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Currents in Korean-American Biblical Interpretation

Hyun Chul Paul Kim¹

Introduction

When the renowned Korean-American violinist Sarah Chang plays Bruch's violin concerto No. 1 in G Minor (Op. 26) or the famed Chinese pianist Lang Lang performs Listz's La Campanella in G-sharp minor from *Grandes Etudes de Paganini*, some absent-minded people like me might wonder whether such a musical interpretation is genuinely German, Hungarian, Italian, Chinese, Korean, American, Korean-American, or Asian-American. Inasmuch as it is difficult to cultivate what "Korean" biblical interpretation is, it is all the more daunting to label what "Korean-American" biblical interpretation is or should be. Alternatively, must one play only a traditional Korean/Asian instrument or compose music with typically Korean/Asian tune for western instruments, when we talk about Korean-American musicality, and also in analogy Korean-American biblical interpretation?

Admitting music is not my expertise, it seems there might be three broad—and often overlapping—trends in biblical scholarship, for what can be called Korean-American (and also correspondingly Asian-American) biblical interpretation: (1) nonconforming Korean hermeneutics, (2) indirect Korean hermeneutics, and (3) direct Korean hermeneutics.²

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² Due to the limited scope of this paper, my primary focus will be on "Korean-American" biblical interpreters, and especially of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament fields. Admittedly, it would be impossible to discuss Korean-American biblical hermeneutics without addressing "Korean" hermeneutics and "Asian-American" works. However, such a worthy task would require far more space, even though it would be a rewarding task for a future project.

First, the “nonconforming” trend is, simply put, a typically (or purely) European/American interpretation that just happens to be written by a Korean-American. These interpreters have no (primary) intention to marinate or spice up biblical interpretation with their Korean-ness or Asian-ness.

Second, the “indirect” trend includes works of Korean-American biblical scholars, of which both topic and methodology are rooted in European/American scholarship, and yet, at the same time, certain (minor) insights derive from Korean/Korean-American culture, contexts, and the like.

Third, the “direct” trend encompasses biblical interpretive works that primarily aim to incorporate a Korean/Korean-American lens in reading biblical texts. To exaggerate, we may say that these are more Korean-American voices that happen to use the English language. In other words, ethnic and cultural locations of Korean-American-ness are at the center of the hermeneutical standpoint, whereas the typical European/American methodology is pushed aside on the margin.

As it becomes clear, these three trends overlap with one another. When we talk about fusion-style, such a labeling can be very subjective. Similarly, one scholar may work on all these three trends. In fact, I believe many Korean-American biblical interpreters have this extra load of having to juggle or dance between these two or three poles. We strive to sound as Wellhausenian or Bultmannian as possible, and at the same time we want to be authentic in presenting who we are and how we read the ancient biblical documents. Hence, in this brief overview, I intend to (somewhat subjectively) group recent works of Korean/Korean-American biblical scholars into these three trends. In doing so, I hope to not only bring to the fore the emerging trends and contributions of these scholarly works (albeit far less extensive) but also pose pertinent questions and challenges for the ongoing hermeneutical tasks into the future.

1. Nonconforming Works

Because the works in this category are not so much related to the Korean-American hermeneutical facets, only a brief comment may suffice. At the outset, however, no matter how western their works may appear, these biblical works offer significant *de facto* values in their representing eastern worlds. At the least, even though their works

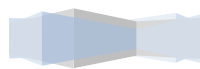
seem so Euro-centric, the last names of these scholars and thereby the contributions they provide deserve recognition.

What is further remarkable may be the increasing volume of publications by Korean-American (let alone Asian-American) biblical scholars in the recent decades. Until the end of the twentieth century, publications in the so-called major monographs—mostly in English or German—by Korean/Korean-American biblical scholars have been sporadic, far outnumbered compared to the western scholars. Without doubt, the quality of those sporadic works should not be underestimated by mere lack of quantity, e.g., the monographs by Chan-Hie Kim and Seyoon Kim, among others.³ Yet, it is during the recent two decades, since 1990, that numerous monographs and articles in major journals by Korean-American biblical scholars have started inundating the academic guild. The quantity is too enormous to list all of them here. It is my humble hope that this trend only continues in greater depth, in both quantity and quality, as the academic guild is becoming inter-connected in a global world.

I would like to add just one more observation on the works of this trend. While many of these works are nonconforming with regard to Korean-ness or Korean contexts as a hermeneutical axiom, some monographs are of interest as they address the topics of the Gentiles, outsiders, universalism versus particularism, exile, diaspora, and so on. It is understandable that Korean/Korean-American authors somehow may have felt strongly and passionately about those characters on the margin and/or the issues of outsiders, e.g., Eung Chun Park, Johann D. Kim, Lloyd Kim, and more.⁴ Regardless of their intention, thanks to their works, such topics that have been either pushed aside or controversial in the past have come to the horizon, and thus it is commendable that our scholars of ethnic

³ Chan-Hie Kim, *Form and Structure of the Familiar Greek Letter of Recommendation* (SBLDS 4; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1972); Seyoon Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982); idem, *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); idem, *Christ and Caesar: The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the Writings of Paul and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

⁴ Consider the following selective examples: Eung Chun Park, *The Mission Discourse in Matthew's Interpretation* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1995); idem, *Either Jew or Gentile: Paul's Unfolding Theology of Inclusivity* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2003); Johann D. Kim, *God, Israel, and the Gentiles: Rhetoric and Situation in Romans 9–11* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000); Hyun Chul Paul Kim, *Ambiguity, Tension, and Multiplicity in Deutero-Isaiah* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003); Lloyd Kim, *Polemic in the Book of Hebrews: Anti-Judaism, Anti-Semitism, Supersessionism?* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2006).



minority locations reassess those topics with fresh insights and diverse interpretive perspectives.

2. Indirect Works

In a nutshell, these works attempt to analyze the ancient sociocultural contexts that may shed further insights on the issues of ethnicity, (im)migration, etc. of the ancient biblical text and world. In other words, the ancient biblical society is the main target for investigation, and then the hermeneutical contexts of today's ethnic or multicultural society remain peripheral or secondary in the interpretive process. As we can see below, in the third trend, this contrast between the primary and secondary steps with regard to methodological approaches tends to be reversed.

Many noteworthy works have come out. Here I will discuss only a few examples. Chan-Hie Kim has written an article in the two-volume series that contain biblical interpreters of various ethnicity and continents.⁵ In this contribution, he presents a solid example of interweaving the historical-critical redactional analysis with the interactive reading from the Korean-American social settings. He lays out key exegetical issues on Acts 10:1–11:18, e.g., the Lukan emphasis not only on Cornelius's conversion but also on Peter's changed, lenient attitude toward the Gentiles, which are then subsequently correlated with the similar challenges of the immigrants in the United States, e.g., the dominant racial group's reticence to recognize and respect other ethnic minority groups in the multicultural and multiethnic country. Kim has also written an article introducing the Asian-American biblical hermeneutics in the monumental *New Interpreter's Bible Commentary* series, which elucidates the more general interpretive approaches, and thus may fit closer to the third trend below.⁶

John J. Ahn's monograph is a promising example of this methodological trend.⁷ This revision of his Yale dissertation employs sociological methods, juxtaposing the ancient Near Eastern contexts of exile and the comparable modern contexts of forced

⁵ Chan-Hie Kim, "Reading the Cornelius Story from an Asian Immigrant Perspective," in *Reading from This Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States* (vol. 1; ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 165-74.

⁶ Chan-Hie Kim, "Reading the Bible as Asian Americans," in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (vol. 1; ed. Leander E. Keck et al.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 161-66.

⁷ John J. Ahn, *Exile as Forced Migrations: A Sociological, Literary, and Theological Approach on the Displacement and Resettlement of the Southern Kingdom of Judah* (BZAW 417; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011).

migration. After examining key features of the Judean exile with regard to the socioeconomic and political aspects, Ahn expounds those features in light of the contemporary immigration types. Here he astutely delineates the unique stages of forced migration, displacement, and resettlement vis-à-vis first, 1.5, second, and third generations. This study illustrates both the analytical compatibility and the sociocultural significance of investigating the Judean exiles as forced migrations in the Babylon and the Persian diaspora, in association with the struggles and generational gaps of the (im-)migrants in a dominant foreign land, such as the Korean-American immigrants in the United States.

3. Direct Works

This is the area where Korean/Korean-American biblical writings have flourished. Scholars have endeavored to read the Bible afresh, from, by, and for the standpoints and/or contexts of the Koreans or Korean-Americans. In these works, sociologically speaking, two largely interdependent but distinguishable hermeneutical locations may be identified: (a) Korean and (b) Korean-American hermeneutical contexts.

a. Korean *Hermeneutical* Contexts

Strictly speaking, “Korean” biblical hermeneutics cannot be considered the same as “Korean-American” biblical hermeneutics. Apparently, the socio-geographical locations and interpretive contexts are different. Nevertheless, still in its early stage, reassessing and envisioning the Korean-American hermeneutics should take into consideration much of Korean hermeneutics, and hopefully vice versa.

Korean biblical hermeneutics has its origin as old as the start of Christianity, i.e., Catholic tradition more than 200 years ago and Protestant tradition more than 100 years ago. Yet, first of all, it was *minjung* theology during the 1970s-80s, which certainly marked one of the major interpretive watersheds in the history of Korean Christianity.⁸ This theological movement was undoubtedly inspired by the surging movements of

⁸ Nam Dong Suh, “Towards a Theology of Han,” in *Minjung Theology: People as the Subjects of History* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1983), 55-69; Byung Mu Ahn, “Jesus and the Minjung in the Gospel of Mark,” in *Minjung Theology*, 138-52; Cyris H. S. Moon, *A Korean Minjung Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1985); Yong Bock Kim, “The Bible and Social Biography of the Minjung,” in *Messiah and Minjung: Christ’s Solidarity with the People for New Life* (Hong King: CCA, 1992), 11-29.

western feminist theology, Latin American liberation theology, the civil rights movement in the United States, and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. At the same time, it should be noted that the deep hermeneutical roots of *minjung* theology may be traced back to the non-violent independence movement which was led by Christian leaders alongside other religious leaders in 1910–1945, during the time when Korea was colonized by Imperial Japan.

A key common denominator of these hermeneutical movements lies in the very contexts of the oppressed and disenfranchised, *minjung*, whose sufferings and tears of *han* function as the essential interpretive locus of reading the Bible and doing theology. Such an existential hermeneutical attentiveness has induced analogous theological works by notable Korean-American theologians, in the last several decades. Even though their fields remain in the discipline of (systematic) theology, rather than biblical studies per se, their perceptive and persuasive theological constructions on the Bible, God, and humanity vis-à-vis marginalization, liminality, and woundness have presented significant insights for the subsequent generations, e.g., Jung Young Lee, Sang Hyun Lee, Anselm K. Min, Andrew Sung Park, Hyun Kyung Chung, and so on.⁹ Their works have laid an invaluable foundation for the next generation of scholars to do theology in the postcolonial contexts of immigration, multiculturalism, and globalization.

Second, another noteworthy case of Korean hermeneutics, an indigenizing hermeneutics, is exemplified by Young Chan Ro.¹⁰ His theological hermeneutics picks up the traditional Korean Neo-Confucianism of the reciprocal relationship of yin and yang, beyond dualistic reductionism. This effort to cultivate understanding in dialogue with the

⁹ Jung Young Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); Sang Hyun Lee, *From a Liminal Place: An Asian American Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010); Anselm K. Min, *Dialectic of Salvation: Issues in Theology of Liberation* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1989); Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993); Hyun Kyung Chung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1990). For the recent related works, see Volker Küster, *A Protestant Theology of Passion: Korean Minjung Theology Revisited* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Dong-sun Kim, *The Bread for Today and the Bread for Tomorrow: The Ethical Significance of the Lord's Supper in the Korean Context* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001).

¹⁰ Young Chan Ro, *The Korean Neo-Confucianism of Yi Yulgok* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1989).

pertinent Korean anthropology, folklore, sociology, literature, and philosophy can be traced back to the indigenous theology of *pungryu*, coined by Tong Shik Ryu.¹¹

For example, with regard to reading the biblical narrative in comparison with Korean folklore, Samuel Cheon presents reading Lot's wife through *Jangjanup* folktale and Jephthah's story through *Shimcheong* folktale.¹² In these innovative studies, Cheon not only displays cases of cross-cultural comparative readings but also elucidates new insights in interpreting the ancient biblical texts fraught with the issues of theodicy and justice. Similarly, Hyun Chul Paul Kim explores reading the David-Bathsheba narrative through *Domi* folktale, both of which contain the theme of the royal authority's totalitarian power abuse over a woman of common, lowly status.¹³ Ever since Hermann Gunkel, and now with the renewed interest in the sociocultural and anthropological comparisons on the folklore and mythology of the ancient Near East and the Bible, such efforts in cross-cultural analyses through Korean folktales can shed new lights on the customs, culture, and religiosity of the ancient biblical world.

For another example, borrowing insights from Young Chan Ro's seminal work on yin-yang dynamics, Hyun Chul Paul Kim suggests the hermeneutical potentials of "both-and" interpretation, as opposed to "either-or," on biblical concepts and theologies.¹⁴ Attention to the Asian hermeneutical aspects of keeping the tension of the dialectical or conflicting conceptualities can offer enriching insights, somewhat analogous to the Jewish midrashic traditions, highlighting the ambiguities and complexities of the biblical texts and theologies.¹⁵

¹¹ Samuel Cheon, "Biblical Interpretation in Korea: History and Issues," in *Ways of Being, Ways of Reading: Asian American Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Mary F. Foskett and Jeffrey Kah-Jin Kuan; St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice, 2006), 31-44 (37-38).

¹² Samuel Cheon, "Filling the Gap in the Story of Lot's Wife," *Asia Journal of Theology* 15 (2001): 14-23; idem, "Reconsidering Jephthah's Story in Asian Perspective," *Journal of Asian and Asian American Theology* 6 (2003-2004): 30-45.

¹³ M. Fulgence Nyengele and Hyun Chul Paul Kim, "Murder S/He Wrote? A Cultural and Psychological Reading of 2 Samuel 11-12," in *Pregnant Passion: Gender, Sex, and Violence in the Bible* (Semeia Studies 44; ed. Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 95-116.

¹⁴ Hyun Chul Paul Kim, "Interpretative Modes of Yin-Yang Dynamics as an Asian Hermeneutics," *Biblical Interpretation* 9 (2001): 287-308.

¹⁵ Consider the magnum opus of Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), where he constructs biblical theology of the Hebrew Bible in the context of court witnesses, as Israel's "core testimony" versus "countertestimony."

Third, Korean-American female/feminist biblical scholars have similarly proposed an intercultural reading between the culture or politics of Korea and that of the biblical texts. Seung Ai Yang thus offers an intercultural interpretation on the issue of divorce in Jesus' sayings in the Gospels.¹⁶ Investigating the compatibility between the patriarchal first-century Palestine and the patriarchal traditions of Korea, Yang contends that both cultures share common androcentric traditions regarding women as commodities before, during, and even after the marriage. Reading Deuteronomy 24 against such cultural milieus, she argues that Jesus' sayings do not condemn divorce per se but rather the husband's patriarchal abuse of power in one-sidedly repudiating his wife. This intercultural hermeneutical insight can be illuminating for the people marginalized not only by other groups/ethnicities but also "by their own communities."¹⁷

Last, but not least, Marvin L. Chaney, an eminent American biblical scholar, has proposed an ingenious way of comparing the topography, archaeology, and politics of the two similar nations—Korea and Israel.¹⁸ Chaney calls for the legitimacy of a comparative study on the socio-historical aspects of Korea and Israel, compiling similarities, such as the agrarian settings, the politically volatile location against China and Egypt respectively, regionalism and factionalism between various provinces/kingdoms, tension and relocation of capitals (e.g., Saul versus David, Shechem versus Jerusalem, Koryo versus Joseon), and so on. He acknowledges distinctive differences between these two countries, including climates and chronological gaps. However, for the sake of cross-fertilizing insights on the socio-historical parallels of these two similar nations, Chaney makes a bold and inspiring plea: "My plea to my Korean colleagues would be to follow their own research agendas wherever they lead, to be sure, but to consider owning and honing their knowledge of and access to Korean history and culture as an intentional and distinctive part of their contribution to scholarship on the Hebrew Bible."¹⁹ These comparative

¹⁶ Seung Ai Yang, "Has Jesus Ever Condemned Divorce?: An Intercultural Interpretation of Jesus' Saying on Divorce," in *Off the Menu: Asian and Asian North American Women's Religion and Theology* (ed. Rita Nakashima Brock et al.; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 253-78.

¹⁷ Yang, "Has Jesus Ever Condemned Divorce?" 267.

¹⁸ Marvin L. Chaney, "Korea and Israel: Historical Analogy and Old Testament Interpretation," *The Korean Journal of Old Testament Studies* 16 (2010): 87-120.

¹⁹ Chaney, "Korea and Israel," 113. Note the work of one of his doctoral students, who investigates the socio-economic connotations of the metaphor of illness and healing in Hosea through the social traditions of the ancient Near East and traditional Korea: Seong-Hyuk Hong, *The Metaphor of Illness and Healing in*

approaches to the ancient historical, sociological, cultural, political, philosophical, and theological aspects of the Bible in light of the “Korean-ness” of ancient Korea’s struggles and survivals certainly deserve further engagement and exploration.

b. Korean-American Hermeneutical Contexts

In this area, the social location of interpretation makes a shift from Korea, the Far East peninsula, to the United States, the superpower country of North America. Common factors exist in those distant locations, such as the volatility and struggles of the powerless. Yet, the Korean-Americans’ uprooted or expatriate experiences in a foreign soil form unique contexts for identifying with the diaspora communities in the Bible. Those unique but interconnected voices of the diaspora scholars of the Korean-American heritage are arising, bigger and louder into the twenty-first century.

Uriah Yong-Hwan Kim has demonstrated an astute analysis of Uriah the Hittite in 2 Samuel 11, whose hybrid identity as an outsider in David’s kingdom corresponds to the Asian-Americans as the “others,” “non-Americans,” in the United States.²⁰ By reading Uriah the Hittite from the perspective of the comparable struggles of the Asian-Americans, Kim not only highlights the oft-neglected but pivotal character Uriah the Hittite in this narrative but also explicates the implicit issues of the hardship and discrimination the ethnic minority immigrants all too often experience in this country.

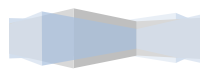
Seung Ai Yang has contributed a trenchant appraisal of the Asian American theology of the past generation, of which she codifies three main themes: “forever strangers on the margin,” “religious pluralism,” and “story (or autobiographical) theology.”²¹ She surmises how these correlated contexts of the Asian Americans have laid foundations for the Asian American theologies, which then continue to generate upcoming theologies and interpretations, including Korean-American biblical works.

In another publication, from the perspective of her own socio-geographical locations, Yang authentically underscores the etymological problems and even

Hosea and Its Significance in the Socio-Economic Context of Eighth-Century Israel and Judah (New York: Peter Lang, 2006).

²⁰ Uriah Yong-Hwan Kim, “Uriah the Hittite: A (Con)Text of Struggle for Identity,” *Semeia* 90/91 (2002): 69-85. See also idem, *Decolonizing Josiah: Toward a Postcolonial Reading of the Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005); idem, *Identity and Loyalty in the David Story: A Postcolonial Reading* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008).

²¹ Seung Ai Yang, “Asian Americans,” in *Handbook of U.S. Theologies of Liberation* (ed. Miguel A. De La Torre; St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice, 2004), 73-84.



hermeneutical dangers associated with the commonly expressed terms, such as *third world* versus *first world*, *east* versus *west*, *secular* versus *religious* (or *Christian*) groups, as if reinforcing one group's innately hierarchical superiority.²² Thus, she calls for a hermeneutical sensitivity to the complexities of the "others" in poverty and marginalization, situated not only in the so-called third world but also in the United States.

Jae Won Lee similarly contests the misleading dilemma in the notion of the Jews and the Gentiles in biblical scholarship.²³ Cautioning against the view that the "all inclusive" notion in Pauline discourses imply, or impose, one's adopting a universal identity, she proposes that "Paul's politics of difference as attested in Rom 14–15 does not obscure but rather upholds ethnic particularity."²⁴ She reinterprets the implied dichotomy between the "strong" and the "weak" in the first-century socio-historical contexts as a radical admonition for the strong to show solidarity with the weak. Thus, she contends that this understanding of mutual respect by not serving themselves but welcoming others, especially the weak, can have significant implications for the two divided Koreas as well as for the Korean-Americans in their intergenerational conflicts.

James Kyung-Jin Lee, - an associate professor of Asian American Studies and English at UC Irvine who is also educated at Claremont School of Theology, advances a penetrating reading of Leviticus 19 through an Asian-American lens.²⁵ In this study Lee forcefully juxtaposes the horrific episode of the murder and violence on the Levite's concubine and the tragic biography of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, the author of *Dictée* published in 1982. Probing and analyzing the law of the Levites' landlessness (Num 3:41; 8:18; 18:24; Deut 14:27), Lee interprets the Torah's programmatic emphases that "YHWH is the inheritance of the Levites, not the land" and that the Hebrew Bible depicts "the Levite as symbolic figure *par excellence* of the monotheistic impulse, for the Levite owns

²² Seung Ai Yang, "Challenges and Opportunities in Current Feminist Biblical Studies," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 25 (2009): 107-12.

²³ Jae Won Lee, "Paul and Ethnic Difference in Romans," in *They Were All Together in One Place? Toward Minority Biblical Criticism* (ed. Randall C. Bailey, Tat-siong Benny Liew, Fernando F. Segovia; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 141-57. See also idem, "Justification of Difference in Galatians," in *Character Ethics and the New Testament* (ed. Robert Brawley; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 191-208.

²⁴ Lee, "Paul and Ethnic Difference in Romans," 143.

²⁵ James Kyung-Jin Lee, "The Landless Levite and the Call of Israel," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 40 (2010): 4-8.

nothing but YHWH's call and thus yearns for nothing but to serve YHWH."²⁶ These motifs of serving YHWH accentuate, Lee believes, the human call for solidarity with the aliens, similar to the landless Levites of their socially marginal status (Deut 16:11; 26:11-13), over against the human propensity toward alienation and violence.

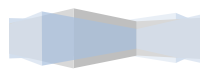
Conclusion

The reviews above are much too selective to be considered a legitimately extensive survey of current Korean-American biblical scholarship. At the most, they may be considered an appetizer or an overture to a grand opera to be followed. Numerous other works are omitted, inadvertently, and by my tendency to focus on works in the Hebrew Bible than those in the New Testament fields. Hence, besides those scholars mentioned above, I should add the following notable Korean-American biblical scholars in North America: Michael Ahn, InHee Cho, Jin-Young Choi, Jin Hee Han, Jin Ki Hwang, Jean K. Kim, Wonil Kim, Yung Suk Kim, Eunny P. Lee, Kyong-Jin Lee, Max J. Lee, Sang Myeng Lee, Won W. Lee, Michelle Lee-Barnewall, Bo H. Lim, Kang Na, Aaron W. Park, Jung Eun Sophia Park, Seong Hyun Park, Suzie Song-Mi Park, Hyunhye Junia Pokrifka-Joe, Yohan Pyeon, Victor Rhee, and S. Aaron Son.²⁷ Moreover, even the three broad "trends" I propose appear to be arbitrary, if not incomplete. Accordingly, I request that the information gathered here, including the categorization of the trends, be corrected, revised, and upgraded in due process. At the least, one of the positive aspects of an online journal like this one is the availability and possibility to list all the published works of the Korean-American biblical scholars and then even to continually and thoroughly update the list.

Despite these stated shortcomings of the survey, I hope that this study can help bring together various perspectives in the Korean-American biblical scholarship thus far. Likewise, I posit that looking at the maps of the trends we have charted can provide good navigation as to what we have done, how we have grown, and where we need to go,

²⁶ Lee, "The Landless Levite," 7.

²⁷ Cf. Jean K. Kim, "A Korean Feminist Reading of John 4:1-42," *Semeia* 78 (1997): 109-19; idem, "An Asian Interpretation of Philippians 2:6-11," in *Escaping Eden: New Feminist Perspectives on the Bible* (ed. Harold C. Washington et al.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 104-22; Yung Suk Kim, *Christ's Body in Corinth: The Politics of a Metaphor* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008).



especially in terms of the direction of this scholarly venture. For example, Korean traditions and contexts ought not to be dismissed nor distanced, when it comes to constructing and envisioning Korean-American biblical interpretation. Korea both as the nation and as the hermeneutical root is too essential to be put aside from the Korean-Americans on the other side of the Pacific Ocean, much the same way the Jewish diasporas could not and would not desert their homeland in Judah and Jerusalem. It is indeed uplifting that just as the diasporas are growing in various regions, more works are being produced by the Korean-American biblical scholars in the recent decades, whether direct or indirect Korean-American hermeneutical works, or even nonconforming works.

At the same time, many daunting obstacles and questions remain. What is unique about Korean-American biblical hermeneutics in relation to Asian-American biblical hermeneutics? Is it possible to do a Vietnamese-American or Mexican-American biblical interpretation, in distinction from Asian-American or Latin-American ones? Is it even necessary? Furthermore, such a minority-oriented or cross-cultural hermeneutics can be merely labeled as a sightseeing spots or desserts, as opposed to the main landmarks or menus in the European/American-dominant scholarly field. Last, but not least, as the mainline church membership is declining, how long will the invigorating surge of the Korean-American religion and theology scholars continue the wave well into the second, third, and more generations?

It would be pointless to try to predict the future with regard to these pressing questions. Yet, insofar as *all* biblical interpretive works produced by Korean-American scholars can be considered a part of the hugely extended trends, as categorized above, I personally remain optimistic for the future of Korean-American biblical scholarship. Put another way, let there be ongoing prolific outcomes, in terms of both quantity and quality, whether direct, indirect, or nonconforming to any Korean- or Korean-American-ness. All efforts, I believe, will be worthwhile as they will be essential dialogue partners in interdisciplinary correlations, challenges, and collaborations with European/American, feminist, womanist, African-American, Latino/a, and fellow Asian-American scholars.

Biblical scholarship, like many other fields, has a lot to do with theory that is supported by analytical and rational argumentation. Yet, ironically, praxis in its empirical and reciprocal relation to theory, whether *a priori* or *a posteriori*, has been mutually

indispensable for the birth of a new theory. Traditions or records reveal such illustrations. It was hearing a youth chanting, “Take up and read,” that caused Augustine’s conversion and the writing of the monumental tome *Confessions*. It was the opposite hills of the philosopher’s walk in Heidelberg, as the legend goes, that spurred Hegel’s theory of dialectic. It was a playground where children played with one another that inspired Gadamer’s concept of play as a clue to ontological cognition. These illustrations might be mere anecdotes. Nevertheless, it is important that authentic and profound thinking, truth if you will, often come out of tangible events, locations, and contexts. Making Korean-American biblical hermeneutics, therefore, can be worthwhile or instrumental because such an endeavor will come out of our own tongues, hearts, and prayers.

