

## Some Tasks of Minjung Theology in the Age of Globalization

Won Don Kang (Social Ethics/Hanshin University)<sup>1</sup>

### I. Introduction

The process of globalization has brought tremendous changes in our life and social system. Globalization has put into question the political, social, and cultural projects that had been designed and practiced within the boundary of a national state since our modern time, and we are confronted with how to think and act in the current post-national context. But, this is a very difficult situation for Korean people, who have encountered the division of the country without successful elimination of the past colonial legacy, and thus have not accomplished the task to establish a nation-state yet.

Minjung theology has emerged from reflections on the practice of the Christians who participated in the democratization, the human rights and the minjung movement in the context of divided Korea. While minjung theology had a keen awareness about how the suffering of Korean minjung was connected with the contradictions of the world, it has not transcended its political boundary of a national state. This may explain why it is not easy to discuss some tasks of minjung theology in the age of globalization. In this connection we have to first ask whether the basic concerns of minjung theology that were articulated within the political boundary of a national state are still significant in the context of the so-called post-national era. If we can answer this question positively, then we have to ask how to elaborate and materialize those concerns in the context of globalization.

With such a question in mind I will (1) address the current state of minjung theology, (2) analyze the process of globalization within a larger framework, (3) highlight the subject status of minjung as one of the most significant themes of minjung theology and reassess it within the framework of globalization,

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<sup>1</sup> Won-Don Kang is Associate Professor at the Hanshin University. He received his Dr. theol. at the Ruhr University at Bochum in Germany. In his dissertation he has started from an ecological concept of work and articulated a new basis of Economic Ethics. As Minjung theologian he has made efforts to combine the Marxist analysis of reality and the theological reflection with each other in the struggle of Korean Minjung for democracy, justice and national reunification. He has developed his own theology that is deeply rooted in the liberation praxis of minjung and materialism and named it a 'materialistic theology.'

(4) deal with how to conceptualize the question of nation (in Korean ‘minjok’) in the global era, and finally (5) suggest key agendas that minjung theology should engage in the age of globalization.

## II. Current Trends of Minjung Theology

Minjung theology since the beginning of 2000 can be characterized by three trends. The first trend seeks to reinterpret and develop the theological achievements of the first-generation minjung theologians like Ahn Byung Mu, Suh Nam Dong, Hyun Young Hak, and others. This trend appears to be an advance over the so-called exegetical interpretation of minjung theology produced during 1990s. Notably it has provided new paradigms of interpreting the works of the first-generation minjung theologians. It has appropriated new and cutting edge approaches, namely, materialistic, cognitive-anthropological, postmodern or process theological approaches.<sup>2</sup>

The second trend is characterized by the attempt to reconstruct minjung theology by adopting postmodern perspectives and methods. Whereas such an attempt had already begun since the late 1990s, it is noticeable that postmodern methods have been consistently used not only for the analysis of Korean church and society, but also for the formation of discourses responsive to such analysis.<sup>3</sup> The thoughts derived from Foucault, Deleuze, Lacan, Derrida, Badiou etc. have been adopted and incorporated into minjung theological discourses by the younger group of those who are concerned with minjung theology. Some have stated that they could no longer recognize ‘minjung’ in our reality, nor its significance. They even talk about minjung as “ghost” or as “non-citizen.” This can be considered a new and fresh attempt to break through established epistemological frameworks. Such an attempt, however, seems to miss an important point. That is, it fails to see minjung as the ensemble of contradictory relations, and thus as “little people” and “poor people” who are already here and there as products of the contradictory reality.

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<sup>2</sup> Won Don Kang interprets the theology of Byung Mu Ahn and Nam Dong Suh from a materialistic and cognitive-anthropological perspective. Won Don Kang, “Ethical Thoughts of Byung Mu Ahn,” *The Theological Thought* 139(2007), 227-265; Won Don Kang, “Theology of Nam Dong Suh,” *These are Korean Theologies*, ed. by the Korea Association of Cultural Theology(Seoul : Handeul, 2008), 195-225. – Jin-ho Kim rereads the theology of Byung Mu Ahn especially from a postmodern perspective. Jin-ho Kim, “An Essay on the Hermeneutics of Byung Mu Ahn: Centerd on the ‘Discovery of Innerness’ and the ‘Otherness of Minjung,’” *These are Korean Theologies*, 226-256. - Jin-kwan Kwon and Hiheon Kim attempt to read the minjung theology of the first generation from the viewpoint of process theology. Jin-kwan Kwon, “Minjung Theology from the Perspective of Process Theology of A. N. Whitehead,” *Main Points of Theological Thoughts of Byung Mu Ahn, Vol. 1*, ed. by the Byung Mu Ahn Commemoration Society(Seoul: Korea Theological Study Institute, 2003), 211-231; Hi-heon Kim, *Minjung and Process: MInjung Theology in a Dialogue with Process Theology*(Berlin: Peter Lang, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Such a trend can be well observed in the following book: *Reading Minjung Theology in the Twenty-first Century: Selected Writings by Ahn Byung-Mu and Modern Critical Responses*, ed. by Yung-sik Kim & Jin-ho Kim(Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2013).

It doesn't see into the reality of minjung in their real relations, but abides excessively in psychological and cultural appearance forms of the reality. As a consequence, it tends to revert to psychologization or even culturalism.<sup>4</sup>

The last trend shows an attempt to develop theological-missiological discourses in order to resolve the problems that confront minjung in Korean society today. Although this attempt is rooted in the minjung theology of 1970s and 1980s, it has not been actively operating since the early 1990s, when the minjung movement became weak in Korea. Perhaps it is because minjung theology has failed to or has not wished to integrate moments for the transformation of reality into the process of theological formation that minjung theology has been preoccupied with its highly sophisticated theoretical experimentations or with formulations of discourses separate from the reality of minjung. Recently minjung theologians have begun to re-discover the reality of minjung represented in the following political, geopolitical, economic, social and ecological issues : the increase of precariat (temporary, unstable workers), the dramatically increasing unemployment of young adults, the workers of Ssang-young cars,<sup>5</sup> the Young-san tragedy,<sup>6</sup> the naval base at Gang-jeong,<sup>7</sup> the high crane protest,<sup>8</sup> the Four Rivers disaster<sup>9</sup> and so on. They want to

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<sup>4</sup> In such a discourse the concept "suffering" is rendered to the concept "pain," and the "pain" of minjung is analyzed mainly from a psychological viewpoint. Cf. Jin-ho Kim, "Theological Phenomenology of Pain and Violence: In Search for a Contemporaneity of Minjung Theology," *Main Points of Theological Thoughts of Byung Mu Ahn*, Vol. 2, ed. by the Byung Mu Ahn Commemoration Society (Seoul: Korea Theological Study Institute, 2006), 229-265.

<sup>5</sup> In the Ssang-yong automobile factory at Peongtaek hundreds of workers were fired out through the unconvincing employment conciliation 2009. They have struggled for their reemployment in various ways including demonstrations, campaigns, appeals, legal actions etc., but in vain. In desperate situations 25 workers have lost their lives due to diseases or through suicide.

<sup>6</sup> In the redevelopment area at Yongsan, one center of the metropolitan Seoul, 5 persons were killed in January, 2009, by the violent attacks of the police special force. They were tenants and demonstrated against the forced removal of their rental buildings without appropriate compensations.

<sup>7</sup> Gang-jeong is a small and beautiful town at the seashore of the island Jeju. It has been esteemed to be ecologically worthy of preservation. There the naval base has begun 2011 to be constructed in the framework of military alliance of Korea, Japan and the USA. Regardless of campaigns and demonstrations the construction is on the way.

<sup>8</sup> On the high crane Jin-sook Kim, a member of direction committee of the Pusan branch of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, has protested 309 days in 2011 against the one-sided employment conciliation of the Hanjin Heavy Industries and Construction. In Korea high crane protests have occurred occasionally in the struggle of workers against the dictatorial management.

<sup>9</sup> The regiment under the State President Myung-bak Lee has pushed ahead the project of 4 river canalization and development. The project costs amounted almost 200 Milliard US Dollar and has brought ecological disasters not only in the process of canalization, but also after the completion of the project.

discuss how to solve the problems, and provide some basic guidelines, and suggest concrete resolutions on the policy making level.

There is a long list of current issues with which minjung theology should deal from the perspective of minjung. The condition and process of globalization has accelerated the social polarity along with the spread of poverty, the retrogression of democracy and human rights, and the ecological crisis, which are threatening the life and living of minjung tremendously. Thus, it is urgent that minjung theology should engage in discussion of identifying problems and seeking alternatives. At the same time, it should contribute itself to a liberation movement which promotes the Korean minjung as agents of change in the Korean society today.

### III. The process of globalization.

The contemporary situation under conditions of the speedy globalization is a great challenge for the theologians who are committed to the liberation of minjung. The life and living of minjung has deteriorated and minjung are dispersed and isolated cannily by the logic of domination, suppression and deprivation. Such a situation is a challenge and, at the same time, an opportunity for minjung theology.

#### 1. The formative process of empire or the rise of net-work society?

It is not simple to conceptualize the process of globalization. Some consider globalization as the formative process of empire (Negri and Hardt). Others define it as “the rise of net-work society” (Manuel Castells). On the one hand, it has been argued that the current globalizing process paralyzes the function of nation-state and relegates the latter to the apparatus for capital domination, and on the other hand it has been asserted that nation-state still maintains its intermediating power in the process of globalization. Information technology is the scientific basis of globalization. As such, information technology can serve to expand cultural openness through intercultural encounter and transmutation. However, the globalization process propelled by the development of information technology can also contribute to consolidating fundamentalism as a response to the sense of identity crisis.

A proper conceptualization and analysis has become an important task for humanities and social science. This is an important task for minjung theology as well. Strategic options for the liberation of minjung depend deeply upon how the process of globalization is explained. For example, in the case of understanding globalization as the formative process of empire, the advent of empire would mean that the actual assumption to capital and its external expansion has come to completion, and the empire would not allow any space outside of its reach. This empire is not an imperialist power any longer. In other words, it will not be overthrown by liberation movements like anti-colonization movements. The collapse of

empire will be possible only through implosion.<sup>10</sup> In order to prevent such implosion to occur, the empire will seek to consolidate its external integration through separating and dispersing peoples of the empire. In contrast, the minjung of the empire will look for any implosion that will help them organize alternative movements of solidarity against the imperial separation and dispersal. Such alternative movements will lead to the formation of autonomous communes, that is, a network of emancipatory communes in form of counter-empire.

If the process of globalization is defined as “the rise of network society,” people may recognize increasing importance of nation-state especially in the global networks of production, transportation, and finance.<sup>11</sup> Nation-state may function as an apparatus conducive to the needs of capital. However, in order to return the labor to the public service sector, that is, the labor that the market cannot embrace under the condition of rapidly increasing production, nation-state should proceed to promote income redistribution policies to stimulate public investment and support the welfare of the poor.<sup>12</sup> As least to prevent “tax-increasing society” from recurring, nations will intervene more strongly to maintain macro balance between production and consumption on the level of national economy.

From the above it can be drawn that the two paradigms about the process of globalization present different directions for minjung movement. The first suggests a direction for communes which will be liberated from empire. The second suggests possibilities for compromising class interests within the frame of nation-state. Which paradigm is a better understanding of the contemporary process of globalization? This question is also relevant to address other aspects of the contemporary globalization.

## 2. Capitalism with insane plunder and oppression

In spite of different approaches to globalization it is rather clear that globalization, aided by remarkable enhancement in the development of high technology, has helped capitalism enter a new phase in its history. In order to suggest some examples, we see developments in computer and internet technology,

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*(Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000), 207. Cf. Won Don Kang, “‘Empire’ and Minjung: There is no Place for Empire!” *Justice and Minjung: Theological Reflections in the Age of Global Empire*, ed. by Madang Journal Editors(Seoul: Dong Yeon, 2013), 314-319.

<sup>11</sup> Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture Vol. I: The Rise of the Network Society*(Cambridge, MA; Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1996), 92-97.

<sup>12</sup> Manuel Castells and Pekka Himanen introduce the Finnish model which shows that the welfare state functions well in the framework of an information society. They evaluate the following things: free education, very cheap health services, social protection through income transfers, universality of welfare, public character of the welfare system. Manuel Castells/Pekka Himanen, *The Information Society and the Welfare State: The Finnish Model*(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 81, 85.

spread of new material engineering, DNA fabrication, etc. The development of knowledge economy based upon intellectual property rights seems to demand a new definition of capital and anticipate the priority of “non-material labor” over “material labor” in the future economy.<sup>13</sup> The creation of global network of production and consumption, accumulation and financing seems to demonstrate the omnipotent presence of capitalism.

But the contemporary capitalism hides its insane greed for plunder and oppression behind its face. As revealed in the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s, and the 2008 financial crisis in the world, monetary capital holds the power to destroy the economy of nations and continues to weaken the conventional economic sovereignty of nation-state. Escalating global competition, by means of the rationalization of labor, flexible labor market, and the global network of lean production, suppresses labor and diffuses new types of social poverty in societies all over the world, both in North and South. The new economy based on intellectual property rights proliferates social inequality in information access and management, and institutionalizes the plundering monopoly of DNA resources. Capitalism disconnects solidarity among people, drives them into competition, and reduces each of them to isolated individuals. Although one is separated from other, s/he lives in delusion, thanks to the manipulation of multi-media, as if s/he lives in an interconnected, integrated society. What integrates people is image and image deceives reality. The so-called “society of the spectacle” has arrived.<sup>14</sup>

### 3. Critics of capitalism

Minjung theology is facing the brutal reality derived from the actual assumption to and the expansion of capital. If minjung theology aims to theoretically support the praxis of Christians who want to participate in the history of God, who creates, sustains, and completes the life-community of human beings and nature, minjung theology cannot help but understand clearly the expansion of capital and its logic of accumulation and search for alternatives against the currents.

In this context, it is meaningful for minjung theology to re-examine Marx’s critique of political economy. For Marx’s critique of political economy is a paradigm that offers an analysis of the logic of capitalism and an alternative against it. More scholars tend to think that Marx’s critique of political

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<sup>13</sup> Michel Hardt, “Affektive Arbeit,” *Immaterielle Arbeit und imperial Souveränität: Analysen und Diskussionen zu EMPIRE*, ed. by Thomas Atzert/Jost Mueller (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2004), 179. A “non-material” work appears in form of information, communication, knowledge and affect which play a fundamental role in the production process.

<sup>14</sup> Guy Debord, *Society of the spectacle* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1983), § 63: “...the spectacle is nothing more than an image of happy unification surrounded by desolation and fear at the tranquil center of misery.”

economy no longer explains the contemporary reality, arguing that technology, and especially “knowledge” in the so-called new economy, has replaced the human labor as the source of surplus value. This view points out that the monopoly of technology and knowledge in the capitalistic competition means its capacity for excessive profit. In this view, however, it is overlooked that the monopoly of technology and knowledge can be achieved only through its parasitic relationship with the violent power of nation-state. When capital cannot solve the problem of accumulation through extracting absolute and relative surplus value, capital tends to resort to the regime of intellectual property rights secured by the power of nation-state in order to perpetuate its accumulation.<sup>15</sup>

Beyond the sphere of economics, the logic of capitalism has infiltrated into human body, emotion, desire, and thoughts, and further systematically penetrated into the areas of politics, society, culture, and even religion. Consequently, we realize that it is imperative for us to elaborate a theoretically well-grounded paradigm for the understanding of globalization. As long as the market economy sustains on the global scale, so I believe, Marx’s critique of political economy can still make a contribution to the task for the analysis of reality and the search for alternatives.

#### IV. Revisiting minjung as subjects

Minjung theology has acknowledged “minjung as subjects” and articulated the vision of a community where minjung are able to act as historical agents in their lives. In such a community minjung are to participate in making decisions about economic, political, and cultural issues of life and work to promote justice and peace in the fullness of life.

With regards to “minjung as subjects,” three paradigms have been presented till now. The first paradigm concerns with the socio-biography of minjung. This paradigm methodologically draws from an ethnographical approach to minjung. The significance of this paradigm lies in that during the period when the minjung was conceived only as the object of domination, deprivation, and marginalization it asserted minjung as historical subjects against prejudicial and biased thoughts among the intellectuals.<sup>16</sup>

The second paradigm views minjung from the perspective of class. Minjung is conceptualized as a sort of class coalition and thus as historical agents to lead revolutionary movements for people’s democracy. This paradigm helped the Korean Christians, who were committed to the liberation of

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<sup>15</sup> Nam-hoon Kang, *Political Economy of Information Revolution*(Seoul: Munhwakwahaksa, 2002), 110f.

<sup>16</sup> Yong-bock Kim used socio-biographical methods to gain deep insights to the subject status of minjung. For his methodological conception see Yong-bock Kim, “The Socio-biography of Minjung and Theology,” *Minjung and Korean Theology*(Seoul: Korea Theological Study Institute, 1982), 372, 377.

minjung, to reconsider the importance of class and seek methodological approaches to connect social scientific analysis of reality to theological reflections.<sup>17</sup>

The third paradigm emphasizes the importance of organizing networks of civil society, while acknowledging the decentered-ness and diffusiveness of civil and social movements. It underscores that diverse movements such as environmental, feminist, cultural, political, and ecumenical movement should undertake their own tasks and at the same time unite together in the networks.<sup>18</sup>

Each of three paradigms has shown its strengths and weaknesses. As for the first paradigm (the ethnographical approach), theologians have sought to see into the reality of minjung and describe the reality of minjung as it was. Yet it is questionable whether this paradigm is an appropriate approach to understand the reality of minjung. If minjung should stand for the ensemble of social relations, an ethnographical analysis does not seem to replace the social scientific analysis of reality.

Second, treating minjung as a class has shown the strength that it provides social scientific analyses of the reality of minjung. However, it was reluctant to recognize the relative autonomy of other movements involved in the issues of gender, culture, and religion. Consequently, it designates these movements as an integral part of the whole minjung movement.

Third, the network movement based on decentered-ness and dispersed-ness concedes the multiplicity of conflict and opposition in human realities and underscores the importance of horizontal solidarity among diverse movements. This perspective is valuable. However, it fails to see how diverse social contradictions are rearranged through intermediation with other social contradictions.

Here, I wish to suggest an alternative paradigm a little different from the paradigms above, that is, a paradigm of praxis which will lead to the realization of the subject status of minjung in the course of globalization. Minjung liberation movement in the age of globalization should take a form of networks with diverse movements. Yet, such networks should be shaped on the basis of a proper understanding of the nature of contradictions between labor and capital in the process of globalization, and seek to solve

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<sup>17</sup> In my book *A Materialistic Theology: In Search for a Theology which stands firmly on Liberation Praxis and Materialism*(Seoul: Hanul, 1992) I have represented such a paradigm and methods.

<sup>18</sup> Jin-ho Kim, "What is Minjung Theology?" *Times and Minjung Theology* 1(1994), 30. In the beginning of 1990s he asserted that the age of struggles for democracy and liberation of labor was over and that network movements have risen in the Korean society. - Jin-kwan Kwon, *Jesus as Symbol of Minjung, Minjung as Symbol of Jesus*(Seoul: Dong Yeon, 2009), 343. Here he pays attention to the networking and solidarity of various agents and initiatives in social movements. Church and non-church organizations like YMCA, YWCA, KSCF, EYC etc. should play roles as connecting links in social movements.



those contradictions with a blueprint for the construction of alternative economic, political, and cultural forms. While it is empty to separate the issues of gender, race, and generation from the issue of class, it is blind to reduce such cultural issues to class issue. Although the issues of minjung will be formulated in diverse ways on the levels of economics, politics, and culture, one obvious thing is that minjung cannot stand up and unite together as the subjects of the history, as long as they remain the mere objects for capital and its expansion.

## V. Nation and globalization

In the age of information technology and globalization it is difficult to pose the question of nation as a topic for meaningful discussion. With the rapid growth of information technology the phenomenon of intercultural encounter and fusion prevails, and the majority of population is preoccupied with the culture of the global multi-media and the culture of consumption. In this global era it may look quixotic to discuss about something “Korean.” In view of the reality that global financial capitals and transnational corporations diminish the sovereignty of nation state and its function of mediation in the social polarity, what can be gained by foregrounding the notion and topic of nation (in Korean ‘Minjok’)?

### 1. New horizon of discourse on nation

It is true that discourse on nation is dwindling under the conditions of globalization, but we the Koreans have the task to liquidate the colonial legacy and reunify the divided nation, so that we are compelled to undertake the question of nation and carry out the modern task of nation and nation-state building. Further, given the geopolitical situation of potential and actual contradictions between the United States as the oceanic power and China as the continental power, it would be difficult to deal with the issue of peace if the question of nation and nation state would be sidelined in East Asia. Nowadays a number of areas are exposed to conflict and intervention by the super powers, those are areas from the Kamchakta peninsula through the Dokdo, the Ieo, the Senkaku islands to the islands of the South China Sea.

To speak strictly, the question of nation cannot be approached in the framework of the modern concept of nation state. If we presumed nation as a given substance and accepted the conventional notion that national state might be a political configuration of nation, we would not come to an appropriate understanding of nation, nor solutions to the problems related to nation.

With regards to discourse on nation, the following two perspectives deserve particular attention. First, it is waning to see nation as substance. Although the substantializing approach promoted the conviction that the notions like “racial homogeneity” and “white-clad race” for long facilitated to sustain the particularity of Korean’s national identity, and regard nation as a trans-historical entity, some have

refuted that such an entity never existed from the very beginning.<sup>19</sup> A nation emerged, it is argued, only as a phenomenon when peoples began to demarcate boundaries and differences among them. But it did not exist as a real substance.<sup>20</sup>

The second perspective is that nation is a modern concept, derived from the process of nation and nation state building. It has been argued that nationalism invented nation where no nation existed,<sup>21</sup> that diverse elements were fabricated and invented for creating a national identity in the process of nation building,<sup>22</sup> and that nation is “imagined as a community.”<sup>23</sup> All these arguments emphasize that the nation concept is nothing but a modern product in particular historical contexts. Here one thing must be stressed: Whereas the concept of nation in the modern sense was a necessary conceptual apparatus for the historical task of building a nation-state, the very concept rendered other issues such as class, gender, and race constrained to the framework of nation-state. Korea is a case in point, when she was colonized by the foreign power.

## 2. The significance of the nation question in Korea

Korea, with her people and land, was divided into North and South by the force of foreign powers, and consequently the two Koreas have different governing systems along with a long history of war, antagonism, and mutual denial. This historical fact itself speaks for the importance of nation for us. It is our right to build a nation-state over the Korean peninsula as a whole. It is simply outrageous for any foreign powers to suppress or deny such an indelible right.

The Korean nation as a whole, in its divided situation, had to pay enormous sacrifice and burden. Apart from the human and material loss that we suffered from the Korean War, we are now witnessing unprecedentedly escalating antagonism between North and South Korea. Such a military and political antagonism has made the Korean peninsula a geopolitical place over which the interests of China and

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<sup>19</sup> Ji-hyun Lim, *Nationalism betrays: Beyond Nationalism Discourse as Myths and Emptiness*(Seoul: Sonamu, 2005), 55.

<sup>20</sup> Gojakai Doshiaki, *Nation doesn't exist*, tr. by Kwang-suk Bang in Korean(Seoul: Ppuriwalpari, 2003), 32.

<sup>21</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*(Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 55: “it is nationalism that engenders nations, and not the other way round.”

<sup>22</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and nationalism since 1780*, tr. by Myung-se Kang in Korean(New York : Cambridge University Press, 1990), 26.

<sup>23</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*(London : Verso, 1991), 7.

Russia as continental powers clash with those of the United States and Japan as oceanic powers. This situation persisted during the Cold War era and remains so even now after its end. Since the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has developed nuclear weapons for the sake of her national security against the USA, the Korean peninsula today has become one of the most dangerous regions in the world. Further, since it is one of the U.S. military and political strategies to use the Korean peninsula as a political leverage to contain China, the future of our nation and its prosperity is getting darker, due to its divided state.

Therefore, the future of our nation is incumbent on how to overcome its division and accomplish reunification. Recently more people assume that the expense for reunification will amount to astronomical figures. Thus they propose that we keep our nation divided, revitalize exchanges between South and North Korea, and seek to establish a peace regime. But I think that such an argument misunderstands the military and political significance that the division of the Korean peninsula has had in the region of East Asia. In the meanwhile we have seen how the ultra-conservative groups in Korea improvised a reunification-talk by declaring that "reunification is to hit jackpot."<sup>24</sup> But we need to be wary of it, because it is, as I mentioned above, a ruse to camouflage reunification through absorption according to the logic of capital. In the midst of such muddling arguments about peace and reunification, we have to deal with seriously the most desirable measures and procedures through which to integrate the two long-separated regimes. Further, keeping in mind power relations between the authorities and the surrounding powers concerned in the division of nation and land in Korea, we should realize that cooperation and mutual assistance between South and North Korea toward peace and reunification will promote the possibility of agreement among the surrounding powers about the reunification of Korea. If South and North Korea launch a peace regime through building mutual trust, providing bilateral assurance of security, and institutionalizing personal and material exchanges, and the two regimes guarantee people's sovereign rights and move toward the construction of a social, egalitarian, and multi-cultural state, our nation will realize exemplarily the modern task to build a nation-state. If the reunified nation can become a peace nation and the necessary institutional apparatuses are provided, then it will be difficult for the surrounding powers to justify their opposition to reunification of Korea.<sup>25</sup>

I wish that this process will go along with the process which will help the United States and the DPRK to end their hostile relationships toward each other through concluding a peace treaty in place of

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<sup>24</sup> In the New Year press conference in January, 6, 2014, the state president Geun-hye Park made such a mention.

<sup>25</sup> Yung-myung Kim, *Globalization and Nationalism in our Eyes*(Seoul: Orum, 2004), 150.

the Armistice Agreement, normalize their international relationship, and finally work together for the project of the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

## VI. Agendas for an Alternative World

I expect that minjung theologians develop visions for liberating suffering peoples under the conditions of globalization. In this respect I would like to suggest four agendas as follow.

### 1. Economic Democracy

It is not easy to discuss an economic democracy in Korea in which the '1987 regime' shook. Nowadays the democratic and republican constitutional order has been fundamentally challenged and the rule of law has turned into the effective means of control and oppression. Insofar as it is clear that an economic democracy can be realized on the ground of procedural democracy and the rule of law, it is also evident that struggles for keeping the procedural democracy and a proper rule of law should be organized.

Economic democracy is a program to overcome problems of the market economy in which labor is assumed to capital and systematically alienated. It is the historical experiment to put labor and capital into an institutionalized balance of power under the conditions under which the workers' three major rights are guaranteed by the Constitution, respected in the civil society and practiced in reality.

In order to realize economic democracy in the age of globalization it is necessary to distinguish four levels of economic activity and specific tasks on each level. Traditionally discourses on economic democracy have focused on the national economy level, the industry relation level, and the enterprise level.<sup>26</sup> But in the context of financial globalization any discussion on the economic democracy would make no sense if the dimension of global economy is ignored.

I would like to suggest some agendas on each level in the following:

- On the global economy level people speak of the necessity to create the global governance which can accomplish the task to rule the finance capital according to democratic principles.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> For the classical concept of economic democracy cf. Fritz Naphtali, *Wirtschaftsdemokratie : Ihr Wesen, Weg und Ziel*, hg. u. eingel. v. R. F. Kuda, 4., mit einer neuen Einf. versehene Aufl. (Köln [u.a.] : Europäische Verl.-Anst., 1977), 11ff. – For recent discussions on economic democracy cf. Ulla Plener, “Für umfassende Demokratie in Wirtschaft und Staat als Strategie der Linken im 21. Jahrhundert: Überlegungen, Thesen, Fragen,” *Demokratisierung von Wirtschaft und Staat: Studien zum Verhältnis von Ökonomie, Staat und Demokratie vom 19. Jahrhundert bis heute*, ed. by Axel Weipert (Berlin: NORA, 2014), 9-36.

<sup>27</sup> Ulrich Duchrow, *Alternativen zur kapitalistischen Weltwirtschaft : Biblische Erinnerung und politische Ansätze zur Überwindung einer lebensbedrohenden Ökonomie* (Gütersloh : Gütersloher Verl.-Haus, 1994), 276ff.;

- On the national economy level the economic democracy can be implemented through the control and supervision of the financial capital market, institutionalized social agreements, macroeconomic planning and income distribution, socialized basic industries, social and ecological oriented labor market policies, expanded social services, the introduction of basic income, and so forth.
- On the industrial relations level the economic democracy can be reinforced only if the industry-level trade union is institutionalized.
- On the enterprise level it is crucial to dismantle the 'chaebol' system (a Korean form of hierarchal and expanded combination of enterprises) and to innovate the corporate governance structure, that is, to replace the dictatorship of the "chaebol president" to a co-determination system based on stakeholder's right to participation. In the enterprise the labor and the capital are coerced to maintain a co-operation in the interest struggle. Therefore the worker's right and the right of managers under the mandate of stockholders should be respected mutually. Rather it is more reasonable to start from the primacy of the labor over the capital, if the economic democracy should be put into practice under conditions of hard competition in the market economy.

Even if the conception of the economic democracy has been grasped on four levels of economic activity, so much research is needed for designing and institutionalizing the economic democracy in each level. Furthermore, I would pay attention to that social and civil forces must struggle together in a strong solidarity for implementing economic democracy in Korea. It takes a lot of thought and research to make clear how civil and social movements on the basis of solidarity can be unfolded. If Korean Christians should participate in such civil and social movements, minjung theologians will be called to present theological foundations and designs of Korean Christian's initiatives for economic democracy.

## 2. Welfare

The developmentalist welfare regime which had been designed in the decades of economic development has been changed to the neo-liberal workfare regime since the 'civilian government' under the state president Yong Sam Kim, especially under the economic trusteeship of IMF since the end of 1997. The workfare regime has produced a lot of problems because it has denied the proper right of citizens to

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Axel Troost, "Den Bankensektor neu ordnen – und mit der Vergesellschaftung beginnen," *Wege zum Sozialismus im 21. Jahrhundert : Alternativen – Entwicklungspfade – Utopien*, hg. von Michael Brie u. a. (Hamburg : VSA, 2011), 82f.

welfare and adhered to the conviction that the social welfare right should be rewards to achievements of labor. But if the state should be responsible for realizing the citizen's proper right to welfare, people demand the state that the selective, partial and minimum welfare should give the way to a universal, optimal and full welfare. It is well known that the countries in which the 'social state' had been shaped have introduced at the times of economical disadvantages the welfare system, namely, accident insurance, health insurance, pensions, unemployment benefits. The Korean economy is capable enough to expand welfare. The expansion of welfare can give the chance to promote an integral and normal development of economy based on the macro balance of production and consumption. It can contribute also to solving the problem of excessive accumulation of capital and overcoming the excessive dependence on foreign markets.

Social discourses on the introduction of the universal social welfare have been provoked through the controversies over the introduction of free meals for students at the stage of compulsory education since 2011. After the free meal had been introduced, the universal welfare appeared in form of gratuitous childcare. Today people have begun to discuss the possibility to introduce a free education and a free health service. Once the universal social welfare has been increasingly realized in spheres of life, the demand on the optimal welfare will certainly not be a utopian dream, and the demand on the full welfare will become stronger.

From such social discourses on an alternative welfare regime people can draw consequences that a 'basic income' should be introduced as ground for achieving the universal, optimal and full social welfare.<sup>28</sup> As 'basic income' people speak of the payment delivered to the human beings with the citizenship by a state or local government regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, labor income, property, etc. The amount of the 'basic income' could be determined on the basis of social agreements under the consideration of an appropriate rate of the economic growth, but it must cover ethical minimum requirements of human beings in society.

Christians are called to act in responsibility for shaping more welfare society in which the 'least of people' can meet their 'basic needs.' Minjung theologians regard it as their task to support the right of

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<sup>28</sup> For the concept of basic income cf. Yannik Vanderborgt/Philippe Van Parijs, *Ein Grundeinkommen fuer alle? Geschichte und Zukunft eines radikalen Vorschlags: Mit einem Nachwort von Claus Offe* (Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 2005), 37.

human beings to welfare theologically and present diaconal-theological framework for Christian social services.<sup>29</sup>

### 3. Global Citizenship

In the world in which the global networks of production and consumption, financing and distribution are in operation, a 'nomadic' immigration of laborers is required in reaction to the free movement of capital. If not so, the laborers who are tied to the local labor market can be victimized to the attacking capital which knows no barrier to its free movement all over the world. But if the free movement of labor is guaranteed, the mechanism of an optimal distribution of capital on the global level could be provided at a faster speed. The spokesmen of the capital know exactly that the global distribution of capital will be safer than the concentration of immigrant laborers on the boom areas. Therefore it is reasonable that a global 'Marshall Plan' should be newly designed and brought to practice.

If the people who stopped a 'nomadic' life could be granted the citizenship in the place where they settled, and if they could acquire a "basic income" on the basis of their citizenship, the feast of the kingdom of God would take place on the spot. On the way to the Kingdom of God minjung theologians advocate the global citizenship of all human beings<sup>30</sup> and give reasonable proposals for implementing it.

### 4. Reform of Property Order

The right to property has been regarded as sacred and inviolable in the "Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen" after French Revolution. Since it has been settled in the Napoleon Constitution, the right to property has been the default system of the modern bourgeois state. In almost all the countries in which the bourgeois Constitution has been established, the principle is declared that the property right should be protected. On the basis of the constitutional principle all the registrations that could violate the essence of the property right must be denied and rigidly restrained.

In the capitalist system the material basis of the bourgeois domination is the private ownership of the means of production.<sup>31</sup> It is also recognized as the sacred and inviolable right in the bourgeois society. Strictly speaking, however, it must be noted that the sacredness and inviolability of the property right was

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<sup>29</sup> Won Don Kang, "Evaluating the Concept of Basic Income from the Perspective of Christian Ethics," *The Theological Thoughts* 150(2010), 177-215.

<sup>30</sup> I borrow the concept of global citizenship from Hardt/Negri, *Empire*, 396ff.

<sup>31</sup> Hans Georg Schweppenhaeuser, *Macht des Eigentums: Auf dem Weg in eine neue soziale Zukunft*(Stuttgart: Radius-Verl., 1970), 18ff.

declared as the material guarantee for protecting the freedom of person from interferences of state. The personal right to property was nothing but the integral part of the rights of freedom.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, people must examine thoroughly if a profit oriented organization or a juristically recognized person according to the commercial law can be regarded as the agent of the right to property as the right of freedom.

In the modern society there are various contexts in which problems of the property right must be reviewed differently and the policy for property order must be appropriately designed. In order to give some examples:

- Regarding the property order reform it is one of the issues what is the proper ownership of the common resources. Such common resources as rivers, mountains, lakes, forests etc. belong to the state, but it has destroyed them systematically according to the logics of growth and development. Therefore people have discussed if the local community should assume the responsibility to protect the common goods and avoid the well-known 'tragedy of the commons.'<sup>33</sup>
- People are also conscious of the tragedy of the 'anti-communal goods' which appear in form of 'gridlock.'<sup>34</sup> The gridlock is a technical term for inescapable results from the excessive segmentation and distribution of intellectual property rights and patents. In the gridlock constellation it is almost impossible to develop new designs for proper techniques and products. In order to overcome the gridlock the prevalent order of intellectual property right must be profoundly reformed.
- The intellectual property system which is parasitic on state violence is the source of market domination and excess profits in the capitalist system today. Such a parasitic system requires a fundamental review.

Here I would concentrate myself only on one point. If it is acceptable that the property right is a historical and cultural institution which has been constantly reshaped on the basis of social agreements or through social struggles, it is reasonable that the ownership of the means of production must be regulated

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<sup>32</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden, Bd. 7: Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*(Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), § 42. In the tradition of the modern property thoughts Hegel formulated the internal relationship between property and freedom of person very clearly.

<sup>33</sup> G. Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons: The population problem has no technical solution; it requires a fundamental extension in morality," *Science* 162(1968), 1244.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. M. Heller, *The Gridlock Economy : how too much ownership wrecks markets, stops innovation, and costs lives*(2008), tr. by Mi-na Yun in Korean(Seoul: Ungjin, 2009), 44: "the tragedy of anti-commons."



in consideration of the laborer's social rights and their interests. As is put out above, the property right exercised by the profit-oriented organization or the juristically recognized person is in its essence different from the property right of the natural person. It is evident that capital has been products of labor. Therefore it must be a common sense that various appearance forms of capital should serve as instruments of working people and contribute to promoting the commonwealth. But the reality is quite the contrary. Labor is assumed to capital. People suffer from the subjugation to capital. People see in it the very core of the modern barbarism. In order to overcome such a barbarism people must struggle against the assumption of labor to capital and the prevailing property system. For the latter forms the ground for the former. If the property order could be reformed, then people could access freely to various appearance forms of capital and bring them under their democratic control.<sup>35</sup>

I believe that it is one of the great tasks of minjung theologians to present theological arguments for property order reform and policy nowadays.

## VI. Conclusion

I am greatly impressed by what minjung theologians have accomplished over the last decade. Remarkably, more minjung theologians had their works published in English and this helped the recent work of minjung theology introduced to and studied by scholars in the world. I think that minjung theology has entered a new phase for further progress and promise. An immediate and appropriate question arises: Could there be any better time than today for minjung theologians to make their voices heard and do something for the church and society? In our daily life we experience that many people today live like "zombies." Thus, not surprisingly, we ask whether it is really appropriate to call them "the subjects of history," that is, historical agents for social transformation and change. Our answer is often negative. It appears that such people are isolated from one another, scattered, and deceived by spectacles. It seems that they are not capable to work together, nor dream an alternative society, and nor take collective actions for change. But they will change the course of history, so I believe, as the subjects of history.

I hope that minjung theologians, in order to help transform the Korean church and society, provide well-grounded theological arguments and develop effective strategies to communicate with lay believers in the church and ordinary people in society.

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Ulrich Duchrow/Franz J. Hinkelammert, *Property for people, not for profit : Alternatives to the Global Tyranny of Capital*(London : Zed, 2004), 181.

## <Abstract>

In the article I ask whether the basic concerns of minjung theology that were articulated within the political boundary of a national state are still significant in the age of globalization. If we can answer this question positively, then we have to ask how to elaborate and materialize those concerns in post-national constellations.

With such a question in mind, first, I explain three current trends of minjung theology, those are, 1) critical and creative succession to the achievements of the first-generation minjung theologians, 2) post-modern reconstruction of minjung theology, and 3) theological-missiological discourse on the reality of minjung and their liberation praxis.

Second, I characterize the process of globalization as spread of capitalism with insane plunder and oppression and suggest that minjung theology in search for an alternative world should integrate Marx's critique of political economy into theological reflection again.

Third, I highlight the subject status of minjung as one of the most significant themes of minjung theology. I distinguish three paradigms for the subject status of minjung from one another, namely, socio-biographical paradigm, class struggle paradigm, and network movement paradigm. In the age of globalization I accept that social movements must shape networks, but accentuate that it is empty to separate the issues of gender, race, and generation from class issue, while it is blind to reduce such cultural issues to the issue of class.

Fourth, I deal with how to conceptualize the question of nation (in Korean 'minjok') in the age of globalization. I pay attention to the danger to consider nation as substance and suggest that minjung theology should make an open approach to the question of nation. Only with such a premise minjung theology can contribute to shaping a peace nation on the way to national reunification.

Fifth and finally I suggest key agendas that minjung theology should engage in the age of globalization: economic democracy, welfare, global citizenship and property order reform..

## <Key Words>

capitalism, economic democracy, global citizenship, globalization, minjung, nation, national state, property, reunification, welfare.