

A Theology from our Own Resources: toward an Asian Story Theology

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I. Introduction

As of November, 2016 it has been two and half years since a tragic accident, the sinking of Sewol ferry that claimed 304 lives whose majority were high school students, took place. The accident itself and the process of dealing with this accident and its casualties show the real face of our society and the state. The marine authorities did not make any sincere effort to rescue the victims. The captain and his crew were the first to be rescued leaving those young people behind in the sinking ship. Rescue efforts were scarcely made, while the whole populace was watching the ferry sinking on TV. There was no State to govern the situation. No one took responsibility for that incident. After this incident, ordinary people's distrust of the public authorities was heightened and public morale lowered. The president of South Korea was blamed for not doing enough as the head of the state. (Nobody knew president's whereabouts during the crucial seven hours at the beginning!) Up until now, any official report has not been published; the special commission for investigation on the incident is still not functioning properly, because of, the victim families believe, the intentional negligence of the state and the ruling party. People are suspicious whether the state intends to hide crucial facts and evidence. The accident awakens people to see the nature of the state and its power with suspicious eyes.

The most frustrating thing for people and victim families is that communication and dialogue are not possible with the authorities who hold the key to investigating the problem. The victims' families demanded the authorities investigate the matter thoroughly and to form an independent investigation commission. Although the commission was formed, some crucial positions in the commission were appointed by the government, which hinders the independence of the commission. Furthermore, the government and its party have not been cooperative with the investigation commission. The disaster of the Sewol ferry has brought into a bright light the corrupt links that have been strengthened for many decades, especially during the rule of neo-liberal and conservative governments. The present government wanted to cover up the corrupt links for fear of public

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criticisms and loss of power. In order to cover up the structural contradictions, the government isolates the victim families and their sympathizers, and drives them out of the society. But their protesting voices are never diminished. Tens of thousands of people gathered in downtown Seoul and other cities to demand justice for the tragic accident. The exclusion of the victims and their families and sympathizers is the policy of the corrupt and neo-liberal government. An unjust society maintains a system where victims and the weak are excluded. Such exclusive and discriminatory systems have survived throughout the long history in Asia and in Korea.

In this essay, I will attempt at doing a story theology by selecting some stories. I will eventually interpret those stories from theological viewpoints. I will do this as part of my final goal to construct an Asian story theology. Before I begin to go to the main body of the essay, I will try to explicate my understanding of Asia.

II. What is Asia for an Asian Theologian?

There can be various different understandings of Asia depending on different theologians in different contexts. Asia is a continent of different cultures, traditions, and religions. Because we live in Asia, we do not recognize easily what Asia means. When we go to the West, we find Asia is singular and different in many ways. Asia is very dynamic continent. Asian economy has been growing fast since the late 20th century.

China and India have grown to global economic powers along with Japan. Korea, a relatively small country, is divided and still in the state of conflict against each other. In the Korean peninsula the continental power of China and Russia and the oceanic power of the U.S. and Japan are confronting each other. The collisions of the two big powers on the soil of the Korean peninsula have taken place since the late 19th century when the imperialist expansionism started to affect Korea and Asia. Looking back to the past history of Korea, we can simply conclude that the destiny of Korea including its prospect of peace and reunification has been affected by the conflicts of two big imperialist powers, especially by the oceanic powers. Korea cannot achieve its own stability and peace without the stability and peace of neighboring countries in Asia. This would not apply only to Korea, but to other nations in Asia.

There are some undesirable pictures of Asia. Two typical examples of it: Asia may be imagined as a continent with super powers such as Japan or China at its center and with the ideal of Great Common Wealth of Asia. The Japanese ideal of the Great Common Wealth ended up with war and colonization of other nations such as Korea, Taiwan, parts of China and others. Asia under the Chinese

superiority would end up with suppression of other nations with the loss of the identity and sovereignty of many different ethnicities and nations. I imagine an Asia of different and colorful traditions and cultures, and of different ethnicities and nations that enjoy equality and mutual respect. Asian population grows rapidly and Asia will become a continent that will house two thirds of the whole population on earth in near future. Traditions and cultures in Asia are rich: major religions started in Asia. Asia walked different path than Europe and North America. Asia is a former colony, which it makes Asia different from the West. The West colonized Asian nations and drew a lot of resources from Asia, by which the West became empires and is now economically developed and wealthy. But Asia is rich in culture and tradition that enlightens the whole humanity. Asian theology is a theology that takes its roots deep in the soil of the tradition and culture of suffering Asian minjung, especially in their stories. Asian minjung stories treasure hope, utopian vision, and wisdom of life. Asian theology seeks to find God's action for love and salvation in the stories of Asian people especially those of lower classes, castes, and ethnic groups (minjung).

III. Why stories?

Stories have many positive functions. They provide redemptions to the defeat, new alternative lives, and they can give the meanings of life in uncertainty. They are like a mirror on which to reflect ourselves and our life. They can disclose the corrupt aspects of the society and provide deep wisdoms and insights that help us go over the present contradictions. They are media by which to account for actions and events. Without narratives and stories, action and events disappear quickly, and then there are no memories for a new future utopia. Stories and narrative catch action and events and make them permanent, so that we draw upon them for new insights and visions. Gospels are full of narratives and stories. Minjung theologians favored stories. Jesus was a story teller. St. Paul's letters are not narratives, but they have a high narrativity. Stories are media and means to communicate revelatory events. Stories and narratives are far from speculative abstractions.

Stories are given to us, and in this sense they surround us. We are born into our particular Asian stories and historical events, are raised, and die in them. Stories and events are already with us. New stories and events were, are and will be created. Stories are created in connection with historical events. Stories are history-bound. A historical event very often brings about different versions. For example, the incident of the Sewol ferry created different versions of the story. The government version tells that it is an incidental accident like natural disaster; e.g., the ferry sinking was caused by the swift currents at some points of time and

place at sea. But the other version tells that it is caused due to the negligence and inefficiency of the authorities to rescue those on board, and that the fundamental cause for it was the corrupt structure the present powers have built up. Between these versions and different stories, we theologians have to discern truthful one.²⁾

All stories, fictional or non-fictional, are historical; they have effects on history and society. A certain historical and social context creates its particular stories and fictions. For example, the practice of the discrimination against the low-class born in the context of the late 17th century of the Chosun Dynasty in Korea led to the creation of a story of Hong Gildong, a revolutionary who had been discriminated against for he was an illegitimate child of the concubine of a high class father. The author of *The Story of Hong Gildong* as a novel was Huh Kyoon of the 17th century Korea. Huh Kyoon himself was a revolutionary and executed for his activities for a radical reformation of the state.

Stories are not limited to folk tales, myths, and narratives. All artworks including paintings, theatrical performances, dances, and monuments contain in themselves stories. Artworks have stories in themselves and the latter tell the meanings and messages of the former. For example when we look at a painting by an artist (for example, Vincent Van Gogh), it is hard to understand the meaning of the work, that is, what the work tries to tell us. But when we hear his/her life-story, it will help us understand what the artist tries to tell by his/her work. An artwork tells us a story by its artistic expressions. Asian theologians have long explored into Asian stories to find salvific wisdom and utopian vision in them. It is very unfortunate that such efforts are no longer made these days. It seems that Asian theology is lost and astray. If there is a story theology in Asia, it is just a story telling theology. I had such an impression when I read C. S. Song's recent work, *In the Beginning Were Stories, Not Texts: Story Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011). Song tells story after story in this book, which has little space for social and political understanding of the meanings of our situation.

Of course, story is a fascinating and efficient tool by which theologians approach to the real life of people. But the problem is that story is not the only tool for theology, and theologians must use story in such a way that adopting stories does not discourage the use of other theological tools such as social analysis and hermeneutics. Rather, the use of story should go well together with social analysis and theological-Biblical hermeneutics. We have inherited numerous stories from Christian traditions and also from Asian traditions. Stories continue to

2) A fascinating study of the different versions of story and of how to find the truthful one for them was done by Karen Lebacqz, "A Tale of Truth: Story Theology and Ethical Analysis" *Doing Theology with Asian Resources* (Auckland, New Zealand: PTCA, 1993) 83-100. See also Jin Kwan Kwon, "Narrative and Minjung Theology," *Madang, International Journal of Contextual Theology in East Asia* (Seoul: Sungkonghoe University Press) Vol 23, June, 2015: 10-12.

be created and told, because events always happen in our history and are told in the form of story. Even if collective and individual events are told by stories, stories are not always historical, but also fictional. Historical events bring about stories and are told by stories. Folktales are fictional and non-historical, but they have historical effects on hearers. We are born into such historical and fictional stories. Stories create a world we live in. Further, true stories have truth and salvific effect on our lives. Theologians have the task to discern true stories from different stories and different versions of stories.

In this essay, I will tell the story of Hong Gildong, who was a righteous bandit, and who sought to build an egalitarian world. I would like to read it in the context of the Sewol ferry incident. Many theologians and other scholars in Korea consider this tragic incident to be a historical event that divides modern Korean history into the one before it and the other after it. It becomes a crucial event-incident in modern Korea. Korea has seen democratization and industrialization during the last several decades, which has helped Koreans to have a confident self-image. But such a self-image turned out illusionary and the real face of the whole society and nation turned out to be very ugly. Korea has achieved industrialization and development in many aspects such as technologies at such a high speed, but its system and its morale was so inefficient, corrupt, and inactive, that many indexes that tell the quality of life are worst among developed nations. And because of such an inefficient system of Korea and its structure in coping with an incident like the accident of the Sewol ferry, it ended up rescuing only a few crew members, leaving the rest drowned in the sinking boat. What is the root cause of the tragedy? The mother of a junior high school girl, who was on the ferry and drowned, testifies in her short essay that the root cause of all problems including the ferry tragedy is neo-liberalism that puts money-making first before respecting life. She criticizes our whole system for being a system that puts money-making (the mammon) first before any other, including life.³⁾

People began to demand the reform and correction of corrupt neo-liberalism in the state and the society. For example, the inspection and checking system for the shipping and sea traffic was corrupt, and an unchecked overloaded ferry was always at risk of a ship wreck. But the government betrayed the demand and tried to trivialize the incident as a one of ordinary sea traffic accidents. Then the government along with ruling party and major mass media excluded and discriminated the people who demanded truth and justice. Communicative relationship between the authorities, including the president, and those people was not established, or had already been broken. Once discrimination and exclusion was used to oppress the weak sectors of the society, communicative

3) Park Eunhee, "In Spite of Pain by a Piercing Sword, Let me be like Jesus," an unpublished paper.

relationships in the society were diminished.

IV. The Story of Hong Gildong

There are several viewpoints on the general characteristics of The Story of Hong Gildong. One is a view that The Story of Hong Gildong is an adventure and entertainment story of a heroic person, who is “an extraordinary hero who achieves great things despite the initial disadvantage of his birth.”⁴⁾ Another view is that the novel is a proto-socialist one, where an archaic type of socialism is advocated. These two views seem not adequate. The third and the most acceptable view is that this novel tells a story that reflects people’s aspiration for a more just and equal society.

The Story of Hong Gildong was written in 1600 ca. by Huh Kyoon, a poet and statesman in the feudal Chosun. It was first composed in Hangeul, the Korean alphabet, which was invented by King Sejong in the 15th century. Hangeul was so easy to learn that it was used by women and other lower class people. During the Chosun dynasty period, the upper class noblemen (yangban) used Chinese letters for their literary expressions. Hangeul was minjung language. In this way, Hangeul contributed to developing minjung arts, culture, and traditions.

Hong Gildong, the hero of the story, was an illegitimate and secondary son from a concubine of the State Minister Hong, and so discriminated against that he was not allowed to address his father as Father and his older brother as Brother. It is interesting that the only story that matches the popularity of The Story of Hong Gildong was The Story of Chunhyang a love story of Chunhyang and a young nobleman. Chunhyang, the protagonist of the latter, was an illegitimate daughter of the concubine of a nobleman. Both stories were typical minjung stories, which contributed to the enrichment of minjung culture and tradition.

The narrative of The Story of Hong Gildong goes as the following. Hong Gildong was a secondary, illegitimate son, but was bright and talented. He escaped from the attempt of an assassin employed by another concubine of the same nobleman, who thought Hong Gildong’s extraordinary ability would make him a rebel against the state. He left home and made a journey to a strange land where many bandits gathered together. Hong Gildong walked to the bandits, who then were enjoying a great feast; and he introduced himself to them, and knowing that they were discussing how to select their leader, he expressed his desire to become the head of the bandits. Everyone stared at Gildong in silence for a while. One of them proposed to give him a chance. Then, they gave him tests. One test was to move a heavy stone that no one among them was able to move. He lifted it up and threw it in the air. The next test was how to steal treasures stored in a

4) Minsoo Kang, “Introduction,” *The Story of Hong Gildong* (New York, N.Y.: Penguin, 2016) xix.

wealthy Buddhist temple where thousands of monks lived. Gildong came up with a good plan and with it he outwitted the monks and successfully stole the treasures from the temple. He became the bandit leader and named the band of bandits Hwalbindang (league of those who help the impoverished). He addressed all the bandits: "We will go forth across the eight provinces of Chosun and seize wealth that was ill-gotten, but we will also help the impoverished and the oppressed by giving them goods. And we will do so without ever revealing our identities." He and his followers punished corrupt officials. It was like a revolt against the state from the bottom and King ordered his soldiers to arrest Gildong. But Gildong was so skilled and agile that he was able to escape the king's army. Gildong demanded the king to appoint him as the minister of war. In order to appease him the king appointed him to the position he demanded. But, Gildong and his three thousand bandits, as well as their families and possessions, left Chosun on ships and sailed out to an unknown island named Yuldo and constructed a utopia where no one lacked food and necessities and all lived peacefully.

V. Discriminatory Structures in the Medieval Korea (Chosun) and Modern Korea

The narrative of Hong Gildong was a story of discrimination and exclusion in the times of medieval Korea. It is a story of overcoming the discriminations and exclusions upon which the status quo structure is established. The narrative is still living among those who aspire to equality, inclusion and fair treatment, that is, justice. The discriminatory structure makes a society where mutual communication is not possible. It is a society where one cannot address his/her father as Father and his/her older brother as Brother. In such a society bilateral communication is discouraged and only one-sided and unilateral communication remains prevalent. The voices of the victims and their families of the Sewol Ferry incident are not heard; they are excluded and thrown to the margin of society and to death.

Jesus envisioned a society where everyone is in the intimate relationship and treated as "brother, sister and mother," which is diametrically opposed to a society where one cannot address his/her father as Father and so on. Interestingly enough, Jesus did not mention his father. Does this tell us that Jesus distanced himself from patriarchy? We may well interpret that Jesus felt uncomfortable with the dominant status of the father in the family, or that Jesus lived only with mother, brothers and sisters. Anyhow, Jesus extends the boundary of the family to include whoever does God's will.

"A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you." "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!"

Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mk 3:32-35)

Hong Gildong was all alone without any sympathizer and helper in the family. In the society he was discriminated against and excluded from the mainstream. He found his friends and collaborators in bandits and together with them he plundered and punished evil administrators and officials. In real history Huh Kyoon, the author of *The Story of Hong Gildong*, befriended men of illegitimate and secondary birth and with them tried to correct the discriminatory structure and construct an egalitarian society. He was executed by the government as a rebel. In his novel, Huh Kyoon realized his dream, but in historical reality he failed and was publicly beheaded. Likewise a story gives us hope, while the reality very often betrays our dreams. *The Story of Hong Gildong* was an expression of wishes and hopes of ordinary people, but it was a fantastic fiction. In order to realize an unrealizable dream, Huh Kyoon in his fiction equipped Gildong with invincible magic power and skills. Because of his magical power even the king succumbed to him. In reality such ability to do splendid things by magic does not exist, but only collective human power can bring such a dream into reality. What made Huh Kyoon more revolutionary than any other reformer-scholar during the Chosun dynasty was that he directly focused on the discriminatory structure of Chosun that excluded certain segments of people and marginalized them, while other reformer-scholars such as Chung Yakyong of the 19th century concentrated on the reform of administrative problems and policies.

Now I would like to move from a fantastic story to our grim historical reality, to the discriminatory structure of modern Korean society. Migrant workers are most isolated and discriminated against in Korean society. As neo-liberalism dominates the capitalist market economy in Korea, many Korean workers fall as victims. Only a small segment of society survives the competitive system of neo-liberalism and few people enjoy the fruits of economic development. Corrupt powers make use of the neoliberal inhumanity and gather wealth and power into their possessions. Such a corrupt and blind pursuit of material wealth and power, which neo-liberal capitalism more intensifies, constitutes the root-cause of the Sewol ferry tragedy. Neo-liberalism structures the society into a discriminatory one. Some segments of the people become victims and are discriminated against. We may well say that neo-liberal system lives on by creating victims and scapegoats.

The discriminatory structure maintains itself throughout our history. The medieval discriminatory structure hinges on hereditary system by blood and birth, while modern discriminatory structure is subtle and flexible, but fundamentally is the same as the medieval one. In Korea there is a popular saying that some are born with “golden utensils” and others with “earthen utensils.” “Earthen utensils” would end up falling into the victims of a discriminatory structure. Such a

discriminatory system has been operative and applied to the victims of the Sewol ferry incident. The government has been excluding and isolating them to the margin of the society, making their voices voiceless and unheard, labelling them as undesirable and an abnormal sector of society. What an unbelievable situation it is! But, "Back to the normality" has been a catchword of the government in the abnormal situation of the Sewol ferry incident.

VI. Collective Power Can Create Magic in History

Hong Gildong stood against the unjust discriminatory system of the Chosun dynasty and acted by magical power (instead of people's revolutionary power) and realized his dream in a fantastic way in the plotted fiction. In history such magic can take place only by the collectivities' sympathetic solidarities. On April 13, 2016 Korean political landscape changed. The opposition won the general elections; and the ruling party became the minority in the parliament. Nobody predicted such a victory of oppositions. The neo-liberal and fascist government was defeated by people's collective power. This government showed indifference to, and even excluded, the protesting victims and their families of the Sewol incident to the margin. Now, the situation has turned around. It is magical: Koreans are amazed at the turn out of the general elections. The victory in general elections may change the scene of politics in Korea and may lead to the resolution of the han of the victims of the Sewol ferry by a thorough investigation of the incident. But such a magic or dream can be realized only by coordinated collective efforts of people's movements. The incident of the Sewol ferry has become a historical event. It started a new beginning of minjung movement in our contemporary Korea. Of course, the Sewol ferry incident is not the only issue the Korean minjung movement must address at this point of history. Labor, environment, human rights, reunification and peace in the Korean peninsula, democratization, and migrant workers are a few of crucial issues minjung movement has to deal with. The Sewol ferry issue, however, is a barometer by which we can measure the level of humaneness of our society. If Koreans are not able to resolve this issue after the oppositions' victory in the general elections, it will be the failure for Korea, and all Koreans will become beasts, not humans! Now, there has been a decisive and crucial battle going on in Korea between the humans and beasts (Rev.13,14), and between the way of the Spirit and the way of the flesh. (Romans 8:1-8) It will take long before Koreans win the solution, because the power of the flesh (neo-liberal fascist power) is tenacious, strong, and self-justifying. It believes itself as normal, and others (followers of the Spirit) as dangerous and abnormal. It seems to many people a miracle that a new group of faithful and truthful subjects emerged from the Sewol ferry incident. They are the family members of

the victims. Before the incident they were simply ordinary people. But they become truthful subjects and agents to demand justice. The government has been waiting for gradual amnesia of the people regarding the incident. But people remember it and the memory is still within people. The neo-liberal fascist government seems to be losing in this game. It would not be able to cope with it.

The growing remembrance of the victims and the people's participation to demand justice is a result of communications between different groups and individuals and victims and their relatives. The Spirit is active and alive when communications take place. Solidarity and cooperation with victims are the work of the Spirit who breaks walls of discrimination and exclusion and makes communication possible.

VII. Theological Reflections

I have told two stories. One is a fictional story of the 17th century Korea; the other is a historical story that has been happening in our times. I approached these two stories in the perspective of discrimination and exclusion. Both stories tell about people who suffer from the exclusive and discriminatory system of the society. In medieval times, the discriminatory system was more hereditary, naked and severe, and in modern times, it is sophisticated, shrewd, and subtle.

These Korean stories must be merged "theologically" with the different type of stories, stories in the Christian Bible, in the context of our struggle for justice. What do I mean with the word "theological(ly)" here? It does not mean the extracting the spiritual meanings from stories. 1) The term "theologically" points to insights that inspire us to a new reality, to a beauty of life, 2) wisdom that expands our mind and thinking to a larger one, 3) values that provide the ultimate meanings of our life, and 4) truths that transform the existing world. Thus, when we hear and read stories in Korean and Asian history, we read them in theological terms that have the aspects indicated above. We hear and read them in a way that they inspire us to an alternative reality, teach us so that our minds and thoughts become enlarged, provide us with ultimate meanings of life, and criticize and transform the status quo. In short, we explore the stories to find wisdom for life.

The late minjung theologian Suh Namdong pronounced that the task of minjung theology is to witness to the confluence of the minjung tradition and the Biblical tradition in the context of people's participation in God's liberating actions in the world (*Missio Dei*).⁵⁾ The confluence here implicates the above-mentioned meanings of the term "theologically." The confluence is an analogical term for

5) Suh Namdong, *Minjung Shinhak ui Tamgu* (The Study of Minjung Theology) (Seoul: Hankilsa, 1983), 78.

theological hermeneutics, that is, theological interpretation of stories and events.

1. The Power of Magic and the Power of the Spirit

The first Pentecost took place when the communication among different language and ethnic groups took place. (Acts 2:1-4) The life-giving Spirit works in communicative events and acts. Different groups and divergent peoples engage in dialogue and communication, and experience the fact that the Spirit is operative as they are included and barriers fall down and a communicative and cooperative relationship is established. The situation where a son cannot address his father as Father and his brother as Brother is of a non-communicative and unilateral communicative relationship.

In order to overcome the barriers of communication and relationship in the discriminatory system of Chosun, Hong Gildong fought against the powerful and the system with magical power. He attracted his collaborators and co-workers by showing his magical power. Jesus sometimes used miracle and magical power. He brought a dead man back to life. He healed a deaf man, a leper, and a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for 12 years. When Jesus conducted a miracle, he did it in collaboration with his client. Miraculous power is created when two or more people are helping each other. When the client was healed, Jesus said to him/her, "Your faith has saved you!"(e.g., Lk. 18:42) Miracle often, if not frequently, happens in such a trustful and communicative relationships. The Story of Hong Gildong seemingly lacks such an aspect. The story tells that Gildong stages miraculous things with his own magical power. Hong Gildong appears and disappears, and moves far distances in a second. He changes his outlook appearance and disguises himself as other figures. He duplicates himself into 8 Gildongs and has them act as Gildong in all 8 provinces. With such power Gildong defeated corrupt powers. In the novel, such miraculous works were done by Gildong's own power. Gildong's miraculous works definitely gave a certain satisfaction and consolation to ordinary people who had been excessively oppressed and extorted by central and local powers. The magical power or the extraordinary power that cannot be possessed by ordinary people sometimes signifies a collective power of many people who are in cooperation. Gildong's 8 replicas is a sign of such signification. We can refer to the story of Spartacus, when he was searched among the captives by the Romans, the captives stood up saying "I am Spartacus!"

Such miracles were done not only by Jesus the Christ, but by Apostle Paul and other apostles. But the magic and miracles constituted only minor part of the work and acts of Jesus and his disciples in the Bible. The Spirit, who creates "life and peace" among people (Romans 8:6), works in, with individuals, and groups. In other words, the Spirit points to a certain quality of relationships operative in society and collectivities. Jesus the Christ and his disciple St. Paul did not

spiritualize the Holy Spirit, but socialize and politicize the Holy Spirit.

2. The Power of Suffering

In The Story of Hong Gildong, Gildong suffers because of his low birth from his father's concubine. But suffering is not a major part of Gildong's story. Gildong outmaneuvers the powerful and rich. By his magical power he defeats all powers and constructs a utopia in an island and becomes the king of it. Suffering in Gildong's story submerged from the plot stream, and became a latent, but crucial element in the story. In Asian stories, such tragic and suffering on part of the hero or heroine seems often omitted. When it comes to Jesus' story, it is full of suffering. Suffering conspicuously constitutes a major part of Jesus' life. He was prosecuted for political and religious reasons and was crucified to his death. Gildong in the story does not die. In reality in Asia, political and economic sufferings are everyday life, especially for the victims of the Sewol ferry incident and their families. Quite a number of family members of the victims still keep vigils near the site of the incident, for more than two years. Many keep vigils in various parts of Korea. Their protesting sufferings have been going on during the last two years, and will go on. Suffering upon suffering forms the life of innocent victims. Sufferings caused by righteous causes create the power of the Spirit. The Spirit itself is "a wounded Spirit and a Spirit of suffering and han. Apostle Paul closely connected the Spirit with suffering and weakness."⁶⁾ Sufferings of innocent people for the sake of justice have such a spiritual power that it creates, gathers and consolidates sympathizing people and creates them into the changer of history and society. Look at the power of Jesus's suffering and crucifixion. If there were not sufferings in Jesus' life, he could not be our Lord and Christ and he could not transform his followers to be the changers of history and society. Resurrection without suffering is simply a fantasy.

Having interpreted Hong Gildong's story, where did I reach in terms of its meanings? I trust that there is a latent and unseen theme around which the story is composed. This unseen element is the theological point of the story. It is the aspiration for another world, an alternative and egalitarian and peaceful world where all members are treated equally and as friends. Such aspiration for another world is a void because it is not seen, but a powerful and appealing void.

VIII. Concluding Remarks

I have told two stories, and compared them from Biblical and theological viewpoints. The Story of Hong Gildong is one of Asian and Korean stories. I find

6) Kwon, Jinkwan, "Minjung Theology as a Counter Theology: Suh Namdong's Case," Madang, Vol 21, June. 2014: 34.

that The Story of Hong Gildong gives us much information about what ordinary Koreans in the times of medieval Chosun felt and thought about such crucial issues as the discrimination of secondary birth and the living situation of ordinary people under the corrupt structure of the Chosun Dynasty. The Story of Hong Gildong also informs us of people's hope and sufferings.

I argued that The Story of Hong Gildong has elements that do not match with historical events which takes place in our real history and even with the story of Jesus. Then, a significant issue arises. It arises when we theologians employ stories of Asia—especially novels, fictions, legends, and myths in order to construct a living Asian theology. They do not nicely fit into theological and practical purposes; they very often do not provide us with theological insights, which would make Asian story theology not only possible, but meaningful and truthful. Story lures listeners and readers and gives them amusement and wisdom. Story has an enormous potential for theology. But it seems not easy to employ a story as a major tool for doing “Asian Theology with our own resources.” Nevertheless, we Asian theologians will get more benefit from employing Asian stories than not. At least stories from our own soil will make our doing theology a living one. Asian Theologians must keep attempting at employing stories originating in our own culture and situation. Asian resources like many other resources—including the Biblical ones—will not guarantee us a good theology. They are only raw materials. How to make a good living theology out of them is at the hands of Asian theologians. It is an enormous challenge for us all to cope with.

One of the future tasks would be the problem of the story theology of C.S. Song, about whom Suh Namdong has made significant comments. I should like to analyze Suh Namdong's points of criticism about C.S. Song in his late essay of 1983. Some years ago, Song came to Korea and delivered his idea of the present situation of minjung theology. He pronounced that minjung theology had died prematurely, because minjung theology no longer adopted stories as major tools and was no longer a story theology. I will further pursue the debate between the two senior scholars, Song and Suh, and will walk on a narrow path between these two major story theologians in order to attain a new Asian story theology.

Abstract

Author examines two stories and attempts at interpreting them theologically. They are the Story of Hong Gildong of the 17th century story provides us with a vision of an alternative world that would replace the discriminatory and oppressive world. He also claims that the modern tragedy of the Sewol ferry is fundamentally a story of discrimination in the time of neo-liberal capitalism. Author tries to point to differences between the two stories and emphasizes that the Story of Hong Gildong is a fictitious and fantastic story and the magic of Gildong plays an important role in the plot, while in the stories of the Sewol ferry and Jesus suffering and solidarity of people play the most crucial role.

Key Words: Story, magic power, Hong Gildong, Sewol Ferry, discrimination

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