

Towards a Balanced Youth Ministry Theology for South Korea:
From Solemnity to Joy through *Heung*

South Korean youth ministry can be grounded in a theology of joy by examining why joy is underemphasized in these adolescents' South Korean Presbyterian Church context, by acknowledging how joylessness affects Korean Christians, and by recovering the forgotten but innate cultural sentiment *Heung* – a uniquely Korean understanding of joy. The transformational, cosmic, and communal traits of *Heung* offer practical factors that youth educators should consider while restoring joy in its ministry.

By
Eser Kim, Knox College at the University of Toronto
eser.kim@mail.utoronto.ca

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....1

How the Focus on *Han* Influences South Korean Presbyterians in sermons, seasons, sacraments,
and spiritual practices3

Rethinking Christianity and Adolescents.....8

 Rethinking Christianity.....9

 Rethinking Adolescents10

Heung: A Uniquely Korean Form of Joy13

Heung: An Opportunity for Transformation14

Heung: A Cosmic Way to Encounter God.....18

Heung: A Communal Quality.....21

Conclusion23

Bibliography25

Introduction

“Is it wrong to be excited in the church? Do being happy and being Christian not go together?”

The questions came from a student in my ministry who had just been told by her teacher to be more calm and solemn in church, particularly during worship. Her words struck me hard, and I became curious if other teachers would agree. Later that day, during the teacher meeting, I asked the teachers what they expected from the youth, what direction our youth group should go, and what they wanted me to emphasize. I was surprised that their dominant ideas asserted that since youth are not young kids anymore, the teachers hoped the youth could sit down quietly and participate in “holy” worship in a solemn way. Teachers also wanted me to focus more on Bible study and deliver God’s message rather than planning activities for the youth to have fun in the church. In the teachers’ eyes, being excited in the church, enjoying relationships with church peers, and asking questions during my sermons seemed like “just having fun” and were an indication of immature faith. Since youth are not children anymore but “grown-ups,” it was time for them to possess mature faith, which meant being more serious in worship and other church activities. Through this meeting with the teachers, I learned that my church’s youth ministry was undergirded by an atmosphere of solemnity instead of joy, despite youth have the natural inclination toward joy.

Why were the teachers uncomfortable with uplifted youth in the church? Are these opinions only confined to my church teachers? In a nutshell, the answer is no, but the details are more complicated. The religious symbols and language that are dominant in the South Korean Presbyterian Church (hereafter referred to as “the Korean church”) and theology stress the

crucifixion and solemnity rather than resurrection and joy. Western Presbyterian theology, which was delivered by the early missionaries to South Korea, helped lay the groundwork for this pattern. This Western theological flow, starting from Martin Luther and continuing through such landmark theologians as John Calvin and Karl Barth, emphasized fallen humanity's need for salvation over the joy and hope of redemption. Growing out of this introduced theology, South Korean Presbyterianism did not only found its theology on the crucifixion but also elevated its importance. This focus on the crucifixion and on the dialectic between human weakness and the almightiness of God correlated perfectly with the South Korean cultural sentiment *Han* – a deep-rooted, melancholic, and repressed sorrow that stems from oppression or suffering throughout history.¹ Hence, the God who comes to earth and participates in people's suffering accorded with South Koreans' circumstances. However, is Christianity only about Jesus's suffering on the cross? Where did the resurrection and joy go?

The imbalanced theological focus on *Han* is an issue for all generations in the Korean Presbyterian Church, but it particularly feeds into youth ministry. A Korean theology that emphasizes God's suffering love as its focal point misunderstands God, the Bible, and the Christian life. This theology stiffens the church atmosphere and excludes youth, who are less accustomed to *Han* and long for joy more than the older generations. Reintroducing joy to youth ministry promotes a proper understanding of Christianity and better meets the needs of youth. Furthermore, by being grounded in joy, youth ministry becomes more expansive, since joy can incorporate the crucifixion.

¹ An adapted definition from the book Chu Yǒng-ha, *Han'gukhak ūi chūlgōum: Han'guk ūi taep'yo chisigin sūmul-tu myōng i mal hanūn Han'guk, Hangugin, Han'gukchōk in kōt* 한국학의 즐거움: 한국의 대표 지식인 스물두 명이 말하는 한국, 한국인, 한국적인 것 [The Joy of Doing Koreanology: Twenty-two scholars Sharing What is Korea and Korean] (Seoul: Humanist, 2011), 18.

South Korean youth ministry can be rooted in a theology of joy by examining why joy is underemphasized in these adolescents' South Korean Presbyterian Church context and by recovering the forgotten but innate concept of *Heung* – upbeat and pleasant but multilayered energy that arises from the unity between the self and the world or an object.² To foster a change in youth ministry, this research will start by looking more closely at how the cross and solemnity became the core values in modern Korean Christianity to discover in what ways that imbalanced focus is affecting the church. In the next section, I will argue that, although the cross is a significant element in faith, joy cannot be underestimated or ignored in ministry but must instead be cultivated. Lastly, I will focus on the concept of *Heung*, which can make youth ministry more holistic and grounded in joy.

How the Focus on *Han* Influences South Korean Presbyterians

Han is a psychological word that describes the “depth of human suffering.”³ It is often described as one of the most basic communal sentiments that is unique to Koreans; the concept is not found in classical Chinese or Japanese literature, while *Han* is depicted in several important contemporaneous pieces of Korean classical literature.⁴ Although in academia the specific definition of *Han* is still debated, scholars commonly define it with the combination of these

² An adapted definition from the Encyclopedia of Korean Culture. Shin Yeon Woo, “Heung,” accessed September 11, 2018, <http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/Contents/Item/E0077363>.

³ Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart of God: the Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 15.

⁴ Kim Yeol Gyu, “Han,” accessed September 11, 2018, <http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/Contents/SearchNavi?keyword=%ED%95%9C&ridx=1&tot=9255>.

words: unresolved, accumulated, deep-rooted grudge, bitterness, and sorrow.⁵ These emotions accumulate because the intense feeling of suffering was silent, inward, and inexpressible due to a national belief that revealing honest feelings of pain is immature.⁶ *Han* usually originates from other people or natural disasters.⁷ To be specific, it results from a history of anxiety and atrophy that is saturated with constant civil war, invasions by surrounding countries, and colonization.⁸ In addition, poverty, violations of human rights by dictatorial regimes, and media blackout internalized people's grief and anger.⁹ These historical experiences piled on as time passed and continually generated a recoiling psychology within people's minds.

The sentiment was passed down for decades; however, in the 1970s, Minjung theology¹⁰ formally incorporated the notion of *Han* into Korean theology. Minjung theology grew from a

⁵ The scholarship on *Han* reveals an array of slightly different definitions of the term; as Andrew Park asserts, *Han* is hard to translate even in Korean. The following sources represent the spectrum of perspectives: Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart of God: the Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), Chu Yōng-ha, *Han'gukhak ūi chūlgōum: Han'guk ūi taep'yo chisigin sūmul-tu myōng i mal hanūn Han'guk, Hangugin, Han'gukchōk in kōt 한국학의 즐거움: 한국의 대표 지식인 스물두 명이 말하는 한국, 한국인, 한국적인 것* [The Joy of Doing Koreanology: Twenty-two scholars Sharing What is Korea and Korean] (Seoul: Humanist, 2011), Kim Jung Jun, "Theology of Han", *The Christian Literature Society of Korea* 23, no. 12 (December 1979), Encyclopedia of Korean Culture, Wikipedia, Korean Language Dictionary.

⁶ Kim, "Han."

⁷ Kim Jung Jun, "Theology of Han," *The Christian Literature Society of Korea* 23, no. 12 (December 1979): 55.

⁸ Chu, 18.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ "The birth of Minjung theology came about through the Korean Christians' experience in an era filled with injustice and corruption in Korean society and politics, and their attempt to find ways to correct the situation." Kim In Soo, *History of Christianity in Korean* (Seoul: Qumran Publishing House, 2011), 527.

"Minjung theology is an accumulation and articulation of theological reflections on the political experiences of Korean Christians in the 1970s. It is a theological response to the oppressors, and it is the response of the oppressed to the Korean church and its mission." Minjung theology also identifies itself with the narrative of Exodus. If Minjung theology is to be interpreted in light of the principles found in history and the truth of society, then the priority of the church is to be with the Minjung (those who are publicly outcast, poor, weak and in need of help). David Kwang-Sun Suh, "A Biographical Sketch of an Asian Theological Consultation," in *Minjung Theology: People as the Subject of History*, ed. Commission on Theological Concerns, Christian Conference of Asia, Revised ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 16-22.

belief that South Korean Christians need to enculturate their theology instead of uncritically accepting Western doctrines into the South Korean context despite cultural differences. The focus of Minjung theology was on people who are being oppressed, and the core element in the political consciousness of the oppressed was *Han*.¹¹ Hence, Minjung theologians focused on the notion of *Han*, and joy became alienated within South Korean theology and the church. Although Minjung theology ended as a passing fad, this perfect intertwining of Korean sentiment and a Western theology that focuses on the cross penetrated every aspect of South Korean churches, including sermons, seasons, sacraments, and spiritual practices.

Korean sermons are largely embedded in the meaning of suffering, temperance, devotion, and God's unconditional love. Fred Craddock asserts that traditional Western sermons are both rational and moralistic,¹² which is also the case in South Korea. These sermons tend to be very narrow in ethically applying the Christian narrative to modern life. The heavy concentration on Jesus's suffering in sermons functions to instill guilt and motivation: "God sacrificed even God's son. Jesus came to the Earth for us, so why not follow Jesus' path." If joy is proclaimed in the pulpit, it is usually not about a God who rejoices or is delighted; rather, the sermon spotlights the kind of person whom God enjoys or the types of prayers that please God. These sermons often finish by glorifying a pious or ethical life. Although this message is necessary in sermons, it gives little room to present joy.

Liturgical seasons also show how much Korean churches are rooted in the crucifixion. In South Korean Presbyterian churches, the most celebrated seasons are Lent and Advent. Around

¹¹ Suh, "A Biographical Sketch of an Asian Theological Consultation," 24.

¹² Fred Craddock, *As One Without Authority: Fourth Edition Revised and with New Sermons*, Revised ed. (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001), Ch.1.

Lent and Good Friday, many churches develop and encourage several programs and practices. Yet Easter is celebrated for only one day, and the season of Pentecost, which is also known as the “fifty days of joy,” is barely observed and is treated as one normal Sunday. The whole church dives into a time of deep sadness before Easter through various Lenten practices,¹³ dawn prayers, and Lenten sermon series. Through this season, the church teaches the congregation to live a reserved life and portrays joyfulness as blasphemy against the cross. It seems that the congregation deeply assimilates itself into the sadness to such a point that even on Easter Sunday people cannot recover from Lent. In other words, the immoderate meditation over Jesus’s suffering and accentuation of abstinence makes it hard to spring back from deep sorrow to rejoice in resurrection. Although mourning during Lent is necessary, we should remember that the cross connotes not only death but also resurrection. The church should highlight the transformative aspect of the cross that changes our sorrow to joy and prolong the joy of Easter instead of belittling it as a one-Sunday event.

Advent is also deemed a season of waiting in tribulation rather than a story of joy. In Korean homiletics, theologians argue that, although Advent is related to Christmas, it is a season of remembrance of the end, death, and judgment rather than of joy.¹⁴ It is understood as a season to remember Jesus Christ, who came to die for us.¹⁵ This understanding is derived from a misunderstanding of eschatology. Jürgen Moltmann, a pioneering theologian on the topics of

¹³ Many Christians fast or, in current days, give up certain luxuries in order to replicate the sacrifice of Jesus Christ's journey into the desert for forty days.

¹⁴ Kim Gyung Jin, “Liturgical year” (class note from Introduction to Worship at Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary, Seoul, 2014 fall semester).

¹⁵ Ju Seungjung, *Ŭnch'ongŭi Kyohoeryŏkkwa Sŏlgyo* 은총의 교회력과 설교 [Grace, Liturgical year, and Homiletics], (Seoul: Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary Press, 2014).

eschatology and hope. on theology of hope, helps to revise this misunderstanding of eschatology. He asserts that everyone is judged when the end time comes, but for those who believe in Jesus, this is a time not only of judgment but also of hope. The whole of creation will rejoice without being terrified.¹⁶ Yet, even though it can be a pleasure to wait for Jesus Christ because God, who fulfills eschatological justice and joy, is coming to us now,¹⁷ Korean worship leaders state that joy is to be addressed only after Jesus' incarnation on Earth, not during Advent. These liturgists should rethink the linear timeline (past, present and future) to understand that the future is coming towards the present.¹⁸ Hence, even in Advent, we can rejoice because God and the future that fulfills eschatological justice and joy are coming to us now. In the midst of this reality, humans are able to laugh and brush away their tears because of eschatological joy.¹⁹

The conventional understanding of eschatology also influences how sacraments are observed. The sacrament of communion is solemnized in South Korean churches, where liturgists emphasize the suffering of Jesus; as Michael Welker asserts in his book, quoting Immanuel Kant, churches generally think of holy communion as "a sad colloquy."²⁰ Churches neglect the blessing and thanksgiving that are also traits of communion and give the possibility to celebrate communion as a festival.²¹ We can construe communion not only as Jesus' funeral but also as a festival because we partake of the bread and drink from the cup in appreciation of

¹⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, First ed. (Princeton, NJ: Augsburg Books, 2004), 58–65.

¹⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology and Joy* (Hymns Ancient & Modern Ltd, 2013), 46-58

¹⁸ Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, 58–65.

¹⁹ Moltmann, *Theology and Joy*, 46–58.

²⁰ Michael Welker, *What Happens in Holy Communion?* trans. John F. Hoffmeyer, First Printing ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: London: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 6.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

the overwhelming grace of Christ.²²

Moving from corporate practices to individual spiritual practices, monastic ascetic spirituality has been the theology most consonant with the Korean church. The monastic movement began with the recognition that Christian faith involves following the narrow and steep way to the cross on Golgotha. Monasticism's core values are poverty, chastity, and obedience. It emphatically advocates temperance, abstinence, and solemnity rather than joy. These values have affected South Korean Presbyterians' everyday life; people have considered living an austere life and trying to follow the narrow path that Jesus walked, a pattern that Christians must follow. People have shown reverence toward those who have lived ascetically. Although the ascetic life can be one of the virtues that Christians should follow, overly accentuating the ascetic life has engendered an imbalanced theology where joy, flourishing, and happiness are deemed less important or even unnecessary.

The theology focused on *Han* and crucifixion has shaped the Korean Church to ping-pong between didactic and earnest belief. The church's practices and conventions, vice versa, has reinforced the theology to prioritize solemnity over joyfulness.

Rethinking Christianity and Adolescents

Practical theologians should consider two factors while perusing the literature of their field: theory and context. In the case of South Korean Presbyterian theology, the passion of Christ and the culture of *Han* are the theory and context. Yet this theory and context give only a

²² James F. White, *The Sacraments in Protestant Practice and Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 100-110.

partial understanding of Christianity and youth ministry. Although the Bible accentuates the suffering of Jesus on the cross, it also demonstrates a God who rejoices and a people of God who are filled with joy; theology ought to reflect both. The context is also changing, particularly in youth ministry, where Han is not currently the central sentiment.

Rethinking Christianity

The appearance of joy throughout the Bible gives us one reason why joy cannot be neglected in youth ministry. Scripture contains ample evidence of both divine joy and the joy of the Israelites. At the end of creation, God looks over creation and is pleased, saying it is “very good” (Gen. 1:2).²³ Zephaniah reveals that God is not a holy other but rejoices over humans by stating, “The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing (Zep. 3:17).” The book of Nehemiah also demonstrates that God possesses and experiences joy by writing “for the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh. 8:10).

Alongside all the evidence of divine joy, biblical narratives demonstrate that the people of God also rejoice. First Chronicles reports that “there was joy in Israel” when all the twelve Tribes of Israel gathered together and fought for David (1 Chr. 12:40). After Esther saved the Jews, we read that, “For the Jews there was light and gladness, joy and honor” (Est. 8:16). The Psalmist proclaims that “all who take refuge in you [God] will rejoice” (Ps. 5:11). In the New Testament, Luke describes the salvation of Christ as great joy:²⁴ “rejoice that your names are

²³ All scriptural citations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1989.

²⁴ Marianne Meye Thompson, “Reflections on Joy in the Bible,” in *Joy and Human Flourishing*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Justin E. Crisp (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 18.

written in heaven” (Lk. 10:20). John introduces a Jesus who spoke to his disciples regularly about the pure joy that he will give to them.²⁵ Paul describes joy as the substance of the kingdom of God: “For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17). Joy is also included as a fruit of Spirit, along with eight other elements (Gal. 5:22).

These many examples are not exhaustive. We can see that the Bible does not only demonstrate a people of suffering, abiding by God’s law or Golgotha’s path for Jesus, but also contains abundant references to joy.²⁶ Therefore, joy must be restored in youth ministry, since all people are blessed by God and claim that their lives can rejoice in God.

Rethinking Adolescents

Another reason for reincorporating joy, aside from imbalanced theology, is that the national sentiment of South Korean youth is changing. Youth ministry leadership often leave joy unacknowledged in the face of youthful angst. Adolescents’ developmental stage is mostly characterized by identity crisis and role confusion; therefore, they are in the most chaotic time of their lives.²⁷ Adolescents undergo rapid internal and external changes as they grow, including, among other things, psychological changes, physiological growth, and societal expectations of

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ For more biblical text about joy and the bible refer to *The Gift of Joy*. Christian Duquoc, eds., *The Gift of Joy* (New York: Paulist Press, 1968).

²⁷ William Crain, *Theories of Development: Concepts and Applications*, Fifth ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2005), Ch.9.

adolescents.²⁸ In South Korea, a popular joke is that North Korea will not invade South Korea because even they fear the youth who are undergoing a myriad of changes and therefore are rebellious and resentful. This joke shows how troubled adolescents are.

In addition to this conventional perception of adolescence, South Korean society and churches view their youth's adolescence as more tragic than that of Western youth, as Korean teens are forced to run toward one aim: succeeding in college admissions. Koreans criticize the college admission system for several reasons; the system makes adolescents compete with their peers, the education is too standardized, and there is no room for self-reflection beyond rote memorization of test content. The immense academic pressure of the South Korean educational system enrolls adolescents in endless after-school programs and extracurricular activities in an effort to pursue a flourishing life. Students undergo ten months of a school year, averaging nine hours in classes per day and completing about eight hours of extra after-school study programs.²⁹ Hence, the dominant messages proclaimed in youth ministry are empathy for adolescents' situation and comfort focused on the crucifixion. However, while the conventional understanding of youth is proven and accepted by society, anguish, upheaval, and sorrow are not the sole characteristics of youth. They also experience joy, happiness, and passion.

Furthermore, as Korea has leapt into the ranks of developed countries and now suffers less from outside oppression, the young generation's sentiment is changing to a longing for *Heung* instead of *Han*. To youth, the history of *Han* has become an old story of their ancestors, not a journey that they are currently walking. When we confine the age range of Korean youth

²⁸ Ibid., 281-283.

²⁹ Ana Singh, "The 'Scourge of South Korea': Stress and Suicide in Korean Society," last modified October 31, 2017, accessed December 4, 2017, <https://bpr.berkeley.edu/2017/10/31/the-scourge-of-south-korea-stress-and-suicide-in-korean-society/>.

from twelve to eighteen years old, we realize that they were born after the 2000. This is a generation that has not experienced national economic deficiency, the Korean war, military regimes, or a war of aggression. Not only do youth not identify themselves with the sentiment *Han*, but youth also do not find it difficult to express their anger, sorrow, or any other feelings. In fact, youth are comfortable with expressing their feelings and their individuality. In the times of older generations who experienced oppression and suffering, totalitarianism was one of the reasons why South Korea achieved rapid economic growth, so these generations had to adapt to the needs of others, of society, or of the greater good. However, nowadays youth are not hesitant to pursue personal taste and enjoyment.³⁰ Whereas the older generation worked hard in pursuit of overcoming poverty, today's youth are more relaxed and spontaneous and value enjoying their life over hard work.³¹ The book *2018 Korean Trends* also underscores that youth are longing more for fun, joy, and happiness.³² Even in their spare time, instead of doing productive work, teenagers are more likely to listen to music, dance and party, play video games, browse social media, or satisfy their taste buds.³³

The church needs to aim for a more expansive theology, realizing that adolescence is not only about suffering but also about joy. Neglecting the notion of joy can isolate teens' lives

³⁰ Park Jin-Kyu, "A New Direction for Better Understanding of Youth Culture in Postmodernism an Age," *Korea Institute of Youth Facility & Environment*, (May 2007): 20, accessed September 3, 2018, <http://www.earticle.net.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/Article.aspx?sn=169511>.

³¹ Ko Yohan, "Perspectives on Youth (Culture)," *Christian Language Culture News Letter* 7 (June 2006): 51, accessed September 7, 2018, <http://www.earticle.net.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/Article.aspx?sn=50084>.

³² Kim Nan-Do, *T'ürendü K'oria 2018: Söuldae sobi t'ürendü punsök sent'ö üi 2018 chönmang : 10-chunyön t'ükyölp'an* 트렌드 코리아 2018: 서울대 소비 트렌드 분석 센터의 2018 전망: 10주년 특별판 [Trend Korea 2018: Seoul National University Consumption Trend Analysis Center 2018 Outlook: 10th Anniversary Special Edition], (Seoul: Mirae üi Ch'ang, 2017).

³³ Park, *A New Direction for Better Understanding of Youth Culture in Postmodernism an Age*, 22.

inside the church from their lives outside the church because of the difference between what is taught at church and the nature of youth. It is crucial for youth to know that Christianity is also about joy and that God is already rejoicing for them. This will help them to live a more holistic life, gain faith that is more relevant to them, and cope with adversities more effectively.

***Heung*: A Uniquely Korean Form of Joy**

How can youth ministry overcome this overemphasis on the cross of Jesus? We can find a clue in the notion of *Heung* – upbeat and pleasant but multilayered energy that arises from the unity between the self and the world or an object.³⁴ Throughout Korean history, *Heung* has been a way to both overcome and embrace *Han* by commemorating suffering and transcending tragedy, thereby embodying paradoxical sentiments to make a richer theology. Examining the attributes of this redemptive sentiment *Heung* through South Korean history, customs, and literature offers several practical factors for restoring joy in youth ministry.

Joy is a universal feeling; however, it is expressed or developed in different ways in each nation. *Heung* is a uniquely Korean understanding of joy that developed alongside the history of *Han* in everyday life through traditional poetry, buffoonery, and dance.³⁵ We can appreciate three core traits of *Heung* that can be used to ground youth ministry in joy: *Heung* is transformational, cosmic, and communal.

³⁴ An adapted definition from the Encyclopedia of Korean Culture. Shin Yeon Woo, “Heung,” accessed September 11, 2018, <http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/Contents/Item/E0077363>.

³⁵ Kim Baikgyun, “A study of contingency and true heart on ‘Xing(興)’,” *Philosophical Investigation* 21 (May 2007): 72, accessed August 26, 2018, <http://www.dbpia.co.kr/Article/NODE01949331>.

Heung: An Opportunity for Transformation

How did Koreans manage the *Han* that was accumulating in them throughout the repeated history of oppression and invasion? They neither suppressed the sentiment nor ignored the feeling but managed it in their own way. First, Koreans deeply lamented, and then instead of turning aggressive, they reversed their feelings of oppression and suffering into laughter, found it an opportunity to grow, and proceeded toward healing from the hardship.

Koreans overcame the emotions of *Han* using *Heung* through antics and laughter that transformed sorrow into joy. *Heung* was a natural way that people discovered to release *Han*, so they ritualized it. Through folk songs, dances, and plays, *Heung* helped release *Han* cathartically. To be specific, the *Han* of suffering that Koreans had accumulated could be transformed into the wisdom of life in harmony with *Heung*, which revived them.³⁶ Due to their effort to express *Han* in a positive way, Koreans could avoid experiencing depression, inducing violence, and falling into a nihilism that ends with resignation of self.³⁷ Therefore, in Korea, *Heung* is not only characterized by exuberance, fun, or excitement but also includes an element that transforms sadness.³⁸ *Heung* can be understood as a form of joy notwithstanding one's circumstances. Transforming the sadness into laughter helped people endure times of suffering, and that endurance led to maturity and firmness.

³⁶ Shin Bong Hee and Chung Ji Hye, "Study of Experiential Perception of "Heung" in Korean Dance," *Journal of Korean Association of Physical Education and Sport for Girls and Women* 25, no.4 (December 2011): 56, accessed June 20, 2018, <http://www.dbpia.co.kr/Article/NODE02480969>.

³⁷ Shin, "Heung."

³⁸ For further understanding, I would compare the concept *Heung* with an emotion that can arise when listening to jazz music. Jazz has its upbeats and exuberance, but it simultaneously arouses sadness because it reminds the listener of a society in which racial discrimination and oppression of African Americans was rampant. Jazz music makes people laugh, but it also moves them.

The folk songs, dances, and poetry that always accompanied *Han* were followed by a healthy sense of humor that ordinary people enjoyed in their daily lives. One of the traditional folk arts, mask dancing,³⁹ characterizes people in a good-humored way. It portrays the life of the oppressed, satirizes aristocratic intellectuals, and criticizes male-dominated society, but the performers never forget to hold onto *Heung*.⁴⁰ Kwang-Sun Suh, a representative of the first generation of Korean Minjung theologians, describes the outcome of mask dancing as follows: “People’s laughter, jokes, dances, and shouts are themselves expressions of the tenacity of purpose for life; and therefore, they find newness and a revival of the spirit to persist even though they continue living the wretched life of the oppressed.”⁴¹ *Heung*, which Korean ancestors never disregarded, nurtured resilience and hope.

Along with mask dancing, *Heung* is also presented in Korean traditional dance moves, which express *Heung* through refined, slow movements, in contrast to conventional expressions of joy that are fast and energetic. The beauty of Japanese dance is in tragedy, such as the beauty of death, but Korean dance has a strong will to survive, stay alive, and finally reach joy. To reach joy, paradoxically, dancers believe that slow movements and even pausing for stillness create a way for dancers to sublimate *Han* into *Heung*.⁴²

These traditions demonstrate that Koreans never let sorrow have the last word, but tried to encompass both sorrow and joy in their culture and used *Heung* as a way of transforming the

³⁹ Mask dancing, also known as Tal-dancing, is a performance by one or more actors that dramatizes a scene in which the actors wear masks and dress up as persons, animals, or supernatural beings (god). Most mask dances in Korea are composed of dance, music, and dialogue. Suh, 27.

⁴⁰ Shin, “Heung.”

⁴¹ Suh, 27.

⁴² Shin and Chung, 63.

“abysmal experience of pain.”⁴³ What we should remember in youth ministry is that the cross similarly never ends with suffering or death; it has the power to transform sorrow to joy. We can find the transformative traits of the cross in Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians. Paul writes that he “rejoice[s], not because you were grieved, but because your grief led to repentance” (2 Cor. 7:9).⁴⁴ The Gospel of John also asserts that Christian joy can start from suffering: “you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy” (Jn. 16:20). The disciples could confess this to be true because of the resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus was never a superficial matter that should be considered after death, but it was about the here and now that fosters a life worth living in the present. Forgetting the transformative attributes of the cross and belittling the power of *Heung* can cause youth to stay trapped in crucifixion and *Han*. By recovering the transformative essence of *Heung*, the church has an opportunity to recast the cross in a way that helps usher move through *Han* with resilience.

To apply this *Heung*-informed theology of the cross, one way to nudge youth ministry toward joy is the reinterpretation of liturgical seasons such as Advent and Lent as opportunities for transformation. The seasons where youth ministry has previously dwelled in solemnity give us a chance to advance from sorrow toward joy, a joy that we can taste in the midst of suffering. As the cross was not only about anguish but also showed the possibility and power of change, it can communicate to youth that life is about allowing joy amidst youthful angst. Furthermore, churches must not only proclaim the transforming power of the cross but also celebrate Easter and restore the joy of every Sunday. Some Christian traditions deny Lenten practices, asserting

⁴³ Park, *The Wounded Heart of God*, 15.

⁴⁴ Woo Jaegug, “Theology of Joy,” *Catholic Theology and Thought* 4 (December 1990): 166, accessed September 14, 2018, <http://www.dbpia.co.kr/Article/NODE01543470>.

that we are living in resurrection every day. We do not have to neglect or jettison Lent or Lenten practices, but we need to remember that every day is Easter. The joy of Easter embraces the sufferings in our ordinary lives.

Youth ministry needs a broadened explanation of the cross that also associates the Passion of Christ with the passion that youth possess. The cross of Jesus provides not only mere comfort to youth, but also the love, purpose, and fidelity that they are seeking. Kenda C. Dean, a renowned scholar of youth ministry, asserts that youth desire to die for something. This desire can relate to the Passion of Christ, a love for which Jesus voluntarily died for us.⁴⁵ However, since youth's longing to embody sacrificial love could not be resolved in the church, it led them to meander in the world looking for a purpose that they can die for. Although, the context of Dean's North American youth is different from those in South Korea,⁴⁶ it is true that the message of the cross as traditionally preached is not connecting with youth. In the Korean context, and in other applicable setting, when the church moves beyond mere comfort to guide youth to find their meaning and purpose in the message of the cross, adolescents' overflowing passion can convert into an authentic joy. When adolescents' purpose is oriented in the right way, genuine joy can be cultivated. This joy comes from finding their passion in the Passion of Christ.

Given the historical proof that *Heung* is an innate sentiment in Koreans, youth ministers should acknowledge that fact and create a space⁴⁷ for youth to let their *Heung* burst out by

⁴⁵ Kenda C. Dean, *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passion Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 52.

⁴⁶ Dean states that North American churches barely discuss the Passion of Christ, as opposed to churches in South Korea, where the Passion of Christ is all that is discussed.

⁴⁷ "Space" means not a geographical location but room for joy.

emphasizing that our everyday life is in the resurrection. They may also orient youth's passion toward a holistic understanding of the cross, where joy can, surprisingly, be generated. We can create this space by proclaiming the transformational interpretation of the cross. Since the cross embraces and transforms suffering because of the resurrection, we do not have to set aside suffering to bring joy into the church; as we saw in the concept of *Heung*, joy can be a tool to embrace the cross and can even be fostered through the Passion narratives.

Heung: A Cosmic Way to Encounter God

Another component that we can consider when trying to restore joy in youth ministry is where *Heung* is evoked. A theology that overly accentuates the cross can generate the idea that solemnity is the true virtue of Christianity and that joy is irreverent; however, joy is a way to encounter God. In Korean history, *Heung* did not only transform *Han* but was also a way of finding divine truth, and nature in particular was a medium for that discovery. Yi Hwang, a highly respected sixteenth-century Neo-Confucian Korean scholar, described *Heung* in this way: “through singing, dancing, and running, my contaminated mind is washed, and an emotion arises that unites me with the cosmic.”⁴⁸

Heung provides an access beyond the self that is commonly provoked through being in communion with nature. For instance, Geug-in Jeong, a pioneer in a genre of Korean literature that mixes poetry and songs, writes that joy is revealed by becoming united with nature: “As winter passes and spring returns, all things are born anew, and through the lively interaction between human and nature, they accord in harmony. Birds cry out due to the power of spring,

⁴⁸ Shin, “Heung.”

and from deep inside a human mind, *Heung* bursts out naturally.”⁴⁹ Geug-in Jeung asserts that humans can observe, be part of, or be united with nature. He states that when people commune with nature, the feeling of being connected to the cosmos occurs. Along with this literature, several ancestors wrote poems expressing *Heung* evoked by nature and feeling merged with an other that is bigger than themselves.⁵⁰ For instance, numerous folk songs⁵¹ say that, due to the clearness of a spring sea where the sun is shining and the waves are sparkling, *Heung* arises, and the fisherman even forgets that he needs to fish and instead sings a song in awe, gazing on the scenery.⁵²

All of this literature on *Heung* teaches us that nature and experiencing unity with nature beget joy. The popularity of outdoor trips in youth ministry demonstrates this lesson, too. Every spring and fall, when the weather is breezy, Korean youth educators are busy taking their youth out to the mountains or riversides. Usually the schedule is packed with hiking, ziplining, exploring, barbeques, and most of all trying to find God in the midst of the wilderness. The hymn “How Great Thou Art,” a hymn that praises God and God’s creation, is the anthem of these adventures. Youth love to be out in nature and away from their daily distractions. Although on the last day of the trip almost every youth appreciates their experience – they had fun, made good

⁴⁹ Kim Hyejin and Kim Jongcheol, “A Study of Education for Understanding Koreans’ Emotion of ‘Heung(興)’ in order to improve intercultural competence: With Focus on Classical Literatures,” *Journal of the International Network for Korean Language and Culture* 12, no. 1 (April 2015): 92, accessed September 1, <http://dx.doi.org/10.15652/ink.2015.12.1.079>.

⁵⁰ Choi Jae Nam, “A Study on the Embodiment Condition of Heung(興) and Sirum(시름),” *The Studies in Korean Poetry and Culture* 24 (2009): 13, accessed August 21, 2018, <http://www.riss.kr/link?id=A76616207>.

⁵¹ Dosansibigok 도산십이곡, Eobusasisa 어부사시사, Eogaja 어가자, Gosangugokga 고산구곡가.

⁵² Choi, 16.

friends, and somewhat meditated on God – the touch of this experience fades away ephemerally. Taking the youth on nature excursions is a prominent start for faith formation; however, why does the impact of the experience barely last? Furthermore, due to economic growth, the church is not the only place where youth can find opportunities for field trips. Currently, numerous organizations provide good quality outdoor trips, sometimes better than the church's programs because of the capital they have.

For the experience to last longer and impact the life of the youth more substantially, the youth must experience transcendence, a connection to something larger than myself, or enlightenment inside their hearts. Something more is needed than solely having fun. Instead of piling up the outdoor trip with programs and inculcating youth with the lessons their educators want them to learn from nature, letting them dwell, experience, and discover what they need is necessary. Youth educators, including me, fear stillness, which pushes us to create programs and direct youth to participate in activities. Not planning any activities may be considered too risky, since youth cannot be controlled. However, as educators, we need to stifle our fears and let God do the work.

At first, the breathtaking moments in nature might disappear quickly, and what remains can be a desperate struggle with the bugs. However, as time passes, youth experience various joys for innumerable reasons. Some experience the smallness of themselves, as the psalmist confesses,⁵³ that leads to joy in how God is providing for them. Others can clear their minds, creating room that is filled with abundant joy they never have experienced before. Still others feel complete freedom in nature, which brings them joy and leads them to praise God.

⁵³ Psalms 8, 29.

Along with outdoor trips, farming is also a medium that creates genuine joy and helps youth to encounter God. Youth plow the field, stand the seedlings straight, and spread the seeds. Farming teaches the youth to be more attentive on what is growing not only in the farm but also inside them. Small joys come from the visible change in the farm, and the youth feel self-worth from helping to give life. Those joys expand to incorporate how God views them; they learn that, as they care for the crops, God cares for them, rejoices with them, and loves them as they are. Whether in the wilderness or on the farm, nature is a mediator for youth to find joy and encounter God.

Heung: A Communal Quality

Heung can be experienced individually, but it also occurs and multiplies in community, where people socialize and build empathy together. *Heung* grows in the unity formed between oneself and others.⁵⁴ The origin of the word *Heung* is a combination of the Korean characters *seung'* and *dong*, which carry the meaning “to face each other and hold up something.”⁵⁵ The grouping of these characters became *Heung*, whose literal translation means “to combine strength” and “to socialize with one another.”⁵⁶ The origin of the word itself demonstrates togetherness and oneness.

The communal aspect of *Heung* is also apparent when looking at where it usually arises. *Heung* is often triggered by music, dance, and interaction not only for individuals but also in

⁵⁴ Shin and Chung, 56.

⁵⁵ Kim and Kim, 84.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

groups. The boisterousness of socializing spreads *Heung* to others. Therefore, in community we partake of *Heung* but also positively extend *Heung* to others.⁵⁷ Partaking in *Heung* means that we have to engage in what is happening in the community. Extending *Heung* means that *Heung* is transmissible to others. This phenomenon is often seen when groups of adolescents are together convulsing with laughter. No one knows why they burst out in laughter, or even if they do know, it was usually a trivial moment that sparked the outburst. However, the joy they create as a group has the power to multiply and spread to others, which eventually makes everybody in the room laugh together.

Heung teaches us that, in order to create and multiply joy, youth ministry needs to intentionally build community. Educators, teachers, and all the staff should work together as team to change the community's culture of solemnity into a culture of joy. When the adults still stand counter to joy in youth ministry, it is impossible for youth to make the difference alone. Chap Clark, a well-known scholar and minister of adolescent and family ministry, claims that adults have a tendency to refer to their own experience and set it as a norm.⁵⁸ He asserts that everyone involved with youth needs training to understand how different the culture of current days is from the leaders' adolescent days through "continuous seminars, educational classes, and informal talks."⁵⁹ Everybody should wrestle for a youth ministry that is grounded in joy.

The communal nature of *Heung* is vital for adolescents because community is one of the most important aspects of adolescence. One of the reasons adolescents desire community is

⁵⁷ Ibid., 97.

⁵⁸ Chap Clark, *Hurt: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers, Youth, Family, and Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 178.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 179.

because that is the place where they establish their identity through the eyes of others.⁶⁰ Therefore, the community to which youth belong will establish the standard lenses for their self-reflection and opportunities for self-correction. Youth agonize over different values and ponder the virtues of Christians in comparison with the world.⁶¹ Relationships in the Christian community offer opportunities for youth to establish their identities from God's perspective and choose a Christian way of life. Kenda C. Dean states that there are many mirrors that help adolescents find their identity, but the church is the only way through which they can learn, feel, and see the gaze of God, who rejoices with them, loves them, and blesses them.⁶² Therefore, a healthy Christian community can not only empower youth to root their identity in God but also rejoice in God together as a group. Through worship, communion, and group activities, youth can overcome their adversities together, just as Koreans transitioned their *Han* into *Heung* in community through the activities of mask dancing and plays.

Conclusion

Joylessness is a crucial issue in South Korean youth ministry, not only because of the pursuit of an imbalanced theology but also because of the theology's remoteness to the lives of adolescents. The fact that churches dwell so firmly in a theology of the cross is unhealthy and

⁶⁰ Kenda C. Dean and Ron Foster, *The Godbearing Life: The Art of the Soul* (USA: Upper Room Books, 1998), Chapter 2.

⁶¹ John H. Westerhoff III, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (Toronto, Canada: Anglican Book Centre, 2000).

⁶² Dean and Foster, Chapter 2.

incomplete. Historically, even though it was an imbalanced approach to Christianity, emphasis on the suffering of the cross and linking it to the national sentiment *Han* has received ardent support. However, as Korea underwent rapid growth in its economy, technology, and politics, *Han* has become a sentiment that is no longer shared by all generations; the national sentiment, particularly among youth, is changing to a longing for *Heung*. Therefore, a church that focuses merely on the cross and suffering misunderstands today's adolescents and fails to acknowledge their needs.

Making a change is always daunting, particularly in the South Korean context where youth ministry has less autonomy within the church. Although the norms of adult ministry feed into youth ministry, youth ministry can challenge adult ministry – by laying a cornerstone for a joy-filled church, youth ministry can reverse engineer change in adult ministry. Hence, applying the transformative, cosmic, and communal traits of *Heung* to youth ministry will allow youth ministry and perhaps the whole church not only to inhabit Jesus's death on the cross but also to continue to the empty tomb, not only to dwell in Lent but also to proceed to Easter, and not only to practice Christian solemnity but also to live in joy.

Bibliography

- Chu, Yŏng-ha. *Han'gukhak ūi chŭlgŏum: Han'guk ūi taep'yo chisigin sŭmul-tu myŏng i mal hanŭn Han'guk, Hangugin, Han'gukchŏk in kŏt* 한국학의 즐거움: 한국의 대표 지식인 스물두 명이 말하는 한국, 한국인, 한국적인 것 [The Joy of Doing Koreanology: Twenty-two scholars Sharing What is Korea and Korean]. Seoul: Humanist, 2011.
- Choi, Jae Nam. "A Study on the Embodiment Condition of Heung(興) and Sirum(시름)." *The Studies in Korean Poetry and Culture* 24 (2009): 1-34. Accessed August 21, 2018. <http://www.riss.kr/link?id=A76616207>.
- Clark, Chap. *Hurt: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers, Youth, Family, and Culture*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004.
- Craddock, Fred. *As One Without Authority: Fourth Edition Revised and with New Sermons*. Revised ed. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001.
- Crain, William. *Theories of Development: Concepts and Applications*. Fifth ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2005.
- Dean, Kenda C. *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passion Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004.
- Dean, Kenda C. and Ron Foster. *The Godbearing Life: The Art of the Soul*. USA: Upper Room Books, 1998.
- Duquoc, Christian, eds. *The Gift of Joy*. New York: Paulist Press, 1968.
- Ju, Seungjung. *Ŭnch'ongŭi Kyohoeryŏkkwa Sŏlgyo* 은총의 교회력과 설교 [Grace, Liturgical year, and Homiletics]. Seoul: Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary Press, 2014.
- Kim, Baikgyun. "A study of contingency and true heart on 'Xing(興)'." *Philosophical Investigation* 21 (May 2007): 69-93. Accessed August 26, 2018. <http://www.dbpia.co.kr/Article/NODE01949331>.
- Kim, Gyung Jin. "Liturgical year." Class note from Introduction to Worship at Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary. Seoul, 2014 Fall semester.
- Kim, Hyejin and Kim, Jongcheol. "A Study of Education for Understanding Koreans' Emotion of 'Heung(興)' in order to improve intercultural competence: With Focus on Classical Literatures." *Journal of the International Network for Korean Language and Culture* 12, no. 1 (April 2015): 79-111. Accessed September 1, <http://dx.doi.org/10.15652/ink.2015.12.1.079>.

- Kim, In Soo. *History of Christianity in Korean*. Seoul: Qumran Publishing House, 2011.
- Kim, Jung Jun. "Theology of Han." *The Christian Literature Society of Korea* 23, no. 12 (December 1979): 53-65.
- Kim, Nan-Do. *T'ürendü K'oria 2018: Söuldae sobi t'ürendü punsök sent'ö üi 2018 chönmang : 10-chunyön t'ükpyölp'an* 트렌드 코리아 2018: 서울대 소비 트렌드 분석 센터의 2018 전망: 10주년 특별판 [Trend Korea 2018: Seoul National University Consumption Trend Analysis Center 2018 Outlook: 10th Anniversary Special Edition]. Seoul: Mirae üi Ch'ang, 2017.
- Kim, Yeol Gyu. "Han." Accessed September 11, 2018.
<http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/Contents/SearchNavi?keyword=%ED%95%9C&ridx=1&tot=9255>.
- Ko, Yohan. "Perspectives on Youth (Culture)." *Christian Language Culture News Letter* 7 (June 2006): 49-52. Accessed September 7, 2018.
<http://www.earticle.net.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/Article.aspx?sn=50084>.
- Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*. First ed. Princeton, NJ: Augsburg Books, 2004.
- _____ *Theology and Joy*. Hymns Ancient & Modern Ltd, 2013.
- New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1989.
- Park, Andrew Sung. *The Wounded Heart of God: the Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993.
- Park, Jin-Kyu. "A New Direction for Better Understanding of Youth Culture in Postmodernism an Age." *Korea Institute of Youth Facility & Environment* (May 2007): 16-24. Accessed September 3, 2018.
<http://www.earticle.net.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/Article.aspx?sn=169511>.
- Shin, Bong Hee and Chung, Ji Hye. "Study of Experiential Perception of "Heung" in Korean Dance." *Journal of Korean Association of Physical Education and Sport for Girls and Women* 25, no.4 (December 2011): 55-68. Accessed June 20, 2018.
<http://www.dbpia.co.kr/Article/NODE02480969>.
- Shin, Yeon Woo. "Heung." Accessed September 11, 2018.
<http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/Contents/Item/E0077363>.
- Singh, Ana. "The 'Scourge of South Korea': Stress and Suicide in Korean Society." *Berkeley Political Review*. Last modified October 31, 2017. Accessed December 4, 2017. <https://bpr.berkeley.edu/2017/10/31/the-scourge-of-south-korea-stress-and-suicide-in-korean-society/>.

- Suh, David Kwang-Sun. "A Biographical Sketch of an Asian Theological Consultation." in *Minjung Theology: People as the Subject of History*. ed. Commission on Theological Concerns, Christian Conference of Asia. Revised ed. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983.
- Thompson, Marianne Meye. "Reflections on Joy in the Bible." in *Joy and Human Flourishing*. ed. Miroslav Volf and Justin E. Crisp. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014.
- Welker, Michael. *What Happens in Holy Communion?* trans. John F. Hoffmeyer. First Printing ed. Grand Rapids, MI: London: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000.
- Westerhoff III, John H. *Will Our Children Have Faith?* Toronto, Canada: Anglican Book Centre, 2000.
- White, James F. *The Sacraments in Protestant Practice and Faith*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999.
- Woo, Jaegug. "Theology of Joy." *Catholic Theology and Thought* 4 (December 1990): 148-169. Accessed September 14, 2018. <http://www.dbpia.co.kr/Article/NODE01543470>.

© Copyright by Eser Kim 2018 All Rights Reserved

“The author(s) of this paper holds copyright protection of their work. This paper is shared with you in a spirit of collegial collaboration. You do not have permission to copy, disseminate, or quote extensively from it, without the expressed, written permission of the author.”