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Review: Christian Intercultural Communication

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Abstract

A Review: Chang, C. Tim, and Ashley E. Chang. *Christian Intercultural Communication: Sharing God's Love with People of Other Cultures*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, 2021. 277 Pages. \$82.11.

Keywords

Chang, Christian, Chul, Communication, Intercultural, Review, Tim

Cover Page Footnote

Andrew J. Ondo is currently an MDiv. student with the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University. Alongside his current studies, Andrew has earned the following degrees: AA in Interdisciplinary Studies (Liberty University, 2019); BS in Religion (Liberty University, 2020); MA in Christian Ministry (Liberty University, 2022). His primary specializations are in Apologetics, Biblical Exposition, and Christian/Pastoral Counseling.

Christian Intercultural Communication: Sharing God's Love with People of Other Cultures. By C. Tim Chang and Ashley E. Chang. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, 2021. 277 Pages. \$82.11.

Christian Intercultural Communication (abbrev.) stands as a testament to the evidenced success of applying cultural intelligence with a Christian perspective. This evidence comes from the examples seen in the ministerial and educational journeys of its authors, C. Tim Chang and Ashley E. Chang. Concerning expertise on the subject matter, C. Tim Chang is the predominant figure in the formal arena.¹ After coming to know Christ, Tim jumped right into ministerial studies. He began engaging in missional work, leading him first to Seoul, South Korea, and later to Northeast China.² Educationally, Tim Chang currently serves as an Associate Professor in the Department of Global Studies at Liberty University, located in Lynchburg, Virginia.³ In addition to his current role, he also holds earned degrees in the following areas: Bachelor of Arts, Baylor University (Texas, USA); Korean Language Studies, Sogang University and Ehwa University (Seoul, South Korea); Master of Arts in Biblical Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary (Texas, USA); Master of Divinity, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (Texas, USA); Chinese Language Studies, Yanbian University and Dongbae University (Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, China and Dalian, China – respectively); and, Doctor of Philosophy in Intercultural Studies, Fuller Theological Seminary (California, USA).⁴ Thus, Tim Chang's background allows one to assert that when he writes, "CIC [Christian Intercultural Communication] focuses on the way our faith, and the power of the Holy Spirit, enable us to be effective across cultures..." and "CIC is the core of missionary work" that his words must therefore be reasoned from factual evidence in the intercultural endeavor rather than being mere conjecture based in principle or philosophy alone.

¹ Note: This is not to say that Ashley E. Chang's contributions are without merit, but it is to say that upon research of this contributor no relevant data was found pertaining to her formal education or professional work in the direct field of cultural intelligence, intercultural communication, or combination thereof. That said, her educational and experiential backgrounding are as follows: Bachelor of Science in Computer Science / Literary Arts, Brown University (Rhode Island, USA); she currently holds multiple roles as a research assistant and software development intern (*ref.* – LinkedIn, "Ashley Chang | LinkedIn," accessed July 23, 2021, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/ashley-e-chang/>). Conclusively, this author remains a vital part of the experiences and perspectives offered in the text insofar as she was a participant of influence and assisted in the writing of the work.

² "Dr. Tim Chang | School of Divinity," Liberty University, accessed July 23, 2021, <https://www.liberty.edu/divinity/faculty/tim-chang/>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

As alluded to above, the central thesis proposed by Chang and Chang is simply that though secular texts may help with one's ability to learn to effectively bridge cultural gaps when engaging in diverse contexts, *Christian Intercultural Communication* builds a special bridge in that the Christian aspect of intercultural communication is efficacious based not simply in the secular principles of applied cultural intelligence but with the added benefit of incorporated faith, the Holy Spirit, and purposeful application of the overarching theme of God's love. Put another way; the thesis is simply that the faith of the Christian, in concert with the empowering of the Holy Spirit, allows one to effectively engage cross-culturally.⁵ On a personal note, this writer believes the clarification given by the authors, that "[i]t's not about 'saving the pagans.' It is a rich journey of following Christ's lead as we engage in justice, mercy, and humility. It's about sharing God's love with those who are *also* made in God's 'image' and who are crowned with His 'glory and honor' (Gen. 1:27; Ps. 8:5 NIV)"⁶ stands as a clear and able indicator that intercultural action from the Christian aspect is not merely one homed in on proselytization or evangelism *per se* but is geared toward the ideology that one should simply do as Paul discusses in Philippians 1:27, "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ."⁷ To provide a bit of rationality to this, often, one engages with the sole purpose of effectively living up to the great commission so far as they understand it (Matt. 28:18-20). The reality is that the act of disciple-making is not simply about words; it is also about evidencing the gospel in how one acts. Thus, the thesis of *Christian Intercultural Communication* can be shown to be true in that both words and deeds, bound up in faith and empowered by the Holy Spirit, will allow the Christian believer to be efficacious in their intercultural endeavors based on sharing the *love* of God toward others – through seeking to know them better, meeting them where they are at (both literally and figuratively), endeavoring to build quality (lasting) relationships with them, and evidencing faith throughout it all.

Now, as to the content, some general thoughts (better said synopses) of each chapter should be accounted for. There are nine chapters, and each deal with a different concept related to Christian efforts to work with and for others of differing cultures. The chapters themselves deal with the following concepts: (1) *culture shock* – being a discussion of the reality of effects associated with lacking familiarity in one's environment and how to prepare for and overcome this obstacle;⁸ (2) *Christocentrism* – placing God/Christ (rather than self) as the locus for all endeavors related to cross-cultural engagement and, this

⁵ Chang and Chang, *Christian Intercultural Communication*, 17.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical references are from the *New American Standard Bible* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2016).

⁸ Chang and Chang, *Christian Intercultural Communication*, 23-39.

goes without saying, life as well;⁹ (3) *ethnocentrism* - an evaluation of the importance of realizing inherent cultural assumptions and predispositions toward others and oneself, respectively (*ref.* a failure to embrace and/or positively recognize the uniqueness of differing cultures/persons);¹⁰ (4) *verbal and non-verbal communication* – this chapter emphasizing the aspects of verbal and non-verbal communication as being ways to provide adequate reflection of the gospel message (evidencing Christ in word, action, and deed);¹¹ (5) *cultural values* – a provision given concerning that the relativity of inherent cultural values presents one with the necessity of orientation toward *kingdom values* in their place on the part of the Christian, while simultaneously recognizing and adapting to the cultural values of others as may be necessary to reach them with the message of salvation in Christ (*ref.* 1 Corinthians 9:19-23);¹² (6) *contextualization* – a discourse in the idea that one must both comprehend and acknowledge diverse cultural contexts so that, by way of humility, they might have the most efficacious result in the sharing of the gospel message and its application in the lives of those engaged with (simply, adapting the “form” of the message and application to suit the need of the audience; again, *ref.* 1 Cor. 9:19-23);¹³ (7) *conflict-management* – an elaboration on the aspects of humility and means by which conflicts can be worked through and learned from so that they do not pose a hindrance when attempting to build relationships with others of diverse cultures, thus safeguarding the effort to share God’s love with them (gospel or otherwise);¹⁴ (8) *authenticity in love* – this portion of writing serves as a sincere and direct exhortation that *love* must needs be unconditional in the effort of the cross-culturally engaged Christian, and that that same love is in fact the guiding principle when confronted with discomfort, animosity, and even in the face of giving one’s life for another (*ref.* John 15:13; 1 John 3:16);¹⁵ and (9), *moving on* – being a clearly heartfelt reminder for all Christians engaged in intercultural activity that there is to be constant evaluation of one’s need to be involved in their current context, accountability in the endeavor overall so that one might have a “check and balance,” and further that one would understand that *moving on* is a part of the missional journey (there are always other opportunities to engage cross-culturally, even on the metaphorical “home front”).¹⁶

⁹ Chang and Chang, *Christian Intercultural Communication*, 41-58.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 59-75.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 77-92.

¹² *Ibid.*, 93-108.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 109-24.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 125-40.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 141-55.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 157-72.

Having addressed each of the above concepts, this writer can only offer that all these certainly play a significant role in the *how* of intercultural communication for the believer in Christ. Perhaps more still, the special quality of each, as outlined by Chang and Chang, can be derived from a clearly objective standpoint as opposed to their secular counterparts – namely, that with Christian intercultural communication, one does not frame the effort around a mix-‘n-match of cultural norms by which communicative manipulation occurs to suit a business or personal need, but rather around the primary premise that one engages to the best of their ability with a heart bent toward love, eyes opened to see others as Christ would, and hands ready to act accordingly for the benefit of one another rather than self. Now, one can certainly see that each of these chapters presents a specific yet versatile concept that must be carefully thought out in terms of engagement from the Christian perspective.

Overall, the presented concepts found in *Christian Intercultural Communication* are those that, in this writer’s view, is wholly necessary to further the gospel with compassion, poise, and purpose. In fact, based upon all that has been covered, it may be said that by resting upon faith in God more so than upon one’s own expertise in a given situation, the knowledge needed in order to reach persons of diverse cultures will come by His direction and guidance far easier than by one’s own machinations. Thus, the summary conclusion is that Chang and Chang have lain out for their readers the veritable foundational principles for the Christian to be effective based on faith and partnership with God rather than self, bound up in love rather than human intellect, with a desire for the best for others rather than what is most advantageous for self. Definitively, this is certainly a text worth sharing, concepts worth ready application, and authors worth giving thanks to for making such things plain for their readers with experience and education in mind.