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A Cross-Cultural Reading of Proverbs 31:10-31 and Korean Wisdom Writings

Heewon Chung¹

Introduction

The encounter of Christianity with Korean religions over the past 250 years could be described as a “Culture War” without sound. Since the once-oppressed Korean Christianity had been prevalent over the Korean society, a kind of the “Culture War” has in fact existed between Korean Christianity and other religions. Recently, the anti-Christian movement in Korea has been accumulating against Korean Christianity’s exclusivism and its aggressive missionary activity.² The movement criticizes Korean Christianity for its intolerance of different value systems, depreciation of human reason and intellect, and an attitude of blindly following the Judeo-Christian tradition, to the neglect of Korean traditions and belief systems.³ Consequently, there is much anger and bitterness against Korean Christianity in society, but Korean Christianity has not yet actively responded to this criticism: it is hard to find an organized reaction by Korean Christianity. The more serious concern is that a sincere and productive dialogue cannot be found between the two sides.

¹ This article is summarized from Heewon Chung’s D.Min. final project from Columbia Theological Seminary, 2009.

² For the details of recent anti-Christian movement, see, Jin-Gu Lee, “Korean Protestantism as Viewed by Netizens: A Focus on Recent Activities of Anti-Christian Sites,” *Korea Journal* (2004), 223-45.

³ The main reason that provokes anti-Christian sentiment in Korea is Korean Christianity’s aggressive missionary activities. In the past several years, some enthusiastic Christians committed a series of acts of violence, such as destroying statues of Tan’gun, who is regarded as the founding father of the Korean nation, Buddhist images and symbols, and the totem poles at village gates, once considered to be guardians of communities. Such aggressive activities accompanied by physical violence not only arouse public rejection for Christianity, but also worked as a major factor spreading anti-Christian sentiment.

This article is an attempt to find a practical and possible way to bring cultural and religious harmony in Korea under the situation of the “Culture War.” To accomplish this goal, I will provide a concrete example of cross-cultural interpretation of the Bible in Korean context. By placing a wisdom text from the Hebrew Bible in conversation with Korean wisdom texts, I will illustrate what this exegesis might entail and will draw some meaningful conclusions about the overall effectiveness of cross-cultural interpretation in the context of Korean Christianity.

1. Cross-Cultural Reading: A Test Case

The worlds of the Hebrew Bible and ancient Korea had regarded women as inferior in many aspects. For whatever reason, the wisdom texts about/for women are connected to rule over them, and the goal of their teaching is to enable to one to cope with life, and to impose a kind of order which surrounds women. Therefore, ‘truthfulness,’ ‘fidelity,’ ‘diligence,’ and ‘kindness’ are typical topics.

However, unlike such a conventional wisdom of/for women, few exceptional biblical and ancient Korean wisdom texts had acclaimed particular women not for the degree of perfection with which they were able to mimic the stereotype, but for their individuality. Such descriptions of the virtuous women go far beyond the social precepts laid down in the Hebrew Bible and the Korean classics. Even when the authors describe some aspects of reality for women as “the way it is,” they propagate gender quality and depict women as “the helpmates” at very least. Proverbs 31:10-31 is a good example.

a. Proverbs 31:10-31

10 A capable wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. **11** The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. **12** She does him good, not harm, all the days of her life **13** She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands. **14** She is like the ships of the merchants, she brings her food from far away. **15** She rises while it is still night and provides food for her household, and tasks for her servant-girls. **16** She considers a field and buys it: with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard. **17** She girds herself with strength, and makes her are strong. **18** She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night. **19** She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle. **20** She opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy. **21** She is not afraid of her household when it snows, for all her household are clothed in crimson. **22** She makes herself coverings; her clothing is fine linen and purple. **23** Her husband is known in the city gates, taking his seat among the elders of the land.

24 She makes linens garments and sells them: she supplies the merchant with sashes. **25** Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come. **26** She opens her mouth with wisdom; and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. **27** She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. **28** Her children rise up and call her happy; her husband too, and he praises her: **29** “Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.” **30** Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that fears the LORD is to be praised. **31** Give her a share in the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the city gates.

Proverbs 31:10-31 is a wisdom poem, exalting the “capable wife.” The poem is unusual because of its literary characteristic⁴ and its positive description of woman. The description focuses on the worth of the wife, her devotion to her husband and the domestic work that she does. She is also involved in wider administrative concerns, such as buying of a field and the planting of a vineyard. She is a diligent worker, who sells merchandise and works at night, helps the poor, sews and sells her products and, most important of all, she “fears the Lord” (v. 30).

Due to such literary and thematic peculiarities, the identity of the woman in Proverbs 31:10-31 and its purpose has been the subject of debate.⁵ Some scholars argue that the depiction of the “capable wife” in Proverbs 31 is simply the listing of qualities of the ideal future wife from a man’s point of view which runs through the wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible and other Ancient Near Eastern wisdom literatures.⁶ On the other hand, others denounce the man’s point of view in the interpretation of Proverbs 31:10-31. M. B. Crook suggests woman’s point of view in its interpretation. She argues that it is not an instruction for prospective husbands but an instruction for marriageable young women in high social class for which they must strive in order to attract future husbands.⁷ She further maintains that it is a “technical and administrative program” of

⁴ Proverbs 31:10-31 is acrostic alphabetically: the first letter of each of its twenty-two verses begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

⁵ For the details of scholarly discussion regarding Proverbs 31:10-31, see Roger N. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs: A Survey of Modern Study* (History of Biblical Interpretation Series 1; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 100-11.

⁶ For instance, Gemser compares the poem with passages from Egyptian domestic instructions in which men are advised for marital matters. He argues that Proverbs 31:10-31 is a typical wisdom literature. B. Gemser, *Sprüche Salomos* (HAT 16; Tübingen: JCB Mohr, 1937).

⁷ Margaret B. Crook, “The Marriageable Maiden of Proverbs 31:10-31,” *JNES* 13(1954): 137-40. Following the observation of Crook, Gemser changes his previous view on the purpose of the poem and insists that the poem is a manual for unmarried girl. B. Gemser, “The Instructions of ‘Onchsheshonqy and



home economics and a “memorandum from a first known school” where young girls had been instructed on the subject. In spite of different perspectives, these two interpretations share the following assumptions. Proverbs 31:10-31 is meant for institutions like schools in ancient Israel to teach it to young boys or girls, and it is an ideal rather than a realistic picture of wife. As a result, scholars understand that the description of the “capable woman” is solely a catalogue of desirable female accomplishments, not achievable.⁸

In regard to its instructive purpose, R. N. Whybray presents an unusual thesis. While he basically agrees with those who insist that Proverbs 31:10-31 is an instruction, he argues that the ideal wife in Proverbs 31:10-31 goes beyond the description of wise woman and reflects a picture of a well-to-do family, which has achieved prosperity and stability through decent and honest hard work.⁹

Owing to the unrealistic character of the “capable wife,” most scholars, unlike those who regarded Proverbs 31:10-31 as an instruction, understand the “capable wife” in Proverbs 31 as an allegory or a reflection of the personified Lady Wisdom, as portrayed in 9:1-6.¹⁰ Certainly, the description of the “capable woman” shares a number of characteristics with personified Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9 and is reminiscent of Proverbs’ description of the value of virtue as this image emerges throughout the wisdom’s virtues

Biblical Wisdom Literature,” in *Studies of Ancient Israelite Wisdom* (ed. J. L. Crenshaw; New York: KTAV, 1976), 134-60.

⁸ See, R. N. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs*, 105-6. It is because Proverbs 31:10-31 does not give the impression of being taken from real life. Its praise of the wife is not in accordance with the attitude of a patriarchal society mirrored elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. For instance, the reference to the woman’s bringing “her food far away” is unrealistic; her planting of vines (v. 16) was not regarded as women’s work in ancient Israel; her endless labor makes the wife somehow superhuman. In this respect, some scholars suggest that the woman reflects the description of a particular class of women in Persian or Hellenistic period of Syria-Palestine. See, E. L. Lyons, “A Note on Proverbs 31:10-31” in *The Listening Heart: Essays in Wisdom and Psalms in Honor of Roland E. Murphy*, ed. K. G. Hoglund et al., (JSOTSS 58; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 237-45; Christine R. Yoder, *Wisdom as a Woman of Substance: A Socio-Economic Reading of Proverbs 1-9 and 31:10-31* (BZAW 304; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2001).

⁹ Roger N. Whybray, *Wealth and Poverty in the Book of Proverbs* (JSOTSS 99; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990). The very ideal strived for in Proverbs 10:1 22:16 and 28:19-20.

¹⁰ Andre Barucq, *Le Livre des Proverbes* (Domais biblique; Paris: Gabalda, 1964), cited by Thomas P. McCreesh, “Wisdom as Wife: Proverbs 31:10-31,” *RB* 92 (1985), 28-29; E. Jacob, “Sagesse et alphabet. A propos de Prov 31:10-31,” in *Hommages à André Dupont-Sommer*, (Paris: Librairie d’Amérique et d’Orient Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1971), 287-95; William McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach*. (OTL; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975); Arndt Meinhold, *Die Sprüche*. 2 Volumes. (ZBK AT 16. 1/2; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1991); Claudia V. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*. (BLS 11; Decatur, GA: Almond, 1985), 90-92, 186-91; McCreesh, “Wisdom as Wife,” 25-46; Albert M. Wolters, “Proverbs XXXI 10-31 as Heroic Hymn: A Form-Critical Analysis” *VT* 38 (1988): 446-57. In fact, there are certain points of similarity, such as the references to Wisdom’s house (cf. Prov 9:1; 14:1; 24:3) and to her competent skill (cf. Prov 8:30).

discourse. The poem, for instance, begins with a series of images that celebrate woman's diligence – a virtue highly valued in wisdom's virtues discourse.¹¹

Besides literary and socio-critical interpretations of Proverbs 31:10-31, scholars investigate this poem in form-critical approach. Albert M. Wolters suggests that this poem is formally a “hymn” or “song of praise.”¹² The hymns are normally in honor of YHWH. A hymn in honor of a human being is unusual. In this sense, the question is raised: whether the poem praises a female deity in ancient Syro-Palestine, the personified Lady Wisdom, or a real wise wife. Probably, the depiction of the figure in Proverbs 31:10-31 may draw from each possibility and works on all three levels.

As reviewed above, scholars suggest the variable opinions on the identity of the “capable woman” and its purpose. However, despite various opinions, scholars reach a consensus conclusion that the description in Proverbs 31:10-31, going far beyond anything which any wife likely achieve, is not a realistic picture of an actual household but an ideal proposed by the teachers or the sages.¹³ In sum, the search for the identity of woman in Proverbs 31:10-31 and its purpose is often concluded that “capable woman” is an abstraction or literary imagination in the patriarchic ancient Israel. But, this conclusion brings forth a problem: the superwoman figure in the poem was impossible and unachievable. In other words, women cannot be as good as capable woman in Proverbs 31:10-31. Thus, Proverbs 31:10-31 can be a good example for how our social and cultural prejudice on women may shape the misunderstanding of women and produce its application in the interpretation of biblical texts.

In response to this prejudice and consensus on the identity of the “capable wife,” the biographies or stories of virtuous women in other cultures can enrich our understanding of the capable wife, because the cross-cultural findings of virtuous women

¹¹ For instance, she sets her hand to wool and flax; she rises early to secure provisions; she acquires an estate; she plants a vineyard; etc.

¹² Wolters, “Proverbs XXXI 10-31 as Heroic Hymn,” 446-57. It has the characteristic structure of a heroic hymn: introduction with announcement of praise to be given to the recipient (verses 10-12), recounting the subject's valiant deeds (verses 13-27), and concluding exhortation to the audience to join in praise (verses 28-31; cf. hymns to Yahweh such as Psalm 145 and 150).

¹³ Christine R. Yoder's statement of Proverbs 31:10-31 precisely expresses the consensus view of scholars: “Proverbs 31:10-31 remains a portrait of the most desirable woman, an image of the ideal wife intended for a predominantly male audience ... She embodies no one woman, but rather the desirable attribute of many.” Yoder, *Wisdom as a Woman of Substance*, 446.

can be a supplement in the understanding of Proverbs 31:10-31 by reconsidering the capability of women.

2. The Praise of Lady Yum

There is a Korean poem similar in its content and didactic quality to Proverbs 31:10-31. It is “Praise of Lady Yum” which describes the deeds of a beloved deceased wife. The author of this poem is Nubaek Choi (?-1205) who was an official of *Koryo* dynasty. After the death of his wife, Kyognae Yum (1100-1146), Choi composes the poem in commemoration of his wife’s virtue. He later inscribes this poem on the monument to honor her and to instruct his descendent. The following is the abbreviated version of the poetry.¹⁴

As a person, my wife was pure and modest. She was very literate and well understood moral obligations. In speech, appearance, skill, and conduct, she was superior to others. Before marriage she ably serve her parents; after marriage she was extremely diligent in wifely ways. She was the first to perceive and carry out the wishes of the elders, and the filial piety she nourished my now deceased mother. In good and bad fortune, in congratulations and condolences, she could share the feelings of immediate family members, in-laws, and neighbors. There was no one who did not praise her... and when I was involved in military matters, she endured hardship in our poor home and often made and sent military uniforms. And when I was a palace attendant, she used every means possible to supply delicates to present to the king... One day she said, ‘You are a man of letters. Mundane matters should not be important to you. I consider providing clothes and food for the family to be my task’... [When] I was promoted to a drafter of royal edicts and proclamations, my wife, showing her happiness in her face, said ‘It seems we have almost seen the end of our poverty,’ I responded to her, ‘Being a policy critic is not a position to earn a rich stipend.’ My wife said, “If suddenly one day you are standing in the palace court with the king arguing over an issue, even if I am forced to wear a thorny wooden barrette and poor cotton skirts and carry heavy burdens in making our life. I will accept willingly.’ These were not the words of an ordinary woman. I continued to be promoted many

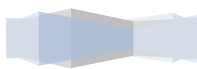
¹⁴ For the original and full text, see Nubaek Choi, Yumkyungae moyji 廉瓊愛墓誌 (Date uncertain, Yiwanga bakmulgwan). The translation is from Peter H. Lee and Wm. Theodore de Bary, eds. *Sourcebook of Korean Civilization Volume I: From Early Times Through the Sixteenth Century*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 183-85. The verses related to Proverbs 31:10-31 are emphasized with italics.

times and successively received higher stipends. In looking at my family's present situation, however, it is not as good as in the days when my wife struggled to make ends meet. How could anyone say my wife did not have wisdom? When my wife was about to die, in leaving her last instructions to me and our children, all her words were wise and many were worth listening to... Her epitaph reads: 'I, your husband, pledge not to forget you. That I am not yet buried together with you gives me great pain. The children will live in harmony and expect to be prosperous forever.

The poem highly praises a virtuous woman for the four basic behaviors: moral conduct, proper speech, proper appearance, and the sense of responsibility for household work. She is close to her parents-in-law, harmonious with family members, friendly with clan members and neighbors, obedient and dutiful to her husband, and wise and caring to her children. The wife is exalted above all married women. The wife is also acclaimed as a wise woman for her individuality: “How could anyone say my wife did not have wisdom?” Beyond the ideals of a male-chauvinistic society and the norm of woman’s behavior developed by the Confucians,¹⁵ she is literate, loyal to the state, and wise enough to instruct her husband. In addition, she governs herself according to moral obligation, maintains family rectitude with prosperity, teaches children correctly, and maintains integrity in poverty.

In sum, the description of a virtuous wife in this poem is uncommon in ancient male-chauvinistic Korean society. The poem describes that the virtue and virtuous acts of Lady *Yum* is the foundation of the peace and the stability for the family and the society: the wife is in charge of not only the domestic sphere but also the public sphere. Although she is an inferior member of society, she bears the responsibility of providing the government with loyal and capable men by helping and educating them.

¹⁵ Ancient Korean women were confined only to the inner quarters of the house where they received instruction in domestic duties from their mothers and grandmothers. They learned embroidery and the cultivation of silkworms, and were initiated into the intricacies of sacrificial food preparation. Girls’ cultural training was focused entirely on fulfilling the role of married women. The successful application of these teachings was reflected in customs and manners. It was important to prepare girls for their future functions as guardians of the domestic sphere and providers for the physical needs of their families. For the discussion of ancient Korean instruction of women, see Martina Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 231-82.



3. Queen-Consrt Sohye's *Naehun*

In order to understand the poem of virtuous women further, it is helpful to consider another wisdom text of Korean women. The most important and influential textbook for women is compiled in 1475 by the mother of King Sōngjong, Queen-Consort Sohye. Entitled *Naehun* “Instructions for the Inner Quarters,” this book consists of preface, an epilogue by a royal consort, and seven chapters: Speech and Comportment, Filial piety, Management of House, Husband and Wife, Motherhood, Amiability, and Thrift.¹⁶

In this book, Queen Sohye insists that women have important roles to play in maintaining the social order. In particular, the section of “Husband and Wife” gives some examples of women being indispensable advisors to their husbands. The following is from its “Preface” and “Husband and Wife.”¹⁷

... I have written these seven chapters, which I give to you. Ah, the learning of forming one body with Heaven and Earth and all things is all here. Once you lose the Wisdom, you may repent but how can you recover? Inscribe these teachings in your heart, engrave them on your bones, and strive everyday to follow the sages. A bright mirror has great luster; how can you not take heed?...

The way of husband and wife joins in the harmonization of yin and yang and reaches to the spirits. It truly embodies the broad intent of Heaven and Earth and constitutes the essence of human morality ... This tells us that we must not take lightly the way of husband and wife. If a husband is not wise, then he cannot lead his wife. If a wife is not wise, she cannot serve her husband. If a husband cannot lead his wife, he loses dignity. If a wife cannot serve her husband, she loses righteousness. These two things are of equal value, and they are not one in function...

Looking at the sages of today, I see that all they know is that they must lead their wives and not lose their dignity. For this reason they train only men and transmit book learning only to men, and they do not know that women must serve their husband and the women must know ritual

¹⁶ For detail, see Sohye wanghu Han-ssi, *Naehun*, There are several reprints of this work: see especially, Chi-young Kim, ed. *Naehun* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1969); *Naehun-Yosaso* (Seoul: Asea Munhaksa, 1974).

¹⁷For the original and full text, see Sohye wanghu Han-ssi, *Naehun*, chapters 1, 7, and 8. The translation is from Youngho Choe, Peter H. Lee, and Wm. Theodore de Bary, eds. *Sourcebook of Korean Civilization Volume II: From the Seventeenth Century to the Modern Period*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 47-8. The significant verses are emphasized with italics.

property. Thus they teach men and do not teach women because they have not taken both into consideration. The Rite say to start studying at eight and to set one's mind on learning at fifteen; how should this not be so for women along?

As stated above, the instruction of Queen *Sohye* begins with an exordium to hear and remember her teachings.¹⁸ In the exordium she emphasizes that all human beings need the “learning of forming one body with Heaven and Earth” and its bestowed moral nature in order to become sages. She, then, reassures that the universe can be affected by serious consequence of women’s relation to men and their position in society. She insists that the union between husband and wife is the foundation of human morality and the mainspring of the socialization process. She maintains, therefore, that the peace and stability of the relationship between wife and husband is a precondition for the peace and prosperity of the society and the universe.

4. Analysis

As shown above, the two poems, Proverbs 31:10-31 and “Praise of Lady *Yum*,” show a number of striking parallels. They are used for ritual and instruction,¹⁹ and there are considerable thematic correspondences. Proverbs 31:10-31 describes “the woman who fears the Lord” (v. 30) by listing her works. The “Praise of Lady *Yum*” also describes the wise wife by her works: “with filial piety she nourished my deceased mother.” In ancient Korea, women’s relationship with family members, particularly in-laws, is extremely important for the functioning of the household. The filial piety thus receives a special attention. To respect (敬 in Chinese, meaning “fear”) and to value filial piety meant to be loyal to the Heaven which is equivalent to the “Lord.”

In addition, the women in both poems are described in terms of wisdom, diligence (vv. 13, 16, 18; “providing clothes and food for the family to be my task”), to be proud of (v. 28; “the children will live in harmony”), compassionate for the neighbors (v. 20; “in

¹⁸ It is similar to Deuteronomy 6:1-4 and Proverbs 3:1-3.

¹⁹ See note 31. Even the Sitz im Leben of Proverbs 31:10-31 is unclear. This cross-cultural study gives a hint that Proverbs 31:10-31 might be used in the liturgical context, as “Praise of Lady *Yum*” was initially composed to be used in the funeral.



congratulations and condolences, she could share the feelings”), having administrative skills (v. 16, 24; “she used every means possible to supply delicacies to present to the king”), fearless to embrace poverty (v. 27; “if I am forced to wear a thorny wooden barrette and poor cotton skirts and carry heavy burdens in making our life. I will accept willingly”), and prudent and judicious in speech (v. 26; “all her words were wise and many were worth listening”). Therefore, they are praised by their husbands (v. 28-29; “she was superior to others”). In addition, the success of these women is viewed on the basis of what she provides for her husband. They are praised by everyone, because they successfully fulfill the roles assigned to them by the society (v. 31; “there was no one who did not praise her”).

As indicated above, Proverbs 31:10-19 and “Praise of Lady *Yum*” glorify the good works of a woman in the ordinary affairs of family, community and administrative life. These worthy women represent more than simply a model for performing the everyday tasks of marital life. They are more than women whom the young males dream of. Their astonishing capacities and their wisdom, at least in some ways, minimize and overturn the ancient socio-cultural ethos that requires woman to do childrearing. In fact, the virtue of these women arises not from husbands’ authority but from the heavenly wisdom: their virtuous deeds are rooted in the fear of the Lord and in the fear of Heaven. This observation would be confirmed with the comparison of *Naehun*. Queen *Sohye* demonstrates that virtuous acts can only be carried on by learning wisdom, since wisdom of Heaven and Earth is the foundation of human morality.

In addition, *Naehun* provides several implications of the two poems and sheds further light on interpreting the biblical and Korean texts about women. In light of Queen *Sohye*’s instruction, Proverbs 31:1-31 and “Praise of Lady *Yum*” picture the image of the universe (‘family or society’ in narrow sense) filled with events that interact in spontaneous system (‘marriage system’) and claim “a unity and equality” between husband and wife under the realm of Wisdom. Boldly speaking, the authors of Proverbs 31:10-31 and “Praise of Lady *Yum*” romanticize and propagate the hidden principle of Wisdom (egalitarian principle) in the male chauvinistic cultures.

Consequently, in light of Korean wisdom texts, one might conclude that Proverbs 31:10-31 reflects a *real* “capable wife”, and the author intends to present a theological

and ideological rationale for women's positive role to the patriarchal society. On the other hand, in light of Proverbs 31:10-31, "Praise of Lady *Yum*" could be understood as an example of social roles fulfilled by woman, focusing on the description of the place and functions of women in relation to other social entities beyond family structure. Therefore, on a subtle and more indirect level, two poems contain a polemic against the socio-cultural ethos of ancient male chauvinistic societies.

In sum, wisdom tradition of the Hebrew Bible and Korean literature sees the female as a person-in-community whose job is to fulfill her responsibility in a web of social relations. They also teach that an ideal form of social interaction only exists in the harmony of man and woman under Wisdom. Especially, the selected wisdom texts of the Hebrew Bible and Korean wisdom tradition above both emphasize that man and woman are "helpmates" in nature. There cannot be one human being unless there are others, and human beings become whole in and through their interactions with one another. This cross-cultural interpretation thus teaches us that differences must be complementary rather than contradictory.

Conclusion

Korean society and Korean Christianity has been criticized for its tendency to accept gender inequality. They have often enforced male chauvinism in society and churches by using Confucian feudalism and few biblical texts as their tools. However, as the cases of Proverbs 31:10-31 and "Praise of Lady *Yum*", the Bible and Korean wisdom texts contain passages describing women who take authoritative roles in male-chauvinistic society.²⁰ Consequently, by reading the Bible in dialogue with its own traditions, Korean Christianity can present a redemptive stance for the heavy criticism against the Bible and its own cultural traditions.

²⁰ For example, see the Hebrew Bible's depictions of Deborah, the judge who later led Israel to military victory; the Queen of Sheba, the ruler who traveled a great distance to come to trade with and learn from King Solomon; and Esther, the queen who valiantly exposed a scheme to murder the Jews. In Korea, there are heroines, called Domi and Princess Pyung-gang, who are relevant to Deborah and Esther.

