

MA Dissertation in Theology, Ministry and Mission

Title:

“Transgressing the patriarchal borders in the Korean church: an auto-ethnographic feminist study of Korean women's identity leading to a reimagination of Korean feminist ministry.”

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation aims to examine and reflect on some of the struggles Korean Christian women¹ endure within the patriarchal church and familial structures in particular. It hopes to reveal how traditional beliefs and conflicts cause the subordination of Korean women thus inhibiting their full participation in church life. With this, their existence, gifts and potential are not being released but rather diminished and ignored. I propose to explore a reimagining of Korean feminist ministry and leadership in the church where there is an empowering of the image of self, a reconstruction of the image of God and a model of ministry that Korean women can find affinity with.

To navigate this journey of unveiling some of the rifts in the Korean church/home concerning Korean women, I will look to the voices of Korean feminist theologians who have sounded out their cries for reform. Korean feminist theology has emerged under the influence of Western feminist theology and liberation theology,² but Korean women have recognised its limitations in fully addressing their concerns

¹ When I refer to the 'Korean Church(s)' or 'Korean Christian women' I am mainly using it as an umbrella term to speak of the South Korean Church and the Christian women of South Korea. This does not particularly refer to one denomination or women who are affiliated with one denomination. The language of 'Korean church' and 'Korean Christian women' is the language that is familiar to various Korean scholars and used widely by them. I will refer to the 'Korean immigrant church' or identify a particular denomination if and when necessary to make the distinction. However, it is important to highlight that through the use of such overarching language generalisations will undoubtedly occur, although it is my intention not to paint all Korean Christian women and Korean Churches with the same brushstroke.

² Meehyun Chung, *Liberation and Reconciliation: Feminist Theology's Relevance for Korea*, Visions and Voices Series (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2014), p. 36.

which are distinctively Korean.³ I hope this research will enable the listening of these distinctively Korean voices to grasp how Korean feminist theology can be an emancipatory tool for Korean Christian women.

I endeavour to focus particularly on the lived experiences of women, more specifically Korean women and some of their deep struggles to promote and construct their self-identity and self-image in relation to their image of God. To a large degree, these painstaking struggles are embedded within the fabric of the Korean culture which is in many respects heavily woven with threads of patriarchy and hierarchy. I hope to weave in some of my own stories where I sense possible points of overlap, connection and intersection.

Context of the research

The context from where this research has emerged is from a deep wellspring of desire to research and write about my Korean cultural heritage, background and identity as a Korean woman, daughter, wife, mother and Korean woman making the journey to step into presbyteral ministry in the Methodist Church of Great Britain. It comes from a long-dormant desire to dredge up and bring to the surface some of those suppressed and unconscious memories of growing up in a conservative, patriarchal, immigrant Korean household and church, which I felt were disjointed from the surrounding mainstream UK culture. This dual identity caused friction and

³ Min-Ah Cho, 'Stirring up Deep Waters: Korean Feminist Theologies Today', *Theology Today*, 71.2 (2014), 233–45 (p. 238).

tensions within me, where inwardly I played a game of ‘Tug of War’ to find my place, fit and balance between the two cultures.

Through this process of dredging up or unearthing what has been buried, which may bring back past hurts and pains, I hope to hold the ‘excavated’ pieces up to the light to have the courage to see it and hold it for what it was and not necessarily to fix that which seems broken.⁴ It is from the margins, the liminal and in-between space of my identity that I intend to reach out, research and write. This is not with the hope that I may be able to escape that liminal and interstitial reality, but rather address the yearning to bridge that gap and find points of intersection between the two identities I hold precariously within me.

Methodology

This piece of research and writing will take the form of a qualitative research approach using a reflexive methodology. Within this methodology, I hope to incorporate two components, one being autoethnography and the other feminist theological research. The autoethnographic approach I take will lean closer towards a reflexive methodology that is characterised by the use of self⁵ and autobiography which involves the researcher’s whole self in all its emotionality, subjectivity and lived experience.⁶ The ‘ethno’ segment of the autoethnographic research will

⁴ Nicola Slee, *Fragments for Fractured Times: What Feminist Practical Theology Brings to the Table*. (London: SCM Press, 2020), pp. 5, 13.

⁵ Kim Etherington, *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher: Using Our Selves in Research* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2004), p. 16.

⁶ Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner, ‘Autoethnography: An Overview’, *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12.1 (2011), p. para 2.

manifest itself through the understanding of the cultural experience of Korean women, by the method of reading, and writing about their lived experiences as well as creating a dialogue.⁷ By doing so, I hope to enter the lived experiences of Korean women and enter into this ‘otherness of something I don’t understand or want to know better’ through this method.⁸ I hope that through this autoethnographic research, I may be able to uncover some of the misinterpretations I have held about my cultural upbringing and background and bring forth a reinterpretation that can provide a form of catharsis. My own stories which will all be shared from memory will contain interpretations that are from my perspective and, therefore, hold limitations and biases.⁹

I envision the feminist theological aspect of my research will equip me to bring to the scholarly and theological table a spiritually transformative methodology that seeks to subvert and dismantle patriarchy and examine the ways it has been misused to harm Korean women and other marginalised groups unjustly and corruptly.¹⁰ I will delve into the study of Korean feminist theology and find ways it is working towards the decolonisation of patriarchy in the church and its theological leanings. This will also involve looking at how Korean feminist theology is giving voice to marginalised Korean women and empowering them in their search for identity in relation to God, scripture and the Church.

⁷ Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner, p. para 1.

⁸ Slee, *Fragments for Fractured Times: What Feminist Practical Theology Brings to the Table.*, p. 185.

⁹ I will be sharing stories only as I recall them. Some contain references in particular to my parents. My aim in sharing such stories is not to blame or show disrespect to my parents, but to bring to light why things might have been the way they were. It is important to note that my interpretations will most likely be different from those I am speaking about. The focus is on the emancipatory nature of this research and not a dwelling on the past.

¹⁰ Slee, *Fragments for Fractured Times*, p. 4.

Through this research process, I hope to discover what it means to read, write and think 'like a [Korean] woman' with a dual identity,¹¹ as I believe this will play a key role in this type of feminist research. In doing so, I hope to transgress the patriarchal borders, not only for myself but for Korean women and the wider circle of those experiencing oppression and marginalisation, into a space where such ideologies are dismantled and transformation is possible.

The sections

This piece of writing is split into five chapters, which I hope will take the readers on a journey from understanding some of the key contexts and history of the rise and effects of patriarchy in the South Korean Church, to glimpsing at the hope to come of how such oppressive structures can be challenged and dismantled to bring empowerment. My heartfelt desire is that the readers will be able to join me in what I envisage to be a liberating journey that may stir up questions, challenges and emotions but will eventually be spiritually encouraging and transformational.

I propose my argument to proceed as follows: Chapter 1 will dig into the roots of patriarchy in the Korean church and explore the impact Confucianism and Christianity in particular have made toward the subordination of women and the promotion of patriarchal ideologies and theologies. I will begin to delve into the notion of 'Koreanised Christianity' which arose as a result of Confucianism and

¹¹ Slee, *Fragments for Fractured Times*, pp. 143–46.

Western Christianity merging. This will lead into chapter 2 with a study of how 'Koreanised Christianity' impacted the gender imbalance of leadership in Korean churches and how women's theological experiences were/are undermined, crushed or brushed under the carpet.

In chapter 3, I will focus on how Korean women's self-identity has been shaped through the patriarchal culture rooted in Confucianism, and how the 'Koreanised Christian' teachings of God have not led to the emancipation of women but rather trapped them to believe in a false reality about who they are. As a result, the long-entrenched feelings of shame and low self-worth can lead to a Korean concept of *Han*. Following this, chapter 4 will observe the ways Korean women may be empowered by transforming their understanding of themselves in the light of a new understanding and image of God. The intention is that reconstructing images of God may lead to reconstructing images of self as well thus enabling Korean women to be released from *Han*. Then finally, chapter 5 will look at how Korean feminist ministry can be a transforming power and an expansion of God's vision for the 'whole' church. It will look at reimagining a feminist model of ministry that touches on Korean women's experiences of feeling *Othered* and marginalised and propose a method of being in ministry with and alongside people in co-creative, collaborative and empowering ways.

The contribution I hope the research will make

The core message I aim to communicate through this study is not one that blames or crushes those who may be identified as holding the dominating power in patriarchal

religious structures, but to find new grounds for doing Korean feminist theology that can liberate not only the subordinated but also those that maintain patriarchal values.¹² Most importantly, through the transparency and vulnerability this autoethnographic feminist research process allows, I hope to recognise and become aware of my own biases, prejudices and at times distorted lens through which I have viewed and interpreted my experiences, culture and upbringing. I would not, however, want the research to end with me and my sense of who I am and my identity, but it will be a stimulating force for sociocultural reform and liberation for those feeling they cannot be their true identities in the margins and liminal spaces.

1. THE ROOT OF PATRIARCHY IN THE SOUTH KOREAN CHURCH

Patriarchy in the Korean Church stems from a long history and tradition of colonialism, religious influences and socio-cultural norms. The patriarchal structures within Korean society have by and large shaped the narrative in Korean churches. This has had a profound effect on Korean women's faith formation and in particular the characteristics they attribute to God and themselves.¹³ In this chapter, I will seek to offer a brief historical account of the impact Confucianism and Christianity in particular have made toward building and maintaining patriarchy in the Korean

¹² Grace Ji-Sun Kim, *Intersectional Theology: An Introductory Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018), p. 76.

¹³ Hee An Choi, *Korean Women and God: Experiencing God in a Multi-Religious Colonial Context* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2005), p. 9.

Church. I will also look at the nature of 'Koreanised Christianity' which has come as a result of the two religions fusing.

CONFUCIANISM

Confucianism enters Korea

Confucianism was introduced to Korea by China as early as the 4th century CE but only gained recognition towards the latter part of the Koryo Dynasty (918-1392).¹⁴

From there it continued to prosper throughout the Choson Dynasty (1392-1910)¹⁵ and eventually became adopted as the state philosophy, religion and way of life.¹⁶

The origins of Confucian thought contained values of order and harmony; around maintaining the balance between heaven and earth to exist together in a harmonising and life-giving formation.¹⁷ The core values were rooted in upholding, cherishing and respecting life and its life forms. There are five recognised cardinal virtues of Confucianism which originally stressed the importance of an 'equal and right relationship' between 1) father and son, 2) ruler and subject, 3) husband and wife, 4) elder and younger and 5) between friends.¹⁸ However, during the Choson Dynasty, such grounds for equal and harmonious relationships became distorted and interpreted into subordination and hierarchy in relationships.¹⁹

¹⁴ Choi, *Korean Women and God*, pp. 23, 35.

¹⁵ Jonathan Y Tan points out in his research that 'The Choson Dynasty has the distinction of being the longest continuous Confucian dynasty in the world'. Jonathan Y. Tan, 'Encounter between Confucian and Christianity', in *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia*, ed. by Felix Wilfred (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2014), pp. 428-443, (p. 433).

¹⁶ Choi, *Korean Women and God*, p. 35.

¹⁷ Choi, *Korean Women and God*, p. 36.

¹⁸ Kyung Sook Lee, 'Neo-Confucian Ideology in the Interpretation of the Book of Ruth: Toward a Cross-checking Hermeneutics' in *Korean Feminists in Conversation with the Bible, Church and Society*, ed. by Kyung Mi Park and Kyung Sook Lee, *The Bible in the Modern World*, 24 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), pp. 1-13 (p. 5).

¹⁹ Kyung Sook Lee, 'Neo-Confucian Ideology', p. 5.

At the time, Korea held a structure that admired prestige which exalted the rich, elite and learned over the poor, working class and unlearned. Therefore, with such a hierarchical social structure already in place, where those who laid the rules were predominantly men, Confucianist values would only naturally veer towards prestige and power. Thus, heaven, husband, king, parents, elders and men were seen as superior, whilst earth, wife, servant, children, youth and women were considered inferior and at the lower end of the cosmic order.²⁰ The accepted way to maintain universal harmony in the natural order was for those in inferior positions to obey those in superior positions, whilst those with superior status were given the privilege to use their power to look after their inferiors.²¹ With this in mind, hierarchy in Confucianism was promoted and pushed as something that was for the good of all to maintain a sense of equilibrium.

The Confucian expectation of Korean women

Within such Confucian dualistic confines, which differentiated the superior from the inferior, it is evident as Hyun Kyung Chung suggests, that dualism breeds division, separation and the objectifying of others to have control and dominion.²² Though Confucianism has been commended for its high moral and ethical values, there is the

²⁰ Choi, *Korean Women and God*, pp. 36–37.

²¹ Choi, *Korean Women and God*, pp. 36–37.

²² Hyun Kyung Chung, 'Come, Holy Spirit – Renew the Whole Creation', in *Signs of the Spirit: Official Report, Seventh Assembly, Canberra, Australia, 7-20 February 1991*, ed. by Michael Kinnamon (Geneva : Grand Rapids: WCC Publications ; Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 37-47, (p. 44).

undeniable underlying reality that it has had a toxic and negative impact on Korean women.²³

In the name of upholding the cosmic and harmonious order the imbalance of power in genders was legitimised. Women were viewed as being naturally inferior, unintelligent, unable to make decisions and therefore needed saving 'from their own stupidity' by the men in their lives.²⁴ In Confucianism, all functions and roles of leadership were performed by men, which left no room for women to be equal or share in such roles with men.²⁵ Rather their role was to follow and obey male orders and ensure the male genealogy in their families continued.²⁶ Procreation was deemed to be one of the most important duties for Korean women in Confucianism.²⁷ This did not involve simply giving birth per se, but they were expected to give birth to a son so that the male lineage could be carried forward. Women's bodies did not even belong to them for their bodies belonged to their husbands and the husband's families, and unless they presented their husband's family with a son, they were not accepted. A Korean women's sense of identity had close ties with giving birth to a son, to the point that women without sons were shamed and dehumanised. As a result, for a Korean woman to gain some morsel of worth, recognition and status their goal in life was to give birth to a son.²⁸

²³ Chung, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, p. 30.

²⁴ Choi, *Korean Women and God*, p. 37.

²⁵ Chung, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, p. 30.

²⁶ Choi, *Korean Women and God*, p. 37.

²⁷ Choi, *Korean Women and God*, p. 37.

²⁸ Choi, *Korean Women and God*, p. 37.

According to Confucianist principles, the men in a woman's life determined the fate of that woman.²⁹ These were usually, their father, husband and son, and women found they were trapped in fixed and prescribed roles of being the ideal daughter, wife and mother.³⁰ The ideal daughter, wife and mother would often be defined as one holding the highest female virtues of chastity, submission, passivity, modesty, loyalty, patience, self-sacrifice and being silent.³¹ Korean women sadly internalised these patriarchal belief systems and values with such intensity that they grew to accept these as being rightly true and permissible.³²

Looking back, there were traces of Confucian values upheld in my family upbringing. I wasn't the 'ideal' daughter, but I was certainly obedient, quiet and more or less submissive. I found the rules my parents, particularly my father laid down were far too strict and conservative. However, I still obeyed them because whenever I tried to challenge it or voice my opinions it was met with anger and comments such as 'I'm so disappointed in you' or 'you're so ungrateful for all we do for you.' All I ever wanted was to be heard or listened to, but it seemed my parents misunderstood me for being disloyal and disrespectful.

²⁹ Jungja Joy Yu, *Breaking the Glass Box: A Korean Woman's Experiences of Conscientization and Spiritual Formation* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2013), chapter 2 The Invisible Glass Box. Moodle ebook.

³⁰ Yu, chapter 2.

³¹ Choi, *Korean Women and God*, p. 69.

³² Choi, *Korean Women and God*, p. 50.

Although Confucianism doesn't hold the status of being a state religion in Korea today, the patriarchal norms and social behaviours are still very much embedded in the Korean people's way of life.³³

CHRISTIANITY

Christianity enters Korea

When Christianity entered Korea, it was able to merge all too well with Confucian ideologies, therefore enabling the building of churches that held strong patriarchal structures.

The first protestant missionaries began making their way onto Korean soil from around 1882 onwards with the opening of its borders to unlimited trade to the US and some European countries.³⁴ Western Christianity brought with it Western colonialism and ideologies, and many Koreans initially opposed Christianity as they believed it neither respected nor made attempts to understand the Korean culture, people, gods and its indigenous religions such as Shamanism.³⁵

³³ Choi, *Korean Women and God*, p. 39.

³⁴ Chung, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, p. 6.

³⁵ Choi, *Korean Women and God*, p. 41.

Shamanism is said to be the oldest indigenous religions of the Korean people and has existed before the 10th century BCE. It is a polytheistic religion with the gods (around eighteen thousand in all) varying from male, female, animal, nature and supernatural deities. Shamanism is known to be the religion of Korean women, because shamanistic rituals have been largely performed by female shamans. Shamanism is known to have no hierarchy, no church, no building and no doctrine, but rather involves spiritual exorcism, communication with the spirits and healing through rituals. Korean feminist theologians believe Shamanism can provide a 'plural' understanding of God to help transform a narrow and limited image of God, but others also criticise the exclusive nature of Shamanism that doesn't accept other religions.

Found in, Choi, pp. 11-17; Man Ja Choi, 'Feminine Images of God in Korean Traditional Religion', in *Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Trends*, ed. by R. S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1994), pp. 80-89, (pp. 81-82).

Meehyun Chung, 'Illness and Healing from a Korean Woman's Intercultural Perspective', *Feminist Theology*, 19.2 (2011), 118-28 (p. 119).

Many could not accept the notion of believing and obeying the one Christian God.³⁶

Nevertheless, gradually the Korean people opened up to Christianity particularly as they endured many hardships and wars. Between 1910-1945 Korea suffered greatly under Japanese colonial rule and then after the liberation from Japanese colonialism in 1945, they were afflicted by the Korean War from 1950-1953. The Koreans were not the ones who caused the war, nor were they the enemies, yet they were completely powerless, helpless and voiceless.³⁷ All these horrors of war and devastation were simply heaped upon Koreans. They had no voice, no identity, and no country and any independent actions taken to regain their land were ruthlessly ignored.³⁸

It was during such desperate periods of socio-political crisis and oppression that the missionaries stood beside the Korean people. Many Koreans felt their own gods had neglected them, and hence lost faith in them. Instead, they gained interest in the Christian faith and turned to the Christian teachings that offered hope, freedom, equality, justice and comfort in times of sorrow and bondage.

However, it may be fair to say that the presence of missionaries was somewhat ambiguous and counter-productive. Missionaries who came to Korea were predominantly American and the teachings were heavily influenced by American fundamentalism of the time, which stressed that Christians needed to submit and

³⁶ Choi, *Korean Women and God*, p. 42.

³⁷ Chung, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, p. 8.

³⁸ Chung, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, p. 8.

act in subordination to the current government and state.³⁹ In many ways, the teachings of the missionaries played a part in suppressing Koreans from speaking out against injustice and gaining that sense of autonomy that was needed to stand up against their oppressors. Despite this, even to this day, many Korean Christians do not hold anger or resentment as some other countries might do toward this dominating Christian influence and the inculturation they may have faced, because Korea was not colonised by Western forces, but by Japan which is a non-Christian country.⁴⁰ Rather their fear and trust in God has become internalised as a fear and trust in Western powers, especially the US. There has sadly been a very passive response to the gospel amongst Korean Christians, without questioning its soundness, and this shows a lack of independent opinion and clarity in judgment.

Christianity's influence on Korean women

The arrival of Western Christianity into Korea has had both negative and positive impacts on Korean women. Through the encounter of the gospel, women learned that they were equal with men before God, and for example, found hope in the message from Genesis 1:27, 28 where it says men and women were created equally in God's image.⁴¹ This led to some shifts in the Korean Confucian order as Korean women began to gain some sense of identity and self-worth. Christian missionaries established schools, particularly for women and through reading the Bible they were

³⁹ Chung, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, p. 11.

⁴⁰ Chung, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, p. 17.

⁴¹ Hyun Kyung Chung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1990), p. 47.

able to become literate,⁴² which had not been possible in the patriarchal Choson Dynasty.

There was a female missionary by the name of Mary F. Scranton, and she was a Methodist from the US. She came in 1885 and having witnessed the suffering of the Korean women, dedicated and sacrificed her time to the welfare, well-being and freedom of these women from their oppressive, patriarchal situations.⁴³ Many other missionaries like her helped Korean women discover the Christian teachings of justice and freedom that brought them empowerment and strength. Moreover, it drove them to believe and hope in being released and set free from the suppressive nature of Confucianism.⁴⁴ The gospel was an eye-opener for Korean women, and they passionately played a crucial role in the growth of Christianity and the church in Korea.⁴⁵ It was an exciting and liberating time for women as it enabled them to step outside the home to attend worship and take part in church activities sometimes with particular leadership roles.⁴⁶ Unfortunately, once Korean churches found their ground and were better established, Korean women were slowly pushed to the margins and dismissed from remotely powerful positions.⁴⁷

⁴² Chung, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, p. 30.

⁴³ Chung, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, p. 31.

⁴⁴ Choi, *Korean Women and God*, p. 44.

⁴⁵ Chung, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, p. 32.

⁴⁶ Choi, *Korean Women and God*, p. 44.

⁴⁷ Chung, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, p. 32.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's work (*In Memory of Her: a feminist theological reconstruction of Christian origins*, London, SCM, 1983) has been important in recognising and providing historical background to a very similar occurrence that happened to women in the early church movement. Fiorenza finds evidence where 'women played key roles as apostles, prophets and leaders' within the church as 'discipleship of equals', but this egalitarian structure was lost as Christianity expanded and the church became further established.

Nicola Slee, *Faith and Feminism: An Introduction to Christian Feminist Theology*, Exploring Faith (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2003), p. 91.

Though the introduction of Christianity to Korean women did play a positive role to a varying degree, on the flip side, as Meehyun Chung states, 'Christianity did not lead to the complete emancipation of women.'⁴⁸ Western Christianity that entered South Korea contained patriarchal and colonial threads within its theology and structure and played a part in reinforcing the patriarchal and hierarchical traits of Confucianism.

KOREANISED CHRISTIANITY

The process of Western Christianity becoming 'Koreanised' has been critical to the shaping of the Korean people's faith, therefore needs to be addressed if we are to grasp the nature of Korean churches today. Conservative, fundamentalist and patriarchal strands of Christianity which came to Korea during the 19th century fused with similarly patriarchal Confucianism which permeated Korea.⁴⁹ Though there were missionaries who desired to empower and liberate Korean women from these oppressive patriarchal norms, there were undoubtedly practices and teachings within its Christian fundamentalist core that turned a blind eye to the treatment of women and justified patriarchy further. For example, the very rigid teachings of predestination and the cross added another layer of delusion and misinterpretation of the Christian faith. It was instilled in the Korean women that to be a good Christian they had to accept their suffering, just as Jesus suffered.⁵⁰ It glorified their

⁴⁸ Chung, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, p. 30.

⁴⁹ Chung, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, p. 30.

⁵⁰ Chung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again*, p. 43.

Ivone Gebara, a Latin American feminist theologian speaks of the patriarchal experience of Latin American women, which seems to parallel the experience of Korean women in relation to the concept

suffering and encouraged them to passively endure the victimisation and injustice they faced. The fact that Christianity did not play a part in expelling the patriarchal and hierarchical landscape of Korea, is a painful and disappointing truth. Rather it seems to have created a different type of discrimination which women accepted willingly under the guises that it would ultimately please God.

Hee An Choi, a Korean feminist theologian offers an example of a Korean woman's real-life experience of this 'Koreanised Christian' faith at work. Hyun Jin was treated extremely harshly by her mother-in-law. Yet as a faithful Christian, she obeyed her mother-in-law and did everything from housework, farming to looking after her six children all by herself. She thanked God for the situation she faced as she believed God was in control. She denied herself and her needs constantly and changed her anger and pain toward her mother-in-law to love and forgiveness. She could not talk to her mother-in-law or anyone else about her anger and pain, but she expressed her feelings to God. She felt her faith in God helped transform her heart and she was thankful. Would God truly have desired for her to deny herself and her needs to the point that her identity had diminished? It appears she was 'trapped between a situation of silent, traditional Confucian virtue and Christian doctrine'.⁵¹

of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. She states that Latin American women most identify with the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross as they believe it validates their suffering and gives meaning to their lives.

Therefore, they accept their sorrow and suffering as the will of God.

Ivone Gebara, *Out of the Depths: Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), p. 88.

⁵¹ This story has been taken from Choi, *Korean Women and God*, pp. 74–76. The quote is from p. 76.

My mother always used to say to me that the best profession in the world was to be a minister's wife as she was. My father was a minister of a Korean immigrant church for many years as I grew up in the UK. She was a homemaker and always talked about how unworthy and stupid she was because she never had a proper education. Many women of my mother's generation were not able to even finish secondary school due to poverty. Also, daughters were less likely to be given adequate education, these usually landed on sons.

As a homemaker, she never really learned English and didn't have the opportunity to have a job outside the home. It always pained me to see how my mother never seemed to have fulfilled her dreams or aspirations. This is not because by being a homemaker one cannot find their niche, but I felt with my mother, her life revolved around my three younger sisters, my father and me.

However, she was content to be a minister's wife, because she believed this was the best route to pleasing God and receiving the 'crown of glory', in her words, once she got to Heaven. By being the minister's wife, she somehow reinforced the belief that she was in the right place with God and had direct approval from God. It did not seem to matter that she had somehow been living her identity through my dad and his vocation as a minister. It felt as though she had given up her own precious identity and all desire to address her own joys, interests and needs.

Koreanised Christianity as a by-product of Confucian and Christian traditions amalgamating, has in my opinion formed quite a different type of Christianity. One that is quite removed from today's Western Christianity. It has indoctrinated women

in particular with distorted beliefs about themselves and the attributes of God. It seems to have been a very common trait, especially in my mother's generation where their worth lay in pleasing God, even if that meant sacrificing their own identity and suppressing their emotions and needs.

2. SOUTH KOREA'S PATRIARCHAL CHURCH STRUCTURE

As explored in the previous chapter, Koreanised Christianity, a consequence of Confucianism and Christianity merging, has been instrumental in building an enculturated structure in the Korean church that seems to have a patriarchal and hierarchical enduring power and presence. In this chapter, I will examine the effects Koreanised Christianity has and is having on the gender imbalance of leadership and roles in the Korean Church; the authoritative figure and image of male ministers and female ordination.

The gender imbalance of power

I came to live in the UK with my family when I was five years old, and my Christian upbringing predominantly took place in a Korean immigrant church, where my father was the minister. Growing up I encountered only two Korean female preachers. The first time I heard a Korean woman preach in the pulpit was when I visited South Korea during my teens. During an evening service, she preached whilst giving her testimony and I remember soaking up every word. In the first instance, I was rather

stunned to see a woman preach, but she spoke so powerfully, energetically and eloquently that it left me mesmerised as well as empowered as a fellow female.

The other Korean female preacher was a missionary my family and I met in the Philippines. I recall calling her *jundosanim* which means 'student minister'. My family and I met her again several years later in South Korea. She had become a *moksanim*, an ordained minister, and had planted her own independent church. The church was very small and had the appearance of humble beginnings, but she expressed her joy in finally getting to that place. It was clear there had been many obstacles in her path. This was my first encounter with a Korean female minister, and to be honest it felt unnatural to me at the time, because I had always believed ministers were men. It is evident that from a young age, I had held stereotypes regarding the gender of ministers. I never saw female preachers in the Korean immigrant church I grew up in, as all the visiting preachers/ministers were men. The only time a woman stood before the congregation was to lead prayers, sing or give the notices. Some female stewards took part in meetings, but most of the church's decisions were made by men who took up the majority of leadership positions. In my memory, the women in the church were seen mostly working in the kitchen or involved in the choir, crèche or children's ministry.

The gender hierarchy I saw within my Korean church context seems to be in line with the thinking of several Korean feminist theologians. Soon Young Kim defines the Korean church structure as being 'domesticated' as it upholds a hierarchical and patriarchal mentality that continues to place women in subordination to men,

particularly in their roles.⁵² Meehyun Chung similarly states that though women would like to and are capable to do more, their roles are limited to the kitchen, home visits or Sunday school.⁵³ Sun Ai Lee Park also speaks of this unequal distribution of power where women have automatically been given stereotypical gendered roles 'related to their biological functions' and prevented from areas involving the governance of the church,⁵⁴ thus anything to do with the 'brains' of the church. Grace Ji-Sun Kim's experience of growing up in her immigrant Korean American church mirrors these opinions, as she witnessed sexism in the church community where men were seen as the 'head' of the church and held all the power, whilst women were marginalised and responsible for the domestic side of church activities.⁵⁵

Soon Young Kim adds that although Korean churches have grown rapidly and evolved, patriarchal Confucian teachings of the inferiority of women still pervade throughout its culture and theology.⁵⁶ In-Cheol Shin makes a point that with the influence of incremental changes in Korean society towards the treatment of women, gender discrimination may have lessened in the Korean church, particularly recognised through the ways leadership roles of women have expanded to include women pastors and the growing ordination of women since the beginning of the 21st

⁵² Soon Young Kim, 'Personal Reflections on Feminist Ministry as a Transforming Power', in *Korean Feminists in Conversation with the Bible, Church and Society*, ed. by Kyung Sook Lee and Kyung Mi Park, The Bible in the Modern World, 24 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), p. 82.

⁵³ Chung, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, pp. 32–33.

⁵⁴ Sun Ai Lee Park, 'A Theological Reflection', in *We Dare to Dream: Doing Theology as Asian Women*, ed. by Fabella M.M., Virginia and Park, Sun Ai Lee (Kowloon, Hong Kong: Asian Resource Centre for CULTure and Theology, 1989), p. 72.

⁵⁵ Grace Ji-Sun Kim, *Intersectional Theology*, p. 25.

⁵⁶ Soon Young Kim, 'Personal Reflections on Feminist Ministry as a Transforming Power', p. 82.

century.⁵⁷ He views the current church structure as undergoing some major changes with a greater balance of roles between men and women, mainly arising from the reality that women make up around 60% of church membership together with a growing acknowledgement of the importance of the role of women in church.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, despite these interesting shifts, he expresses his disappointment that some of these adjustments may have a superficial element, as many female ministers are still not given the authority to exercise appropriate leadership as those with pastoral oversight.⁵⁹ As Kwok Pui-Lan similarly highlights, female ordained clergy are less likely to be called to larger established congregations and will often need to start their own churches,⁶⁰ as I described with *Jundosanim's* case.

Rather, there is an 'ideology of domesticity'⁶¹ which has been influenced by Western Christianity within the Korean church where there exists a socialisation of women into domesticated gendered roles, whilst also internalising the belief that this is where women belong because it pleases God. When viewed from such a lens, though Christianity may have played a part in addressing women's discrimination in the Korean Church, it has unhelpfully played a 'double-edged role' with its 'direct

⁵⁷ In-Cheol Shin, 'The Role of Women in the Korean Church as a Reflection of the Gospel of Matthew', *HTS Theologese Studies / Theological Studies*, 77, 2 (2021), 1-8, (p. 1).

⁵⁸ Shin, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁹ Shin, p. 1.

⁶⁰ Pui-lan Kwok, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology*, Introductions in Feminist Theology, 4 (Sheffield (GB): Sheffield academic press, 2000), p. 100.

⁶¹ Gemma Tulud Cruz defines this 'ideology of domesticity' which she understands to have roots in Christianity's mission history in parts of Asia. She observes that some female missionaries encouraged Christian female domesticity as a solution to involve and evangelise uneducated women into the church and faith. Instead of exporting 'feminism' into the faith they celebrated a 'Western femininity' which in some ways venerated the ideal character of women as being servile, docile, weak, delicate and charming.

Gemma Tulud Cruz, 'Christianity and the Cause of Asian Women', in *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia*, ed. by Felix Wilfred (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2014), pp. 302-314, (p. 306).

and indirect source of low status' that Korean Christian women still face.⁶² Together with this and Confucian patriarchal expectations, the two have seemingly created the perfect combination to 'block women from ascending to leadership and ministerial roles, roles that have power' in Kim's words.⁶³

Male ministers as the authoritative figure

If Korean women are generally regarded as being at the bottom of the hierarchical church ladder, men are considered to occupy the top, at times without being questioned or challenged. I grew up being told, particularly by my mum, that dad was the 'head' of the household. When asked why, Mum would mention Eve who caused the fall of Adam in Genesis and hence women have the status that they have. I found this concept quite hard to absorb, but couldn't question it as we were taught not to question our elders. Looking back, I can now see how the nature of such distorted biblical interpretation would have reinforced the androcentric and conservative nature of ministry where the 'Bible was seen as the supreme authority and the minister the authoritative figure'.⁶⁴

Dad was definitely the authoritative figure both in the household and the church. At home, he would always sit at the head of the dinner table and be waited on by us (Mum and my sisters) to be served. Rarely did I see him cook, clean or do the dishes. When we had toast for breakfast, I remember Dad telling my sisters and me to quickly butter the toast before the toast cooled down. I recall feeling rather annoyed

⁶² Cruz, pp. 306, 310.

⁶³ Grace Ji-Sun Kim, *Intersectional Theology*, p. 25.

⁶⁴ Soon Young Kim, 'Personal Reflections on Feminist Ministry as a Transforming Power', p. 86.

and wondering why he couldn't do it himself and why he hardly did any chores around the house. Yet to my frustration, I couldn't say anything because that would have been a sign of disrespect to my elders. My dad has changed significantly over the years and does more around the house now, but looking back I can see how the male dominance in our patriarchal household and many Korean households alike transmitted into the church environment as well.

Cruz points out that in many Asian countries, the clergy are 'imbued with holiness and divine authority as very "holy people" beyond reproach'.⁶⁵ Sook Ja Chung, casts a similar shadow on the way ministers in the Korean church are elevated to a seat next to God to the extent that people associate worshipping God with worshipping the minister.⁶⁶ I found this attitude toward ministers very much the norm in my church context. Ministers were placed on a pedestal, and at home, we were taught never to say anything bad about a minister or a 'man of God'.

Yani Yoo identifies Korean Church women as being 'distorted by survival tactics'.⁶⁷ Though women may find a male minister offensive or at fault, they do not challenge the system head-on, as the androcentric church disregards women who speak their minds and praises those who are obedient.⁶⁸ Due to such inculturations of values, women develop survival tactics to stay in the 'good books' by being silent.

⁶⁵ Cruz, 'Christianity and the Cause of Asian Women', p. 307.

⁶⁶ Sook Ja Chung, 'We are the Daughters of God', in *Dissident Daughters: Feminist Liturgies in Global Context*, ed. by Teresa Berger, 1st ed (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), p. 92.

⁶⁷ Yani Yoo, 'Women's Leadership Fragmented: Examples in the Bible and the Korean Church', in *Korean Feminists in Conversation with the Bible, Church and Society*, ed. by Kyung Sook Lee and Kyung Mi Park, *The Bible in the Modern World*, 24 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), p. 114.

⁶⁸ Yani Yoo, 'Women's Leadership Fragmented: Examples in the Bible and the Korean Church', p. 114.

I remember a time we had a youth group minister. I was in my teens. He was well-liked and respected by all. Our youth group took to him because he was funny, musically talented and led the group with charisma. However, when we developed a closer relationship with him and became like a 'family' I noticed he would make comments about people's appearances, especially the girls. He did this to me too, and every so often would make comments such as 'You look pretty' or 'You look like you've gained weight'. Making remarks about people's appearances such as the ones I have mentioned is quite common amongst Koreans. It is an aspect of my culture that I am not proud of and has never sat comfortably with me, but as it was a 'norm', I just tried to ignore his comments.

However, over time, not only would he make inappropriate remarks, he started touching me physically too, particularly when talking about my weight.⁶⁹ This made me feel so vulnerable and violated. I felt I couldn't tell anyone because he was a minister and someone everyone respected. I simply brushed it under the carpet. That was, however, the extent of the encounter and he never took it any further than that, but I dread to think that he may have done similar or worse to others. Eventually, my parents did notice his unprofessional and inappropriate behaviour and dismissed him quietly. To this day, I feel guilty that I never challenged his behaviour or reported it. He had a wife and a baby daughter and I questioned his morals but didn't know how to deal with the situation. Kwok Pui Lan makes the

⁶⁹ This disclosure of possible historic abuse emerged more fully during the writing of this dissertation and subsequently there has been a conversation to address the safeguarding issues around it and the support available.

comment that, in the Asian context, male ministers ‘tend to act as patriarchs of an extended family, exercising power without appropriate checks and balances’.⁷⁰ This minister exercised and abused his power over those who looked up to him like a patriarch, but there was no one he was accountable to. Everyone simply trusted him. It appears I fell into that trap of believing that the minister was an authoritative figure whom I couldn’t question because he could not be ‘wrong’.

Women’s ordination

For a long time, the concept of women’s ordination was alien to me. The idea that I could even ponder ordained ministry for myself simply did not cross my mind, because I certainly did not look, speak or act like the male ministers around me. My parents were not against the ordination of women, but could it be that they didn’t picture *me* going into ordained ministry until much later? They felt I was called to ministry as a minister’s wife and encouraged this strongly. On several occasions, they tried to set me up with their friends who had sons going into ordained ministry. I felt called to ministry but was unable to define in what shape or form, so being the ‘good’ daughter I was, believed I was called to ministry as a minister’s wife. Only until, I married an astrophysicist who wasn’t a minister or was ever hoping to become one. Since then, I wrestled seriously with whether God was calling me to ordained ministry. I felt I had to unravel years of wrong belief systems that had become ingrained in me through the formation and upbringing in the church and home. I came to understand that my identity or calling was not something that could

⁷⁰ Kwok, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology*, p. 107.

be found or defined through a husband. Would I have followed my sense of call to ordained ministry even if I hadn't married or found a partner? I would like to believe 'yes' though it may have taken much longer to do the 'unravelling'.

My parents have been supportive of this journey, but along the way, I have come across Koreans who simply found my calling difficult to grasp. It took *me* a while to grasp, so it does not come as a surprise when others do. I simply feel the agony that some cannot imagine women being in such roles. One Korean male minister approached me and said I ought to let my husband be the minister and not me. I had to tell him my husband isn't interested in the slightest. There have been people asking me 'Why on earth would you want to do that?', 'Oh, but you're so young' or 'What about the children?'

The Methodist Church in South Korea first accepted women's ordination in 1931, but interestingly the educational system did not immediately allow women to be trained for ordination.⁷¹ Eventually, in 1955 two Methodist women to be first ordained in the history of the Korean Church were Jun Mil La and Mung Ha Lung.⁷² The journey took much longer for the Korean Presbyterian Church which finally approved ordination in 1974.⁷³ There are still Korean churches that do not ordain women and according to Sang Nim Ahn one of the reasons is simply because Jesus' disciples were

⁷¹ Choi, *Korean Women and God*, p. 121.

⁷² Choi, *Korean Women and God*, p. 121.

⁷³ Choi, *Korean Women and God*, p. 121.

all men,⁷⁴ and Kwok Pui-Lan points out it is because women do not resemble Jesus who was male⁷⁵. Nonetheless, there are positive steps towards the approval of ordination, but it is important to note that the struggle for equality and partnership in leadership continues as female ministers still endure 'male authority, hierarchy and clericalism'.⁷⁶ Soon Young Kim has been working together with her husband at Han Gang Methodist Church both as ordained ministers.⁷⁷ She speaks of her struggle to be recognised as a minister in her own right within this couple's ministry, as people make remarks such as 'Can you not be satisfied with just being the pastor's wife?' and 'You only need to fulfil the duty of a pastor's wife'.⁷⁸ Interestingly, Yoo identifies that frequently, it is the women in Korean churches who do not support female leadership or female ministers.⁷⁹ She, therefore, encourages cooperation among women, because due to long and hard internalisations of patriarchal teachings within the church, women struggle to think highly of other women and fear their power.⁸⁰

If churches are to become whole and carry out Jesus' mission in the world,⁸¹ the gender imbalance of power in church structure and leadership must be broken to be shaped and moulded into an equal partnership. Sun Ai Lee believes that both men

⁷⁴ Sang Nim Ahn, 'Feminist Theology in the Korean Church', in *We Dare to Dream: Doing Theology as Asian Women*, ed. by Fabella M.M., Virginia and Park, Sun Ai Lee (Kowloon, Hong Kong: Asian Resource Centre for Culture and Theology, 1989), p. 131.

⁷⁵ Kwok Pui-Lan, p. 100.

⁷⁶ Soon Young Kim, p. 84.

⁷⁷ Soon Young Kim, pp. 84-85.

⁷⁸ Soon Young Kim, p. 85.

⁷⁹ Yani Yoo, p. 115.

⁸⁰ Yoo, p. 115.

This aspect will be explored further in chapter 4.

⁸¹ Kwok Pui-Lan, p. 101.

and women are equipped to be 'whole persons' but with the unequal distribution of power arises the problem of 'partial personhood' formations.⁸² She believes the path to this equality towards 'whole personhoods' needs to begin from the nitty-gritty of family life where a balance of roles is upheld.⁸³

3. IDENTITY AND IMAGE

Building on Sun Ai Lee Park's concept of 'partial personhood' formations and the need for 'whole personhood' formation to begin in the familial relationships and context,⁸⁴ I will seek to explore some of the ways Korean Christian women may experience rifts in their identity formation beginning in the home. This will then lead to studying the close ties between Korean women's self-identity and image with their image of God, and how sometimes the feelings of shame, guilt and self-hate arising from these images can produce bitterness and wounds called *Han*.

Korean women's self-image

JungJa Joy Yu states that Korean women struggle with losing their sense of being an independent entity due to the patriarchal society that distorts the representation of women,⁸⁵ but I believe for many Korean women the formation toward becoming an

⁸² Sun Ai Lee Park, p. 72.

⁸³ Sun Ai Lee Park, p. 81.

⁸⁴ Sun Ai Lee Park, pp.72, 81.

⁸⁵ JungJa Joy Yu, chaps 1, Introduction.

individual entity is a painstaking struggle even from the beginning of their existence.

How can something be lost if it doesn't exist in the first place?

Choi makes the analysis that in the Korean context, the understanding of self is not solely about who 'I' am but rather an identity that is formed through the lens of a 'communal self' called *Woori* (we).⁸⁶ Boyung Lee similarly speaks of how Koreans are conditioned to develop 'communal personhood', rooted in Confucianism, which places value on community and interdependence rather than independence and individualism.⁸⁷ Since such a collective consciousness is so deeply and culturally engraved in the make-up of Korean people, it may act as a barrier to forming an autonomous self-identity that is distinct from the *Woori*. Young Ae Kim backs this point with the notion that 'communalism' which is based on hierarchical trends tends to create low self-esteem among Korean women in particular.⁸⁸

In this vein, it is believed a Korean woman's identity is first and foremost moulded around not who she is as an individual, but around her 'communal self' within the family unit.⁸⁹ Both are important factors in identity formation, but within the Korean

⁸⁶ Hee An Choi, *A Postcolonial Self: Korean Immigrant Theology and Church* (Albany: SUNY Press, State University of New York, 2015), p. 9.

⁸⁷ Boyung Lee, 'Caring-Self and Women's Self-Esteem: A Feminist's Reflection on Pastoral Care and Religious Education of Korean-American Women', *Pastoral Psychology*, 54:4 (2006), 337–53 (pp. 342–44).

⁸⁸ Young Ae Kim, 'Han: From brokenness to wholeness, A theoretical analysis of Korean women's Han and a contextualised healing methodology', Ph.D. Dissertation, School of Theology of Claremont, Claremont, CA, 1991, p. 94, quoted in Boyung Lee, 'Caring-Self and Women's Self-Esteem: A Feminist's Reflection on Pastoral Care and Religious Education of Korean-American Women', *Pastoral Psychology*, 54:4 (2006), 337–53 (p. 346).

⁸⁹ Choi, *Korean Women and God*, p. 49.

There may be an element of universality in this which is not simply isolated to the Korean culture, though may be more pronounced among Korean women. Eun Sim Joung's research demonstrates that a number of feminist psychologists suggest that gender identification in early childhood shows

culture it would seem the communal self takes precedence. Choi implies that a Korean woman's value, worth and ultimately her identity is measured and shaped through how she functions as a daughter, wife, mother or daughter-in-law.⁹⁰

Chung states that 'from birth to death Asian women [and Korean] have to fight against "death-wishes" from male-dominated society', and beginning from the moment of conception to birth parents desperately hope and pray to the gods for a son.⁹¹ Some feel great disappointment when a daughter is born, whilst some opt for sex-selective abortion earlier in the pregnancy.⁹² Chung's statement may present an extreme portrayal of Korean society which may have applied to women particularly before and of my mother's generation (before and around the 1970s), and less to Korean women of today where much has progressed in thinking since. Nevertheless, there are still traces of such thought patterns where daughters may be made to feel that their very existence is a mistake.⁹³

I never had the experience of having to fight against the 'death wishes' from a patriarchal society, but I have wondered whether life might have been a little simpler if I had been a boy. Each time my mother was pregnant my parents wished and prayed for a boy. When my mum was pregnant with my second sister, I remember praying together as a family for a son. It didn't feel like a strange thing to

boys producing a self which is autonomous, whilst girls experience a self as connected and assimilated to others.

Eun Sim Joung, *Religious Attachment: Women's Faith Development in Psychodynamic Perspective* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2008), p. 13.

⁹⁰ Choi, *Korean Women and God*, p. 49.

⁹¹ Chung, *Struggle to be the Sun*, p. 38.

⁹² Lee, p. 346.

⁹³ Choi, *Korean Women and God*, pp. 51, 53.

do at the time, but looking back I question whether it demonstrated soundness and maturity. I don't believe my father ever intentionally tried to place guilt or shame on my mother for not having a son, but I do wonder how she felt when he frequently made passing comments such as 'if only I had a son...', 'my daughters are no help...' I found these remarks insensitive and at times difficult to listen to, whether it was uttered with a degree of sincerity or as a passing joke. It made me feel somewhat inadequate and incompetent as a daughter.

If a Korean woman cannot find their sense of identity or worth as a daughter, it would appear that they can 'redeem' themselves and gain respect from her family and those of her community, by becoming a mother and giving birth to a son. Choi observes that becoming a mother is the most respectable role, whilst the most honoured mother is the one who gives birth to a son.⁹⁴ To reach this 'honoured' status, women first of all are expected to become a wife. Getting married is seen as a Korean woman's natural duty.⁹⁵ Unfortunately, it used to be the case and still is very much that an unmarried, separated, widowed, divorced, barren woman or a single mother has no place of respect in society.⁹⁶

I married when I was 31 years of age. By Korean standards, this is considered rather late. In the years leading up to my marriage, my parents worried constantly that I wouldn't be able to find the right partner to marry. It was something very high on their agenda and the pressure I felt as a result of their concern affected my self-

⁹⁴ Choi, *Korean Women and God*, p. 58.

⁹⁵ Choi, *Korean Women and God*, p. 67.

⁹⁶ Choi, *Korean Women and God*, p. 58.

esteem. Whenever I met other Koreans during that time, I heard a lot of ‘you need to get married’ or ‘you need to go first so your sisters can go too’. Once my mum asked in frustration, ‘Is there something wrong with you? Why can’t you find someone?!’ A sense of uncontrollable anger welled up in me whenever such remarks were made at me, but I felt I had to suppress it all. Over time, I found myself internalising these negative statements that seemed to define who I was, and soon I believed them to be true.

In such an environment, I found it very difficult to form my sense of self as an individual that was detached from my parents and the extended Korean community. Consequently, it would seem for many Korean women and for my mother and myself, a lack of self-development resulting in ‘partial personhood’, could be due in part to our identities needing to be affirmed through other male figures, such as fathers, husbands or sons and not in ourselves.

Korean women’s God-image

The struggle for Korean Christian women in particular to form a self-image and identity that is solely based on who they are seems to contain a two-fold battle. First, they long to discover what it means to be fully human⁹⁷ and yearn for wholesome identities, but on the other hand, they suppress such desires believing that God is pleased with their practice of self-denial and self-negation⁹⁸. Choi confirms this view by divulging that patriarchal Korean Christianity has instilled in

⁹⁷ Chung, *Struggle to be the Sun*, pp. 38–39.

⁹⁸ Choi, *A Postcolonial Self*, p. 62.

women the false consciousness that sacrificing their needs and suppressing their desires is a value of Christian humility, which inevitably pleases God.⁹⁹

Jung Su Pak states that Korean women's lives have the 'distorting power that abuses humanity and breaks the image of God'.¹⁰⁰ Do Korean Christian women realise that by abusing and squashing their self-image that God has created, they are distorting and breaking the image of God also? Simone Sunghae Kim would argue that women are equally made in the image of God as men and 'nullifying and downgrading' a woman's personhood or existence 'directly' hurts God.¹⁰¹ Some may not come to this realisation and remain stagnant in their belief that God approves of self-nullifying thoughts and actions that are done for Christ and the community. The body of Christ for them is the communal body in which they belong and seeking the freedom of this 'communal self' at the expense of their individuality and freedom¹⁰² is seen as upholding Christian values. There may exist an element of taking Philippians 2:4¹⁰³ far too literally and out of context to the detriment of defacing God's image as well as one's self-image.

There have been moments where my search for self-expression and self-identity would get confused with my image of God and God's view or opinion of me. Growing up, I believe I looked to my parents as a representation of God. I pictured God being

⁹⁹ Choi, *A Postcolonial Self*, p. 62.

¹⁰⁰ Jung Su Pak, 'The Anguish of the Korean Woman's Soul: Feminist Theologians on a Real-Life Issue', *Pastoral Psychology*, 60:2 (2011), 291–303 (p. 291).

¹⁰¹ Simone Sunghae Kim, 'A Korean Feminist Perspective on God Representation', *Pastoral Psychology*, 55:1 (2006), 35–45 (p. 39).

¹⁰² Choi, *A Postcolonial Self*, p. 63.

¹⁰³ Philippians 2:4, 'Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others' (NRSV).

authoritative, strict and conservative similar to my parents, especially my dad, and believed God loved and accepted me the way my parents did. When my parents were disappointed in me, I felt God was too. This is not uncommon amongst Korean women where the male figures in their lives become a portrayal of God, with daughters seeing God through the eyes of their fathers and wives seeing God through the eyes of their husbands.¹⁰⁴

I was keen to study ceramic art at university, but at the time my father showed great disapproval saying that I needed to study theology. He held strongly to the view that the firstborn male should be given to God as stated in Exodus 13:1-2; 12-16.¹⁰⁵ He explained to me that because he didn't have a son, and since I am the firstborn, I ought to follow in his path and dedicate my life to God's ministry.¹⁰⁶ This made no sense to me. First of all, I felt invalidated because I was not a son and it felt as though he was implying 'You don't quite fit the bill but you'll just have to do!' Secondly, I couldn't grasp why my dreams and aspirations were not valued and why I wasn't accepted for just being me. I felt stifled and trapped being pushed into a mould that did not belong to me, but simultaneously felt torn deep within wondering whether this was what God saw in me too. Is this what God had in mind for me and was this his image of me?

¹⁰⁴ Choi, *Korean Women and God*, pp. 52, 70.

¹⁰⁵ Exodus 13:2 'Consecrate to me all the firstborn; whatever is the first to open the womb among the Israelites, of human beings and animals, is mine' and 13:15b 'Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord every male that first opens the womb, but every firstborn of my sons I redeem' are particularly pertinent passages where my father's views may have arisen from.

¹⁰⁶ At the time, I don't believe my father was necessarily thinking of a form of ordained ministry for me, but he seemed to believe I ought to prepare myself to embark on some type of ministry by beginning on that path of theology.

However, I did not relent and spent some years fighting against my dad's opinion. He did eventually give in. That is when I began pondering the notion of ministry and theological studies of my own accord. Although I did get my way and studied ceramic art, I'm not sure how comfortable I felt taking the path I did. There was always a niggling sense that I was doing something against my father's wish hence against God's wish too. As my God-image had been shaped around my parents, particularly my father, my image of God could only result in a distorted and fragmented figure, because my parents were (and are) broken and imperfect human beings.

The Korean concept of *Han*

When oppressive feelings of prolonged shame, guilt and self-denigration are suppressed with no channels to challenge or vent them, Chung speculates that women experience a 'severe split' within themselves or a 'separation of self'.¹⁰⁷ This split or separation in a Korean woman's identity arises out of the tension she experiences between her longing for wholeness and the patriarchal expectations and pressures that shroud her.¹⁰⁸ When such intense feelings of anger, resentment, powerlessness or self-hate have no place to be expressed but continue to be suppressed, Chung says the 'oppressed become "stuck" inside' forming a 'lump' in their spirit.¹⁰⁹ This 'lump' or sense of unresolved resentment against injustice in Korean is called *Han*.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Chung, *Struggle to be the Sun*, p. 44.

¹⁰⁸ Chung, *Struggle to be the Sun*, p. 41.

¹⁰⁹ Chung, *Struggle to be the Sun*, p. 42.

¹¹⁰ Hyun Young Hak, 'Minjung: The Suffering Servant and Hope', a lecture given at James Memorial Chapel, Union Theological Seminary, New York, April 13, 1982, p.2, quoted in Hyun Kyung Chung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1990), p. 42.

Han is a feeling that is widespread among Korean men and women as Korea has a long history of oppression and violation from surrounding powerful countries,¹¹¹ and the word is often used to describe the deep-seated anguish of Koreans who endured such atrocities. It is however, a word used extensively to describe in Hyun Young Hak's words a profound 'pain and sorrow in one's guts and bowels making the body writhe and wiggle' as well as 'an obstinate urge to take revenge and right the wrong...'¹¹² According to Pak, Korean women's lives are '*Han*-ridden'¹¹³ and Kim believes it is entirely legitimate to say that *Han* is closely related to Korean women more than any other because of the deeply entrenched pains, frustrations and wounds that arise from being continually marginalised, belittled and dehumanised within the patriarchal context.¹¹⁴

To be healed of a *Han*-ridden life Korean feminists believe there are essentially two methods of dealing with it, either accepting it or being empowered by it.¹¹⁵

Traditionally Korean women are known to have disentangled their complex webs of *Han*-ridden inner selves through songs, dances and rituals. This untangling is called *Han-pu-ri* and has its origins in Korean Shamanistic traditions¹¹⁶ whereby *Han*-ridden women would gather together to release their accumulated *Han* through a Shaman

¹¹¹ Pak, p. 294.

¹¹² Hyun Young Hak, 'Minjung: The Suffering Servant and Hope', a lecture given at James Memorial Chapel, Union Theological Seminary, New York, April 13, 1982, p.2, quoted in Hyun Kyung Chung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1990), p. 42.

¹¹³ Pak, p. 294.

¹¹⁴ Simone Sunghae Kim, p. 43.

¹¹⁵ Pak, p. 294; Chung, p. 42.

¹¹⁶ Simone Sunghae Kim, p. 43.

ritual called *Kut*.¹¹⁷ *Han-pu-ri* through *Kut* became a space where women could share their life experiences¹¹⁸ and give the voiceless ‘ghosts of Han’ as well as the women an opportunity to speak out their stories of distress to collectively eliminate the source of the entanglement.¹¹⁹

Yu describes how she had experienced gender oppression and marginalisation without even knowing it.¹²⁰ When she did become aware of it, she said she could not break out of it because she had internalised the culture, and used the image of being trapped in a dark, invisible glass box with no doors as being analogous to her experience.¹²¹ She suggests the only way out is to break the glass box, and envisages this being possible through stages of awareness whereby the box becomes visible and she realises she can break free using her internal energy.¹²² She believes the awareness of her *Han*-ridden life itself could not bring liberation, but stresses the important starting point of this ‘waking-up process’ whereby she became critically aware of her social reality and then could accept and acknowledge her oppressed state.¹²³

I wouldn’t describe my lived experiences as necessarily being *Han*-ridden, but there is a part of me that questions whether similarly to Yu’s experience, I had been a

¹¹⁷ Hyun Kyung Chung, ‘“Han-pu-ri”: Doing Theology from Korean Women’s Perspective’, in *We Dare to Dream: Doing Theology as Asian Women*, ed. by Fabella M.M., Virginia and Park, Sun Ai Lee (Kowloon, Hong Kong: Asian Resource Centre for Culture and Theology, 1989), p. 143.

¹¹⁸ Chung, “Han-pu-ri”, p. 143.

¹¹⁹ Simone Sunghae Kim, p. 43.

¹²⁰ Yu, chap. Introduction.

¹²¹ Yu, chap. Introduction. See Appendix 1 for image.

¹²² Yu, chap. Introduction. See Appendix 2 & 3 for image.

¹²³ Yu, chap. Introduction; chap. 3, A Personal Narrative about the Process of Breaking the Visible Glass Box.

victim of marginalisation and sexism without knowing it, therefore *Han* had festered in me without my awareness of it. There were years of repressed emotions of anger, shame and guilt bottled up within me, and it is possible these manifested through depression during my years at university and thereafter. One might argue that depression comes to anyone whether they are a Korean woman with unresolved *Han* or not, but I sense all the unexpressed and deep-seated feelings of frustration toward my parents, myself, God and my upbringing had to go somewhere therefore seemed to have found its channel by taking a toll on my mental health. I sought counselling and remember my mother's look of disapproval who believed that Christians shouldn't need counselling because they have God. I found her fundamentalistic worldview very difficult to comprehend at times and in this case, her opinion only added to the layer of guilt that maybe I wasn't a good Christian.

Counselling provided a good form of *Han-pu-ri* for me in that I was offered a space where I had the freedom to vent my emotions without feeling judged. Chung, speaking on Korean women's experience believes 'if we do not permit ourselves to fully experience who we are, we will not have the power to fight back and create our own space'.¹²⁴ I feel counselling gave me the permission to explore my identity or lack of it and begin the journey of visualising and acknowledging my social reality.

¹²⁴ Chung, "Han-pu-ri", p. 136.

4. DISMANTLING PATRIARCHY AND RECONSTRUCTING THE GOD-IMAGE

So far, we have explored aspects of the Korean church and familial dynamics which are riddled with patriarchal and hierarchical conditions and norms. We have seen the debilitating effects a Koreanised Christianity can have on Korean women's self-image and God-image. This chapter will examine potential ways Korean women may find empowerment through transforming the understanding of themselves in the light of a renewed understanding of God. For reconstruction to take place, there needs to be a dismantling and deconstructing of that which has oppressed and marginalised.

DISMANTLING PATRIARCHY

Owning one's oppression

Yu's imagery of Korean women breaking out of the *Han*-ridden glass box through the internal power of awareness and acknowledgement of their oppression provides a hopeful message that dismantling and transgressing those patriarchal borders is possible and healing is possible. However, it is a poignant reminder that dismantling patriarchy ought to begin within the inner lives of Korean women. It is something that needs to be worked at to deconstruct the internalised patriarchal web of beliefs within them. Yu points to an intriguing reality that it may be easier for Korean women to remain in the comfort zone of the oppressive box because by doing so

they do not need to work or fight for liberation and can ignore their oppressed state.¹²⁵

Furthermore, according to Yu, it may be a long while before a Korean woman will feel the absolute need to fight for her liberation as well as for other women, as it is a very painful process especially for 'educated' women to come to an acceptance of their dehumanisation.¹²⁶ I would be wary of this notion of compartmentalising 'educated' women as those who experience more pain when facing their oppressive state. Such stereotyping may be unhelpful and I would rather hold the opinion that for any woman, reaching the pivotal point of owning one's victimisation is agonising. It has taken me up to the point of writing this dissertation to acknowledge that my youth minister had potentially abused me. For a long time, I had made excuses for him and was in a state of denial because he was a 'Godly' person therefore his intentions were supposedly 'good'.

Once Korean women begin to have a growing awareness or 'conscientization'¹²⁷ that they may have been oppressed, they can show characteristics of feeling fearful or frustrated because all the foundations they thought their lives were built upon will seem to come crumbling down in a heap.¹²⁸ As a result of being submerged in a rigid

¹²⁵ Yu, *Breaking the Glass Box*, chaps 4, *Breaking the Glass Box, Spiritual Formation: Awareness through Conscientization*.

¹²⁶ Yu, chaps 4, *Breaking the Glass Box, Spiritual Formation: Awareness through Conscientization*.

¹²⁷ Anthony De Mello, *Awareness: The Perils and Opportunities of Reality* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), p. 5, quoted in JungJa Joy Yu, *Breaking the Glass Box: A Korean Woman's Experiences of Conscientization and Spiritual Formation* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2013), Introduction. The word 'conscientization' has been derived from Paulo Freire a Brazilian philosopher's research to describe the condition of becoming critically aware of one's social reality thus enabling the possibility of seeing their liberation.

¹²⁸ Yu, chaps 4, *Breaking the Glass Box, Spiritual Formation: Awareness through Conscientization*.

belief system for so long, the process of reorganising their inner world as well as coming to terms with their patriarchal reality is undoubtedly unnerving.¹²⁹ Pursuing freedom means taking risks¹³⁰ and going places where Korean women have dared not tread before. Yu observes that this emotionally charged process can make Korean women angry and become like their oppressors.¹³¹ Instead of venting their anger at the oppressor, there is a tendency to direct their anger and resentment at other women, and Chung calls this damaging and unhealthy way of doing *Han-pu-ri*, 'Horizontal violence'.¹³²

Solidarity amongst Korean women

Both Pak and Chung emphasise the point that women with low self-esteem who have internalised self-hate and *Han* makes them distrust themselves and other women, and do not possess the capacity to encourage other women to work toward collective as well as individual liberation.¹³³ Pak observes that in an environment that produces shame, guilt and self-hate, oppressed and *Han*-ridden women become divided among themselves.¹³⁴ A crucial step in working toward dismantling patriarchy would be to unearth any deeply embedded 'horizontal violence' and begin challenging the conditions where women marginalise other women.

¹²⁹ Choi, *Korean Women and God*, p. 158.

¹³⁰ Yu, chaps 4, *Breaking the Glass Box, Spiritual Formation: Awareness through Conscientization*.

¹³¹ Yu, chaps 4, *Breaking the Glass Box, Spiritual Formation: Awareness through Conscientization*.

¹³² Chung, *Struggle to be the Sun*, p. 40.

¹³³ Chung, p. 40; Pak, pp. 293-294.

¹³⁴ Pak, p. 294.

Many Korean female congregation members are acclimated to believe firmly that the teachings of male superiority in the church are an unwavering Christian truth, therefore, look up to men, especially ministers, but struggle to empower other women in the church.¹³⁵ There is also a culture of older women speaking condescendingly to younger women which can make them feel inferior. This stems from Confucian values, where the younger must respect the older whilst the opinions of the younger are ignored because the elders are always in the right.

Once I attended a British Methodist church where there was a Korean lady who was my senior. She always spoke to me as though she was my superior, telling me what I should or should not do. I found her presence extremely disempowering and controlling. One time, when my children were little, I attended an evening church event for the first time after having my twins. When the lady saw me, she asked immediately 'How did you make it here? What about the children?' Her tone was critical and it felt as though she was implying that I ought to be at home with the children. However, thinking back I wonder whether the power struggle I saw in the lady may have had something to do with her own lack of self-confidence and self-actualisation which was apparent to some degree. Had she experienced oppression in the Korean church and society in the past?

Since I speak from my own perspective there may be biases, but it is my view that all Korean women need to stand in solidarity with one another; encourage and

¹³⁵ Kwok, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology*, p. 100.

empower one another, if patriarchy in the Korean church is to be dismantled.

Meehyun Chung has made this observation about the dynamics among Korean women and states that instead of women seeking solidarity with one another within the patriarchal framework, some act as though they are seeking revenge to compensate for what they have suffered by demeaning other women.¹³⁶

Meehyun Chung goes on to say that 'women are victims, yes, but they are also oppressors' and suggests that if Korean women oppress in the same way as men, not only is this conflict a contributing factor, it can continue to perpetuate patriarchal values.¹³⁷ Paulo Freire offers in his liberative pedagogy that liberation cannot occur in 'isolation or individualism but only in fellowship and solidarity'.¹³⁸ Yu believes this is true for Korean women, and in line with Freire's opinion, agrees that they cannot achieve full humanity by preventing other Korean women from reaching this, but need to strive together.¹³⁹ Therefore, liberation for the individual Korean woman cannot come about unless the liberation of all Korean women is cultivated.

It seems important to recognise that being in solidarity does not mean viewing all Korean women's lived experiences as being the same, but rather embracing the intersectionality and uniqueness of each experience. Min-Ah Cho highlights this with her view that Korean women's experiences are 'multidimensional', therefore, no

¹³⁶ Chung, 'Illness and Healing from a Korean Woman's Intercultural Perspective', p. 120.

¹³⁷ Chung, 'Illness and Healing from a Korean Woman's Intercultural Perspective', pp. 120, 121.

¹³⁸ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2008), p. 85, quoted in JungJa Joy Yu, *Breaking the Glass Box: A Korean Woman's Experiences of Conscientization and Spiritual Formation* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2013), Chap. 4, Pedagogical Implications.

¹³⁹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy*, p. 85, quoted in Yu, *Breaking the Glass Box*, chap.4, Pedagogical Implications.

'monolithic methodology' can sufficiently address all situations.¹⁴⁰ This is where I believe Korean feminist theology can help, by enabling and communicating a paradigm shift where Korean women can fully recognise that they need each other to dismantle the patriarchal structures and norms that have defined their existence.

RECONSTRUCTING THE GOD-IMAGE

Negative images of God

One particular method of working toward a paradigm shift is to tear down the negative images of God and enable Korean women to conceptualise God in new ways so they may awaken to 'how deeply they have been indoctrinated'.¹⁴¹ Choi states that 'the process of reconstructing images of God also involves reconstructing images of self'¹⁴² and I would like to add, the images we attach to one another also. Yu also highly encourages the process of replacing traditional and negative images of God with positive ones as she sees the impact it can have in helping women break their glass box,¹⁴³ ultimately transgressing the patriarchal walls.

Several images of God and Jesus have emerged in Korean Christianity, especially with the influence of Western Christianity but I will focus on a couple of images and offer an image of God that may be more inclusive.¹⁴⁴ A key disempowering and exclusive

¹⁴⁰ Cho, 'Stirring up Deep Waters: Korean Feminist Theologies Today', p. 240.

¹⁴¹ Choi, *Korean Women and God*, p. 156.

¹⁴² Choi, pp. 156, 159.

¹⁴³ Yu, chaps 4, Restructuring the Image of God.

¹⁴⁴ Some common negative images of God in Korean Christianity are God the Father, God of the Oppressor, God as a Higher Being and God as Eschatological Saviour. Images of Jesus common to Korean Christians are Jesus as Suffering Servant and Jesus as Lord. Some suggested positive images of God are, God as Family, God as daughter, God of the Oppressed, God as friend, God as Liberator, God as Life-giving Spirit, Female God of Earth and Jesus as Shaman. Found in Bong, 'Gender, Sexuality, and Christian Feminist Movements in Asia';

image of God for Korean women has been God as the Father. This maleness of God is not an experience isolated to Korean women but has and continues to be the experience of women globally, whilst many Western feminists have challenged it.¹⁴⁵ I would like to focus on how Korean women perceive the maleness of God.

The Korean language is not gender specific, and the word for 'God', *Hananim* can be both male or female.¹⁴⁶ Then how has the maleness been ascribed to *Hananim*?

Koreans have relied on traditional understandings of God and Christ received from Western missionaries, which were predominantly male.¹⁴⁷ The Korean Christian God naturally became *Hananim-Abuji* which is translated God-Father and this fitted very well with Korea's Confucian patriarchal family system.¹⁴⁸ Both *Hananim* and *Hananim-Abuji* are used interchangeably but when Koreans think of God the automatic default is God the Father.¹⁴⁹ Sermons, Bible studies, worship and activities in the Korean church have lauded the image of God the Father to the extent that it has become so deeply fixed in people's minds and hearts.¹⁵⁰

Choi, *Korean Women and God*;

Choi Hee An, 'Re-Imagining Theological Reflection on God from the Context of Korean Women', *Feminist Theology*, 16.3 (2008);

Chung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again*;

Kim, 'A Korean Feminist Perspective of God Representation', *Pastoral Psychology*, 55.1 (2006) and Man Ja Choi, 'Feminine Images of God in Korean Traditional Religion' in *Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Trends*, ed. by R. S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1994), (80-89), pp. 80, 86.

¹⁴⁵ Feminists such as Mary Daly, Sallie McFague, Rosemary Radford Ruether and others have closely analysed and criticised how the male Father God represents the superiority of the male.

Hee An Choi, 'Re-Imagining Theological Reflection on God from the Context of Korean Women', *Feminist Theology*, 16.3 (2008), 350–64 (p. 352).

¹⁴⁶ Simone Sunghae Kim, 'A Korean Feminist Perspective on God Representation', *Pastoral Psychology*, 55.1 (2006), 35–45 (p. 38).

¹⁴⁷ Pak, p. 295.

¹⁴⁸ Choi, *Korean Women and God*, p. 103.

¹⁴⁹ Simone Sunghae Kim, p. 38.

¹⁵⁰ Choi, *Re-Imagining Theological Reflection on God*, p. 354.

Kim expresses that when Korean women think or call upon God it is very likely that their biological father will come to mind. I would say this has been the case for me. However, Kim goes on to say that if a Korean woman's biological father happens to be godly, loving, faithful and compassionate she would have an 'easy' time approaching God during times of distress, but if the biological father exhibits patriarchal, hierarchical and misogynistic qualities she could have a difficult time going to God for help.¹⁵¹ I can see the validity of Kim's argument but feel it may be too simplistic. It seems to justify that if a Korean woman can see God in a similar light to their biological father who has good, loving qualities, then it is fine to portray God as male. Also, she uses the word 'easy' to describe approaching God who possesses 'godly' father qualities. In my experience, I have found this 'godly' image of God less approachable in comparison to the image of God incarnate who came down to earth in human form as one who knew what it was to have a mix of human emotions and was able to identify with human's imperfections.

I would argue that there are benefits to forming God's image tinged with humanity. However, it still does not take away the concept that God and Jesus are primarily portrayed as male figures. In an attempt to form feminine images of God, God as Mother has been an emerging image in women's theological discourse. God as Mother denotes images of gentleness, sacrificial love, abundant life, creation, reproduction and progeny.¹⁵² Both Choi and Chung view this image in a relatively

¹⁵¹ Simone Sunghae Kim, p. 42.

¹⁵² Choi, *Korean Women and God*, p. 109.

positive light,¹⁵³ since a female figure may be more approachable, but I sense it is riddled with potential issues. Many women may have mixed feelings about their mothers and particularly regarding the notion of reproduction, procreation and giving birth, not all women can or desire to become mothers themselves. The concept of becoming a mother in the Korean context can bring up painful emotions of being pressurised into marrying, becoming a mother, giving birth to a son and also the shame that may come with barrenness. Therefore, I do not view the image of God the Mother as being a helpful alternative to God the Father.

Towards a renewed God-image

Female theologians support the emerging discussion that images of God should avoid being gender specific and instead be gender-neutral which promotes a sense of equality.¹⁵⁴ First of all, intentional efforts need to be made in Korean churches and the wider Christian settings to call God, simply *Hananim* and not *Hananim-Abuj*, to accentuate the gender neutrality in the former term. Chung holds the view that when women can see God as having an all-inclusive reality, they begin to have a growing confidence in themselves shaped around their new image of God.¹⁵⁵ With this in mind, I would like to suggest an image of God, that is seemingly yet to be explored in Korean feminist circles.

Rather than view God as Mother, a labouring woman or as one who gives birth, I would like to suggest the metaphor of God as a Midwife. The midwife does not give

¹⁵³ Choi, *Korean Women and God*, p. 109; Chung, *Struggle to be the Sun*, p. 51.

¹⁵⁴ Pak, p. 297.

¹⁵⁵ Chung, *Struggle to be the Sun*, p. 50.

birth to the child but journeys beside the labouring mother, working unceasingly to bring life into the world. There is a life-giving and liberating aspect to this image of God depicted as one who carries and delivers his/her people into a new place of life, safety and nurture. God can be pictured as being 'with' the 'birthgiver' as they cross the borders from one place to another; from a place of discomfort and pain to a place of release and new life.¹⁵⁶ The metaphor of God as Midwife is a less dominant theme in the Bible, but L. Juliana M. Claassens who has explored alternative images of God in the Old Testament points to Psalm 97:1 in particular.¹⁵⁷ It offers the picture of God doing the work of a midwife.¹⁵⁸

Margaret Guenther also draws on this Midwife image but as a model for spiritual direction. She uses the examples of Shiphrah and Puah in Exodus who risked their lives to bring forth the life of others.¹⁵⁹ Guenther believes they were the 'foremothers of all midwives' but most importantly during the time of upheaval, God stood behind them as the guardian and ultimate midwife of all.¹⁶⁰ Guenther states that God is the midwife.¹⁶¹ This image invokes inclusive qualities because a midwife doesn't have to be a mother herself/himself. Nor does she/he have to be a wife.

Most midwives may be women, but that is not a requirement. It may contain feminine imagery but it is also not exclusively female, and therefore contains

¹⁵⁶ Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction* (United Kingdom: A Cowley Publications Book, 1992), p. 81.

¹⁵⁷ L. Juliana M. Claassens, 'Praying from the Depths of the Deep: Remembering the Image of God as Midwife in Psalm 71', *Review & Expositor*, 104.4 (2007), 761–75 (p. 767).

¹⁵⁸ Psalm 71:6 'Upon you I have leaned from my birth; it was you who took me from my mother's womb. My praise is continually of you.' (NRSV)

¹⁵⁹ Exodus 1:15-21.

¹⁶⁰ Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction* (United Kingdom: A Cowley Publications Book, 1992), p. 80.

¹⁶¹ Guenther, p. 80.

gender-neutral aspects. It also bears the image of a God who gently journeys alongside, listens and enables.

This concept of God as Midwife is not an image that has been explored in depth amongst Korean feminist theologians.¹⁶² ‘Midwife’ in Korean is *Cho-san-sa*. Though midwives are recognised professionals in Korea, the practice went through a stage of decline after the late 70s, when childbirth began taking place largely in hospitals rather than homes and centres.¹⁶³ Midwives mainly work in birthing centres,¹⁶⁴ but where midwives work alongside doctors and nurses in hospitals, they can be marginalised because there is a general culture of mothers seeking a qualified doctor to see them rather than a midwife. Eun Hyung Kim points out that despite the breadth of knowledge midwives have of childbirth they feel discriminated against as people with second-class jobs.¹⁶⁵

Due to this underrepresented reputation midwives in Korea may have, I feel more keenly drawn to the image of God as Midwife and would like to offer it to the table

¹⁶² So far, to my knowledge and research I have not come across the mention of God as Midwife amongst published works in English by Korean feminist theologians. This does not mean that there aren’t published works in English or Korean. I may be unaware of it.

¹⁶³ Eun Hyung Kim, ‘행복한 출산, 산파가 있잖아!’, *한겨레/21 (Hankyoreh21)*, 2 May, 2020 (updated) <https://h21.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/3809.html> [accessed 2 August 2023].

The information about midwifery in South Korea has been taken from this article in a South Korean journal called *HanKyoreh21*. This journal deals with some of South Korea’s current news, politics and social affairs. The title of the article can be translated ‘Happy Childbirth, there is a Midwife!’ This title uses the more ancient Korean word for ‘midwife’ which is *San-pa*.

¹⁶⁴ After some decline in the recognition of midwives, their reputation picked up again with women in search of more natural birthing methods. However, currently the profession is in crisis again due to the fall of fertility rate in South Korea. Kyung Won Kim supports the strengthening of midwifery by encouraging women to give birth in birthing centres. Found in Kyung Won Kim, ‘Expanding the Role of Midwives in Korea’, *Korean Journal of Women Health Nursing*, 27.3 (2021), 167–70.

¹⁶⁵ https://h21.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/3809.html.

of Korean feminist theological discourse. I believe it contains life-giving characteristics that need to be reclaimed. Such an image can offer a reminder that God was marginalised in the person of Jesus, and desires to journey with the marginalised to help bring Korean women and all those who may feel 'othered' to a place of life and nourishment.

5. TRANSGRESSING BORDERS AND BEING EMPOWERED FOR FEMINIST MINISTRY

In the previous chapter, we explored the reconstruction of the God-Image as one of the potential ways forward in dismantling patriarchal norms deeply imprinted in the lives of Korean women. In this final chapter, I will seek to draw out ways Korean feminist ministry can be a transforming power through the exploration of feminist models of ministry, which I feel speak out of and into the Korean context. I will particularly focus on the immigrant Korean context as a channel for reconceptualising feminist ministry.

TRANSGRESSING BORDERS

In my quest to transgress the patriarchal borders of the Korean Church and to unleash the transformative power of Korean feminist ministry, I would like to reflect theologically on my immigrant experience of living as a Korean in Great Britain. I believe it contains metaphors and imagery that may contribute to a reimagining of Korean feminist ministry and the broader landscape of feminist ministry. To search

for a model of ministry that I feel has the power to liberate and take wings for me and hopefully for others, I believe first and foremost it will need to make sense for me as a Korean woman entering presbyteral ministry in the U.K., and emerge from my lived experience.

The Other

As I reflect on my immigrant experience, the question that reverberates in me is would my experience of Korean patriarchal norms in the home and church have been very different if I had lived in South Korea and not the UK? The answer is always 'yes'. The values and core beliefs stemming from a Koreanised Christianity may have been similar, but I certainly would not have had the experience of living in-between two cultures that often seemed polarised and at different ends of the spectrum.

Several Korean-American feminist theologians describe their American immigrant experiences which resonates very closely with mine. W. Anne Joh offers the image of herself hanging over the Pacific with one foot on the shores of America and the other dangling over but never quite grounded on the shores of Korea.¹⁶⁶ Jung Ha Kim speaks of constantly 'straddling cultures that were disparate and at times contradictory'.¹⁶⁷ Kim, speaking from personal experience and through her research

¹⁶⁶ Wonhee Anne Joh, 'The Transgressive Power of Jeong: A Postcolonial Hybridization of Christology', in *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire*, ed. by Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner, and Mayra Rivera (St. Louis, Mo: Chalice Press, 2004), 149-163, (pp. 149–50).

¹⁶⁷ Jung Ha Kim, 'Spiritual Buffet: The Changing Diet of America', in *Off the Menu: Asian and Asian North American Women's Religion and Theology*, ed. by Rita Nakashima Brock, 1st ed (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 69-86, (p. 71).

of Korean American women, articulates that Korean American as well as Asian American women live in two worlds.¹⁶⁸ They feel the pressure to belong to their Asian cultural heritage but also feel the need to fit into the surrounding Western culture.¹⁶⁹ She analyses that as a result of this constant toing and froing, these women find they cannot belong to either culture and feel marginalised.¹⁷⁰ They sense a separation from their native country but are unable to 'melt' into the dominant culture¹⁷¹ and thus find they are stuck and wedged between cultures.

Although these Korean feminist theologians speak from their American immigrant encounter, I sense an affiliation with their story as that feeling of being wedged between cultures is something I can certainly identify with. My recollection is that I lived in a 'bubble' where my life revolved largely around the home and the church community. It would seem my upbringing was predominantly dictated by Korean values, morals and mannerisms, whilst the British culture around me had the appearance of a distant reality.¹⁷² During my journey of 'straddling' two cultures, I found I was always searching for a sense of identity, belonging, fit and connection with either or both cultures but discovered I was always up against an immovable

¹⁶⁸ Grace Ji-Sun Kim, 'Revisioning Christ', *Feminist Theology: The Journal of the Britain and Ireland School of Feminist Theology*, 28, 2001, 82–92 (p. 83).

¹⁶⁹ Kim, 'Revisioning Christ', p. 83.

¹⁷⁰ Kim, p. 83.

¹⁷¹ Kim, p. 83.

¹⁷² It may be possible that this gap or chasm I encountered between the two cultures may have been wider, because there is a general understanding that Koreans who immigrate hold onto their patriarchal, chauvinistic and religious fundamentalistic traditions from their native country when they leave, but are unable to move on from it even though contemporary culture in South Korea may have progressed in their thinking. They become stagnant and remain stuck in some of the more traditional and conservative ways in comparison to those living in South Korea. We arrived in the UK in the early 80s and it is likely that my parents held onto the status quo of South Korea as it was when they left. (Hee An Choi, *A Postcolonial Self: Korean Immigrant Theology and Church* (Albany: SUNY Press, State University of New York, 2015), p. 66).

barrier defined as the *Other*. This identity as the *Other* became an unyielding and marginalising force within me. So, how did it get there?

Grace Ji-Sun Kim describes the process of becoming the *Other* concerning Asian/Korean women as they immigrate/migrate to America. She says that as they struggle with their identities and how best to relate to their dominant culture, they have great difficulty trying to fit in.¹⁷³ As they wrestle to form their identities whilst living along the borders, they may find they cannot truly be one or the other.¹⁷⁴ This complex tension of being neither one nor the other causes women to become the 'female Other' and the 'foreign Other'.¹⁷⁵ Korean women have already been considered the female *Other* from their patriarchal Korean community, but through immigration, they adopt this new layer of *Otherness* as a foreigner.¹⁷⁶

Whether Korean women have had the experience of dual cultures or not, something most have in common is the experience of being *Othered*. Due to this *Otherness*, their lives are wrought with complexities as they attempt to make sense of their existence in the margins, borders and fragile fissures.

¹⁷³ Grace Ji-Sun Kim, 'In Search of a Pneumatology: Chi and Spirit', *Feminist Theology*, 18.1 (2009), 117–32 (p. 119).

¹⁷⁴ Grace Ji-Sun Kim, 'Hybridity, Postcolonialism and Asian American Women', *Feminist Theology*, 24.3 (2016), 260-274 (p. 264).

This tension of living in-between cultures is not only an experience pertaining to women, or Korean women, but to men and anyone who live with the multiplicity of locations.

¹⁷⁵ Grace Ji-Sun Kim, 'Hybridity, Postcolonialism and Asian American Women', p. 263.

¹⁷⁶ Women as *the Other* is not only a form of marginalisation that Korean or Asian women face, but can be seen as a universal reality. For example, Gloria Anzaldúa speaking out of her experience and of others living across borders of different cultures such as the one between the US and Mexico, believes women are seen and treated as 'the stranger, the other'. Anzaldúa's context does differ from Korean and Asian women's borderland experience in that there may be a greater degree of dehumanisation and exploitation at the US/Mexico border. However, my aim is to emphasise the shared experience of being *Othered*. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: La Frontera, The New Mestiza*, 1. ed (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), Preface, p. 17.

Liminality & hybridity

For me this *Otherness* meant I could never be truly 'Anglicised' no matter how hard I tried to fit in, but neither could I ever be completely 'Koreanised'. I perceived this place of *Otherness* as the liminal space from which I needed to escape to find my identity, home and belongingness. Gradually, I have come to realise that I do not need to break free from this liminal space and be fully Anglicised or Koreanised. Neither do I need to be fully immersed in both cultures to find wholeness of identity or a sense of belonging. Although this interstitial space may have an ambiguous and at times crushing nature, it has become for me a place where I envisage the potential for transformation, healing and creativity both in my spiritual and ministerial practice.

Several feminist theologians view this liminal space of the borders and margins in a similar light. Despite such a space being infused with discomfort and tension, where identity formation is in flux, some envision this space as also having transformative and revitalising qualities. June Hee Yoon who identifies as a queer Korean-American Christian woman felt she couldn't find 'home' in her Korean-American church community and was stuck in between cultures.¹⁷⁷ However, she sees this interstitial space as a liberating place from where she is on a journey to find 'home' and identity.¹⁷⁸ Gloria Anzaldúa visualises these shifting and fluid margins as being similar

¹⁷⁷ June Hee Yoon, 'Finding Home from the In-between Space for a Queer Asian American Christian Woman', in *Asian and Asian American Women in Theology and Religion: Embodying Knowledge*, ed. by Pui-lan Kwok (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 59-69, (pp. 59, 60).

¹⁷⁸ Yoon, 'Finding Home', p. 69.

to swimming in a new element, an 'alien' element'.¹⁷⁹ It is not comfortable but it is 'home' for her and she views it with exhilaration as there can be stirrings of newness and life.¹⁸⁰

So how can the place of interstices release this transformative power to help empower Korean women and enable them to transgress the patriarchal borders and break down the walls of *Otherness*? Kim suggests the concept of hybridity as a helpful understanding to Korean women's complex situation as they struggle to find a sense of belonging and identity in the in-between spaces.¹⁸¹ She believes once women can accept their identities as hybrid it can help normalise who they are and discover they are not the *Other* or foreign,¹⁸² but rather as those equipped with the lived experiences to stand in the gaps, margins and borders where discrimination and *othering* seeps through.

By being in the liminal spaces, Korean/marginalised¹⁸³ women can see both sides of the coin of the differing dominating cultures and act as an 'intermediary' to work towards softening the borders.¹⁸⁴ Kim senses that this could be achieved by helping

¹⁷⁹ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: La Frontera, The New Mestiza*, 1. ed (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), Preface.

¹⁸⁰ Anzaldúa, Preface.

¹⁸¹ Grace Ji-Sun Kim, 'Hybridity, Postcolonialism and Asian American Women', p. 261.

¹⁸² Kim, 'Hybridity, Postcolonialism and Asian American Women', pp. 262, 263.

¹⁸³ Although the main focus of this dissertation is on Korean women, their experiences and Korean feminist theology, I would like to begin expanding the arguments to include any and all who experience marginalisation and *Otherness*.

¹⁸⁴ Min-Ah Cho describes how Korean feminist theology/feminist theology can be an 'intermediary' between progressive and conservative Christians/churches. She believes it is as important to educate the more dominant and possibly more conservative/middle-class spectrum of Christianity as is standing with people in the margins. Both is needed.

Min-Ah Cho, 'Stirring up Deep Waters: Korean Feminist Theologies Today', *Theology Today*, 71.2 (2014), 233–45 (p. 243).

people recognise that all humans are hybrid in one form or another, meaning the traditional or rigid categories with which people understand each other will become futile.¹⁸⁵ This suggestion may be erring on the side of idealism because, in an ideal world, this might be achievable, but in reality, it takes a change of mindset from people of both sides or all cultural facets to bring this to fruition. This does not mean Korean/marginalised women cannot do their part and use their experiences and wounds of being *othered* to stand on the fringes and be in solidarity with those on the periphery.

BEING EMPOWERED FOR FEMINIST MINISTRY

I find the concept of being an 'intermediary' in the liminal spaces a helpful way of defining and reimagining a Korean feminist/feminist model of ministry.

Ministry of *Jeong*

A seemingly popular model of spiritual practice and ministry amongst Korean feminist theologians is the theology or ministry of *Jeong*. *Jeong* is seen as the opposite of *Han* that exudes a positive energy that can ultimately counter *Han*.¹⁸⁶ *Jeong* can be defined as a Korean concept of love that encompasses but is not limited to affection, compassion, empathy, solidarity and deep connection all meshed into one.¹⁸⁷ In my experience, *Jeong* is a type of love and connectedness amongst Koreans that go beyond the usual boundaries between close relationships, as *Jeong* can reside amongst those who have no mutual connection.

¹⁸⁵ Grace Ji-Sun Kim, 'Hybridity, Postcolonialism and Asian American Women', p. 262.

¹⁸⁶ Yu, chaps 3, *The Invisible Glass Box, Jeong: Potential Positive Emotional and Psychological Energy*.

¹⁸⁷ Joh, 'The Transgressive Power of Jeong: A Postcolonial Hybridization of Christology', p. 152.

Both Joh and Yoon draw on this theology of *Jeong* as emerging from their and Korean American women's experience of hybridity.¹⁸⁸ Joh views *Jeong* as the emancipatory force that can bring 'radical inclusivity and mutuality' even in the margins and in-between spaces where there is separation and dichotomy of views.¹⁸⁹ *Jeong* possesses a 'stickiness' that glues or wedges itself in the intervals and interstitial sites of relationality and has the potential power to forge people together,¹⁹⁰ such as those who might *Other* and those who may feel *Othered*. Joh also sees *Jeong* as a model that can transgress the boundaries that maintain the separation and marginalisation of people. Moreover, she portrays Jesus as fully embodying *Jeong* in his ministry because he often placed himself between the coloniser and the colonised whilst ministering to both, and also experienced hybridity, foreignness and Otherness.¹⁹¹

The concept of *Jeong* contains some attributes that help reconceptualise a model of feminist ministry in the margins, but it also possesses the nature of dissolving boundaries to the point that it can harm interpersonal relationships. For instance, quite frequently in my experience, *Jeong* can be the excuse to intrude upon people's emotional, personal and spiritual boundaries without consent or approval.¹⁹² The

¹⁸⁸ Joh, p. 150; Yoon, 'Finding Home from the In-between Space for a Queer Asian American Christian Woman', pp. 67-69.

¹⁸⁹ Joh, pp. 152-153.

¹⁹⁰ Joh, pp. 152-154.

¹⁹¹ Joh, pp. 156, 163.

¹⁹² Yu, chaps 3, The Invisible Glass Box, *Jeong: Potential Positive Emotional and Psychological Energy*.

fluidity of *Jeong* can be a positive aspect, but it can also have controlling factors that demand people's rights and privacies in the name of *Jeong*.

Furthermore, modelling a ministry of *Jeong* around the person of Jesus may not always be an enabling method for Korean women, because of Jesus' perceived male gender. Nam-Soon Kang also warns against identifying Korean women's struggles with Jesus' because it risks homogenising their sufferings, particularly when Jesus did not suffer from patriarchy from a female standpoint.¹⁹³

Ministry of the 'Crossroads'

In Anzaldúa's poem 'To Live in the Borderlands means you', I find an intriguing and budding image which could conceivably be used as an empowering model for Korean feminist/feminist ministry. She portrays the sheer struggles of life and identity formation along the borders particularly between Mexico and the US and suggests that 'to survive the Borderlands' one must 'live without borders' and 'be a crossroads'.¹⁹⁴

Mayra Rivera, a Puerto Rican post-colonial theologian expands upon this notion of the Borderlands and Crossroads depicted through her interpretation of *Sophia*¹⁹⁵ in

¹⁹³ Nam-Soon Kang, 'Creating "Dangerous Memory": Challenges for Asian and Korean Feminist Theology', *The Ecumenical Review*, 47.1 (1995), 21–31 (pp. 29, 30).

¹⁹⁴ Anzaldúa, pp. 194, 195.

¹⁹⁵ Wisdom appears as *Hokmah* (Hebrew) and *Sophia* (Greek) in the Christian scriptures. Both are feminine. Grace Ji-Sun Kim, 'Revisioning Christ', p. 84.

Proverbs.¹⁹⁶ I am rather drawn to the postcolonial concept of *Sophia* as a model for exploring the liminal space as a transformative power for feminist ministry.

Sophia is seen at the crossroads taking her stand.¹⁹⁷ The crossroads according to Rivera is a place of confusion, diverging paths, conflicting choices and uncertainties, yet *Sophia* chooses to stand there as a character who disturbs, mediates, intervenes and transgresses.¹⁹⁸ She is portrayed as a rather elusive personality who is fluid and a living hybrid residing in the liminal space intervening between God and creation, yet is also able to transgress borders by refusing to fit into established or traditional categories.¹⁹⁹ She is present in the margins and edges of life, at the 'entrance' of the city gate offering her words of wisdom and stretching out her hands to offer counsel and life.²⁰⁰ Through these images, *Sophia* presents a 'being alongside' model of ministry whereby similar to the midwife²⁰¹, the minister is with, beside and present with people in their struggles as they navigate their lives in the margins, borderlands and crossroads in search of new life.

¹⁹⁶ Mayra Rivera, 'God at the Crossroads: A Postcolonial Reading of Sophia', in *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire*, ed. by Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner, and Mayra Rivera (St. Louis, Mo: Chalice Press, 2004), 186-203, (p. 186).

¹⁹⁷ Proverbs 8:2 NRSV

¹⁹⁸ Mayra Rivera, 'God at the Crossroads', pp. 186, 189.

¹⁹⁹ Mayra Rivera, 'God at the Crossroads', p. 189.

²⁰⁰ Proverbs 1:21-24

²⁰¹ In chapter 4 I explored reimagining the image of God based on the midwife imagery. Here I am referring to the image of the midwife in terms of looking at the way it may model ministry. I am aware that there may be potential issues if the same image is to be used for God and humans. Here I would simply like to touch upon the example of the way a midwife is 'with' those struggling/labouring in life. As Margaret Guenther points out, the midwife does things *with* and not *to* the birth giver. Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction* (United Kingdom: A Cowley Publications Book, 1992), p. 81.

Theologians have been puzzled by the concept of Sophia but have identified her in the dimensions of the Trinity as *Spirit-Sophia*, *Jesus-Sophia* and *Mother-Sophia*, or rather as an ‘other’ substance of God.²⁰² *Sophia* can be seen as a feminine, marginalised and *Othered* figure in traditional scholarship.²⁰³ This aspect is not necessarily diminishing in that in her *Otherness* she can stand with those who are *Othered* and model solidarity. Her *Otherness* does not crush her, for she is pictured as a model of resistance who speaks out and challenges, seen in the way she ‘cries out’ in the street and busiest corner, ‘raises her voice’ in the squares and ‘speaks’ at the entrance of the city gates.²⁰⁴ I feel this depiction of Sophia is a particularly powerful model for Korean feminist ministry because of Korea’s patriarchal Christian and Confucianist teachings that expect women to be silent and where Korean women have internalised silence as a virtue.

In a similar vein, Kim is convinced that Korean/Asian women need to enculturate ‘the language of *Sophia*’ into their theological and philosophical patterns of thought because *Sophia* offers a variety of models which can help transgress the patriarchal borders and empower them to flourish and grow.²⁰⁵ The characteristics she draws out from *Sophia* are that of a ‘Creator, respected nurturer, and a strong, assertive prophetic female figure’.²⁰⁶ These traits are far removed from the Korean patriarchal views of women and provide alternatives to the traditional moulds women feel they

²⁰² Rivera, p. 187.

²⁰³ Rivera, p. 192.

²⁰⁴ Proverbs 1:20-21.

²⁰⁵ Kim, ‘Revisioning Christ’, pp. 82, 89.

²⁰⁶ Kim, ‘Revisioning Christ’, p. 89.

need to fit into.²⁰⁷ It also encourages Korean women to exercise the leadership aspects of ministry, which is not about leading with a hierarchical model, but an egalitarian form of leadership that nurtures, guides and speaks up against injustices.

Sophia was with God at the beginning before creation; she was the first to be created and is seen as being beside and co-creating with God all along.²⁰⁸ Kim states that *Sophia* is full of creative power²⁰⁹ and I believe this aspect of *Sophia* can help unleash the creative and co-creating force in Korean women that may have lay dormant, to then be used for ministry. Instead of being excluded from patriarchal models of ministry where words, symbols and ideas are mostly masculine, women can participate fully in God's work²¹⁰ as co-creators and co-partners with God whilst modelling a ministry that is collaborative and interweaving in nature.

Using *Sophia* as a model for ministry instead of Jesus' male figure may be helpful for those who find the gender of Jesus difficult to identify with. Most scholars believe *Sophia* was the precursor of Logos/Jesus as she was there with God in the beginning.²¹¹ Some would argue Jesus to be the embodiment of *Sophia* or as God incarnate in female symbol.²¹² Therefore, using *Sophia* as a model provides a more inclusive and female Christological form of ministry that women may feel they can emulate.

²⁰⁷ Kim, 'Revisioning Christ', p. 89.

²⁰⁸ Proverbs 8:22-31.

²⁰⁹ Kim, 'Revisioning Christ', p. 89.

²¹⁰ Kim, 'Revisioning Christ', p. 90.

²¹¹ Rivera, p. 188.

²¹² Kim, 'Revisioning Christ', p. 87.

In this realm I offer *Sophia* as creative power and model for ministry, believing it can enable Korean women/women to see that they have the gift and ability to bring new ideas, new projects, and new ways of working and being together²¹³ to the ministerial table so that together in partnership with men and women they can flourish and deliver life.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has been a personal and arduous, but life-enhancing journey for me, where at times I felt through the autoethnography I needed to open up and make myself vulnerable to relive some of the past hurts, pains and memories. However, it is through the resurfacing and sharing of these personal experiences, that I have found connectedness as well as disconnectedness with the lived experiences of Korean women. I felt myself soar when I could find similarities and intersections between my story and the story of other Korean women, and where their experiences differed from my own, I was able to notice the gaps and find a measure of meaning and renewed knowledge in that too.

²¹³ Kim, 'Revisioning Christ', p. 90.

I began by examining some of the historic backgrounds of how patriarchy in the Korean Church may have taken root. Those roots then took us to explore the patriarchal underpinnings in the Korean church structure that cause the gender imbalance of power in leadership roles. Searching deeper into the root of how patriarchy arose has helped cultivate a greater awareness and understanding rather than resorting to anger or blame. This, however, does not excuse or justify patriarchal norms and structures, for they must continue to be challenged if there is to be a wholesome ministry that promotes equality, diversity and inclusivity.

It has been eye-opening to put into perspective the notion of 'Koreanised Christianity' and to look back at the impact it has had on my upbringing as well as my self-image and God-image which contained distortions and wrong beliefs. Growing up, the teachings, values and morals that had shaped me in the home and the church felt quite removed from the surrounding British culture and I struggled to find a comfortable middle ground. I can now see that the struggle wasn't something to be ashamed of but necessary and valid in that situation.

Korean feminist theology has shed light on some of the reasons behind Korean women's struggle to form holistic self-identities that celebrate individuality and uniqueness. The concept of *Woori* and communalism which is a domineering factor appears to discourage exploring one's self-identity and self-image. The sense of community and interdependence is crucial to flourish and grow together. It is also important that Korean women stand in solidarity with another in support and encouragement. However, if Korean women cannot prioritise being their

autonomous selves but feel the pressure to construct their identities for instance through their fathers, husbands and sons, then the strength of being one close-knit community/unity cannot liberate them. It has been seen that their image of God emerges from their image of self and vice versa causing a vicious cycle that can be very disempowering, especially if one or the other image is negative.

We have seen that a way to break this vicious cycle causing this 'identity trap', according to Korean feminist theologians, is by breaking down the walls of patriarchy through coming to an awareness that one has/is a victim of oppressive patriarchal ideologies in the church, home and community. Once women can come to a conscientization and acknowledgement of their oppressive state and *Han*-ridden lives, they can then work toward breaking out of and transgressing the patriarchal boundaries. Pastoral care, spiritual practice and a safe space where women are listened to without judgment can be helpful in this regard.

Along with this, it was discussed that forming and shaping a positive image of God can help to dismantle hegemony and promote women's self-worth. After exploring the image of God as Midwife, I felt it offered an image that was inclusive, gender neutral and spoke for and out of the experience of Korean women who have wrestled with the high expectations and pressures of being/becoming a wife and a mother. The Midwife image presents a God who is not controlling, overpowering or authoritative and one who is *with* and beside Korean women in all their 'birth pangs', but does not do the work for them. Embracing and implementing such a

God-image has potential to help subvert the patriarchal *Hananim-Abuji* (God the Father) concept of God.

It can be seen that Korean women have experienced layers of being *Othered*. They have been viewed as the *Other* in Confucian Korea, *Othered* when Western Christianity entered, *Othered* in the Korean patriarchal church structure and the familial context and finally immigrant Korean women experience another layer of *Otherness* whilst living in between two or more cultures. I recognised this *Otherness* in me as a Korean immigrant living in Great Britain. As I carried both cultures within me, I discovered I was living in a liminal space between the two cultures. Though I have resented this liminal space, now it has become for me a place of potential, creative force and freedom.

I see this image of living in the borders, margins and in-between space of *Otherness* as a helpful model for Korean feminist ministry, particularly in light of my own ministerial journey as a Korean woman on the road to becoming a minister in the Methodist Church of Great Britain. So, I ask myself, how might I minister in the liminal space where I stand between two different cultures? How might I be that intermediary between cultures to find common threads of desires to facilitate spaces of connection? How might residing in the margins enable me to be with and alongside those who are also marginalised and on the periphery at both sides of the boundary? I find the concept of *Sophia* a helpful and empowering image to model Korean feminist/feminist ministry, because similarly Sophia is seen standing at the

crossroads, borders and margins to intervene, mediate, minister and transgress borders freely.

I hope the stories I have shared alongside the lived experiences of Korean women can be a catalyst for bringing about the empowerment of Korean women, women who feel they are in the margins and all who feel they are disenfranchised.

Patriarchy in the church, community and society is still very much alive and cannot be dismantled unless women and men stand together in solidarity and awareness to transgress those borders that have subjugated the powerless and voiceless for so long.

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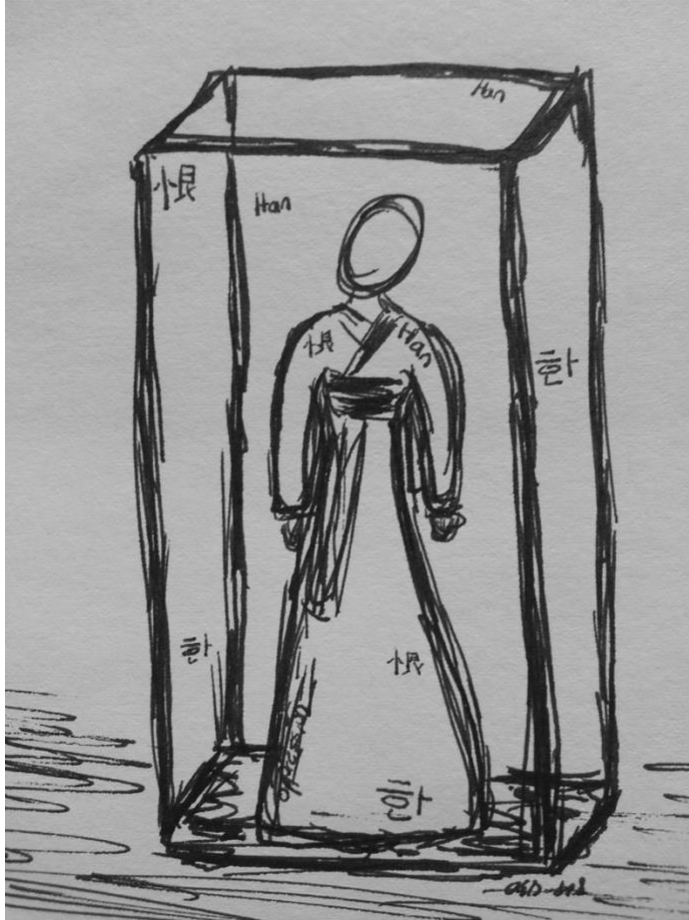
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APPENDIX

1.



JungJa Joy Yu's first stage of her metaphor of Breaking the Glass Box. It pictures a Korean woman in a traditional Korean dress trapped inside a glass box. This image represents Korean women's experience of interpersonal conflicts within patriarchal and Confucian Korean society leading to *Han*.²¹⁴ She is not yet aware of the roots of the oppression and the box is not yet visible to her.

²¹⁴ Yu, Introduction.

2.



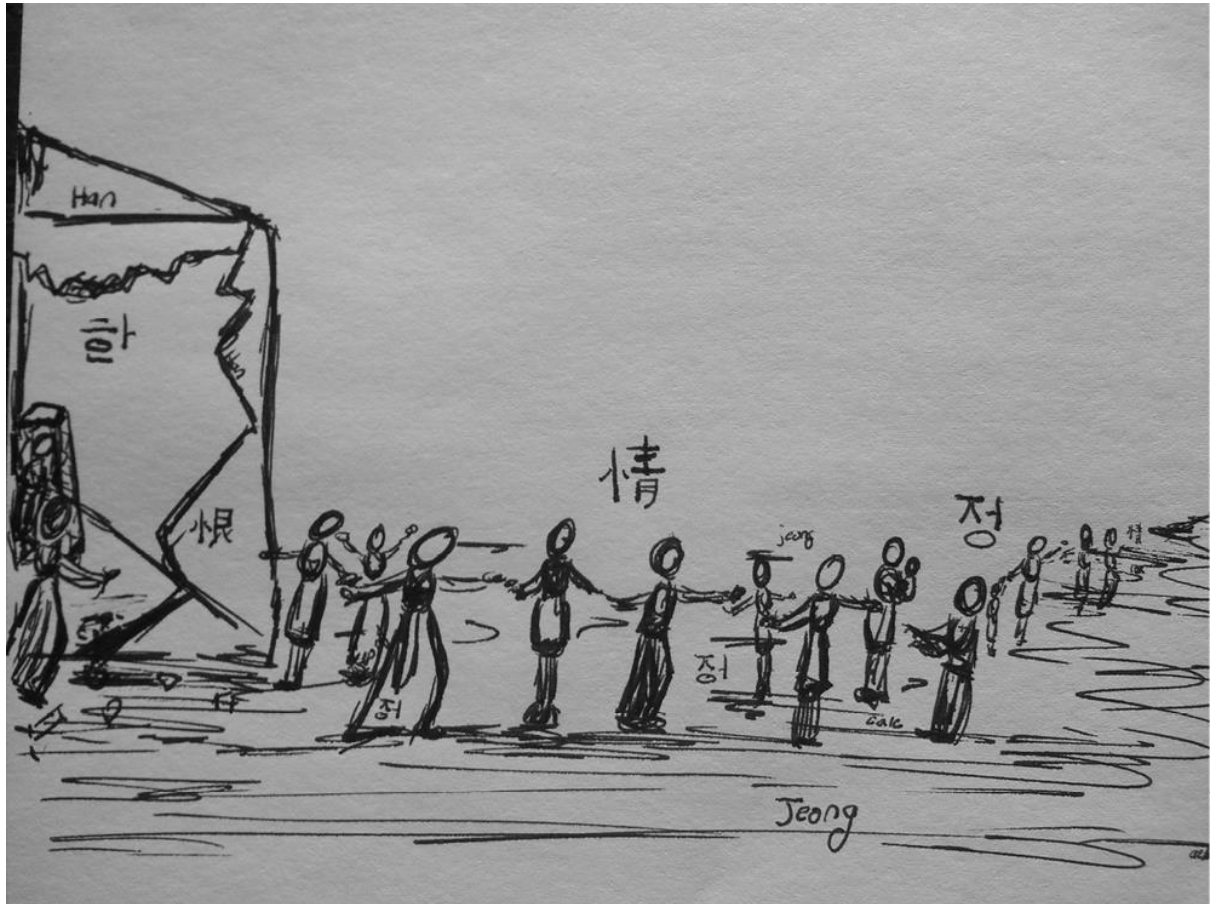
JungJa Joy Yu's second stage of Breaking the Glass Box.

This image represents the 'waking up' of Korean women to their oppressive conditions.

The box is becoming visible to them and it reflects their rising awareness of patriarchal oppression and social reality.²¹⁵

²¹⁵ Yu, chaps 3, The Visible GLass Box; chap. 6 Conclusion.

3.



This is Jungja Joy Yu's image representing the Korean women finally breaking free from their glass box. Once they are fully aware of their oppressive situations, they can break free even though there is no door. ²¹⁶

It depicts how in Yu's words, 'The oppressive glass box can no longer hold the transformed beings of Korean women when they begin to acknowledge the acceptance of their being in self and in God.'²¹⁷

²¹⁶ Yu, chaps 4, Breaking the Glass Box; chap. 6, Conclusion.

²¹⁷ Yu, chaps 6, Conclusion.