

Introduction

When I talk about ethnic relations, I often hear words similar to these: “We (whites) are privileged, and it’s at other people’s expense. We especially benefitted from slavery. Black people were forced to be here, unlike other immigrants who came to America voluntarily. For about two hundred years, they were forced to be slaves, brutally abused, and forced to build this country under free labor. Most other groups didn’t have it anywhere near as bad,” “We (whites) have fought a lot and worked to give up our privilege to bring about justice and equality for everyone. How long do we have to be blamed for injustices? I’m tired of hearing everyone else’s complaints. Our situations aren’t perfect either,” “Don’t ask us (blacks) to teach you what to do or how to be better. You need to figure it out for yourself. Study history and culture before you ask us for help. We’re so tired of teaching people who don’t make any effort to learn themselves,” “Now they (whites) always complain about experiencing reverse racism and are tired of hearing our complaints. I laugh. They have no idea what we (blacks) go through every single day,” “In this country everything is black and white. There is no room for us (Latinx). We’re invisible. And if we aren’t invisible, we’re just illegal immigrants to them (whites). They ask us to work for next to nothing, then tell us to leave because we’re taking their jobs,” “Even though many of us (Asians) are here escaping colonial and postcolonial war and white imperialism, they say that we are here voluntarily and need to go back to our homelands. We aren’t allowed to stay. They always treat us as foreigners in this country. They say we don’t belong to America, so we don’t talk about racism. It’s easier to stay out of it.”

Although people hear these conversations in private domains within each ethnic group, these conversations are not seriously discussed cross-ethnically in the public domain. Even in private domains, people often feel uncomfortable or fearful of discussing racial relations with other ethnic groups. Some white elite liberal groups confess their colonial history and

criticize white racism, whereas some conservative white groups express their feeling of reverse racism and confirm white supremacy. Both elite liberal and conservative white groups are concerned about their relationships with black groups, but in different manners. Some black groups try to teach the problems of white racism, whereas other black groups express their exhaustion from teaching others about white racism when there is no effort made by white groups. Both black groups give more attention to white domination and supremacy than other racial relations. Some Latinx groups observe that racism is not about racial discrimination against all racial minorities, but only white/black relations. Other Latinx groups are much more into immigration issues than racism issues. Some Asian groups want to stay out of racism issues because they believe they are white/black issues, whereas other Asian groups stay out of racism discussions because they feel ignored by both black and white groups. Both Latinx and Asian groups often feel that racism in U.S. society focuses on black/white relations only. They claim that black and white racism dominates all ethnic relations, and their voices are not heard.

Each ethnic group points to different standpoints when observing ethnic relations. However, their different standpoints are not acknowledged equally. The current construction of racial/ethnic relations is heavily built on the foundation of a black/white binary relationship. Various other racial relations are discussed selectively with different weight, with or without intentionality. This black/white relationship is often thrown into the talk of white/black racism, which is treated as a completely separate issue from Asian and Latinx racial issues. In fact, Asian and Latinx racial issues are often misunderstood as problems of immigration, not racism. The discussion of their issues in conversations around racism is not appreciated. In fact, they are not allowed to engage in black/white racism conversations. Rather, talking about racism among other racial groups is often misunderstood as a tool to dismiss the importance of black/white racism, especially as a tool to weaken the importance of African Americans' suffering. Adding more racial problems that various groups bring to the table is seen as an act of jeopardizing and distracting from the weight of black/white racial conversations.

Although many uncomfortable and uneasy relations among and between Asian, Latinx, and black groups exist, it is taboo to talk about these complicated, conflictive relations collectively. These groups are urged to suppress their differences and merge them into one similar narrative from a unidirectional approach. Their focus of conversation is quickly moved to either dismantling white privilege and criticizing white power only or developing multicultural and intercultural diversities generally that are more socially and politically correct in this society. Understanding socioeconomic political power relations among various racial groups in this country usually starts from and ends with black/white binary racial relations without critical

investigation to understand these uncomfortable and uneasy relations among nonwhite and nonblack groups. Even when discussing the dismantling of white privilege in various contexts, the focus is exclusively on the discussion of a black/white relation within the black/white binary divide in the U.S. context. It disregards any attention to where all racial ethnic groups stand domestically and transnationally, how they relate with each other, and what it takes to recover the broken relationships among these groups.

In a similar manner, when people talk about immigrant issues, they are mainly focused on the discussion of Latinx aliens and white natives. “Colonial” and “postcolonial” power, and its relationship among various ethnic groups, hardly enters into the discussion of immigrant issues. Dismantling white privilege in terms of natives’ rights and security is not even considered as an agenda on the table of native/alien divides, especially from a non-Latinx immigrant perspective. Even though awkward relationships among different ethnic groups exist inside and outside of U.S. borders, these relationships are simply recognized as foreigners’ problems, not as racial relations of natives. Perceiving immigrant issues as either a competition or a survival necessity among undeveloped and/or developing countries’ citizens, the native/alien divide easily erases the presence of each ethnic group in the United States and dismisses their different ways of experiencing suffering as an unfortunate alien incident that is a separate, independent issue from that of natives.

The main goal of this book is neither simply dismantling white privilege from a point of black/white relations nor understanding other racial relations from a point of native/alien relations. The main focus of this book is to dismantle binary relational divides that support white privilege and colonial and postcolonial domination and to provide a deeper understanding of Asian racial relations. Examining interactions and intersections of black/white, native/alien, and host/guest binary divides, it addresses the current structures of sociohistorical paradigms, investigates the unique challenges of Asian racial positions, analyzes the position of their *third otherness*, and explores the possibilities of transforming binary relationships into postcolonial Asian racial relationships based on ethical and theological religious traditions and practices.

This book has three parts. The first part of this book analyzes two socio-political cultural binary paradigms: the black/white binary divide and the native/alien binary divide. The black/white binary divide is one of the most powerful paradigms that U.S. society has traditionally practiced. It dominates and changes the dynamics of ethnic relations among various ethnic groups. By analyzing the black/white binary paradigm, this part shows how Asian immigrants are used to support white people and alienate black people. The native/alien binary divide is another paradigm that dominates ethnic relations. Asian immigrants are forever called foreigners and aliens. This binary divide

locates Asian immigrants in between natives (white) and aliens (Latinx). The current immigration issues and discussions are heavily focused on Latinx groups regardless of their nationalities. Asian immigrants are seen neither as complete aliens nor as complete natives. Rather, they are treated as visitors, foreigners, and temporary workers. In between black/white binary and native/alien binary paradigms, Asian immigrants occupy the positions of double in-betweenness. Exploring the function of the black/white binary as a paradigm to dismiss racial discrimination against nonblack and nonwhite racial minority groups and analyzing the function of the native/alien binary as a paradigm to dismiss voices of various racial immigrants, the first portion of the book shows how Asian immigrants are doubly ignored and marginalized at the intersections of these two paradigms.

The second part of this book addresses the unique challenges that Asian immigrants experience. Examining the dynamics of racial triangulation, anti-Asian sentiment, minority/nonminority issues, and in-group struggles, this part demonstrates the uniqueness of Asian immigrant struggles and explores how Asian immigrants are blamed and excluded by various racial groups in these complicated issues. In the beginning of U.S. immigrant history, Asian immigrants were compared with black people, including black immigrant communities and African Americans. This comparison eventually resulted in racial triangulation. Embedded in white racial racism, racial triangulation has since been used not only by white privileged groups but also by various Asian immigrant groups. This triangulation has caused severe problems and violence between Asian, black, and white people. As Asian immigrants accept and exercise white racism against blacks on the side of whites, blacks and whites practice anti-Asian sentiment under the influence of white colonial and postcolonial power. From this binary relationship, anti-Asian sentiment is cultivated and exercised institutionally and individually. Minority/nonminority issues are another challenge that only Asian immigrants experience. This chapter shows how they are concomitantly treated as both a minority and a nonminority depending on the needs of black/white and native/alien divides. Examining these dilemmas of Asian immigrants' in-betweenness illustrates how they navigate these double barriers. This part also reinterprets the strength Asian immigrant groups possess to transform their lives in the face of their unique challenges and barriers.

The last part of this book shows how these binary divides and the unique challenges of Asian immigrants place them in a position as *the third other*. This part introduces the meaning of the third otherness and demonstrates how Asian immigrants are used and played as the third other in the interactions and intersections of black/white and native/alien binary paradigms by examining three different practices. The first practice shows the conflictive message of assimilation to locate Asian immigrants in the position of third

other, and the second practice addresses the complications of coalition work that made Asian immigrants the third other. These practices invent the position of Asian immigrants as the third other institutionally and sociopolitically. The third practice explores how these institutional practices impact Asian immigrants psychologically and emotionally as the third other.

Analyzing black/white, native/alien, and host/guest binary divides from an Asian immigrant perspective, this book critically examines the problems of current U.S. racial relations and provides a new understanding of the complications that Asian immigrants uniquely experience. These findings can open a new understanding of race relations and introduce a better way to understand Asian immigrants in relation to other racial groups beyond the current binary structures. This book can contribute not only to reevaluating and reinterpreting the current racial theories but also to widening the horizons of creating new racial theories in relation to Asian religious practices.

Before I move to the chapter 1, there are two definitions that I need to address in this book: Asian immigrants and colonial/colonialism/postcolonial/postcolonialism. Because the main discourses of this book are deeply engaged with these concepts, it is important to clarify them at this point. First, who are Asian immigrants? The definition of “Asian immigrants” in this book follows the definition that I described in my previous work, *A Postcolonial Leadership: Asian Immigrant Christian Leadership and Its Challenges*.

Asian immigrants are not one fixed group. They are not exactly identified as Asian Americans only. They include Asian Americans, but go beyond Asian American groups. In fact, US society creates various categories to define Asian immigrants such as immigrant generations, sociopolitical status, nationalities, and other characteristics. In terms of immigrant generations, Asian immigrants can be the people who both migrated from Asian countries and are born in the United States. First-generation immigrants are defined as people who migrate to this country when they are adults. Second-generation immigrants are people who are born in this country with Asian ancestry. 1.5 generation immigrants are the people who migrate to this country before adulthood. In terms of visa statuses and citizenship, Asian immigrants can include people who permanently live in the United States and people who temporarily stay in the United States with the intention to go back to their mother countries such as students and temporary workers. In terms of nationality, they can be both Asians from Asia and US Asian Americans who stay in the US. It includes transnational Asian groups. In terms of Asian ancestry, Asian immigrants can include both Asians from non-interracial marriages and Asians from interracial marriages.

In terms of legal status, Asian immigrants can include both documented and undocumented populations of Asians and people with Asian ancestry. Even though these binary distinctions exist in the US social system, in reality, Asian immigrants do not hold fixed statuses or clear boundaries. Especially in terms of economic status, they are all over the spectrum from the upper class to the lower class. Most of them do not or cannot stay in fixed positions. Rather, their social, political and economic positions are always in flux. The boundaries are not static but are permeable and open. . . . Asian immigrants can be defined as the people who belong to these various categories and go beyond and in-between colonial and postcolonial immigrant spaces simultaneously.¹

I am aware that my attempt to define Asian immigrants in this book is not sufficient to show the complete picture of who Asian immigrants are because Asian immigrants are hybridizing, growing, and extending as they keep interacting with others and among themselves. However, in order to understand the relationships of Asian immigrants and analyze their positionality in the current postcolonial U.S. context, this definition can provide some critical parts of what it means to be Asian immigrants. Instead of using the Asian Americans/immigrant binary concept, the term “Asian immigrants” will be used throughout this book to encompass all of the above variations.

Second, what are the meanings of colonial/colonialism/postcolonial/postcolonialism? As I defined in my previous work, *A Postcolonial Self: Korean Immigrant Theology and Church*, “Colonialism is a physical, psychological, and even spiritual exercise of a nation’s sovereign power beyond its borders, involving physical, geographical dominion; psychological oppression; spiritual manipulation.”² Based on this definition, the definition of “colonial” in this book indicates the various texts and contexts of colonial discourses that include the Western and Eastern colonial history, culture, and characteristics of colonialism. The “colonial” can refer to the colonial past/present, its sociopolitical economic oppressive constructions, and its religious and cultural interactions.

What about “postcolonial” then? Even though the common assumptions of “postcolonial” are often understood as the remnants of (neo)colonialism, “postcolonial” in this book is neither a simple notion of “after” or “neo” colonialism, nor just a resurgence of colonialism.

Although many former colonies have now achieved national independence and tend to believe that they are free from colonialism, world power dynamics have not changed. With or without geographical dominance, the same colonial and imperial policies and

rules dominate formerly colonized countries culturally, socially, and politically. Even though physical domination is limited because of the newly won independence of formerly colonized countries, the descendants of colonizers create persistent sociocultural, religious, and even linguistic structures to portray the formerly colonized as inferiors. Many colonial rules and cultures are still influential and dominant in the formerly colonized world. It is a new form of colonialism: postcolonialism.

The power of postcolonialism *within power structures and institutional ideologies* reaches far beyond any territories or borders. Its methods involve geographical visibility/invisibility, psychological control/manipulation, religious distortion, and more. . . . However, unlike the power of postcolonialism *within power structures and institutional ideologies*, there is the power of postcolonialism *within people*, which is not just a resurgence of colonialism. . . . The power of postcolonialism that people exercise is the power of resistance and challenge. It resists the colonial and postcolonial power structures and challenges their impacts on toxic postcolonial, sociocultural, and political manipulations and institutional ideologies. It is the power to resist postcolonial domination.³

“Postcolonial” includes discourses of colonialism, neocolonialism, anticolonialism, and postcolonialism as it analyzes both the liberative and the hierarchical/imperial paradigms of these discourses. I agree with Kwok Pui-lan that “postcolonial” indicates not only “merely a temporal period or a political transition of power but also a reading strategy and discursive practice that seek to unmask colonial epistemological frameworks, unravel Eurocentric logics, and interrogate stereotypical cultural representations.”⁴ I use the term to reveal how Western colonial domination is constructed and to examine how the colonizers and the colonized interact and interrelate. Critically examining colonial and postcolonial power structures and institutional ideologies, using the term “postcolonial” shows how new forms of colonial and imperial power reproduce colonial paradigms and regenerate its colonial practices in the current economy, politics, history, and culture.

At the same time, “postcolonial” also denotes the movements of people’s resistance and challenges. It explores how people resist the colonial and postcolonial dominations and challenge the power structures and institutional ideologies. It reveals how they hybridize and negotiate the colonial and postcolonial reality in their daily life. Therefore, “postcolonial” refers to the simultaneous process of deconstructing the current dominant discourses and structures of colonial/neocolonial and postcolonial constructions and reconstructing/reimagining the past, present, and future with the power

of people's resistance and challenges. It is a create-*ing* space to understand and analyze multilayers of dynamics between institutionally represented colonialism and people's actual resistance and challenge to create hope. Therefore, the definition of postcolonialism in this book includes not only deconstructing and challenging discourses and practices of colonialism, neo-colonialism, anticolonialism, and postcolonialism but also reinterpreting the movements of people and their power to negotiate, hybridize, and transform these colonial/postcolonial realities into hope for justice and freedom. It is not an ideology that merely condemns colonialism, but a reimagining process that demands a subversive paradigm shift. Intentionally focusing on reconstructing the values of difference and otherness, this book introduces a new postcolonial paradigm that goes beyond the binary notions of I/the other, center/margin, black/white, native/alien, host/guest, and so forth.