"PLANS TO PROSPER YOU":
Practical Theological Resourcing of Immigrant Churches for Civic Engagement[1]

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Abstract

Immigrant churches function as interpretive interstices, where assimilation strategies are adjudicated and clashing cultural norms negotiated. Addressing purported Asian American malaise vis-à-vis civic engagement, I propose a practical theology method that privileges interlocution between a scriptural hermeneutics of diaspora and certain insights from social science. In the case of Asian American Christianity, how might immigrant churches *more faithfully* seek the "city's" *shalom*? What resources are available to evangelical migrants—and their children—for helping define *identity* and sense of *belonging* in this (new) land? How might immigrant churches better serve their ethnic constituencies *within* the context of American civic society? Thoughtful appropriation of the mantle of *exile* on the part of immigrant Christians helps to theologize that space of perpetual foreignness within contemporary American society. Immigrant churches are called to foster exilic interpretive imaginaries, in order to discern divine agency and faithful human response within the very contexts where God has dispersed God's people. One such example of doing practical theology is here offered.

Keywords: practical theology (method), immigrant churches, civic engagement, Asian American Christianity, exile, diaspora, identity, *shalom*

Abstrak

Gereja-gereja bagi kaum imigran berfungsi sebagai ruang interpretasi, di mana strategi-strategi asimilasi diputuskan serta norma-norma budaya yang bertabrakan dapat dinegosiasikan. Menyoal dekadensi di kalangan orang-orang Asia-Amerika yang berhadapan dengan kewajiban untuk berperan sebagai masyarakat sipil, penulis mengusulkan sebuah metode teologi praktikal yang bersumber dari pertemuan antara hermeneutika Alkitab dari perspektif diaspora dan beberapa pandangan tertentu dari ilmu sosial. Secara khusus untuk kekristenan Asia-Amerika, pertanyaan yang disasar adalah bagaimana gereja-gereja imigran dapat lebih serius mengupayakan shalom bagi "kota" yang mereka diami? Sumber-sumber apa yang tersedia bagi para migran dari kalangan Injili–juga anak-anak mereka–supaya dapat lebih jernih mendefinisikan identitas serta rasa memiliki kepada tanah (yang baru) ini? Bagaimana supaya gereja-gereja imigran dapat melayani konstituen-konstituen mereka dengan lebih baik di tengah konteks masyarakat sipil Amerika Serikat. Penyesuaian identitas yang tepat di tengah-tengah situasi "pembuangan" para imigran Kristen dapat membantu mencipta ruang yang lebih baik bagi mereka di tengah masyarakat Amerika kontemporer. Gereja-gereja imigran dipanggil untuk membentuk imaginasi-imaginasi interpretatif yang dapat membantu umat untuk mengenali panggilan yang ilahi serta menentukan respons manusia yang tepat di tengah konteks di mana Allah telah menyebarkan umat-Nya. Artikel ini juga akan memberikan satu contoh dalam melakukan teologi praktikal.

Kata-Kata Kunci: teologi praktis (metode), gereja imigran, keterlibatan sosial, Kekristenan Asia-Amerika, pembuangan, diaspora, identitas, *shalom*.

Introduction

Assimilationist melting pot or *multicultural salad bowl*? These two metaphors in recent decades have come to represent competing interpretations of how immigrants are, *in toto*, incorporated within societal life in the United States.[2] Immigrant havens—like San

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[2] See, for example, the foundational works of Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made the American People* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951); and Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1955). Milton Gordon suggests a third theoretical process for immigrant incorporation, dubbed the "Anglo-

Francisco, Miami, and New York—underscore the U.S.'s reputation of being a veritable nation of immigrants.[3] In spite of its stated welcome of diversity, however, recent episodes of racialization and ethnocentrism continue to define modern America.[4]

Asian Americans have become the fastest growing population segment in the United States, increasing by at least 30% between 2000 and 2010 in 49 out of 50 states.[5] Where might Asian American immigrant churches fit, then, within the contentious racial frameworks of American social segmentation? [6] How might immigrant congregations better serve their ethnic constituencies—as they are situated *within* the context of American civic society? What resources are available to evangelical migrants and their children, to help them define their *identity* and sense of *belonging* in this (new) land?

As a natural born American citizen of Chinese-Indonesian heritage—and as pastor of a small Indonesian-American immigrant church in Los Angeles County—I live and toil in interstitial spaces where ethnicity, religiosity, and nationalism come to define, not only

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conformity" model, in his *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

[3] Nancy Foner and Richard Alba present such a comparative case, in their "Immigrant Religion in the U.S. And Western Europe: Bridge or Barrier to Inclusion?" *International Migration Review* 42, no. 2 (2008).

[4] Throughout this paper, "America" should be taken as coterminous with the U.S.A, while "American" is to be understood as denoting *residents* of this nation-state. This does nothing to alleviate the difficulties of using the term "civic engagement"—the task being problematized in this essay—because citizenship is often assumed. However, the Asian Americans I have in mind include politically limited denizens, without voting rights, who remain citizens of other nation-states. For the Christian, in this view, discipleship and presence together stake claims upon the sociopolitical conduct and expressed religiosity of Christian immigrants vis-à-vis *civitas Americana*.

[5] Although the state of Hawaii saw "only" an 11% increase of its Asian population between 2000-2010, it still boasts the highest proportion of Asians in the U.S.; see United States Census Bureau et al., *The Asian Population: 2010* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), 8. N.B. the questionnaire portion concerning race in the 2010 census was worded differently than the 2000 version. While this could very well explain some of the dramatic shifts in self-reporting during this period, other population indicators—viz. birth and mortality rates, and in- and out-migration figures (United States Census Bureau et al., 3 n.14; cf. 5 n.18)—are among the trends that seem to suggest that the U.S. is currently undergoing a period of increasing *Asianization*, both demographically and culturally—and even perhaps religiously (cf. Helen Lee, "Silent No More," Christianity Today 58, no. 8 October (2014)).

[6] Various other categories exist—such as socioeconomic status or different abledness—by which to measure social segmentation, or a lack of "us"-ness. Such themes, however, cannot be taken up in this limited space.

what kind of American one might be, but what kind of Christian, too. In this essay, I offer a methodological example for theorizing and theologizing Asian American immigrant churches in the task of civic engagement. Throughout the essay, I work from the assumptions that (1) God actively pursues sociocultural reconciliation and that (2) immigrant churches face profound challenges in their call to serve the gospel faithfully amid U.S. culture. This privileging of divine agency and of the improvability of the church's witness—along with integration together among other domains of knowledge—constitute an exercise of *practical theology*.[7]

In the next section, I survey some of the relevant literature in social science on immigrant civic engagement. I describe the psychosocial dynamics of Asian American civic engagement, by summarizing insights from select social scientific disciplines. Working within a *theory of segmented assimilation*, I argue for recovery on the part of immigrant churches of an exilic identity that takes seriously the ethnocultural particularities of such congregations vis-à-vis the marginalizing realities of life in the U.S. This gives way to a composite model of *segmented assimilation* and *cultural schemas* as a working psychosocial theory.

A concerted theological turn is then made: Jeremiah 29:1-14 serves as biblical exemplar for resourcing a renewed theological imaginary. By considering the prophet's injunctions to those *exiles* in antiquity, immigrant churches today can better discern God's wisdom and activity. As instances of divine initiative become contextualized in diasporic life, Asian American Christian immigrants are called thereby to exert their own agency in seeking the "city's" *shalom*.

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[7] Integrative, multiply perspectival work is necessary to surface the *theoria* that is already-laden within current *praxis*, as an overall processes of conscientization. Theological commitments shape epistemology, to the extent that empirical inputs can be theologized according to a dominant credo—such as the *reign of* God / *kingdom of heaven*; see Thomas H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980); as well, his *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: The Way of Shared Praxis* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991; reprint, Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1999). On the concept of *conscientização* as emancipatory education, see Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans., Myra Bergman Ramos, 30th Anniversary ed. (New York: Continuum, 2005 [1968; ET 1970]).

Asian American Civic Engagement in Social
Scientific Perspective

In the case of Asian American Christianity, literature at the intersections of theology, social science, cultural studies, and human development is burgeoning.[8] So vast are the literatures on civic engagement vis-à-vis immigrant incorporation that only a brief survey can even be attempted here. The present aim is to construct a helpful framework for understanding how immigrant churches, acting out their own agency, locate themselves in a given sociopolitical context. These engagements are undertaken strategically, if also subconsciously. Practices (e.g., selfless overworking) are born of embedded theories (e.g., reification of upward mobility) and become *de facto* machinations of ideologies (e.g., bamboo ceiling as internalized racism). Surfacing awareness of such realities would yield a reflective *praxis* epistemology able to sustain immigrant churches for the task of doing public theology. Analysis below takes the lenses of political science, sociology, and educational psychology, in order to better explain the current praxis of Asian Americans in terms of their civic engagement.

Political Science

Immigrants negotiate variations of civic engagement in ways that are culturally shaped and situationally expressed. Therefore, *civic engagement* can rightly be construed broadly as well as narrowly. For the practical theological purposes of the present exercise, I limit the scope initially—to electoral participation in the democratic process.[9] Data on electoral participation are perhaps easiest to gather, while empirical records for electoral trends could provide helpful orientation for interpreting and explaining immigrant civic engagement. Significant for this task remains the need to transcend a prevailing black/white binary that has historically dominated U.S. political culture.[10] Race matters—but apparently not as much as other

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[8] See chapters 2 and 3 in Amos Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology: Soundings from the Asian American Diaspora* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014).

[9] This year (2015) marks the semicentennial of the 89th United States Congress' landmark approvals for the Voting Rights Act (August 6, 1965) and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (October 3)—among other notable pieces of legislation passed by this particularly productive Congress.

[10] Personal conversation with Daniel D. Lee, Associate Director of the Asian American Initiative at Fuller Theological Seminary, on December 17, 2013 in Pasadena, CA.

factors do, for Asian American voters whose racial preferences are often confounded by stronger allegiances like political party self-identification and positional attitudes toward key issues.[11]

Other key variables for assessing voting trends include age, language proficiency, duration of residency, educational attainment, socioeconomic status (SES), and the prevalent political climate of the surrounding region. These factors seem to corroborate certain assimilationist assumptions, for example, that the first generation is likely disengaged from the processes of civic polity. For Asian Americans, levels of civic engagement in the first generation appear to correlate positively with indicators such as SES, age, and education—more strongly and more consistently than when compared to successive generational cohorts. [12] However, the intergenerational dynamics of this *immigrant distinction* appears in counterintuitive relationship with the development of civic identity in the next generation. Thoroughgoing assimilation in successive generations appears to have little, disproportionate impact upon the civic engagement levels of second-, third-, and fourth-generation Asian Americans. In other words, electoral trends across generations of Asian Americans appear to differ mostly in *degree*, not in *kind*.[13] Beyond the first generation, overall Asian American voting trends do not correlate well with SES indicators or demographic particulars.[14]

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[11] One notable example of this was Barack Obama's putative "Asian problem" during the 2008 Democratic primaries and beyond. For a comparison of polling figures—disaggregated among the top six Asian subpopulation demographics—leading up to the most racialized U.S. presidential election in history, see S. Karthick Ramakrishnan et al., "Race-Based Considerations and the Obama Vote: Evidence from the 2008 National Asian American Survey," *Du Bois Review* 6, no. 1 (2009): 226.

[12] S. Karthick Ramakrishnan, *Democracy in Immigrant America: Changing Demographics and Political Participation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 46.

[13] In his ethnographic study of the long-term impacts of urban Christian missions intensives on Asian American students, Jonathan Lew sees "indications that civic engagement is on the decline in the United States, especially in its politically-oriented forms and especially among younger generations," in Jonathan W. Lew, "The 'Moral Minority' Meets Social Justice: A Case Study of an Evangelical Christian Urban Immersion Program and Its Influence on the Post-College Civic Engagement of Asian American College Students" (PhD dissertation, Claremont Graduate University, 2013), 48. Interestingly, Lew's respondents overwhelmingly self-identified with the concept of *community participation*—noting a sense of positive impact personally, even decades later—over against other categories, like *political participation* and *political voice*.

[14] Although Ramakrishnan finds that this pattern becomes more pronounced in subsequent generations, one wonders whether the deviation holds true only insofar as those profiled continue to self-identify as Asian American. Could assimilation effectively "mute" the qualification of being *Asian* American?

Organizational dynamics shape powerfully the motivations of a group's constituents, effectively mobilizing those individuals to act.[15] Organizations that seek to empower immigrants stand to benefit directly from immigrant buy-in.[16] According to geographers Patricia Ehrkamp and Caroline Nagel, immigrant congregations that seek to foster personal *agency* alongside communal *service* have the potential to become "sites of political agency in which immigrants (and non-immigrants) formulate and implement narratives of societal membership that mesh with their moral outlooks."[17] Ehrkamp and Nagel contend that this dynamic, however, often yields contradictions between stated faith and lived practice. On the part of immigrant churches, their attention to in-group/out-group dynamics—as well as individual/collective realities—helps to foreground contradictory practices and certain assumptions of

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Interestingly, when comparing across ethnic/racial groups, Ramakrishnan finds no convergence of political participation levels. S. Karthick Ramakrishnan, "But Do They Bowl? Race, Immigrant Incorporation, and Civic Voluntarism in the United States," in *Transforming Politics, Transforming America: The Political and Civic Incorporation of Immigrants in the United States*, ed. Taeku Lee, S. Karthick Ramakrishnan, and Ricardo Ramírez (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006).

[15] In one example, Jeffrey M. Berry observes that lower-income Americans are oftentimes first introduced to the civic/political system at the invitation of nonprofit organizations, in "Nonprofits and Civic Engagement," *Public Administration Review* 65, no. 5 (2005): 571. See also "Framework of Political and Civic Integration and Stratification" (figure) in S. Karthick Ramakrishnan and Irene Bloemraad, eds., *Civic Hopes and Political Realities: Immigrants, Community Organizations, and Political Engagement* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2008), 15—wherein the volume editors chart out individual and collective action, according to several units of analysis.

[16] Although the context for their work is Canada, some similarities of national culture between Canada and the U.S. extend the validity of Femida Handy and Itay Greenspan's research to the present item of inquiry (i.e., religiously-funded U.S. Asian American immigrant civic engagement); see Handy and Greenspan, "Immigrant Volunteering: A Stepping Stone to Integration?" *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 38, no. 6 (2009)—in particular, their chart ("A Conceptual Framework of Immigrant Volunteering"), on 975. Yet because America is an increasingly individualist society, spirituality approaches that are more individually negotiated may potentially—and paradoxically—prove to be more effective in fomenting and sustaining community volunteerism, when compared to communal approaches alone; see Elaine Howard Ecklund, *Korean American Evangelicals: New Models for Civic Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 118.

[17] Patricia Ehrkamp and Caroline Nagel, "Immigration, Places of Worship and the Politics of Citizenship in the US South," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 37, no. 4 (2012): 624. The researchers—whose region of analysis here is the U.S. South—are concerned with "the ways that faith communities interpret, produce and contest narratives about citizenship, and act upon these narratives both within community settings and in their relations with 'outsiders'."

internalized racism and/or ethnic exceptionalism.[18] Because religious communities often provide important resources for civic participation, Asian Americans actively engaged in the collective expression of religiosity also "tend to be more involved in politics and secular civic activities, lending some credence to the idea that these spaces do promote skills that facilitate political participation in other contexts," according to Janelle Wong and colleagues.[19] As such, immigrant churches can play significant roles in the political process of American life. The interplay between religious adherence and political activism has been demonstrably strong.[20]

Civic engagement aims for "twin goals," according to faith-based philanthropy expert Craig McGarvey: "The *product goal* (the solution to the problem) and the *process goal* (the bringing of people together to solve the problem themselves) are of equal importance and in dynamic relationship with each other."[21] From this vantage, divisive realities, such as racist ethnocentrisms, remain a substantive challenge threatening immigrant political participation. At the same time, civic engagement—as *product goal*—must be framed within a conative project of practical wisdom, freely undertaken by immigrants who regard themselves (and others) as agents-in-relationship.[22] The struggle to accomplish this, as a ministry of the

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[18] For a secular example of the contradictory forces of the axiomatic concept *Pluribus et Unum* (a historical motto of the U.S., meaning "out of many, one"), cf. *Civic Hopes and Political Realities*, 15. Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad's model frames processes of integration/ assimilation/incorporation—as well as the shadow-side, stratification—on the levels of civic and political discourse. As a matter of coincidence, the national motto of Indonesia (*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*—Old Javanese, meaning "unity in diversity") hints at similar civic and political dynamics as the U.S. incorporation/stratification paradox.

[19] Janelle Wong et al., *Asian American Political Participation: Emerging Constituents and Their Political Identities* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2011), 226. In testing their five "lens" approach to assessing Asian American political participation, Wong and colleagues find that (1) *immigrant socialization* and (2) *political party identification* are key factors, that (3) *racial identity formation* and (4) *geographic/residential context* lag—surprisingly—in relative significance, and that (5) *membership in religious/civic associations* appears to correlate positively with increased levels of political participation.

[20] For just one example of religiously-funded advocacy for immigration reform, see Stephanie Kotin, Grace Dyrness, and Clara Irazábal, "Immigration and Integration: Religious and Political Activism for/with Immigrants in Los Angeles," *Progress in Development Studies* 11, no. 4 (2011).

[21] Craig McGarvey, *Civic Participation and the Promise of Democracy*, Center for Religion and Civic Culture (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 2004), 16 (italics mine).

[22] My constructive summation here of practical theology borrows from two significant figures in the subfield's rebirth. On conation (from *conatus*) and

(immigrant) church, must be understood as a *process goal*—with dynamic social implications. In light of the political dynamics outlined above, consideration of psychosocial factors will contribute toward a better understanding of individual and collective identity development, in relation to the benefits—and the risks—of civic engagement.

Sociology

Transdisciplinary considerations of race, ethnicity, culture, and religion have served profoundly as lenses for sociological study. All of these factors are found amid life in diaspora.[23] Immigrant churches naturally convene ethnically homogenous groups, and thus they employ the strategy of "selective assimilation."[24] Yet the existence—and persistence—of immigrant churches demand renewed appraisals of purportedly insular activities. Immigrant church initiatives, such as ethnic identity maintenance, migrant peer support networks, and immigration law advocacy, have transformative potential vis-à-vis the well being of society. Might certain ethnocentric activities be understood as legitimate and sincere expressions of civic engagement, with positive impact outside the ethnic enclave?[25] How should immigrant churches theologically evaluate their own practices, in terms of *faithfulness* and *discipleship*? How can Asian American Christians distinguish between exigencies of the ethnic enclave and overt racism—that is, the prejudiced and antagonizing outworking of the social construct of race? How do immigrant church pastors and congregants account for the "Asian American civic engagement gap"?[26]

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relational agency, see Groome, *Sharing Faith*. On practical wisdom (from *phronēsis*) and mutual regard as love, see Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

[23] Cf. Wendy Cadge and Elaine Howard Ecklund, "Immigration and Religion," *Annual Review of Sociology* 33, no. 1 (2007).

[24] Fenggang Yang, *Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999). Cited in Femida Handy and Itay Greenspan, "Immigrant Volunteering: A Stepping Stone to Integration?," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 38, no. 6 (2009): 965.

[25] For example of how this term functions in sociological analysis, see Alejandro Portes and Kenneth L. Wilson, "Immigrant Enclaves: An Analysis of the Labor Market Experiences of Cubans in Miami," *American Journal of Sociology* 86, no. 2 (1980).

[26] Lew, "The 'Moral Minority' Meets Social Justice," PhD diss., 2. Cf. S. Karthick Ramakrishnan and Hans P. Johnson, *Second-Generation Immigrants in California* (San Francisco: Public Policy Institute of California, 2005).

Immigrants have long negotiated *Americanization* in multiply varied ways. Sociological accounts of the process of cultural assimilation have likewise morphed over the decades, but the concept of assimilation is widely assumed. For example, a half-century ago sociologist Milton Gordon theorized seven stages of immigrant assimilation (see Table).

TABLE: The Assimilation Variables
(Gordon 1964)[27]

Subprocess or Condition	Type or Stage of Assimilation	Special Term (if any)
Change of cultural patterns to those of host society	Cultural or behavioral assimilation	Acculturation
Large-scale entrance into cliques, clubs, and institutions of host society, on primary group level	Structural assimilation	-
Large-scale intermarriage	Marital assimilation	Amalgamation
Development of sense of peoplehood based exclusively on host society	Identificational assimilation	-
Absence of prejudice	Attitude receptional assimilation	-
Absence of discrimination	Behavior receptional assimilation	-
Absence of value and power conflict	Civic assimilation	-

These social dynamics assume differentiation in phenotype (race), in sociocultural (dis)location (ethnicity), and in religious (non)identification. Significant for immigrant churches are the deep interrelationships among these meta-categories. For example, according to social philosopher and religious scholar Will Herberg, both a group's ethnicity and religiosity appear each to condition and reinforce the other.[28] Such processes have been further theorized, as demonstrated by widespread support for *segmented assimilation theory.*[29]

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[27] Synthesized by present author; source: Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, 71. While Gordon's variable-framework has suffered rightful critique for its rigidity, potential for reductionism, and zero-sum propositionalism, the literature of scholarship since Gordon includes numerous variations on themes he had earlier proposed. Even *segmented assimilation theory*—the position adapted below in the present essay—bears resemblance to the assimilationist trends Gordon charted above, prior even to the Hart-Celler / Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965.

[28] This was a foundational assertion for Herberg's *Protestant, Catholic, Jew.*

[29] Examples in the literature abound—e.g., Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou, "The New Second Generation: Segmented Assimilation and Its Variants,"

As religion migrates with immigrants, these faithful weave a transnational network of homeland values, actively incorporating them into their site of relocation. Through rite and custom, ascribed social status, and communal spirit, religion provides structure and meaning for Asian Americans—as a hermeneutical moment that is able "to bind people together in ways that other institutions are not equipped to do"—thus becoming a "safety-net" for these immigrants—spiritually, psychologically, and culturally, in a formational moment.[30] Pressures both internal and external to these immigrants contribute to the construction of what Asian American studies scholars Carolyn Chen and Russell Jeung term *hybridized ethnoreligion*.[31]

An example of utilizing cultural resources from *hybridized ethnoreligion*[32] for the negotiation of *segmented assimilation* may prove helpful here. Relative to its share of the U.S. population, the Filipino ethnic group has been understudied.[33] According to Joaquin

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The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 530, (1993); Ruben G. Rumbaut, "The Crucible Within: Ethnic Identity, Self-Esteem, and Segmented Assimilation among Children of Immigrants," *International Migration Review* 28, no. 4 (1994); Min Zhou and Carl L. Bankston, III, "Social Capital and the Adaptation of the Second Generation: The Case of Vietnamese Youth in New Orleans," *International Migration Review* 28, no. 4 (1994); Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Immigrant America: A Portrait*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Carl L Bankston, III, and Min Zhou, "The Social Adjustment of Vietnamese American Adolescents: Evidence for a Segmented-Assimilation Approach," *Social Science Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (1997); and Min Zhou, "Segmented Assimilation: Issues, Controversies, and Recent Research on the New Second Generation," *International Migration Review* 31, no. 4 (1997). See also "The Process of Segmented Assimilation: A Model" (figure), in Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 63.

[30] Donald E. Miller, Jon Miller, and Grace Roberts Dyrness, *Immigrant Religion in the City of Angels*, Center for Religion and Civic Culture (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 2001), 37.

[31] This phrase appears as the title of a major section in Carolyn Chen and Russell Jeung, eds., *Sustaining Faith Traditions: Race, Ethnicity, and Religion among the Latino and Asian American Second Generation* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

[32] Gonzalez' (2012) contribution to the book section bearing this borrowed title is noted, but the review to follow here concerns his earlier (2009) monograph; cf. n.19 above.

[33] Gonzalez notes the lacuna in literature on intercultural life and adaptation, specifically concerning the role of religious institutions, and points out the population of Filipino Americans outnumbers those of Korean and Japanese background—combined—and would plausibly challenge the most populous Asian immigrant category, were the designation "Chinese" to be disaggregated to show origins from Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, apart from mainland China; see Joaquin Jay Gonzalez, III, "Second-Generation Filipino American Faithful: Are

Gonzalez, since Filipinos have had broad exposure to Asian, Hispanic, and American imperial cultural experiences over their history, they are in a unique position to assimilate quickly and with minimal acculturative stressors.[34] For Filipino migrants, he identifies the collective/communal unit of *barangay* as

> a traditional Philippine village, barrio, district, or neighborhood . . . [that] is composed of family clusters and is considered to be the smallest political unit in the Philippines. A group of *barangays* makes up a town, city, or municipality. Filipinos see their church as a key community gathering space in their new American *barangay*. Churches therefore become sites where the familiar social structure of the *barangay* can be practiced.[35]

Gonzalez suggests challenging the dominant assumptions of social capital theory.[36] he (2009) adapts the categories of bonding and bridging socialization, as *kasamahan* (community organizing; bonding Filipinization) and *bayanihan* (community action; bridging Filipinization). This binary correlates to the dominant migration paradigms, viz. melting pot assimilation and multicultural pluralism. In Gonzalez' estimation, strategic alternation of *kasamahan* and *bayanihan* can reconcile the theoretical divide between the social integration models of the hot *pot* and the cold *bowl*. Transnational conceptual frameworks afford Filipinos the adaptive ability to make spaces for hybridized practices, expressions, and institutions.[37] The activity *to adapt*, in a sense, is both transitive (changing the context) as well as intransitive/reflexive (changing oneself). Perhaps in the very

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They 'Praying and Sending'?," in *Sustaining Faith Traditions: Race, Ethnicity, and Religion among the Latino and Asian American Second Generation*, ed. Carolyn Chen and Russell Jeung (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

[34] Joaquin Jay Gonzalez, III, *Filipino American Faith in Action: Immigration, Religion, and Civic Engagement* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 83-84.

[35] Gonzalez, *Filipino American Faith in Action*, 7.

[36] See Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

[37] For further discussion on whether such transnational connections might continue in future generations, see Gonzalez' observations surrounding prayers and remittances, in Gonzalez, "Sustaining Faith Traditions," in *Sustaining Faith Traditions: Race, Ethnicity, and Religion among the Latino and Asian American Second Generation*. See also Peggy Levitt and B. Nadya Jaworsky, "Transnational Migration Studies: Past Developments and Future Trends," *Annual Review of Sociology* 33, no. 1 (2007).

adaptive spirit Gonzalez says Filipinos offer, he himself disarmingly argues that Putnam's emptying bowling leagues do not reflect the spiritual gatherings of the immigrant faithful.[38]

Negotiating the *hybridization* of racial identity and of religious identity might be a path-dependent process governed by *ethnicized* values.[39] In her field research on Korean Evangelical churches, Elaine Howard Ecklund found that "the kind of religious individualism necessary to sustain a multiethnic evangelical church may actually *foster* commitment to civic participation." [40] Nevertheless, individualism and collectivism seem to ebb and flow. Ecklund points to what is "distinctively religious" about congregational life vis-à-vis civic life—in particular, the presence of *cultural schemas* that provide moral meanings to and impetuses for integrative, formative practices. This sociology of culture approach addresses certain blind spots in the forms-of-capital approach, particularly in articulating why a given instance of civic engagement is preferred over another opportunity.

If social capital leans more toward being quantitative in orientation, then *cultural schemas*—and their resultant moral meanings—invite qualitative approaches, to surface motivations.[41] Internalized schemas are then to be actualized when the situation calls for moral response.[42] It then becomes an open question as to whether immigrant churches regard civic engagement as a moral issue. Such attitudes, positive or negative, receive their articulation from and are influenced profoundly by a group's *cultural schema*. The narratives and *cultural schemas* inhabited by a group are just as important as the communally-oriented activities funded by those

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[38] Gonzalez, *Filipino American Faith in Action*, 101-104.

[39] In the case of Korean Evangelical churches, Ecklund observes that "even when ethnic diversity is a spiritual value, it is not legitimate for Korean Americans to prioritize a racial identity as an American minority over an identity as an evangelical Christian . . . . For these Korean-American, Christian identities do more than sit alongside other identities; they actually have the ability to reorder racial and ethnic identities and consequent approaches to civic life . . . [and] may influence how American evangelicals view the racial, ethnic, and class context-sensitive life," in Ecklund, *Korean American Evangelicals*, 13.

[40] Ecklund, *Korean American Evangelicals*, 149 (emphasis hers).

[41] Ecklund, *Korean American Evangelicals*, 99-101; 116-118.

[42] Mark Chaves, "SSSR Presidential Address / Rain Dances in the Dry Season: Overcoming the Religious Congruence Fallacy," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 49, no. 1 (2010): 8; cf. Elaine Howard Ecklund et al., "Motivating Civic Engagement: In-Group Versus out-Group Service Orientations among Mexican Americans in Religious and Nonreligious Organizations," *Sociology of Religion* 74, no. 3 (2013): 386.

narratives and cultural resources. [43] As a strategy for *segmented assimilation*, the cultivation of *cultural schemas* provides certain narratives and matrixes of morality the necessary conative traction to foster practical wisdom.

Educational Psychology

In her survey of Asian American ethnic identity maintenance models, pedagogy scholar Deborah Gin contends that considerations for familial and hierarchical interactions must be given, for any model of Asian identity formation to be valid. Over the rigidities of straight-line assimilation and single-dimension integration theories, Gin endorses the psychosocial identity development model of Kodama and colleagues, resulting from the team's research on Asian American college students. [44] Kodama and colleagues' model suggests multidimensionality in Asian American identity formation, by positing a binary fluid of *identity* and *purpose*, residing at the conceptual center of Asian American developmental negotiation. Seeing this model as a helpful start, Gin suggests further theoretical work be done to chart ongoing negotiations of identity by Asian Americans, beyond the college-aged that had been the focus of the original study. The upshot of their model is the simultaneity of theorizing both race and social location. Import for understanding Asian American civic engagement is clear.

On the other hand, immigrant agency—perhaps especially when expressed religiously—can also be exercised as a social inhibitor. In his ethnographic work on two Asian evangelical congregations, Antony Alumkal observes that these racial minorities are not afforded the same "optional" ethnicity enjoyed by European-Americans, and they at times even suppress their Asian, minority ethnic identities, by invoking "Christian" identities to supersede (but

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[43] Ecklund et al., "Motivating Civic Engagement". NB: Ecklund and colleagues regard such research-work as "lay[ing] the foundation for a stronger theory within the sociology of religion that does not assume religious organizations are unique but instead empirically examines their specific contribution within a broader social and organizational landscape" (387). While contributions may(!) lend themselves well to be empirically studied, motivations are perhaps less so. The turn for the *practical theologian* is to see the descriptive (what God does) inform the prescriptive (how God invites).

[44] Corinne Maekawa Kodama et al., "An Asian American Perspective on Psychosocial Student Development Theory," *New Directions for Student Services*, no. 97, Spring 2002, Special Issue: Working with Asian American College Students (2002).

not replace) ethnic/racial categories.[45] Thus, identity formation is fluid and complex.

Much of Western democracy is indebted to the world-shaping—albeit not innocent—influences of Christian theology.[46] Immigrant churches represent globalizing trends, in which contested spaces for competing narratives emerge from transnational sites of meaning-making struggle. Strategic shaping—i.e., the intentional and faithful manipulation—of an immigrant congregation's *cultural schemas* may more effectively fund their commitments toward civic engagement.

Exiles and Civic Engagement:
A Theological Perspective

Jeremiah's Letter to Perpetual Foreigners

The prophet Jeremiah's vocational appointment theopolitically positioned him—

> over nations and over kingdoms,
> to pluck up and to pull down,
> to destroy and to overthrow,
> to build and to plant.
> *Jeremiah 1:9-10, New Revised Standard Version*

Posted from bereft Judah, the literary content of chapter 29 went out from that conquered place of origin, addressing first-wave Hebrew exiles in Babylon circa 598/597 BCE. As textual record of the prophet's correspondence with this historic people of God, Jeremiah 29 attends to the exigencies of sociopolitical dislocation.[47]

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[45] Antony W. Alumkal, *Asian American Evangelical Churches: Race, Ethnicity, and Assimilation in the Second Generation* (New York: LFB Scholarly Pub. LLC, 2003), 174.

[46] Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* (New York: Random House, 2005).

[47] In the present consideration of immigrant civic engagement from a theological perspective, one would be remiss not to make some slight allusion of wordplay between the prophet's task—"to uproot and tear down," as rendered in the New International Version—and Oscar Handlin's memorable descriptor for immigrant peoples, from which comes the title of his best-known work (1951): *The Uprooted.*

Some measure of justification must be made, concerning the choice to treat specifically verses 1-14 in this essay. Providing this rationale is necessary, considering views like that of biblical scholar Jack Lundbom, who stresses the importance of seeing the positive message (verses 4-14) on balance with the negative remainder of the prophet's dispatch (see Figure 2). In excerpting this text, certain hopeful choices are presently made. How might *shalom* be considered apart from *judgment*? What theological import does the public welfare have upon immigrant civic engagement? The task of theologically articulating conative motivations for immigrant civic engagement suggests active selection between constructive and destructive options.[48]

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A        4-9      Jerusalem  }  SHALOM
   B     10-14    Babylon
     ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─
   B'    15-19    Babylon
A'       20-25    Jerusalem  }  JUDGMENT
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Figure 2: Jeremiah 29 Chiasmus
(Lundbom 1999)[49]

Chapter 29—and verses 1-14, specifically—provides insight into how displaced lives are to be lived out in faithfulness to God's sovereignty within that faraway place where, even now, faith is to take root. Verses 1-3 frame the prophet's injunctions geopolitically. Attention here focuses upon both the *place of dislocation*—namely, that cosmopolis Babylon, to which the exiles have been moved (by force)—as well as the exiles' *preferential options in context*. As such, somewhat akin to the bordering drawn above between *shalom* and *judgment*, a theologically pregnant category of *hope* emerges to be cultivated and proclaimed.[50]

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[48] These are not mutually exclusive categories, of course, when considered concretely. Also, *deconstructive* options remain conceptually available.

[49] Figure synthesized by present author; source: Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 347.

[50] This finds parallel in the narrative of the immigrant's spirit of hard work—recalled by means of exemplary "can-do" migrant optimism, in accordance with forward-looking assumptions concerning successive generations. The import for immigrant churches, therefore, becomes easy to see. Cf. "Foundations of a Theology of Migration"—part one in Daniel G. Groody and Gioacchino Campese, eds., *A Promised Land, a Perilous Journey: Theological Perspectives on Migration* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008).

All theological action-reflection (*praxis*) reveals the person of God.[51] From under the yoke of Egypt, YHWH had been revealed as *Liberator.* Now captive in Babylon, God's chosen people remember Egyptian bondage *and* look toward their own deliverance. In this way does the word of the LORD in Jeremiah 29 become a kind word, one of consolation and encouragement to a people banished for a time and yet perpetually foreign.[52] But the political realities seem bleak, when considered apart from a theological optic that sees God's providence and care for the deported and the displaced.

Seeking Shalom amid Dispersion and Sojourn

Exiles and immigrants, by means of their sociopolitical solidarity with the surrounding contexts, come to find their theological imaginaries shaped by *shalom*-seeking preferences. For immigrants and other marginalized peoples, this hope-filled vantage thus funds a civic engagement that is theologically motivated and locally resourced. In this way, a number of congruities between the exigencies of Babylonian exile and the realities of the contemporary church's "cultural captivity" call for attention.[53] But before moving too quickly to connect YHWH's known plans (29:11) with how they might apply to "us," immigrant churches must first attend to the prophet's this-worldly injunction—namely, to *seek the city's shalom.*[54]

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[51] J. Andrew Dearman, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 265-266. Cf. the Christopraxis approach of Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001); see summary—and emendation—by Anderson's former student, Andrew Root, in *Christopraxis: A Practical Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014).

[52] Details for a homeland return cannot be considered here and must be left to God's future activity—an eschatologically hopeful move that the prophet himself felt was prudent to suggest later in his dispatch. The concept of "perpetual foreignness" has been widely studied along a number of lines of inquiry—for example, see the intersectionality of marginalization, speech proficiency, mental health, and gender, in Su Yeong Kim et al., "Accent, Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype, and Perceived Discrimination as Indirect Links between English Proficiency and Depressive Symptoms in Chinese American Adolescents," *Developmental Psychology* 47, no. 1 (2011).

[53] On "cultural captivity," see Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Releasing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009).

[54] As exegetes are wont to remind, a Bible reader's interests ought to lie elsewhere than merely a "name it, claim it!" approach—or, to phrase it all the more colloquially, the "blabbing and grabbing" of scriptural promises without regard for context and cotext. For orientation to the prophet Jeremiah, see John Goldingay's

The prophet suggests timeless attitudes, which God's displaced people are to foster amid the perpetuity of hardships and ostracism in *the city*.[55] Jeremiah adjures the migratory generation to locate themselves with a degree of permanence (verse 5a: "Build houses") in their new home-away-from-home; likewise, the people of God are to be cultivators (verse 5b: "plant . . . and eat") in a place so unlike Zion—much less like Eden. [56] Yet echoing God's admonishment in Genesis 1:28-29, these perpetual foreigners in Babylon are—to *bloom!*—and to enlarge their families. [57] In the (androcentric) encouragement to have "sons and daughters" and grandsons and granddaughters, the emphasis of Jeremiah 29:6 rests upon the mandate to (pro)create culture—less as a strategy of exogamy, though it may be that (cf. Gen 28:8-9), and more as a proposal to cultivate *hope* in the next generation.

The prophet addresses his letter exhaustively: to elders, priests, prophets—*all the people*, including artisans, metalworkers, and Judah's elite (verses 1-2). Thus the prophet intimates they are no longer in control of their destinies; the Gentiles lord power over them.[58] He assumes that the available political options of exiles are

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broad overview—including a helpful outline/timeline of the Book of Jeremiah accessible on his faculty/library site:
http://infoguides.fuller.edu/content.php?pid=190354&sid=3819568.

[55] The "push/pull" factors that give immigrant congregations their *raison d'être* might have more direct parallel with the long-term migration of patriarch Jacob's clan to Egypt, more so than the politically-motivated dislocation of Judah's elite to Babylon. At any rate, both the *Egyptian sojourn*—being an "economic migration" during a time of famine—and the *Babylonian exile*—being an ostensible display of imperial power—are theologized in the Judeo-Christian scriptures as having been expressions of divine providence. This is seen specifically within our passage, in the blurring of Nebuchadnezzar's agency (verse 1) with the act of YHWH to banish Judah's elite (verse 4; verse 14). That the conditions of Jacob's/Israel's "economic migration" to Egypt turned oppressive, serves to underscore the salience of biblical models for interpreting such diachronic realities. For (contemporary) orientation on various types of migration, see Khalid Koser, *International Migration: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[56] Jeremiah envisions pod-planting politicians—prescribing a social imaginary made replete with government bureaucrats, their gardening work, and their green thumbs. Cf. Jorge V. Pixley, *Jeremiah*, Chalice Commentaries for Today (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004).

[57] See Lundbom, *Jeremiah*.

[58] Perhaps the deported elites can be likened to "transnational hostages" amidst the political tensions Judah faced, as a vassal of Babylon. See Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, and Thomas G. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26-52*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word, 1995); cf. R. E. Clements, *Jeremiah*, Interpretation: A

few. But instead of mere lament, Jeremiah creatively engages the circumstances. The very writing of his letter is a hopeful, politicized move. Subversively, Jeremiah's dispatching the word of the LORD becomes a matter of "state business," in that it attends to the commonwealth of both the ruling city and of the exilic enclave.[59] From afar, the prophet communicates to his fellow covenant people a competing narrative, which in practice becomes a reclaiming of theologized identity.[60] The exilic situation becomes framed thus in terms of YHWH's agency—a fact that must elicit hope, not despair.[61]

Resourcing Immigrant Civic Engagement: The Case for Practical Theology

Practical Theology as Contextual and Eclectic Analysis

Practical theology takes seriously God's active presence, finding the Spirit to already be ahead of the church, inviting laborers to work the field. As a method, practical theology constantly oscillates[62] between the activity-domains of engagement/action and study/reflection. Practical theology, therefore, is eminently *interpretive*. The perpetual "fusion of horizons" between action and reflection, funds what renowned practical theologian Don Browning terms a *fundamental practical theology*—in which all theology is fundamentally

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Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 171.

[59] In verse 3, the named letter carriers appear to be government officials. Cf. Dearman, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 261.

[60] Cf. Mark Lau Branson, "Interpretive Leadership During Social Dislocation: Jeremiah and Social Imaginary," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 8, no. 1 (2009).

[61] Walter Brueggemann, *To Build, to Plant: A Commentary on Jeremiah 26-52*, International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991). Juan Martínez recalls similar assumptions—of hope and optimism—throughout his ethnographic work concerning transnational migrants, in his "Remittances and Mission: Transnational Latino Pentecostal Ministry in Los Angeles," in *Spirit and Power: The Growth and Global Impact of Pentecostalism*, ed. Donald E. Miller, Kimon H. Sargeant, and Richard Flory (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[62] For an explanation on how praxis and theory cycle in ongoing hermeneutical interplay, see the section entitled "Praxis, Practical Theology and Cultures," in Mark Lau Branson and Juan Francisco Martínez, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities*, (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), location 386f, Kindle edition.

practical.[63] To do this kind of theology requires a variation of inputs and confluences, wherein the theologian's epistemology is the most significant factor for the theological task. Practical theologian Johnny Ramírez-Johnson illustrates the plurality of sources for theologizing (see Figure 1).
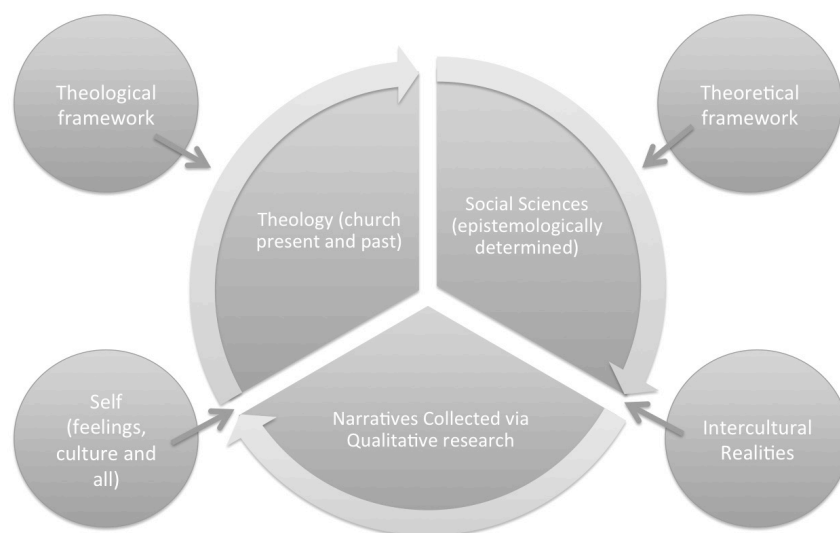

Figure 1: Practical Theology: Epistemology & Methods
(Ramírez-Johnson 2015)[64]

The interpretive cycle of practical theology oscillates between new findings and strategic proposals.[65] At times, even the methods themselves can be composited, in order to achieve further levels of analysis. Within the guild, some questions have been raised

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[63] Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*. Browning borrows the concept of *fusing horizons* from Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans., Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd ed. (London: Continuum, 2004 [1989]; reprint, 2006). For a more Christocentric appropriation of Browning's watershed methodology, see the "Christopraxis" model of Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*; and compare Andy Root's interpretive expansion, in his *Christopraxis*.

[64] Johnny Ramírez-Johnson, "Practical Theology: Epistemology and Methods" (Course/Seminar: "Methods for Observing and Interpreting Culture" (MB860), Fuller Theological Seminary (Pasadena, CA), 6 January 2015).

[65] Cf. Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains: Manual for Practical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

concerning the "whiteness" of practical theology as a discipline.[66] Thus, methodological purity has been questioned for its political import. Over recent decades, cognate disciplines such as migration studies, critical race theory, cultural anthropology, and ethnic studies—among others—have contributed to the practical theological task of articulating ministry in terms of measurable faithfulness. One such contextualized approach is the composite method of constructive theologian Daniel D. Lee (see Figure 2).
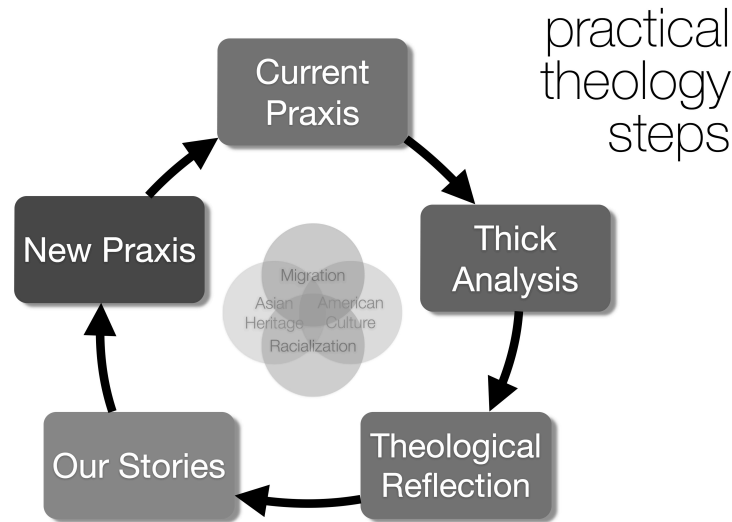
Figure 2:
Asian American Quadrilateral + Practical Theology Steps
(Lee 2015)[67]

Covenant and Confounds

Although Asian religious groups hold a considerable amount of potential for influencing their congregants *towards* civic engagement, in reality there is also danger of a double effect *away*

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[66] See a number of relevant essays, collected in Kathleen A. Cahalan and Gordon S. Mikoski, eds., *Opening the Field of Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).

[67] Daniel D. Lee, "Asian American Quadrilateral + Practical Theology Steps" (Course: "Engaging Asian American Contexts" (TM528), Fuller Theological Seminary (Pasadena, CA), 11 February 2015). For the particular practical theology method used to frame AAQ—as portrayed above—see Branson and Martínez, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership.*

from it. [68] In other words, faith communities may inhibit civic engagement on the very basis of religious reasons. Whether congregations encourage or discourage local political involvement here is less the point; rather, it is important to acknowledge of churches that each free association assumes and exerts its own (internal and external) political nature. According to Ehrkamp and Nagel, "Places of worship . . . cannot be seen exclusively as spaces of illiberal reaction or as spaces of resistance, liberation and progressive change. Instead, they must be appreciated for the contradictory impulses and stances that reside within them." [69] This politicized nature begs the question of *motivation* for various modes and approaches of engaging wider society. [70] As motivations and mental models are increasingly surfaced, the findings of empirical and ethnographic research can motivate maturation in the (immigrant) church.

For pilgrims on the way to the city of God, obedience to YHWH bestows a covenantal obligation to seek America's *shalom*, while avoiding idolatrous nationalism. A counterpart temptation for immigrant churches is that of exercising agency in solidarity *exclusively* in terms of insular activities that dismiss *the other*. Instead, Jeremiah 29:1-14 inclusively frames the immigrant church's responsibility for *ethnic identity maintenance*, by means of *unprejudiced* civic engagement. As immigrants exercise their agency, both in the maintenance of ethnic identity and in the founding of an ethnocentric enclave, there is much to glean in comparison with Jeremiah's audience in antiquity: that historic people of God had been tasked to remain a contrast society within Babylon yet was forbidden to disengage totally from Babylonian life. The countercultural community developed a radical (i.e., "rooted") faith, in spite of—or perhaps, because of—their

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[68] Janelle Wong, Kathy Rim, and Haven Perez, "Protestant Churches and Conservative Politics: Latinos and Asians in the United States," in *Civic Hopes and Political Realities: Immigrants, Community Organizations, and Political Engagement*, ed. S. Karthick Ramakrishnan and Irene Bloemraad (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2008).

[69] Ehrkamp and Nagel, "Immigration, Places of Worship and the Politics of Citizenship in the US South," 635.

[70] For example, deconstructing social capital would show elements of self-interest vis-à-vis civic engagement. Jo Anne Schneider provides a helpful rubric, demonstrating how implications and meaning shift as levels of analysis are adjusted and negotiated; see the table entitled "Characteristics of Civic Engagement and Social Capital," in Schneider's article, "Connections and Disconnections between Civic Engagement and Social Capital in Community-Based Nonprofits," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (2007): 575.

(dis)location; such commitments had profound impact on the development of Israel's faith.

Towards a Practical Theology of Immigrant Churches

The above analysis has yielded sufficient trajectories for offering a few strategic proposals. First, I suggest the church (re)learn the discipline of interpreting, following, and propagating the Holy Spirit's initiatives. The informed and purposeful remodeling of *cultural schemas*, in order to fund conative moral actions (including civic engagement), may be regard as functional strategy for "selective acculturation."[71] Biblical virtues of humility and obedience are learned in accordance with the "city's" needs and its brokenness, thus paving the way for Spirit-led experiments that seek *shalom*.[72]

Second, community leadership must be transformed to meet—and anticipate—concrete challenges. For example, prefiguring the type, level, and manner of agency a pastor aims to foster for her congregation, such faith leaders actively set trends *within* their faith community—functioning as a laboratory of sorts—so that prayerful experiments and intercession may be offered on behalf of *the city*. As once-insular congregations push the level of engagement outward—beyond themselves—covenantal partnerships can emerge between immigrant churches and their *city*.[73]

Third, the racialized politics of Asian American church leaders who "construct race by defining who Asian Americans are," call for commitments to celebrate ethnic diversity—as well as gender, racial, vocational, socioeconomic, generational, even theological diversities.[74] This is done for the upbuilding (*oikodomē*) of the church, the blessing of all, and the interrogation of oppressive exclusivity. The church is to be indeed *holy*, among other things, and yet is not

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[71] R. Stephen Warner, "The Role of Religion in the Process of Segmented Assimilation," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 612, no. 1 (2007): 108.

[72] *Encyclopedia of Christian Education* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2014 forthcoming), s.v. "Educating for Intercultural Life." Elsewhere, Branson writes, "Only with adequate focus on geography and committed practices can a congregation serve the cause of neighbourhood shalom," in Mark Lau Branson, "Forming Church, Forming Mission," *International Review of Mission* 92, no. 365 (2003): 162.

[73] For an example of partnership, see Korean Churches for Community Development," Website, http://www.kccd.org/ (accessed May 30, 2014).

[74] Russell Jeung, *Faithful Generations: Race and New Asian American Churches* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 159.

impervious to sins, both structural and personal. Prayerful navigation of racial dynamics, power relations, and identity politics "significantly structure a church's growth and racial composition."[75]

Fourth, immigrant congregations must remain countercultural and not abandon the fostering of intergenerational relationships. A lack of modeled civic engagement, on the part of older exemplars (particularly in Asian American contexts), can have a profoundly debilitating impact on the civic engagement patterns of younger generations.[76] Balanced parts *political participation*, *political voice*, and *community participation* are to be fostered, transcending mere maintenance of ethnic identity.[77]

Fifth, immigrant churches must hold fast to both the promises and the promptings of God. Achieving religious congruence requires "substantial cognitive effort, intense and consistent social reinforcement, or internalization" to take hold.[78]

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[75] Jeung, *Faithful Generations*, 156.

[76] Lew, "The 'Moral Minority' Meets Social Justice," 208.

[77] On these three categories to be balanced, see Lew, "The 'Moral Minority' Meets Social Justice." Lew's discovery that "[t]here was only one obstacle that applied solely to community participation, but it showed up in four participant interviews: discouragement from being involved in efforts that are not sustainable over time" (212). This lack of sustainability may be attributable to the culture, itself (cf. 233-234). How much of all this can be generalized from the study's limited sample size (i.e., N = 40), sole focus upon universities as assumed contexts of fomentation, and specificity within such contexts (viz. Asian Americans involved in InterVarsity Christian Fellowship's L.A. Urban Program) is not immediately clear. Nevertheless, Lew's results appear to scale up accurately. He asks, "Why was LAUP so influential in this area of community participation? The secret to LAUP's long-lasting, life-altering influence on participants' community participation seems to be related to two factors: (1) employing multiple means of socialization to reinforce the messages its leaders were trying to get across, and (2) aiming to shape students' values and lifestyles, rather than focusing solely on specific forms of civic engagement" (283).

[78] Chaves, "Rain Dances in the Dry Season": 7-8. Chaves reminds those involved in the scientific study of religion that every instance of social action, particularly of a religious nature, is highly situational and can influence the assumptions of researchers and practitioners, alike—as well as the publication habits and biases fostered within the guild. In discussing how to avoid the *religious congruence fallacy* in social science explanations, he suggests, "we should hesitate to treat religious beliefs as stable dispositions, we should hesitate to explain behavior by connecting it to religious affiliations, practices, or beliefs from which the behavior seems to follow, and we should try to better understand the conditions under which religious congruence really does emerge" (10). It is unclear whether Chaves would (or even should) categorize *prayer* as religious belief, or whether he sees it cohere in the study of other mental states—one of the additional six proposals Chaves offered upon his presidential inauguration of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion a few years ago.

Immigrant churches can be encouraged that, beyond immigrant optimism, the heart of God beats to see the transformation of *the city*.

Finally, there is need for active hope—that the project of conscientizing the American church concerning divisive racialization and "cultural captivity" is ongoing and worthwhile.[79] For instance, the diversity and uniqueness *within* Asian America complicates an unjust essentialism that meta-defines America according to dominant categories of exclusivity, like race.[80] By complicating race and complexifying ethnicity, the term "Asian American" might begin to lose its more descriptive hegemony. Assuming this much, how might the American church better understand—for example—the unique contributions of Chinese Indonesian Americans toward immigrant faith?[81] And how would a diasporic identity normed and conditioned by the narratives of Christian Scripture reinterpret the dual-marginalization of Chinese Indonesian Christians—first, in Indonesia (on account of their Chinese heritage) and, second, in America (in terms of cultural assimilation variance)?

A proper theological complexification of American church life from an Indonesian perspective is still forthcoming. Yet every week within immigrant churches, there are countless hybridizations occurring between Indonesian immigrants, their children and exogamous spouses, and the geopolitical setting—the *city*—in which their Christian faith is becoming *Americanized*. Understanding civic engagement from a theological perspective requires multidisciplinary approaches for gathering empirical observation, collecting ethnographic research, and improving theological reflection. In turn,

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[79] For example, see Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); cf. Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism*.

[80] Despite some similarity with ethnic-specific vignettes earlier in the paper, the forthcoming mention of Chinese Indonesians in America is not intended to be more than an example of variance *within* Asian America. In-depth contextualization here would threaten any wider application beyond this select subpopulation. In another project, contextual disaggregation would foreground elements that are unique to a certain demographic. But that task lies outside the scope of this paper.

[81] By this terminology, I intend to denote ethnic Chinese from the diaspora in Indonesia, who self-identify primarily as Indonesian, amidst a second-level dispersion as immigrants to the United States. Behavioral sciences professor Virgo Handojo finds that the chosen attachment styles of Chinese Indonesian immigrants to the U.S. correlate strongly with varied strategies for acculturating to American life—further supporting the composite psychosocial modeling of Asian American Christian identity vis-à-vis civic engagement, above. See Virgo Handojo, "Attachment Styles, Acculturation Attitudes/Behaviors, and Stress among Chinese Indonesian Immigrants in the United States" (PhD dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2000). Handojo is also pastor of a local Indonesian immigrant church.

immigrant churches—as interstices of culture, of politics, of identity construction, of faithful discipleship—become interpretive communities with the potential to foster stewardly civic engagement. They do this, primarily, by their very presence (see Map).
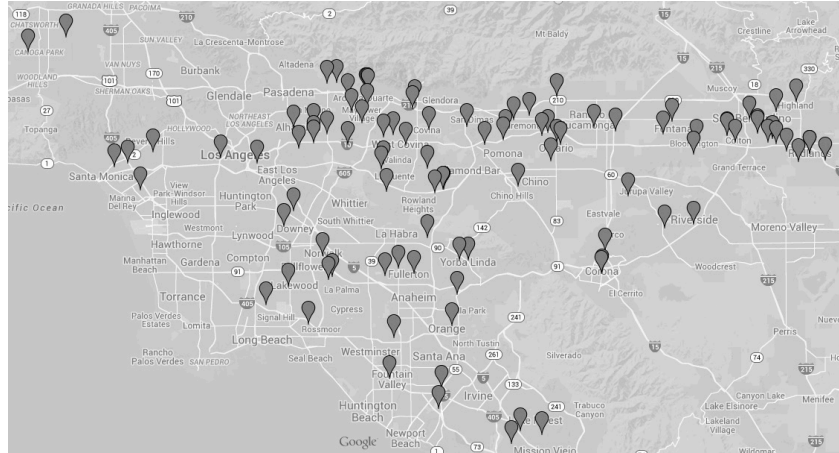
**Map: Greater Los Angeles & Inland Empire Area
Indonesian Churches**
(BKS-GICS 2014)[82]

Conclusion

Asian American immigrant churches are called to foster imaginative spaces in which civic engagement becomes a natural outworking of practical theological work. To this aim, I have modeled a method of practical theology that takes seriously current, prevalent articulations of U.S. immigrant racialization. A limited social scientific literature review (section I) yielded a composite psychosocial model for Asian Americans, wherein individual identity formation is found to be normed according to deep communal pressures. Because such *cultural schemas* fund and shape the meta-process of *segmented assimilation*, the narratives underpinning these schemas greatly influence immigrant civic engagement.

Next, the Judeo-Christian trope of the *exile* was considered (section II), as means of shaping the *cultural schema* of an immigrant

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[82] Synthesized by present author; source: Badan Kerja Sama Gereja-Gereja Indonesia di California Selatan (BKS-GICS) [trans. "Cooperative Body of Indonesian Churches in Southern California"], "Greater Los Angeles & Inland Empire Area Indonesian Churches" (personal communication with Danny Wurangian, 10 December 2014).

church. Taken both as historical condition and as a designation of personhood, *exile* conceptually contributes significant theological motivations for civic engagement. Central is the conviction that YHWH's promises propel the ethnic enclave into commitments of solidarity, which transcend constructed barriers between it and the "city." Taken together, these frameworks resulted in the proposal that strategic emendations to a faith community's *cultural schemas*—namely, in the formation of an exilic identity—would lead to new (or renewed) praxis measurable in terms of increased and improved civic engagement.[83]

Finally, introduction was made to the practical theological methodologies of two Fuller Seminary faculty members, Johnny Ramírez-Johnson and Daniel D. Lee (section III). Because the methodological dynamics of practical theology are iterative and fallible, eclectic use of a number of proposed approaches can prove profitable. Only transversal approaches that are interdisciplinary, contextualized, and orthoparadoxical may approximate a rich representation of the varied conditions of our present circumstances. More, not less, variation in approaches to theological resourcing shall better fund the work of local, marginalized congregations.

The church's actions here in *this city*—be it Babylon, Jerusalem, Rome, Jakarta, or Los Angeles—ought to bear witness to the edenic scene (Rev 22:1-5) of *that Holy City* to come (Rev 21).[84] Prefiguration of this curative space is taken up in the mandate to seek the (earthly) city's *shalom*, thereby expressing an "applied theology" of intercessory prayer and practical theology of civic engagement.[85] As *faithful generations*[86] of Christ's church continue the task of constructing new interstices of dislocation and of vocation, of both Spirit-led sojourn and humanly hopeful imagination—God's people might then come to understand such a word as this to be trustworthy and true: "'For surely I know the plans I have for you,' says the LORD, 'plans for your *shalom . . .*'" (Jer 29:11).

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[83] Because methodology was the focus of this essay, specific opportunities to develop conative practices have only been hinted at and need to be treated elsewhere in full.

[84] For example—the source of *life* (river) is located in the very situated-ness of God's sovereignty (throne), becoming thus realized and cultivated as *salvific reconciliation* (trees/fruits/leaves) in God's presence. For a vision of how the Apocalypse of John relates specifically to multiculturalism vis-à-vis the healing of the nations, see Justo L. González, *For the Healing of the Nations: The Book of Revelation in an Age of Cultural Conflict* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999).

[85] Dearman, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 265-266.

[86] Cf. Jeung, *Faithful Generations*.

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