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The Emergence and Convergence of Christian Identities: An East Asian Reflection on the Bible, Minjung, and Identities

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Introduction

The Bible is never read in a vacuum, insofar as it affects believers in their own contexts as a "Word of God" to live by. Whether the interpreter is aware of it or not, the context serves not only as a choice, but also as a consequence. It is a choice because the interpreters choose to read from a particular location. It is also a consequence because biblical interpretation has powerful effects on people and their lives in certain ways. Hence, critical readers have to make explicit at the outset their own context and bring to critical understanding their own interests and perspectives.

My reading of the Bible in general and the Gospel of Luke in particular

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emerges from an East Asian global context, where globalization becomes a new world order and its own rule and conception creates scarcity. This context informs my reading of the text. However, the same context is also informed by my reading which helps me to see it in a new light. In light of the Gospel of Luke, I see that the People of God struggle with a lack of agency under the construct of power.

The issue of human agency is such an "uncomfortable" subject in my native South Korea, which was one of the poorest countries in Asia until the 1960s and has grown into the tenth largest economy of the world. In a country, still gripped by the memory of the colonial rule and the ethnic, national divide, the "World" within and beyond has been heavily influenced by what Althusser calls "ideological representation of ideology."[1)]

During the latter part of the twentieth century, South Korea was governed by a military dictatorship that had served the Japanese Empire and then quickly turned to the U.S. for its protection.[2)] Consequently, the Japanese colonial legacy and the American hegemony have long supported each other in South Korea. At the same time, the domestic power has combined itself with such discourses as anticommunism, modernization, and globalization, which have followed one after the other, each supporting the next.

Being haunted by the memory of colonial cruelty and exploitation, South Korea has cultivated its own colony - not a "colony" abroad, but a "colony" within.[3)] Thus, while problems and contradictions emerge from

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1) Louis Althusser, *Essays on Ideology* (London: Verso, 1984), 36-42. According to Althusser, "ideology is a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence," and "their imaginary transposition is caused by a few men who base their domination and exploitation of the people on a *falsified* representation of the world which they imagined in order to enslave other minds by dominating their imagination." As he points out, the "ideological representation of ideology" has influenced people to have a "consciousness" or "belief" in particular ideas, according to which they must act and conduct themselves, lest they become deviant.

2) For further elaboration, see George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

3) As Franz Fanon observes, in this situation, the combination of colonialism and such other discourses forms oppression that runs tighter. *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991), 148-205.

the life of the colonial and postcolonial subjects, South Koreans must relegate them to a distant past and move on rather than contest and resist in their present (hi)story. They were deprived of their own (hi)story, culture, and language, while being harnessed for modernity, progress, and development - in Partha Chatterjee's words, to experience "continued subjection under a world order which only sets their tasks for them and over which they have no control."[4)]

Therefore, what the colonial and postcolonial subjects desperately wanted and still cannot acquire is their sufficient agency and freedom. Their lack of agency, however, arises most poignantly today in globalization - a process of appropriation that reaches across diverse cultural, ethnic, and racial identities while creating 'inside' / 'outside' boundaries. With regard to the current globalization, Fernando Segovia traces it to the last five hundred years of imperialism and the domination of capitalism:

> At each stage of imperialism in the modern and postmodern era, capitalism has prevailed and dominated the economic landscape, from mercantile capitalism in the 15th to 18th centuries, to monopoly capitalism in the 19th and first half of the 20th century, to global capitalism in the latter half of the 20th century to the present.[5)]

At each turn, human identities are contested, challenged, and often jeopardized by strife and scarcity. Throughout this history, the poor - the "others" of history - always have been present, crying for a more just world.

However, the issue of living together, as well as the representation of self and other, has drawn limited attention from modern (mostly, western) economics, while the over-representation of scarcity has been widespread.[6)] Biblical studies also have increased knowledge of wealth and poverty. However, biblical criticism's seemingly "impartial" and "neutral" measures

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4) Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (London: Zen Books, 1986), 10.

5) Fernando F. Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 127.

6) I find myself in agreement with the alert offered over the assumptions of modern economics and their solid presupposition of scarcity by Douglas Meeks, *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), see esp. 15-28.

have not advanced the awareness of how the construction of political economy pertains to such a topic, while the value of such practices as "almsgiving" is dragged into the politically charged zone of economy.

This paper seeks a connection between human identities and agency, especially with regard to those materially poor who are locked out of the prevailing political-economic paradigms. For my overall project, I ground myself as a real reader, immersed in a specific historical, cultural, social, and geographical location. From such a location, I take into account the (hi)stories of Korean minjung as another text and evaluate as well as analyze in dialogue how a biblical text stands with regard to the particular East-Asian global context.

To begin with, I illuminate the social memory of *minjung,* which will characterize both the narrative world of Luke and my own reading context. Then, I tackle the economic constructs and relations represented by the Lukan text and acted out by the literary characters in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (15:11-32) in particular. Finally, by reweaving my argument through a more direct theological engagement with minjung (hi)stories, I address the ethical (and political) power of biblical interpretation. With this, I now turn to a social script of *minjung* in the early 1970s.

Does Minjung-Jesus Still Live?

In a context such as mine, the presence of the Korean *minjung*, or grassroots people, is highly significant.[7] While the legacy of colonialism and the threat of neocolonialism shape the lands of the Far East, *minjung* have been subject to a long subordination and have borne the imprint of colonial oppressions.

Since the seeds of capitalism and its infrastructure were first laid in Korea during the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945), colonial and neocolonial development has continued upwards. Economic success made possible by the *minjung* and their cheap labor has favored the wealthy and the corporations. This brought out strong resistance from students, laborers, farmers, and religious institutions in the 1970's.

At that time, one famous poetic expression of discontent came in the

7) The concept of *minjung* first came to the fore when people in a rural area flocked to urban centers after the Korean War (1950-1953).

form of a parody, "Five Bandits," by Kim Chiha. "Five Bandits" employed stylistic features of *Pansori*, a traditional style of oral performance that often had its own obscene and satirical elements. Such use of traditional folk culture has served as a "negative dialectic," as Adorno put it, and became central to *minjung* movements through the 1980's. His work contributed to the formative *minjung* theology in the mid-1970s. For this and other poems, Kim was arrested, imprisoned, and tortured. Later, in 1974, he would be sentenced to death for advocating rebellion. However, he was eventually released because of heavy international pressure upon the Park government.

Upon being released, Kim Chiha wrote another *Pansori* poem, "Chang Il Tam," that came out in *Declaration of Conscience* (1976). In this poem, a man named Chang Il Tam is a butcher and the son of a butcher. He comes from a lineage of three generations of butchers and prostitutes. He himself is the son of a prostitute. He later becomes a criminal and escapes from prison. While being pursued by the police, he was able to hide in a back street where prostitutes live. There he notices a prostitute giving birth to a child. She has tuberculosis, and her body is rotting with venereal disease. She is risking her life with the delivery. This scene enlightens Chang's consciousness, and thereby he exclaims, "Oh, from a rotten body, new life is coming out! It is God who is coming out!" He kneels down and says, "Oh, my mother, God is in your womb. God is the very bottom." [8)]

By way of this awakening, Chang not only recognizes but also invalidates the code of "identity thinking" - for Adorno, a "covertly paranoid style of rationality" which inexorably transmutes the Others into a mere simulacrum of humans or expels them beyond the human borders in "a panic-stricken act of exclusion." [9)] After his awakening, he himself becomes an itinerant preacher, proclaiming the liberation of people. He calls prostitutes his mother, kisses their feet, and declares:

> The soles of your feet are heaven.
> God is in your decaying wombs.
> God's place is with the lowest of the low.[10)]

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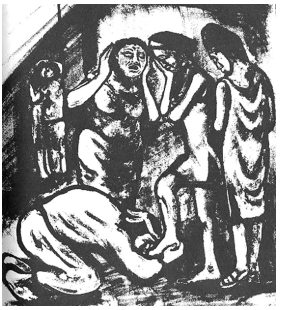
8) Kim Chi Ha, *The Gold Crowned Jesus And Other Writings,* eds. Chong Sun Kim and Shelly Killen (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1978), 27.

9) Terry Eagleton. *Ideology: An Introduction*, 126; Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 1973.

Chang meets and argues with various urban mission pastors, priests, intellectuals, professors, trade union leaders, monks, servicemen, and social workers.



"Oh, you are my mother!"

Figure 1: The Picture of Chang Il Tam and Prostitutes in The *Gold Crowned Jesus*.[11)]

He acknowledges his own life as a journey going in a reverse direction to that which most people have been forced to take. He leads his disciples up a mountain and teaches them the philosophy of *Dan* that pertains to self-denial, and which helps them cast out the temptation of selfishness and comfort.[12)] At the end of the story Chang leads his disciples and they march together toward the capital city, each and every one carrying beggars' cans.

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10) Kim Chi Ha, *The Gold Crowned Jesus And Other Writings*, 27.

11) *Ibid.*, 29.

12) See Suh Namdong's discussion of *Dan,* "Towards a Theology of Han," in The Commission on Theological Concerns of the Christian Conference of Asia, *Minjung Theology: People as the Subjects of History* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1983), 55-72. According to Suh, *Dan* (meaning the act of "cutting") is the poet's self-denial. One's enlightenment (or revolution) should be accompanied by living as "a wayfarer, leaving everything behind." *Dan* also conveys a social dimension of the people: "Cutting the vicious circle of revenge" for "the transformation of the secular world and secular attachments." If needed, *Dan* ought to be developed into a decisive and organized explosion. This transition lies in "religious commitment" and in "internal and spiritual transformation." I will address the theme of "commitment" and "internal/spiritual transformation" in the concluding chapter. See Suh (1983), 56-57.

Chang proclaims in their midst:

> Paradise is to share food with others.
> Food is heaven.[13)]

When the big march comes closer to the capital, the authorities get more confused and more frightened. The journey of Chang and his disciples goes against the flow of the multitudes undertaking their daily journey, an "endless transmigratory pilgrimage to their destination and then a return to the place where there is no food."[14)] These multitudes throng around Chang and his disciples, adding to their numbers. Before Chang finishes his journey, however, he gets arrested. He was betrayed by one of his disciples, another down-and-out.

The authority takes him out in order to execute him in public for conspiring against the throne. At the moment, he begins to sing a song, entitled "Food is Heaven":

> Food is heaven
> You can't make it on your own
> Food should be shared.
> Food is heaven.
> We all see
> the same stars in heaven
> How natural it is that we
> all share the same food.
> Food is heaven
> as we eat

13) Kim Chi Ha, *The Gold Crowned Jesus And Other Writings*, 28.

14) Suh Namdong sees the life of Chang as the social biography of the Korean *Minjung*. Suh notes that: "religious ascetism, revolutionary action, a yearning for the communal life of early Christianity and a deep affection for the valiant resistance of Koreans are all part of Chang's kaleidoscopic world." For Suh, some of those movements and ideas combine and coalesce, and others clash in confrontation. See "Historical References for a Theology of *Minjung*," in eds. The Commission on Theological Concerns of the Christian Conference of Asia, *Minjung Theology: People As the Subjects of History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983), 155-182; esp. 177.

God enters us
food is heaven.
Oh, food
should be shared and eaten by all.[15)]

Finally, Chang is beheaded. Three days after his decapitation, however, he returns to life. His resurrection is so strange that his head is put on the betrayer's body, and the betrayer's head on Chang's body. The head speaking justice and truth is bonded to the body carrying injustice and falsehood.

Presumably, such a strange scene promises resurrection not to physical bodies, but to hybrid existence woven out of "self" and "other," regardless of whether or not each is recognized as "good" or "bad." For Kim, this is the resurrection - an embrace that is truly celebrative, from which the notion of political economy shall flow. In the face of conceptual straitjacketing, Kim affirms heterogeneity over and against the tyranny of seamless homogeneity. Chang already witnessed the Otherness - a "God" - in a grimy cesspool of humanity.

As such, Kim envisions Chang's birth, itinerating, preaching of liberation, trial, and execution as the reproduction of the life of Jesus.[16)] Those prostitutes, prisoners, and beggars, with whom Chang joins himself were, in fact, the *minjung* who are victimized by the powerful oppressors - that is, markets, governments, and corporations. They were heavily taxed by the bias of the ruling class and marginalized from the center of society. Some of them lost their speech, others followed the path of the powerful, and still others had to engage in self-censoring. Chang Il Tam's story is a witness of the life of *minjung* in the 1970s, one that slides into a deep pit where political economy normalizes the degrading of human lives and bodies.

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15) Kim Chi Ha, *The Gold Crowned Jesus And Other Writings,* 30.

16) David Suh describes Chang's life as "complete conformity with the *han* of hell." According to Suh, *Han* which is a feeling of helpless suffering and oppression becomes the most important element in the politico-economic consciousness of the *minjung*. See the discussion of David Suh, "A Biographical Sketch of an Asian Theological Consultation," in *Minjung Theology: People as the Subjects of History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983), 24-28.

However, when Chang finds the truth at the bottom, the bottom turns upside down and becomes heaven. Chang's resurrection is an initiation into mysteries, enabling those marginalized to perceive and understand what is otherwise beyond human perception and understanding. Through the carrier, a body of the "evil," the news of liberation becomes widespread as by a wild and stormy wind.

Challenge of *Minjung* Theology Today

The word *minjung* was first used in theology by two scholars, Ahn Byungmu and Suh Namdong, both in 1975.[17] When Minjung Theology first arose in Korea in the early 1970s, it was most likely a theological proposal to vindicate 22 year-old *Jun Tae-il*. He immolated himself on a street in the front of the Pyonghwa Market in November 1970 in a protest against the labor conditions to which he and his coworkers were subject. Sweatshops were densely packed into the market where he toiled as a garment worker.

What particularly caused his suicidal protest were the miserable lives of "See-da," who worked in a sweatshop covered with dust, from early morning to midnight every day. The term *"See-da"* used to refer to downcast laborers, albeit with a despised connotation of "errand boy." Most of them were women as young as thirteen, in Korea. The Japanese colonial etymology of the word, however, points to a different meaning, that is, "supporter" or "advocate," *"See-da-ba-da-rakee."*

These *"See-da,"* who were never known by their own names or capacities, frequently fell victim to abrupt deaths or fatal diseases due to the hazardous working circumstances. Feeling that there was no other way to bring attention to their plight, *Jun Tae-il* had decided on a more radical course of action. He left his world shouting, "We are not machines!" Jun's

17) The word *minjung* indicates common people who undergo socio-cultural alienation, economic exploitation, or political oppression. Kim Yong-bock states that "the reality and identity of Minjung is not to be known by the philosophical or scientific definition of the character or substance of *minjung*. It is to be known by the story of *minjung*, that is, the social biography created by *minjung* themselves." Kim Yong-bock, *Korean Minjung and Christian* (Seoul: Hyungsungsa, 1988), 110.

death is recorded in Korean history as a spark that started the labor union movement, which led to the end of the "developmental" dictatorship. A distorted meaning of See-da, the plight of the downcast and undocumented laborers, has been still transmitted through Korean *minjung* (hi)story.

For the *minjung* theologian, Suh Namdong, Chang Il Tam is an heir to both Korean *minjung* and Christian *minjung* traditions. He acknowledges that the story of Chang Il Tam provides a description of the suffering Jesus *in disguise*, just like the poor, the weak, and the ones who need clothes or have nowhere to go (e.g., Matt 25:31-46). Chang Il Tam is the Jesus of Korea, born in Korea in the 1970s. In this way, the *minjung* becomes Messiah.[18] This does not mean that the *minjung* and Jesus are ontologically identical. Although the *minjung* are not Jesus himself, they rather play the role of Messiah in two distinct ways.

First, they bear "the remaining suffering" of Messiah. In Matt 25:31-46, for example, the poor, the weak, and those who are in need of clothes and have nowhere to go are identified with Jesus. They are "Jesus in disguise." A man who suffered at the hands of robbers in Luke 10:30-35 also can be a type of Messiah, playing a Messianic role, a role of Jesus Christ. He was half dead and cried out for help. His groaning and crying is a symbol that repeatedly asserts itself in the process of history and controls what one may find in the cultural text.

By presenting the despised *minjung* as the one who has true subjectivity, the early *minjung* theology attempted to tackle all the stereotypes and prejudices. True salvation is found among those *minjung* who bear the suffering of the Christ and who cannot truly rely on powerful institutions - be they economic, political, or religious institutions. The suffering Jesus is an affirmation for *minjung* in the face of a constant barrage from the experience of "otherness," a cry from agony.

Second, tainted as they are by colonial exploitations, the identity of *minjung* regenerates itself into the one who participates in the suffering of the *minjung*. The fellowship of suffering involves a self who responds to the Others as a "subject of history."[19] A self-conscious turn to the Others not only expresses the eschatological aspiration of an unredeemed world, but actually overcomes the powers of evil that enslave, and dwell in, humanity.

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18) Suh Namdong, *A Study on Minjung Theology* (Seoul: Hangilsa, 1980).
19) *Ibid.*, 181; emphasis mine.

In this regard, Suh states that:

> If someone goes to the dying man and treats him, then s/he becomes a true human. But if s/he ignores him and passes by, then s/he becomes a beast. The way I fulfill humanity depends on whether I hear the groan of the suffering man and help him or not… The participating in the suffering of the *Minjung* is the way of becoming a true human and a way of salvation.[20]

The affirmation of those participants as a *prototype* of humanity is a call to recognize the *present* manifestations of the divine Jesus in the *minjung*. This enables human agency in a mysterious way and creates opportunities in bringing about different life and reality.[21]

With hope both for and against historical realities, *minjung* share such stories as folktales, songs, and even rumors that inspire the *minjung* to resist or to transform the oppressive power and construct. Through the stories multiplying, the *minjung* participate together in their movement.[22] In this respect, the role of the *minjung* as Messiah is not merely *given*, but *gives*, especially to the one who receives it. The affirmation of those participants not only clarifies what it means to be a human being, singularly and in community, but also establishes their identity as the subjects of history. The vision as such brings forth the ethical, political, and theological significance of human subjects. Minjung Theology, through the 1980s, has addressed the power of subordinated individuals and groups to resist and subvert the dominant structures, even if they must do so in ways that appear hybrid, abnormal, illegal or ineffective.

For early Minjung Theology, the "social biography of the *minjung,*" or

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20) *Ibid.*, 180-81.

21) This seems peculiar when compared with the Hebrews exodus from bondage in Egypt. Richard Horsley asserts that those Hebrews are the very prototype of people claiming its agency. See Richard Horsley, *Covenant Economics: A Biblical Vision of Justice for All* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 18.

22) Indeed, listening to those stories and voices from the margin should broaden one's knowledge and information base, provoking the process that becomes a discursive conscientization. See Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1993), 52-53.

the collective experience of *minjung*, serve as the hermeneutical basis for interpreting the resources of Minjung Theology - that is, the Bible, tradition, and history.[23] Listening to the voices from the margin through such stories as folktales, songs, and even rumors inspires the readers to (re)read the Bible and examine some of the core beliefs of history. Hyun YoungHak refers to this as an "experience of critical transcendence."[24] He states that "beginning to *do* theology in such a way is exciting, for you feel theology with your body and dance with it before you *think* it."[25] Thus, as anti-Western theology, early Minjung Theology pertains to what Freire might call a "discursive conscientization."[26]

For an East Asian global reader, recourse to the *minjung* may serve not only as a "point of contact," but also as a tremendous resource for trans-historical and cross-cultural reflection on humanity and human agency - the kind of vision that Luke presents over and against the colonial construction of fear and scarcity. Henceforth, from an East Asian *minjung* perspective, I focus special attention on the household *(oikos)* story in the Gospel of Luke that might thrust the reader back to an encounter with the *(minjung-)* messiah, which will foster human agency and (comm)unity between and beyond center and periphery, metropolis and margins. From an East Asian *minjung* perspective, reading the Bible becomes thus a mutual dialogue between the text and readers more than a discovery of the latent meaning of the text. Hence, an examination of the creation of the household is in order.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son[27]

The Parable of the Prodigal Son unveils a material construct of economy

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23) Kim Yongbock, *Korean Minjung and Christian* (Seoul: Hyungsungsa, 1988), 110.

24) Hyun Younghak, "A Theological Look at the Mask Dance in Korea" in *Minjung Theology,* ed. Commission on Theological Concerns of the Christian Conference of Asia (CTC-CCA) (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 47-54.

25) *Ibid.*

26) Freire (1993): 52-53.

27) For more detailed discussion, please see Rohun Park, "Revisiting the Parable of the Prodigal Son for Decolonization: Luke's Reconfiguration of *Oikos* in 15:11-32," *Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches,* Volume 17,?Number 5, 2009: 507-520.

that carries out the norms affirming "this is the way things are" or "should be." In order to disclose what is really at stake in the parable, there is a need to reconstruct the submerged voices emerged within the *oikos*. First and foremost, a very perceptive articulation is drawn from the older son who confronts his father:

> Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends (15:29).

The older son disparages himself as a slave at home, when his father champions his voiceless younger brother as the cause for celebration. The kyriarchal order hinted at in his speech carries out the authorization of scarcity. The father as a property owner, a slave master, and a patron to clients, exerts both "material and moral power over those who live in and around" the household, as Paul Veyne states. With the *paterfamilias* commanding economic goods and food, the household becomes an embodiment of material force in its exclusive operation, serving as the site of the denial of "enough" to everyone else.

In this regard, the older son is a counter-model, an illustration, or clarification of the problem in Luke's *oikonomia*, as he further criticizes his father for his lax economic management:

> But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him (Lk 15:30).

When the deprivation of the older son emerges from the power problematic, its mode of relational polarity should condone silence or engender mimicry. For its victims, poverty becomes an intention or discipline of "God," just like the younger son says to the father, "I have sinned against heaven" (Lk 15:18, 21). For its masters, on the other hand, it only reinforces opportunities to develop a vast source of patronage and to evade accountability. This makes it very difficult for colonial subjects to discern the call of God to act and resist (Lk 15:29).

Hence, turning the older son's speech into a personal confrontation, the way most commentators do with this parable, could undercut any chance of envisioning human subjectivities, or what it means to be a human being,

singularly and in community.[28] For the older son, "the problem" is not the lack of loyalty, but the lack of agency to live the kind of life he has reason to value, 'that [he] may celebrate with his friends.' A young goat he refers to becomes goods that not only define his subjectivity, but also his communal experience.

The older son has long internalized the rule of kyriarchal boundary. He could not go out to celebrate with his friends, since, for him, the boundary is highly marked by the power of the *paterfamilias.* This boundary justifies human suffering, rationalizes the cost and benefit, and undermines the possibilities of (comm)union.

Thus, it is striking that the *paterfamilias* of the *oikos* does not dictate or exercise his power, but tries to conciliate his household with a soothing voice:

> Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours; but we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found (15:31-32)

What really strikes the reader herein, however, is not the father's attitude, but the father's construction of communion between the *paterfamilias* and the son, then-slave. Luke's patriarch lacks the ambition of strict management of the household and fails to maintain it. He rather goes back and forth interacting with his sons and erasing the borderlines. As such, no distinction exists between the "prodigal" and the "principled."

The father's sense of (comm)unity, in which self and other seem so interconnected and interdependent, allows one's property to be absorbed in each other. The father's utterance, "Son, you are always with me; all that is mine yours," could amount to saying: You are neither indebted nor

28) The manifest breach of rules in Luke is actually the condition for the alternative *oikos* and *oikonomia to become* more visible. When colonial agents apply dominant power to every corner of the household, creating scarcity, especially in a zero-sum colonial society, Luke's *oikos* discourse tends to focus on entitlements rather than on loyalty, on rights rather than on discipline. Hence, the idea of 'repentance' alone, condoning the "like-mindedness" under the Empire, fails to explain Luke's substantial development of the human agents. The text of Luke does not give a chance to exploit the marginalized with a sense of indebtedness, inequality or immorality.

obligated to me, as you think, because you are part of the *oikos* whose economy ensures (comm)union and liberation. Accordingly, both profits and losses are socialized, rather than privatized.

This is not a zero-sum game, but a positive-sum game. The household as a whole widens and everyone in it wins. Its pervasive interdependence from within and without salutes the full humanity of shameful and honored, have-nots and haves, powerless and powerful, all embracing culture of a community caught in structural oppression. Hence, the sacred space of the family encourages human subjects to cross over imperial-colonial descriptions of the boundary between center and periphery, metropolis and the margins - in effect, the imperial and the colonial.

For the father, celebration serves as a symbolic act in which one can enter and participate as a community and communicate a different faith/vision and a sense of the move from the binomial polarities and contradictions to the heternomous communion and correlation. Those persons formerly conceived as voiceless and invisible, are reclaimed and become legitimated for the (comm)union of the *oikos*. Hence, the colonial inscriptions of self and other are lifted up, and so will be colonial convention and conformity.

This new world that we hear from the parable is quite challenging, since it redefines what our culture sees as the problem with the economy, and therefore how we envision security for ourselves and our society. Luke's housheold might be felt as unsettling and even as threatening. Indeed, few New Testament texts reflect to the same degree an awareness of the link between human existence and economy.

Within the reconfiguration of Luke's household and its related, ideological stance against the empire, a postcolonial *minjung* finds an alternative way of living-together or meals-together. Luke's *oikos* discourse produces an internal structure shared by *all* of the household of God, a dangerous union that might have pressed back against individual relations and exclusive motivation, its abstractions and delimitation of life and

29) This cannot be told through narratives of success or failure, narratives with their endings in this present world. But it might take the form of eschatological genealogies, as in Luke (3:23-38) - a story that can be told only from a redeemed end that is continuously transcendent from the present moment. In this regard, Luke's genealogy is a cultural turn to the culture of the now and the present Household of God.

death.[29] For an East Asian global reader, this more hybrid account of *oikos* might suggest a vision within a wide array of institutions between and beyond self and other.

Heteronomous Communion

While economy originally refers to a household, it also provides a norm, whereby self and other, or individual and community (communal selves), may live in a house in a manner that is both just and sustainable. Under the neocolonial dominance of global economy, however, the flow of economy has the effect of marginalizing the rest of the world, so that those on the periphery become merely a means of supplying the needs of others.

In this regard, Luke's *oiko*s visions can be understood as a "fitting" theo-ethical response, where a rhetorical situation similar to that addressed by Luke exists today.[30] Indeed, it would seem that implicit and explicit scriptural allusions also abound in the contemporary neo-colonial economy. Hence, my reading of the Gospel of Luke and its economy helps me to see my own context in a new light where globalization becomes a new world order and its own rule and conception creates scarcity.

Economy as Domination Today, while the contemporary world sees a more nearly equal, "flat" world, bringing with it "open markets," "open trade" and "open politics," proponents of neoliberal shifts release diverse capitalist truisms for those who strive to be globally competitive:

> Make your corporate taxes low, simple and transparent; actively seek out global companies; open your economy to competition; speak English; keep your fiscal house in order; and build a consensus around the whole package with labor and management.[31]

Since globalization has become a new world order, its own rule and conception has been able to influence virtually every space in the world. Its deceptive appearance presents capitalist realities as natural and eternal - a

30) E. S. Fiorenza, "Changing the Paradigms: The Ethos of Biblical Studies," in *Rhetoric and Ethic*, 31-55.

31) Thomas L. Friedman, "The End of the Rainbow," *New York Times*: 29 June 2005.

continuing representation of 'god,' which is an idolatrous cult of Mammon.[32)]

Henceforth, when capitalism charges itself with domination and exclusion, poverty becomes the result of divine will, though it is an inevitable consequence of the nature of the capitalist market. It has thrived at the cost of such disenfranchised human subjects, while at the same time having excluded those who do not have the property which results from having a livelihood. This leads to a number of issues, or problems to be resolved: first, the market itself as the mechanism of global domination; second, commodification as the reality of the mechanism as such; and third, scarcity as the consequence of the domination and its justification.[33)]

First, while the market promises a free and harmonious way of integrating and coordinating society, its universal justification for "rational" choice is, in reality, a reflection of domination. Second, commodity chains emerge as the core of marketization. The whole process of commodification effectively reduces the lands and labor to rents (in place of lands) and wages (in place of persons) as well as limiting justice, health, and life. Everything in the commodity chain is commodified; the market renders all transactions inhuman. Third, as wealth is used merely as a means for gaining more wealth, scarcity emerges and it effectively denies others access to their livelihood.[34)] The Gospel tackles the problems and needs as such, while conveying a liberating new narrative for the people of God living under global capitalism.

Economy as Liberation For an East Asian postcolonial reader, Luke's parable stories point to political and economic changes by way of a broader sense of the Others not simply as alien, but in their full human dignity as persons and groups. This awareness is directly related to the ethical

32) See the earlier discussion of Segovia (2000); Meeks (1989).

33) Rohun Park, "Revelation for Sale: An Intercultural Reading of Revelation 18 from an East Asian Perspective," *The Bible and Critical Theory* 4 (2008:2): 25.1?25.12.

34) In this regard, Dussel notes that "Once capital is absolutized - idolized, fetishized - it is the workers themselves who are immolated on its altar, as their life is extracted from them (their wages do not pay the whole of the life they objectify in the value of the product) and immolated to the god. As of old, so today as well, living human beings are sacrificed to mammon and Moloch." *Ethics and Community* (Maryknoll, NY : Orbis Books, 1988), 260.

imperative: If God is on everyone's side, what must I/we do as a "faithful" response to the world as is? The question touches upon how broadly we can imagine the economy for all of God's creation and how broadly we bring justice for sustainable existence for all.[35)]

In this regard, Luke's representation of human beings suggests that my existence is not quite my own since my life is already bound up with the life of the Other(s). In addition, the relationship to self and other emerges in the *dative* (e.g., kissing and hugging between the parent and the prodigal; cf. Luke 16:22, "Lazarus in the 'bosom' of Abraham").[36)] This economy redefines what our culture "sees" as the problem with poverty and also redirects how we envision life and life-together for ourselves, our families, and our society.

The teaching is therefore seen as unsettling and even threatening. However, constant empowerment through the corrective of the Gospel shall serve as a condition for being rescued from the power of mammon and its destructive bondage of slavery. This understanding certainly opens the possibility of liberation, as opposed to oppression by neocolonial market mechanisms. For the people at the grassroots, Luke's *oikos* story serves as a vehicle through which all others participate in their world as envisioned by story-makers, story-tellers, and story-performers. The *oikos* becomes a possible locus for emancipatory practice. Hence, the *minjung* can be directly connected to and grow out of the irrepressibly inspired convictions that imagine the world that is not and engage in the practice of freedom.

Economy as Transformation Luke raises this sort of radical reflection and critical consciousness over and against the construct of political economy that justifies scarcity and triggers the threat of starvation. What still needs to be done, however, is to display that which the practice that Lukan (hi)stories inspire might look like in our time and space. At the heart

35) It is here worth quoting from the poem of Wallace Stevens: "We are not our own. Nothing is itself taken alone. Things are because of interrelations and interconnections." *Opus Posthumous: Poems, Plays, Prose*, ed. Milton J. Bates (NY: Vintage, 1990), 163.

36) Deleuze defines transcendence by means of the *dative* relation. *Between Deleuze and Derrida*, eds. Paul Patton and John Protevi (London; New York: Continuum, 2003), 81; see Claire Elise Katz and Lara Trout's *Emmanuel Levinas: Levinas and the History of Philosophy* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), 179.

of the *oikos* is God's invitation to God's people to live in a "present" that has been liberated and transformed by the visions of the beyond. For grassroots *minjung*, this is an affirmation of hope and a call for dreaming new visions in a way that is so "foreign" in their land which obsesses with mammon-"capital."

Luke's economy not only goes beyond all the concepts of "utility" or "disutility" but also establishes transformation across categorical dominant boundaries of "self" and "other." In the *oikos* of God, partial identity cannot rule or tyrannize communal identity. In addition, all the exploitations, abstractions, and delimitations of life are lifted up. There is always "enough" to go around for all by radical interdependence from with-in and with-out. One may return to the o*ikos* and find oneself at home. Luke's *oikos* stories as located in the travel narrative invite us to a transmigatory pilgrimage to God and then to return to the place in which there is found enough for us all.

From a perspective of the minjung-messiah, however, the Gospel of Luke does not condone interested relations, but rather fosters (comm)union - such as "hugging" and "kissing" with the "prodigal." Hence, the disappeared will be found, the missing welcomed home. For an East Asian global reader, the "prodigal" remains a marker of the *heteronomous* unity of self and other. Luke's Gospel populates its *oikos* discourse with such alternative visions, recreating an *oikos* which subverts the exploitative political economy presently governing human agency and identity.

Neither an "atomized" self nor an "ideal" whole can be viable "in a salutary and vivifying manner" without the Other(s).[37] In view of the Gospel, it is pure formalism to imagine that otherness, heterogeneity and marginality are unqualified political/economic benefits. Without the imperial-colonial drive to "atomized singles" (e.g., the older brother) or "constrained wholes" (e.g., *paterfamilias*), one may find the *oikos* in Luke to be both internal pluralism and external connection - that is, a living space in which to encounter competing visions and to cultivate human capabilities and freedom. The readers are also invited to imagine and build up (*oikodomeo*) what they could be with regard to the political-economic "double bind." The divine *oikos* in Luke does not divide or discriminate

37) Dwight N. Hopkins's insightful discussion of humanity, *Being Human* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 82.

according to interested, oppressive relations. It rather fosters a mutual, "heteronymous" unity (e.g., "hugging" and "kissing," 15:20).

This calls into existence the people of God as c*ommunity* whereby one re/members the suffering Others as (*minjung*-)messiah, a manifestation of God, oppressed as well as exploited by the destructive power. In the *minjung's* intertext, Chang Il Tam encounters God when he sees the prostitute risking her life at delivery. This shapes truly postcolonial subjectivity which is heterogeneous by nature over and against homogenizing, colonial, and capitalist, straitjacketing totality.

Conclusion

In the Gospel of Luke, human misappropriations bring about scarcity. For those who monopolize resources and exclude those who do not have property from the *oikos* (that is, from livelihood), Luke's prophetic impulses announce irretrievable curses. No elite families on earth have a natural, moral, or divine mandate to monopolize the resources of the earth. However, for those who "see" (2:20; 7:22; 15:20), "hear" (2:20; 4:21; 7:22), and "respond" (1:46-56), they will find the beginning of their redemption by entering God's economic work for the creation which ensures abundance for all.

Hence, Luke unabashedly presents a whole range of work options: renouncing riches for the poor, lowering debts (16:5-7), lending without expecting return (6:34-35), putting oneself at others' disposal both with service and riches by and providing hospitality (8:1-3; 10:38-42), inviting the poor and the social outcasts (14:15-24), offering (21:1-4), wasting for love (7:36-50; 15:22-32), disposing half of one's assets and also making restitutions (19:1-9), and communal ownership (Acts 4:32-37). This sort of variety in the Lukan corpus precludes the formulation of any single norm as to "the" Lukan ethic about property and wealth. Rather Luke commends and even celebrates all the options by inviting the people of God, be they "children" (16:25), "friends" (12:4, 22; 16:9), or "disciples" (14:26; 16:1), to the *oikos* - a rich, full, and joyful environment for the individual and the communal.[38)]

38) Sondra Ely Wheeler, *The New Testament on Wealth and Possessions: A Test of Ethical Method* (Ph.D. Dissertation: Yale University, 1992).

Luke's political economy, therefore, pertains to cultural, ontological, and theological consciousness. All the parables we have observed occur in Luke's unique so-called Travel Narrative. Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, which inspired Chang Il Tam, remains a central section of Luke. Luke describes Jesus as one constantly on the road. At the heart of this journey are the invitations to the people of God to live in the present being shaped and transformed by the dreams and visions, which go beyond simply a concept of "utility," or "disutility," while affirming communion and liberation. As such, reading the Gospel from the present may give us pause, but does Luke's narrator also want to stop us in our journeys? Notice that the parable is still open-ended!

Thus far, my reading of the Gospel has not taken place beyond perspective and contextualization. While the exclusive focus on the text has long obscured the ways in which cultural context and social location inform the subjectivity of interpretation, foregrounding cultural/social location puts readers in a better position to recognize the ways in which their location informs and reforms their understanding of the text. Bringing an interpreter's context to critical understanding also enables interpreters to "see" more clearly when their interpretations contribute to oppression or to justice - that is "ethical dimensions and ethical consequences." [39)]

Hence, from an East Asian global perspective, I have employed the marginality of the colonized as a cultural text that creates new horizons with biblical interpretations. I have since attempted to read the text anew by way of discursive reflections and conscientizations through a struggle between competing visions and ideologies.[40)] In the process, meaning has been

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39) Rhoads (2004): 55.

40) On this point, Segovia states that: "[C]ritical situation envisioned is not necessarily one where 'anything goes,' since readers and interpreters are always positioned and interested and thus always engaged in evaluation and construction: both texts and "texts" are constantly analyzed and engaged, with acceptance or rejection, full or partial, as ever-present and ever-shifting possibilities." *Interpreting Beyond Borders* (2000), 47; see also the discussion of E. S. Fiorenza. She asserts that: "In and through such a critical rhetorical process of interpretation and deliberation religious and biblical studies are constituted as public discourses that are sites of struggle and conscientization. The transformation of biblical studies into such a theo-ethics of interpretation calls for a rhetorical method of analysis that is able to articulate the power and

produced through complex modes of interaction involving both text and reader; the meaning is, for sure, not value-neutral, not autonomous-hermeneutical, and not authoritative-dominant.

The alternative construction of Luke challenges our own convictions and empowers us to confront the economy in our worlds. We cannot be inactive in this endeavor since without our collective self-reflection of and engagement in the political economic institution we will remain its victims. As "the child grew and became strong in spirit" (1:80), the readers need to be deeply connected to, and grow out of the irrepressibly inspired convictions that imagine the world that is not and draw them into radical visions of the beyond. Since the experience as such cannot be transmitted directly - because it is not an idea or doctrine that one can understand - one only experiences it in a true experience of communion with the Others, in which one determines the very character of political economic existence.

It is, then, a relocation into the imaginative landscape of God's *oikos* that allows the readers to "see" and "hear" "salvation" - indeed, "see" (2:30, "My eyes have seen your salvation") and "hear" (4:21, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"). This salvation shall no longer sound like a special language for the saints, since the economy (*oikonomia)* of God is the greatest "realism," with its emphasis on the intuitive appreciation of the Others as a way to sane heavenly belief and practice (11:2, "Your Kingdom come!") - a concrete, real, efficacious, bodily contest and engagement, as we listen:

> Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them (7:22).

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radical democratic visions of well-being inscribed in biblical studies." E. S. Fiorenza, "Changing the Paradigms: The Ethos of Biblical Studies" in *Rhetoric and Ethic,* 55.

Abstract

While economy is a word about a 'household' (*oikos*), it provides a description of a norm - a 'norm' (*nomos*) whereby self and other live in both a just and sustainable way. The representation of self and other, however, has derived little attention from Western discourses, while the overrepresentation of insufficiency has been common. Meanwhile, the process of economy has become a site of great contention, a place where political and cultural gravity becomes condensed and incarnate - and so does the human subjectivity in its interrelated symbolic, political, and economic constructs. The process has not only legitimated scarcity, but also has assigned human subjects, namely the self and other(s), their given place and purpose. If the contemporary construct of globalization in which everyone is so interrelated and interconnected can be a cultural context, does the biblical text also help us to confront the power that entraps human agency and creates scarcity today just as it did in the past? Is there an economics of life, a theology of "self" and "other" in the Bible that can move people today beyond clinging to wealth and possessions? This essay combines insights from the stories of the grassroots *minjung* as well as the story of those in the Bible who share a common life or even those who hold goods in common - that is, a group who lives together and makes a living together.

Key Words

East Asian, minjung, household, living-together, economy

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