

구약논단

제 16권 3호(통권 37집) 2010년 9월 30일

Lee Archie C. C.(The Chinese University of Hong Kong) Con/textual Biblical Interpretation in the Multi-Religious World of Asia	175
본 논문에서는 'con/text'라는 새로운 용어를 통해 아시아 상황에서의 성서해석을 시도하고자 한다. '본문'(text)과 '상황'(context)라는 이분법적 도식을 뛰어넘어, 성서(the Bible)와 아시아인들의 존재와 삶에 깊숙이 영향을 준 아시아인들의 종교적 본문들(texts)을 함께 읽을 것(con/text)을 제안한다.	
Lee Archie C. C. Con/textual Biblical Interpretation in the Multi-Religious World of Asia	175

Con/textual Biblical Interpretation in the Multi-Religious World of Asia¹⁾

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1. The Problem of Text-Context Paradigm

I was delighted to have the honor to deliver a talk about *The Old Testament and its Interpretation in the Cross-Cultural World* at the auspicious occasion of the celebration of the Jubilee Year of the Korean Society of Old Testament Studies. During my preparation, however, I found it desirable to redefine the topic and to narrow the scope to the interpretation of the Bible in Asia in view of the abundant Asian scriptural traditions. Like it or not, the Bible was originated in West Asia and has taken on various interpretations from a variety of groups which have endeavored to engage it and make sense of it to answer the questions of religious identity and missionary vocation of the

1) This is to acknowledge that the research for the preparation of this paper is generously supported by the General Research Funds of the Hong Kong Research Grants Council on the research project on the *The Bible in China* (2010-13).

reading communities.

When the Bible came to the Asian people, it has already been overlaid with different doctrinal positions, embodied diverse human aspirations and social-political struggles of the interpretative communities which had the text transmitted. To many people in Asia, the Bible was at first a foreign book from another cultural setting, a book we only acquired from the missionaries and western churches. Asian Christians were first taught to lay down their own cultural heritages which had been viewed as pagan and evil. We all know that it is simply an impossible task for anyone to make a radical cultural break from ones past. How could anyone deny his or her cultural web totally and make a radical discontinuity from the social ethos?

For Asian Christians coming to the new textual tradition of the Bible, it is natural to begin first to understand and learn about the biblical text by way of the native cultural text they have in possession. The religious-symbolic system, the core values of society and the ethical codes of their own cultural configuration are the preferred media through which Asian Christians will have come to terms with the Bible. These are embedded in the Asian languages and the cultural ethos. In the process of translating the Bible into Asian languages, a variety of cross-over and transformation have inevitably come to play. Naming God in Asia is a case in point. How to call the biblical God in Asian languages is not only a translation problem but also, most significant of all, a theological issue. Every Asian name is historically, culturally and religiously, a loaded term with numerous ramifications taken from the Asian religious belief in the deities and spirits. Missionaries who are theological motivated to defend the introduction of a totally new God, whom the pagan Asians have absolutely not the slightest knowledge about, would insist on a new name or just a generic term for God in the local language. But for those missionaries who are convinced of the universality of the God history, which does not need to be carried over to Asia by human agents, would opt for a traditional Asian name of God to designate the biblical God. 2)

The rich Asian scriptural traditions constitute the lens through which the Bible is to be read meaningfully and relevantly. These traditions may enhance our comprehension or may act as cultural barriers as well as obstacles in blocking us from getting to the proper understandings. Nevertheless, in no way will they be ignored and put aside. They may very well focus our attention on the textual lacuna otherwise unnoticed when the Bible is read alone. Cross-textual hermeneutical strategy, which has been tried out in other occasions by the present author, has been assumed to be an appropriate method specifically put forward to deal with the multi-scriptural context of Asia.³⁾

The word-pair, text and context, has become popular in biblical studies for some time. I used it too to talk about the impact of the social location of Hong Kong in facing the challenges of the return of sovereignty of the Colony to China in 1997. The focus on contextual interpretation and the framework of postcolonial critique have shaped biblical studies in the event of the return of Hong Kong to China as a Special Administrative Region of China.⁴⁾ I have also learnt from my teaching experience in Hong Kong that the strict dichotomy between what the text meant, and what it means for today in our own context, is a much welcomed paradigm by students who are inspired by the search for theological meanings and social implications of a text. They would like to engage the Bible contextually, but only as a second

2) See the following articles by A. C. C. Lee, "Naming God in Asia: Cross-Textual Reading in Multi-Cultural Context," *Quest: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Asian Christian Scholars*, vol.3 no.1(Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2004.04), p. 21-42. A. C. C. Lee, "Gods Asian Names: Rendering the Biblical God in Chinese," a web publication on *SBL Forum*, (November, 2005), A. C. C. Lee, "The Politico-Cultural Dynamics of Rendering the Biblical God in Asia," *Humanities: Christianity and Culture*, 37 (March 2006), p. 75-89. A. C. C. Lee, "The Names of God and Bible Translation: Engaging the Chinese Term Question in the Context of Scriptural Interpretation," *Journal of Theologies and Cultures in Asia*, 5 (2006), p. 1-17.

3) "Cross-textual Hermeneutics and Identity in Multi-textual Asia," Sebastian Kim(ed.), *Christian Theology in Asia: Emerging Forms and Themes*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 179-204.

4) See A. C. C. Lee, "Biblical Interpretation of the Return in the Postcolonial Hong Kong," *Biblical Interpretation*, 9 (1999), p. 164-173.

stage of inquiry. The social location of the reader only matters after independent and objective exegetical work has been done. To most of the Hong Kong students, and even scholars working on Asian theology, the context affects only the application of a text in our social location. There is an assumption that the meaning of a biblical text can be retrieved by an objective exegetical study without reference to the location of the reader in terms of gender, ethnicity, class, color, and power relationship. Only when one is concerned with applying and communicating will the contextual elements of language barriers, social boundaries and cultural peculiarities come into play.⁵⁾

There is a common understanding among some Asian scholars that contextualization only deals with social application and effective communication when the original meaning has been ascertained and the self-sufficient eternal message of the word has been properly understood. My dissatisfaction with the text-context interpretive mode and the current concern with social location go beyond the simple dichotomy described above.⁶⁾ In engaging biblical studies, my pedagogical and hermeneutical issue is primarily concerned with whether the context or social location has anything to contribute to the interpretation of the biblical text. If put into practice in the multi-scriptural Asian setting, the text-context paradigm has its apparent limitations as it does not take into serious consideration of the reality of plurality of scriptures and co-existence of diverse religious communities in Asia. In most cases contextual biblical interpretation still tends to privilege the mono-textual status of the Bible in seeking for meaning in a new context. The idea of putting the Bible in context usually assumes not only that the text is universal, but also that the context is void of any texts of scriptural status.⁷⁾

5) For discussions on historical-critical method and the response from feminist perspectives, see Sh. Ringe/C. V. Stichele(eds.), *Her Masters Tools? Feminist Challenges to Historical-Critical Interpretations* (Global Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship Series), (the Society of Biblical Literature, 2005).

6) The notion of the text-context interpretive mode is briefly discussed in A. C. C. Lee, "Biblical Interpretation in Asian Perspective," *Asia Journal of Theology*, 7 (1993), p. 35-39.

7) The author has recently published an article spelling out this problem of contextualization in biblical studies, see A. C. C. Lee, "Cross-Textual Hermeneutics in Multi-Scriptural Asia," S. C. H. Kim(ed.), *Christian Theology in Asia*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 190.

D. Preman Niles, a Sri Lankan scholar, formulates a similar concern on seeing Asia only as the context and the West possesses the text in terms of a couple of rhetorical questions:

Is theology always a matter of relating text to context? Is it not also a matter of relating context to text so that the context may speak to the text? Is Asia there to receive? Has it nothing to contribute?⁸⁾

The hermeneutical issue of probing the meaning of scripture and scriptures⁹⁾ in India has been one of utmost significance in Asian biblical interpretation. Asians have been nurtured and their lives sustained by the Asian scriptural traditions that provide ethical guidance, religious ideals and spiritual strength; not only to individual adherents of the religions concerned but also to the wider society. Fundamentally, the very social fabric and political order of Asian societies are shaped by scriptural insights. It is to no ones surprise that even drastic political measures aiming at eradicating the power of traditional Confucian, Buddhist and Daoist claims on the mindset and practices of the Chinese people during the Communist Cultural Revolution (1968-78), have not succeeded in ridding off the age-old grip of these traditions and the syncretistic form in popular religion.¹⁰⁾ The authority of the scriptures of these religio-cultural traditions, though being called into question and shaken at the very foundation, still functions to guide the social practices and the life orientations of most Chinese people. The fact of the matters is that the deep-rooted Chinese mentality has been formed by the Chinese cultural and religious world.¹¹⁾

8) D. Pr. Niles, "The Word of God and the People of Asia," J. T. Butler et al(eds.), *Understanding the word, Essays in honor of Bernhard W. Anderson*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1985), p. 282.

9) Scripture and Scriptures is the title of Stanley Samarthas chapter in *One Christ, Many Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991).

10) R. P. Madsen, "Beyond Orthodoxy: Catholicism as Chinese Folk Religion," St. Uhalley, Jr./Xiaoxin Wu(eds.), *China and Christianity*, (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharp, 2001), p. 233-256.

11) A. Lee, "Syncretism from the Perspectives of Chinese Religion and Biblical Tradition," *Ching*

As a reminder of the intrinsic problem and the complexity of the text-context interpretative mode, I would like to coin a new term for the comprehension of biblical interpretation in Asia, taking both the Bible and the text of Asian context. The word con/text may illustrate the dynamics of specific hermeneutical strategy, pointing to the fact that our context is well embedded and richly impregnated with a diversity of texts that have shaped our very being, our identity and also our sense of vocation and mission in this world. In short, context is never without text and is itself a text as well.

Readers too are never neutral and unbiased. In addition to being affected by numerous factors, including educational backgrounds and upbringing, social location and political orientation, religious affiliation and spiritual status, readers have been influenced and will continue to be shaped by the many texts. How one reads depends on what one has read, asserts Miscall who tries to show that all readers are inter-textual. Readers bring other texts to their reading. In approaching a text, readers are a plurality of other texts.¹²⁾ To him, these many other texts will serve to destabilize and defamiliarize our views and ways of reading given literary works.¹³⁾ They will challenge our confidence in the established interpretations and open up space for us to make negotiation between different texts in our interpretation.

2. Religiosity and Social Reality of Asia as Text

My previous experience as pastor in a local congregation before my teaching career at the university has enlightened me to the fact that most Christians still retain the basic tenets of their former religious world even after long years of conversion to Christianity. In Christian funerals, burials, wedding ceremonies and the celebration of the New Year and other festivals, one witnesses the vitality of the native religion in mingling with Christian practices. In the reading process I engaged with different groups in the

Feng, 39 (1996), p. 1-24.

12) P. D. Miscall, "Text, More Text, A Textual Reader and a Textual Writer," *Semeia*, 60/70, p. 256.

13) Miscall, p. 257.

Church and at the university, I have discovered that comparable religious motifs in the readers experience may shed light on the otherwise unspotted syncretistic ingredient embedded in the religious world of the Bible. I put forward the method of Cross-textual Reading which aims at facilitating the eyes of the reader to focus on the commonality and differences embedded in both of the Bible and Chinese religious text. In reading the Bible through the perspective of an Asian text, the reader is invited to engage the Bible existentially and critically appropriate the religious world of the Bible.

There are certain basic cultural-religious elements of the world of Asian communities that should have a great impact on our reading of the Bible. Here I want to highlight a couple of them. The conception of the divine in terms of divine-human continuum is a primary factor common to most Asian religions. In the case of the Chinese, the understanding of the deities as only quantitatively different from the human and the imagination of the possible crossing of the boundary between the divine and human have given rise to the perception of the immortals in China and the belief in the operative power of the notion of incarnation in Chinese folk religions.¹⁴⁾ One can observe that veneration of ancestors and the belief in ghosts and spirits are widespread features in the religious world of Asians. They have persisted even after centuries of fierce and, at times, violent attacks by Christianity. The Chinese religious world is a key that will help to unlock some of the texts in which the religious experience of the people of Israel in the Canaanite context is alluded to. We will come to understanding the negative prophetic presupposition adopted in the composition of the satire on making of idols in Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 44: 9-20 and other anti-idol texts: 40: 18-20; 41: 5-7; 42: 17; 45: 16-17; 46: 1-4, 5-7). George Soares-Prabhu, S. J. takes a critical stance toward Isaiah in its contemptuous ridiculing of the people who presumed to worship idols by pointing out the mistaken conception of idolatry and the

14) It is interesting to engage understanding of Jesus with the conception of incarnation in Daoism. See A. Lee, "Asian Encountering Jesus Christ - A Chinese Reading of Jesus in the Wisdom Matrix," *Quest, An Interdisciplinary Journal for Asian Christian Scholars*, 4/1 (2005), p. 41-62.

completely untrue charge in the Deutero-Isaiah:

The satire supposes that the idolator is foolish enough to bow down to a block of wood, part of which he has just used as fuel for his fire. But no idol worshipper in India or elsewhere ever does this. Even the simplest of them do not worship a block of wood. They are quite aware that their idol is and remains wood and stone. What they believe is that when an idol is consecrated, the god (whether Bel or Marduk, or Shiva or Devi) comes to dwell in it. The idol then mediates the real presence of the divine in somewhat the same way, it seems to me, that the consecrated bread and wine in the Christian Eucharist mediate the real presence of Jesus.¹⁵⁾

Soares-Prabhu, S. J. opines that Indian readers are scandalized by a text from Scripture that offers what seems to be a dishonest caricature of a meaningful religious practice,¹⁶⁾ which he does not expect to be found in a religious book. He further demonstrates from his Indian religious experience the dark side of the exclusive nationalist monotheism and the anti-gentile bias.¹⁷⁾

It is clear that biblical interpretation from the perspective of Asian scriptures and religiosity may illuminate levels of meaning not readily being revealed to a mono-textual reader. The multi-scriptural context will bring out presuppositions hidden in the biblical text. The textual traditions of Asia operate at a deeper level than we could expect, even to a devoted Christian. There was a famous Chinese Christian literary writer by the name of Xu Dishan, who wrote an interesting fiction about a certain Chinese Bible woman going about preaching the gospel to folks in the villages. At one time after her visit, it was already too late for her to return home. She was put up

15) George Soares-Prabhu, S. J., "Laughing at Idols, The Dark Side of Biblical Monotheism. An Indian Reading of Isaiah 44:9-20," Scaria Kuthirakkattel, S.V.D.(ed.), *A Biblical Theology For India*, (Pune, India: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 1999), p. 284. The article first appeared in F. Segovia/M.-A. Tolbert(eds.), *Reading from This Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), p. 109-131.

16) George Soares-Prabhu, S. J., p. 275.

17) George Soares-Prabhu, S. J., p. 286-290.

for the night in an old house recently purchased to be converted to a church. Because of the fear of ghost the heroine, Yu Guan, could not go to sleep all night. She could only feel a bit better when she took out the Bible, chanted the Nicene Creed and the Lords Prayer, but the fear did not go away. She concluded the following morning that perhaps Chinese ghost were not afraid of the Holy Bible or foreign prayers; otherwise, why hadn't there been a moment of peace last night? She further discovered that the man who took care of the house had the Chinese Book of Changes by his pillow because he was afraid of ghost as well. It suddenly dawned on her that Chinese ghosts were only afraid of Chinese texts.¹⁸⁾ This short story illustrates the in-depth belief of the Chinese in ghost even when one has been converted to Christianity. More enlightening is that it not only points out the existence of other texts in the world of Chinese converts, but also highlights the competition for efficacy between the Chinese religious text and the Bible in dealing with the world of ghosts and spirits.

The practice of shamanism is another arena through which one comes to a certain comprehension of the religious world of Asians in general. The Korean *minjung* hermeneutics serves as a good example in illustrating the grasp of shamanistic beliefs and practices on the mind set and daily life of the *minjung*. Korean feminism has made some efforts in recovering this piece of Asian religiosity for the empowerment of women.¹⁹⁾

The second factor of influence in the religious world of Asia is the belief in fate of some sort. Pre-determinism of ones life is widespread in Asian religions in addition to determinism in terms of *karma*, or deeds of ones previous existence in Buddhism, in the various traditions in Mahayana and

18) On Xu Dishan and his fiction on Yu Guan, see the discussion by L. St. Robinson, *Double-Edged Sword, Christianity & 20th Century Chinese Fiction*, (Hong Kong Tao Fong Shan Ecumenical Centre, 1986), p. 183-201.

19) D. Kwang-sun Suh, "Liberating Spirituality in the Korean Minjung Tradition: Shamanism and Minjung Liberation," and Lee, Chung-Hee, "Liberation Spirituality in Dae-dong Gut," V. Fabella, et al.(eds.), *Asian Christian Spirituality: Reclaiming Traditions*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992), p. 31-43. Theresa Ki-ja Kim, *The Relationship between Shamanic Ritual and the Korean Masked Dance-Drama: the Journey Motif to Chaos/Darkness/Void*, (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI, 1988).

Theravada Buddhism. Many of the Asian articulations of fate do not fit in with the conventional conception of fatalism. There is the dialectic relationship between a strong belief in the will of heaven (*ming*, 命) as well as an equally firm position in the faith of human conduct in effecting changes in ones fate. In the face of the seemingly predestinate fate, each Chinese person finds it a challenge to seek the best means to discern the various chances and possibilities for change of the cosmic time (*ji-yuan*, 机缘) and to determine the opportunities for change occurring at specific moments for an individual (*yun*, 运).²⁰⁾ In matching individual fortune and cosmic time, one encounters auspicious and harmonious moments, which are considered to be propitious (*ji*, 吉) and bring good luck; and discordant moments, which are considered inauspicious (*xiong*, 凶) and bring calamities.²¹⁾ This religious element is instructive to our re-reading of the Book of Ecclesiastes in the discernment of the appointed time, ones allotment and opportunity. A new translation and interpretation of the notions of *zeman*, (predetermined or appointed time in 3: 1), *miqreh* (fate in 2: 14) and *heleq* (usually portion or lot)²²⁾ congruent to the positive Asian understanding of fate, not only can help to comprehend Qohelet but also greatly enrich the relatedness of this enigmatic book and the existence of Asians in daily life experience.

Stanley Samartha, an Indian biblical scholar, remarks on the Bible and Asian multi-textuality I have just underlined above:

To enter this multi-scriptural situation with the claim that the Bible is the only written witness to Gods deeds in history is to cut off all

20) Yih-yüan Li, "Notions of Time, Space and Harmony in Chinese Popular Culture," Chun-Chich Huang/E. Zürcher(eds.), *Time and Space in Chinese Culture*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), p. 387.

21) Yih- yüan Li, p. 388.

22) See C. L. Seows discussion on three words relating to fate and destiny; cf. C. L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes, a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, (New York: Doubleday, 1997), p. 13, 24, 135, 159, 168. *Miqreh* occurs seven times as noun (2:14, 15: 3-19 [3 times]; 9:2) and three as verb (2:14, 15: 9:11), 135. For another view on *miqreh*, see P. Machinist, "Fate, Miqreh, and Reason: Some Reflections on Qohelet and Biblical Thought," Z. Zevit/S. Gitin/M. Sokoloff(eds.), *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots: Biblical, Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas C. Greenfield*, (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995).

conversation with neighbors of other faiths in the world. This attitude makes it impossible for Christians to develop their own hermeneutics. In a continent like Asia a claim for the supreme authority of *one* scripture can be met by a counter claim for similar authority for *another* scripture.²³⁾

To avoid detrimental effects on both the Asian scriptures and the Christian Bible Samartha's warning must be taken seriously. The multi-scriptural reality of Asia resists any claim of absolute authority and challenges the principles and practice of hermeneutics based on such a claim.²⁴⁾ Most of the Asian scriptures, be it Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, or Daoist, understand the notion of scripture and scriptural authority differently from that of Christianity.²⁵⁾

The complexity of Asian religiosity exhibits both the impacts of modernization and globalization as well as traces of the traditional conceptions of the supernatural, human fate, social destiny and *feng shui* (literary wind and water) or geomancy. They are profoundly articulated in religious classics handed down from the past and still widely practiced in the daily rituals and rites today. It still constitutes the belief system and religious mentality of the common people in Asia. The water fountain in the Suntec City, Singapore, is considered as a contemporary expression of *feng shui*. This is even publicized in tourist literature handed out to visitors to this secular city. Today, Suntec City is Singapore's largest shopping, business and entertainment centre and according to the experts, its success is all to do with *Feng Shui*:

23) S. J. Samartha, *One Christ Many Religions. Toward a Revised Christology*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), p. 76.

24) See the discussion in S. J. Samartha, *The Search for New Hermeneutics in Asian Christian Theology*, (Serampore: Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College, 1987).

25) The practice of a strictly close canon with the final revelatory authority ascribed to a Christological understanding of the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth is basically foreign, if not totally strange, to the other Asian scriptural family members. See Paul A. Rule, Does Heaven Speak? Revelation in the Confucian and Christian Traditions, St. Uhalley, Jr./Xiaoxin Wu(eds.), *China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future*, (Amonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), p. 63-79.

According to *Feng Shui*, Suntec City is located in the region of Singapore's left hand. The right hand is located at the financial district of Raffles Place, and together the hands cradle City Hall. At the crucial site of the left hands palm therefore, the developers of Suntec City built the Fountain of Wealth - a structure designed to ensure the prosperity of Suntec City. All this talk of wealth and prosperity for Suntec City however doesn't mean you can't get your piece of *Feng Shui* good fortune here. During the day, visitors to Suntec City walk around the central base of the Fountain three times, touching the water at all the times to gain some good luck of their own.²⁶⁾

It is clear from this tourist literature that *feng shui* is promoted in the setting of modern architecture, advanced technology and contemporary tourist industry. This 21st Century urban ritual attracted my attention and I went to the Suntec City site one afternoon during the SBL International Meeting (Singapore, 2005) to find it out myself. There were a whole group of Chinese visitors and some local Singaporeans queuing up for the interesting act of circling the fountain of wealth. I joined them to walk around it three times, touching the water all the time as instructed by the tourist literature I quoted above. People seemed to be satisfied that they participated in sharing the success and wealth of Suntec City and anticipated similar prospect to themselves.

Context is therefore not just a setting in the intersection of time and space. It comprises of a conglomeration of texts. Text is not only in the conventional sense of written document, but also in the more elusive socio-scientific notion of historical events, people movements, daily experiences and human actions in community as being social text.²⁷⁾ In a word, the Asian context contains multiple texts and is itself a text, contributing to the reading and enriching

26) Suntec City: Feng Shui Heaven, *The Real Destination Singapore*, (Singapore: Harding Publishing and Media, April June, 2005).

27) See W. A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). A. C. C. Lee, "Engaging the Bible and Asian Resources: Hermeneutics of the Globalized in the Global-Local Entanglement," *Journal of Theologies and Cultures in Asia*, 2 (2003), p. 5-30.

the meaning of the biblical text. With this understanding of text and context expressed in the word con/text, I try to implement the cross-textual reading strategy of bringing the Asian complexity of texts (Text A) and the Bible (Text B) together, reading them in parallel and in constant interaction.²⁸⁾

The prefix con in con/text has the meaning of together and complete. Here in the coning of the word con/texts I mean to introduce the idea of both the conventional meanings of context and the new meaning of confluence of a multiplicity of text in the reading of the Bible. These texts are brought together and regarded as being on a par with the biblical text in order to bring out a fuller range of meanings, some of which have been hidden or marginalized in the history of biblical interpretation. Besides placing the two texts side-by-side, cross-textual interpretation signifies the dynamic interaction and mutual illumination of one text by the other. Through such encounters, new meanings of the biblical text can be engendered, which might never be highlighted in the reading of the Bible alone. Cross-textual interpretation makes multiple crossings between the two texts, engaging them in creative tension. In the process, the two texts should be subjected to a vigorous and critical appraisal of the readers who seek to engage both of them for a renewed configuration of meaning and identity. The aim of such multiple

28) For the basic principles behind cross-textual hermeneutics, see A. C. C. Lee, "Biblical Interpretation in Asian Perspectives," *Asia Journal of Theology* 71 (1993), p. 35-39. For its application to Chinese creation myths, see A. Lee, "Genesis 1 from the Perspective of a Chinese Creation Myth," A. G. Auld(ed.), *Understanding Poets and Prophets: Essays in Honor of George Wishart Anderson*, (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), p. 186-98; and A. Lee, "The Chinese Creation Myth of Nu Kua and the Biblical Narrative in Genesis 1-11," *Biblical Interpretation* 2 (1994), p. 312-24. I have been asked why I use cross-textual rather than inter-textual. Two reasons come immediately to mind. First, in the Jewish rabbinical tradition of hermeneutics, the term inter-textual refers to the relationship between or among texts within the Bible. Thus, the rabbis think that the Hebrew Bible constitutes an organized whole. As such, it is not only consistent from beginning to end, but it also involves cross-referencing and hence cross-expansion in meaning. Second, contemporary literary and biblical scholars have developed this idea even further, as they search for important historical links in literary forms and concepts between texts or chapters of the Bible. See, e.g., M. Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts*, (New York: Schocken Books 1979); D. Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990); D. N. Fewell(ed.), *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).

crossings is life-enriching and life flourishing; the transformation of ones life, a process of self-discovery. The result is an enriched-transformed existence.²⁹⁾

3. Conclusion

The biblical text of the Hebrew Bible can be conceived in various negotiations in the historical and contextual lived experiences of the Israelite community, both in the Palestinian and Diasporic settings. It captures the religious situation of the exilic people and records a truncated dislocated people away from the land.³⁰⁾ It reflects a book religion inherited by Judaism and Christianity as well as further developed by these two monotheistic traditions. The text represents an anti-Canaanite polemical writing aiming at a new beginning of the community in exile, explaining away the past as sinful and portraying a monotheistically abstract religion with no embodiment at the home land, no ritualistic redefinition of reality in the temple and no institutional basis for the exercise of political power. The suppressed local religious world must be uncovered and their face must be restored in order to comprehend the interactive dynamics between Yahwism and the Canaanite religious context.

In the face of the irreversible process of globalization the major concern of Christianity in Asia must adhere to is the enhancement of life for all, for every single member of the human family. It is too often the case that the interest of the majority of the ordinary folk is sacrificed for the so-called common good defined by the economic and political elite. In the name of globalization, local communities are being marginalized and the poor are further exploited. Gnana Robinson of India is right to observe the contribution of our biblical tradition:

The Bible condemns the attitude of any one nation or people in

29) For this term, see R. Wentz, *The Contemplation of Otherness: the Critical Vision of Religion* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984), p. 13.

30) See, D. L. Smith, *The Religion of the Landless, The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile*. (Bloomington, IN.: Meyer Stone Books, 1898).

claiming to create a world order for all. The Story of the Tower of Babel(Gen 11) and the Story of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon(Daniel 4) are perhaps warning against such attempts.³¹⁾

In the spirit of justice, peace and integrity of creation we must always be aware of the voices of the victimized in the face of the push for a global order. The wounded must not only be cared for as an after thought contingency measure to patch up. They must be protected and their life be ensured to flourish. Con/textual biblical interpretation is to prompt and urge us to look at the text that is employed, appropriated and incorporated in the production of meaning in the process of formation of the biblical text and the context from which it has evolved.

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Key word

Biblical Interpretation
Context
Cultural and Religious Studies
Multi-Religious World
Text

투고일: 2010년 7월 1일
심사일: 2010년 7월 15일
게재확정일: 2010년 8월 1일

