Contextualization versus Globalization: A Glimpse of Sounds and Symbols in Asian Worship

I-TO LOH

Let me take this opportunity to thank your Institute of Sacred Music, formerly my alma mater at Union Theological Seminary. My studies there, nearly forty years ago, laid the foundation for my long journey toward contextualization of church music and liturgy in Asia. My intention in this talk is to explore some of the struggles between contextualization and globalization, and to give you a glimpse of how some Asians are dealing with sounds, and to a lesser extent symbols, in worship. I will describe a framework that presents some of the relevant dimensions. In order to really understand and feel the musical issues I am talking about, we will look at some examples together.

The General Asian Scene

Over fifteen years ago I gave a lecture in Hong Kong for the World Association of Chinese Church Music in which I pointed out the awkward situation of Chinese-speaking churches around the world. I said that Chinese churches:

- were banana churches, because they looked yellow in their skin, but deep in their heart and mind they wanted to be as white as Caucasians;
- translated and borrowed theologies, having no theologies of their own;
- copied music—they copied Western styles of composition, and also illegally copied Western published anthems;
- used liturgies that were all secondhand liturgies introduced and used by missionaries over a century ago.¹

I challenged these Chinese musicians and pastors: "Where is the rice?" Where is the staple food, the substance of their Chinese Christian expression? Unfortunately those observations and comments still to some extent reflect the general situation and attitude of most of the churches in Asia today, with the exception of a few seminaries and institutions in India, Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, and Indonesia.

The central theme of my life's work has been this struggle between contextualization and Westernization or globalization. You may ask, what is wrong with globalization? Globalization is not inherently bad. But globalization, like Westernization, is problematic when it promotes the wholesale supplanting of local cultures by Western ideas. I frequently tell my Asian students and colleagues that modernization does not equal Westernization. If you copy others all the time, then you lose yourself. In regard to Christianity, this has occurred primarily in two ways: the initial wholesale transplantation of the Gospel by early missionaries without any regard for local context, and rapid globalization. As a result, local people have come to see their own culture as without value. Local culture is being thrown out in favor of Western ideas.

Let me give you some examples of the impact of globalization on local culture in Taiwan and Asia.
• The wholesale importation of Western praise choruses and pop style hymns is causing a host of problems. First, music is no longer placed in its liturgical context; it is only used as a warm-up for half-an-hour or longer without consideration for its relevance in the liturgy. Second, the people’s musical ability has declined. Fewer people are interested in other types of music. Native traditions and newly composed songs in ethnic styles have little chance of survival. Third, the church is losing her historical and ecumenical links. The overall result is that Christians are becoming narrow-minded, and Christian doctrines of God and the Church are distorted.

• Entertainment-oriented worship services and success-theology, formulated after globalization, have become the primary mode of preaching and evangelism.

• Some Western editors/compilers have made recordings of songs from the Third World which they then published under their own names as arrangers, when in fact they had only transcribed, or at most changed a few notes, and then claimed ownership.

• Some Western composers have arranged simple Third World songs into larger Western-style choral works, altering the original styles so much that their uniqueness was lost. Even worse, the Western arrangers then copyrighted the songs for themselves, forcing the original developers to pay money for their own diluted music.

Ethical issues also emerge from this aspect of globalization. The rich West has the know-how and power to take over the works of the poor Third World. "Learned composers" randomly superimpose Western harmony in order to "globalize" Third World songs for Western consumption. Forcing these songs into Western style is like forcing people from hot climates to put on formal suits and ties before being allowed to worship God.

This is not a new problem. D. T. Niles, the cofounder of the Christian Conference of Asia and its first General Secretary, recognized this problem decades ago. In his writings he suggested an elegant metaphor for explaining the problem of transplanting the Gospel. Although he did not live long enough to experience the phenomenon of globalization, his observations and suggestions for solutions are still valid. He said:

The Gospel is like a seed and you have to sow it. When you sow the seed of the Gospel in Palestine, a plant that can be called Palestinian Christianity grows....The seed of the Gospel is later brought to America and a plant grows of American Christianity. Now when missionaries came to our lands they brought not only the seed of the Gospel, but their own plant of Christianity, flower pot included! So, what we have to do is to break the flower pot, take out the seed of the Gospel, sow it in our own cultural soil, and let our own version of Christianity grow.²

Here Niles pinpoints the heart of the problem, not only of the Gospel but also of our music and worship. The major part of our effort in Asia today is still focused on translating, imitating, and copying Western ways of singing and worship, believing them to be the only authentic Christian
expression. Instead, our efforts today should be focused not only on breaking the Western flowerpot, but also on taking out the seed of the Gospel and figuring out how to plant this new seed. We need to cultivate a version of Christianity that is appropriate to our own cultural soil.

**Contextualization of Christian Musical Expression**

Our basic challenge is this: How can we encourage an expression of Christian faith that is Asian in nature, and not merely a transplantation of Western Christianity? In my view, contextualization is the approach we need to take in order to plant this new seed of the Gospel. In my first attempt, in 1984, to define the meaning of contextualization, I concluded that contextualization is, above all, the manifestation of the Imago Dei in human kind. It is the revelation of the mystery of God's creative power as shown in his creation, including human minds that formulate various art forms. And it is our participation in God's continuous creation, letting God transform our culture and arts into dynamic media that will effectively communicate and express the meanings of the Gospel to our people.³

Today I would add that the ultimate goal of contextualization is the realization of incarnation in any given context, that is, God in Christ taking native forms and speaking native languages. The Gospel is no longer confined in any flowerpot, or in need of translation.

In the rest of this presentation I will give you examples of Asian music at different degrees of contextualization. I hope that you will appreciate both the challenge that we face in promoting contextualization, as well as the enormous potential for creative contextualization and insight into faith that can be gained by drawing upon the rich cultural diversity of Asia. I am going to begin by characterizing the degrees of contextualization taking place in Asia, and providing a number of examples of these contextualizations. I will conclude with an example of my own work.

Asia covers a huge area, and contains thousands of ethnic groups as well as a rich diversity of cultures. There are no easy ways of classifying the forms of contextualization, but to help make sense of the diversity we can roughly categorize Asians into three basic types: forks, chopsticks, and fingers/spoons. The first Asian dean of the Southeast Asia Graduate School of Theology, Kosuke Koyama, suggested in his well-known book *Water Buffalo Theology* that all the professors in his institution are people of two cultures, "fork and chopsticks."⁴ I interpret him as categorizing the modern educational orientation of his faculty members according to their way of eating or handling food: chopsticks for Asian-oriented education, and forks for Westernized education.

While this may be an oversimplification of the day-to-day reality in which many people use both forks and chopsticks, this analysis remains a useful metaphor for understanding the relationships between Western and Asian ideas. For our analysis and understanding of Asia as a whole I add another category: "fingers/spoons." Most of the indigenous peoples in many parts of Asia, especially those in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific, eat with fingers and/or spoons. They are also the ones who have kept their traditions, being less influenced from the West. Let me explain how these three types of food consumption are related to musical styles and their contextual practices.

**Forks.** This term refers to Asians who, because of their Western education, tend to subscribe to Western cultural expressions and value systems. They appreciate Western music, but may be
ignorant of their own culture; some of them might even look down on their own native culture and music. There are two subcategories here: Asians learning to use a fork, and Asians creating new pieces in the Asian fork style.

Let me cite one example of Asians learning to use a fork, that is, Asians learning to sing Western songs. Korean folk music is usually in compound time, 9/8 or 6/8, and tends not to repeat the same note in the melody; Koreans are also fond of anticipating the next tone. When missionaries introduced the hymn tune Nettleton ("Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing"), the Koreans were unable to sing it exactly the way they were taught; they had to change the song to fit their native song style, changing the time and anticipating the next tone\(^5\) (see example 1).

Example 1

![ NETTLETON ]

\begin{verbatim}
Come, thou Fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing thy grace;
\end{verbatim}

They not only changed the rhythm and the time signature, and anticipated the next tone on the weak beat (the last eighth note), but also removed the seventh degree of the scale (si), because it is not in the traditional five-tone scale. This is an example of a Western song but not sung according to a Western manner. The song was changed to fit a native idiom.

There is also an "Asian fork style" that mostly follows the Western concept of composition and is treated with Western harmony. The Japanese melody, "Gathering Round the Table of the Lord" (see example 2) has only a slight Asian flavor.
I have had arguments with people who claimed this tune as very Japanese, but when I asked them to sing it in English they could not identify the Japanese elements. It seems that the language has made it seem Japanese, and the reiterated eighth notes may also sound Japanese, but the setting in Western traditional four-part harmony has turned this into an Asian fork style.

Chopsticks. The second type of Asian uses chopsticks. Culturally and geographically this refers to Northeast Asian countries, namely Japan, Korea, China, Taiwan, plus all the cultural Chinese in Southeast Asia (Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Indo-china). Most of them are proud of their own traditional culture, but many still look up to the Western "fork" culture as their ideal. Musically, they may be divided into two groups.

Group 1 includes those who can perform or appreciate their own traditional high art music. Group 2 includes those who have acquired certain Western musical ideas and skills but who have little or no knowledge of their own music. They equate modernization with Westernization. Here we find the phenomenon of hybridization or syncretism, that is, composing melodies in ethnic styles but harmonizing in a Western way. This is more Asian than the Asian fork type, because the melody demonstrates a stronger Asian character, but at the same time it still uses Western harmonies. In a sense it is half Asian and half Western. So far, this is the most popular practice, enjoyed by composers, singers and listeners. Let me cite two examples here.

F. Pratt Green's "God Is Here As We Your People Meet," has been set to a melody in Chinese style: Shen zai dian zhong (see example 3).
The composer, Dr. Daniel Law of Hong Kong, uses a C natural minor with a pentatonic scale, concluding the A section at the end of the second system in its relative major. Then without modulations he starts with G minor, introducing two new tones, D and A, to create a contrast and sense of modulation, and returns back to the opening motive for the conclusion. Here we can see typical Chinese melodic progressions harmonized in a constantly moving counterpoint with contrary motions, almost Bachian in style. This shows the ideal of many Asian composers today for mixing two cultures together in a hymn.

Another example of an Asian melody with partial Western harmonization may be found in Yong-cho Lee's *Sarangui Chunim* (see example 4).
The text is an earnest prayer for guidance, based on the words of one of the criminals nailed on the cross who begged Jesus to remember him when he came into his kingdom (Luke 23:42). The melodic line and rhythm show a strong Korean character. The harmony is somewhat ambiguous, because there are hints of both Asian and Western influences, with very Romantic chord progressions.

Fingers/Spoons. The third type of Asian contextualization covers not only the peoples in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific, but also the Aborigines in Taiwan. They use fingers and/or spoons in eating; they have also preserved more of their original culture and have less Western influence. Herein lies a wellspring of rich Asian music that awaits investigation.

Let me give you an example. You may be aware that traditional music in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Thailand, Myanmar, and Cambodia is, in general, without harmony. The Indian song called a Bhajan is a kind of spiritual song in praise of the attributes of God. It preserves a distinctively Indian composition style, sans harmony. Indian music is characterized by a number of key features, including the use of drones, ornaments, microtones, rhythmic cycles, and raga. The notion of raga is very complex. The important tones are Sa, the foundation or the tonic of the raga, and Pa, the dominant. These two pitches are frequently sounded together as drones. The Indian octave is divided into twenty-two sruti, that is,
microtonal intervals smaller than a half-step. Another important feature is ornaments, without which Indian songs would lose their character. Let us sing a bhajan to demonstrate some of these points. (See example 5).

OM is a mystic syllable of ancient origin. It is the combination of three sounds A-U-M, symbolizing the beginning, the middle and the end of life.7 Bhagawan refers to the name of God. This is a very clear example of the use of entirely indigenous music to express a Christian idea. The melody, the rhythm, and all the other elements are Indian in their origin. This song breaks the Western flowerpot. Unfortunately, this bhajan has not been generally accepted by all the Indian churches, because the mystical sound OM is a Hindu, not Christian, expression. The Indian name of God, Bhagawan, could also be helpful in contemplating the attributes of God. I hope that in due time Indian theologians may be able to come up with more convincing interpretations of their own theologies.

We have just seen some examples of how we can characterize Asian contextualization. Let us turn now to an example of how contextualization is expressed through non-lexical syllables.

*Non-lexical syllables.* Some cultures in Asia like to sing songs with non-lexical syllables. They are vocables or "untalkables," words or syllables without specific meaning. They gain meaning from the title, the purpose or context, words sung before or after, or the singer's own mood
and imagination. I propose that singing in non-lexical syllables may be comparable to St. Paul's idea of "sighs too deep for words" (Rom 8:27); that is, one may express something that is inexpressible. This can be further confirmed from the contemporary view of the Jewish tradition, as was pointed out recently by a Jewish cantor who said that the best kind of singing is wordless, which expresses the deepest and inner personal feelings. This may be demonstrated through the next hymn from the aborigines of Taiwan, Paiska Lau Paku. (See example 6.)

The Bunun tribe in Taiwan builds its choral singing in overtone series, i.e. do-mi-sol. This can be demonstrated by the jew's-harp. When singing the Bunun people naturally divide into four or more parts to sing homophonically. In certain call and response songs, the congregation responds to the soloist with the non-lexical syllables U-I-HI, which do not have a particular meaning but express agreement or approval of the text just sung. These non-lexical syllables can mean "Yes, I agree," or "I support your words," or even "Amen." Note that the final cadence is in an open fifth without the mi. This is an authentic way of harmonizing without any Western influence.

The above examples are just a few native or acculturated sounds of worship, using fingers/spoons, chopsticks, or forks. Some are genuinely indigenous; nothing has been added. Some are syncretic, that is, they mix two styles, with different degrees of Western influence and contextualization.

I am pleased to report to you that the Christian Conference of Asia has published Sound the Bamboo: CCA Hymnal 2000, which contains 315 hymns from twenty-two countries in Asia, in forty-four languages, all with singable English translations. Through this collection you will be able to trace and discover some Asian musical identities, and get a general picture of how some Asians are struggling to contextualize our faith in worship.

Some Innovative Sounds

We have looked at examples of the range of contextualizations taking place in Asia. We turn now to focus more on innovation. There are pockets of innovation in Asia, where composers
are adding something new, and stretching beyond both native and western tradition to worship God. Let’s look at a few examples.

Silence. Silent meditation is important in Asian culture. A composer from Bangladesh, Bart Shaha, made use of silence symbolically in composing a prayer of confession. His innovation involved the creation of two cycles, six counts each, of total silence. Although the music seems to have stopped, the sound of silence becomes the agent of "a still small voice" (1 Kings 19:12) speaking to us that we can hear only in total silence. This silence may also awaken our conscience to see our true sinful self, thus creating a genuine spirit for confession. As expressed by Madeline L’Engle, "The deepest communion with God is beyond words, on the other side of silence." Let us experience this prayer by looking at "Lord, We Did Not Live Up to Your Teachings. Lord, Forgive Us" in Bengali (see example 7).

Non-lexical syllables. These are used in various styles of music. Some composers are taking advantage of the nature of non-lexical syllables in a Christian context. For example, the Korean song "Ohoradiya" (see example 8) was originally associated with a farmers’ dance during festivals. The syllables are shouts of joy and excitement. Geonyong Lee has adapted the singing style, and has transformed the non-lexical syllables ohoradiya sangsa diya into the meaning of "Hallelujah" by simply adding a parenthetical "Hallelujah" in the lyrics everywhere that ohoradiya appears. In this Psalm 150 Korean instruments have replaced all the biblical instruments. The composer has transformed the folk singing style into a hymn of highest praise.

The way to sing this is for the leader to sing the ohoradiya, and for the congregation to repeat after. The leader will continue to sing other phrases, but the congregation still responds with the same ohoradiya, until the leader introduces a new ohoradiya, when the congregation changes accordingly.
The symbolism of sound. Another example of innovation uses an image to guide the development of the motif. The next piece is a mysterious, meditative hymn, marveling at God’s creation, its diversity, harmony and perfection. The Filipino author/composer, Francisco F. Feliciano, a Yale graduate, uses an image to explain the symbolism of sound. He says that when one throws a rock into a calm lake it stirs up ripples, first small, then expanding bigger and wider, and finally fading. The composition evolves from this imagery. The melodic construction uses the movement of sound to describe the ripples expanding, then fading. Feliciano is also innovative in utilizing two guitars, one playing only three tones 3 4 6, with the other playing accompaniment in arpeggios, all in discords. To my knowledge no other hymns in the West or in Asia are composed with this kind of texture and symbolism. See "Still, I Search for My God" (example 9).
Drones. The following is an example where I have taken the Indian concept of raga, tala (rhythmic cycle), and drone, and have added new ideas, which are neither Indian nor Western or Taiwanese. This is my personal ideal of the goal of contextualization as an Asian, not necessarily limiting myself to a single culture.

The function and role of the Holy Spirit is a mystery to many. Shirley Murray, a New Zealander, is one of the best hymn writers today. In her hymn "Loving Spirit" (see example 10) she describes the loving Spirit as a mother, feeding and forming me with her own body; as a father: protecting me and hoisting me on his shoulder to see the world; as a friend and lover, knowing, comforting, and giving me rest. When I set her text to music I tried to express this mysterious yet intimate feeling of the Holy Spirit with the so-called Gypsy scale of India. The Gypsy scale is organized in two tetrachords, 3 4 #5 6 and 7 1 #2 3, each of which consists of the intervals of a minor 2nd, augmented 2nd, and minor 2nd (similar to the Indian Bhairav raga family). I used an additive rhythm, or the South Indian triputa tala 3 + 2 + 2. With this variety of melodic intervals, additive rhythm, and ornaments, I could create different melodic lines. As I indicated earlier, Indian music has no concept of harmony. In order to innovate I borrowed the tonic and dominant of the Gypsy scale as drones. These drones, however, move slowly, and gradually develop to a more complex inner melodic line. This creates a mood of mystery, building up to a climax that expresses the "wonder" of the Spirit near the end. The drum and concussion bell accompaniment also adds to the mystery of this hymn. The end of each stanza should leave a
cycle of seven beats as interlude.

Two Asian cultures. In this last example, I describe my own work in attempting to fuse musical ideas from two Asian cultures in conflict as a way to symbolize possible unity and reconciliation.

Over four hundred thousand migrants work in Taiwan; they come from the Philippines and other Asian countries. Some of them have taken jobs that formerly would have been held by Taiwanese aboriginal people. This causes resentment and tension between Taiwanese tribes and migrant workers. When I discovered the New Zealand poet Bill Wallace’s hymn "Sound a Mystic Bamboo Song" which vividly depicts Christ in Asian ways of life—wearing tribal cloth, living in a squatter’s shed, bending while planting rice—I was deeply moved. I decided to use this text to create a contextualized hymn bringing Philippine and Taiwanese musical cultures into unity. My immediate idea was to use non-lexical syllables to establish the link between the Kalinga people from the Northern Philippines and Taiwanese aboriginal people, both of whom are fond of singing in non-lexical syllables. As I indicated earlier, non-lexical syllables can take on new meaning according to context. I created a new context by putting non-lexical phrases from each culture into the same song. Thus, the Kalinga motive begins the first half of the song, and the Taiwanese tribal motive completes the second half. I hoped that Kalinga and
Taiwanese singers and listeners would experience a feeling of unity and reconciliation through bringing the familiar and unfamiliar sounds together. The theology and symbolism behind this composition are that Christ, the Son of God, our Savior, has taken our mortal body, working with us, suffering with us. We, as children of God, in spite of all our differences, are equally loved by Christ. Therefore we can share our burdens, our resources; we can work together, live in harmony, and manifest our unity in Christ. This is my humble attempt in contextualizing with our Asian sisters and brothers our mutual faith in Christ. (See example 11).

Symbols and Symbolic Acts

So far, I have talked mostly about music in an Asian context. In the last part of this presentation I would like to share with you some of the symbolism used in Asian worship.
Dance and symbolism in Bali. The Protestant church in Bali has stood out as Asians who have been testifying to Christ through various art forms. Their efforts at contextualization may be seen in the following examples:

- The Balinese associate mountains with the presence of God as well as the source of life; this has prompted them to build their churches to resemble mountains.

- In Balinese tradition a temple gate symbolizes coming into the presence of God. Thus, a traditional temple gate is constructed behind the communion table, but a cross is set in the middle affirming that Christ is the Way to God.

- Dance in Bali is "a powerful medium of communicating ideas, emotions and feelings. Their highly-stylized gestures and eye, finger, arm, and foot movements are the keys to understanding Balinese dance, for all these are symbolic representations of something deeper in meaning." For instance dance movements have a traditional meaning that Christians have re-interpreted in a Christian context:

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<tr>
<th>Body Part</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Pinky</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eyes</td>
<td>Heaven, God’s watching eyes</td>
<td>Heaven, God’s loving care, God’s watching eyes</td>
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<td>Hands</td>
<td>Human beings</td>
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<td>Feet</td>
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<tr>
<td>Symmetrical movements</td>
<td>Balance between good and evil, right and left</td>
<td>God’s justice and mercy, Judgment and grace</td>
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All of these new Christian interpretations have added new dimensions in communicating the
Gospel to the Balinese through dance.

A famous painter, dancer, musician, and composer, I Nyoman Darsane, composed Anak Dara (The Parable of the Ten Virgins) to urge people to prepare diligently and be ready to welcome the sudden coming of the bridegroom. He used the gamelan to accompany singing, which was rare at the time. The parable begins with an overture of dance. It marked the beginning of a new era of Balinese Christian dance and music.

I will mention only a few other symbols and symbolic acts.\(^{11}\)

*Parikrama.* Some Christians in South India create a mandala in the sanctuary to pay obeisance to God. A mandala is a space decorated with a vase, pebbles, flowers, etc., to represent the Holy of Holies or the presence of God. When people come to worship they bring gifts of flowers or other objects of God's creation, and walk slowly and meditatively around the mandala, placing the gifts to decorate the mandala, holding their palms together with the sign of namaskar, and slightly bowing the head, which means "I salute the divinity that is in you." It symbolizes thanksgiving, praise and offering. This whole act of worship is called parikrama.\(^{12}\)

*Mat covering.* When a Pacific islander wants to show his regret for having seriously offended someone, he has to ask a respected person from his community to take his place. This respected person sits in front of the house of the offended party, covering himself with a mat to express his plea for forgiveness. If someone comes out to remove the mat, it means that the apology has been accepted. If not, this person has to be killed! The church has utilized this act of penitence. During the prayer of confession, one representative of the congregation sits in the middle, covered with a mat. After the assurance of forgiveness the pastor comes down to remove the mat, symbolizing the forgiveness of sins, and the reconciliation between God and people, and between human beings.

*Elements for Holy Communion.* The liturgy of Holy Communion provides people with ample spaces for imagination. For instance:

- Coconuts are one of the main subsistence foods of Filipinos and many other Asian peoples, and so Filipino Christians have used coconuts to replace bread and wine in the Holy Communion. One can easily understand the symbolism of one body broken, the meat and juice coming from the same coconut to nourish the people (although some people have problems with the juice, which is not red).

- Taiwan is shaped like a sweet potato. Besides, in the past sweet potatoes were the food of the poor. A recent poem uplifting this Taiwanese spirit reads: "Sweet potatoes, fearless of being rotten under the earth,/ Only yearn for sprouting of leaves and branches for generation after generation." So, we have used sweet potatoes for Holy Communion. The meaning of sacrifice implied in the poem above also reflects the word of Jesus, that when "a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies...it bears much fruit" (John 12:24).

- Tea is the most important drink in Taiwanese society. It is very meaningful for Taiwanese to serve tea in place of wine or juice in communion.
• Some theologians in Indonesia have done an experiment using chicken meat for Holy Communion, with the following rationale: (1) chicken is the most popular meat for general consumption; (2) chickens only live for people, sacrificing themselves to nourish human beings; (3) a rooster reminds us of the weaknesses in our human nature, warning us of our possible denial of Christ, as did Peter; (4) chickens remind us of God’s love as shown in Jesus’ lamentation for Jerusalem: "How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings . . . " (Matt. 23:37); (5) chewing the meat makes people experience the actual eating and partaking of "the body."

• Rice wine, a very strong local liquor, is used in place of grape juice.

The sacred flame. South Indian families keep a copper lamp, Aathari (sacred flame), lighted at night. The original lamp had a pagan symbol on the top, which is now replaced by a cross. It has five wicks that symbolize five ways to the deity. Christians have given this lamp a new identity: the Aarathi symbolizes the presence of God, or Christ, the light of the world. The flame also stands for the Word, the truth, and eternal life. After a sermon each member of the congregation is invited to come forward to feel the flame. After the first touch they place both hands on top of the head to symbolize receiving the Word or Christ intellectually. After the second touch they place both hands on the eyes, as a prayer for illumination of the mystery and the understanding of the truth. After the final touch the hands are placed on the heart as a sign of receiving Christ and his Word in one’s heart with emotion, feeling and love.

Conclusion

These are but a few Asian sounds, symbols, and symbolic acts in worship. They are born out of Asian Christians' genuine search for truth, their glimpses of God's glory. These works, vulnerable as they are, represent humble attempts to comprehend the incomprehensible mystery of God's love and revelation. They may be called religious art that "transcends its culture and reflects the eternal."13 It is their imago Dei responding to the call of the Spirit to participate in the continuing act of God's creation "in us, through us, [and] with us,"14 whether they use arts, fingers, spoons, chopsticks, or forks to express their incarnated faith. Let us pray that the unique glory of God as shown in God's special gifts to any particular culture will not be lost because of globalization. Let us also keep an open mind, to see through our third eye, and listen through our third ear, to what God may be telling us or revealing to us today through unfamiliar imageries, through the loud sound of gongs, or through a still small voice.

ENDNOTES


2. Quoted by C. Michael Hawn, Gather into One: Praying and Singing Globally (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 32.


6. The meanings of *raga* can only be explained through the combinations of scale, mode, melodic shape, and tonal center, etc. It is also associated with certain moods, seasons and times of the day. Theoretically there are over seven thousand *ragas*, but even trained musicians would hardly know more than fifty.


Born in Taiwan, I-to Loh received the M.Div. from Tainan Seminary, the SMM from Union Seminary, and the Ph. D. at UCLA. He has taught Asian and Global Church Music, Ethnomusicology, and Worship in Manila and Taiwan, and compiled over 20 collections of hymns, including Sound the Bamboo: CCA Hymnal 2000. He has published over one hundred original hymns and anthems, Teach Us to Praise, and many academic essays, and has led music and worship at WCC and CCA assemblies and conferences. I-to Loh retired from the presidency of Tainan Seminary in 2002, and is currently editing a hymnal and writing a companion to Sound the Bamboo.