

Preface

What is Asian feminist biblical studies, and how does one teach or learn it? This was a question arising out of an Asian Women Theological Educators Conference in 2015, sponsored by the Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia (FTESEA) and the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA). The conference was led by the eminent Asian feminist theologian Kwok Pui-lan, who urged the participants to produce the necessary academic resources needed to answer the question.

This book is thus written as a textbook for seminary students and pastors and to give them an idea of what Asian feminist biblical studies looks like and what it aims to do. We have 14 authors from 10 different Asian countries, and where possible, we asked for an essay from a Hebrew Bible and a New Testament scholar from each country.

Each contributor was asked to give a short review of feminist biblical studies in her own context, illustrate an Asian feminist reading of a biblical text, and share some future directions. The essays are arranged by regions (East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia), with the countries of the authors arranged alphabetically within each region.

We are privileged to publish a paper by Professor Kyung Sook Lee as the introduction to this collection. Professor Lee gave the keynote address at the 2016 conference of the Society of Asian Biblical Studies in Seoul. Being the most senior scholar amongst the contributors, she laid out a clear topography of the development and potential of Asian biblical studies, including feminist criticism.

Asian Feminist Biblical Studies

For a long time in my academic journey, I too, have wondered, what is Asian feminist biblical studies? When I first learnt about Western feminist studies, the issue was about equality between the sexes. Then I read works by womanist biblical scholars and realised that race was an additional issue for black women. Mujerista studies highlighted the economic obstacles for Latinas in their context, and feminist biblical scholars in Africa sought liberation from colonialism while restoring their traditional sense of community.

What is Asian feminist biblical studies when Asia is the largest continent with the most diverse range of ethnicities and religions? The essays in this collection will help to consolidate the answer. It is not a methodology, for as feminist scholars have pointed out, we use all the tools in our toolbox to recover the fundamental worth of all human beings and dismantle the patriarchy (or kyriarchy) imposed by a fallen world in or onto the text. So, the authors here employed methods such as historical-literary, cultural, sociological, and postcolonial criticisms or a combination of them.

Three things, however, stand out as characteristics of Asian feminist biblical studies in these essays. First, the emphasis on community, second, the appeal to one's religious or cultural heritage, and third, the impact of past or current injustice against women in one's society.

Beginning with Kyung Sook Lee's analysis of the "we" in Isa 53, Zakali Shohe elucidates what "the common" in Eph 2 and for the Naga community is. Similarly, Naw Eh Tar Gay explores a balanced reading of Gal 3:28 from a Myanmar perspective, and Maggie Low reads Eph 5:21–33 intertextually with Gen 2 to elucidate a one-flesh egalitarian union. Holding forth the communal aspect promotes a collaborative

rather than a combative stance and would find broader acceptance in the Asian context.

Secondly, the rich, pluralistic religious and cultural Asian heritages are considered in other essays. Sonia Kwok Wong's take on naked female exposure in the Hebrew Bible is read together with the treatment of mistresses in Chinese culture. Monica Melanchthon compares Sati Savitri with Job's wife, and Elaine Goh considers Lady Folly in the book of Proverbs with the Goddess of Mercy. Lily Apura reads the creation stories in Genesis with the babaylan culture in the Philippines, and Tran Thi Ly brings the Song of Songs to bear on Vietnamese love poems. Just as our culture gives us insights into the biblical texts, so the Bible can transform our communities.

Thirdly, the rest of the essays are provoked by past or present traumas experienced by women. Kyung Sook Lee addresses the plight of Korean comfort women, and Hisako Kinukawa's awareness of Japanese expansionism informs her reading of the Syrophenician woman's encounter with Jesus. Yeong Mee Lee's reading of Ruth attends to the current social challenges faced by migrant women in Korea, and Seong Hee Kim's focus on Mary Magdalene responds to the escalating misogyny in Korea. Ira Mangililo compares the dismembering of the Levite's concubine in Judg 19 with the 1965 Indonesian massacre of suspected communists, especially the women. Finally, Tan Yak-hwee's postcolonial reading of Jesus' farewell discourse is mirrored in the Singapore church's ambivalent attitude towards feminist teachings and ministry.

We thank FTESEA for making it possible to publish this book. While not every essay reflects this editor's view, all of them stir the heart with the struggles of women and the marginalised in Asia, challenge

the mind to read the Scripture in fresh ways, and rouse the will to work towards the vision where there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 2:28).

As I am writing this preface amid the COVID-19 pandemic and the racial protests that have gripped the world, the inequalities in our global communities are further laid bare with the poor losing their jobs and income, children losing out on education if they are the technological have-nots, women suffering domestic violence, and the disabled being left in isolation. All the more we need to hear the cry of this book and to work for all human beings simply because they are created in the image of God.

Maggie Low
Editor

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