

Minjung Theological Aesthetics

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Abstract

This essay explores the possible confluence of minjung and inculturation theologies into a 'minjung theological aesthetics.' To demonstrate this possibility, the paper offers six theological suggestions. First, minjung must be understood in their political-economic as well as cultural-aesthetic dimensions. Second, minjung theology's hermeneutics of suspicion and inculturation theology's hermeneutics of retrieval are to be creatively fused as a dialectic of resistance and poeticity. Third, the analysis of minjung art is to be needed as minjung's self-expression of their poeticity and transcendentality. Fourth, theology itself is a form of art and a product of human imaginative construction. Fifth, a historical incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth needs to be coupled with an aesthetic incarnation of God in beauty and art. Lastly, the

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rightful use of art for minjung theology must not be excluded due to its possible misuse.

- **Keywords**

minjung theology, inculturation theology, theological aesthetics, freedom, beauty, hermeneutics, art

"God goes forward before theologians do."

- Suh Nam-dong

There seems to be a time lag phenomenon between God and theologians. While God has already gone forward in the path of beauty, we theologians are still lagging behind. Like the paradigm shift of Feuerbach and Nietzsche from theology (God) to anthropology (humanity) in the 19th century, and that of Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Derrida from anthropology (humanity) to grammarology (language) in the 20th century, a totally new paradigm shift from grammarology (language) to aesthetics (beauty) is needed in our century, heralded by theologians including Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar. Perhaps it is the paradigm shift with an eye on the reenactment of God's historical incarnation as aesthetic incarnation in the cultural matrix of our time. "Displacing the time-honored importance of the discipline of philosophy," according to the editors of *Converging on Culture*, "a shift to make cultural analysis and criticism the major dialogue partner of theology is underway in many quarters of academic theology today."¹

Minjung theology as a Korean political theology in the 70s is still an unfinished project with many further possible developments. This essay focuses on one such possibility, what I would like to call a 'minjung theological aesthetics.'² Despite the past tension in the 80s be-

1 Delwin Brown, Sheila Greeve Davaney, Kathryn Tanner eds., *Converging on Culture: Theologians in Dialogue with Cultural Analysis and Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), v.

2 For a Western theologian who also envisions this potentially fruitful project, viz. "the possibil-

tween minjung and inculturation theologians, it is my fundamental conviction that a confluence of minjung and cultural theologies is one of key tasks left for the future generation of Korean theology.

I. Minjung's Struggle for Freedom and Beauty

§1. Minjung must be understood in their holistic dimension, viz., in their political-economic as well as cultural-aesthetic situations simultaneously. Both the survival value and the aesthetic value of animal kingdom need to be taken into account analogically in theological analysis of minjung's struggle for freedom and beauty.

Even though the existence of beauty in animal kingdom is not an indispensable condition for the survival of the fittest, why is beauty so extravagantly prevalent in nature? In *The Descent of Man* Charles Darwin suggests two crucial principles of evolution, “natural” and “sexual” selections.³ The sense of beauty is neither exclusively peculiar to humanity nor marginal or ineffective in the evolutionary process of life. Darwin's principle of sexual selection is in essence an aesthetic principle of evolutionary self-expression and pursuit of beauty in life

ities of a ‘symbiotic interpretation’ of gospel and culture,” see Volker Küster, *A Protestant Theology of Passion: Korean Minjung Theology Revisited* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 82. See also idem., “Minjung Theology and Minjung Art,” *Mission Studies*, vol. XI-1, 21 (1994), 108-129. According to Küster, Suh Nam-dong sees a possible confluence of minjung and cultural theologies in Pansori, mask dance, Maitreya-Buddhism, and Tonghak movement in the Korean history.

3 Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: John Murray, 1871; 1909), 70ff., 140ff., and 928.

forms. Darwin refers to the mating process of peacock and peahen in this context.

When we behold a male bird elaborately displaying his graceful plumes or splendid colours before the female, whilst other birds, not thus decorated, make no such display, it is impossible to doubt that she admires the *beauty* of her male partner.⁴

Josef H. Reichholf, a German evolutionary biologist, reinterprets Darwin's sexual selection as a dialectical interaction between *individuum* and beauty. While beauty is pursued by all living beings as an ideal median point between two extremes in the spectrum of aesthetic judgments, it tends to homogenize their gene pool with the result of increased vulnerability to malignant parasites and viruses. Contra Darwin who emphasizes the positive role of beauty for the sexual selection process of species, Reichholf suggests what he calls the "paradox of beauty" that the survival of species depends on the occasional escape from beauty and the pursuit of individuum to overcome beautiful yet vulnerable homogeneity.⁵ What interests me in this debate is the fact that for both Darwin and Reichholf the evolutionary process of life cannot be reduced to a single principle of survival of the fittest.

Similarly, Sigmund Freud also sees this dialectical interaction between the survival value of natural selection and the aesthetic value of sexual selection when he traces the origin of neurosis back to the tension between the "reality-principle" and the "pleasure-principle"

4 Ibid., 140. *Italic added.*

5 Josef H. Reichholf, *Der Ursprung der Schönheit* (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2011).

of life in the human civilization's achievements such as religion, science, education, and art.⁶ In short, Darwin, Reichhold and Freud are all puzzled by the extravagant existence of beauty operating in nature and its evolutionary process. Aesthetic principle of beauty is an intrinsic dimension of life itself.

Analogically, the survival value of freedom and the aesthetic value of beauty are interconnected yet irreducibly distinct in the life of minjung. Most minjung theologians have refused to reduce minjung to a simple politico-economic category of *proletariat*. The first generation minjung theologians including Suh Nam-dong, Ahn Byung-mu, Kim Yong-bock, Hyun Young-hak, and Suh Kwang-sun are fully aware of the rich multidimensional hybridity of minjung's identity based on the survival and aesthetic values of life.⁷ In contrast, later minjung theologians appear to me to emphasize socioeconomic analyses of minjung unilaterally while relatively marginalizing the irreducibly stubborn fact that the sense of beauty is deeply rooted in minjung's life and culture on all levels. The future of minjung theology depends on a possible renaissance or retrieval of the first generation theologians' insights on the aesthetic dimension of minjung's self-expression or, better, social-biographical expression in their struggle for freedom and beauty. Here also lies the necessity of the future development of minjung theology into a kind of minjung theological aesthetics. Theological aesthetics can perhaps offer important creative impetus to minjung theology.

6 Sigmund Freud, "Formulations regarding the Two Principles in Mental Functioning," *Collected Papers*, vol. 4 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953), 14.

7 In this sense, the future of minjung theology as a 'minjung theological aesthetics' has already existed in its embryonic form from its very beginning.

Hans Urs von Balthasar offers an important observation on the forgetfulness of beauty in the history of Christian theology and the consequent mysterious vengeance of beauty on the remaining other transcendental values. "In a world without beauty," says Balthasar, the good also loses its "attractiveness" and the true its "cogency."⁸ In a word without beauty, the luminous mystery of being degenerates into a mere lump of matter. When we forget the beauty and poeticity of minjung, they also become statistical numbers!

II. Minjung Hermeneutics

§2. Minjung theological aesthetics must be developed into a critical hermeneutics that mediates minjung theology's hermeneutics of suspicion and inculturation theology's hermeneutics of retrieval. Such a minjung hermeneutics is only possible when the minjung theologian's willingness to criticize ideology and the inculturation theologian's willingness to preserve traditional culture are creatively fused into a dialectic of resistance and poeticity.

Minjung theological aesthetics can be perhaps envisioned as a creative dialogue between the two most well known Korean theologies, viz., minjung and inculturation theologies. It is not to suggest however that such a desirable encounter is an easy task to be achieved despite mutual criticism and subtle tension between the two theological camps. In his last published article Suh Nam-dong, the founder of

8 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. Volume 1: Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 19.

minjung theology, expresses his concerns about inculturation theology whose preoccupation with the dimension of “religio-cultural reality” may result in a total neglect of the “social political reality” of life.⁹ In Suh’s judgment “pungryu (the way of wind) theology” of Ryu Tong-shik, the most prominent representative of Korean inculturation theology, relatively marginalizes the issues of poverty, class struggle, exploitation, and oppression in the third world countries. Conversely, Ryu is critical of the danger of minjung theology as a mere political theology reducing minjung’s multidimensional spirituality to a flat socio-political one while neglecting the religio-aesthetic depth and poeticity of minjung. In Ryu’s opinion, the task of minjung theology is to recover the poetic nature and cultural rootedness of minjung as an event of aesthetic incarnation of divinity in the world. Theology must be concerned not just with political freedom or economic justice but also with total recovery of humanity and their aesthetic transcendentality. Ryu summarizes this religio-aesthetic task of minjung theology as one of “the recovery of poetry.”¹⁰ Kim Kwang-shik offers an informative summary of critical confrontation between these two theological

9 Suh Nam-dong, “Saheijungchijuk Hyunsilui Tonghapi Pungryusinhakui Kwazae” [Integration of socio-political reality as the task of Pungryu theology], *Kyohweuiwa Saegae* [Church and the World] 29 (1984), 20. This review article is published in 1984, the year of Suh’s death.

10 Ryu Tong-shik, *Sogum Ryutongshik Jungip* [Collected Works of Ryu Tong-shik], vol. 9 (Seoul: Handl, 2009), 225-227. For Ryu, poetry is an art of enshrining or incarnating the divine logos in human words: “The essence of poetry is expressed in the Chinese character for a poem. Poem (‘si’) consists of two parts, the word (‘un’) and to enshrine (‘sa’ or, ‘si’). Poem is to enshrine the Word. The Word refers to ‘logos,’ viz., God’s Word.” Ibid., 227. To make this transcendental ‘Word’ to dwell in human words is what poetry’s task is. Karl Rahner similarly interprets the historical incarnation of Jesus as the poetic or aesthetic embodiment of God’s Word in the finite world: “In the region encompassed by the human word, infinity has built itself a tent, infinity itself is there in the finite.” Karl Rahner, “Poetry and the Christian,” *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4 (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 361. For Ryu’s pungryu theology, see

giants as follows.

As inculturation theology adopts hermeneutical theology of the West as its paradigmatic model of method, minjung theology adopts liberation theology as its equivalent model. Consequently, the critical confrontation in the Western theology and philosophy between hermeneutics and criticism of ideology is in some sense repeated again between inculturation and minjung theologies. For the Korean theology to advance, we must prepare a possible project of bridging the gap between these two positions.¹¹

Minjung theology and inculturation theology must encounter each other for genuine advance of Korean theology. Paul Ricoeur's notion of "critical hermeneutics" may be helpful here for such a methodological bridge. Suh's minjung hermeneutics of a "confluence of two stories" is already *de facto* closer to Ricoeur's dipolar critical hermeneutics than to Hans-Georg Gadamer's unilateral traditional hermeneutics of the "fusion of horizons."¹² Neither does Suh's minjung hermeneutics developed in the third world inherit the "consciousness of being affected by history" (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*) or effective-history of mainline Christian tradition as its

Hohyun Sohn, "Ryu's Pungryu Theology as a Theology of Art: The Trinity of Oneness, Beauty, and Life," *Korean Journal of Christian Studies*, vol. 57 (2008), 179-202.

11 Kim Kwang-shik, *Tochakhwawa Haesukhak* [Inculturation and Hermeneutics] (Seoul: Dae-hankeedokyosuhoi, 1987), 34.

12 Suh Nam-dong, *Minjungsinhakui Tangu* [In Search of Minjung Theology] (Seoul: Hangilsa, 1983), 45-82; Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, second revised edition (New York: Continuum, 1996), 301-302, 306-307, 374-

natural legacy, nor identify itself as inborn part of the “one great horizon” of Christianity, as in Gadamer or other first world Western theologians.¹³ Minjung hermeneutics consciously highlights epistemological distance and tensive conflict between the Western Christian tradition and the heterodox heritage of its own indigenous Korean culture. It claims to possess God’s anonymous history of liberation as part of Korean minjung’s liberation history. Here lies hermeneutical confrontation between Gadamer’s colonizing *fusion* model and Suh’s fissuring *confluence* model. While Gadamer presupposes one gigantic unbroken horizon of effective-history of Christianity within the Western civilization, Suh is based on the discontinuity of memory, collapse of hope, and universality of suffering in the colonized world. The nucleus of minjung hermeneutics is exactly this sense of fissure as well as its hope for anonymous *missio dei* in non-Christian cultures of the underprivileged. It shows why Jürgen Habermas’s ideological criticism is needed for this experience of conscious discontinuity from the mainline Western Christian tradition. Suh makes a deliberate choice to sever himself from the neglectfulness of first world theologians who fail to see God’s aesthetic-sacramental incarnation among the oppressed of the underside of history. Jesus’s historical incarnation is to be continuously and anonymously reenacted as an aesthetic incarnation of minjung events in their struggle for freedom and beauty. “God goes forward before theologians do,” Suh says.¹⁴

375, 397, 576; Paul Ricoeur, “Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology,” in Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift eds., *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur* (Albany: SUNY, 1990), 298-334.

13 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 301 and 304.

14 Jukjae Suhnamdong Moksa Yugojiip Pyunjipweewonhoi [The editorial committee of Rev. Suh

The hermeneutical debates among Gadamer, Habermas, and Ricoeur are informative for the future development of a critical minjung hermeneutics as well as for a productive encounter between minjung and inculturation theologies. Habermas highlights the potential link between ideology and violence in Gadamer's hermeneutics of tradition. Criticizing Gadamer's claims on the universality of hermeneutics and supremacy of language, Habermas argues that "language is *also* a medium of domination and social power," and that hermeneutics must be thus replaced by a depth-hermeneutics or "critique of ideology" which offers a multidimensional analysis between labor, power, and language.¹⁵ Against Habermas's challenge, Gadamer replies that criticism of ideology as a depth-hermeneutics or meta-hermeneutics is *still* a hermeneutics, and that Habermas's hermeneutics of resistance remain in that exact sense *still* as a kind of "effective-historical reflection" within the Western community of liberation discourse.¹⁶ Instead of suggesting a rash superficial synthesis of Gadamer and Habermas, Ricoeur tries to show irreducible validities of the two thinkers and their mutual complementarities. While Ricoeur urges Habermas to give attention to the necessity of "hermeneutical reflection on critique," he also invites Gadamer to see the necessity of "critical reflection on hermeneutics."¹⁷ Revolutionary suspicion of reason and poetic retrieval of tradition are two permanent phenomena of any critical hermeneutics,

Nam-dong's works] ed., *Suhnamdong Sinhakui Eesakjupkee* [Collecting the Remnant Grains of Suh Nam-dong's Theology] (Seoul: Daehankeedokyosuhoi, 1999), 418.

15 Jürgen Habermas, "A Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*," in *The Hermeneutic Tradition*, 239-240.

16 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Reply to My Critics," in *The Hermeneutic Tradition*, 285.

17 Ricoeur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," 321ff. and 328ff.

suggests Ricoeur.

Hermeneutics seems to me to be animated by this double motivation: willingness to suspect, willingness to listen; vow of rigor, vow of obedience. In our time we have not finished doing away with *idols* and we have barely begun to listen to *symbols*.¹⁸

When hermeneutics of symbols and critique of idols are separated from each other, both will eventually become no more than mere ideologies. In the history of Korean theology, “willingness to suspect” has been one of dominant motifs of minjung theology. For instance, Suh’s notion of “*Gegen Theologie*, countertheology” aims to criticize the ideological effective-history of Western verbal idols.¹⁹ In contrast, “willingness to listen” is exemplified among inculturation theologians such as Yun Sung-bum, Ryu Tong-shik, and Byun Son-hwan. Yet, the simultaneous validity or hermeneutical circularity of minjung and inculturation theologies needs to be positively affirmed as a creative event of dialogue between hermeneutics of suspicion and hermeneutics of retrieval, between the critique of idols and the honoring of symbols, between hermeneutical reflection on critique and critical reflection on hermeneutics. I follow the important observation of Hyun Young-hak here, who might be considered in my opinion as the very first minjung cultural theologian in Korea, that the fundamental hermeneutical tension is perhaps not between ‘*minjung* theology’ and ‘inculturation theology,’ but between ‘*elitist cultural* theology’ and

18 Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970), 27. Italics in original.

19 Suh, *Tamgu* [Search], 305.

'minjung cultural theology.'²⁰ Hyun's theological aesthetics of minjung dances like Bongsan mask dance, Jakdoo dance (a shamanistic ritual dance jumping on the sharp edges of two gigantic knives), and the Cripple's dance of Ms. Kong Ok-jin, offers us invaluable resources and insights for the imaginative construction of Korean minjung theological aesthetics for this century. Political theology and cultural theology in general, and minjung theology and inculturation theology in particular, are not the two different rivers flowing into opposite directions but the two confluent streams merging together into the sea of minjung and their struggle for freedom and beauty.

III. Minjung Art

§3. Art is a language of minjung as well as a form of theology. Against the logocentric elitism of past theology, minjung theological aesthetics needs to be developed as a challenging resistance to theological elitism through the analysis of minjung art as minjung's self-expression of their

20 As Raymond Williams says, the word 'culture' is one of the "most complicated words in the English language." Williams offers the three dominant meanings of culture: (1) "a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development," (2) "a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general," and (3) "the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity" (music, literature, painting and sculpture, theatre, film, etc.). Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, revised edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 87 and 90. Hyun Young-hak correctly points out that the first generation inculturation theologians have mainly focused on the first elitist meaning of culture as an intellectual *Bildung* or mental maturation while neglecting the other two dimensions. See Hohyun Sohn, "Minjungsinhakwa Munhwasinhakui Hapryul Hyanghayuh" [Toward a confluence of Minjung Theology and Cultural Theology], *Theological Form*, vol. 77 (Seoul: Dongyun, 2014), 165-196.

poeticity and transcendentality.

Once Friedrich Nietzsche said against Christianity that “I would believe only in a god who can dance.”²¹ Perhaps Nietzsche has forgotten the fact that Jesus has indeed danced with us! We theologians should also respect God’s sovereign freedom to reveal himself abundantly in the beauty of nature and human art, not just in conceptual language and academic articles. “If God returns we may have to meet him first in the dance before we define him in the doctrine,” suggests Harvey Cox.²² However, we cannot deny that the history of logocentric elitism in theology is to be traced back to the very first beginning of Christianity. According to the *Apostolic Constitutions* written in about 380 by a unknown Syrian theologian, for instance, artists must be denied the Christian baptism due to their occupations. “If one of those who work upon the stage approaches, either man or woman, or charioteer, or gladiator, or runner, or wagerer, or athlete, or aulos player, or cithara player, or lyre player, or one who performs the pantomime, or a hukster, let them desist or be rejected,” says the document.²³ As in philosophy, especially as in Gadamer’s remark that “being that can be understood is language,” we find a similar contemporary example of logocentric elitism in George Lindbeck’s postliberal theology with its claims that “language (or, more generally, some conceptual and/or symbolic interpretive scheme) is a condition for religious experience.”²⁴ As a logical corollary of Lindbeck’s *intratextual* theology, only

21 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (New York: The Modern Library, 1995), 41.

22 Harvey Cox, *The Feast of Fools: A Theological Essay on Festivity and Fantasy* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1969), 28.

23 John Stevens and Peter le Huray eds., *Music in early Christian literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 111.

some people with a certain level of mental capacity have the possibility of becoming a Christian while others like young babies and the mentally handicapped are necessarily to be excluded from the Christian faith.

Art was, and still is, a fierce resistance of beauty to elitism and logocentrism. Language is also a kind of mental icon or image itself, and verbal or intellectual concept is not the only medium of Christian faith. When Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten coined the term “aesthetics” in 1735 as “a science which might direct the lower cognitive faculty in knowing things sensately,” it was intended as a fundamental challenge to the supremacy of higher abstract cognitive faculty of philosophy and logic.²⁵ We encounter the world not just in the clear-and-distinct thought of logic and philosophy but also in the clear-yet-confused continuum of aesthetics and art. Against the logocentrism of verbal language in our time, Vasilii Kandinsky claims that “art is a language whereby we speak to the soul of things which are the soul’s daily bread and which it can acquire only in this form.”²⁶ And Karl Barth includes in the soul’s daily bread Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s music: “our daily bread must also include playing.”²⁷ More recently, Richard Viladesau suggests religious art to be a challenge of

24 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, xxxiv; George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 37.

25 Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Reflections on Poetry*, trans. Karl Aschenbrenner and William B. Holther (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954), 78.

26 *The Life of Vasilii Kandinsky in Russian Art: A Study of “On the Spiritual in Art”*, trans. John E. Bowlt (Newtonville, MA: Oriental Research Partners, 1980), 99; quoted again in Albert L. Blackwell, *The Sacred in Music* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 22.

27 Karl Barth, *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 16.

the uneducated Christians to the establishment of elitist theologians. "Sacred art's involvement in popular piety and its direction to a largely uneducated audience, even in its didactic doctrinal function, make much of Christianity's art intrinsically less elitist than its written texts."²⁸

Minjung seldom leave behind written documents of their own experience for historians. With respect to women as the most representative minjung among minjung in human history, for instance, Margaret Miles points out ideological quality of verbal texts of Christian tradition. "These texts, almost exclusively the product of culturally privileged, highly educated, male, and most frequently monastic authors, constitute the bulk of the literary products of Christianity before the modern period."²⁹ The situation is similar in the history of Korean minjung. Mingjung's history must be carefully reconstructed through a dipolar hermeneutics of suspicion and retrieval. Ham Sok-hon, a Korean Quaker thinker as well as a democratic fighter, teaches an important lesson about the sources of minjung theology.

History is given to us as two things. One is what is left behind, and the other is what is left inside. ... The former is written on history books, gravestones, or metal plates but the latter is inscribed on faces of those minjung who have given birth to history itself and on their gravestones erected in people's heart.³⁰

28 Richard Viladesau, *Theology and the Arts: Encountering God through Music, Art and Rhetoric* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 134.

29 Margaret R. Miles, *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 9.

30 Ham Sok-hon, *Hamsokhon Juhjakjip* [Collected Works of Ham Sok-Hon], vol. 30 (Paju:

Suh Nam-dong's hermeneutical method of "socioeconomic" analysis aims to show the external condition of minjung, while his method of art and "literature sociology" tries to give testimony to minjung's internal condition.³¹ External life situation of minjung is suffering, while internal one is *han*. Minjung's history shows the former, while minjung's art expresses the latter. The full humanity of the unlearned, the mentally handicapped, the physically crippled, the ethnically marginalized, the gender discriminated, viz., total minjung must be affirmed through a conscious analysis of their language, as in the case of Hyun Young-hak's theological aesthetics of the cripple's dance.

It is the power and the beauty of humanity of these downtrodden people that makes it possible for them to 'create out of nothing' the joy of life when every other kind of joy has been taken away from them. ... The cripple's dance of the crippled beggars is not a form of their self-laceration or self-pity as the healthy tend to think. It is an assertion of their humanity ... They seem to be saying, 'We are just as human as you are.'³²

IV. Minjung Art as Theology

§4. Theology is a form of art and a product of human imaginative construction, as in the case of natural science as well. Scripture is to be viewed

Hangilsa, 2009), 429.

31 Suh, *Tamgu* [Search], 48.

32 Younghak Hyun, "Cripple's Dance," *The East Asia Journal of Theology*, vol. 3, no. 2 (October 1985), 211-212.

not as a timeless classic but a popular text of art with its continuous renewal of contemporaneity. The authority of Scripture does not exist in its timeless and infallible validity but in its disturbing and liberating power from the Christian's self-complacency and exclusivity. The truth claim of scripture needs to be also rediscovered as a social biographical work of minjung art.

We need to analyze minjung art from theological perspective. In addition, we must remember that theology itself is also a form of art. For St. Augustine, music functions a wordless theology. Against the usual prejudice that theology can be done only with words, Augustine in his commentary on Psalm 33 suggests benefits of song in jubilation as a form of wordless theology for praising the ineffable God.

Words cannot communicate the song of the heart. ... Truly is He ineffable whom you cannot tell forth in speech; and if you cannot tell Him forth in speech, yet ought not to remain silent, what else can you do but jubilate?³³

Theology cannot talk about the ineffable God properly but it also cannot remain utterly silent. Augustine sees art and music in particular as offering a new possibility of theological aesthetics. The falsely assumed link between theology and elitist language is broken up by Augustine's theological aesthetics. Similarly, Rudolf Otto views art as an excellent expressive medium of the numinous, the ineffable, viz., the

33 Augustine, *St. Augustine on the Psalms*, tr. Dame Scholastic Hebgin and Dame Felicitas Corrigan, 2 vols. (New York: Newman Press, 1961), 2:111-12; quoted again in Blackwell, *The Sacred in Music*, 16.

sublime. "In the arts nearly everywhere the most effective means of representing the numinous is 'the sublime'."³⁴ More recently, Gordon Kaufman argues that both theology and art share their common "mythopoetic" root and in that sense both can be viewed as the same mythopoetic activity of human imaginative construction. Due to their common task and destiny, "there is every reason, therefore, for theologians and artists, and critics of the arts and literature, to be in rather continuous conversation with each other."³⁵

Art as an imaginative human construction is not just analogous to theology but also to natural science as well. J. B. S. Haldane suggests for instance that both theology and natural science are "an art-form used to express religious experience."³⁶ In a similar vein, James W. McAllister shows how much a natural scientist depends on aesthetic judgment when one constructs scientific theory.³⁷ We must escape now from a myth of theology as a unique and qualitatively different discipline on the one hand and its exclusive preoccupation with ethics on the other. Jürgen Moltmann describes the aim of his book, *Theology of Play*, as follows. "These sketches seek to reassert the value of aesthetic joy against the absolute claims of ethics."³⁸ Suh Nam-dong also offers his minjung theology of art as a "*Gegen Theologie*, countertheology"

34 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 65.

35 Gordon D. Kaufman, "Theology as Imaginative Construction," *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50 (March 1982), 78-79.

36 J. B. S. Haldane, "Science and Theology as Art-Forms," John Maynard Smith ed., *On Being the Right Size and other essays* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 43.

37 James W. McAllister, *Beauty and Revolution in Science* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996).

38 Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Play*, trans. Reihard Ulrich (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), vii.

against the Western logocentric theology.³⁹

Asian religious followers show fundamental aesthetic character of oriental culture within their religious practices and sensibilities. As F. S. C. Northrop claims, “their religion is best thought of by Westerners as something nearer to what the West regards as aesthetic than it is to what the West has regarded as religion.”⁴⁰ “Political, economic, aesthetic, and religious factors have been more subtly intertwined in the East than in the West,” James Alfred Martin also says.⁴¹ Reflecting on Meister Eckhart, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy also confirms that the Asiatic arts function a visual religious symbolism. “Art is religion, religion art, not related, but the same. No one can study theology without perceiving this,” says the Hindu philosopher.⁴² As a Korean theology located within Asian culture, minjung theological aesthetics affirms the distinctively aesthetic character of its own Korean cultural heritage. Suh considers Kim Chi-ha’s epic drama of “Chang Il-Dam,” written as a script for Pansori, as such an attempt of minjung theological aesthetics or “inculturation of theology” that forms a confluence of the story of Jesus in the Gospels and the artistic expression of Korean minjung’s *han* in the indigenous artistic genre of Pansori.⁴³

Scripture itself is a work of art. Christian tradition has not taken this view seriously however. According to Charles Hodge’s theory of “ple-

39 Suh, *Tamgu* [Search], 305.

40 F. S. C. Northrop, *The Meeting of East and West: An Inquiry concerning World Understanding* (Woodbridge, Connecticut: Ox Bow Press, 1979), 403.

41 James Alfred Martin, Jr., *Beauty and Holiness: The Dialogue between Aesthetics and Religion* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), 139.

42 Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art: Theories of Art in Indian Chinese and European medieval art; Iconography, ideal representation, perspective and space relations* (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), 62.

43 Suh, *Tamgu* [Search], 82.

nary inspiration," the Bible is identical with the infallible word of God "spoken directly by the lips of God himself" who used the human writers as "his organs of communication."⁴⁴ Modern theologians with their training in historical criticism disagree. Following St. Augustine and Erich Auerbach, for instance, Kathryn Tanner suggests that "the Bible is not a typical high-culture work of literary artistry but something more like a popular text."⁴⁵ Similarly, Suh shows a change of his hermeneutic position in regard to the Bible. He used to consider the New Testament as "revelation," "the Word of God," and "the canon of faith" in 1959.⁴⁶ From the year of 1979, however, Suh starts to use the term "reference" as a counter-theological concept against infallible revelation, which is to be understood as a flexible paradigm or a kind of theological grammar book of Christian faith that needs to be reinterpreted or performed differently in history.⁴⁷ It is important to notice that Suh has decided to call his hermeneutical method neither as a confluence of 'text and context' nor as a confluence of 'two texts,' but that of 'two stories.' The genre of story is one of the most predominant aesthetic languages of minjung expressing themselves. "Minjung's stories are a vessel of minjung's self identity as well as an expressive matrix of minjung's collective souls."⁴⁸ The language of minjung is stories and narratives, not academic papers and philosophies. Besides,

44 Charles Hodge, "Inspiration," *Biblical Repository and Princeton Review*, XXIX (October 1857), 661-664; quoted in James C. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought. Volume 1: The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century*, second edition (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 308-309.

45 Kathryn Tanner, "Scripture as Popular Text," *Modern Theology* 14.2 (April 1998), 290.

46 Suh, *Tamgu* [Search], 420 and 425.

47 Suh, *Tamgu* [Search], 47-48.

48 Suh, *Tamgu* [Search], 289.

Suh is critical of the formative history of Scriptures themselves that is not totally free from “sociological bending and distortion” when they are fixed from oral stories to written texts.⁴⁹ That is why the Bible should be re-imagined as a popular text of collective stories told by minjung as their “social biography.”⁵⁰ Paradigmatic performance of feminist hermeneutics is helpful here to reinterpret the Christian origin from a totally new perspective of gender as in the case of Elisabeth Süssler Fiorenza.⁵¹

V. Trinity as a Community of Divine Artists

§5. *While Jesus of Nazareth is a ‘historical incarnation’ of God in the world through the creative activity of Spirit, art is an ‘aesthetic incarnation’ of God in beauty through the inspiration of Spirit. Minjung theological aesthetics is to reflect on this ‘analogia entis’ or, better, ‘analogia pulcri,’ of incarnation and art within the trinitarian context of sacramentality when it analyzes minjung art.*

Plato describes the lure of beauty as a ladder of the soul’s ascent to God, the thought of which has been reaffirmed in some Greek, Jewish, and Christian views of salvation. “So now we find that the good has taken refuge in the character of the beautiful” (*Philebus* 64e). When

49 Suh, *Tamgu* [Search], 290.

50 For Kim Yong-bok’s notion of “social biography” of minjung, see Küster’s article, “Theology as a Social Biography of the Minjung,” in Volker Küster, *A Protestant Theology of Passion: Korean Minjung Theology Revisited* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 95-102.

51 See Elisabeth S. Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1994).

the good loses its attractiveness and the true its self-evidence, we take refuge in the beautiful. Perhaps it is now the time when only the power of beauty enables the soul not to fall into the tempting nihilistic question of “why not investigate Satan’s depths?”⁵² Simone Weil lists three things in our world that God is secretly and sacramentally present within: “religious ceremonies, the beauty of the world and our neighbor.”⁵³ Among these three she thinks that only beauty is left to us as a lively option for the recognition of God’s sacramental presence. “And yet at the present time, in the countries of the white races, the beauty of the world is almost the only way by which we can allow God to penetrate us.”⁵⁴ Following Balthasar and Weil, we must creatively reappropriate the first generation minjung theologians’ insight on the panentheistic presence of God in minjung or the collective identity of minjung and God within the doctrinal framework of Trinity.

God is the first artist of creation, suggests St. Augustine. The ontological function of beauty is to bridge the chasm between God and the cosmos.⁵⁵ What makes a confluence of revolution and God possible is beauty. Music is one of God’s medicines to lead humanity gradually from the fallen existence of ugliness and oppression, “since music somehow issuing forth from the most secrete sanctuaries leaves [trinitarian] traces in our very senses or in things sensed by us” (Augustine, *De musica*. 1.13.28). Music is God’s consolation in this fallen world. In the Lutheran tradition, based on 2 Chronicles 5:13-14, Johann Sebast-

52 Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord*, vol. 1, 19.

53 Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, trans. Emma Craufurd (New York: Putnam, 1951), 137.

54 Simone Weil, *Intimations of Christianity among the Ancient Greek*, trans. Elisabeth Chase Geissbuhler (London: Routledge and Kagan Paul, 1957), 115.

55 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 15.

ian Bach conceives God as a dynamic verb spoken and performed in music rather than a noun fixed in doctrine. “Where there is devotional music, God with his grace is always present,” says Bach.⁵⁶ Creation is God’s beautiful performance of music. The term “*poiesis*” used in the *Septuagint* for God’s act of creation is the same word Plato uses for aesthetic making of all craftsmanship, poems, plays, pictures, or sculptures.⁵⁷ In the cosmogonies of many ancient religious traditions, God is understood as a cosmic artist. Vincent Van Gogh, a Dutch minjung painter, also sees God as a painter like himself. “I feel more and more that we must not judge of God from this world, it’s just a study that didn’t come off.”⁵⁸ As Nikos Kazantzakis suggests in his novel, *Zorba the Greek*, gods and devils talk in dance. Or, to borrow Mark C. Taylor’s expression, we must imitate this divine dance or “theoesthetics” in theology.⁵⁹ “The Teleology of the Universe is directed to the production of Beauty,” says Whitehead.⁶⁰ The production of beauty is not merely a human invention but also a collaboration of onto-theo-ego-logical art. In the beauty of nature and human art is sacramentally incarnated God’s own beauty. “The beauty of the world is God’s own

56 Quoted in John Butt, “‘A mind unconscious that it is calculating’? Bach and the rationalist philosophy of Wolff, Leibniz and Spinoza,” John Butt ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Bach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 68.

57 James Alfred Martin, “Aesthetics: Philosophical Aesthetics,” Mercea Eliade ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), vol. 1, 40.

58 Vincent Van Gogh, *The Complete Letters of Vincent Van Gogh with reproductions of all the drawings in the correspondence*, vol. 2 (London: Thames & Hudson, 1978), 572. Van Gogh’s letter to Theo in May, 1888.

59 Mark C. Taylor, *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 17ff. I use the term “theoesthetics” without Taylor’s negative evaluation of it.

60 Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1933), 341.

beauty, as the beauty of the body of a human being is the beauty which belongs to that being.”⁶¹ In sum, as Viladesau says, “God is the ‘horizon’ of every experience of beauty” in the world.⁶²

Minjung theological aesthetics must take the sacramental textuality of God’s being in minjung art seriously. Minjung art is in a sense the continuation of divine incarnation in history. First generation minjung theologians have not missed this *intertextuality* of human and divine arts. For Suh, the confluence of the two stories found in Kim Chi-ha’s literature is the *missio Dei* of “the unification of God (spiritual reformation) and revolution (structural reformation).”⁶³ Kim Chi-ha himself characterizes his poetry as a “poem of ecstatic mystical union.”⁶⁴ Minjung art is a climax of the confluence of two stories: politics and culture, being and reason, freedom and beauty, God and revolution, Jesus and minjung, spirit and matter. The depth-dimension or religious implication of art lies in this unification of two stories. Minjung theological aesthetics should not fail to interpret this coalescence of God and minjung art as a simultaneous politico-aesthetic adventure of freedom and beauty, giving minjung art its full theological dignity.

In the spirit of St. Thomas Aquinas who says “art, then, is properly in God” (*Summa Contra Gentiles* bk. 1, ch. 93, 4), Jacques Maritain points out the plain yet not much emphasized historical fact that Jesus was himself an artist. “If Christ willed to be an artisan in an insignificant village, it was because He wanted to assume the common lot of humanity.”⁶⁵ Jesus was also a dancer. In the apocryphal Acts of St. John

61 Weil, *Intimations of Christianity*, 150.

62 Viladesau, *Theology and the Arts*, 43.

63 Suh, *Tamgu* [Search], 47.

64 Quoted in Suh, *Tamgu* [Search], 23.

65 Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism with Other Essays*, trans. J. F. Scanlan (New York:

is described the dance of Jesus as the earliest known Christian mystery ritual. The round dance of Jesus and his disciples is suggested here as the culmination of the Lord's Supper, as the celebration of the *unio mystica*.⁶⁶ Furthermore, as Simone Weil says, "the beautiful is the experimental proof that the incarnation is possible."⁶⁷ In human art, God dance us to beauty and freedom!

Jesus Christ is a paradoxical identity of God and minjung. As Jesus of Nazareth is a *historical incarnation* of God in the world, so is art an *aesthetic incarnation* of God in beauty. Christian theology has long affirmed this *analogia entis* of Jesus and art. Due to this analogical yet paradoxical sacramentality, all art in its highest purpose is religious. In Kim Ji-ha's Jang-Il-Dam, Gong Ok-jin's Cripple's dance, the woodprints of Lee Chul-su and Oh Youn, the historical incarnation of God is aesthetically reenacted again and again as the suffering beauty of minjung themselves, as God's own incarnation. "The incarnation reveals a God who took with maximum seriousness the limitations of a specific cultural context," says David Brown, giving us even a chance for "the 'correction' of biblical perspectives."⁶⁸ In this sense the beauty of Jesus and the beauty of minjung is paradoxically identical. It is di-

Charles Scribner's Son, 1930), 16.

66 Quoted in Maria-Gabriele Wosien, *Sacred Dance: Encounter with the Gods* (New York: Thames and Hudson Inc., 1974), 28; E. Louis Backman, *Religious Dance in the Christian Church and in Popular Medicine* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1952), 15.

67 Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 150.

68 David Brown, *Tradition & Imagination: Revelation & Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1. It is one of Brown's fundamental convictions that "Scripture must not be privileged as occupying a normative criteriological role 'over' or 'above' extra-scriptural tradition." See Robert MacSwain and Taylor Worley eds., *Theology, Aesthetics, & Culture: Responses to the Work of David Brown* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 147.

vine and human simultaneously in the *coincidentia oppositorum*. This paradoxical simultaneity is exactly what incarnation means. In this paradoxical co-extensiveness of the beauty of minjung and Jesus, the crude dualistic distinction between the so-called 'self-powered' salvation and 'other-powered' salvation is not precise. There is neither I nor other in the paradoxical beauty of incarnation. The identity of Jesus as minjung transcends far beyond usual distinctions of 'identity vs. difference,' of 'inside vs. outside,' 'self-powered salvation vs. other-powered salvation,' and 'God vs. the world.' God in the full dignity of the word refers to a cosmotheandric, panentheistic, or onto-theo-ego-logical process of life itself in its freedom and beauty. God Himself has become the suffering beauty of the world, not just any beauty but that of the underside of history, viz., the beauty of minjung! "This incomparable paradox stands as the fountainhead of the Christian aesthetic, and therefore of all aesthetics," as Balthasar says.⁶⁹ This paradoxical beauty of minjung is "a beauty crowned with thorns and crucified," and it is reenacted especially in minjung art.⁷⁰ Here lies the promise and hope of minjung art in its proleptic eschatological sense as a dawning of minjung's resurrection. The Catholic theologian Balthasar expresses his fundamental agreement with the Protestant theologian Karl Barth in this regard.

'The beauty of God' in the 'beauty of Jesus Christ' appears therefore precisely in the crucified, but the crucified, precisely as such, is the one risen: 'in this self-disclosure, God's beauty embraces death as well as life, fear as well as joy, that which we

69 Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord*, vol. 1, 29.

70 Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord*, vol. 1, 33.

would call ugly, as well as that which we would call beautiful.⁷¹

The crucified beauty of God on the historical cross of Golgotha is also the crucified beauty of minjung themselves hung on the aesthetic cross of minjung art. *Ecce homo, ecce minjung, ecce pulchrum!*

Kim Chi-ha's figure of Chang Il-Dam fits perfectly with this aesthetic profile of the paradoxical suffering beauty of Christ. "The confluence of Christian and Korean minjung traditions ... finds its programmatic equivalent in Kim Chi-ha's dictum of the 'unity of God and revolution'."⁷² In the suffering of minjung, God himself becomes minjung. Furthermore, as Bonhoeffer says, "only the suffering God can help."⁷³ And, as Suh insists, "Jesus' crying out at death, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?,' is not a situation of being thrown out outside God but a penetrating suffering into God's own innermost heart."⁷⁴ Jesus' death as the collective death and suffering of minjung is immortalized into part of the trinitarian God's own life. Minjung theological aesthetics must reinterpret Hegel's penetrating remark on panentheism from this perspective of an ontotheological confluence of God and minjung: "The True is the whole."⁷⁵

71 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 7: *Theology: The New Covenant*, trans. Brian McNeil C.R.V. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 23.

72 Küster, *A Protestant Theology of Passion*, 81-82.

73 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters & Papers from Prison*, new enlarged edition (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 361.

74 Suh Nam-dong, *Junhwansidaewi Sinhak* [Theology in the Age of Transition] (Seoul: Hanguksinhakyonguso, 1976), 28.

75 G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 11. It is no accident that Suh used the term "confluence" for the first time in the winter of 1965 to refer to a panentheistic christogenesis of Teilhard de Chardin. It is minjung theology's method as well as truth, viz., a theological hermeneutics as well as an ontotheolog-

Spirit is the creative beauty of God in nature as well as in human art. Patrick Sherry shows in his detailed study of patristic fathers that “the Spirit of God communicates God’s beauty to the world” through the creation of natural beauty and the inspiration of artistic beauty.⁷⁶ We remember Suh Nam-dong’s claim that minjung theology’s inculturation project must start from, yet move beyond, a “christological-diachronic” interpretation of faith toward a “pneumatological-synchronic” one.⁷⁷ Suh gives a hermeneutical example of the parable of the Good Samaritan here. In his opinion Jesus Christ is to be understood not as the good Samaritan but as the robbed victim. He sees the incarnated face of Jesus exactly in the damaged and broken face of minjung, forming a mystery of sacrament of brotherhood.⁷⁸ According to Balthasar’s view on sacrament as an essential ecclesial aesthetics, “Christ is the offended God and the offended neighbour all in one.”⁷⁹ The anonymity of Christ is transformed into an aesthetic incarnation of sacraments through the wind of spirit in minjung. In this way, Jesus invites us to the dance of spirit that is a cosmic round dance. For only the Spirit of God knows, Suh suggests, how to lead us to the path of beauty from the “kerygmatic” Christ of the past, through the “secular” Christ of the present, and finally to the “cosmic” Christ of the future.⁸⁰

ical or panentheistic theology. For Suh, God is inseparable from the Hegelian or Whiteheadian ‘minjung as the whole’ or Teilhard’s ‘noosphere’ as an collective mind.

76 Patrick Sherry, *Spirit and Beauty: An Introduction to Theological Aesthetics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 2.

77 Suh, *Tamgu* [Search], 78.

78 For Suh’s borrowing of von Balthasar’s concept of the “sacrament of our brother” as a reference to minjung’s messiahship, see Suh, *Tamgu* [Search], 117-119. Suh sees in Balthasar a transition of the horizon of theology from “metaphysics” to “sociology.” Suh, *Sinhak* [Theology], 73-77.

79 Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, vol. 1, 581.

80 Suh, *Sinhak* [Theology], 65ff.

Suh calls this cosmic adventure of spirit as art. "Since art is humanity's highest expression of creativity and spontaneity, there is no question that art will continue to occupy the highest place as humanity's worship of God."⁸¹ In sum, minjung theological aesthetics as the practice of a critical hermeneutics must be applied to all the dimension of theological analysis, viz., the critical suspicion and/or retrieval of the biblical, the doctrinal, and the Korean traditions of minjung in both history and art.

VI. Art as Practice of Freedom

§6. Art can function either as a possible ideological concealment of the ugliness of the world or as a transformative practice of liberating beauty. The rightful use of art for the practice of Christian faith must not be excluded a priori due to its possible misuse.

Theodor Adorno has no wish to soften his saying that "to write lyric poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric."⁸² To talk about beauty and art in this broken world may appear to be offensive to minjung theologians. However, art does transform the ugliness of ordinary world occasionally. It liberates us in the political as well as spiritual realms. This spiritual-political dimension of art is well emphasized by Paul Tillich, when he says that "art does three things: it expresses, it transforms, it anticipates."⁸³ Art expresses the estranged human condition of anxiety,

81 Suh, *Sinhak* [Theology], 83.

82 Theodor Adorno, "Commitment" (1962), Charles Harrison and Paul Wood eds., *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 761.

it transforms our ordinary reality into the existence of depth dimension, and it proleptically anticipates the saving beauty of God. And according to many theologians including Hyun Young-hak, Ryu Tong-shik, Harvey Cox, Jürgen Moltmann, Richard Viladesau, John DeGruchy, and Garcia-Rivera, art can be an ideology of oppression as well as a political struggle of freedom against evil and ugliness. Minjung theological aesthetics must pay attention to this aesthetico-political dimension of Christian faith. Beauty is *potentially* a practice of freedom, e.g., a struggle for freedom from the pulling gravity as in ballet, or freedom from materiality as in Hegel's analysis of art, or freedom from apartheid as in DeGruchy's analysis of South Africa.⁸⁴

Lastly, minjung theological aesthetics must address the issue of theological style in regard to Christian education, showing the one-sidedness of traditional sermon-centered logocentric performance of theology. The children of God are not all social elites but include the mentally handicapped and the unlearned and the children, in short, minjung. Since Gregory the Great's suggestion of art as the *biblia pauperum*, medieval theology has emphasized the didactic, mnemonic, and affective role of art in the Christian education.⁸⁵ Similarly, James Cone emphasizes the salvific role of music in actual practice of faith among the black minjung. The black Christians have endured the si-

83 Paul Tillich, *On Art and Architecture*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 18.

84 See Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Sacred and Profane Beauty: the Holy in Art*, trans. David E. Green (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963); G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); John W. DeGruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation: Theological Aesthetics in the struggle for Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

85 Lawrence G. Duggan, "Was art really the 'book of the illiterate'?", *Word and Image*, vol. 5, no. 3 (July-September 1989), 232.

lence of God and resisted against the dehumanizing oppression of slave owners with their music of spirituals and blues.⁸⁶ From the beginning of minjung theology, Korean theologians have also emphasized the artistic expression and language of minjung themselves. Suh and the woodcut artist Lee Chul-su have produced a co-authored work of *Han: The Encounter of Theology, Literature, and Visual Art*, even though Suh has not survived to see the actual publication due to his premature death.⁸⁷ David Kwang-sun Suh's *The Korean Minjung in Christ* contains many woodblock printings done by the woodcut artists Lee Chul-Su and Hong Song-dam.⁸⁸ Volker Küster suggests that democratization must be achieved not just by political engagements but in art as well. He highlights the difference between oil paintings and woodcuts, suggesting the wide circulation of woodcut prints made by minjung artists in 70-90s as an aesthetic actualization of "democratization." "In this way genre art experiences a politically motivated renaissance."⁸⁹ As Moltmann cites Friedrich Schiller, perhaps "the path to freedom leads through beauty."⁹⁰ The expressive form of freedom is beauty, and the substance of beauty is freedom.

Due to its metaphysical unpersuasiveness and practical irrelevance, minjung may have given up their hope for salvation in institutional religion. Art is perhaps competing directly with religion for the heart

86 James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation* (New York: Seabury, 1972).

87 Suh Nam-dong and Lee Chul-Su, *Han: Sinhak, Munhak, Misului Mannam* [Han: The Encounter of Theology, Literature, and Visual Art] (Waekwan: Bundo, 1984).

88 David Kwang-sun Suh, *The Korean Minjung in Christ* (Hong Kong: The Christian Conference of Asia, 1991).

89 Küster, "Minjung Theology and Minjung Art," 116.

90 Jukjae Suhnamdong Moksa Yoogojip Pyunjip Weewonhoi [The editorial committee of Rev. Suh Nam-dong's works], *Eesakjupkee* [Collecting the remnant grains], 46.

of minjung now. And in some occasions, as Max Weber suggests, “art takes over the function of a this-worldly salvation, no matter how this may be interpreted. It provides a salvation from the routines of everyday life, and especially from the increasing pressures of theoretical and practical rationalism.”⁹¹ When minjung theological aesthetics ignore Dostoevski’s remark in *The Brothers Karamazov* that beauty is “the battlefield where God and the Devil contended with one another for the heart of man,” theology itself will lose its persuasiveness and transcendental beauty, leaving minjung in the middle of ambiguous diabolic melancholy and despair of life.⁹² Barth’s remark that theology is “the most beautiful of all the sciences” will be soon forgotten from minjung’s mind.⁹³ Theology needs to struggle to regain its own beauty.

VII. Conclusion: the Story of the Lying Buddha

Suh Nam-dong says that “history is the *modus entis* of God.”⁹⁴ Suh’s minjung theology never aims at the salvation *from* history but always the salvation *of* history. Yet the salvation of history is without its face of beauty. Minjung theology should overcome its present oblivion of

91 Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 342; quoted again in Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic* (Grand Rapid, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 49-50.

92 Quoted again in Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953), 161 note 3.

93 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics II.1, The Doctrine of God*, trans. G. T. Tompson and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), 656.

94 Jukjae Suhnamdong Moksa Yoogojip Pyunjip Weewonhoi [The editorial committee of Rev. Suh Nam-dong’s works], *Eesakjupkee* [Collecting the remnant grains], 46.

beauty in minjung's life. It must build a bridge of dialogue with inculturation theology. Only when this task of creative dialogue between freedom and beauty is achieved, the future of minjung theology will have something to offer as an Asian theological contribution to the world. To emphasize the urgent necessity of the change of style of minjung theology into a minjung theological aesthetics, I would like to end this essay not with a systematic conclusion of previous arguments but with my telling of a Korean folk story about the lying Buddha at the Unjusa Temple. The story shows how minjung achieve their poetic immortality in anonymity. Poetic immortality that can be pin down to a certain name is in some respects elitist. Minjung's poetic objective immortality is always anonymous and without name.⁹⁵

Unjusa is a Korean Buddhist temple located in Hwasan county, South Jeolla province. It is known for the only Korean temple to ever have had a thousand stone Buddha statues and stone pagodas, especially a huge lying 'Miruk' (Maitreya) unfinished on the ground. Legend has it that one day the lying Miruk will rise and a new world will come. Unjusa is believed to be built by the Korean minjung in the late period of the Unified Silla (57 BC – 935 AD) or the early Koryo dynasty (935 – 1392 AD), but the exact time of construction is unknown. Presently only 91 statues and 21 pagodas still remain at the site.

Hwang Suk Young's novel, *Jang Gil San*, has revitalized the legend of the lying Buddha or "Wabul" during the military dictatorship of 1970s. The novel is based on a real historical figure of Jang Gil San in

95 Suh Nam-dong has expressed his interest in the Korean religious faith of the 'Miruk' or Maitreya Buddha through Ko Eun's writings. He finds there a dialectical overcoming of the antithesis between the self-powered salvation and the other-powered salvation. If Miruk is believed to be incarnated in minjung, so is Jesus incarnated as a minjung in Chun Tae-il, Kim Chi-ha, etc. Suh, *Tamgu* [Search], 74-75.

the late 17th century who was a runaway slave and bandit dreaming of a new nation for minjung, and never arrested by the authority. Hwang Suk Young masterfully weaves this Korean Robin Hood and his slave revolt together with minjung's hope for the coming messianic kingdom of Miruk around the 10th century. Miruk Buddha will not return from heaven without the awakening of minjung. The legend of the lying Miruk shows why minjung need to realize they are themselves a Buddha. The novelist artfully recaptures the legend of a thousand Buddhas and pagodas at Unjusa as follows:

Runaway slaves were hiding in a valley to receive Miruk Buddha's revelation. One day Miruk announces that He will come and a new capital city will be built at this valley only if they complete a thousand stone Buddhas and pagodas here in one day. All the slaves and the untouchables of the country were gathered as unskilled stone masons. Huge rocks ran against each other to the valley to become a Buddha. A temple was also erected there and given the name of "Unjusa" (the temple of a moving ship; 運舟寺). A young slave asked, "Why is it called as the temple of a moving ship? Where is water on this mountain? Does that mean we have to be chased out again to another island?" A wise old slave replied, "No, son. Miruk's new world will be like a coming ship. Without water, the ship cannot move, you asked? We are the water, the slaves and the untouchables! When we gather together, we the water will move the ship toward a new world of Yong Hwa (the World of Dragon and Flower). Do you get it now?

All the masons went back to carve the statues out of rocks. After

a while, another slave stopped the work and asked, "But we have never seen Miruk Buddha. How can we sculpture Him?" The same wise man said, "You have never seen Miruk? Of course, you did see Him. Miruk looks exactly like you!" The slave resisted, "Nonsense. My nose is broken due to my master's beating, and I am also crippled." The old slave chuckled, "When Miruk Buddha comes to this new capital, he will look exactly like you. Don't be troubled. Go back to work." All the slaves went back to work to carve out the Buddha statues according to their own humble images.

Nine hundred ninety nine Buddhas and pagodas were completed. "Let us make the last Miruk!" All the slaves were gathered in front of a huge lying rock and began to work on the last remaining Buddha. When they finished carving, they tried to erect the last Miruk from the ground. Due to the weight, however, they failed again and again. The time is almost up. A lazy tired slave had a cunning idea. "The cock crowed!", he lied. When people heard the sad news, they all fell on the ground helplessly. All the hurrying rocks dropped dead with their heads toward the lying Miruk. The last Buddha is still lying on the ground at Unjusa till today. When the lying Miruk will rise, all the rocks will eventually become a Buddha. From that day on, the temple was renamed as "Unjusa" (the temple of cloud dwelling; 雲住寺) and became a place of waiting. For the new world has stopped coming until the water gathers again to raise the lying Miruk up.⁹⁶

96 A summary of the legend of the lying Buddha based on Hwang Suk-young, *Jang Gil San*, vol. 10 (Seoul: Hyunamsa, 1984), 436-442.

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