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## Book Review: Growing Healthy Asian American Churches

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## Book Reviews

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### **Growing Healthy Asian American Churches**

**Reviewed by Benjamin C. Shin**

*Cha, Peter, S. Steve Kang, and Helen Lee, editors, Growing Healthy Asian American Churches. InterVarsity Press, 2006, 221 pages. \$16.00*

The Asian American church movement in America has been a fast growing and flourishing presence throughout the country over the last 20 years. With this rapid growth and expansion has come many ministerial and cultural challenges that have tested its leaders and congregants alike. For this reason, *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches* (InterVarsity, 2006) edited by Peter Cha, S. Steve Kang, and Helen Lee, comes as a timely and welcome refreshment and relief to the challenges and hardships that the Asian church in America faces in its every day workings.

The book is structured to represent different aspects of what an Asian American church would look like under the motif of a "healthy household." There are 9 topics which the various contributors frame within the whole "healthy household" idea. These topics include Grace-Filled Households (ch. 1), Truth-Embodying Households (ch. 2), Healthy Leaders, Healthy Households, (ch. 3-4), Trusting Households (ch. 5), Hospitable Households (ch. 6), Multigenerational Households (ch. 7), Gender Relations in Healthy Households (ch. 8), and finally Households of Mercy and Justice (ch. 9). One of the strengths of this book is that the different contributors represent a good cross section of scholars, pastors, and practitioners with different experiences but who all share a common passion—wanting to grow the Asian American church to be all that it should be to the glory of God.

The approach to each chapter is a good balance between addressing some of the shortcoming and difficulties of the Asian

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American church and then providing practical and biblical guidance on how to overcome these situations. This is done by addressing the “problem” or “difficulty” (which is usually culturally related) which is then followed by tangible examples of pastors and churches who have moved towards great progress in overcoming these hardships. As a pastor myself of an Asian American church, I find this extremely helpful so that I can visualize the steps and the final product of the many good principles that are mentioned in each chapter. One of the unique aspects of this book is that it demonstrates a great sensitivity to the post-modern seeker or potential church attender. With this in mind, many practical insights are offered as to how to approach different ministries within the church such as evangelism, social justice and mercy ministry, and perceptions of pastors and their leadership from this paradigm. These are lessons that are so necessary for the pastor for today which often times are never taught in the context of a bible college or seminary. Thus, this is invaluable counsel and insight for those in ministry.

Some of the highlight chapters which resonated the most with me were Helen Lee’s chapters on Healthy Leaders, Healthy Households, chapters 3-4; Jonathan Wu’s chapter on Trusting Households—Openness to Change, ch. 5; and Soon-Chan Rah’s chapter on Households of Mercy and Justice, ch. 9. Lee’s analysis of some of the tendencies of Asian American leaders due to their cultural base (i.e. honor and shame, saving face, hierarchy, etc.) was right on the target. Her positive examples of Moses and Jesus clearly provided a wonderful counter-example of what it looks like to be a healthy leader in the household of God. Wu’s chapter on Trusting Households discussing change was something that I could have used years ago as I lead different groups through change. His insights on how to prepare and model good and positive change from the leadership perspective, was a good reminder to be in touch with the people of the congregation. Priceless counsel for any pastor or leader of a flock! Finally, Rah’s heart can clearly be felt in his chapter on mercy and justice. This area of ministry is probably one of the weakest for the Asian American church as a whole. His instruction and examples were very inspiring and enlightening. A striking quote that comes from his chapter concerning how churches should impact their communities where he writes “churches should learn more about communities of need and attempt to become an authentic part of those communities, churches that don’t merely meet in the neighborhood but actually become part of the neighborhood. (p. 195)” This was a wonderful challenge for me personally as I think about my own Asian American church situation.

This book is an invaluable tool for anyone, congregant or leader, within an Asian American church context. It touches on many different topics that are all within the mix of the unique struggles and challenges of the Asian American church. My prayer is that more material like this will come out in the future. Each of the individual chapters could be a more developed book by itself! I thank and applaud Cha, Kang, and Lee for their valuable contribution to the Asian American church and to leaders like myself who face these kinds of situations daily.

Reviewer

Shin, Benjamin. Benjamin Shin is the senior pastor of the English ministry of L.A. Open Door Church in Los Angeles, California. He is a graduate from the University of California, Los Angeles, and also Talbot School of Theology where he currently teaches in the Bible Exposition Dept. as an adjunct professor.