

## **Cultivating Woori: The Experience and Formation of Children and Youth in Korean Immigrant Communities**

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### ABSTRACT

This article discusses the identity and spiritual formation of children and adolescents in the Korean immigrant community, particularly in the context of the Korean American immigrant church. Using the framework of Woori as a Korean theological concept for togetherness, the article examines the power and potential impact of Woori as an understanding of self in relationship to community in the formation of children and adolescents of Korean immigrants. Using an auto-ethnographic approach and Woori as a theological framework, the author discusses the complexities of biculturalism, acculturative dissonance, and the negotiation of tension and conflict in the lives of churched Korean American children and adolescents.

In the North American context and landscape, scholarship focused on the lives of children and youth is coming to a deeper recognition of how the patterns and experiences of migration and immigration affect the lives of the second and even third generation. The way in which the children of immigrants navigate their understandings of personal and communal identity and spirituality in public North American life can occur in opposition to the frameworks of identity and spiritual formation in private religio-cultural spaces. In particular, the children of Asian immigrants who are often continuously perceived as perpetual foreigners<sup>1</sup> can find themselves as liminal people between two cultures, never fully accepted into either community. Regardless of this positionality, the desire that children and adolescents of Asian immigrants have to find belonging in a community, brings them into spaces of negotiation of their identities and spiritual commitments in both positive and negative ways. This article explores the lives of the children and adolescents of Korean American immigrants and the relationship they have to the Korean immigrant church in the process of their identity and spiritual formation. Using the Korean concept of Woori as a framework for understanding the relationship between Korean American children and adolescents and the

Church, the article explores the complexities of bi-culturality, acculturative dissonance, and the negotiation of tension and conflict in the lives of churched Korean American children and adolescents.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology used is auto-ethnographic within the framework and context of Woori or in other words, within the framework of the story of “us.” The auto-ethnographic approach lives into the practical theological commitment to the centering of lived experience as a way of investigating and interrogating what is happening in shared religious spaces. Many immigrant communities are storytelling communities and the Korean immigrant Christian community is no exception. The epistemological commitments of the Korean immigrant Christian community as well as the larger Asian American community are witnessed through the auspices of narrative storytelling. Telling one’s own story is also the practice of retelling the stories of those who have come before and also the re-telling of the culturally significant religious stories that carry fresh meaning in new lands. Notable Asian American theologians across both practical and systematic theology like Wonhee Anne Joh, Rita Nakashima Brock, Boyung Lee, and Kwok Pui Lan promote and practice the art and culture of storytelling and auto-ethnography as a way of preserving histories, anchoring theologies, and re-envisioning communal and personal histories as a way of combating invisibility and erasure. As such, Korean American theologies and spiritual formations are also developed within the contexts of multiple stories which connect people to one another across time, space, and borders, visible and invisible. For communities and people who are separated from their homelands, stories are culturally appropriate and legitimate ways of knowing, remembering, and re-membering self to community and vice-a-versa.

## **WOORI FORMATION**

As a child of Korean immigrants growing up in Southern California and Seattle, the Korean American church was a place where I found comfort in my skin and my spirit, even when the world at large was less than hospitable. In church, no one pointed out my physical differences, the features that made me a “non-white” person in society.<sup>2</sup> No one defined me by what I was not rather than who I knew I was. My experiences in the Korean American immigrant church world and in larger American society, were always juxtaposed for me. The church world was communally centered, and the outside world was individually focused. At church, the way in which we talked about one another was through the word woori, or us. It was always, woori kyo-hwe (our church), woori ah-e-duhl (our children), woori seng-myung (our life), and even woori nah-rah (our nation). Woori is far more than a word that connotes togetherness or possession, it is a word embedded with theological significance of a singular peoplehood. Woori encompasses what it means to cultivate a communal theology that gives birth to a theology of selfhood not the other way around.<sup>3</sup> A theological selfhood that is shaped and defined by the community of which you are a part.

In the formation of children and adolescents, woori is both positive in some respects and negative in others. For some children and adolescents, woori is a double-edged sword. The connective quality of woori anchors children and adolescents to and within shared co-ethnic structures and histories of religious community and spiritual practice, but it also has the potential to require a denial of the aspects of personhood that develop counter to the theological leanings of the woori community. Divergence from what is normative to woori is risky and isolating. I will discuss this challenging attribute of woori later in this essay. In sum, we are woori in the eyes of God and one another, sometimes even to the detriment of authentic individual and communal life.

In the Korean immigrant church, there is an understanding across generations that each of us belongs to a tapestry that is still growing, a tapestry that is far larger than our individual selves. We are knit together as one people and one body. Mapped over this understanding of woori, community, and peoplehood was the understanding that we are also God's people in God's world. Therein lies the theological significance, we see one another as extensions of ourselves and understand that God also sees us as extensions of one another. How one person behaves, lives, and embodies faith, whether well or poorly, reflects on that person's family and even larger community. This communal or corporate identity formation begins in childhood and adolescence and is part of a pre-constructed identity<sup>4</sup> that is mapped onto each person as they enter into and move in community.<sup>5</sup>

For the Korean American child and adolescent, the world outside of the church community is in stark contrast with what occurs within it. This external world focuses on the dreams and identity of the individual. For instance, teachers used to ask me in class to imagine what I would be when I grew up. They wanted me to understand that I could do anything I set my mind to do if I only tried. They wanted me to embrace a type of independence that may very well take me from outside of my natal family and community to bigger and better things. This perspective was deemed a natural progression of adulthood and leaving the nest. Never mind that this Horatio Alger-ian belief that one only needs to work hard to achieve one's dreams is already trite in the face of a white supremacist society that seeks to destabilize and demolish any such dreaming from minoritized communities and people. In addition, these types of individualistic understandings of self, requiring separation from community rather than growth out of it, never made sense to me in the face of what we were learning explicitly or implicitly at church about our connectionality as a people and as spiritual beings.<sup>6</sup>

The narratives I internalized from the two worlds I inherited and inhabited did not always align and were often in tension with one another. To choose to be an individual meant I would have to choose myself over the woori-ness of the Korean American church and therefore the woori-ness of God. It also meant a severing of self from community in a way that felt like a betrayal of both cultural, familial ties and religious ties. So, like many children and adolescents of immigrant parents, I walked in two worlds without being able to reconcile them to one another, the tension of such a journey was confusing to say the least. Religion, faith, and theology was constructed differently in both worlds. I had to learn how to function

in both worlds, to code switch back and forth as necessary, and compartmentalize questions and pain in order to survive in both places.<sup>7</sup> During a time in my life where I was still in the throes of understanding who I was and who I wanted to be, and as an adolescent with limited social power in both worlds, this labor of learning multiple cultures and ways of trying to authentically embody myself in both places, was exhausting.

### ***LONGING FOR BELONGING BETWEEN TWO WORLDS***

As bi-cultural people who straddle two worlds, children and youth belonging to Korean immigrant communities experience religion, faith, and spirituality as interpreted differently and even possessing different and contrasting values in different spaces. This leaves the children of immigrants to try and reconcile the two disparate worlds, perspectives, and multiple theologies, often on their own. Their parents, who often do not acculturate as quickly as their children, are unable to help them navigate across cultural differences.

In my childhood and adolescence, woori described all the storied people and places that had been lost through war, time, and immigration. They were all tied to us, and to me through communal and familial imagination, memory, and pain. Children of immigrants and migrants are shaped and formed by the tides of human movement, sometimes forced upon them by immigration and migration. They are affected, one could say, even more acutely because they understand what it is to long for a particular place, through the shared family narratives to which they are privy, often without ever having seen the places or people their families are describing.

Even though I was born in Los Angeles, I have always had a deep yearning for the homeland of the Korean Peninsula. It is a cultivated yearning passed down from my parents and my grandparents who immigrated post 1965, when travel and communication between Korea and the United States was not easily affordable. I watched as my parents built Korean immigrant community around themselves but could never quite replicate the feeling of “home.” I listened to the voices of my family in Korea as they spoke to my parents over the phone and heard the echoes of longing as they dreamt of reuniting. Later, speaking to my grandparents about their family in North Korea, I heard the same longing for family one would never see again and the desperate hope of reunification across borders and time.

Even before transnationalism was sustained and supported through technology,<sup>8</sup> there has always been a spiritual sense of border and boundary crossing and yearning for places one has departed.<sup>9</sup> Though for many immigrants and migrants it may be possible to re-cross particular boundaries and revisit spaces that one has departed, the sense that homelands have transformed and transitioned without them, is deep. My mother and father often talk about how Korea has changed beyond their comprehension. The places that they knew are no longer there, the colloquial language used among Koreans in Korea is different from the one they have painfully preserved for their children and grandchildren in the United States, and they

are also suddenly “other” and westernized when they are visiting their homeland. My grandfather used to tell me that my mother and I “smelled like America” when he tried to describe how we too had changed.

Scholarship now tells us that consecutive generations suffer from the loss and trauma of the experience of forced and sudden geographic movement. We have learned that trauma is etched onto our DNA and that one generation may have gone through displacement directly but the experience, collective and individual memory is shared and even multiplied within future generations. This occurs among African American, Native and Indigenous peoples, Jewish peoples, refugee peoples, etc.<sup>10</sup> All this to say, even children born in the United States and North America with parents or grandparents who have experienced necessary immigration, migration, war, or forced displacement bear the consequences of what that journey means upon their psyche, their spirits, their inherited theologies, and in their reality of marginalization (the feeling and being perpetually other in white dominant spaces), and the experience of being religious pilgrims<sup>11</sup> in a hostile land. Children and adolescents have these theologies mapped onto both their spiritual and identity formation in religious spaces as well as through confirmation bias and their experiences of constantly being reminded that they are perpetual foreigners in North American culture and society.

### ***KOREAN IMMIGRANT CHURCHES AND WOORI AS COORECTIVE TO ACCULTURATIVE DISSONANCE***

Shared religious practice in Korean and Korean American communities and homes are ways in which the precious articles of what it means to belong to the woori-ness of one’s community are passed down, taught, and learned. Though land, place, language, and other tangible things may be lost or forgotten over time, practices of spirituality, the enculturated ways in which we converse and imagine God and ourselves, are still very much grounded in those lost places and things, and in a way, as we engage in religious rites and spiritual practices revives what has been lost before our very eyes.<sup>12</sup> Religious education and its partner spiritual formation have always been two ways in which language, histories, customs, and entire cultures and ways of being are preserved. Religious education and spiritual formation are also where new meanings, both religious and cultural, have the potential to be co-created and negotiated across generational differences and multiple cultures and languages.

Faith and the spiritual practices that emanate from faith are passed down and learned from authority figures and caretakers even as these very same authority figures and caretakers are diminished by an inhospitable host society and culture. How to live a life of faith, how to practice one’s beliefs in ways that honors culture, family, God, and community are precious inheritances in the wake of all other inheritances no longer being viable or simply erased and gone.

Alejandro Rumbaut and Ruben G. Portes have defined acculturative dissonance as the experience

of the different rates of acculturation for immigrant parents and their second-generation children. As acculturation occurs at different rates for immigrants and their children, the relationship between them can become strained and cause conflict. The experience of acculturative dissonance can be exacerbated by outside forces and systems. For instance, one of the ways in which acculturative dissonance is experienced by children and youth of immigrants and migrants is when they witness elders in their communities facing and dealing with racism, white supremacy, and prejudice on a daily basis.<sup>13</sup> One of my earliest memories as a child is of my great-grandfather taking me to school early in the morning. He was a tall and gentle man with sparkling eyes, who commanded respect from those in our community. As our daily ritual, we would walk hand in hand to the bus stop and we would ride together to my school. He would tell me fantastic stories the whole way and I remembered being excited about our time together each morning as he took my hand. One morning the bus pulled up to the stop, but the bus driver did not open the door. Through the shut door he yelled out at us that we were not welcome on his bus and drove away. “No room for chinks!” he spat out at us. I had never heard this word, “chink.” I was in kindergarten. Even though I did not understand what the bus driver had said, I saw and felt what it had done to my great-grandfather, a man who had survived Japanese Occupation, war, and displacement on the Korean Peninsula. He visibly shrank. His shoulders became stiff and rounded as he shuffled his large feet and took hold of my hand once more to walk us back home. I remember a stark change coming over him. For the first time, his eyes did not sparkle. He looked small. The boisterous voice that told vibrant stories was strangely silent. That day, the stranger driving the bus had taken my great grandfather from me, a child who leaned on her caretaker for her own strength and confidence in the world.

As children and youth of Korean American immigrant communities become increasingly hybrid in their cultural dynamics, they are also having to negotiate what it means to witness the diminishment of those in their communities who traditionally hold power and care for them by a xenophobic culture and nation. They undergo role reversals in their homes, where the parent is necessarily dependent on their children to navigate a new homeland, language, and culture. For instance, as a child I remember having to call the phone company to discuss errors in billing on my parent’s behalf. This role reversal led to feelings of resentment towards my immigrant parents as well as feelings of vulnerability in myself. I often had to attend parent teacher conferences with my parents as translator, even though this posed a conflict of interest. I would have to translate for my teachers and parents how I was doing as a student in a particular class, making the relational hierarchy confusing for me as a child and adolescent.

What happens to the relationships between caregivers and their children and adolescents when role-reversals or societal diminishment of people occurs regularly? Children in particular need consistent trust of their caregiver’s abilities to protect them in order to have opportunities for a strong development of self. These types of role reversals in immigrant households can lead to children and adolescents feeling vulnerable and confused about authority and caretaking in the household. When one is having to help their caretakers navigate a new language, culture, or society, it forces you to grow up rather quickly so that everyone is able to thrive together. In these cases, religion can serve as a vehicle to pass down knowledge

and wisdom from the older immigrant generation to the younger as a way of righting the role reversals that occur outside of the religious community and fostering greater resilience and strength within children, adolescents and their families.

The church and shared spiritual practice can be a place where families are reminded of their woori-ness. In places of worship and community, children and adolescents are able to perceive their parents and grandparents as wisdom bearers, and community leaders in their ethnic and religious contexts, creating an alternate narrative to that of the one society forces on the family. Jung Ha Kim in her book *Bridge Makers and Cross Bearers* discusses the significance of downward mobility and status inconsistency experienced by immigrants.<sup>14</sup> Immigrants arrive on new shores and often times have to start over, their previous skills, jobs, and education do not necessarily pave a way for them to find comparable work or pay in a new nation. The language and cultural barriers add to this disparity between the past and present life of immigrants. New immigrants find themselves in a quickly downward moving spiral in society in regard to jobs and lifestyle, which also leads to feelings of isolation, inadequacy, and personal pain. Religion and religious spaces among people who share language and culture become one of the only places where one can reclaim on the outside societal scale the human dignity one feels on the inside, combating the feelings of loss with downward mobility and status inconsistency. Meanwhile, the children of these immigrants are carefully noting and watching their parents, grandparents, and other community members struggle with these drastic internal and external changes that affect the self-worth and personhood of their caregivers. The feeling of vulnerability one has as a child is compounded by the intense feelings of anxiety that come with watching those who care for you navigate the hostilities of a new land. This in turn creates acculturative stress on the child and adolescent, and in Korean American children and adolescents causes them to place undue pressure on themselves to succeed academically and professionally in order to single-handedly ensure the upward mobility of their families.<sup>15</sup>

Religious spaces for the children of immigrants and migrants then become places where they are able to witness and perceive the edification of self, their racial ethnic community, and their caregivers move within religious and cultural structures with confidence and authority. This is why it is important for immigrant parents and grandparents to practice an open sharing of one's religious and cultural traditions through community and to do so with transparency. Not only does it affirm the ethnic and religious identity of young people<sup>16</sup> past the immigrant generation, it also reinforces the woori-ness of community in an intentionally intergenerational way, while righting the ways that immigration can disrupt the ways families are sustained and ordered. Healthy Korean American congregations offer correctives to the experiences of children and adolescents in "Americanized" spaces and help them develop healthy concepts of self in relationship to caregivers.

### ***KOREAN IMMIGRANT CHURCHES AND WOORI AS SPACES AND PLACES OF TENSION***

The concept of woori as well as the Korean immigrant churches that cultivate woori can also be

a challenging space. Religious communities, including Korean immigrant churches, are potential places of comfort for those seeking solace from a hostile new homeland that perceives you as other and foreign, but they can also act as places of confusion and tensions at the intersections of dissonant liminalities. This ease of comfort and the feeling of belonging in religious spaces can come at a cost to personal identity, authenticity, and even personal convictions. Korean American children and adolescents who live bi-cultural lives and are able to code-switch between Korean immigrant culture and American culture may find congregational spaces to be insular and unwelcoming of particular identities, beliefs both theological and political, which are not in line with more conservative communal and religio-cultural beliefs.

For instance, the queering of Asian American theology as well as the acceptance of LGBTQIA people are still difficult and unapproachable subjects for many Korean immigrant churches. Conservative theologies held by Korean immigrant congregations historically do not make room for open and affirming spaces for Koreans and Korean Americans who identify as LGBTQIA let alone for women who are ordained or seeking ordination. I once served a Korean immigrant church where youth began coming out to the disbelief of the first generation. There was no way for queer identifying youth or their family to remain as part of the congregation which vehemently theologized a relationship of queerness with sin, while being openly queer. Families with adolescents who had come out had to practice silence about the queer identities of their teens. Essentially, youth and their families had no support or affirmation for living into their authentic selves within the construct of woori.

As much as second-generation Korean American children and adolescents balance living in between two cultures, the culture and theologies of woori do not mirror this liminal space. In this particular instance, either you sought to belong and made yourself fit or you chose not to depart and belong at all. The connective nature of the Korean and Korean American community which occurs through the auspices of the church ended up winning the day, with the newly “out” youth agreeing to continue to attend the church without openly discussing such a significant part of their personal and even their Christian identity. This uncomfortable and tense truce, which acted as a violent form of erasure, was negotiated because the value of having a community, even with fabricated comfort, was held in higher esteem than the feeling of being adrift and alone without the church and therefore without a religious racial ethnic community. In cases where children, youth, and their families are seeking to be their authentic selves within Korean immigrant Christian community, the threat of losing the support and comfort of woori-ness and becoming an outsider is a real and dangerous compromise.

There is an insidious side to woori-ness in the Korean immigrant church, an identity and epistemology that supersedes other identities that children and adolescents might name and claim outside of the congregational context. Rebecca Y. Kim in her book *The New Second Generation* also posits that the desire and longing for comfort within Korean Christian community as a counterweight to the feeling of otherness in larger American society overrides personal needs for being recognized in the fullness of one’s identity.<sup>17</sup> Adhering to the communal identity and theology is seen as the aim even at the cost of someone’s

individual self-determination. In many ways, the nail that sticks out gets hammered down. This can leave Korean American youth in the church context feeling isolated and invisible even within a protective ethnic religious context of woori.

This dangerous erasure through the concept of woori is problematic because it assumes that woori-ness is a one-sided formation instead of a mutual growth and formation where both the individual and community are pushed to grow and expand their theological frameworks of belonging through shared histories and lived experiences. Woori-ness as it is lived out in the Korean immigrant context can function in a singular unidirectional and almost didactic fashion where communities form individuals, without reciprocity. A question we should ask the Korean immigrant church as it continues to grow and flourish is, how can there exist a mutuality of woori-ness that protects both individuals and community? Though there is significant value in the concept of woori in Korean American immigrant life as it pertains to the formation of children and adolescents, because of its double-edged quality, it is helpful not to romanticize it. Instead, it should be engaged critically and earnestly in a way that seeks to foster an authentic woori where both community and individual might be challenged to continue to grow, transform, and inculcate new histories and theologies of togetherness.

## **CONCLUSION**

The concept of woori is more than a concrete Korean concept of oneness and community. For children and adolescents of Korean immigrants, it is a framework that is transnational, boundary crossing, a corrective to dissonant cultural experiences, and at times, dangerously prioritized over one's self-determination. Korean American children and adolescents are able to locate themselves in woori-ness, though perhaps not wholly, in ways that ground them in religio-cultural spaces, language, and a shared peoplehood that works to support their developing sense of who they are becoming in the world. Woori-ness is part of formation, a lens through which Korean American children and adolescents learn to see one another and themselves as grounded in significant places, people, and spiritualities amid feelings of otherness on North American soil. Though not a perfect framework or construct, it offers a chance for children and adolescents of Korean immigrants to thrive as they negotiate what it means to be between two worlds.

ENDNOTES

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1 The term perpetual foreigner has been utilized by Asian American theologians like Sang Hyun Lee, Rita Nakashima Brock, and Peter Phan to describe the constant state of otherness and liminality experienced by Asian Americans in the white dominant culture of the United States. Asian Americans are perceived as perpetually foreign even when they have citizenship and/or are native born. See Peter C. Phan and Jung Young Lee, *Journeys at the Margin: Towards an Autobiographical Theology in American-Asian Perspective* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1999).

2 Defining people in the negative, as what they are not, centers what is dominant in society thereby putting minoritized individuals in contestation with dominant cultures.

3 There is a danger to this unidirectional theological and individual formation that will be addressed later in this essay.

4 Gilbert C. Park's concept of the pre-construction of American identity as model-minorities taken on by Korean immigrant students can be extended to the experience of adopting pre-constructed identities in Korean immigrant congregational spaces. For instance, pre-constructed gender roles and identities and obligations of filial piety which are theologically and spiritually grounded in the practice of Korean immigrant Christianity.

5 Gilbert C. Park, "Becoming a "Model Minority": Acquisition, Construction and Enactment of American Identity for Korean Immigrant Students," *Urban Rev* 43 (2011): 622.

6 Findings from studies (Grace J. Yoo and Barbara W. Kim, "Remembering Sacrifices: Attitude and Beliefs Among Second-generation Korean Americans Regarding Family Support," *Journal of Cross Cultural Gerontol* 25, (2010): 168.) of second generation Korean Americans who are now in adulthood reveal that the choices they made in adulthood to remain connected with their parents to the point of becoming their caretakers, providing for them financially, and co-habiting with them, were linked to their experiences in childhood and adolescence of the cultural and religious practice communalism as well as their witnessing of their parent's struggles and sacrifices as immigrants.

7 Theologian, Wonhee Anne Joh in her book *Heart of the Cross* writes about interstitial space in the Korean American experience as being an in-between space that cultivates resilience and resistance. Likewise, the children and adolescents of Korean immigrants, travel an in-between space that cultivates abilities like code-switching that ease the transition between cultures and expectations, though they may not always be able to reconcile the tensions between two distinct sets of cultural codes and expectations. See Wonhee Anne Joh, *Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006).

8 Philip Kasinitz, John Mollenkopf, Mary C Waters, and Merih Anih, "Transnationalism and the Children of Immigrants in Contemporary New York" in Mary C Waters and Peggy Levitt et al. *The Changing Face of Home: The Transnational Lives of the Second Generation* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation Press, 2002), 97-99.

9 In the documentary, *A Seat At The Drum*, documentarian Mark Anthony Rolo traces the painful loss of heritage, language, and identity among indigenous people in the United States. In on particularly poignant scene, Rolo narrates as a mother and her two young girls walk along the beach. As the mother walks she names for her children, out loud, what she sees in her indigenous language. Rolo states that the language she is using is tied to ancient knowledge about the southwest environment and that in this new place by the ocean, parents struggle to keep language alive in their children, and struggle to keep alive the depth and significance of the wisdom in the words tied to a land, which is now gone.

10 “Trauma May Be Woven Into DNA of Native Americans,” *Indian Country Today*, Oct 3, 2017, accessed July 26, 2018, <https://indiancountrymedianetwork.com/news/native-news/trauma-may-be-woven-into-dna-of-native-americans/>

11 Sang Hyun Lee has written extensively about the Korean American immigrant experience through the theological lenses of both perpetual foreigners and pilgrims. See Sang Hyun Lee, *From a Liminal Place: An Asian American Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010).

12 Jung Ha Kim in *Singing the Lord’s Song in a New Land*, describe distinct Korean American practices of faith using both auto-ethnography and historical research. The authors share how particular forms of Korean American spiritualities like *ttong-song-kido* or fervent prayer are both inherited and sustained across generations. See Su Yon Pak et al., *Singing the Lords Song in a New Land: Korean American Practices of Faith* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

13 R.G. Rumbaut & A. Portes, *Ethnicities: Coming of age in immigrant America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002).

14 Jung Ha Kim, *Bridge Makers and Cross-Bearers: Korean- American Women and the Church* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1997), 19.

15 Kim et al. “Coping strategies to manage acculturative stress: Meaningful activity participation, social support, and positive emotion among Korean immigrant adolescents in the USA,” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies Health Well-Being* 7, (2012): 5.

16 Research of Asian American children and adolescents reveals that affiliation with both ethnic identity and religious traditions work to support self-esteem and prevent self-harm behaviors. In a North American society and political environment that has grown increasingly hostile and openly white supremacist towards those perceived as foreign and those who are non-white, the value of communal and personal affirmation and buttressing up of self-esteem is crucial for the cultivation of resilience of children and youth in immigrant and migrant communities. It is possible that this may also cultivate resistance to the harmful narratives children and adolescents of immigrant and migrant communities ingest on a daily basis through media and social interactions with prejudiced persons. For a child or adolescent to be able to flat out reject a judgement, bias, or valuation by a white supremacist society as an identifying marker of their personhood is a powerful vehicle of resistance and self-determination and furthermore a staunch protection against things like self-harm.

17 Rebecca Y. Kim, *God’s New Whiz Kids: Korean American Evangelicals on Campus* (New York: NYU Press, 2006).