economical, political, geographical, and historical locations. That is the main reason why African American women developed their own theology.

Based on unequal relationships between male and female, White feminist theologian Rosemary Reuther protests sexual discrimination and gender inequity. She advocates the full humanity of women for themselves. She argues that women should be subjects who are empowered to name their authentic and full humanity. Ruether says,

> The use of this principle [of the full humanity of women] in male theology is perceived to have been corrupted by sexism. The naming of males as norms of authentic humanity has caused women to be scapegoated for sin and marginalized in both original and redeemed humanity. This distorts and contradicts the theological paradigm of *imago dei*/Christ. Defined as male humanity above servant classes, the *imago dei*/Christ paradigm becomes an instrument of sin rather than a disclosure of the divine and an instrument of grace.44

The primary focus in Ruether’s argument is on gender. She develops her feminist theology by examining her context as a white female. With her social and cultural background, Reuther criticizes male images of God, the alienation of women’s body in the creation, the patriarchalization of Jesus, and the dualistic dichotomy of good and evil.

---

44 Ibid., 19-20.
She criticizes all male-centered theological themes and human relationships as distorted and diminished.

Even though White feminist theology paved the way for women to challenge deep-rooted patriarchal social and cultural systems, it was not an appropriate theological tool for interpreting Black women’s historical experiences during and after slavery. Grant argues that White feminist theologians utilize White women’s experience for developing their theological standpoints. And she refers to White feminist theologians’ imperialistic tendency of generalization and universalization of their experiences:

In a racist society, the oppressor assumes the power of definition and control while the oppressed is objectified and perceived as a thing. As such, White women have defined the movement and presumed to do so not only for themselves but also for non-White women. They have misnamed themselves by calling themselves feminists when in fact they are White feminists, and by appealing to women’s experience when in fact they appeal almost exclusively to their own experience.45

Susan Thistlethwaite, a white American woman theologian, also criticizes the limitations of white feminists as follows:

There are profound political differences between white, Western Christianity and black American Christianity. The examination of God the Father as a form of psychological support of patriarchy is critical; but all too frequently white feminists stop with interpersonal self-examination and fail to move on to political and economic analyses. If hegemony of God the Father is a particular cultural legacy of Western Christianity, a white feminist analysis of that fact should include a systemic analysis of its social and political origins.46

45 Grant, 199 -200.

46 Susan Thistlethwaite, Sex, Race, and God (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1989), 120-121.
Historical and Social Contexts of Asian Feminist Theology

What kind of experiences or historical contexts make Asian woman’s experience unique and specific? Like White women, Asian women experienced sexism. They also experienced, like Black women, racism and classism. Along with sexism, racism, and classism, Asian women have had a long history of colonization and dictatorship. To begin with, we need to investigate the histories of suffering in Asian countries. Most Asian countries were colonized by Western European nations for more than two hundred years. They fought against the colonizers for the purpose of their independence. But independence did not give Asians authentic freedom. Many Asian countries have struggled against the vicious cycle of oppression and violence. Kwok Pui-lan describes the colonized political and historical aspects of Asia:

Asian people lived under the heavy yoke of the Portuguese, Spanish, British, French, Dutch, American and Japanese colonial powers. After World War II, many Asian peoples regained their independence, but their search for their national and cultural identities continues into the present.47

Regardless of gender, most Asian people were exploited, dominated, and colonized by Western imperialists and their ruling class. Consequently, Asian peoples had to fight for their very existence, social justice, national independence, and human dignity.

Meanwhile, during the period of colonization and military dictatorship, the bodies of Asian women “were raped, mutilated, and disfigured by [their] husbands, policeman and the soldiers of colonizing countries.”48 Without understanding Asian women’s suffering, we cannot understand authentic meanings and values of their existence in Asia.

---


48 Ibid., 22.
Chung says, “To be human for Asian women is to suffer because suffering is the major element of their life experience. Therefore, Asian women must come to terms with their suffering in order to understand who they are as human beings.”\textsuperscript{49} In a word, Asian women have been victims of imperialism, racism, sexism, and classism. Chung summarized Asian women’s experience of oppression:

In all spheres of Asian society, women are dominated, dehumanized, and de-womanized; they are discriminated against, exploited, harassed sexually used, abused, and viewed as inferior beings who must always subordinate themselves to the so-called male supremacy. In the home, church, law, education, and media, women have been treated with bias and condescension. In Asia and all over the world, the myth of subservient, servile Asian women is blatantly peddled to reinforce the dominant male stereotype image.\textsuperscript{50}

Asian women began to realize that they should be subjects of their life. Asian women resisted all kinds of oppressions and dominations surrounding them. Chung illuminates those movements as follows,

Currently, women’s movements against capitalism and patriarchal society are flourishing in Korea and many Asian countries. There are the movements against dowry and sati in India; the movements against military dictatorships, multinational corporations, and the international prostitution industry in the Philippines; the ecological movement in Japan; and the movement against state terrorism in Sri Lanka.\textsuperscript{51}

Asian women’s growing awareness of the oppressive social and political conditions of their lives made them realize that they needed to confront this oppression and develop Asian feminist theologies. That is, Asian feminist theology has emerged and been developed by Asian women within dehumanizing social and political situations:

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 39.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 40.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 44.
Asian women’s theology is “very Third World” because their reality is marked by poverty and oppression. Colonialism, neo-colonialism, militarism and dictatorship are everyday reality for most Asian women. When poverty strikes Third World people, the ones who suffer the most are women and children. They are also the majority of the population. When there are no material sources for survival, and many poor men have already lost their wills to continue their lives, most Third World women do not even have the luxury to give up their lives. They refuse to lose hope and die. They feel that they have to survive. They know their children will die from starvation if they give up life. They created food for life out of nothing. Their bodies take and carry all the burdens for survival. They choose life under the worst lifeless conditions in order to give life to their children.\textsuperscript{52}

Asian Feminist Theology as “Very Asian” and “Very Women”

Asian feminist theology is very Asian. It is hard to say exactly what it means to be “very Asian” because the specific contexts of Asians and Asian women are different according to ethnic groups, class, history and culture. Nami Kim, a Korean American feminist scholar, argues that we must reconsider the unifying term “Asian” that has been used in Asian theology:

Asian feminist theology from the 1980s to the mid-1990s adopted and reiterated much of Asian theology’s way of using the unifying term “Asian.” What is, then, that theologians claim as Asian? Does “Asian” simply refer to the non-Western or anti-Western? Is the term “Asian” used as a cultural category or as a racial or ethnic category? When and how do theologians employ “Asian” or “Asianness” to underscore the distinctiveness of Asian theology?\textsuperscript{53}

We must be aware of our tendencies to universalize and oversimplify when using the terms of Asian and Asianness. Kwok points out the diversity of women’s experience by quoting Kang Nam-Soon, Korean feminist theologian:

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 23.

Asian feminist theologians, despite certain common cultural bases, have extremely diverse histories, religions, cultures and traditions. Sharing a common goal to end primarily patriarchal domination does not prevent feminist theologians from having radically divergent perspectives on how that goal might be reached.54

This dissertation recognizes the diversity of Asian women’s experiences.

Nevertheless, we also cannot deny that Asian women’s theology is rooted in the history of Asia. That is, Asian feminist theology constructs new theological languages within social, cultural, economic, and political contexts of Asia. Kwok quotes one Asian poem to describe Asian roots and spirituality in Asian feminist theology:

Asia . . .
We pause in silence
Before the awesome reality of Asia.
Her vastness, variety and complexity,
Her peoples, languages, cultures,
The richness of her history
And the present poverty of her peoples.
We take Asia to our hearts,
See her and feel her within us,
Embrace her
In her wholeness and brokenness,
While her rivers and tears flow through us,
Her winds, her sighs, her spirits,
Her moans, her howls blow within us.55

Trying to examine critically the term Asian, this dissertation is aware of the significance of Asian culture and history in constructing Asian feminist theology. The 2005 statement

---


on “The Future of PANNAWTM” describes the commonality and diversity denoted in terms Asian and Asian American:

We [Pacific, Asian, and North American Asian women] recognize that both the terms “Asian” and “Asian American” are social and cultural constructs, arising out of particular historical stages of our political struggles. These terms have been useful for creating group identity and rallying support for political mobilization and for creating a space of our theological pursuits. They should not, however, be essentialized or homogenized so as to hinder critical reflections on diversity within our communities.  

In this vein, Asian feminist theology has paid much attention to the rise of the subalterns’ voice in Asia, and its influence on Asian women. The major theological themes of the 1980s in Asia were the church’s concern and caring for the excluded social groups such as Indian dalits (untouchable), and Japanese Burakumin people (the defiled indigenous group and the tribals).  The discarded and oppressed social groups began raising their voice to reconstruct their oppressed life experience theologically. R.S. Sugirtharajah describes the liberation movements in Asia as follows:

They [Indian dalits and Japanese Burakumin], too, collectively try to recover their often denigrated past heritage, and in doing so, seek to control their own theological discourse. . . . . Many of them feel, and rightly so, that the dominant Asian Christian theologies, liberation, ecumenical, or denominational, have made them once more invisible and have reproduced a theological agenda which was primarily hierarchal, elitist, and casteist. Discovering their self-worth and reclaiming their cultural heritage, dalits, Burakumin, and tribals have recently


raised their voices against their own indigenous elites who not only tried to displace their discourse but also to determine the content of it.⁵⁹

Many Asian feminist theologians challenge Western, male-centered theological interpretation, and try to reinterpret Christian doctrines such as concepts of humanity, Christology, God, sin, salvation, and wholeness. Chung articulates,

Asian women’s theology is being made by women in Asian churches who realize that they cannot continue to accept the place for them defined by Asian men. With other religious and secular sisters, we are determined to create a theology, church, and society that are liberating for women.⁶⁰

In this vein, we can understand why Cakenaka portrayed God’s life giving power as rice. He uses a metaphor of rice to emphasize the significance of Asian culture and history in doing theology. He says, “One of the central issues in Christian art in Asia is that of interpreting Christ through our Asian mind and of expressing the image of Christ through Asian culture.”⁶¹ Kwok quotes C. S. Song who describes the power of Asian resources in doing theology:

Doing theology in Asia today is exciting because it is no longer dictated by rules and norms established elsewhere outside our living space called Asia. Its contents are not determined any more by schools and systems of theology formed under the influence of cultural elements alien to cultural experiences of Asia. Its styles—yes, one must speak of style of doing theology—does not have to be shaped by thought-forms and life-experiences remote from Asian humanity.⁶²

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Chung, Struggle to be the Sun Again, 35.

⁶¹ Cakenaka, 31.

⁶² Kwok, “The Emergency of Asian Feminist Consciousness of Culture and Theology,” in We Dare to Dream: Doing Theology as Asian Women, ed. Virginia Fabella and Sun Ai Lee Park (Hong Kong and Philippines: Asian Women’s Resource Centre for Culture and Theology and The EATWOT Women’s Commission in Asia, 1989), 98.
Asian feminist theology is also very women. As we already know, most Asian countries have a long history of widespread poverty, militarization, colonialism, and imperialism. In these contexts, Asians suffered from a variety of socio-cultural, economic, and political tumult, inequity, oppression, and discrimination. Yet Asian women had to endure more severe pain and suffering than Asian men. Mary-John Mananzan describes Asian women’s struggle and suffering:

Asian women suffer double and triple oppression. Aside from discrimination and subordination, women experience various forms of domestic and social violence. They are also victims of trafficking in different forms: as prostitutes, mail-order brides, overseas contract workers, domestic helpers and entertainers.\(^63\)

Responding to this suffering, Asian feminist theologians raise their distinctive voices. By awareness of their historical and social realities, Asian feminist theologians stress the importance of liberation from all forms of prejudice, oppression, and dehumanization. Chung describes Asian women’s awakening:

It is a theology articulated by women out of their specific experiences and questions. Asian women share all the blessings and the problems of being Asian and Third World people with Asian men. What distinguishes Asian women’s struggle from the men of the continent is their women-ness. Asian women are oppressed economically, socially, politically, religiously, and culturally in specific ways just because they are women. They are naming this gender-specific oppression in order to liberate themselves from patriarchal bondages and achieve self-determination.\(^64\)

Asian feminist theologians, especially, recognized the necessity of creating a network of Asian feminist theologians “to promote a liberating and transforming

---


\(^{64}\) Chung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again*, 24.
theology from the perspective of Asian women.”65 The two crucial networks are the Women’s Commission of the Ecumenical Association of Third World theologians (EATWOT, 1983) and the Asian Women’s Resource Center for Culture and Theology (AWRCCT, 1988). Through these two organizations, women “take a critical look at their own and other women’s experience, trace the roots of their secondary and subservient position in Church and society, and venture towards a new world of just and reciprocal relationships.”66 Asian feminist theology can be summarized as Asian women’s critical reflection on their life experiences using theological resources to resist patriarchal and imperial theological notions, and to transform the dominant interpretations in order to seek liberation and justice.

New Interpretation of God in Asian Feminist Theology

Asian feminist theology closely connects to Asian women’s historical and social contexts, and it interprets God in relation to their stories of suffering and survival. In re-articulating their experiences of God, Asian feminist theologians challenge colonial and patriarchal interpretations of the Scripture, and seek to rediscover the liberating power and justice of God. In a word, Asian women encounter God within their specific suffering and despair. Kwok describes Asian women’s ways of knowing God:

When Asian feminists talk about God, they do not begin with the abstract discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity, the debate on the existence of God, or the affirmation of God as omnipotent, unchanging and immovable. Rather, they

65 Virginia Fabella and Sun Ai Lee Park, ed. *We Dare to Dream: Doing Theology as Asian Women* (Hong Kong and Philippines: Asian Women’s Resource Centre for Culture and Theology and The EATWOT Women’s Commission in Asia, 1989), vii.

66 Ibid., vii.
focus on God as the source of life and the creative, sustaining power of the universe . . . . God is often seen as the compassionate one, listening to the people’s crises and empowering them to face life’s adversities. God is the source of hope, the power overcoming despair and the vision that brings peace amidst ethnic strife, alienation, and oppression.67

Along with re-examining the patriarchal interpretation of God, many Asian feminist theologians refer to the compassionate nature of God. That is, Asian women become aware that God suffers when they suffer. Kwok describes the compassion love of God: “The compassionate God listens to the cries and supplication of the Asian people, as God listened to the slaves in bondage during Moses’ time.”68

Kwok points out that compassion is not a sentimental sense of love. That is, the compassionate nature of God comes from God’s justice and relationships with all creatures. God listens to the cries of women suffering in the midst of oppression, discrimination, and exploitation. Kwok describes how God’s justice is the ultimate source of life, and God creates relationships with all creatures within God’s compassion and justice: “To affirm that God is compassionate is to acknowledge that the ultimate source of life is good and that the moral nature of the universe is characterized by mutuality, caring and interdependence, and not by ruthless exploitation and greed.”69

Asian feminist theology also challenges traditional images of God as father, male, and White. It does not mean that God should be exclusively imagined as mother, female, Black, and Yellow. Instead, Asian feminist theology wants to portray God in inclusive ways. Chung introduces one Korean poem created by a Korean woman:

---

67 Kwok, Introducing Asian Feminist Theology, 66.

68 Ibid., 77.

69 Ibid., 78.
God is movement
God is the angry surf
God is like mother
God is like father
God is like friends
God is power of being
God is power of living
God is power of giving birth.  

As this poem insinuates, Asian feminist theology tries to deconstruct the masculine imagery of God. Apart from skin color, gender, and class, Asian feminist theology understands God as a life-giving power. Kwok describes Asian feminist theologians’ perspectives of God as creative power of life:

Many Asian feminist theologians have begun to move away from a hierarchical, dualistic and patriarchal notion of God to a model that is ecological, feminist and organic . . . . A feminist and ecological approach points to God as non-intrusive, inclusive and sustaining, and it uses inclusive images and female metaphors to describe God, including non-anthropomorphic ones. An organic worldview respects the interdependence, diversity and inherent value of all life forms.  

In the metaphor of God’s life giving power, Chung describes how Asian women discovered their power to resist patriarchal social and cultural structures, and transform their lifeless lives into life full lives: “Asian women’s trust in this God enables them to trust themselves and to hope in the midst of their hopelessness. The power of God evokes in Asian women a different kind of power, which has been lost in patriarchal religion and society.”  

An Asian woman addresses the life giving power of God, 

The power that fosters life rather than death
the power of working together,

---

70 Lee Sun Ai, “Image of God,” In God’s Image, September 1988, 37; quoted in Chung Hyun Kyung, Struggle to be the Sun Again, 50.

71 Kwok, Introducing Asian Feminist Theology, 75.

72 Chung, Struggle to be the Sun Again, 51.
the power of experiencing one’s true feelings,
the power of acclaiming others and
enabling them to realize their full
potential as human beings.\textsuperscript{73}

Asian women’s life giving power of God is different from that of dominant
Western and Asian men. That is, Asian women claim that the power of a female God is
not a power that dominates or is coercive or destructive. In Asian feminist theology, life
giving power includes liberation of both men and women. Chung describes Asian
women’s aspiration of creating full and equal community with men in the image of God:
“Asian women’s yearning for and rediscovery of a Godhead which contains both male
and female qualities is the same yearning for full humanity in which both males and
females are fully respected as equal partners.”\textsuperscript{74}

Henriette Katoppo, an Indonesian feminist theologian, articulates the integrative
aspect of liberation. She argues that women’s liberation is concerned with not only
women’s emancipation. Rather, the ultimate purpose of women’s liberation is “the
liberation of all people to become full participations in human society.”\textsuperscript{75} In order to
practice authentic function of liberation, Katoppo advocates that men need to
acknowledge and accept women’s Other-ness positively, and vice-versa. Once we
acknowledge and accept this Other-ness, the image of God is authentically practiced in

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 48.

\textsuperscript{75} Henriette Katoppo, “Asian Theology: An Asian Woman’s Perspective,” in
Asia’s Struggle for Full Humanity: Towards a Relevant Theology, ed. Virginia Fabella
human society. She illuminates the significance of acceptance of the Other-ness as follow:

The Other: I am – You are.
I am free – You are free.
But where I am, what I am, you cannot be.
Where you are, what you are, I cannot be.
Am I encroaching on your freedom?
Are you intruding on mine?
Have I the right to be what I am?
Can we be fully human, you and I, each in our own way?
Can we enrich another, by being the Other?\textsuperscript{76}

Summary

In this chapter, I have examined contextual theology, theology of \textit{han}, and Asian feminist theology to describe theological issues involved in the suffering of Korean military wives. Korean military wives have struggled against their specific and unique life experiences. They understand God and experience God’s transforming and liberating power within their suffering contexts; therefore, any efforts to develop adequate theological interpretation should be contextual. The simple application of the Western-based interpretations is not helpful.

On the basis of contextual theology, I have reviewed the relevance of a theology of \textit{han} and Asian feminist theology for Korean military wives. The Asian concept of \textit{han} highlights the psychological and emotional sides of Korean military wives. The term \textit{han} is inclusive; that is, it includes the sense of anger, frustration, despair, self-desperation, trauma, and so on. Park argues that offenders and victims have to work together to resolve the \textit{han} of the sinned-against. Park’s two-way approach to the resolution of \textit{han}

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 144.
motivates Korean American congregations to sustain Korean military wives as they resist oppression and discrimination.

Asian feminist theology helps us understand the socio-cultural, economic, and political background of the suffering of Korean military wives. As Asian women, Korean military wives have been influenced by the political and military contexts of Asian countries in that Asian militarism and American soldiers closely relate to the lives of the women. Asian feminist theologians emphasize liberation and the justice of God in practicing theology. Considering the oppressive and discriminative contexts of Asian women, it is not strange for them to focus on these two themes. To them, God is life giving power. The metaphor of life giving power is also significant to Korean military wives because Korean military wives, as I already said in Chapter 2, have also experienced oppression, exclusion and discrimination. In next chapter, I will explore liberation psychology, which I believe is the most adequate psychology to explain the hanful lives of Korean military wives.
CHAPTER 4

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR KOREAN MILITARY WIVES

In Chapter 3, I examined contextual theology, Andrew Sung Park’s theology of *han*, and Asian feminist theology as a theological framework for interpreting the suffering of Korean military wives. All of those theologies challenge pastoral caregivers and counselors to confront the biased, oppressive, dominant, and unequal social, cultural, economic, and political contexts of Korean military wives. When they become critically aware of the dehumanizing contexts of these women, pastoral caregivers and counselors are able to support Korean military wives in a process of deconstructing and reconstructing their understanding of their life experiences, humanity, and their concepts of God. It is very meaningful, valuable, and challenging to aid in sustaining these women in their suffering, grief, and struggle.

This chapter will explore the psychological issues experienced by Korean military wives so that we can develop adequate pastoral care strategies. In this chapter, various psychological theories will be evaluated in terms of their relevance to understanding the suffering of Korean military wives. At first glance, multicultural psychology and Asian American psychology are the most meaningful psychological theories for understanding these women. As I will note below, these theories are ultimately not as relevant as a liberation psychological approach. In this dissertation, I am not able to examine the psychological issues of Korean military wives separate from their cultural and social
contexts. Given that I cannot account for the entire range of psychological difficulties experienced by Korean military wives, I will focus on the suffering that can be attributed to the dynamic interaction with their historical, social, and cultural environments. Even though not all of the psychological problems of the women are due to their social circumstances, we cannot deny that their social, cultural, and historical contexts play a crucial role in their psychological difficulties. First, the limitations of Asian American and multicultural psychology will be addressed; second, I will present the main ideas and concepts of liberation psychology.

**Limitations of Asian American Psychology and Multicultural Psychology**

Korean military wives are classified as Asian American women who are living in multicultural social and ethnic contexts. Consequently, Asian American psychology and multicultural psychology and counseling offer ways for psychologists to develop culturally-sensitive clinical counseling methods for Asian American women. Some of these approaches are written by psychiatrists, psychologists, and counselors who are not from Asian counties, who apply their knowledge of Asian American culture and multicultural therapeutic skills and methods to treating this population. The usefulness of these approaches for understanding the psychological suffering of Korean Americans or other Asian Americans is questionable in the case of Korean military wives. Yuh describes the basic limitations of Asian American psychology and multicultural psychology:

Military brides and their experiences in the United States revolve around being women, colonized peoples, and racial minorities. Most of Asian American psychology and multicultural psychology does not adequately address these
issues. They are also often geared toward those born in the U.S., which again is not quite appropriate for the military brides.¹

In the following sections, the specific limitations of Asian American psychology and multicultural psychology will be examined in more detail.

Limitations of Asian American Psychology

Sumie Okazaki and Gordon C. Nagayama Hall describe Asian American psychology in this way: “[R]ecent efforts in Asian American Psychology have been made to simultaneously identify and examine psychological constructs and processes that are unique to Asian Americans as well as those that transcend cultural or ethnic membership.”² As they note, the primary purpose of Asian American psychology is to analyze the psychological impact or functioning of Asian Americans by conceptualizing and assessing ethnic identity. In this sense, Asian American psychology contributes to an understanding of how Asian Americans’ experience of their ethnic identity and other cultures in the United States affects their everyday life realities, mental health, and psychology. Yet this psychology is not of much help in identifying the contextual causes of suffering for Korean military wives. Although Korean military wives are also Asian Americans living in the United States, their life contexts and their psychological realities are unique and complex.

¹ Email conversation with Ji Yeon Yuh by author, January 14, 2007.

Asian American psychology also tends to rely on Asian American values such as the value of the extended family, parent-child bonds, role hierarchy and self-restraint for developing its clinical methods and therapeutic skills. But many Korean military wives are living in the midst of white or African American cultures in their intercultural families. Although Korean military wives are likely to want to participate in their Asian culture, many of them, unlike other Asian Americans, are forced to follow an American way of thinking and acting through close relationships with the members of their nuclear families, namely their husbands and children. Of course, psychologists or counselors can use Asian cultural values and norms to try and understand Korean military wives’ psychological situations. However, Asian American psychology does not critically engage in the dominant socio-political contexts which resulted in the psychological difficulties of Asian Americans. That is the main reason why Asian American psychology is not a helpful psychological theory for understanding Korean military wives.

Limitations of Multicultural Psychology

Why do many pastoral caregivers, counselors, and clinicians pay attention to multicultural pastoral care, psychology, and therapeutic methods? Culturally competent therapeutic skills and methods are regarded as essential to psychiatrists, counselors, social workers, and chaplains who are living in multicultural social contexts. Why are such theories and practices important to them? Apparently, we can find the answer in the current situation’s rapidly changing social, cultural, economic, and political environment. Socio-culturally, America is an ethnically, culturally and religiously diverse and complex
society. The economic and political contexts of the United States are much more closely related to those of the rest of world in terms of global and international markets.

In these interrelated and complex webs of human relationships, it is urgent to understand other cultures and the people who come from those cultures. Pamela A. Hays describes this challenge: “Increasingly, practitioners are recognizing the need for information that addresses the complexity of clients’ and therapists’ lives beyond as well as within U. S. borders.”

Although multicultural therapy and counseling is designed to explore dynamic and multidimensional approaches to other cultures, most multicultural therapeutic techniques and counseling skills are still based on the dominant Western American psychology and counseling theories and methods. As Sue and Sue point out,

Whether the particular theory is psychodynamic, existential-humanistic, or cognitive-behavioral in orientation, a number of multicultural specialists . . . indicate that they share certain common components of white culture in their values and beliefs.

As Sue and Sue describe, multicultural approaches to therapy tend to utilize the dominant white culture to understand minority cultures. In this sense, multicultural therapy and counseling methods cannot explain adequately the complex psychological phenomena of Korean military wives because they originated and were developed within discriminatory, oppressive, and dominating social, cultural, and political contexts of Asia and the United States. Furthermore, the theory-based approach of multicultural psychology and counseling is not an ideal method through which to analyze the


psychological and mental problems of underrepresented social and ethnic groups. Yuh describes the apparent weakness of multiculturalism:

Like cultural pluralism before it, multiculturalism imagines these cultures as the “ethnic” cultures of America, properly subsumed and disciplined within a social and cultural system which allows superficial difference for pleasure in the variety, but harshly rejects substantive difference as “un-American.”... The diversity that multiculturalism celebrates is a thin cover-up for America’s hegemonic homogeneity.\(^5\)

What then is the most critical role of psychologists for Korean military wives?

What kind of psychology is appropriate to analyze the sufferings of Korean military wives? The crucial tasks to be addressed by caregivers are to help the women to reinterpret their life realities and experiences, and to realize the social, cultural, and political contexts which generate their suffering, grief, and struggles. Considering Korean military wives’ struggles with patriarchy, racism, sexism, and classism, liberation psychology, which was first articulated by Ignacio Martin-Baro, is the most appropriate psychological theory for understanding how Korean military wives can resist and transform their personal and socio-cultural oppressive contexts, and help the women seek liberation.

**Liberation Psychology: Social Justice and Transformation**

What is liberation psychology? Why is it an appropriate psychological method for interpreting the suffering of Korean military wives? And what specific concepts of liberation psychology can contribute to analyzing women’s psychological realities, particularly in relation to their social, cultural, economic, and political contexts? This section will explore these questions in more detail.

\(^5\) Yuh, *Beyond The Shadow of Camptown*, 216.
Liberation psychology originated within the context of Latin America and developed through an awareness of such dehumanizing realities. It is influenced by liberation theology, which was developed under the conditions of oppression, and for the benefit of the poor in Latin America. Many psychologists who practice liberation psychology also are committed to community psychology because, like liberation psychology, it focuses on oppression, inequality, and social justice issues. Many liberation psychologists see liberation psychology as different from “U.S. community psychology.”

Mark Burton describes the difference between them:

Its [liberation psychology] roots are in social psychology, and there is less emphasis on the clinical and mental health tradition (one of the North American roots of the discipline). There has been an orientation to work with poor communities in settings as diverse as the poor urban districts...

Some also criticize the individualistic orientation of community psychology interventions and analysis. Emphasizing the oppressive social conditions and the need for social transformation, liberation psychologists point out that liberation psychology focuses on the collective and structural dimensions as well as the individual problems and needs:

[T]he root causes of oppression lie in the structures – political, economic, and cultural – and ideologies that underlie oppressive social conditions. These structures and ideologies create the everyday experiences of violence, poverty, stress, discrimination, and prejudice that are manifestations of oppression. Liberation will therefore ultimately involve transformation of oppressive social

---


structures, which can only occur through collective action. One of the aims of liberation psychology is to develop an understanding of the role of psychology and of the psychologists in social transformation.\(^8\)

Identifying oppression at the macro and structural level, liberation psychologists focus on these six patterns: violence, political exclusion, economic exploitation, control of sexuality, cultural control, and fragmentation.\(^9\)

Ignacio Martin-Baro, a Jesuit priest and social psychologist, is considered a pioneer of the psychology of liberation. He calls for a more involved role for psychologists to play in the oppressive socio-political contexts in Central America. Martin-Baro insists that liberation psychology must work for the peoples of Latin American and should be distinct from Western-centered psychology. That is, liberation psychology does not rely primarily on scientific theories and methods; rather, it is based on the historical task of serving the real problems of the majority of Latin Americans.

Burton succinctly summarizes the people and context-centered nature of liberation psychology, comparing it with empiricist social psychology:

> There the academic field has settled into a broadly peaceful coexistence between empiricists and social constructionists, with little impact on psychological work in field contexts. Much of the critical effort remains within the academic community at a highly theoretical level. But Martin-Baro outlined an agenda that was to correct irrelevant scholasticism through the ‘search for truth from the popular masses’ – the oppressed majorities. New psychological theory would be put into practice to transform people and society, using the broader liberatory model common to Latin American popular pedagogy . . . and liberation theology.\(^10\)


\(^9\) Ibid., 93.

\(^10\) Mark Burton, 584- 85.
Martin-Baro criticizes the slave-like situations of Latin American psychology:

“The historical misery of Latin American psychology derives from three principal interrelated causes: its scientific mimicry, its lack of an adequate epistemology, and its provincial dogmatism.”¹¹ He challenges Latin American psychologists to practice three urgent tasks: recovering historical memory, de-ideologizing common sense and everyday experience, and utilizing the virtues of the people.¹² In a word, Martin-Baro emphasizes the significance of critical reflection on the historical and current socio-political context of the people of Latin America and the transformative role of psychology in Latin America. Maritza Montero summarizes the essential notions of Martin-Baro’s liberation psychology:

Martin-Baro wanted to create new ways of applying psychology in order to carry out the transformation of individuals and societies and acknowledging the potential for developing the capacities of the former which were denied because of the negatively stereotyped view of their social identity in Latin American populations . . . . He thought that one cannot achieve internal liberation that does not entail external liberation (Martin-Baro, 1990, p.74), for liberation is a social process beginning simultaneously in the individual (internal) and collective (external) process of de-alienation. Liberation’s goal is the creation of a new person in a new society with a new social identity.¹³

Nancy Hollander extends Martin-Baro’s arguments. She describes liberation psychology as a distinctive form of psychology because “it is about the people who practice it in order to free themselves and their patients from the terror of dictatorship and

¹¹ Martin-Baro, 20.

¹² See, Ibid., 30-31.

the social order.” In her arguments, she emphasizes not only emotional sources but also social sources of human sufferings. Lawrence Alschuler summarizes Hollander’s view of liberation psychology in terms of practice and theory:

As practice, “[T]he psychology of liberation is psychotherapy that engages mental health professionals politically [1] to be ‘at the service of those engaged in the radical transformation of society,’ and [2] to free patients, who are victims of state repression, from ‘the terrors of dictatorship and social violence.” As theory, “Liberation psychology studies the psychology of political repression [1] to understand the psychological tools used by authoritarian states to gain domination over their citizens; [2] to understand psychological defenses of citizens as they adapt to the rules of repression; and [3] to understand the ‘psychological factors that contribute to the human capacity to struggle against political oppression and to sustain hope in the possibility of fighting on behalf of peace and social justice.’”

Alschuler coins the term the psychopolitics of liberation to describe liberation psychologies. His theory was influenced greatly by Martin-Baro and Hollander’s liberation psychology. He emphasizes that psychopolitical analysis should serve the oppressed, that is, the psychopolitics of liberation as practice should help the oppressed to raise their political consciousness of the oppressive socio-political realities. At the same time, Alschuler’s psychopolitics of liberation seeks both public policies for healing the psychic wounds of oppression and direct action strategies to confront oppression. He demonstrates that the theory of the psychopolitics of liberation “explains the transformation of oppressed consciousness according to the perspective of psychopolitics.”

In summary, liberation psychology and the psychopolitics of

---


liberation focus on the oppressive, dominant, dehumanizing, and unequal socio-political and historical contexts of Latin America in analyzing the psychological and mental problems of Latin Americans. The theory and practice of liberation psychology are not separated from the specific living experiences of Latin Americans.

How then is this psychology of liberation related to the psychological study of suffering Korean military wives? Considering the socio-political perspectives of liberation psychology, it is the most useful psychological approach to investigate Korean military wives’ suffering. Even though the geographical locations, social, political, and historical backgrounds are not same, Korean military wives and Latin Americans have experienced oppression, discrimination, and dehumanization. In this vein, liberation psychology can be a meaningful psychological tool for understanding the experience of Korean military wives. Among the many concepts of liberation psychology, the concept of conscientization and the psychology of social trauma in particular will be further explored.

Conscientization for Liberation of the Oppressed

Martin-Baro challenges Latin America psychologists to reflect critically on the historical contexts of psychological studies of Latin Americans in practicing their psychological therapeutic work. He demonstrates the importance of socio-political perspectives of psychology for the people of Latin America:

And at the present time, the most important problem faced by the vast majority of Latin Americans is their situation of oppressive misery, their condition of marginalized dependency that is forcing upon them an inhuman existence and snatching away their ability to define their own lives. It stands to reason, then,

16 Ibid., 4.
that if the most incontrovertible object need of the majority of the people of Latin America consists in their historical liberation from the social structures that continue to oppress them, it is toward that need that psychology must focus its concern and energy.17

In this sense, one of the main roles of liberation psychologists is to help Latin Americans to be liberated from the oppressive individual and socio-cultural realities. In other words, the focus of liberation psychology should be on enabling the people of Latin America to define their own lives, and becoming aware of their oppressive socio-political circumstances. Martin-Baro emphasizes the necessity of “self awakening” in liberating themselves:

Overcoming their existential fatalism (which some psychologists modestly or ideologically prefer to call “external control” or “learned helplessness,” as if it were a purely intra-individual problem) entails for the Salvadoran people a direct confrontation with the structural forces that oppress them, deprives them of control over their own existence, and forces them to learn submission and expect nothing from life.18

In relation to the ‘self-awakening,’ Martin-Baro asserts that psychologists in Latin America must help the people of Latin America consciously resist oppressive, distorted, and dehumanizing socio-political conditions, and transform them. In fact, resistance plays a prominent role in liberation psychology. That is, Latin Americans should resist the dominant power of hegemony, colonialism, and oppression by developing their critical consciousness. Roderick Watts and Irma Serrano-Garcia cite Watts and his colleagues’ description of the critical consciousness as a “process of growth in a person’s knowledge, analytical skills, emotional faculties, and capacity for action in political and

---

17 Martin-Baro, 26-7.

18 Ibid., 27.
social systems.” Nelson Varas-Diaz and Irma Serrano-Garcia call the function of supporting Latin Americans to construct critical consciousness an ‘empowerment’: “As with empowerment, the psychology of liberation has been defined as one that attempts to work with people, taking their social context into account, to enhance their awareness of oppressive situations and ideologies.”

Martin-Baro calls the obligation of psychologists in Latin America the “historical responsibility” of psychology. He continues,

One cannot do psychology today in Central America without taking on a serious historical responsibility; that is, without trying to make a contribution toward changing all those conditions that dehumanize the majority of the population, alienating their consciousness and blocking the development of their historical identity.

Referring to this historical responsibility, Martin-Baro utilizes the concept of conscientization which Paulo Freire coined. He points out that the psychologist must enable the practice of conscientization by helping alienated groups and persons attain a critical understanding of themselves and their identity.

Martin-Baro explores three crucial aspects of conscientization. First, it is not enough for the oppressed simply to know their realities; rather, they must critically reflect and react to transform the falsified and dominant ideologies. In this sense, conscientization is an action-based praxis. As Martin-Baro describes,


21 Ibid., 42
“[Conscientization] responds to the situation of injustice by promoting a critical consciousness of the objective and subjective roots of social alienation.”

Freire also demonstrates that conscientization transcends subjectivist perception:

To achieve this goal [to resolve the oppressor-oppressed contradiction], the oppressed must confront reality critically, simultaneously objectifying and acting upon that reality. A mere perception of reality not followed by this critical intervention will not lead to a transformation of objective reality – precisely because it is not a true perception.

Freire’s arguments greatly influence Martin-Baro’s liberation psychology.

Martin-Baro demonstrates that it is not the psychologists’ primary duty to change the structural socioeconomic injustices in Central America; rather psychological knowledge needs to be placed in the service of constructing a just society by practicing conscientization. In a word, Martin-Baro and Freire emphasize the significance of balancing critical reflection and confrontation with oppressive and dehumanizing realities. Freire emphasizes, “[M]en’s activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the worlds. And as praxis, it requires theory to illuminate it. Men’s activity is theory and practice; it is reflection and action.”

Secondly, Martin-Baro talks about conscientization in relation to the vicious cycle of dominance and submission. He says, “The dialectical process that allows individual self-knowledge and self-acceptance presupposes a radical change in social relations, to a

---

22 Ibid., 42.

23 Ibid., 37.

condition where there would be neither oppressors nor oppressed.” Freire also indicates that becoming oppressors is not an ultimate goal for the pedagogy of the oppressed, and strongly insists that the oppressed must not seek to become oppressors of the oppressors. By warning of the possibility of reproducing the dehumanizing relationships of dominance and submission, Freire shows the tragic dilemma of the oppressed:

The conflict lies in the choice between being wholly themselves or being divided; between ejecting the oppressor within or not ejecting him; between following prescriptions or having solidarity or alienation; between being spectators or actors; between acting or having the illusion of acting through the action of the oppressors; between speaking out or being silent, castrated in their power to create and re-create, in their power to transform the world. This is the tragic dilemma of the oppressed which their education must take into account.

Freire challenges the oppressed to resist the unfathomable temptation to be like the oppressor. As long as the oppressed give into this temptation, they can neither liberate themselves nor the oppressor. Freire stresses that authentic liberation can be realized by critical reflection on the distorted human relationships, which result in dehumanization. The critical reflection is only possible from the side of the oppressed:

This, then, is the great humanistic and historic task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. The oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both.

Martin-Baro also insists that psychology of liberation must be redesigned from the standpoint of the lives of the people of Latin America; more specifically, from their

---

25 Martin-Baro, 42.

26 Ibid., 33.

27 Freire, 28.
sufferings, their aspirations and their struggles: “A psychology of liberation has to learn that only from the oppressed will it be possible to discover and build the existential truth of the Latin American peoples.”

Thirdly, Martin-Baro emphasizes the significance of interconnectedness between person, culture, and society. He sees personal problems in the context of historical realities, and criticizes the individualism of the prevailing psychology: “[I]ndividualism ends up reinforcing the existing structures, because it ignores the reality of social structures and reduces all structural problems to personal problems.” And he demonstrates that psychotherapy and clinical psychological activities must work with acknowledging the social, cultural, and historical contexts:

Conscientization leads people to rediscover historical memory, to get back what is most authentic in their past, to purify what is most genuine in their present, and to project all that into a personal and national plan. No learning process, vocational guidance, or therapeutic counseling can hope to see the development or realization of persons if it does not cast the individual in his or her social and national context, thereby setting forth the problem of one’s authenticity as member of a group, part of a culture, citizen of a country.

In this sense, liberation psychology is contextual psychology. In other words, liberation psychology reveals that the mental health and psychopathological symptoms of the people of Latin America mainly result from the oppressive and dehumanizing sociopolitical contexts of Latin America. Consequently, it is necessary for psychologists and psychiatrists to understand the suffering, grief, and struggle of the people of Latin America within the social and political systems. Freire also describes resistance and

28 Martin-Baro, 28.
29 Ibid., 22.
30 Freire, 42.
transformation in relation to the dehumanizing contexts of the oppressed. In particular, he accentuates the cultural synthesis and action in liberation action. As he describes it,

Cultural synthesis is thus a mode of action for confronting culture itself, as the preserver of the very structures by which it was formed. Cultural action, as historical action, is an instrument for superseding the dominant alienated and alienating culture. In this sense, every authentic revolution is a cultural revolution.31

The starting point of Freire’s theory is to illuminate real, concrete, and historical problems surrounding the oppressed. In other words, the main concern of his education methodology is to discover how to participate in the transformation of the world.

Liberation psychology strongly insists that psychologists take a critical and conscious sense of responsibility for their own society, culture, and history; most importantly, for the people of Latin America who are continually suffering from the dehumanizing and unequal social, economic, and political oppression through their history. As was noted earlier, the social responsibility of Latin American psychologists can be realized through the process of constructing and reconstructing a critical consciousness, called conscientization. Montero effectively relates the individual and collective effects of consciousness and the liberating role of psychologists:

This process of questioning, criticizing, acknowledging, rejecting, redefining, and changing aspects of daily life has both individual and collective effects. Individually, emotional, cognitive, and active aspects change because beliefs, knowledge, and modes of behaving are reorganized. Collectively, people can understand the importance of organization in order to transform their living conditions, understanding that one’s life is better if everyone has a better living standard. In this dynamic psychologists have to work along with the people, facilitating discussions, providing information, helping people to develop aspects concerning their self-esteem, their prejudices, and their stereotypes, and fostering democratic dialoguing, so multiple voices are heard.32

31 Ibid., 182.

32 Maritza Montero, 525.
Prior to investigating the psychology of social trauma, we first need to review the meaning of trauma. Lisa McCann and Laurie Pearlman provide this definition: “An experience is traumatic if it (1) is sudden, unexpected, or non-normative, (2) exceeds the individual’s perceived ability to meet its demands, and (3) disrupts the individual’s frame of reference and other central psychological needs and related schemas.”

The *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling* (DPCC) classifies trauma into physical and psychic trauma. According to the DPCC,

Physical trauma is an injury or wound produced violently and the resulting physical and psychological condition. Psychic trauma is an emotionally shocking experience which has a lasting psychic effect, usually categorized posttraumatic stress disorder.

Hernandez cites Becker’s definition of extreme traumatization:

It is an individual and collective process that occurs in reference to and in dependence of a given social context: it is a process because of its intensity, its duration in time, and the interdependence of the society and the psychological processes. It exceeds the capacity of the psychic structure of the individuals and of the society to answer adequately to this process. Its aim is the destruction of individuals, their sense of belonging to the society and their social activities. Extreme traumatization is characterized by a structure of power within the society that is based on the elimination of some members of this society by others of the same society. It is not limited in time and develops sequentially.

---

33 Nancy Caro Hollander uses the term psychology of social trauma; and Martin-Baro uses the term psychosocial trauma. In this writing, these two terms will be used interchangeably because they emphasize social and political perspectives of trauma in relation to liberation psychology.


Latin Americans’ personal and collective experiences can often be described as traumatic. That is, individual peoples of Latin American suffer; and the trauma is manifested individually. At the same time, the trauma is also a collective experience under the conditions of war, terrorism, and repression. Pilar Hernandez points out that experiences of trauma are intertwined with continued war and political persecution. He elaborates on the social and political turmoil and their impact on people’s lives in Colombia:

Colombia, like many other Latin American countries. . . has experienced internal war and civil conflicts, including state terrorism and repression. However, Colombia continues to suffer under a slow, bloody, and dirty war that is now 40 years old, and the legacy of wounds in its people’s hearts, minds, and bodies is partially reflected in the precariousness of social institutions and the progressive weakening of communities.37

While he illuminates the crucial areas that psychologists specializing in liberation psychology should deal with, Burton also describes the oppressive sociopolitical conditions of Latin America: “Latin America has been marked by oppressive regimes, military conflicts and the repression of liberation movements. There are still murders of activists, clearances of peasants from prime land, and other abuses in several countries.”38

How then does liberation psychology describe social or psychosocial trauma? Liberation psychology argues that we must focus not just on the individuals’ wounds or injury, but more on the social environments which give birth to trauma. That is, traumatic experiences should not be treated as individual problems but rather should be

37 Ibid., 16.

38 Burton, 586.
regarded as social and relational suffering and struggles within complex social environments. Moane describes the psychosocial trauma, relating the social analysis of the six patterns of oppression we saw earlier in this chapter:

Psychological patterns [of oppressive social conditions] may be directly linked to mechanisms of control. For example, violence can be associated with fear, political exclusion with helplessness and frustration, economic exploitation with insecurity and worry, and sexual exploitation with shame and guilt. Cultural control obviously has a direct impact on consciousness in a variety of ways, and fragmentation can produce a sense of isolation.39

Along with the above six patterns, Latin American liberation psychologists like Martin-Baro and Hollander consider civil war a serious factor in the psychological trauma of the people of Latin America. They developed their theories by examining several deadly civil wars and how they affected the mental and psychological disorders of the majority of the people of Latin America. Hollander, especially, deals with the social characteristics of trauma in relation to the state’s repressive tactics of forced disappearances, imprisonment, and torture. In the case of Latin America, the colonized and militarized political structures act as traumagenic structures and environments. Hollander illustrates co-relationships between military dictatorships and political repression and the citizen’s traumatic feelings of fear. She portrays the influence of the extremely fearful and oppressive social atmosphere on the people of Latin America by citing a prominent Uruguayan socialist:

Fear exterminated all social life in the public realm. Nobody spoke in the streets for fear of being heard. Nobody protested in the lines for fear of being reported to the police. One tried not to make new friends, for fear of being held responsible for their unknown pasts.40

39 Moane, 96.
40 Hollander, 111.
These examples show vividly how deeply the social milieu influences the formation of social trauma in the people of Latin American. In such contexts, the social trauma experienced by the people of Latin America results in human destruction. Many Latin Americans lost their relatives and friends without a trace; their bodies were used as vehicles for relentless torture; and they spent months in dark, hopeless, and fearful cells as prisoners. All of this socio-political oppression created in the people of Latin America “sleep disorders, severe anxiety, psychosomatic illness, difficulty in thinking, loss of self-esteem, social withdrawal, decrease in productivity, abandonment of goals, and premature death.” Hollander calls these individual and collective dehumanizing atmospheres the culture of fear. Hollander cites Lucia, “[T]here is a traumatic impact on the society… I prefer to use ‘the culture of fear’ to emphasize that individual subjective experience is shared simultaneously by millions of people, with dramatic repercussions for social and political behavior.” Martin-Baro emphasizes that trauma is produced by a society, at the same time, trauma permeates and resides in particular social relations and historical contexts:

Precisely because trauma must be understood in terms of the relationship between the individual and society, one cannot simply predict that a given type of social situation will automatically produce a trauma in anyone, or that a particular type of person will never suffer a trauma…. In other words, in asserting the dialectic character of trauma, we necessarily affirm its historical character.

As an example of the dialectical character of trauma, Martin-Baro illuminates the effects of the Salvadoran war on the mental health of the Salvadoran people and society.

41 Ibid., 121.

42 Ibid., 110-11.

43 Marin-Baro, 124.
He argues that the primary victims of the Salvadoran war are not individual Salvadorans. The mental health of individual Salvadorian people often has seriously deteriorated at different levels. Yet, he argues, the worst concern is the collective erosion of social relations because of its effect on the suffering of the psyche and mentality of Salvadorians. Moreover, Hernandez describes the inappropriateness of the intrapsychic intervention model of trauma:

Models that overemphasize trauma’s intrapsychic dynamics and conceptualize its social dimensions as merely another external factor fail to address the intertwined nature of social, political, and personal conditions of war. In addition, they help to maintain a view of social problems as individual.44

In support of this, Martin-Baro demonstrates the destructive effect of war on the Salvadorian’s collective mental health:

Without doubt, of all the deleterious effects of the war on the mental health of the Salvadorian people, the undermining of social relations is the worst, for our social relations are the scaffolding we rely on to construct ourselves historically, both as individuals and as a human community. Whether or not it manifests in individual disorders, the deterioration of social interaction is in and of itself a serious social disturbance, an erosion of our collective capacity to work and love, to assert our unique identity, to tell our personal and communal story in the history of peoples.45

According to Martin-Baro, trauma vividly remains in the memories and the present life realities of many Salvadorans. In this sense, it is controversial whether the theoretical and clinical diagnosis of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is adequate in contexts of war and political repression. Generally speaking, PTSD is a diagnostic category linked to traumatic stress. Nevertheless, many mental health professionals in

44 Hernandez, 16.

45 Martin-Baro, 115.
Latin American assert that the psychiatric approach of PTSD is not an adequate method for analyzing the psychological impact of war on Latin Americans. Hernandez says,

In his essay on the deficiencies of the PTSD concept, Becker (1995) stated that first, the word post suggests that “the traumatic event was limited to a certain event in time” (p.101) in the past. Second, to label the victims of political repression, genocide, or torture as disordered because of the symptoms they experience presents fundamental ethical problems. Similar to the situation of political repression in Chile, some Colombians are subjected to continued traumatic experiences. In fact, human rights activists constitute a group that is highly exposed to the risk of constant and severe trauma.46

Actually, the traumatic situations of Latin Americans including the Salvadoran people are historic; and the traumatic experiences are still progressing. That is, the people have suffered from their traumatic symptoms for generations. Martin-Baro indicates the nature of the traumatic experiences of Salvadorans:

I contend that today many Salvadoran civilians, among them many children, are suffering traumatizing experiences that are perfectly foreseeable and, unfortunately, perhaps even foreseen and planned by the exigencies of a counterinsurgency war such as the one we are living through. This is why it is not enough to direct our attention to the post-traumatic situation, and why we can and must orient our analysis toward the pre-traumatic situation, including an analysis of trauma as the normal consequence of a social system’s way of functioning.47

Hollander points out the limitation of the diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the contexts of state terror, war, and torture of Latin America. She criticizes the individualistic view of PTSD by citing Lucia, “[W]e do not think the concept of PTSD is an adequate one to describe the psychological impact of state terror. It makes a

46 Hernandez, 20.

47 Ibid., 123.
psychiatric problem out of social phenomena." Hernandez also insists on the significance of relational and communal interventions as effective ways to treat trauma:

> Appropriate treatment for the wider effects of trauma, such as the destruction of community nets and trust, has to do with the cultural beliefs people have about the self, its relation to community, and the meaning of trauma. If the effects of trauma in these communities are conceptualized in a way that breaks the dichotomy between the individual and the social levels, intervention criteria should reflect that they be rooted in communities and therefore developed through relationships with community members.  

Lastly, when we examine trauma in liberation psychology, we need to notice that liberation psychologists emphasize the traumatic experiences must be resolved to move toward liberation. Moane describes the significance of resolving the oppressive psychological patterns in order for liberation to occur:

> One of the important processes in attaining liberation, therefore, is to counteract or transform the negative psychological patterns associated with liberation. Interventions that address not just psychological distress but also other patterns that act as barriers to taking effective action to bring about change can be important tools for a community psychology of liberation.

By critical reflections on the chronic nature of trauma, the people of Latin America need to take a critical step to demolish the dehumanizing social, cultural, and historical causes of trauma. In this vein, the destructive and dehumanizing social relations or systems are the principal objects of resistance and transformation to Latin Americans. Liberation psychologists call it a new praxis:

> Thus, I agree with Fals Borda, who maintains that practical knowledge acquired through participatory research should lead toward the people gaining power, a power that allows them to become the protagonists of their own history and to

---

48 Hollander, 110.

49 Hernandez, 24.

50 Moane, 96.
effect those changes which would make Latin American societies more just and more humane.\textsuperscript{51}

**A Liberation Psychology Approach to Korean Military Wives**

As I examined earlier, liberation psychology begins with the colonized and oppressed social and political circumstances of the peoples of Latin and Central America. Based on the very unique experiences and realities of Latin Americans, it focuses on the liberating role of psychology in human suffering. By critically reflecting on the suffering of Latin Americans, liberation psychology does not rely on Western-centered psychology. Rather than uncritically imitating the Western-centered psychological theories and methods, liberation psychology is based on the suffering of the peoples of Latin America, and is oriented toward the liberating praxis of psychology. Liberation psychology also shows why the theory-based and Americanized Asian and multicultural psychologies are not appropriate theoretical tools to analyze the psychological problems of Latin Americans. Liberation psychology recognizes that indigenous experiences play critical roles in analyzing the psychological concerns of the peoples of Latin America. That is, liberation psychology stresses the unique and specific suffering and struggles of the peoples of Latin America.

This context-based perspective of liberation psychology offers adequate ground to interpret the psychological aspects of Korean military wives. Like the peoples of Latin America, any kind of psychological effort to examine the psychological suffering of the Korean military wives must begin with critical reflection on the real life experiences of the women, and support the women as they discover hope in their despair. That is,\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 30.
pastoral caregivers who want to explore the psychological and mental suffering, struggles, and problems of Korean military wives must have deep compassion for the women and their desperate situations. Of course, theory-based psychology is important in diagnosing various psychological problems of the Korean military women. We cannot minimize the contribution of scientific and theoretically-oriented North American psychologists and psychologies. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that psychology for Korean military wives must focus on their empowerment to resist and transform all kinds of dehumanizing, oppressive, and discriminatory social, cultural, and political contexts.

Liberation psychology emphasizes the power of conscientization in doing psychology for the oppressed. Actually, self-awakening is the primary and most critical process for Korean military wives to undergo, in order to resist the violence of patriarchy, racism, and sexism. It is urgent that the women recover their human dignity and self-confidence by raising their own voices to fellow Korean Americans and American spouses. Because their life stories have been denied by other Koreans, Americans, and even by themselves, self-definition with critical reflection on their dominant life realities should be the first step to resist and transform unequal and oppressive social structures and systems. Korean military wives must be critically aware of their internalized fatalism and confront the dominant cultures, prejudices, and ideologies. And they can practice conscientization through building their own network, with the Christian community helping the women to do their tasks creatively. Yuh describes the significance of community in revealing one’s positive self-image:

The gaze of outsiders – both other Koreans and Americans – has been a continuous force in the lives of the women, for one of their goals has been to show the world what military brides could do and thereby combat the prejudice they felt so keenly. Awareness of this gaze, for example, motivates Mrs.
Kingston to take a leadership role at a crucial moment in her organization’s history. It also motivates the women to portray themselves positively to both Koreans and Americans. During the early years of the ABC Association, for example, one of the women’s goals was to let the Korean community know that military brides were intelligent, well-educated, and living interesting, productive, and fulfilling lives.\textsuperscript{52}

An understanding of the dialectical and integrative process of conscientization is critical in describing the Korean military wives’ endeavor to confront their realities. Human beings act not as estranged and alienated beings from society and history, but as relational and social creatures. As long as we only consider the suffering and struggles of Korean military wives in terms of individual life experiences, we fail to find the deeper side of their suffering. That is, we must recognize the relational, social, and historical dimensions of their individual psychological experiences of oppressive and dehumanized life realities. As Martin-Baro articulates,

\begin{quote}
[\textit{Conscientization}] supposes that persons change in the process of changing their relations with the surrounding environment and, above all, with other people. No knowledge can be true if it has not attached itself to the task of transformative reality, but the transformative process requires an involvement in the process of transforming human relationships.\textsuperscript{53}
\end{quote}

As a matter of fact, Korean military wives continue to live in confrontation with other Koreans, Americans, their children, and other Korean American congregants. They are humiliated, dehumanized, and alienated from complex human webs within Korean American society and church, American society and church, and their original and American families. As Korean and American, Korean military wives need to consciously

\textsuperscript{52} Yuh, \textit{Beyond the Shadow of Camptown}, 215.

\textsuperscript{53} Martin-Baro, 41.
acknowledge their dynamic and complex human relationships and dialectic characteristics of the relationships. Yuh points out that,

In imaging themselves into community, military brides have created a space of their own. This creation emphasizes that while they may be multiply connected to multiple communities, they are not split among these communities, but rooted in their own community. Recall the annual events – vacation, holiday party, and fund-raiser – that placed military brides at the center of an ever-widening circle that included both Koreans and Americans. Recall how they lay claim to both Korea and America, refusing to give up one for the other.54

In conclusion, Korean military wives practice conscientization in two ways. One is that they begin to take hold of their fate, try to get rid of false images, and construct supportive relationships with fellow Korean military wives. Another is that Korean military wives recognize the multicultural connections with both Korean American societies and American society. Even though I examine the conscientization of Korean military wives now, it is also important for Korean American congregations, as the dominant group, to under take a process of conscientization to sustain Korean military wives as they resist their suffering. In Chapter 5, I will deal with this issue.

Next, a liberation psychological interpretation of social trauma helps us understand the emotional and psychical shocking experiences of Korean military wives in relation to social, cultural, economic, and political spheres beyond individual psychological and mental problems. Just as the pastoral theology of living human web emphasizes wider complex contexts of pastoral care and counseling, liberation psychology interprets experiences of abuse, fear, and trauma in broad relational and public perspectives. Korean military wives experience low self-esteem, lack of confidence, guilt and shame, vulnerability, anger, anxiety, fear, suicide, and physical

54 Yuh, Beyond the Shadow of Camptown, 221.
abuse. And those painful emotional and physical experiences are linked to various traumatogenic social environments. Yuh makes this point:

The domination that military brides faced came at all levels, from the most personal to the most public, from the very subtle to the blatant. It inflicted upon them continual humiliation, degradation, and marginalization that stemmed from an assertion that all that was superior was male, American, and English speaking. . . . . marriage to an American and immigration to America left no aspect of their lives untouched. Korean military brides faced struggle in virtually every aspect of their lives.\(^{55}\)

To Korean military wives, family is one of the primary social institutions where they experience psychological trauma. Korean military women experience psychological loneliness and depression in relation to their original Korean families. Even though Korean military wives sponsor and invite their family members and relatives from Korea, and help them settle into Korean American society and American society, Korean military wives were sometimes later exploited, excluded, and abandoned by those they helped. In Yuh’s interviews with Korean military wives, a Korean military wife, who is abandoned by her siblings and relatives, confesses:

So if you look at the life situation of military brides, they are like orphans, orphans. So now, I give up. I just give up. If I think about my family, it just makes me sad, so I just think of myself as an orphan without a family. That’s how you have to live. . . . If they can gain something from you, then there is contact. Otherwise, nothing. . . . They are worse than strangers. Others, they call me and ask, “How are you doing?” When there’s an event at the church, they call and tell me to come. But these brothers and sisters, no. Do they say, “Today is Chusok and you’re alone, so come over?” No, there’s nothing like that. “It’s Thanksgiving, come over for some turkey.” No, they don’t do that. Before, I would invite them to thanksgiving, Christmas, but now I am alone, what am I going to cook when I am alone? The ones with the large family should have holiday dinners and invite people like me who are alone. But they not call me. I don’t want to call and say why don’t you call me, why don’t you send a Christmas card. No. There’s no point. I don’t want to bother them.\(^{56}\)

\(^{55}\) Ibid., 86.

\(^{56}\) Ibid., 170.
From the above example, we come to know that familial relationships between Korean military wives and their siblings and relatives are very conditional. Their siblings and relatives contact Korean military wives only when they need help from the women. Such conditional and unstable relationships produce a psychological sense of not belonging and anger in Korean military wives. In the meantime, the familial relationship is only one of the many relational and social factors in which Korean military wives’ experience psychological trauma. Many Korean military wives also have “broken heart” experiences through social relationships with other fellow Korean women who are not Korean military women. Through an interview with Yuh, a Korean military wife reveals her experience of psychic trauma through the distorted social relations with other Korean woman:

I’ve known this woman for about twenty years and during that time I’ve helped her a lot. But once she wasn’t pleased with the way things turned out, and she decided that it was my fault. And so right to my face, she called me a nigger yank whore bitch. That’s what she called me, a nigger yank whore bitch. So you can imagine the kind of things people call me behind my back.57

Lastly, Korean military wives must resist and transform traumatogenic relationships with families, relatives, other Korean Americans, their American families, and Korean American congregations. As long as the traumatogenic social relations remain, the traumatic suffering of Korean military women never is healed. The unchanged social relations feed and multiply the levels of psychic trauma of Korean military wives. This is the main reason that Yuh indicates that Korean military wives must exert their energies and all resources to resist the unequal and dehumanizing social conditions and ideologies from which they suffer:

57 Ibid., 168.
Korean military brides as a whole have built a network of ties – personal and organizational – that allow them to connect with one another and often provide valuable, practical assistance. Perhaps more importantly, they have imagined themselves into a coherent community with common interests, a community in which they can express and receive affirmations of self and of sisterhood.\footnote{Ibid., 193.}

As the above statement shows, building their own relational web is an important step in resisting and transforming dehumanizing social relations, for proclaiming their human dignity in the image of God. Along with their own communities, Korean military wives need authentic cooperation with Korean American pastors and Korean American congregations. In the following two chapters, I will describe how Korean American congregations and Korean military wives can implement the process of\textit{ conscientization}, and what the specific pastoral care strategies of Korean American pastors and Korean American congregations should be for Korean military wives.

\textbf{Summary}

In Chapter 4, I examined the essential ideas and concepts of liberation psychology. I also described its application to understand the psychological suffering and struggles of Korean military wives. In liberation psychology, \textit{conscientization} is a leading term to help Latin Americans implement the liberating actions. That is, liberation psychology began with the critical awareness of the unique social, economic, and political contexts of Latin America. The relevant aspect of liberation psychology is linked to the critical reflection of the insufficiency of traditional psychologies. Although there are some levels of differences in experiencing fear, despair, and trauma, the psychology of liberation formulated in a Latin American context can be helpful to Korean American pastors and
congregations working to sustain Korean military wives. Rather than trying simply to give advice and resolution, Korean American pastors and congregations need to reflect on the fundamental sources of the suffering of Korean military wives. In other words, they must acknowledge that the psychological suffering of the women has occurred within the dynamic and complex socio-political contexts.

Liberation psychology does not pay much attention to personal psychological intervention; rather, it aims toward transformative action for Latin Americans. The transformative action is exactly what Korean military wives need. That is the reason why the multicultural or intercultural psychology cannot provide adequate psychological theory for understanding the psychological suffering of Korean military wives.
As I described in Chapter 1, North American pastoral theologians and caregivers have utilized the clinical therapeutic method as the paradigm most relevant for the correlation of depth psychologies and theology in the practices of one-on-one pastoral counseling practice throughout the last half of the twentieth century. Even though the clinical method may still be useful in many contexts of counseling care-seekers, many pastoral theologians and caregivers have began to recognize the limits of this paradigm, especially in contexts where social oppression is the ultimate cause of suffering. John Patton describes one emerging paradigm as a communal contextual paradigm.\(^1\) Similarly, Emmanuel Lartey emphasizes the need to pay attention to cultural context, proposing that the term “intercultural” be used to describe the dynamic and interacting aspects of culture in the practice of caring.\(^2\)

According to Nancy Ramsay, the communal contextual paradigm emphasizes “ecclesiastic contexts that sustain and strengthen community practices of care.”\(^3\) More specifically, this paradigm acknowledges that caring and healing can be practiced not

---

\(^1\) See Patton, *Pastoral Care in Context*.

\(^2\) See Lartey, *In Living Colour*.

\(^3\) Ramsay, 1.
only by ordained pastoral caregivers but also by the Christian community. By utilizing this paradigm, pastoral theologians and caregivers reflect upon human suffering in relation to social and cultural systems and structures. In this chapter, I will use a communal contextual paradigm to examine the role of Korean American pastors as pastoral caregivers in encouraging Christian communities to participate in the practice of resistance to the oppression of Korean military wives.

To begin with, Korean American pastors need to reconsider the function of Korean American churches as agents of resisting negative norms and behaviors, and transforming the culture, society, and world. As the communal contextual paradigm emphasizes, the congregation is not a passive recipient of pastoral care but an active agent of care giving. Korean American pastor Sun Shin says, “To heal the suffering of Korean military wives, I emphasize the activities of Church community. I believe that Church community should be a community of understanding and acceptance to Korean military wives.” A pastor is not only a private expert of caring but also a sustainer of networks of care. Bonnie Miller-McLemore points out:

Recent congregational studies have also begun to confirm the congregational nature of pastoral care. Aware of the limits of relying primarily on one-to-one counseling and the expertise of the pastor, pastoral care curriculum has focused increasingly on how congregations provide care and on the clergy as facilitators of networks of care rather than as the chief sources of care.

---

4 In this dissertation, Christian community includes Christian churches and other Christian institutions.

5 Email interview by author, May 25, 2008.

Patton also emphasizes the need for the community and the pastoral caregiver to work together:

One of the major assumptions of the communal contextual paradigm is that the power of pastoral care rests in the fact that it is the care given by the community, not by the individual pastoral care giver alone. The pastoral care giver goes out with the strength and blessing of the caring community and with a conviction that because she, the carer, is cared about, she can offer the community’s care to others. Care of self and care of others go together, and perhaps most important, care and community are somehow together in the memory of God.⁷

It is inarguable that Korean American churches should be places where Korean American pastors and congregations practice communal care of Korean military wives. The problem is how Korean American congregations can recognize their role as caregivers, and authentically understand the contexts of Korean military wives. Before the Korean American congregations become safe places for Korean military wives, they need to go through a process of conscientization in order to support and sustain Korean military wives as they resist oppression. It is not sufficient for Korean American congregations simply to understand and accept Korean military wives. Korean American congregations need to engage critically in the situations of Korean military wives, and to prepare for action against the obstacles to the realization of God’s justice and restoration of full humanization. The effort to keep a balance between conscious understanding and critical practice is what Martin-Baro describes in liberation psychology.

It is neither easy nor simple for Korean American congregations to engage in the process of conscientization; that is, they will likely resist going through this process of conscientization because of their rootedness in the tradition of Confucianism. As Korean American pastor Hyo Lee notes, “The deep-seated discrimination and prejudices of

⁷ Patton, 35.
Korean Americans are due to Confucianism and traditional patriarchy of Korea.\textsuperscript{8} The hierarchical religious relationships between pastors and elders, and elders and deacons in Korean American churches as well as the hierarchical structures between men and women, and the old and the young in the same congregation make it difficult to implement a more communal orientation to pastoral care. Considered as messengers of God’s Word, Korean American pastors are regarded as God’s chosen persons with absolute spiritual authority. It would be considered unfaithful and inappropriate for a layperson to initiate an act of caring instead of a pastor. After directly observing Korean American churches, Antony Alumkal describes the character of Korean Protestantism:

Korea’s pre-existing religious traditions influenced the character of Korean Protestantism. Confucianism, also a significant influence on Chinese Christianity, reinforced principles of hierarchy and authority. Also significant is the influence of Shamanism, a religious tradition that involves a medium, or shaman, acting as an intermediary between earth and a spiritual world of gods, demons, and ancestors.\textsuperscript{9}

Meanwhile, relational justice is at the heart of the communal contextual and intercultural models of care. Ramsay states,

Relational justice, normative for the communal contextual and intercultural paradigms, shifts the understanding of the self to a far more contextual, socially located identity in which the political and ethical dynamics of asymmetries of power related to difference such as gender, race, sexual orientation, and class are prominent. From within the clinical pastoral paradigm pastoral counseling had long focused largely on liberating persons from spiritual and psychological bondage, but relational justice requires that care also includes attention to liberation from the actual bondage of oppression—the corollary of freedom from bondage is relational justice.\textsuperscript{10}

\textsuperscript{8} Email interview by author, April 11, 2008.


\textsuperscript{10} Ramsay, 9-10.
Pastoral caregivers engaged in relational justice must pay attention to relational power and power imbalances. Larry Graham identifies “victimizing power” as the dynamic that occurs when a dominant person or group stands over another person or group who cannot change his or her subordinated conditions. Korean military wives have been victims of such relational injustice. Many Korean American churches have discriminated against Korean military wives. Although Korean American churches have often been regarded as religious institutions to Korean immigrants that are of utmost importance for their spiritual well being, they have not been so regarded by Korean military wives.

A Korean American pastor, Sang Lee says, “Many Korean military wives have experienced some levels of discrimination and exclusion from Korean American churches. Therefore, Korean military wives tend to have a negative image of Korean American church.” In other words, Korean American churches have not been supportive communities for Korean military wives. In an interview in Christian Today, a Korean American weekly newspaper, one Korean military wife describes her experiences of exclusion and oppression from Korean American churches:

I want to worship God, and have a fellowship with other fellow Koreans and Korean women. But I find that it is impossible for me as a Korean woman who married an American military soldier to enjoy full participation with them because of my marriage. They too often say, ‘we are one family, one brother, and one sister.’ But what does it mean to me? I don’t think they really know the authentic meaning of ‘one family’.12

Nevertheless, some Korean American pastors think that Korean American churches are able to help Korean military wives resist oppression. In other words,

11 Email interview by author, April 11, 2008.

Korean American pastors believe that Korean American churches can support Korean military wives’ efforts to resist oppression and transform the social and cultural prejudice and discrimination toward them. Korean American pastor Jae Sim remarks, “Congregants must be disciplined to serve and help Korean military wives, and to make a church a positive and loving community to them.” In the above statement, it seems to me that he runs the risk of using a simplistic approach to solving the suffering and perceived isolation of Korean military wives. Simply learning about and knowing how to help Korean military wives is not sufficient. As I said earlier, Korean American congregations need to be aware consciously and critically of the unjust living conditions of these women.

The process of conscientization will enable Korean American congregations to empathize with the suffering of Korean military wives, and open their eyes to the racism and sexism Korean military wives have experienced. David Chang, another Korean American pastor, describes briefly the necessity of the process of conscientization: “Once a pastor encourages the whole congregation to realize that all people are equally created in the image of God, I believe that there would be no issues of discrimination and prejudice.” Sun Shin, other Korean American pastor, also says,

Korean Americans are experiencing racial discrimination from white Americans. As the community of faith, Korean American churches should recognize and confront the shameful experiences of racism, and embrace Korean military wives and other minorities by practicing God’s love and good neighborhood.

13 Email interview by author, April 3, 2008.
14 Email interview by author, March 20, 2008.
15 Email interview by author, May 25, 2008.
Then, how can Korean American pastors and pastoral caregivers lead Korean American congregations through the process of conscientization? In order to propose some strategies, I need to go back to the issue of relational justice. When pastoral theologians use the concept of relational justice, they describe a specific individual as an “inexplicitly social, relational, and political”\textsuperscript{16} and understand human beings systematically, as existing “in the cultural, social and natural orders.”\textsuperscript{17} Yet often the relational and social self suffers as a result of power imbalance and injustice, which are related to differences of social status related to race, gender, sexual orientation, and class in wider cultural contexts and social systems.

Archie Smith and Edward Wimberly introduced the notion of relational justice in describing how pastoral care functions to sustain African Americans living in a racist culture. They articulated what was later to be identified as a communal contextual paradigm that focused on relational justice in African American contexts. Smith utilizes the term “relational self” to describe inner emancipation and outer transformation. He understands pastoral counseling from a bio-psycho-social perspective: “The important point is that therapy is oriented toward a process of continuing self-critical reflection, change, healing, and growth within a web of social relations.”\textsuperscript{18} In the early 1980s, he challenged the individualistic paradigms of pastoral care that focused on one-on-one relationships between minister and congregant. Drawing upon practices of pastoral care

\textsuperscript{16} Ramsay, 22.

\textsuperscript{17} Graham, “Pastoral Theology as Public Theology in Relation to the Clinic,” Journal of Pastoral Theology 10 (2000): 8

in traditional black churches and pastors, he was one of the first pastoral theologians to begin constructing what could now be called a communal contextual approach to pastoral care in African American congregations. In formulating his model of care, he used Christian social ethics to emphasize the liberation of African Americans from oppressive social and cultural systems and structures.

Wimberly describes that the extent to which the self-image and identity of African Americans are influenced by racism, which is caused by power imbalances and devaluing connotations of racial differences. He notes, “A favored strategy of the white dominant group is to reinforce negative perceptions among and of other racial groups in order to both appear to legitimate the power imbalances and actually stymie healthy self-perception.”

Noting the impact of internalized racism, Wimberly contends that pastoral care for African Americans is a political process, which means that resisting negative self-images “leads African Americans into full participation in shaping their own destiny” in the United States of America. In this sense, the ultimate goal of pastoral care and counseling in an African American context is to engage in sociopolitical empowerment and transformation.

Bonnie Miller-McLemore is another pastoral theologian who stresses the significance of analyzing social structures, ideologies, and systems in doing pastoral theology and care. She says, “Clinical problems, such as a woman recovering from a hysterectomy or a man addicted to drugs, are always situated within the structures and

---

19 Edward P. Wimberly, African American Pastoral Care and Counseling (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2006), 12.

20 Ibid., 28.
ideologies of a wider public context and never purely interpersonal or intrapsychic.”\(^\text{21}\)

By emphasizing relational and social systems, she demonstrates that pastoral theologians need to shift their foci from intrapsychic to social location and identity as well as political policies and public responsibility.

Utilizing a theological concept of the image of God to the practice of pastoral care of lesbians and gays, Larry Graham builds on the concept of relational justice. He points out that lesbians and gay persons, as sexual minorities, need creative and deep communion with God, and with all persons as a way to sustain them in the face of the dominant culture’s unjust response to them. He interprets relational justice this way:

> Relational justice underscores the need for ‘right relationship’ to self, other, and world. It is opposed to social arrangements characterized by domination of one individual or group over another. Against the destructiveness of dominion, relational justice promotes the values of egalitarian mutuality and ecological sustainability. Relational justice leads to shalom and celebration of the harmonious relationships established between God and humans, among humans, and between all entities of the ecosystem.\(^\text{22}\)

Graham also employs a systemic approach “to articulate the complex interplay between individual psyches and the environments.”\(^\text{23}\) By utilizing the systemic approach, Graham emphasizes the formative influence of the broader systems such as family, society, culture, and nature on human personality, and vice-versa. He adopts the term “psychosystem” in order to describe “both conceptually and practically, the ongoing


\(^{23}\) Graham, *Care of Persons*, 38.
tension between concern for individual psyches and the increasing awareness of the ecological or systemic connection between all living things.  

The contextual model of care and relational justice can be used to help Korean American congregations go through the process of conscientization. One strategy for implementing the process of conscientization is to educate Korean American congregations about the suffering and isolation of Korean military wives, so what they can appreciate the impact of such dynamic and complex environments, such as: (1) the Korean War and the American military presence, (2) the economic and political tumults from the ‘50s to the ‘80s, (3) Asian cultures and philosophy, (4) imperialism, and (5) racism. All of these contexts have contributed to the painful experiences of Korean military wives not feeling included or welcomed in Korean American congregations. Thus, traditional individual psychotherapeutic skills and methods cannot provide adequate pastoral care and counseling, either to these women or inhospitable congregations (although in certain cases these methods are still effective). In the same way that African American pastoral theologians and caregivers encourage African American churches to reflect critically on the structural inequality and power imbalances in America society, pastoral care in Korean American congregations must focus primarily on relational and social contexts, with pastors implementing the ideas I already examined in Chapter 2. Yuh describes the dynamic and complex contexts Korean military wives experience:

Studying the lives and history of Korean military brides has profound ramifications for American history, Asian history, and Asian American history. Broadly speaking, a serious consideration of Asian military brides forces a

24 Ibid., 13.
reconsideration of the whole of U.S.-Asia relations and the social consequences that are a part of these relations. Attention should be paid to the unequal nature of U.S. relations with Asian countries as well as to the gendered and racialized ideologies that are part of this relationship and which have greatly impacted the lives of Asian and Asian American women.25

The goal of relational justice can begin to be achieved when Korean American pastors lead Korean American congregations through a process of conscientization. Korean American congregations very often hear of God’s justice and love from Korean American pastors, but, perhaps because of their own experiences as an immigrant people marginalized in a racist culture, they are not personally able to practice God’s justice and love inside and outside of Korean American churches. Fortunately, some Korean American pastors have already begun to pay attention to the influence of social, cultural, and political circumstances of Korea and America regarding the suffering and struggles of Korean military wives. In particular, they pay attention to racial prejudice, discrimination, and alienation. A Korean American pastor Su Kim describes:

For a long time, Korean military wives were discriminated by other Korean Americans in Korean American society and even by Korean American Christians. I believe that it is time for Korean American churches and Korean American Christians to practice the true meaning of love and justice Jesus Christ showed us. Furthermore, Korean American churches and Korean American Christians need to work for God’s justice and peace in this racial-biased society of America.26

As I noted, Korean American congregations, as immigrants, have seen and experienced unjust, destructive, and oppressive human relationships in their daily lives. They already recognize that many racial minorities lose their full humanity in the image of God. Like many victims of injustice, it is difficult for Korean American congregations to turn their spiritual eyes to social injustice such as poverty, racial, and sexual


26 Email interview by author, March 3, 2008.
discrimination experienced by subsets of people within their communities, like Korean military wives. Understandably, Korean American congregations want to have a close and authentic communion with God that can sustain them in their struggle; like many victimized people, it is painful for them to acknowledge that way they ignore true communion with Korean military wives, who are also God’s creatures. As Korean American congregations are critically aware of and actively participate in recovering both their full humanity and the full humanity of Korean military wives, they can realize the true meaning of communion with God.

Thus far I have described how Korean American congregations can stand in solidarity with the suffering of Korean military wives by exploring the communal contextual paradigm, focusing on the process of conscientization and relational justice. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, I will use the theories I have explored in previous chapters to construct a communal contextual model of care. In the next chapter, I will elaborate concrete pastoral care strategies that may arise from this model of care.

The Theology of Han and Pastoral Care of Korean Military Wives

In Chapter 3, han is described as deep human suffering and the abysmal psychological and spiritual experiences of pain and heartbreak. Park concisely defined han as “frustrated hope, the collapsed feeling of pain, letting go, resentful bitterness, and the wounded heart.” He insists that sin is not resolved simply by repentance of the oppressor, but also needs to be treated from the side of the oppressed. That is, the sin of the oppressor can be resolved only when the deeply wounded heart of the oppressed is

also healed. More importantly, the theology of han challenges us to confront human suffering and transform dehumanizing, unequal, prejudicial, and discriminatory social and cultural realities. In this section, I will talk about how the theology of han helps Korean American congregations raise their consciousness about the suffering of Korean military wives, so that Korean American churches can become authentic faith communities that sustain Korean military wives as they resist oppression and unjust domination.

To begin with, the contextual and relational interpretations of human suffering help Korean American congregations to become critically conscious of the suffering of Korean military wives. To feel han is to experience unjust psychological, social, political, economic, and cultural oppression.28 Therefore, awakening to and transforming the reality and causes of han means that one begins to criticize the unjust and exploited social structures and systems, and to practice transformational actions. By recognizing the limits of the individualistic perspective of human suffering, a Korean American pastor, Song, points out the significance of changing the oppressive environments of Korean American churches to sustain Korean military wives as they resist oppression:

The motto of my ministry is to share faith and life with each other. Conflict is not always bad. The congregants try to interpret conflict positively, and to change the structure of Korean American churches in order that all members, including Korean military wives, share their suffering and struggles.29

How, then, do Korean American congregations change the structure of the church? How can Korean American pastors raise the consciousness of Korean American

28 Ibid., 10.

29 Email interview by author, March 3, 2008.
congregations to become fully authentic communities that sustain Korean military wives? We cannot simply say that Korean American congregations need to understand and have compassion for Korean military wives. Authentic communion between Korean American congregations and Korean military wives will not occur without critical and conscious efforts by pastors and lay leaders.

In imaging how to implement a communal contextual model of pastoral care, I want to find culturally meaningful strategies that draw upon practices indigenous to Korean American congregations. I contend that unique faith practices of Korean American churches can provide an adequate foundation that will enable Korean American congregations to go through the process of conscientization. That is, it is still possible for unique faith practices of Korean American churches to provide good opportunities for Korean American congregations to listen to and perceive the suffering of Korean military wives, and to develop empathy for them.

American Korean congregations are used to practicing their faith through the daily dawn prayer meeting, fervent prayer (Tong-Sung Ki-Do), fasting prayer (Keum-Sik Ki-Do), weekly and weekend Bible study, praise worship (Chan-Yang Yeh-Bae), and rice fellowship. These practices have become influential factors in the rapid and explosive growth of Korean American churches. Korean American pastors and Christians believe that spiritual power, experienced individually and communally, is a great blessing from God. Given the urgency of their personal and familial needs, particularly as marginalized people, Korean American pastors and congregations tend to use the spiritual practices I described above only to heal individual spiritual suffering and pain. As long as Korean American pastors and congregations maintain an individualistic orientation, such faith
practices cannot be an adequate pastoral care strategy for responding to the suffering of
Korean military wives. Su Yon Pak et al. describes the negative side of individually –
focused healing practices:

The practice of healing in Korean American churches is predominantly
individualistic in nature. The result of this tendency is that community formation,
which demands both individual and communal healing to be effective, is
truncated. Since it is limited to the individual, Christian healing as commonly
practiced cannot function to heal the community as an entire entity. When
healing is focused on individuals rather than the community, individual needs and
ideological standpoints become paramount, rather than community.30

Korean American pastors do not need to use these faith practices simply as individual
healing methods and spiritual ways of experiencing encounters with God. They can also
use these practices to experience justice and liberation of God, and to make Korean
American churches communities of faith that resist and transform the corruption and
inhumanity of the world.

It is very important to recognize this because Korean American churches are the
most important social, cultural, and religious institution for Koreans, regardless of race,
gender, age, education level, and occupation. Through full and authentic participation in
prayer, Bible study, worship, and fellowship, Korean military wives are able to tell their
life stories. When Korean American congregations actively hear their voices, they can
become consciously aware of unjust domination and distorted humanity in the women’s
stories. The question is, how can unique faith practices of Korean American churches be
developed to include the dimensions of liberating and transforming, within the patriarchal
and hierarchical structures of Korean American churches? Park considers structural

30 Su Yon Pak, Unzu Lee, Jung Ha Kim, and Myung Ji Cho, Singing the Lord's
Song in a New Land: Korean American Practices of Faith (Louisville, KY: Westminster
transmutation of Korean American churches as a serious task of Korean American congregation:

Korean-American Christians must change our churches, which are still patriarchal, hierarchical, and exclusively ethnocentric. Women are not treated fairly in many Korean-American churches. . . . Concerning hierarchy, most Korean-American churches have the vertical structure of church spiritual order. . . . Regarding exclusive ethnocentrism, many Korean-American churches neglect or overlook non-Korean members affiliated through interracial marriages. Korean-American Christians must transmute the ethnic and ethos of our churches.31

Secondly, self-examination leading to a critical consciousness is an indispensable step for Korean American congregations. This important step will allow them to enter into authentic relationships with Korean American wives, and to stand in solidarity with them. When Park describes transmutation, he points out that outward transmutation should be accompanied by inward transmutation. He says, “The inward aspect [of transmutation] presumes personal self-criticism, self-rectification, self-permutation, and self-healing. Inward transmutation is a self-reflective process, reforming the consciousness and structure of the oppressor.”32

In particular, Korean American congregations seriously need to reflect upon their social identity. As racial and cultural minorities, they cannot devalue the influence of American culture, economic and political systems, and relationships with white as well as other minorities in the formation of their identities, and their personal and daily lives. On a daily basis, most have experienced racial discrimination and economic injustice. When they acknowledge the extent to which their personal suffering arises out of their living conditions as immigrants, they are able to understand that Korean military wives also

31 Park, Racial Conflict and Healing, 101-02.

32 Ibid., 100.
suffer from the same oppression. As Korean American congregations come to recognize
their resistance to subordination by others, they come to acknowledge that Korean
military wives are not subordinates to be discriminated against, but they also suffer from
racism, injustice, exploitation, and violence. Transforming this unjust society into a
society without *han*, where all human beings can see God’s love and justice, should be a
major intention of the Church.

Thirdly, the interpretation of sin in relation to *han* of the oppressed gives Korean
American congregation adequate motivation to raise their consciousness to the suffering
of Korean military wives. Considering the traditional conservative faith of Korean
American churches, Korean American congregations are used to confessing the
individual sins committed in their everyday lives. They simply ask for God’s forgiveness
without offering resolution to the wounded heart of the oppressed. When Korean
American churches talk about sin, their focus is very often placed on the relationship
between the sinner and God, with no focus on themselves or other as ‘sinned against’.
Andrew Sung Park, however, asserts that the sin of the oppressed must be addressed by
having them attend to the unresolved suffering of the oppressed. Park says, “After
reconciling with the sinned-against, the sinned need to reconcile with God.”33

In the case of the suffering of Korean military wives in Korean American
churches, many Korean American congregations do not even regard their oppressive
behaviors and prejudices toward Korean military wives as sin. In other words, Korean
American congregations’ understanding of sin is too individualistic, general, religious,

33 Park, *From Hurt to Healing*, 101. Also see Andrew Sung Park and Susan L.
Nelson, *The Other Side of Sin: Woundedness from the Perspective of the Sinned-Against*
and abstract. Korean American congregations need to recognize that Korean military wives have *han*-full experiences in part as a result of their relationship with Korean American congregations. And their ignorance of or nonchalance toward the suffering of Korean military wives is a form of collective sin. When they leave the *han* of Korean military wives unresolved and unattended, Korean American churches cannot be in full communion with God. Park describes the vicious cyclical relationships between sin and *han*:

> The sin of the oppressor may cause a chain reaction via the *han* of the oppressed. The *han* of the oppressed in its active mode can seek retaliation against the oppressor in a form which is often itself unjust. The oppressor will in turn react in a way that is yet more harsh and unjust. As a consequence the vicious cycle of violence continues.34

Within the process of these vicious cyclical relationships, the nonchalance of Korean American congregations toward the suffering of Korean military wives might lead Korean military wives to want to be oppressors. Freire describes this phenomenon as *distortion of humanity*. He argues that dehumanization, which means the distortion of full humanity, is the result of unjust violence of the oppressors; and it “leads the oppressed to struggle against those who made them so.”35 He points out that becoming the oppressors of the oppressors cannot be the ultimate goal of liberation of the oppressed. Freire proposes that the path to authentic freedom and justice includes restoring the distorted humanity of both the oppressed and the oppressors.

Relational justice becomes a central concept in the process of the awakening of the consciousness of Korean American congregations. Denying the resolution of the

---


35 Freire, 28.
unattended han of Korean military wives will keep the women from having full and creative relationships with themselves, their families, neighbors, and God. In fact, Korean military wives often intentionally or unintentionally tend to reject self-acceptance, other Korean church members, and God. The vicious cycle of sin and han also hinders the faith community from realizing its full humanity in the image of God. In the end, both Korean American congregations and Korean military wives become victims of the failure to actualize relational justice. In this vein, Korean American congregations can contribute to fulfilling the image of God in their faith communities through the critical consciousness of the suffering of Korean military wives. Graham describes the significance of relational justice to fulfill the image of God,

> To fulfill the image of God in human relationships, therefore, is to be liberated from internalized bondage and to create a human environment characterized by relational justice rather than oppressive structures of domination and subordination.\(^{36}\)

Finally, Korean American pastors need to challenge Korean American congregations to perceive their privilege in Korean American churches. Freire says, “Those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly.”\(^{37}\) He continually points out that the actions of the oppressors cannot lead to the liberation either of the oppressed or of themselves. He states as the main reason: “The oppressors do not perceive their monopoly on having more as a privilege which dehumanizes others and themselves.”\(^{38}\)


\(^{37}\) Freire, 47.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 45.
In Korean American churches, Korean Americans take leading positions such as pastor, elder, and deacon. Korean military wives rarely take these roles. At Korean women’s meetings, Korean military wives are usually regarded as supporters, rather than as leaders. Without critically challenging their privilege, it is very hard for Korean American congregations to practice the process of critical consciousness for the purpose of realizing relational justice. When Korean American congregations deeply and critically acknowledge their power and privilege over Korean military wives, they can authentically begin a process of conscientization, and can stand in solidarity with Korean military wives. When they work together toward resisting and transforming unjust oppression and domination, Korean American churches will be an authentic and creative community of God which practices relational justice. As Park’s theology of han concludes:

The resolution of victims’ han should not be the final goal of all action. The goal should be building the community of God through the mutual transformation of victims and their offenders. Victims can transmute their negative energy of han into a positive one for constructing the community of God; their offenders can cease afflicting others and participate in the establishment of God’s community.39

Asian Feminist Theology and Pastoral Care of Korean Military Wives

In the previous section, I described how the theology of han can be used by Korean American pastors to construct a communal contextual approach to care in the process of conscientization. One of the biggest challenges facing Korean American pastors is helping Korean American congregations transform the dominant power structures of Korean churches. Without the critical consciousness within Korean

American congregations, pastoral treatment of Korean military wives could exacerbate their suffering and despair and perpetuate a destructive relationship between the congregation and the military wives. In this section, I will describe how the theories of Asian feminist theology can be used to motivate Korean American congregations to move through a process of conscientization and establish authentic relationships with Korean military wives.

To begin with, we need to recognize that Asian feminist theologians have founded their theories on populations based in Asia. Consequently, their theories address problems specific to the sociopolitical and historical contexts of Asia. Resisting the tendencies of normalization and universalization of Western theology, Asian feminist theologians construct their theologies out of experience of colonialism, social and political injustice, oppression, and violence. Such an inductive approach to theology demonstrates that Korean American congregations, as Asian immigrants, should consciously reflect on the historical context from which the Korean military wives come.

The term conscientization not only applies to individuals but also to relations among individuals. For conscientization to be successful, Korean American congregations need to reflect on the American racial and cultural context within which military wives exist. Next, they need to examine how the oppressive social conditions of American culture affect these women. Through deep reflection on the historical realities of Asian immigrants, Korean American congregations can begin to recognize the necessity of communion with Korean military wives. In other words, once Korean American congregations realize that their experiences in a foreign country and the military wives’ experiences have much in common, the process of understanding begins.
At the same time, it is imperative that Korean American congregations acknowledge the sexual discrimination that military wives face within the church. Through Asian feminist theology’s focus on the suffering of Asian women, we can more accurately identify problems of sexual discrimination. In such a male-dominated religious structure, Korean American pastors and congregations need to acknowledge and resist Korean women’s subordinate position in Korean American churches. Grace Ji-Sun Kim describes the circumstances of females in Korean American churches:

Women’s leadership or authority has not been well accepted in the Korean immigrant churches during most of the twentieth century, and the roles women are usually allowed to play are largely as assistants to men. Women’s roles and status in the churches have been largely influenced by Confucian thought and practice. . . . They are mainly relegated to kitchen-related services in the church, which means that churchwomen repeat the daily routines of housework when they go to church on Sundays.  

Moreover, women are often excluded from important decision-making meetings. Jung Ha Kim notes that,

Despite the fact that women consist of the majority of church attendees, the Kyo-whe manifests patriarchal bias in its structural and functional material arrangements. Structurally, there are no official and legitimate channels for women’s leadership to become more visible and empowering in the Kyo-whe. Relegating churched Korean-American women invisible and their contributions unimportant takes both subtle and overt forms.  

In this sense, their pastoral roles do not only include listening to and understanding the women’s life experiences. In addition, they must be oriented toward social change to build a more just church and society. These transforming activities are

---

40 Ibid., 72.

41 Koreans call church Kyo-whe, which means a spiritual and faithful community.

42 Jung Ha Kim, Bridge-Makers and Cross Bearers (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1997), 54.
possible given cooperation between Korean American female congregations and Korean military wives. A conscious effort by Korean American female congregants to resist and transform the dominant sexual discrimination will create a sense of solidarity with Korean military wives. Socially, as Korean American women married to Korean men, they hold a power over Korean military wives. Unfortunately, this false sense of social privilege deters Korean American female congregants from the process of critical consciousness. As such, pastors must encourage dialogue and understanding between these two groups.

In Chapter 3, I described the ultimate goal of Asian feminist theologians as recovering Asian women’s full humanity in the image of God. As I argued, it is clear that realizing their full humanity should be one of the most important goals of pastoral care. As a Korean American pastor observes, “Aren’t all human beings equal in front of God? Korean American congregations must treat Korean military wives equally and respect their full humanity. I think that it is what Korean military wives expect from others.”

To this end, Korean American pastors need to examine closely how this can be achieved. In a multiracial and multicultural society such as the United States, this means reconciling Korean Americans to other suffering minority groups.

Korean American pastors need to understand that pastoral care of Korean military wives requires more than merely caring for the women but also demands that they repair the whole structure and system of the Korean American community: church, family, culture, and its relation to other communities. Many Korean military wives live in interracial or intercultural families: white American, African American, or Hispanic.

43 Email interview by author, May 25, 2008.
American. In such situations, they may experience rejection from their husband and/or children. However, it may be the case that their African American, white, or Hispanic husband and children are also suffering from dehumanized or unjust social structures.

In such situations, a commitment to just relationships is essential. Specifically, I refer to the commitment to justice among Korean American congregations, Korean military wives, interracial families, other racial minority groups and God as “Divine Vocation.” (In Chapter 6, I will further detail this concept.) Some Korean American pastors I interviewed recognize their prophetic vocation in American society. As Korean American pastor David Chang explains:

Korean military wives are also created in the image of God like other Korean Americans. So, Korean American pastors must try to rebuild their self-esteem, and teach the congregants that all of us, including Korean military wives and other Korean Americans, are equal human beings in front of God. Furthermore, we must recognize that there are some differences among race, ethnicity, language, and culture both in Korean American churches and outside of the churches. We need to embrace others because all human beings are created in the image of God.44

**Liberation Psychology and Pastoral Care of Korean Military Wives**

Given the gravity and depth of suffering in Korean military wives’ life experiences, unpacking the complex psychological difficulties they carry is no easy task. Oppression, shame, frustration, guilt, anger, isolation, disconnection, and not belonging are just a few of the emotions felt by these women. Such complex, interacting dynamics pose a challenge for pastors. Furthermore, each woman responds to her unique situation differently, making hard-and-fast rules of care an impossibility. I have used Andrew

44 Email interview by author, March 20, 2008.
Sung Park’s term *han* to describe the emotional suffering of Korean military wives and the Asian feminist paradigm to interpret these experiences. Additionally, liberation psychology has two aspects in common with the Asian concept of *han* and Asian feminist theology; namely, a genesis in a real historical context and a focus on the collective memory of oppression. When I examined the theory of *han* and Asian feminist theology, I named *conscientization* as an essential component in practicing justice. In this section, I will relate the process of *conscientization* to Korean American pastors’ care of Korean military wives.

It is important for Korean American pastors to develop a sense of critical consciousness before offering pastoral care to Korean military wives. However, the practice of *conscientization* can be difficult for pastors to practice given the influence of systems like patriarchy and Confucianism. Often, Korean American pastors, out of their own experiences of victimization, act in overpowering ways and, as a result, are regarded as part of an authoritative religious group focused on maintaining their status within the patriarchal power structures of the church. Korean American pastor Sun Shin remarks,

> Actually, I do not know much about Korean military wives. It is a very sensitive issue to try to get to know their life stories before they tell me about them, but they usually do not even want to do that. Therefore, understanding the particulars of their suffering is a big concern to me.45

Korean American pastors I interviewed tend to understate and oversimplify the complexity of psychological and spiritual suffering of Korean military wives and overemphasize individual faith development as a solution. They need to engage in this issue, paying close attention to the broader public areas.

---

45 Email interview by author, March 5, 2008.
To practice communal care, Korean American congregations must discuss openly and critically God’s justice and love. By interpreting the concepts of family, culture, sexuality, and other social issues, Korean American pastors can lead a practical moral discourse within the congregation. Such communal discourse is essential in making Korean American churches safe and reliable places for Korean military wives. Miguel De La Torre puts it succinctly:

Confessions of sins that prevent reconciliation are meaningless unless a church is actively involved in dismantling the very social structures designed to provide it with privilege. Only by losing its privileged space in the culture can the church hope to gain a place at God’s table. Church as community requires not just individual confessions of sins but communal confessions of complicity in the sins of oppression and injustice. While individual pleas for forgiveness are important, even more important in bringing about real change in the world is corporate penitence that commits to letting “justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24). 46

Acknowledging and addressing these larger cultural and moral issues must be followed by the process of de-centering; cultural and religious privilege denied to Korean military wives needs to be deconstructed. Without de-centering, the discourse of norms and moral foundations will be meaningless to Korean military wives. De La Torre assures us that the humanity of the oppressors can be recovered as long as they are willing to take a critical look at their privilege and power. He describes what may result without genuine self-analysis:

All too often those who benefit from unjust social structures are the first to call for reconciliation, but for a reconciliation that does not hold them culpable for

---


47 Ibid., 93-94
what has taken place and a reconciliation that allows them simply to move on without giving up the very oppressive structures that continues to benefit them. Conscientization without de-centering privilege is futile. Conscientization in liberation psychology requires practical and authentic action to resist and transform the unjust conditions of Latin Americans.

Moreover, Korean American pastors must recognize that Korean military wives do not merely want to be understood and accepted. Simple acceptance without liberating action is useless. Korean military wives want Korean American congregations to be co-participants in resisting and transforming han-generated suffering. Korean military wives yearn for liberation from oppression, prejudice, discrimination, and rejection. As Korean American pastor Sang Lee observes, “Korean military wives want the unsafe situations to change in a positive direction. They believe that God can help them. To them, faith is not just a speculative and theoretical doctrine. It is a real and practical experience.”

Finally, how Korean military wives become critically aware of their own suffering and life experiences is important in resisting and transforming such han-caused realities. Latin Americans have long suffered from a fear of kidnapping, disappearance, imprisonment, torture, and death. In such conditions, Latin Americans lost their agency in proclaiming their human dignity in the image of God. Therefore, it is very important for Latin Americans to re-evaluate critically their situations in the process of regaining their agency. Freire describes this process: “In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a

---

48 Email interview by author, March 5, 2008.

49 Freire, 34.
closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform.” Although the specific historical circumstances differ, Korean military wives also suffer from feelings of fear and isolation. However, resisting and transforming the deep-rooted social and cultural prejudice, oppression, and discrimination requires Korean military wives’ collective efforts.

Helping Korean military wives recover their agency and recognize their humanity in the image of God is an important pastoral role of Korean American pastors. Freire’s injunction can be used to challenge Korean military wives:

As long as the oppressed remain unaware of the causes of their condition, they fatalistically ‘accept’ their exploitation [by the oppressor]. Further, they are apt to react in a passive and alienated manner when confronted with the necessity to struggle for their freedom and self-affirmation.50

In the next chapter, I will describe how Korean American pastors and congregations can work together with Korean military wives to build a community of resistance and transformation through solidarity among women.

Summary

Here I have examined the communal and contextual paradigm of pastoral theology, care, and counseling, and described how Korean American pastors can utilize the paradigm in practicing pastoral care of Korean military wives. Since the communal and contextual paradigm regards the congregation as an active caring agent, it challenges Korean American pastors to transcend their traditional understanding of the congregation. In other words, they do not need to look at the congregation simply as recipients of

50 Ibid., 51.
individualized caring and ministry. Rather, the communal and contextual approach argues that Korean American pastors need to teach Korean American congregations to practice communal care. In particular, Korean American pastors and congregations must go through the communal process of conscientization in order to make Korean American churches a supportive and trustworthy place for Korean military wives.

This chapter has also illuminated how the theology of han, Asian feminist theology, and liberation psychology aid Korean American pastors and congregations in raising critical consciousness. There are two similarities among the theology of han, Asian feminist theology, and liberation psychology: one, a critical awareness of the influence of society and culture on human suffering, pain, and despair; and two, the liberating and transforming practices of Korean American pastors and congregations. Many Korean American pastors and congregations tend to assume that the suffering and despair of Korean military wives is attributable to psychological and spiritual problems. These three perspectives challenge them to reflect critically on negative influences in the power structures of Korean American churches, society, and culture and take action to deconstruct these oppressive situations.

What, then, are the specific pastoral strategies that Korean American pastors need to help military wives resist oppression? How can Korean American churches help Korean military wives resist and transform these oppressive and unjust environments? How can faith communities stand in solidarity with Korean military wives? In the next chapter, I will address these questions. Furthermore, I will challenge the relevance of the metaphor of the living human web, which Miller McLemore has used to describe the sociocultural and political influences on the suffering of the individual, and will propose
a new metaphor, the *living human cell*, as a more adequate metaphor for describing relational systems that may be life affirming, life limiting, or destructive.
CHAPTER 6

STRATEGIES FOR PASTORAL CARE OF KOREAN MILITARY WIVES

This dissertation argues that the pastoral care of Korean military wives must be based on a critical consciousness of the social, cultural, and religious contexts of Korean military wives. That is, conscientization is the foundational level that must be in place in order for pastors to develop strategies for pastoral care. Through the process of conscientization, Korean American pastors and congregations can begin to respond to the suffering of Korean military wives by standing in solidarity with them, and supporting them as they resist dehumanizing social, cultural, and religious oppression.

Unfortunately, not many Korean American pastors recognize the need for a critical consciousness of the cultural and religious dimensions of social oppression. Many of the Korean American pastors I interviewed tend to emphasize the need for personal spiritual transformation through Christian practices like hearing sermons and engaging Bible study. Others focus on participation in workshops or conferences. For example, David Chang states,

The most appropriate ways to heal the women’s suffering are to educate them through well-prepared sermons and lead the change of personal character through Bible study. Furthermore, Korean American pastors must be upstanding role models, sufficient to earning their trust.¹

Another Korean American pastor, Sang Lee says,

¹ Email interview by author, March 20, 2008.
I encourage Korean military wives to participate in The Association’s annual national conference. I think that multiethnic worship, multiethnic ministry and mission program, intercultural family workshop program are very helpful for Korean American Christians to modify their prejudice to Korean military wives.2

While this strategy is important in helping Korean military wives experience an accepting community outside of their congregations, it does not address the need for congregations to become stand in solidarity and work with Korean military wives to confront racism and sexism. Without conscious and critical efforts to resist and transform the social oppression experienced by Korean military wives, the particular practices of care do not fully take into account the social dimensions of their suffering, and the need for societal, and not just personal transformation.

Neuger points out that authentic feminist-oriented pastoral counseling is not simply listening to women’s experiences, doing crisis counseling, or supporting women in recovering their self-realization and fulfillment. She insists that feminist-oriented pastoral counseling must include political commitments and the goal of transforming any culture that puts women at disadvantages:

Pastoral counseling can be considered to be feminist only when its goal is not just personal transformation, but transformation of the culture – including the church – as a part of the counseling process. . . . A feminist-oriented pastoral counseling is for the benefit of individuals, and it is in keeping with the nature of ministry that claims that the care of people includes their [empowerment to transform] “principalities and powers” for the good of God’s kingdom.3

2 Email interview by author, April 11, 2008

Pastoral care of Korean military wives must include the social dimensions of their suffering, recognizing their marginalized social and cultural location in the United States. In this regard, the literature and perspectives of both feminist and African American pastoral theologians, with their awareness of the need for social transformation, are relevant to developing pastoral care strategies for those who are marginalized.

Using resources from both feminist and African American pastoral theologians, I propose three pastoral care strategies for Korean American pastors and congregations: (1) creating a caring community; (2) empowering Korean American congregation and Korean military wives; (3) working together for social transformation and liberation.

**Creating a Caring Community**

After embracing a process of raising critical consciousness of the suffering of Korean military wives, Korean American pastors and congregation must rebuild Korean American churches as authentic caring communities. Without reconstructing the sexist and racist structures of Korean American churches, their practice of *conscientization* will remain at an intellectual level, but will not yet fully transform their community life. It is undeniable that Korean military wives have experienced sexism and racism within Korean American congregations in Korean American churches. While congregations may ‘accept’ them as individual members, if they come to know each woman as an individual, they need to go through the kind of transformation that would make every single Korean military wife feel truly at home in Korean American churches.

In order to appreciate fully the breadth of such congregational transformation, I will review the brief history, function, and significance of intentional efforts to create
authentic and caring community, made possible through the work of the National Association of Inter-Cultural Family Ministry (NAICFM).

This is Our Community, Not Their Community

With the assistance of Korean United Methodist pastors, the first Intercultural Family Ministry Convention was held in Killeen, Texas in 1987. Later, the National Association of Inter-Cultural Family Ministry (NAICFM) was established at a general meeting that was held in St. Louis; the NAICFM is a subdivision of the Korean ministry under the United Methodist Church. As pastor Wonho Kim, the first president of NAICFM, describes, “Korean military brides have specific life experiences and faith development, so we want to encourage them to collect their power, and to use it for ministerial passion and for searching for their solidarity.” Song, a Korean American pastor, talks about how the NAICFM has helped Korean military wives reinterpret their life stories:

There are life stories of Korean military wives in the Association. That is, they officially share their own suffering and painful life experiences, understand them in the name of faith, and further, reinterpret them theologically. Ultimately, the most important point is that Korean military wives are able to realize God’s purpose toward them, resist the oppressive prejudice and bias, and finally recover their self-esteem and dignity.

---


5 Email interview by author, March 3, 2008.
The primary goals of NAICFM are to help Korean military wives critically reflect upon their life situations and to empower them to resist and transform prejudice and exclusion. According to NAICFM,

The purpose of the Association is to examine the uniqueness of intercultural marriages and families from a Christian perspective; to exchange information; to establish the oneness of all Korean women married inter-culturally; and, participate in the great work for the building of God's kingdom.⁶

Furthermore, NAICFM “seeks to expand the movement to build a strong community of Korean women in inter-cultural families by sharing our stories and dreams with each other, and by working to realize God's kingdom of justice, love and peace.”⁷

In 2002, in response to the needs of Korean military wives, NAICFM bought property in Saint Louis, Missouri. Korean military wives named it the ‘Peace Village,’ and described the place as a second motherland. Here the women began to deconstruct and reconstruct their life experiences in a space where they could redefine themselves, sharing life stories with each other. By working together at the Peace Village, Korean military wives realized that their identities are not fixed and unchangeable. In this sense, the Peace Village should not be considered merely a location, but rather an avatar of survival, resisting, transforming, and caring. Through the deep and intimate relationships established at the Peace Village, the women were able to disclose and share their experiences of personal anguish, uniting individual stories into a communal narrative.

⁶ NAICFM, 1999 Pamphlet: National Association of Inter-Cultural Family Ministries.
⁷ Ibid.
The Concept of Community – Real and Pseudo

Before exploring how Korean American churches can become the kind of authentic caring communities that women have found at the Peace Village, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of community. Margaret Kornfeld, in her book *Cultivating Wholeness*, differentiates real community from pseudo community: “Community is not just the place where healing occurs, it is a means through which it happens.”

Kornfeld’s definition of community emphasizes the dynamic and active role of community. In real community, people can experience their wholeness through authentic interconnectedness within a community. Yet not all communities are places where members experience healing and wholeness. Communities can also create alienation, oppression, separation, and prejudice; even churches can be sources of such negative experiences. These pseudo communities are described by Kornfeld as places where “you [are] not able to tell anyone you [are] frightened, alienated, or feeling unaccepted. You [cannot] be yourself. You [do] not trust that the group [can] accept your real, vulnerable self.”

Here people are not valued for their differences or uniqueness. Instead, pseudo communities do not welcome others, and they are exclusive rather than inclusive. In such a community, people who do not fit in are unwelcome.

Unfortunately, Korean American congregations must acknowledge that Korean American churches are likely to be regarded as pseudo communities by Korean military wives. In Korean American churches, Korean military wives are forced to keep their

---

8 Kornfeld, *Cultivating Wholeness*, 16.

9 Ibid., 18.
suffering and life stories secret. Why does this exclusion exist? Simply put, Korean military wives are regarded as fundamentally different because they have married American servicemen. In an interview with a Korean weekly newspaper, a Korean military wife confesses, “I want the other Korean congregants to accept me as the same human being. Of course, my life is not the same to them. But their lives are different from each other, right? I want to worship God without any feeling of exclusion.”

In addition, Korean American pastor Su Kim says, “Frankly speaking, it is very hard for Korean military wives to share their life experiences and emotions even in Bible study because their stories are treated as part of a shameful history.”

In the midst of painful experiences and emotions I described in Chapter 2, Korean military wives thirst for an authentic Christian community where they can experience God’s justice and love regardless of their marriage and life conditions.

Becoming a Caring Community

How then can Korean American congregations become authentic communities for Korean military wives? What do Korean American congregations need to change in order to practice communal care? How are they different from the kind of community Korean military wives found in the Peace Village? First of all, Korean American congregations need to identify the ways in which racism and sexism distort their relationships with Korean military wives, preventing open communication in genuine

---

10 Christian Today, October, 2002

11 Email interview by author, March 5, 2008.
community. Kornfeld describes this process: “In community, we can tell our story. We can become more experienced in saying what we really mean. By being listened to, we can know more fully who we are.” In Korean American churches, very often, the stories of Korean military wives have been meaningless to Korean American congregations; racism and sexism make their stories worthless; indeed, these stories are seen as trash which must be discarded.

In light of these considerations, the Peace Village plays an important role for Korean military wives in regaining and reinterpreting their forgotten life stories. It gives them hope for true community where they can say, “I can be myself here!”, and a place where they need not feel fearful. In Korean American churches, their identities and narratives are not taken into consideration. Korean military wives often find that their stories and experiences are lost, discredited, or twisted to fit better within the racism and sexism of the dominant culture. Korean American female pastor Yuh Keum says, “Korean military wives feel the sense of isolation and discrimination in Korean American churches. As international married women, it is very hard for them to get along well with other Korean Americans.” Korean military wives need to be able to claim their life stories and experiences as their own truths in their own voices and language.

In this sense, Korean American churches must become the place Korean military wives recover their wholeness of humanity through open communication. As Kornfeld describes, “When we communicate, we are in deep relationship, communion, with others."

12 Kornfeld, 21.

13 National Association of Inter-Cultural Family Ministry, *The Song of Peageon.*
We give. We receive. We do this with our total being – body, mind, soul. We think and we feel. We are whole. We are ourselves.”\textsuperscript{14} James Poling emphasizes that persons who experience some measure of social privilege with the dominant cultures need to have a deep communication with the stories and lives of others who experience oppression. He says,

To develop a spirituality of resistance, we must immerse ourselves in the stories and lives of Others. . . . Some have lived to tell about their experiences, of their suffering and their hope. The more we hear, read, and mediate on such stories, the more they shape our identity.\textsuperscript{15}

Not all acts of telling and listening, however, always lead Korean military wives to find hope. Some Korean American congregations have already heard the suffering and shameful stories of Korean military wives, but nothing has changed. Authentic open communication must be accompanied with the active listening of Korean American congregations, and it must include respect and empathy, rather than judgment and criticism. Larry Kent Graham makes this point:

In listening to the stories of the powerless, it is essential that these stories be believed. Respect for the teller, and for the difficulty of telling, must be communicated verbally and nonverbally. Interpretations should be at a minimum. They should be self-affirming rather than denigrating.\textsuperscript{16}

To rebuild Korean American churches as caring communities, Korean American congregations also need to reform carefully their racist tendency to pursue “sameness” in

\textsuperscript{14} Kornfeld, 21.

\textsuperscript{15} James Poling, \textit{Deliver Us from Evil} (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 175.

\textsuperscript{16} Graham, \textit{Care of Persons}, 148.
the church. Kornfeld calls this desire for sameness the “false perception of likeness.”

She says,

We all tend to look for the ways in which we are similar to others; it makes us feel at home, less anxious. We feel simpatico with those of our cultural and religious “tribe.” However, in our attempt to find people like ourselves, we often do not see others as they really are. We screen out the ways in which they are different.17

Korean American congregations cannot fully embrace Korean military wives as long as they do not see and appreciate the ways in which racism and sexism make them denigrate the differences between them and Korean military wives. For instance, Korean military wives are regarded as ‘special’ groups among Korean American congregations. There is usually an implied negative connotation when Koreans say ‘special.’ That is, ‘special’ often implies ‘inferior’ or ‘second or third-rate.’ Korean American pastors typically refer to a multi-cultural ministry as a ‘special’ ministry. Korean American pastor Park Seung says, “Whenever Korean American pastors meet, they call us ‘special’ ministers because we minister with Korean military wives.”18 As such, Korean congregations prefer homogeneity; they look for ‘alikeness’. As Yuh describes, “The internationally married women, mostly military brides, are usually clustered apart from the other congregants. Numerous ministers of Korean churches in the United States told me that relations between military brides and other congregants are superficially polite and deliberately distant.”19

---

17 Kornfeld, 22.

18 National Association of Inter-Cultural Family Ministry, The Song of Peageon.

19 Yuh, Beyond the Shadow of Camptown, 164.
In contrast, Korean military wives consider the Peace Village as a real community. Despite the fact that all members have unique and different life experiences and stories, they mutually respect each individual’s perspective. Some of them married European American soldiers, others African American soldiers. Some worked in camptowns as military prostitutes, others as military camp officers. Some are still living with their husbands, others not. In short, Korean military wives gather at the Peace Village with different social, economic, and familial backgrounds. Nevertheless, they are willing to listen to each other’s stories. Neuger describes the significance of this kind of community for women who are marginalized:

> These communities have the potential not only to recognize difference, but to put faces on difference in such a way that stereotypes and negative judgments are avoided. The stories that are told are both personal and political and allow each to be known even as the community develops shared counterstories. The hope is that the stories of each are heard carefully and that they cause each member to examine her own narrative in ways that are both accountable and empowering.²⁰

²⁰ Neuger, *Counseling Women*, 135.

To respect the ‘otherness’ of Korean military wives, Korean American congregations need to reconsider the meaning of brotherhood and sisterhood. During worship service, prayer, and Bible study, Korean American congregations use the two words, brothers and sisters, too often without deep consideration. They tend to believe simply that they are brothers and sisters because they have one father, God. When they maintain a falsified reiteration of brotherhood and sisterhood, Korean American congregations cannot be authentic caring communities, not only to Korean military wives, but also to themselves. They should seriously perceive that they are brothers and sisters to each other even if they are different, because God loves such differences.
Finally, Korean American congregations need to note that true community is the place where members who are able to love themselves can love others as well. Kornfeld says, “Religious communities that worship the God of Love are places where those who do not love themselves are able to learn to love themselves. In these communities, the God of Love replaces the God of Fear.”21 She emphasizes both ‘loving oneself” and ‘loving the other,’ relating the authentic meaning of the religious communities to the concept of love. Religious communities should not be merely places where congregants worship God, but where all members of the communities participate in practices that reflect the God of love.

While it is important for Korean American congregations to be authentic caring communities to Korean military wives, they also need to reflect how much they are able to experience love for one another. It is not true to say that only Korean military wives experience marginalization in Korean American congregations. Even among Korean American congregations who appear to fit in well, there are still lots of conflicts, problems, oppression, prejudice, bias, and isolation. Why do Korean American congregations abuse their power? One of the possible answers might be that they do not fully love and respect themselves. In fact, many Korean American congregations have lived in the midst of self-denial and self-hatred. Like Korean military wives, their social and cultural experiences of racism make it difficult for them to accept and love themselves. As Asian immigrants, they must work from dawn to dusk in order to manage their everyday lives. They also experience racial discrimination, economic difficulty,

21 Kornfeld, 31.
family conflict, and confused cultural identities. As a result, they have difficulty in reconciling with themselves, other people, and God.

In light of these challenges, to create caring community that enable Korean military wives to resist oppression and discrimination, Korean American congregations first need to recover an authentic sense of self-acceptance and love for themselves. In this sense, the process of conscientization includes critical reflections on the part of both Korean military wives and Korean American congregations themselves. Through an inclusive process of conscientization, Korean American churches become places where they can experience self acceptance, embrace each other, and create a new vision and future for Korean military wives. It is good for Korean military wives to confess that the Peace Village is the place where they can share God’s grace by caring for each other within a faithful community. Why can’t this be true for all Korean American churches? When they rely on a sense of privilege over and against others, a false sense of sameness, and unearned power, Korean American congregations cannot be a real caring community. The practice of pastoral care of Korean American pastors and congregations should be grounded in God’s loving and just power. In the next section, I will deal with the issue of power, which has been a huge barrier to creating and practicing communal care in Korean American churches.

Empowering Korean American Congregations and Korean Military Wives

In the previous section, I examined the concept of community and the requisites of Korean American congregations to create caring communities for Korean military
wives. Based on Kornfeld’s theory of community, I proposed open communication, respect for racial difference, and authentic love of themselves and others. To create caring community is only a first stage in caring of Korean military wives. Many Korean American pastors are likely to be satisfied with this step. Their misunderstanding is that once the caring community is created, many problems are resolved without any further effort.

Yet, if Korean American pastors really want Korean American congregations to develop a resisting and transforming faith community, they must treat the issue of power critically and seriously, which is the second strategy. Understanding power dynamics, especially the differences between abuse of power and empowerment, is the central issue of the process of conscientization and relational justice, and one of the important topics in pastoral theology and care today. Prior to describing the role of empowerment for Korean American congregations and Korean military wives, it will be meaningful to review the concept of power and its influence on the practice of care.

Pastoral Theological Perspectives on Power

Power can be defined in many ways based upon the definer’s interest area. For example, the definition of power in the physical sciences is different from definitions in the social sciences. And philosophers define power differently from theologians. Among theologians, there are a variety of definitions of power, across theological perspectives, from systemic theology, to biblical theology, to Christian ethics. I will focus on a pastoral theological understanding of power. According to the Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling, power is “the ability to act or to be acted upon. A psychologically,
socially, philosophically, and morally necessary part of our personal and social experiences, it is also open to great abuse.” Many pastoral theologians understand power in relational and socio-cultural dimensions. Poling understands power in the relational webs among humans: “Power is the ability to act in effective ways with the objects and people that make up our perceived world. To the extent that people or institutions deprive a person of the power to live, that person is rendered powerless and her life is limited.” Graham uses the concept of *bi-polar power* to stress the relational aspects of power. He says, “Power is the bi-polar ability to influence and be influenced. It is the capacity to exercise agency or influence in relation to others and to be a receptor of the agency or influence of others.”

Among these definitions, Graham’s is helpful because bi-polar ability will be a very useful concept in describing the *de-powering* process of Korean American congregations, which will be treated later in this section. There is one more thing we must recognize about the nature of power. Power has been given to all human beings from God, but power itself is neither good nor bad. In nature, it takes a neutral position. Power becomes the force of evil when we use our power for the purpose of violence, oppression, discrimination, and injustice. Why then is the term of power important in pastoral theology and care, in particular, within the communal and contextual paradigm?

---


The reason is that power is deeply related to human suffering in the dynamic and complex social systems today. Poling explains this relationship very eloquently:

Power in its ideal form is the energy of life itself as it is organized into the relational web that includes us all. This primal relational power is distorted through human sin by individuals and societies into abuse of power and is the cause of much human suffering. Through resistance to the abuse of power and the work of God’s love in Jesus Christ, the human spirit is made resilient.25

Recognizing the relational natures of power, I am going to proceed to the next topic. I will first deal with how Korean American pastors challenge Korean American congregations to recognize their abuse of power and to change destructive power to constructive and creative power in order to help Korean military wives. And then, I will examine the empowerment of Korean military wives.

Empowering Korean American Congregations

The empowerment of Korean American congregations is one thing, and that of Korean military wives is another. In the dominant structures of Korean American churches, critical reflections on unearned power26 of Korean American congregations should be undertaken first before we talk about the empowerment of Korean military wives. In the context of Korean American congregations, my definition of empowerment is: “a process of critical reinterpreting a power through de-powering and de-centering of power systems.” Simply stated, the process of empowering Korean American


26 Here, I use the term ‘unearned power’ to describe the power of Korean American congregations over Korean military wives, because Korean American congregations acquire their power from the unequal and unjust socio-cultural structures of Korea, Korean American societies, and Korean American churches.
congregations is the process of deconstructing their power in a positive way. Korean American congregations require *de-powering* to take part in helping Korean military wives resist racism and sexism. De-powering refers to deliberate efforts to become aware of the destructive effects of the abuse of power, and to advance and share power with the powerless. Poling calls this process ‘*disidentifying*’ and points out that this will have a high cost for the dominant group:

Disidentifying with established power is a soul-wrenching experience for those of us who have been formed by the dominant culture, for we are forced to face our complicity and open ourselves to the massive suffering whose existence we have denied. However, we can be empowered as we join in the grief of Jesus over the ongoing crucifixion of the children of God.  

The practice of de-powering is challenging for Korean American congregations. As I already described in Chapter 2, Korean Americans have been deeply influenced by traditional Korean and Asian culture and philosophy: patriarchy, sexism, and Confucianism in particular. The group-oriented way of life of Korean Americans has only reinforced these cultural and social norms; Korean American congregations are no exception. Such an ethos makes it difficult for Korean American congregations to practice de-powering, especially within the racism of the United States. Although Korean military wives may be accepted by individual Korean American Christians, the challenge of group acceptance still remains. This is not to say that individual acceptance is meaningless, rather, that de-powering requires a group consensus.

Additionally, Korean American pastors need to encourage *de-centering*. De-centering does not require Korean American congregations to place themselves in a

---

27 Poling, *Deliver Us from Evil*, 176.
subservient position to Korean military wives. However, it does require that Korean American congregations resist the deep-rooted temptation to divide power into those with power (in the center) and those without power. As Korean American congregations resist imbalanced power structures within their congregations, they will be empowered to confront abuses of authority.

Some Korean American congregations may find Graham’s concept of bi-polar power useful in practicing de-centering. Graham points out that people tend to regard agential power as legitimate but receptive power as having no real authority. If we accept Graham’s concept of bi-polar power, de-centering will have two faces: that of agent and receiver. The difficulty lies in the fact that Korean American congregations in their struggles to survive are accustomed to agential power and many of them are reluctant to receive others’ power or influence. Many Korean American pastors have experienced power struggles with elders or other church leaders; power frequently plays a role in church conflict and division. With critical awareness of the power-laden structures of Korean American church, many Korean American pastors point out that pastors should begin with sharing their power with laypersons. For example, they argue that Korean American congregations should be encouraged to learn how to practice their leadership in productive ways both for Korean American churches and for other communities. In summary, a critical consciousness of power is required by Korean

---

28 Graham defines agential power as “the dimension of power that influences the world and resists undue influences from the environment.” Meanwhile, receptive power is “the capacity to be influenced by the environment. It is the polar opposite of agential power.” See Ibid., 261-262.
American pastors if they are genuinely to practice God’s justice and love in their congregations.

By practicing de-powering and de-centering, Korean American congregations can begin to resist abusive power within Korean American churches. Furthermore, these practices can help transform relational injustice and illegitimate privilege. Poling refers to this as “responsibility for power;” specifically, “boldly facing attitudes and actions for which we are individually responsible.”

Empowering Korean Military Wives

As one Korean pastor eloquently noted, “Like other human beings, Korean military wives yearn to discover the meaning of their being and their value. To acquire their goal, they have to recognize the power God bestowed upon them. They should be agents of their specific life locations.” In practicing pastoral care of Korean military wives, Korean American pastors need to acknowledge that pastoral care for these women must focus on encouraging them to rediscover their repressed power. Beginning with Hiltner, the functions of pastoral care have expanded from healing, sustaining, guiding and nurturing to include the functions of reconciling, liberating and empowering. Among the latter, liberating and empowering are the most relevant functions of pastoral care with Korean military wives. Emmanuel Lartey describe one model for focusing on empowerment in pastoral care:

29 Poling, Deliver Us from Evil, 177.

30 Email interview by author, January 28, 2008.
In contrast to a therapeutic model of pastoral care, in an empowerment model the emphasis is on the fact that there is something good, something of worth and value, within human persons as they presently are. Empowerment implies not weakness but rather some pre-existing strength upon which one builds. The task of pastoral care under this model is the ‘drawing out and building up’ of the unnoticed strengths and resources within and around people and communities.31

Carroll Watkins Ali defines empowering as “Putting people in touch with their own power so that they are enabled to claim their rights, resist oppression, and take control of their own lives.”32 As both Lartey and Watkins Ali point out, it is critical for Korean American pastors to support Korean military wives in discovering their suppressed power and agency. Pastoral care oriented to individuals, using a therapeutic model can perhaps relieve them of pain for a short period of time. However, individual therapeutic methods do not adequately address marginalization, social exclusion, God’s transforming and liberating power or justice. For Korean military wives, my definition of empowering is that: “rediscovering and developing pre-existing but rejected power or capacity within Korean military wives.” In short, the purpose is to awaken Korean military wives to claim power that has been suppressed by racism and sexism.

How then can Korean military wives restore this lost and repressed power?

Neuger’s feminist paradigm of pastoral counseling offers us some insight. In Counseling Women, Neuger points out that women have lost their voice in the midst of patriarchal dominant cultural and social systems. In summary, “Non-dominant groups are not only deprived of language but are also denied voice. Most works in feminist counseling have focused on the importance of helping girls and women to gain access to their own

31 Lartey, 58.

voice.” What exactly does it mean to lose one’s voice? Again, the answer lies in power relations. These women have been forced to feel powerless in the ways they express themselves and in unequal relationships with men. The male-privileged culture has constrained their social existence with family members, friends, and congregations. Such distorted human relationships cause them to lose their sense of humanity as creations of God. Neuger argues that helping women regain their voice is a crucial step in recovering their full humanity:

Women’s naming of self, context, and creation is necessary for the full participation of humanity in the ongoing co-creative process with God. Helping women – and all those who have been denied the right to voice and language – to name reality in their “mother tongue” is an important dimension to the personal and cultural transformation that is the purpose of feminist pastoral counseling. Neuger indicates that pastoral counselors must fully respect the woman counselee’s “attempts to find language for realities that have been denied, minimized, and distorted by the dominant culture.”

Neuger’s feminist approach offers Korean American pastors a method for empowering Korean military wives. These women exhibit many of the aspects of silencing that Neuger describes above. They were unable to express their suffering; for the parents and siblings, the suffering and painful experiences simply caused shame and guilt. Many Korean military wives still do not want to tell their life stories and have continued to live with a sense of hopelessness.

33 Neuger, Counseling Women, 68.

34 Ibid., 72.

35 Ibid., 71.
To relieve these feelings, Korean American pastors must encourage the women to communicate their life stories. As pastor Min Kwon explains: “I try to listen to their stories and help them construct their thought and value system.” Sim, another Korean American pastor, notes that “Korean American pastors must help them critically acknowledge what their problems really are and express the problems to the others.” However, Korean American pastors must recognize that this does not simply mean that the women merely tell stories to the congregation. Regaining their voice demands reinterpreting the meaning of their life experiences. Korean American pastors can encourage them to view their life experiences as significant and valuable.

How is this accomplished? Neuger stresses the importance of letting women make their own choices. She argues that authentic resistance and transformation occur only when women are able to have a sense of control over their lives. Emphasizing the significance of a supportive community in this process, Neuger observes that:

Making choices against a system, even a destructive one that has been deeply internalized as a truth and that is persistently presented in culture as part of the natural order, is a frightening enterprise. The choices cannot be made without a great deal of personal and relational deconstructive work. And the choices (and their healthy consequences) cannot be maintained without communities of support and communities of shared prophetic mission.

Without a supportive community, these choices are quite difficult. Carroll Saussy points out the importance of bonding with other women in the process of self-discovery:

36 Email interview by author, January 28, 2008.
37 Email interview by author, April 3, 2008.
38 Neuger, Counseling Women, 196.
Perhaps the primary reason women have not begun to believe deeply in their own value and in that of other women is that they have not utilized their enormous ability to empower one another to break the bonds of patriarchy. . . To be empowered by women requires special time with women. Women need to tell their stories, and they need to be heard. Otherwise they remain isolated and unknown by other women – and often trapped in patriarchal expectations.39 The mutual support of women is a critical element for Korean military wives in the process of making their own choices and regaining their agency. As Korean American pastor Song remarks,

Korean American pastors must lead Korean military wives to be active agents of ministry. They need to have opportunities to practice their ministry and evaluate themselves by building community. That is the reason why Korean American congregations need to create supportive communities for the women.40

As I have already explained, NAICFM has been helpful as a supportive community for Korean military wives. With the assistance of NAICFM, Korean military wives have begun to find their voice. As Korean American female pastor, Kim Min, a minister to Korean military wives, points out:

Many Korean military wives tend to ask me, “Why do we have to meet and gather together?” I usually let them know about the miserable death of a poor Korean military wife in Chicago. We have no place to rely on. Nobody can help us except us. Korean military wives should strive to recover their lost human right and regain their power and agency by creating their community.41

Lastly, Korean American pastors need to acknowledge the important role of the counterstory for Korean military wives. Neuger follows Hilde Lindemann Nelson in defining counterstory as “a story that contributes to the moral self-definition of its teller


40 Email interview by author, March 3, 2008.

41 National Association of Inter-Cultural Family Ministry, The Song of Peageon.
by undermining a dominant story, undoing it and retelling it in such a way as to invite new interpretations and conclusions.⁴² Neuger describes counterstory as a defiant and moral story that intends to resist a destructive dominant story and exhort its teller to take action. Korean American pastor Su Kim points out that Korean military wives need this counterstory to recover their power:

Most Korean military wives I met tend to regard their life stories as shameful and hard-to-believe things. Some of them do not want to expose their emotions and share their life experiences. However, I believe that they have to reinterpret their life experiences. Their life stories are not problematic and abnormal. By recreating their life stories, they are able to resist stereotypes and negative judgment. I think that they can do this important task individually and communally.⁴³

Counterstories are not only stories about resistance. They are creative stories, which resist past interpretations of their personal history and constructively rewrite their stories. One reason why Korean military wives are often in conflict with the congregation is that the women are sometimes perceived as being “too aggressive” in the ways they express their needs and tell their stories. This perception is illustrated in the remarks of this Korean American pastor,

Korean military wives sometimes become troublemakers. They are excessively negative or selfish. They tend to believe that other Korean American congregations have a deep-seated prejudice toward them. I think that they want to say Korean American congregations are wrong. Unfortunately, they don’t know how to tell them their life experiences in constructive ways.⁴⁴

This remark illustrates how easy it is to perceive women with complex needs resulting from racism and sexism as being excessively negative or selfish. Without doubt, Korean

⁴² Neuger, Counseling Women, 134.

⁴³ Email interview by author, March 5, 2008

⁴⁴ Email interview by author, April 3, 2008
American congregations need to recognize how sexism shapes their response to women who express their needs and describe the negative experiences of racism and sexism. Still, Korean military wives need to learn how to rewrite their stories. Thus, empowering women to construct counterstories is fundamental in regaining a sense of justice, liberation, and reconciliation between Korean military wives and Korean American congregations.

Thus far, I have examined the meaning, function, and significance of empowering Korean American congregations and Korean military wives. But, specifically, what do Korean American congregations need to do in order to engage the processes of de-powering and de-centering? Why do Korean American churches and Korean military wives have to form a partnership of resistance? The following section will illustrate strategies that Korean American pastors can use to encourage Korean American congregations and Korean military wives to work together to transform Korean American churches.

**Working Together for Social Transformation**

Along with establishing the importance of critical consciousness for Korean American congregations and Korean military wives, I have also proposed the creation of caring communities and empowerment as important pastoral strategies. Why is a caring community important? Why is the process of empowering necessary for Korean military women? Next, I will describe the final strategy for Korean American pastors: transforming.
Again, conscientization is not just a theory but also a practice. Critical consciousness without practical implementation is of little use to oppressed and hanful persons. As both Asian American women and hanful persons, Korean military wives have yearned for transformation of the oppressive and destructive structures and systems they have had to endure; they are primarily interested in reconnecting. Consequently, it would be inaccurate to say that Korean military wives are looking to recover their full humanity in the image of God and rediscover their lost power and agency. Rather, they are more concerned that the Korean American congregations change their deep-rooted prejudices and bias and that marital and familial violence cease. I call the pastoral practice of working for social transformation the Divine Vocation of Korean American pastors. Korean American pastor Su Kim observes that:

Korean American churches should practice justice and liberation of God. Many Korean American Christians do not take seriously their sinful behavior towards Korean military wives. Transformation and liberation have become bigger issues to the ministry of Korean American pastors in Korean American churches.45

In practicing divine vocation through transformation and liberation, Korean American pastors need to challenge their pastoral identity. Which pastoral roles do they most value: Bible interpreter, church organizer, preacher, teacher, pastoral counselor, or prophet? How do they articulate the ministry of care? How does their ministry fit in the larger multicultural and multiethnic context of America? Certainly, ministry in America differs from ministry in Korea. To encourage Korean American congregations to practice resistance and transformation, pastors must first critically reflect on the dynamic and complex context in which they practice their ministry.

45 Email interview by author, March 5, 2008.
How, then, can Korean American pastors encourage their congregations to work with Korean military wives towards social transformation? One method focuses on solidarity with Korean military wives; NAICFM, for example, demonstrates this possibility. Before, Korean American churches had already played an important role for all Korean immigrants and Korean Americans, as they face racism in an American context. As Korean American Methodist pastors developed NAICFM, however, they decided to make the Korean American church the central hub of the group. The members became active agents in resisting and transforming personal, cultural, and social prejudice and oppressive systems. Today, many Korean American pastors of the United Methodist Church and other congregations still help Korean military wives strengthen their spiritual power through communication and understanding.

Additionally, Korean American pastors of the United Methodist Church built the National Association of Korean United Methodist Churches for a Bi-Cultural Family, holding an annual Spiritual Formation Conference. Most participants were Korean military wives, but other members of the congregations began to participate in the conference as well. There, the military wives shared their life experiences and faith with other members in the Korean American community. The result was a great opportunity for the Korean American congregation to join with Korean military wives in resisting and transforming activities; living in such solidarity, the congregations and Korean military wives could authentically experience God’s justice and liberating power.
A further example of Korean American congregations supporting military wives, or internationally married women\textsuperscript{46}, is the Korean-American Women’s Associations of the USA (KAWAUSA), an institution protecting the human rights of internationally married women and promoting social and political equity and justice. Their primary aims are to:

Help the settlement of immigrants with their legal, social and financial status; promote traditional Korean culture in mainstream American culture; help resolve domestic issues involving Korean-American women living in the U.S. or other countries around the world; promote the rights and interests of Korean-American women everywhere.\textsuperscript{47}

KAWAUSA confronts not only an individual’s problems but also structural oppression and discrimination. Recently, KAWAUSA came to the aid of Yong Sun Havill, an internationally married Korean woman who was treated inhumanly and unjustly in a jail located in Florence, Arizona. She was released only after receiving widespread attention from a national campaign once KAWAUSA wrote letters to senators, representatives, and those involved in immigration. Numerous Korean American congregations supported this movement by signing the letters and praying for Yong Sun Havill. Pastors encouraged their congregations to join this important campaign to save the life of a Korean military wife, stressing that the issue meant more than saving one unknown Korean woman, but rather affected the whole of Korean American society.

\textsuperscript{46} Here, the term ‘internationally married women’ is interchangeable with ‘Korean military wives’. Generally, the former is preferred to the latter in recognition of the fact that all internationally married Korean women are not Korean military wives.

\textsuperscript{47} http://www.kawausa.org/tab_about/English_By-Laws.doc
This movement is a paradigmatic example of Korean American congregations working together with internationally married Korean women. Efforts to improve the status of Asian Americans have even included attempts at legislation; KAWAUSA, for example, has introduced a bill, the ‘Citizenship for Amerasians Act of 2004, H.R. 3987’\(^\text{48}\), into the House of Representatives. Because many Amerasians are children of Korean military wives, these efforts are of particular importance. Like the case of Yong Sun Havill, many Korean American pastors and their congregations have come together to aid this campaign. This case is still pending now. The above examples are a reminder to Korean American churches of their capacity to change the socio-cultural and political landscape as well as their responsibility to future generations of Korean Americans.

Finally, the social transformative actions of Korean American congregations and Korean military wives need to become allied with other minority groups. Actually, the issues of Korean military wives are not just matters of urgency for the Korean American community because the husbands of many Korean military wives are African Americans and members of other racial minorities. In this sense, to understand the socio-cultural and political contexts of African Americans challenges Korean American congregations to enlarge their communal actions for transformation and liberation toward the broader society and culture.

\(^{48}\) According to KAWAUSA, it is “A bill introduced to Congress by Rep. Lane Evans on February 15, 2005 to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to provide for the automatic acquisition of citizenship by certain individuals born in Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Kampuchea, or Thailand.” See http://www.kawausa.org/tab_events/order2d.html.
Carroll Watkins Ali, an African American feminist pastoral theologian, believes that survival and liberation must constitute the basic conceptual framework within which African American pastoral theology operates:

[C]ritical care of African Americans, especially poor black women and their children, also requires that pastoral caregivers be advocates for survival and liberation. That is, in addition to Hiltner’s “solicitous concern,” the approach to ministry needs to include an attitude of advocacy for “the least of these” who are struggling with survival and liberation issues.49

Watkins Ali continues by illuminating the role of the congregation in survival and liberation:

In terms of the existential concerns that are material and encompass the survival of all people as well as liberation from oppression, the congregation must become part of larger ecumenical systems and networks that advocate for issues that are socioeconomic and political in nature.50

She encourages African American churches, clinics, and the community to practice a holistic communal approach for the survival and liberation of African Americans.

Similarly, Korean military wives also face poverty, exclusion, dehumanization, patriarchal systems, and racial discrimination. Watkins Ali’s prescriptions apply to the Korean military wives’ situations. In particular, their suffering and struggles should be treated with cooperation among Korean American congregations, other Korean military wives, and internationally married women.

Additionally, Homer Ashby views the African Americans’ struggle for survival, freedom, justice and equality as crucial concerns for today’s black community. In his book, Our Home Is Over Jordan, he describes the functions of survival and liberation in

49 Watkins Ali, 120.
50 Ibid., 120.
pastoral theology and care for African Americans. Ashby enumerates the important problems in the African American community as follows: unemployment, political exclusion, unhealthy and unequal healthcare, a biased and dehumanized cultural identity, and the lack of a clear vision for the future.\textsuperscript{51} His metaphor of the Joshua church symbolizes the prophetic role African American churches can play in the formation of new methods of survival and liberation for the African American community. He argues that the African American church must empower its members to fix their vision on the future:

\begin{quote}
We are God’s people, created black, free, and embedded in a culture of rich texture and flavor, whose purpose is to make known the love, grace, and power of God. We are engaged in the process of claiming as God’s black people in the inheritance of full humanity that God has promised to us.\textsuperscript{52}
\end{quote}

To achieve the prophetic role, the African American church must continually protest unequal and oppressive economic and political structures. Both Watkins Ali and Ashby emphasize the significance of connecting and relating in African American communities. Ashby argues that African American communities, including churches, need to work together to produce a more powerful collective voice. Similarly, Watkins Ali remarks that:

\begin{quote}
[T]he most concrete example of an approach to the pastoral needs in the African American context is that of a community that cares for all its members. In other words, a nationwide community of support networks needs to be created through which there is a concerted effort among churches, schools, social agencies, and
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{51} See Homer U. Ashby, Jr., \textit{Our Home is Over Jordan} (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003), 2-9.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 64.
other institutional resources to provide caregiving of African Americans that is urgent, advocating, nurturing, empowering, liberating, and reconciling.\textsuperscript{53}

It is time for Korean American churches to learn how they can practice God’s justice and love through living in solidarity with the suffering. To this end, Ashby’s Joshua church can function as a biblical symbol for Korean American churches and, by extension, Korean military wives. It provides Korean American pastors and their congregations with a model about how best to employ prophetic functions. Specifically, there are three aspects that are relevant to the Korean American church.

First, the Korean American church ought to be a place where Korean military wives can recover their full humanity. One of the primary reasons why Korean military wives feel such anger and despair is due to the treatment they receive from members of the congregation. To rectify this, each Korean American church must find a way to welcome and embrace Korean military wives.

Secondly, Korean American churches need to reconnect the disconnected. This means reaching out to the excluded and isolated Korean Americans. Korean military wives generally have difficulty living and working together with other Korean Americans, and vice versa, which cultivates a sense of alienation and disconnectedness. In response to this problem, it is imperative that Korean American churches “foster the virtues of commitment, sacrifice, responsibility, and accountability among all its members.”\textsuperscript{54}

Finally, Korean American churches need a comprehensive plan for the future. As Ashby explains, “A full vision for the future not only describes the desired place but also

\textsuperscript{53} Watkins Ali, 144.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 123.
points in the direction of where the desired place lies.” Many Korean American pastors and congregations often ask, “Where are Korean American churches headed?” When considering the future of Korean American churches, pastors tend to concentrate on spiritual maturity, church growth, and their mission. In addition to these important spiritual and theological issues, Korean American churches must include liberating roles such as social transformation, political action, coalition building, and social service for the alienated, excluded, and poor.

**Conclusion: From “Living Human Document” to “Living Human Web” to “Living Human Cell”**

In Chapters 1 to 5, I explored the dynamic and complex aspects of the suffering of Korean military wives and analyzed their suffering, focusing on their connectedness to family, culture and society. I paid special attention to giving communal life, through life giving relationality and social justice. In this regard, all acts of resisting and transforming should be aimed at giving life to Korean American churches, Korean American society, and others. As a way of elaborating the importance of communal life, I would like to reevaluate the metaphor of the living human web and propose a new metaphor, the living human cell.

Beginning with the living human document and continuing with the living human web, pastoral theologians, psychiatrists and counselors have developed various models to understand pastoral theology, care, and counseling. Anton Boisen relates human experience to Christian belief systems with the metaphor of living human documents,

55 Ibid., 128.
pointing out that we can understand Christian doctrines and belief systems by interpreting the specific human experiences. Bonnie Miller-McLemore employs the metaphor of the web to illustrate the importance of wide cultural and social systems in pastoral care and counseling: “Genuine care now requires understanding the human document as necessarily embedded within an interlocking public web of constructed meaning.”

Such an image effectively represents the broad dimensions of human relationships. Employing this metaphor, pastoral theologians have realized the limitations of the clinical pastoral paradigm, which predominately uses psychodynamic therapeutic models, and have appreciated the importance of context, power, difference, and relational justice in pastoral care and counseling. Pastoral theologians and caregivers today have come to recognize that human suffering and pain should not be treated as matters divorced from complex and interconnected socio-cultural, political and economic systems.

What then is the essence of the relationship between the individual and the web? As Poling describes,

The web is a metaphor not just for the collection of individuals that are bound together but for the whole pattern that determines that context for the individual’s life. Personal existence is a building block that makes up the fragile, temporal web of reality. Without the web, we cease to exist because the web is the totality of reality itself.

As Poling elucidates, the notion of web is crucial in understanding human activities and relationships. The metaphor of a living human web broadens our understanding of self by putting it in the context of a social network.

---


I believe that it is time for pastoral theologians and caregivers to revisit the metaphor of web. Merely demonstrating that humans are connected with each other is not enough. In a web, part of the web can survive even when other sides of the web are broken. As Poling has argued, webs formed through abuses of power are often more intractable than life-giving relational systems. Theologies of han and Asian feminist theology also highlight the pervasiveness of webs based upon abuses of power. As I have already explained, the theology of han and Asian feminist theology hold that the oppressor and the oppressed cannot discover true humanity until they successfully coexist together. Coexistence in this context refers to life giving relationships; more than simple relationality. In other words, authentic humanity in God’s image can be discovered through life giving interactions in the human web.

In order to highlight the challenges of intentionally seeking life giving empowering relationality, I propose adding the metaphor of living human cell to highlight the suffering, despair, and oppression of the marginalized groups. This image emphasizes the life giving interconnectedness of human beings. A cell can exist only in relation to the whole body, and vice versa. Each cell gives life to the whole body. If one cell stops working, the whole body will not work well. Malfunction of one cell produces critical problems in other cells. Furthermore, a cell can only exist and function appropriately when other cells are also healthy. Consequently, a cell cannot be excluded from other cells; every cell is vital for the health of the entire body.

When I propose adding the metaphor of the living human cell, I emphasize not just the interconnectedness of each part, but the dynamic and lively nature of inter-relationship. Consider, for instance, the webs of abusive power formed through racial
oppression and violence. Pastoral caregivers who know the metaphor of the living human web tend to say that racial discrimination must be treated in a whole cultural, social, and political system. They also tend to say that racism is very harmful to the whole social structures. It, however, is not enough to say that each racial group is connected with other racial communities. It is also not sufficient to say that the suffering of the individual has to be analyzed within the whole social and public systems. It is correct to say that we need to analyze the interaction of racism and sexism in the whole of human relations.

Nevertheless, we must pay more attention to the life giving relationships among all human beings, rather than to sheer connections among human beings. European white people must take care of the suffering of African Americans not because they are connected to the whole society of the United States, but because their suffering, as each cell, can keep America, as the whole body, from sustaining health. In this respect, this metaphor shares common ground with Graham’s psycho-systemic approach to pastoral care and counseling. Graham describes the mutual and indivisible correlation between individuals and social, cultural, and natural orders:

[T]o care for persons is to create new worlds; to care for the world is to build a new personhood. The destiny of persons and the character of the world are intertwined. Each is made poorer or richer by the quality of the other and of the forces uniting or dividing them. Thus, the call to care for persons is simultaneously a call to care for the world. A psychosystemic approach provides theoretical and practical assistance for persons in the pastoral helping role to understand more fully the character of these forces contending within and for the psyches of persons. And even more, once understanding them, it will help pastoral caretakers and the caretaking community find ways to interrupt, oppose, and channel them toward constructive and transforming ends.58

58 Graham, Care of Persons, 13-14.
The metaphor of a *living human cell* is a way of elaborating the need for life giving relationships that foster the health of the entire *living human web*. Again, the suffering of Korean military wives exists within the context of various socio-cultural and political environments, for example, patriarchy, unjust social and cultural structures, war, poverty, imperialism, and militarism. However, it is not sufficient for Korean American pastors to merely *acknowledge* that the suffering of Korean military wives is mainly caused by abusive power and social injustice of Korean Americans and Americans; Korean American pastors must consider that Korean military wives are suffering psychologically and spiritually. Consequently, this sense of despair and death has crept into Korean American congregations; Korean American churches have the potential to become lifeless and hopeless institutions. Thus, it is important that Korean American congregations practice transformative action to give life, not only to the Korean military wives, but also to the entire congregation.

Ultimately, it is my hope that the metaphor of a *living human cell* can aid pastoral theologians who want to support oppressed, excluded, and powerless social groups. In the 21st century, the life giving nature of humanity in the image of God will be a crucial topic in pastoral theology, care, and counseling.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


______. “Han-pu-ri: Doing Theology from Korean Women’s Perspective.” In We Dare to Dream: Doing Theology as Asian Women, ed. Virginia Fabella and Sun Ai Lee Park, 135-50. Hong Kong and Philippines: Asian Women’s Resource Centre for Culture and Theology and The EATWOT Women’s Commission in Asia, 1989.


Fabella, Virginia and Sun Ai Lee Park, eds. *We Dare to Dream: Doing Theology as


Hernandez, Pilar. “Trauma in War and Political Persecution: Expanding the Concept.”


Lapsley, James. “Moral Dilemmas in Pastoral Perspective.” In Dictionary of Pastoral


Schreiter, Robert J. *Constructing Local Theologies.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis


Stone, Howard W. *Depression and Hope: New Insights for Pastoral Counseling*. 202


Watts, Roderick J. and Irma Serrano-Garcia. “The Quest for a Liberating Community


