

Creating a Culture of Reconciliation and Life through *Hanpuri* and *Hanmaji*
– A Feminist Theological Interpretation of the *Miyalhalmi* Dance
in the *Bongsan Talchum* (*Bongsan* Mask Dance)

Preamble

During the earliest period of its history in Korea, when the Gospel of Christ was being propagated, the Korean church was the quintessence of salvation bringing liberation to the *baekjeong*¹, slaves, peasants, and powerless women who had been living a repressed and *Han*-full life under the patriarchal tradition of Confucian feudalism and caste structures. However, as the church gradually became institutionalised and authoritarian it began to take on the characteristics of a patriarchal hierarchy and the Gospel, which had liberated the poor, became distorted into a Gospel for the powerful. During the Japanese colonial period the autocratic leaders of the church acquiesced to the unjust power of the colonial overlords and merely sought to further their positions, and preserve their livelihood. Many continued to distort the Truth of Christ by blindly adhering to the logic of ideology that sought to legitimate the division of the Korean people in order to preserve their dictatorial power over the people.² In spite of Jesus teaching us that we “cannot serve both God and Mammon” (Matthew 6:24) Korean Christians became immersed in building bigger churches, neglecting the poor and powerless of our society.

The church did not simply neglect the poor. The autocratic leaders of the Korean church used the doctrines and laws that they had formulated on the basis of an arbitrarily interpretation of Biblical passages to castigate individuals, labelling them as “reds,” “gays,” “cripples,” and “divorcees” and branding them “sinners.” They further disparaged women in the church and demanded that they simply obey and keep silent. Wholly disregarding the reality that the Korean people, as a nation, faced in a world of colonial domination and autocratic dictatorship the church urged their membership to

¹ The *baekjeong* occupied the lowest rung in traditional *Joseon* (Korean) society and were a stigmatised minority, comparable to the “untouchables” in India. They were regarded as inferior even by low-status slaves. Consequently, they were severely discriminated against by ordinary people throughout the *Joseon* period. (Translator’s Notes).

² Park Sun-kyeong strongly criticises the fact that after liberation from Japanese colonial domination in 1945 the majority of the churches in South Korea uncritically adhered to the logic of the dictatorial governments that referred to North Korea as “the principal enemy” and aligned themselves emphatically with the government’s anti-communist ideology. *Hanguk Minjog-gwa Yeoseong Sinhag-ui Gwaje* (The Korean Nation and the Task of Feminist Theology) (Seoul: Korean Christian Literature Society,), p.115.

simply seek spiritual revival. Gradually the church became a place where only the so-called and self-perceived righteous and blessed could enter, a place for the rich and powerful. As a result, the church, rather than alleviating the suffering and *Han* of the poor and the powerless, the so-called ‘sinners’ of society, added to it. The *minjung* and women who were increasingly marginalised from society and the church rhetorically asked “Is there true salvation within the church?” The gradual ostracism of the weak, powerless, women has been a recurring phenomenon within the Korean church for many years.³ What is more worrying is that the *Han* of those who have been marginalised from society, as well as the church, has a tendency to explode in a violent manner, increasing social conflict in Korean society.⁴

The question for us today is how can the church truly engage in conversion, a true *metanoia*, which will enable us to become renewed as a church which can assuage the *Han* of the *Han*-full? It is obvious that an act of *metanoia* requires that the Korean church reclaim the Gospel of Jesus, that Gospel which is the liberating Truth and Good News to the poor and oppressed. Bearing this in mind, this article looks at the Korean traditional methods of assuaging *Han* through *sori*, *talchum*, and *gut*. More specifically, this article will look at the *Miyalhalmi* Dance⁵ from a feminist theological

³ Son Gyu-tae presents an extensive investigation into the ways in which the Korean church today has become the object of society’s criticism from a social-ethical perspective. “*Hangug Gaeshingyohoe Sahoejeok Shinroeseong Wigiwa Geu Mirae*” (The Crisis of Social Trust in the Korean Church and Its Future) in *Midgo Argo Argo Midgo – Jeong Yang-mo Gyosu Euntoe Ginyeom Nonchong* (Believing and Knowing, and Knowing and Believing – A Festschrift for Professor Jeong Yang-mo) (Waegwan: Bundo Chulpansa, 2001), pp.398-441.

⁴ Korean society has witnessed many instances in which persons who have become economically deprived because of the socio-economic structures exasperated by the prolonged division of the Korean peninsula and continued dictatorial policies in South Korea have taken out their frustrations in indiscriminate acts of violence, including homicides, directed against the more affluent members of society. The more recent incidents in which an individual set fire to an Underground train in Daegu, the recurring instances of peer abuse in our schools, and the numerous violent homicides that occur in our society today can be interpreted as a violent explosion of the *Han* that has welled up in the *Han*-full of our society. According to a media report on the Seung Hee Jo incident, more people commit suicide in Korea than die from gun related incidents in the United States. This clearly demonstrates that, when *Han* is allowed to fester and build up in individuals it has a tendency of violently exploding, eventually leading to psychological disorders, suicide, or acts of aggression directed toward others.

⁵ The *Bongsan Talchum* (Mask Dance) is composed of seven Parts, of which the *Miyalhalmi* is the seventh. It relates the story of Miyal, an elderly lady (*Halmi* is a regional dialect for *Halmuni*, meaning Grandmother, and usually used to refer to an elderly woman). Miyal and her husband are forced to flee their village home by the turmoil of war, and eventually become separated. After being separated from her husband Miyal forages through the countryside with her son, desperately searching for her lost husband. Then, one day, more tragedy strikes as the son, who went to the woods for firewood, is eaten by a tiger. Finally, after the prolonged period of suffering Miyal is able to meet up with her long lost husband. During their meeting, as she is relating the travails that had befallen her, she finally tells him that their son is dead, eaten by a tiger. The husband is angered by this news and demands that they separate and go their own ways. Just as they are arguing, the concubine of the husband enters the scene, further enraging emotions. In the end, Miyal suffers an untimely death and undeserved death. Another character, Old Man Namgang calls a *mudang* perform a *gut* so that Miyal’s spirit will be able to depart to

perspective. This is because *sori*, *talchum*, and *gut* were the traditional cultural elements that were utilised by our forebears, and which, tragically, was repressed by the Japanese colonial authorities, for assuaging the *Han* of the *Han*-full, and creating a new dynamic of reconciliation and life. Furthermore, I wish to contend that by investigating the *Miyalhalmi* Dance from a feminist theological perspective we will be able to distinctly recognise the presence of the Truth of the Jesus Gospel within the traditional cultural methods of assuaging the *Han* of our people, a process that has been long overlooked by the Korean church and theologians.

1. *Sori, Talchum, and Gut as Hanpuri*

In a world where history has been dominated by the Anglo-Saxon male from the Western, industrialised countries the disenfranchised *minjung* and women have suffered inexplicable agony, sexual exploitation, and death. Within the Korean cultural tradition *Han* has been used to refer to the particular experience of traumatic victimisation that an individual is unable to adequately express and forced to bear within themselves, an act of violence committed against them without a distinctive perpetrator who can be called to account.⁶ The *Han*-full are those who are forced to endure suffering without being able to relieve themselves of this *Han*.

Professor Seo Nam-dong presented the definition of what the Koreans refer to when they speak about *Han*.

The Korean people have had to endure extensive experiences of invasion by surrounding countries because of their relative weakness. This has led to their national existence, itself, being perceived as *Han*; the people who have had to endure suffering and oppression by autocratic and authoritarian governments have come to consider their existence as a people as *Han*; women, who have been denigrated

the other world and enter the Land of Happiness. The Dance ends with the *gut* appeasing Miyal's spirit. (Translator's Notes).

⁶ Baek, Nak-cheong describes the *Han* experienced by the Korean people as follows: *Han* is different from simple resentment. It is an ambiguous feeling of distress, a nameless suffering and pain that one suffers, and which one is unable to pinpoint its origin or perpetrator thereby enabling an act of retribution or calling to account. This *Han* reveals, on the one hand, the learned wisdom and kind-heartedness of the *minjung* who have responded to the experiences of oppression and violence by deciding that naming the perpetrator only increases the evil in one's hearts, as well as a sense of resignation. On the other hand, we can also see the extensive and oppressive nature of the violence perpetrated against them that does not even allow for the naming and recognition of the perpetrator. *Ingan Haebang-ui Nonrireul Chajaseo* (In Search of A Logic of Human Liberation) (Si-in sa, 1979), p.166.

under the patriarchal structures of a Confucian ideology have come to consider their feminine existence as *Han*; the outcasts, slaves, and individuals relegated to servitude, which in the most extreme circumstances accounted for approximately a third of the overall population of Korea, have considered their life, itself, as *Han* because they have been entrapped in a legal and systematic structure which prevents them from breaking free of the *social* stigma and reclaim status as citizens.

However, Professor Seo further elaborates by stating that the *Han* of the Korean people is not simply a personal emotion of resentment or vengeance. Rather, it is an expression of waiting for reunion, healing, and reconciliation, a characteristic that is well represented in the Legend of the Stone Gate.⁷ In this respect, within the Korean tradition the *Han*-full have not sought to appease their *Han* through revenge or resentment. They have, rather, sought to assuage their *Han*, the process of *Hanpuri*, that resides in the depths of their hearts through the expressions of *sori*, *talchum*, and *gut*, a process that is the rending of their own selves. For example, in the novel, *Seopyeonjae*,⁸ by Lee Cheong-jun the dialogue between the owner of the inn, the brother who is looking for his stepfather and sister, and the sister who has become a blind *sorikkun* (singer of the traditional music, *pansori*) that takes place in the inn where the sister is living, making a living by singing *pansori* to guests, best represents the *Han* experienced by Koreans and how they assuage this *Han* through *sori*.

⁷ The Legend is presented thus: On the first night that a husband spent with his new wife he had a sudden urge to urinate and rushed out of the house in search of the toilet, which traditionally was situated outside, in the yard. As he was rushing out his outer garment caught on the stone hinge of the stone gate entrance of the house. The husband thought that the wife had attempted to hold onto his clothes as an improper expression of lust. Without a backwards glance the husband left the house and his new wife behind, determined that he could not live with such an immoral woman. After forty years the husband finally returned home. Upon entering the house he discovered that his wife was sitting, poised and sedate, wearing the same clothes that she had been wearing the night of their wedding. He also discovered the torn piece of cloth from his garment caught on the hinge of the stone gate entrance. With much regret he went toward his wife and clasped her shoulder with his hands. At his touch her physique crumpled and became a pile of ash. Within the narrative of this legend, the *Han* that the wife had was more than a simple resentment or feelings for revenge directed toward the husband. It was, rather, a *Han* that was waiting, expectantly, for the husband to realise his mistake and return to assuage the wife's *Han*. Seo Nam-dong, "*Han-ui Hyeongeonghwa-wa Geu Sinhagjeok Seongchal*" (The Imagery of Han and the Theological Reflection of the Image) in *Minjung Sinhak-ui Tamgu* (Exploring Minjung Theology) (Seoul: Hangilsa, 1983), pp.88-89.

⁸ The novel, published in 1976, is found in *Ilheobeorin Marul Chajaseo* (In Search of Lost Words) a collection of short stories by Lee Cheong-jun. It is the story of a *sorikkun* who sleeps with a widow in a remote mountain village. When the widow becomes pregnant as a result and has a child, the *sorikkun* takes the little girl and trains her to become a *sorikkun*. In order to make her a better *sorikkun*, one who can emphatically express the emotions of Han contained in many of the *pansori* songs, he intentionally blinds her. The story tells how the blind little girl eventually learns to assuage her hand through her *sori*, and in the end forgives her father.

Han is not something that you can simply implant within a person. It is not something that is received from another person. Rather, *Han* is like the dust that gathers over the passing years in the space of everyday life. It is the result of a collection of life-long experiences. For some, life itself is an accumulation of *Han*, and the accumulation of *Han*, life. ...In any case, it is probably a good thing that she has forgiven her father. It is best for the father, as well as herself. ... If she had not forgiven her father, her *sori* would have become one of resentment rather than *Han*. Because she forgave her father her *sori* could be more deeply expressive of the depth of *Han* ...

Many people say that the *sori* of the Southern regions are songs of *Han*. It is probably more correct to say that it is an opus of *Hanpuri*, the assuaging of *Han*. The *sori* of the Southern regions is not an expression of the toxic *Han* that has accumulated within us, but rather a process of assuaging *Han* and releasing it from our being, much like undoing a tightly pulled knot in our souls. For those who find that the knot of *Han* is especially tight, *sori* is a tool which enables them to live a life of assuaging *Han* and thus undoing those knots. That is probably the case with your sister as well.⁹

For the men and women who lived life on the bottom-most rungs of life, enduring oppression and suffering the *talnori* (theatrics with masks) performed the role of assuaging the deep feelings of *Han* that they held. Professor Hyeon Yeong-hak, a *minjung* theologian says that this *talnori* was an instrument of resistance toward the status quo employed by the *minjung*, a choreographed disorder challenging the order of society. He interprets the *talnori* as having been an expression of the absurdity and falsehood of the existing order of society through a choreographed staging of disorderliness that presented the *minjung* with a form of emotional ecstasy and opened the way for new visions and possibilities to be uncovered. He also investigate the humour, satire, and laughter in the *talnori* as expressions of the *minjung* and interprets the *talnori* as an aesthetic expression of the *minjung*'s secular experience of the dredges of society that are transformed into a religious experience through which they come into contact with the transcendent world, a world which the so-called "righteous" *yangban* and ruling elite are unable to enter. Through the *talnori* the *minjung* are able to sublimate their tragic situation through a process of self-objectification by thoroughly

⁹ This passage from *Seopyeonje* is quoted from Seo Nam-dong, "*Han-ui Hyeongseonghwa-wa Geu Shinhagjeok Gochal*," *Minjung Shinhak-ui Tamgu*, p.92.

exposing themselves. In this way they are able to experience a “critical transcendentalism.” Hyeon goes on to argue that this experience of the transcendent does not attempt to seek solace in the present structures but provides the strength and courage to struggle for change and liberation by critiquing it.¹⁰

Along with the village community, the numerous *guts* that were performed, such as the *Maul Gut*, *Dure Gut*, *Pulmul Gut*, *Shin Gut*, *Jib Gut*, the *Ogwi Gut* and *Jinogi Gut* for the dead, provided a communal space where the deep *Han* between the divine and humanity, between humanity itself, and between humanity and nature were assuaged, and conflict and discord were overcome and truly reconciled.¹¹ Baek Gi-wan referred to the *gut* as a gathering point where those who are experiencing the same kind of suffering can converge together. In this sense, it was democratic gathering organised by the *minjung*, and was also symbolic of their struggle against the feudal society in which they lived, as well as the creative expression of their cherished desires for change. Additionally, the *gut* in traditional Korean culture was always performed on the spot where *Han* manifest itself. In this sense, the *gut* always took place in the places of labour in which the *minjung*, quite literally, worked to their death but were denied the fruits of their labour. Therefore, this place, the field of labour was their place of *Han*. As the *minjung* could not continue to live without assuaging the *Han* that accumulated over an extended period they, inevitably, performed *gut* on the spot. Through a *gut* the *minjung* sought to overthrow their reality, and the central instrument of such revolutions was the *gut*.¹²

Not many theologians have studied the practice of *gut* from a theological perspective. This may be because the practice of *gut* was considered by the Korean church as being idolatrous, an act of worshipping heathen gods, while even the mere act of attending a *gut* was considered as contradictory to proper Christian faith. However,

¹⁰ Hyeon Yeong-hak observes that though the *minjung* return to their ordinary lives after the mask dance performance is finished it does not mean that they simply return to acquiescence of the original status quo. On the contrary, at the opportune moment (the *Kairos*) they engage in active resistance and even revolutions. When such acts are violently repressed, they retreat and re-start the process by dancing their hopes for a new world. *Yesu-ui Talchum* (Jesus' Mask Dance) (Cheonan: Hangug Shinhak Yeonguso, 1997), p.128.

¹¹ Ju Gang-hyoen, “*Maul Gongdongche-wa Maul Gut, Dure Gut Yeongu*” (A Study of the Village Community and the *Maul Gut* and *Dure Gut*) in *Minjok-gwa Gut – Mongok gut-ui Seroun Yeollimeur Wihayeo* (Nation and Gut – Toward a New Horizon of Openness) (Seoul: Hagminsas, 1987), p.61 states, “The *gut*, itself, is a process of appeasement. As such, through a *gut* the knotted-ness of calamity and disease is assuaged, and this process is referred to as the process of “*shinmyeong*” (encountering the divine). In particular, the *Daedong Gut* is the space where the divine is encountered through the expression of social, biological, and psychological grudges. Through the proceedings of the *gut* the satisfaction and liberation of relieving the grudges, of assuaging the *Han* occurs as the encountering of the divine.”

¹² Baek Gi-wan, “*Minjok-gwa Gut*” (The Nation and Gut) in *Minjok-gwa Gut – Mongok gut-ui Seroun Yeollimeur Wihayeo*, p.9.

the Catholic theologian, Bak Yeong-il identifies the *gut* not as superficial shamanism but rather a traditional Korean indigenous religious phenomenon, *Mugyo*. He has conducted research into the spirituality of *Mugyo* that is manifest in the spirit of *gut*, the understanding of salvation expressed by *Mugyo*, and has attempted to engage *Mugyo* in a religious dialogue with Christianity.¹³ The Protestant feminist theologian, Cha Ok-sung argues that the *gut* is not a shamanistic practice that should be discarded. She stresses the fact that the space where the *Maul Gut* (Village *Gut*) takes place becomes a place for denunciation. As such, it performs the vital function of providing space where the hidden stories are told, history is corrected, traditions are passed on, and truth revealed. In addition, she engages in a theological hermeneutics which views the *gut* as a process of assuaging the wrongful death of the innocent, thereby preserving their integrity and becoming a space for reconciling the living and the dead, as well as bringing healing to the relationship between the living.¹⁴

2. A Feminist Theological Investigation of the *Miyalhalmi* Dance

This section of the paper will engage the *Miyalhalmi* Dance from a feminist theological perspective. We shall begin this section by first presenting, briefly, the summary of the *Miyalhalmi* Dance as it is presented by Professor Hyeon Yeong-hak.

On the remote island of *Jeju*, a husband and wife are forced to flee from their isolated village, *Mangmak Gol*, due to war. Unfortunately, the husband and wife are separated in the chaos. At last, they have succeeded in finding each other, and copulate. However, because they have grown too old with the passage of time they are unable to conceive. During the years that they have been searching for each other, both have endured suffering beyond words. The elderly woman, *Miyal*, who is a *mudang*, suffered the pain of losing her son to a tiger while the son was in the forests, retrieving firewood for their poor neighbours. The husband, meanwhile, barely sustained himself by working as a day labourer in the stone pits, as a tinker, and by foraging potatoes and acorns. His clothes were tattered and the hat on his head was made of leather taken from dead dogs. He was often beaten by tax collectors, and even by monks. As they were relating their stories *Miyal* discovers

¹³ Bak Il-yeong, *Hanguk Mugyo-ui Ihe* (Understanding Korea's Mugyo) (Kyeongbuk: Bundo Chulpansa, 1999)

¹⁴ Cha Ok-sung, "Hanguk Yeoseong-ui Jongyo Gyeongheom" (The Religious Experiences of Korean Women) in *Hanguk Yeoseong Shinhae Pyeon* (Korean Feminist Theologians Association ed.), *Hanguk Yeoseong-ui Gyeongheom* (The Experiences of Korean Women) (Seoul: Korean Christian Literature Society, 1994), pp.113-33.

that her husband has a mistress. This sparks an emotional argument, with the couple deciding to go their separate ways. However, *Miyal* is turned out by her husband with nothing, and in the heat of argument he beats her to death. The Part ends when the elder of the village, *Namgang*, comes and performs a *gut* to assuage the spirit of *Miyal* and send her to paradise.

Professor Hyeon Yeong-hak looks at the Part 4 – *Nojang's* Dance and Part 6 – *Yangban's* Dance from a *Minjung* Theological perspective and interprets these as the *minjung's* attempts to ridicule and satirise the hypocrisy of the religious leaders and *yangban*, thereby expressing their desires for a new world through the *talchum* (Mask Dance). However, he views the *Miyalhalmi Dance* as simply describing the reality in which the *minjung* are victimised. He fails to find any elements of liberation in this part of the *Bongsan Talchum*. Thus, he states, “It is the ill fated reality of the *minjung* that not only human made wars and social structures but nature, in the form of a tiger, brings pain to their life, conflicting interests caused by the existence of concubines and mistresses cause strife amongst the *minjung* themselves, and the *minjung's* fate in life is to die an untimely death after untold suffering while simply looking toward the next world in search of solace. ... the *Miyalhalmi* Dance is thoroughly tragic . . . The *Miyalhalmi* Dance, unlike the dances of the *Nojang* and *Yangban* is the depiction, criticism, and satirising of the intolerable suffering and pain that is the lived reality of the *minjung*.”

A perfunctory review of the *Miyalhalmi* Dance seems to concur with Hyeon's assessment that is a depiction of the painful reality in which the *minjung* live. However, when viewed from a feminist theological perspective the script of the *Miyalhalmi* Dance reveals more than simply a depiction of the *minjung's* painful reality.¹⁵ When we look closely at the script we see that *Miyal* is an old lady, a *mudang* who existed on the bottom most rung of the social strata at the time. She was separated from her husband during the confusion of war, witnessed her son being torn to death by the ravages of a tiger, and endured intolerable suffering during her long search for her lost husband. In contrast, the husband, in spite of the difficulties that he experienced, sexually assaulted a Buddhist nun in a monastery and passed himself off as an unmarried man, taking a female employee from a roadside inn as his concubine. Although *Miyal* finally meets up with her husband her husband renounces her and chooses the concubine over her. In the end, she is beaten to death by her own husband.

¹⁵ This study uses the same version of the script as that investigated by Hyeon Yeong-hak. This can be found in Lee Gyu-hyeon, *Hanguk Gamyongeuk* (Korean Mask Dramas) (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 1995), pp.301-25.

The *Miyalhalmi* Dance is not simply a story of the average *minjung*. It clearly reveals that the *minjung* of the *minjung*, those who suffer the most from wars of invasion and patriarchal cultures and social structures are not the men but the women in the bottom most strata of society who are powerless, robbed of health and wealth. It also causes us to reconsider the reality of women living on the Korean peninsula today who continue to endure suffering and pain. The numerous women who, even now, are forced to suffer, those who suffered humiliation and denigration as concubines and mistresses; those who were forced to work as sex slaves for the Japanese military, and who upon returning home were denied compensation for their suffering; the multitude of female labourers who were exploited in the name of economic development; the endless number of women who suffer from sexual assault and domestic violence but are silenced because of the patriarchal social structure and culture; the women in the sex industry who are considered mere tools of sensual pleasure by men; the numerous women who are exploited by the U.S. military and are the unseen victims of political and ideological division, all of these women have lived, and continue to live *Han*-full lives.

Then, does the *Miyalhalmi* Dance simply portray the suffering reality of the women, the *minjung* amongst the *minjung*? Not in the least. At first glance, it appears that Miyal is the embodiment of the tragic female, one who has endured untold suffering to find her husband only to be chastised and rejected, finally succumbing to a brutal death at his hands. However, Miyal is not simply a woman who suffers a tragic death. In order to flesh this out, let us take a closer look at the script.

Miyal presents us with an image of a woman who, in spite of the traditional Confucian teachings of the Seven Sins and the Three Servitudes of the Woman, confronted her husband and fought for her status. When her husband, who had a hidden concubine, chastised her and sought to be rid of her she did not attempt to ignobly hold onto him. She looks him straight in the eye and responds by saying, "Let's separate, if you want, and each go our own ways." She also demands that the husband return the items that she brought at the time of their marriage, as well as an equal share of their common possessions. When the husband ignores these demands and begins to beat her, she fights back and bites him. During the course of the fight between Miyal and her husband, the concubine discovers that she has been lied to. She, in turn, demands that she be given her share of the material possessions that the husband had promised her when they were marrying. However, the husband denies this request from the concubine as well. At this, the concubine

joins the foray and the fight takes on another complication. While the two women are flailing their fists at him, the husband manages to slip out from between them and sneak away. During the confusion, Miyal is hit in the face by the concubine, who had attempted to strike the husband, and dies.

This reading of the *Miyalhalmi* Dance shows that it is not simply about the tragic death of a powerless old lady who became the victim of jealousy, a fight between two women over one man. Neither is it simply the story of a old and frail woman who is the victim of male injustices perpetrated under a patriarchal socio-cultural structure. Rather, this story is equivalent to the story that Jesus tells in the Gospel of Luke, the one in which the widow consistently perseveres in front of an unjust judge to reclaim her rightful privileges (Luke 18:1~8). The actions of Miyal portray the feistiness of Biblical women, individuals who struggled and fought against the autocratic social and religious structures, the crafty teachings, and the legalistic regimen of their times.¹⁶ In this sense, the concubine is also a woman who was the victim of male deceit and exploitation, and she, too, fought for her rights. However, Miyal, in contrast to the women found in the Bible, appears to have been unsuccessful in securing her rights and, in addition, suffered a tragic death. Was her struggle in vain? Not at all. I will, now, attempt to argue for meaning in Miyal's death by exploring the *Jinogi Gut* that took place afterwards.

3. The Culture of Life Created Through the *Hanpuri* and *Hanmaji* of *Gut*

Miyal, who had suffered an unjust death, was totally abandoned by her husband and everybody else. It is at this point that the character "Old Man Namgang" comes on the scene. Old Man Namgang is the incarnation of the South Pole Star which is responsible for the longevity of human life, and is also referred to as the Star of Age and Mercury.¹⁷ Old Man Namgagn, who did not even know Miyal, empathises with her fate and weeps over her unjust death. He goes to summon a *mudang* who can ferry her spirit to the Land of Happiness. The *mudang* who is summoned by Old Man Namgang

¹⁶ For more details on such women found in the Bible, refer to Choi Young-sil, *Shinyagseongseo-ui Yeo-seongdul* (Women in the New Testament) (Seoul: Korean Christian Literature Society, 1997); *Seongseo-wa Pyeonghwa* (The Bible and Peace) (Seoul: Mindeulle Chegbang, 2004); and *Seongseo-wa Yeo-seong* (Women and the Bible) (Seoul: Mindeulle Chegbang, 2004).

¹⁷ In some editions of the script the title, Old Man of the South Pole is used. See, Park Jeon-yeol, *Bonsan Talchum* (Bongsan Mask Dance) (Seoul: Hwasan Munhwa, 2001), p.247; Lee, Gyu-hyeon, *Hangug Gamyonguk* (Korean Mask Dramas).

gathers all of the people from the neighbourhood and performs a *Jinogi Gut*, a *gut* for the dead. Legend has it that the *Jinogi Gut* originated from the belief that the spirits of those who died an unjust death roamed the nether world and brought misfortune to the living. Why is it that the spirits of those killed unjustly torment the living? It is my contention that this is because the spirits of those unjustly killed harass the living so that they living will attempt to reveal the truth and punish the unjust, thereby establishing justice.

The *mudang* who stands before the body of Miyal at the invitation of Old Man Namgang begins to narrate the long tale of Miyal's travails, giving voice to many of the things that Miyal was unable to say while alive. Through this ritual those who are gathered in front of Miyal's body come to realise that Miyal has died a wrongful death and empathise with her, consoling her spirit and sending it to the Land of Happiness. When the *mudang* begins to sing the long tune of the *Baridegi* Female Spirit¹⁸, who is the guide of the spirits to the other world, and utters the last words of the departed, the gathered neighbours weep over the fate of Miyal's spirit and present all that they have at the altar as an offering of solace. The *mudang* tears a piece of cloth, which opens the door to the Land of Happiness for the departed spirit and the *Jinogi Gut* comes to an end.

In the Korean context, the *mudang* who officiated the *gut* were all women. This was because those who have experienced the full extent of a life that is *Han*-full can appreciate and empathise with those living with *Han*. This was why women, who have lived the most *Han*-full lives at the bottom-most strata of Korean society, have managed to discover the divine in the midst of their *Han*-full lives, becoming the mediator between Heaven and Earth and performing the role of the priest who appeases and resolves *Han*.¹⁹ This brings us to an important element in our investigation. The appeasement of Miyal's departed soul which allowed it to enter the Land of Happiness was not due to the actions of the *mudang* alone. All those who had gathered for the

¹⁸ Traditionally, the spirits in folk religion are males. However, the *Baridegi* is female. She was born the seventh child of a royal household, a princess. She was abandoned by her parents because she was a girl and endured a great deal of suffering. When she hears of her father's illness she sets off on the long road to Hades, and after a lot of difficulties, returns with the medicine that brings her father back to life. The *Baridegi*, who endured the most stringent suffering as a woman, became the deity that gives back life.

¹⁹ Ju Gang-hyeon states that, "the fact that the *dangol* or *mudang* were from the bottom-most strata of society but were called upon to fulfil the role of Priest for the Community clearly demonstrates the irony of the most dejected of humankind functioning as the most deified, and how the relationship with the divine experienced by the lowest of castes can be transformed into the experience of the divine with power to save the entire community." "*Maul Gongdongche-wa Maul Gut, Dure Gut Yeongu*" (A Study on the Village Community and the Village Gut, Cooperative Gut) in *Minjog-gwa Gut* (The Nation and Gut) (HagMinSa, 1987), p.62. Seo Nam-dong also refers to the *mudang* as the "National Priest who assuages the *Han*" that resides in confounding tangles within Korean society. "*Han-ui Hyeongsanghwa-wa Geu Shinhagejeok Seongchal*" (The Imagery of Han and the Theological Reflection of the Image), Ibid., p.97.

gut that the *mudang* performed came to realise that Miyal had died and unfair and undeserved death. They empathised with her fate and wept on her behalf, finally presenting all they had as gifts. Without such communal participation the *gut* would not have been successful.

Jo Heung-sun comments that the reason why those who were gathered round the *mudang* and wept as she was performing the final rite and chants was because this would be “the last opportunity for them to face”²⁰ the departed. However, I would like present a different interpretation for their tears. Wouldn’t it be more appropriate to interpret their tears as those of repentance, a way of asking forgiveness for ignoring the plight of their neighbour and letting her die an unjust and undeserved death? I do not regard the materials that the people presented at the end of the *gut* as seeking personal betterment by appeasing the spirit of the departed. They are symbolic expressions of their commitment to work for justice so that no one else will suffer the same injustice or an undeserved death like Miyal. There can be no experience of true reconciliation or salvation without such communal actions that establish justice and assuage the *Han* of the *Han*-full.

As a result of the *Jinogi Gut*, the departed spirit of Miyal is able to enter the Land of Happiness. Then what is this Land of Happiness? Is it simply a place that the spirit goes to after one is dead? Would it be too much to regard this Land of Happiness as being something akin to the Kingdom of God, the Reign of God referred to in the Bible, a land in which the chains of injustice are broken and the dynamics of justice and life representative of the Kingdom of God is realised? This would enable us to interpret the death of Miyal and her entry into the Land of Happiness in the following way. Although Miyal, who is a powerless old lady suffering under the oppressive social structures imposed by foreign invasion and patriarchy, further becoming the victim of an undeserved death, her death results in the denunciation of the husband’s violence and abuse, calls those who witnessed yet ignored her suffering to repentance, and succeeds in establishing a dynamic of God’s Kingdom justice and reconciliation.

When the *Jinogi Gut* is completed Old Man Namgang comes out and proclaims, “Arise, one and all, a new light has dawned.” These words of Old Man Namgang contain more than a simple expression revealing the end of the *gut* and encouragement for people to return to reality and normality. They are the proclamation of a new dawn, the chasing away of the darkness of injustice through the tearful and repentant resolutions that individuals made before Miyal’s spirit to sever the chains of injustice.

²⁰ Jo Heung-sun(?), Lee Bo-gyeong(?), *Gut – Seoul Jinogi Gut (Gut – The Jinogi Gut of Seoul)* (Seoul: Yeolhwadang, 1971), p.86.

In this sense, they are like the words of Jesus who began his earthly ministry with a proclamation that the Kingdom of God is at hand. They are a prophetic voice sounding the end of darkness. Darkness cannot defeat the Light (John 1:5). The Kingdom of God where the *Han* of the *Han*-full is acknowledged as the *Han* of the very people of God, leading to a struggle with the powers of injustice to sever its chains of oppression and to assuage the *Han* of those who have bled and died undeservedly is here, established in our midst. In this respect, the Miyalhalmi Dance is not simply a story of the tragic reality of their *minjung*, their fate of suffering. Rather, it is a story which reveals how the women, who have suffered and died throughout the historical travails of the Korean nation have still managed to be the subjective creators of true justice and life, even in the midst of their suffering and *Han*.

4. The Church as the Priest of *Han*, the Pacifier of the Knots of *Han*

We have seen in the previous paragraphs how the traditional practices of *chang*, *talchum*, and *gut* that had been neglected and ridiculed as shamanistic nonsense by the Korean church and theology contributed to the creation of a new historical experience by assuaging the *Han* of the *Han*-full who suffered throughout the history of the Korean people. As Hyeon Yeong-hak had stated, “God did not come riding on the backs of the missionaries but was present in the midst of our history as Liberator. If we believe this to be true, then the Korean church and its theology must actively embrace our traditional culture to assuage the *Han* of the *Han*-full and open the ways for creating true reconciliation and a new historical experience of life. I would like to propose several tasks that the Korean church faces on the basis of an interpretation of the *Miyalhlmi* Dance in the *Bongsan Talchum*.

1) The Church as Listener of the Cries of the *Han*-full

The Korean church, and for that matter the church in the world, should not be satisfied in simply resting assured in its salvation within the safety of its walls, peddling a cheap religion of blessings and transcendence and following the materialism of the world that is being conducted under the pretence of globalisation. As Old Man Namgang went to the abandoned Miyal who had been abused and killed under the oppressive system of foreign occupation and a patriarchal society, the Korean church must go to those who have been marginalised and excluded from society, and the church, to live *Han*-full lives. The church must go to the homeless who wander

the streets without any place to go; the elderly who have been forsaken by their families; the underpaid workers; those who have robbed and committed other crimes; homosexuals; victims of domestic violence and abuse; women in the sex industries; the foreign workers who work and live in our midst; and the Comfort Women who have been abused many times over, physically by the Japanese soldiers and then mentally and emotionally by those who refuse to take responsibility and compensate them for their suffering and pain. The church must listen to their stories and their cries of pain, must learn to cry and shed tears with them, and walk in solidarity to appease and relieve their *Han*.

The People of God that Jesus had gathered as his followers and called the Church was not a building. God is not limited to the confines of the walls of a building. The People of God, those whom Jesus has called to be Church is the whole of the created world. Jesus has called all the people of this earth to be God's people and invited them to partake in the Kingdom of Heaven. However, the ones who answered Jesus' call were not the rich, the powerful or the religious leaders but those who had been oppressed by them, the tax-collectors and prostitutes, the lame and those possessed by evil spirits. In this respect, the Korean church today must become a Community of the Poor that walks in solidarity with those ridiculed and despised as worthless, sinners by those who perpetuate the unjust structures of oppression and exploitation.

2) The Minister as the Priest of *Han*

We saw in our investigations above that the *mudang*, an individual who had been ridiculed by the Christian tradition, was the one who received the heavenly revelations that would appease the *Han* of the victims, performing the role of the Priest of *Han*, an agent assuaging the *Han* of the *Han*-full. The question would, then, be whether the leaders of the Korean church know the pain of the *Han*-full, and whether they are adequately performing the role of a Priest of *Han*, assuaging their *Han*. The leaders of the Korean church should be asking themselves whether they have been acting as false prophets, speaking words of false peace and blessings to the rich and powerful who engage in acts of injustice, and whether they have been false shepherds who have preyed on the flesh of the sheep entrusted to their care. They must seriously reflect on whether they have condemned innocent individuals as "sinners" on the basis of arbitrarily interpreted verses from the Bible, causing the women and *minjung* to be further victims of *Han* by excluding and marginalising them, and turning the church into a layer of thieves and a house of money changers that Jesus had so strongly

condemned.

Within the history of the church the women who had followed Jesus and remained faithful to their calling as his disciples, taking on the cross in obedience, were excluded as the church became institutionalised and structured its polity around males. During the time of Jesus' earthly ministry, as well as the earliest Christian communities, women were responsible for performing various duties, including that of teachers, deacons, prophets, disciples, administrators, and priests. They even went on to work as leaders in evangelism and ministry after Jesus' death. However, during the Patriarchal Period of the church's history the autocratic leaders of the church labelled women as "witches" and systematically excluded them from the life of the church, even burning them at the stake. Within the present context of the 21st century many of the male autocratic rules in the church are utilising selective passages from the Bible to effectively gag the women in the church and deny their right to become ministers. However, I wish to contend that the role of Priest of *Han* can best be performed by those who, themselves, have experienced *Han*, similar to the experiences of the *mudang* whose primary role is to assuage the *Han* of the *Han*-full. In this respect, it is the women who can better perform this role. Those who have no experience of *Han* will not be able to wholly empathise with those whom they claim to be ministering, nor will they be able to adequately share in the pain. Even worse, they can further perpetuate the *Han* of the *Han*-full by looking down upon their *Han*-filled experiences and either belittling them or failing to appreciate the gravity of pain and suffering it entails.

3) The Duty of the Church to Properly Proclaim the Truth of the Gospel

The Korean churches all claim to be proclaiming the true gospel, the pure gospel. Then, what is the Truth of the Gospel which Jesus proclaimed? The *mudang* who has come to receive the heavenly revelation through the *Jinogi Gut* becomes the departed spirit of Miyal and tells all the people who have gathered where her death took place, what injustices were involved, and consequently assuages Miyal's *Han*. In this respect, the ministers of the Korean churches need to preach that the Gospel of Jesus is Good News to the poor and oppressed, while at the same time being the news of imminent judgment to those who abuse power and perpetuate injustices. The church must properly bear witness to the reasons why the weaker nations and the weaker, powerless people suffer death and abuse, they must also prophetically proclaim the true meaning of their resistance and struggle.

Miyal, according to the established patriarchal social order that elevated the status

of men while denigrating that of women was an “evil” woman, a “violent” woman who had dared to fight back against her husband and bite him in defiance of the Law of the Three Servitudes. However, if we accuse Miyal of using violence against her husband, then what can we call the taking of a concubine and the abuse and abandonment of Miyal? Isn’t such actions the embodiment of violence committed against the powerless by the powerful? As a matter of fact, the so-called violence that Miyal is accused of using is not violence but the struggle of the powerless in opposition to and against the violence perpetrated by her husband. It is a struggle to live.

Therefore, the Korean church should refrain from simply mimicking the logic of the powerful in labelling those who are less so “sinners”, “terrorists” or “axes of evil” according to their vested interests and arbitrary value judgments. An Byeong-mu describes those who were treated as sinner in Jesus’ time as those victims who bore the pain of the world that resulted from the distorted structures of society.²¹ If we are to adequately interpret the words of Jesus, those who ate from the wheat field on the Sabbath were the poor and hungry persons in need of God’s grace, individuals who were blameless, without sin (Matthew 12:7). In Jesus’ view, those who stood condemned to judgment were not the poor who were despised as “sinners” but those in power who arbitrarily abused the religious laws to cause others to “stumble and fall” making them “to become sinners.” Therefore, the Korean church must stand and pronounce the judgment of the Kingdom of God against the powerful countries and individuals who cause the weak to stumble, calling them to account and to repentance. This repentance should not merely be playing lip service. It must include the specific act of returning everything that has been exploited and taken (Matthew 5:26). This is the true Gospel of reconciliation and peace that can liberate the unjustly oppressed.

4) The Duty of the Church to Stand Up Against Injustice

During the military dictatorship of Park Jeong-hee a poet by the name of Kim Ji-ha was imprisoned and tortured by the government. He once wrote of his poems that he desired them to be “the sound carrying *Han*, a messenger of *Han*.”²² He describes his vision for the church as “the church as comforter that assuages the *Han* of the *minjung*, thereby severing the cycle of violence that mitigates *Han*, a church

²¹ An Byeong-mu, *Minjung Shinhak Iyagi* (Story of *Minjung* Theology) (Cheonan: Hangug Shinhak Yeonguso, 1988), pp.33-4.

²² “This small plot of land on which we live, the Korean peninsula, is filled with the cries of spirits that have died unjustly. I desire my poems to be the medium of such cries, the messenger of *Han*, the sharp consciousness of historical tragedies. A poem of the incarnated spirits.”

transforming this cycle into another dynamic, a church which understands and acknowledges the place of a limited use of force in order to affect this severance, a church that is a sanctuary for all fighters and radicals who struggle in the dark.”²³

What is the church to do if it is to sever the cycle of violence that mitigates *Han* and assuage the *Han* of the *minjung*? Kim Ji-ha says that the church should acknowledge the place of a limited use of force. What does this mean? What is he referring to by a limited use of force? I regard Kim’s words as stating that the church is not to remain silent in the face of violence but to stand against it and fight. When we look at the Gospel’s portrayal of Jesus we discover that he was not simply meek and humble while establishing the true peace that liberates the oppressed. Jesus, himself, states that he came to the world to give the sword, to set fires, and to cause divisions.

In order for the church today to truly be reborn as the church that assuages the *Han* of the *Han*-full it must stand against and fight the existing structures of injustice that cater to the status quo of the powerful, although this may bring persecution upon itself. If Jesus had not disclosed and condemned the injustices of his times and challenged the legal structures of his society he would not have been crucified on the cross. Jesus did not simply preach on the development of inner spirituality while disregarding the political, social, and cultural context in which he was situated. However, the church has gradually come to conform to the status quo and defend the oppressive practices of the imperial powers, keeping silent in fear of the authoritarians, refusing to fight the fight that Jesus fought. As a result, the church is no longer a recipient of persecution as a consequence of fighting against the unjust. Paul said that to suffer for justice is the privilege of a Christian (Philippians 1:29). The Christians and the church should never lose this privilege of suffering for standing on the side of the oppressed and suffering people in history.

5) The Responsibility of the Church to Open Itself as a Space of Reconciliation, Breaking Down the Walls of Intolerance

The assuaging of Miyal’s *Han* through the *Jinogi Gut* is not something that the *mudang* achieved on her own. It was the result of a cooperative effort by all those who had gathered at the *gut*, learned of the unjust death of Miyal and shed tears of empathy at her fate, and prayed together for a new world in which there would be no

²³ These words were written by Kim Ji-ha during his time in prison from November 1974 to 15 February, 1975. They were later published as part of his works from prison. The quote is taken from Seo Nam-dong, “*Han-ui Hyeongseonghwa-wa Geu Shinhagjeog Seongchal*,” (The Imagery of Han and the Theological Reflection of the Image), *Ibid.*, p.101.

more unjust deaths, finally coming together to present their gifts at the altar and share a common meal. In order for this process of *Hanpuri* where the historical event of reconciliation occurs in the *gut*, the Korean church must break down the crafty words and doctrinal intolerance that limit its vision. The interpretation of the Bible and the doctrinal standards that the Korean church regards as being its “traditions” were those that are based on the theological positions of the 18th century American fundamentalism brought to Korea by Western, Anglo-Saxon, male missionaries.

Professor Seo Nam-dong, who sought to interpret the Bible from the eyes of the suffering *minjung* in Korean history, re-interprets the Western theological concepts of Christ, salvation and judgment, sanctification, and Holy Spirit. In the parable of the Good Samaritan that Jesus presents in Luke 10 the traditional Western theological interpretation presents Christ as the Good Samaritan. However, Professor Seo Nam-dong says that it is not the Samaritan but the groans of the person who was robbed that was the “call of Christ” beckoning to the passers-by. He says that depending on how we listen to this call and respond to it is the deciding factor of whether we enter the path of salvation or judgment. He also argues that the simple sharing of bread and wine within the traditions of the church is not a true sacrament but the act of sharing what one has with the suffering and oppressed neighbours is the sacrament that mediates the true existence of Christ. Living in solidarity with the *Han*-filled suffering neighbours in our context is receiving the Messiah into our midst, partaking in his forgiving grace. He refers to this as the Messiah-ness of the suffering *minjung*, and the forgiving character of *Han*.²⁴

The Reverend Lee Seon-ae, a feminist theologian, says that the women who took on the burden of the sins of the unjust political leaders, enduring the yoke of slavery are the Messiah, described in Isaiah 53, who “took upon himself the burden of others, the Lamb of God that was pierced and slain.” What kind of Messiah is the Korean church waiting for today, and what kind of salvation and judgment, the calling of the church is it preaching from its pulpit? Isn’t the church distorting the Gospel of Jesus and denigrating the *minjung* and women by engaging in a Biblical hermeneutic and formation of doctrines from a perspective of the powerful? Aren’t we refusing to acknowledge the God of Love, who freely forgives and claims as his own all people by discriminating against the adherents of other religious traditions? Are we not, furthermore, culpable of the blanket denunciation of the traditional cultures of *sori*, *talchum*, and *gut*, labelling them as heretic and satanic, thereby disregarding the role

²⁴ Seo Nam-dong, “*Han-ui Hyeongsanghwa-wa Geu Shinhagjeok Seongchal*” (The Imagery of Han and the Theological Reflection of the Image), *Ibid.*, p.97.

that they played in providing the energy for the liberation of the *minjung* and Nation, assuaging the *Han* of the poor and oppressed *minjung* and women, and mediating the saving reconciliation between the dead and living, as well as between the living?

Those who are studying the traditional cultures of Korea today criticise how the *gut* and *salpuri*, which had originally been agents of assuaging the *Han* of the *minjung* has now become distorted into a system of exploiting the *minjung* and women. This would seem to coincide with the extreme cases of distortion that we can see taking place with regard to the Gospel of Jesus occurring in the church. We can be certain of one fact. If the church continues to oppress and fill the hearts of the poor, powerless, and marginalised *minjung* of our society with *Han* by arbitrarily interpreting selective passages from the Bible and utilising that as a pretext for doctrinal formulation, then the church is no longer a Jesus Community. The place where the restrictive and confining walls of religious doctrine and institutionalism are broken down and true solidarity with the poor and oppressed takes place, enabling the creation of a new history of life, this is where the true people of God are gathered, and this is the true Church in which the saving acts of God take place.

In this regard, I argue that the church must not remain within itself. The Korean church should not be satisfied, anymore, with simply gathering amongst themselves in perfunctory acts of worship. It should open its doors and go out to where our neighbours are suffering, engaging in acts of solidarity with them and sharing in their pain. The church must ring forth the clarion call that names the imperialistic motivations and greed of the powerful who distort reality so that they can justify their continued exploitation and renewed invasion of the weaker countries and peoples. The church should work to appease and assuage the *Han* of the powerless so that they do not become poisoned with the logic of power that encourages one to oppress the other. We must a process of *Hanmaji* that acknowledges one's *Han*-full-ness and begins the process of assuaging it without becoming an agent of vengeance and resentment. By taking on the *Han* within us with our entire being we must act to sever the oppressive structures that create a culture of competition and death. Let us go forth and dance the *talchum* of divine encounter together, assuaging the *Han* of those *Han*-full lives and creating a new culture of reconciliation and life. *Deong-gi Deong-gi Deong Deong, Deong Deong Deong-gi Deong*, Arise, one and all, a new light has dawned!

** The following is a re-interpretation of the Miyal Dance from a feminist theological

perspective. I would like to encourage us to adopt it as a for of alternative Christian culture. One could further interpret the following in more contemporary forms and perform it as a *talchum* or conventional play. The part presented in bold italics reflects my presentation of it as an alternative Christian culture.

The *Miyalhalmi* Dance in *Bongsan Talchum*

Characters: *Miyalhalmi*, Husband, Concubine, Neighbours, Old Man Namgang, *Mudang*

The characters for Neighbours can be altered to reflect contemporary Korean society. Possible examples would be a Priest, Buddhist Monk, Christian, a foreign worker from Asia, and others. They would not need to wear masks. The Neighbours can enter the stage towards the end of the gut performed by the Mudang when invited by Old Man Namgang. Alternatively, they can partake in the dance rituals from the beginning.

Act One

All the characters enter and dance together. Suddenly, this scene is violently disturbed by the invasion of a neighbouring Superpower and in the confusion of war Miyal is separated from her husband, later witnessing the death of her son. She cries “Yeonggam, Yeonggam” as she roams the countryside in search of her husband. At the other end of the stage the husband is portrayed sexually assaulting a pretty Buddhist nun and taking a concubine, generally living a loose and wasteful life.

Scenes depicting the activities of the imperialist powers and those that denounce the injustices committed by the powerful can be added as further/alternative examples contrasting the suffering of Miyal.

Act Two

After much suffering and difficulty, Miyal is finally reunited with her husband. They embrace each other in joy, and copulate. Afterwards, Miyal relates her experiences and tells how their son died, and how she suffered over the past months. However, her husband who had been listening to her relate her experiences begins to abuse her, becoming violent, and finally attempting to abandon her. This was because he wanted to preserve his relationship with the concubine. When Miyal realises the ulterior motives of her husband she says, “Let’s separate and go our own ways, if that’s what you want.” She also demands that he return her dowry and her share of what is left of

their possessions. The husband, however, refuses to give her anything and begins to beat her. At this, Miyal fights back and bites her husband.

This scene can be used to exemplify the Han-full lives that many women are forced to live. We can also use it to describe the plight of women who are suffering from sexual exploitation and violence within the culture of competition and militancy in today's Korean context. Many women continue to live as poor and powerless minjung. However, we must also emphasize that the victimised women are pro-actively struggling and fighting against the structural injustices that they face with their whole bodies.

Act Three

The concubine, who had been standing to one side and listening to the argument between Miyal and her husband, eventually learns that she was lied to by the husband, who had told her he was unmarried. At this, she joins the argument and fight. Amazingly, the husband is able to somehow escape from the midst of this heated argument and fight. The two women do not realise that the husband is gone and continue to fight. The fight ends tragically when Miyal, the older and weaker of the two, is struck down. The concubine hastily runs away from the scene and the husband who had escaped returns to check on Miyal. He discovers that she is dead. After a brief moment of silence in which he appears to show remorse, he suddenly stands up and abandons the body.

This scene can be used to denounce the reality faced by women who suffer from the abuse and violence perpetrated by men within the patriarchal structures of present society.

Act Four

Old Man Namgang, who is the incarnated deity overseeing the lifespan of humankind, comes to Miyal's body and weeps over it. He calls a *mudang* to comfort the dead and lead it to the Land of Happiness, and gathers the neighbours for the *Jinogi Gut*. The *mudang* transforms into Miyal and tells those who have gathered how she died an undeserved and unjust death. In the process, the *mudang* becomes the *Baridegi*, once again reiterating Miyal's experience of injustice. The *mudang* then calls the husband and concubine forward and calls them to confess their sin and wrongdoing. She also goes on to tell the gathered neighbours that they are not without fault for knowingly ignoring Miyal's plight and turning a blind eye and ear to her undeserved and unjust death. All the people, including the concubine and husband, confess their sin and

present offerings to the altar. When Old Man Namgang, the *mudang*, neighbours, husband and concubine all confess their wrongdoing and weep in repentance, Miyal is reborn. All those who had gathered at the *gut* rejoice and dance in happiness. A catharsis of forgiveness and reconciliation takes place. After the *gut* is finished, Old Man Namgang comes forward and declares, “Arise, one and all, a new light has dawned.”

The mudang is replaced with a minister or priest. The priest should not be dressed in western robes but in traditional clothing. The priest does not simply remain in the church praying, but actively goes out into the world in search of the Han-full, assuaging their Han and addressing their grievances. The priest addresses the sins of the powerful, and also castigates the Christians for being silent to the injustices. The priest, the powerful who’ve sinned, and the Christians who’ve been silent all confess and repent, offering gifts. Those who suffered unjust and undeserved deaths are resurrected, and everyone joins in dancing a dance of peace and reconciliation, rejoicing in the establishment of justice, forgiveness and reconciliation. One of the members comes forward to proclaim that a new dawn, a new history of God’s Kingdom, a Kingdom of service, sharing and peace has come. All sing praises in joy and pray together.

Abstract

Through much of its history Korea has been a victim of countless invasions by more powerful foreign powers. As a result, the Korean people have suffered many instances of oppression and exploitation at the hands of the powerful. Within this experience of suffering, the majority of Korean women have lived *Han*-full lives due to their experiences of extreme sorrow and pain that was a consequence of their being the poorest and weakest of the *minjung* in Korean society, a status which burdened them with additional suffering from the power structures within Korean society. Even today, in the new millennium the powerless *minjung*women suffer under the culture of competition and death, oppressed by the powerful. Within this context, this article raises the following question: Is the church appropriately assuaging the *Han* of those who are living such *Han*-full lives? Is the church today creating a culture of true reconciliation and life which liberates the oppressed?

After Jesus’ ascension the church has continuously sought to consolidate its powerbase through institutionalism. As a result, the institutionalized church has drifted away from the teachings of Jesus and followed the competitive culture dominated by the powerful, raging religious wars and pursuing materialistic wealth while remaining silent to the injustices of the authoritarian autocrats. Furthermore,

the church has continuously interpreted specific portions of Scripture in a manner that reflects their fundamental and literalist hermeneutic practices and devised doctrines based on such narrow perspectives. Utilising such instruments the church has labelled those who dare to differ or contradict their teaching as "sinners," increasingly marginalising and excluding the weak and powerless. Consequently, the church has become a distorted platform of power which uses arbitrary laws and doctrinal teachings to further oppress the oppressed and add to their *Han* rather than appeasing and alleviating the *Han* in the lives of the Han-full.

In light of this reality, this article looks at the culture of reconciliation and life that is produced through the Korean cultural traditions of *sori*, *talchum*, and *gut*. Regrettably, these traditions had long been ignored by the Korean church and theologians. More specifically, this article attempts to engage in a feminist theological interpretation of the *Miyalhalmi* Dance in the *Bongsan Talchum* (Mask Dance). It looks at how Miyal sought to struggle and fight against the oppression of a patriarchal social structure and the invasion of foreign powers. It also explores how the practice of *Hanmaji* performed through the practice of *gut* denounces those who were responsible for the unjust and undeserved death of Miyal, awakens those who had been silent and ignored the plight and suffering of the weak and powerless to an extent where they are compelled to repent and renounce their silence, and involves the people who have gathered at the *gut* in such a way that they are able to empathise with the *Han* of Miyal, finally embracing all the participants in a new dynamic creation of reconciliation. The article challenges the Korean church and its theology to revisit Korean traditional cultural elements that had been ignored and regarded as inferior. It also calls upon the Korean churches today to move beyond the Western traditions of legalism and doctrinalism to reclaiming the essence of the Christian Gospel, thereby enacting the specific task of assuaging the *Han* of the Han-full in our society.

Key words

the Miyalhalmi Dance of the Bongsan Talchum, Han & Hanpuri, reconciliation & life