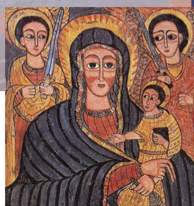
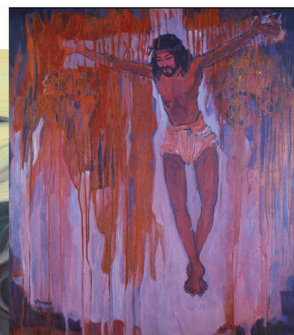
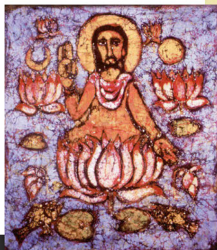


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Minjung Theology Today

Contextual and Intercultural Perspectives



Contact Zone

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ContactZone

Explorations in Intercultural Theology

edited by

Prof. Dr. Volker Küster
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Jin-Kwan Kwon | Volker Küster (Eds.)

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Contextual and Intercultural Perspectives



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Introduction

This book is an outcome of the International Conference on *Minjung*, Liberation, and Contextual Theologies in Asia. The conference was to celebrate the life and work of the late Prof. Prof. Suh Nam-Dong (1918-1984), on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of his death. It was held on October 24-25, 2014, at Songdo Yonsei University International Campus in South Korea.

More than 50 theologians and scholars, more than 10 of whom were from abroad, joined in the conference and shared their theological wisdom and ideas, especially on a new liberation theology in Asia. We attempted to re-evaluate *Minjung* (민중, 民衆, the oppressed but resistant people) theology, especially its relevance to the new context of Korea in particular and Asia in general. This book now before you presents the wide spectrum of Asian *Minjung*, liberation, or contextual theologies currently emerging. All essays are in agreement about the fact that in the new context of globalized market capitalism, the situation of *Minjung* has even more deteriorated and their numbers have been growing.

The organizers of the conference asked representative liberation and contextual theologians and scholars from India, the Philippines, Indonesia, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Germany, and the U.S. to come and share with Korean *Minjung* theologians the present state of their liberation and contextual theologies, and asked them to evaluate and critique *Minjung* theology from their own perspectives. Their wisdom has greatly helped Korean *Minjung* theologians in their attempt to chart paths for a new *Minjung* theology in the context of the 21st century. Korean *Minjung* theologians, I believe, will remember this conference as an occasion for a new beginning and re-energizing of *Minjung* theology. This conference was held at a time when, on the one hand, post-modernism and post-colonialism were having a great impact on theo-

logical discussions and, on the other hand, the neo-liberal market system was in full swing, devastating the life of the poor and the weak, in both Korea and abroad.

The analysis of our situation in terms of the neo-liberal market system is what all participants have agreed upon. The “post-” thoughts have had ambiguous impact on our theologies. Post-modernist theories have cast an illuminating light on the different impacts of oppressive systems on different classes, gender, groups, races, etc. and their different hopes and acts. Post-colonialists bring a new light upon different layers of the conscious and unconscious of people who had gone through colonial past. In communities of theological discourses in Korea and other countries, the *isms* resting in the post-modernism and post-colonialism often make their analyses futile and hinder our attention from addressing the realities of the situation, because they basically originated in the Western context.

The most striking difference that I can observe between *Minjung* thought and post-modern thought lies in the question whether we find more unity and common experiences or singularity and different experiences in Asian people. Of course, *Minjung* thought finds more commonalities among the oppressed people. Different groups of *Minjung* are born into and raised in stories and common language. *Minjung* thought seeks common ground derived from common stories, struggles, culture and language among oppressed people. Post-colonial thought is helpful for *Minjung* theology, but it is also problematic. Its analyses and explanations are intricate and sometimes abstract.

Both post-isms tend to divide people and thereby weaken their innate power by overly emphasizing singularities and differences within people and *Minjung* in front of their common enemy, the neo-liberal market capitalism and its collaborators. *Minjung* theologians and Asian liberation theologians have been working hard to find, as their theological sources, stories, art works, cultural traditions and languages of peoples that reflect common and distinct experiences of exploitation, suffering and oppression as well as hope, joy and liberation. We appreciated and selected those papers that reflect and consider our situation and experiences more directly than just applying theoretical tools derived from those new schools to our situation and experiences. Papers that were presented in the conference but are not included in this volume will be printed in a volume of conference proceedings.

There has been a significant change between the present time and the 1970's when *Minjung* theology was originally constructed. Since then, nearly half a century has passed and so *Minjung* theology, along

with other Asian liberation and contextual theologies, must renew themselves in order to respond to the new situation in a creative way. The conference was designed to look at what we have achieved through efforts made over the last few decades for reviving and renewing our theologies in the new contexts.

I would like to take the liberty of making some observations on what I have learned from different papers and presentations at the conference. The first issue that emerged as important for me was the question of how we understand the new situation we find ourselves in. The related question here is what terms and concepts we can employ to designate and describe the root of all evil in our times. Several terms came up from different papers and presentations: Empire, the Global Hegemonic Power, Capital, and the State. Some suggest Empire is the origin of all evil; others suggest Capital both global and local is the arch-evil; still others suggest States and Governments are the most immediate powers to oppress the weak and the marginal. Conference participants had some difficulty grappling with concepts and ideas about the origin of today's evil because of its invisibility and elusiveness. But they tried to grasp it in such terms as Empire, the Network Power, Capital, and State power. I would designate neo-liberal market capitalism as modern Mammon or Satanic Power and the origin of all evil. Mammon is a comprehensive power; it is hard for us to grasp it. It manipulates all present worldly powers, financial, political, social, and cultural. Mammon is not such entities as banks, TNCs, corporations, and states, although they may become agents of its force, especially in the situation of injustice. Justice can be the only possible power humanity can draw on to fight against Mammon. Thus, justice should not only be a major subject-matter of our theologies, but it requires us to become its bearers in our concrete life and action. The spirit of justice molds us into the people of God and the subjects of history.

The second issue is about these subjects of history. Who are they who would transform the world ensnared in the grasp of Mammon? This issue is not easy because of our flawed traditional conviction that the poor are the harbingers of the new world and the transformers of the present world, because they like other ordinary people very often accept as their own the basic tenets and interests of rulers, and follow them. They are apt to become like the *Ochlos* (the crowd) who demanded the crucifixion of Jesus at the court of Pilate (Mark 15:13-14). Therefore, we cannot equate poor and underclass people automatically as the subjects of history. We can, however, identify through socio-economic analysis the classes, groups, and individuals who are most oppressed

and alienated under the current structures. But to be the subjects of history and the agents of justice in the present world is another story. We cannot suppose that there is a substantial class, like the Marxist proletariat, which “owns nothing but its own labor-power” and carries out revolutions. A certain underclass cannot be considered exclusively equal to the historical subjects actively changing the world and struggling against Mammon and Capital.

The appearance of the subjects of history in society is itself an inevitable but often unusual event. The emergence of the movement by tens of thousands of people for 79 days in Hong Kong in 2014 (the so-called Umbrella Revolution) for the autonomy of Hong Kong from the Chinese government’s authoritarian control is one example. The massive people’s protest for an in-depth investigation of the structural problems that caused the deaths of over 300 young victims who were on board the sunken *Sewol* Ferry in Korea in 2014 is another. Through participation in such events, people emerge as the subjects of history. An event is not a predetermined and pre-planned occasion. But by saying this we should not preclude our self-conscious actions and active participation in history, which I believe is a fundamental condition of historical subject-hood. The appearance of the subject-hood of people in society and in the public domain is made possible mainly by their self-conscious, active participation in public affairs. These participants are story-tellers, who participate in the public domain with their own stories or narratives. By telling their stories they are interconnected with other people and to the social contexts, and then politicized, emerging as active participants in the social and public sphere. The right to participation in civic and political society by telling stories/narratives is a basic requirement for a democratic society. In mass demonstrations in a public plaza, people tell their own stories, from which the subjects of history emerge.

The third problem is about the over-determination of a certain theoretical or ideological framework in the analysis, explanation and understanding of the correlation of the external conditions of *Minjung* and their inner (revolutionary) subjectivities in the political arena. The latter’s dynamic, ever-changing and undetermined dimensions are often ignored or evaded. Very often a certain scientific method or metaphysical framework is monolithically and one-sidedly drawn upon to determine both the subjective and objective situation and condition of *Minjung*. An understanding reached by the over-determination of a method or a framework is inadequate and off the target. We Asian the-

ologians must come back to our fundamental resources. They are historical events, narratives and stories of *Minjung*. Theology as a logical enterprise must employ different scientific and logical methods. But a certain method must not be allowed to claim that it is the ultimate criterion for our understandings and thoughts.

I believe that the starting point of theologizing in Asia for the cause of the liberation of Asian *Minjung* is the subject, i.e., the agent of the change for a more equal, participatory and democratic world. Our theology must, first of all, start with our witness to the emergence of the oppressed and alienated people as subjects of history and of their own destiny. Our analysis of any situation must be conducted in accordance with our witness to the *Minjung*, the oppressed and alienated, especially our witness to their emergence as the subjects and agents of change in history and society. That means that the wheel of our analysis and understanding of the current situation should turn with the wheel of our witness to the emergence of the oppressed people as the subjects of revolutionary change. I would like to emphatically argue that our theology must be equipped with an actor/agent-oriented socio-political analysis. This means that our politico-theological analysis and claims have to be made in a way that contributes to enlarging the possibility of the emergence of historical subjects in our concrete contexts.

We Asian liberation theologians are experiencing both despair and hope these days. We experience despair because our churches and theological institutions are growing weak and politically less conscious. Neoliberalism and capitalism have dominated churches, seminaries, and universities, which have turned conservative and politically uncritical. There is little space in the church and theological institutions for *Minjung* and liberation theologians in which to breathe and prosper. But this situation becomes our opportunity, because our theology will grow by feeding on our agonies and sufferings. Our situation is complex and difficult. Our theological context is a tension of all kinds of contradictions and injustices, which also pushes us to respond creatively and theologically. Our context is filled with events and stories, which require us to respond and to make our own theological witnesses creatively.

We met in honor of Suh Nam-Dong who left a ground-breaking volume entitled *The Study of Minjung Theology* (민중신학의 탐구, 民衆神學의 探究, 1983). It is still relevant to our situation and theologies. It is unfortunate for Asian theology that we have not translated this book into English. Suh's theological ideas are so innovative and subversive that they provide us with abundant methodological resources and discursive

materials for a new liberative contextual theology. Suh Nam-Dong engaged himself with *Minjung* theology and *Minjung* movements during his last decade (1975-1984). His major articles such as “The Confluence of Two Stories” and “Towards a Theology of *Han*” were published in 1979. The year 1983 was a significant year for it was then that he published important essays such as “Theology of Folktales: a Counter Theology,” “Christ, the Life of the World,” “Theology of Culture, Political Theology, and *Minjung* Theology: An Appraisal of C. S. Song's Theology,” and “Sociology of the Poverty and Theology of the Poor.” He went on a lecture tour in North America in 1984 after having received an honorary doctorate from Victoria School of Theology, University of Toronto, his *alma mater*. He passed away in the same year soon after he returned to Korea. For such a short period of time during the very end part of life, he jumped into *Minjung* theology movement. His last words on his sick bed to his junior friend and fellow *Minjung* theologian Suh Kwang-Sun David was: “Please, continue to do *Minjung* theology.” This call continues to resonate with all of us.

Lastly, I would like to explain how this conference was made possible, and express our deep gratitude to related persons and organizations. Chairperson Dr. Kim Yong-Bock and the executive committee members (including myself) of the Society for Commemoration for the late Prof. Suh Nam-Dong, decided to hold this conference on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the late Prof. Suh Nam-Dong's passing. Rev. Dr. Park Chong-Hwa, the chair of the executive board of the Global Institute of Theology (GIT) of Yonsei United Graduate School of Theology accepted co-sponsorship for this conference, and also arranged for the GIT faculty to be part of the preparatory committee for the conference. A number of universities, including Yonsei, Anglican, Hanshin, Methodist Theological, the Seoul Theological Universities, as well as institutions and individuals, not only participated, but also donated financially to make this occasion possible. The Korea Association of *Minjung* Theologians coordinated all the procedures for the conference. Also, Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), took part in the preparatory work and invited important Asian theologians. I also want to express my gratitude to Prof. Dr. Volker Küster who not only invited us in an early stage to publish a selection of the papers in the *Contactzone* series but who also agreed to serve as a co-editor of this volume addressed to an international public.

December, 2017
Prof. Dr. Kwon Jin-Kwan
Conference Coordinator

I. Suh Nam-Dong Revisited

Suh Nam-Dong and *Minjung* in the Globalizing World – A Belated Eulogy

Suh Kwang-Sun David

1. October 24, 1979

Thirty-five years ago tonight, that is October 24th 1979, at the outskirts of the city of Seoul, Suh Nam-Dong, Ahn Byung-Mu, Kim Yong-Bock and others were together with me in a small conference room at Christian Academy House to greet such Asian theological friends as Preman Niles, for the first international conference on *Minjung* Theology. Soon after the meeting was over, while some of the participants were wandering around the city, we heard the news, the earth shaking news that President Park Jung-Hee had been shot to death by his most trusted KCIA Chief, right in the middle of a lavish dinner party with his staff and some young female singer-entertainers. Park Jung-Hee grabbed power at gun point in a 1961 *coup d'état*, right after the student revolution of April 19th 1960 which toppled the Rhee Syng-Man dictatorial government. Park Jung-Hee ruled South Korea for 18 years with an iron fist, pushing the policies of high speed economic development with anti-communist ideology and national security against North Korea.

Some of us Koreans here today, who are in their fifties and sixties, lived through the time of Park Jung-Hee as student demonstrators against the military government. They demanded a democratic Korea as they took over the city streets, and they were arrested, tortured by the KCIA and police, tried in military courts, and sentenced to stay in prison as political prisoners. In prison, they read the Bible again and studied liberation theology – for them the prison cell was a “full scholarship national free university for liberation.” After they came out of prison, as they were denied a return to their university education, they went to an underground theological school managed by Suh Nam-

Dong, who had also been a jailbird. The school was modeled after Bonhoeffer's faith community. One of the graduates is Professor Kwon Jin-Kwan, the so-called second generation *Minjung* theologian and an organizer of this conference.

2. *Juk Jae* Suh Nam-Dong's Pen Name

We are here to celebrate Professor Suh Nam-Dong's theological life and work with full memories about his painful and joyful stories of old and new told with his beautiful smiles, and memories of him tearfully describing his prison experience, or memories of his passionate lectures on *Minjung* theology. He was an angry prophet when he was talking about young female workers, and about his eye-witness account of Jun Tae-Il, a young textile worker who burned himself to death in protest against the brutal exploitation of young laborers and against the development of Park Jung-Hee's military dictatorship in the cold winter of 1970.

Suh Nam-Dong was a handsome, attractive person with a smiling face. His was a tall and lean physique, so much so that his senior colleague and teacher Kim Jae-Joon admired him, honoring him with a pen name *Juk Jae* (죽재, 竹齋):

His countenance and thinking are clean and pure,
His truthfulness and mind is straight and "empty",
His scholarship is boundless and his friendship admirable,
In the middle of suffering he is calm and composed,
Concentrating on his study and learning,
So that his name is known everywhere,
Honoring his virtue, I give him a pen name, *Juk Jae*,
As an old man of 84. by Jang Kong, Kim Jae-Joon¹

The pen name *Juk Jae* for Suh Nam-Dong was, in Chinese characters 竹齋, "a man like bamboo," who stands straight with an empty core. A person like bamboo is a person of integrity who keeps loyal and faithful even to death and whose mind is "empty" and pure. His pen name *Juk Jae* means "a straight and awesome bamboo shoot."

Suh Nam-Dong was honest and straightforward to God, as he was honest and straightforward to people. He stood on the side of the university students who were shouting for democracy and freedom against the riot police firing tear gas with guns and batons. He drafted with his

¹ Kim Hi-Heon, *The Life of Juk Jae Suh Nam-Dong*, in: *The Pioneers of Korean Theology. (Han Kook Shinhak-eu Sungooja-deul)*, Seoul 2014, 19 (translation is mine).

professor friends the straightforward and strong political statements demanding basic human rights and academic freedom as well as religious freedom of expression and freedom of the press. He was named as a politically dangerous professor who only upset innocent students, and he was followed by the secret police, and eventually expelled from the university campus twice, first in 1974, and then in 1980.

He joined a group of dissident university professors, Protestant clergy and Catholic priests as well as civil movement activists such as Kim Dae-Jung, later President of South Korea and Nobel Peace Prize winner of 2000, who demanded the end of military dictatorship on March 1st (the March 1, 1919 Independence Movement Day), in 1976, in Myung Dong Catholic Church, right in the middle of “Emergency Decree No. 9.” With his colleagues, he was court-martialed, and spent 22 months in prison.

After Suh Nam-Dong came out of prison, his denomination, the Presbyterian Church of the Republic of Korea, invited him to establish the Institute of Mission Education (otherwise known as the Bonhoeffer School), whose students were political prisoners expelled from their universities. He served as director and mentor of the Institute until he was imprisoned again in May 1980, when General Chun Doo-Hwan, the military successor of Park Jung-Hee, seized power at gunpoint. General Chun put Suh Nam-Dong and thousands of dissidents into prison. Court-martialed again, he was sentenced to prison for two and a half years, but only stayed in prison for some five months.

3. “He Was Not a Political Prisoner by Birth.”

Suh Nam-Dong was not a political prisoner from his birth, however. He was born and raised on a small island called Jindo (Rare Island) in a well-to-do family. Jindo Island is located in the southwest corner of South Korea where some hundreds of high school students were drowned when the ferry boat *Sewol* capsized on the morning of April 16, 2014. He attended mission school in Jeon-Ju, which was run by the Southern Presbyterian missionaries, and graduated with a high honor to be able to go to Do Shi Sha University in Kyoto, Japan at the age of 18. There, he studied theology. Later, he recalled his student life in Do Shi Sha where he learned intellectual honesty and rigorous scholarship, and was immersed in European liberal theology. During the Pacific War of 1941-45, he was teaching at one of the Bible schools in Pyongyang, the present capital city of North Korea, before he moved to Daegu, a South-eastern city. There he ministered in three different churches as full time

minister for ten years before he was invited to teach at the newly established Hanshin Theological School in 1952. He was quite young, only 34. He was sent to the University of Toronto Immanuel College to further his theological education and returned to Hanshin in 1955. This was the tragic time of war; Hanshin was located in the middle of the chaotic city of Busan which was at the time a city of refugees from all over North and South Korea. But he was silent during his life in the period of the Korean War of 1950-53.

4. From the Book-lined Professor's Office to the Tear Gas Filled Street

After six years of teaching at Hanshin, he moved to Yonsei University in 1961 to teach theology at the non-denominational Yonsei School of Theology. And yet he was silent during the revolutionary time when the April 19 student revolution toppled the all-powerful dictator Rhee Syng-Man government in 1960, and when the May 16 *coup d'état* of General Park Jung-Hee was happening in 1961. Apparently, he must have been reading in his own comfortable office – perhaps reading Bonhoeffer's *Letters from Prison* or Jürgen Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* or *The Secular City* of Harvey Cox or the death of God theologians. He was reading revolutionary theologies in his quiet and comfortable office away from the street fights of the students who were shot to death by the dictator's police fire. Until the end of the 1960's, Suh Nam-Dong was truly an academic theologian, thoroughly immersed in Barth, Bruner, Tillich, Niebuhr, Chardin – neo-orthodox theology, existentialism, evolutionary theology, secularism, and death of God theology. He did “translation theology,” but he was known as a “theological antenna,” because he managed to introduce the most recent theological trends in the West to the Korean audience.

A politically aloof academic theologian, Suh Nam-Dong came down from the lecture podium, pushed his book-lined office door open, and rushed down to the tear-gas-filled university campus square where students were demonstrating against the riot police demanding democracy, human rights and academic freedom. He did not run back to his safe office. But he joined them. He realized he should stand with the students.

The gentleman-professor Suh went to see the tragic scene of immolation on the street corner of the textile factory where an unknown young worker Jun Tae-Il was burning himself to death, shouting for justice in the labor market and demanding government compliance of

the labor law. Professor Suh Nam-Dong was existentially shocked by the Korean *Minjung* reality through the tragic death of this young textile worker. Later he organized a meeting with teenaged female factory workers who were fired by the company and put on the “black lists” and who were not allowed to be hired by any other company. And during and after the meeting he told us, “I could not help but wipe my tears when I heard young teenage girls telling us about their plight, their suffering, their tears and anger. They only tried to organize a labor union. Because of that simple and innocent move they were sexually molested and, moreover, they were kicked out of the factory and put on the black list so that they were never able to come back to work for their living.” I was there at the meeting with Suh Nam-Dong, Ahn Byung-Mu, and Hyun Yong-Hak, the so-called first generation *Minjung* theologians, who heard a girl say: “One Sunday morning, the well-dressed wife of the company president came to us girls, who were finishing working overnight in the sweat shop, and told us ‘We will pray for you, girls, when we go to church. We will pray for God’s blessing for you!’ But we wanted rest and long hours of sleep, instead of her God’s blessing!”

5. Poet Kim Ji-Ha and Suh Nam-Dong

When he attended the Faith and Order Committee meeting of the WCC in Latin America, for the first time he learned about Liberation Theology. At the meeting, when the European theologians were asking him about the then famous Korean poet, Kim Ji-Ha, Suh Nam-Dong was embarrassed about his ignorance about the poet and about the Korean *Minjung* struggle against the military dictatorship. Kim Ji-Ha was sentenced to death because of his political poems against the military regime. One of his poetical plays which shocked Suh Nam-Dong was the famous *Gold Crowned Jesus*. In the play, Jesus, with a gold crown, was to be freed by the homeless beggars on the street.

Suh Nam-Dong completely changed direction. He had begun doing theology from above to below: from the gold-crowned Jesus to the homeless beggar Jesus. He came out of university lecture halls to the tear-gas-filled streets where anti-government demonstrations and parades were going on; he put down the *text* and the Western theological books and came out to see the *context* where we were and where *Minjung* struggled for humanity, justice and life; and he came out of the preaching podium in the church and began shouting at the church to repent and work for the Reign of God in the Korean political, economic and social realities. He did not try to “enlighten” or “conscientize” the

Minjung, but let the *Minjung* educate him, challenge him, and let him stand on their side, although he could never be a *Minjung*.

So he re-started his historical education by reading Professor Lee Ki-Baek's *A New Reading of Korean History*. He read with Professor Lee and came to realize Korean history should be written not from the king's point of view, but from the point of view and experience of *Minjung* and their struggles for freedom. He believed and made confession that *Minjung* is not the object of subjugation, control and exploitation, but *the subject of history*. As he was re-reading Korean *Minjung* history, he began studying sociology. His liberal philosophical orientation pushed him forward to a socio-political orientation in his theologizing.

6. Marginal Theology

So, he labeled his theology as an "Alien Theology," or a theology from outside, or a theology from the margin, "A Marginal Theology (方外神學)." Socio-biographically, he was expelled from his comfortable university lecture hall. So he had to do his theology outside his academic home as a homeless theologian. He also began doing theology outside of the established church, leaving the traditional and the so-called orthodox theological frame or paradigm. His "marginal theology" is a contextual theology. And he claimed his theology was "*anti-theology* (반신학, 反神學)" and "*post-theology* (탈신학, 脫神學)". He was a Korean pioneer of "theological deconstruction," and post-colonial theology. But Suh Nam-Dong was following Jesus the *Minjung* from Galilee, outside the Jerusalem Gate, the wandering preacher, crying with the lonely, feeding the hungry, healing the sick and raising the dead. Suh Nam-Dong was undoing his traditional academic dogmatic theology, as YHWH God destroyed and de-constructed the Tower of Babel, the central power of domination, against *Minjung* and Godself, and dispersed the people all over the world with colorful languages. Suh Nam-Dong was following Jesus as he was challenging the religious authorities of the establishment who were only enslaving the *Minjung* in their dogmas and laws, and he declared that the *Minjung* was not for the Sabbath, but that the Sabbath was for the *Minjung*.

7. Convergence of Two Stories

The Korean *Minjung* theologian, Suh Nam-Dong, thus became a constructive theologian as he proposed the hermeneutical principle of "*convergence of two stories*." He brought the Korean *Minjung* stories

to the stories of Jesus and the Bible in constructing his *Minjung* theology. And he explained his theological method with a metaphor of echo or echoes:

In the 13th Century BC, when the Hebrew people cried out to God out of their misery as slaves in the land of Egypt, YHWH responded with an echo. That echo was the liberating event of exodus. In the 8th century in the social situation of Northern Israel, the cry of YHWH was responded to and echoed by Amos. That was Amos' prophetic movement. In our (Korean) case, some theologians responded with echoes to the cries of *Minjung* in the 1970's. That was the beginning of *Minjung* theology.²

Suh Nam-Dong's "*Echo Theology*" is a resounding metaphor for his hermeneutical principle of convergence of two stories, namely, the stories of the Bible and the stories of *Minjung*. With Korean *Minjung* stories we read and explain the stories of the Bible, and with the stories of the Bible we read and explain our stories of *Minjung*. Some theologians call it the "*hermeneutical circle*."

Suh Nam-Dong did not stay in the "hermeneutical circle" but moved out of the circle and joined the *Missio Dei* movement of liberation. According to him, the *Minjung* tradition of Christianity came to converge with the Korean *Minjung* tradition in the *Missio Dei* movement. Thus, *Minjung* theology has become *Minjung theopraxis*. "What is happening here and now is recognized as "God's intervention into human history, the work of the Holy Spirit, similar to the event of the Exodus, and we participate in God's work in history and theologize it. This is the work and role of doing *Minjung* theology."³

Suh Nam-Dong called this method "pneumatological-synchronic interpretation," going beyond the traditional "Christological diachronic interpretation." This does not mean that he gives up on the stories of Jesus. He needed many kinds of stories, parables, metaphors, stories of Jesus' own experience of the Cross and Resurrection. What he did was to bring the stories of Jesus to the stories of Korean *Minjung*.

So, Suh Nam-Dong became interested in the stories of Korean *Minjung* – the stories of *Han*-ridden *Minjung* of Korea. Korean history is full of *Han*-ridden stories of women and men who lost their young sons and their fathers and mothers and daughters in the wars, in order to defend their home town from the repeated invasions by the mighty armies of China from the north and the Japanese from the south. The

² Suh Nam-Dong, *The Study of Minjung Theology (Minjungshinhak-ui Tamgu)*, Seoul 1983, 3 (in Korean).

³ Op. cit., 78.

Korean *Minjung* has been oppressed and exploited by their own kings and queens as well as local magistrates and land owners and aristocrats. The stories of Korean *Minjung* are both her-stories of *Han* as well as his-stories of *Han*. *Han* (한,恨) is a Korean word for “political and psychological” feeling, sometimes translated as “regret,” “anger,” “grudge,” “resentment,” “bitter feelings,” “stress” or “rancor.” *Han* is just *Han*. This deep-seated tragic feeling cannot be translated into other languages. *Han* is something the oppressed *Minjung* express against the perpetrator, but it cannot be expressed in the open. *Han* is accumulated deep inside your body and mind, a sickness that would become sickness unto death. But it can explode into the open to act against unbearable oppression and exploitation. This can be a revolution, or an act of revenge which would break the vicious circle of violence. This is called by Kim Ji-Ha, *Dan* (단,斷).

As Suh Nam-Dong was exploring Korean *Minjung* theology, he himself became a story-teller, and abandoned his identity as a conceptual theologian, as he had once been. From being a Western-style systematic and constructive theologian, he advocated counter – (反) or post – (脫) theology, story theology or narrative theology. However, it would be fair to say that his doing theology is a combination of all of the above; his theology is a combination or a mosaic work of constructive post-modern, post-colonial counter-theology with narrative theology and theopraxis.

8. The Summer of 1984, 30 Years Ago

In the summer of 1984, some of us so-called dismissed professors (to put it mildly), after we were expelled from the university lecture halls and imprisoned – with the accusation that we agitated the students to demonstrate against the military dictatorship demanding democracy and human rights as well as academic freedom – were allowed to return to teaching. Suh Nam-Dong was one of us dismissed professors waiting for the university’s summons to return to the classroom in the first week of September for the second semester. But we heard the news that he had been hospitalized as he returned home from his long and busy lecture trip to the United States and Canada, where he received an honorary degree from Victoria School of Theology, Toronto University.

I visited him in his hospital bed struggling against colon cancer. He held my hands looking up to me with his smile and said:

Dr. Suh, Don’t give up on doing *Minjung* theology. Spread our *Minjung* theology all over Asia and all over the world.