

Article

Reimagining Christian Theology from Asian and Asian American Protestant Experiences: A Methodological Typology

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Abstract

In this article, I argue that a significant stream of Asian and Asian American Protestant theology is best understood not only as recurring themes (e.g., suffering, marginality, race, diaspora) but also as the *methods* through which lived experience is translated into theological reasoning. It proposes a methodological typology that differentiates operative logics across five experiential sites: woundedness and healing; coerced in-betweenness and liminal creativity; political struggle and praxis; racialized peoplehood and communion; and postcolonial/feminist diasporic imagination. Across these types, “Protestant” functions as an analytic theological grammar—Scripture-centered hermeneutics, the grace-justice dialectic, reform and public witness, and eschatological hope expressed as praxis—rather than a mere denominational label. By specifying experiential sites, theological problems, operative methods, and normative aims, the typology clarifies internal differences among influential figures whose vocabularies often overlap and provides a framework for extending analysis to additional Asian and diasporic Protestant trajectories.

Keywords: Asian and Asian American Theology; *Han*; Marginality; Liminality; Theology of Struggle; Postcolonial Theology; Feminist Theology; *Tao*

1. Introduction

In this article, I develop a methodological typology for reading Asian and Asian American Protestant theologies as distinctive *modes of translation* from lived experience into theological reasoning. Accordingly, rather than offering a descriptive survey of major figures, I propose a methodological typology that maps how distinct experiential sites—woundedness, coerced in-betweenness, political struggle, racialized peoplehood, and postcolonial/diasporic imagination—function as generative loci for doctrinal and ethical construction. The aim is twofold: (1) to clarify internal differences among influential Asian/American Protestant theologians whose vocabularies often overlap, and (2) to provide an analytic framework for future research and teaching that can situate additional voices beyond the representative figures discussed here.

1.1. Framework: Experience as Translation

Recent scholarship has sought to reframe Asian and Asian American theology by situating it within broader socio-economic and pneumatological accounts of race, power, and theological construction. Jonathan Tran’s *Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism* (2021) is especially instructive foregrounding how racial formation is entangled with capitalist regimes and spiritual imaginaries, thereby refusing to treat the “Asian American experience” as a merely cultural or psychological datum. In a different register, Heejun Yang’s *Asian Case Studies on Translating Christianity: Toward God’s Self-Communication*



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and the Trinitarian End of Asian Theology (2024) advances a constructive horizon for Asian theology by emphasizing translation as a theological task oriented toward God's self-communication and a Trinitarian telos. While these frameworks differ in scope and aims, they share a crucial methodological insight: lived experience is never "raw," but mediated by history, institutions, and theological grammars. Building on this insight, I propose a methodological typology that asks a more specific organizing question: "How" do Asian and Asian American Protestant theologians translate structurally mediated experiences (woundedness, coerced in-betweenness, struggle, racialization, and postcolonial diaspora) into constructive theological reasoning? By foregrounding operative logics, namely, healing, liminal creativity, praxis-oriented struggle, peoplehood/communion, and postcolonial re-writing, this typology complements thematic or generational mappings and clarifies internal differences among thinkers whose vocabularies often overlap.

Methodologically, this article treats "experience" as a site of "translation": the movement by which socially and politically structured realities become theologically intelligible and normatively generative. This prevents experience from functioning as a self-authorizing foundation and instead frames it as mediated by power, history, and communal interpretation. Tran's account of racial capitalism underscores how racialized experience is inseparable from institutional economies and spiritual formations, pressing theology to attend to the political spirituality of racial formation (Tran 2021). Yang's translation-oriented constructive proposal, by contrast, highlights how Christian theology in Asian contexts is oriented toward God's self-communication and a Trinitarian end, thereby offering a telos for translation beyond mere cultural adaptation (Yang 2024). Taken together, these perspectives justify a typological approach that differentiates Asian and Asian American Protestant theologies not only by topics but by "operative methods"—that is, by the specific logics through which experience is translated into soteriological, ecclesiological, ethical, and doctrinal claims. This article does not claim to offer an exhaustive taxonomy of all Asian and Asian American theologies. It focuses on a significant stream of Asian and Asian American 'Protestant' theology in which "experience" functions as a primary site for theological construction. Here, experience is treated not as a raw or self-authorizing foundation but as historically and institutionally mediated, calling for interpretive translation within communal and doctrinal grammars. Trajectories that do not begin from experience as a primary locus (e.g., projects centered on political economy, doctrinal retrieval, or other theological loci) fall outside the analytic scope of the present typology. The typology, therefore, includes figures for whom experience functions not merely as illustration but as a constructive locus that reorganizes doctrinal and ethical reasoning.

1.2. Protestant: A Theological Grammar for the Present Typology

It must be acknowledged that the themes discussed in this article are not exclusive to Protestantism. Roman Catholic figures, such as Peter Phan and Anselm Min, have profoundly articulated the theology of "being-in-between," and orthopraxis is a hallmark of Latin American Liberation Theology, which largely originated in Catholic contexts. Thus, the methodological distinctiveness of the figures discussed here should not be overstated as purely denominational. However, the term "Protestant" is retained in this typology to identify a specific theological grammar of legitimation. Unlike Catholic approaches that often ground marginality or praxis within sacramental theology, ecclesial tradition, or the Magisterium, the theologians in this study primarily legitimize their experiential reflections through a direct appeal to Scripture and the "priesthood of believers." They exhibit a distinctively Protestant impulse: reliance on the "Word" reinterpreted through the lens of lived experience, and an emphasis on the community's "confessional witness" as a sufficient authority for theological construction. Therefore, in this article, "Protestant"

does not exclude ecumenical convergences but highlights a hermeneutical pattern in which the dialectic of Scripture and experience takes precedence over institutional tradition.

“Protestant” does not function as a mere marker of denominational identity; rather, it names a recognizable pattern of theological reasoning—one that is repeatedly reconfigured through Asian and diasporic experiences. Four features are especially salient for the typology presented in this article. First, these theologies display a strong hermeneutical orientation shaped by Scripture and the interpretive “Word” tradition. The decisive question is not simply what a community experiences, but how such experience is rendered intelligible through interpretive practices that appeal to biblical narratives, symbols, and theological judgment. Even when intercultural concepts are employed (e.g., ‘*Tao*’), they are frequently mobilized to re-describe the Christ-event and the “Way” of discipleship in relation to Scripture rather than as independent religious authorities.

Second, a recurring Protestant grammar appears in the dialectic of grace and justice. The theologians discussed in this article are not content with a purely inward or private account of salvation; instead, they press soteriology toward the restoration of violated dignity and the repair of social relationships. In this grammar, grace is not opposed to justice but becomes the enabling condition for repentance, reconciliation, and transformation. This logic is especially clear where accounts of woundedness, forgiveness, and healing are explicitly linked to the rectification of wrongs and the recovery of communal wholeness.

Third, these works repeatedly articulate an ecclesial and public orientation that can be described as reform and witness. The church is not treated as a self-enclosed religious institution but as a community accountable to suffering and struggling, calls to conversion, solidarity, and public truth-telling. In this grammar, ecclesial life is evaluated based on its capacity to resist idolatrous formations (including racialized and imperial orders), to cultivate truthful communion, and to participate in social practices that embody justice. This public and reform-oriented grammar is not unique to Asian American contexts; it also appears in broader Protestant political theologies that treat doing theology as inseparable from revolutionary or crisis situations (Bonino 1975).

Fourth, these theologies are sustained by eschatological hope expressed as present-tense praxis rather than as otherworldly escape. The future horizon of God’s promise functions to critique the present order and to energize transformative action. This eschatological orientation is visible not only in liberationist accounts of struggle but also in constructive visions of reconciled difference, multiracial communion, and postcolonial reimagination.

Taken together, these features justify the use of “Protestant” in the present study while avoiding a reduction in Protestant identity to a single doctrinal formula or a narrow confessional lineage. They also provide analytic leverage: across the typology proposed below, Asian and Asian American theologians can be compared based on how lived experience is translated into theological claims within a shared—yet diversely reconfigured—Protestant grammar.

1.3. Proposed Typology

Before proposing a new typology, it is necessary to acknowledge existing classifications within the field. Jonathan Tan and Heejun Yang describe Asian and Asian American theologies through a typology of first- and second-generation developments. In their accounts, first-generation individuals are primarily concerned with survival, pastoral care, and identity formation in response to racial marginalization, exclusion, and the pressures of assimilation. A second generation emerges in later historical contexts and is characterized by more explicit critical, interdisciplinary, and constructive engagements with issues such as race, gender, power, and socio-political structures. Tan traces these generational shifts within the development of Asian American theology (Tan 2008), while Yang situates

doctrinal translation within historically distinct contexts that correspond to these first- and second-generation concerns (Yang 2024)¹. While these typologies provide crucial historical and thematic maps, they often focus on ‘what’ is discussed rather than ‘how’ theological construction occurs. This article, therefore, proposes a ‘methodological typology’ that differentiates not primarily what topics are addressed but how lived experience is translated into theological reasoning—by specifying (a) experiential sites, (b) the theological problems thereby framed, (c) operative logics of construction, and (d) normative aims. The typology is intended to complement, rather than replace, existing approaches by providing an analytic tool for clarifying internal differences within Asian and Asian American Protestant theologies.

This article draws on several theological figures to develop the present typology of the translation of Protestant identity through Asian and diasporic experiences. Andrew S. Park developed his theological framework in terms of his Korean concept of suffering, *han* (suffering), and engaged in intercultural dialog between his Asian tradition and the Western theological tradition. Jung Young Lee and Sang Hyun Lee argued that the marginal experiences of Asian Americans can formulate a new theological implication. Eleazar S. Fernandez began his theological endeavor by examining the political struggle of the Filipinos through the lens of liberation theology. Fumitaka Matsuoka questioned the racial identity of Asian Americans and articulated a faith of color. Pui-lan Kwok illustrated postcolonial imaginations through historical, dialogical, and diasporic perspectives related to postcolonial feminist theology. Finally, Anne Joh articulated her experiences of *han* and *jeong* (love) as a Korean American in her postcolonial feminist theology, a postcolonial Christology. Table 1 summarizes the proposed typology by specifying each type’s experiential site, analytic category, theological question, operative method, and normative aim:

Table 1. Methodological typology of Asian and Asian American Protestant theologies.

Type	Primary Experience	Key Analytic Category	Theological Questions Framed
Woundedness-healing (Park)	Personal/collective woundedness shaped by sin/evil/absence; racialized suffering	<i>Han</i> ; healing; <i>Tao</i> as “Way”	How salvation addresses victims’ wounds and social evil without reducing suffering to guilt
Marginality-liminal creativity (Jung Young Lee; Sang Hyun Lee)	Coerced in-betweenness under racial exclusion; non-acceptance by dominant structures	Marginality; liminality; in-between/in-both/in-beyond; <i>communitas</i>	How identity/community/vocation are formed under coerced boundaries
Struggle-praxis (eschatological accountability) (Fernandez)	Colonial/neo-colonial oppression; people’s movements; church’s complicity/solidarity	Struggle; praxis; contextualization; eschatological hope	How theology becomes accompaniment and accountable practice within liberation struggle
Race-peoplehood (Matsuoka)	Racialization in multiracial society; structural inequality; “idolatrous chosenness”	Color of faith; peoplehood; communion; racism as evil/“monopoly of imagination”	How racism distorts imagination/institutions and constitutes a theological problem of peoplehood
Postcolonial Re-writing (Feminist/Diasporic Imagination) (Kwok; Joh)	Diasporic hybridity; gendered colonial histories; abjection; affection	Postcolonial imagination; hybridity/mimicry; <i>han/jeong</i>	Who “we” are under an empire; how theology is re-authored amid asymmetrical power

Table 1. Cont.

Operative Method (Experience → Theology)	Normative Aim	Protestant Grammar
Healing-oriented soteriology; cross/way as transformative “translation”	Wholeness; peace-with-justice; jubilee	Word + grace–justice dialectic
Coerced in-between as generative theological space	Communitas; “harmony of difference,”	Word + ecclesial-ethical formation
Eschatology as critique; struggle as community of accountability	Liberation; solidarity; restored humanity	Reform/witness + eschatological praxis
Confessional critique of idolatry; moral praxis	Justice-oriented reconciliation; multiracial community	Sin/idolatry diagnosis + public witness
Postcolonial/feminist hermeneutics; tradition under empire	Decentering; reimagined subjectivity’ solidarity	Word(hermeneutics) + critique of empire

2. Mapping the Methodological Typology

2.1. Woundedness-Healing Hermeneutic

Type 1 develops a woundedness-healing hermeneutic in which lived experience of suffering is translated into a soteriological and ethical logic oriented toward restoration. In this type, experience functions neither as mere illustration nor as self-authorizing evidence; rather, it becomes the theological locus for reconfiguring sin, evil, forgiveness, and justice as interrelated realities requiring healing. Andrew S. Park’s use of *han* exemplifies this method: *han* names the depth-structure of wounded existence (personal and social), while Christian salvation is articulated as a process that moves from hurt to healing through repentance, forgivingness, justice, and communal wholeness. Park’s intercultural turn to *Tao* further clarifies that translation here is not a departure from Christian grammar but an attempt to redescribe the “Way” of Christ cross-culturally, preserving Scripture-centered interpretation and the grace–justice dialectic characteristic of Protestant theological reasoning.

Andrew S. Park grounds his theological inquiry in his struggle with the phenomenon of human suffering and develops the meaning of suffering out of the Korean notion of suffering called ‘*han*.’ Park defines *han* as “an Asian, particularly Korean, term used to describe the depths of human suffering. . . . *Han* is the abysmal experience of pain. It has two dimensions: active and inactive. Active *han* is closer to aggressive emotion, while inactive *han* is similar to an acquiescent spirit. Of the two, inactive *han* is more common in human experience (Park 1993, p. 15)².” Park diagnoses human suffering (*han*) as that coming from not only inner individual experiences like forsakenness, bereavement, and victimization, but also social issues such as racism, classism, and sexism. He develops his theological understanding based on the theology of God’s suffering within Trinitarian, Christological, and eschatological perspectives of Western theology. He argues not only that the process of *han* healing is the role of theology and its ultimacy but also that theology is the source of the transformation of the individual and society (Park 1993, chap. 9). Based on this phenomenological understanding of human suffering, Park develops his theological framework from the traditional theological understanding of sin, guilt, repentance, forgiveness, justification, sanctification, and Christian perfection to the dimension of healing of the wounded in terms of resistance, forgivingness, justice, healing, and jubilee/joy (Park 2004, p. 7).

Park identifies three main causes of suffering (*han*): sin, evil, and the absence of God. The individual or collective experiences of victimization and suffering of human beings, such as abuse, rape, violence, bereavement, discrimination, oppression, and so on, can be

called sin. Park says, “When sin is committed, *han* arises as its corollary. . . . Sin causes *han* and *han* produces sin (Park 2004, p. 16)³.” Park exemplifies evil as other sources of suffering (*han*) based on the story of Job in the Bible, arguing that “Job is not a victim of sin, but a victim of *han* caused by evil.” Park clarifies this further, “Evil in absence of sin is *han*; *han* in absence of sin is evil. Sin causes *han* and evil. Evil can produce *han* and sin, and *han* can regenerate evil and sin (Park 2004, p. 21).” The third category, the absence of God, is a different realm of suffering (*han*) in that this is experienced “in the midst of the suffering and death of the innocent (Park 2004, p. 21).” For Park, the execution of Jesus discloses salvation as God’s solidarity with the wounded and as a transformative “way” enacted through divine woundedness for the sake of the world (Park 2004, p. 28). This is Park’s critical understanding of sin, especially original sin, as such sin is not transmitted, but it is “our proclivity to sin as the potential to commit sin” that sin has two levels: individual—the personal offense against God and God’s creation; and collective—the communal aggression against God (Park 2004, pp. 31–32).

Park delineates the differences between shame and guilt and illustrates the anger that comes from them to articulate his theological argument of suffering (*han*) and healing. Shame and guilt are the two main patterns for people to respond to *han* and sin. Shame is an emotional expression of vulnerability of human beings, such as humiliation, discretion, failure, disgrace, and collective shame. Guilt is an internalized state of moral and social culpability in human beings and has several dimensions such as legal, ethical, and religious guilt, including crime, sin, failure of duty and responsibility, and collective guilt (Park 2004, chap. 2). Anger, the spontaneous reaction to being threatened, is related to the condition of shame and guilt in that it is a grounding power of resistance against suffering (*han*) and sin. Park distinguishes between anger of shame and anger of guilt. The former is the anger of the wounded, which can be assertive, positive, and constructive, but the latter is the anger of the offender, which is aggressive, self-justifying, and offensive. Guilty anger can be a destructive power; however, shame anger can be a foundation of resistance against suffering (*han*). As such, “assertive anger comes from the heart of fairness; aggressive anger might emerge from a desire to control and a superiority complex (Park 2004, p. 51).” Park argues more deeply that collective anger might be in both categories. Here is the theological ground of Park: “No anger against evil possible without God’s grace. It encourages victims to express their assertive anger; it empowers them to transmute their passion into the strength needed to make the oppressors repent of their sins (Park 2004, p. 59).”

Anger needs to be used creatively in order to make people respond, confront, and resist victimization (*han*). There are three principles of confrontation: challenge, care, and respect. There are several forms of challenge, such as nonviolent resistance, non-cooperative resistance, reflective resistance, civil disobedience, boycotts, sit-ins, street demonstrations, and picketing. Among these, nonviolent resistance is a powerful way to resist *han* as a way of “turning the other cheek” as an even more “proactive gesture” rather than silence or resistance alone (Park 2004, pp. 63–65). Care is a responsible love not only for the victims but also for opponents or enemies who oppose evil power, with the power of love, not with the power of evil (Park 2004, p. 67). Moreover, respect is not only an attitude of regard and admiration, but also the action to provide a positive self-estimation. For instance, Jesus respected Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10) and the Samaritan woman (John 4:1–26) so that they could come to live a totally new life (Park 2004, pp. 67–69). Unless we confront suffering without challenge, care, and respect based up the love of Jesus Christ, we cannot go forward to the next step of healing, repentance, forgiveness and forgivingness.

The gospel (good news) is the proclamation of God’s forgiveness for humanity. Park asks about the meaning of forgiveness in terms of the human relationship between victims and the offenders. The significance of forgiveness is that only victims can offer forgiveness

to the offenders as a symbol of God's unconditional forgiveness and love. Thus, forgiveness is "the foundation of transformation" in that it "can make room for warm feelings or acceptance for both the victim and the violator (Park 2004, pp. 83–84)." Park demonstrates this condition of forgiveness with the word "forgivingness" as "letting go of the feeling of resentment and of seeing the self as victim." Park says more deeply,

It is the readiness to accept one's own accountability instead of blaming his or her problems on someone else, and starting to clean oneself up. Then forgiveness and healing, nor only by God but even of God, can take place. One cannot, however, generate forgiveness by himself or herself since it is a gift (forgive-ness). (Park 2004, p. 84)

Thus, after the victims let go of (forgive) their wounds, the offenders will receive forgiveness. Park emphasizes forgiveness as the core of Christian worship in that its basis is the repentance and restoration of the relationships with God and with the offended. There are four steps in forgiveness: a change in behavior, an act of recompense, asking for forgiveness, and seeking reconciliation (Park 2004, pp. 97–98).

Lastly, Park explains two dimensions of faith: faith in justification—the faith of the sinner; and faith in justice—the faith of the sinned against. He articulates these two dimensions very insightfully:

When God's forgiveness of offenders concurs with the offenders' restoration of their victims' rights, justice's hand transpired. Justification by faith does not mean that sinners can be justified without the world of repentance. Rather, it means that they are justified in order to do the work of restoration. Justification occurs not when God lets sinners off the hook but when God's grace convicts and empowers to work for the rectification of their wrongs. (Park 2004, pp. 106–7)

Finally, the healing (wholeness) of the wounded will come true because "justice will bring forth peace and sacred contentment to the sinned against" according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Park 2004, p. 131). Simultaneously, sinners will become the followers of God's will in terms of their holiness (sanctification) until they can achieve Christian perfection through the grace of God. At that moment, broken relationships will be recovered, people will rejoice with thanksgiving and exult God, and finally, people can meet the year of Jubilee on both levels as individuals and the society in terms of Christian perfection (Park 2004, chap. 8).

Furthermore, this theology of *han* has been developed into the theology of *Tao*, which is one of the main concepts of the religion of East Asia. Park argues that Western theological terms such as *theos* and *logos*, which focus on reason and words, do not clearly fit within Asian religious thought. Asian Americans possess a rational aspect of their religious thinking; however, Park argues that "it does not help much in their own struggle (Matsuoka and Fernandez 2003, p. 41)." Instead, he argues, "to deal with their *han*, a more intuitive term is needed: *Tao*. The word *Tao* literally means 'way,' 'road,' or 'path,' but symbolically denotes a way of living and truth. In lieu of the theology of the *logos*, Asian Christians need to develop the theology of the *Tao*. The term *logos* is not a Hebrew word, but a Greek word. In Hellenistic culture, the New Testament writers deliberately chose the word *logos* to describe God's activity in Jesus Christ, a remarkable apologetic move to explain the Way of Jesus Christ. The fact that the Johannine writer drew on the term *logos* from their historical and cultural background provides a strong foundation for Asian and Asian American biblical hermeneutics and for Asian and Asian American apologetic theologies. The notion of *Tao* helps Asian Americans interpret and understand the Jesus event cross-culturally in connection with the issue of *han* (Matsuoka and Fernandez 2003, p. 41)."

Based on this cross-cultural theological notion, Park develops his theological arguments for *Tao* more deeply. There are two meanings in *Tao*: “the eternal *Tao*,” which is “the Ultimate Way of Endless Dynamic Principle of the universe,” and “a common way or road, implying the ordinary way of life (Matsuoka and Fernandez 2003, p. 44).” According to East Asian religious classics like the *I-Ching* (Book of Change) in Confucianism and the *Tao Te Ching* in Taoism, *Tao* makes people recognize the Great Ultimate, the One. The One generates *yin* and *yang*, which is the basis of harmony in the universe and human beings. Under the harmonious energy of *yin* and *yang*, everything can be reversed, such as active-passive, doing something-doing nothing, full-empty, and moving-remaining, as well as human hierarchical relationships like male-female, the oppressed-the oppressor, parents-children, and emperor-servant (Matsuoka and Fernandez 2003, p. 45). This reversal is the harmonious way of human beings. However, this harmony cannot be obtained through forceful or coercive human action; rather, it comes from effortless, non-active, or self-emptying action because the *Tao* does everything for people rather than people doing something for themselves.

Park interprets the way of the cross according to the way of *Tao*. The way of the cross is the process of ‘self-denial’ (Luke 9:23), the new-life-giving power by the water and the Spirit (John 3:5), and the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6). God heals human beings’ *han* through the way of the cross as God gives us the new life by the water and the Spirit. Jesus shows the Way, the Truth, and the Life by loving God and loving his neighbors while he walks the way of the cross (Matsuoka and Fernandez 2003, pp. 47–52). Likewise, the way of *Tao* is “to transcend self-centeredness,” which is the starting point of healing and the harmonious life. As human beings follow the *Tao* without any artificial or superficial actions, they can experience not only personal transformation, but also social transformation, because this can transcend all evil power, which is the main cause of *han*. Finally, *Tao* is what gives us the new energy of life, just as water benefits all living things. The followers of *Tao* “conduct themselves as water, bringing forth benefit and goodness to others.” Park demonstrates more insightfully that “the person of *Tao* exercises true strength, not violent power, to change evil at the personal and social level. While letting go of their pain of *han*, the wounded challenge the wrongs of offenders through integrity, softness, persistence, mercy, and order. Water is the symbol of healing, changing sin and evil into the energy of construction for a community (Matsuoka and Fernandez 2003, pp. 50–51).” Park concludes, “To these *han*-laden people, it is more vital and significant to develop a theology of *Tao* than a theology of the Logos,” because “The *Tao* can resolve *han* and sin in their entanglement. It defeats sin at its root, not by violent reaction or oppression, but by a natural process (Matsuoka and Fernandez 2003, p. 52).” Thus, Asian Americans can discover the way of *Tao* as they follow the way of the cross of Jesus Christ.

Park’s articulation of *han* is part of a wider Asian and Korean genealogy in which suffering is not merely psychological pain but a socially produced wound bound up with histories of oppression and gendered violence (Chung 1990, pp. 1–10). This broader genealogy helps clarify why *han* functions methodologically in Park: it is a diagnostic category that names the depth-structure of wounded existence and therefore reorganizes soteriological reasoning around healing, forgiveness, and justice rather than around a narrowly juridical account of guilt. Moreover, Park’s intercultural move toward *Tao* can be read in conversation with Asian constructive projects that foreground theological translation and re-narration from within Asian life-worlds (Song 1986, pp. 1–3). Based on this reading, *Tao* is not introduced as an alternative religious authority but as a cross-cultural hermeneutical strategy for re-describing the Christ-event and discipleship as “the Way,” thereby extending a Scripture-centered Protestant grammar through Asian conceptual resources.

2.2. Marginality-Liminal Creativity

Type 2 translates coerced in-betweenness into a theological account of liminal creativity and reconciled difference. Rather than treating marginality solely as a sociological condition, this type reads marginal experience as a constructive site for theological imagination: the in-between becomes a space where identity, community, and vocation can be rearticulated beyond the binaries enforced by racialized centrality. Jung Young Lee's in-between/in-both/in-beyond schema and Sang Hyun Lee's emphasis on liminality illuminate how Asian American exclusion is interpreted not only as deprivation but also as a constrained possibility for *communitas*, critique, and new configurations of life together. Protestant grammar appears here through an ecclesial-ethical orientation: the community shaped by love, service, and reconciliation becomes a public witness to a "new center" where difference is neither erased nor absolutized.

Marginal experiences form the basis of the theology of Jung Young Lee, as he argues, "Marginality is a common ground that unites us, regardless of class, gender, cultural or ethnic differences in the United States (Lee 1995, pp. 2–3)." Although Asian Americans have diverse ethnic backgrounds and immigration histories, their experiences of struggle, suffering, survival, and flourishing are often marked by resilience and proliferation—like a dandelion that takes root, blooms, and disperses. Lee argues that the marginalizing experiences of Asian Americans and their autobiographical stories are the primary sources of theology (Lee 1995, pp. 7–8).

Lee describes four stages of marginality, drawing upon Robert E. Park's sociological interpretation of the race-relations cycle: the initial contact or encounter between the central people and the marginal people, competition, accommodation, and assimilation. In the first stage, "contact itself is an experience of marginality," where "competition is a process that marginalizes the vulnerable and the poor," and "total accommodation to the lifestyles and values of centrality is possible. But total assimilation is not, because of persistent racism by central people (Lee 1995, pp. 36–42)." Based on this acknowledgment of the race-cycle, Lee develops his argument of marginality with three definitions: in-between, in-both, and in-beyond.

The first definition of in-between is a classical understanding of marginality as it makes people aware of their place according to race and identity, a boundary apart from the center. Ironically, the more Asian Americans try to go into the center, the more they feel marginalized because of their cultural and racial distance from the center (Lee 1995, p. 45). These marginalized experiences make them acknowledge their in-between-ness, but in neither case. This two-world-ness can be explained as the "existential nothingness" which is the root of dehumanization. They form their self-image through self-alienation, and this gives them an undesirable personality development (Lee 1995, p. 46). This dual image of self, however, helps them examine themselves to be conscious of their self-image as being on a marginal boundary, which can encompass two or multiple worlds (Lee 1995, p. 47). This realization offers them a positive possibility, as it can sometimes foster creativity in affirming interconnectedness. Lee recapitulates, "The idea of interconnectedness "in-between" leads us to a positive and self-affirming understanding of marginality "in-both" worlds (Lee 1995, p. 47)."

As the contemporary definition of marginality, Lee suggests that in in-both-ness, self-affirmation broadens the marginal identity into the worlds of in-both. In-both-ness not only acknowledges the roots of an Asian American's Asianness but also makes them embrace their Americanness. Multicultural inclusiveness occurs in this space in that "marginality imposes a new reality that transcends marginalization, for it means to be truly in both or in all worlds (Lee 1995, p. 53)." Lee explains the connection between in-between and in-both:

The contemporary self-affirming definition means a marginal person is in-both worlds without giving up either one. I am more than an Asian because I am an American, and I am more than an American because I am an Asian. This positive self-affirmation helps me accept that the contemporary self-affirming definition is as realistic and meaningful as the classical self-negating definition. In other words, to be in-both is as authentic as to be in-between. (Lee 1995, p. 58)

Lee proceeds with his third definition, for in-beyond, a holistic one. The new marginality is “the harmony of difference,” which is the transcendent power of a new life to live in-both without any limitations to their boundaries. Therefore, the “new marginal person” is, for Lee, “a liberated person. . . truly free,” because such a person becomes “whole” and thus able to be fully present in the world (Lee 1995, p. 63). Precisely because this person is “whole,” Lee argues, the new marginal person can reconcile “two opposing worlds” within the self and become “a reconciler and a wounded healer” in relation to a rigid two-category system (Lee 1995, p. 63). In this sense, Lee proposes “new marginality” as a creative nexus that connects different—often antagonistic—worlds and enables a more inclusive social imagination (Lee 1995, p. 63). This is the space for a new harmonious center that can achieve all-embracing fulfillment, empowered by love, which does not mean that everything is united, but that the worlds will be liberated and reconciled through the power of harmony. Therefore, “a theology of marginality deals with both the central perspective of marginality (neither/nor) and the self-affirming perspective of marginality (both/and). This inclusive approach makes marginal theology holistic, which is appropriate for a multicultural society (Lee 1995, p. 75).”

Lee develops his argument for overcoming marginality through marginality, arguing that it can transform the world and individuals alike. In particular, he recapitulates that personality can be transformed through experiences of marginality. The marginalized have experienced rejection, humiliation, dehumanization, alienation, loneliness, and nothingness. These sensibilities, however, make them sense their new potentiality to overcome marginality through their experiences of love as Jesus did as “the marginal of the marginal people.” They can sense their allness and new vision of life, “which was inaugurated in the resurrection of Jesus-Christ (Lee 1995, p. 169)⁴.” The new vision of life and the world is not a life that is simply unified, but a new life in which the differences are harmonized (Lee 1995, p. 170). Lee concludes, “Marginality is overcome through marginality, and all are marginal to God manifest in Jesus-Christ. When all of us are marginal, love becomes the norm of our lives, and service becomes the highest aspiration of our creativity. We then become servants to one another in love (Lee 1995, p. 170).” This is the new vision of the Christian church in the world and its ministry for the world, as well as the way of Christian theology.

Sang Hyun Lee is another Asian American theologian who focuses on the marginalized experiences of Asian Americans and their theological implications. Sang Hyun Lee reevaluates the socio-cultural experiences of Asian Americans in terms of the racial identity of Asian Americans. Asian Americans experience two kinds of racial assimilation: cultural and structural. Structural assimilation matters are worse than those of cultural assimilation in that cultural differences, in a sense, can be accepted by white American peers, but the structure of American racism never allows Asian Americans to be “one of them” in terms of structural assimilation. Phenomenologically, cultural adaptation does not guarantee Asian Americans to be accepted socially and politically by the dominant group (Matsuoka and Fernandez 2003, pp. 23–25). This is the invisible reality of Anti-Asian American racism. To show us this reality, Lee uses the metaphor “strangers from a different shore” from Ronald Takaki’s history book (Matsuoka and Fernandez 2003, p. 24).

Marginal experiences of Asian Americans have two dimensions, which are interrelated: in-between-ness and non-acceptance by the dominant group. Lee depicts that

Asian Americans are forced to remain in between, pushed to stay there. The spatial image of in-between-ness has to be combined with the power phenomenon of being pushed to remain in between. The Asian American in-between-ness is a forced in-between-ness. Thus, as we relate to the two dimensions in the marginal predicament of Asian Americans, we come to the realization that the marginality of Asian American is a coerced in-between-ness, or an in-between-ness that is made seemingly permanent by the dominant group. (Matsuoka and Fernandez 2003, p. 13)

Ironically yet interestingly, this marginal experience has its own creative nature in terms of in-between-ness, that is “liminality.” While the marginalized are aware of their power of resistance to struggle against marginalization, they realize their creativity from their in-between-ness and liminality.

Lee demonstrates three positive aspects of liminality: openness to the new, the emergence of *communitas*, and the creative space for the prophetic, knowledge, and action (Matsuoka and Fernandez 2003, pp. 14–16). Lee uses Victor Turner in order to explore the openness and potentiality of liminality as follows: “Liminality is society’s ‘subjective mood, where suppositions, desires, hypotheses, possibilities, and so forth all become legitimate.’ Liminality is ‘a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise (Turner 1969, pp. 94–129)⁵.’ Liminality, in short, is an openness and potentiality for what is new and different (Matsuoka and Fernandez 2003, p. 14).” In terms of *communitas*, Lee also cites Turner, “*communitas* breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; and at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority (Matsuoka and Fernandez 2003, p. 16).” Lee argues, “liminality is the creative space where one has the freedom to break down the status quo and also the freedom to rebuild it in a different way (Matsuoka and Fernandez 2003, p. 17).” As a negative concept, liminality is the space in which critical knowledge develops with the structure and the center. However, it is also a positive and transformative way to envision and enact new ideas and models (Matsuoka and Fernandez 2003, pp. 17–18).

Lastly, Lee defines “marginality” as a “coerced liminality” in that Asian Americans exhibit in-between-ness “that is suppressed, frustrated, and unfulfilled by barriers that are not in one’s own control. Even though “liminality is a potentially creative condition,” a coerced liminality is “marginalization” with all of its dehumanizing consequences (Matsuoka and Fernandez 2003, p. 26).” Lee concludes that “this definition of marginality enables us to recognize a potential creativity of liminality in the Asian American experience without ignoring the negative effects of racism in American society. The Asian American minority in America, in other words, is that of a liminal people who can use their in-between liminality precisely to struggle against marginalization. But their liminality is forcibly suppressed by racist hostilities, and it has been crying out to be freed from suppression.” This definition shows us the main task of “a constructive Asian American Theology (Matsuoka and Fernandez 2003, p. 26).”

2.3. *Struggle-Praxis and Eschatological Accountability*

Type 3 frames political struggle as a primary community of theological accountability and translates historical oppression into praxis-oriented theological construction. Here, theology is not primarily a discourse about struggle but a mode of participation within struggle—an interpretive and constructive practice accountable to communities seeking liberation. Eleazar S. Fernandez’s theology of struggle exemplifies this logic by contesting fatalistic theologies and relocating theological authority toward contextualization, sociopo-

litical analysis, and praxis. Eschatological hope functions not as escapism but as a critical horizon that energizes present-tense action, ecclesial conversion, and public truth-telling. In Protestant grammatical terms, this type foregrounds reform and witness: the church is called to repentance, solidarity, and prophetic engagement as part of a wider struggle for restored humanity.

Eleazar S. Fernandez initiates his theological inquiry by examining Filipinos' acceptance of their dehumanizing situation through fatalism, that everything comes from the will of God. He suggests the realization of the truth that a situation is not from the will of God, but a product of history, and thus, it can be changed. He uses a Filipino slogan, "Hindi Ka nag-iisa (you are not alone)" to encourage and empower Filipinos to join the struggle for a better society. This is the central idea of his theological theme—the theology of struggle: that is, the companion of Filipino Christians in their struggle for liberation (Fernandez 1994, pp. 1–2). Fernandez states,

The theology of struggle then manifests a struggle in theology: that theology is one arena in which a struggle has to be waged. . . . This means that Filipinos must attempt to theologize from their own experience; Filipino theologians must cease being mere theological compradors of the Western theological megamarkets. In Edicio de la Torre's powerful words, "Christ must be a Filipino if Filipinos are to be Christians. (Fernandez 1994, p. 2)⁶

Fernandez develops his theological argument as he analyzes the social context, the theological construction, and method based on his concept of theology of struggle. To be sure, Fernandez's theology of struggle shares liberation theology's methodological commitments to praxis and to the preferential option for the oppressed (e.g., Gutiérrez 1971; Sobrino 1991). However, the typological point here is not merely thematic overlap but the specific manner in which "struggle" functions as a community of accountability that reorganizes theological sources, authority, and ecclesial vocation.

While three imperial powers, Spain, the U.S.A, Japan, and again the U.S.A., had colonized the Philippines during the nineteenth and the twentieth century, the majority of Filipinos accepted their fate that their dehumanized situation was the will of God. Fernandez calls it "the totalizing perspective" of the conqueror, which has overwhelmed the whole country of the Philippines (Fernandez 1994, pp. 6–8). However, Fernandez argues that the history of the Philippines is not a simple story of cowardice; he also accounts for the various resistances and struggles of Filipinos. For instance, the resistance movements against the Spanish colonizer, like the resistance of Lapu-lapu against Fernando Magallanes and the revolutionary movement under the leadership of Katipunan, were almost successful in gaining their independence, but they failed because of the result of the Philippine-American War in 1899. During World War II, Filipinos organized guerrilla resistance against Japanese colonization. After WWII, Filipinos had struggled against the neo-colonial regime of the U.S.A. Progressive and radical groups have struggled against three evils in the Philippines: feudalism, imperialism, and bureaucratic capitalism. Moreover, Filipinos struggled against the dictator Ferdinand Marcos during the country's period of independence (Fernandez 1994, pp. 8–11). More importantly, although middle-class groups such as teachers, medical practitioners, and lawyers had joined these resistance movements, the majority of these resisting groups were the most oppressed, comparable to the peasantry, workers, and poor in the urban context (Fernandez 1994, pp. 12–15). Interestingly, there is a wonderful slogan for this history of struggle: "Kung Hindi Tayo Kikilos, sinong kikilus? Kung hindi ngayon, kalian pa (If we do not act, who will act? If not now, when?) (Fernandez 1994, p. 18)?" This is the backbone of the theology of struggle.

Fernandez places particular value on the struggle of the Filipinos church and its theological understanding of struggle. The theology of struggle is not like a popular

fashion phase that disappears soon after the political structural issue is solved, because it focuses on the struggle of people for liberation (Fernandez 1994, p. 23). It is contextual theology, rooted in the suffering, aspirations, and struggles of the people. Fernandez clearly argues, “Contextualization is an imperative if theology is to be responsive and relevant to the suffering and struggling people, that is, if it is to be liberating (Fernandez 1994, p. 26).” Here is the location of theology that it makes people do ‘praxis’ as the maxim of liberation theology: “From the struggle it derives its life and motivation; it is struggle that it serves. Geared toward enhancing the people’s struggle, it is only proper that its primary community of accountability is the struggling community, primarily to strengthen and equip it for the long and arduous struggle (Fernandez 1994, p. 27).” When the majority of people who are suffering are engraved with the idea of kapalaran (a form of fatalism), the theology should create liberation from their place of kapalaran to the light of eschatology and struggle, and their request for humanity and subjecthood. Thus, the theology of struggle is a theology of liberation (Fernandez 1994, pp. 31–32).

For those who are suffering, wounded, bruised, mangled, and victimized, the eschatological understanding of history can serve as a wider horizon of hope. Eschatological hope is not a simple desire to escape or refuse their reality, but it is the fullness of hope to live in the present for the promise of the future. This is the hope of those who are aware of their suffering and know how to cry, the hope of subjugating these memories and experiencing resurrection in their realities (Fernandez 1994, pp. 47–49). Eschatological hope, thus, does not come from a simple negation of oppression, but is initiated by the critique and subversion of the dominant order. The power of eschatological hope can formulate a new power of freedom and justice for the future of people (Fernandez 1994, pp. 50–51). The political struggle is also based on this eschatological hope. This is not a struggle for those who have extreme resentment against the oppressors, but this is the struggle of those who have the spiritual strength related to God’s grace. Fernandez argues that eschatological hope enables the oppressed to discern the sources and uses of power and to cultivate what he calls “people’s power” as a communal capacity ordered toward the common good, rather than power mobilized for narrow group interests (Fernandez 1994, pp. 56–58). Accordingly, the praxis of eschatological hope strengthens people to stand with the poor—not because God shows favoritism, but because God wills human freedom (Fernandez 1994, pp. 62–63).

Fernandez criticizes the Western concepts of humanity or selfhood in that the Euro-American understanding of ego usually focuses on the individual self rather than the humanity of others. This tendency leads people to form a distorted view of humanity, namely that freedom is for the strong and that the weak should be under the mercy of the strong (Fernandez 1994, pp. 73–75). This forms a “conquering anthropology” that blames the victims and misnames others, for example, as “developing country,” “first-world” and “third-world,” or “reasonable men” or “insane men.” Filipinos have been devalued and exploited by this bad anthropology, especially the poor, women, and children, and even the nature of the Philippines (Fernandez 1994, pp. 79–82). Instead, Fernandez advocates the humanity of the oppressed:

The restoration of the humanity of the struggling Filipinos requires that they themselves realize their dehumanization, that anthropology takes as its new interlocutor not the bourgeois subjects, but the “nonpersons.” With the eruption of the subjugated peoples around the world, there have been some attempts at trying to recover the humanity of the conquered. (Fernandez 1994, p. 85)

It is important for Filipinos to obtain their own image of humanity because it is the only the way for them to realize themselves and present a good example of the hope for the future of the global community, especially to countries that remain oppressed. Therefore,

the search for a new humanity is “only by way of struggle, through struggle, in being in and of the struggle, that this new humanity is to be born and find its present expressions (Fernandez 1994, p. 96).”

With a similar account on the conquering anthropology of the Western tradition, Fernandez criticizes the ecclesiocentrism of the Euro-American tradition in that it is a “religious consciousness characterized by universalistic and totalistic thinking” and is also “a history of the rise of one particular group, locale, race, and interest group that became the sponsor of Christianity (Fernandez 1994, p. 130).” Instead, he proposes a new ecclesial paradigm. First, the church needs to be a site of struggle within a wider struggle as an instrument of liberation, as it tries to decenter the ecclesiocentrism of the Euro-American tradition of the church. Second, the church should remember its history of suffering to overcome triumphalist ecclesiocentrism. Third, the church should work toward a new reformation through repentance and conversion—above all, the church’s own conversion—repenting of its noninvolvement in resistance movements and turning toward the poor with humility, service, and solidarity with the marginalized (Fernandez 1994, pp. 146–48). This is the way toward recovering the prophetic tradition in the Old Testament and the mission of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. To this end, Fernandez suggests that the church should become the witness to suffering, hope, and struggle (Fernandez 1994, pp. 150–51) and argues that this new ecclesial paradigm is the basis for an ecumenical movement that deliberates the global community and the new way of being of peoplehood and human dwelling. Although the church exists in the world in a fragile form, it can and should become the conveyor of the truth for people who are struggling in not only the Philippines, but also global communities (Fernandez 1994, pp. 155–57).

Lastly, Fernandez argues that the theology of struggle is a new way of “doing theology (Fernandez 1994, p. 164).” His central theological construction of the theology of struggle is “contextualization.” Arguing that theology is grounded in the context rather than the house of authority of the Euro-American tradition. He then criticizes the aspect of habitus in theology, “Third-world theological constructions and the theology of struggle in particular need to retrieve and revise this notion of theology as habitus (understood as soul saving) in terms of theology as habitus of transformative praxis. Liberation theology has spearheaded a notion of theology that moves in this direction with its emphasis on praxis (Fernandez 1994, p. 166).” More profoundly, he identifies the nature of the theology of struggle as follows: a reflexive/reflective activity of Filipino communities who are involved in the struggle, a theological discernment for this struggle, the connection of this struggle to the contemporary situation both theoretically and practically, the interpretations and analysis of the idioms of Filipino, and the praxis of the ongoing struggle of Filipinos for liberation (Fernandez 1994, p. 167). The sources of the theology of struggle, moreover, are the experiences of Filipinos, the context, the sociopolitical and cultural analysis, traditions, and Scripture. In particular, the experiences of suffering in their social context need to be considered first, as theology can be distorted by the Euro-American misconception of the third world. Although tradition, in a sense, implies a house of authority, it should be modified by the theology of struggle through contextualization. Moreover, Scripture is indispensable for the theology of struggle as it reveals the truth of life, which does come from the oppressors, but from the Word of God for the sufferers (Fernandez 1994, pp. 170–73).

Finally, Fernandez proposes a new way of ‘doing theology’ in terms of the theology of struggle, suggesting four categories: “doing theology in context,” “doing theology in its spirituality,” “doing theology in the art of life,” and “doing theology with the technique of understanding (Fernandez 1994, pp. 183–87).” Thus, Fernandez shows us his theological foundation of the theology of struggle based on his interpretation of the social experi-

ences of Filipinos and their struggle for their humanity, their spirituality, and Christianity for themselves.

2.4. Race-Peoplehood/Communion and Critique of Idolatrous Chosenness

Type 4 translates racialized experience in a multiracial society into a confessional critique of idolatry and a constructive vision of peoplehood as communion. In this type, racism is not treated as a secondary “social issue” added onto theology but as a structurally embedded moral-spiritual formation that distorts imagination, institutions, and communal life. Fumitaka Matsuoka’s “color of faith” approach exemplifies how theological reasoning can diagnose racial supremacy as idolatrous chosenness while retrieving practices of conversation, communication, and ecclesial communion as counter-formations. Protestant grammar is visible in the interplay of confession and moral praxis: acknowledging finitude and sin, resisting evil in institutional forms, and cultivating communities of justice-oriented reconciliation.

Fumitaka Matsuoka begins his theological work by questioning the racial issues inherent in contemporary multicultural society. He reveals that the founders of racism and their claims of “truth” are not “self-evident” at all as racism is a system in which the privileged group in economic, social, cultural, and intellectual spheres promotes the domination of “the vulnerable.” In particular, the claim of truth in racism is meaningless in this society, where diverse voices compete with particular moral, cultural, and spiritual traditions and histories, so that each tradition is divided in its encounter with others (Matsuoka 1998, p. 3). Racism permeates social life, yet relationships among racial groups remain marked by persistent tension rather than by a shared commitment to valuing difference. In this context, Matsuoka calls for a critical pause to reflect on race and racism within a multicultural society. Matsuoka argues that our society should move toward conversational “communion” which is rooted in human relatedness from the speechlessness of difference and alienation. Matsuoka cites Martin Buber: “A person is truly saved from the ‘one’ not by separation but only by being bound up in genuine communion.” Matsuoka further states, “Communion is not possible where speech is destroyed by callousness, violence, and other acts that erode trust among people. In the midst of theological silence, ways need to be found that open a world of conversation, communication, and communion (Matsuoka 1998, pp. 4–5).” Matsuoka suggests three focal challenges to theology in order to communicate with each other: (1) explore the common struggle of race relationships, like our social values and institutions, and assess the meaning of the common confessional coherence of the Body of Christ and interactions within churches; (2) explore the ways of power dynamics in our racially pluralistic society and the means of the rights of the racially separated churches; and (3) witness the signs of promise within historic faith communities related to the culture of resistance against racial violence amid our historically diverse and divided population (Matsuoka 1998, p. 6)⁷. Matsuoka’s diagnosis of racism as a deformation of imagination and institution can be situated within wider theological discourse that treats race as a constitutive theological problem rather than a secondary ethical add-on (Carter 2008; Jennings 2010). This placement clarifies why “race” in Type 4 functions methodologically—shaping theological reasoning regarding peoplehood, sin, and communion.

Theologically, “chosenness” is directly related to the racial dominance of certain groups of people. The perception of race originated with the European expansion from the 1400s. Their chosenness promoted their exploitation and occupation of “others” with violence. In particular, the ideology of “the chosen” prevailed in the U.S. in that they were the chosen people of God to conquer the new land, and it developed into a form of white supremacy, such as idolatry (Matsuoka 1998, pp. 26–28). Matsuoka argues that this “idolatrous cho-

senness” of white supremacy—an absolutization of one group—helped legitimate and perpetuate the historical tragedy of slavery. This racial idolatrous ideology formulates a particular cultural structure in the U.S. (Matsuoka 1998, p. 30). Matsuoka recapitulates, “The idolatrous history of one human group has become powerfully destructive, devoid of life-giving power in relationship, incapable of experiencing others’ feelings (Matsuoka 1998, p. 34).” This power of idols is embedded into the economic system for the absolutized group not only in the history of slavery but also in the immigrant history of the U.S. The European immigrants, the chosen, became the center of the American economic system, but the colored immigrants were sent to the bottom of this economic system. More terribly, the Europeans chose to frame their privileged cultural peculiarity, but not vice versa. That is people of color did not have any notion of their peoplehood, so racial plurality was totally ignored under this idolatrous racial system (Matsuoka 1998, pp. 35–37).

Cultural studies are required to investigate racial pluralism in order to speak of race theologically, as there is no coherent definition of race. Matsuoka says: “Race is both dynamic and fluid, defying any attempt to provide a comprehensive definition (Matsuoka 1998, p. 42).” Cultural studies value the mutuality of race relations by seeing the significance of the reciprocal influence of groups on one another and diminishing interracial pressures. Thus, cultural studies reveal their racial issues and relativize group differences, especially their interracial power dynamics, without the totalization of human equality, which simplifies human diversities (Matsuoka 1998, pp. 46–48). In order to articulate race theologically, we need to confess our finitude and the goodness of creation as we esteem the promise of redemption based on the nature of God, humanity, and church (Matsuoka 1998, p. 50). This theological question is initiated by our understanding of communion, that is, what constitutes “we” in our society. In a sense, the church needs to be the center to witness God’s intended wholeness for all creation. In another sense, Scripture provides a primary source for understanding peoplehood in relation to racial relatedness, calling Christian communities to bear witness to God’s redeeming love (Matsuoka 1998, pp. 53–54). However, we need to be aware of the stubbornness of racial evil at the very nucleus of our society and its framework. Matsuoka demonstrates the significance of theological study of race as follows: “A Christian understanding of peoplehood must proceed with an acknowledgment of this foundational inequality that is woven into the fabric of our society. Our task is not just a prescriptive attempt to right the existing ills of race relations. What is needed instead is an honest yet humble confessional act of witnessing to the gracious hospitality of God and at the same time a vigorous rebuff of those attempts to substitute human fearfulness for God’s grace (Matsuoka 1998, pp. 55–56).”

Racism is the “monopoly of imagination” in that evil embodies in institutions with coercive power as it manipulates human knowledge, dehumanizes us, and even drives us toward death (Matsuoka 1998, p. 57). Evil generates discrimination that dehumanizes, victimizes, and forces people into the margin. Reconciliation, thus, cannot be possible with the simple restoration of the broken relationship, but it should remedy the issue of injustice for victims. As the monopoly of imagination, evil makes people pretend to restore their broken relationship without the resolution of injustice toward victims. Accordingly, Matsuoka frames racism as both a societal illness and a theological concern, rooted in evil’s power to deform imagination and embed itself in institutions. Matsuoka recapitulates,

The good, as embodied by the recovery of dignity and equality for all people, must be maximized not only through the rejection of the veil of racism but ultimately through the transformation of evil, redirecting its energy and passion to the service of the good. . . . Hence it is capable of redemption by the process of the world spirit, the grace of God, or the redemptive activity of people even though the end of racism cannot be discernibly assured. (Matsuoka 1998, pp. 60–61)

Matsuoka suggests undertaking moral praxis, such as education, housing, criminal justice, employment, health care, and colonialism, in order to deal with this structural condition of racism and the issue of racial justice. The issues of housing, health care and unemployment prevail in the agendas of racism and classism, which should be dealt with in the political arena like the civil rights movement. Moreover, the issues of colonialism and education in racism is an innate problem of society in the form of mental or cultural trauma. The issue of criminal justice and racism is the most pronounced and tragic problem as it cannot inspire any hope for any people (Matsuoka 1998, pp. 65–94). Matsuoka signifies the voices of the subsidiary institutions like family, church, and neighbors:

“The voices of neighbors in subsidiary institutions bespeak a wistful longing for another life that could be lived with a singleness of vision that is driven by neither rage nor fear. These voices invite a faithful living-through. That living-through is possible, however, only when the pathos of personhood, the rawness of power, and the hidden resilience of human hope converge. These neighbors strive to express in their living this faithful living-through.” (Matsuoka 1998, p. 96)

Lastly, Matsuoka illustrates the possibility that transcends beyond the dividing walls of hostility through his theological perspectives. Firstly, we need to confess that “diversity is not a curse, not some problem to be solved, but rather it is the supreme expression of the creative spirit of God (Matsuoka 1998, p. 103).” This confession allows us to realize our relatedness, in that we cannot be saved without others, and overcome our fear, distrust, and hatred toward our neighbors. It makes the church become the sole witness to this structural issue, as well as serve society by breaking down barriers among people. This is a new vision of the holistic community in the world. To realize this vision, we need to be honest and humble about our past when the church became a puppet of racism, and to remember this history for our future, so we overstep the myopia of racial and cultural superiority (Matsuoka 1998, pp. 103–8). Secondly, we need to articulate a new vision for humanity’s communion, grounded in the reciprocity and openness of peoplehood. We should further articulate the redemptive tradition that focuses on the fullness of humanity, the embracement of others, and the forgiveness of our hatred and estrangement of others (Matsuoka 1998, pp. 108–11). Thirdly, we should have a fellowship of reconciliation regardless of racial identities. This fellowship is founded on justice and truth, mutual accountability and love, and the Eucharistic power of the gospel (Matsuoka 1998, pp. 114–15). Lastly, this fellowship can follow community revitalization through the participation of churches and other religious groups in this process (Matsuoka 1998, pp. 118–20). Matsuoka concludes,

“The signs of hope that are present in Christian faith communities reveal this dimension of race relations and, at the same time, the vision of humanity by which the present reality is being measured. The vision speaks of what is possible in race relations. It also provides us with clues as to how race matters and how the challenges are to be addressed. These clues are not merely utilitarian clues about how to solve race issues; rather, they speak of how people to live with each other.” (Matsuoka 1998, p. 121)

2.5. Post-Colonial Imagination and Re-Writing Theology

Type 5 employs postcolonial imagination as a method of re-writing theology through diasporic, gendered, and imperial histories. Rather than beginning with stable doctrinal essences, this type asks, “Who are we?” within asymmetrical power relations and treats hybridity, memory, and difference as constitutive of theological subjectivity. Pui-lan Kwok’s historical, dialogical, and diasporic imaginations exemplify a hermeneutical strategy that retrieves subjugated memories and resists Western Christian normativity as the unquestioned center. Anne Joh’s postcolonial feminist Christology, articulated through *han* and

jeong, demonstrates how the cross can be read as the risky praxis of love amid abjection, thereby reconfiguring atonement discourse without collapsing into either the romanticization of suffering or denial of redemptive possibility. Protestant grammar appears here as a disciplined practice of re-reading Scripture and tradition toward de-centering, solidarity, and constructive doctrinal imagination.

Postcolonial theology begins with questions such as, “Who am I?” and “Who are we?” instead of “What am I?” and “What are we?” The concepts of alienation, marginality, hybridity, and mimicry collectively form the basic conceptual identity within postcolonial theory and theology, which is like a “labyrinth of identities (Keller et al. 2004, introduction).” This postcolonial identity promotes Asian theologians and several Western white theologians to reevaluate hybridity and Christianity, as they come to doubt the meaning of “an essential sameness,” which is the basic thought of human subjectivity in Euro-American traditions (Keller et al. 2004, pp. 11–12). Rather, Christianity is not based on sameness, despite its hybrid origins from both the Greek and Jewish traditions during the Roman imperial period before it became a monolithic version after Constantine. Christianity also founded various events of relationships “between aliens, between places and between times.” More insightfully and thoroughly, “Relationships are internalized through mimicry as hybridity. Within the imperial condition, then, a human subject is a hybrid event rent by the asymmetries of power (Keller et al. 2004, pp. 13–14).” The issue of identity is the focus of the postcolonial milieu in that it not only criticizes the Westernized understanding of identity in terms of sameness but also proposes the asymmetrical state of human relationships in terms of differences⁸.

Asian American postcolonial feminist theology has been trying to answer the ultimate question of “Who are we?” with the same question of postcolonial theology. In particular, Pui-lan Kwok developed postcolonial feminist theology more profoundly as she depicts the postcolonial imagination. Kwok’s starting point for the postcolonial imagination is that of women’s experiences, especially their colonized experiences, including their stories, songs, poems, dances, crafts, and so forth. She explains her idea of imagination, “without the power of imagination, we cannot envision a different past, present, and future. Without interrogating the mind’s “I/eye,” we are left without alternative perspectives to see reality and to chart where we may be going. For what we cannot imagine, we cannot live into and struggle for (Kwok 2005, p. 30).” Kwok’s postcolonial feminist imagination participates in, and can be sharpened by, postcolonial theory’s attention to the production of knowledge under an empire and to the problem of subaltern representation (e.g., Spivak 1988). It also resonates with postcolonial biblical criticism that interrogates how Scripture has been read within colonial modernity and how biblical interpretation can become a site of resistance and reconfiguration (e.g., Sugirtharajah 2006). These interlocutors clarify the methodological thrust of Type 5: theology is not merely contextual “application,” but a re-writing of theological imagination under asymmetrical power.

There are three main types of postcolonial imaginations in Kwok’s feminist theology: historical, dialogical, and diasporic. History is not simply the story of winners, a view that emphasizes a monolithic identity; rather, it is the memory of those who have resisted “institutionally sanctioned forgetfulness.” The remembrance of their experiences speaks directly to us that “the body, in an enslaved and colonial context, speaks a language of hunger, beating, and rape, as well as resistance, survival, and healing (Kwok 2005, p. 37).” This memory opens us up to the hope for tomorrow rather than to the notion of an ambiguous future, such as the final eschaton (unpredictable utopia) or the progress of history (Kwok 2005, pp. 37–38). Dialogical imagination is the source of the creative hermeneutics of Asia, which drives us to “imagine the whole,” which Gadamer demonstrates as the “fusion of horizons (Kwok 2005, p. 39).” Kwok demonstrates two focal points of this multicultural

dialog: to consider the theoretical challenge posed by the studies of the contact zone, and to capture the fluidity and contingent character of Asian cultures (Kwok 2005, p. 43)⁹. Finally, diasporic imagination “recognizes the diversity of diasporas and honors the different histories and memories.” Thus, it has to “decenter and decompose the ubiquitous logic and “common sense” that the cultural form and norm of Christianity is defined by the West. It resists a predetermined and prescribed universalism and a colonial mode of thinking but insists on the reterritorialization of the West and by tracing how the so-called center and periphery of Christianity have always been doubly inscribed, and mutually constituted (Kwok 2005, pp. 48–49). Kwok’s postcolonial feminist imagination also resonates with third-world and postcolonial biblical interpretation that foregrounds the voices of marginalized communities and interrogates colonial readings of Scripture (Sugirtharajah 2006, pp. 64–81). This strengthens the methodological claim of Type 5: theology advances through re-reading and re-narrating Scripture and tradition under conditions of asymmetrical power.

Based on these imaginings, Kwok develops her postcolonial feminist theology with two major concerns: the sources of postcolonial feminist theology and its theological vision in terms of her argument for “redoing theology.” There are four sources of postcolonial feminist theology: women’s experiences, Scripture, tradition and reason. Scripture, tradition and reason need to be reclaimed by women’s experiences as the sources of truth because feminist theologians cannot count on “the androcentric interpretation” of Scripture in church tradition related to truth claims (Kwok 2005, pp. 53–54). Kwok analyzes four issues of women’s experience in terms of feminist theology: the truth claim of theology on women’s experience, the universalizing tendency in feminist discourse, the postmodern challenge of the issue of subjectivity and the politics of difference and solidarity among women (Kwok 2005, p. 54).

Feminist theology emerged from feminist theory from the late 1960s to the present, and feminist theology shifted from the commonalities of women’s experience to the differences in women’s experience. It focused on the theoretical explanations of women’s subordinate status during the 1970s and developed into the issue of ontological foundations in women’s experience during the 1980s. These common and universal aspects of women’s experience can serve as a basis for feminist solidarity and reflection. The issue of being different and otherness, however, makes feminist theologians ask the significance of the notion of subject, especially for postcolonial feminist theologians, as they criticize the essentialism of women and their experience. This question of subjectivity comes from the claim of postmodern and poststructural theory that “no autonomous and transcendent ‘I’ that is not marked by social coding and discursively constituted (Kwok 2005, p. 57).” Feminists’ main argument is “whether we can speak of ‘women,’ of ‘subjectivity,’ and of ‘agency’ and on the implications of these concepts for the struggle against injustice (Kwok 2005, p. 57).” The issue of plurality and solidarity needs to be considered simultaneously with a search for a new space of sisterhood which is a constantly moving space and is located at the boundary of patriarchal spaces as a new center. Therefore, “a postcolonial perspective must insist that not all women are included in the pronoun ‘our,’ the boundaries of patriarchy’s space are not the same, and the transparent space is constructed because of the power difference implicit in the white gaze (Kwok 2005, p. 59).”

Kwok exemplifies the stories in the book of Ruth in order to develop her theological perspectives on the issues of gender, sexuality, and politics of otherness. This book is related to Kwok’s interests in the history of immigration, discussion of foreigners, and politics of identity formation in the U.S., especially her investigation into the significance of “home” which reveals the desire, identity, and sense of belongingness of immigrants to postcolonial critics (Kwok 2005, pp. 101–2). There are several foci in the image of home, such as kinship, the patriarchal household, and hospitality for strangers. Kwok highlights

the substance of foreign women “as the boundary marker” to characterize the difference in cultures in the contact zone related to the reflection of home as kinship (Kwok 2005, p. 107). Kwok regards several characters of home as patriarchal, like female protagonists, female friendships, decent/indecident female sexual behavior, and lesbian love in terms of the power dynamics of race, nation, and ethnicity (Kwok 2005, p. 108). Drawing on Honig, Kwok highlights how “home” is constituted through boundaries—between home and stranger, the “dangerous alien” and the assimilated immigrant, kinship-style identity and a contested democracy—thereby framing hospitality to strangers as a politically charged practice rather than a neutral virtue (Kwok 2005, p. 112).

Kwok develops her argument of “redoing theology” as she asks, “Who are the people who can do postcolonial feminist theology?” She tries to answer this question with her inclusive implication for both the female colonizers and the colonized women, in that their different social locations and subject positions led to the intersection of oppressions. She points out three focal issues of this theological venture: the issue of how to reconceptualize the relation between theology and empire through the multiple lenses of gender, race, class, sexuality, religion and so forth; the issue of how to conceptualize the religious difference that has fueled much colonial discourse; and the issue of how to deal with environmental degradation and its impact on the lives of marginalized women who bear the major brunt of its effects (Kwok 2005, pp. 144–45). Kwok suggests two approaches to this: a reformist and an inductive approach¹⁰. The former approach involves the theological adoption of the traditional concept of God, Christ, atonement, and church for this new venture for postcolonial feminist theology. The latter begins with the postcolonial analysis of the human condition, and then articulates the theological themes based on the results. Finally, Kwok argues that both approaches should benefit one another in order to realize the “vast potential of postcolonial inquiry” in theology (Kwok 2005, pp. 147–49).

Anne Joh insightfully develops her postcolonial feminist theology by exploring the implications of postcolonial imaginations for postcolonial Christology, specifically based on her experiences of *han* and *jeong* (Love) as both an Asian and Korean American¹¹. In other words, she inscribes her theological work of Christology with her postcolonial feminist perspectives, like the issue of identity, hybridity, marginality, and mimicry, and then examines traditional Christology, especially Moltmann, with her feminist critiques. Diasporic identity makes immigrants formulate a double consciousness of their notion of home, that is, the uncertainty of being “out of place.” This ambiguity of diasporic identity, ironically, affects ‘diasporic subjectivity’ of which immigrants acknowledge their “elsewhere-ness” in their relationship with the cultural politics of their current homes. This paradoxical notion of their identity, with multiple roots and routes, makes them aware of their “inevitable process of hybridization” of all the various roots in which they have traversed (Joh 2006, pp. 3–4). Beyond the essentialism of the Western tradition of ontology, this diasporic identity investigates in-betweenness, homelessness, hyphenation, and multicultural relatedness in order to cultivate the possibility, potentiality, and continuity of their diasporic journey toward the forthcoming discourse of the issue of identity in theology and philosophy (Joh 2006, pp. 9–12). Postcolonial feminist theology especially delves into the significance of otherness and relationality rather than the essence of being or pluralism of the Western tradition. Otherness and relationality embrace the double-edged diasporic identity and admit the inter-subjectivity rather than the account of individual subjectivity. Thus, differences have been the crux of the postcolonial feminist discourse of the issue of identity of politics against totalizing narratives, such as those of racism, sexism, and classism. Joh values this relationality in order to build up her theological argument of a new approach to Christology based on her postcolonial feminist discourse as she makes

the most of her diasporic experience of *jeong* as the backbone of relationality between the self and the other (Joh 2006, pp. 13–18).

Joh expounds her postcolonial feminist theological argument into the significance of the crucifixion of God through the way of *jeong*. She resonates with the execution of Jesus through her Christological perspective of *jeong* as “the execution, the cross event, discloses both the horror of abjection/*han* and the power of *jeong*/love. The execution, then, is the way of the cross; it is a particular way of living out the praxis of *jeong* (Joh 2006, p. 73).” The traditional atonement theory describes a passive suffering of Jesus for the sake of the world; instead, the execution of the Roman Empire implies that Jesus had enough power to threaten the Empire, so the death of Jesus might be interpreted as “the result of the liberative *jeong* that is at the heart of liberative action, a living by the way of the cross (Joh 2006, p. 73).” She delves into Moltmann to further develop her Christological argument. Moltmann focuses on the Trinitarian event on the cross in his Christology. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are interrelated on the cross in that God speaks on the cross through the death of the Son, who was not yet dead. Joh criticizes this Christological perspective of Moltmann: “The suffering, utter abjection on the cross, is somehow theologically masked or contained (Joh 2006, p. 77).” The event of the cross is not only of God, but also of the abjection of the other. God is part of both *han* and *jeong*; thus, “God is ‘holy’ but paradoxically abject in all abjectness’s misery, suffering, and pain (Joh 2006, p. 83).” Joh infers that Moltmann’s theology implies God’s thorough attendance of love/*jeong* on the cross, but she goes further than Moltmann to her perception of Jesus’ experience of abjection and *han*, as the expression of our discrimination, that is, the central experience of our *han* (Joh 2006, p. 83).

Therefore, “the cross is not redemptive in itself, nor should it stand as a symbol of love alone.” Rather, “the cross is a possible risk for those who live in the fullness of *jeong*. It presents the horror of abjection while recognizing the love that simultaneously irrupts on the cross. . . . What is significant about the cross, then, is not that Jesus died on it but that because of his living out of *jeong*, he ends up de facto on the cross (Joh 2006, p. 106).” Joh concludes her theological argument as follows:

Jeong has power to unravel *han* through heart and connectedness in the midst of differences. *Han* is not only caused by political or social oppression. *Han* understood as the “original wound” allows me to sustain my contention that unraveling *han* must go deeper into the individual and collective unconscious. This unraveling requires an entry into the Third Space of hybridity, and Christ on the cross becomes that entry into the Third Space. Likewise, a Christology of *jeong* also occupies a Third Space, between Moltmann’s insistence on the cross as an inner-Trinitarian relational dynamic, on the one hand, and the feminist critique that there is absolutely nothing redemptive about the cross, on the other hand. Asian American Christologies, including a Christology of *jeong*, can contribute to this theological construction. (Joh 2006, p. 115)

Thus, Anne Joh embodies the postcolonial feminist theological perspective by developing her diasporic experiences of *jeong* as the heart of the cross, thereby as “A Christology of *Jeong*.”

3. Conclusions

In this article, I argue that influential Asian and Asian American Protestant theologies can be fruitfully mapped through a *methodological typology*—not merely through recurring topics but also through the operative logics through which lived experience is translated into theological reasoning. By specifying experiential sites, theological problems, constructive methods, and normative aims (Table 1), the typology clarifies internal differences

among thinkers whose vocabularies overlap and provides a framework for comparing additional voices across Asian and diasporic contexts.

The typology also helps us specify what is meant by “Protestant” in this study. Across five types, Protestant grammar is manifested through Scripture-centered hermeneutics, the grace–justice dialectic, reform and public witness, and eschatological hope expressed as praxis. These features do not eliminate intercultural difference; rather, they form a shared pattern of theological reasoning that is repeatedly reconfigured through Asian and diasporic histories. In this sense, “Protestant” functions in this article not as a denominational boundary-marker but as an analytic grammar that becomes visible precisely through its diasporic reconfigurations.

At the same time, using “Asian American” experience and identity as a theological locus entails a persistent risk of essentialism. While postcolonial theory has proposed “strategic essentialism” as a provisional and politically situated practice (Spivak 1988), such moves remain fragile and context-dependent. This caution is especially salient for Protestant hermeneutics, which often authorize theological claims through lived experience, communal discernment, and confessional witness; without sustained critical vigilance, experiential appeals may harden historically contingent and internally diverse identities into fixed or normative categories. The methodological typology proposed in this article, therefore, does not presume a stable or unified Asian American essence, but seeks to clarify how particular experiential sites become theologically generative while remaining open to plurality, contestation, and ongoing reform.

This study has limitations. The selected figures are representative exemplars and do not constitute exhaustive coverage, and the analysis was weighted toward theologians working in the United States and its diasporic contexts. Future research should broaden the typology’s scope by incorporating additional Asian contexts, expanding postcolonial and interreligious voices, and testing the typology against diverse Protestant trajectories (including evangelical, Pentecostal/charismatic, and global-south ecumenical forms). Such work can further illuminate how translation, power, and lived experience continue to generate new theological grammars and communities.

Future research can test and refine this methodological typology in at least three directions: (1) examining hybrid cases in which multiple operative logics co-exist within a single theologian, congregation, or movement; (2) extending the analysis to additional Asian and Asian American Protestant trajectories—especially evangelical and Pentecostal/charismatic forms—whose practices of authorizing experience and Scripture may differ from the corpus treated here; and (3) conducting explicit ecumenical comparison (e.g., Catholic counterparts that employ similar experiential sites) to clarify which moves are broadly shared and which are shaped by the Protestant operational markers specified in this study.

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Notes

- ¹ Tan mentioned representative figures: the first generation includes Jung Young Lee, Sang Hyun Lee, Roy Sano, Paul Nagano, and Jitsuo Morikawa; the second generation includes Kwok Pui-lan, Fumitaka Matsuoka, Andrew Sung Park, Eleazar S. Fernandez, Chung Hyun Kyung, Grace Ji-Sun Kim, and Peter Phan (Tan 2008). Instead, Yang has proposed them slightly differently, based on his interpretation of theology: the first generation includes Jung-young Lee, Anselm Min, and Peter Phan; and the second generation includes Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Amos Yong (Yang 2024).
- ² He explains various notions of han from Asian understanding in his endnote: “Han is hen (hate) in Chinese, kon (to hear a grudge) in Japanese, *horosul* (sorrowfulness) in Mongolian, *korsocuka* (hatred, grief) in Manchurian, and *hân* (frustration) in Vietnamese.”
- ³ Park uses this word *han*, sometimes in an italicized form, and other times not. I use this word in its italicized form for consistency in my article.
- ⁴ Lee uses a hyphenated term, “Jesus-Christ,” as he uses the hyphenated form of “Asian-American.” Lee develops his Christology that Jesus was the marginal of the marginal people as Jesus suffered for the world and was a servant for the world. This marginal experience of Jesus makes him be in-between, in-both, and in-beyond through sacrificial love.
- ⁵ Where Turner theorizes liminality through the dynamics of structure and anti-structure, postcolonial theory emphasizes hybridity and “Third Space” as an ambivalent site where colonial power is both reproduced and disrupted (Bhabha 1994). Reading Asian American marginality through these lenses helps specify why this type is methodological: coerced in-betweenness becomes a theological logic for critique and for imagining reconciled difference rather than only a description of minority status.
- ⁶ Fernandez cited this sentence from (de la Torre and Ground 1986).
- ⁷ Matsuoka’s diagnosis of racism as a deformation of imagination and institution can be situated within wider theological discourse that treats race as a constitutive theological problem rather than a secondary ethical add-on (Carter 2008; Jennings 2010). This placement clarifies why “race” in Type 4 functions methodologically—shaping theological reasoning about peoplehood, sin, and communion.
- ⁸ Emmanuel Levinas also argues that the main cause of Western totalitarianism is the symmetrical relationship between subject and subject, which originated in the Western philosophical tradition of ontology and metaphysics, in his renowned work *Totality and Infinity*. He argues ethics as first philosophy rather than ontology in that human beings can realize an asymmetrical relationship when they feel responsibility for others through face-to-face encounters.
- ⁹ Kwok says more about the contact zone, “The interaction between two cultures with asymmetry of power is often not voluntary and one-dimensional, but is full of tensions, fractures, and resistance.”
- ¹⁰ I obtained the first word, ‘reformist’, from Kwok’s book, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, but I chose the second word, ‘inductive’, according to her argument in this book.
- ¹¹ Although both Park and Joh employ *han*, they do so with different operative logics. In Park, *han* functions primarily as a soteriological-diagnostic category that reorganizes salvation around healing and justice within a reconciliation framework (Park 2004). In Joh, *han* is more explicitly tied to abjection, diaspora, and postcolonial/feminist critique, serving as a lens for re-reading the cross as the risky praxis of *jeong* amid asymmetrical power rather than as a generalized therapeutic account of suffering (Joh 2006). This difference underscores the methodological nature of the typology: similar vocabularies may mask divergent theological operations.

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