When we think about male-female roles in relationship to Asian American churches, especially those from evangelical and East Asian contexts, there is a sense of a general correlation between the complementarianism in evangelical Christianity and that of the Confucian tradition. But what about evangelical egalitarians who are of East Asian descent or those more dialogical (white and other) evangelicals who might think that theological construction in the twenty-first century ought to engage cross-culturally and transnationally with non-Western traditions in general, including Asian and especially East Asian sources? Is there a way forward beyond the dominant complementarian discourse at this nexus where a predominantly white North American evangelical Christianity has met racial and ethnic others, especially East Asians in the contemporary milieu?

The following seeks to contribute to the few brave souls charting more robust global evangelical theological paradigm to emerge. The next few pages then, as no more than preliminary first steps for a (pentecostal and) evangelical transcultural, transnational, and transreligious dialogue where gender and race overlap. Not only will there need to be deeper engagements with East Asian wisdom traditions along these lines, but also further discussions with other non-Western interlocutors in order for a more robust global evangelical theological paradigm to emerge. The following seeks to contribute to the few brave souls charting such a global evangelical conversation, yet in this case, is focused at the intersection of gender and race.

**Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Sons and Daughters Prophesying from Every Nation under Heaven**

I have long argued that the Day of Pentecost narrative opens up to a trans-ethnic, transnational, transcultural, and thereby a transreligious theological exploration. In the present discussion, we will observe also that the Lukan account includes the registers of both race and gender. In brief, the promise of Pentecost not only extends to the “ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8) but also includes “sons and daughters,” indeed, “both men and women” (Acts 2:17–18). These are extrapolations to be sure, since contemporary notions of “race” and “gender” that read back into ancient biblical texts without careful qualification will undoubtedly be anachronistic. Hence, how can we attend to Luke’s own perspective at this juncture?

First, let’s be clear about the cosmic horizons of the Lukan texts (both the Third Gospel and Acts). The introductory segments of the messianic narrative already announce, drawing from the prophet Isaiah, that he would be “a light of revelation to the Gentiles” and that through his ministry, “all flesh shall see the salvation of God” (Luke 2:32a, 3:6; cf. Isa 61:1–2, passim). We are therefore not surprised when the disciples’ Jerusalem-centric questions to Jesus before his ascension, about when he would “restore the kingdom to Israel” (Acts 1:6b), is answered more universalistically: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

The Pentecost scene then suggests that this initiating of a movement outward, to the ends of the earth, is preceded, complemented even, by a centripetal dynamic. As these messianists “were all together in one place” in receiving the divine breath (2:1b), their glossolalia (2:4) is heard by “devout
It is not only that the sixteen regions or ethnic/national groups (2:9–11) are meant to be representative of the known world, but “visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes” are noted as present (2:10b). This means that the blowing of the divine wind needed not wait until the end of the story (Acts 28) to reach the edges of civilization—Rome, from the apostolic Jerusalem-centered perspective—but that the center and the periphery are already brought together from this Pentecost beginning, all together caught up in the outpouring of the divine breath.

If Luke would have known about the Americas and Oceania, or about East, South, and Southeast Asia, he would have included them on his list. What is clear is that the divine breath enabled “speaking in the native language of each” (2:6b), leaving a bewildered, amazed, and astonished (2:6a, 7a) gathering of those from around the known world to ask, “how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?” (2:8), and then, in a sense, answer their own question: “in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power” (2:11). What is clear, then, is that the promise of Pentecost concerns the capacity of the gospel to be announced in the native languages of the world. Indigenous, local, and glocal cultural-linguistic traditions thus have the potential to be conduits of the divine word, carried by the divine wind.

There is one more point to be made, which is when Luke records Peter’s explanatory response to the perplexed crowd (Acts 2:12), drawing on the prophet Joel: “In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy” (2:17–18; cf. Joel 2:28–29).

As if to accentuate the cosmic scope of the divine breath’s gift, Luke (through Peter and Joel) underscores that the promise is for and upon all flesh. As there are none who are neither sons nor daughters (or neither men nor women)—at least in the ancient near Eastern mind—that is the egalitarian point: Any and all can be visited by the divine wind and hence can speak or bear witness to God’s redemptive work.

Then put together, I would read the Pentecost narrative as inviting our attentiveness to the witnesses of those to and from the ends of the earth—in this case, East Asian cultures and traditions. More specifically, we ought to heed the witnesses of women, those who are daughters among us. This is not to say that any testimony is equal to any other—that is, the ongoing task of discernment; it is to say that the witnesses of all persons ought to be listened to on their own terms, no matter the color of their skin, whether male or female, and regardless of national, cultural, or geographic origination.

**Spirit Poured Out on East Asian Flesh: Implications of Yin and Yang Complementarity for Male-Female Relationships**

I now wish to turn East, in part because this reorienting belongs to my own lifelong sojourn to connect more deeply with my ethnic and cultural heritage, but in part, also because in our new global context, all theological reflection and construction will need to be cross-cultural and inter-religious in some fundamental respects. Here, however, we step back behind the important efforts of retrieving and documenting women’s voices, not because such work is unimportant, even as this would be the natural extension of the Pentecost narrative’s authorization of female speech (prophesying, etc.). Instead, given the theological reframing of the preceding that empowers our reaching out to engage with East Asian traditions, we now transition also theoretically, albeit refracted on the philosophical key given the non-theistic character of the East Asian context, in order to probe the theology and philosophy of gender. In particular, our question is how to engage with East Asian understandings of gender amid our quest for a global egalitarian theology. We shall see that reliance upon traditional Confucian sources is less promising than a turn to the philosophical and other currents flowing into Daoism that coalesced during the latter part of the so-called Axial Age (ca. eighth – third centuries BCE).

What is so commensurate about Confucian gender perspectives and evangelical complementarianism is the subordination of female to male, especially in their assigned spheres: the former to the domestic arena and the latter to the public realm. In the Analects itself, there are only three references to women, with the most problematic one comparing women to “small men” (in contrast to what would have been normally expected for male capacities; 17:25) almost offset by the other two that justify consultation with a woman (6:28) and include a woman among other governing officials (8:20). Yet what was the presumed division of labor of Confucius’ time came to be codified in the Li jì (the Record of Rites that most scholars date to the first century BCE): “The woman follows the man: in her youth, she follows her father and elder brother; when married, she follows her husband; when her husband is dead, she follows her son.” It was this subordinationism—known initially as the “Three Obediences” and then later as the “Three Bonds,” both indicative of female submission under male domination—that came into full flowering over the course of the next millennium when, during the Neo-Confucian revival, only males were allowed to be educated and to participate in civil, legal, and political activities and women were relegated to the domestic sphere. This long history of sociopolitical hierarchicalism and patriarchalism is what correlates with Victorian-era sensibilities that clearly define male and female roles, locating the latter predominantly in the household.

Ironically, such gendered Confucian “complementarianism” has developed despite a Daoist “minority report” that yin-yang “complementarity” is arguably egalitarian in at least some respects of this latter contemporary notion. What we now call Daoism—related to the primary canonical documents such as the Dao de Ching and the Zhuangzi that found convergence around the third century BCE—itself drew inspiration from various pre-existing tributaries, not least the Yin Yang jia School of Yin-Yang, a speculative system of metaphysical and cosmological thought that derived from the occult arts of astrology, almanacs, divination, and physiognomy. In brief, as summarized by Wing-tsit Chan, “all things and events are products of two [opposite] elements, forces, or principles: yin,
which is negative, passive, weak, and destructive, and yang, which is positive, active, strong, and constructive.”

Yin and yang were certainly correlated with female and male respectively, but these were also natural and cosmological associations, not merely anthropological or gendered notions. So, if the primordial forces of heaven and earth, the chi of the world, not only encompass and connect but also regulate the yin-yang movement, then the cosmos is an ongoing dynamic of alternation, waxing into and waning out of balance continuously. Yin and yang are thereby potencies that rotate through and constantly transform the five elements—metal, wood, water, fire, and earth—that produce the phenomenal world as we know it. With the appearance of human creatures, the yin-yang structure of the world also interrelates their actions, whether of individuals, communities, societies, governments, etc., with heaven and earth’s natural rhythms, so that human activity is optimized when ritualized in accordance with the seasons of the cosmic environment.

Intriguingly, while yin and yang are “Chinese chains of opposition,” these are of the complementary rather than the contradictory or conflicting sort. Thus, if in the West, binaries contest against each other toward erasure, in the East Asian mentality, yin and yang “are the assimilating and differentiating influences behind chains of pairs” each everlasting impinging upon the other, neither with capacity without the other, relationally interconnected and never apart. Primarily “symbols of movement or action, rather than the symbols of entity or substance,” yin and yang are thereby “coexistentially opposite but essentially united.” Put pointedly, yin (becoming-changing) and yang (being-unchanging) cohere in all reality and things and are “interdependent, interactive, intertransforming, and interpenetrating . . . [and] enjoy equal metaphysical status to the extent that neither could exist without the other [both are indispensable] and neither is absolutely dominant over the other.”

Epistemically, then, yin-yang is both-and holism, rather than either-or binarism, while culturally and operationally, East Asian idealism presumes yin-yang interrelatedness and inter-connectedness.

Applied to our topic at hand, however, yin-yang philosophy is more about the cosmic and relational dynamics of human-becoming than reducible to male-and-female distinctions. Yes, the yin is generally linked with the female and the yang with the male. Yet, as one Korean American theologian writes: “I am yang in my relation to my wife but yin in my relation to my father. It is thus the relationship that determines whether I am yin or yang.”

Yin and yang are about not just male-female but all relationships. From this perspective, then, the Daoist tradition’s absorption of the yin-yang cosmology also moderates the subordinationist norm for women in the East Asian world bequeathed through the later Confucian tradition. If “Daoism definitely favors yin, the moon, and soft, while Confucianism prefers yang, the sun, and strong,” the interdependency of yin and yang means that the “charge of sexism should belong to the Confucian view of women rather than to the Daoist view of women.” The Daoist tradition has thereby perennially lifted up women as cosmic life-givers, as divine teachers and media of cosmic revelations and healing potencies, and as embodiments of the essential ingredients for human and personal transformation, even if it achieves all of this in ways that support rather than subvert Confucian values such as filial piety and loyalty to the state. Thus, Asian American evangelical women have been drawn to and also attempted to develop a yinist-feminist paradigm toward an anthropological theology of harmony in dynamic equilibrium.

One comment is important before transitioning back to explicitly evangelical theological considerations. The option for the Daoist minority report is not meant to suggest that Daoist traditions are free from the patriarchalism of East Asian cultures more generally, nor even that Daoist complementarity would not even resituate the relationship with the main lines of Confucian development in a more both-and rather than either-or frame of reference. Put otherwise, the preceding is meant to serve as a heuristic reappropriation of East Asian resources that can allow for a more egalitarian vision to emerge from out of the dominant gender complementarianism that especially evangelicals have associated with contemporary Confucian perspectives. In that respect, Daoist complementarity suggests that evangelicals working on issues of gender across racial lines can engage fruitfully across the East-West chasm since received Confucian complementarianism does not need to have the final word on how to think about male-female relations, not just in a North American, but also in a global context.

Spirit Poured Out on Ecclesial-Catholic Flesh: Gender Egalitarianism and Trans-Ethnic Complementarity in the Anointed Messiah

In this final section, I wish to return toward an evangelical egalitarianism but now informed by East Asian—and Daoist, in particular—sources. If evangelical complementarianism (note the -ism with which I consistently deploy in this regard) maps onto and mutually reinforces Confucian subordinationism, then evangelical egalitarianism may gain from a trans-cultural dialogical exchange with Daoist and yin-yang complementarity (note: not an -ism). There are three brief steps in sketching the contours of how such a more robust conversation might ensue.

First, we began with the Pentecost event in Acts 2 to discover that its message regarding the outpouring of the divine breath upon all flesh, male and female alike, was the fulfillment of ancient Israelite prophecy regarding the eschatological renewal and redemption of the world. In the Daoist and yin-yang scheme of things, the world and its members are all derived from a primordial heavenly modulation of continuously dynamic and complementary interactions. Daoist protology here anticipates Pentecostal eschatology, and both have implications for reconsidering male-female relations in the egalitarian perspective. I am not here wishing for any simplistic appropriation of Daoist ideas with Christian theology. This is but an initial step that begs for deeper comparative analysis.

From this, and second, the pneumatological approach toward a Pentecost-theological anthropology is consistent with the christological framing of a Pauline conception: “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:27–28). The formation of the new people of God...
is about, in this case, the overcoming of the three most obvious barriers dividing human beings: ethnicity, social status, and gender. The new body of Christ does not in this case erase the particularities of human identities and bodies: There are still Jews and Greeks, just as there remain those enslaved and those free (see also 1 Cor 7:21–24), and human bodies continue on as male and female in this ecclesial dispensation. Precisely for these reasons, Asian and Asian American biblical scholars emphasize Galatians “as a resource for Christocentric inclusivity,” reconfiguring the body of Christ beyond East and West. As Jews and Greeks are no longer divided in Christ, so also Asians and Americans are united in Christ, beginning with the experience of the spirit of Jesus (Gal 3:2–3).

Yet, thirdly, the Pauline phrase may have other eschatological ramifications for gender beyond those related to ethnicity. If the apocalyptic imagination foresees that the eschatological people of God will nevertheless retain those distinctly distinguishable “from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev 5:9b; also 7:9), then Jesus’ response to the Sadducees’ questions and disavowals about the resurrection of the body was that men and women “neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven” (Matt 22:30). Yet the point here is less to deny that male and female become something else, like angels, than to undermine the Sadducee assumptions about the character of the resurrected life. From this perspective, the “neither male nor female” in Galatians was not about anticipating a non-gendered resurrected embodiment but about overcoming the divisions between men and women in this present aeon. More precisely, this is about redeeming and renewing the promise of maleness and femaleness heralded in the creation. As Craig Keener puts it,

Paul here uses the precise terminology for male and female that appears in the creation narrative. Most commentators thus suspect an allusion to Gen. 1:27 here; the three-word phrase together quotes exactly the phrase in Genesis. Paul envisions a restoration of the preeminent unity of male and female that flourished before the judgment of Gen. 3:16... Some find here an allusion to primeval androgyny, a prototype of the new creation. Some Jewish thought understood the original Adam as a hermaphrodite before Eve was taken from him; God first made “man” and then separated out the female component; originally the man was “neither male nor female.” Paul’s interest, however, is not a return to the putative androgyny of the old creation, but rather the transcendent status of a new creation.

Yin-yang cosmology thereby also maps onto the male-female complementarity identified in first creation. Whereas yin and yang are mutually interdependent, male and female are also two aspects of ha adam, and it is the hierarchical domination of one over the other that is overcome in Christ by his breath. Pentecost announces that the coming divine reign is now present, at least in part, by the spirit of Jesus, and that this eschatological transformation both heals the subordinationism of female to male normalized in both the West and East, and fulfills the promise of the first creation, not to mention the yin-yang vision of anthropological complementarity.

This essay has operated at the so-called 30,000-foot level in being mainly theoretical and abstract in its comparative theological consideration of race and gender in evangelical contexts. If we were to begin to touch down in the historical realms of evangelical practice, there would be a lot more unpacking of implications for male-female relations ecclesially and interpersonally. My approach would be to bring scholarship on women in Luke-Acts or evangelical and pentecostal models of women in ministry, for instance, into the evangelical egalitarian conversation, but now in dialogue with Daoist complementarian perspectives. The issue with evangelical complementarianism is that the possibilities of male and female mutuality are undermined by subordinationist impulses, so the key would be to imagine reciprocal praxis looking backward and forward to both creational and eschatological horizons. My wager is that Daoist notions can helpfully factor into such an exploration to inspire imaginative forms of interrelational practice for a global evangelical ecclesia.

In this essay, I have made some very preliminary suggestions about how we can develop a pentecostal and evangelical egalitarian theology in transethnic and intercultural dialogue with East Asian sources. I have suggested that a yin-yang approach provides a dialogical lens for evangelical thinking about theological anthropology that connects our protological ruminations with our eschatological hopes. Much more work needs to be done, not only comparatively and constructively between Western and East Asian Christian communities, but also between men and women in both venues and in between (such as in Asian America). May a fresh Pentecost blow upon male and female bodies for this venture.

Notes

1. Thanks to Mimi Haddad and CBE (Christians for Biblical Equality) International for inviting my participation on the panel on gender and race in the “Evangelicals and Gender” section of the Evangelical Theological Society annual meeting, San Diego, California, 21 November 2019, and then to the CBE journal Priscilla Papers for publishing my essay along with those of other panelists at the event, for the encouraging peer review report, and for the editorial corrections. I have taken this invitation to consider matters intersectionally to press further into the East Asian dimension of my own ethnic identity and, from that perspective, have turned to resources that I am familiar with, predominantly that of the comparative theological enterprise with which I have long been engaged. Given this East Asian trajectory of argumentation, I thereby also appreciate Priscilla Papers for a publication policy that does not inhibit appearance elsewhere, and to the editors and peer reviewers of ChristianityNext for both accepting this paper and substantive referee feedback that helped to render the argument, however preliminarily, more coherent and compelling. I am grateful also to Jeremy Bone, my graduate assistant, for proofreading prior versions of this essay twice. All remaining errors of fact and interpretation are my responsibility.


3. Within pentecostal churches—the ecclesial tradition within which I have been a lifelong member and participant—we can find as many (if not more) complementarians as egalitarians, certainly in practice; for egalitarian arguments, see Estrelda Alexander and Amos Yong,


My earliest work was devoted to this line of inquiry; for an early crystallization of my argument on this front, see my *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Baker Academic, 2005) chs. 4–5.

Unless otherwise noted, all scriptural quotations will be from the New Revised Standard Version.

In my discussion of this section of Isaiah, called "Third Isaiah" by many scholars of that prophecy, I have suggested that 61:1–2, and 61:1–9 more generally "is the pivot upon which the visions of the restored Jerusalem turn (60:1–22 and 61:10–62:12), and is the hinge around which the judgment (chs. 56–59) and redemption (chs. 63–66) of Yahweh are thereby also achieved to the ends of the earth"; see my *Mission after Pentecost: The Witness of the Spirit from Genesis to Revelation*, Mission in Global Community (Baker Academic, 2019) 129.

Those familiar with my work will not be surprised at my Day of Pentecost starting point; I have developed such a Pentecost hermeneutic in my *The Hermeneutical Spirit: Theological Interpretation and the Scriptural Imagination for the 21st Century* (Cascade, 2017).

Luke in general and the Acts account more specifically are surely not egalitarian by modern standards – on this point see, Mitzi J. Smith, *The Literary Construction of the Other in the Acts of the Apostles: Charismatics, the Jews, and Women* (Pickwick, 2011) chs. 3–4 – but ours is a theological reading that exploits exegetical openings, and it is the latter that I am highlighting in this discussion.

Which was my primordial theological concern, dating back to my doctoral thesis, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions*, Journal of Pentecostal my doctoral thesis: *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Latter that I am highlighting in this discussion.

Isaiah 63–66) of Yahweh are thereby also achieved to the ends of the earth”; around which the judgment (chaps. 56–59) and redemption (chaps. 63–66) of Yahweh are thereby also achieved to the ends of the earth”; see my *Mission after Pentecost: The Witness of the Spirit from Genesis to Revelation*, Mission in Global Community (Baker Academic, 2019) 129.

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38. See Yeo What Has Jerusalem to do with Beijing?, 58–64.


40. See also Tat-siong Benny Liew, What is Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics? Reading the New Testament (University of Hawai‘i Press, 2008) ch. 2, which unfolds his own proposal for a yin-yang hermeneutic, although Liew uses yin-and-yang more as a rhetorical trope than he engages the notion historically or metaphysically.

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