

Continuing gender issues for second-generation Korean-American women in the home and in the church

Grace Choi-Kim
Garrett-Evangelical Seminary

In 1965 the U.S. government abolished the National Origins Act of 1924, opening the gateway for an influx of Korean immigrants. By the 1990s, a large number of these Korean immigrants had children who were between the ages of 18 to 24. During their early years, these children attended their parents' churches, which often provided English-speaking ministries under the leadership of Korean-speaking youth pastors. However, during the 1990s a growing number of young Korean-Americans began to establish separate congregations, both under the umbrella of first-generation immigrant churches and as completely independent churches.

During these years, the rapid development of scholarship in Korean-American studies contributed to numerous works on Korean-American churches (Min 1992, Y.I. Kim 1994, K.C. Kim and S. Kim 1995, A.R. Kim 1996, J.H. Kim 1996). Nevertheless, studies of Korean-American women's experiences in the church are few. Recently, Ai Ra Kim wrote *Women Struggling for a New Life*, documenting first-generation Korean-American women's experiences in the church. At the present time, however, there is no such literature for 1.5 (those who came to America after age five or six) and second-generation Korean-American women's religious experiences. This paper aspires to fill this void.

To this end, I will investigate how the influence of Christianity in the Korean-American community (more specifically, conservative and evangelical Protestantism and Confucius ideology) impacts both first- and second-generation Korean-American women. In pursuing this investigation, I hope to bring about a re-creation of women's self-image, resulting in the transformation of immigrant families, churches, and even entire communities. Another goal is to provide insight into the ethnic and religious experiences of specific first- and second-generation women and to bring about better understanding of the religious experience of contemporary non-white ethnic groups, whose experiences of acculturation and assimilation diverge in significant ways from earlier European immigrant groups.

Context of the Study

A number of sociologists have stated that Confucian ideology and Korean immigrant churches have been the most influential social agents for first-generation Koreans in America during the past 20 years (Hurh and Kim 1984, 1990; Min 1992). Confucianism has arguably been the most significant influence in shaping family structure, marital relationships, gender roles, education, political culture, and other social institutions. It has been the driving force shaping both thought and behavior in Korea since the Yi Dynasty (1392-1910) adopted it as the approved kingdom religion. Confucianism promotes a strong patriarchal, hierarchical and kinship-based society, labeling a woman as a man's property—forced to obey her father before marriage, her husband after marriage, and her son after her husband's death.

Most studies on Korean-American society indicate that Korean immigrant churches model Confucian ideals and play a central role in the adjustment process for Korean immigrants. These churches have become the center of the Korean ethnic community, providing a safe, familiar place to satisfy social and religious needs (Hurh and Kim 1984, 1990; Min 1992). Churches fulfill men's psychological needs of recognition and importance, for example, by conferring leadership titles such as deacon, elder, board member, or trustee. (Most of the pastoral staff and important administrative officers in first-generation churches are male.) Since the social status of most men declines after immigration, men enjoy exercising leadership and power in immigrant churches (A. R. Kim 1996, 67).

Sadly, in spite of the large number of women in Korean immigrant churches and in spite of their sacrificial service, Korean immigrant churches are still fundamentally hierarchical and patriarchal. Although women often do the lion's share of church work (including all of the cooking for special events, coordinating fundraising events for missions, and visiting the sick), they often receive minimal recognition (68). What, then, draws these women to church?

Immigrant Korean women often live and work in socially isolated arenas, such as small groceries stores or dry cleaning shops. As a result, they appreciate and enjoy precious fellowship time in church with their family members and peers. Participation in worship service through the singing of hymns and meditation on the Bible helps to allay their sense of frustration, loneliness, and pain. Regardless of the oppressive situation at hand, churches help to meet their psychological needs (68).

The challenge before me is how to empower not only the process of my own liberation but also that of my community. In this process I want to challenge Korean-American women to discover God as a path to affirm their autonomy against patriarchal authority. I want them to discover God's calling to preach, teach, and form new communities where women's gifts are fully actualized. The question, then, is how have Christianity and Confucianism impacted the role and status of second-generation Korean-American women? With this question in mind, we now turn to the status and role of second-generation women in the home and church, including the length to which second-generation Korean-American women have come in overcoming the various philosophical ideologies and institutional restrictions placed upon them.

Methodology and Epistemology

This research will employ feminist research method and epistemology. The feminist qualitative method is intended to assist unempowered interviewees in engaging in a process of inquiry on their life experiences and views (Behar 1993, Geiger 1986, Patai 1988, Shostak 1989, Tsing 1993, Wolf 1996). Darling (1987) and Etter-Lewis (1991) contend that oral narratives (listening to life histories of women) may be the most excellent method to research women of color who may feel marginalized and unempowered. This method allows for the critical recognition of problems in one's life context.

To gain knowledge of Korean-American women's experiences and values, my positionality as a Korean-American woman is very important, according to the feminist theory. Dorothy Smith (1987, 107) contends that the only way a person can understand a

socially constructed world is to know it from within. The epistemological contribution of women researchers is their “embodied subjectivity” which can create better understanding and knowledge of a phenomenon. In this light, I, as a woman, may be in a better position than a man to examine the lives of other women and as a Korean-American to study the lives of Korean Americans..

Some feminist theorists argue, however, that the “epistemology of insiderness” of feminist theory (that is, only women can understand other women) (Reinharz 1992, 260) might fail to see the differences among women. For instance, awareness of class, racial, and ethnic diversity among women has escalated and has led to “standpoint theory” in the field research. Margery Wolf argues that standpoint implies that “one group’s perspective is more real or better than others; it implies that the greater the oppression, the greater one’s potential knowledge” (Wolf 1996, 13). This feminist “standpoint theory” claims that only those who are of a specific race or ethnic group can research or understand others in a similar context (Hardings 1991, 278, Wolf 1996, 13).

In light of feminist standpoint and positionality theory, my particular standpoint and positionality as a Korean-American woman researcher grants me “double consciousness,” “outsider within,” and “double vision” (Collins in Harding 1991, 131, Wolf 1996, 14). As an insider, I share more common positions and experiences with second-generation Korean-American women due to my particular locationality (historical, national, generational) and positionality (race, gender, class, nationality).

Along with my feminist standpoint and approaches, this dissertation will employ a qualitative approach with social analysis and critical ethnography as the major methodological tools. Critical ethnography, according to Jim Thomas, encompasses the thoughtful and reflective procedures of deciding between conceptual description alternatives and making value-laden judgments to contest policy, research, and other forms of human activity (Thomas 1993). In this light, critical ethnography is an effective and appropriate tool for disclosing the predicament of Korean-American women in patriarchal and hierarchal systems with a political purpose. Furthermore, it promotes women’s self-awareness and emancipation.

Critical ethnography challenges me to turn to the “field” of second-generation young adult women and their narratives as a means of understanding the experiences and views of women’s roles and positions. By positioning myself in the research field of second-generation Korean-American churches, I, as a critical ethnographer, will bring my own “particular and specific embodiment,” in contrast with traditional ethnographers who tend to be invisible, detached, aloof, and objective (Haraway 1988, 582).

As a critical ethnographer, I will consciously dialogue with an awareness of the power dynamics at play between the interviewees and me. I will invite my research respondents to join me in theorizing. Being born and educated in Korea until my college years and having moved to America for my graduate work, I regard myself as a *participant-as-observer* both in the American culture at large and in the Korean-American young adult subculture. I approach Korean-American young adult women as an independent inquirer, searching for meanings, significance, and purpose.

Procedures

I had the opportunity to interview ten women last summer for my independent study with Dr. Jack Seymour. These women shared the following characteristics:

1. All of the women came to America when they were less than five years old. Currently, they are all between 25 to 35 years old. All of them attended Korean-American churches for a considerable part of their childhood and adolescence. Their formal education took place completely in the U.S.
2. Although these women grew up in different states, all presently live in the Chicago metropolitan area.
3. Two of the women are housewives who were previously very active in their professional lives but decided to stay home to raise their children. Eight of the women are working professionals (two CPA accountants, one high school teacher, one business consultant, one psychologist, one college recruiting coordinator, one ESL teacher, one medical doctor).
4. Five women attend English services in Korean immigrant churches. The other five attend second-generation independent Asian churches.

The interview questions consisted of a combination of structured and semi-structured inquiries into the interviewees' background, experiences, feelings, knowledge, and especially, their views on women's roles and position in the home and church. All names have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

Data Collection

I employed three data collection procedures discussed within the context of qualitative research: interviews, observations, and documents. The areas of data collection are as follows: a) data collected from my own nine years of ministry experience with second-generation Korean-American young adults as an educator and minister, b) data collected through individual interviews, c) data collected through social analysis of Korean-American literature.

The Language About God

Recently, expressions for God and the use of image and metaphor have become critical issues for feminist educators. As Maria Harris writes, "My first awareness of the impact of contemporary feminism came when I awoke to the issue of inclusive language" (Harris 1984, 19). In fact, "not only were we, as humans, creating us, language was at the same time creating us" (19). Feminist educators recognize that "the symbol of God functions as the primary symbol of the whole religious system, the ultimate point of reference for understanding experience, life, and the world" (Johnson 1992, 4). Language molds our imagination and our image of God; it also shapes our understanding of God and what it means for us, as female and male, to be made in the image of God.

Churches, however, have made very slow progress in understanding how God-language shapes how we name, perceive, and understand God in relationship to humankind. Some small transformations in our expressions for God and inclusive language have begun to enter our thinking and liturgy. Yet the educational task of constructing a God-language is far behind the feminist theological constructive thinking about God (Morton 1997, 51). Similar to Confucian ideology (for example, the whole structure of a Father-ruled society with the male dominating the female), Judeo-Christian thought has reinforced hierarchical stratification using the Divine as the zenith of this system of privilege and control.

According to Ai Ra Kim's interviews with first-generation Korean women, God is described as an almighty male Creator, Helper, Judge, Protector, and Ruler that requires absolute obedience from women. Only one of the 22 women interviewed described God as love. The degree to which first-generation women advocate sexist anthropomorphic views of God parallels their scale of religiosity and social orientation. The more religious and more "Korean" the women are, the more fervently they assert gender hierarchy and male supremacy (A. R. Kim 1996, 89-90).

Along with this patriarchal concept of the Christian God, the traditional Korean concept of *Hananim* ("God in heaven") before Christianity became popular in Korea seems to reinforce the perception of God as the male transcendent and authoritarian God among Korean-American women. The early Christian leaders in Korea took up the term *Hananim* for the supreme God of their new religion to resolve the impending incongruity between the new doctrine and the core values of the Koreans. The term *Hananim* denotes the highest deity in their religious traditions from primitive times, and the Judeo-Christian God fits perfectly into their distinctive and traditional image of *Hananim* (Grayson 1985, 135; Kim 2000, 119).

In contrast to first-generation women, the second generation seems to have a much less sexist and anthropomorphic view of God, though everyone I interviewed portrayed God as a male who is holy, sovereign, loving, merciful, just, and wise. They seem to understand different aspects of the characteristics of God. Many of the women interviewed said they initially thought of God as a disciplinarian and later, as an authoritarian as they grew older. For example, Christine Choi, who is very active in an Asian American church, had this to say:

My initial image of God was very similar to that of my father--very stern, unaffectionate, and distant. The only time I sensed any kind of approval from my father was when I did something right in his eyes. I felt the same way about God and his approval of me. If I did any wrong, I thought there was almost nothing I could do to remedy the situation or change how my father viewed me.

Here, her description of God mirrors her impression of her earthly father. Many Korean men are undemonstrative toward their children; Confucius teaches that men should be very aloof and authoritative, especially toward their children. Honored men are supposed to rule and govern their household (particularly their wives and children) with authority and strict discipline.

Jenny Yoo very perceptively recognized that her view of God stems from her Korean cultural baggage.

I used to feel, and still often do, that I have to earn His grace. It is a hard concept to master that grace cannot be earned. I do believe this is partly because of my Korean background. God seems more like a disciplinarian and authoritarian. However, the other women I interviewed were able to move beyond their initial perceptions of God after they became seriously involved in Bible studies, scripture reading, and prayer. They now describe God as Love, yet the loving God is a father image of the male.

Second-generation understanding of God reflects the language and view of evangelical Christianity. The second generation emphasizes being "born again" and having a personal encounter with God as opposed to the emphasis on loyalty and commitment by the first-generation church. The second generation chooses Christianity

as the basis for its identity. Due to the language barrier and difficulty of adjustment for first-generation Koreans, many personal and material resources were not available for their children's Christian education. Korean churches would sometimes recruit a "mission-minded" adult from a Caucasian church or local seminary for their children's ministry (Goetti 1993, 241; Chai 1998, 310). Thus, most second-generation children grew up with a very evangelical doctrine and teaching. Having pastors who attended conservative theological schools, these second-generation churches tend to be very evangelical in theology. As a result, their views and expressions for God are very much congruent with the present American evangelical view of God.

The Relationship Between Husband and Wife

According to Ai Ra Kim's interviews (A. R. Kim 1996, 112), most first-generation Korean women, especially housewives, rationalize women's inferiority and legitimize their low self-image for the sake of personal survival or to avoid causing trouble in the Korean Christian community. They accept and justify gender hierarchy and female inferiority based on their understanding of Christian beliefs about women's role and status or more Christianized Confucian ideology of gender hierarchy. First-generation career women, on the other hand, waver between God-sanctioned male omnipotence and male-female equality. They are relatively free of traditional obligations and are less religious and more unconventional in their view of God and the relationship between husband and wife. Women whose lives are more immersed in Korean Christianity, however, are still prisoners of the traditional expectations of woman as the selfless nurturer, and are upholders of patriarchy in their thinking. Yet regardless of background, they try to live out their Christianity in reference to the Christianized version of the Korean Confucian culture (91-5).

Several studies demonstrate that when American women work outside the home, power relations between husband and wife start to change. This shows that there is room for adjustment and transformation of marital power even in a patriarchal society. Studies about other immigrant married women suggest that their participation in the labor force affects family life, living arrangements, the division of domestic labor, and conjugal power relations (Chang and Moon 1998, 75).

However, the results of an empirical study of 200 Korean immigrant women (looking at work status, conjugal power relations and marital satisfaction among Korean immigrant married women) presented by Hye Kyoung Chang and Ailee Moon contradict that finding. This study found that married Korean immigrant women's work status and type of employment have no impact on their conjugal power relations and marital satisfaction. Working women's financial contributions do not improve their gender roles and decision-making status in the family. Instead, working outside the home tends to cause marital conflict. These working women, who held the least traditional attitudes toward gender roles, seemed least satisfied (75-87).

A Korean sociologist, Pyong Gap Min, analyzes "the burden of labor on Korean first generation wives in and outside the family" based on interviews with 298 Korean immigrant wives in New York City. This study shows that the majority of Korean wives labor for many more hours than their American counterparts and their husbands. Furthermore, their length of residence in America does not largely affect their value of

gender roles, due to working in the ethnic sub-economy. First-generation women who have more progressive views on gender issues expect their husbands to be more supportive, yet their husbands' attitudes are not conducive to modifying their gender role. Thus, the majority of Korean first-generation wives often face the overwhelming work in and outside of the family with frustration and stress (Min 1998, 97-99).

To further analyze and understand their view of themselves and their position as wives, we must examine the teaching of Christian churches and the experiences of pre-modern Korean women (Choson Dynasty women). The following section will discuss these issues.

Common Teachings of the Korean Churches

Korean churches teach that women should submit to men "just as the church submits itself to Christ" (Eph. 5:24). Women's subjugation has been justified by interpretations like these: Eve was created from a man's rib to be a helper for Adam (Gen. 2); it was Eve who brought sin into God's created design (Gen. 4); women are unclean during menstruation and seven days thereafter (Lev. 15:19-33:19-23); female sexuality is a "dangerous" force that needs to be purified and to be controlled by men (Lev. 8, 9, 15, 18, 21); women ought to submit to male leadership in the church by God's created design (I Cor. 11:1-16); women should be quiet in public (I Cor. 14:33b-35); and wives should submit themselves to their husbands as to the Lord (Eph. 5:22-24).

Both the Old and New Testaments are full of claims regarding women's submission and subordination to men as God's ordained and unquestionable rule and order. Christian theologians and church fathers have established patriarchal ideologies for the last 20 centuries. At their worst, Korean immigrant churches Christianize the Confucian ideology of women's subjugation to men to enhance and justify the patriarchal system. Therefore, the good news for everyone – women and men, slaves and free, Gentiles and Jews (Gal. 3) – has been both oppressive and liberating for women in the church. For instance, Christianity has been a liberating force by being a powerful catalyst for social change in Korea. Missionaries from America have built many schools for the lower class and outcast groups (especially women) to improve their literacy and provide a better life. The next sections will explore how the convergence of Korean social values and priorities with Pauline ones has made the gospel of Jesus Christ a tool of oppression for many Korean American women.

Obey Your Husband (Yi Dynasty Wives)

The ruling ideology of the Choson dynasty in Korea (1732-1910) has defined the role and place of Korean women for the last several centuries in Korea. This role is based on the *Sam-gano-ryun* (three principles and five norms). The three principles are standards for structuring and enhancing hierarchy and submission. These principles lay out the proper rules and conduct between ruler and ruled, elder and youth, husband and wife. The principles together with the norms underscore the basic tenets of Confucian teachings and legitimize the authority of the group of ruling classes, elders, and the male population (Kim, J. H. 1996, 9).

Furthermore, Confucian scholars and politicians (all males) have articulated and reinforced severe ritual codes (*chilgochiak*: the "seven offenses") and legal rights of men over women. If a woman commits any of these seven offenses, the husband has a right to

divorce the wife. The seven offenses are as follows: not bearing a son, disobeying a parent-in-law, adultery, jealousy, theft, chronic illness, and talkativeness. Purely gender-based discrimination of Confucian ideologies has caused women to go through enormous struggles to make sense of their oppression by men--especially their fathers, husbands, and sons (10).

Reflecting on the teachings of the Korean churches and the impact of Confucianism illustrates why most first-generation Korean women, especially the housewives Ai Ra Kim interviewed, rationalize women's inferiority and legitimize their low self-image. For the sake of personal survival and avoiding trouble in the home and Korean Christian community, they need to accept and justify gender hierarchy and female inferiority based on their understanding of Christian beliefs or the more Christianized Confucian ideology of gender hierarchy.

Second-Generation Women's View on the Relationship Between Husband and Wife

Second-generation women, on the other hand, display a more diverse spectrum of stances than first-generation women on the relationship between husband and wife (although seven out of ten respondents reveal their evangelical flavor and frequently refer to Paul's letter to the Ephesians as the ideal relationship for husband and wives in families). Though they strongly believe that male headship is a biblical truth they need to follow, they do not abide by female inferiority or rationalize gender hierarchy, unlike the majority of first-generation Korean-American women interviewed by A. R. Kim. In my interviews, I observed that the more involved the women are in their church, the more conservative they seem to be on this issue. Listen to what Jean Kim, who decided to stay home with her children (rather than pursue a career), says:

I believe it is biblical that man is the head of the woman. It is a complicated thing, however, to see it lived out in daily life. First of all, I love being a woman! God made me a woman for a reason, and I revel in most aspects of it, motherhood being one of them. I personally fight the urge to lead and assert my own leadership in my marriage. I am a stubborn person. It is not easy to not get my way. This often causes discord.

Jean seems to be very content with her role as a housewife and mother of three children because she believes this is God's ordained position for her right now. Even though she struggled initially to accept the traditional role as mother and wife, now feels she God has been working in her heart to receive her reality with gratitude. She believes that she is fortunate to have three healthy children and to be able to stay home without any financial repercussions. Jean goes on to specify the reason why she believes her husband is the head of her household:

I often defer to my husband in some areas mainly because of his greater wisdom--for example, spiritual maturity and finances. Whether I do this because he is the man or because he just happens to be wiser in these areas, I don't know. I do know that God in His perfect knowledge planned it this way, and as far as I am able to follow Him, there is familial harmony, and even greater blessings. Allowing the man to be the head of the family out of obedience to God, in addition to other forms of godly obedience, seems to be the key point. It is not enough to appoint the man the head and not obey God in any other way. The man has to be a godly man.

Jean characterizes men's headship as having spiritual maturity and being able to provide financially for the family. This entails a sense of men's ultimate accountability to the spiritual and material well-being of the family before God. As long as he is a godly man, acknowledging and allowing the husband to be head of the family is God's will. In other words, if a wife doesn't acknowledge her husband as the head of her household, she is disobeying God.

Another frequently cited component of men's headship involves the responsibility for making decisions. Psychology Ph.D. student Mijin Oh tries to explain her belief in the male headship:

The man must carry the responsibility of loving his wife so much that he would give up his life for her, and I believe this is true in the pastoral male positions also. They must love the other staff members or church members so much that they would be able to give up their life for them. If the man understands what it really means to be head of the woman, he would know and understand it means to sacrifice his life and serve the woman unconditionally as Christ did the church and ultimately died for the church. Within this context, I love to embrace and teach it to others as the heart of God.

Mijin defines male headship as being accountable for loving the wife and providing guidance and encouragement to her. Quoting the Bible, she compares the relationship between husband and wife with the relationship between Christ and the church.

Two respondents who are less involved in church express a more egalitarian view. Martha Lim, an accountant, put it in this way:

Even though the Apostle Paul was inspired and used by God, he is a man of his time. When he says that man is the head of the woman and woman should be submissive to her husband, [that] may be somewhat cultural as many things are in the Bible, e.g., polygamy.

Another woman who works as a consultant explains her view this view:

If I think about how women were treated in those days (first century), I find Paul somewhat radical in asking men to love their wives in such a way as Christ did for the church. Submission was not even a question for both women and slaves at that time. I think Paul's emphasis is on the state of the heart to do it willingly, gladly, as unto the Lord. Personally, I would like to be loved in no other way than the Bible commands men to do for their wives!

She factors the status and position of women in the biblical time period in her understanding of this Bible passage. Both of these women consider this aspect of Paul's teaching as cultural bias, rather than one of the God's unchangeable commandments.

Like the two married respondents, five of the unmarried respondents who have been very active in their churches emphasize the importance of spiritual headship. This may be because the majority of the independent Asian churches and Korean churches in Chicago area are very evangelical and their teachings of the Bible are very conservative. Surprisingly, only one respondent mentions mutual submission.

Being Single at Church

For Korean parents, marrying off their daughters seems to be one of the most important parental duties, not just during the Yi Dynasty period but even in the present

Korean community in America. From my observation, many parents encourage their young adult children to attend second-generation Korean-American churches, even though they themselves do not attend church (they know Korean churches are the biggest social places to meet other second-generation young adults). These parents expect their children to find Korean-American spouses, and see marriage as an important obligation to fulfill. Not only do Korean parents feel that it is essential for their children to be married and have a family, they tend to view singleness past a certain age as abnormal.

Shua Shin, an American-born woman who is now 33 years old, displays her angst toward her parents, who are the leaders of a Korean immigrant church in Chicago, and shares how she overcame the strong parental resistance to unmarried life:

My parents are very disappointed because I've chosen not to follow the path of marriage and having a family. I have even told my parents of the possibility that I may remain single, which has caused further angst for my parents. They have refused to believe that God may be calling me to be single, although both my parents claim to be Christians. I know that they have often wondered why I remain single when most of their friends' children are now married with children of their own. Overall, I just wish that they would leave me alone with this subject. The issue of marriage adds on to the message that I am not a complete person without a husband.

Her parents believe that marriage is what every woman should have. Shua eventually moved out of her parents' house because of their insistence on her getting married (the majority of second-generation women live with their parents until they are married).

Similarly, many first-generation parents consider marriage as the primary means of survival for women. The first-generation Korean-American women's self-image has been molded and formed through their obligation and abnegation in family lives; many first-generation women have developed their collective identities with their spouse and their families. They have lived their lives through their husbands and see the family as the center of their lives (A. R. Kim 1996, 8). Due to the heavy emphasis on collective identity as a family member, first-generation parents do not regard single life after a certain age as a legitimate alternative way of life for either a man or a woman. Within the Korean family, children are treated as children until they are married. Clearly, their view on marriage severely reflects the more traditional ideology of the Yi dynasty.

Even as recently as the 1960s, marriage ceremonies were performed for the deceased, since Koreans often consider marriage a sacred means of affirming one's full humanity. Due to the belief that the unmarried dead would be forever full of *Han* (deep sorrow), it was a widespread custom to marry the dead spirits of unmarried men and women through rituals. Their Han would be discharged through "soul-marriage" in death (46). As discussed before, Koreans in their deep consciousness believe that marriage is a channel to personal fulfillment.

The Korean churches' tendency to favor married life and married people over single life brings about tremendous pain and stress for those who do not fit that role. Even I grew up hearing the same message: "You need to go to a good college to meet a well-educated man." A lot of parents think that meeting a good Korean husband is the number one priority because they believe a woman's happiness depends upon her husband.

Unlike first-generation women, some second-generation women fight against the normative lifestyle of the first generation and make tremendous efforts to overcome through Christian faith. Shua Shin shares her conflicts with her parents and the healing process in this way:

InterVarsity opened my eyes to the reality that God created me for a reason and a purpose and therefore, I am important. I decided then that I would move out of my parents' home for the sake of sanity and to live out God's will and purpose. As a result of being more confident in my identity in Christ, I pulled further away from my parents' expectations. Of course, they saw this as disobedient and dishonoring, but I chose not to listen to the "guilt" when I knew God had other plans for me. To this day, these same issues cause further strife and strain in my relationship with my parents and so I have asked them not to bring up issues of career and marriage.

Shua is in dilemma to meet her parent's expectation to get married, even though she doesn't want to, because she believes that disobeying and dishonoring her parents is sin before God. At the same time, she is able to cling onto her faith in Christ to overcome any feelings of guilt.

As described before, the Korean churches give the impression that marriage is the norm, essential to human life and ordained by God. Churches are known as an "inclusive" community, yet they seem to be very "exclusive" and family-oriented in this matter. According to Ai Ra Kim, single or divorced women easily become social outcasts or are constantly bothered by people who are prone to matchmaking. In Korean churches matchmaking is a significant function, sometimes for the sake of keeping the Korean blood. Pastors and church leaders buttress the institution of marriage through Bible study and marriage counseling (A.R. Kim 1996, 75).

The Status and Role of Korean-American Women in Churches

Throughout most of Christian history, patriarchal theology has rigidly prohibited women from the ministry. Women have been excluded from leadership in churches as well as in society in general, based on the general theology of male leadership and female subordination. This subordination is ascribed to women's physiological role in procreation and extends to an inferiority of mind and soul as well. Women are classified as being less capable than men in the areas of moral self-control and reason. In priestly traditions, female bodily discharges are viewed as polluting and defiling the sacred. Holiness belongs to the male realm, whereas "uncleanness" lies in the female from birth (Ruether 1993,195).

Women in ministry: Theologies of Exclusion in Korean-American Immigrant Churches

There has been some progress in the status of first-generation women in immigrant churches. Small numbers of women have begun to serve in church administration and decision making as members of committees, councils, and boards. But given the large number of churchwomen and their sacrificial services, by no means has their full potential been realized.

For instance, being ordained as an elder carries a special prestige in Korean immigrant churches. According to PCUSA statistics, in 1997 a relatively small

proportion (15 percent) of Koreans were ordained as elders, where being an elder is of a much higher status than being a deacon. In view of the higher status, a greater proportion of males would be expected to be ordained than females, according to our prior analysis. Indeed, the PCUSA statistics show that 92 percent of Korean elders are males while only 8 percent are females. That is, a mere 2.3 percent of female members in the Korean sample are ordained elders, in contrast to 28.6 percent of male members. This is even more significant when we compare this to the 57 percent of Caucasian, 39 percent of Hispanic and 30 percent of African-American females that have been ordained as elders. In fact, a majority of Korean Presbyterian churches have been under great pressure to ordain more women as elders for some time (K.C. Kim and S. Kim, 2000, 83-4).

Regarding pastoral positions, out of 350 Korean immigrant churches in the Chicago area, only two senior pastors are women and only one first-generation Korean woman has planted a second-generation independent church, and that just one year ago.

According to 1993 United Methodist denomination statistics, only six out of more than 350 Korean United Methodist churches in America have women pastors. Two women pastors serve as co-pastors with their husbands, yet their ministry is limited to just women. One of the clergywomen is in charge over the educational ministry in her church. Others work for American churches as pastors or associate pastors, even though their first choice would be to serve in Korean-American churches (A. R. Kim 1996, 71-72).

While such mainline denominations as the Presbyterian Church of USA (PCUSA) and the United Methodist Church (UMC) do sanction and ordain women as pastors and elders, admission for women into senior or associate pastor positions in Korean-American churches remains blocked by a veritable glass ceiling. The statistics demonstrate that women in ministry are under tremendous pressure in male-dominated patriarchal churches. They are, however, making an effort to create and develop a new image for themselves.

Second-Generation Women's View on Women in Pastoral Leadership

Even though second-generation women have begun to take some important roles in leadership, only one respondent (eight of the ten respondents are very active in their churches) works as a committee member of an elder board, and the rest hold more traditional roles such as teaching Sunday School for young children or serving on a refreshments committee. In my interviews, seven of the respondents express uneasiness about women in pastoral leadership. Yujin Park (who is very gifted, yet unable to see herself as a leader) says:

To be honest, I am uncomfortable with women in pastoral leadership positions. Because first of all, I think this would pose a great problem for the great majority of churches. And secondly, because of what Paul says about man being the head of the woman and also the fact that woman was created from man, I personally would not be in support of a woman pastoral leadership position, but I also have to say that I don't know exactly how to interpret 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, which states that women should remain silent and be in submission in the churches.

She quotes the Bible to justify what she believes is right. At the same time, she expresses her confusion about women's role in the church. She seems to be very content with her

role as a refreshment coordinator. When I talk to her, she seems to be very gifted and well-versed in many ways. She is even a manager of her department at work, yet regarding women's role in the church, she seems to be very conservative.

Even Juliet Lee (a consultant who travels all over the world every week), who tends to be the most liberal on most of the issues discussed above, exhibits her discomfort at the thought of a female pastor:

[I am] very liberal in belief, but still feel a little uncomfortable with women pastors. I still see men pastors as an all-knowing presence, especially older pastors. Knowing the women as I do, and the personalities that women can have, I think they could come across as either being too emotional or too butch. Juliet seems to have a very clear picture of what the male pastor should be like (someone who is very wise, astute, knows everything, and has tremendous patience and a great persona). She has a very low view of women in general.

Jean Kim appears very confused about this issue. Like me, Jean has heard that many gifted women pastors are doing a great job on the mission field, especially in Asia, where her husband as the president of a missionary organization often travels. At the same time, her church teaches that women should not be ordained as a pastor. This woman's ambiguity is glaring. Jean says that on the one hand, she would love to see more women involved and would want to personally benefit from the fruit of their ministry. On the other hand, she is not comfortable about this matter because of her church's particular teaching. Yet she seems to be very open to whatever might be true to God and His Word, and ready to learn.

Only a couple of women who attend Asian American independent churches display a more egalitarian view of women in ministry. Martha Lim (an accountant) explains her view on women in the ministry:

I feel it is fine for women to be in pastoral leadership as long as they have the time and commitment to give to the ministry and the people in the church. As qualified in character, leadership, temperament, etc.--and as God leads! Martha believes that as long as a woman is as committed and qualified as a man in the ministry, she approves of women in pastoral leadership.

According to my survey in the Chicago metropolitan area, there are at least 12 English ministries within Korean churches and five Asian American churches (predominantly Korean or at least more than half of the congregation is Korean), which have more than 80 young adults members. Only one second-generation woman pastor, who is not ordained and a graduate from Princeton Seminary, serves in an English ministry for college students and young adults at Asbury United Methodist church. To some degree, this statistic may reflect how second-generation women feel and think about women in ministry as described in my interview excerpts.

Discussion

Immigrant Korean churches operate as a mini-version of Korea in America. This immigrant Korean community is a microcosm of the "modern Yi society" in America, and the Korean church, the most important institution in Korean immigrant society, clearly reflects the ideology of the Yi dynasty and modern Korean society (A.R. Kim, 1996). These observations witness to the double minority status of first-generation

women who encounter sexism in the church and racism from the larger society in America.

How do the roles and views of second-generation Korean-Americans differ from those of the first generation? According to Chai (1998), second-generation Koreans choose the Korean church because “the church is a safe space where ethnicity and spirituality merge into one,” and it provides a deeper sense of spirituality and Christian identity. Compared with the first-generation churches, the second-generation churches tend to place greater emphasis on Christian ethics, evangelism, and personal encounter with God. They shift their focus from learning Korean culture and language to maximizing their personal growth in Jesus Christ (Chai 1998, 311).

Their worship has “loosened up” in terms of music, dress, and worship schedule, but the worship also reflects very intense and spiritual aspects of their Christian faith. Their worship is very similar to the “Vineyard-style” where lyrics accompanied by a guitar, an electronic keyboard, and drums are projected on an overhead screen as opposed to traditional hymns, which are traditionally accompanied by an organ or a piano. However, these churches may have more of a communal flavor than the predominantly white Vineyard churches. In this respect, they blend evangelistic flavor with Korean Confucian culture. At the same time, second-generation churches keep their parents’ conservative theological perspectives (311).

From my observation over the past nine years, the Korean-American churches that I visited (at least more than 50 English services in Korean-American churches and Asian American churches in the United States) have almost a uniform style of worship (Vineyard-style) and sermons that just focus on the individual’s salvation and sanctification. There is virtually no second-generation Korean-American female pastor at the pulpit. I did not find any inclusive language about God during the worship, in the sermons that were preached by male pastors, or in the church service documents. Lack of women's voices and leadership within the church is clearly reflected in the interviews and my nine years of observation.

The second-generation Korean-American churches are a strong reflection of their first-generation churches as well as contemporary American evangelism. These dual influences are reflected not just in my interviews but also in their strong focus on individual salvation, confession of sins, and strict moral code and conscience. The influence is further accentuated by the fact that most of the second-generation Korean-American pastors have been trained in more conservative seminaries such as Trinity Evangelical, Gordon Conwell, Talbot, Fuller, and Westminster.

What factors, then, have affected the present status and role of women in immigrant churches and second-generation churches? First, churches throughout history have disapproved of women in pastoral leadership. Second, the traditional Confucian ideology, which regards women as the property of men, still implicitly influences and intensifies gender hierarchy. Third, in their sermons first-generation Korean pastors implicitly and explicitly praise women that sacrifice for their men and children, and these sermons are the most powerful tools to transmit ideas and values in Korean churches (Kim 1996, 74). Pastors also emphasize self-sacrifice as the primary requirement for being a virtuous woman (100). Fourth, the majority of women have not seen or heard women preachers at their church pulpit. In my own nine years of experience, I have

never attended a single church that would host a woman pastor as guest speaker for a Sunday service or a church retreat. Fifth, there is a paucity of good female role models whose ministries are prosperous and well-respected among first- and second-generation women.

In this respect, second-generation women do not exactly reflect the gender socialization of American evangelicalism. Second-generation women's views on the gender issues and women's ordination are very congruent with a blend of evangelicalism and Korean Confucian heritage.

Implications for Christian Education for Korean-American Women

According to Rosemary Ruether, "Conversion from sexism means both freeing oneself from the ideologies and roles of patriarchy and also struggling to liberate social structures from these patterns"(Ruether 1993, 201). She believes that "a beginning of this transformation might happen in the local churches of more liberal denominations, with women pastors or women and men in team ministry, who share a vision of the Gospel as liberation from patriarchy."

The challenge, then, is how we might help Korean-American churches reflect and use inclusive language for God, overcome the monopolization of ministry by men, and create instead a shared ministry. How, in church praxis, could the marginalized women, especially in Asian American churches, rectify and reform the present system of injustice in order to claim the redeemed community for both males and females? In a context where Confucius speaks much louder than Jesus, how can we as Asian women challenge the authority of men in a male-dominated ministry setting?

We as pastors and ministers need to analyze and draw upon Korean history, Korean-American history, and church history to better understand why and how the present relationship has been formed between parents and children, husbands and wives, Korean-American churches and their congregations. The documents of history trace the genesis of social context, ideology, and philosophy, and they explain how oppressive structures have emerged. Historical analysis assists in the understanding of present gender norms and social regulations in the home and in Korean-American churches and communities. This process of critical inquiry can provide a source of consciousness and a new direction for Korean-American women.

James Poling believes that "suffering and healing in the congregation are embedded in narrative histories with plots, unfinished stories, and an open future"(Garrett Seminary lecture). In order for the congregation to be a healing community, they must remember their journey of suffering and their stories from the past and draw upon the faith that has sustained them. In this way, remembering history can help us recover the truth of the biblical mandate without glossing over it.

We also need to envision a healthy Korean-American identity in both the Christian and Confucian Korean-American contexts. A more holistic understanding of the individual and a new theological framework of self are necessary for Korean-American women. Therefore, the educational and pastoral ministry for Korean-American women calls for a theory of healthy personhood that fosters the well-being of individual Korean-American women and their communities. In other words, the church as a

transforming and healing community must promote women's equality with men and project a new and positive understanding of womanhood.

Finally, as a future project in my educational journey, I want to propose an educational ministry framework for women's healing and growth that integrates theology, biblical studies, social sciences, and church practice in the context of women's life realities and experiences. This new framework will foster not only women's spiritual, emotional, psychological, theological, and biblical self-development, but also build the community of faith for both men and women. With such a goal in mind, a '*community theology*' (which will encompass feminist theology) will be proposed to promote women's self-awareness and self-reflection. This process will hopefully bring about a re-creation of the woman's self-image with the result that immigrant families, churches, and even whole communities will be transformed.

When I asked second-generation Korean American women, "When you hear the word 'feminist,' what words or images come to mind?," a majority of women I interviewed expressed very negative responses, with words like *overbearing*, *selfish*, *domineering*, *anti-men/anti-relationship*, and *strong*. One woman had this to say:

The word "feminist" conjures up in my mind the word "fear." That is my first reaction. Feminism seems to be a fight against being overtaken, a fight for survival, a struggle against forces that try to beat us down. It is a defensive term. It is a term of reaction.

Somehow, many second-generation women have developed very negative thoughts about feminists and the feminist movement. Jung Ha Kim, a Korean-American socialist, contends that "Korean-American women often share in the church setting their reluctance to identify with feminism (and women-ism for that matter), for they perceive it as 'someone else's' movement. Feminist goals and methods do not address the struggles of Korean-American women in their racial and ethnic communities, where, in order to survive racism, capitalism, and imperialism, both women and men have had to be interdependent" (Kim, J. H. 1997, 24). Since feminism, or even women-ism, has largely been developed outside the experience of Korean women, it cannot effectively attend to the unique and particular struggles, pains, and contexts of Korean women.

When working with an ethnic community, it is important to be mindful of language, culture, and ethos, not categorizing liberation as predominately a "white" feminist movement or a predominantly "black" women-ist movement. There are concrete differences and similarities in various racial and ethnic contexts, whether the women are white, black, Latino, or Asian American.

I do not want to minimize the common goals and struggles of feminists and women-ists among women of different race and ethnicity, nor diminish the impact of their contribution to society at large. I believe we need to build our work upon their accomplishments, too. I want to propose a theology called "community theology," instead of feminist theology. Community theology embraces and incorporates feminist and women-ist movements. Before putting community theology into practice, feminist theology should first be launched to provide a foundation.

This community theology does not negate the worth of the individual; rather the individual cannot be fully appreciated apart from his or her role in the community.

Korean-American churches, influenced by Confucianism, have been built on the communal self, rather than the individual self. Their history does not fit the modern culture because, contrary to modern ideology, Korean history makes relationship and community central to its ideology. A community theology would embrace the post-modern concept of the “non-individualistic or corporate view of community” (Murphy 1997, 6) in contradistinction to modern individualism and atomism.

In praxis for Community theology, we as ministers need to ask ourselves how we can create a safe space to encourage congregational members to engage and discuss the issues of patriarchy and hierarchy. The sharpening of women’s intellectual reflections can be a very powerful tool to raise consciousness of their oppressed state. When women are encouraged to give voice to their pains and hurts in small group settings, they are empowered by the support of other women to move away from self-hate, shame, and guilt. They attain a more lucid and authentic understanding of their identity, which has been obfuscated by a patriarchal culture (Chung 1997, 96-97).

A loving and safe community can be created, where Korean Americans are accepted and loved regardless of who they are in the midst of generational conflicts, gender prejudice, and women’s confined roles in their families, Korean churches, and communities. Korean-American women would then be free to experience God’s grace and power in their painful stories, though they may still carry their burdens and wounds from the past.

The journey of Korean-American women toward a new expression for God and new experiences through small groups should be creative and prophetic. Theology for Asian-American women must come in a language of hope, dreams, and poetry. It ought to bring out the remembrance of their original wholeness in creation and their experience of active healing. It can produce healing and nurture not only in terms of theological or liturgical expression but also in terms of concrete mutual commitment. It can promote justice and peace for the afflicted and exploited among women. It can do this not just in churches but also in communities and throughout society.

Finally, in order to build a healthy and benevolent community of faith, there is a crucial need for dialogue between women and men in order for the grace of God to be mutually experienced in the house of God. It is important for educators and ministers to provide a safe space for both men and women to have an authentic, genuine, and healthy community of faith. Through such a dialogue the congregation may become a healing community.

Bibliography

- Chai, J. Karen. "Competing for the Second Generation: English-Language Ministry at a Korean Protestant Church" *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration*. ed. R. Stephen Warner and Judith G. Wittner. Temple University Press, 1998
- Chang, Hye Kyoung and Moon, Alice. "Work Status, Conjugal Power Relations, and Marital Satisfaction among Korean Immigrant Married Women" *Korean American Women: From Tradition to Modern Feminism*. ed. Young I. Song and Aliee Moon. Westport: Praeger, 1998
- Connell, Robert, *Masculinities*. University of California Press, 1995
- Darling Marsha Jean. "The Disinherited as Source: Rural Black Women's Memories." *Michigan quarterly Review* 26, no. 1:48-63. 1987
- Etter-Lewis, Gwendolyn. "Black Women's Life Stories: Reclaiming Self in Narrative Texts." *In Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, ed. by Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai New York: Routledge, 1991
- Glesne, Corrine. *Becoming Qualitative Researcher*, 2nd edition New York: Longman, 1999
- Haraway, Donna. "Situated Knowledge: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of the Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (fall 1988): 58-72.
- Harris, Maria. "Weaving the Fabric: How My Mind has changed." *Religious Education* 79 (Winter 1984): 19.
- Johnson, Elizabeth. *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, New York: Crossroad, 1992
- Keely, Anne Barbara. *Faith of Our Foremothers: Women Changing Religious Education*. Westminster John Knox Press, 1997
- Kim, Ai Ra *Women Struggling for a New Life*. State University of New York press, 1996
- Kim, El-Hannah. "The Social Reality of Korean American Women: Toward Crashing with the Confucian Theology" *Korean American Women: From Tradition to Modern Feminism*. ed. Young I. Song and Aliee Moon. Westport: Praeger, 1998
- Kim, Jung Ha. *Bridge-Makers and Cross-Bearers*. Scholars Press, 1997
- Kim, Kwang Chung and Shin. "The Ethnic Roles of Korean Immigrant Churches in the United States" *Korean Americans and Their Religions*. ed. Ho-Youn Kwon, Kwang Chung Kim, R. Stephen Warner. Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001
- Mead, George Herbert. *On Social Psychology*. Chicago: University Press of Chicago Press, 1964.
- Min, Pyong Gap. "The Korean American Family." *In Ethnic Families in America; Patterns and Variations*. ed. Charles H. Mindel. New York: Elsevier, 1992
- Min, Pyong Gap, editor. *Asian Americans: Contemporary Trends and Issues*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995
- Morton, Nelle. "A Radical Journey." ed. Keely, Anne Barbara. *Faith of Our Foremothers: Women Changing Religious Education*. Westminster John Knox Press, 1997
- Murphy, N. *Anglo-American Postmodernity: Philosophical Perspectives on Science, Religion, and Ethics*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997

Parks, Daloz Sharon. *Big Questions Worthy Dreams*. Jossey-Bass inc., 2000

Reinharz, Shulamit. *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992

Ruether, Rosemary Radford. *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*. Beacon Press, 1993

Smith, Dorothy E. *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987

Sohng, Sung Sil Lee. "A Critical Feminist Inquiry in a Multicultural Context" *Korean American Women: From Tradition to Modern Feminism*. ed. Young I. Song and Aliee Moon. Westport: Praeger, 1998

Song, Young I. and Moon, Aliee. *Korean American Women: From Tradition to Modern Feminism*. ed. Westport: Praeger, 1998

Thomas, Jim *Doing Critical Ethnography* Newbury park: Sage Publications, 1993

Wolf, L. Diane. *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*. Westview: Oxford, 1996