

Consultation on Asian Minjung Experiences and Event in the 21st Century

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On 12-13 October, a consultation of Asian theologians was held in Seoul, Korea, under the theme “Asian Minjung Experiences and Events in the 21st Century,” which was co-sponsored by four organizations—Ahn Byung-mu Memorial Project Committee, Hanshin University, The Society of Korean Minjung Theology, and Hyanglin Church. The purpose of the meeting is, in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the birth of the minjung theologian Ahn Byung-mu, to examine the current state of Asian contextual theologies in relation to minjung theology, and to build solidarity for Asian progressive theologians. Eight invited theologians from seven countries engaged in in-depth dialogues of two full days with Korean minjung theologians in four sessions each of which focused on Gender in Asia, Climate Crisis and Eco-Human Suffering, Inequality and Justice in the Neoliberal Age, and Resistance and Spirituality. Besides, Michael Welker (University of Heidelberg, Germany) delivered a public lecture and discussed with Hiheon Kim (Chair, the Society of Korean

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The first day began with OPENING PLENARY in Hyanglin Church, moderated by Yang Guen-Seok (Sungkonghoe University, Korea). Eight theologians introduced various issues that are important in the social context of their respective countries. *Karl J. Evasco-Villarmea* (Silliman University) spoke about the militarization of Philippines democracy in which extra jurisdictional killings happened in ideological hostility. *Septemmy E. Lakawa* (Jakarta Theological Seminary) told a story of a former political prisoner as an example of hidden stigma in Indonesia and drew theological necessity of interreligious re-imagination of collectivity and social compassion. *Wesley Cheng* (Tainan Theological Seminary) raised questions ‘Who is minjung?’ and ‘Who defines who minjung is?’ and paid attention to LGBTQ+ in Taiwan as the people who lost their voices. *Kanan Kitani* (Doshisha University) introduced some grim phenomena of Japan that appear in social apathy, communication problems, low rate birth, exploitation of foreign labors, and environmental crisis. *Min-Ab Kim* (The Korea Christian Action Organization) illustrated the struggles of Korean minjung on various social problems, including the National Security Law, growing polarizations and gentrification, gender discrimination and sexual violence, and recent social disasters in the absence of government’s role. *Aorenla Longchar* (Clark Theological College, India) underlined the oneness of humanity in face to ethnic conflicts in Manipur, India. *Michael Welker* shared post-war experiences of German society and his family that caused silence and desperate strife in the social conservatization. *Sharon A. Bong* (Monash University) presented a feminist-postcolonial reading of ‘Save Malaysia, Stop Lynas’ protest, a protest as a civil disobedience of Malaysian Green March against the exploitation

of Rare earth elements (REE) by Lynas Corporation (Australia), and suggested care for our common home with concepts of 'ecological debt' and 'differentiated responsibilities' between the global South and North.

SESSION ONE, moderated by Hee-Kyu Heidi Park (Ewha Women's University), focused on "Gender in Asia" with three presentations. *Soon-Yang Choi*(Ewha Women's University) criticized Korean church's fixed gender-role education and biblical interpretations that caused women to be alienated and discriminated. Many concurred Choi's suggestion that a faith community should consider holistic approaches in Christian education in order to be friendly to sexual minorities and the underprivileged. *Septemmy E. Lakawa* presented a paper, titled "Rethinking Gender in Minjung Theology: Collectivity, Event and Art of Healing and Liberation," in which minjung theology is appreciated with its ideas of 'collectivity' and 'event' and also faces challenges in directly addressing minority theologies. Still relevant to making 'sacred queer space' for those whose gender-based trauma has been overlooked, minjung theology could provide a framework in struggle for liberation and healing, queer art, art sites, and movements. *Wesley Cheng* criticized the gender-based violence, which suppressed the voices of sexual minorities, and unraveled the meaning of #MeToo movement in Taiwan that promoted respect for individual choices and identities and created a safe environment for discussing sex, gender, and emotions as shown in 'Thursday in Black' movement. Participants shared his criticism that hierarchical thinking drives people into rigid categories and conflicts between the family-centered vs. the queer-centered.

On the evening of the first day, a public lecture was given by *Michael*

Welker on “The Future of Ahn Byung-Mu’s Theology and the Spirit of Jesus Christ,” which outlined the formation of Ahn’s theology in relation to his painful youth and the Korean social context of suffering. Welker admired Ahn’s theology for being deeply rooted in biblical traditions and the historical Jesus, and formed into an inclusive socio-political existential theology, so that it remains relevant to today’s faith in the power of transformation and liberation by maintaining strong biblical and Christological foundations with prophetic power. Welker suggested a next step for the future of minjung theology with his idea of Spirit Christology which witnesses to the divine Spirit as the Spirit of justice, freedom, truth, benevolence, love and peace. *Hibeon Kim*, stating a misdirected conservative criticism of minjung theology, articulated the non-dualistic nature of minjung theology and distinguished its voices from the Pentecostal charismatic movement despite the seemingly common use of the term ‘Spirit of Jesus Christ’. Using the phrase “whose spirit, and whiter it goes,” Kim underlined the ‘spiritual discernment’ in the life of faith communities for responding to the suffering of minjung and also for the future dialogue between Spirit Christology and Korean minjung theology.

On the second day, the participants moved to Hanshin Graduate School of Theology to continue the consultation, SESSION TWO, moderated by Karl Vilarmea, was dedicated to “Climate Crisis and Eco-Human Suffering,” in which three presenters spoke. Ick-Sang Shin (Sungkonghoe University), in his paper “Thinking about social-ecological transformation through the structure of Paul’s messianic life,” suggested the expansion of meso-level interactions between macro-level goals and micro-level actions in which context-shaping powers actually play for the social-ecological transformation (SET). For this purpose, Shin attempted to link two

social-ecological politics between ‘decoupling’ and ‘degrowth’ models and utilized Agamben’s idea of ‘messianic life’ as living ‘as if not’, based on 1 Corinthians 7:29-31, for the life of SET. *Sharon Bong* presented on “Climate crisis and eco-human suffering: an Asian ecofeminist perspective” in which she asked if minjung theology could speak to the climate crisis and eco-human suffering as its integral part of theology. Bong referred to priest-shaman ideas of Hyun-Kyung Chung and Jojo M. Fung as exemplars of Asian ecofeminist perspective that could overcome anthropocentric limits and provide a potential avenue to liberation theology of ‘sacred sustainability’ that celebrates the mystic interconnection of ‘human-earth-sacred power-ruah nexus’. *Kanan Kitani* showed disastrous effects of climate change in Japan and emphasized its relation to structural injustice. Whereas individualistic approaches to this crisis focus on human greed and excessive consumerism, Kitani proposed ‘collective’ salvation as a means to address social injustice and the suffering of minjung which is implied within Ahn Byung-mu’s idea of ‘Jesus event’.

SESSION THREE, moderated by Hiheon Kim, had two presentations on “Inequality and Justice in the Neo-liberalistic Age.” *Yong-Taek Jeong* highlighted the changed situation of today’s labors into the precarious, vulnerable and surplus identities in “Precariatization of Labour and Minjung Theology” and claimed that the labor issue remains a central theme of minjung theology. Hence, the social suffering of the precariat due to the proliferation of irregular jobs in the neoliberal system must be noticed as important as minjung theology has delved into the ‘infrastructure’ of revelation. *Philip Vinod Peacock*¹(Executive Secretary

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for Justice and Witness for the World Communion of Reformed Churches) participated through online Zoom conference to present “What is Dalit about Dalit Theology: Uncomfortable and Devious Paths in Dalit Theology and Ideology.” He reviewed the tradition of Dalit theology, initiated by Arvind P. Nirmal in 1981, which leads to discomfort and deviousness in today’s doing Dalit theology in the sense that Dalit theology involves in dangers of essentialism, homogenization, and methodological exclusivism in its seeking of the pure Dalit identity and the normative way of theologizing. Peacock suggested a ‘heuristic’ way of Dalit theologies, which A. P. Nirmal called, by manipulating “the places of the powerful, changing their agenda, taking over their spaces, and revolutionizing society.”

SESSION FOUR, moderated Wesley Cheng, discussed “Resistance and Spirituality.” Aorenla Longchar presented a concept paper that clarifies basic ideas on the topic: spirituality as an organic and dynamic part of human development and alignment with the emotional, intellectual, psychic and physical self of both individual and society in the process of transformation and growth; resistance as advocacy for the oppressed and marginalized against structural inequality and oppression in the belief that positive change for social justice is possible through collective actions of dedication, persistence, and commitment to nonviolence. She applied these ideas to various justice issues, including climate and gender justice, in solidarity and liberation. *Kyeong-Il Jung* (Practitioner of Social Spirituality) elaborated “the Spiritual Roots of Protest and Social Spirituality.” Jung surveyed striking phenomena of our world such as ‘the absence of the social’ in the neoliberal propensities of individualism, materialism, consumerism, and competitionism out of which human spirits are corrupted into various forms of privatization, commercialization, spi-

ritualization, and politicization. In the observation on activists' burnout, Jung suggested mindfulness in the sense of 'trans-religious spirituality'; practices of silence, solitude and solidarity; discernment in both personal and social levels; and harmonious relationship between contemplation and action. *Karl Vilarmea* introduced "a queer spirituality of struggle on drag, politics and people's theology in the Philippines" in which a recent drag performance known as 'Pura Luka Vega' was depicted as a form of societal criticism and spirituality. Vilarmea suggested that its transgressive portrayal of a 'drag Jesus' holds a profound and prophetic religio-political commentaries in that it challenges conventional condemnations and advocates for non-binary and queer individuals with its implicit meaning of praxis to love what is good and just for the beloved and decent community.

The two-full-day consultation is wrapped up in the Closing Plenary. Participants shared what they had learned, identified the current state of Asian contextual theologies, and explored possibilities for future solidarity. All agreed to refine their presentations and publish them through *MADANG*, the journal of the Society of Korean Minjung Theology, and shared their commitment to continued solidarity in anticipation of the next meeting somewhere.