



Grace Ji-Sun Kim. *Invisible: Theology and the Experience of Asian American Women*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021. 177 pages.

Historically, the words “cunning, deceitful, and domineering, or lotus blossoms . . . objects of explicit sexual appeal or commodification . . . obedient, exotic beings . . . sexual fantasy” (44–45) have been used to describe East Asian women. I wish I could say that this perception remains only in history. In her book *Invisible*, Grace Ji-sun Kim presents the ongoing nature of the objectification and commodification of Asian North American women in both religious and nonreligious spaces. As the title suggests, Asian women living in North America are often treated as if they are invisible. Perhaps it is easier to unsee them as oppression and privilege are complex at best. Kim names racism and sexism as the two major forces that make Asian North American women invisible.

Beginning the book with her personal stories of becoming aware of her identity as a Korean Canadian immigrant woman, she connects her lived experiences to the larger and commonly shared experience of Asian women living in diaspora. Chapters 1 and 2 provide a history of Asian immigration in North America, snapshots of her own family life in Korea that trace the history of her parents, and the implications of being displaced and living in a foreign land. Kim artfully weaves her own experiences into her analysis to put faces and names to the oppression and injustice that erase Asian women’s presence and existence. Readers get a sense of the layers of systemic injustice, such as imperialism, patriarchy, and Confucian hierarchy, as well as the stereotypes used against Asian women.

In chapters 3 and 4, Kim locates Asian women in racist and sexist contexts in North America. In Asian contexts, women find themselves in the center of patriarchy, but in the diaspora they face not only sexism but also racism. The long history of racist and sexist immigration policies has resulted in deeply ingrained stereotypes to which North American society and individuals subscribe. Because society is unwilling to recognize Asian American women’s capacity to contribute in diverse ways, these women are eroticized and are captive to stereotypes of the “model minority.” Thus, Asian women are marginalized in North America in various ways. More specifically, in chapter 4, Kim discusses the intersection of the Asian church and sexism. Church for many is a safe and comforting place, but for Asian women, church is often where sexism and patriarchy are validated in the name of conservative theology. Patriarchy and Confucianism lead to the condescension and oppression of women, and Kim shows that church is no exception. Introducing the section on church and women, Kim writes, “[W]omen occupy male spaces” (111). This short sentence accurately describes the sentiment and culture many Asian Christian churches share regarding women’s leadership in church. Women, who

ought to be silent, invisible, and obedient, are claiming authority, space, and visibility; therefore, many Asian churchgoers are confused and offended but now must reconcile with this reality.

How do Asian Americans thrive in such an oppressive environment? Kim offers a theology of visibility to resist and stand against the invisibility of Asian women. She describes four elements Asian American women can contribute to developing a theology of visibility: *ou-ri* (us, collectiveness), *han* (reaction to oppression), *jeong* (attachment or affection), and *chi* (energy). European male theology dominates North American Christian rhetoric and limits non-European theologies to a life only in the margins. The theology of visibility demands that we decenter Eurocentric theologies, and Kim argues that “decentering is a joint endeavor” (126). This part of the book, chapter 5, “Living into a Theology of Visibility,” is where she calls her readers to action and collaboration. The theology of visibility can be summed up by the idea of *ou-ri*. *Han*, *jeong*, and *chi* hinge on the sentiment of *ou-ri*, which leads Asian women to find solidarity with one another, other minoritized people, and even those who identify as white.

For practical theologians, religious educators, and practitioners, the task at hand is to walk with these Asian women in our own contexts and to work toward decentering Eurocentric male theology. This book does not offer practical ways to achieve this goal, but it offers guidance as to where we might start. Kim speaks to those who are seeking to learn more about the history and complexity of Asian American immigrant women and for those Asian American women who may not be aware of or have been questioning their identity. As an Asian American immigrant woman and a practical theologian, I appreciate this narrative into which I can weave my own stories of oppression, challenges, resistance, and victories.

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