

“A Friendly and Critical Appraisal of the Late Dr. Kim Yong-Bock’s Idea of the Subjecthood of the Life”

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Abstract

This article discusses on the validity of conferring the subjecthood to the whole life by the late professor and minjung theologian Kim Yong-Bock. Dr. Kim’s theological journey can be characterized by such pivotal terms as social biography and zoography. The first term, the social biography, was the central concept for his minjung theology during his earlier career as a minjung theologian. In the epoch of the Anthropocene, when the life of all creations is at the brink of total destruction, zoography, the story of life, has become the reference point of theology. Kim argues that the whole life in the webwork of life has the subjecthood. The author of the article counterargues that life or the whole life is but an idea. As an idea this does not have the body and thus it is not yet the subject. In addition, the author claims that things and objects in the cosmos which have bodies, are subjects that interact and affect one another. But this

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author argues that they are weak subjects, because they do not have the capacity of transcending their own limitations. This author argues that minjung, as strong subjects, must take more responsibility for the integrity of the life of all creations.

● Keyword

social biography, zoography, zoesophia, zoe, life, strong subject, weak subject

Dr. Kim Yong-Bock (1937-2022, hereafter Kim) was one of the major pioneers of minjung theology (*minjung* a Korean term meaning ordinary people). Kim's journey of theology and ecumenical movement can be characterized as a journey from the social biography to the *zoography*. Kim was the youngest of the first-generation minjung theologians, and as he passed away, the first minjung theology has ended, and minjung theology is now entering a new era of its history. Kim was a great theological voice and a significant contributor to minjung theology and theology of life. His theological journey can be divided into two: the phase of minjung theology and the phase of theology of life. The latter phase is not wholly disconnected from the first. The core ideas of minjung theology are still operative, if not partially, in his theology of life.

As I started to work on this article I encountered a book written by a Japanese sociologist Saito Kohei entitled 지속불가능 자본주의 (*Unsustainable Capitalism, Das Kapital in the Anthropocene*).¹ This book reminded me of a certain idea, not a new but still very relevant to the major content of this article, that the capitalist drive of the unlimited economic growth is the root cause of the destruction of the environmental life and the poverty of the weak sectors of the world.

If the destruction of the environmental life and the economic death (i.e., poverty) of the poor in the world are originated by the common factor, that is, the capitalist drive of the unlimited economic growth, who and how can challenge and fight the capitalist drive of unlimited economic growth? The “how” issue

1 Saito Kohei, 지속불가능 자본주의, (*Unsustainable Capitalism, Das Kapital in the Anthropocene*) (Dadasoje, 2020) trans. Kim Young-Hyun.

is not the target of this paper. The “who” issue is the question this paper would like to address. Different people will have different answers. Kim Yong-Bock offers a definite answer to this question. He states that the whole life is the subject. Then what is the whole life for Kim Yong-Bock. The whole life is for him is the life that integrates human, non-human, and inhuman lives and all different (social, cultural, biological, ecological) dimensions of the life into a whole. The life is for him is “the life of all living beings in the cosmos.” Dr. Kim affirms that life is “the sovereign subject of the cosmos” in the times of the unprecedented threat of total destruction of life.²

I. The social Biography of Minjung

The social biography of minjung was a key idea of Kim Yong-Bock. For him, minjung are, most of all, subjects not objects. Minjung are actors and speakers; they are agents who are participants in society and history. Minjung are the tellers of their stories. They create history as they participate in crucial moments and phases in history. For example, the *Donghak* peasant revolution against the Korean feudal system and Japanese imperialism in the late 19th century was a typical historical event by the minjung, who were poor peasants and ordinary people.

The March 1st movement against Japanese imperialist occupation of Korea in 1919 was minjung’s collective actions to restore the independence of Korea. Minjung and religious

2 Kim Yong-Bock, “The Study of Life in Doing Theology,” Unpublished paper, p.3.

groups including Christianity, the Heavenly Way (*Donghak* Religion), Buddhism, and Confucianism were involved in this minjung movement for the independence from Japanese occupation. Many casualties and imprisonments of minjung and their leaders were followed.

Later in 1975, the name of minjung theology appeared in Korea. The era of the 1970's was when huge number of industrial workers were created by the industrialization of the modern Korea, and their working and living conditions were so poor that call for justice for the minjung was demanded. Ahn Byung-Mu, another major minjung theologian, once commented that underneath nation's struggle for independence and democracy, a collective group to carry out incessant struggles were the deprived and underprivileged people, the minjung, and they have played the role of Christ the liberator in Korean history.

Minjung are protagonists and heroes. They are not objects for social scientists to analyze and for the haves to exploit. The social biography of minjung refers to the stories of minjung that are told by minjung in relation to others in society. The social biography of minjung symbolizes the idea that minjung are subjects, not objects in history and society.

Kim's understanding of minjung as subjects who tell and write their own socio-biographies reveals his wish to view minjung as active participants and agents. He demands us understand the minjung as agents of activities and changers of history, and avoid from viewing them as objects to be analyzed, taught, and commanded. Kim believes that stories told by minjung themselves show their subjecthood in the arena of history and society. For Kim, social sciences and other disciplines are not

competent in showing them all, but only socio-biography is. He sometimes includes fictional stories and folk tales in the socio-biography.

Kim Yong-Bock asserts that technocracy, militarism, totalitarianism, military-industrial complex, transnational corporations, and the empire are the powers that exploit minjung as objects. To fight them, minjung must practice messianic politics by non-violent and self-emptying suffering action. Technocracy is the most widespread power in the modernity. It is a combination of technology, sciences, and bureaucracy. Now in this post-modern era, technocracy has gone under the power of the global empire.

In the age of global market and empire, not only minjung but all living beings are at the brink of total destruction. He starts to talk about life instead of minjung, because minjung does not represent the whole creation suffering under the rule of the destructive global market and empire. Regarding the global imperial power, he even says that the global geopolitical power has shifted: from Bi-polar Geo-politics to Mono-polar Geopolitics, the Hegemony of the Global Empire.³ But it is obvious that the Globe has already entered into the Third World War, as we see the war in Ukraine. The globe is not monolithically controlled by a mono-polar global empire, the U.S. There are global powers competing and conflicting against one another.

However, the crisis of the climate change and natural disaster has become a common issue that must be dealt with by all

3 Kim Yong-Bock, "The Origin, history and future of minjung theology—An Outline," Vol 35, *Madang: International of Contextual Theology*, (Sungkonghoe University: June, 2022): 106-107.

sectors of the world. This is the reason why liberation and minjung theologies must create discourses and narratives that not only relate socio-economic structural problems to the problems of ecological crisis, but address concretely the problems poor people are facing in this capitalism. The present capitalist ways of production and consumption are the root-cause of the poverty, hunger, and climate change. Capitalism increases the production of CO₂, the cause of global warmth, and the gap between the poor and the rich.

How can we balance between the structural problems of minjung, the poor, and the ecological crisis of the world? The temperature increase has already reached the target degree, but the reduction of the CO₂ production is not in view yet. Because the climate change affects agriculture and fishery, the poor sectors engaging in such traditional industries are in crisis, which gets the poor poorer. The climate catastrophe does not affect the poor and the rich equally. The poor in the Global South are the most affected. Recent floods in Pakistan are an example. Wikipedia reports, “Since June 14, 2022, floods in Pakistan have killed 1,678 people. The floods were caused by heavier than usual monsoon rains and melting glaciers that followed a severe heat wave, all of which are linked to climate change. It is the world’s deadliest flood since the 2017 South Asian floods and described as the worst in the country’s history. ... The government of Pakistan has estimated losses worth US\$40 billion from the flooding.”⁴ One third of the country was underwater, and there was no dry land to pump the water out. In other parts of the world, many lands in Oceanic countries

4 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2022_Pakistan_floods#cite_note-D_1545-5

are sinking because the sea water level rises. Some nations can be wholly wiped out by water sooner or later. Wild fires in California, heat waves and droughts in Europe are just among a few effects of the climate change in 2022. More catastrophes will follow in the days and years to come.

II. Zoography and the study of life

Kim Yong-Bock once explained why he began to develop the idea of *zoography* as follows:

My development of zoography comes from minjung theology, but even more, it is a rejection of the Western individual concept of self, reductionist and controlling, dividing humans and nature. Native Americans understand humans and nature as one.⁵

Minjung theology as a political theology has been anthropocentric. It has dealt with the social and political problems of minjung (people). In minjung political theology during the movement of the democratization in Korea, the *socio-biography* of minjung was a major point of reference for minjung theology. The term *bio* is more political and social than the term *zoe*. Kim Yong-Bock uses the term *zoe* as a term for inhuman (and human) affairs, while *bio* is a term for human affairs. Kim Yong-Bock explains thus:

5 Kim Yong-Bock's unpublished manuscript, "APAY 35th Advanced Studies Programme, Kim Yong-Bock Lectures, November 9-9, 2017," 5.

We have used the social biography in reference to the story of the Minjung to express the social and community dimension of the subjecthood of the Minjung. The *zoography* is used here in reference to an integral study of the whole life (living being), which involves biological and ecological as well as social and cultural dimensions of the life.⁶

In the age of global empire or global capitalism, the life of the whole creation including minjung are in destruction. Minjung theology has to change itself and become a theology of life. Life and ecology have become imperative categories; the life and ecology are organically connected with the traditional themes of minjung theology, e.g., liberation and justice. Without considering the life as a major issue, minjung theology cannot touch on the real issues of minjung. Many statistics and researches prove that poor minjung are more vulnerable to ecological disasters.

Kim once wrote thus: "When the Minjung theological reflection was unfolding in the 1970's, the primary focus was the society of nation state. The Minjung was understood in terms of the structure of the nation state in its modern and capitalist development. The Cold War situation has effected its thinking very much. In the 21st century, however, the context is radically changed in global terms. This may be described and analyzed in terms of the globalization and the global empire." (Vol.37 *Madang*: 90-91)

Kim reiterates the situation by such terms as *thanatography*

6 From Kim Yong-Bock's unpublished paper, "The study of life in doing theology: overcoming the forces of death"

(story of death). In order to counter the *thanatography*, Kim employs such ideas as *zoegraphy*, *zoecracy*, and *zoesophia*. *Zoesophia* is the wisdom of life, which can be found in both eastern and western religions and thoughts. He emphasizes that the *zoesophia* is rich in the Eastern religions and thoughts such as Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. He suggests that the convergence of those religions and thoughts will bring forth a genuine *zoesophia*.

According to *zoesophia*, all beings on earth, human or nonhuman, organic or inorganic, are in a close relationship. All beings are not thing-objects, but body-subjects. Life is not only specific to human and animal lifeworld, but it is the most essential factor consisting in humans, animals, plants, rocks, and other things, organic and inorganic. They form the “webwork of life.” Life lives in this web, communion of bodies-subjects, and their relationality. Life is lived in people in this wider web of life. For Kim Yong-Bock the universe is first of all a communion of subjects in the subject-subject relationship, not a collection of objects. Kim Yong-Bock views universe and life as unknown and as a mystery, and he envisions the Messianic feast of life as the final destination of all beings. It is *Oikonomia Convivencia*, the new heaven and new earth, the new garden of life, *oikonomia tou zoe* (economy of the life), which is life together, *Sangsaeng*.

Zoegraphy can be defined, following Van den Hengel, as: “a mode of writing life [...], which centers on the generative vitality of *zoe*, an inhuman, impersonal, and inorganic force which [...] is not specific to human lifeworlds, but cut across

humans, animals, technologies, and things.”⁷ Again, Kim says that death also lives through all this connective relationality. It is the *thanatography* as opposed to the *zoography*. For example, sea squirts eat plastics (suck up plastics), and they are eaten by fish, which are eaten by humans. Some scientists say that we might “be ingesting the mass of a credit card’s worth of microplastic a year” by inhaling and eating.⁸ The amount of plastics produced every year is skyrocketing on top of existing plastics landfills. It is like a timebomb for the future generations, because studies found it as toxic and harmful for living organisms.

Life or zoe (and death) is a key idea for the understanding of the bleak reality of the human and non-human life. But when it comes to the issue of the recovery of the ecological integrity, *bio* becomes the key for action for it. Human subjects can turn things around. I think that subjects can be divided into strong ones and weak ones. I understand a strong subject as a subject who transcends her own limitations, while by a weak subject a subject that remains simply in relation with other subjects affecting each other. When Kim talks about the universe as the communion of subjects, I believe, he speaks of weak subjects. Inter-relationality presupposes individual beings and individual subjects. Following Kim Yong-Bock we can see all beings in the world as subjects, but I would add that a certain segment of them are strong subjects who are capable of transcending themselves, transcending from the carnal, fleshly being to the spiritual being, and turning things around. Not all humans can become strong subjects. Most humans are weak subjects as flesh,

7 Van den Hengel, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/241892335_Zoography_Performing_Posthuman_Lives

8 <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-01143-3>.

who live a *normal* life in the present structure. All other beings of the world, we call them nature as a whole, may also be seen as weak subjects. Weak subjects can be changed to revolutionary and strong subjects at a certain moment. Ordinary people--weak subjects--can be changed to revolutionary minjung at an event-al moment. Natural beings can also become strong subjects to turn everything around, as we have experienced the recent pandemic Covid-19 and natural disasters caused by climate change.

III. Is Life the Subject in the cosmos?

Kim Yong-Bock's understanding of current situation is summed up in a simple, highly critical sentence: "The current global imperial order utilizes Christianity as its culture and religion."⁹ The same global order controls and utilizes sciences, technology, humanities, arts and religions, and destroys the living beings in the cosmos. In this context, Kim Yong-Bock asserts that life is the sovereign subject in the cosmos. He affirms, "life is the most universal substance in all living beings on earth and in the universe."¹⁰ He also affirms that *zoosophia* (the study of life) is necessary and this will lead us to alternative understanding of the whole situation, and this will be carried out by "multi-disciplinary study and convergence of the various wisdoms about life."¹¹

Why is the subjectification of life needed? It is, Kim observes, because life is objectified by the global empire and capitalism. If

9 Kim Yong-Bock, "The Study of Life in Doing Theology," Unpublished paper, 3.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid, p.4.

you become objects, then you will be utilized, manipulated and destroyed. It is urgently necessary that life be regarded as the subject in the world and cosmos.

I quote Kim Yong-Bock in relation to the subjecthood of life.

Here life is the most inclusive category, which includes all living beings. The discrimination between human life, animal life, life of plants and trees are arbitrary. The life of humans, animals and plants and trees forms one inter-related webwork of life. The fragmentation and reduction is abstract and arbitrary. Even the discrimination between the organic and inorganic is abstract and arbitrary, for the life cannot exist without inorganic substance.¹²

Whole life is a dynamic, intelligible web-work of the infinite reproductive and productive activities of living beings. As Lovelock has asserted, the earth as GAIA is a whole living being. This whole living being is a subject with unknown dimensions.

The productive and reproductive dynamics of birth and rebirth are an elaborate, holistic network of mutual cooperation and common life. Here the subject of life is not individualistic or fragmentary but a convivial entity. The subjectivity of any living being should be understood in terms of the close, organic cooperation of its cells and genes at the micro-level; the symbiosis of living beings; and the interaction of organic and inorganic elements. Any living being is a subject in this complex matrix of “common life,

12 Kim Yong-Bock, “The Story of Life: Zoography,” <https://zoosophia1101.blogspot.com/2015/03/the-story-of-life-zoography.html>

cooperation and co-existence.” Yet it is a mystery. It is a mystery that life is the subject, not the object, of its being.¹³

And,

But we are looking for an answer for an integral and holistic understanding of life. We are rejecting any understanding of the life that is reductionist, fragmentary and compartmentalized. Life is known through its story. The story of life is a best way to describe the way the life lives. The underline assumption is that the life is not object, but the subject.

This has two important understanding of the life. The life is not to be fragmented and reduced as minutest parts; and its subjecthood is in the whole of the living being, not in the part of the living body. This means that the whole of the living being constitutes the subjecthood. The subjecthood of life does not abide in the particle of the living being. The subject abides in the whole being of the life.¹⁴

Who are the subjects that play the role of agents to counteract the global empire and capitalism that create poverty, death, climate change and other ecological crises? Kim announces that “life is the subject,” and “the subjecthood of life does not abide in the particular of the living being. The subject abides in the whole being of the life.” Kim focuses on the whole life rather than individual life/lives. The single whole life matters. But

13 Kim Yong-Bock, “The study of life in doing theology: overcoming the forces of death,” Unpublished paper, 8-9.

14 “The Story of Life: Zoography.”

I wonder if such whole life exists in reality in real form. I can imagine, following Kim, that life is something that cuts across all the creation. *Zoe* is non- and pre-human vitality, *elan vital*, vital force, *ruach* in Hebrew, or *qi* in Korean. *Zoe* is the common vital element in the universe and all (in-)organisms. In contrast, *bio* refers to human life in the polis. Kim announces that *zoe* is a “force of inhuman vitality that runs through humans, animals, and things, and connects them transversally.”¹⁵

Kim declares that the life force is the real subject to counter the power of the global imperial capitalism. He no longer says that humans and *minjung* are subjects to counter it, because he believes that the life force is the genuine power to countervail the powers of the death, the global capitalism and empire. For Kim Yong-Bock life is the real representative of all organic and inorganic creation. Humans including the *minjung* are not authentic representatives of the whole creation at a time of total destruction.

But I think there is a tricky problem when we confer the subjecthood upon life. Subjecthood that is placed upon non-human living beings is not usual and ordinary. But Kim affirms that life/body should become the subject. Kim argues that all living beings must be seen as subject, not as object. He rejects the reduction of living beings to objects and materials for human, corporate subjects to utilize and manipulate. This argument is authentic and right. He further asserts equality among all living beings, especially between humanity and non-humanity.

However, considering all living beings an authentic subject as opposed to the global empire and capitalism looks unrealistic

15 “The Story of Life: Zoography.”

in a praxical sense. If life, organic or inorganic, has to become a subject, it must be satisfied by some qualifications. Kim illustrates those qualifications as follows. He says: Life reproduces itself, grows, learns to live, heals itself, communicates, matures by itself, creates and recreates by itself.¹⁶ But such qualifications are not enough, because they are instinctual functions of most animals and plants. And they belong to the category of animal instincts. The body/life thinks and acts; it does so, following the vital instincts. However, instinct is not a sufficient enough qualification for the subjecthood. Thus, Kim adds that life is also the spirit. He says, living beings are “bodies as well as spirits.”¹⁷ The spiritual dimension lets the body/life go over its instinctual and biological domains, which follow (more) determinate rules and orders. Human body is spiritual and cultural, and because of the spiritual aspect of the human life, the human world is open to the more infinite, which is less complete and determinate, and therefore human world is characterized by (more or less) incompleteness, indeterminateness and infinity, which provides the humanity with the opportunity to get on dialectical process of changes. When Kim says that the life is both body and spirit, I am sure that he actually talks about the human subject, although he did not clearly express it. However, his idea of the spirit is close to the universal life force, *qi*. This idea of the spirit lacks another important aspect of the spirit, that is, a creative spirit that transforms and sublimates contradictions, distortions, lacks and indeterminates in history into the more truthful and more wholistic. This is the reason why human subjects as spirits can

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

take part in the process of constructing / finding truths in the conflict-ridden world.

Kim expressed hesitance and oscillation between life and body. I quote from the second chapter of his unpublished manuscript *A Preliminary Study on the Method of the Study of Life*:

“If life (*zoe*) is objectified, minimized, fragmented, and reduced to some fundamental elements, then life becomes non-intelligible (a phantasm). It seems that the life is the body. If we are speaking of life instead of body, however, we may lose individuality. The real, tangible base of life can be weakened. The life can become an unreal being. Then, the being? The biography of the being? The reason for employing the language of life is in order to speak of the anti-life powers. That is binary conflict and opposition (between life and anti-life), like Augustine’s opposition of *Civitas Dei* and *Civitas Terrena*.” (my translation)

Kim attaches the idea of subject to life in order to let life itself overcome the destructive power. But he sometimes falls into a conception of life without tangible bodies. He opposes the webwork of life to the network of Death and Destruction following Augustine’s opposition between the City of God and the City of the earth. The two cities are ideas, not tangible realities. Kim often claims that the life is the subject of the cosmos. I here observe Kim’s oscillation between life as a living being with body and life as an idea without specific bodies. When he talks about life, he does not consciously distinguish between the two. The life or the network of life is an idea and

that it cannot become the subject with the body. For example, let us suppose that a big steel mill is dumping toxic chemicals into village streams, whose contaminated water threatens the lives of the villagers and the environment, which is the whole webwork of life of the village community. Who will rise and struggle to change it? The whole webwork of life in the environment, or the villagers? Whereas Kim states that life is the subject of the universe and community, the webwork of life cannot play the role of the subject in this situation. The villagers who are awakened to the threat and danger of toxication, take action against the dumping of toxic chemicals. They are aware that all living beings are interconnected to the whole environment, and that if the latter is destroyed, the life of villagers is also in danger. As we have seen the case of the 2022 flood in Pakistan, the poor (minjung) are co-sufferers of the endangered life.

IV. Life, Body, and Subject

In his later integral study of life, Kim seems not to grant the subjecthood to individual humans but to the life of both the human and the inhuman.¹⁸ He points out that the subject that carries out the cosmic movement toward the eschaton of the cosmic feast for life is the life, not the minjung (people).

The modern human civilization with high techs is regarded as a destructive power that will lead the whole world into death. He is clear about the destructive nature of modern technology

18 Kim Yong-Bock, "The study of life in doing theology: overcoming the forces of death," Unpublished paper, 8-9.

and technocracy. Kim attempts at finding spiritual sources for life in the past traditions of the East and the West, especially in narratives and wisdoms in them. He regards the mythical narrative of *Dan-gun*, the legendary ancestor of the Korean people, as a typical source for the wisdom of life. Kim has the tendency to focus on the eschatological end rather than the process in history: *Oikonomia Convivencia*, New Heaven New Earth, Jubilee, *T'aeguk* (太極, the Great Absolute, the omega point), *Sunkyung* (仙境, the Heavenly, Ideal Land), the Messianic feast of life, the new garden of life, *oikonomia tou zoe* (economy of life), and *sangsaeng* (life together). Thereby he tends to neglect the analysis of the root-causes of current socio-economic inequalities and other problems. More importantly, he does not do a keen investigation of the current *minjung*, their possibilities as well as limitations as subjects.

I would argue that the embodied-ness of life cannot be too much empathized, when we discuss the life-subject of the environment. The body constitutes an essential part of the subject. The embodied-ness of the humans corrects the human civilization that drives the unlimited growth in significant ways. First, the bodily existence of the human subjects awakens us that humans as bodies participate in the whole network of life/body. Humans as bodies do not live on their own, and they cannot live without sound relationship with non-human beings in the world, the environmental world. Second, the body of the human subject points to its creatureliness and its finiteness and limits as other non-human living beings. The finiteness and limitations of the human body does not fail the subjecthood of the human. The finiteness and limitations of the human body reveals truths

about the human subjectivity. The embodied-ness of the human subject must be seen as a source of a real subjecthood. All the creatures have bodies, and having the body is not a limit but a new possibility. The late minjung theologian Suh Nam-Dong contrasted language of the body as opposed to language of the head, which was for him the discourse of the dominant classes. Language of the body tells truths about our lives.

Then, how can we understand the body in relation to the subjecthood? The body is an organic substance that can assume the subjecthood. Human body is, first of all, affected by human language (and discourse). Human's ability of speaking language makes it different from the non-human. Culture and technique are produced by the human ability of speaking and using the language. The body is affected by another element, which is the spirit of the truth (God).

"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God" (Rom 8:14). The sons of God are the subjects of history. In the New Testament, the human body-subject (*the soma*) is affected by two powers or two languages: the Spirit and the Letter (the Law). The Spirit of truth has the power to reveal the real humanity (the truth of life), while the Law represents the language that leads to destruction. Apostle Paul says, "For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God" (Gal 2:19). "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law" (Rom 3:31). The law is language that we cannot avoid. This is our destiny. But we have to be careful not to be prisoners of the law. "But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit" (Rom 7:6). "To set

the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace" (Rom 8:6).

"Our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3:5-6). The human body (*Soma*) as a neutral matter abides by the Law and the Spirit, in other words, by two opposite types of language and power. Our thinking can also be under the power of the Law and the Spirit. Thus, the thinking of the people can be ambiguous, because both have a determining effect on them. The diminishing of the power of the Law is what Apostle Paul teaches us to do.

If the body is overwritten and affected by the dominant language (discourse and narrative), then this body becomes a reactionary subject. If the body adopts the Spirit of truth, then the body will become sons of God, truthful subjects of transformation and revolution, who create new things, new Heaven and new Earth in history.

We may also consider the body as the one totally dissociated from language, that is, organs and organism.¹⁹ The body as organism is not simply the object of language and affected by the language, it becomes a source of a new language, which breaks up the dominant structure. This is why philosophy and theology in the post-pandemic age starts to look to the body as a focus and key for the new perspective. Such a body, an animal body, is organism, an organic body, the biological matter, the real base of *zoe*.

19 Verhaeghe, P., "Subject and Body: Lacan's Struggle with the Real," <https://paulverhaeghe.psychanalysis.be/artikels/Subject%20and%20body.pdf>, 9.

In the time of the pandemic, we need to view the human body as an animal body and matter, which is no longer swayed by dominant language and discourse, which constructs the current dominant structure. We have to give a full respect and independence to the matter and the organic body. Such a full respect for the matter and objects in the world is necessary for doing justice to the suffering organic bodies in the pandemic and to all objects and creations in the age of climate change. Giorgio Agamben, the Italian philosopher, in contrast, argues that the separation of “bare life” from social life is “the most shocking element of the new cult established by medicine-as-religion.”²⁰ For Agamben social life matters. It is more essential than the bare life. That is why he demands for social life, even when social distancing and other related measures are necessary to save the lives of individual bodies. But, in the pandemic times, the bare life by itself matters. In order to save the bare life of the bodies, social life needs to be controlled.

For Kim, *zoe* is a mysterious entity, and it does not belong to individual bodies. It belongs to the whole of the living beings. If that is so, the disappearance of the body in his theory of subject is inevitable. An entity without body such as the spirit, is not the subject. The spirit is rather an element of truthful and faithful, subjectivized body.

Can non-human bodies such as plants, animals and other individual living beings have the subjecthood? Can only the human body be the subject? This question is related to the issue of equality and democracy among all living beings, between

20 Giorgio Agamben, *Where Are We Now? The Pandemic as Politics*, (Lanham, Maryland, UK: Rowman and Littlefield, 2021), 64.

human body and non-organic things, and between subjects and objects.²¹ This issue of ontological weight of and among different things is not easily resolvable. If we put down the subjecthood of the humanity, we may end up weakening the role of the humanity in the recovery effort for ecological integrity. In this sense, I think that the subjecthood and subjectivation in a true sense must be applied to human subjects. Minjung theology upholds the idea that minjung, the poor, ordinary people, are the subjects of history. In the era of ecological destruction and Anthropocene, the idea of *zoegraphy* and *zoesophia* gives urgent message to the minjung, and brings more responsibility to them for the life of the whole creation. I believe that subjecthood must go with the minjung, and that the minjung in solidarity with other groups of people must take more responsibilities to deal with the global ecological crisis.

V. A Conclusion

I would call Kim Yong-Bock a visionary and a scholar. I think that we can detect logical pitfalls in his study of life. For example, he oscillates between life and body, and between life with body and life as an idea. He claims that the whole webwork of life is the sovereign subject of the cosmos. The subjecthood of the whole life seems to me unreal and idealistic. It seems that such a discourse is possible because he is a prophetic visionary. By seeing him as a prophetic visionary, we can understand why he could take such a liberty of constructing his own ideas for the

21 Refer to footnote 13.

study of life (*zoosophia*).

Dr. Kim employs such terms as *zoegrrophy* and confluence. He believes that all sorts of stories, ideas and wisdoms from the East and West can be integrated into *zoegrrophy* and converge into *zoosophia*, which is to fight and overcome the *thanatography* (the biography of death) of all destructive powers including the global empire and technocracy.

Dr. Kim envisions a world where all creations are regarded and respected as the subjects, not as the objects. He gave the full subjecthood to the whole life. Kim envisions a utopia or sun-topia (*sun refers to an angelic and utopian landscape*) where all living and non-living beings / things are respected as subjects and celebrate the feast of life, a cosmic feast.

Finally, I believe that Kim adopts evolutionary viewpoint of the world, rather than the viewpoint of dialectic and transformative change of the world. He has left behind such ideas as messianic politics, revolutionary changes of the world and political theology, it seems to me, when he has gone over to *zoosophia* and *zoegrrophy* from the political minjung theology and socio-biography of minjung. I must, however, add that Kim Yong-Bock did not leave minjung theology totally. We can see this from the remark in his most recently written but unpublished manuscript, *A Preliminary Study on the Method of the Study of Life*.

"I claim that we cannot separate minjung theology, theology of life, study of minjung and study of life. The problem of life must include that of socio-economic oppression and injustice. The problem of minjung must start from the life or the living on a micro level toward the life on a macro level and eventually the life of the cosmos. The problem of life and the problem of

minjung cannot be separated.” (From the 8th chapter)

Finally, I found quite a few writings which are beautifully written and insightful. Among them some are carried in the recent issues of the Journal of *Madang*.²² But one article is not yet carried in *Madang*, and is entitled “From Historical Polity of “Conviviality” to Future Polity of Democracy--June Democratic Resistance as Turning Point”. This article was probably written in 2015 at an anniversary of the June 10 Resistance of 1987. It is short but clear about Kim Yong-Bock’s zoesophia (and zoecracy) from the perspective of minjung theology. Zoesophia and minjung theology are integrally connected here. I wish this article be published in the next issue of *Madang*. As his integral study of life evolves further, his minjung theology becomes thinner and the subjecthood of the minjung less focused, while the subjecthood of life becomes more focused.

22 For example, “The Origin, History and Future of Minjung Theology: An Outline,” and “Transformative Convergence of Spirituality for Conviviality,” are carried in Vol 37, 15th June 2022, *Madang*.

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