

The “Call of God”: Korean American Women’s Activism in the Pacific Northwest

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**Abstract**

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This study examines the multidimensional history of Korean American Christian women’s activism in the Pacific Northwest between 1940 and 2012. Few scholars have explored Korean American women’s experience in American religious history especially the relationship between activism and religion among Korean American women.<sup>1</sup> Using an intersectional perspective that takes into account various dimensions of Korean American Christian women activists reveals a distinct gendered, raced, and religious narrative of Korean American history in the Pacific Northwest. This study also analyzes Korean Bible women’s histories to explain the importance of Korean American Christian activist women’s current involvement. I argue that Korean American Christian women’s gendered, raced, and religious activism, challenge conventional understandings of Korean American history, the purpose of activism, and the relationship between activism and religion.

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this study, I use a Protestant understanding of religion. The way I use the word religion here is a single organization with members that subscribe to basic Biblical belief of a Divine God, salvation through Jesus Christ.

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## **Introduction: Korean American Christian Women's Activism in the Pacific Northwest**

*If it were not God, if it's not Jesus, I wouldn't do this. I get that message through the Bible and I got the sense of a call. This is God's work... And if it's not God, if it's not Jesus, I won't do this. It's a heck of a job, one heck of a work. I prepare sermons and write articles and books. I teach Bible classes so I prepare for the Bible class and worship and, you name it, I do it. There's no dull moment.*

- Julie

Julie's statement illustrates how influential her belief in God is as she engages in pastoral leadership and teaches Bible classes. Embedded in Julie's statement is the message that her activism, without God, would not exist. There is a relationship between religion and activism that is expressed repeatedly among Korean American women activists, like Julie, in the Pacific Northwest. This relationship is described primarily by the phrase, "Call of God." Thus, this study is entitled, "The Call of God: Korean American Women's Activism in the Pacific Northwest" and focuses on the relationship between Korean American activist women and Christianity. The twenty Christian women<sup>1</sup> interviewed in this study used phrases such as, "I've been called by God" or "There is a call of God on my life..." to illustrate the practical implication of scripture and relationship with God to their lives. The use of these phrases reveals the connection between what Christian women are doing (activism) and who they are (identity).

Korean American Christian women activists draw upon Biblical scriptures such as Isaiah 43<sup>2</sup>, indicating that their life purpose is closely connected to, even inspired by, God's will. This study examines Korean American Christian women activist's experiences in Washington State, specifically those who reside in the King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties. Currently, all three

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<sup>2</sup> In Isaiah 43:1. God is speaking through the prophet Isaiah saying the following to God's people, "But now, O Jacob, listen to the LORD who created you. O Israel, the one who formed you says, 'Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine.'" This is from the New Living Translation of the Christian Bible.

counties contain large numbers of Korean Americans. According to the 2010 US Census, Washington State contains the 5<sup>th</sup> largest Korean American population in the US.<sup>3</sup>

My study examines the multidimensional history of Korean American Christian women's activism in the Pacific Northwest between 1940 and 2013. Korean American women's activist histories and experiences are largely underrepresented in Korean American scholarship and general US history. This study addresses this gap through an examination of the complexities of Korean American women activist experiences and their religious values.<sup>4</sup> Using intersectionality theory, I take into account various dimensions of Korean American Christian women activist experiences that reveal a distinct gendered, raced, and religious narrative of Korean American history in the Pacific Northwest. I argue that Korean American Christian women's gendered, raced, and religious activism challenges conventional understandings of Korean American history, the purpose of activism, and the relationship between activism and religion. More specifically, I argue that the impact of religion initiates, drives, and sustains Korean American women's activism. Korean American Christian women activists use religion<sup>5</sup> and spirituality<sup>6</sup> to affect social change in Korean American communities and the surrounding Puget Sound area.

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<sup>3</sup> California, New York, New Jersey, Illinois, Washington, and Texas have the highest numbers of Korean Americans in the United States. California has the highest number of Korean Americans residing in its borders with over 505,225 Korean Americans and New York trailing behind with 153,609 Korean American residents total. Washington numbered at 80,049 Korean Americans total in the state in 2010. A study of the 2000 US Census from Eui-Yung Yu's, "Korean Population in the United States, 2000. Demographic Characteristics and Socio-Economic Status." In the *International Journal of Korean Studies*. Vol VI:1. (Los Angeles, CA: Korean American Coalition – Census Information Center, 2002). 71-107, states that Korean American women outnumber Korean American men in the 20 to 54 year age bracket. This situation is reversed when it comes to Korean Americans ages 15 and younger. The reason why the younger generations have more males than females also reflects immigration patterns but the immigration patterns of latter Koreans also reflect Korean culture's male child preference. The author argues that sex-selective abortions, although illegal, contribute to a less number of younger Korean immigrant girls immigrating to the US.

<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this study, we will use a Protestant understanding: Single organization with members that subscribe to basic Biblical belief of a Divine God, salvation through Jesus Christ.

<sup>5</sup> The term religion describes the institution that teaches and affirms religious beliefs. In other words, when we think of 'religion,' we typically think of churches or places of worship.

<sup>6</sup> According to the field of theology, primarily defined by feminist theologians, spirituality is a way of being rather than a building or place of worship. As a holistic approach to religious beliefs, spirituality provides a means of thinking through, being, and acting in a religious capacity apart from institutions.

This study addresses the following questions. What are the multidimensional experiences and histories of Korean American women in the Pacific Northwest? What kind of raced, classed, gendered, and religious narratives are a part of these histories? How has activism developed among Korean American women activists and for what purposes? What forms of activism are Korean American women activists involved in and to what extent does religion shape the perspectives and actions of these women? What are the social, political, and economic changes that have shaped Korean American women's activism and strategies of resistance over time? Why is this history significant to our understandings of gender, race, religion, and social change? In order to answer these questions, my study centers and analyzes the activism of Korean American women in the Pacific Northwest and the degree to which a Christian identity influences their activist strategies.

A Christian identity influences each of the twenty Korean American activist women living in the Pacific Northwest. In order to interview these women, I employed the snowball method and networked using existing social and professional relationships. Geographically, Korean American women subjects live in Washington State. Korean American Christian activist women primarily live in the Seattle region. They live as far north as Lynnwood, as far south as Tacoma. A number of Korean American women subjects also live in Bellevue, WA.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> According to the 2000 US Census compiled by the Korean American Coalition of California, the cities of Seattle (4,863), Federal Way (4,417), Tacoma (2,748), Lakewood (2,244), Bellevue (2,131), and Shoreline (1,390) are included in the top 100 cities that Korean Americans reside in. This information was compiled in cooperation with the Center for Korean-American and Korean Studies in Los Angeles, Cal State University. Washington is currently ranked five of ten states with the highest Korean population of 57,507 Korean residents. According to the 2009 American Community Survey conducted by the US Census department, from the year 2000 to 2009, the Korean American population has grown from 58,438 to 57,507. The most significant population jump occurred between 1990 and 2000 when the Korean American population increased from 29,697 to 56,438. The birth of second generation Korean Americans and increasing number of Koreans sponsoring family members explain this increase in population numbers. This pattern can also be explained by the attractive nature of entrepreneur opportunities among small business owners in the Pacific Northwest.



Korean American women activists also come from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds. A majority consider themselves middle class. However, all were born into families that experienced financial struggles early on in their childhoods. This was especially true among the subjects whose parents were first generation Korean immigrants in America.<sup>8</sup>

The majority of the subjects identified as second generation Korean Americans. About half identified as 1.5 generation. Julie identified as a first generation Korean American because she was the first in her family to immigrate to the US. While most Korean American women and

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<sup>8</sup> Source: Northwest US Travel. "Map of the State of Washington." About.com. [Gonw.about.com/od/mapswa/ig/Washington-State-Map-Gallery/Washington-State-Map.htm](http://Gonw.about.com/od/mapswa/ig/Washington-State-Map-Gallery/Washington-State-Map.htm). Korean Americans reside primarily between Tacoma and Lynnwood for several reasons. One reason is their early immigration pattern to the state. A majority of Korean Americans, particularly Korean military brides, resides in Tacoma. The Joint Base Lewis-McChord is located in Tacoma, WA. Many military wives sponsored Korean families and thus many reside in Tacoma. One of the reasons for the large number of Korean Americans living in the Lynnwood area also has to do with the growth of Korean owned businesses, restaurants, and churches. The Korean American Historical Society will publish details about this information in a publication to be released by November of 2014. We are still compiling this information through oral histories and archives.



their families were sponsored through a relative, thus providing entry into the US, one Korean American woman immigrated to the US with her husband without a sponsorship.<sup>9</sup>

Korean American women activists are involved in many facets of the workplace. Of the twenty Korean American activist women I interviewed, three are pastors. One is a youth pastor, the second is a lead pastor who founded a local church, and the third is a care pastor. One Korean American woman is a university administrator. Three are businesswomen. Five are involved with nonprofit work while two are local government officials. Four work in the medical industry. Two are stay-at-home mothers. All the Korean American women activists volunteer at a local church and a community organization.

The ages of the subjects range from 23 to 77. Many were attending a local university or community college at the time of the interviews. Many found that higher education provided one or more avenues for participation in community activism. Korean American activist, Cheryl, for example, aspires to return to law school. Like Cheryl, other Korean American businesswomen supplement their day job by working as a mentor in the evenings or weekends. Those who had been in the paid labor force for longer were better at verbally expressing their satisfaction about their paid work and volunteer work.

Korean American Christian women are highly involved and often multitask. All the Korean American Christian women activists interviewed are involved in multiple volunteer opportunities or community projects in Washington State. All are currently involved in a local Korean American or non-ethnic-specific church in the Puget Sound region. They are involved in

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<sup>9</sup> Sponsorship is a term used in immigration law and immigration history. The definition of sponsorship has changed throughout US history. Various immigrant populations have also practiced it in different ways. Sponsorship specific to Korean immigration history to America is otherwise known as “family reunification”. The specifics are outlined in the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act. This act made it possible for US citizens (of any racial/ethnic background) or permanent residents to sponsor family members. Korean Americans who were separated from family members began sponsoring or providing official documents to petition their family members from Korea to live in the US. Citizens or permanent residents of Korean descent living in the US could sponsor a spouse, immediate family member, children, siblings, and refugees. This is how my parents were brought over from South Korea to the US. My aunt, who married an American GI, became a US citizen in the early 1960s. She then sponsored my father, her brother, to come to the US in the early 1970s.

a variety of community service projects and ministries such as youth leadership, children's ministry, bible studies, community outreach, fundraising, and preaching. Korean American women activists volunteer in multiple ways especially as it concerns their local church and they quickly respond to the immediate needs of the local church.

Korean American women's activism also includes volunteer work with nonprofit organizations and social service organizations.<sup>10</sup> Some combine their paid work with volunteer work and find ways to bring them into relationship with one another. Grace's paid work can also be considered volunteer work. As a pastor, Grace's pastoring and community service are easily relatable. Often the line between her paid work and volunteer work is blurred. She does not always expect to be paid for some of the work that she does as a pastor. For example, Grace is always seen as a pastor, even when she is involved in a community outreach event. Her involvement is seen as a part of her pastoral work. Thus, even though Grace enacts unpaid labor, her actions are viewed as part of her paid pastoral work.

For others, the line between paid work and volunteer work (work done without an expectation of payment) is clearer but Korean American women activists attempt to bring them into relationship with one another often. For example, Angie works as a fundraising coordinator at a local nonprofit organization. Although the organization she works for is highly involved in social services for the Seattle community, she herself works on financial paperwork. She expects to be paid for it. While this work eventually leads to bringing communities together, she often does not get to interact with the people she is helping. Instead, she finds other avenues in the organization where she can participate in direct social service provisions, without the expectation

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<sup>10</sup> Volunteer work is any type of labor, work, and/or services done without any expectation of payment. Volunteer work and paid work are done with similar passions or purposes; they differ in terms of expectation of payment. Volunteer work is done with the expectation that the volunteer is not paid for what they do.

of payment for her work. Angie does this to bridge or connect the two types of work together. She feels that one without the other is not enough.

Korean American Christian activist women are or have at some time been involved in several local Korean American and non-ethnic specific churches primarily in the Puget Sound region. The churches that Korean American women are most active include: Bellevue Korean Presbyterian Church, The City Church, Quest Church, Hyunjae Church, Bellevue Sarang Church, Seattle New Life Church, Presbyterian Church USA, United Presbyterian Church of Seattle (Yunhap), Full Gospel Tacoma First Church, and the Missional Community. Most of these churches are located in the King, Snohomish, or Pierce Counties.



Figure 1: The City Church, Kirkland Campus<sup>11</sup>



Figure 2: Bellevue Korean Presbyterian Church<sup>12</sup>



<sup>11</sup> This image was taken from the Bellevue Korean Presbyterian Church website at [www.bellevuekpc.com](http://www.bellevuekpc.com)

<sup>12</sup> This image was taken from a public website called Active Rain at [www.activerain.com/blogsview/2546160/the-city/church-kirkland-wa-](http://www.activerain.com/blogsview/2546160/the-city/church-kirkland-wa-)

<sup>13</sup> The image was taken from the Washington State Department of Transportation. [www.wsdot.wa.gov](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov)

In addition to church involvement, Korean American Christian activist women are primarily involved with non-profit and/or “Para” church organizations.<sup>14</sup> Some organizations are faith based, while others are not. For example, faith based organizations include the Seattle Union Gospel Mission, One Day’s Wages, 82<sup>nd</sup> Ministry, various homeless ministries across King County, MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers), Samaritan’s Purse, Bible Study Fellowship, and Youth With a Mission. These organizations are transparent about their commitment to the Christian gospel and the implications of the gospel in their everyday community involvement.

Other organizations are not always affiliated with a local church or religion. These organizations include Women of Washington, Korean Women’s Association, King County Republican party, Ballard Food Bank, King County Democratic party, Korean American Coalition – Washington, Morning Star Korean Cultural Center, Korean American Professional Society, Seattle Children’s Theatre, Korean Student Association, LINK (Liberty in North Korea), Kollaboration Seattle, and Asian Counseling and Referral Services.



Figure 3: Image of Korean American women in the Korean Women's Association of Tacoma.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Para church organizations are social and political groups that are not accountable to a particular church or church leadership. Para church organizations work with churches and individuals across various denominations. Korean American women’s Para church organizations provide social services to Korean American communities and others. I describe Para church organizations further in Chapter 3.

<sup>15</sup> This image was taken from the Korean Women’s Association website at [www.kwaonline.org](http://www.kwaonline.org)



Figure 4: Korean American Coalition of Washington. This is an image of some of their leaders.<sup>16</sup>



Figure 5: Dance and drum performance by performers from Morning Star<sup>17</sup>

The primary goal of these organizations is to provide social services or education to the community. Even though these are not faith-based organizations, Korean American activist women still use their religious beliefs as reasons for their continual involvement.

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<sup>16</sup> This image was taken from their national website at [Kacnational.com](http://Kacnational.com)

<sup>17</sup> This image was taken from a blog called, Of Paramount Importance at [ofparamount.blogspot.com/2010/06/cindy-ryu-campaign-kick-off-rousing.html](http://ofparamount.blogspot.com/2010/06/cindy-ryu-campaign-kick-off-rousing.html). This is a blog created by Representative Cindy Ryu.

## *Methods*

One of the most effective approaches to understanding Korean American Christian activist women's activism is to conduct a qualitative and ethnographic study. It is one of the most effective because it centers the perspectives and experiences of whomever the study addresses. This study centers the stories of Korean American women activists in the Pacific Northwest by following the tradition of *shifting the center*, an idea that scholar bell hooks is best known for.<sup>18</sup> Shifting the center simply means that when we, as scholars, write about marginalized communities, we begin with their perspectives and experiences.

This qualitative and ethnographic study includes oral histories that are drawn from one-to-one interviews. Without personal narratives and life stories of Korean American women, this study would be incomplete. Personal narratives of Korean American women reflect histories and experiences that have historically been relegated to the margins of academia. The details of Korean American women's histories are often ignored by mainstream historians and theologians. They are also marginalized within a larger umbrella of Asian American history. The inclusion of Korean American women's oral histories remedies this gap in scholarship and furthers the visibility of their lives in America.<sup>19</sup>

Oral history interviews are different due to the, "emphasis placed on the formation of questions that guide the research."<sup>20</sup> These oral history interviews required that the questions were constructed ahead of time. I also revisited these questions after the first couple of interviews. I also posed the questions differently depending on the interviewee's responses. I

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<sup>18</sup> bell hooks, otherwise known as Gloria Jean Watkins is an author and feminist activist. The perspective of shifting the center is discussed in her book, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1984 and 2000. Other feminist scholars such as Margaret L. Andersen and Patricia Hill Collins have built upon this perspective in the following anthology, Andersen, Margaret L. and Patricia Hill Collins. *Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1995.

<sup>19</sup> An oral history interview is a qualitative method that most social scientists use to validate details about historical events or simply to create biographies about their research subjects.

<sup>20</sup> Yow, Valerie. *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2005. 8.

ended up questioning my assumptions about the kinds of answers that I wanted from the interviews and allow for hypotheses to occur organically. This also helped me to better understand how the approaches I used, impact the interview subject and resulting data.

Oral history is an ethnographic method that is necessary for recording interpretations made by Korean American women activists about broader Korean American women activist histories. Oral histories are not only about an individual but also provide historical evidence for the existence of a given community. In other words, oral histories are important because they are, “reflections of an individuals’ personal experience...and as records... [are] reflections of collective memory and storytelling.”<sup>21</sup> Individual oral histories collected from Korean American Christian activist women validate their own stories and also reveal a collective memory of events and significant moments about Korean American Christian history. Korean American Christian activist women’s narratives help to further explain the formation of Korean American church communities, the creation of Korean American women’s groups, and provide a narrative about Korean Bible women in Washington State.

Emily Honig claims that oral histories are interpreted explanations of history and they require analysis.<sup>22</sup> I examined the factors that construct the activist narratives such as race, class, religion, gender, and immigration. By doing so, I attempt to better understand how Korean American women activists negotiate meanings of race, gender, and religion as individuals but also as activists among communities. Examining factors such as religion and gender provides some insight into how Korean American women activists theologize as well. I also examine the degree to which religious beliefs influence the ways that Korean American women choose particular kinds of avenues of activism. Secondly, I drew conclusions about why or how these

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<sup>21</sup> Honig, Emily. “Striking Lives: Oral History and the Politics of Memory”. In *Journal of Women’s History*. (Spring, 1997): 139-157.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

factors might produce similar or different narratives among Korean American women. I analyzed whether these narratives are in conflict with one another, hoping for a diverse and unique Korean American women's activist history.

In order to retrieve oral histories, I established relationships with various members of the Korean American community. Growing up as a Korean American person in the Pacific Northwest, I was part of the Korean American community in Lynnwood for most of my adolescent years. Korean Americans often identified who I was by remembering who my parents are. This is a common way of relating to one another.<sup>23</sup> Thus, one of my goals was to establish an individual reputation and identity as a researcher and returning community member.<sup>24</sup> Having established my identity as a researcher and community member, I met and built friendships with as many members of the Korean American community as possible. It was important to foster trust as a researcher and as a community member.

Through informal participant observations at community events, I met Korean American and non-Korean American individuals that I could speak to about this research topic. For example, I attended an Asian American women's conference in 2009 at Seattle Pacific University. At the conference, I found a network of second generation Asian American and Korean American Christian activist women. I was met with sincere curiosity and overwhelming support. As a result, informal participant observations resulted in referrals for research subjects.

A few of the participant observations were conducted at various cultural, social, and political events where I immersed myself in the community and anticipated a greater number of

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<sup>23</sup> Many community members knew who my mother was and because she had a respected reputation, they engaged in discussion with me in a positive way. Community members even remembered me as a young child and often treat me as if I was a family member. Because I speak Korean, many of them were also more willing to talk with me.

<sup>24</sup> I say "returning member" because I was away from Korean American community in the Pacific Northwest for four years during college.



Korean American women activists and community volunteers attendees.<sup>25</sup> While this method was useful in the early stages of participant recruitment, it became increasingly difficult to sustain due to time constraints and an inability to visit multiple events simultaneously. Thus, I relied primarily on a second method of snowball sampling.

Snowball sampling is a method that identifies a “hidden” or “hard to reach” population.<sup>26</sup> Through the existing activist network, which included Korean Americans and non Korean Americans, I took “advantage of the social networks of identified respondents...”<sup>27</sup> Although Korean American women activists are very active in the Pacific Northwest, they can be considered a hard to reach population for several reasons. First, it is their constant involvement in community activity and balancing work and home life that makes it difficult for them to participate in an interview. Korean American women activists who were mothers and had a full time job were more likely to ask for a phone or email exchange rather than an in-person interview. Second, although this study includes 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean American women whose primary language is English, some first generation Korean American women were wary of their English speaking skills. I reassured them that the interviews could be conducted in English and Korean.

I developed an open line of communication with several members, which aided in the snowballing process. Respondents were the primary conductors of referrals; however, some of the conductors also surprisingly included non-Korean American men who had developed significant professional relationships of trust and mutual respect with Korean American women

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<sup>25</sup> I drew some conclusions about where Korean American women involved themselves, their reasons for participating, and the significance of their contribution to their communities. Korean American Christian women activists participated in a wide array of community events. Some events were explicitly Christian while others were not affiliated with any religious organization.

<sup>26</sup> Rowland Atkinson and John Flint. “Accessing Hidden and Hard-to-Reach Populations: Snowball Research Strategies”. *Social Research Update*. Guilford, United Kingdom: University of Surrey, 2001. The snowball sampling method is a, “technique where one subject gives the researcher the name of another subject who in turn provides more referrals to other possible subjects.” Atkinson and Flint, 1.

<sup>27</sup> Atkinson and Flint, 1.

active in the community.<sup>28</sup> As Atkinson and Flint points out, those who have some form of local social power provide access to similarly situated research subjects.<sup>29</sup> This is true of the respondents that referred a majority of the research subjects to this study. One respondent is a male professor at a highly regarded university. His position in the community is respected among Asian American communities throughout the Pacific Northwest. He has demonstrated a strong support of Korean American women activists. Another respondent is a leader at a local non-denominational church in Bellevue, WA. He referred me to Korean American women activists who worked in the local churches in the area. While it is true that these male respondents have social power, the Korean American women whom they referred came from varying social statuses.

My relative insider status is also a critical component of the project. The fact that I am a second generation Korean American church woman facilitated this prospect by enabling me to quickly establish a sense of familiarity and trust. For example, a few of the research subjects agreed to interview with me after I explained who I was in more detail and how I could relate to the research topic. Research subjects were also more eager to participate in a one-to-one interview once they understood the importance of the research.

I use this study to affirm and encourage Korean American women's experiences and histories as valid and intellectual. Jung Ha Kim, my experience as a co-ethnic research exemplifies that, "I learned to rely on my 'common sense' as a hyphenated person for understanding other hyphenated people and their constructions of reality."<sup>30</sup> As a Korean American woman scholar interviewing other Korean American women, I use my lens as a

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<sup>28</sup> I refer to respondents as individuals, Korean and non-Korean American women and men who I contacted for possible research subject referrals.

<sup>29</sup> Atkinson and Flint, 2

<sup>30</sup> Kim, Jung Ha. *Bridge-Markers and Cross Bearers: Korean American Women and the Church*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997. 30.

Korean American woman as a point of reference or as another window through which to understand how others who are similarly positioned also see and experience the world. I am a scholar who can identify with the individuals I study.

As a co-ethnic researcher, I thought it was important to collect research data through oral history interviews with Korean American Christian women. I collected this data between the months of June 2011 to August 2012. The interviews were conducted in two languages, English and Korean. As I had anticipated, both the interviewer and the subjects used a combination of Korean and English, also known by the street slang, “Konglish.” Konglish is a hybrid language purposefully used by second generation Korean Americans in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Sometimes Konglish is used to convey a message when the appropriate Korean or English word is not available. Konglish is used as a bridge language between first, 1.5, second and third generation Koreans and Korean Americans. It is also used among Korean Americans when they do not want non-Korean speaking individuals to understand what they are saying. Konglish appears as or is spoken when one English word and one Korean word is combined to produce a similar or new meaning. The first half of the word could be Korean and the second half of the word could be English and vice versa. Konglish is also spoken by using Korean words and English words all in one sentence to form an idea. The interviewees and I used Konglish during the interviews. Historically, Konglish was understood among Korean language scholars as a, “variant of English spoken by Korean immigrants in the US.”<sup>31</sup> Others like Robert J. Dickey defines Konglish as a Koreanized interpretation of English or English words used in Korean grammar.<sup>32</sup> As yet, there is very little written about the use of Konglish as a hybrid language.

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<sup>31</sup> Lee, Iksop and Robert Ramsey. “The Korean Language.” In *The Journal of Asian Studies*. Vol. 60.4. (November, 2001): 1212-1214.

<sup>32</sup> It is difficult to find literature about “Konglish”. Many scholars refer to it briefly but there are no comprehensive studies done by scholars about Konglish specifically. Robert Dickey is the Publications committee chair for KOTESOL (Korea Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages), a professional organization for teachers of English in South Korea. According to

Each interview was recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions were sent to the interviewees for review and final approval for use in this study. I asked each Korean American woman activist to review her interview transcript and from the twenty transcribed interviews, I chose five to present as testimonial stories. The challenges of language barriers or questions of authenticity were smaller obstacles than expected. The challenges I faced are common among researchers who conduct interviews. A few challenges included the constant concern or worry of having enough interview data. The majority of interview subjects, who verbally offered to do a second interview if needed, offset this concern.

Another challenge was navigating the line between Korean and American socio-cultural cues when conducting the interviews. Korean Americans constantly navigate two sets of social cues or rules, one Korean, one American and as an interviewer I was not exempt from either one. For example, when interviewing Korean American women older than I was, I was careful to properly address and speak with formality. Whereas with younger Korean American women either my age or younger, I could speak casually. The intersection of both Korean and American cultural cues could best be seen in interviews with younger Korean American women who lived in America for most of their lives. Interviews with them were dictated more by American social rules than Korean ones. Interviews do not occur in a vacuum outside of social or cultural meaning. Within an interview, certain social and cultural meaning was navigated.

Another method useful to this study was the analysis of key texts that included scholarship by historians, theologians, critical race theorists, feminist thinkers, and sociologists produced between 1970 and 2012. Utilizing these texts helped place this research into broader literature about gendered, raced, and religious US histories. Reviewing this literature also

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Dickey, there are six types of Konglish, loanwords, hybrid terms, truncated, pseudo-loanwords, fabrications (use of English), and corruptions (The use of an English word for another meaning).

revealed gaps and areas of research about topics that arise from the intersection of race, gender, religion, and activism. Useful theories from key texts helped the analysis of interview data and informed my written content.

In addition to key texts, I used historical archives. Historical archives are a primary source of Korean American Christian women's history in the Pacific Northwest. Historical archives include organizational archives, local church archives, and public archives. The archives I accessed were useful because they provided some information about individual Korean American women otherwise unavailable through current academic scholarship. Since a majority of contemporary scholarship focuses on Korean Americans in Hawaii, New York or California, local archives provided some basis for information regarding local activism and histories of Korean American women. A local archive I mainly consulted was housed in Korean the Wing Luke Asian Museum, which is relatively unknown to the public.

Initially, I hoped that local church archives and organizational archives provided information about where, what, and how Korean American women participated in the community. I expected that local churches would have detailed records of Korean American women's involvement. However, accessing local church archives proved difficult.<sup>33</sup> Local churches contained very little details about Korean American women's involvement. I found that speaking to a Korean American woman was more useful. Korean American women interviewed, had and continue to have, a vast network of friendships and relationships that could never be recorded in an archive alone. Ironically, most of the women organizers and volunteers kept track

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<sup>33</sup> In order to access local church archives, there were multiple steps that I had to take. First, I had to establish a relationship of trust with leaders that had the power to make the archives available and accessible. After establishing these kinds of relationships, I had to organize coordinate times where I could look through the archives. The archives available were often written in the Korean language. Archived texts like service programs and event programs do not list who organized the events. Therefore, it is very difficult to identify whether Korean American women were involved in events or responsible for the construction of the programs. Local church archives typically hold sermon notes provided by the pastor, video recordings of the messages in the case that they have the technology, and minimal pictures of church events. These images are for church use only.

of their involvement verbally. Scholars tend to overlook this history because it is the kind of history that is transmitted personally through stories.

### *Significance of the Study*

This study of Korean American Christian women's activism is meaningful for several reasons. First, Korean American Christian women's activism raises questions about the role and impact of religion among Korean Americans in the US. Scholars of Korean American history can no longer ignore the role and influence of Christianity in the lives of Christian or non-Christian Korean Americans. This is especially true among early 20<sup>th</sup> century Korean women and contemporary Korean American women. This study is the first that examines the intersection of race, gender, religion, and activism about Korean American women activists.

This study is also valuable because of its geographical specificity. Current research about Korean American women is limited to Korean American women living in regions such as Los Angeles and New York City. Very little concerns Korean American women in the Pacific Northwest. As a scholar living in America, of Korean descent, it is important to serve the Korean American community through academia. One way to serve this community is by helping to make visible and available the histories of Korean American women's activism previously obscured in academic work. Currently, there is little research about the histories of Korean American women and their contributions to the one of the largest Korean populations in the Pacific Northwest.

This study is also distinct because it is the first study of Korean American women's histories and activism in the Pacific Northwest. Asian American scholars Ronald Takaki once claimed that studies about Asian Americans have had the tendency to be California-centric. This pattern is also applicable to Korean Americans. This study departs from this pattern in order to extend the history of Korean Americans, and by extension, Asian Americans in the US.

Korean American Christian women's activist history in the Pacific Northwest challenges a mainstream perspective that communities living in the Pacific Northwest are the most unchurched or least spiritually involved in America. Discussions among politicians, research among scholars, and mainstream news media reports by journalists, pastors, and church leaders nation-wide argued that the Pacific Northwest, particularly Seattle, has a minimal amount of church-related participation. In an article published in *Response*, writer Jeffery Overstreet cited two American Religious Identification Surveys conducted in 2001 and 2008 by Barry A. Kosmin & Professor Egon Mayer to argue that religious participation in Washington is minimal in comparison to the national average.<sup>34</sup> These surveys and Overstreet's thoughts illustrate an inaccurate observation. They argue that attendance in church on a Sunday accurately represents the level of religiosity, belief in God, or involvement in religious related activity. This survey does not consider small group participation, outreaches, community events, and fundraisers, which should be evaluated as avenues of church involvement. The claim that a majority of the population in Washington seems to be the most unchurched is not the most accurate conclusion.<sup>35</sup> Had survey conductors considered the historical and contemporary involvement of Korean American women in Protestant and Catholic churches, the statistics they provided might have looked different. Korean American Christian women's activist history challenges the dominant understanding that the Pacific Northwest is the least churched in America.

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<sup>34</sup> Overstreet, Jeffery. "Stronger Together: SPU's Perkins Center Joins Partners in a Movement to Transform Seattle." In *Response: Engaging the Culture, Changing the World*. Vol. 32.1. (Seattle Pacific University: 2009). Accessed September 2010. <http://www.spu.edu/depts/uc/response/winter2k9/features/stronger-together.asp> Overstreet claimed that the first survey conducted in 2001, found that Washington State is one of the least churched states in the US. Overstreet also identified in Kosmin's and Mayer's second survey, that there was a downward trend of church involvement, regardless of denomination among residents of Washington. Overstreet is a magazine editor, blogger, writer, and film reviewer. He is a part of the Chrysostom Society, an organization of Christian writers.

<sup>35</sup> Both surveys do not consider race, class, or gender in its analysis. Neither survey presented the rate at which particular groups with respect to race nor did gender attend church nor church related gatherings among Washington residents. Disregarding race, class, and gender results in a possible misrepresentation of churchgoer attendance.

Lastly, this study expands scholarship about how gender and gender roles are constructed, understood, and shaped by religion (institutions) and spirituality (personal relationship with God). Religion and spirituality, two areas of analysis, are interconnected and distinguishable among Korean American Christian activist women. Korean American Christian activist women, intentionally or unintentionally, question gender and gender roles in Christian Korean American communities and in their own faith life. A prominent Korean American scholar, Jung Ha Kim claimed that one of the difficult challenges that Korean American women face is patriarchy within Korean and Korean American churches.<sup>36</sup> The Korean American women activists I interviewed expressed similar difficulties. Concerns ranged from issues of legitimacy as a female leader amongst male leadership, authority on Biblical knowledge questioned by laity, to questioning one's own ability to work.

### *Terminology*

In the following chapters, I use several terms that need explanation. These terms are discipline specific. They are, 'Korean American Christian woman activist', 1<sup>st</sup> generation Korean American, second generation Korean American, and 1.5 generation Korean American, Pacific Northwest, and activism. First, the term 'Korean American Christian woman activist' is an identity category that describes the ethnicity, race, and religious preference of a particular group of people of color in the US. All participants self-identified as Korean American women.

The terms first, second, and 1.5 generation can be explained together. "1<sup>st</sup> generation" simply describes the immigrant generation. First generation Koreans are the first in their family to immigrate to the US. The term 2<sup>nd</sup> generation usually refers to American born children of the

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<sup>36</sup> Kim, Jung Ha. *Bridge-Markers and Cross Bearers: Korean American Women and the Church*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997. 30. In institutions such as the "Kyo hye," Kim argued that Korean American women faced several difficulties as a result of patriarchy. Patriarchy supported the limited promotion of women as pastors, designated gender specific tasks, and affected the ways that women related to God. Kim, 1.



1<sup>st</sup> generation. Korean Americans who are of the second generation are automatically American citizens.<sup>37</sup> Second generation Korean Americans grow up speaking English in public and at home. They also speak some Korean but this depends on whether their parents taught and spoke Korean on a regular basis. Second-generation Korean Americans usually view themselves as American whereas the first generation tends to see themselves more as Koreans who live in the US. 1.5-generation Korean Americans are a unique group. The term refers to a variety of Korean Americans in the US. Typically a 1.5-generation person is a person born in Korea and moves to the US as infants or young children. All generations of Korean Americans can include multiracial Koreans and Korean adoptees.

The Pacific Northwest typically refers to the geographical region of Washington, Oregon, British Columbia, Alaska, and Idaho. For the purposes of this study, I use the term, ‘Pacific Northwest’ to refer to the King, Pierce, and Snohomish Counties in Washington State. This study does not include Korean Americans in Oregon, British Columbia, Alaska, or Idaho.

Lastly, there is “activism.” Activism is defined in several ways and usually includes political organizing. Activism can also be righteous discontent that describes actions that originate from recognition that there are injustices that need to be addressed from a spiritual and holistic perspective.<sup>38</sup> Activism is also an action or multiple actions for the purpose of challenging and transforming an inequality or oppression for the good of everyone. However, activism also includes movements to maintain inequality such as white supremacist movements.

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<sup>37</sup> This is true according to the idea of *jus soli* that means you are a citizen when you’re born on American soil.

<sup>38</sup> Righteous discontent is a term coined by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham who wrote *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993. Righteous discontent is a term that describes how African American churchwomen argued against racial and gender discrimination. Like many Protestant Christians, many believe that they are righteous, without guilt, and should resist oppression. Black churchwomen in Higginbotham’s work believe that because they are righteous, they become discontent with injustices and discontent is a part of organizing for racial self-help and social change activism.

Some may have argued, and rightly so, that white supremacist is not good for everyone because it furthers racial and class inequality. Thus, activism is subjective.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Practical Activism Conference at the University of California Santa Clara describes activism as practical. Activism can be as practical as participating in discussions that raises awareness about social issues. The irony about this discussion of activism is that activism is difficult to define. Even scholarship produced in Ethnic Studies discusses examples of activism but does not give an exact definition of what it is.<sup>39</sup> Thus, I interviewed study participants about their definitions of activism and constructed a definition applicable to this study. Activism is an action or multiple actions that one takes, aligned with one's life purpose or calling, in order to affect change in society and culture. Korean American Christian women activists describe the nuances and specificities in chapters four through six.

### *Introduction of the Chapters*

Chapter 1 provides a literature review of scholarship about Korean American history about Korean American women from the fields of Korean American Studies, Asian American Studies, Women and Gender Studies, Sociology, and History. I analyze this literature to further develop Korean American women's history as a field. I also analyze literature about Korean American Christian women's history specific to their activism. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the gaps and how my study addresses some of them.

Chapter 2 introduces the reader to Korean American women's history with a focus on the relationship between religion and activism. This chapter gives an in-depth description of the historical context that first generation Korean women and subsequent Korean generations experienced in the United States. I also provide an overview of the history of Korea's initial

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<sup>39</sup> Liu, Michael, Kim Geron, and Tracy Lai. *The Snake Dance of Asian American Activism: Community, Vision, and Power*. Lanham: Rotman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008. Nancy, Ed. *Community Activism and Feminist Politics: Organizing Across Race, Class, and Gender*. New York & London: Routledge, 1998.

interaction with Christianity. I briefly describe how early Korean women participated in Christianity and exercised their beliefs as they emigrated from Korea to the US.

Korean American women's activism is one thread of history nested within Asian American activist women's history. Chapter 3 presents and analyzes five types of activism common among Korean American Christian women activists from 1900 to 1960s and includes some examples of contemporary Korean American women's activisms to challenge previous notions of US women's activism. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of four areas in literature about Korean American women's history that can be expanded.<sup>40</sup>

In Chapter 4, I argue that Korean American Christian women's (Bible women) civic participation presents Korean American Christian women as activists, rather than passive churchwomen. In other words, I redefine Korean American Christian women's activism as a labor of compassion that is comparable to 18th, 19<sup>th</sup>, and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Korean Bible women's community work.<sup>41</sup> Their history and experiences are part of a larger social change movement that centers religion and reveals the transnational relationship between contemporary Korean American women's activism and early Korean Bible women's activism through time.

Chapter 5 and 6 presents and analyzes the lives of twenty Korean American Christian women activists or contemporary Korean American Bible women, living in the Pacific Northwest. I argue that contemporary Korean American Christian women activists are community builders and without their activism, the political, social, and economic development and success of Korean American communities would not be where it is today. Using each

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<sup>40</sup> These four areas are: The interaction between Korean American women activists and feminist activism, Korean American women's student activism, Korean American women's political activism concerning North and South Korean politics, and Korean American women's local and national political involvement.

<sup>41</sup> The term, labor of compassion, was coined by Jung Ha Kim in her work with Korean American church women in New York. Kim, Jung Ha. "The Labor of Compassion: Voices of Churches Korean American Women." In *New Spiritual Homes: Religion and Asian Americans*. David K. Yoo, ed. Honolulu, Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press. 202 – 217.

woman's stories about race, gender, activism, and religion, I explain the importance of the use of religion and religious expression in social change activism. Through their stories, scholars and community members can better understand that religious expression and spirituality are also reasons for activism in the Pacific Northwest.

In the tradition of oral story telling prevalent in early Korean culture and used widely by Korean women throughout Korean and Korean American history, Chapters 7 and 8 presents five testimonial stories by Korean American Christian activist women living in Washington State. Included in each testimonial story are words of wisdom or advice for the readers. This practice of sharing stories among Korean American women is similar to what ordained elder and scholar, Rosetta Ross discussed about African American women's religious practices, testifying and witnessing.<sup>42</sup> Like African American women who use testimonials as, "verbal affirmations of belief and narratives of divine interaction with ordinary life..."<sup>43</sup> Korean American women activists express their stories about God, activism, and everyday life that produces a more empowering narrative of religion and gender. Three Korean American women pastoral testimonial stories are presented in chapter 7. Chapter 8 contains three testimonial stories by Korean American women active in the Pacific Northwest community. These stories are meant to inspire and encourage activists and community members. Audiences for these chapters include Korean American Christian women, Korean American women activists, community members, and scholars interested in research at the intersection of religion, gender, race, and activism.

The conclusion offers a summary of the study's main points and methods. The conclusion also emphasizes why this study is important. I also discuss Korean American women's theology

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<sup>42</sup> Ross, Rosetta. *Witnessing & Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003. Testifying and witnessing, Ross says, are a way that African American women, "cast everyday life as sacred by asserting divine intervention in ordinary circumstances." 13.

<sup>43</sup> Ross, 13.

with a little more depth. I end this chapter with questions for colleagues and community members interested in furthering scholarship about religion, race, and gender.

## Chapter 1: Influential Perspectives & Literature Review

In 2008, a scholar of Korean American women's history Lili M. Kim stated that, "Korean American history has remained a relatively uncharted territory."<sup>44</sup> Scholars committed to recovering and analyzing the histories of Korean American women has taken this statement seriously. Korean American women's history now appears in interdisciplinary scholarship that draws from Korean American Studies, Asian American Studies, Sociology, History, Religion, and Women Studies. This scholarship attempts to better understand Korean American women's histories. An analysis of interdisciplinary scholarship about Korean American women helps contextualize the experiences of Korean American Christian women and their activist histories.

In *Asian American Historiography*, historian Sucheng Chan divides Asian American history into four periods of which the fourth is the most applicable to this study.<sup>45</sup> Following the 1980s, there was a proliferation of autobiographies and oral histories, which Chan defines as the fourth period. This period coincides with an increased amount of scholarship about Korean American women. Thus, the work I review here includes scholarship produced from the 1990s until the present. Before I analyze the scholarship, I present key theoretical frameworks that I use to understand Korean American Christian women's experiences.

The first and most important theoretical framework is intersectionality.<sup>46</sup> Using intersectionality, I incorporate a woman-centered Korean subjectivity. I also use the theoretical

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<sup>44</sup> Kim, Lili M. "Doing Korean American History in the Twenty-First Century." In *Journal of Asian American Studies*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press. (June 2008): 199-209.

<sup>45</sup> Chan, Sucheng. "Asian American Historiography." In *Pacific Historical Review*. Vol. 65.3. (August 1996): 363-399. The third period refers to scholarship written in the 1960s to the 1980s. Social scientists began to revise earlier scholarship about ethnic groups, particularly that of Asian Americans. They created a plethora of critical writings about Asian Americans, including Korean Americans. It was during the latter part of this period that writing about Asian American women and activism emerged, but writing about Korean American women was sorely lacking.

<sup>46</sup> In 1989, feminist thinker and writer Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality. The theory of intersectionality aids in the study of social, political, and economic study of the interactions of multiple systems of categorizations like race, class, and gender. This theory helps to understand inequality better. In feminist literature, intersectionality is primarily used to analyze

frameworks of Asian American theology and *shifting the center*.<sup>47</sup> Using these theoretical frameworks, it is important that the research subjects and their experiences become of the center of intellectual inquiry rather than the margins of American society.<sup>48</sup> The goal of both theoretical perspectives is to shift the center so that the experiences of the marginalized become the new center of scholarly examination.<sup>49</sup> The presumed center, experiences and histories of white, male, and Americans written primarily by similarly situated individuals, have been the long-standing tradition in scholarly analysis. Shifting the center now places marginalized communities such as Korean American women, at the center of scholarly inquiry.

Relatedly, scholars critical of religion argue that Christianity is and has always been part of the center of scholarly inquiry and a dominant institution and religion in the United States. While this may be true, the various expressions and ways that marginalized communities throughout American history have practiced Christianity has not been part of the center. Primarily white, male, and conservative interpretations, practices, theologies, and expressions of Christianity are more commonplace in scholarship about religion. Less common is research about how Christianity is practiced among marginalized groups like Korean American women. Research about Korean American women activist experiences emerges as Korean American scholars argue that their theologizing and religious practices matter. In order to effectively analyze and understand the multi-layered experiences of Korean American women, the theory of intersectionality proves most useful.

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oppressions that arise from the relationships between race, class, and gender. The way I use intersectionality is different because I use a woman-centered Korean subjectivity to center the analysis about Korean American women. In addition to analyzing race, class, and gender, I also consider systems of categorizations like nationhood and religion.

<sup>47</sup> hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1984 and 2000.

<sup>48</sup> In social science scholarship, the margins are referred to as economic, social, political, sexual, and religious, among other categories, identities in spaces that are often ignored by mainstream scholarship, media, and institutions of power.

<sup>49</sup> Collins, Patricia Hill. "Shifting the Center: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorizing." In *Women in Culture: A Women's Studies Anthology*. Lucinda Joy Peace, ed. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Inc., 1998. 231-243. Shifting the center is the idea that the center, as a space of power, needs to be shifted over to experiences and histories of people of color and communities that have been marginalized or ignored in academic work or mainstream US culture.

Intersectionality that incorporates a woman-centered Korean subjectivity argues that we need to center the experiences of the marginalized in our accounts of US history. Marginalized experiences in America, including Korean American women's experiences have long been relegated to the margins of gender studies and studies of religion. Korean American Christian activist women do not experience life events as only raced, or gendered, or religious people. An examination of one category is not adequate enough to understand their experiences. They always experience their lives as women, as Christians, and as activists. While one identity category may be more prominent in their personal identification, their experiences are characterized by multiple identity categories.<sup>50</sup>

Rebecca Y. Kim's research about Korean American evangelical students uses intersectionality to analyze the meanings of race, ethnicity, and religion and how they shape the ways that Korean Americans students begin and sustain their involvement in evangelical organizations.<sup>51</sup> Kim analyzed the meanings of race, ethnicity, and religion, as experienced and understood by Korean American evangelical students to describe how and why Korean Americans participate in religious activity. Although Kim does not identify gender as an important analytic, she nevertheless uses an intersectional framework to provide a multi-layered analysis of student evangelicals. This analysis challenges and adds to scholarship about Korean American students and religious activism on college campuses.

Jung Ha Kim examined how race, religion, and gender intersected in the lives of Korean American women in the church. In *Bridge-Makers and Cross-Bearers* Kim asked, what does it

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<sup>50</sup> I use intersectionality to underscore the influence and role of religion as well as race, class, and gender. Like feminist theorist, Marilyn Frye who analyzed gender oppression intersectionally and claimed that "women" experience oppression in multiple ways, I argue that Korean American women histories represent a social, political, and economic picture that shows how multiple wires intersect. Without this intersectional analysis, significant portions of their histories can and have been ignored or omitted.

<sup>51</sup> Kim, Rebecca. *God's New Whiz Kids?: Korean American Evangelicals on Campus*. New York and London: New York University Press, 2006.



mean to be a woman in the context of a Korean-American church?<sup>52</sup> In this ethnographic study of Korean American women in a church she called “Kyo hye,” Kim analyzed how values of gender and gender roles impacted Korean American and Korean immigrant women’s participation in Korean American churches. Kim claimed that the way the church valued gender limited the leadership and non-leadership roles for women. The Kyo-hye typically assigned domestic tasks to Korean women members while responsibilities such as pastoral care were assigned to Korean men. In response, Korean American women used the limited space of the church for self-empowerment by creating avenues just for women.

In this study, I expand intersectionality theory by considering religion and activism.<sup>53</sup> The use of intersectional theory, as mutually constitutive, is beneficial because it challenges how theologians understand and conceptualize Korean American women’s experiences and histories. In the field of Theology, Korean American women’s histories have been subsumed under general histories of Korean Americans. In research about Korean American church history, Korean American women have largely been ignored and minimized.

In the field of Women or Gender Studies, using intersectionality to examine race, religion, gender, and activism together has had a longer trajectory. For example, Shirley Yee’s exploration of the history of free Black women and their abolitionist activism in the early to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century analyzed race, gender, and activism in Black women abolitionists’ interaction with

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<sup>52</sup> Kim, Jung Ha. *Bridge-Makers and Cross-Bearers: Korean American Women and the Church*. Atlanta: Scholars, Press. 1997.

<sup>53</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw’s understanding of intersectionality about U.S. Black women is useful to this study of Korean American women because of the anecdotal comparisons made between Korean American women and Black women. Studies about Black women’s experiences are pertinent to Korean American women’s history and experiences for several reasons. First, these studies highlight commonalities between Black women’s and Korean American women’s experiences in the US. Historians of both groups need the theory of intersectionality to understand the depth of these histories and the impact of religion and church between these social groups. Religion and the church also play an important role in Black women’s religious history and Korean American women’s religious history in the U.S. Specifically, Christianity shaped the ways that Black women and Korean American women resist oppression and enact social change as gendered, raced, and religious beings.

faith-based organizations, churches, and other abolitionist believers.<sup>54</sup> Although religion is not explicitly mentioned as a category of analysis, it is a prominent factor described in the experiences of Black women activists, such as Harriet Tubman and Sarah-Mapps Douglass. Another example is Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's study of Black churchwomen between 1880 and 1920.<sup>55</sup> Brooks Higginbotham argued that Black churchwomen used the Bible to resist racism and to fight for the rights of Black women. She explained that Black churchwomen "developed a distinct discourse of resistance."<sup>56</sup> This discourse of resistance was exercised through the avenues they created in Baptist churches.

Asian American Studies, more specifically, Korean American Studies has given some attention to religion. There are studies about Korean Americans and church life. However, intersectional research that examines religion, gender, race, and activism in the lives of Korean American women is absent. This study is the first to use an intersectional theory to analyze Korean American women's activism that considers religion, gender, and race together.

I use intersectional theory to analyze the experiences of Korean American women activists who are at the margins of Korean American churches and non-ethnic specific churches. Being Christian in a predominantly Christian nation like the US affords some religious privileges.<sup>57</sup> However, if one is a member of the marginalized gender or race in a predominantly white church, this Christian privilege is mitigated. In other words, while Korean Americans

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<sup>54</sup> Yee, Shirley. *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828-1860*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1992.

<sup>55</sup> Brooks Higginbotham, Evelyn. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880 – 1920*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.

<sup>56</sup> Brooks Higginbotham, 2.

<sup>57</sup> One privilege of being Christian is to find a Protestant church in almost every neighborhood in every state. Having access to a religious institution is a privilege. Another privilege is finding the Christian Bible in most bookstores. There are bookstores and outlets that sell Christian literature and Bibles. Then there is the privilege of practicing Christian holidays with the entire nation. The privilege of practicing one's religion without ostracism or public disgrace is also available to Christians in the US. There are many more privileges. It is also important to remember though that these privileges afforded to Christians are typically associated with privilege attached to whiteness. It is privileged associated with whiteness that helped open and maintain Christian bookstores and other bookstores.

enjoy privileges associated with Christianity, the ways that they experience privileges associated with Christianity is different.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, if Korean American women activists are active in a Korean American church that does not recognize the contributions or involvement of women, the presumed privileged position of being a Christian also takes on a different meaning. By using intersectionality to examine the meanings of race, gender, religion, and activism, I argue that Korean American women activists inhabit the margins of churches yet they also create various forms of activism and community work from these positions of marginality.

Young I. Song states, “Using a woman-centered perspective doesn’t simply amount to a recipe of add women and stir.”<sup>59</sup> Gender, as well as religion or activism, is an integral category in the lives of Korean American Christian women and examining the meanings of gender, religion, and activism broadens the scope of this research. It is “a philosophy based on values of individual worth, an inherent connectedness to others, concern with collective wellbeing as well as a perspective that living is an ongoing process.”<sup>60</sup> Thus, this study recognizes the individuality of each Korean American Christian woman and how each person’s activism influences others.

While theologians, historians, and sociologists have done much work in recording and analyzing Korean American religious activity, a gendered intersectional perspective can always be improved. This woman-centered perspective about the study of Korean American Christian women activists would help make their experiences, histories, and lives more visible, especially in the field of Korean American Studies. This study uses this woman-centered perspective to

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<sup>58</sup> Privilege is contingent on gender, race, and class. For example, Korean American women involved in a predominantly white church may experience the privilege of accessibility. However, accessibility does not mean that Korean American women will always be treated based on meanings associated with race, ethnicity, or class. More specifically, Korean American women have access to participate in predominantly white churches but sometimes face racism from church members. This is just one example of privilege being contingent on meanings of race.

<sup>59</sup> Song, Young In. “A Woman Centered Perspectives on Korean American Women Today.” In *Korean American Women: From Tradition to Modern Feminism*. Young In Song and Ailee Moon, eds. Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1998. 6.

<sup>60</sup> Song, 6.

show how religion interacts with race and gender to produce various types of activism prevalent among Korean American Christian activist women.

Part of this intersectional perspective includes a woman-centered perspective that first positions Korean American women as subjects in the research. Second, it argues that Korean American women's gender consciousness is a precursor to their long-term activism. Each Korean American woman subject in this study developed a gender consciousness that eventually aided involvement in activism. The first stage of gender consciousness was the recognition of inequality followed by a choice to conform or resist. Each activist interviewed was able to identify some type of inequality in her life and as a result, they chose to respond. When activists investigated these issues further, their knowledge about the topic expanded. The activists then exercised empowerment strategies that included working with others. All Korean American women activists interviewed in this study were involved in some form of social justice work. Korean American women have at some level, made a conscious decision to help others and by extension; they address a relevant social issue. The process of developing a gender consciousness that leads to activism, is also a strategy used by Asian American theologians with respect to thinking about their racial and religious identities.

Asian American theology analyzes Korean American women's experiences by giving specific attention to the meanings of race, ethnicity, and culture with respect to religion. Asian American theology is coupled with evangelical theology.<sup>61</sup> Evangelical theology is a close kin to Asian American theology when employed by theologians committed to producing scholarship about marginalized communities. In this way, both are committed to centering the lives of Korean American women with respect to their difficulties and triumphs in life. Evangelical

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<sup>61</sup> Evangelical theory believes that believers in Jesus share the gospel to others because it is a positive and life changing way to influence others. Evangelical theory believes in Sola Scriptura, which means that the Christian Bible contains words divinely written through prophets directly from God. Theologizing can also be understood as religious reflections.

theology is used by Korean American theologians to better understand the impact of religion in the lives of Korean Americans.<sup>62</sup> Evangelical theology is informed by evangelical theory drawing from a culmination of years of studying the Christian Bible. Evangelical theology is an active commitment to the restoration of people and their relationships with God and with others. The Korean American women I interviewed use evangelical theology to interpret their experiences and to participate in activism.

Evangelical theology is also coupled with my relational commitment to God. I have entitled this study, “The Call of God” also because I can relate to this idea of “calling”. I understand how deeply connected one’s life purpose or “call” is with one’s relationship with their deity. The call of God, which is typically understood as a “purpose in life,” is an important aspect and a significant motivating factor among Korean American Christian women activists. Most often, Korean American women align their activist work with doing what they believe God has called them to do. Their activism is spiritual and political. The two cannot be separated. Thus, evangelical theology allows for an analysis of the depth of spiritual commitment among Korean American women activists and their activism.

Relatedly, Asian American theology (ies) is not, “a universal, monolithic pan-Asian American theology.”<sup>63</sup> It is often difficult to choose one theology that one would refer to as *the* Asian American Theology. It is however possible to identify general characteristics of Asian American Theologies as described in Jonathan Tan’s work.<sup>64</sup>

According to Tan, Asian American Theologies is a framework that helps us to understand Asian American history with respect to religion in three ways. First, Asian American Theologies

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<sup>62</sup> Although evangelical theology is used by Korean Americans, it does not only apply to Korean Americans. Any theologian can and have applied this theology.

<sup>63</sup> Tan, Jonathan Y. *Introducing Asian American Theologies*. Maryknoll: Orbis Book, 2008. 77.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

analyzes the relationship between the researcher and the researched.<sup>65</sup> In other words, Asian American Theologies allows for a dialectical analysis of this relationship. This practice is similar to the practice that feminist scholars use when they analyze their relationship to research subjects. The main difference is that Asian American Theologies pays specific attention to the spiritual dimensions of the researcher and subjects. Asian American Theologies also raises questions about how Korean American women negotiate and understand their beliefs about the gospel and its impact on their communities. Asian American theological framework also accepts Korean American Women's Theology and Evangelical Theology as valid forms of theology and theologizing by Korean American women.

An Asian American theological framework also encourages analytical reflection in the research of the relationship between the subject's and the researcher's religious beliefs. Asian American theologies are also, "intercultural and contextual theological reflections concerning the significance and implications of the Christian gospel on the distinct life experiences and realities of Asian Americans..."<sup>66</sup> Asian American theology does not exist without an examination of the histories and experiences of Asian Americans. Therefore, Asian American theological framework provides a tool of reflection that allows an analysis of the ways that Korean American women negotiate and interpret their beliefs.<sup>67</sup> Earlier theologies suggest and even argue for a separation and distancing of researcher's religious beliefs from that of their study's participants. These theologies assume that the researcher can objectively separate their beliefs

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<sup>65</sup> Specifically, Asian American Theologies are used to explain the nuances of Asian American experiences with religion and spirituality. In other words, they are critical reflections about the lives of Asian Americans by Asian American Christians. For example, Asian American theology might explain the commonalities or differences between the life experiences of Asian Americans with the gospel. Asian American theology (ies) are unique because they are dedicated specifically to analyzing meanings of race, class, gender (and other social categorizations) associated with Asian Americans with respect to religion and spirituality. Like Black liberation theology or womanist theology that interprets religion and spirituality in light of meanings of gender or race, Asian American theologies are dedicated to understanding Asian American Christian experiences and histories.

<sup>66</sup> Tan, 77.

<sup>67</sup> The two phrases, "the gospel" and "the gospel of Jesus" are often used interchangeably. The gospel of Jesus is the story of Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection and the resulting action of salvation made possible through the resurrection.

when employing research methods. Asian American theologies argue that rather than assuming an objective state, the researcher instead, should analyze their religious perspective and analyze its implications to their study. They should also analyze how it influences their relationship to the subject, the data content, and the general outcome of the research. Using this method allows for a more in-depth gendered, raced, and religious interpretation of the research.

Korean American women live out their Christian lives based on Christian principles and the gospel of Jesus found in the Bible. The women activists interviewed in this study consult multiple versions of the Christian Bible such as the New King James, New Living Testament, New International, The Message, Amplified, among many others. The differences between these versions depend on the editor and for what purposes the versions will be used. Many theologians have attempted to provide an accurate translation of the Bible for contemporary readers. For example, the Amplified version of the Christian Bible expands verses with more explanatory words to emphasize the meanings of each scripture for study. The New Living and New International versions use a more contemporary version of English for younger readers. Pastor Eugene Peterson, the creator of The Message, uses the most contemporary phrases and wording in the English language, edits the Message version of the Christian Bible. Korean American women activists use these versions and the translated Korean versions.<sup>68</sup>

The Christian Bible is imperative to the walk, experience, and expression of a Christian person. The ‘walk’ is described as the daily journey that a believer participates as an expression of their faith. Scriptures are often presented to an unbeliever before conversion. Once converted, the Christian Bible is used as a guideline for living. This is a general practice among all Christian believers, regardless of denomination. Among Korean American Christian women the Christian

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<sup>68</sup> Korean Americans activists use the Message version because it is accessible to a range of audiences. They might also use the New Living or New International versions as they teach the Bible to youth.

Bible is sacred. Korean American Protestant women view the Bible as the only infallible word of God. To them, only the Bible is divinely inspired and exempt from error.<sup>69</sup>

The first thirty-nine books of the Bible (including the Torah) are considered the Old Testament and the latter twenty-seven books are considered the New Testament.<sup>70</sup> Both the Old Testament and New Testament are believed to describe the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Many evangelicals including the Korean American women interviewed in this study also believe that over three hundred prophecies about a Messiah, or Savior, were fulfilled in Jesus' lifetime. The reason why the New Testament is of great importance to Christian believers, study participants included, is the new covenant that is in place as a result of Jesus' death and resurrection.<sup>71</sup> The Old and New Testaments are important for one reason; its testimony of Jesus signifies salvation and a new life.

Korean American women activists believe in Jesus' salvation, the Christian Bible and its emphasis on faith and grace alone like other Christians do. The women activists interviewed study the impact and influence of the Bible, the ideas of grace and faith and apply it to their activism. In other words, all of the Korean American women interviewed claimed that these factors influence their reasons for participating in activism.

This leads us to Korean American women's theology exercised by the researcher and research subjects.<sup>72</sup> Korean American women's theology asks the following questions: What is a Korean American woman's theology? Who defines this concept? In what kind of context does a Korean American woman's theology take shape and is understood? How is Korean American

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<sup>69</sup> An exception is Mormonism, which considers the Bible as one of two inspired sacred texts.

<sup>70</sup> The Torah is the Jewish name for the first five books of the Bible.

<sup>71</sup> Christian believers believe that the New Covenant is a promise based on a prophecy by Jeremiah in Jeremiah 31:33 in the Old Testament, and written hundreds of years later again by Luke, one of Jesus' disciples and then again in Hebrews 7:22 of whom Paul is guessed to be the author.

<sup>72</sup> A Korean American theology contributes to the field of theology by expanding its attention to issues of race and gender. This contribution also helps to explain the diversity of religious and activist expression among Christian communities, specific to the Pacific Northwest.



women's activism influenced by religion, specifically the gospel of Jesus? Does the relationship between religious practice and activism change the way activist's view or influence religion? And broadly, what implications does a Korean American women's theology concerning activism, have on the fields of theology and religion? A Korean American women's theology centers the lives of Korean American activist women who practice their religious beliefs in and outside church institutions.

As Asian American theology "moves Asian American Christians to the center of theologizing,"<sup>73</sup> Korean American theology moves Korean American Christians to the center of research about Korean American history. Korean American women theologians' work against "gender blind" thinking has become a problematic norm in Korean American Studies and Religion in 20<sup>th</sup> century research. Research about Korean American men was not clearly marked, yet most of the scholarship about Korean Americans was about Korean American men. In other words, there was an unacknowledged gender focus prevalent in Korean American history especially about Korean American religion(s) and theology. Thus, writings about Korean American women's history are especially poignant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Korean American women's historical research and writing is primarily ethnographic using methods such as oral history collection or interviews, the use of historical archives, and participant observations. These oral histories, archival information, and data from participant observations appear primarily in secondary work that examines an issue in Korean American history. Minimal quantitative research; provide valuable information on population demographics of Korean Americans across the United States. The second most common way that research about Korean American women appears is through autobiographies. Korean American women, scholars and community members, write these autobiographies. They are often the ones

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<sup>73</sup> Tan, 81.

recording, transcribing, and including Korean American women's stories in their research. These autobiographies describe and analyze the experiences of Korean immigrant and Korean American women activists, Christians, mothers, politicians, laborers, ministers, and others.

Delores Williams once noted that theologians, "... In their attempt to talk to and about religious communities, ought to give readers some sense of their autobiographies. This can help an audience discern what leads the theologian to do the kind of theology she does."<sup>74</sup> This statement is applicable to Korean American scholars who write about Korean American women. Autobiographical work engages the audience especially if the research is closely connected to the communities they learn about, speak to, or speak about. Jung Ha Kim said, "To a person or community in need of recovering a sense of subjectivity due mainly to historical erasure...self-reflections and autobiographies are viable means of reclaiming wholeness, rather than producing privacy."<sup>75</sup> Kim re-interpreted the idea of autobiography not just as practice of revealing of private information but also as a way of reclaiming the pieces of history that was erased. Autobiography helps to reinterpret, re-imagine, and in some cases, change accounts of history.

Sociologist Ai Ra Kim posed a broad yet plaguing question about Korean American women's history: What are the experiences of Korean American immigrant women like in the US?<sup>76</sup> I also ask, why are their experiences important to us as scholars of gender and race studies? Only a few scholars of Korean American history have attempted to address these questions and they do so through an examination of the multiple facets of Korean immigrant women's journeys to and in America.

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<sup>74</sup> Williams, Delores S. *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995. lx.

<sup>75</sup> Kim, Jung Ha. "But Who Do You Say That I Am?" (*Matt 16:15*): A Churched Korean American Woman's Autobiographical Inquiry. In *Journeys at the Margins: Toward an autobiographical Theology in American-Asian Perspective*. Peter C. Phan and Jung Young Lee, eds. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1999. 23-40.

<sup>76</sup> Kim, Ai Ra. *Women Struggling For a New Life: The Role of Religion in the Cultural Passage from Korea to America*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1996.

In Kim's attempt to answer this question, she examined the lives of Korean *ilse* (first generation) women in two contexts. Kim analyzes the experiences of Korean women during the Yi Dynasty in Korea from 1450 to 1750 to show the rigid gender boundaries that prevailed. Kim also describes Korean women's experiences during their journeys to the US particular between 1945 and 2000. Kim's work was one of the first to describe how Korean woman's identities were constructed at the intersection of immigration, race, gender, and religion. Kim also used philosopher George Mead's theory of self to interpret how Korean women understood themselves as immigrants in the United States.<sup>77</sup> Kim argued that their involvement in Korean immigrant churches affected how they adjusted to American society.

Korean women during the Yi Dynasty were primarily expected to be caretakers and nurturer, due to the influence of Confucianism. There was a clear line positioning Korean women as the caretakers and the inside house person (안, 집사람), while the Korean man was the outside mature adult (바깥어른).<sup>78</sup> As Christianity (Protestantism) was introduced to Korean women, expectations about their gender roles began to change. According to Kim, Korean women's introduction to Christianity and education encouraged them to immigrate. Korean women, especially upper class women, in Confucian society were typically relegated to the private, domestic area. They were not encouraged to travel across the country or internationally. However, Christian missionaries encouraged Korean women to immigrate for the opportunity to study and practice their religious beliefs. Kim also described how Korean women, once in America, used their religious beliefs to deal with, contest, and resist oppressions.

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<sup>77</sup> George Herbert Mead was a philosopher and social theorist from the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Known best for her work in philosophy, published *Mind, Self, and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*. George Herbert Mead's theory of self explains that there is no disconnection between social forces and its impact on social members. In other words, society affects people and people affects society. People begin to identify whom they are based on the dialectical relationship of impact between people and the social factors that arise from the social environment. Kim, 2.

<sup>78</sup> Kim, 9.

Like Ai Ra Kim, Jung Ha Kim provides historical evidence of Christian influence among Korean women. However, she focuses more on Korean immigrant women's sociohistorical experiences in the United States, particularly the nuances of Korean American churchwomen's experiences.<sup>79</sup> Kim was one of the first scholars to argue that a study about Korean American women and immigration has much to do with religion and analyzed the influence of Christianity in the daily lives of Korean ilse (first generation) women in America. Kim's work explained four causes of Korean women's immigration to the US: The role of Christian missionaries; famine and social unrest in Korea, reunification of families (including military and picture brides), and education. All were affected in some way by religion as an institution or spirituality as a practice.

Kim's study also clearly critiqued patriarchy in Korean immigrant churches, describing it as a double-edged sword. One on side was its ability to maintain and perpetuate patriarchy while, on the other, was its ability to serve as a powerful and positive aspect in the lives of Korean women. Kim claimed that Korean immigrant women's participation in Korean American churches shaped and influenced the process of acculturation. Therefore, Christianity acted as a survival tool in Korean women's adjustment to American life. This is true among present-day Korean American Christian women in the Pacific Northwest.

Although there were early Korean women present in the first wave of Koreans in the US, most of the scholarship, with the exception of the work by Ai Ra Kim and Jung Ha Kim, ignores gender or age. For example, Korean immigration history written by scholars like Wayne Patterson, Yo-Jun Yun, Hyung-Chan Kim, and Ilpyong J. Kim do not include any information about Korean American women or Korean American in their narratives.<sup>80</sup> Although their work is

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<sup>79</sup> Kim, Jung Ha. *Bridge-Makers and Cross Bearers: Korean American Women and the Church*. Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1997.

<sup>80</sup> Wayne Patterson has conducted much research about Korean American history. His work includes chapters in anthologies and edited books. The works I specifically refer to here are, "The First Attempt to Obtain Korean Laborers for Hawaii, 1896-1897." In *The Korean Diaspora: Historical and Sociological Studies of Korean Immigration and Assimilation in North America*. Santa

very important in building a Korean American historical archive, it creates a type of historical narrative that erases the experiences of Korean American women and children. Research by scholars Hyung-Chan Kim and Jai P. Ryu present demographic numbers of Korean American women and children in the U.S., these quantitative studies only reveal numbers from which we draw values.<sup>81</sup> Numbers do not analyze gendered meanings of Korean immigrant history. These studies lead us to raise questions about why the numbers are the way they are, they do not present a holistic picture of the lived experiences of Korean American women and children. Thus, when Ai Ra Kim asks, what does the history of Korean immigrant women's history look like? The answer lies in the work of Korean American women scholars who have taken up the project of archiving and re-presenting Korean American women's histories.

One of the aspects of Korean American women's histories that scholars reviewed and re-presented is how their work histories are an example of survival activism. Scholarship about Korean American women provided some detail about their work histories. Many if not all-Korean women immigrants in the US in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century participated in some form of wage work and in some cases, unpaid domestic work.

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Barbara, CA and Oxford, England: ABC-Clio, Inc. 1977. 9-32. I also refer to Patterson's edited book with Yun-Bok Lee titled, *Korean American Relations 1866-1997*. Albany, New York. State University of New York Press, 1999. His work is important in that it has uncovered much of Korean American history that is needed in the field. Yun, Yo-Jun. "Early History of Korean Immigration to America." In *The Korean Diaspora: Historical and Sociological Studies of Korean Immigration and Assimilation in North America*. Santa Barbara, CA and Oxford, England: ABC-Clio, Inc. 1977. 33-46. Hyung-Chan Kim has also been a pioneer writer of Korean American history. Kim is known for the wide range of Korean American histories that he researches. The absence of a gendered analysis in some of his work like, "The History and Role of the Church in the Korean American Community," has inspired some questions such as, why are women left out? This work is published in *The Korean Diaspora: Historical and Sociological Studies of Korean Immigration and Assimilation in North America*. Santa Barbara, CA and Oxford, England: ABC-Clio, Inc. 1977. 47-64. Scholar Ipyong J. Kim has dedicated most of his life writing about Korean American history. There is an interview narrative provided through the East-West Center Oral History Project that can be found at [www.eastwestcenter.org](http://www.eastwestcenter.org). Kim's work is unreservedly a work of recovering Korean American history. In, "A Century of Korean Immigration to the United States: 1903-2003," published in *Korean-Americans: Past, Present, and Future*. Elizabeth, New Jersey: Hollym. 2004, Kim outlines waves of Korean immigration and includes the numbers of Korean women immigrants as well. However, there is no further gendered analysis that contributes new information or ways of understanding Korean American women's history.

<sup>81</sup> Kim, Hyung-Chan Kim. "Some Aspects of Social Demography of Korean Americans." In *The Korean Diaspora: Historical and Sociological Studies of Korean Immigration and Assimilation in North America*. Santa Barbara, CA and Oxford, England: ABC-Clio, Inc. 1977. 109-128. Ryu, Jai P. "Koreans in America: A Demographic Analysis." In *The Korean Diaspora: Historical and Sociological Studies of Korean Immigration and Assimilation in North America*. Santa Barbara, CA and Oxford, England: ABC-Clio, Inc. 1977. 205-228.

Korean American women have always been involved in almost every type of work in the US. Work includes plantation labor, farming, small business, manufacturing, and other service oriented work. Much of the scholarship produced in the 1990s about Korean American women in Hawaii and California focused primarily on work done on sugar plantations or in entrepreneurial small businesses.

The histories of Korean women's labor on sugar plantations are best seen in the stories of Korean picture brides. Korean American scholar Alice Yun Chai developed much of this using oral histories and archival work.<sup>82</sup> Chai presented individual histories and detailed analysis of Korean picture brides' lives in Hawaii. Chai explained the gendered nature of their work and home life. The details that Chai provided showed what the plantation work was like and how Korean picture brides formed their ways of resisting oppressive marriage or work life.

Miliann Kang and Miriam Ching Yoon Louie also provided intersectional analysis of the types of work Korean American women have done. Miliann Kang examined Korean immigrant women's work in the nail salon industry. Kang used feminist methodology to argue that meanings of gender, race, and class shape unequal power relations between Korean immigrant women and American women customers.<sup>83</sup> She also conducted in-depth interviews with nail salon workers. Using the theory of emotional labor by Arlie Russell Hochschild, Kang argued that Korean immigrant women used "emotional labor" and "body labor" in nail salon work.<sup>84</sup> While emotional and body labor are seen as demonstrations of an unequal power relationship,

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<sup>82</sup> Chai, Alice Yun. "Korean Women in Hawaii." In *Women in New Worlds*. Hilah F. Thomas and Rosemary Skinner Keller, eds. Nashville, Tenn., 1981, 328-344. Alice Yun Chai. "Picture Brides: Feminist Analysis of Life Histories of Hawaii's Early Immigrant Women from Japan, Okinawa, and Korea." In *Seeking Common Ground*. Donna Gabaccia, ed. Westport, CN: Praeger Publishing, 1992. 123-138. 123-138. Alice Yun Chai. "Women's History in Public: 'Picture Brides' of Hawaii." In *Women's Studies Quarterly*. Vol 16.5. New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1998. 51-62.

<sup>83</sup> Kang, Miliann. "Korean Immigrant Women's Work in the Nail Salon Industry: Gender, Race, and Class in the Service Sector." In *Korean Americans: Past, Present, and Future*. Ilpyong J. Kim, ed. Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym International Corp., 2004. 150-179. Kang, 158.

<sup>84</sup> Hochschild, Arlie Russell. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. London, UK: University of California Press, 2012. According to Kang, body labor is a type of gendered work where Korean immigrant women use their own bodies to serve primarily working class and wealthier women in and around the New York area. Kang, 151.

these types are also a part of Korean women's entrepreneurial skills. Nail salons are a type of entrepreneurial business that Korean immigrant women use to survive.<sup>85</sup> They draw from this business experience to inform how they work and how they participate in the larger Korean American community.

Kang's work is useful to the scholarship about Korean American women because it imagines Korean American women as having agency in the work place. Kang understood Korean women's labor and the Korean women themselves as entrepreneurial and having agency. As a result, Kang offered a lens through which we can understand Korean women's work having agency in the context of a nail salon. This work presents a feminist perspective about Korean women's work. It also challenges scholars, activists, and community members to recognize and fully understand the value of emotional and physical labor that nail salon workers do.

Miriam Ching Yoon Louie offers another analysis of the activist dimension of Korean immigrant worker's experiences. Yoon Louie described Korean women's historical involvement in *minjung* activism and their ability to translate that into a workers' rights movement in the Los Angeles area.<sup>86</sup> As more Korean immigrant women faced health hazards, low pay, discrimination based on sex and age, as well as racism, they found the language and avenues of expression that helped petition for better working conditions. Using the method of interviews, Louie presented stories of Korean immigrant women workers' experiences that described workplace inequality. These stories represented how resilient Korean immigrant women were.

Modern Korean American women's work is primarily a combination of unpaid community work and paid full time or part time wage labor. An example of a Korean American

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<sup>85</sup> I argue that entrepreneurship among Korean American women is a medium of activism. They use their businesses to survive which relates to survival activism.

<sup>86</sup> Minjung means mass or common people, Louie, 129. Korean women were involved in minjung feminist movement and a minjung labor movement in Korea in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ching Yoon Louie, Miriam. "Each Day I Go Home with A New Would in My Heart: Korean Immigrant Women Workers." In *Sweatshop Warriors: Immigrant Women Workers Take on the Global Factory*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2001. 123-178.

woman whose work is paid and unpaid is Martha C. Ch'oe.<sup>87</sup> For example, scholars could analyze how Ch'oe engages in paid and unpaid work to better recognize and explain contemporary 21<sup>st</sup> century Korean American women's work experiences. We need to ask questions like: Have the working conditions among contemporary Korean American women improved? If so, in what ways? If not, how come? What types of work and work related issues do they face today as second and third generation Korean American women? There is very little scholarship that addresses their work experiences.

Related to questions about Korean American women's work experiences are questions about Korean American women's agency as women. Scholars of Korean American women's history have asked a common question: What is Korean American women's relationship to feminism? Scholars of Korean American women's history address feminism in light of Korean American women's experiences in two ways. First, scholars examine what feminism means to Korean American women through an analysis of Korean American women's responses to US based feminisms. Scholars like Ai Ra Kim and Alice Yun Chai also tried to understand what feminism offers to Korean American women through an analysis of feminist organizing in Korean women's history.<sup>88</sup>

Korean American women's organizing resembles feminist organizing in Korea. Korean American women have learned from earlier history of Korean women's activism. This

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<sup>87</sup> Martha's last name is spelled, Ch'oe. Ch'oe is a high profile businesswoman and community activist in the Puget Sound region. Kim, Hyung-Chan, ed. *Distinguished Asian Americans: A Biographical Dictionary*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc. I describe in detail the life of Martha Ch'oe in chapter 3.

<sup>88</sup> I put the word "feminist," in quotation marks because there are several definitions of 'feminism' that I analyze. First, feminism, as it concerns Korean American women living in the US can more easily be narrowed down to a western definition of equality between women and men. This has been the usual definition that is agreed upon by a majority of feminist thinkers and activists. The nuances of this definition are important to keep in mind as well. When scholars analyze feminism in a non-western context, two things happen; first we begin to question whether feminism is primarily western project. The Korean context begs the question, has feminism or feminist actions occurred in Korean history long before Western white women labeled the thinking or action as feminist? Thus, if I analyze feminism in Korea with a primarily western perspective, am I participating in colonialist feminism? I think that the scholars that do engage with that question can provide some important thoughts about this.



knowledge informs their activism in US.<sup>89</sup> In other words, since the word “feminism” is primarily a western terminology, literature that examines “feminist activism” among Korean women is cautious in its use because of its relatively recent emergence in scholarship about Korean women. The idea of equality between women and men existed in Korea long before the term “feminism” was popularized in US scholarship about gender. Literature about American-born Korean American women and feminism reveals that their initial interaction with feminism occurred in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Korean American women used, rejected, accepted, or created their own brands of US feminisms to make sense of the world around them.

While the term “feminism” is limited in its scope, scholars use feminist theorizing to analyze women’s activism. For example, historian Alice Yang Murray, using feminist thinking, analyzed Korean immigrant women’s organizing among in the US. Murray argued that modern Korean American women should look to examples of Korean immigrant women’s organizing as a model for feminist strategizing.<sup>90</sup> Murray used autobiographies of early Korean women and cited Eui-Young Yu’s work on Korean *ilse* women to provide examples of Korean women’s organizing. Murray urges contemporary Korean American women to use the ways that they organized as a model for contemporary feminist organizing. Korean immigrant women participated in leadership building activities and persevered through tremendous challenges. One of the salient arguments and critiques that Murray made was that the history, leadership styles, and active involvement of Korean immigrant women challenged white middle class “traditional

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<sup>89</sup> Scholars who are interested in this history can consult the work of Alice Yun Chai and her analysis of Korean comfort women. “Korean Feminist and Human Rights Politics; The Chongshindae/Jugunianfu (“Comfort Women”) Movement.” In *Korean American Women: From Tradition to Modern Feminism*. Young I. Song and Ailee Moon, eds. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishing, 1998. 237-254.

<sup>90</sup> Murray, Alice Yang. “Ilse Women and the Early Korean American Community: Redefining the Origins of Feminist Empowerment.” In *Korean American Women Living in Two Cultures*. Eds Young I. Song and Ailee Moon. Los Angeles, CA: Academia Koreana Keimyung-Baylor University Press, 1997. 14-27.

views of ‘feminist’ agency and consciousness...”<sup>91</sup> First wave feminist thinking assumed that all women could relate to domestic life and its restraints. While Korean immigrant women have a shared burden of domestic responsibilities, first wave feminist’s conceptualization of agency was different than that of Korean immigrant women.

Early Korean immigrant women were constantly involved in community through work and social service simultaneously, which provided a different lens through which they understood agency and how they related to the world around them. Murray argued that although Korean women’s organizing was not defined as feminist, a Korean American feminist reading of their work provides modern Korean American women with a tradition of feminist thinking from which to draw.

Relatedly, Young I. Song used a behavioral psycho social approach to further analyze Korean American women’s response to sexism in Korean American and American communities. From Song’s perspective, Korean American women’s response to sexism was a form of Korean American women’s feminism. Song argues that Korean American women can relate to and identify with feminism or feminist organizing. Korean American women’s interpretations of gender, sexism, and inequality shape and construct a type of Korean American feminism. It is not the idea of equality between the sexes that primarily drives their feminism. Rather, it is the everyday responses to concerns such as community building, survival, and resisting inequality resulting from racism and oppression, that constitutes Korean American women’s feminism

Instead of asking, do Korean American women identify as feminists? The better question to ask is, how have Korean American women dealt with issues of inequality and sexism? To what extent does their resistance to inequality create their own brands of feminism? This leads us back to the question Alice Murray posed earlier: Can modern Korean American women create

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<sup>91</sup> Yang, 15.

their own versions of feminisms and how so? While it is possible that modern Korean American women are creating feminisms, literature has yet to address this question in-depth.

An extension of this study of Korean American Christian women's activism would include an analysis of their activism and interpret them as an example of contemporary feminism. There are challenges with this as well. Can a scholar identify or define Korean American Christian women's activism as feminist when the activists themselves do not identify their community work as feminist? What challenges would arise in doing so?

Another topic that ethnographic scholarship about Korean American women has addressed is identity construction primarily through the analysis of autobiographies. Autobiographies about Korean American women are intimate and deeply personal. Sandra Lim's autobiography, *Growing Up and Living in Two Cultures*,<sup>92</sup> is an analytical narrative of race/ethnicity, culture, gender, and identity construction for a hyphenated Korean American woman. Lim stated, "It [hyphenated identity] puts you in the middle, and it's always hard being caught in the middle. No one wants to be in a 'hyphenated state for long. For me, I feel as I'm continuously coming to terms... I suspect that it will be a life-long process...the conflicts that come with living with two cultures..."<sup>93</sup> Living in two cultures or at the intersection where two cultures meet describes much of Korean American women's experiences of identity construction.

Korean American scholar Kristine Kim described the phenomenon as a multicultural experience.<sup>94</sup> Lim and Kim illustrate how living in two cultures (Korean and American), contributes to challenges as a result of the intersection of meanings of race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Korean American women find that there are difficult contradictions between these two

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<sup>92</sup> Lim, Sandra. "Growing up and Living in Two Cultures." In *Korean American Women Living in Two Cultures*. Young In Song and Ailee Moon, eds. Los Angeles, CA: Academia Koreana Keimyung-Baylor University Press, 1997. 252-258.

<sup>93</sup> Lim, 253.

<sup>94</sup> Kim, Kristine. "Building Ethnic Identity and Pride through Multicultural Experiences." In *Korean American Women Living in Two Cultures*. Young In Song and Ailee Moon, eds. Los Angeles, CA: Academia Koreana Keimyung-Baylor University Press, 1997. 279-289.

cultures and while they negotiate these contradictions, they try to construct an identity that makes the most sense. In chapters five and six, oral histories from Korean American women activists in the Pacific Northwest show how they grapple with living in or between two cultures.

Some of this identity construction also occurs in Korean American churches. Literature about Korean American identity construction and churches are minimal. Even though Protestant and Catholic narratives dominate literature are about Korean American women, church, and religion, less is mentioned about constructions of identity. Additionally, little is known about Korean American women's involvement in religious traditions such as Confucianism and Buddhism. While it is of great importance to acknowledge and analyze various religious traditions in the lives of Korean American women, one of the reasons for this focused attention on Christianity was that a vast majority of Korean women immigrants in America were Christian. Therefore, much of the scholarship about Korean American women reflected this pattern. Also, literatures about religion and Korean American women are a recent phenomenon. As a result, recovering and reinterpreting histories of Christianity in the lives of Korean American women is an unfinished project. It has been primarily Korean American women scholars and theologians that have taken the responsibility to address this unfinished historical excavation. Interdisciplinary literature about Korean American women presents an important overview of their histories. This literature review also contextualized Korean American Christian women's experiences as part of a larger Korean American history.

## Chapter 2: A Historical Context of Korean American Women and Christianity

This chapter traces the history of Korean American Christian women's activism and religion from the early 1900s to 2012. I begin with an overview of Korea's interaction with Christianity and how Christianity influenced Korean immigration to the US. I also describe how Korean immigrant women's participation in Christianity shaped their reasons to go to the US.

The influence of Christianity among Koreans begins early in Korean history. Some historical records claim that Catholicism was introduced to Koreans as early as 1592 through a Jesuit missionary named Francis Xavier.<sup>95</sup> It was not until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century that Christianity (Protestantism and Catholicism) became influential in Korean society. Historian James Grayson's work found that Koreans were self-evangelized as early as 1777.<sup>96</sup> A Confucian scholar, Yi Sunghun (이승훈, Peter) converted to Catholicism during his visit to Beijing. Upon his return to Korea, he shared the Christian gospel to family and community members.

Beginning with evangelical missionaries like Yi, Christianity was accepted as a social and religious movement in Korea. Missionary Yi helped evangelize thousands of Koreans. As the numbers of foreign missionaries began to increase over time, the population of Protestant and Catholic Christian converts also grew. By the mid-1800s, with the help of Protestant Bible women and local Korean women missionaries, a larger number of Koreans converted to Christianity. The early participation of Korean Bible women and Korean women in general escalated the Christianization of Koreans in Korea. Christianity became known as a religion for the masses.

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<sup>95</sup> Lee, Soo-Young. *God's Chosen People: Protestant Narratives of Korean Americans and American National Identity*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008.

<sup>96</sup> Grayson, James Huntley. "A Quarter-Millennium of Christianity in Korea". In *Christianity in Korea*. Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Timothy S. Lee, eds. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006. 7-28.

Catholicism and the consultation of Matthieu Ricci's *True Doctrine of the Lord of Heaven* shaped initial interactions between Koreans and Christianity.<sup>97</sup> The widespread acceptance of Catholicism or Protestantism depended on how open Korea's leadership was to what they saw as a "foreign" religion. Every time a change in leadership and approach to religious practice occurred, Korea's approach to Christianity (Catholicism & Protestantism) changed. One of the results of the changing degree and nature of acceptance of Christianity was the persecution of Koreans converts. Government leaders and community members who wanted to hold onto Confucianism as the main religion persecuted many Korean converts and missionaries and local converts.<sup>98</sup> According to L. George Paik, 1866 is noted as a, "severe"<sup>99</sup> year for the persecution of Korean Catholics. While Catholic missionaries were able to create a Roman church, the Korean government's hostility against Catholicism and their inability to teach converts Scripture accurately impeded their efforts to convert Koreans to Catholicism.

Protestant Christianity had a slightly different history in Korea. Early Protestant missionaries like John Ross and Alexander Williamson learned from the early ventures of Catholic missionaries and found other ways to convert Koreans.<sup>100</sup> Williamson took advantage of the times when Koreans and Chinese came to the trading ports. He sold books to them and shared the gospel. John Ross took a different approach. Ross learned the Korean language to communicate directly with Korean people. Ross then translated the book of Luke into the Korean language so that Koreans could read the gospel for themselves.

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<sup>97</sup> Matthieu Ricci was an Italian Jesuit missionary in Peking, China. His books were brought to Korea through Chong To-Won in 1631 where Korean scholars studied the text.

<sup>98</sup> Christian converts were threatened in multiple ways. They experience psychological and physical violence. Many were also martyred because they professed a belief in God.

<sup>99</sup> Paik, L. George. *The History of Protestant Missions in Korea: 1832-1910*. Seoul, Korea: Yonsei University Press, 1970. 48.

<sup>100</sup> John Ross was a Scotch Protestant missionary assigned to Northeast China. Alexander Williamson was also a Scotch missionary to China. Williams was part of the London Missionary Society.

Following these early missionaries many American, Chinese, Scottish, and Japanese Protestants, and Catholic missionaries continued to evangelize Confucian Korean society by influencing Korean social norms. American missionaries like Horace N. Allen and American Bible women shared the Christian gospel across various socioeconomic classes. The spread of Christianity among Koreans would not have been possible without the much-needed help of Korean women and men. American missionaries who espoused Christian principles influenced community leaders, members, and church leaders. Conversion of influential community leaders resulted in a change among people of various socioeconomic classes and how they interacted with one another. For example, Korean converts spread the Gospel using scriptures such as Galatians 3:26-29<sup>101</sup> to argue for people of different classes to treat one another equally and to be treated equally. This push for equality eventually influenced larger social reform. Converts argued that because believers became sons and daughters of God through their faith in Jesus, everyone should be treated with the same decency and respect.

According to these evangelicals, God viewed each person as equal in social and economic standing. Converts used this interpretation to argue that if all believers were equal, Korean cultural norms and laws could not add to or detract value from a person because of his or her class status. No one could be devalued or mistreated because of their economic status. Christians were to treat each other with respect in daily interactions with one another. When offering social services of any kind, no one was to be mistreated or offered fewer services because of their class or religious affiliation.

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<sup>101</sup>Zondervan New King James Bible. Fully Revised. Ed. Thomas Nelson Publishers, gen. ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008. Galatians 3:26-29. For you are all sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Christianity in some ways challenged and replaced existing social norms and values among Korean people. Confucianism was introduced to Koreans when the Han Dynasty of China colonized some areas of Korea. Confucianism was adopted as the main religion during the Choson (Yi, 1392-1910) dynasty. Confucianism influenced many social norms. For example, Confucian thinking about women defined them as a lower class. As a result, Confucianism demanded that Korean women submit to the men in their life, first their father, husband, and then son. Korean women were also relegated to the domestic sphere. A majority of upper class Korean women were limited in their social, political, and economic power as a result of Confucian dictates of about what women could or could not do. Working class women however were treated differently. While wealthier Korean women were expected to stay in the domestic sphere and had limited mobility, working and poor Korean women moved somewhat freely yet were still expected to respect and maintain ideas of Confucian womanhood. According to Confucian ideology, Korean women of all classes were seen as property and servants to the men; the only exceptions were Ki-Saeng women (entertainers) or Man Sins (shamans) who were typically working class Korean women. In Korean Confucian society, shamans were more likely women. These women enjoyed more mobility and were seen as mediums for contact with ancestors or for fortune telling.

Christianity was often used to challenge Confucian thinking about gender roles. Korean Bible women and Korean women converts believed that women were meant to live personal and public lives unlimited by strict gender roles that Confucianism place upon them. The term “Bible women” refers to Korean women, Korean immigrant women, and Korean American women who are spiritual leaders in their communities. Bible women also act as missionaries, teach others about the Bible, and serve their community in practical ways. Bible women were “quasi-



ministers, who combined the role of evangelist, teacher, public health educator, and social worker.”<sup>102</sup> I discuss this history further in chapter four about Korean women and Korean American Bible women.

While Korean Christian converts challenged the sexism of Confucian society, some also dealt with the racism of American white missionaries. American missionaries’ narratives or missionaries’ religious account were replete with racist one-dimensional characterizations of Korean women. Some Christian missionaries’ accounts of Korean women in Confucian society described them as either, “quiet and peaceable people” and “helpless victims” of Confucian “evil” or “poor” or “lazy”. For example, one Methodist Henry G. Appelenzer is quoted in a report as saying, “They (Koreans) are poor as church mice, lazy as dogs, dirty as pigs, ravenous as wolves, and proud as hypocrites...”<sup>103</sup>

In the same report Henry G. Appelenzer also said, “...There is much to be admired in them (Koreans). They are reaching out for something they do not have.”<sup>104</sup> In both cases, Confucianism was depicted as evil, practiced by Koreans, and always in opposition to Christianity. In addition, according to some American missionaries, Korean women were seen as the weaker sex and therefore more susceptible to being victimized by Confucianism. Jung Ha Kim argued that, “a more integrated and holistic understanding of so-called ‘traditional’ Korean women can be achieved only through listening to the accounts of women’s experiences in the Confucian society and reconstructing a more balanced ‘reality’.”<sup>105</sup> The first problem was that often the accounts of Korean women’s experiences were written from American missionaries’ perspective. Second, the way foreign missionaries perceived and depicted Korean women’s

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 76.

<sup>103</sup> Hunt Jr., 59. From Everett N. Hunt Jr.’s *Protestant Pioneers in Korea*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1980.

<sup>104</sup> Hunt Jr., 59.

<sup>105</sup> This idea is discussed among theologians but specifically by Jung Ha Kim, 11.

experiences were limited. The voices and perspectives of Korean women living during that era about their own social conditions were either absent or presented in a limited way.

While many Korean people converted to Christianity, some practiced Christianity in different ways. In other words, while foreign missionaries and Korean Bible women preached that evangelical Christianity was the only right religion, some constructed their own versions of Christianity. Some fused Confucianism and Evangelical Protestant Christianity together. This version of Christianity is also known as Confucianized Christianity or Christianized Confucianism.<sup>106</sup> They adapted some Confucian beliefs to Christianity or vice versa in order to practice religious beliefs that best suited their experience.

In some Korean Protestant church settings, pastors and laymen used interpretations of Scripture about submissiveness, combined with ideas of Confucian womanhood, to associate women's primary roles with the private or domestic sphere. For example, some Korean pastors or influential church members referred to scriptures like 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, "Women should be silent during the church meetings. It is not proper for them to speak. They should be submissive, just as the law says. If they have any questions, they should ask their husbands at home, for it is improper for women to speak in church meetings."<sup>107</sup> Some pastors also used these verses to argue that Korean women should not be pastors. This reveals three things. First, Christian pastors were not in agreement with how scripture should or could be applied to real life. Second, these verses were taken out of its Jewish context and applied to a social context that was different than originally implied in scripture. Third, pastors and leaders in Korean churches had an enormous amount of power that influenced lay members' perspectives about gender, gender roles, and other social rules.

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<sup>106</sup> Kim, 12.

<sup>107</sup> This scripture is cited from the New Living Translation version of the Christian Bible.

Contemporary Pentecostal and Evangelical Christians and Korean pastors argue that this scripture was misinterpreted.<sup>108</sup> Theologically, many argue that Apostle Paul had a specific reason for the statement in 1 Corinthians. They claimed that Paul was not arguing that women should not be pastors or preachers but rather than the life of Paul demonstrates otherwise. Paul worked alongside women pastors and leaders like Priscilla and Junea. Some pastors argue that the verse represents one of Paul's secondary theologies. As a secondary theology, it cannot be taken as a literal commandment. Therefore, it should not be applied directly to the gender roles of Korean women and men.

Korean Bible women argued that scripture verses does not contradict other scripture verses. This is aligned with Evangelical teaching about the Bible. They pointed out many instances where Jesus worked alongside women pastors to spread the gospel. They also pointed out other instances where God used specific women like Deborah (a judge), Mary (a woman who was known to be 'possessed'), and Esther (persecuted Jew) as public leaders. By arguing that God appointed women leaders evidenced by stories in the Bible, Korean Bible women argued that women's roles are not to be limited to the domestic sphere. In fact, Korean Bible women convinced some Korean pastors and fellow lay members that women's leadership and public service was based on Biblical principle and justified by Scriptures. They argued that Korean women were supposed to hold leadership positions in the church. Korean Bible women and foreign women missionaries' work demonstrated this truth. Korean Bible women leaders and pastors challenged Korean male pastors' conceptions about gender roles and leadership in and outside of the church.

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<sup>108</sup> Pentecostalism is a movement within Christianity. It is an evangelical movement that emphasizes one's relationship with God. The term Pentecostal is drawn from story of the church described in the book of Acts. The Pentecostal movement in the US has its roots in the Azusa street revivals of the early 1900s. Pentecostalism believes in the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues. Pentecostals believe that the Bible is the infallible word of God. They also believe that it is necessary for those who believe in Jesus Christ, to accept Him as Lord and Savior.

Korean Bible women exercised leadership alongside foreign missionaries, especially women missionaries. Missionaries, both men and women, from Japan, Korea, and America (specifically Anglo Americans) converted many Koreans during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although much of the initial work on Christianizing Koreans paid little attention to questions about gender or the role of women, scholarship written in the late 1990s and early 2000s showed that women and women's networks were needed to spread the gospel.

Foreign missionaries and Korean Bible women in Korea continued this role, in different ways in America.<sup>109</sup> One of the goals of early missionary work in Korea was to convert mothers, single women, and girls. Missionaries believed that women had a unique influence in the conversion of others. Converting mothers was based on the idea that “mothers exercise influence over future generations.”<sup>110</sup> When Korean mothers were converted, usually the children, spouses, and other family members would convert. The intentional targeting of evangelizing Korean women resulted in many conversions in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>111</sup>

Korean Bible women were more effective evangelists in some cases than foreign missionaries in Korea. Korean women spread information about Christianity through their established networks quickly. Korean women used social gatherings, creeks where women came to do laundry, and marketplaces to communicate information to one another. The context in which they were able to establish their network mattered as well. In the aftermath of the Sino-

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<sup>109</sup> Chai, 76.

<sup>110</sup> Clark, Allen D. *A History of the Church in Korea*. Seoul: Christian Literature Society of Korea. 1992. 112.

<sup>111</sup> This history of intentionally evangelizing Korean mothers, is also similar to the US Settlement house movement and partly the historical role of Christianity among African American communities. US Settlement houses were formed in the late 1880s of which Jane Addams was a pioneering figure. Prominent white women like Jane Addams influenced many middle class mothers to help their surrounding communities. This strategy of evangelizing among mothers or women was similar. Historical research about the US Settlement movement indicates that it was primarily used to solve the problem of poverty but also was used to assimilate immigrants into the labor force using middle class values that were highly influenced by Christian thinking. Particularly early white women also used settlement homes as space for activism and social justice. The United Neighborhood Centers of America state that these settlement houses became neighborhood centers and now operate as programs to help youth, senior folks, and immigrant populations. Among African American communities, historical research tells us that the settlement movement occurred partly to provide community social services. In a way, this could be seen as an anti-racist response to the growing problems of red lining and poverty.

Japanese war, Koreans believed that war and general disruption was caused by an imbalance in the spiritual world. Many Koreans accepted the societal fear of evil spirits. In this context, Christian missionaries began to spread messages of salvation and deliverance from evil spirits. Korean women shared personal testimonies of salvation and peace. The messages of peace in particular helped to draw people who experienced war-torn Korea. As Korean Bible women visited several towns and cities, they quickly established and used their networks to evangelize more Koreans. Some Korean women, mainly those from similar class backgrounds felt called to evangelize to poor and working class Koreans. Other Korean women established in Korean upper class communities evangelized to other upper class members of Korean society. Without Korean women, American missionaries realized that the evangelization of Koreans would occur at a slower pace. Korean Bible women and their influence in the conversion of Koreans and later Korean American women are discussed further in chapter five.

Korean women in Korea and in the US are indispensable community leaders, missionaries, Bible Women or transmitters of culture. Korean women influenced many people and swayed public opinion on issues such as gender roles, religion, and the expression of religion.<sup>112</sup> This is also true of Korean American activist women in the Pacific Northwest.

Few scholars pay attention to the influence of missionaries in the immigration choices of Korean American women. The reality was that many Korean women, who immigrated to the US in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, were Christian converts. Thus, the absence of the discussion of religion is a curious one. Many of Korean women immigrants converted to Christianity before their move to the US. Others converted shortly after their arrival in Hawaii or mainland US. Many of these

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<sup>112</sup> Chong, Kelly. *Deliverance and Submission: Evangelical Women and the Negotiation of Patriarchy in South Korea*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008.

Korean women worked on sugar and fruit plantations in Hawaii or California. Many also helped establish local churches or faith based women's groups.

Conventional Korean American women's history in the US begins in the early 1900s with the highest numbers migrating to the U.S. between 1910 and 1924. This scholarship mainly uses the picture bride phenomenon as the framework to understand Korean women's immigration to the US. Korean women's immigration to America was not a linear process. Rather, there were ebbs and flows to their pattern of immigration.

Some historical records of the initial immigration of Koreans to America are contradictory because not all historians of Korean American history offer similar evidence of when Korean American women immigrated to the US. Scholars like Ai Ra Kim claim that Korean women arrived in the US earlier than 1900. The earliest Korean women immigrants came individually to the US before 1900 and numbered less than five. These Korean women resided in various cities across the US. Others came after 1910 in larger numbers proportionate to the predominantly male Korean immigrant population residing in the mainland US and Hawaii. According to early Korean American community records from Arirang and the Korean American Museum, Korean immigrant women came to Hawaii on the S.S Gaelic as early as January 1902.<sup>113</sup> It is estimated that 120 Koreans arrived in Hawaii on the S.S. Gaelic, many of them women and children. The gender of the children was not recorded. According to Alice Chai, the first wave of Korean immigrant women came to Hawaii between 1903 and 1905. Approximately 600 Korean women worked on Hawaiian sugar plantations.<sup>114</sup> Immigration to the mainland US did not occur in significant numbers until 1908 after the Gentleman's Agreement

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<sup>113</sup> "Timeline" <http://www.arirangeducation.com/main/index.htm>. Arirang: An Interactive Classroom, accessed January 2011. "Korean American History" <http://www.kamuseum.org>. Korea American Museum accessed January 2011.

<sup>114</sup> According to Seattle Korean American Historical Society, about 7,333 women, men, and children immigrated to Hawaii between 1903 and 1905.

was signed into law.<sup>115</sup> There is little written about why Korean women immigrated to the US, but most historians speculate that work and family reunification were prime motivations.

Ai Ra Kim found that Korean women resided in the US even before 1900.<sup>116</sup> Due to the lack of accurate records, many of the individual histories of Korean women in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century are still unknown. However, Korean women such as Kim Chom-Dong (김충동), otherwise known as Esther Pak, was the first Korean woman to study in America and became “the first Korean female medical doctor in 1900”.<sup>117</sup> Ha Nan-Sa (하난사) entered Ohio Wesleyan Women’s college in 1896 and received her Bachelor’s degree in English in 1900. Helen Ahn was a Korean woman missionary. She was also the wife of Changho Ahn who came to the US earlier than 1902 and established the first Korean church in the US.<sup>118</sup> The extent of their life experiences, community work, and labor histories in the US are still emerging.

According to Bang Weon Lee, Esther Pak’s parents introduced her to Christianity.<sup>119</sup> In 1886, at the age of ten, Pak attended Ewha School in Seoul South Korea.<sup>120</sup> She eventually met Mary Scranton, who was also a leader in the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society in Korea. Pak exercised her spiritual understanding and leadership through prayer meetings and served as a medical assistant and interpreter. Esther evangelized and used western medicine to help care for other Koreans. At the age of 17, Esther married Yoo San Park and began medical missions in North Korea and eventually came to America to obtain her doctoral degree in medicine. Pak

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<sup>115</sup> The Gentlemen’s Agreement (1908) made it possible for Japanese and Korean immigrant men (as Japanese nationals) to bring picture brides to the US.

<sup>116</sup> Lee, Bang Weon. “Esther Park (1877-1910): Life and Her Medical Mission Work”. In *Korean Journal of Medical History*. 16:193-213. December 2007.

<sup>117</sup> Kim, 50.

<sup>118</sup> Chang, Chul Tim. *Korean Ethnic Church Growth Phenomenon in the United States*. Paper presented at the American Academy of Religion. Claremont, CA. March 12, 2006.

<sup>119</sup> Lee, Bang Weon. “Esther Park (1877-1910): Life and Her Medical Mission Work”. In *Korean Journal of Medical History*. 16:193-213. December 2007.

<sup>120</sup> Ewha is also known as Ewha Hakdang (이화학당). It originally opened as a mission school for young girls. Mary F. Scranton, a Methodist missionary, was its founder. In 1910, Ewha Hakdang became an university in 1946. .

graduated from the Women's Medical College in Baltimore in 1900. Pak was the, "sole Korean missionary working in a foreign missionary Society."<sup>121</sup> She was the earlier Korean Bible woman whose evangelism and medical service served Korean Americans and Koreans.

The history of Korean women's entrance into the US began with women like Esther Pak and continued with a larger group of Korean women, picture brides. Historians refer to the initial entrance of Korean women as the first wave of Korean women's immigration. Picture bride practice, common among Korean, Chinese, and Japanese people, was a form of arranged marriage where women in Korea and Korean men in the US would exchange pictures and agree to a financially and socially suitable marriage. Korean men had to prove to the US government and to the bride's family that they were able support a wife in America. After a period of preparation, picture brides arrived in various ports in Washington, New York, California, and Hawaii to meet their husbands.<sup>122</sup>

By 1910, Korea's annexation by Japan encouraged many Korean picture brides to immigrate to the US. Korean picture brides were integral among Korean American efforts for Korea's independence. Korea's annexation by Japan created a tremendous amount of political, economic, and social unrest among Koreans. Resistance movements against Japanese colonialism were common in Korea and the US. According to Sonia S. Sunoo, a US based Korean resistance movement began in 1910 and rapidly grew in Hawaii and the mainland US.<sup>123</sup> Some Koreans viewed immigration to the US as a method of resistance against Japanese colonialism in their everyday lives. To quell the growing independence movements in the US among Koreans, Japan granted Korean women exit permits to leave Korea. By granting the

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<sup>121</sup> Chang, 7.

<sup>122</sup> Scholars like Alice Chai, Sonia Sunoo, and other Korean American women scholars recorded the life histories of Korean picture brides.

<sup>123</sup> Sunoo, Sonia S. "Korean Women Pioneers of the Pacific Northwest". In *Oregon Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 79.1 (Spring 1978): 51-63.



permits to Korean picture brides, Japan hoped to “calm political passions among overseas Koreans.”<sup>124</sup>

The Japanese government assumed that Korean men were the main independence organizers and that their passion for independence would immediately be pacified by the presence of incoming Korean women. Another assumption held by the Japanese government was that Korean women were unlikely to protest Japan’s colonization of Korea. These assumptions proved incorrect. Korean immigrant women were some of the most outspoken resistance activists. For example, Korean women of the Korean Women’s relief Society of Hawaii and Korean Women’s Patriotic Society in California rallied to boycott Japanese goods and raised funds for the Korean independence army. The increasing presence and involvement of Korean women initiated and strengthened resistance organizing within a thriving independence movement in the US. Over a thousand Korean women entered the US as picture brides and these picture brides participated in activities that strongly supported Korea’s independence movement.

The entrance of picture brides in the US marked an important moment in Korean American women’s history. These early pioneers created many opportunities in American society for later Korean women who immigrated after them. Rising political, social, and economic tensions between US, Korea, and Japan before the Korean War began, influenced how the US treated Korean women living in the US. Anti-Asian exclusion laws stopped the immigration of Korean women, including picture brides after 1924. The Immigration Act of 1924 otherwise known as the Johnson-Reed Act “barred the entry of ‘aliens ineligible to citizenship’ that virtually ended Japanese immigration.”<sup>125</sup> According to the Japanese, Koreans were considered “Japanese nationals”. Although the Japanese colonial government in Korea

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<sup>124</sup> Sunoo, 51.

<sup>125</sup> Chan, Sucheng. *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History*. New York Twayne Publishers, 1991. 55.

previously allowed Korean women to move to the US, they no longer permitted Koreans to emigrate. This legislation prevented Korean spouses and picture brides from entering the US. This action also criminalized picture bride activity as illegal and unwelcomed. Any picture bride, in the process of entering the US legally a few months earlier, was viewed as breaking US law.

As Japanese colonial rule in Korea ended in 1945 and the Korean War (1950) followed shortly after, US military presence on the Korean peninsula increased. US military men who were sent on active duty to Korea contributed to further interaction between US men and Korean women. As a result, another wave of Korean women and young female children entered the US. Like their predecessors, adult Korean women came to the US as war brides. According to Ai Ra Kim, Korean women who married American servicemen entered the US between 1950 and 1975. Kim estimated that a little over 28,000 war brides immigrated to the US during this time. Kim also estimated that 6,293 war orphans also came. Among the war orphans, female children outnumbered male children.<sup>126</sup>

Between 1945 and 1965, another group of 6,000 Korean students, women and men, immigrated. Korean students came to study and many of them were Christian. These students and highly skilled professionals were instrumental in the creation and proliferation of new churches between 1951 and 1973. Korean students were fewer in number than their highly skilled professionals counterparts. One of the reasons why there were not as many Korean students was because education in the US was a privilege for those who had the finances. Many Korean students came from privileged social and economic backgrounds unlike earlier Korean women immigrants. Their family's ability to pay for their education in America made it possible for them to come to America. Korean female students who immigrated in the early 1900s to

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<sup>126</sup> Kim, 56.

pursue American education in the US depended on missionary societies to provide for their tuition and daily living expenses.<sup>127</sup>

The post 1965 era in the US ushered in a time of increasingly relaxed immigration legislation and policies. Japan surrendered to the US and gave up control over Korea while the US relaxed its policies on immigration from South Korea. South Koreans continued to immigrate to the US. During this time a third wave of Korean women immigrated. According to Kim, Korean women made up two-thirds of the total number of Korean immigrants after 1965.<sup>128</sup> Many of these recent immigrant women were employed in nursing or worked as physicians. Others were entrepreneurs and small business owners. Some also worked in the manufacturing sector. Unlike the class background of previous female students, Korean women who immigrated after 1965 came from working class backgrounds. Many of these women were married and came with their families.

A majority of Korean immigrant women of whom Ai Ra Kim calls “*ilse*,” came to support their husband’s financial success or children’s education.<sup>129</sup> My mother’s experience, along with extended female family members’ experiences corroborates this finding. My mother accompanied my father to the US in the late 1970s and supported the family while my father attended a trade school. Kim stated, “Most of them (*ilse* women) worked incessantly and supported their families while their husbands studied for advanced degrees...”<sup>130</sup> At the time of her arrival my mother did not have children but as she worked full time, her financial earnings helped with the costs of my father’s real estate classes. It was physically difficult for my mother

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<sup>127</sup> Like Korean women who immigrated in the beginning of the 1900s, many female students were Christian. Korean women students converted to Christianity and moved to the US. Kim found that among women students, personal beliefs in God and interactions with American missionaries influenced their decision to study in America. Their personal beliefs and the changing political environments also helped facilitate this process of immigration.

<sup>128</sup> Kim, 59.

<sup>129</sup> Kim, 64.

<sup>130</sup> Ilse describes Korean American women of the first generation living in America. Kim, 62.

to work long hours with a limited English speaking ability. Korean immigrant women like her faced extreme economic and social hardship. This type of economic survival is a common story among Korean immigrant and first generation Korean American women.

This is also true about Korean American women living in the Pacific Northwest. Data from the US Census records indicate that larger concentrations of Korean American women live in various areas of the US. The 1990 US Census records indicated that Koreans and Korean Americans travel around the US for seasonal work. Mostly Korean American men move to areas that employ them in work such as mining and fishing. There are a larger number of Korean Americans in California than other states, as a result of earlier Korean immigration patterns. Recent census records showed that a growing number of Korean Americans also now reside in Georgia, Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Washington. Areas that are specifically marked as “Korea towns” have rapidly growing Korean populations in Los Angeles, CA, Queens, New York, and Federal Way, WA. While there are Korean Americans in every state, scholarship draws from and applies mostly to Korean Americans living in Los Angeles, New York City, and Hawaii, even though there are growing populations of Korean Americans elsewhere such as Seattle or Federal Way, Washington. The lack of scholarship about Korean American women in Washington is puzzling given their high level of activism and the presence in the community.

Korean immigration is also characterized by a larger number of Christian converts and Bible women. Korean Bible women and other Korean immigrant women found Korean immigrant communities in the US very accepting of church involvement. With the proliferation of Korean immigrant and Korean American churches from the early 1900s to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Korean American women found it easier to become involved in community so long as they were willing to accept Christianity.

There are several similarities among Korean American Christian women in the US including their ability to create and sustain women only organizations, continual participation in church work, and the establishment of extensive networks and relationships. Each of the similarities is interconnected. First, Korean American Christian women create and sustain women-only organizations through various activities such as fundraising, community building, and providing other social services. Korean American Christian women in organizations like the Young Women's Christian Association conduct similar activities as for example, Korean military wives in their respective military organizations.

Another similarity among Korean American Christian women is their continual participation in church work. Due to the higher number of church establishments in Korean American communities, Korean American women are more likely to be involved in church related activities. When Korean American women are involved in the church community, their responsibilities include organizing events, leading small groups, providing pastoral care, home visits, counseling, childcare, worship or music ministry, and many others. Korean American women are active in every ministry or arm of the church.<sup>131</sup> Some even argue that without Korean American women, Korean Americans churches would cease to operate properly. This is because they are integral the operations of each ministry. It is their physical, emotional, and spiritual labor that sustains these ministries.

A third similarity is the establishment of extensive networks and relationships. Korean women create organizations and sustain them through relationship building with one another.

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<sup>131</sup> Korean American woman activist Crystal described ministry in this way, "I consider my work as ministry." What activists do for professional work and volunteer work are forms of ministry. Ministry is broadly defined as actions by Christians to spread their faith and encourage others. Korean American women activists view all they do as a part of ministry and a call on their lives. Therefore it is difficult for them to differentiate between work life, volunteerism, and how they live their lives as Christians.

They also network and create more relationships that they then use to offer or receive help or social services. I discuss this further in chapters five and six.

While there are some similarities between Korean American Christian women, there are differences as well. For example, Korean American Christian women have a longer history in California and Hawai'i than Korean American Christian women living in Washington State. This is a result of immigration patterns. Early 20<sup>th</sup> century Korean immigrant women immigrated to areas where they knew there was paid work. They initially immigrated to Hawaii or California due to the availability of work on sugar plantations. This is important because immigration leads to community formation and the start of community activism in that given region. Thus, Korean American Christian women's history in California is longer than their counterparts' histories in Washington State. This is important because it helps us understand why history of Koreans in the Pacific Northwest is a relatively new one.

Korean American immigration history in Washington State surfaces in the latter part of the 1920s. A majority of Korean immigrants moved to Washington after their initial contracts with Hawaiian plantations ended. Some emigrated from Korea to Washington but that was not as common. Nonetheless, Korean immigrants came to Washington State for similar reasons as those who moved to Oregon or Alaska. They came to work on farms, railroads, or canneries. Korean American church communities were established as the Korean American population increased. Thus, the involvement of Korean American women in church related activity in Washington began later. Korean immigrants, who had already participated in the establishment of churches in Hawaii or California, helped to establish and build Korean American church communities quickly in Washington State. Korean American women were instrumental in this process. Like

Korean women immigrants, three of the twenty Korean American women interviewed for this study, originally resided in California before moving to the US.

Historians interested in Korean American women's history should analyze the similarities of early 20<sup>th</sup> century and later 20<sup>th</sup> century populations of Korean Americans in different areas of the US. This is important because it will provide comparative and detailed histories of Korean American women in the US. This comparative history can explain how the differences among Korean American Christian women in different states and at different times, influence the kinds of community activism and networking abilities of Korean American Christian women today. It is important to trace these histories to understand better how activism changes over time.

### Chapter 3: Korean American Christian Women's Activism

Korean American women's activism is part of a long tradition in Korean women's history. Korean women have challenged and resisted unequal power dynamics in Korean society in many ways. While an analysis of Korean women's activist history is beyond the purview of this study, Korean American Christian women's activism follows in their predecessors' footsteps. As stated earlier, Korean American Christian women's activism is a part of their everyday lives. It is because activism is normalized in their lives that the ways they enact activism and the kinds of activism challenges the notion that US women's activism and community service is without spiritual or religious influence.

Activism is defined in many ways and is dependent on the context. It is typically understood in the US as actions with the purpose of changing an oppressive situation. Amy Blackstone defines activism as socially constructed ideas whereby we as humans create what activism is and define its purpose.<sup>132</sup> Sarifa Moola describes activism as, "involvement in action to bring about change, be it social, political, environmental ...that takes the form of a movement/s for true democracy, social justice, self-determination, and environmental protection..."<sup>133</sup> Many Korean American women defined activism as actions with the intent to create social change in order to better the situations of Korean Americans and the downtrodden. A definition offered by a Korean American Christian woman activist in the Pacific Northwest was that activism is *acting on what you believe in to change a situation for the better*. Activists, believing that a vision of equality is attainable, believe that there is an oppressive or unequal

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<sup>132</sup> Blackstone, Amy. "'It's Just About Being Fair': Activism and the Politics of Volunteering in the Breast Cancer Movement." In *Gender & Society*. Vol. 18.3. (June 2004): 350-368.

<sup>133</sup> Moola, Sarifa. "Contemporary Activism: Shifting Movements, Changing Actors." In *Agenda Feminist Media*. No 60. (2004): 39-40.



practice or system that needs to change. There are several types of activism practiced widely among Korean immigrant women activists and Korean American Christian women activists.

Korean American Christian women's activism began in the early 1900s and coincides with their arrival in the US. There are five types of activism demonstrated by early and contemporary Korean American Christian women: women's church activism, survival activism, independence organizing, activism specific to Korean military brides, and "Para" church activism.<sup>134</sup> While early 20<sup>th</sup> century Korean immigrant women's activism was enacted through their participation in the US based Korean independence movement, many contemporary Korean American women draw ideas from independence organizing activities to enact activism about human rights pertaining to North Korea.

Korean American women are involved in multiple organizations and church institutions. Women's church activism is activism that occurs within the space of the church. One way that church activism occurs is through their involvement in various ministries of Korean American and multi-ethnic churches. Another way that church activism is enacted is through the organization of women-only gatherings. These women-only gatherings are small groups and social

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<sup>134</sup> The term "Para" church is a term originating from Protestant church members who actively participate in community service outside of the church. The exact origins of the term or who coined it first is unknown however there is some speculation that the term was coined sometime in the early 19th century in Bible societies and missionary groups. Hadden, Jeffrey K. "Parachurch Organizations." *Religious Broadcasting*, July 8, 1999, accessed May 23, 2013, <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/relbroad/parachurch.html>. A common agreed upon characteristic about para churches or parachurch ministries are that they are primarily not-for-profit and engage in an array of community service projects. Stiles J. Mack. "Nine Marks of a Healthy Parachurch Ministry." *9 Marks: Building Healthy Churches*, March/April 2011, accessed May 23, 2013, <http://www.9marks.org/journal/nine-marks-healthy-parachurch-ministry>. According to Reverend R.A. Bell, pastor of Heartland Baptist Church, para means 'to be alongside'. Therefore a para church is a group or ministry that operates alongside a church but focuses very specifically on a particular need in their community. Thus, a "Para" church is a term that applies to any church or organization whose members are Christian working to serve communities. Abell, R.A. "What is A Para-church ministry?" *Heart Baptist Church Pastor's Newspaper Articles*, September 6, 2012, accessed May 23, 2013, [http://www.heartlandbaptistames.com/index.cfm/50507/20039/what\\_is\\_a\\_parachurch\\_ministry](http://www.heartlandbaptistames.com/index.cfm/50507/20039/what_is_a_parachurch_ministry). Various scholars and theologians from Protestant and Catholic backgrounds contest the meanings and use of the term Para church. In a recent article in *Christianity Today*, definitions of a para church is discussed indirectly. Pastor James MacDonald discussed leaving a para church ministry called the Gospel Coalition. In the article, MacDonald critiques the Gospel Coalition for not being accountable to one specific church leader. This shows that one of the characteristics of a para church ministry is that they do not operate under church leadership. Moon, Ruth. "Behind James MacDonald's Resignation from the Gospel Coalition." In *Christianity Today*, February 6, 2012, accessed May 23, 2013, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/februaryweb-only/james-macdonald-resignation.html>.

fellowships. They use these women only gatherings as spaces to exercise leadership, encourage cultural and ethnic awareness, and foster social entrepreneurship.

A second type of activism is “survival activism”. I define survival activism as actions that contribute to one’s daily and long-term survival. For example, Korean picture brides engaged in survival by working more than one job in order to make a living. This is an example of survival activism. Survival activism are everyday actions (activisms) such as work and care giving. Ji-Yeon Yuh describes every day activisms or everyday resistance as resistance that is, “woven into the fabric of daily life...subtle, and rarely identified as resistance.” Survival activism is rarely recognized as a form of resistance among scholars, yet in the lives of Korean picture brides, it is an essential part of their activism.

A third type of activism among Korean American Christian women is independence organizing. Part of independence organizing is “benevolent nationalism”. Historian Lili M. Kim described “benevolent nationalism” as a nationalism expressed through services that met various social and economic needs of Korean American communities.<sup>135</sup> Benevolent nationalism did not advocate for a radical shift in American society or cultural practices. However, it did support the complete eradication of Japanese influence in Korea. There are some similarities between independence organizing; “Para” church activity, and women’s church activism. The same Korean American women involved in one were involved in the others.

A fourth type is activism practiced by Korean American military wives. Korean American Christian women who were married to Americans GI’s, those of whom academics would call military wives of World War II (1939-1945), the Cold War (1945-1991) and the Korean War (1950-1953), networked across state lines and created organizations that drew upon highly organized communication networks. The Soldier Brides Act of 1947 and the Immigration

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<sup>135</sup> Kim, 107.

and Nationality Act of 1952 made it possible for Korean military brides to immigrate to the US in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>136</sup> Korean American women in these organizations identified and addressed areas of need among Korean American women. Some military bride activists also exercised infrapolitics. Infrapolitics were actions that challenged power relations indirectly. Although they participated in strikes or other forms of visible activism, a less direct form of activism that military brides exercised was infrapolitics.<sup>137</sup> Infrapolitics is defined as, “forms of resistance and practices that aim at unobtrusive renegotiation of power relations.”<sup>138</sup> Infrapolitics re-negotiate power relations about gender or race without changing established institutions.

Lastly, Korean American Christian women engaged in “Para” church activism participate in organizations that work alongside churches. “Para” church activists work with church members and people across various denominations and nonprofit organizations. These “Para” church activists support Korean American communities and provide social services. They also provide language classes, promote and fund cultural shows, and offer vital social services that help support these communities. “Para” church activism is primarily done without the leadership of a church pastor. Embedded in “Para” church activism is the idea of belonging.<sup>139</sup> Korean American Christian women activists participate in Para church activism to belong to a community of their own or to create a community for others to belong in.

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<sup>136</sup> The Soldier Brides Act of 1947 was one of three amendments to the War Brides Act of 1945. The War Brides Act allowed US soldier, after World War II, to bring their “alien” brides to the US. The Act originally excluded brides that were of Asian descent. This is why the Soldier Brides Act included Asian spouses. The Soldier Brides Act of 1957 eliminated race which allowed Korean, among other Asian wives, to immigrate to the US. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 is also known as the McCarran Walter Act that supported the quota system from the Immigration Act of 1924. It allowed a quota of about 100 visas from each Asian nation and emphasized family reunification allowing those who were either married to or had one parent of Asian descent to immigrate. This act also supported the immigration of highly skilled workers.

<sup>137</sup> Yuh, Ji Yeon. “Imagined Community: Sisterhood and Resistance among Korean Military Brides in America, 1950 – 1996”. In *Asian/Pacific Islander American Women: A Historical Anthology*. Shirley Hune and Gail Nomura, eds. New York & London: New York University Press, 2003.221- 236.

<sup>138</sup> Yuh, 225.

<sup>139</sup> Yuh, Ji-Yeon. “Imagined Community: Sisterhood and Resistance among Korean Military Brides in America, 1950-1996.” In *Asian/Pacific Islander American Women: A Historical Anthology*. Shirley Hune and Gail Nomura, eds. New York & London: New York University Pres, 2003. 221-236.

Korean American Christian women's activism is practical and meets the needs of Korean American women, Korean American churches, and the surrounding Korean American communities. 20<sup>th</sup> century women participated in church activism through the establishment of church affiliated women's auxiliaries and independent women's groups in Hawaii and on the mainland US. These women created gatherings and auxiliaries for three reasons: To provide a space where Korean American community members could actively and freely practice their religious beliefs; second to encourage a social environment where Korean American women and Korean American men could interact with one another without the watchful eye of their sugar plantation employers; and third, to encourage community leaders who organize and champion social causes important to Korean Americans.

Korean American churches were central places for Korean Americans to exercise their religious beliefs. Their religious beliefs also informed cultural standards including gender roles. According to Alice Chai, "The Korean churches placed an indispensable role in providing an organizational basis: first for the maintenance and perpetuation of Korean culture..."<sup>140</sup> Korean American Christian women used Biblical principles to maintain and perpetuate aspects of Korean culture concerning Korean gender roles and gendered leadership in church. For example, some Korean American Christian women (and men) used Biblical notions of manhood and womanhood to support Korean cultural standards for what women and men could do in the church and in the family.

Church activism also provided an avenue where these women exercised some autonomy and power. While most literature about the creation of churches does not describe the involvement of Korean American women, they in fact, did help to create churches. Their involvement as leaders afforded them some authority in the church space but this autonomy and

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<sup>140</sup> Chai, 81.

power warrants analysis. While Korean American women played several roles in the church community, they were still expected to take on domestic related tasks. Korean American women participated most in church activity that included care taking and food preparation for church fellowship.<sup>141</sup> They were also in charge of providing food and structure for fellowship times. Most often caretaking took the form of childcare or what churches often call, children's ministry. Most, if not all, Korean American churches that had children's ministries were headed by pastor's wives or women's small group leaders. Even older children, most often young daughters of Korean American women members, were asked to help with the children's ministry.

A large part of Korean American women's church activism was their organization of and participation in women-only gatherings. Women-only gatherings were primarily small groups or social gatherings. Women-only gatherings were valuable for a number of reasons; first they met the needs of Korean American women. They sought each other for encouragement and support. Without the existence of women-only gatherings or small groups, Korean American women had little space to meet apart from Korean American men. Thus, women-only spaces provided much needed interaction between Korean American women. In the women-only spaces, Korean American women encouraged one another's pastoral and leadership talents. They also provided each other with constructive and supportive criticism whereas in many Korean American churches, they experienced much criticism and lack of support by men.

Korean American women, who exercised leadership skills in these church spaces, indirectly challenged male leadership and male hierarchy in Korean churches. They did so through preaching, teaching, and practicing theology and biblical hermeneutics. These were practices previously reserved for male clergy. By exercising these spiritual activities, they were

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<sup>141</sup> Fellowship times were designated times that occurred after church service for the purpose of creating community and reflecting about life in relationship to the recent sermon.

practicing theology long before most feminist theologians developed the idea of women's theology in the field of gender studies. Through Korean American women's discussions of leadership, callings and visions, many were encouraged and supported by Korean American women leaders and activists to develop their theology further. Korean American Christian women embraced a belief that women could be pastors and leaders. They believed that their leadership abilities were a result of loving God (doing what He thinks one should do) and loving people (encouraging others and being a public servant).<sup>142</sup> They believed that women should be leaders and pastors because God used anyone. They acted on the belief that God accepted men and women as equal partners especially in leadership and evangelism.

Third, Korean American women-only gatherings encouraged and developed women's relationship with God. While participation in church services and church ministries were impactful to Korean American Christian women, many found that it was their participation in women-only gatherings or small groups that exponentially grew their faith. In order to teach Biblical material in small groups, Korean American women studied the scriptures for themselves. Many developed their own theologies. They also prepared teaching material for one another. This practice of studying the Bible caused their relationship with God to deepen as they immersed themselves in scripture and analyzed how scripture applied to their lives.

Korean American women also found that their faith walk grew as other Korean American women prayed and interceded for them. It was the constant and faithful encouragement that Korean American women gave to one another on a weekly basis that helped each of their faith walks develop. As a result, women only gatherings were used for the purpose of evangelism.

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<sup>142</sup> This belief is from Biblical scripture out of Matthew 22:38-40. Jesus is asked what the greatest commandment was. Jesus responds with, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second like it, love your neighbor as yourself. Hang all the law and prophets on these two commandments." New International Version of the Christian Bible.

Korean American women invited other women to these women-only gatherings and small groups to introduce them to a different way of relating to God.

In addition to evangelism, Korean American Christian women's activism cannot be fully understood unless one takes into account survival activism. Korean picture brides actively participated in survival as an everyday struggle and strategy. Christian Korean picture brides who entered the US between 1910 and 1924 did not intend to become activists. Rather they became activists as a response to their social and economic living situations. This was not unusual. Many Christian Korean women before becoming picture brides did not experience similar responsibilities or hardship in Korea as they did in the US. Some did not struggle with finances growing up in a middle class family yet when they came to the US, they experienced financial hardship. Once in the US, many Korean picture brides followed the example of previously arrived Korean American women in coping with these struggles.

Survival activism among Christian Korean picture brides occurred at work and in the home. Many Korean picture brides worked to survive. Most if not all worked to survive alongside their husbands. They labored on sugar plantations or did laundry-related work to bring income into the home. Thus, Korean picture brides learned how to survive economically as wage earners. They learned to manage both of their finances. Many also attempted to save money for a return trip to Korea. This can be seen in the life of Mrs. K, a Christian Korean picture bride. She worked at an army laundry ironing to support her life in Hawaii and family in Korea. She eventually took a boat to South Korea at the cost of \$55 to visit her sick mother.<sup>143</sup>

Part of survival activism among picture brides included the operation of small businesses. Mrs. K. eventually became a businesswoman. As an entrepreneur, she initially bought a laundry

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<sup>143</sup> Chai, Alice Y. "'Mrs. K.': Oral History of a Korean Picture Bride." In *Women's Studies Newsletter*. Vol. 7.4. (Fall 1979): 10-13.

business to make a living. Even though she did not have the finances to begin another business, she had to survive and provide for her family. With the help of financially stable Korean American picture bride friends, Mrs. K. gathered enough borrowed finances to buy a hotel business and run it successfully. She described what it was like to begin a business as a way of surviving, “That is how we first started business. By other[s]. We have a women’s society lending and helping each other with money... We like business that time, even a small amount... We called the meeting Kye in Korea... That’s how we started living well.”<sup>144</sup> Early picture bride’s use of entrepreneurial work began with Kye. Kye meetings were spaces where Korean picture brides socialized and provided financial and emotional support to one another. Thus, Korean picture brides were successful entrepreneurs and activists of survival because they had a support network they relied on.

Korean Christian picture brides also enacted survival activism in the home because the home presented another space where they had challenges. Family members or close friends arranged many Korean picture bride marriages. For example, Mrs. K.’s cousin arranged her marriage. Many like her were given pictures of potential husbands that were taken twenty or so years earlier. When Korean picture brides arrived in Hawaii or the mainland US, many were shocked to find that their husband was twenty or so years older than expected. Korean picture brides felt deceived and worked hard to gather enough finances to go back home. However, they also realized that there was a social cost to returning home. One of the social costs was bringing shame to their families. This was common regardless of the Korean picture bride’s religious affiliation. Thus, Korean picture brides went into immediate survival mode when adjusting to a new home life and a husband they barely knew.

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<sup>144</sup> Chai, 13.



On one hand, many Korean picture brides bucked against the marriage and did everything they could to convey their mistrust and disgust with the living situation. Mrs. K. described not eating for eight days and sneaking out for a drink of water in the middle of the night. She responded to an unfair situation in her own way. She also made food for her husband for 3 months without speaking with him before she accepted the situation.

Other Korean picture brides who arrived in the Pacific Northwest practiced survival activism in the home in different ways. Sonia S. Sunoo's work described six excellent examples of Korean picture brides' survival activism in the Pacific Northwest in the home through childcare.<sup>145</sup> Korean picture brides like In-Sook and Myong-Soon who had ten children each, Ok-Ja who had five, and Soon-Hi who had seven children, provided for their children so that their family could survive. These picture brides worked on farms while caretaking. They put their oldest children to work so that they had enough money for food and electricity. Many of the picture brides were widowed while pregnant with their last child or when their youngest was an infant. They also cared for other people who lived in their home with them to survive. For example, Bokki, a picture bride living in Chicago, supported two other men who worked with her husband by providing food, room, and board because she needed them to work as farm hands.<sup>146</sup> Even though they eventually left, Bokki understood that caretaking in exchange for labor was one way that her family could survive in the farming business. Sunoo stated, "The ingenuity and the adaptability to sudden crises as evidence by Bokki are further strengths displayed."<sup>147</sup> This provides further evidence of survival activism by Korean picture brides in the Pacific Northwest.

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<sup>145</sup> Sunoo, Sonia S. "Korean Women Pioneers of the Pacific Northwest." In *Oregon Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 79.1. (Spring 1978): 51-63.

<sup>146</sup> Sunoo, 61.

<sup>147</sup> Sunoo, 63.

Korean picture brides and other Korean American Christian women also participated in independence activism and exercised benevolent nationalism. Korean American Christian women were active in independence organizing and many were known to be outspoken and charismatic leaders and community members. They were highly involved because they had personal experiences with Japanese colonialism and were committed to the fight for Korea's independence. They experienced firsthand what it was like to live in a country where being Korean was challenged and almost annihilated by Japanese colonialists. Korean immigrant women also experienced the effects of foreign militaries' use of Korean land as battlegrounds. They saw the effects of Japanese colonialism on the cultural practices of Korean people. Thus, many found that community formation was one way to resist Japanese exploitation of Korean land, customs, and people.

Korean women and men in Korea resisted Japanese control while some Koreans fled to the US for economic, social, and religious freedom. Those that came to the US organized a US-Korean movement for Korean independence. Family ties and nationalism linked Koreans in Korea with Korean immigrants in the US. These transnational ties were especially useful in order to send financial support to the independence movement in Korea. Korean immigrant women and Korean American women often participated in two interrelated independence-organizing activities; fundraising and the promotion of benevolent nationalism in the form of social service provisions and language preservation. These two types of activism also occurred in "Para" church activism and women's church activism, which is why there is some cross over.

The first type of independence-organizing activity was fundraising. Korean American women used community organizations to raise funds for a burgeoning independence movement

in Korea. Funds were vital as they supported independence organization's daily operations in Korea. Funds also provided for the needs of impoverished Korean people.

One of the ways that Korean American Christian women raised funds was through the Korean Women's Relief Society.<sup>148</sup> Maria Hwang, a well-known Christian churchwoman, established the Korean Women's Relief Society in Hawaii in 1919. According to Lili M. Kim, the Korean Women's Relief Society redefined the scope of the Korean independence movement by addressing the overall needs, including the financial stability of Koreans in Korea and Korean American communities in the US.<sup>149</sup> The KWRS gathered funds to help relief efforts in Korea. More specifically, the funds were used to support Korean independence activist's daily living expenses and political organizing activities until Korea won independence over Japan in 1945.<sup>150</sup>

Korean American Christian women also pushed for benevolent nationalism that was expressed through social services and a peace march. Benevolent nationalism was one way to support the overthrow of Japanese colonialism in Korea.<sup>151</sup> Using benevolent nationalism, the women promoted unity between Korean American and Korean communities. For example, Korean American women's organizations in Hawaii from 1900 to the 1945 pushed for Korean independence and unity between Korean and Korean Americans through social service clubs. Some of the clubs included Hyungjae (형재) Club and the Young Nam Buin Hoe (known also as

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<sup>148</sup> Hune, Shirley and Gail Nomura, eds. *Asian/Pacific Islander American Women: A Historical Anthology*. New York & London: New York University Press, 2003.

<sup>149</sup> Kim, Lili M. "Redefining the Boundaries of Traditional Gender Roles: Korean Picture Brides, Pioneer Korean Immigrant Women, and Their Benevolent Nationalism in Hawai'i." In *Asian/Pacific Islander American Women: A Historical Anthology*. Shirley Hune and Gail Nomura, eds. New York: New York University Press, 2003. 106 – 122.

<sup>150</sup> As a result of a collaborative independence movement between Korean Americans and Koreans, many still celebrate the Restoration of Light day on August 15th of every year.

<sup>151</sup> Lili Kim defines benevolent nationalism as gendered expressions of nationalism that is expressed through specific actions. An example of benevolent nationalism is described in Kim's work where Korean women dressed up in traditional Korean dresses and led a peaceful march not only for Korean independence but also for a broader unity among humanity. Kim argued that in doing so, Korean women's benevolent nationalism reshaped the independence movement in Hawai'i.

the Southern Women's Society). Korean American women in both organizations participated in charity work and fundraising in order to support the overall purpose of unity and independence.

The Hyungjae Club provided classes to young second generation Korean American girls. These classes taught Korean culture and language. The founding organizers believed that teaching the culture and language and the production and enactment of folk stories was important to the installation of nationalism among second generation Korean Americans. The Japanese occupation of Korea banned the use of Korean language thus; Korean nationals in the US became even more passionate about the preservation of Korean culture. Korean American women taught second-generation children how to read, write, and speak the Korean language as an act of defiance against the Japanese. Much of this also propelled cultural productions staged by organizations like the Hyungjae Club. Social services like the classes Hyungjae played an important role in the overall cohesion of Korean American independence movement activities.

Korean American women also demonstrated benevolent nationalism through social services in organizations like the Young Nam Buin Hoe. The Young Nam Buin Hoe was primarily a social service club that helped newly arrived Koreans adjust to life in America. These organizations raised funds in support of recently arrived Korean students who fled from Japanese colonialism. They also fundraised to send one of their representatives to Korea as a supportive demonstration of Korean independence. Korean American women in organizations similar to the Young Nam Buin Hoe also provided economic services such as financial planning, retirement advice, and home buyer strategies to make Koreans' adjustment to life in America easier. Thus, supporting Korea's independence movement also facilitated acculturation to American norms and values<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Acculturation is a process where two cultures interact with and influence one another. The dynamics of power in this process works in a way that, depending on whom one asks, either one or both cultures are negatively or positively impacted by unequal

Benevolent nationalism still occurs as a type of activism among Korean American women today. Instead of fighting for Korea's independence, Korean American women organize to unify the separated Koreas, South Korea and North Korea. Currently, Korean American women activists enact a contemporary version of benevolent nationalism through cultural centers and organizations in the US. An example of a Korean cultural center in Washington State is the organization called, Morning Star.<sup>153</sup> Like Korean cultural clubs of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Morning Star was created and is led by Korean American women who don Korean traditional wear whenever they perform publicly and encourages unity within Korean American communities. Morning Star preserves the arts of Korean culture in America and aims to instill a strong sense of ethnic identity primarily amongst second, third, and fourth generations of Korean Americans today. Morning Star instills an affinity for Korean American culture by teaching current generations of Korean Americans important aspects of Korean culture. As Korean Americans learn about their ethnic identity, studies have shown that this contributes to an increase in activism and organizing activities around North and South Korean politics today.

A related type of activism exercised by Korean American Christian Military includes infrapolitics. Much of the literature about Korean American military wives does not analyze their religious beliefs. After conducting some research into the individual lives of a few Korean military wives, they practice religion.

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power relations. For example, Korean American organizations that provide financial advice on home buying help Korean Americans navigate the process. This is a positive impact. The home buying process becomes slightly easier but still requires an agent who will look for a home, a bank who will supply a loan with affordable interest, a substantial down payment, proof of steady income, and the ability to sustain monthly mortgage payments. Here, the American value that buying a home makes one a better American interacts with the idea of a Korean person's idea of success in a foreign country. The Korean homebuyer may obtain the knowledge needed to buy a home, yet when power dynamics are examined, the acculturation process reveals that a Korean home buyer still might not have full access to buy a home, which is one step closer to becoming a "full American."

<sup>153</sup> Morning Star is a cultural center that provides classes, houses a pre-school, library, and puts on Korean cultural productions every year across the world. Their musical performances are widely popular among people of all ages and races. They currently have more than a thousand people that attend their art school, use their cultural library, and attend their classes. Most of their students are 1.5, second and third generation Korean Americans. They are successful in meeting their goal to share aspects of Korean culture to many. They can be found at [morningstarkcc.org](http://morningstarkcc.org)

Some Christian Korean American military wives were born and raised in America and married an American soldier. Some Christian Korean American military wives married an American soldier and then came to America. The majority of literatures about Korean American military wives are about the experiences of the latter group.

One of the salient characteristics of early Korean American military wives' experiences was that they lived in areas where they were the ethnic or racial minority. They were isolated from other Korean Americans and surrounded by American military families, extended families, or military communities. There were some exceptions to the norm where Korean American women found other Korean American women to socialize in the area. But nonetheless, if a Korean American woman was surrounded primarily by her husband's immediate family, extended family members, or other community members, they were often unfamiliar with Koreans or Korean culture. Many early Korean military wives faced difficulties in their adjustment to life in America. Many experienced hostile racial attitudes from neighbors and in some cases, their in-laws. Difficulties such as these propelled them into community activism.

Ji-Yeon Yuh's research provided extensive examples of how Korean American military wives were able to find one another and create communities.<sup>154</sup> Their decision to create community was an empowering one in that they did so to take back some control of their lives. One of the ways that Korean military wives sustained a sense of stability and community was through long distance networks. Korean American military wives constantly moved because of their husband's military assignment changes. Korean military brides became experts in the creation of extensive networks of support. In Yuh's research, Korean military wives created

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<sup>154</sup> Yuh, Ji Yeon. "Imagined Community: Sisterhood and Resistance among Korean Military Brides in America, 1950-1996." In *Asian/Pacific Islander American Women: A Historical Anthology*. Shirley Hune and Gail Nomura, eds. New York & London: New York University Press, 2003. 221-236.

networks among friends and women-only organizations to maintain friendships (long distance and local) and to pass along pertinent information about resources that would help one another.

There are several types of hardships that Korean military wives constantly experienced. Some of these experiences included social isolation, language barriers, and familial hardships. This was primarily true for the wives who were not born or raised in America. Korean military wives' experiences relate more closely to that of other military women who immigrated to the US to join their military husbands. Military wives of Asian descent, like Koreans, were not included in the initial War Brides Act of 1945 that indicated that only non-Asian spouses could enter the U.S. The context that Korean military brides were met with when they arrived in the US requires careful consideration.

With the backdrop of the Cold War, followed by the Korean War, many Korean military wives left a war torn Korea to come to the US. The United States was also embattled in the Cold War and there were tensions about whom they welcomed into the US. Americans were not particularly friendly to "foreigners". Koreans were no exceptions. While the Korean military wives' focused on creating a better life by using the vehicle of marriage to an American soldier, some were met with racial animosity and ignorance.

Korean military wives arrived in the US knowing one individual, her husband. Unfortunately because her husband was the only person she knew, she experienced social isolation. Often isolated and a racial minority, Korean military wives experienced negative stigma associated with being marked as "different." Korean military wives lived on military base communities and the communities were often primarily white as is the case in many part of the United States. Few had larger Korean populations in the area. Depending on where Korean military wives lived, they experienced varying forms of exclusion from both Korean

communities and white communities. Korean communities and dominant white communities often treated Korean military wives as social pariahs. Socially derived negative connotations of foreignness as a military bride made life extremely difficult for Korean women. Nativism and racism made it especially challenging for Korean military wives to interact with family members or community members. Some local Korean American community members were embarrassed by the negative stigma associated with Korean military wives. They also associated all Korean military wives with prostitution when that wasn't always the case. This stereotype made it difficult for recent military brides to be accepted by the local Korean community.

Nevertheless Korean military wives began to, “struggle for and struggle against”<sup>155</sup> exclusion, racism, and difficulties created by their social environment. Korean military wives were resilient. Their activism occurred in two ways, the creation of non-profit organizations and social spaces through the local church. Both types of organizing still occur today.

Korean military wives created the multifaceted ABC Korean American Wives Association to address some of the difficulties explained previously. The ABC Korean American Wives Association began in 1979. Many of its members were wives of men from various branches of the military. This organization also included Korean American women who had married men in other professions. Korean military wives in this organization often recruited members through conversations with other Korean women in public places. These public places included grocery stores and coffee shops. Korean military wives' organizations such as ABC KAW addressed many issues. Korean military wives' organizations publicly condemned the stereotypes of military brides. They emphasized the importance of educating the larger community about the realities and experiences of military wives and their families. They also raised funds for community causes that demonstrated their commitment to Korean American

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<sup>155</sup> Yuh, 222.



communities. They also extended their networks and further developed their social community beyond the Korean American community.

Korean military brides were active about other social justice issues as well. For example, an issue that the ABC KAW addressed was domestic violence because the women they worked with experienced it too. Korean military wives who experienced violence in the home found support from this organization. In response to this sensitive yet important issue, Korean military brides created resources for one another. They provided training in how to respond to domestic violence in the home. They worked to educate Korean women about their rights as immigrants and as citizens. Members of the ABC KAW also provided job referrals, childcare services, and financial assistance. These were three very important facets of responding to cases of domestic violence and generally a part of the supportive structure of the organization. Korean American military wives in Washington also created a similar organization that I discuss in chapter 4.

Korean American Christian military wives also became active in local churches and church related activism. They created social spaces to gather other military wives and discuss ways to best adjust to American life. These brides found that military bride organizations created by US military bases primarily catered to the white, middle-class military wives of whom they had very little in common. Social spaces created by Korean military Christian wives would better provide for their needs.

Korean American Christian military wives used these social spaces to discuss other strategies of survival. One particular strategy of survival was infrapolitics. As stated before, infrapolitics are indirect actions. Robin D.G. Kelly also described infrapolitics as, “small acts... in daily life...which together amount to a collective resistance and consciousness...”<sup>156</sup> Ji-Yeon Yuh identifies networking as an example of infrapolitics in the lives of Korean American

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<sup>156</sup> Yuh, 225.

military wives. Networking does not pose a direct threat to the ways in which a system of power (such as a military base) works, but it does help Korean military wives, Christian and non-Christian, provide for their own needs and desires. Another example of infrapolitics is the way that they speak the Korean language with one another when they do not want their non-Korean-speaking husbands or family members from understanding their conversations. This type of activism proves that Korean American women have multifaceted approaches to activism.

Lastly, Korean American Christian women are involved in “Para” church activism for the purpose of building their communities. “Para” church organizations are faith-based groups that are not under the leadership of any particular church or pastor. An early example of a “Para” church organization among early Korean American women is the Young Nam Buin Hoe.<sup>157</sup> The Young Nam Buin Hoe was not accountable to or led by any pastor or church. Korean American women leaders were the ones who led Korean American women’s “Para” church organizations. Their leadership style was different than the hierarchical structure present in the local Korean American churches. While they did have positions of leadership like, president, vice president, and so on, many of these organizations made decisions in a more democratic way. The members of the “Para” church organizations and the leadership team made important decisions together.

Korean American “Para” church activist organizations also exercise more freedom in which they choose to organize comparably to women’s organizations that are part of less flexible protestant denominations. Korean American “Para” church activists work with people of various denominations and political affiliations. They do not limit their work to members of one denomination but believe that bringing multiple perspectives to address a social issue strengthens their cause and provides well-rounded solutions. An aspect of Korean American women’s “Para” church activism that is similar to Korean military wives’ activism is that they are successful in

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<sup>157</sup> Yuh, 114.

building bridges between two or more different organizations or communities. For example, the Young Name Buin Hoe organizers recognized that there were two factions within the Korean American independence movement. The presence of and fighting between these two factions negatively affected the movement overall. Korean American women convinced leadership and general members of these two factions to work together for the overall goal of the creation of a stronger unified Korean American independence movement. Korean American Christian women activists were bridge builders. They were bridge builders through the facilitation of communication between members of the Korean American community. They were also bridge builders through the provision of social services that bridged the gap between privileged members of Korean American community with the underserved members of the same community.

Characteristic of Korean American women's "Para" church is the provision of social services to their respective ethnic communities. Their activism is similar to Chinese American women's activism in the Square and Circle Club described by Judy Yung.<sup>158</sup> Early Chinese women activists organized the Square and Circle that focused on charity projects, organized a Hope Chest Project, and focused on a generational pipeline that helped younger Chinese Americans in education and social service opportunities.<sup>159</sup> Similar to Chinese American women activism, Korean American Para church activists connected their work with their ethnic community both in America and in Korea. Also, like Chinese women, Korean American "Para" church activists also participated in charitable and philanthropic ventures that extend their influence to contemporary women led organizations today.

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<sup>158</sup> Yung, Judy. *Unbound Feet; A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

<sup>159</sup> The Circle and Square Club. [www.squareandcircle.org](http://www.squareandcircle.org). 2009.

Korean American Christian “Para” church provided social services to non-Korean Americans. One of the reasons for this may be due to their desire to provide a sense of belonging to others. Korean American women know personally what it was like to adjust to life in a foreign land. Their desire to belong to a community that accepted them is built into their activism. The provision of social services that contributed to others’ sense of belonging is of great importance. A contemporary example of this is Korean American Christian women in the Korean Women’s Association in Federal Way, Washington. These activists provide language classes, citizenship preparation, elderly care, and much more to help longtime Korean and non-Korean residents and newly arrived community members adjust to their lives in America.

Korean American women involved in “Para” church activism, like Korean American women involved in church activism, use a framework of faith. “Para” church activists use their faith as a reason for continuing community work. However, “Para” church activists tend to be more careful that they do not impose their faith onto whom they provide social services to. Unlike early 20<sup>th</sup> century Korean Bible women who mixed evangelism with the provision of social services, “Para” church activists did not always share the gospel with the people they helped. Like Korean Bible women, their faith was a personal reason for why they participated in “Para” church activity but their primary goal was to provide practical services to those in need.

Korean American Christian women’s activism is expressed in many ways and this chapter only addressed five types of activism. While church activism, survival activism, independence organizing, Korean military wives’ activism, and Para church activism are the most prevalent types of activism in Korean American women’s activist history, there is always room to ask, are there more? What types of activism are we still missing from these narratives?

What about Korean American women's activism from other religious traditions? The following is a brief discussion of further areas of development.

Feminist activism and feminism among Korean American women activists is still an under researched area. Although there are Korean American Christian women activists who identify as feminist, many still do not. One of the reasons that many Korean American Christian women activists do not identify as feminists could be the influence of conservative religious values. Additionally, while scholars could label, and some have, Korean American Christian women's activism as feminist because their activism uses feminist ideas, this could be considered presumptuous.

One of the reasons for the distancing can be explained by Esther Ngan-Ling Chow's argument in *The Feminist Movement*.<sup>160</sup> Chow argued that Asian American women activists were turned off by the "racial insensitivity and unreceptivity"<sup>161</sup> of some US white feminists. This is true for Korean American Christian women activists as well. Their needs and struggles as Korean American women and as Christians are largely ignored by larger feminist organizations. Racism and religious insensitivity was and is prevalent in women's rights organizations despite their commitment to eradicating all forms of inequality.

Some Asian American women chose not to associate with feminism while others found ways to merge the feminism and identity politics together. Like Asian American women who developed their organizations and women's groups, Korean American Christian women also created their own. It is possible that the language of "feminism" was not accessible to them. However, what about mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Korean American activists who interacted with the larger US feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s? There must be Korean American women's

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<sup>160</sup> Chow, Esther Ngan-Ling. "The Feminist Movement: Where Are All the Asian American Women?" In *Making Waves: An Anthology of Writings By and About Asian American Women*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989. 362-377.

<sup>161</sup> Chow, 371.

organizations that critiqued sexism in the church and community yet there is little research about it. Future studies could better address how Korean American Christian women's activism speaks to or against ideas of feminism or feminist activism.

As important as feminism and feminist activism is to the history of Korean American Christian women activism, research also needs to recover history about Korean American Christian women's student activism. Scholars like Susie Ling and Rebecca Y. Kim have begun this work by drawing our attention to the intersection of religious activism, student life, and meanings of identity. However there is strangely still a lack of gender analysis with respect to Korean American Christian women's student activism. Rebecca Kim's work examines second-generation Korean American activism with ethnic campus ministries yet the gender analysis is missing.<sup>162</sup> Susie Ling, while analyzing Asian American women's student activism in the Los Angeles area leaves out the religious factor.<sup>163</sup> Both studies are important yet research that lies at the intersection of these two works is still missing. My study addresses a portion of this intersection. I analyze Korean American Christian women's activism that includes student activists because it is in those narratives that a relationship between religion, spirituality, and social change is identifiable.

Another area of study about Korean American Christian women's activism arises as North and South Korean politics becomes more of a reality for Korean Americans living outside either Korea. It is becoming more commonplace to interact with North Korean refugees seeking asylum in America. More of the American media broadcasts stories of how North Korea presents

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<sup>162</sup> Kim, Rebecca Y. "Second-Generation Korean American Evangelicals: Ethnic, Multi Ethnic, or White Campus Ministries?" In *Sociology of Religion*. Vol 65.1. (2004). 19-34.

<sup>163</sup> Ling, Susie. *The Mountain Movers: Asian American Women's Movement, Los Angeles 1968-1976*. Los Angeles: University of California, 1984. This piece was edited and reprinted in *Amerasia* (15:1) in 1989 and then for the third time in *Asian American Women and Gender: A Reader*. Frankling Ng, ed. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc. 1999. 19-35.

a political and economic threat to America. Strangely any discussions or opinions by South Korean political leaders are absent from these broadcasts.

Korean American churches across the U.S. sponsor talks and messages featuring North Korean refugees and their stories. Korean American Christian women are particularly active in spreading the word about these events and raising awareness about human rights violations in North Korea. Korean American women activists in Korean American churches in particular continue to become more vocal about North and South Korean politics. As a result, there will be an increasing response to this political, social, and economic situation by Korean American Christian women in the Pacific Northwest. Thus, this is a gap in research that will be addressed as North and South Korea continue to engage with one another and with the rest of the world.

Lastly, Korean American Christian women's activism in the political arena such as involvement at the local and national levels will garner further scholarly attention. Currently there is a limited amount of scholarship about Korean American Christian women in political work because one; there are not very many Korean American women politicians at the local or national levels. Although there are a few in Washington State the local levels. Second, scholarship about Korean American women's activism often lumps political activism into community work and does not analyze the specifics. As a result, I include specific stories of activism by Korean American Christian women political activists in the hopes of presenting an emerging analysis of religion, political activism, and gender.

## Chapter 4: Korean Bible Women (Chōndo Puin, 전도부인): Redefining A Labor of Compassion

“True activism is compassion that God has put in your heart regarding an area of ministry. Whether it’s inside or outside of the church and committing yourself to that, long term. It’s important that you leave your mark.” – Leslie

“Activism is advocating for myself in an environment where especially as a woman and starting out in my career very young. It’s only in the last 10 years where I realized the importance of advocating for others. I’m drawn to the kind of activism for people that identify with what it means to be a woman, what it means to be a minority, an ethnic minority, who wants to be a leader in this culture.” – Grace

Korean American Christian women and Korean immigrant Christian women can look to a rich historical legacy of Korean Bible women in Korea and in the US. Many Korean immigrant women and Korean American women are Bible women. An analysis of Korean Bible women’s history in the Korea and in the US reveals a pattern of changes in their civic participation that is influenced by religion, race, and nationhood. Their civic participation otherwise known as a *labor of compassion* is a form of activism that presents Korean American Christian women as agents rather than passive church attendees.

Jung Ha Kim defines this *labor of compassion* as experiences that represent the intersections of gender, race, nationality, and religion among Korean American church women.<sup>164</sup> I extend this definition of *labor of compassion* to include Korean American Christian women in the Pacific Northwest whose activism is enacted in and outside of the church. The

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<sup>164</sup> Kim, Jung Ha. “The Labor of Compassion: Voices of Churched Korean American Women.” In *New Spiritual Homes: Religion and Asian Americans*. David K. Yoo, Ed. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1999. 202 – 217.



*labor of compassion* describes the actions of Korean American women who actively engage their communities through social, cultural, and economic services. Korean American Christian women practice a constant compassion for their community yet their work is also laborious and often times unacknowledged or under appreciated. The *labor of compassion* refers also to Korean American women's involvement in the church ranging from event planning, fundraising, choral and worship participation, teaching in youth ministry, leading Bible study groups, and women's auxiliaries. When applied to Korean American women, the *labor of compassion* reveals a history of Korean American women's resistance and experiences of survival. Thus, Korean American Bible women's activism is a *labor of compassion*, not only because it occurs in the church, but also because their experiences always represent the interplay of race, gender, nationhood, and religion, in all aspects of their lives.

Like many of the stories about women in the Bible, Korean American Bible women's evangelism occurred outside of the a physical church space. This leads to the first definition of the term "Bible woman". A Bible woman is simply, a woman in the Bible. Most notable in American mainstream popular culture are Eve, Mary (Jesus' mother), Delilah, and Esther.<sup>165</sup>

The values of femininity drawn from women in the Bible inform our understandings of femininity in the US. In other words, mainstream media interpretations of Biblical womanhood helps to inform our understanding of what it is to be a "good" woman in the US. For example, the cult of true womanhood, a model of femininity in 19<sup>th</sup> century America, is an application of Biblical femininity or womanhood to middle class white women. Some scholars, particularly those of the Christian faith, often encourage modern day women to imitate women of the Bible. However, not everyone agrees. Some feminist historians and scholars critique the idea of white

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<sup>165</sup> For example, Mary is a woman who exemplifies piety and virtue.

womanhood because it inaccurately describes the conditions of all women.<sup>166</sup> Others critique the model for its connection to Biblical femininity. In other words, women who do not identify with Christianity and its beliefs about women, find this ideal unattainable or inapplicable to their lives. Others who try and bridge feminism and spirituality like feminist biblical spiritualists like Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Rosemary Ruether, or Ursula King argue that it is necessary to read and interpret the Bible and meanings of gender, from a feminist standpoint.<sup>167</sup> In other words, feminists analyze the Bible's meanings of femininity or womanhood by critiquing unequal power relations associated with race, class, and gender.

A second definition of a "Bible woman" is found in scholarship and archival work about American and European women missionaries. Christine Sungjin Chang provides a definition of Bible Mission Women based on British Foreign Bible Society documents.<sup>168</sup> Bible mission women were primarily wives of 19<sup>th</sup> century European missionaries to China and Korea. According to Chang, Bible women built friendships with Chinese and Korean women for two purposes. First they did so to create a social network and secondly, they build these friendships to convert them to Christianity. Bible women like Mrs. Thomas (1882) from the US Presbyterian Church, Scottish missionary Mary S. Davison (1900), and Dr. Mary C. Horner introduced the Bible to Korean women and their children. Methodist missionary Ella Lewis taught Bible classes

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<sup>166</sup> White womanhood or cult of true womanhood is also known as the cult of domesticity. The idea itself came about in the 19<sup>th</sup> century American culture. Historian Barbara Welter examines the concept further in her article, *The Cult of true Womanhood: 1820-1860* in 1966. The cult of true womanhood maintains that the main characteristics exemplified by proper women are piety, purity, submission, and domesticity.

<sup>167</sup> Fiorenza, Elizabeth Schüssler. *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation*. Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 2001. Ruether, Rosemary Radford. *Introducing Redemption in Christian Feminism*. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998. Rosemary Radford Ruether. *Gender, Ethnicity, and Religion: Views from the Other Side*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002. King, Ursula, ed. *Religion and Gender*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1995. Ursula King, ed. *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994.

<sup>168</sup> Chang, Christine Sungjin. "John Ross and Bible Women in the Early Protestant Mission of Northern Korea and Eastern China." In *Rethinking Mission*. The Institute of Cross-Cultural Studies. Seoul: Seoul National University, March 2008.

and facilitated burning ceremonies.<sup>169</sup> One of the main goals of Bible mission women was to teach literacy to women and children. Bible mission women established all-female schools to teach literacy to women and girls. They also taught whom I identify as Korean Bible women.

Thirdly, a related definition of a Bible woman is a single, unmarried, or widowed Korean woman who used the Bible to evangelize and convert people to her faith. The second definition of a Bible mission women best describes white foreign women missionaries. According to Ai Ra Kim, the term is translated as an “evangelizing woman”.<sup>170</sup> Unlike foreign Bible mission women, Korean Bible women were at an advantage. They could communicate in Korean more fluently than foreign white women missionaries. Kim described early Korean Bible women as the “hands and legs...managing everything related to church life both inside and outside the church...”<sup>171</sup> Single, unmarried, or widowed Korean women could also move more freely without the constraints of wife/mother or church specific duties. These Korean Bible women evangelized through home visits or interactions in public. Many converted others to the Christian faith through prayers of salvation. Korean Bible women came from all socioeconomic classes who were typically older unmarried women who, according to Korean society, were freer to move around in the public sphere.

There is much more information about Korean Bible in Korea primarily because of the existence of the Ewha Institute for Women’s Theological Studies. Ewha is strongly committed to Korean women’s education in South Korea. Ewha University (이화여자대학교) was formerly

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<sup>169</sup> Burning ceremonies were ceremonies where Bible women and missionaries would visit the homes of recent converts and help burn previous idols and fetishes that homes had.

<sup>170</sup> Kim, Ai Ra. *Women Struggling for a New Life: The Role of Religion in the Cultural Passage from Korea to America*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996. The difference between the second and third definition is difference in evangelistic methods between foreign white women missionaries and local Korean Bible women.

<sup>171</sup> Kim, 51.

known as Ewha Hakdang (이화 학당, 梨花學堂).<sup>172</sup> Ewha scholars are dedicated to producing scholarship about gender, religion, and society. Most of the scholarship is written in Korean and an analysis of them is beyond the scope of this study.

Korean Bible women's experiences do appear in journals or personal accounts written in English by foreign missionaries. Methodist American and European missionaries in their reflections describe Korean Bible women's involvement.<sup>173</sup> For example, the experiences of Korean Bible women are sometimes present in American and European women's personal journals of their missions. Korean Bible women are presented as companions in these accounts. They are not often depicted as primary transmitters of their experiences.

Scholars need to look to other sources to understand Korean Bible women's histories and experiences better, such as oral histories, which provide first hand experiences of Korean Bible women. The tradition of oral stories spread by word of mouth among Korean women best describes their experiences. Historian Sung-Deuk Oak's research is a good example.<sup>174</sup> Oak's work examined Korean Bible women's healing and exorcist activity in Korea during the early 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Oak uses Korean women's oral histories to provide a detailed description of these healings and exorcisms that characterized most of the interaction between European women missionaries, American women missionaries, Korean Bible women, and Korean society.

European and American missionaries viewed Korean shaman culture as a roadblock to Christian evangelism. The Sino-Japanese war, rampant sickness among Koreans, and widespread poverty encouraged many Koreans to visit Korean mudang women whom they believed had the

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<sup>172</sup> An American Methodist missionary named Mary Scranton, with the help of Korean Bible women, established Ewha in 1886. It was not until 1925, during Japanese colonial rule that Ewha became a college. Eleven years later, Ewha became a four-year university officially acknowledged by the Korean government. Ewha has remained a forerunner in advancing women's rights and women's education in South Korea.

<sup>173</sup> These reflections are often found in larger church organizational archives.

<sup>174</sup> Oak, Sung Deuk. "Healing and Exorcism: Christian Encounters with Shamanism in Early Modern Korea." In *Asian Ethnology*. Vol 69.1. (Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture: 2010): 95-128.

power to get rid of their suffering. As customary in a Confucian Korean society, many Koreans practiced spirit or ancestor worship. Koreans consulted mudang women for spiritual guidance and to protect them from evil spirits. Foreign missionaries discouraged the practice of shamanism by encouraging Korean folks to stop visiting Korean mudang women.

Foreign missionaries recognized the importance of spiritual guidance and offered an alternative to shamanism through the Gospel. They also discouraged spirit or ancestor worship. As more Koreans converted to Christianity, the spiritual authority of foreign missionaries, Korean Bible women, and Korean pastors replaced the spiritual authority of Korean mudang women. Korean Bible women who worked alongside foreign missionaries became those whom Koreans consulted over mudang women.

In order to understand how Korean Bible women rose to spiritual prominence, one has to understand how Christianity interjected itself into early Neo Confucian Korean society. In the early Choson dynasty, Neo Confucianism was introduced to Korean society.<sup>175</sup> Neo Confucianism's influence on the Korean class system had differential effects on Korean women. Among upper-class Korean women, Neo Confucianism limited Korean women's ability to go out in public. For example, upper-class Korean women could not venture outside their home without a veil. Thus, most of their interactions with family members and friends occurred in the

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<sup>175</sup> According to Keumg Jang-Tae, a Korean scholar of Confucianism at Seoul National University, Neo-Confucianism was introduced to Korea through An Hyang, a Confucian scholar. Hyang transcribed Chinese Confucian texts into Korean and attempted to replace Buddhism as the national religion. During the Koryo dynasty, which lasted from 918 to 1392, Buddhism was the state's dominant religious and political ideology. During the latter end of the Koryo dynasty, Korean scholars trained in Neo Confucianism, began to critique Buddhism. They offered Neo Confucianism as a replacement. Many Confucian scholars saw Buddhism as a "foreign" religion, not indigenous to Korean ways of life. Yet high-class scholars of Neo Confucianism, like An Hyang were willing to replace it with an equally "foreign" (Chinese) way of thinking to the Korean people. The transition between the Koryo dynasty and the Choson dynasty was not a smooth one. During the Koryo dynasty, many Korean scholars believe that Buddhism and Confucianism existed side by side. Existing within each brand of political and religious ideology were gendered meanings. Neo-Confucian thought believed in filial piety among Korean women, particularly upper class women. Other Neo-Confucian beliefs, merging with earlier Buddhist and Confucian thinking created specific gender roles that were mediated within class lines that attempted to keep particular groups of Korean women in the private spaces of their homes.

*anbang* (안방). Thus, the *anbang*, a woman's inner quarters, became an important space for spiritual interaction and Christian conversion.

Historian Lee-Ellen Strawn claimed that while Neo-Confucianism held strict boundaries for the yang ban (양반, the elite), Korean women of the middle to lower class women were not held to the same standard.<sup>176</sup> Working class older Korean women who were married or widowed were seen in public often, as were younger working or poor class Korean women. Considering the intersection of religion and gender in early Neo Confucian Korean society, Korean Bible women and mudang women moved around somewhat more freely than any Korean woman. Korean mudang women were seen in public mostly when they were called for consultations at families' homes. However, they struggled with the widespread negative stigma associated with their vocation.<sup>177</sup> Mudang women were often ignored or shunned in public, which may be one of the reasons why many of them opted to do consultations in a private space like the home. Unlike Korean mudang women, Korean Bible women from every socioeconomic class background ventured out in public. This was especially true during home visits with foreign missionaries. Generally, they were regarded as highly respected spiritual leaders. They freely approached other Koreans, uninhibited by the social stigma often experienced by mudang women.

Most Korean Bible women received some education. Those who lived in major urban cities received educational training in theology, ministry, and foreign languages. Rural Korean Bible women received training in literacy and Biblical instruction primarily through one to one

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<sup>176</sup> Strawn, Lee-Ellen. "Korean Bible Women's Success: Using the Anbang Network and the Religious Authority of the Mudang." In the *Journal of Korean Religions*. Vol. 3.1. (April 2012): 117-149.

<sup>177</sup> Christian missionaries spread some of the negative messages about mudang women. However, these negative images were also complicated by the clashing of Shamanism and Neo Confucianism in Korean society.

interaction with missionaries rather than in established educational institutions.<sup>178</sup> With the help of foreign missionary women who lobbied their sending organizations, many poor or working class Korean Bible women received some financial support for their education.

Foreign missionaries played an instrumental role in connecting Korean Bible women to opportunities for further education. Foreign missionaries believed that education was an important part of Bible women's training. The relationship between a Korean Bible woman and a foreign missionary began and was mediated first through evangelism. Once Korean women were converted, foreign women missionaries and Korean Bible women worked together to share the gospel and convert other Korean women. Korean Bible women relationships with foreign missionaries were friendly yet challenging. Their relationships were friendly because of a shared faith. Their relationship mirrored a mentor-mentee relationship where advice based on Biblical ideas was shared and direction was given. It was also challenging because of the unequal power dynamics associated with race and class. Often, middle-class white women missionaries were regarded as the authority of Biblical knowledge. Thus, Korean Bible women were to listen to and learn from foreign missionaries. The knowledge only flowed in one direction despite the fact that Korean Bible women mastered the Korean language, understood social and cultural cues, and were regarded as respected spiritual leaders.

Korean Bible women responded to and sometimes challenged this power dynamic by playing the roles of interpreters and bridge builders between Korean people and foreign missionaries. Without Korean Bible women acting as interpreters, foreign missionaries' attempts to convert Koreans would not have been as successful. Their ability to translate messages from English to Korean was important in order for potential converts to understand religious texts.

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<sup>178</sup> The distinction in curriculum between rural and urban Korean Bible women may have more to do with class differences resulting in different rates of literacy. It was believed that Korean women raised in urban areas were more educated and literate than those living in rural areas whose access to education was limited by distance and financial resources.

Korean Bible women translated Biblical literature documents and made them accessible to Koreans so that they could read and understand the Bible better. Korean Bible women also translated the Korean language spoken by locals for foreign missionaries. Their role as interpreters facilitated better communication between Korean people and foreign missionaries.

Interpretation by Korean Bible women also served another purpose. Korean people could relate more closely to the Korean Bible women than to foreign missionaries or foreign Bible women. When Korean Bible women shared the gospel through their life experiences, read as another Korean woman's story, many Korean women felt a sense of assurance knowing that they too could practice Christianity. Korean Bible women's knowledge of the Bible and their presence as spiritual leaders confirmed that Christianity was not just a foreigner's religion. Some were wary of foreign missionaries' potential to lead them astray. While some missionaries eventually learned to speak Korean, many relied on Korean Bible women and their expertise.

Women foreign missionaries and Korean women missionaries often worked together to plan evangelical outreaches and home visits.<sup>179</sup> Foreign missionaries drew from Korean Bible women's expertise of the local culture to create outreach plans. Korean Bible women's insights about where to have the outreach and who to talk to helped missionaries develop a more effective outreach ministry. Foreign missionaries often saw Korean Bible women as consultants or authorities of Korean culture. At the same time, Korean Bible women raised critiques of the limited ways that foreign missionaries approached Korean people in their evangelistic efforts. Korean Bible women in their weekly meeting shared these critiques with one another and sometimes with foreign missionaries. As a result, their evangelical outreaches became more effective than earlier missionary outreach of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

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<sup>179</sup> In this study, whenever I mention 'foreign missionaries,' I mean that they are foreign to Korea. They are typically missionaries who do not identify as Koreans. This includes missionaries from North America, various parts of Europe and Asia.



Many foreign missionaries learned from the ways Korean Bible women interacted with Korean people in order to encourage religious practice. Korean women in particular framed religious participation as accessible to all, Korean women and taught that anyone who believed in Jesus would have eternal life. Many Korean Bible women were charged with repeated interaction with non-religious or mudang Korean women, believing that through repetitive interactions with non-believers, many would convert to Christianity. Oak described many stories of conversion, spread primarily through word of mouth. As accounts of Korean women's conversions began to spread, these stories and the women who told them encouraged others to search for foreign missionaries and Korean Bible women to convert to Christianity.

Evangelism and sharing stories through word of mouth was a type of religious activism among Korean Bible women. Korean Bible women's practice of religious activism is still rarely discussed in literature about activism and social change. Religious activism among Korean Bible women are defined as acts that challenge or actively resist oppression based on gender, religion, or class, through religious or spiritual practice. These actions renegotiate and challenge typical gender roles in the home, public life, and in religious institutions. There are several examples of Bible women's religious activism in Sung Deuk Oak's study of Korean Bible women.<sup>180</sup> One of the ways that Korean Bible women engaged in religious activism was through home visits that resulted in conversions. During home visits, Korean Bible women preached, an action that was not fully acknowledged in the local patriarchal Korean churches. Even though home visits were seen as part of the domestic realm, Korean Bible women challenged the gender role of pastors and preachers as they began to exercise the primary responsibility of preaching outside of the

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<sup>180</sup> Oak, Sung Deuk. "Healing and Exorcism: Christian Encounters with Shamanism in Early Modern Korea." In *Asian Ethnology*. Vol. 69.1. (Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture: 2010): 95-128. Oak, 100-114. Oak also shared a story from 1905 of a former sorceress and mudang who converted to Christianity after a visit from a Korean Bible woman. Many Korean Bible women visited homes to share sermon and pray for sick family members like Sarah. Sarah is the Christian name given to this particular Korean Bible woman. It was most likely that the woman was given this name after she converted as a symbol of conversion. Oak does not give the Korean Bible woman's Korean name.

church. In this way, Korean Bible women exercised spiritual authority that was typically afforded to male clergymen.

Korean Bible women participated in religious activism through familiar Christian methods such as worship, sermonizing, testifying, and distributing the Bible, literacy training, and continual discipleship through Biblical instruction. Unfamiliar practices include exhortations, burning of fetishes, and prevailing prayer. Exhortations are short messages about the application of Biblical ideas to the lives of the audience with the purpose of encouraging other Christians. The burning of fetishes is a spiritual practice done primarily by Korean Bible women. Recently converted families or individuals would give any object that represent other gods are burned. This symbolizes the rejection of an old faith for a new one. Lastly, there is prevailing prayer. Prevailing prayer describes continual nonstop praying. During a home visit, Korean Bible women would pray until they believed that God answered their prayers. Prevailing prayers could last anywhere from a few minutes to days. These methods served two purposes; first to share the Gospel for conversion, and secondly, to resist spiritual oppression. Spiritual oppression is a term that describes a range of spiritual activity. One of the more common understandings of spiritual oppression is described as demonic possession. Demonic possession was seen in individuals who manifested what Bible women thought were demonic sounds or unusual physical contortions.<sup>181</sup>

Korean Bible women often encountered spiritual oppression when they visited various *anbang* spaces. As stated earlier, many Korean Bible women demonstrated religious activism

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<sup>181</sup> Among Protestant Christians, and to some extent Catholic Christians, particularly Evangelical, Pentecostal, or Charismatic Christians, believe that spiritual oppression is a condition that a person is in, where their spiritual beliefs and physical manifestations of spirits, do not align with whom Bible women believed was the Spirit of God.

through interaction with Korean women during *anbang* visits.<sup>182</sup> Lee Ellen Strawn argued that Korean Bible women's success as evangelists was attributed to two factors.<sup>183</sup> One factor is the *anbang* network and the other a type of borrowed authority from previous mudang women. Korean men and especially male foreigners were not allowed to enter this space. Only Korean Bible women of various socio economic classes were allowed to enter. For the most part, women foreign missionaries were also allowed. Foreign missionary women access more often when they came with a Korean Bible woman. The *anbang* was a powerful space where women controlled any and all activity in the home and Korean women's decisions affected the entire household.

In *anbang* activism, middle to upper class wealthy Korean women called for a Bible woman to visit. Private spaces like the *anbang* where spiritual and religious conversation and practice occurred without interruption were important to Korean Bible women. The *anbang* network facilitated the "lines of communication"<sup>184</sup> among and between Korean women, Korean Bible women, former mudang women, and some female foreign missionaries. Using the *anbang* network, Korean Bible women visited more homes than earlier foreign missionaries had. During home visits, Korean Bible women often met other Korean women and mudang women. Korean Bible women and foreign missionaries conducted prayer or led worship sessions, provided counseling, and healthcare or access to healthcare if the families asked for it.

In the *anbang*, Korean Bible women primarily interacted with upper-class women and mudang women. The space itself was not limited to Korean Bible women; many mudang women were also called for home visits. The *anbang* was also a critical space for inter-religious interaction. It was a common practice among elite upper-class women to call for a mudang for

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<sup>182</sup> Strawn, Lee-Ellen. "Korean Bible Women's Success: Using the Anbang Network and the Religious Authority of the Mudang". In *Journal of Korean Religions*. Vol. 3.1. South Korea: Institute for the Study of Religion, Sogang University. (2012): 117-149.

<sup>183</sup> The *anbang* network is a phrase coined by Elle Strawn that describes the network or relationships among Korean women made possible by the existence of *anbang* rooms.

<sup>184</sup> Strawn, 122.

counsel and find themselves visited by a Bible woman as well. There is much evidence that many mudang women converted to Christianity, yet scholarship rarely cites an example of any Korean Bible woman becoming a mudang.

Korean Bible women also enact religious activism through networking. Korean Bible women used the *anbang* network among upper class and wealthier Korean women to convert Korean women. In order to interact with working class Korean women, Korean Bible women used other existing social networks. Working class women who gathered on the basis of common interests created these networks. For example, Korean Bible women, already established within a community, would visit groups of 20 or so women at women-only gathering spaces. Women-only gathering spaces included public places like creeks or markets. Many Korean Bible women participated in regular conversations or Bible studies with the Korean women who ran their regular day-to-day errands in these spaces.

Another way that Korean Bible women exercised religious activism was through exhortation. Exhortation was exercised with all Korean women regardless of class affiliation. Exhortation is another form of preaching. It is a method that challenges the religious, classed, and gendered belief that only elite Korean men could pastor. It is a multidimensional method of communication that encourages others towards a relationship with Jesus. It is often presented in the form of counsel. It also is presented as a challenge to listeners to delve deeper in the study of the Bible and applying its message in a more meaningful way. When sermonizing, exhortation was included in or at the end of a message to emphasize the importance of faith with action. It was not enough that one believed a Biblical principle but believers were encouraged to act upon that belief. Bible women emphasized the Biblical belief about faith and action, one with the other. Exhortation was also a way to express Korean Bible women's personal beliefs about God

and the supernatural. Exhortation was also a form of story telling. Included in exhortations were stories of one's own spiritual path and conversion. These exhortative stories were used to encourage other to identify with or convert to Christianity as a way of life.

An extension of anbang evangelism and religious activism is a method practiced by Korean Bible women called "exorcism." Exorcism is a method of getting rid of an unwanted spiritual presence. Korean Bible women who exorcised unwanted spirits challenged two gendered and religious aspects of exorcism. In terms of gender, exorcism was primarily the realm of clergymen. In terms of religion, Catholic male priests used exorcism to demonstrate their own spiritual authority and leadership therefore reifying a gendered and religious power dynamic. These women used exorcism to get rid of evil spirits from people or from their homes using the name of Jesus. Korean Bible women used spiritual authority previously only afforded to male clergy to get rid of demonic possession not for their own gain but for the benefit of those they prayed for. Exorcism also had a powerful influence over those involved. Many who personally experienced an exorcism and were, in the words of Bible women, delivered from demonic oppression, converted to Christianity afterwards.

News about exorcisms spread by word of mouth among Korean community members. The Korean Christian newspaper that published activities of foreign missionaries and Korean Bible women was the Kippun Sosik (기쁨소식, translated as Joyful News). Kippun Sosik published many instances of exorcist activity among Korean Bible women.<sup>185</sup> Exorcisms included praying for a sick person, burning or getting rid of fetishes, claiming the people and space in Jesus' name, and offering prevailing prayer. As a result of Korean Bible women's success with exorcism, many were highly respected and invited often for home visits. Korean

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<sup>185</sup> Kippun Sosik (translation in Korean) Isangjok Chondo Puin. Vol 4.7. (July of 1937).

Bible women attributed their ability to effectively conduct exorcism as, “not a human effort but the help of the Holy Spirit that could overcome the power of evil spirits.”<sup>186</sup>

A symbolic aspect of exorcism exercised by Korean Bible women included the burning of fetishes. Fetishes were objects that symbolized the worship of spirits other than the Christian God. Symbolism is highly regarded in Korean culture so fetishes were commonplace. The objects that symbolized the worship of or even fear of other spirits would be burned and this included clothing, jewelry, or idols that had representational meaning. Fetishes also included objects that were thought to scare away evil spirits. Symbolic of their spiritual authority, Korean Bible women were called to homes to pray for the home and get rid of the fetishes.

Korean Bible women emphasized an inward change of heart coupled with an outward expression of faith. In other words, conversion not only meant actions that followed the Bible but that a convert practiced a strong Christian faith. They believed that a strong inner faith would result in an active outward expression of that faith. Worship was one of the outward expressions of an inward faith. Worship, through music, was known as a public expression of adoration for their God. Korean Bible women led these worship services with the intention of also inviting non-believers. Worship was thought of as an avenue of interaction with the spiritual realm and a way to open up people’s hearts to God’s spirit. Korean Bible women taught that the worship of God would help to promote a positive perspective of life and eliminate sickness or worry. Following worship, the Bible women preached the gospel, believing that by doing so they could convert others to their belief system.

Additionally, Korean Bible women were well known for their use of prevailing prayer.<sup>187</sup> Prevailing prayer is repeated over an extended period of time or days. Prevailing prayer is a form

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<sup>186</sup> Oak, 103.

<sup>187</sup> Prevailing prayer is a term coined by Methodist missionary Mary Scranton in her public reports of Bible women. Strawn, 127.

of religious activism. Prayer could be exercised anywhere. Korean Bible women were most known for their ability to pray for long periods of time. If and when someone needed to be healed of a sickness or delivered from a demonic possession, Korean Bible women were asked to offer prayers on behalf of the family or sick person. When visiting a home of someone who was sick, Korean Bible women would pray until they saw a physical manifestation of healing in the person. Some included fevers lowering, spiritual manifestations subsiding, or events considered miraculous such as body parts changing in size or other ailments immediately disappearing.

Korean Bible women were also effective in the distribution of the Bible, literacy training, and Biblical instruction. Like male colporteurs, they distributed Bibles wherever they went.<sup>188</sup> Unlike male colporteurs, however, they reached Korean women who lived remote place in Korean society. Foreign missionaries who worked alongside Korean Bible women found their network important to the distribution of Biblical literature.

In Korea, 19<sup>th</sup> century European Catholic missionaries had a difficult time distributing Bibles. This was because of the low literacy rate among working class Korean women. They were unable to read the highly complicated Korean versions of the Bible that were available. Foreign missionaries who worked with Korean Bible women also faced a similar challenge. In Confucian Korean society, literacy was seen as a privilege exclusive to the yangban, upper class Korean people. Although many foreign missionaries communicated verbally, they found that a majority of Korean people had a difficult time understanding the Bible, which was either written in English, a higher level of Korean, or Chinese.

The Bible was eventually translated into the conversational Korean language in pieces. The New Testament was translated first by John Ross in 1877.<sup>189</sup> Bible women employed

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<sup>188</sup> Colporteurs are individuals who travel to sell Bible and other religious texts and historically have been male.

<sup>189</sup> John Ross was a Scottish Protestant missionary originally station in China.

through churches like the Methodist Church, passed out these Bibles and Biblical literature. Korean Bible women circulated the Bible more effectively through existing social networks. Korean Bible women were also charged with teaching Korean literacy to those who wanted to learn. This is partly what made foreign missionaries' evangelism among missionaries with Korean Bible women more effective.

Korean Bible women played an important role in the history of Korean American churches in the US. Early 20<sup>th</sup> century Korean Bible women were effective evangelists and community members. Many were encouraged to move to North America by foreign missionaries to further their education. A few Korean Bible women moved to the United States as early as 1895. The majority of Korean Bible women arrived in North America between 1910 and 1930 and then again in the 1970s. This pattern of immigration among Korean Bible women and Christian converts fits within the timeline of Korean American church history.<sup>190</sup> As Korean Bible women arrived in the US, many helped establish churches and create ministries.

In the US, Korean American Christian or churched women tend to be the most active in Korean American churches and community organizations. Despite the depth and breadth of Korean women and Korean American women's involvement in expressions of faith and church involvement, there is far more written about churched women of color in America. For example, scholars in Theology and Women Studies have uncovered the histories of Black American women and White American women evangelists, pastors, and missionaries.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Kim, Hyung Chan. "The Church in the Korean American Community". In *The Korean Diaspora: Historical and Sociological Studies of Korean Immigration and Assimilation in North America*. Hyung Chan Kim, ed. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC- Clio Inc., 1977. 47-63.

<sup>191</sup> An exception is Priscilla Pope-Levison's work about American women evangelists. Pope-Levison is a professor of Theology at Seattle Pacific University. Pope-Levison, Priscilla. *Turn the Pulpit Loose: Two Centuries of American Women Evangelists*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004. Pope-Levison argued that American evangelical women have always been a part of American histories yet their experiences are part of emerging scholarship in Religious Studies Pope-Levison presented the histories of American women evangelists like Sojourner Truth, Evangeline Booth, and Ida Robinson to show that American women have a long history of Christian leadership in the US. As important as this work is, it is one of few emerging studies about women of color evangelists, pastors, and missionaries.



According to Hyung Chan Kim, Korean American church history is divided into four major time periods. The first period lasted from 1903 to 1918 and is characterized by the rapid growth of Korean Christian churches and communities. According to Kim, in Hawaii alone 2,800 Koreans converted to Christianity and over thirty churches were established. Dora Kim Moon founded the first Korean American Methodist Church of Hawaii in 1904.

On the mainland US, Korean ethnic churches were created primarily among working class folks and seasonal workers. Changho Ahn and Helen Ahn established the first Korean church in the United States on October 14, 1902 in San Francisco.<sup>192</sup> Korean ethnic churches grew rapidly in Hawaii. It was not until after the Korean War that there was an increased growth of Korean American churches on the mainland US.

Among the Korean immigrants who created churches in the US, there was a Korean Bible woman named Dora Kim Moon. Esther Kwon Arinaga, a Korean American writer, retired attorney, and activist shared some details about Moon's journey to America. Dora Kim Moon traveled as a missionary and Bible woman to America. Kim Moon was an influential community and church leader. During the voyage from Korea to the US, Kim Moon converted many Koreans to Christianity.

From 1919 to 1945, Korean churches experiences some growing pains. This was a period of conflict and division. The splitting of Korean churches profoundly impacted Korean Americans in the US. When a church split, Korean Americans had to stay, leave, or transition to a newly established church. Church divisions occurred as a result of leadership struggles and the separation of politics and church. For example, the leadership style presented by the pastoral team within a Korean church affected church operations and congregation. For example, Hilary,

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<sup>192</sup> Chang, Chul Tim. *Korean Ethnic Church Growth Phenomenon in the United States*. Paper presented at the American Academy of Religion in Claremont, CA. March 12, 2006.

a Korean American activist in the Pacific Northwest shared her experience about a pastor who operated with a top down mentality. This leadership style often silenced female members of the congregation. It also affected the ways that the church dealt with issues of domestic violence. Although this church did not split, some members did leave. She stayed with some lasting reservations about how long she would attend the church. Experiences such as these, lengthened over a period of time and combined with other structural issues, gave rise to church divisions.

Some Korean churches split because church leadership tried to separate Korean independence activity from church work. This reason was less common than the first factor described above but nonetheless important. Hyung Chan Kim described an example of how a pastor in a Korean Church decided to exclude all non-church related from the church premises. For many Korean Americans, church and independence activity were highly connected. By not allowing independence movement related activity, church members became dissatisfied. This contributed to growing factions within the membership.

There were a variety of responses by Korean American women to church divisions. Some Korean American women stayed with the church. Other Korean American women helped created new churches. Most of the Korean American women created an alternative. Korean American Bible women were involved in providing social services. For example, many organized non-profit organizations and missionary societies that were linked to their church. Instead of the creation of separate churches, Korean American women and Korean American Bible women worked together and created organizations that provided resources and support for their communities. As described above, an ordained Korean Bible woman Dora Kim Moon also founded the Korean Women's Society, a social service organization. The Korean Women's Society, otherwise known as the Korean Women's Club, Kim Moon worked with Korean picture

brides. Like Korean Bible women in Korea, Kim Moon taught language and writing proficiency to recently arrived Korean picture brides in the US. After the March First demonstration, Dora Kim Moon helped create other Korean women's organizations that were well known for their independence-related work. They also provided support to Korean immigrant's families. In 1932, Moon created the Korean Missionary Society. The Methodist mission in Hawaii supported her efforts. Institutional support helped Moon succeed in her evangelical and community efforts, apart from the local church. Moon was one of the individuals that provided a space where women, in particular, could go to when their church experienced difficulties.

Following the period of church divisions was the period of status quo, from 1946-1967. It was defined this way because of the growing presence of the *Itae* and *Samtae* generations, which raised questions about what Korean American identity encompassed.<sup>193</sup> The *Iltae*, first generation Koreans in the US, tried to maintain the status quo of Korean culture and nationalism among these younger generations within Korean church communities.<sup>194</sup> The *Iltae* taught the following generations about Korean language and culture. They also attempted to instill a sense of Korean pride and nationalism.

However, the struggles between the three generations increased. The *Itae* and *Samtae* generations could not relate to the struggles of the *Iltae* generation. According Kyong-Suk Ch the *Itae* and *Samtae*, "lacked interest in the matter of politics and religion."<sup>195</sup> I find this perspective limiting. It is important to understand which politics and which religions that the *Itae* and *Samtae* were not interested in. For example, second and third generation Korean Americans were increasingly interested in politics concerning race or gender inequality in America. As a

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<sup>193</sup> *Itae* is a word that describes the second generation of Koreans born in the US. Kim, 58. *Samtae* is a word that describes the third generation of Korean Americans born in the US. Kim, 58.

<sup>194</sup> Kim, 58.

<sup>195</sup> A quote by Cho Kyong-suk Gregor. Kim, 58.

result, many participated in the civil rights movement, anti-war movement, and Asian American movements on campuses nationwide. Their focus was on race or gender inequality in America rather than politics about the Korean independence movement.

With respect to religion, many Asian Americans of the second and third generation were involved in religion, but they expressed their faiths differently. While many Koreans of the first generation immersed themselves in activities primarily involved with the church, the following generations practiced their religious beliefs beyond the church space. Second or third generation Korean Americans have participated in many non-profit organizations and “Para” church groups. These generations have demonstrated their commitment to social change and community service through involvement in the non-profit sector. Many have also been involved in on-campus related organizations. Julia described her experience with “Para” church organizations and various on-campus activities, “I was an officer for a student organizations for two years. I was the external chair and then the PR person. I was really involved in the community. I was also a part of the organization’s North Koreans Support group, and then any community drives in University Village...” Julia enacts both types of social service activism.

The fourth period between 1968 and 1976 is marked as a period of revival in Korean American church history. The relaxing of immigrant policies coincided with a large wave of Korean immigrants to the US. Korean immigrants who fulfilled positions of pastors and Christian educators Korean American churches acquired in Korean American communities. Among these more recent Korean immigrants were Korean women and young girls, which included adoptees, Bible women, and wives of American servicemen. From 1959 to 1971 the largest group of Korean immigrants that came to the US and were women between the ages of

twenty and twenty-nine.<sup>196</sup> Many of these Korean women were Christian converts and some were Bible women. Many came to study, work, or rejoin families. The second largest group were Korean women ages thirty to thirty-nine and girls under the age of four. According to Kim, Korean women within this age cohort were the second largest was due to the increased number of interracial marriage that resulted from American servicemen's presence in Korea. The presence of the third largest group, Korean girls ages four years old and younger resulted from adoptions by white American couples.

1.5-generation and second generation Korean American women, like their Korean Bible women predecessors, are itinerant preachers, pastors, and evangelists devoted to sharing the gospel. The experiences of contemporary Korean American Christian women as pastors and evangelists change the definition of Bible woman. One of the ways that experiences of Korean Bible women in Korea differ from Korean American Bible women in US is about the contestation over citizenship. For example, Korean Bible women in Korea were not questioned about their citizenship or nationalist devotion. Korean American Bible women were treated as foreigners and non-citizens in the US. Many assumed that Korean American Bible women were not born in the US and often asked where they were from. In the eyes of non-Korean Americans, Korean American women were seen as forever foreign.

Many Korean Bible women in Korea had an established authority in their own communities. Korean American Bible women, this was not always the case. Only American missionaries and recent Korean converts, who had seen or interacted with Korean Bible women in Korea, accepted and recognized the role and influence of Korean American Bible women. In Korea, Korean Bible women were highly respected for their spiritual and caretaking abilities.

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<sup>196</sup> Kim, Hyung Chan. "Some Aspects of Social Demography of Korean Americans." In *The Korean Diaspora: Historical and Sociological Studies of Korean Immigration and Assimilation in North America*. Hyung Chan Kim, ed. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO Inc., 1977. 109-126.

Their reputations as healers and prayer warriors were upheld and respected. In the US, Korean American Bible women's spiritual authority and knowledge were often called into question. Often male pastors, in Korean American churches, sometimes criticized Korean American women's leadership.<sup>197</sup> Living in the US presented another set of challenges for Korean American Bible women.

Unlike Korean Bible women who used the *anbang* network to communicate with other Korean women, Korean American Bible women found other ways to network with one another. The way that Korean Americans lived in the US was vastly different from the upper class system in Korea. The private women's only *anbang* space was no longer a physical space in the Korean American home. Rather, the *anbang* space was replaced by semi-private spaces such as women's group meetings at churches or at women's organizational meetings. These spaces were not as private as the *anbang* space. Men and children could enter these spaces when the women allowed them to. Korean Bible women influenced Korean women in the *anbang*, which would eventually affect the way an entire household was managed. In America, semi-private spaces did not carry the same weight or influence.

With respect to exorcism and the spiritual authority that Korean American Bible women possessed, they were not seen as exorcists in America as they had been in Korea. Korean Bible women, as exorcists, were needed by Korean families to help get rid of previous articles of worship. Many Koreans in America had already converted to Christianity and America was predominantly seen as a Christian nation. Korean American communities no longer needed Korean Bible women to burn fetishes. Many Korean families did not have the fetishes that were

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<sup>197</sup> For example, one of the Korean American women activists shared an anecdotal experience about her experiences with Korean American churches and how she has had to debate, argue, and challenge male clergy's patriarchal notions of the "appropriate" gender roles among women in Korean American churches. Even while some Korean American women become pastors in children's ministries, they are still met criticisms and questions concerning how competent they are as leaders.

customary among people in Korea. Their articles of worship were Christian. The need for a Korean Bible woman to help rid of household fetishes or idols was almost non-existent in America. As a result, Korean American Bible women's spiritual authority transformed, as the women expressed their religious devotions primarily through social services.

Korean American Bible women also faced many challenges. One of the challenges was economic. In Korea, a majority of Korean Bible women were employed by a religious organization or church. Many of them were given additional funding and further education by their sponsoring organization or church. They considered their involvement in evangelism as a type of employment. Thus, many Korean Bible women survived because they relied on other paid sources of income. In America, however, a majority of Korean Bible women were not employed by a local organization or church. More Korean American Bible women's work shifted into the social service arena to make a living. As a result, most of their time was spent working a full time job. Community service became more of a volunteer (unpaid) activity.

Korean American Bible women who had few transferable or marketable skills in the American mainstream marketplace, faced difficulty finding jobs that were high paying or prestigious. Many Korean Christian women found work in the low-paid service sector or in family-owned small businesses. Korean women struggled because they were often required to work long hours with little pay and minimal or no health insurance. Others returned to school to obtain a BA, MA, or PhD. Their ability to earn a living influenced their involvement in community service. Service to a local church and community became volunteer work when "regular" work was finished.

Korean American Christian women also experienced discrimination. Soyoung Park described the tension between Korean, Christian, and American cultures: "Korean Americans

cannot simply be Christians in the larger (US) society... there is a tension between their 'pure' and 'spiritual' identity as evangelical Christians and their 'cultural,' 'social,' and 'political' identity as Korean Americans."<sup>198</sup> Korean Americans, unlike Christian Anglo American, were unable to describe their experiences as Christians without describing their experiences as Korean American. While some Anglo Americans ignore meanings of race in their Christian perspectives or encounters, Korean Americans could not ignore how race impacted or influenced their everyday lives. For example, although most Korean Bible women were well educated and spoke or wrote English, many struggled to maintain leadership credibility among white American-born pastor colleagues. In some Christian circles, they were not seen as credible pastors because of their race and because they were women. Some were judged solely on the basis of their Korean accent or look of "foreignness". Korean American Christian women who struggled to be pastors or spiritual leaders in American churches faced the challenge of equal standing and equality of condition in American church leadership.

Nevertheless, Korean American Christian women have stayed active in American society, Korean American churches, and Americans churches. Korean American Bible women activists are multitaskers, identified with the Bible in their hand but were also recognized for the many roles they play in Korean American and American communities. As evangelists, they spread the gospel to unbelievers. As teachers they teach in various capacities. For example, Bible women teach the Bible to groups of women and also teach younger generations about their cultural heritage. Korean American women often learn from one another in the context of women shared spaces. Korean American Bible women team-teach as well. Taking on the responsibilities of public health educators and social workers, Bible women not only attend to the spiritual needs of Korean Americans but their practical needs as well. As social workers, they

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<sup>198</sup> Park, 197.



often facilitated ways built better familial or social relations in and among Korean American families. Korean American Bible women were also key leaders in the creation of missions and mission teams to other parts of the US and the world.

The term, Korean American Bible women activists, better describes Korean American Christian women active in community from the 1960s to the present. Early Korean Bible women were named Bible women because their lives revolved around preaching and teaching the Bible. They participated in evangelism because it was an extension of their paid work. Korean American women activists interviewed in this study are similar in the sense that the Bible remains a central influencing factor in their community involvement.<sup>199</sup>

Korean American Christian women's activism began in North America with the beginning of Korean immigration to the US. From the early 1900s until today, Korean American Christian women have been involved in various activisms. Korean American women such as military brides, picture brides, immigrant workers, adoptees, Bible women, stay at home mothers, pastors, educators, or evangelists have a long history of community involvement.

First generation and some 1.5-generation Korean American Christian women were activists for an independent Korea. As described earlier, they also organized events that taught second-generation Korean children about Korean heritage. Korean American Christian women's activism of the latter 20<sup>th</sup> century shifted, in focus and in expression. The social, economic, and political changes in the Koreas (following the Korean War, circa 1953) and North America were highly impactful. The backdrop of the civil rights movement, the aftermath of the Vietnam War, South Korean and US feminist movements, most Americans including Korean Americans had a

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<sup>199</sup> Korean Bible women of the early 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries identified as Bible women. Korean American Christian women interviewed in this study identify as Korean American Christian women activists or women who do community work. I use the term Korean American Bible women activists to explain how contemporary Korean American Christian women include the Bible in their activism and community work. The Bible is one of the most influential factors cited among Korean American Christian women activists.

different set of issues to deal with in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The establishment of Korea as an independent nation, the simultaneous split of Korea into North and South, and the conditions of North Koreans became a larger area of focus in international media, US media, and among Korean Americans. The second generation of Korean Americans, including Korean American women, dealt with a different set of concerns and issues.

Korean American Christian women activists, like many Korean Americans, are concerned with various social, economic, political, and even technological issues common to Americans in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Between first and 1.5 generations of Korean American Christian women activists of the latter 20<sup>th</sup> century (1960s – 1999), the more prevalent themes of activism included church involvement, evangelism of community, community building, and social services. In this study's interviews with 21<sup>st</sup> century (2000 – 2012) Korean American Christian women activists, in addition to the issues previously listed, their activism is also directed at issues such as poverty, human trafficking, homelessness, and other pressing social issues that concern youth folks.

Korean American Christian women activists of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have a slightly different history than Korean American women activists who do not identify with Christianity. It seems as though non Christian Korean American women activists were more actively involved in labor, socialist, and/or feminist organizing during the 1960s and 1970s. Korean American women activists or community service members such as Angela Oh, Chu Mi Hee, and Kyung Park were active in labor, socialist, or feminist organizing.<sup>200</sup> Korean American

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<sup>200</sup> Angela Oh is an attorney and lecturer. She is most known for her work on behalf of the Korean American community after the 1992 Los Angeles uprisings and was a member of President Clinton's Initiative on Race. She is also an ordained Zen Buddhist priest and practices Buddhism regularly. She published a book called, *One Woman's Journey* (LA, CA: UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press, 2002) that describes her journey as a Korean American Buddhist woman in America. Mi hee Chu was a Korean woman worker in Los Angeles, Korea town. Chu worked with the Korean Immigrant Worker's Association to fight for living wages, and humane working conditions. Kyung Park lived in Los Angeles, California and was a restaurant worker in

Christian women were involved in labor organizing but scholarship about Korean American women who are Christian in labor activism is minimal. For example, the only work that cites religion in any form about Korean American women activism is by Miriam Ching Yoon Louie.<sup>201</sup> Louie interviews Korean immigrant women factory workers in the 1990s that have faith but struggle in attending church due to work. Mrs. Paek shared, “I used to go to church but now I can’t because I have to work on Sundays. The people I work with are my friends. But working so many hours, there is never enough time to socialize and spend with friends.”<sup>202</sup> Mrs. Paek described how work has overtaken her ability to attend church yet she still participated in labor activism. Taking Mrs. Paek’s story, labor activism is closely connected to work (paid) and self-care over church involvement. Scholarship about Korean American labor activism needs to consider religion and gender further.

The latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a time of the proliferation of social services and women’s organizations as a result of Korean American church participation. Korean American women have always been active in the creation of church since 1903 when the first four Korean American churches were established in Hawaii and California.<sup>203</sup> Korean Bible women helped established these churches across the United States. According to Jung Ha Kim, there were over 1,300 Korean American churches by 1984 on the mainland and Hawaii.<sup>204</sup> According to

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Korea town where she fought for worker’s rights. Her story is published in *Sweatshop Warriors: Immigrant Women Workers Take on the Global Factory*. Written by Miriam Ching Yoon Louie and published by South End Press in 2001. 166-172.

<sup>201</sup> Ching Yoon Louie, Miriam. “Each Day I Go Home with A New Wound in My Heart: Korean Immigrant Workers.” In *Sweatshop Warriors: Immigrant Women Workers Take On the Global Factory*. South End Press, Cambridge: MA: 2001. 123-178.

<sup>202</sup> Louie, 144.

<sup>203</sup> Hawaii Methodist Church (1903), San Francisco Korean Methodist Church (1904), Hawaii Korean Anglican Church (1905), and Los Angeles Presbyterian Church (1905). Kim, 7.

<sup>204</sup> Kim, 8.

*Christian Today*, reported that there are over 4,000 Korean American churches in the US.<sup>205</sup>

Korean American women are active members of these local churches.

Sociological research about Korean Americans claimed that the high rate of Korean conversion, church participation, and the creation of churches were due to several factors. Some factors include the impact of the gospel among Korean American believers, the insistence on evangelism, ethnic pride, and assimilation into American culture. Among Korean American churchwomen the creation and participation in Korean American churches served these purposes. Church participation provided a community of women believers who shared common interests. Church participation also provided a sense of identity as Korean American churchwomen in the US. The proliferation of women's auxiliary groups among Korean American women is telling of the continual needed presence of Korean women's spaces.<sup>206</sup>

Korean American women's auxiliary groups were created for various purposes. These auxiliary groups provided services for the churches they were connected to. These groups also provided social and spiritual support to Korean American women. Auxiliary groups were also known for their language courses that they made available for Korean American children. They also organized holiday events and performances. They were also effective in fundraising for Korean churches and other social and political causes.

Korean American women recognized that the auxiliary groups needed to expand in order to provide other social services. Thus, the social service organizations that we see in contemporary US society developed from Korean American Bible women's auxiliary groups. These organizations provided many resources for larger community needs. Korean American

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<sup>205</sup> *Christian Today* is a Christian publication on theology, media, church, and culture. It is run by a nonprofit media group, started in 1956, with six print publications and web resources for Christians of any denomination. They can be found at [www.Christianitytoday.org](http://www.Christianitytoday.org). According to the article titled, *Increased Number of Korean Churches in the U.S.* posted on February 17<sup>th</sup> of 2012 by Melissah Yang, the reporter claims that for every 350 Koreans found in the US, there is one Korean church available for them.

<sup>206</sup> Korean women's auxiliary groups are known as women's cell or small group within churches in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Bible women activists created two kinds of organizations. Some Korean American women joined larger women's organizations and created ethnic specific branches. Others created advocacy based organizations to serve surrounding Korean American communities. Both types of organizations were instrumental in contributing to the growth of Korean American populations across the US. In the following chapter, I explain and analyze modern Korean American Bible women's activism in the Pacific Northwest to expand scholarship about Korean American Bible women.

### **Chapter 5: Modern Day Bible Women's Oral Histories in the Pacific Northwest.**

Korean American women living in the Pacific Northwest are our modern day Bible women. Drawing from twenty interviews, chapter five and six presents their stories and analyzes Korean Bible womanhood through the perspectives of Korean American Christian women activists. I argue that contemporary Korean American Christian women activists are primary community builders in the Pacific Northwest and their involvement helps to produce vibrant and interconnected Korean American communities in Washington State.

I begin with a brief discussion of the importance of oral histories of Korean American Bible women community builders and activists. I then provide an overview of Korean American women-run nonprofit organizations to emphasize the critical role that Korean American women activists have played in the building of Korean American communities. This is important because without Korean American women activists, there would not be a thriving community-

centered Korean American population in the state. This overview aids in analyzing the extent to which the experiences of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Korean American women compare to contemporary 21<sup>st</sup> century Korean American women activist experiences.

There are three reoccurring themes drawn from Korean American women's oral histories such as identity construction, church and community, and the use of religious language that reveal how important their involvement in the Korean American community is. However, to understand Korean American Christian women's activism as a crucial component of community building, one first has to understand the importance of oral histories. Oral histories are stories that reveal the details of Korean American women's involvement. In *Asian/Pacific Islander American Women*, Shirley Hune stated that oral histories "...Yield rich historical details and first hand observations whereby women, as historical subjects, become knowledge producers."<sup>207</sup> Korean American Christian activist women produced knowledge as they share firsthand experiences. Korean American Christian activist women are the best narrators of their own experiences.<sup>208</sup> They also describe how their involvement impacts and expands the communities they are involved in. Their experiences also describe how the intersecting meanings of Christianity, gender, and race act as social and cultural norms in Korean American communities.

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<sup>207</sup> Hune, Shirley and Gail Nomura, eds. *Asian/Pacific Islander American Women: A Historical Anthology*. New York University Press, New York, 2003. Hune and Nomura, 9.

<sup>208</sup> The idea of the "subject" of history is an attempt to rectify the objectification of marginalized people in scholarship that concerns them the most. When Hune and Nomura argue that Asian American and Pacific Islander women are subjects of their histories, they argue that they are those who participate in the creation of history, of experience, not just as those who experience it. Experience is typically understood as an interpretation of what a subject is seeing, feeling, and responding to. Joan W. Scott argued, "It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience. Experience...becomes not the origin of our explanation, but rather, that which we seek to explain..."<sup>208</sup> In other words, experience is not just feeling and seeing, but processes that we analyze to understand how subjects are constituted. Pertaining to this study, I analyze institutions; the meanings of categories like race, gender, and religion in order to understand how Korean American women experience and experienced activism. I refer to the Korean American women activists in this study as 'subjects'. The term, 'subject' is primarily used by scholars of American ethnic histories and feminist theories like Shirley Hune, Ronald Takaki, and Patricia Hill Collins among others, to show that marginalized folks do not simply experience oppression without resistance or response. The word 'subject' refers to a person who is knowledgeable about his/her context and makes intentional decisions either in response to or in advance preparation of events that have social, political, economic, spiritual effects on oneself and/or their communities.

“Korean American evangelical women enjoy greater gender equality and leadership opportunities in their own religious organizations than in Korean ethnic churches.”<sup>209</sup> Soyoung Kim speculated that one of the many reasons why Korean American women create so many religious-affiliated organizations is to further exercise gender equality and leadership. Among 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century Korean women’s organizations, exercising gender equity and leadership were two of the most important reasons for an organization’s existence. Without disrupting the power or leadership structure of Korean American churches, Korean women exercised leadership through the creation of organizations. Early 20<sup>th</sup> century Korean women in the US created social service organizations that provided economic, social, and spiritual services among Korean Americans. The same is true for Korean American Christian women in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>210</sup>

In the Pacific Northwest, Korean American Christian women created organizations like the Korean Women’s Association of Washington. This organization provides social services for immigrant populations and those living in poverty. Korean American women are also actively organizing cultural events that preserve Korean American culture or maintain extensive social networks. Some of these organizations included Seattle- KIMWA (Korean Intermarried Women’s Association), Korean American Coalition of Washington, Morning Star, and the Korean Community Service Center.

The Korean Women’s Association of Washington exists today as a 501(c) 3 nonprofit organization.<sup>211</sup> Korean American women, some of whom are Christian, recognized a need for

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<sup>209</sup> Kim, Soyoung. “The Intersection of Religion, Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Identity Formation of Korean American Evangelical Women.” In *Korean Americans and Their Religions: Pilgrims and Missionaries from a Different Shore*. Ho-Young Kwon, Kwang Chung Kim, and R. Stephen Warner, eds. University Park: Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001. 202.

<sup>210</sup> For example, contemporary Korean American Christian women created branches of the Young Women’s Christian Association that provided resources to local communities. They provided services to both Korean and non-Korean community members. One of the well-known branches of the YWCA among Korean Americans is the YWCA Queens branch that was created in 1978 to help support Korean immigrant families in Queens, New York. The organizations offer resources for children, youth, young adults, and seniors spanning across various racial and ethnic groups as well. <http://ywcaqueens.org/about/history/>

<sup>211</sup> Korean Women’s Association of Washington can be found at [www.kwa.org](http://www.kwa.org)



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Figure 6: Korean Women's Association Symbol

community building and social services among Korean wives of American military men. Kim Nam Hui began meeting with a few Korean American women leaders in Tacoma that led to the creation of the Korean Women's Association of Washington in 1972. Based in Federal Way, the Association is in close proximity to Fort Lewis, a Joint Base Lewis-McChord military facility. Early in its history, Korean American women provided resources to Korean wives of American military men. Korean American women involved helped to build community amongst themselves and then branched out to provide resources to Korean American community members. Many Korean American community members praise the Korean Women's Association for its involvement in supporting and building a thriving Korean American community wherever the organization has branches. As the organization became more prominent, it widened its vision and helped people of various racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Currently, KWA of Washington serves Korean American communities in various pockets of the state but also caters to the needs of larger communities. Its mission is to "provide multi-cultural social services to meet basic human needs through education, socialization, advocacy, and support."<sup>212</sup> To date, Korean Women's Association provides services to more than 150,000 residents of Washington. It is committed to serving the poor and vulnerable such as the elderly, youth, and non-English speaking immigrants. With branches across the state, KWA provides

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<sup>212</sup> This symbol can be found at Korean Women's Association youtube channel KWA Cares. "Korean Women's Association," YouTube video, 8:41, posted by "KWA Cares," March 4, 2011, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=AnGlt4SxViQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AnGlt4SxViQ).

<sup>213</sup> *Korean Women's Association of Washington*. KWA website. 2012. Web. December 2012. [www.kwa.org](http://www.kwa.org)



social services in eleven different counties. One of their most recent fundraisers was called the “Duck Derby,” held in October of 2011 at the Foss Waterway.<sup>214</sup> About 5,000 rubber ducks were released and the winner of the duck race won \$5000. All the funds raised at the event went to support KWA’s programming.

Korean Women’s Association, like most non-profit organizations, need continual funds to run 18 social service programs, provide affordable housing, and deliver supplies to local food banks. The organization is successful because of the committed volunteers and staff members that work for the KWA. KWA is regarded as one of the most successful and much needed social service organizations in Washington State. They partner with organizations and news outlets like the Tacoma News Weekly, Northwest Asian Weekly, and King 5 news to remain a public presence. According to the *Federal Way Mirror*, Korean Women’s Association was awarded recently for their work with elderly folks. KWA won the King County Green Globe Award for the sustainable aspects of its senior citizen housing development in Federal Way in 2011. The international community, including South Korea, recognized KWA for their work with immigrant populations.

Like Korean Christian American women who help found the Korean Women’s Association of Washington, Korean American women also were involved with World-KIMWA and created chapters (Seattle and Mercer Island) in Washington State. Lea Armstrong, who once served as President of World KIMWA, helped establish the Seattle chapter. In August, 2013

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<sup>214</sup> Dunkelberger, Steve. “Duck Derby Got Supports Wet.” In *Tacoma Weekly*. (October 5, 2011).



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**Figure 7: Lea Armstrong**

Armstrong organized the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Korean Inter-married Women’s World convention in Seattle, WA. Currently, Seattle-KIMWA focuses on providing resources for intermarried Korean women, their children, leadership training, and cultural events.<sup>216</sup> Events featured in the *Seattle Korean Weekly*, *The Journal of Korean Culture*, and *Korean Times* indicate that members of Seattle-KIMWA are dedicated to raising funds for children of intermarried couples as well as teaching people about Korean culture.

Korean American community leader and activist Cheryl Lee helped found the Korean American Voters Alliance, which was a nonpartisan and non-profit organization. Its mission was to help Korean American communities in the Pacific Northwest through voter registration,



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**Figure 8: This is an image of KAVA’s banner at a local political event.**

<sup>215</sup> This image of Lea Armstrong can be found at the Greater Tacoma Community Foundation’s website at [www.gtcf.org](http://www.gtcf.org). Armstrong was featured in their donor spotlight for her work with ResCare Homecare. Pritchard, Jeff. “Donor Spotlight: Lea Armstrong.” 2013. Web. May 21, 2013. <https://www.gtcf.org/blog/donor-spotlight-lea-armstrong>.

<sup>216</sup> Armstrong, among other Korean American women leaders recognized that many intermarried Korean women, like early 20<sup>th</sup> century Korean military wives, faced many difficulties. These difficulties were similar to issues that Korean military wives faced such as stigma associated with marrying a non-Korean man. Many intermarried Korean women needed an organization for social support and Armstrong helped to address this need in the local community.

<sup>217</sup> This image can be found at the following website: <http://www.berenforcongress.com/photos.html>.

advocacy, and civic participation. Lee along with several other Korean American women involved with KAVA joined other Korean American leaders of Korean American Professionals Society (KAPS) to create the Korean American Coalition of Washington State.<sup>218</sup>

The Korean American Coalition of Washington is a non-profit and non-partisan community based organization led by Korean Americans spanning across many generations.



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Figure 9: This is image features KAC's symbol.

The coalition has over four thousand supporters and members. One of the unique characteristics of this organization is that Korean American women participants hold proportionately more leadership positions than Korean American men. In its eleven-year history, Korean American women such as Angelie Kim, Shari Song, and Jina Yoon Kim have been respected leaders. This is unique because although their founding members were Korean American women, the organization itself is not a women's only organization yet they always have had women leaders. Unlike early Korean American women's only groups that were created by and led by Korean American women, KAC-WA is part of a larger national organization.<sup>220</sup>

Korean American women members of Korean American Coalition of Washington are involved in every aspect of the organization and its services. As an organization, their involvement in Washington State occurs in four ways; civic education and participation,

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<sup>218</sup> This merged occurred in 2002.

<sup>219</sup> This was an image that KAC-WA created for the 2011 leadership awards gala on November 4, 2011 and can be found at KAC-WA's event webpage at <https://www.facebook.com/events/204524729598580/>.

<sup>220</sup> This national organization is the Korean American Coalition that began in 1983. This organization is based mainly in advocating for the Korean American community.

leadership development, community advocacy, and social networking.<sup>221</sup> KAC-WA has supported and encouraged many Korean American women leaders running for local office such as Martha Ch'oe, Hyeok Kim, Cheryl Lee, Cindy Ryu, Lisa Shin, and Shari Song.

Martha Ch'oe is currently the Chief Administrative Officer of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's Human Resources, Security, and Site Operations teams. Ch'oe is known in the Korean American and broader Asian American community as a community activist and political leader. Ch'oe ran for two terms on the Seattle City Council. Previously, she was the chair



**Figure 10: Martha Ch'oe**

of the White House Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islanders. Martha Choe was and continues to be an inspirational figure among Korean American women and Korean American communities.

Another inspiring Korean American woman is Hyeok Kim. Hyeok Kim is the Executive

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<sup>221</sup> Korean American Coalition. *Korean American Coalition – WA*. 2002. Web. December 2012. [www.kac-wa.org](http://www.kac-wa.org).

<sup>222</sup> "Martha Choe," Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, accessed May 21, 2013, [www.impatientoptimists.org/Authors/C/Martha-Choe](http://www.impatientoptimists.org/Authors/C/Martha-Choe).



**Figure 11: Hyeok Kim**

Director of the InterIm Community Development Association. Her work primarily revolves around preserving and building community in the International District area in Seattle. In the past, Kim worked as a policy analyst for the House Democratic Caucus. She also has worked as a Legislative Assistant for Representative Tomiko Santos.

Two significant politically involved Korean American women are Cheryl Lee and Cindy Ryu. Cheryl Lee is an active member of Korean American Coalition-WA. She is currently a senior product manager and a community leader. Elected at the age of 27, Lee was the youngest Korean American woman member of Shoreline’s City Council. Current Democratic Representative (32<sup>nd</sup> LD, King County District 1), Cindy Ryu is a devoted Christian. Ryu was



**Figure 12: Representative Cindy Ryu**

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<sup>223</sup> “Hyeok Kim,” White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, accessed May 21, 2013, [www.ed.gov/edblogs/aapi/commission-members/hyeok-kim/](http://www.ed.gov/edblogs/aapi/commission-members/hyeok-kim/).

<sup>224</sup> “Representative Cindy Ryu,” Washington State Legislature: The House of Representatives, accessed May 21, 2013, <http://www.leg.wa.gov/house/representatives/pages/ryu.aspx>.

the first Korean American female mayor (mayor of Shoreline) in the US. Ryu is known for her work with transit issues, labor issues, and other civil rights related issues in the King County.

Shari Song is an activist and political leader in many ways. She is an active volunteer in her community and also works as a managing broker for over thirteen years. Song is now



Figure 13: Shari Song

running for King County Council District 9. Shari Song is known as a “bridge builder” and an advocate for residents living in the King County.

Korean American women like Martha Ch’oe, Hyeok Kim, Cheryl Lee, Cindy Ryu, and Shari Song demonstrate that community organizations and Korean American women’s involvement in these organizations are an important part of the Korean American community in the Pacific Northwest. More specifically, they are part of the larger group of Korean American women that continue to bring needed attention to the community’s social, economic, and political presence in the state. Many of these individuals are involved in the political arena and are highly visible. However, other Korean American community women leaders are visible in other ways. Jiyeon Cheh and Sinae Cheh, for example, support the Korean American community through their cultural center, Morning Star.

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<sup>225</sup> This image can be found at <http://www.nwasianweekly.com/2013/03/shari-song-declares-candidacy-for-king-county-council/>. Northwest Asian Weekly Staff. “Shari Song Declares Candidacy for King County Council.” In Northwest Asian Weekly. Web. Vol. 32.11. March 2011. [www.nwasianweekly.com/2013/03/shari-song-declares-candidacy-for-king-county-council/](http://www.nwasianweekly.com/2013/03/shari-song-declares-candidacy-for-king-county-council/).



Figure 14: Morning Star Cultural Korean Cultural Center Image

Morning Star is a Korean Cultural Center located in Lynnwood, Washington founded by a Korean American community member, Jiyeon Cheh in 1985. The organization continues to run with leadership provided by Sinae Cheh, Jiyeon's daughter. Both women are active Christians and are responsible for every aspect of the organization. Morning Star is known for its yearly performance, *Narae*.<sup>227</sup> Morning Star provides dance classes, music classes, and cultural resources that help Korean Americans understand their Korean culture better. This organization also educates the surrounding community with art education and access to a cultural library. Morning Star also houses an art Montessori school. Like earlier non profit organizations ran by Korean immigrant women in the US, Morning Star is dedicated to enriching and educating the lives of American born Korean American children through art and music. In doing so, they are helping to build an upcoming generation of educated Korean American children in the state.

Like many of their predecessors, Korean American Christian women's activism is primarily channeled through cultural organizations or schools and through social service provisions. They work with local non-profit organizations that care for whom they see as

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<sup>226</sup> This image can be found at Morning Star's facebook webpage. <https://www.facebook.com/morningstarkcc?filter=3>.

<sup>227</sup> *Narae* is a music, dance, and cultural showcase that Morning Star performs every year. *Narae* means wings and is representative of the young boys and girls who perform. This performance includes instrumental performances and highly skilled traditional and modern Korean dance choreography. *Narae* is one of morning Star's most important performances because the performers showcase the skills they learned throughout the year. These youth performers learn about their Korean heritage and represent how much they've learned through the performing arts.

societies' oppressed. Contemporary Korean American Christian women activists still use the gospel as a reason to participate in this kind of activism.

Korean American Christian women often refer to their community service or activism as a call from God or a response to God's love. Contemporary Korean American Christian women activists are Pacific Northwest's 21<sup>st</sup> century Bible women. Their main goal is to live the call of God based on their interpretations of Biblical messages. In the following sections, I describe and analyze an emerging history of Korean American Christian activist women, their experiences and how race, gender, and religion merge to produce unique religious activist experiences.

Based on the twenty interviews, I identified seven reoccurring themes. These themes reveal the multi-faceted experiences of Korean American Christian women activists that include identity construction, involvement in church and community, the use of religious language, and significance of involvement, struggles, leadership, and social issues. I begin by addressing the first three.

*To Be or Not To Be- Korean, American, or Korean American: The Identity Construction of Women Activists*

Am I Korean, American, or Korean American? This is a question that many Korean Christian women also have asked themselves. However, their identity as Christians was more evident in their discussion. A religious identity seemed to trump other identity categories. Korean American activist women who served in Korean or multi-ethnic churches identified as Christians first. Discussions of their racial and ethnic identity came second to discussions of religious affiliation. Park's observation that Korean Americans interpret their race and ethnicity through evangelical Christianity is true among the Korean American women activists interviewed. Park stated that, "The foundation of the identity of second-generation Korean



evangelicals becomes no longer Koreanness but evangelical Christianity.”<sup>228</sup> Natalie also responded with, “I’m a believer. I was raised Presbyterian conservative. The past couple of years, I’ve been exposed to a couple of different things. So now I feel like I’m a balanced believer but with the charismatic and also fundamentalist as well.” When asked about their identity, some simply responded with, “I’m Christian” or, “I’m Presbyterian.” These statements reveal the significance of their religious beliefs in the construction of their religious identity.

So Young Park stated, “the religious identity of Korean American evangelical women is largely shaped by their socialization in conservative Korean ethnic churches and contemporary American evangelicalism focusing on a born again conversion.”<sup>229</sup> This is true of the Korean American women interview subjects who grew up in conservative Korean churches. They were taught at a young age that they should always act Christian. Some described their Christian identity by naming their denominations. Most of the Korean American subjects described their identity as Christians by sharing their personal experiences of growing up in a church.

Korean American women explained that although they grew up in conservative Korean churches their beliefs about God and religion became more solidified during their college years. Many of the participants attended local universities or Christian colleges and it was then that they revisited and questioned their identity in relationship to their religious beliefs. They solidified who they were and what they believed in apart from parental influence. It also seemed to be a time when their personal beliefs about religion were most challenged. More than half of the Korean American women activists questioned their religious beliefs and stopped attending the church they grew up in. Many of these women eventually joined new churches.

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<sup>228</sup> Kim, 199.

<sup>229</sup> Park, Soyoung. “The Intersection of Religion, Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Identity Formation of Korean American Evangelical Women.” In *Korean Americans and Their Religions: Pilgrims and Missionaries from a Different Shore*. Ho-Young Kwon, Kwang Chung Kim, and R. Stephen Warner, eds. University Park: Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001. 194.

Despite Korean American women's initial introduction to church, almost all of the Korean American activist women interviewed shared a similar experience of leaving church during their high school or college years and then returning shortly after. Peter Cha's "silent exodus"<sup>230</sup> explains this trend among second generation Korean Americans. The silent exodus describes the wave of second-generation Korean American young adults who leave their home churches after high school. Korean American women's stories follow this trajectory.

Many Korean American women activists often reflect upon this the silent exodus as a reminder of why they continue their involvement in community and church once they return. Katherine stated, "I grew up in a very Korean church...maybe I was too young or maybe I didn't know God for myself so once I hit college I started having a lot of second thoughts about everything that I had believed in, not only religiously but also in faith and about what path I was going. My friend introduced me to a new community, which I am currently at right now, and it changed me a lot. I think God really showed me who I was and for the first time in my life I felt like I knew God personally." Katherine's story describes briefly an experience that many Korean American youth, who grow up in Korean churches and decide to leave for a period of time, only to come back because they entered into a personal relationship with God.

All of the Korean American activist women served in a church community. Seven of the twenty Korean American activist women were involved in a Korean church. Thirteen Korean American activist women were involved in multicultural churches and ministries. Korean American women involved in a Korean church were more vocal about identifying as a Korean woman. This may be because they used the Korean language more often to talk about their

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<sup>230</sup> Cha, Peter. "Ethnic Identity Formation and Participation in Immigrant Churches: Second-Generation Korean American Experiences." In *Korean Americans and Their Religions: Pilgrims and Missionaries from a Different Shore*. Ho-Young Kwon, Kwang Chung Kim, and R. Stephen Warner, eds. University Park: Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001. 141.

Korean identity with Korean youth and colleagues. Korean American women involved in multicultural churches were less vocal about the Korean aspect of their identity. Unlike Korean churches where speaking or acting Korean is a normal part of the culture, multi-ethnic or multicultural churches seem to celebrate racial difference. In other words, they celebrate the diversity of languages and ethnicities among their members. They reinforce a message about racial difference secondary to being part of a Christian family. Korean American women who come to terms with their Korean American identity do so primarily in a church space where the Korean language or cultural customs are an everyday part of life, not the exception, marker of difference, or a reason for celebration.

Korean American activist women born in Korea then moved to the US as children easily identified with their Korean heritage.<sup>231</sup> Jenny stated, “I’ll say I’m Korean just because I’m more fluent in Korean...I lived much longer in the US... I associate more with Korean[s]. A Korean who speaks English...” Their ability to speak Korean and sense of closeness to the culture made it easier to identify as Korean. However, Korean American activist women who were born in the US and grew up in predominantly white or multi-ethnic communities struggled with bringing their Korean and American identities together.

So Young Kim described that Korean American identities, “indicates their socialization in the two worlds of the US and Korea, from both of which they often feel alienated and marginalized.”<sup>232</sup> Korean American women and men are socialized to believe that they are either one or the other. This socialization process makes identifying as Korean American difficult. The definitions of Koreanness and Americanness change depending on who does the defining.

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<sup>231</sup> Korean folks who move to America at an early age are considered part of the 1.5-generation.

<sup>232</sup> Kim, 197.

Grace shared, “I actually self identified for much of my life as non Korean American... being Korean American, I don’t know. I think I’m still figuring that out... I think for me it’s a little different too because Koreans, they were actually the ones that gave me the hardest time. I don’t look Korean so they think I’m mixed...” She struggled with being Korean American because of the ways that the Korean community treated her.

Based on Grace’s looks and Korean language ability, Korean community members made her feel like she was less Korean. However, one’s looks and language abilities also have the ability to distinguish someone as non-American and only Korean. Mary stated, “I think growing up in a school where my family was the only minority, I was very aware of it too. You know, you’re just different growing up.” For Mary, her physical looks differentiated her from other Americans whereas Grace was viewed as less Korean. Grace and Mary’s experience confirms Kim’s observation. The ways that some Korean Americans are socialized in church and community spaces makes identity construction a difficult process.

However, not all American born Korean American activists struggled in the process of coming to an understanding of a Korean American identity. Growing up in a Korean American church helped solidify their identity as Koreans. For example, Angie explained that due to her upbringing in the Korean American church, she was able to identify as Korean and appreciates that part of her identity. She says, “We went to a Korean American church and I think church and home made up a majority of my time...it’s part of my identity. It’s something that I don’t have negative feelings about. I love being Korean...” Family dynamics sometimes make it easier for Korean American activist women to identify with both cultures. For example, a multiracial Korean American activist shared how identification with her Korean mother helped shape her Korean American identity. Michele recounted, “My mom is Korean and I’m half Korean and

half German. I feel like anything that varies from this (American) culture is more of Korean and so that is why I would identify as Korean. I identify more with my mom than with my dad. I grew up with her..." Even though Michele's mother did not speak Korean or make Korean food in the home, Michele learned that a Korean identity was more about how her mother lived. Michele could relate to that and easily identified as Korean American. Another activist explained using a Biblical perspective of embracing Korean and American identities. Katherine stated, "I think I would identify myself as a Korean American person... I do believe God created us to be diverse and for a purpose and to deny the fact that I am Korean just because I'm living in America doesn't feel right with me." The process that Korean American women go through to construct their identity reveals the intersection of religion, culture, race, and gender.

As Christian women, they are socialized to believe that their religious identity is their primary identity. As Korean American women, they are expected to speak, look, and act in ways that align with Korean cultural norms. However religious and cultural norms are interconnected. Korean American Christian women construct their identities at the intersection of culture and religion and somehow manage to come to terms with their own understandings of Korean American women's identities. This process occurs in the context of church and community.

#### *Korean American Women's Involvement in Church and Community*

Korean American women's involvement in church and community is important because it continues to build and maintain ministries that contribute to the growth of local churches and communities. These ministries are mainly children's and youth ministries. Early 20<sup>th</sup> century Korean Bible women created youth and children's ministries and as a result, many of these ministries are available to modern day Korean American women. They also provide avenues for Korean American women to exercise their leadership and teaching skills. These opportunities are

available for leadership development and contemporary Korean American activist women benefit by learning important skills.

Korean American activist women teach and also use these ministries for childcare. Korean American activist women benefit by learning from earlier models of youth and children's ministries established in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. They learn what worked and didn't work for earlier ministries and continued to establish more youth ministries in newly created Korean American churches. These youth ministries are conducted in English and cater to Korean Americans from as early as elementary to college.

Many parents of the American-born Korean American women in this study also encouraged participation in church sponsored youth groups. The usual practice among Korean American families was that the children followed the religious practice of their parents. Some were not given a choice. Julia stated, "I think it was more surface level Christianity where your parents always went so you tagged along. I hated that. I pretended to be sick so I wouldn't have to go to church on Sundays. I don't want to go! It's so boring! It was religious, very rule book-ish..." Among those who were forced to go, it was not until later in their adult lives that they began to seek a relationship with God on their own.

Korean American women who were born in Korea and then moved to the US shared a slightly different experience with church. Unlike American born Korean American women, 1.5-generation Korean American women converted to Christianity before attending a Korean American church. Mary was born in Seoul, South Korea and first encountered Christianity through YWAM missionary pastors David Ross and his wife.<sup>233</sup> The Ross' visited many families

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<sup>233</sup> YWAM is a ministry called Youth with a Mission. This ministry is an international member organization of Christians that served throughout the world. This organization began in 1960 and its purpose is twofold: To know God and to make Him known. More information can be found on their website at [Ywam.org](http://Ywam.org)

and Mary's family was one of them. Mary eventually converted to Christianity as a result of hearing the gospel preached in her home. She eventually attended a local church.

Julie encountered Christianity through education. Her family encouraged her to pursue an education and she attended Ewha junior and high school. Both were private schools in Korea, where she learned the gospel and a girl's potential to change the world. Julie eventually joined a Korean Presbyterian church and continued her education in ministry and seminary. Soona moved eventually converted to Christianity when a neighborhood friend introduced her to a local Korean church. Soona shared, "It was in third grade. My friend took me to church... She would take me on Wednesday evening for their service." Soona sneaked attended vacation Bible school and church during her childhood years. She enjoyed hearing stories from the Bible. She claimed that it was her early church going experience that kept her open to attending church in America.

Another Korean American woman activist shared that "Upon obtaining my degree and landing a career related to my major, I moved out of my parent's house... I still had an emptiness lingering inside of me and my relationship with family and friends began to deteriorate. I felt a loneliness that led me to eventually acknowledge that God was my Savior and I no longer had to rely on myself for all of the answers but He would be there to lead me. I had a friend already going to a solid church and I felt that it was a good representation of a Christ like community." According to this activist, there was an emptiness that she could not fill with social capital such as an education or a home. She explained once she began a new relationship with God, the feelings of emptiness went away. Being a part of a church community where she could share details of this relationship also helped. She continues to engage in community activism by volunteering at her local church every week.

One of the reasons why Korean American activist women are highly involved in a church community is because of their church's emphasis on volunteerism. Pastors and other church leaders encourage volunteerism as an extension of one's faith. This is important because volunteerism helps to build community and it also attracts more members. Rose stated, "I've been going to church ever since I can remember. When you grow up in a smaller culturally based church, you kind of get thrown into volunteer work right away...I just made an assumption that part of being a member in a church was that you would have some level of volunteerism..." Some argue that a church's emphasis on volunteerism is Biblical, which is why Protestant churches are involved in community service. However, the emphasis on volunteerism is a gendered and cultural characteristic of Korean Protestant churches. While Korean American churches encourage families to volunteer. The gendered and Korean cultural expectation is that the women in the families do so. Their participation is seen as a representation of their family. Thus, Korean American women are encouraged to volunteer more so than men are. Thus, Rose learned from an early age to normalize volunteerism in her church life. Rose carries this message into her church life today. Rose attends a non-ethnic specific church and participates in several ministries. She is known as a strong leader in her community and is often sought out as a mentor for many Korean American and non-Korean American Christian women.

Korean American women activists are involved in a wide range of community involvement and volunteerism across the state. Volunteerism through childcare, political organizing, and non-profit organizations are consistent themes in Korean American women's activism. Cindy is a self-professed third generation Christian because her grandmother and mother were Christians. Cindy has run for local government and is active in the Korean American community. Cindy has sat on many panels discussing women in politics and is



regularly involved in her church. Others like Hilary and Natalie are involved in children's ministry on a weekly basis. Hilary taught weekly Sunday school for 3<sup>rd</sup> grades while Natalie led a local weekly youth group. Mary, like many evangelical mothers, led a 'Moms in Touch' group where she encourages and pastors other mothers with young children. Mary also helped in the creation of a non-profit organization with her husband.

Korean American activist women describe where they are involved, how they became involved, and some anecdotes about what it is like to engage in community activity. Two experiences capture the essence of how committed the activists are. Natalie is involved with online blogging, homeless ministry, serving at a home for at risk youth, and political advocacy. She also worked as a youth pastor for a local Korean American church. With respect to gender and race, Natalie stated, "I feel like as a woman in prison ministry or homeless ministry, I feel like women have a certain emotional intelligence, intuition, and ability to really be there... Even sensing people's pain and even being more of a motherly role. It changes the atmosphere when a woman is present... I feel like having that emotional intelligence and intuition, a woman's intuition is really valuable and when people carry that, people tend to get it right away." According to Natalie, being a woman is an advantage when it comes to caring for people in these ministries. She relies on certain 'natural' beliefs about women.

Meanings of race and ethnicity affect her ministry as well. Natalie says, "I think people are more open to Asian Americans than Caucasian Americans when they are doing ministry on the streets because they feel a little more like they understand what it's like being a minority... Being a minority breaks down their walls and their defenses faster. They know we're not going to come from the standpoint of white privilege or standpoint of doing it like we know everything..." Natalie relies on socially constructed ideas of the minority status to convey the

idea that homeless ministry is easier to participate in, especially for someone like her. When she approaches those in need, she assumes that a majority of them are also people of color. Thus, the shared experience of being a minority opens communication. According to Natalie, being a woman and an Asian American minority in the US is a benefit as it concerns community involvement and outreach.

Another Korean American activist woman described her community and church work as an extension to her paid work. Rose became involved in a larger community through her position at a higher education institution. She spoke to many young adults and college students about the importance of education as part of her activism to the community. Her position afforded her a built in community service component which made work as a form of community service much clearer. Leslie, who is involved with the King County Republicans, believes that her work is an extension of community service. As a politician, her community service is an everyday part of her work, which makes it easier to identify her work as social or civic service.

#### *“I Am Called By God”: The Use of Religious Language*

When Korean American Christian women activists discuss their community involvement, they often use religious language. Korean American Christian women activists talk about their walk with God and activism by using phrases or words like, “calling”, “a heart for”, or “the call of God”.<sup>234</sup> These phrases are often used among charismatic evangelicals in the US who try and incorporate religion into every aspect of their lives. By using religious language and phrases in their every day conversations, Korean American Christian women invite God in. An analysis of religious language also helps to understand how and why they are active in their community.

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<sup>234</sup> It is important to note here that a calling is also seen as a choice. Korean American women activists acknowledge that a calling can be ignored if they so will it. They believe that everyone has their own will and can choose to not follow their calling if they do not want to. Korean American women activists that defined activism as a calling demonstrate that it is a choice of their own will.

Religious language is a facet of Korean American Christian women's activism that reveals the extent of their commitment to community as inseparable from a full expression of a Christian life. They use religious language to describe their beliefs, relationships with God, and decision-making. All of the subjects responded that decision-making was done through prayer and the recognition that their faiths were "not their own".<sup>235</sup> Korean American Christian activist women viewed activism as a Biblical mandate or command, connecting faith with action.

Anthropologist Webb Kean described, "Religious language is deeply implicated with underlying assumptions about the human subject and divine beings..."<sup>236</sup> Among the interview subjects, there is an assumption that God, the divine being, offers guidance through the hearts of the subjects. The human subject the assumed avenue through which the divine acts. The religious word most often used is heart. Mary, a Korean American woman activist that is involved in her church through pastoral service said, "Try to examine yourself and with the relationship (with God), how it impacts your congregation and your church and the bigger community. That's the thing I feel that God gave me the heart for." Mary described her relationship with God and community as a direct result of the heart that God gave her.

Many Korean American Christian activist women subjects use the word heart, which refers to their desires and passions. When Korean American women describe their heart, they describe how God directs them towards a specific cause, people group, or issue. Hilary stated, "I think God calls us to serve, you know and then He uses our hearts to give us a place to serve... I think it's a calling from God to bring us into relationship with people in our community." According to Hilary, God guides Korean American women's hearts to a specific cause to help.

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<sup>235</sup> Mrs. B. responded to the above question with this idea that when it comes to Christianity, faith is not one's own.

<sup>236</sup> Kean, Webb. "Religious Language". In *Annual Review of Anthropology*. Vol. 26. (1997): 47-71. 49.

Nearly all the Korean American women activists used the words, “calling” or “to be called to.” There is the assumption that God is the one directing and the woman responds or follows. Korean American Christian activist women, a ‘call’ is the larger principle of helping the marginalized. It is an action that pleases God. Rose shared, “My personal relationship with God encourages me to be active in the community. I think it’s something that as Christians, we are all called to do...I don’t believe that we’re called to separate ourselves out of the world as much as we are called to a higher standard of living.” Rose not only links herself to a larger Korean American church community but the wider evangelical Christian community. Leslie stated, “What you’re doing in life needs to be something that God calls you to do...” Uniformly all Korean American women subjects stated that there is a “call of God” on their lives. This call is defined as a purpose or direction. For some, the call is a regular job where they help their colleagues or community members. Korean American women activist have jobs that range from public service positions in local government to employment in non-profit organizations. The “call” comes directly from a personal relationship with God but always encourages individual activists to be a part of a larger community of faith.

The “call” is a vision that is acted upon through community service. Alyssa explained, “As a Christian, I believe that is what God calls us to do. To serve those who are in need, widows, orphans, those who are outcasts of society, those who are marginalized because those are the people that God cares about. God calls us to people.” Alyssa’s perspective is one that helps explain why so much of Korean American women’s activism is directed towards the marginalized in the Pacific Northwest. The organizations and causes that Korean American women activists are involved with provides services to the most marginalized groups because the women believe that to do so is to fulfill a call of God on their lives.

A commonality among modern Korean American Christian women activists and early Korean women activists is found in their emphasis of scripture and public service. Much of this has to do with Biblical teaching from scriptures, such as James 1:27 which says that a true, pure, and faultless religion is one that looks after orphans and widows. Many Korean American Christian women interpret this to mean that practicing a true Christian religion is serving those who have the least amount of power and resources available to them. This often refers to women and children. Angie shared, “I really have a heart for marginalized populations... orphaned youth...” In Washington, the most marginalized communities include orphaned children, at-risk youth, and impoverished adults with limited access to social services and health care.

Korean American Christian women activists recognize the needs of their communities through a religious lens. In doing so, they help develop the social and economic survival of Korean American communities in the Pacific Northwest. This process includes their struggles and experiences with identity construction, church and community, and use of religious language. In the following chapter, I address five more themes that support my claim about the importance of Korean American Christian women’s involvement in the Pacific Northwest.

## **Chapter 6: Oral Histories of Modern Day Bible Women in the Pacific Northwest**

This chapter continues the analysis Korean Bible womanhood through five more themes present in Korean American women's oral histories. These themes are activism and community service, causes for involvement, struggles and challenges, leadership, and reasons for continuing activism. The details of these themes support the claim that contemporary Korean American Christian women's activism is primarily for the purpose of community building. These themes and similarities among Korean American Christian women activists strengthen the social, political, and economic survival of Korean American communities in the Pacific Northwest.

Activism and community service has fluid meanings and it changes depending on whom you ask. Contemporary Korean American Christian activist women subjects described several definitions and understandings of activism and community service in response to two questions. The first asked how they defined activism and community service and the second asked whether they identified as an activist or not. I also discuss some of the social issues that Korean American Christian women activists in the Pacific Northwest are most concerned with.

All Korean American women subjects differentiated between community service and activism. This was because they were more comfortable with their definitions of community service than they were with activism. Gina stated, "Community service is, I guess, doing something for the community. It comes down to loving the community around us. That could include cleaning or things like that." Gina explained a conventional understanding of community service which was simply, actions that help one's community. Julia understood community service as something, "more intimate, bringing people together... Community service is about people who are passionate about just helping people around them rather than looking at things that are always distant." There is an element of community service that is local. Community service is done within the local church or community.

Definitions of activism were discussed as an extension of community service. Activism was actions initiated by a strong set of beliefs about an injustice or a cause. Angie stated, “When I think of activism, I think of justice. I think of propelling, like putting forth an idea or thought.” Rebecca’s interpretation of activism is that it “can be a pro active action.” Grace stated, “Activism can arise out of a place of lack because you identify with the lack in others. Or it can arise out of a place of power. When you feel empowered and situated where you feel like now you can go out and be an advocate for others. I feel that there are two different ones and I think we’re always negotiating that.” Grace described that activism can arise out of two places. When a need is recognized, Korean American activists respond by creating organizations or social services that address that need.

Once Korean American women activists saw how empowering and effective their service was, they continued their participation because they had the right tools to help their community. An important point that Grace made in the above statement was that activism, rising from a place of lack or a place of power, is always negotiated. Many Korean American women activist participants stated that their activism and service to community began because they saw a lack or need in their community. Many agreed that to fill that need, they also started from a place of power, a source like their relationship with God. They perceive power as something that is part of their faith and is relationally derived.<sup>237</sup> In other words, God gives them the power to act in accordance with their religious beliefs to address a need in their community.

Definitions of activism were also differentiated by how and why it occurs. One of the ways that activism is defined is as an action that is “worldly” and involving lots of passion.

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<sup>237</sup> This is partly due to Biblical interpretation as well. The verses in Matthew 28:18-20 state, “Jesus came and told his disciples, ‘I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’” This is from the New Living Translation. Korean American Christian women activists use scriptures like this to claim power from God. Thus, power is never separate from their faith but something they can harness and use for community service.

Natalie described activism from a secular standpoint. “The world holds the definition...getting involved in a cause whether it is world peace or environment or animal rights...things like that and just getting really gung ho about that.” Among Korean American women activists, secular activism is a type of activism that occurs prior to their conversion experience. Angie described secular activism when she stated that, “activism has a more negative tone but it’s just a different angle of how you go about it.” Leslie claimed that, “A lot of times people kind of float around in different circles because there is no internal change. It keeps you there [a] short time while it’s a fad or popular. We have a generation of young people who float around who are passionate for something for about two months and then they move onto the next thing.” Leslie associated secular activism with fad activism. She defines secular and fad activism as activism that do not necessarily require a foundation of beliefs but operates on what is popular at the time.

Secular activism seemed to be activism that is acted upon without spiritual or religious guidance or direction. Korean American women activists define secular activism as activism by people who do not include God and operate only by anger. There is an assumption that secular activism is associated with only what is popular, mainstream, or at the cost of personal safety or growth. Natalie described secular activism as an, “Activism with anger. It’s a problem when activism in place of personal relationship or our own growth or personal healing.” Natalie separates secular activism from spiritual activism in order to encourage the latter over the first. Activism should not come at the cost of personal growth and health. Thus, all the Korean American women activists opt for a spiritual activism.

Among Korean American women activists, spiritual activism was clearly marked as “Christian.” In the words of Natalie, “An activist is a believer. A believer is someone who walks more in the power of the Holy Spirit. It’s about community, partnering with God.” Activism is



done with the involvement of God. Leslie explained that, “When God is involved, God places eternity in our hearts and so you see a big picture. I think what’s why you see a lot of Christian young people stay more long term involved in a youth group.” Korean American women activists are more apt to identify as activists when activism is defined as actions that are directed by God. Somehow linking God with activism helps to make women activists more comfortable with identifying as activists. However, a few of the Korean American women still expressed some hesitations about identifying as activists.

Any hesitation about identifying as activists was linked to the negative connotations of activism. Activism is often associated with protest. Angie expressed that she could identify as an activist and community service person, “But I’m not really outspoken...I don’t try to convince others of my values strongly. Maybe not a strong activist but I can see where with certain things, I stand my ground and say this is the right thing and this is how things should be.” Natalie expressed, “I don’t know if that would be the title I use. You know. But right now my focus isn’t about impacting the community but more about partnering with God.” It seemed that activism or being an activist was associated with more verbal and visible forms of action. Alyssa expressed, “I definitely have a lot of community service tendencies. But I want to get more activist.” For some Korean American Christian women subjects, being an activist is something that one becomes as they continue their participation in community.

A majority of the Korean American women interviewed expressed without hesitation that they were activists. Leslie candidly identified as an activist stating, “I think people should see themselves as an activist. I think sometimes the word activist has been misappropriated and misused and too flippantly used. Being an activist in your life for what you’re passionate about and what you’re involved in. I consider myself an activist for Jesus, an activist for Republican

politics. An activist and advocate for family.” Leslie easily identified with activism because of the clarity of its purpose and process by which one becomes an activist. Sinae identifies as an activist when she said, “I have to be an activist... I’m realizing that I can do more.” According to their understandings, activism can be done by anyone for the purposes of fulfilling a passion that benefits others. Sinae said, “Everybody has capacity for activism. Activism becomes, can you really express yourself, and so if you’re somebody who likes to do a lot of community service then you’re going to express yourself that way... There is no activism without community.” Without community, God, and a passion for social change, Korean American Christian women believe that activism is non-existent. Korean American women are highly involved in their church or local communities, have an active relationship with God, and act on their passions for social change which defines them as activists.

#### *Championing Social Justice Causes*

Korean American Christian women activists define and negotiate understandings of activism through engaging many social justice issues. These include homelessness, Korean politics, human trafficking, church ministry, and experiences of child soldiers, poverty, abortion, and healthcare. One common thread among all the Korean American women activists is that they became involved with a social issue because of their friends. Friends were integral in the introduction of Korean American women activists to a local church or a local nonprofit organization. Julia was involved in a ministry to homeless folks in Seattle and Kollaboration Seattle. She heard of both organizations through a friend who was actively involved. Julia also became involved in anti-human trafficking efforts and a student organization on the UW-Seattle campus called the Korean Student Association because a close friend introduced her to the group. Gina, a friend of Julia and also involved in the same homeless ministry shared that

through that particular ministry, she became passionate about another issue. Gina shared, “I realized that God really gave me a heart for kids and that’s really what I want to do.” This was common among Korean American women activists who often began their activism with one cause and expanded the scope of their activism with another.

Closely related to the issue of human trafficking are poverty, abortion, and evangelism. Poverty was mentioned often as one of the main causes that Korean American women activists championed. Jenny stated, “Poverty. I think poverty is one. I’m getting a lot involved with NGOs these days to help out with what they’re doing...So I see a lot of poverty; I’m excited to learn about it more.” Katherine stated, “Growing up I was very passionate about third world countries’ issues like poverty especially with children... Over the past few years, one thing that God has spoken to me about is that I can’t care for people outside of my sphere of influence when my heart is indifferent towards people around me...I started to see the injustice and issues around in Seattle a lot more clearly.... homeless outreach...I think I’ve grown a heart for local people who are under privileged...” Michele stated, “Abortion, anything involving children. The more I’ve had a relationship with God and understand how He is and cares about life, is the more I have, just feel more of a passion for those things...especially you know, the abortion issue because I never really cared about it before.” How Korean American women activists described the issues of poverty and abortion is revealing. Both activists describe these two issues as something that they became involved in as their relationship with God grew. Their relationship with God encourages them to be open to organizing around these two issues.

Though a relationship with God helps keep them involved, why else do Korean American women activist’s stay involved? Why do they think others should be involved in community service or activism? These questions elicits reasons about the importance of community service

and activism and it also draws conclusions about the kind of impact and influence it has on communities in the Pacific Northwest. There were several responses to why Korean American women think others should be involved including the value and importance of community, the influence of Christian mandate (evangelism), building one's character, and helping others.

Korean American activist women in the Pacific Northwest value community. Angie stated, "I was reading a quote the other day about how you can't walk out your faith or your salvation without others. Community shapes who people are." It is very difficult to be an activist or serve a community without one. Gina stated, "I realized that having a community, was something that we're supposed to do. Something we need for many reasons. That's why I'm a part of the church." Whether the community is a church or a group of friends, Korean American women activists strongly support the presence of a community. Katherine shared, "As I was continuously out there (in community) I realized why we need a community... So many people were lonely and depressed... Everyone needs to feel that they're loved and cared for." Communities provide a sense of belonging and love that activists believe everyone needs.

The influence of Christian teaching is another reason for why Korean American activist women believe that being involved is important. Alyssa stated, "As a Christian, I believe that is what God calls us to do... not only because He told us to do that but also through that I believe that we get to know the character of Christ. You get to know more about the love He has for people and the love He has for us...it gets us outside of ourselves...you're more thankful and not as materialistic. You realize well, there are other people around me." Many Korean American women activists like Alyssa shared that acting upon what God reveals to them inspires them to help others. Alyssa's explanation is reminiscent of Korean Bible women's reasons for evangelizing and providing services in Korea. Sinae stated, "There's community in just building

character... being able to consider somebody else than yourself. It's not just about what I can gain, it's about what we can gain together." Soona explained that, "If you don't get involved in community... you'll end up being a frog in a pond and you won't see more." Both Korean American women activists make a connection between being involved and building the character of a person. Activism is about helping others and also about building oneself up. This is similar to historical expressions of women of color and the concept of uplift. More specifically, Black churchwomen demonstrate the concept of "lifting as we climb"<sup>238</sup> in their church work.

Lastly, one of the primary reasons that Korean American women activists think others should be involved is simply to help. Earlier I quoted an activist who stated that it is often the lack that we see in ourselves or in other's lives that inspires one to take action. This is true among Korean American women activists. Leslie stated, "I think that involvement is key because in whatever area that you are involved, I would hope that you're involved in that area so that you can help change parts of society. I'm a huge believer in walking out what you talk about or don't say anything about it at all." One of the core beliefs that were reiterated by Korean American women activists about activism or community service was that people should help because the help is needed. Natalie stated, "There is so much hurt... It takes a village to raise a child ... when we take care of our community, it makes our community safer...it makes us who we're supposed to be..." The hurt that others experience is visible. They recognize experiences of oppression and it gives them a good reason to participate in community activism or outreach and they share these thoughts for others to learn from. As they share their experiences and thoughts, they also share their challenges and struggles as a way to encourage others.

### *Struggles & Challenges*

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<sup>238</sup> This is a phrase or concept encouraged by the National Association of Colored Women in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Korean American Christian women activists evaluated the multifaceted struggles and challenges they faced with respect to their religion. The challenges that Korean American women experience lie at the intersection of race, gender, and age. Assumptions associated with their gender, race, and age permeate their narratives. Korean American women activists often deal with explicit racism, sexism, and/or ageism, and consider how internalized oppression gives rise to personal challenges on a day to day basis.

Korean American Christian activist women are committed to the Korean American communities where they grew up. Many of them had fond experiences of growing up in a Korean family or Korean church community. Korean church communities had members of the church that acted as extended family members. Along with these memories though were experiences that were also painful. They experienced several struggles in their interactions with the Korean church community, their family, and the broader Korean community.

Korean American women activists said that they experienced some familial conflict about their involvement in church or community service. Some families expected that community service be done in relationship to a Korean church. Community service enacted outside of a Korean church or a church that the family attended did not seem acceptable. Julia shared, “I feel like my mom and dad didn’t want me to become involved in the Korean Student Association.<sup>239</sup> It’s kind of ironic because it’s your identity, but Korean traditional parents are more interested in academics rather than anything socially related.” She continued, “You’d think Korean parents would be supportive of my involvement. It’s very weird. I felt like it was hard because I loved doing it but at the same time, my parents didn’t agree... I struggled a lot with it.” Julia, like many of the Korean American women activists, was conflicted about balancing family expectations and community involvement outside of a Korean church. Even though KSA was a

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<sup>239</sup> KSA stands for Korean Student Association and is an organization active on most university campuses across the nation.

Korean American organization, it was not a church and did not qualify as a legitimate avenue of service. Gina also struggled with participation in church and meeting her family's expectations. She said, "I insisted on going to church every Sunday. My parents wanted me to visit home but I couldn't miss too much at my home church. They said, oh you can just go to church here. But I am committed to this church." Although Gina's family was accepting of her involvement in an ethnically diverse church, her family assumed that their Korean church provided the same spiritual support and opportunities. Gina struggled with the choice because she felt that she had to choose between one and the other.

Related to familial and church struggles, another challenge that Korean American women activist also face is balancing priorities and maintaining a respectable public image. A majority of the Korean American women activists hold leadership positions and these women have specific priorities or goals that clashes with others' expectations of them. This is especially true among Korean American activist women who are in positions of power.

Shoreline's first Korean American female mayor Cindy described, "I didn't do it for my own health or for the money. We were being accused doing it for the money and the power. It's definitely a public service for me." Her presence as a Korea American woman and the priorities that she aimed to address made others in power uncomfortable. Cindy tried her best to maintain her priorities in local government. She struggled with misguided accusations from the community she served. Criticisms originated from other members of the local government or community members that opposed her political beliefs. Cheryl also explained, "I think that straddling between my Christian faith and the expectation of the greater community... is really a challenge." She also described how the larger community she served perceived her as liberal

whereas her church community viewed her as a conservative politician. She learned to practice her faith and straddle the expectations that the two communities had of her as a successful leader.

Part of the challenge of balancing priorities is time. Many Korean American women were limited on time. Cheryl stated, “I think there are a lot of commitments at church that require your time.” Alyssa agreed, “Time and energy and resources I think are huge! We dream big things but sometimes the body isn’t able to keep up.” There is much to do but not enough time to do it and this is gendered. Korean American women often balance work, family, and personal needs simultaneously in ways that their spouses are not expected to. The overwhelming needs that Korean American women activists attend to give rise to other issues but for the most part activists agree that a sense of urgency encourages them to stay involved.

Another set of struggles deals with sexism, racism, and ageism. In terms of sexism, one of the reoccurring struggles is patriarchy. Patriarchy “is a deeply gendered organization where unequal power and privileges between women and men are reinforced, legitimated, and maintained with religious fervor.”<sup>240</sup> Often women are relegated to childcare church activity while men are expected to fulfill leadership roles. This is why we often see more Korean American women than Korean American men involved in childcare or youth group related service. However, Korean American women activists challenge patriarchy in local churches. One of the ways that Korean American women activists challenge patriarchy is by acknowledging and supporting Korean American women as leaders and pastors.

Korean American women continually challenge these long held assumptions to further Korean American women’s participation and leadership in the church. As a youth pastor, Natalie constantly, by virtue of being present, challenges people’s assumptions of leadership in the Korean American church. Natalie described her experience as a pastor stating, “I think

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<sup>240</sup> Kim, 124.



sometimes being a female, people have some pre conceived ideas of what it means to be a female leader, maybe she's a figurehead. I always felt the need to prove myself. Sometimes they just don't expect a woman. They'd take the guys' hands and say, oh it is so nice to meet you! Thinking that the guy is the youth pastor. I understand why they think like that because sadly there aren't that many female leaders." She explains that it is difficult as a Korean American woman to become a pastor because of the belief that male pastors are better than female ones. If the predominant belief in church communities is that male pastors are better than women pastors, this contributes to an environment that makes it difficult for women pastors to be taken seriously. This also contributes the further invisibility of women pastors, which feeds into the assumption that male pastors are better than woman pastors. The problem is cyclical and is also symptomatic of workplaces or organizations with a hierarchy of gendered leadership.

Concerning male leadership in the Korean American movement in Los Angeles, California, Hilary stated, "It's pervasive in anything to have leadership that is entrenched in their own ways of thought that are not connected to the needs of the community. Its ethereal ongoing culture, the old boy's clubs... The challenge is the top down mentality... favoring the male's voice..." Thus the challenge that Korean American women activists face is two-fold, challenging the sexism of their male cohort and making the space where they can voice their perspectives and exercise leadership skills. Kim's statement holds true about how to effectively challenge sexism. She stated, "As a corrective, church women's experiences of self-empowerment...and resistance within their racial-ethnic churches need to be take seriously."<sup>241</sup> The leadership capabilities of Korean American activist women need to be taken seriously so that first, existing Korean American women leaders can flourish in their positions and second, more Korean American women are encouraged to be leaders and express their talents and skills freely.

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<sup>241</sup> Kim, 125.

Korean American activist women also shared experiences of racism in non-Korean churches, workplace, and volunteer environments. Many of the activists did not label their experiences as racist. However, their experiences reveal how meanings of race and gender, working together, are used to discriminate against Korean American women. Korean American women activists involved in predominantly white churches shared these experiences. Among a group of Methodist Christian women, Soona experienced subtle racism, “During a women’s meeting, this older [white] lady came to me and said, ‘let’s see if you’re as smart as your husband.’ I think if I was Caucasian I don’t think she would’ve said that.” The assumption made by this white woman was that Soona’s race and ethnicity affected her intelligence. She relied on biological stereotypes of who she perceived a Korean woman to be. She then compared Soona to her white husband who she assumed to be more intelligent than Soona.

Cindy shared her experience with running for local government in the following statement, “As an Asian female, easy target, is what is probably what they thought and there were a whole bunch of other names they called me... I don’t think they would have done that to a white person, or especially a white middle-aged male but I think they were ascribing characters and behaviors to me because I was an Asian female. I still faced discrimination, such as anonymous calls stating I should ‘go back home.’ Even though I have lived in this community for nearly 2 decades and have children who attended its schools, I am still considered an outsider by many.” It is clear here that the meanings of her race and gender influenced the ways she was treated. Cindy’s experiences of racial discrimination are reminiscent of the exclusionary history of Asian Americans in the US. Asian Americans were viewed as foreign and never fully citizens. Cindy lived most of her life in the US and her children are US citizens but her community still struggled to accept her. She described racial discrimination in tandem with gender. Her statement

described the disadvantage she faced as an Asian American woman and the privilege that a white middle-aged man in the same position had. Korean American women activists like Cindy are deeply aware of racial and gender inequality.

Korean American women activists also experience ageism. Ageism is typically described as discrimination against older folks because of their age. Often not discussed is how meanings of race and age work to undermine the validity or knowledge of Asian American women in the public sphere. Crystal described an experience at work, “The thing that makes me frustrated or upset is when people treat me without respect because they think I’m young or I don’t know what I’m doing. It all comes out in the first five minutes of meeting them. I try not to let it bother me... But they’re with me and they don’t trust me just because of the way I look or they assume what my age is...” Crystal, like many Korean American and Asian American women are often questioned because of their perceived age and racial background. Some Korean American women appear younger and are therefore assumed to have less knowledge or expertise. US culture believes that expertise and knowledge is linked to aging and the older one gets, the more knowledgeable they become. Because Crystal looks younger than expected, her expertise is constantly questioned. Intersecting with ageism are two stereotypes of Asian Americans that influence the interactions between Crystal and her patients. The first is the stereotype of the model minority.<sup>242</sup> While Korean American women are racialized as “model minorities,” meanings of gender work against them. Stereotypes long associated with Asian American women such as the hypersexual and less intellectual exotic woman also influence perceptions of highly successful Asian American women. The irony here is that although Crystal fits the

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<sup>242</sup> The model minority stereotype is an image rooted in historical meanings of race and nationality. First applied to the Jews, then to Japanese Americans, and then eventually applied broadly to Asian Americans, the stereotype assumes that based on the biological make up of an Asian person, they are “naturally” good at the sciences or math. The image of the Asian American doctor or lawyer comes to mind. This person, typically gendered male, is very intellectual and asexual.

“model minority” stereotype, stereotypical meanings of Asian American womanhood and sexuality together, create discrimination.

### *Reasons for Continuing Activism*

Korean American Christian women activists experience many challenges and struggles as described above. Many of these activists would say they use these experiences of racism, sexism, and ageism to move forward. Korean American women continue their activism and community work because they believe that they can change social inequality that results from these oppressions. To move forward, Korean American Christian women focus leadership building and describe their experiences as leaders in ministry and in the workplace.

When I think about your broader subject about Korean American and religious activity and involvement I think that Korean American women, the religious, Christian circle in Seattle, WA are it's so accommodating to Korean American women because they have, it's a huge opportunity to be involved in so many great things. Women have so many avenues to be involved whether it's childcare or cooking or leading a choir or leading missions, garage sales, in practice, women have more authority than men. Even though there's a lot of traditional structure and leadership. The women just have a lot more involvement. – Angie

The general consensus among Korean American women activists is that they exercise a lot more authority and leadership in and outside the church than in years past. The interviews with each Korean American woman reveal the wide-ranging areas of service that Korean American women leaders are involved in. Korean American women's 20<sup>th</sup> century leadership and activism focused primarily on basic social services. While this is still very much a part of 21<sup>st</sup> century Korean American women's activism, they are involved in much more.

Katherine described leadership in the following statement, “There are different types of leaders. People who like to be in front and people who speak in front of people and lead people that way. I definitely feel that God is calling me to be a supportive role.” She describes a visible style of leadership and a supportive style of leadership. Korean American women activists

express a range of leadership styles. Eight of the twenty activist women teach and preach in front of people and their practice of leadership is very visible. According to Katherine's definition, a supportive role is one that is less visible but imperative to an organization or church.

Korean American women activists are involved in a range of leadership positions. About half of the Korean American women activists are leaders of young adult, children, or youth ministry as teachers or pastors. Korean American women leaders also exercise authority as ministers of the Bible. Cheryl stated, "It takes a lot of preparation and time. I taught Bible study for 10 years." Many of the Korean American women who volunteer their time as pastors and teachers are also involved in other things. For example, Leslie also founded a young professionals group. She also serves on several nonprofit boards as part of the larger King County area. She stated, "I'm lucky because with what God has called me to do, I feel like I can invest myself to and in both, outside of my job, I volunteer to help different candidates with fundraisers and events." Women like Leslie, can do their job and their community work slightly easier because the two are closely connected.

Jenny stated, "I did a lot of events and helping out like working at STOP (a global organization). I was really in the leadership role at the end of my college years as a leader for a Korean organization and at church too. I was leading the design team and helping to plant a new church." Some balanced their work life and community service well because they learned skills from one to facilitate participation in the other. Cindy, while teaching in children's ministry, youth group, and as a treasurer said, "That's where I learned politics because I realized that the elders were the policy makers." Cindy learned budgeting and leadership politics as a teacher in the children's ministry at the local church. She applied that experience and knowledge to her current community service as a local city official in the area of budgeting.

Many of the Korean American women activist women were recruited to volunteer. Julia participated in organizations because a good friend recruited her. Friends and co-activists are highly influential in the lives of Korean American Christian women activists. Leslie started attending her local church in 1999 and became involved in the children's ministry because her close friends were leading it. Leslie stated, "I first started to get involved because my friends were leading and they'd been trying to recruit me for a long time. I was recruited for another women's organization in Washington also." This demonstrates the importance of friendships and networking among Korean American women. Friendships and networks are two of the avenues that Korean American women activists used to build their leadership skills.

Alongside leadership among Korean American women activists, Korean American women subjects shared their thoughts about what inspires them as activists and community service workers. Permeating throughout their responses is language that speaks to, about, and with God. While God is quoted as their first inspiration, other inspirational factors also include the people they work for, hope, ownership about helping others, and community.

Crystal stated, "I definitely think my belief in God inspires me because I think it's evolved more as I've been working. What is the purpose of living right?" While Katherine shared, "I think He's my driving force. He's my support. The reason why I do everything." Rose stated, "My personal relationship with God encourages me to be active in the community..." and Alyssa described what inspires her, "What never fails to bring me to tears is reminders of the Gospel. When you see people coming to know Christ, when you see them having new life and seeing their lives change, I think that fuels so much." God is described as an important factor as to why Korean American women do activism and community service. Korean American women are led by their spiritual beliefs. It is difficult to separate their spiritual beliefs from activism.

People in the local community are another inspirational factor that Korean American women activists described. Crystal stated that people are really important and without people, activism and community service would cease to exist. Another activist explained, “My love for God and the people He created inspires me. I stay involved because of the community that I am surrounded by.” Angie described, “I think I have a natural pull towards people. I see a need and I want to help in some way.” Often scholarship about activism is about the social issues that people are involved in but it also about how people help other people. Korean American women activists are equally concerned about the social issues they address and their interactions with community members. Thus, activism among Korean American women identifies the lack or need in others and aims to respond to it through several avenues. Michele stated, “I think it has to do with ownership. Ownership is what keeps me involved because I can feel like an outsider if I’m not giving... If I want to volunteer less, do less, to help out, I’m only stealing from myself.” Korean American women activists feel a sense of ownership as a result of their relationship with God and commitment to others to participate in community.

Korean American Christian women activists in the Pacific Northwest do activism for many reasons. Their experiences and histories as activists reveal a total of eight reoccurring themes that are prominent in their lives. Many Korean American activists to affect and pursue social change use religion, specifically Christianity. It is my hope that the themes presented offers some data that other scholars will use to comparatively analyze women’s histories, religion, gender, race, and activism. In the following two chapters, I present testimonials of Korean American Christian women activists. Testimonial stories combine an autobiographical style of recounting one’s experiences with a tradition of story telling that is common to many Christians. Testimonials are stories about a person’s interaction with religion, more specifically

the gospel of Jesus and its impact in their lives. These stories use the autobiographical style includes stories and other experiences of Korean American women to demonstrate the various ways that they deal with social issues in relationship to religion and spirituality.

## **Chapter 7: Three Testimonial Pastoral Stories of Korean American Women Activists in the Pacific Northwest**



Korean American women's testimonial stories are legitimate and valuable. These stories complicate any simplified notions of activism in the Pacific Northwest. Korean American women's activist experiences of activism and social issues reveals diverse avenues of social change activism concerning race, class, religion, and gender inequality. I claim that Korean American women's pastoral testimonial stories, as a type of oral histories, contribute to scholarship about how women pastors use religious activism. More specifically, these stories reveal the nuances of the experiences of Korean American women pastors who use religious language and beliefs to continue engaging in activism.

Testimonial stories are a type of long-standing verbal practice of evangelism. Rosetta Ross uses the term 'testifying' to describe testimonial stories by Black women during the Civil Rights era.<sup>243</sup> Like testifying, testimonial stories, "speak truthfully about what they have experienced and seen, offering it to the community for edification of all."<sup>244</sup> I define testimonial stories as stories that originate from Korean American women's accounts of religion, religious experience, and activism. These stories intentionally include God as the center of their lives. These pastoral testimonial stories speak honestly about the details and influence of religion and activism in their lives. They are important because they offer another way of doing activism that considers the implications of their religious activism in the community.

I also use testimonial stories because they differ from oral histories in two ways. Testimonial stories always describe the centrality of religion in a person's life whereas oral histories do not. Testimonial stories share the gospel, how it impacts their lives, and invites the audience to participate in the act of faith. Thus testimonial story telling is another evangelical method. These stories are important because they provide an avenue through which they can

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<sup>243</sup> Ross, Rosetta. *Witnessing & Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003.

<sup>244</sup> Ross, 13.

share details of the religious activism. Second, they are used to edify Korean American community and its members. Third, it is an evangelistic tool to share the gospel.

Among Korean American women, testimonial stories are spread primarily by word of mouth. I recorded their testimonial stories through interviews that combined an autobiographical style of writing with their testimonial sharing to create a cohesive narrative about each person's activism. Each story is presented as one story to give the reader the sense of being spoken to directly. I asked each woman, to review and edit or change the content as they saw fit. We edited each story together for the reader to follow. I also inserted questions where the topic of the interview changes to give the reader an idea of the direction the story is taking.<sup>245</sup>

Five Korean American women activist stories were chosen based on four characteristics. Their names have been changed to pseudonyms to protect their identity and maintain anonymity. I included the stories of first, 1.5, and second-generation women to show a range of generational differences and similarities among Korean American women. I also chose Korean American women activists' base on the length of time that they spent involved in community activism. All five Korean American women activists have been involved in activism or community service work for five or more years of their lives. I chose Korean American activist women who work with a variety of populations and engages in popular and emerging social issues. All five Korean American women activists were chosen also because of the depth in which they described themselves, their work, and how important activism was.

This particular chapter presents stories of three Korean American women pastor activists and chapter 8 presents stories of a stay at home mother and a political community activist. These stories are meant to invite the reader to further understand their experiences. They invite Korean

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<sup>245</sup> Please see Appendix 2 for interview questions. They are not direct translations because the way I posed the questions differed each time I asked it.

American women, activist or not, to find inspiration and examples of endurance, empowerment, and struggle.

**Pastor “Julie”: A Lifetime of Achievements and a Heaven Full of Love**

Pastor “Julie” is a longtime pastor in the Pacific Northwest. Julie founded a church for women and continues to pastor multiples churches in the area.

I have a long story! I am a Presbyterian clergywoman, social worker, and a mental health counselor. I have two licenses in Washington State, one for social work and one for mental health counseling. I have lived in the United States since 1970. I lived in St. Louis Missouri for 9 years and I went to school there and then came to Seattle and have been here since 1979. In St. Louis, all the Koreans went to Korean church and I was involved in the Korean church. I also went to an English speaking church. From the beginning I went to both. In Washington, I go to an English speaking church. I go to Korean churches a lot. I also go to sponsoring churches and meet people and worship and I sometimes preach at Korean churches. I have been involved in both English speaking and Korean speaking communities.

When I moved to Seattle, I looked for a Presbyterian church. I found one and it has been my home church ever since. I started there as an elder of the church and then I was ordained there as a minister. I was also involved in a campus ministry at the University of Washington for 7 years before I started a church for homeless women in 1991. Before that I was a mental health counselor and psychiatric social worker at a community mental health center. I worked in mental health for many years. I’m working now with more men than with women.

The Presbyterian National Assembly hired me to for a speaking tour throughout the nation and I got to preach to many English-speaking churches and helped them understand homelessness issues. I also helped with the development of homeless programs. I did that work for several years and then developed a Presbyterian network on homelessness. I served another

year as an interim director and then I retired from that. That was my second retirement and the third retirement has not come yet. The last day of my breath is my third retirement.

*Can you describe a bit more about your involvement with homeless ministry?*

When I lived in Korea during my late 20s and 30s, I worked for CARE Korea, an American social service agency. Right after the Korean War, we had many homeless people, lepers, orphans, and widows. I was assigned to work with the leper colonies, a case of inactive lepers or persons who were released from leprosarium and had no place to go. The government gave them a piece of land in a remote countryside and they had to settle there with nothing, empty hands and all. So this organization helped them and they assigned me to be in charge of the leper colony. I used to visit 12 leper colonies. At the time, I was also exposed to the homeless population in Korea.

When I came to the United States at 35, I went to St. Louis University to get my license as a social worker because although, I studied theology in Korea and I was a theological graduate, instead of doing church, I made myself a social worker, serving the most downtrodden population in Korean society. My practicum training happened at a mental health center where I met some homeless people from 1975 -1977. As soon as I got my master's degree, I got a job at a community mental health center in East St. Louis. East St. Louis is the worst city in the United States for the homeless, mentally ill, and drug addicted. That's a small city but a very bad one. I was a day treatment coordinator for the community mental health center, dealing with 50% developmentally disabled people and 50% mentally ill homeless population. I did that until I came to Seattle.

In the in-patient unit I had seen many patients who had attempted suicide. I had a theology background and was social worker so I thought I had something to do there. God

challenged me. I have many testimonies to give. He challenged me spiritually. I was a mental health counselor at three different women's shelters downtown so I started a church with that population. Then the Presbyterian Church called me for national work. I was on the go for 7 years and flew about 300,000 miles throughout the US. I've lived a long life!

People ask me, how in the world do I end up serving? I have to give them several reasons. One, the reality in the United States is that there are too many homeless people. I've met them. Then, in the religious sense, in the Bible, Jesus Christ stood in solidarity with the sick and homeless people in society. That was His charge to us, to love them and to work with them. Another reason is due to a personal experience. I myself have a lot of history. I was born in North Korea, became a refugee in South Korea and went through the Korean War and lost part of my family. Then I lost a son in St. Louis. I went through a lot of painful experiences and God transformed all my pain into the motivation I needed to serve the most downtrodden, suffering, and pain filled people. I have a personal story and I have faith.

*What about your relationship with God? Does this relationship affect what you do?*

If it were not God, if it's not Jesus, I wouldn't do this. I got a sense of His call. This is God's work. If it's not God, if it's not Jesus, I won't do this. It's a heck of a job. I live with a computer all day. I prepare sermons and write articles and books. I teach Bible classes so I prepare for Bible classes and worship. There's no dull moment as long as my brain works. With the homeless community, every Friday evening we have a meal program. I am the worship leader there. People sing songs and we have worship service and dinner. I also do a lot of case management such as counseling, outreach, and crisis intervention. That takes up a lot of my time. I also do outreach to the homeless populations and to supporters' groups like church groups and the community. I developed several homeless projects nationally and in the state of Washington.

I am very happily involved with the Presbyterian homeless network while developing shelters that help with renter's assistance for shelter clients who are ready to move into housing. That takes a lot of work and you have to keep raising funds. I do outreach in that area too.

Korean community especially church communities do a lot of overseas missions but they do not understand the local mission. They sometimes don't feel the need to do local mission and evangelism. In my opinion they need a lot of education and motivation to help Americans and the most downtrodden in our local communities. Some Koreans ask, "Why should we help Americans?" We have many reasons why we have to help Americans. We are here. We are blessed here. We raise our children here. We go to school; we make money, have jobs, and buy houses here. We are well to do and more well off than many homeless and poor people. We are blessed here so we have to share our blessings with the most poor in our community. The USA helped us through the Korean War and through most of the hungriest days of Korea. We owe the United States a lot. We have to share blessings now for the local people. There is a lot of education needed. I go speak to churches and I write articles in newspapers and Christian newspapers. We educate and convince them that we need to help the local community. They've come a long way but we see good outcomes from the Korean community.

*How about activism? How do you define activism?*

I see two types of activism in the 70s and 80s. I was heavily involved with political activism and created a Korean American coalition for human rights in Korea. We protested against a dictatorial regime in Korea. They were persecuting a lot of people who were speaking up or standing up for justice. We built a coalition here of 20-30 other social movements agencies and political activists. In Korea at the time, the community condemned that. Korean communities were very conservative and they supported government no matter what. But we did not support a

dictatorial government. We protested so that the government could change. Not only did we protest against a dictatorial government regime, but also South African apartheid and Marcos in the Philippines. You name it; we worked with them, with as many as 23 different international communities. I was known as an activist in those years.

A lot of people were just preoccupied with faith and the spiritual side of faith but I claim that the spiritual side of faith needs to move into action and this is the activist side of me. It comes with social service and action. It's all one. I do both, the spiritual side and social service side. I do worship and the sermon. I preach every week and do Bible study every week. Bible studies that combine therapy, group therapy, and Bible study. I guide homeless people to look at them through the Bible message so that they can change and find new behaviors and lifestyles. I am known as an activist and the Korean government gave me a medal of honor.

*What are some difficulties or challenges that you have faced in your life?*

I'm a pretty fortunate person. I've been here in the US for a long time. I am known here and get a lot of support from both the English speaking and Korean communities. In the Korean church community, women leaders are not recognized but I was ordained by the Presbyterian Church USA, not the Korean church. In the 1980s, I was almost the first woman to be ordained in the Presbyterian Church USA. Two of us were ordained in 1987 together. Now we have many young women. In those days, there were only two of us that were ordained. The male pastors respected that because it was a difficult process to go through that included tests; exams and we had to have language command to meet the requirements. Korean pastors found it difficult to do that. I didn't so they respected that. I went through a difficult hurdle.

Although in some Korean churches they would respect women, they wouldn't ordain women but they would respect me. I have good standing in the Korean community. I go to

pastor's meetings and I'm the only woman pastor sitting there but I get a lot of respect. In the American community, they respected me because of the kind of work I do. No one wants to put his or her hands in it. So, I have good standing in both communities. I am very fortunate.

However, when I was a political activist, my husband and I did it together and we were persecuted. We were condemned as communist in Korea. But the United Nations, Seattle chapter gave me an award in 1981 and the Seattle Examiner gave me a community voice award. I got 19 awards. A few of them were for human rights, community voice, and most for community service. One from the Korean government was a medal of honor. That was a very high honor and I appreciate it. I also received another one from Ewha, a women's high school. I'm a graduate of Ewha high school. They liked what I had been doing.

*Please share any words of wisdom or advice for Korean American women...*

You know it's hard to generalize but I see a lot of young people who are self focused a lot. Maybe you are too busy with your work and your life. I would suggest, open your eyes. Your horizon, wider and further, and see not only yourself, not only Korean communities, but see the wider community. Be involved. Too many young people may be not able to do that yet but gradually if you have that mindset, you will see things. You're living in larger society and deal with English speakers every day and different races. Korean people are very inward kind of people. We need to break that boundary and reach out more. We are blessed here so we need to share our blessings with others.

I have one and a half generation son and second-generation grand kids. I kind of understand both generations and I belong to both. Sometimes I feel more like a part of the English speaking generation. Sometimes I feel like I am a first generation person and yet I don't



belong to either one. I don't have the first generation mentality but I'm not in the second generation because I'm not. So I have my own unique generation.

Second generation young people need to understand where the first generation comes from. First generation people come from a lot of painful history due to poverty and war. In Korean Confucian society, we were very much controlled by our parents, even to the extent that we were abused. We needed to be obedient no matter what. We come from very different educational backgrounds. We memorized everything that was said by the professor and we didn't have chance to read a lot of books in our time. Nowadays it's different. So understand where this older generation comes from. They come from a very controlled parental figured environment so they turn out to be very controlling. Then the first generation needs to understand second-generation people. I tried to understand my grandkids and that's a very hard chore to do because there's a big generation gap. For example, my husband is buried and my son is buried and I go over there quite often and for several occasions but the second generation doesn't care. They don't visit their ancestor's gravesite. But in Korean culture, that's a very beautiful part of the culture. Understanding your roots is very important.

I'm currently writing my autobiography for my grandkids so that my grandkids know where their grandma came from, what kind of person she was, and what kind of work she did. Through this, I can close the gap. I speak English with my son and grandkids. Imagine if you don't speak the English language? You don't communicate. There's a bigger gap. So, people need to speak each other's languages. Secondly, second generation needs to study Korean language. That's very basic. That's very necessary. I came here when I was thirty-five and I didn't speak as much as I do now when I came here. You have to study.

*What are your thoughts about gender roles in the church?*

I wrote a book about gender roles in the church and I was the chair of the women's committee of the Korean Presbyterian Church National. We tried to educate the whole church on women's roles. We gave them a historical perspective of Korea and the USA and then I reinterpreted a lot of Scripture texts to educate pastors in the church and understand the Bible better. Other has used the Bible in the wrong way concerning women. One good example is in 2 Corinthians 14 where it supposedly said that women should be kept silent in church. We point out that this is not St. Paul's major theology. St Paul's major theology is liberating people from previous law, culture, and customs. He adopted many women co-workers and he worked side by side with women. Then Colossians 3:28 say there are no master, slave, no women, no men, no Jews, and Gentiles. That we are all one in Christ so that is Paul's major theology and a lot of Korean male pastors use that verse to keep women silent in church as if that was St. Paul's major theology. We point out that this is not true! You have to read all of St. Paul's books; his writings and then you have to figure out what is his major theology was. It's liberating people from a previous oppressive culture. They [pastors] don't see that. They just quote one passage as if it applies to all women in history.

We point out a lot of other passages. This passage conflicts with all of St. Paul's other writings and sayings. We asked, could one person say two conflicting things? We point out many different things so that people can think and educate church pastors. However, many church pastors still don't respect women so we encourage lay people and pastors to give women the opportunity to serve the church as ordained elders or ordained ministers. Korean churches have more to go. Korean churches still hang onto their old saying and old thinking. The Bible doesn't say to hang onto a few passages to abuse women or to oppress women. Some women also don't try to find their role either because they were abused for so long, they were oppressed so long;

they accept that as a reality. They don't try and just accept oppression and it becomes their belief system. They believe in it and it's amazing and frustrating. Women need to study the Bible more and need to open their eyes and need to find their own roles. We have to claim the God given potential and God given dignity. I'm pretty supportive of challenging the existing church system.

*What do you think about leadership among Korean American churchwomen?*

I learned about women's leadership from the beginning. My family consisted of my mother and brothers. My father didn't live with us. In the old Korean culture, a rich man had another wife so he came and went. My family did not discriminate against girls. They recognized my potential. I grew up recognizing I would be anything I wanted to be. I went to a theological seminary in Korea. It was not a conservative seminary but a rather an open seminary. I went to 5 universities including St. Louis University and then I went to Fuller Seminary to be ordained. I had my doctor of ministry degree at 71 years of age from San Francisco Theological seminary. I received a lot of education and read a lot of books and studied a lot. I was self-educated too. I went to Ewha Girl's junior and senior high school. That was a mission school! American Methodist missionaries established that and that is where I received an open education. They recognized girl's potential and that became part of my core value system. I was very fortunate. My mother came from a very highly educated family. In those days they didn't send girls to school but she came from a family that was very much supportive of education. As a result, we all had an education and I got the most.

Also, I will continue to visit many churches. This year, I'm worshipping at Korean church and supporting a program supported by the Korean community. I'll be supporting Korean churches on Wednesday evening services or Friday evening services or Saturday morning services and sometimes Sunday too. I work with as many churches as possible. I will be

connected to these people. I'm also going to take the homeless choir around to various Korean churches to sing and to connect the homeless population with Korean churches. In Lynnwood, and Edmonds, we developed another program so I lead worship service every Friday evenings.

I will continue to write articles in Christian newspapers and educate Korean community about homelessness. I plan to, in the next three years, write three books. In 2015, I'll be 80 and I'll need to publish a few more books and then I will have a big party. That's the plan. If God allows me life until 80, that's my plan. I will keep working and keep developing.

### **Pastor Grace: An Activist for Lasting Social Change**

Grace is a part of a local church in Washington State and identifies as a Protestant charismatic.<sup>246</sup>

I'm a pastor of administration, worship, and the young adult ministry. As far as my role with the larger community in Washington, I think it can be defined more through the lens of this local church. This local church is an advocate; we actually have an arm of ministry. As one of the pastors here that is probably the greatest influence and impact that I identify with. We also have, on a larger scale; a ministry that is more international. I'm over the administration and worship and as a pastoral team; everybody is involved in support. As far as personal involvement we also have an advocacy office and ministry for our homeless friends here in this area. I've served there, I've helped serve and encourage our pastor who is over that particular ministry.

*Can you tell us more about your story?*

We moved here to Seattle for my husband's job. Right before we moved here I had graduated from seminary. I did ministry for about 14 years. When we moved here I decided that

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<sup>246</sup> The term Charismatic came out of the renewal movement. It's a belief that believes in the acting work of the Holy Spirit now as it did in the early church. In this movement, there is a lot of dependence on the Holy Spirit and manifestations of the Holy Spirit such as speaking of tongues and healing.

I would take a sabbatical. I took a year off from ministry life and did some writing during that time. We heard about this church when we were back in North Carolina from a friend at the same seminary. Her father-in-law was the president of the denomination that this local church is a part of. She told me that we should check out this local church partly because by nature of my family being an interracial one, we are committed to a multi ethnic congregation. She told me that this church was multi-ethnic church and that we should check it out. We actually googled that church and then started listening to podcasts. That was the first church we came to. It felt like it was home. After about 10 months, the lead pastor and I had a conversation about what it might look like for me to come join staff and here I am!

My sabbatical was actually for the purpose of just discerning whether or not I wanted to go back to the church. I wanted to explore what ministry could look like outside of the local church. I felt compelled by the mission and vision of this local church, of being a presence in the community and their desire for a multiethnic community. It's been an interesting journey. I got to know the lead pastor and his family and really feeling called to this local. It's actually been a pretty amazing testimony because prior to this church, I had never been a part of a denomination. I grew up non-denominational, charismatic, and very free. I actually never wanted to join a denomination for a lot of different reasons. Because of my relationship with this church and it being a part of the evangelical covenant church, something happened where I actually felt compelled to also be a part of the church. I am actually now going through the ordination process. It is exciting! Miracles happen! I stay involved because of people! The people of this church are dynamic and passionate!

*How does religion influence what you do here?*

For me personally religion does influence what I do partly because I feel like especially with Christianity, our faith is never our own and especially for those of us who have kind of struggled through life and have witnessed suffering and pain and what that looks like and at times feeling marginalized. I think even more so, Christ calls us to be compassionate and to be the hands and feet of Jesus in this world. I can't imagine being a Christian and living out the Christian life without a sense of thinking beyond myself.

*How do you define activism?*

I guess activism depends on the context. The first thing that comes to mind is, especially as somebody who has grown up in the immigrant life, when I'm honest with myself, is an activism for the self. Advocating for myself in an environment and a culture where especially as a woman and starting out in my career very young, young, Korean, non-white woman. Spending most of my time, I feel like advocating for myself. Only in the last 10 years have I realized the importance of advocating for others that are in similar places as me. I am actually drawn to the kinds of activism for people that identify with what it means to be a woman, what it means to be a minority, an ethnic minority, who want to be a leader in this culture.

I identify as an activist but maybe in different ways than some people might imagine. The reason why I hesitate is that because I have several friends who I think to be incredible activists at a global scale. It's kind of hard to compare the two. In the context of the global, people who are creating non-profits to save the world, to feed the masses of hungry people, I wouldn't necessarily define myself as an activist in that sphere. But in other spheres, yes absolutely!

I feel like activism arises out of a place of lack because you identify with the lack in others. Or it can arise out of a place of power. When you feel empowered and situated where you feel like now then you can go out and be an advocate for others. I feel like there are two different

ones and I think we're always negotiating that whether we realize it or not. For me it is harder for me to be an advocate or to be an activist for certain areas than it are for other areas. Concerning activism on the personal level or in my immediate spheres, I ask, how do I advocate for the person that seems to be invisible? You know people are just running over them. How do I advocate for them? More broadly, in the context of ministry, so who are the people that we are reaching? When we narrow it down to a particular ministry, how are we advocating for our friends that are homeless? I think it starts from the local and the local meaning, the south. It permeates through friendships, colleagues, through co-workers then to the broader neighborhood.

*What are your thoughts about Korean American identities?*

I actually self identified for much of my life as non-Korean American. I identified a lot with the African American culture. As a female Korean American, I almost want to break that up into as a female and as a Korean American. I feel like for much of our culture and society, it is always a struggle for women to, not in a sense of equality, but just be recognized, especially inside of the church. I feel like many times, though it feels like it's getting better, I do feel like being a woman has a lot to do with how I view the world, how I view my role, how I advocate for people. Korean American? I don't know. I think I'm still figuring that out. I would say that in the context of being an ethnic minority, yes I can relate!

I think particular ethnic minorities have been privileged above others. I appreciate my place in that and recognize my place in that. My struggles as an ethnic minority are not the same as perhaps a Latina or an African American woman. I think for me it's a little different too because Koreans, they were actually the ones that gave me the hardest time because I don't speak a lot of Korean but I understand. I grew up in a Korean church. My parents were pastors. I

don't necessarily, from what people have said, look Korean. They think I'm mixed. I'm married to a non-Korean. Koreans are actually the ones that gave me the hardest time. I think that's where I think identity comes into play. I think part of it too is the customs of Koreans, the culture because it is so patriarchal; I've also had issues with that. By nature, I'm a stronger female and have a sense of self and purpose and that has been a struggle within the Korean context. The way I identify and articulate what that means, what Korean American means may be a little different.

*How do you see yourself involved in community?*

I think for me, as much as our society tells us that it's about us and our desire to be self-sustaining or self-sufficient and independent, I have thought outside of myself and you really have to make yourself do so. It's like a discipline. It's easy to be self-contained and worry about yourself and your family, or people, your friends. But when you make yourself, out of obedience or desire, to reach out beyond yourself and your condition, your world will end up looking much better. Your present suffering and your present condition is not the end of the world. It puts your life in context. I personally am committed to being involved in community because I have three boys that are now growing fast and they have a very safe home. Something that their father nor I had. It is really important for them to have context of not only all the things that they have and the life that they have, but that they would know and come to know at some point of their life that it's really about people. How are we choosing to engage people's stories, people's lives, and in that context, finding a common purpose of humanity. This is what I love about ministry. In its ebbs and flows of busy seasons, of difficult situations, to navigate, it is always about people and that always keeps me grounded.

*What kinds of difficulties or challenges have you faced?*



My life was so difficult and just growing up and making it to this point, it has taken me probably longer than most people to get to a point where I feel like I'm in a place where I can give. So much of my life has been about making it myself. My husband and I, we lost our parents early. I only have my father left but we're not actually really that close. It's been kind of a struggle to survive. We're now in a season of life where we feel like we have the capacity to give and to think about the world around us. Because you're in ministry and that's what you're supposed to be doing and that's what we're called to as Christians. But the reality is, some people's lives are such that it takes all that, everything in you, just to make it. I think that's probably been the biggest struggle. I think it's human nature too because once you've "arrived" you feel like your comfortable or in a place of, wow, I can actually breathe, or without being stressed about where your next paycheck is going to come from.

I think that is s the struggle from a lot of conversations that I'd had with a lot of immigrant realities and especially in lower income socioeconomic demographics. It's hard and that's probably why we tend to be advocates in our own spheres first because we identify so strongly with them. That would be my greatest struggle personally. None of what I have was given to me. There was no inheritance. There were no parents helping me pay for college. Everything was in our own strength and determination. But as Christians, even at that, it's not anything we did. It's only by the grace of God. In that sense, I always have to be reminded that even though it seems like I did it in my own strength and timing and in my own effort and ability, it's only by the grace of God.

*Do you have any advice for other Korean American women who might read your story?*

I would say that first recognizing that our stories are not unique is important. Sometimes we feel like our journey is kind unique to us. There are so many facets of our kind of generation

of Korean Americans where there is much resonance. The more I talked to other Korean Americans, especially women; there was so much resonance. Stories of feeling displaced, feeling like we do not belong in one culture or the other. Trying to negotiate the parents, that generation and our generation. I am reminded that it is only in the context of community and hearing other people's stories where you feel empowered and things are possible.

I would also say to be courageous. The biggest thing is to be courageous enough to find your voice. Whatever that looks like and to some, it's having the courage to detach at some level, from pressures of their parents. For some, it's to have the courage to say, I'm not going to live into the kind of Asian feminine passivity. I do have a voice. I can be strong and not offensive. I'm identifying in other Korean American women and men actually, confidence of our placidness, who we are. To also love your friends and your affinities. It's colorful! The life of a Korean American, whatever that means, is not monolithic but it has the possibility of being colorful!

**Natalie, A Multi-Racial Korean and Japanese American Woman: Christian Activist and Believer in Jesus Christ**

Natalie identifies as a balanced charismatic and fundamentalist Christian believer.

I was the lead youth pastor at a local Korean church for a little over a year with hopes of attending seminary. I was a part of the youth program. Before I started to do ministry with this church I felt that God really wanted me to do a women's empowerment lock-in with the youth girls. Before, we were working on this dance hip-hop routine with the youth there and we fell in love with them. It was such a fun time. We were meeting every week and praying and trying different things and it was so fun and it was so beautiful. One of the things that I told the youth girls was that they were going to be exposed to information that is really heavy and it's kind of

mind rocking and paradigm shifting. So I told them that I'd like for them to be very gentle with themselves and a couple days afterwards because it was going to take some time to settle in. The parents were shocked. One of the girls, she had a birthday party that same night after the conference ended and instead she stayed home! She stayed home to think about everything that she learned. I was shocked too because I had never seen anything like that before. It was really good and I could feel that there were ripple effects. The girls solidified who they were instead of what the world expected them to be.

As part of serving, I do all the administrative stuff and I also give messages. I mentor. I work with the kids. I work with student leaders. I do leadership development for our senior leaders. I plan the curriculum. I plan everything! We have volunteers who are unpaid who literally give their lives for the people that we serve. This week we are going to the mall and doing a treasure hunt. We're going to talk to people, believers, and ask them about what they believe and do random acts of kindness. They're going to have to think about, on the spot, how to serve people in their community and people in leadership. We also do homeless ministry.

*What is your perspective about getting involved in community?*

I started getting involved in the community through a youth pastor that was at the local church. The pastor wanted to meet with me so I agreed. He wanted me to pray about being the youth pastor. I thought about it and prayed about it and I even went to the International House of Prayer to get more prayer and discernment. A few months after that, the church went through this devastating church split. Then I thought, Ok I need to help, and it's crisis time now. I'm kind of used to crisis having been around inner city ministry. I spoke with the senior pastor and he asked me to partner with him in ministry. I've been here ever since!

Even before that I was doing things like the Ecclesia project. Three years before I started youth ministry, I used to be on Xanga and one day I felt like God asked me, “If I gave you a bunch of kids from all over the world who had no idea who God was or what it means to live a Christian life, what would you teach them? What would you teach them about life and about the Bible? And about revival and revolution and what it means to be a believer? And what it means to walk in the Holy Spirit? What would you teach them?” I started to write my curriculum like 3 years before I began youth ministry. I love youth and I was really excited. With my youth group today, we have kids from Shanghai, New Zealand, and Romania. One of our leaders is Nigerian. The youth is actually Korean but they’re from different places. One of them is a daughter of a diplomat. Another one is someone who has parents who do small business in different areas.

I just love it! I love working with them! I love spoken word. I love the arts! I love the gifts of the spirit. I love learning about God. I love theology and it wraps everything into one. I love raising people up to be strong men and women of God. It makes me feel alive. Whenever they get something or when that light bulb comes on, in their mind or in their spirit, I love it! I love calling people out and seeing them develop their calling and knowing who they are and having them finding their voice. It’s really exciting. When I was in college I did a lot of youth group revivals. I was a part of those things and café nights. Right after college, I worked at a group home for at-risk youth for about a year and then after that I worked in political advocacy. I worked with college aged volunteers and young adults.

I stay involved because it’s just the hope. I see God moving. I see His hand over the ministry. Whenever something happens or we have something we need, God provides. When it’s difficult, even when there are multiple storms, and lives are crumbling, God really does move on our people. It’s not something that I can control on my own. It’s just something He blesses and

He speaks through that and He speaks to every single one of us and it's very clear. He gives them dreams and visions and I just help. I serve, as a person who interprets them and helps give them direction in different ways and it's interesting to see how God moves.

The Bible influences everything! Every little thing I've seen, like when I worked with people in political advocacy, I was under more secular leadership and I see the church's leadership and it's very dramatically different. Even with activism, when I was in political activism, it was much more based on the cause and the program, which is good because there needs to be a focus on that. But with ministry, you have to focus on the people as well so it's relatively better with people. Because the more you work with people the more you can grow together. There's something about doing it together in a community that's really powerful. So it's really the focus on the people.

*How do you define activism?*

The world holds the definition when it comes to getting involved in a cause whether it is world peace or environment or animal rights. With activism, it's not so much about being an activist but as a believer it's about living a whole balance of life. We're called to love people. There's something about when we help others and love other people. It heals us as well. When I was in college, I was an all out revolutionary activist and I didn't realize that there were a lot of undealt issues. I was dealing with things out of anger. It was fun at first but it's not good to do that when we do activism in place of personal relationship or our own growth or personal healing. The more we get healed, healed people, heal people. Hurt people, hurt people. I'm learning to balance more. The best thing we can give to anybody who is hurting or in a difficult position is to be someone who is always growing and either repenting and getting healed.

*How do you define activism?*

I'm an activist but I don't know if that would be like the title I would use. I am a believer who wants to walk more in the power of the Holy Spirit and that's real. Right now my focus isn't about impacting the community but more about partnering with God. I feel like that could lead to a very different outlet. With me, I'm more of an alpha personality type. Whatever that I do, when I'm passionate about something, I give my all. I sacrifice my social life and everything and I run in that direction. I realized that for the people that were following me, the ones I was leading, they were doing the same thing. That wasn't good for them. We're called to be radical but at the same time we shouldn't be using that as an excuse for other things that we need to do in our own lives too. With a lot of activists, we just see a lot of anger. We see a lot of passion and that's good but it's unrefined. It's not filtered yet with wisdom that is needed to sustain them over the long haul. A lot of activists aren't in community because they feel like they're alone and they have to forge their way higher in this territory all by themselves but that's not right either because they're not supposed to do it all alone. Otherwise they will burn out faster and there's a lot of people who care but you just have to be that bridge of translation for people to understand why you care so much certain things whether it'd be human trafficking, youth ministry, or about AIDS victims in Africa. We have to do that not out of frustration or anger or just for the cause. When we pray and we ask God for wisdom. He's our source and He's the one that has the bigger picture in everything that we do. Without prayer and without God's leading, it doesn't make any sense. Before when I was doing activism, I was so frustrated with the church going, why is the church going so slow? Why doesn't the church care about all the issues that I care about? I just felt very frustrated. Now that I'm in the church, even though the church might be slower, we're doing it together. Even though it is slower, it's going to be there for the long haul because we're raising up individuals, not just workers. People will be raising up relationships and even dealing

with their issues along the way. When we do, volunteer work and activism; a lot of things in us come out too. Even you know, a lot of things that we don't want to deal with, especially if you're doing something like homeless ministry. There's this one quote that I read, it said something like the reason why we don't want to do homeless ministry is because they look the way we feel on the inside. Most people have been through severe wounding but they don't know how to deal with it and don't know how to take it. They hide it away. Going through the storm of our own emotions and our own healing, it takes a lot of bravery and healing.

*What have been your experiences like as a Korean American woman in the community?*

There are benefits; there are pros and cons. I feel like as a woman, in a place like a ministry where people are, women have a certain emotional intelligence, intuition and able to be there. Even sensing people's pain and even being more motherly. It changes the atmosphere when a woman is present. I feel it's really valuable when people carry emotional intelligence and have intuition and people tend to get it right away. They feel more at home. Some of the cons would be because women aren't as physically stronger as opposed to men. Typically if there was a 120-pound woman and a 120-pound man, even though they're the same weight, the man will still be twice as strong as the woman. I've had friends who slept on the streets to understand what it means to be homeless. I would love to do that but I can't do that because of the fact that I am a woman and because it's much more dangerous for me. It's because I'm a woman, I'm made for protection from other people and especially from guys. There have been many times that I wanted to do ministries on my own and I'd be driving homeless people here and there and I realized that was very dangerous. We all need protection. It makes it difficult but I think that it's also beneficial because it makes us work in creative ways. People are more open to Asian Americans than Caucasian Americans when they're doing ministry on the streets because they

feel a little more like they understand what it is like being a minority. When we're not afraid to be vulnerable and show our pain, it makes them more able to show theirs. It breaks down their walls and their defenses faster. They know we're not going to come from the standpoint of white privilege or of doing it like we know everything. We are like a bridge. We can build that bridge.

I think sometimes being a female, people have some pre-conceived ideals of what it means to be a female leader like, maybe she's a figurehead but that is not true. When I was younger, I always felt the need prove myself and now I know who I am so I don't need to. Sometimes they just don't expect a woman. Sometimes they're just wondering, how did you get here and why are you doing this and things like that. Or why are you in ministry and why are your kids so strong? First it's not really about me, it's about God and I'm just there and obedient. Sometimes I'll be walking with my youth leaders and all of them are taller than me. We'll be walking through the church and they'd walk up and say, "Are you involved in the youth ministry"? They would take the guys' hands and say, "Oh it's so nice to meet you"! Thinking that the guy is the youth pastor and there are always assumptions. I understand why they think like that because sadly there aren't that many female leaders, especially more Asian Americans. It's hard! I think being a female youth pastor; there are not as many mentors because of the fact that there are not a lot of women in ministry who are pioneers that are still around. It's important that wherever we step into, that we're covered, especially in the Korean American church.

There are not a lot of positions for Korean American women to step into like positions that are open to them and made especially for them. A male usually does my position and if and when I do well, there's sometimes like a sense of, well who do you think you are? I think that when a woman is in a male's job, it's more of a blow to the ego and so it takes more sensitivity and love because it's not a competition. It's not a pride war. It's not supposed to be anyway,



everything takes time. It's not easy being in ministry period, but being in ministry and being a female and being a minority, and not having as much opportunity as covering and for discipleship makes it a lot harder. Even when women do step up, it creates a whole new world. It opens new doors and it gives girls the ability to dream again. Especially girls who are called to ministry but never get completely validated for that. It's not as easily accessible to women.

*Why do you think it is important to be involved in community?*

There is so much hurt. It takes a village to raise a child and if we don't raise that child or that individual up together, we raise them up and we're punishing the people we're raising up to be criminals or punishing people who we neglected in the first place. When we take care of our community, it makes our community safer and it makes us who we're supposed to be. The more we do ministry, the more we realize that we're not the only one working. When we're alone the enemy makes us feel like we're the only one working or keeps us in shame or fear or isolation. Isolation is very normal in American society, which is why it's unhealthy as well. Coming from an Asian American standpoint where Asians are supposed to be more communal and identify with family, Americans tend to go the way of the independent woman or isolation and that's not healthy. That's one of the reasons for the importance of community. It's amazing to see lives changed because it helps us form our character and perseverance.

*Do you have any advice for Korean American women who might read your story?*

I think the biggest lesson for me is being humble and being teachable. The way that the world teaches is to be this independent woman like Beyoncé. What I mean is being humble and teachable and not doing it alone. I feel like the tendency is for us to do it alone especially if you don't have a lot of people who understand our dreams that God has put in our hearts. Also, it is

important to make time for us to get healed. Taking the time to get healed even if we need to take a month off is really letting God do that healing work in us. It is important to not be afraid to ask for help and not be afraid to reach out for help as well. Also checking us for the right motivation. I get motivation from that.

Another piece of advice is to not be afraid to fail too. There are going to be a time when life is full of mistakes and that is a guarantee. If we let ourselves make mistakes, than we can actually get up from them. If we're even afraid to take the risk of being able to dream and fulfilling those dreams then that chokes us out of the quality of life that God has for us. Every single person has a specific voice that needs to be heard. Every single person has a specific calling to be fulfilled. Every single person has a certain life that fulfills a certain answer to a certain problem that only they can. Even if there are multiple people in the same major as them, the same, you know, emphasis as them, they fulfill a specific need and they are a very necessary person to society. The other one is, other people are always going to try and bring them down especially as minorities. You got to be able to dream. Make mistakes and we'll even fail sometimes but we will keep going.

## **Chapter 8: Two Korean American Activist Women's Testimonial Stories**

Building upon the previous chapter, I present two non-pastoral testimonial stories by two Korean American women living in the Puget Sound region of Washington. These testimonial stories also help complicate notions of activism by revealing details about social change activism about Korean American women whose primary role in the community is not pastoral.

These women are not lead pastors, one is a community volunteer and the other is a businesswoman.

They participate in varying degrees of activism. Like the earlier pastoral testimonial stories, these women also describe their use of Christian beliefs when engaging in activism through religious language. They also share describe their experiences honestly and truthfully. The difference is that their activism and community engagement occurs outside of the Korean church. They describe the centrality of the gospel and the importance of religion in their every day lives. They also describe the challenges and complexities of balancing home, work, and church life. These testimonial stories contribute to emerging histories of Korean American Christian women by representing women whose activism occur outside of the church space.

### **Soona: An Activist and Mother Who Speaks Her Mind**

I was born in South Korea in Kwangju and we moved to Seoul when I was three. I'm going to be 60 this year. It was 1974 when I moved to the United States. We had a wedding in Sioux Falls and we lived there for four years. Because of my husband's job, we moved to Lincoln, Nebraska. He worked there for a year and then went to law school at the University of Nebraska. Then we moved to Seattle in 1985. We've lived here for 27 years.

*What was your first interaction with Christianity or church?*

It was in the third grade when I first went to church. My friend who lived next door took me to church. I couldn't go on Sundays because my mother would know so my friend would take me to a Wednesday evening service. When there was vacation bible school I would attend that too. I think the church was Methodist. I think I stopped going though before I was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

Faith wise, I didn't mind at all when my husband took me to church. There was a story that I still remember. I think it was the story of Abraham. It was a moving story of them in Saudi Arabia somewhere with all the windstorms and how God saved them. The windstorm is hard to survive and they survived. It must have been Abraham's story. This teacher was a great storyteller and I still remember how he was telling this story about the windstorm and faith and I thought, wow! I was little I thought that I needed to come back and listen to that story more! I wanted to know what happened. I still have that memory. I think another memory I have is watching a Christmas pageant, the Nativity story. The place was crowded with children and parents and it was so packed that we were all sitting and somehow, something made people to get out of the church. I literally was almost smothered to death because everyone started going out and I tripped. Everybody was tripping over me. This church was a very small church. In those days there was no pew or anything like that. Everybody was sitting on a wooden floor and it was very poor. At the time everybody was poor. The church itself was very small and I remember hearing how Jesus Christ was born. I think as little as I was, I remembered all of that and I had a lot of questions because I was hearing a lot of Jesus' stories and Old Testament stories. It was so interesting and I wanted to hear more at the time.

Here in Washington, I went to a church that used to be in Wallingford. Initially, I didn't know it was there. The church was 2 blocks away and I walked down and that's how I ended up going there. My husband said that there was a Korean church two blocks away. I felt really grateful for whom my husband is and that he tries to make me, in every way, feel comfortable and happy. He encouraged me to go to the Korean church and I thought, really? If he did not mind watching our two kids, I went but it didn't work out though.

Going to two churches really didn't work out. With the American church, I could just go to church and just come home but the Korean church is not like that. They want you to be involved in the fellowship and all these things. Anyways, I couldn't do that fellowship and I felt guilty leaving my kids and going to Wednesday night service. I was already gone Sunday so it was just way too much for me. And another thing was, Korean people want to be very helpful so they try to give a lot of advice and in some ways, it is like telling you what to do and I didn't like that. I don't like to tell other people what to do. I don't even tell my children what to do now that they're all grown up. I don't tell them what to do, I always tell them, you can filter out what I say but this is what I think.

*What was life like adjusting to America as a Korean woman?*

I think also my husband wanted me to be more than Korean, to be more American. I couldn't speak English and I couldn't adapt to the environment here. But I also wanted to be American. At the same time though I knew I couldn't change. You know the story about how people would come and touch by hair. I thought, I am Korean, so what? As far as I remember, I always had the attitude of, I'm Korean, so what? I can be better than you. Right after we married, my husband wanted me to be a stay at home wife but I never accepted that and I couldn't get any other job except in a factory. But I didn't care; I was not going to stay home. In Sioux Falls, I went to work in a sewing factory. I think I earned \$2.15 an hour.

In church, you know, I don't think people looked at me. I was just there. Nobody approached me. Nobody came to me, shook hands or anything like that. About 27 years ago when I went to 1<sup>st</sup> united Methodist Church here in Seattle I had the same experience. They would talk to the kids but not to me. Nowadays it's different but the people there accepted younger people because they knew how to speak English. They treated younger people in a

normal way but they treated Asians and Koreans differently. They assumed that all Koreans or Asians didn't speak English. They didn't approach me.

Right after we were married like a month or two after, my English was really not there. I sometimes used the dictionary to communicate with my husband too. At the time, I got a telephone call from a Catholic sister; she asked my husband if I was Korean. He said yes and the sister asked if I wanted to help another Korean woman. I said of course and then these sisters picked me up and went to this Korean ladies' house and her husband was Caucasian and she had two children. The older boy was Korean but the second one was from their marriage. She was disturbed because she lived in the US for about three years. There were two other Korean women who lived in Sioux Falls and they were all friends but as time went on, there were a lot of arguments. As a result, she thought that they were going to come and get her. Her house curtains were closed and I couldn't even see if there were people in there and the two children were wild. They were running around like crazy and making sounds and noises. Finally I said, I cannot see, do you mind just opening the window a little? She barely opened them. She was very disturbed and suffering and I thought I don't want to be like that. I really wanted to help her in any way but she wouldn't communicate. She told me; if I want any friend, go to them because she didn't want to be friends with me. If I knew then, what I know now I could've really helped her in some ways. Later I found out that her husband sent her back to Korea to get well. All these years, I wish I could've helped her and I think that carried into Bible Study. I have a passion for helping mentally disturbed women.

*What are your thoughts about community service?*

Before I went to school here in America, I was doing Bible Study with homeless women. The church I went to had ten bunk beds in one room and every day there were always ten women

that came to sleep and then would leave because they had to leave at a certain time. The van would go downtown and bring ten women. They could sleep and then leave around 9:30 or 10. On Sunday mornings I did Bible study with them. That is my heart actually. I was also leading a Bible study as part of BSF (Bible Study Fellowship). It was a women's group. I saw a lot of people who were not poor but mentally disturbed or bipolar. At the time my heart went to them because they wanted the group to pray. There was a lady there who wanted the group to pray so she could quit the medication but psychologist studies shows that you cannot just quit. As soon as you quit, you'll be imbalanced and adjusting that imbalance takes 4-5 weeks.

On another note, because I have kids, I have a lot of community service experience such as being involved with Northwest Harvest. That was ok but it didn't draw me into feeling like going in again the next time. It was hard because the people there didn't draw me. Also, I did downtown Church of Mary Magdalene. I did that a couple of times and it was same way too. They were telling me what to but they didn't draw me in. The place that drew me in was the Asian and Counseling Referral Service. I went there to teach English to Asian people and the leader there, she drew me in. It was fun because the teacher, the young lady was leading and she made it fun for people to come more. She was funny. But, it was very hard for me because even though I personally had an accent problem, I thought I could understand others who spoke English with an accent, but that made it worse. I could not pick up what they were saying. If they didn't speak perfect English, it was harder for me to understand. So, it was hard to teach.

There was a Korean group with all the elderly and there was a Korean woman teaching English and she had a Master's degree in foreign language from UW. She was teaching English to all these elderly. I enjoyed it so much there. Even though sometimes I act like I don't want to

be Korean, deep inside, I know I'm Korean and I want to help Korean people and I think that's what's in my heart. I wanted to pour my heart to help them.

In downtown, there is a Chinese retirement home for poor Chinese people. The government runs it. I went there and applied there to do volunteer work. There was one Korean man and he said there used to be 50/50 Koreans and Chinese. The Koreans all moved out because of tension. This guy didn't mind so he stayed but all the Koreans moved out. I did not like the man who ran it. He was very belittling. He asked me what I studied about ten times. I really don't know what happened; maybe he thought I was crazy for being in school, I don't know. He really didn't like me. He made me clean the table when he knew that I supposed to help with the elderly people. He thought that if I wanted to learn that I would need to start from the bottom and that's what he did so finally I quit.

*Can you describe a little bit more about your experience with church?*

I was in a Methodist women's group for a long time when I went to the Methodist church. We went to that church for almost 19 years. I think I was involved with the Methodist women for 10 years. I led a woman's Methodist group. I went to Methodist woman meetings and luncheons. And at one point, this older lady came to me and said, let's see if you're as smart as your husband. And I thought, what?! They saw me as Korean. I think she said it, let's see if you're as smart as your husband not because he's smart but that I was different. I think if I was Caucasian I don't think she would've said that. All those kind of incidences added up and not because I was being too sensitive. There was one incident when I was teaching Sunday school and I taught bible study for a long time. I was in charge and during a regular Sunday school session, I was teaching 3-5 year olds and they run around a lot. I had to watch what they were doing otherwise glitter went all over. I always looked for a trashcan because I did a lot of



craftwork with the kids. I could not leave the room and go get one. Somehow I always had to go find this trashcan because it was not in the room. I think it was because the janitor either put it away or someone else was using it so I complained about that to one lady. I always thought that I could trust her. I thought I could trust her and I complained about this trashcan that it was missing somewhere. One day another lady, she is much younger than I was, she came to pick her daughter up, and she was very snippy about it. It was almost like she was ready to argue with me. I thought, I could sense that she was ready to argue. She said something very sharply. I was not going to take this so I was trying to get out of the room. She said to me, is that how you deal with your husband? What?!

It was experiences like that that made me think that if I was Caucasian, she wouldn't have spoken to me like that. I think a lot had to do with how they belittled me because I'm Korean and I'm not Caucasian. That church is actually full of lawyers, doctors, UW professors... big business men, they all go there. Here I am leading groups sometimes and do not act like Korean so I think she didn't like that and that's why she snapped at me. Since then, I realized, church isn't all about faith. I am glad I gained faith through Bible Study Fellowship.

Right now, I'm content and busy too. I'm busy with helping my oldest daughter get her house ready and stuff. I am also busy doing yard work and if you see all those flowers, you have to pull them. But I think it's very important to be involved in community. If you are not involved in community, I don't think you can grow up. I don't think your mind will grow up. Because you'll end up being a frog in a pond and you don't see more than what you have.

I still pray. Once in awhile I read the Bible. I don't think it'll ever go away because you are still Christian even if you don't go to church. My children really push me and ask me why I don't go. Ever since I had my first child, my intention was to raise good children. I did every

possible way, even change myself, or change whatever habits, looks, whatever, so that my children could grow up and be a good people and they are good people. I think the children saw me volunteer for many vacation bible schools so they have good faith and I did that so they could go to church.

As soon as my older daughter went to college, it was a battle trying to make her go to church. It was a battle and then when the second one went to college, it was the same thing. My son, he studies theology and questioned us and often said that while he was going to school and studying theology and raised to be Christian, he wondered why we didn't go any longer. He asked, you raised me to be Christian and doing theology, and trying to be ordained, why do you guys not going to church? What is going on? Why? At this point, I feel like a failure in that department, in the Christianity department. In a way, I think I'm disappointed right now. It's not that I abandoned God. I'm just disappointed in life.

*If you could give any advice to Korean American women who might read your story, what would you share?*

I came from a family in Korea, if the father doesn't earn great money; the woman had to do it. My mother did business and she wasn't always home. I think if she was home, she would have straightened the kids out. I think all of the kids would have turned out to be fine. It's a long story. So if I have any advice, which I gave to my sister in law. My advice to any woman who will listen is to stay home and concentrate on your children. I think that is the best advice that I can give to any woman. In fact, you'll think I'm crazy but don't have a baby before marriage but instead wait at least three years. Enjoy yourself but when you have a baby you'll quit everything and start reading books about babies. That's what I did. I read books about babies. I read about how Jews raised children too. For me, it was ok that I went to college late because of my

children, and raising my children was worth it. They turned out to be fine. Now it's my turn, I can do whatever I want to do, like going to school.

**Seattle's Mover and Shaker: Cheryl, a Businesswoman, Youth Leader, Political Leader, and a Born Again Christian**

I was born in April of 1967 in Ma San in the city of Chang Won, South Korea. I am the oldest of four kids and I have a brother and two sisters and when I was seven or eight, my parents immigrated to the US. My mom's sister married a GI and she petitioned us to come. My parents came from a rural area, a farming village. They were farmers and had a little bit of business on the side. I think it was around 1975 or 1976 when we came to the US. My parents came for the future and education of their kids. They had 4 kids and \$1000 in their pocket and that was it. At that time I think it was the maximum that the Korean government allowed for money to be taken converted outside of the country. Just imagine 7 folks coming to the US with a thousand dollars. We initially stayed with my aunt who had petitioned for us, for about a month at her place. Then we moved into a one-bedroom apartment in downtown Seattle for 7 people. We lived there for almost 2 years and during that time, my parents managed to buy a house in Shoreline. I just can't imagine 7 people living in a one-bedroom apartment but we lived there for two years. I grew up in various communities in Shoreline all my life and then went to University of Washington. I'm a Husky! I did my undergraduate in mechanical engineering and then I went to work for Boeing for about ten years and while at Boeing, I also had the opportunity to run for local office.

*Can you describe what your community involvement is like?*

The place I lived in was very well known for the school districts and the education. Washington State had the Growth Management Act, which was basically managing growth

within the confines of the cities to get clumps of community incorporated or annexed into cities. Shoreline used to be an unincorporated part of King County. Under the state's growth management mandate, either bits or pieces of Shoreline were going to be annexed to Seattle or to Edmonds and the School district based community did not want that. They wanted to keep the good school based system so the community leaders got together. About 74% of the citizens said yes we want to incorporate as a city and then we elected local representatives to figure out what the city was going to look like and what services we were going to provide. I ran for the city council, actually the founding City Council. People for icebreakers often say, oh! I built a city in my lifetime and that's exactly what I did. When you incorporate, in essence you are building a city in the state of Washington. As council members, it's a policy-based role. You decide on the budget and you decide on how the services will be delivered. You decide how you're going to deliver police, fire, who are you going to partner with for electricity, road service, and all of that. That was a very interesting process, checking through agreements day after day and understanding how to think about the future. That was a very, very, fascinating and interesting experience for me.

I served two terms and what was interesting was when I ran for office, at that time, I guess I held the title as being the youngest Asian American elected to office. That was kind of cool. I was 27 when elected to office. It is interesting because when the opportunity was there for me to build something from ground up, in essence, it was making history. It was a fascinating concept and exciting opportunity and also an opportunity to make a difference. It was definitely a rewarding experience for me and also for the Korean community, the local Korean community you know the first generation folks. This happened right after the LA riots. So, I think the other cities around the US looked at Los Angeles and were saying, Oh crap. What do we need to do to

prevent something like that? They realized it was political empowerment. I think it was around the time Martha Choe ran for city council. Then the next Korean American to run for office was Paul Shin and then myself.

The community was a lot more aware of the need to be active. There was a lot of encouragement from the first generation to run for this position but also the financial support was overflowing. They wanted to have people participate. I ran the race and won and I think it gave a lot of confidence to the Korean community. Rather than going for congressional or state big races, you can also start small and evolve and grow. I think there was a lot of that thinking. I think in terms of financial support, for a campaign for a small city of 55,000, the support was from Bellingham to Tacoma. The support came from everywhere and obviously the churches played a huge role. I have been a Sunday school teacher since I was a senior in high school. I have been at church and have been serving. The most influential person in my decision to run was my pastor who always said that we really need to look at what purpose we have in life. The pastor asked us, what mark do you want to leave on this earth? To me, to help build a new city, to do something like that at a very young age was part of my purpose.

The initial reaction from the community was, oh my! At the time, Shoreline was about 95% a suburban community. 94% were white and the rest of them were the minority community. I went through the school system there so some were aware of me. The initial reaction was, she's so young! That was a reaction I had to overcome. I think what did help was the fact that I was a professional. I was a female engineer working for a company like Boeing. I think that kind of helped a little bit. I gave the best years of my life to serve my community, to make an impact, to make a difference. That's how I saw it as and I did it. In looking back, it was tough. I was also working full-time. Some days I put in two-hour nights and it was really tough but I'm glad I did

it. When I did run, my pastor and churches were really supportive. For the first fundraising evening, the women of my church prepared all the food. Koreans whenever they get together they have to eat. All the support that they gave it was unreal. It is the network, the church, and friends that I have that really went above and beyond to help out. Then I served and after the first term, I was up for re-election and it was a landslide victory. I served two terms and then I stopped. I did not think it was healthy for somebody to be in that same position. You discontinue challenging yourself and it becomes an everyday norm. Then during my last year in city council, I did my MBA at University of Washington and then after I finished my MBA I had a few options but I ended up going to Microsoft for 10 years.

*What are your thoughts about identifying as a Korean American?*

I identify as Korean American. I think growing up, at that time, we had an organization called Korean American Professional Society, KAPS. It was where the young professionals got together to serve the community and that was also the time I was running for office. It went in parallel. I think it was a combination of things that helped me think of the concept of Korean American. I think being Korean was very strong and bold when I was running for office. A famous reporter for the *Seattle Times* had asked on my primary night or election night, since you're ethnic Korean and you're running for Shoreline city council, does it mean you represent the Korean community? And at the time I said, that's a pretty shallow question. Really well do I really represent the Korean community? I said, am I responsible? I said, No, I think I'm a person who represents the entire community of Shoreline who understands the issues and challenges of multi-, community, multi-ethnic community that Shoreline has. I saw myself as a two for one deal. They get someone who is "American" and someone who understands the various ethnic minority communities that quite frankly comprise America. I think during that election, that the

concept of Korean American was even more solidified. Obviously running for city council in a community where it's 94% white, clearly you had to come to terms with, ok what am I really doing here? Am I really here to represent the American community or the Korean community?

After being elected and making policy decisions and focusing, I did monitor how the city was looking at diversifying the staff and how the city was looking at addressing the needs of not only the majority but also the minority communities. From a policy decision making perspective, I think I was extra careful to not be seen as someone who was just a minority focused person. I wanted to present myself as someone who truly was an American. It was a fine balancing act at times. Damned if you do. Damned if you don't. I guess the ultra liberal would say, "Oh my gosh, you're selling yourself short." Then the other side would say, "You're so focused on the minority and what not community." I passed anti-harassment laws and a few of my colleagues who are clearly on the right and said, why do we need it? I said that there were instances of police brutality where we did need a law. I think that through my campaign and the city council experience, I solidified that I was a Korean American. Even if I was I always got, what are you? Where are you from? I am a Korean American.

*What social issues are you most passionate about?*

Social issues are a tough one. I think the biggest thing and this is the Korean side of the Korean American in me, I wanted to make sure that the Korean community, and the Asian communities truly understood the political system. The political process. I wanted them to understand the empowerment process. I think so many are ingrained in, especially the first generations, the Korean systems, and Korean politics. If you look at the US, all of these very regional powers are locally controlled. It is something very different and new to centralized form of government. My issue was like, look, you're here, living here as an American. Take the

attitude that you're landowners, not tenants. I was trying to drive the first generation to behave and to get in the mindset of being a Korean American rather than a Korean immigrant.

You have to take charge! How do you do it? You got to vote! I think that voter registration was my biggest initiative. That was a social cause. Voter registration was my biggest initiative and focus. For several years, I went as far as translating the voter pamphlets into Korean. It was a nightmare because every district you lived in, you got a different version. I had to get an aggregated one where it covered the King, Snohomish, Pierce Counties because that was where a majority of where the Koreans were and are. It was a huge undertaking and it required at least 40-50 people and with email it got much easier. This included passing and distributing files for people in Korean to translate. Many had used it to help them vote and so, at that time, you did not need to go to the polls to vote. You could vote in the comfort of your home and have your kids explain to you what the ballot issues are. You could also educate your kids to also participate in the civic process. It was 2 years and expensive! It took a lot of work to print those books and ship it but the community was very receptive and raised a lot of awareness and need for folks to vote. I even had my grandma and her friends; they live in the senior housing where a group of 7-8 elderly ladies, come and say, here's my ballot, where should I vote? They all had a coffee session or tea session at my grandma's house. They said to one another, whatever you vote I vote, same thing. The fact is that they registered. They had these ballots and they reached out to me to help them to vote. We've even had some elderly here in Bellevue, who said, I've got this ballot, I'm not sure how to vote, can you spend some time with me walking it through? I've had several coffee sessions with complete strangers and I didn't know they had my phone number based on what I was doing.



For me, you have to pick and choose and some people asked me to focus on North Korea. For me, I cannot even focus on Korea, I cannot focus on Africa, I got to focus on creating a better tomorrow for our Korean community locally. That's pretty much been my focus. Near and dear to me is the Korean community service center. It used to be called Korean community counseling center but now it's called the Korean community service center. It's a health and human services organization that serves the needs of the Korean community. It's definitely a fledgling, shoestring, tough organization that's always on life support. They really help the needs of some recent immigrants and Korean families with dealing with tough issues out there in the community. The Korean language school is also another huge area for me. Every year they do fundraisers and I definitely participate to help them raise money. That's a near and dear cause.

I think social issues are really tough. For example, abortion, I cannot take one extreme view or the other. I don't care what the excuses are. If I were in their shoes, I just cannot picture myself going through that pregnancy and giving birth. But of course the other argument is every life is valuable and God has a plan. So I struggle. I really struggle on that one. I'm definitely not on the hard left. "It's up to the woman whatever she chooses". No. You do need to take responsibility to a certain extent but, then the other extreme, where no matter what circumstances, you cannot. It's tough especially for parents who know that their kid is deformed; do you still carry it to birth? It is a case by case. I haven't found the answer. That is why I don't champion those causes. Maybe call me a copout but I never champion pro or against abortion.

I think the same sex marriage is another tough, tough one. I see both arguments. My position on same sex marriage is that it's not a government; it's not a law. In the Bible, God says you follow my rule, if you do it I will bless you. If not, you will have the punishment. Clearly. Do we really need to dictate by human law? There's human law and God's law. Do you really

need to bring it to the human law to dictate whether it's right or not? And then also, I have a lot of friends, or at least I know people who are homosexuals. It's not a choice that they are making and clearly there are some people who like men who are born with female organs. Ok God, explain that to me. It is a challenging one and that is why I never go behind social causes. It's getting to a point where it's quite difficult. For example, the same sex marriage has gotten enough signatures to make it into an initiative. Washington State is the 7<sup>th</sup> state in the US to approve of same sex marriage. Then, you've got the churches that have gathered over 200,000 ballot signatures to get an initiative to get on the ballot for the November election. It's going to be a tough tight race. The polls indicate that about 53-54% are saying it is ok but it's pretty close. The churches, they are going full steam ahead, getting people registered to vote and to do that. I'm really struggling. It is a tough one.

My childhood friends, who I recently found out, he's pretty much come out of the closet. When we were growing up, he was shy; he was quite on the feminine side and even to his early 40s, he was still single, incredibly brilliant. Then when I returned from Singapore, I heard from another friend that he had definitely come out. Now he's with a partner and raising a child. So if I look at him, I cannot fault him. I've noticed his behavior as a kid. He's struggled with it for 42-43 years of his life. Had I not known people, than I'd be like of course! It's not right! But I know a lot of people and it's tough. Maybe it's a cop out. Maybe God says, you're justifying it and copying out. But, consciously, based on my human relationship, I just cannot rally behind that. But now that I've heard that it's on the state ballot as an initiative, it's going to get tough for me. I think the church community is going to ask me for some leadership and I just can't.

*What has been your experience with community service and activism?*

I also wanted to create a reality as well as a perception that the Korean community is really getting behind civic participation and are voting. One of the big organizations was initially started out as an organization called, KAVA. Korean American Voter's Alliance. I was the founding president. This was about 10 years ago. It was a non-profit organization comprised of registered voters in Washington State. They were all Korean American registered voters. We created a database of 4500 people. This was an organization that was a multi-generation organization. My ability to speak Korean and communicate well really helped bridge that. They collaborated really well. A few organizations do that and they still do to this day. Now it has become KAC and merged with KAHPS. KAVA and KAHPS merged and became a part of the national organization called KAC. We've really made a tremendous impact. When you talk to any politician and say our membership is 4500 voter, registered voters that are impactful. KAC has an ongoing voter registration drive and all that really was the effort of the first generation. Then we've had multiple conventions where for the first time we did, we drove like 3,000 people on a weekday evening to subsequent candidate forums where we had Senator Murray and Cantwell. It was a federal candidates' forum that the Korean community put together. We have 6 federal candidates in front of the Korean American community, answering question on behalf of the Korean American community on small business and North Korea issues. We drove that through KAVA. I served as the founding president.

*What about with church?*

My parents, when I grew up in Korea, they weren't going to church and never heard about church and didn't go to church. When my parents immigrated to Seattle we attended

church. I think back then there was one Korean church in downtown Seattle. My dad somehow got wind of it and he took us four kids but my mom did not want to go. My grandma was a Buddhist. Dad was not a religious man; he went because there were Koreans there so it was a social network. He also wanted his kids to be exposed to the Korean community and I think the Korean population back then was probably like less than several thousand. That was my introduction to church in the third grade.

I enjoyed it and it was definitely an experience to get away. I discovered God in my junior year high school days through a church retreat. I experienced the Holy Spirit and definitely from there that is how my walk with God began. In youth group, I lead a group. In my senior year in high school and first year in college, that's where I got involved in Sunday school. I was the director for our Sunday school for over 20-some years. I was in the same church from day one. I attended Hyung Jae when I was in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Freshman year in high school my folks joined a group of folks that established and founded another church, a Presbyterian Church. It's in Shoreline and has had the same pastor for the last 28 years.

It's definitely been a rewarding experience with Sunday school and youth group. For a couple of years I lead youth group. I actually went to live in Singapore for the past 2 and half years. From 2009 until last September I lived and worked in at the regional headquarters office in Asia, in Singapore. It was a really good experience in my walk with God. I went because I wanted the experience of living and working in a foreign area. I just came upon a church there. It was a mega church and I really didn't care for mega churches really. But Singapore is an island state and is on fire for God. I thought they were a Buddhist nation but with an interesting mix of make up of ethnicities that make up Singapore and the people there have such pure hearts. The gospel just penetrates them and it doesn't bounce back. If you look at South East Asia it's very

interesting because, you have Singapore, the size of the country is the geographical size of Seoul. Dinky! But it is the richest nation in SE Asia. Singapore is the only real wealthy country there. God has a lot of interesting, amazing mega churches. When I first went there for a business trip, I had a friend, a Christian friend who said we could go to church over the weekend. I asked what time was church and she said, 9:30am. I said that I would meet her there at 9:15am and she said that people started to queue up at 7:30am! At 7:30 in the morning they start getting in line to church. Where in the world do you line up for hours to get into church? That's the way it should be. We line up for everything else except for church here. The message was unbelievable and people there, their praises are so passionate. Their hearts are so pure and their obedience is unbelievable. The pastor says so and everybody follows, unlike here. People have every excuse in the book to not obey. To me, faith equals obedience. Through that church, I had a cell group. My cell group met every single week. There was meeting every single Wednesday for prayer meetings and they had worship hours and was so powerful. The pastor was amazing. Through that church, I really rediscovered God. The reason why God sent me off to Singapore, it wasn't for professional development, but for the love of traveling across SE Asia. It really was to, and through some issues with work and what not, to really re establish my relationship with God. If anything I can say, God sent me there so I could re establish my relationship with him and I've been back and leading our youth group kids.

*What are your thoughts about staying involved in community?*

I think it is purpose driven. Today I was listening to Colin Powell and he said, you got to be passionate. You've got to do something that makes you happy, feel good, and is purpose

driven. I think about it and there's purpose behind it. Today's young people, it's really scary to see what's happening out there. More than anything they need God. They also need guidance. If you can couple the belief and faith in God with their individual abilities to have a positive outlook, to overcome difficulties, to develop themselves, I think their chances for success will be good. I have an opportunity to influence them. I'm going to have my youth group kids over at my house, sleep over, all nighters, and lock-ins. That's what keeps me going and at times I do wonder, why are you doing this? Is it because I feel like I'm obligated or what is my motivation? At the end of the day, if I can have an opportunity to change or influence or have a part of the development of that young person, I think it is worth it.

Last night I was taking out a high school senior out to dinner for his graduation and he is an international student and he's returning to Korea. At the dinner, I asked him, so what do you want to do in college? He had no idea. We started talking about what he enjoyed doing and what made him happy. At the end of the evening, I said that hospitality was definitely an area that he would excel in and the light bulb went off. He said, "Oh Teacher, this was a defining moment for me." He now has a better idea of where he wants to focus and channel his energy as he embarks on college and the next steps in his life. That was very rewarding. He also said that the past 6 months have been better than the past 6 years in this country. His walk with God has been unbelievable. He's been attending church three times a week and he's never felt that it's been a waste of his time. Coming from an 18 year old, that's pretty impressive. It's things like that that keep me going and I think that I would like to challenge our young people. Given my personal challenges because my parents immigrated, they spoke 3 words. They came to this country and we had a lot of trials and tribulations. My mom almost died. My dad almost died in accidents. It was if I think about it, incredibly, incredibly painful and difficult. I also look back and realize

that God was guiding me. He had His plan. For example, my dad was actually injured on the job and I accompanied him to hospital visits as a translator for almost 4 years. That experience allowed me to be absolutely conversed in both languages. So, I do simultaneous translations at our church. My pastor, senior pastor's sermon, I translate into English for the main service. Everything, trials and tribulations that you do go through, just like Joseph, instead of looking at what challenges you have today, look at what is the longer term plan that God may have for you.

Easier said than done. Focus on what you have in front of you and rather than what's out there tomorrow. I'm hoping I can instill a community perspective, into some of our young people. I'm out there talking about issues and raising awareness for more people to be involved and engaging more young people to get more civically involved. The Korean community is still quite receptive and they appreciate the work that I'm doing. I think that's the purpose. I can do something to make an impact and there is a purpose behind it. That's what keeps me going and I'll continue to do that.

*How do you define activism?*

I think there's a little bit of difference in my mind about activism and community service. I think activism is a component of community service. Serving the community is a pretty arrogant statement. From a community's perspective, what is needed and what deserves to be serviced can vary depending on the people. I take the general approach, I think consistently the Korean American community wants to make sure that we're represented, our future is established and the challenges that they face as immigrants, whatever challenges they may be, that we have someone who is championing that cause. Championing a cause is activism. Activism is meeting up and trying to figure out the issues, how you resolve it, how you get the

community to rally up, and how to leverage the resources to be able to help. I think I've planted the seeds for people to get active and to participate. I think we still have a long way to go.

*How influence is religion and faith to you?*

Faith is a beacon. People talk about religion and Christianity but at the end of the day, it's a personal relationship with God. It defines your value system and it defines your value. In my relationship with people, in my interaction with people, in how I approach different issues or problems or people, it's obviously based on my values as a Christian. If I veer from that I feel uncomfortable and I feel guilty or I feel pained for having done things that ideally I know as a Christian I shouldn't have been saying or doing. It clearly defines my behavior. At least I try to. It really is my value system and defines how I interact and how I treat people and how I go about doing everything.

I think it goes back to the fundamentals of being Christian. We have been saved because God sacrificed His Son. At the end of the day, that's what it's about. Paul says that we're indebted to the gospel. As a believer we're indebted to the world. I think it's our responsibility; first and foremost, our responsibility is to God. As a demonstration of that relationship I think it's important to serve and share what you have. I've been richly blessed as a daughter of a farmer to having built a city in my lifetime and having the educational opportunity that I've had and having the job and the profession. God has allowed me to see the world. I've definitely been richly blessed and I only think that it's befitting that we share. Also, the Bible tells us to go out. God does tell us to do that so we do need to serve and that is important. It is obeying God's command. It is about purpose. Why do you live your life? At the end of the day, we're all going to go. It's hard to think about it and it wasn't ingrained in me until I lost my dad 6 years ago, quite suddenly to cancer. I lost my dad and realized that we do leave this world and we're



probably the walking and talking time bomb. You and I. Everybody can live this earth doing nothing but self-serving and that's perfectly fine. But, I think given the short time that you have on this earth, how do you want to live it? For me I want to live it at least making a difference in people's lives and giving back for all the blessings I've received.

*What are some challenges and difficulties that you face?*

Straddling between my Christian faith and the expectation of the greater community is one of the challenges. I tend to be more on the bold side. The mainstream community perceives me as a little bit more liberal or as a bold person. The churches see me as a Christian. They don't even question as to where I stand and they know where I stand. I think to be able to straddle between that is a challenge. The other thing is time. There are a lot of commitments at church that require your time. Like Wednesdays, Fridays, youth groups, and Sundays. That is a lot of time commitment. There are also other commitments in the community. To balance that and also, to have me time is really tough. I get squeezed out is on me time. It's really community and church. That's really pretty much all my time. Time is definitely a tough one. The non negotiable is my time to God. As long as you have the non-negotiable and you'll work around it and make it work.

*What is your advice to other Korean American women who might read your story?*

Every single opportunity that comes to your way, whatever it may be, a challenge, or whatever, just realize that whatever you learn, whatever you experience, will always come back to benefit you. So case in point, I was engineering major so we never took courses in the humanities or social sciences. I've had one or two mandatory humanities courses so I took a class called linguistics. When I was doing mechanical engineering, there was an opportunity for me to teach some Korean language classes to Korean air employees who were non-Koreans. A

linguistics professor wrote the textbook they had. They expressed differently the phonetics than how normal average people do.

I was able to understand that book and teach using that textbook because I had taken that linguistics class. That's just one example. I also looked at my example of growing up as oldest of 4 kids who were really the ears, eyes, and mouthpiece of my dad and mom in speaking English. At that time, it was tough, and frustrating. Other kids didn't have to do this for their parents or parents have command of English language how come my parents didn't? You can complain about your experience or you overcome it, and when you do, it does get better. Whatever challenges come your way, suck it up, deal with it. If you do, it'll definitely come back to benefit you. It will really benefit you in terms of enhancing your life. Use it as a tool for you to lean on or leverage later on in your lifetime. Nothing goes to waste. Nothing you do or say or get involved in goes to waste. The one thing that more people should do but don't and I also haven't been able to do very well is to really have some good mentors. I think we're always hungry for good mentors but we're not willing to put in the effort or the time.

We think, wow she's good and we all at least make the first contact. The onus is on you to keep that up. I'm the first to confess, I haven't been able to do it. I let other things distract me and get in the way. It's been a year since I talked to my mentor. I think it's really important and you really have to work at it. People don't consciously put in the time and effort or prioritize because if something comes on our plate, it goes off. It doesn't remain on our plate. People who are successful, do get keep it on the plate and do a very good job. In reflecting, if I could do everything all over again, that's what I would change. One point is that I'm looking to go back to law school. I want to study law. Something I've wanted to do for a long time. I want to study law because it's so powerful. It's so powerful and yet from the Korean community, they see law as

more like a hammer than as a really powerful tool. I want to study that. Do I really want corporate America? Yes for the money and challenge and opportunity. But is there a purpose? I'm contemplating. Law school would be a way of challenging myself and continuing the education. At the end of the day, we all think we're the best things on this earth after sliced bread. On the contrary, we all need that advice and guidance and with that advice and guidance come other benefits too.

## **Conclusion**

Through an in-depth examination of Korean American Christian women's activism between 1940 and 2012, the multidimensional experiences of Korean American Christian women's activism challenges conventional historical interpretations of two aspects of Korean American history. Korean American women's gendered and religious experiences are a valuable American historical narrative. Korean American women's definitions of religious activism and its purposes expand our understandings of activism in the US. This study also encourages scholars to exercise a critical analysis of activism by examining gender and religion.

A tremendous amount of time, energy, and commitment was required to write about Korean American women's history. As discussed in the introduction, participant observations and archival research took the most time. The most emotionally grueling portion of this study was the process of collaboratively editing the Korean American women's testimonial stories. As a fellow activist, community member, and scholar, it is important that I remain committed to the process of creating scholarship that accurately presents the histories of the communities within which I live. It is important to understand that even within the Pacific Northwest region, no two testimonial histories are the same even though they share common experiences.

Korean American women activists use religion to further five types of activism, women's church activism, survival activism, independence organizing, activism by Korean military brides, and "Para" church activism. These types of activism challenge academics to reconsider how historical narratives change when Korean American Christian women's experiences are the central point of inquiry. Korean American Christian women's experiences reveal the centrality of religion or spirituality as a catalyst for women's activism in the Pacific Northwest. This is important because it also asks scholars in the field of Gender and Women Studies to reengage in discussions about the relationship between religion and gender.

This study will help Women Studies scholars to think critically in response to questions about how women use religion to create change and empowerment especially with respect to social justice issues. Women Studies scholars should ask themselves, have we forgotten the relationship we each have with religion and spirituality in its many forms? What histories do we erase when we ignore the influence of religion and spirituality in the lives of women? Given that Women Studies has criticized religion in many ways, is it possible to reclaim the empowering aspects of religion or spirituality to further a vision of equality? This study helps to begin critical discussions in the fields of Women Studies, Religious Studies, and Asian American Studies about the convergence of religion, race, activism, and gender.

This study employed several methods for data collection. Using the snowball sampling method, I conducted twenty oral history interviews. I also participated in informal participation observations at local community events. I conducted archival research and analyzed key texts. I also met with Korean American faculty members and non-Korean American community members to gain knowledge about Korean American history in the Pacific Northwest. Using these qualitative and ethnographic methods, I uncovered details about Korean American women's activist history about religion and religious practice.

With respect to activism, religion and gender, I asked: What is a Korean American woman's theology, how is it defined and in what context does it take shape? I define a Korean American woman's theology as a way of understanding the relationship between God and Korean American women and how this relationship shapes their lives. These women live their day-to-day realities in communities that are constantly influenced by social, cultural, economic, spiritual, and political meanings associated with their Korean and American identities. They

grapple with ideas of race, culture, religion, and gender to identify who they are and what their purposes are. This kind of theology is personal and practiced daily by Korean American women.

Korean American woman's theology does not originate from an academic field, but from a community of Korean American Christian activist women. Korean American woman's theology is defined and understood among Korean American women activists. It is a theology that takes the application of Scripture seriously (and its message about race and gender, among other identity categories) in their lives.<sup>247</sup> More specifically, Korean American woman's theology interprets their experiences by taking scripture verses and analyzes its meanings and implications on an individual level in their lives.<sup>248</sup> Based on how a Korean American woman might interpret scriptural meaning and context she might ask: What practical ways can I live the meaning of this verse in my own life? When this method is applied, their faith is actively engaged. Some may also ask, what makes this theology specific to Korean American women? It is dedicated to the understanding of how Korean American women engage with religion and specifically the practice of Christianity. It is committed to understanding how Korean American women use Christian beliefs to create a more fair and just world.

Korean American women's theology is also about understanding how the gospel of Jesus impacts the lives of Korean American women activists. The testimonies shared in chapters seven and eight demonstrate that the gospel is their main reason for participating in community service. Thus, Korean American women's theology asks, why is this? What is it about the gospel and/or

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<sup>247</sup> The messages from Scriptures about race and gender vary among Korean American women activists. One common understanding of race and gender from Scriptures is that all genders and races are equally valued. This understanding is aligned with gender blind or color blind thinking in contemporary US culture. Another message about gender (or gender roles) that all of the activists agree about it is that any Korean woman can preach or lead a church. It should be noted that Korean American woman's theology not only takes these kinds of messages seriously but also asks questions about the implications of them in the lives of Korean American women.

<sup>248</sup> For example, A Korean American woman who employs a Korean American woman's theology might take a scripture like Jeremiah 27:11 that says, "For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD. They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope," and would analyze its meaning and context and how it applies to Korean American women's lives. New King James Bible fully revised. General Editor. Thomas Nelson Publishers. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008. Print.

about the interaction between the gospel and each Korean American woman that produces involvement in activism? This is an area that I hope to discuss further in a future study.<sup>249</sup>

This study and its claims about Korean American women's theology is also important to scholars in Ethnic or Asian American Studies. As Ethnic Studies and Asian American Studies scholars, we might ask the following questions: What happens to the project of recovering and centering Asian American and other ethnic histories when we ignore how religion shapes lives and communities use religion? How can we re-engage in discussions about the impact of religion and spirituality? Can we participate in these discussions without excluding community members and other scholars who practice religion or spirituality regularly?

As scholars of Religious Studies, many are known for our theoretical perspectives about religious scriptures. Studies in religion are also known for the ways that they analyze and engage religion in a deeply nuanced theoretical way. Scholars are often perceived by non-religious studies scholars for being too theoretical and distant from the realities of non-academic and/or non-religious people. Thus, I encourage scholars of religion to engage in discussions about religion and spirituality in a way that connects to the lived realities of non-academic communities. By connecting scholarship to those who practice religion on a daily basis, any questions about the impact and influence of religion in the lives of real people can be addressed.

This study is written for community members that are Korean American and non-Korean American. Thus, a few questions that I would like to ask community members and activists living in the Pacific Northwest are: In what ways can researchers like myself better understand and work with our communities? Are there other ways can we present community member's

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<sup>249</sup> A future study would first need to analyze scriptures and the contexts from which the scriptures were written. I would also analyze how Korean American women interpret these scriptures and histories and relate these meanings to their lives. I might also consult theological writings by Korean American women pastors. A future study would address the implications that a Korean American women's theology about activism has for theologians and scholars of religion.

stories to a broader audience and how important is that? How can we work collaboratively as committed community members and activists to best portray our stories within the larger narratives about of race, religion, and gender in the US? How has the centering of Korean American women's activist histories made academic scholarship more accessible or inclusive to other community members?

As a Korean American woman scholar interviewing other Korean American women, I used my lens as a point of reference or another window through which to understand how others who are similarly positioned also see and experience the world. It is important to understand that in this ethnographic and archival research, the ideas I came to and conclude with was possible with the generous help of academic colleagues, mentors, and community members. Their ideas and experiences helped to produce the important work revealed in these chapters. Thus, I have gained key insights into Korean American women's activist history in the Pacific Northwest and I invite the reader to continue this journey with me.

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## Appendix 1

## **Korean American Christian Women Activist's Words of Wisdom**

**Crystal:** One piece of advice that I received that I took to heart is about tithing our time. Especially as you get busier, you think, oh I don't have the time, but really if you look, you do. You can find time. If you're passionate about something and you're convicted you will make the time to do it. I think serving God or doing anything for ministry, shouldn't be a 'if I can do it', but a 'I want to do it'. I don't want to waste time because I love God.

**Leslie:** Especially when you're young, you feel like there's a whole list of things that you're passionate about. But start with one. Give yourself to that and get involved and see what kind of time commitment it takes and give yourself to it. Don't give up when the first problem comes around. Nothing is worthwhile unless it's worth fighting for. Ask for help and get advice from people that have been in that particular arena longer than you have. Why recreate the wheel when you could always go to someone who's been more experienced and get good advice.

**Katherine:** To have women around. I had women around me once I had entered the right community that God wanted to have for me. They were really there for me and were loving and patient.

**Jenny:** Try to live your life fully everyday. I think you can do so much in a day and people really slack off. I see myself slacking off too. Live life fully. Be sensitive to what God is doing everyday. If you focus on me doing something, it becomes a day. But if you focus on what God has done in a day, or what God is doing, you have more intention on that. Your perspective gets broader. Don't be afraid to share. You never know what that will bring to other people. When you tell others about something, don't hide it; share it because God truly works in that.

**Alyssa:** This is advice that my pastor gave me, even if you don't know your specific calling. He gave an analogy of a football goal post. You'll want to aim between these two posts: Loving God and loving people. Just shoot between those two and you'll probably be ok. A lot of what you do in life should come from who you are called to in life. Be intentional in what you say and do as much as possible. Be intentional in your relationships.

**Michele:** Don't be the person that will hold you back. You're the only person that can hold you back. Don't let fear be the thing to hold you back. Just do it. Whatever you want to do, you only live once. There's no reason to let anything stand-in your way. I feel that especially being 36 years old right now and I've realized that sometimes I've said no to things but right now, I go, you just better say yes. First of all God is with us, I'll be ok. Let other people disqualify me if they want to but let me be the one to disqualify myself.

**Gina:** I might say just to love their community as best as they can.

**Angie:** My generation, I would call it 1.5 generation, we're in a really unique position where we get a lot of influences of our Korean heritage, like the strong pull of it but also living out most of our lives that are very Americanized and so appreciating how culture influences who you are vs. viewing it as a burden. Understand the value of history. If you did grow up in Korean American

church like me, get outside of that and see, expand your view of seeing just Asian or Christian circles.

**Jane:** I feel like when we grow up, we have that feeling of what should be right or what's in our hearts. I encourage them to just hold onto that and to keep holding onto it. To thrive in that. Make it come outwards and let it become actions, let it become who you are. Find someone to kind of encourage and root for you.

**Carol:** It is not just what we accomplish but also how we accomplish what we set out to do that are just as important. Public service is difficult and not meant to be lucrative and in fact one may have difficult time providing for her family unless independently wealthy. However it does matter who is setting the policy and it is honorable to serve and step up to be a policymaker.

**Soona:** My advice to any woman who will listen is to stay home and concentrate on your children, if you have them. If you don't, try not to have a baby before marriage and wait until after marriage at least three years. Enjoy yourself when you can but when you have a baby, quit everything and start reading books about babies.

**Rose:** We hail from a predominantly male focused community and culture. And that culture goes back for centuries. It is very male centric. I think that, in several conversations with my mom and my grandmother, the untold story is the women, of the culture. I think that there is definitely a place for embracing the fact that I think, just from my own experience; we produce some very strong and intelligent women. So I think Korean American women should be encouraged that they're not the pioneers necessarily that they feel that they need to be but that as you look back at recent history, you will find Korean American women who've done sort of beyond the expectation.

Find a mentor. They're all over the place. They are available. The mentor doesn't necessarily have to be another Korean American woman, I think that's sort of ideal. Don't give up on your search. They exist. You have to kind of find out for yourself what it is that drives you. Finding the originality in yourself and in the genuine spirit of what it is that you want to pursue. Reach for something, don't accept what it is today but reach for something and make a difference. Be active in your community. Whatever that might be. Find a way to marry the idea of what your spiritual gifting is to what, who you are as a person and what you identify as, and that's a Korean American woman.

**Natalie:** I think the biggest lesson for me is being humble and being teachable. Not doing it alone cause I feel like the tendency is for us to do it alone especially if you don't have a lot of people who understand our dreams that God has put in our hearts. Also to make time for us to get healed, really letting God do that healing work in us and not being afraid to ask for help and not being afraid to reach out for help. Checking us for the right motivation. If we let ourselves make mistakes, then we can actually get up from them. If we're even afraid to take the risk of life, being able to dream and fulfilling those dreams than that really chokes us out of the quality of life that God has for us. Every single person has a specific voice that needs to be heard. Every single person has a specific calling to be fulfilled. And every single person has a certain, a life that fulfills a certain answer to a certain problem that only they can. Other people are always

going to try and bring them down, especially as minorities you know. You got to be able to let yourself dream.

**Grace:** Our stories are not unique. The more I talk to other Korean Americans, especially women too; there was so much resonance. Stories of feeling displaced, feeling not belonging in one culture or the other. Trying to negotiate the parent, that generation, our generation. To be reminded that, I feel like it's only the context of community and hearing other people's stories where you feel empowered. I would just say, being courageous enough, this is the biggest thing, being courageous enough to find our voices. Whatever that looks like, having the courage to detach at some level from pressures of their parents. You don't have to feel that your identity has to line up right? Cause sometimes in the midst of our displacement, we've grown up to kind of identity in so many contexts. Loving your friends. So that it's colorful, the life of a Korean American, whatever that means, is not monolithic but it has the possibility of being colorful and how do we embrace that.



## Appendix 2

### One to One Interviews: Interview Script

1. What is your name?
2. For study purposes, may I ask what your age, country of origin, and hometown is?
3. What is your occupation?
4. First, can you tell me about yourself?
5. What is the racial/ethnic identity category that you most identify with?
6. What is your religious identification?
7. What is your current role for work? Can you describe this a bit?
8. What is your current role for volunteer and community service?
  - a. Follow up questions
    - i. Is this a church or a non-profit organization?
    - ii. What does your involvement look like there?
    - iii. How did you become involved in this community?
9. What inspires you to become involved?
10. What keeps you involved in this kind of work/service?
  - a. Follow up questions
    - i. If religion, how so? What impact does religion have on the kind of work you do?
    - ii. How does religion influence your decision making process?
    - iii. Does religion influence how you do activism or participate in social change activities? If so, how?
11. Relatedly, what is your definition of activism? Do you see yourself as one? Why or why not?
12. Do you consider your involvement as activism?
13. What role does religion play in your life experiences and your involvement in community?
14. Do you think being a woman or an Asian American person makes a difference in the kind of involvement you partake in? Has it in the past, present? If not, why?
15. Would you mind sharing any experiences that you have had, while doing what you do, that might give insight into why it is important to be involved in community?
16. What have been some difficulties that you faced in your community service, activism, or workplace?
17. What advice would you give to other Korean American women who aspire to be involved in their communities, specific to any difficulties they might face?