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Minjung Theology and Comparative Theology for Transculturation: Case Study in Minjung and Dalit on Suffering

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Abstract

This article argues that the transnational turn in Minjung theology must begin not with exporting discourse but with reforming method. It proposes comparative theology as the most fitting craft for this reform—an approach that joins close bilingual reading, recorded asymmetry, and public verification through lived practice. The argument unfolds by describing the transcultural turn now visible in Minjung studies, particularly in works that address migration, urban precarity, and ecological crisis, as a methodological rather than topical expansion. Comparative theology is then presented as a disciplined form of learning across borders that refuses premature synthesis, following the work of Francis X. Clooney and Catherine Cornille. Through a case study that pairs Minjung and Dalit theologies on suffering, the essay shows how *han* and pathos can be read side by side without translation: *han* naming memory converted into agency, pathos naming authorization denied and broken, and Hindu accounts of *dharma*, *karma*, and purity providing the religious order against which Dalit pathos takes shape. Read together, these grammars yield a rule for transcultural praxis—name and negate authorization, carry memory in public forms, and test liberation for new attachments that reproduce harm. The article concludes that comparative theology provides Minjung theology with the methodological *On Job* needed to move from Korea's historical experience to a shared global horizon where suffering becomes a public claim for justice and solidarity.

Keywords

Minjung theology, comparative theology, transculturation, *han*, Dalit theology, *dharma*, suffering, liberation theology

1. Introduction

This article argues that the transnational future of Minjung theology is not a matter of exporting a finished discourse but of reforming procedure, and that the procedure that best fits this reform is comparative theology practiced as sustained mutual learning.[1] By "transcultural turn" I mean a shift from bounded containers to the study of flows, translations, and asymmetries that are kept on the record rather than erased, a shift already named in adjacent fields and increasingly visible in Minjung conversations about migrants and marriage migrants, urban precarity, democratization, and ecological breakdown.[2] This is a methodological claim: categories must learn in public if they are to travel with integrity. If Minjung travels as export rather than as method, it risks repeating the asymmetries it opposes; if it travels as disciplined

1 Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 16–19.

2 Sara Jones, "Lucy Bond & Jessica Rapson. The Transcultural Turn: Interrogating Memory Between and Beyond Borders," *Témoigner. Entre Histoire et Mémoire. Revue Pluridisciplinaire de La Fondation Auschwitz*, no. 121 (October 2015): 19–21, https://doi.org/10.4000/temoigner.3749; Andrew Eungi Kim and Jongman Kim, "Minjung Theology," *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*, February 29, 2024, 3, https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/MinjungTheology.

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mutual learning, it can name and break authorization while keeping memory audible and public.

As a Korean comparative theologian writing from within the Minjung tradition, the method proposed here is intentionally workmanlike. Comparative theology operationalizes the turn by doing three things on every page. It keeps key terms bilingual, records non equivalence as data, and routes claims through field feedback—interviews, testimonies, liturgies, and communal practices—before returning to texts for correction.[3] This is not idiosyncratic. Within Minjung scholarship, Hyuk Cho presses for an intercultural reconfiguration that converges faith and culture through paired readings, concept calibration, and attention to lived practice; the present proposal systematizes those instincts into reproducible steps.[4]

The structure follows the logic of the claim and makes the procedure traceable. First, the transcultural turn is defined for Minjung, with a brief genealogy and location in current scholarship. Second, comparative theology is presented as the methodology that fits the turn—what it is, how it keeps key terms bilingual, how it records non equivalence, and how the text to field loop verifies claims—together with reasons for preferring this to export or synthesis models that collapse difference too quickly. Third, the method is tested in a focused case pairing Minjung and Dalit sources on suffering. The case asks how suffering functions within Christian and Hindu frames, especially where Hindu accounts of *dharma*, *karma*, and purity authorize or contest caste, how caste and class shape its social form, and how a Dalit lens can thicken rather than translate *han* by sharpening its public, juridical, and liturgical dimensions. The aim is not to blend identities but to furnish habits of attention and accountability that let Minjung speak with credibility where people now live, move, and remember together.

Over the past several decades, Korean Minjung theologians and Indian Dalit theologians have already met in consultations, conferences, and edited volumes, drawing suggestive parallels between Exodus and exorcism, *minjung* and Dalit communities, and the crucified Christ and bodies marked by caste. These exchanges have been invaluable in naming shared experiences of oppression and in forging solidarity across contexts. At the same time, much of this work has remained at the level of thematic resonance and symbolic analogy. The grammar of *han* and Dalit pathos has often been juxtaposed rather than systematically calibrated, and the comparative procedures themselves have usually remained implicit. What is still needed is an analysis and evaluation of these earlier efforts that can clarify how categories have travelled, where they have been translated too quickly, and how future work might avoid repeating asymmetries. The present essay builds on this history by proposing comparative theology as a method that can make Minjung–Dalit encounters explicit, reviewable, and transferable, so that long-standing exchanges of insight are matched by equally careful reform of procedure.[5]

3 Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 16–19.

4 Hyuk Cho, "A Quest for Intercultural Theology: Converging Faith and Culture in Minjung Theology," *Madang: Journal of Contextual Theology* 41 (June 2024): 43–44.

5 For examples of sustained Minjung–Dalit exchanges, see *Dalit and Minjung Theologies: A Dialogue*, ed. Samson Prabhakar and Jinkwan Kwon (Bangalore: BTESSC/SATHRI, 2006); James Massey and Jong Sun Noh, eds., *Dalit Minjung Theological Dialogue: On Being a New Community and Ecclesia of Justice and Peace* (Bangalore: Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College, 2010); and Hans Ucko, *The People and the People of*

2. Transculturation

Transculturation is used here in the classical Ortiz sense, not as smooth blending but as a reciprocal and uneven process in which loss, translation, and the formation of new ensembles occur together. Ortiz coined the term to correct the one way assumptions of acculturation and to name the simultaneity of dispossession and creativity in contact zones where forms are relinquished and recomposed through unequal exchange.[6] In recent humanities scholarship, this insight matures into a research posture that studies flows and translations rather than bounded containers, keeps power and non equivalence on the record, and resists sanding difference down for quick consensus.[7]

Why is transculturation necessary for Minjung theology now? Three pressures converge. First, social life is newly mobile. Recent overviews of Minjung work note the widening horizon toward migrants and marriage migrants, urban precarity, democratization, and ecological breakdown. This is not mere topic expansion; it signals that lives are lived at borders and in motion, so method must be able to trace movement without dissolving difference.[8] Second, interpretation and practice meet in plural public spaces. In these settings, mourning, hospitality, distribution, and solidarity already operate across languages and traditions: a Korean Christian night vigil may borrow the discipline of silence recognizable from a Buddhist night watch; a workers' memorial meal may adopt the open hospitality of Sikh langar; a church relief fund may learn distributive rules from zakat. To be truthful, such learning must be procedural, not slogan driven: keep key terms bilingual, carry non equivalence forward as data, and route claims through field feedback before returning to texts for correction. Third, public responsibility requires naming authorization. If suffering is to function as a public claim, the structures that authorize injury must be identified and denied; reform in manners without breaking religious and social authorization merely manages subjection.[9]

Dong Hyeon Jeong's contribution in *Stirring Up Liberation Theology* exemplifies these pressures in practice. By rereading Mark's *ochlos* through the lens of overseas and migrant workers, Jeong refuses to confine *ochlos* to a nationally bounded "people" and instead locates Minjung wherever precarity, mobility, and othering congeal. Minjung becomes a political designation that must be identified at sites where labor, status, and legality cross, not a label exported intact from Korea to elsewhere.[10] In this frame, Minjung theology does not travel as a finished discourse. It travels as a method that records movement: bilingual close reading keeps *Minjung* and *ochlos* from collapsing into "the poor," concept calibration maps overlap and non

God: Minjung and Dalit Theology in Interaction with Jewish–Christian Dialogue (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2002). See also ongoing reports of Minjung–Dalit dialogues in Madang and related forums.

6 Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, with Internet Archive (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 97–103, http://archive.org/details/cubancounterpoin0000orti.

7 Jones, "Lucy Bond & Jessica Rapson. The Transcultural Turn," 19–21.

8 Kim and Kim, "Minjung Theology," 3.

9 B R Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, The annotated critical edition, with S Anand (Journalist) editor et al. (Verso, 2014), 29–31, 43–44.

10 Dong Hyeon Jeong, "Mark's Ochlos as Minjung: An Overseas Foreign Workers' Reading," in *Stirring Up Liberation Theologies: A Call for Release*, by Jione Havea (SCM Press, 2024).

equivalence rather than forcing synthesis, and field feedback from migrant churches, worker centers, and vigils corrects theological claims before they return to print.

Inside the Minjung conversation, the turn has already been anticipated. Hyuk Cho proposes reframing Minjung as an intercultural theological venture that prioritizes paired reading, concept calibration, and sustained attention to lived practice. These are precisely the procedures that make transculturation teachable and reviewable: paired reading records flows and translations at the textual level; concept calibration renders non equivalence visible; attention to life worlds institutionalizes field feedback.[11] Read alongside the widened horizon Kim and Kim describe, the implication is direct: without a border aware procedure that can be audited in public, Minjung speech loses traction in the very spaces where it seeks to work.[12]

The payoff is not dilution of identity but a path for verifying it. Transculturation provides a verification route at three points. First, key terms remain bilingual at the point of argument—*Minjung*, *han*, Dalit *pathos*—so that family resemblance and real difference are both charted. Second, authorization is named and denied as part of method, aligning Minjung work with the Dalit criterion that religious and social warrants for harm cannot be left implicit. Third, a text to field loop is formalized: claims drawn from paired readings are tested in public forms of mourning, hospitality, and distribution, then returned to the texts for correction with limits and warrants stated. Kept together, these moves make Jeong's migrant *ochlos* reading a model of self testing Minjung theology: the tradition is neither exported nor abandoned; it is recalibrated in motion and under review.

Because the turn is procedural, it yields auditable outcomes rather than vague ideals. A concept calibration map charts proper and improper uses of *han*, Dalit pathos, and Hindu analyses of duḥkha and attachment; a cross norm checklist asks whether any response to suffering names and negates authorization, converts memory into durable communal action, and resists new forms of clinging that reinscribe harm; and shareable templates turn method into practice—an interfaith mourning order that keeps names public, an open table rubric developed in dialogue with traditions of hospitality, and a brief redress petition that makes juridical criteria explicit. These instruments carry interpretive precision and public responsibility together, enabling Minjung theology to claim the right to speak and the duty to listen in transnational settings. That is why transculturation is necessary for Minjung now, and that is what Jeong's transnational ochlos rereading helps to enact.

3. Comparative Theology as Methodology for Transculturation

Comparative theology, in the strict sense used here, is disciplined learning across religious borders that remains anchored in primary sources and accountable to constructive theology. Its craft is slow and text centered. Sources from more than one tradition are set side by side and read first on their own terms. Key terms are kept bilingual at the point of argument so that

11 Cho, "A Quest for Intercultural Theology: Converging Faith and Culture in Minjung Theology," 43–44.

12 Kim and Kim, "Minjung Theology," 3.

non equivalence is registered rather than sanded down. Insights are then cycled back into lived practice—interviews, testimonies, liturgies, communal norms—for testing and correction before returning to the texts again.[13] The aim is not a lowest common denominator synthesis but learning from the other in ways that can be responsibly received within one's own discourse.

Within this frame, the meaning of comparison is clarified by the question of reception. Cornille distinguishes comparative theology from the study of religions by its confessional location and argues that comparison yields modes of learning—conceptual clarification, imaginative expansion, critical provocation, sometimes even doctrinal development—while binding reception to conditions of competence, humility, respect for difference, and accountability to communities of reference.[14] These conditions operate as methodological guardrails. They prevent universalizing language from leveling distinct grammars and they force precision about what has been learned, who may receive it, and under what warrants.

Understood this way, comparative theology is neither a theology of religions typology that adjudicates traditions in general nor a purely descriptive history of religions, and it is more than interreligious dialogue aimed at goodwill. It is constructive work carried out through paired reading under constraint, disciplined by bilingual precision and verified in practice. Precisely because it refuses premature equivalence and records disagreement as a finding, it operationalizes a transcultural posture. Flows and translations can be traced and tested without erasing asymmetry, and the resulting insights can be audited, taught, and put to work in liturgy, ethics, and public witness.

Placed in conversation with liberation oriented currents beyond Christianity, the method gains range without losing discipline. In Hindu thought, Anantanand Rambachan articulates a non dual ethic in which realization of the Self exposes injury to the neighbor as ignorance, so that compassion and justice become the practical form of truth rather than optional sentiments. Comparison that keeps terms bilingual allows *moksha*, *ahimsa*, and *seva* to interrogate Christian accounts of love and justice without dissolving into them.[15] In Islam, Sufi sources bind divine unity and excellence in worship—*tawhid* and *ihsan*—to shared practices of hospitality and remembrance. Chishti and related handbooks of adab portray open kitchens, leveling meals, and disciplines that check spiritual pride as ordinary grammars of social mercy.[16] Naming such partners does not expand the project into vague pluralism. It makes the comparative craft do what it promises. Keep key terms bilingual, register non equivalence, state disagreements on the record, and return learning to communities as receivable practice.

This methodological frame now prepares the move to the case sequence that follows, where paired readings and reception rules are enacted with Minjung and Dalit sources on suffering and

13 Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 16–19.

14 Catherine Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, First edition. (Wiley, 2020), chap. 1; chs 5–6.

15 Anantanand Rambachan, *A Hindu Theology of Liberation: Not-Two Is Not One*, with EBSCOhost, SUNY Series in Religious Studies (SUNY Press, 2015), Introduction; chs 2–3.

16 Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Univ of North Carolina Pr, 1981), 99–115; Carl W. Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism* (Shambhala, 1997), 133–45.

then checked against Christian theologies and Hindu accounts of *dharma*, *karma*, and purity before looping back to practice.

4. Case Study: Minjung and Dalit on Suffering through comparative theology

4.1. Minjung and Dalit on Suffering

Minjung theology emerges from the 1970s struggles of workers, students, farmers, and the urban poor under dictatorship in South Korea, where suffering was named publicly and organized into memory, ritual, and collective action. Its affective grammar is *han*, the densely sedimented grief and anger that accrue through repeated injury and are transmitted across generations; crucially, *han* is not discharged by private catharsis but converted through *dan*, the "cut" that interrupts repetition and redirects pain toward communal agency.[17] In biblical interpretation this grammar is bound to Ahn Byung Mu's insistence that Jesus stands with the *ochlos*, so that the people's cry becomes a site of revelation and subjecthood rather than an exhortation to patient endurance.[18] Recent surveys confirm that the horizon has widened to migrants and marriage migrants, urban precarity, democratization, and ecological breakdown—signals that method must match lives lived in motion and at borders. In what follows, this Minjung grammar is held in calibrated proximity to Dalit pathos and to Hindu accounts of *dharma*, *karma*, and purity, so that its claims about suffering and agency can be tested without being dissolved.[19]

Dalit discourse travels a different historical arc while maintaining the same refusal to privatize pain. Its modern hinge is B. R. Ambedkar's juridical and religious critique of caste: suffering here is not an ennobling ordeal but structured harm authorized by sacred law and a hierarchized *dharmic* order. Appeals to reform in manners, he argues, leave the machinery of domination intact; what must be broken is the scriptural and social authorization that sustains caste from Hindu legal texts such as the *Manusmriti* to everyday practices of purity and pollution. Hence the call for annihilating caste's religious foundation rather than palliating its symptoms; without naming and negating authorization, alleviation collapses into management of subjection.[20] In Christian Dalit theology this juridical edge is received as a theological mandate: comparison is not a spectator exercise but a demand to articulate faith that sustains daily bread and struggle against oppression, poverty, and suffering.[21]

A third register often adjacent in South Asian Christian–Hindu conversations is the analysis

17 A. Sung Park, *Minjung Theology: A Korean Contextual Theology*, n.d., 2–4, accessed October 30, 2025, https://www.academia.edu/31346950/Minjung_Theology_A_Korean_Contextual_Theology.

18 Park, *Minjung Theology*, 6–8.

19 Kim and Kim, "Minjung Theology," 3.

20 B R Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, 29–31.

21 Arvind P. Nirmal, "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology," in *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, by Arvind P. Nirmal and V. Devasahayam (Published by Gurukul Lutheran Theological College & Research Institute for the Dept. of Dalit Theology, 1990), 139–43; James Massey, *Dalits in India: Religion as a Source of Bondage or Liberation with Special Reference to Christians*, Repr (Manohar, 2009), 2.

of *duḥkha* in classical Hindu sources. Texts such as the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Yoga Sūtra* describe *duḥkha* as the pervasive unsatisfactoriness of conditioned existence and link its cure to disciplined practice—right action ordered to *dharma*, the loosening of attachment to fruits, and sustained work on desire, perception, and habit. It is neither pessimism nor counsel to resignation, but a diagnosis that makes possible paths of transformation through moral discipline, meditation, and discernment.[22] *Dukkha* is not equivalent to *han* or to Dalit *pathos*: it is metaphysical and existential in scope, while *han* is historically sedimented affect shaped in resistance, and Dalit *pathos* is the felt register of juridically organized oppression against a hierarchized religious and social order. Kept in calibrated proximity, however, these terms can test and deepen one another without collapse.

Within Minjung work, *han* has been understood as an emotional reservoir that demands transformation into public agency through *dan* and through practices of lament, vigil, and hospitality. Development along a transcultural path asks two sharpenings. First, authorization: interpretation should explicitly identify which texts, rites, and institutions license the injuries that generate *han*; readings that leave authorization unnamed are insufficient in light of Ambedkar's criterion that religious and social sanction—including caste based warrants in sacred law and everyday practices of purity and pollution—must be denied for emancipation to begin.[23] Second, deliverables: alongside story and liturgy, *han* work should issue juridical and policy tests—distribution, protection, redress—by which conversion of memory into justice can be publicly measured. Suh Nam-dong's appeal to a "priesthood of *han*" already points toward this public horizon by locating the church's vocation in bearing and transforming *han* for the sake of justice, solidarity, and great peace.[24]

Dalit *pathos*, for its part, is not an abstract mood but the affective moral register of life under caste. Its grammar is structural and juridical: suffering names harms that demand abolition rather than spiritualization, harms authorized by a hierarchized dharmic order and by everyday regimes of purity and pollution. A Minjung contribution here lies in repertoires that carry *pathos* without dissolving persons into sheer negation—vigil, march, workers' meal, a hospitable table—so that the struggle's memory remains audible and durable across time and community.[25] Dalit critique lends Minjung criteria for naming and breaking authorization; Minjung practice lends Dalit struggle tested forms for sustaining public memory and solidarity.[26]

Dukkha's diagnostic clarity contributes differently. By exposing craving and clinging as drivers of suffering, it supplies internal checks on movements of liberation, helping scrutinize the

22 Isvarakrsna, Samkhya Karika 1, in Swami Virupakshananda, trans., *Samkhya Karika of Isvara Krsna with the Tattva Kaumudi of Sri Vacaspati Misra* (Mylapore, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1995), 3–5.

23 B R Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, 30–31.

24 Nam-Dong Suh, "Towards a Theology of Han," in *Minjung Theology: People as the Subjects of History*, by Yong-bok Kim (Commission on Theological Concerns, Christian Conference of Asia, 1981), 55–69.

25 Byung Mu Ahn, "Jesus and the Minjung in the Gospel of Mark," in *Minjung Theology: People as the Subjects of History*, rev. ed., by Commission on Theological Concerns of the Christian Conference of Asia (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 155–67.

26 Nirmal, "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology," 139–43.

attachments—status, ritual purity, victory myths—that can reinscribe domination even within resistance.[27] Comparative development requires asymmetry on the record. Hindu analyses of *duḥkha* do not name caste structured violence and cannot by themselves furnish the juridical imagination central to Dalit critique; conversely, Minjung and Dalit witnesses can ask how *mokṣa*, *ahiṃsā*, and *sevā* are specified where harm is institutionalized and authorized, while Hindu partners can ask Minjung and Dalit actors how strategies resist new forms of clinging that breed fresh injury.

Read together, the convergences are plain. Minjung and Dalit voices refuse privatization, treat suffering as truth bearing, and authorize moral speech and public action in the name of the people. The divergences mark different centers of gravity that should be preserved: affect to agency through memory and liturgy on the Minjung side, authorization to abolition through law and education on the Dalit side, diagnosis to discipline in Hindu analyses of *duḥkha* and attachment. A working rule follows. Keep *han*, Dalit *pathos*, and Hindu analyses of *duḥkha* and attachment side by side as non equivalents in calibrated proximity. Let *han* be tested by the Dalit demand to name and break authorization; let Dalit *pathos* be steadied by Minjung repertoires of memory and table; let Hindu analysis interrogate the attachments that deform even well intended liberation. Each term then returns to its sources and communities for correction, and none is quietly translated away.

Concrete outcomes follow. A concept calibration map should chart the terms without translation and name their proper uses—*han* for memory to agency, *pathos* for authorization to abolition, *dukkha* for diagnosis to discipline. A cross norm checklist should ask of any response to suffering whether it names and negates authorization, converts memory into durable communal practice, and resists new clinging that reproduces harm. And liturgical policy templates should carry grief into action: interfaith vigils and meals that hold names and stories in common, coupled with juridical steps toward redress and protection, under disciplines that resist purism and prestige hunger that corrode movements.

4.2. Christianity and Hinduism on Suffering

Suffering in Christianity develops from Scripture's primal scenes of lament and cross into patristic, medieval, and modern efforts to hold together protest, participation, and hope. Israel's psalms give a grammar of public complaint and praise in one breath, which the New Testament reads through the suffering and vindication of Jesus.[28] Patristic writers interpret affliction as a site of formation within the body of Christ; for Augustine, the *civitas Dei* is schooled by *tribulatio* toward rightly ordered love, not resignation.[29] Medieval theology keeps the doubleness of penance and compassion, while popular piety elaborates the *passio* of Christ and the martyrs. Modern voices return this grammar to history. Bonhoeffer's prison letters locate

27 H. D. Goswami, *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali: Literal and Interpretive Translation* (Krishna Village Retreat Center, 2020), 15–16 (2.3, 2.7–2.9).

28 Psalm 22; Psalm 44; Mark 8:34; Romans 8:17–23.

29 Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (Penguin Classics, 2003), XIX. 4.

Christ "in the center of life" under catastrophe, refusing a flight into inwardness; Moltmann's cruciform theodicy insists that God's own life is involved in the world's suffering, so Christian hope is born beneath the cross, not beyond it.[30] Liberationists like Gutiérrez and Cone relocate passion language to the cries of the poor and the lynched, turning soteriology toward justice.[31] A magisterial synthesis like John Paul II's *Salvifici Doloris* gathers these strands: suffering is shared with Christ, protested in love, and ordered to the common good.[32] Across these arcs, the Christian center of gravity is public and paschal: lament authorizes truthful speech, participation in Christ forms a people, and hope presses memory into action in history. This is the Christian grammar that will be held in calibrated proximity to Dalit pathos and to Hindu accounts of dharma, karma, and purity in the case sequence that follows.

In Hindu traditions, reflection on suffering (*duḥkha*) begins in Vedic–Upaniṣadic diagnosis and branches into pathways where learning and practice supply cure, often in tension with social orders articulated as *dharma* and structured by *karma*. Early Upaniṣadic teaching identifies the knot as ignorance (*avidyā*) of the deepest identity of *ātman*, so that liberation (*mokṣa*) comes through knowledge that loosens the "knots of the heart" and reorients desire to what truly is.[33] The *Bhagavad Gītā* holds metaphysics and action together: it teaches endurance of the pairs of opposites while one acts without clinging to fruits, reframes grief with a vision of the imperishable self, and orders practice through disciplined work, devotion, and discernment within a hierarchical yet contested vision of duty (*dharma*).[34] Sāṅkhya and Yoga sharpen the diagnosis. Classical Sāṅkhya opens with the threefold suffering that impels inquiry into release; Yoga states that to the discriminating practitioner "everything is suffering" on account of change, latent impressions, and conflict of the *guṇas*, prescribing an eight limbed discipline ordered to the cessation of *kleśas* and the attenuation of karmic seeds.[35]

Vedānta traditions specify path and cure with different emphases but a shared seriousness about ignorance and desire. Śaṅkara construes suffering as a function of misidentification of the self with body and mind; the remedy is knowledge of Brahman that dissolves superimposition and grounds a life of restraint, meditation, and insight ordered to freedom.[36] Rāmānuja binds insight to devotion and grace, integrating discipline, temple centered worship, and *prapatti* as trustful turning that receives divine aid on the way to release.[37] Later Vedānta lines add further nuance (for example, Madhva's accent on dependence and difference). Modern non dual voices

30 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 1st English-language ed., with John W. De Gruchy and Isabel Best, Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, 1906-1945 Works. English. 1996; v. 8 (Fortress Press, 2010); Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ As the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, 1st Fortress Press edition (Fortress Press, 1993), 274–81.

31 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (Orbis Books, 1987), chap. 1; James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Orbis Books, 2013), Introduction.

32 John Paul II, "Salvifici Doloris (February 11, 1984)," §§7–8, 27–31, accessed October 30, 2025, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1984/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_11021984_salvifici-doloris.html.

33 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.7; Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6.8–16.

34 Bhagavad Gītā 2.11–25; 2.14; 2.47; chs. 3–5.

35 Yoga Sūtra 2.1–2.2; 2.15.

36 Śaṅkara, Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya I.1.1.

37 Rāmānuja, Śrī Bhāṣya I.1.1.

extend the moral reach of insight: for Rambachan, to deny the dignity of others is ignorance of the Self, so compassion and justice become the practical form of truth alongside contemplative discipline, a claim that exposes caste based exclusion as a spiritual as well as social failure.[38]

Bhakti literature and practice translate diagnosis into affect, song, and service. The Āḻvārs and later poets such as Mīrābāī and Tukārām, alongside north Indian *sant* voices like Kabīr and Ravidas, turn sorrow into longing for God and into shared practices of hospitality and remembrance—*śaraṇāgati* and *sevā*—often including explicit critique of pride and stratification sanctioned in the name of *dharma* and purity.[39] The social ethic of service receives modern reinterpretation: Vivekananda links worship of God with service of the neighbor as discipline and realization; Gandhi aligns *ahiṃsā* and *satyāgraha* as voluntary suffering that unmasks violence in the oppressor, while Ambedkar rejects spiritualization that leaves caste intact and demands juridical abolition of religious authorization for harm.[40] In short, classical sources diagnose bondage as ignorance and attachment and chart paths of insight, practice, and devotion; modern debates insist that talk of liberation must name and undo social authorization and caste hierarchy if it is to be truthful.

Read comparatively, the two trajectories converge in refusing to privatize pain and in insisting that suffering authorizes public truth telling and transformation. They diverge in ways that should remain on the record. Christian materials center participation in Christ's passion and the communal reshaping of life through lament, sacrament, and justice; Hindu materials center diagnostic clarity and disciplined response—knowledge, practice, devotion—joined to strong modern debates about the social authorization of harm in *dharma* discourse, *karma* logic, and caste hierarchy. A transcultural Minjung project can leverage convergence while preserving difference. Christian repertoires of public lament and table can steady movements so grief becomes durable solidarity; Hindu analyses of desire, attachment, and disciplined action can interrogate the pathologies that deform even liberation work; and Dalit critique ensures that any spiritual answer names and breaks the authorizing order that produces suffering and measures outcomes by redress and protection rather than sentiment alone. Kept in this calibrated proximity, categories learn without collapsing: suffering becomes a public claim measured by whether memory turns into justice and whether authorization for harm is named and undone—criteria that guide the case sequence that follows.

4.3. Comparative Analysis

Han in Minjung theology can be read through Hindu and Dalit lenses without being translated away. The task is calibration, not equivalence. Three questions guide the reading: What authorizes the injury that generates *han*? Through which public forms is *han* carried and

38 Rambachan, *A Hindu Theology of Liberation*, chap. 3.

39 John Stratton Hawley and Mark Juergensmeyer, *Songs of the Saints of India* (Oxford University Press, 1988), selections on Mīrābāī, Tukārām, Kabīr, and Ravidas.

40 Swami Vivekananda, "Practical Vedanta," in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 2 (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1948), 280–311; M. K. Gandhi, Hind Swaraj and Other Writings, ed. Anthony J. Parel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), chs. 17–19; Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, 29–31, 43–44

converted into agency? By what criteria is the conversion judged as just?

A Dalit lens begins with authorization. Ambedkar insists that caste suffering is not an ennobling ordeal but structured harm legitimated by religious authority and a hierarchized *dharmic* order. Reform in manners leaves the machinery intact. Emancipation requires denying the sanctity of the *śāstras*, including Hindu legal texts such as the *Manusmriti*, that authorize domination and breaking the social order they sustain.[41] Applied to *han*, interpretation should name the concrete authorizing order behind accumulated grief, whether textual, ritual, or institutional. Where authorization remains unnamed, *han* risks drifting into a private mood or a literary trope. A corollary follows for outcome. Claims about "transforming *han*" should be testable against juridical and policy markers Ambedkar would recognize: redistribution, protection, redress, and equal citizenship. Dalit Christian voices keep the same pressure. Nirmal frames theology as faith that sustains daily bread and struggle against oppression and poverty. Lament is ordered to public dignity, not to patient endurance.[42] Read this way, *han* is thickened. It is not only affect shaped by memory and ritual, it is also an evidential record that must name and negate its authorizing order.

Hindu sources offer two further calibrations. One comes from *bhakti*, where sorrow is voiced as longing for God and transposed into surrender and service. The devotional grammar does not erase the world. It locates pain in a relation that can convert grievance into resilient love and public hospitality, a repertoire Minjung already knows in vigils, workers' meals, and a common table. Through a *bhakti* lens, conversion of *han* should be audible in shared practices that keep names and stories together over time, so agency does not collapse into sheer negation or technocratic procedure. A second calibration comes from classical Hindu diagnoses of *duḥkha* and attachment in texts such as the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Yoga Sūtra*. They underscore that *duḥkha* names the pervasive unsatisfactoriness of conditioned existence and functions as a clear diagnosis that enables a path of cessation through moral discipline, meditation, wisdom, and right action without clinging to fruits, not pessimistic resignation. This analysis interrogates attachments that can deform even liberation work—status seeking, purity anxieties, victory myths. Read alongside *han*, it asks whether the "cut" of dan actually loosens clinging or simply rebrands it. At the same time, non equivalence must remain explicit. These Hindu analyses of *duḥkha* do not name caste structured violence and cannot by themselves supply the juridical imagination central to Dalit critique; their role here is diagnostic and ascetical, not a substitute for abolition.

Placed together, the lenses yield a working rule set. Keep *han*, Dalit *pathos*, and Hindu analyses of *duḥkha* and attachment in calibrated proximity, side by side and bilingual, rather than collapsed. Let the Dalit criterion lead on authorization. If a reading of *han* does not identify and oppose the concrete authorizing order, the reading is incomplete. Let *bhakti* repertoires

41 B R Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, 30–31.

42 Nirmal, "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology," 139–43.

lead on venue. If *han* is not processed in durable public forms that bind lament to service and hospitality, the "cut" risks falling back into catharsis. Let Hindu analyses of *duḥkha* and attachment lead on discipline. If conversion of *han* does not loosen clinging in movements and institutions, new forms of domination can be inscribed under the sign of liberation. Each tradition then returns to its sources and communities for correction. *Han* retains its historical density in Minjung usage, Dalit critique retains its juridical edge, and Hindu partners retain their analytic clarity, while the three learn to work together without dissolving difference.

Two practical consequences fix the calibration in place. First, an interpretive grid for *han* should include fields for authorization named, public venue of processing, and discipline of attachment, with concrete indicators under each. The specific text or rite denied or reformed; the shared meal or vigil that carries memory; the practices that check status and purity anxieties in the movement. Second, outcomes should be rendered in shareable forms. Interfaith mourning orders and open tables that carry names across communities. Policy steps toward redress and protection that meet Ambedkar's criterion. Teaching modules that test attachments and rehearse disciplines that keep persons from being sacrificed to causes. Kept in this shape, *han* becomes a public claim measured by whether memory turns into justice and whether authorization for harm is named and undone.

4.4. Comparative theology to Transculturation

Comparative theology provides the practical bridge from a statement about transculturation to a way of doing it. Transculturation names the study of flows, translations, and asymmetries; comparative theology supplies the habits that keep those dynamics on the record while producing claims that can be received within theology. In its strict sense, comparative theology proceeds by close, bilingual reading of primary sources across traditions, treats non equivalence as a finding, and cycles conclusions through lived practice for correction. Those habits answer the core risks of transcultural work. Quiet leveling of concepts and impressionistic borrowing are resisted by precision at the point of language and verification at the point of life.[43]

A cultural linguistic hermeneutic deepens the fit. If religious meaning functions like grammar in a language, as postliberal theology argues, then learning "across" requires intratextual discipline. One must learn the other grammar well enough to be corrected by it, not merely to paraphrase it. Doctrines regulate the way a community speaks and lives, so premature translation is a category error. On this view, comparative theology operationalizes transculturation by training readers to keep key terms bilingual and to recalibrate their own grammar in public, rather than to extract portable "ideas."

Reception is the second hinge. Transcultural studies press for ethical accountability, and comparative theology meets that pressure by spelling out how learning is to be received back into confessional discourse. Cornille names distinct modes of learning through comparison. Conceptual clarification, imaginative expansion, critical provocation, sometimes doctrinal

43 George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Westminster John Knox Pr, 1984), chs. 1-2.

development. Each governed by conditions of competence, humility, respect for difference, and accountability to communities of reference.[44] When those conditions are stated in advance, transculturation moves from slogan to auditable practice. What was learned, under what warrants, and for whom.

The social location of the work provides a third hinge. A transcultural posture demands that comparison answer to sites where oppression and solidarity are at stake. Comparative theology can be explicitly oriented this way. Tiemeier argues that comparison is most truthful when it is accountable to liberation. Success is measured not only in elegant readings but in clarified criteria and responsibility at vigils, shelters, picket lines, and clinics.[45] Voss Roberts complements this by showing how attention to affect, embodiment, and practice expands imagination without erasing difference, and by specifying pedagogies and reception rules that keep learning faithful when it comes home.[46] Together these coordinates align comparative theology with the ethical aims of transculturation.

Rendered as procedure, the bridge looks like this in practice. Begin from a concrete case that already sits at a border. Select paired primary sources across traditions and read them intratextually with bilingual key terms, drafting a concept map that keeps overlap, divergence, and non equivalence visible. Cross apply more than one moral grammar to the same case so that criteria and responsibility are clarified in practice, not only in theory. Route claims through field feedback. Interviews, testimonies, liturgies, communal rules. Return to the texts for correction. Mark limits where consensus is not possible, and translate results into shareable forms. Orders for mourning and hospitality fit for plural settings, policy checklists for distribution and protection, teaching modules that carry method as well as content.

Within Minjung discourse, this bridge is already under construction. Recent overviews register widened attention to migrants, marriage migrants, urban precarity, democratization, and ecology. Lived contexts that demand methods able to travel without dissolving difference. Calls to reframe Minjung as an intercultural venture point directly to comparative procedures. Paired readings, concept calibration, sustained attention to lived practice. These make the transcultural turn teachable and reviewable. What comparative theology adds is the tested craft that turns those instincts into a reproducible sequence, binding the ethics of transculturation to the disciplines of reading, reception, and public accountability.

5. Conclusion

Minjung theology does not travel as an export; it travels as a reform of procedure. Transculturation names the need to study flows, translations, and asymmetries without sanding

44 Catherine Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, chs. 5-6.

45 Tracy Tiemeier, "The Integrity of Interreligious Dialogue: A Catholic Feminist Perspective," *Theological Studies* 71, no. 1 (2010): 139–142.

46 Michelle Voss Roberts, *Comparative Theology: Religion, Women, and Sexuality* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), ch. 1; Michelle Voss Roberts, *Body Parts: A Theological Anthropology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), Introduction.

them down, while comparative theology supplies the craft to make that posture workable through bilingual close reading, recorded non equivalence, and a text to field loop that corrects claims in practice. Framed by a cultural linguistic hermeneutic, learning proceeds intratextually so grammars are learned rather than flattened; clarified by rules of reception, what is learned is specified and returned to communities under conditions of competence, humility, respect for difference, and accountability. Social location keeps the standard of truth tied to liberation and formation, so elegant readings answer to shelters, vigils, clinics, classrooms, and congregations.

The Minjung–Dalit comparison sharpened both content and method. Minjung sources press the conversion of *han* through *dan* into durable public forms of memory and hospitality, while Ambedkar names suffering as structured harm whose authorizing order must be identified and denied; without that juridical clarity, "transformation" risks becoming management of subjection. Hindu analyses of *duḥkha* and attachment add the ascetical test movements often evade: do strategies actually loosen clinging or rebrand it in the name of freedom. Held in calibrated proximity rather than collapsed, these grammars block two failures at once. They refuse spiritualization that leaves structures intact and technocratic procedure that forgets grief. The result is a portable rule of public discernment that can travel: name and break authorization, carry memory in shareable forms, and test the work for new attachments that reproduce harm.

The contribution is concrete and teachable. First, a concept calibration map that charts *han*, Dalit *pathos*, and *dukkha* without translation and notes proper and improper uses, so categories can move without dissolving. Second, a cross norm checklist for any pastoral or public response to suffering that asks three auditable questions: is authorization named and opposed, is memory converted into communal action, and are attachments that reinscribe harm being checked. Third, shareable templates that bind method to practice—an interfaith mourning order that keeps names public, an open table rubric developed in dialogue with traditions of hospitality, and a brief redress petition that makes juridical criteria explicit—each accompanied by reception notes stating what was learned and under what warrants. These instruments meet the widened horizon already visible in Minjung work on migrants and marriage migrants, urban precarity, democratization, and ecology with procedures that can be audited and taught.

Two limits point to next steps. Comparative reading is slow and crises are fast. The response is not to abandon craft but to scale it by publishing small, reusable modules of paired readings, checklists, and ritual policy companions that communities can adapt quickly without skipping reception. Representation is a second limit. Bilingual precision curbs quiet leveling but does not by itself secure voice. Co authorship with affected communities, shared data ownership, and an explicit asymmetry log should become standard appendices to transnational Minjung work. If the people's theology is to remain truthful where people now live, move, and remember together, it must travel as disciplined mutual learning. That is the practical bridge from transculturation to theology, and it is the most reliable way for Minjung speech to keep its promise under transnational conditions.

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