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Reactivating Theology within “In-between” Spaces toward a Korean Women’s Postcolonial Theology

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I. Introduction

Over the several decades, “Korean feminist theology”¹ has explored theological sources and resources with the religio-aesthetic spirituality. Their religious spirituality, reshaping the theological framework, I believe, has creatively grasped the in-between reality repressed within Western dualistic divisions. It has really sought and still seeking to reactivate the “in-between” space as a creative space, focusing on its mutual generation rather than mutual exclusion. Of course, this experimental Korean feminist theology has been carried out within a quite different epistemological dimension from the Western male-centered theology. Indeed, Korean women’s challenge to the traditional theology has changed Korean theological topography, broadening the horizons of feminist theology.

More specifically, for the sake of survival, a global survival, Korean feminist theology creates new visions, while being an implicit critic of imperialist patriarchal theology. Indeed, within the ambivalent and dualistic values imbedded in a global trans-cultural context, women tend to be imprisoned

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1. Since Korean female theologians have not agreed upon a proper name for a Korean women’s theology, I use both “Korean feminist theology” and “Korean women’s theology” according to each context. In fact, as many argue, the expression “feminist theology,” which cannot represent all the diverse theologies of women, is not relevant for Korean women’s theology. The expression “Korean women’s theology” is also irrelevant and tricky. Not all Korean women’s theological works comprise women’s perspectives, while some Korean male theologians’ work can be included as feminist theology. Anyway, when Korean women use either of them, the characteristics of so-called Korean women’s theologies carry a religious tone based on the Korean indigenous spirituality and culture.

through a subliminal socialization. Korean women, however, attempt to creatively and critically incorporate Korean culture into a theological construction, resisting the logic of oneness (Lee, *Hanguk* 106). This logic of oneness or sameness always dualistically divides one and the other and finally the other is conquered by the one. Within the logic, which is extensively explored by postmodern and postcolonial theories, the other tends to be defined and annihilated by the one. They pay close attention to the oppressed other of all creation and its fragility and complexity, especially with the hard-won wisdom received while living for millennia within multi-religious traditions.

Further, I think, Korean women concretely re-embody theology in an explicitly Korean milieu and a global condition. Notably, in this global situation, the so-called Korean feminist theology tries not to indulge in a narrow nationalism that could impede substantial solidarity among women around the world. Rather, it highlights indefinable identity as identities and “pursues a sort of solidarity among the commotion” (Lee, *Yeosungeu* 142). Indeed, the concept of *soran*, which means commotion in Korean, intriguingly depicts the solidarity of Korean Christian women in today’s multicultural and transcultural circumstance, making them re-think the post-national identity of Korean women.

From this feminist theoretical and feminist theological viewpoint, this article reexamines Korean women’s contextual theology and its postmodern and postcolonial theological characteristics. Further, this article will articulate a theological implication of the in-between reality in terms of the incarnate presence of the divine and the embodiment process of women. In this regard, grappling with the ‘(m)other’ erased and effaced within the dualistic and conventional theological discourse, I will stress the permeable relationality and thereby the soteriological embodiment of women. In this vein, the relationality disregarded and disparaged within traditional theology will be reconfigured with regard to the subjectivity of women. Indeed, traditional metaphysical tendency, making abstract and substantialized concepts of the subject obscures plurality, mutuality, fluidity, and relationality. As already shown by feminist theologians, this attitude of theology hardly appreciates the in-between bordered space, reducing multiple differences to an abstract One.

In terms of a Korean women’s spirituality, here I would like to suggest a theological appropriation of in-betweenness as a creative space of redemption. Accordingly, this article will first review Korean women’s religious depth linked to a non-dualistic and non-substantial understanding of reality. The

bridge I am undergirding methodologically between theology and recent theories allows me both to criticize the conventional doctrines and to pursue a possibility of women’s experience of the incarnate presence of God. Some postcolonial theories are conducive to uncovering the in-between spaces that have been prohibited in the logic of the Western dualism. I will thus elaborate on Korean women’s understanding of permeable relationality between the divine and the non-divine, which critically captures the in-between reality against a rigid division. Therefore, this article attempts to reactivate in-betweenness, describing the characteristics of Korean feminist theology and also steering the direction of Korean women’s future theology so that Korean women can tenaciously envision their struggle and hope.

II. Revisiting Korean Women’s Resistance to “Other-Exclusive” Theology

Perhaps the most common understanding of Korean feminist theology, like any other feminist theology, is to identify experience as the starting point of theology. Considering diverse forms of oppression, an experience-based Korean feminist theology as a critical theology keeps a constant vigilance over the abstract theological concepts. Indeed, the traditional theology has given priority to rational and dispassionate knowledge, rather than to engaged knowledge and thus baffled all attempts of Korean women to understand their social and historical reality. Thus, Korean women’s experiences have been disregarded and manipulated in traditional theological discourse. Korean feminist theology, by contrast, takes seriously the lives of Korean women and re-reads the imperialistically patriarchal representations of theology through their own feminist religious and aesthetic spirituality.

In actuality, the abstract classificatory categories within theological accounts hardly consider Korean women’s unaccountably mingled and multilayered experiences. Women thereby remain as split and fragmented subjects, deprived of an opportunity to heal themselves. They are hardly provided with a theological discourse for their experiences due to a multiple-layered power system. With their religio-aesthetic spirituality, however, Korean women have managed to get out of the reality that seemed to allow no way of extrication. Indeed, the Western dualistic thinking system and its perpetual tendency to confine everything to abstract concepts are deeply embedded in

Korean theologies. As a postcolonial feminist philosopher and film maker Trinh Minh-ha incisively argues, however, all concepts and notions always leave gaps and thus for her “in-between ground always exists” (*Women* 41; *When the Moon* 17, 94). The in-between moment and space² effaced through the logic of oneness is the place on which Korean women’s spirituality focuses. Korean women re-read this space with their religious wisdom for their fragmented and objectified subjects.

Korean feminist theological concerns for the oppressed other reflect Asian and Korean religious understanding on the harmonious unity of “becoming-one.” In Asian religious tradition, such as Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, the unity as harmonious one is the essential teaching. With this harmony achieved through discussion not imposition and with a radical inclusivity, Korean feminist theologians never neglect their plural religious traditions. The Korean indigenous spirituality of “becoming-one,” not an abstract “oneness,” is characterized in the notion of *saengmyōng*, as life – the interconnected life. It proffers the image where the one endlessly releases the other, signifying one interconnected life. For Korean women, life implies an endless, *teleo*-less, and beginning-less movement in which lives are born and re-born over and over again. The Korean term for the divinity, *Hananim* also represents the “being-one,” instead of the abstract One or oneness. Korean women’s spirituality resists the logic of oneness that tends to control and subdue the other as inferior in a binary opposition and that thus subjugates and sacrifices women and their bodily reality. Accordingly, their theological concerns emphasize the deteriorated and erased other within the woman and also among women. For Korean women, the Western imperialistic representation embedded in doctrinal theologies only makes an abstract oneness and impels the other to belong to a monolithic totality.

The Western anthropocentric thinking systems rarely take into account a constitutive relationality and inter-relatedness within a woman and among women. Thus, the gendered and colonized Asian and Korean women’s identity, ambiguity, and bodily reality suffer from the imperialistic representation of the One. Gloria Anzaldúa, a leading theorist in ethnic studies, contends that

2. Theoretical recognition of the “in-betweenness” is also affirmed as the “third space,” by Homi Bhabha’s articulation of cultures’ hybridity. Further, it seems to have a similar structure with the “Khora,” a kind of third thing in Plato’s writing, emphasized in Derridian and Kristevan theories.

the identity of women is subjected to an influx across spiritual and cultural borders, resisting categorization and classification (“La Conciencia” 399; *This Bridge* 575). As she focuses on colonized and complexly situated women who underwent a struggle within a cultural collision, Korean women capture their in-between reality. With a religious spirituality, Korean women recognized the ethnic women’s multilayered ambiguous identities within this multicultural and transcultural situation. Here, Korean feminist theological concern about relationality does not simply intend to essentialize woman as a relational character; rather, Korean feminist theologians’ emphasis on relationality attempts to destabilize all the essential concepts of woman-ness or abstract God-ness.

In this transnational and multicultural context, with a special regard to severed and fragmented subjectivity, Korean women’s theological interests have ramified into the theological concern across diverse religious traditions. Kang Nam-soon critically turns her attention to Taoism, uncovering the transformative aspects of Asian and Korean religious traditions and bringing these into the liberative and redemptive images of the divine (*Hyundae* 258–81). Lee Eun-Sun also systematically takes the five-hundred-year-old Korean religious tradition, Confucianism and neo-Confucianism, which had been simply condemned as patriarchal for a long time (“Hanguk” 37–55). Moreover, Chung Hyun-Kyung has staged an encounter between Christian theology and Shamanism (*Dashi* 105–40). Without just replacing Christianity by other religions, Korean women’s theologies incorporate their religious spirituality with a localized understanding of the divine. Notably, they find the efficacy of divinity within the in-between reality, between time and eternity, the worldly and the divine. For Korean women’s theology, the permeable inter-relationality between the divine and the non-divine is generally associated with the interconnectedness and the all-embracing divine beauty.

Here, the Korean feminist theological reconfiguration of the permeable relationality and the endless process of “one in the other” have resonances with Trinh’s postcolonial theory, surmounting the logic of one and the other or “one over the other” (*When the Moon* 16–17). As she remarks, the classificatory and dualistic thinking system of the one and the other is no more than the imperialistic logic of divide and conquer (*Women* 39). In the same vein, as Rita Nakashima Brock’s theology comprehensively reflects, “the Western logic of either/or leads to polarizations in Christianity between good and evil, true and false, insider and outsider, and margin and center” (“Interstitial” 187, 195).

Brock also points out, with the expression “interstitial reality,” the reality that consists in the in-between space, the shifting and contextual intervals between boundaries. As recent feminist theology recognizes, women are located in the endless interrelations with others. Further, for Asian and Korean women, this ambiguous (in)location of women is the very space wherein survival and healing take place. They therein meet the permeably relatedness of the divine to the non-divine.

In short, Korean women attempt to readdress the retrieval of their repressed other in terms of the embodiment of women. Moreover, the hierarchical distinction of spirit and body, which is entrenched in traditional theologies, hardly affirms their bodily experiences and their embodied selves. The logic of one over the other as the spirit’s control over the body impedes the formation of the embodied selves of women. Thus, the gospel of the incarnate presence of the divine hardly works as a salvation narrative for women. Here, to break open a rigid hierarchical dualism of one and the other probably will provide women with a discursive field for their repressed other and further uncover the redemptive space for the split subjectivities. Indeed, the particularity of ethnic women’s bodily experiences is still effaced in theological accounts, despite recent feminist theoretical exploration of the body. The body is rarely acknowledged as a place for self-formation or redemption. Thus, within the ambivalent values of a transnational and multicultural context, women’s body is torn up by poverty, sexual abuse, domestic violence, and the lack of incarnational theology.

Therefore, Korean women are in need of re-claiming the embodiment of women and further the bodily reality that has been tabooed within the so-called ‘decent’ traditional theology, envisioning Korean women’s embodied selves. As the eco-feminist theologian Ivone Gebara arguably contends, “we apprehend in our flesh, in our bodily experience, what we call the divine” (185). Women’s body, their real body as ordinary human body, is the place in which women experience the incarnate mystery of God. Insofar as women’s bodies are imprisoned through a subliminal socialization and remain disregarded in the theological realm, Christological incarnation is not far from *docetic*. These days, the dehumanizing and de-divinizing power produces the enslaved and highly sexualized women’s bodies in cyberspace, mass media, and global market, and in this situation, women cannot be full subjects with their own bodies. Thus, I believe, it is crucial to rearticulate the incarnate presence of God and the inspirited body of ethnic Asian and Korean women.

III. Transgressing the Boundary between Body and Spirit

As far as the repressed bodily reality of women remains in doctrinal theology, I think, the incarnate presence of God is always discarnate. In fact, the rigid boundary between body and spirit in dualistic theology impedes understanding the subjects of women and also God as such. The body of women or bodily reality of the divine is hardly discussed, although body is the ultimate name of the embodied self, as Thandeka maintains (80). Here, a theological focus on the implication of the inseparable relatedness of spirit to the body will lead to a reconstruction of incarnational theology. Within the body-affirmative theology, the body, an ordinary human body can be re-read as spirit-inspired body and thereby the incarnate presence of God can be reenacted. For the sake of the redemptive embodiment of ethnic women, Korean women’s spirituality pays attention to the spirit’s permeable relationality with the non-divine, which will concretize the bodily reality and the incarnate presence of the divine.

The gendered, raced, and colonized Korean women are in a need of an incarnational theology as a way of concretizing a soteriological meaning of the Christological incarnation. Indeed, the embodiment of women remains as under-theologized subject within the male-centered patriarchal theology. I believe the on-going embodiment process of women needs to be understood within a manifestation of the on-going divine creativity, since the body is not simply an extension of matter, but an extension of the divine. The presence of God reveals a rhythmic and dynamic relationality, that is, a pneumatological movement, proffering a certain materiality enmeshed within the very incarnate God. Thus, Spirit is understood as the embodied Spirit, and further the corporeal reality of Spirit signifies to the in-between reality discarded in the dualistic and substance-based understanding of the divinity.

Interestingly enough, although spirit is not inferior in the binary pair of body/spirit, the vivid characteristics of spirit, however, also tactfully get eclipsed. In fact, due to its female images, the person of Spirit tends to recede in the patriarchal and patrilineal understandings of the divine, namely the Father-Son relationship. Nonetheless, Korean women’s spirituality positively perceives Spirit as the embodied one in terms of the permeable relatedness of Spirit to bodily reality. More specifically, within the relationality of the divine with the non-divine, the divine Spirit is conceived of as a “flow of

wind,”³ something vibrating and oscillating within this world.⁴ Korean indigenous spirituality grasps this dynamic flow of the divine as embodied Spirit, *chi*, which vitalizes and enlivens all creation. For Korean women, through the *perichoretic* dance-like movements of Spirit, the divinity includes all the most disregarded and discarded, toward the fullness of life.

In this regard, Korean feminist theologians delve into the characteristics of all-embracing Spirit, and address its life-giving and life-sustaining power. Thus, Lee Kyung-Sook, as a biblical scholar, meticulously examines the use of *Ruah*, i.e., Spirit, in the Old Testament, stressing its healing and eco-friendly power, and thereby making the divine befriend with the brokenhearted women and exploited nature (39–62). Park Kyung-Me’s compassionate arguments for Spirit in the New Testament also profoundly delineates an inclusive spirituality that is at the very bottom of all religious traditions (113–38). The distinctive notion of Spirit that they capture in the Bible is integral to Korean women in the situation that the doctrinal theologies narrowly restrict and substantialize the mysterious wind of God. Korean women’s spiritual depth reconfigures the elusive characteristics of Spirit especially within a more extended relation between the divine and the non-divine. For Korean women, Spirit is not something to be possessed, but rather it frees them with its all-inclusiveness, not being captured by onto-theological notions.

Those theological and religious findings of the life-giving and keeping-alive power of Spirit resonate with an expression used by the French feminist Luce Irigaray, the “corporeal transcendental,” the corporeal divinity within the Incarnation (Irigaray, *Marine* 167–69; Grosz, “Irigaray” 207; Armour, “Divining Differences” 39, 80). Korean women’s insights on the palpable Spirit is associated with this sensible transcendental. Based on an understanding of *chi* as the embodied spirit, Spirit signals the divine principle of life, beyond a dualistic construction of body/spirit. The Korean poet Ji-Ha Kim draws upon *saengmyǒng*, to resist the “*chi*-repressing power” wrought by discrimination

3. The flow of wind was referred to as the term *pungryu* in the old days. As the relationship between the eternal and the temporal, it is described in an ancient writing of Chi-Won Choi back in 9th century. *Pungryu* signifies the Korean cultural vision of “one beautiful life” (Hanguk Munhwa Shinhakhoe).

4. The imagery of the relatedness of the flow of wind to bodily reality is similar to the image of energy/matter continuum in string theory. As if energies pulverize matter as small as a billionth of a billionth of a meter, the fluctuation between Spirit and material body contains elegant and oscillating movements (Greene 123-30).

and maltreatment (347). In Asian and Korean religious traditions, chi, with its rhythmic and circulatory movement of lives does not mean simply opposition to death. The reality of life consists in embodied Spirit, incarnate presence of divinity, without division or fixation. Consequently, for Korean women, both the oppressed and oppressors who practice the occlusion of the rhythmic circulations, mutually inscribing each other, come to impede life as such. The perpetual tendency to divide the one and the other occludes the circulatory flows of life and impedes communal redemption. The dynamic “boundary-crossing” Spirit, its in-betweenness, characterizes the embodied Spirit. This spirit-focused understanding signals the redemptive incarnate presence of God and leads to an awareness of a total life and a respect for all lives.

Accordingly, in the discourse of Korean feminist theology, the divine Spirit is no longer described as engendered from Father or Son, as in the traditional and doctrinal theology of *theoque* or *filioque*. Rather, Korean women try to argue for the un-originated origin like the wind Spirit, focusing on its power and vitality. What is more important for women is to say the radical livingness of the divine, instead of theoretical concepts of divinity. The divine Spirit and its vivifying and greening power is not confined to conceptualizing categories, namely, the compartmentalizing concept, “-logy.” Thus, without taking control over the body, the power of Spirit listens and allures, rather than operating through imperialistically patriarchal coercion. Spirit, permeably related to bodily reality as the vital energy sets the oppressed other free, reviving and retrieving the repressed other without any hierarchical division of the spirit over the body.

A patriarchal obsession with “power-over” within the logic of one and the other, as many postcolonial theories have pointed out, immolates women, body, and nature. Here, a Korean theological appropriation of the counter-substantial or anti-essential perspective of the divinity leads to an understanding of open-ended incarnate presence of God, beyond a self-sufficient and thus, self-enclosed divinity. Further, the ‘other-sensitive’ spirituality re-thinks the compassionate presence of incarnate God, retrieving the repressed bodiliness and (m)other. The incarnate presence of God is endlessly revealed with the Spirit’s permeable relatedness to the bodily reality as the embodied Spirit. This endless and ceaseless process of incarnation as the salvific activity of God reenacts women’s redemptive embodiment of selves.

IV. Reaffirming the Spirit-Inspired Incarnational Process

Within the on-going and ever-flowing Christological incarnation, I think, Korean women can conjure up their experiences of embodied selves. Thus, the re-reading of the incarnate God, God made flesh, is critical for the redemptive embodiment of Korean women. To paraphrase the post-structuralist philosopher Irigaray, through women's experiences of an abysmal abundance of life and jouissance, God is incarnated (*Marine* 166). Indeed, God becomes flesh again through lived experiences of women, that is, their ongoing interpretative commitment. The effect of the incarnation is hermeneutically revealed and unveiled within the dynamic embodiment process of women. Although body is the very place where women's grief and agony are inscribed, their gendered and colonized body is hardly considered in theological discourses. Women therein meet adversity and illness, without any vent to breathe them out. In such a theology of dis-carnation, ethnic Asian and Korean women rarely experience the vivid incarnate presence of God.

For Korean women, Christological crucifixion as a central doctrine has long been emphasized, instead of Christological incarnation. In this vein, the bodily reality has been consciously and unconsciously effaced within doctrinal theology. In conventional theology, "the body of Christ received from the mother" is what gets symbolically sacrificed on the cross (*Marine* 169, 170). This traditional focus on sacrificial redemption thereby unwittingly emphasizes the virginal maternity and thus, the sacrifice of the body. For women, the image of the crucified body, which tends to be associated with a denial of bodily drives, denotes only a celestial redemption. Korean women need to transfigure their repressed bodiliness, so that they can transform their stark reality. Here, a theological affirmation of constitutive relationality of the divine with the human soteriologically will open up hope for Korean women.

Fortunately, Korean women have a legacy that understands the "God *with* us" as "God in oppressed people" of *Minjung* liberation theology. Based on this trajectory, Korean women appreciate and concretize the radical togetherness of God, that is, the in-between reality between God and the bodily reality. Korean women observed these interstitial characteristics disregarded within the division of divine/the non-divine and also I/other. With a religious and aesthetic spirituality that is attuned to life, Korean feminist theology reactivates the in-between reality, trying to make all alive at the deepest level. With this spiritual awareness, Korean women enriched with an understanding of God,

the divine, attempt to embody the redemption with an explicitly Korean ethos. In spite of the static constructs of doctrinal theology, Korean women dare to enter into a spirited debate on vital issues of Korean women, creatively embodying healing and redemption.

Korean women critically reexamine the theological incarnation, which is only emphasized as an already accomplished incarnation through an absolutely exceptional Christ figure. They affirm that the efficacy of God is reenacted and repeated only through the redemptive embodiment of women. Indeed, in doctrinal theology, the divine does not seem to be affected by inter- or intra-relationships. Thus, a fixed notion of the divine unfortunately implies impassibility and immutability. Such a problematic and abstract notion of the divine closes off the possibility, the space-time, in which the divine incarnation can occur, confining the redemption of Christ into one special body and a past moment. In this regard, as Irigaray emphatically argues, “women lack a female god who can open up the perspective in which their flesh can be transfigured” (*Sexes* 64). As a matter of fact, the incarnation of God is not an already accomplished event, which does not need human beings’ participatory interpretations. Rather, through the endless process of releasing of the repressed “(m)other” within a woman and among women, God’s on-going incarnation is revealed and reenacted.

With this body-sensitive understanding of self, and even to God, Korean feminist theology mindfully engages in the gendered and colonized ethnic women. Indeed, the split and fragmented selves of colonized ethnic women by the traditional values and newly infused imperialistic powers, along with their repressed bodily experiences, do not have an adequate discursive field. Here, the exclusive focus on gender can hardly capture the specificity of Korean women’s experiences. Their repressed experiences and bodily reality exceed the communicative structures. With the traumatic colonial experience, body is regarded as an extension of matter or retracted as an exterior of self. That is, the object-like subjects of women are enforced to the sacrifice of body rather than realizing a salvific embodiment of self. The bodies of women are subjugated in the colonial idea of “one over the other” and body is thus the place where the internalized colonialism still remains.

Indeed, as the feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz affirms, the body is neither a mere object nor simply the exterior for a criterion between female and male (*Volatile* xi). She concretely describes the inflection of mind into body and body into mind, the ways in which one side becomes the other and the

other to the one. For her, the fact that body is never quite reducible to being merely a thing leads us to a non-dualistic re-thinking about the body. The feminist theologian Sallie McFague also radically says that God is conceived of as the metaphor of the body (99–102). Through an elaboration on an analogy of body, she develops a way of thinking about relational God to all created matter. Her theology also indicates that women's embodiment of self is realized as inspired bodies, and therefore the visible reality of the invisible God is affirmed by the embodied Spirit of God. Here, the embodied Spirit within the permeable relationality between body and Spirit, to use the feminist process theologian Catherine Keller's expression, is like "a becoming-Spirit," the very Spirit of life ("Burning" 230). This life-giving and life-sustaining Spirit is permeated and penetrated in the body without domination, changing everything new through mutual relationality. Korean women's understanding of the embodied Spirit, *chi*, as "a becoming-Spirit" is never closed off with its self-sufficiency as an ontological being.

A Spirit-focused pneumatological incarnational theology concretizes a dynamic process of redemption, retrieving a creative space for the salvific embodiment of women. This Spirit as a spacing in which bodily things are retrieved is characterized as the in-between characteristics. This dynamic and *perichoretic* movement blurs the supposedly opposed realities between the divine and the non-divine. This theological reappropriation of in-betweenness helps to prevent the incarnational theology from evaporating, or becoming fleshless, discarnate. Korean religious spirituality recognizes that Spirit as embodied Spirit, that is not so much a third product of Father-Son relationship as the embodied God, God-self. This all-embracing Spirit within the incarnation process, I believe, releases the repressed other within woman and among women, manifesting the faith that all others are in one life. Korean women whose identities are subjected to cultural in-between boundary space in this trans-national and post-colonial situation are to be illuminated through this mutually constructive and permeable relationality.

A theological implication of the Spirit-inspired body and life-radiating body certainly surmounts the purview of the male-centered theoretical theologies. The Christological incarnation as the encounter between human body and the divine and further time and eternity can be readdressed within this spiritual depth. The redemptive embodiment of women as a representation of the incarnate God is reclaimed within the in-between space of Spirit and bodily reality, the divine and the non-divine. The incarnate presence of God,

which is a unique point where the divine and the human meet, is endlessly disseminated through embodied Spirit. This pneumatological understanding of incarnation, I believe, concretizes the revealing and veiling dynamism within the in-between spaces. Indeed, the efficacy of the incarnate God is re-realized when the incarnation is soteriologically interpreted for ethnic Asian and Korean women who are living in transitional and interstitial situations as wounded-selves.

V. Retrieving the Inspired and Embodied Subject of Women

Within the ambivalent values of the multicultural context, as postcolonial theories argue, the identity of colonized ethnic women is more ambiguous. Asian and Korean women remain as fragmented and split selves due to the complicated, multiply-stratified oppressions. In fact, the Western logic of oneness, pertaining to theorization or conceptualization, disregards the mutual and fluid relationality within woman and among women. The permeably relatedness of all things, which is effaced within a dualistic and imperialistic division, signifies the in-between reality. In terms of divine/non-divine and Spirit/bodiliness, this relationality of the in-between characteristics has a resonance with the porous boundaries within I/other and here/there. A radical awareness of the divine that permeates within the non-divine readdresses the inspired body every day as ordinary bodies. This theological reactivation on the in-betweenness critically reenacts the efficacy of the divinity, the so-called “God effect,” and thus, opens the possibility to re-embody the ceaseless and endless redemption of God and embodiment of women.

While the binary scheme of one and the other fails to grasp the creative potential in-betweenness, a postcolonial resistance to the imperialistic representation appreciates the transitional and interstitial identities. In terms of this ever-changing identity of women, Rita Nakashima Brock incisively expresses this identity as “interstitial integrity.” In this manner, she opens ways of speaking about the construction of complex cross-cultural identities that include subordination, but destabilize and contest it (Brock, “Interstitial” 187; “Cooking” 125–44). This theological reading of in-between space signals a space of healing and liberation for colonized women. With this regard to this undecidable identity of women, Catherine Keller notes, “moment-to-moment selves,” explaining that one flows into, in-fluences, the other as the other in-

fluences one ("Seeking" 61, 66). This plural, fluid, and relational reality, which Korean women's indigenous spirituality also apprehends, is also true to the divine. This divine beauty is characterized as a ceaseless and ever-changing process of the one into the other and the other into the one. This fluid and transitional identity of women rather opens an awareness of the divine and further the creative space for their fragmented selves.

A theological emphasis on women's identity that is based on the bordered moment and space signals the in-between characteristics of the embodied Spirit within the incarnational process of the divine. This understanding of the permeable relationality between the divine and the non-divine resonates with Brock's observation that "the sacred" is paradoxically embedded in the ambiguous identity and life's ambiguities ("Interstitial" 188). Since the subjectivity of women is situated on an undecidable hybrid identity, the experience of the divinity also takes place within the bordered in-between space. Brock's theology, which creatively develops Trinh's postcolonial theory, signifies the interstitial and transitional reality as the creative space. This interstitial and in-between space is the very place where women's embodiment of redemption and the soteriological solidarity of women are reenacted. Indeed, the gendered and colonized women forge a coalition on the basis of this subjectivity, this un-decidable and ever-changing identity.

In fact, as mentioned, due to the multiple oppressions by many layers of dehumanizing power, not only by sexism and colonialism, but also by compartmentalizing powers, Asian and Korean women struggle with their severed and fragmented subjectivity. The various situations where women are placed do not allow one conceptualized category of women. As Elisabeth Fiorenza succinctly states, "feminist theologians must no longer articulate women's identity in essentialist universalistic terms" (188). Indeed, the influence of globalization complicates the ethnic Asian and Korean women's identities even more, making them victims. In this context, the postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak attempts to deconstruct the identity of women to plural identities, developing a Derridian poststructuralist view, and also strategically positions women's identity as well ("In a Word" 157). Spivak, not only refuses to essentialize women, but also asserts the importance of positionality. In this vein, Asian and Korean theology, with their all-embracing spirituality, rethinks the more oppressed subaltern women and the ways of living-together.

In the context of imperialistically patriarchal society, a national integrity or cultural superiority, which has been reinforced during the expansion of

Western imperialism, is problematic. Further, Korean women have recognized that the imperialistic domination no longer belongs to the sovereignty of the nation-state nor simply confined to the imperialistic attitude of the West against the Two-Thirds World. Thus, Asian and Korean women face non-territorial, center-less superpower that does not consist in fixed boundaries or borders. Korean women thereby tackle this problematic issue, seeking a more critical and more inclusive view of solidarity among women. To situate their positions and also to make a vision for solidarity within this transnational and multicultural context are the inevitable tasks of Korean feminist theology. Thus, for the sake of a localized but not an exclusive theology, strategically-named ‘Korean’ feminist theology pursues a more other-sensitive and other-releasing salvific theology.

For Asian and Korean women, survival or healing is such an urgent issue that they need an awareness of self as a whole human without being dominated or conquered by an imperialistic power. Within this poly-national context, due to the disparity between tradition and modernization, Korean women’s efforts to get out of imperialistic patriarchy stumble perplexedly into the conflicting values of polyvalent discourses. Thus, Korean women indeed straddle, namely, feminism and nationalism, which are offspring of modernity. As stated, the identity of women is subjected to an influx across spiritual and cultural borders. In this post-colonial situation, Korean women are in need of healing and vision. For women, the salvific theology means the embodiment of redemption by which the deadened parts of the self are brought into life, the interconnected life.

Under globalization, through the global mass media, Korean women are subordinated by the production of desire. The promotion of Western lifestyle and the dominance of women’s appearances are being enforced. The abstractly conceptualized women would only be motivated by the West’s desire to regulate, control, and dominate. Here, women hardly become a subject of history with their own stories. Further, in the context of cultural imperialism, most women have to communicate in one language, English. Indeed, this inconvenient colonial situation seems to be a result of global impact that virtually nothing can escape. Thus, Korean feminist theology is alert to the enforced monoculture that would distract attention from the oppressive reality.

In terms of the ethnic women’s subjectivities and their colonized bodies, Trinh Minh-ha’s film, *Reassemblage*, which “challenges any investment in pompous profundities” (Kruger 1), leads us to deliberate on diverse cultures

as such in the midst of our homogenizing situation. Her film affirms the interconnected life, therein the beauty and fragility of life, through an exceptional spirit and with a special attention to our surroundings. This insight signals Asian religious appreciation of primordial “one big harmony.” In the Asian religious tradition, particularly in Confucianism, this harmony is called *taehwa*. Appreciating this, Korean women’s religious spirituality resists the homogenizing power of monoculture, the cultural imperialism that tends to undercut the self-esteem of ethnic Asian and Korean women with cultural humiliation. Korean women’s religio-aesthetic spirituality and their hard-won wisdom, teaching that the divinity is radically permeated in the non-divine, graciously encourage the fragmented selves of women to overcome all compartmentalizing power. The affirmation of the divine beauty will positively enliven the repressed other and provide women with a liberating and redemptive space.

With a more other-sensitive spirituality, Korean women do not universalize or substantialize women into a concept of womanness, in this multiply-layered and inexplicably complex context of global oppression. In this regard, Korean women are also wary of conceptualizing the repressed experiences of women as simply *han*, the Korean term for “the accumulate feeling in their deep hearts.” Kang remarks that the concept of *han* would narrow down the multi-layered and inexplicable oppression of women. Then, she argues that the specific use of the term *han* could limit diverse dimensions of the ways by which other women can conjure up their redemption (“Who/What is” 100–17). As she mindfully depicts, a Korean notion of *han* should be strategically and anti-essentially emphasized for the sake of an inclusive solidarity with the more oppressed women, the oppressed subaltern women. In this trans-national and transcultural context, the stereotypical dualistic divisions of the oppressed/the oppressors, the colonized/the colonizer, and I/other should be destabilized. The concepts are always leaky, and “the boundaries are always porous” (Kim, “A Study” 69). Insofar as the simple distinction between the oppressor and the oppressed exists, life as one big life is insurmountable.

In short, the insight of the all-embracing divinity perceived within the deep spirituality of Korean women emphatically resist a modern or pre-modern understanding of self based on the self-contained, that is, other-exclusive entities. Rather, they affirm plurality, diversity, fluidity, and maternity, within self and between selves, focusing on this blurred and porous boundary between one and the other. Indeed, the self-enclosed subjects based on the Western

metaphysical notion of the changeless self-identity, can only encounter the other as their object. Eun-Sun Lee succinctly argues, by overcoming the self-adhesive identity, the spirituality of Korean women is concretized as other-sensitivity, inclusivity, and thus sustainability (82). This spirituality creatively observes the efficacy of divinity reenact the other-releasing process within this in-between bordered reality.

VI. Conclusion: Reinventing a Korean Women’s “Other-Inclusive” Theology

As mentioned, the imperialistic logic of one and the other, that is, one over the other, as the logic of “divide and conquer” effaces many differences just for one difference. The solidarity of women starts from the attention to these erased differences. The solidarity, of necessity, preconditions the manifestation of differences. First of all, differences should be heard as such for the well-intended solidarity. The solidarity does not mean just becoming one unity, a static oneness. In this regard, each of the oppressive situations should be voiced in the virtue of commotion, encouraging us to enjoy differences and to celebrate them in joy. Although commotion has traditionally been regarded as the lack of discretion in Korea, I believe it is crucial to a genuine solidarity. A variety of different positions of women, without hiding their tensions, need to be revealed. Yet, instead of competition in which each claims to be the most victimized, women need to forge the Spirit-inspired coalition that empowers each other to envision their hope. This solidarity of commotion critically works for destabilizing one imperialistic superpower, and also resisting a meta-theology.

This commotion, which is understood by Hyun-Jae Lee as related to the struggle for recognition, has nothing to do with a breakdown of theology into special-interest theologies. Rather, in the transnational and multicultural context, as an indispensable ground of the future Korean feminist theology, it operates theology as an open-ended system. With the open-heartedness for the solidarity, this commotion works as a mechanism to resist any totalitarian and totalizing meta-discourses. The Korean term of commotion, *soran* is associated with a merrymaking ritual, *yadanbeobseok*. This wild merrymaking ritual is based on a belief of the connectedness between heaven and earth. The commotion, *soran*, will thereby release the oppressed other within women

and among women, and function as potent influences on self-affirmation and constitution. Although there seems to be nothing common among women any longer, with a religious spirituality, Korean women share the communal concern and forge a substantial solidarity within this stark post-patriarchal situation. The other-inclusive spirituality continuously seeks to dwell together in difference-celebrated-unity, caring for the alienated from the global household.

Korean women, resisting the demonic power of globalizing imperialism and regarding the differences and respecting differences, retrieve the repressed other. Globalization, which would create one superpower, is now an inevitable theological concern. We are supposed to live together on this globe, sharing a common destiny. For the sake of global survival, women need to have a new vision for one big harmonious life. The solidarity of commotion provides women with an opportunity and a space, reactivating the in-betweenness and weaving a permeable relationality. Within the in-between and bordered reality between the divine and the non-divine, and further, I and other, the effect of God will be reenacted. In the context of global crises such as ecological and economic-political crises, Korean feminist theology, I think, is situated in a critical moment, that is, at the crossroads, to borrow Anzeldua's expression, "from being the sacrificial goat to becoming officiating priestess" ("La Conciencia" 399). With the precious legacy of struggle, courage, and wisdom, Korean women now confront the challenges and demands of current fate of the globe; to retrieve the other and to reactivate "in-between" spaces as redemptive spaces, and empower the gendered and colonized women tenaciously to articulate their hope and aspirations.

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Abstract

Korean women's religio-aesthetic spirituality, reshaping the theological framework, has creatively grasped the "in-between" reality repressed within the Western dualistic divisions of "one and the other." On this basis, this article attempts to reactivate the in-between characteristics in special terms of the incarnate presence of the divine and the embodiment of women. In this vein, grappling with the "(m)other" erased and effaced in the conventional theological discourses, I reconstruct a theological appropriation of the in-betweenness as a transformative and creative space of redemption for ethnic Asian and Korean women. The "other-sensitive" spirituality reenacts the compassionate presence of incarnate God, retrieving the repressed bodiliness and "(m)other." Here, the bridge I am reinforcing between theology and other theoretical findings allows me both to criticize the conventional doctrines and to pursue a possibility of women's experience of an infinite effect of God. This attempt to theologize the in-between space describes the permeably relatedness of the divine to the non-divine and further steers the direction of future feminist theology so that Korean women can tenaciously envision their struggle and hope.

Keywords: in-between space, boundary, interstitial reality, Korean feminist theology

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