

**Journal of Korean American
Ministries & Theology**

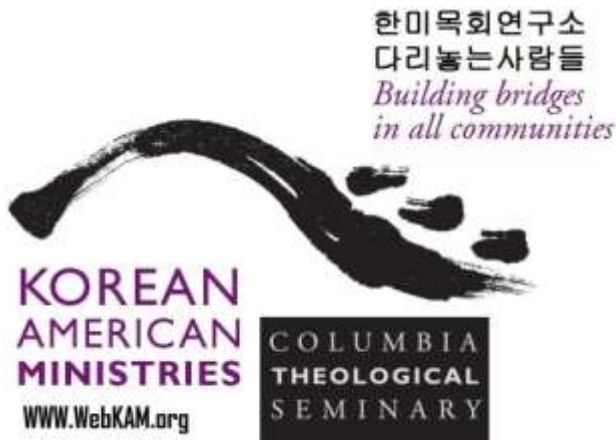
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see other religious traditions, human experience and even manifestation of the spirit in their rituals, in understanding biblical stories that are difficult to understand in the modern way of thinking and contemporary human experience.

Cheon, Samuel. “Biblical Interpretation in Korea: History and Issues.” Mary F. Foskett, ed. *Ways of Being, Ways of Reading: Asian American Biblical Interpretation*. St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2006.

In this essay, Cheon gives a brief history of Christianity and biblical interpretation in Korea. Though the Chinese Bible was introduced to Korea by Catholic missionaries earlier, it was possible through Protestant missionaries to translate the Bible into Korean, New Testament in 1900 and the Old Testament in 1910. With the rise of Japanese imperialism (1910-1945), Koreans began to read the Bible in relation to their own contexts: God is going to bring liberation from Japan as God saved the Israelites from Egypt. Cheon introduces pioneering interpreters of the Bible in a chronological order. In the early period (1780s-1920s), first, Byung-hun Choi understood Jesus “the one who brought to completion the truth of all great East Asian teachers and the teachings of all religions.” Second, Joo-sam Yang argued the need of knowing historical and literary contexts of the Bible. Third, Hyuk Namgung insisted that the theologies of Jesus and Paul were basically same. Fourth, Chang-geun Song understood Jesus as a social revolutionary and a spiritual leader. In the following decades (1930s-1950s), the conservative tradition and the liberal tradition appeared in Korea regarding higher criticism. Hong-gyu Byun and Hyung-ryong Park supported Moses’ authorship of the Pentateuch, inerrancy of the Bible, etc, while Gyung-ok Jung and Jae-joon Kim introduced form criticism and emphasized the need of Christians’ participation in society. During the era of social response (1960s-1990s), three streams of theology and view of Bible appeared. First is Korean indigenous theology. Tong-shik Ryu paralleled religions in Korea, Shamanism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Donghak, to find the element of self-denial that Jesus accomplished in the incarnation. Second is *minjung* theology. Nam-dong Suh during the era of dictatorship and labor exploitation read the Bible in the perspective of the oppressed – *ochlos* in Mark – and argued that historical and political liberation of God like Exodus event and the crucifixion-resurrection event can be repeated to bring

“millennium” in Korea. Byung-mu Ahn, his student, differentiated *ochlos* from *laos* and “my people” from “this people” and identified Jesus with the former signifying the *minjung*. Yong-bock Kim, in the perspective of *minjung* theology, argued for the need of understanding the story of Jesus in the context of the social biography of the people of God. Third is reunification theology. Upon fiftieth year of division of Korean peninsula theologians like Chan-kook Kim, Tae-soo Im, Young-jin Min, Ee-kon Kim, and Sa-moon Kang declared the Jubilee Year and argued for the need of peaceful reunification of Korea on the basis of the Bible. These were attempts to tie Korean contexts in the interpretation of the Bible coming from the questions of “How can biblical interpretation relate to the tradition and culture in the context of Korea?” and “How can it respond to the sociopolitical situations of Korea?” which contemporary interpreters of the Bible still need to ask.

Reflection: Cheon’s article not only gives us enormous information on Korean biblical interpretation but also invites us to think critically about the need and even the calling of interpreters of the Bible: “What are we called to do with the Bible in our context?” Though being influenced by early missionaries and conservative theology, Korean preachers often focused on individual’s salvation. However, there has been a history of finding answers and hope for Korean society from the Bible under Japanese imperialism, dictatorship, and labor exploitation. The study of these traditions allows contemporary readers of the Bible not to ignore the voice of God speaking for the salvation of society as well as individuals.

There are two points of significance. First, cross-religious dialogues with Korean traditional religions should be encouraged and not be pushed aside. Dong-sik Ryu’s inter-religious dialogue is an example of how Christians can bring people in other religions into a conversation rather than rejecting them by calling them pagans. Furthermore, this cross-religious dialogue needs to broaden and deepen Christians’ understanding of the influence of other religions, because the influence of Korean traditional religions on Korean Christianity is pervasive. By teaching that many Korean Christian practices, such as early morning prayer and memorial service for the dead, are hugely influenced by Shamanism, Confucianism, and Buddhism of Korea, they may see other religious

traditions not in contempt but in respect and, as a result, cross-religious dialogue may be possible.

Second, there needs to be an awareness that the Bible is a witness of God's people, the social biography of the people of God. It gives readers of the Bible the identity that they are not passive receivers of the Bible but active writers of biblical history. The Bible itself is a story of people who participated in God's salvation history like Exodus. As the New Testament was written in light of God's salvation history in the Old Testament and their experience of the risen Lord, Jesus, readers of the Bible need to know that their lives are also a biblical history, if they respond to the voice of God speaking through the Old and New Testament in light of their experience of meeting Jesus as the risen Lord.

Moon, Cyris H. S. "A Korean Minjung Perspective: The Hebrews and the Exodus." Sugirtharajah, R. S., ed. *Voices From the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995.

In this article, Moon shows that the Old Testament is a story of liberation of *minjung*. To illustrate this, Moon investigates the identity of *habiru* and Yahweh in the Exodus story. *Habiru*, the equivalent of Hebrew, is a word referring to outcasts and the oppressed living outside the dominant social system. "The *habiru*, therefore, were part of the *minjung* of their time, driven by *han* to act against what they felt to be injustices imposed on them by those in power." They are partners of liberation stories of God who hears the cry of "my people." Furthermore, the name of God, "I am" shows that God is a personal *Being* actively present in oppression and trouble to bring justice. The life of *minjung* in Korean history has striking resemblances with that of *habiru*. To illustrate this point, Moon introduces a brief history of Korea according to kingdoms and dynasties, starting from three kingdom period (57BC - AD 668), Koguryo, Silla and Paekche, to Koryo (AD 918 - 1392) and Yi Dynasty (AD 1392 - 1910). During Koryo Dynasty Buddhism became a dominant religion in Korea, and Buddhist priests often manipulated their wealth and power for their own benefit and, as a result, oppressed the *minjung*. Though Neo-Confucianism replaced the place of Buddhism in Yi Dynasty, *minjung*, *xiang rom* (the slaves, the landless peasants, the lower-class people) and women were still oppressed by