

Mary F. Foskett and Jeffrey K. Kuan, ed. *Ways of Being, Ways of Reading: Asian American Biblical Interpretation*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2006. 260 pages. \$26.99.

This groundbreaking work of contemporary Asian biblical scholars is worthy of our attention who want to study the Bible from Asian and Asian American context. Unlike the expectation of readers who hope to grasp what Asian (American) biblical hermeneutics *is*, however, this book does not provide ABC of Asian (American) biblical interpretation. Rather, it shows a *trajectory*, what it looks like to read and interpret the biblical text from Asian (American) perspectives. Editors, Mary F. Foskett and Jeffry Kah-Jin Kuan, therefore, make clear in forward that “The purpose of this collection of essays is to illustrate for readers...the range of approaches that Asian American scholars now articulate and exercise in the work of Asian American biblical hermeneutics” (xiii). Yet, there is much in common. The essayists are Asian (American) scholars working in North America. Their essays and biblical interpretation are depended upon three disciplines, “cultural hermeneutics, cultural studies, and postcolonial interpretation” (xiii). The essayists 1) uses Asian religious and philosophical traditions, values, and practices in their interpretation, 2) often deals with the politics of identity, and 3) women’s issues.

Chapter 1, *Biblical Interpretation in India* by Devadasan N. Premnath, attempts to “provide a historical sketch of biblical interpretation in India and in that process generate some critical issues pertaining to the discipline” (1). Especially, he introduces four distinct features of Post-Independence Period – 1. Liberation perspectives (Dalit, Tribal, Feminist, Socioeconomic, Postcolonial), 2. Ecological, 3. Religiocultural, 4. Artistic – and raises theological issues, such as the religious pluralism of the Indian context.

Chapter 2, *Chinese Biblical Interpretation* by John Yueh-Han Yieh, shows how Christianity in China experienced “rejections, persecutions, confrontations, and challenges” (28) in the course of history and how scholars and preachers developed the hermeneutics of character and the spiritual exegesis to “indigenize and contextualize biblical messages to relate Christian faith to the Chinese people” (30).

Chapter 3, *Biblical Interpretation in Korea* by Samuel Cheon, introduces three streams of theology and biblical interpretation during 1960s-1990s as a response to social context: Korean indigenous theology, Minjung theology, and Reunification theology.

Chapter 4, *Differences and Difficulties: Biblical Interpretation in the South Asian Context* by Philip P. Chia, suggests that since South Asia countries that were once under colonial powers have diverse historical, political, economic, and religious backgrounds, practitioners of biblical interpretation need to be aware of their foreign theological and imperial perspective and be “sensitive to the sociocultural and religious experiences of the indigenous peoples” (57).

Chapter 5, *Reading the Bible as an Asian American* by Andrew Yueking Lee, points out that Asian Americans are “unlikely to perceive scripture from an Asian American perspective” (68) but take unconsciously Western perspectives as they identify themselves as evangelicals.

Chapter 6, *Neither here nor there* by Lai Ling Elizabeth Ngan, discusses how Hagar, Sarah’s Egyptian maid, is “awakened to her sense of personhood and dignity” (83), as she bore Abraham’s son and was sought by God in times of distress, and how Asian Americans in the predominantly white society should also see themselves as people of dignity.

Chapter 7, *The Realpolitik of Liminality in Josiah’s Kingdom and Asian America* by Uriah Yong-Hwan Kim, shows how Josiah’s kingdom was in *realpolitik* of liminality between two imperial powers, Assyria-Egypt and Babylon-Medes, in which Amon and Josiah both died whatever side they chose. He argues that DH tried to write Judah’s own history and thus formed their identity, while homogenizing Israel and Judah’s history and making Samaritans unhomely. He adds that recent Asian American historians’ endeavor to write their own history should be encouraged while not making some late comers, such as South East Asians, unhomely.

Chapter 8, *Empowerment or Enslavement?* by Jean K. Kim, reads the Samaritan woman in John 4 not as a model believer but as a victim of colonization who chose “voluntary rape” by Roman soldiers to survive and whose action is strongly condemned by Ezra-Nehemiah. She argues that “the Third place” should be created for the victims of colonization, such as military brides, where they can empowered by each other rather than enslaved by a social stigma.

Chapter 9, *A Light to the Nations* by John Ahn, finds similarities between First- and Second-Generation Judeo-Babylonians in sixth century BCE and First- and Second-Generation Korean Americans in our time. He argues that “a light to the nations” in Isaiah 42:6-7 originally means “light-nations” which refers to the people of Israel and Judah in forced migration in Babylon. As they both were called as light nations, he reminds that Korean Americans regardless of their origin – North, South, and provinces – are one.

Chapter 10, *Lot's Wife, Ruth, and To Thi* by Mai-Anh Le Tran, juxtaposes three women and their stories: Lot's wife, Ruth, and To Thi. Unlike a widespread negative view toward Lot's wife and a positive view toward Ruth, she describes, on the one hand, Lot's wife as a mother who shares suffering of her remaining daughters in the city by looking back and turning into salt and, on the other hand, Ruth as a woman who subjugates herself to men and changes her royalty whenever she needs. She juxtaposes the legend of To Thi who became a stone while waiting for her husband gone to war, with the story of Lot's wife, and argues for the need of gazing the human suffering and pain.

Chapter 11, *Between and Between* by Sze-Kar Wan, focuses on doubleness of Asian-American biblical scholars as hyphenated, *both this and that*. Their tradition (ancestral and Western), their text (the Bible and the experience of Asian and Asian Americans), their hermeneutical axis (historical-critical task and one's experience) are double.

Chapter 12, *Yin/Yang Is Not Me* by Gale A. Yee, employs Du Bois' criteria defining authentic black theater, *about us, by us, for us, and near us* in defining what an Asian American biblical hermeneutics is with slight changes. She points out that “making whiteness visible is one of our challenges in creating our own biblical hermeneutics” (163).

Chapter 13, *Constructing Hybridity and Heterogeneity* by Frank M. Yamada, claims that Japanese and Japanese Americans' experience of the internment during World War 2 “as historical text or interpretive lens, can function as a compelling intertext with the biblical material” (175). By reading this history and Genesis 2-3 together, he finds the common theme of survival in the midst of messy human life.

Chapter 14, *Obscured Beginnings* by Mary F. Foskett, contends that the Pacific Asian North American adoptees' search for their origin should be encouraged, as the search for historical Jesus has consistently emerged in history. In so doing, she hopes to make their adjustment in the United States “a smooth ride.”

Chapter 15, *A Hapa Identifying with the Exodus, the Exile, and the Internment* by Henry W. Morisada Rietz, argues that one's identity construction and hermeneutics are closely related to each other. He reminds readers, “By remembering the stories of others and sharing our particular stories with each other, we may *identify with* one another, we may *live past*” (203).

It is this book's achievement not to provide a definitive Asian American way of reading the biblical text. Since our context and experience are different from each other, our identity and hermeneutical lens vary even among ourselves and, thus, our ways of reading. I recommend you to ponder upon, not just to read, this book with a hope that you and I may soon join these voices of Asian American biblical interpretation.

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