Pastoral Counseling in Korean and Korean American Contexts: Introduction

K. Samuel Lee, Ph.D.¹

When the work of the Anti-Racist Multicultural Competencies Task Force (“Task Force” hereafter) of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors (AAPC) was nearing its end (from 2007 to 2010), I suggested to Dr. Ryan LaMothe, the editor of Sacred Space, that two issues of Sacred Space be devoted to the topic of racial minorities: one for Korean and Korean American topics and the other for African and African American topics. I was elated that Dr. LaMothe readily accepted the suggestion. My gratitude is heartfelt for Dr. LaMothe’s commitment to extend the work of the Task Force by the publication of this and the next issues of Sacred Space. His patient, dedicated, and competent editorial assistance made it possible for six Korean and Korean American scholars to complete their work. In this issue, we present six essays that cover a wide range of topics in pastoral theology, pastoral care, and counseling in Korean and Korean American contexts.

Despite a high number of Korean students in pastoral care and counseling graduate school programs in the U.S. and the fast-growing field of pastoral counseling movement in Korea (see Young Gweon You’s article), English language publications in the United States on pastoral counseling in Korean or Korean American contexts have been limited at best, with the exception of doctoral dissertations. In recent years, English publications in Korea are observed to be on the rise. However, their availability in the United States has been likewise limited. To my knowledge, a special issue of Pastoral Psychology (March 2006) is the only publication that

¹ K. Samuel Lee is Associate Professor of Practical Theology, Spiritual Care, and Counseling at Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, California. Licensed psychologist in California and Ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church, he also serves as the Executive Director of The Clinebell Institute of Pastoral Counseling and Psychotherapy. His email address is slee@cst.edu.
dealt exclusively with the topic of pastoral counseling in Korean or Korean/Asian American contexts. This *Pastoral Psychology* issue included four articles written by three Korean or Korean American pastoral counselors (K. Lee, Kwon, and Son), a religious educator (B. Lee), and two articles written by an Asian American (Clark) and an European American pastoral theologian on a non-Korean topic. (See references for the complete list of singly listed articles.) Besides this special issue of *Pastoral Psychology*, only a scattered and limited number of journal articles and book chapters on the topic of pastoral theology, pastoral care and counseling have appeared in Korean and Korean American contexts. A special symposium issue of *Journal of Supervision and Training in Ministry* (DeVelder, Lee, & Griesel, 2002) was published on a more general topic of multicultural competencies in spiritual care. Thus, this special issue of *Sacred Space* is, all the more, a significant contribution. The references to this introduction include English publications by the authors of this special issue, a starting point to the compilation of a more comprehensive bibliography.

The first five essays in this issue are written by Korean American scholars. In various ways, they deal with the topic of cultural, clinical, and theological relevance of practices of U.S. pastoral theological education and pastoral care and counseling in a Korean American context. Writing from a broader Asian American perspective, Hellena Moon points out that “the continuous reproduction of essentialized stereotypes” of Asian Americans is rampant in U.S. The diverse groups of Asian Americans in terms of language, history, culture, and national origins are often ignored and homogenized, an effect of which is colonization by the white majority in the U.S. Moon challenges us to critically examine whether such colonization is not operative in pastoral theological discourses. She deconstructs Miller-McLemore’s pastoral theological metaphor, “living human web,” as an illustration of how such a helpful metaphor for some may
have a not-so-helpful meaning for some others. Her article illustrates the complexity of a postmodern constructed reality that calls for pastoral theologians’ ongoing and vigilant hermeneutics toward the liberation of all persons. Moon is an all-but-dissertation student at Emory University and receives, with this essay, the AAPC Award for Best Student Article in honor of Donald Capps’ numerous contributions to the field of pastoral care and counseling.

Of fundamental significance in Moon’s essay is her recognition of the “epistemic hegemony” (Kang, 2004, p. 103) or “discursive homogenization and systematization” (Mohanty, 1991, p. 54) that may be operating within the U.S. discipline of pastoral theology, not recognized by other essays in this issue. Constructive theologian Namsoon Kang’s (2004) theological question “Who/What is Asian?” makes a significant contribution as pastoral theologians—predominantly controlled by U.S.-based-white scholar—consider seriously and deeply the politics of representation that tends to remain just below the surface of the pastoral theological discourse. Speaking as Korean or Korean American in the U.S. pastoral theological terrain is a tricky business. On one hand, Koreans are expected to speak as Koreans to be authentic; in doing so, their voices become culturalized, homogenized, tokenized, and ghettoized (Kang, 2004, p. 109). Kang (2004) speaks to the heart of the matter: “When the homogenization is practiced by those who have discursive hegemonic power, it is a form of neo-Orientalism, that is, it re-forms and it proliferates a geographical awareness through theological texts” (p. 111). Does a special issue of Sacred Space on the topic of Korean and Korean American contexts give a significant voice to Koreans and Korean Americans? Yes, a significant voice that is needed. However, the issue also leads me to ask whether in some ways this special issue may further “the trap of essentialized identity” (Kang, 2004, p. 104). Granted, we must speak. The critical question is
with what voice should Koreans or Korean Americans speak within the U.S. pastoral theological circle? While serving as a special guest editor of this volume, I am left with this serious question.

Insook Lee introduces the Korean concept of *jeong* as foundational for Korean American women’s relationality. In doing so, she also counters the negative stereotypes about Asian women as submissive, passive, quiet, and less-than-ideal. Lee’s essay illustrates yet another route by which the ostensibly self-expressive, self-affirming, and self-confident “America” views and colonizes Korean American women. She describes what *jeong* is, how it functions in Korean American relationality, attempts to do a constructive theology of *jeong*, and discusses its implication in pastoral counseling.

Other Korean American constructive theologians use the concept of *han* (Chung, 1990; Park, 1993) and the concept of *jeong* (Joh, 2006) for their liberative potential in interpersonal and communal relationships. They argue that theology is constructive and contextual. For theology to be meaningful, it must be born out of contextual specificity, and thus must welcome the use of Korean concepts such as *jeong* and *han*. On the other hand, Kang (2004) cautions that the use of unique Korean culture-specific terms such as *han* or *jeong* may have an esotericizing or ghettoizing effect in theology, leaving non-Koreans in the zone of unknowability, but more seriously, may provide certain non-Koreans a “new culturalist alibi” (Spivak, 1989, p. 281) by which they maintain Orientalism, scholarly particularism or nativism. Kang’s caution or critique is a significant post-colonial insight that must be taken into account more seriously by Korean American scholars.

Sophia Park’s essay invites non-Korean readers to enter the Korean American cultural space in congregational life. The Korean American communal or collective value is highlighted in her essay. This is an excellent example of how the Korean American immigrant church...
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community stands apart from what Insook Lee describes as “the self-expressive, self-affirming, and self-confident” individualistic U.S. society. In communal sharing of meals, the Korean American church community practices its intercultural practice of care for the persons who experience brokenness in their immigrant lives.

Angella Son operationalizes Park’s advocation of the Korean American church community in a more clinically focused way. Son cites many studies that examine the correlation between racism and depression in U.S. She also points out the inadequacy of the general U.S. mental health care system that does not account for the unique cultural and psychological manifestations of Korean Americans who are depressed. It is important to note that the well-established DSM-IV-TR’s diagnostic categories of depression may not be as relevant for Korean Americans suffering with depression. She addresses the important question of how the Korean American church community can become a site of healing and care for teenagers and young adults.

Jin Sook Kwon’s essay, with its striking title “A Dog with Wings,” demonstrates how a Korean American pastoral counselor navigates through the pastoral counseling certification process as the process relates to the cultural and theological explication. The issues of culture, theology, gender, and class—to name only a few of our multiple social identities—are multiplicatively at work in our counseling or certification situations. This also means that possible oppression that may take place in counseling sessions or in the AAPC certification process can manifest in multiple dimensions: on the individual level, institutional level, and societal level (Hardiman, Jackson, & Griffin, 2010). What may be considered insignificant in the dominant culture, thus dismissed as a non-issue whether in a counseling or in a certification process, may be instrumental in understanding clients or certification applicants from minority
cultures. Cultural differences are not simply matters of cultural diversity. Instead, they are the matters of systemic oppression that bestow unearned privilege on the dominant group members and create an unearned disadvantage for the minority group members (Johnson, 2010). Kwon provides a range of clinical, theological and ethical issues that must be accounted for when counselors are working with clients whose origins and experiences are different from their own.

Young Gweon You’s essay, previously published elsewhere, is included in this issue because it provides a helpful historical overview of the development of the pastoral care and counseling field in Korea. You explains that the rapid growth of the field parallels Korea’s rapid economic growth, the growth of the Korean church, and the social and cultural changes resulting from globalization. Pastoral care and counseling provides “a holding environment” for Koreans who face “chaotic identity crisis” in a rapidly changing society. You additionally provides, though cursive, snapshot pictures of pastoral counseling programs and centers and research trends in Korean pastoral counseling.

This special issue of Sacred Space gives voice to AAPC’s commitment to be a professional organization recognized for its anti-racist multicultural competence. In this spirit, I offer the following 2010 Statements on Anti-Racist Multicultural Competencies adopted by the Board of Directors of AAPC (see AAPC Multicultural Competencies and Anti-Racism Task Force, 2010):

Statements on Anti-Racist Multicultural Competencies
2010

To be anti-racist multiculturally competent, AAPC must commit itself to a deep care for the governance, policy, and clinical training and practice that is intentionally inclusive and through which members are willing to hear the pains of those who have been historically, intentionally, and systemically excluded and disadvantaged.

The process of becoming anti-racist multiculturally competent AAPC includes AAPC members' commitment to: a) examine racial and cultural identity formation of pastoral counselors and its
implications in personal life and clinical practice; b) analyze critically how AAPC’s training, certification, and accreditation standards may reflect racism and monoculturalism, c) engage in contextual and multicultural analysis of all governance, policy, and practices, and d) express explicit concern for managing differences and justice.

Furthermore, members of the AAPC commit themselves to become anti-racist multiculturally competent pastoral counselors by embodying the following values:

Anti-racist multiculturally competent pastoral counselors are committed to pursuing social justice and democratic ideals in which all persons are regarded as having equal worth regardless of identity markers, including but not limited to race, gender, age, sexual orientation, difference in ability, religion, language, and cultural or national origins.

Anti-racist multiculturally competent pastoral counselors appreciate human diversity as a gift, not a barrier, and engage in training and the practice of pastoral counseling in order to serve peoples from diverse backgrounds by acquiring the attitudes, knowledge, and skills needed for competent clinical practice.

Anti-racist multiculturally competent pastoral counselors acknowledge that the pastoral counseling movement in the United States has been significantly formed by White Anglo-Saxon Protestants and that AAPC’s organizational structure, culture, governance, and public programs and documents have contributed to systemic exclusion of racial and cultural minorities.

Anti-racist multiculturally competent pastoral counselors commit to bring about individual, organizational, and societal changes to undo the devastating effects of ever-evolving forms of racism and prejudice and are always alert for and responsive to persons and groups experiencing new or newly recognized forms of exclusion.

Anti-racist multiculturally competent pastoral counselors engage in critical self-reflection about ourselves as well as the communities and societies to which we belong. Especially when we belong to dominant groups, multiculturally competent pastoral counselors acknowledge the privileges accorded to us by virtue of our identity and seek to distribute power equitably among all communities.

Anti-racist multiculturally competent pastoral counselors commit to create a safe space where all persons can work through the painful realities and conflicts that arise out of the history of domination and subjugation and out of the differences we bring from our traditions.

Anti-racist multiculturally competent pastoral counselors commit to seek justice “now” because they see the urgency of the individual, organizational and societal changes that must take place, and thus ask, “If not now, when?”


Son, A. (2011). Purpose-driven and value-guided life of Ahn Maria: 'No longer shall your name be no-name, but your name shall be Maria'. *Sounds from the Abbey 2*, 18-20.
References


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