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A POSTCOLONIAL LEADERSHIP: ASIAN IMMIGRANT CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP AND ITS CHALLENGES

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Choi Hee An. *A Postcolonial Leadership: Asian Immigrant Christian Leadership and its Challenges*. SUNY Press, 2020, pp. 296.

The last two decades have seen a flurry of research and publications on the subject of Christian Leadership. A new text by Choi Hee Ann (2020) is a welcome addition to extend this research to the context of Asian immigrants in the United States of America that seek to lead from a Christian perspective. Choi's text, entitled "A Postcolonial Leadership: Asian Immigrant Christian Leadership and its Challenges", structures its proposals in three areas of foci: (a) understandings of leadership, (b) leadership and its challenges in U.S. culture, and (c) postcolonial leadership in an Asian immigrant Christian context. This review follows Choi's outline in an attempt to summarize and evaluate its contributions to the emerging field of Christian Leadership research and especially contextual considerations of it.

The first part of Choi's (2020) text on "Understanding Leadership" is logically divided into two parts: (a) leadership in a secular culture, and (b) leadership in Christianity. The opening chapter, exploring secular leadership models, is a good summary of the trajectory of organizational leadership theory development from the late 1800's till the present time. Ranging from a succinct treatment on the component parts of Trait Leadership Theory to a descriptive analysis of contemporary proposals on Collaborative Leadership approaches, this chapter carefully surveys the major theorists, theories and models in organizational leadership research. The second chapter in this section of Choi's text turns its focus on exploring the development of a distinctly Christian understanding and approach to leadership theory. In this chapter, Choi accurately points out that Servant Leadership Theory, the "go-to" theory often employed by Christian leaders, actually did not find its origin in distinctly Christian circles but in the management theories of Robert K. Greenleaf. However, Choi misses an important opportunity to explore the contemporary developments within Servant Leadership theory that has been done from a distinctly Christian perspective. The ground-breaking work of Bruce Winston (2018) and Kathleen Patterson (2010) come to mind as foundational in any treatment of Servant Leadership in Christian contexts. The chapter concludes with an erudite and helpful exploration on the of the theological dimensions of *diakonia* as leadership in the New Testament church and a how gender roles have been expressed and/or limited within leadership perspectives in the church. Although this first section of Choi's text is good primer to unlock the fields of leadership research and its iteration in Christian contexts, it falls short to introduce its audience fully to the burgeoning domain of Christian, exegetical and theological research in organizational

leadership research. The work of two journals devoted to fostering research in this area would have strengthened this introduction in significant ways: The Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership and the Theology of Leadership Journal.

In the second part of *Postcolonial Leadership*, the book turns its focus on situating Asian immigrant leadership within the wider cultural landscape of the United States of America. Choi (2020) opens this section with a strong, somewhat ideologically-laden, position statement:

Leadership positions in the US culture have been occupied by an elite upper-class while Anglo-European heterosexual male group without disabilities (the privileged white group) throughout US history. Whether in a secular context or a religious context, most leadership positions are occupied by this group. (p. 53)

Although this statement has some elements of truth to it, it unfortunately lacks the necessary nuanced analysis of the complex history of leadership perception and development in world history and in particular the US. Leadership, as a sociological phenomenon, cannot solely be defined or evaluated by the institutional or socially sanctioned positions of leadership. To do so, would not only place a debilitating limitation on any phenomenological exploration of the construct of leadership, but also unintentionally silence some of the voices of transformative leaders that have led from the margins. Choi provides somewhat of an interpretative lens for the cultural analysis that frames this section of the text in the form of “hidden assumptions that already exist in both secular and Christian religious contexts” (p. 54): (a) leading inherently includes a sense of a superiority, (b) leadership is framed in a binary system of leader and follower roles marked by a degree of power differentiation, and (c) models of leadership typically expresses itself in models of hierarchical organizational (pp. 54-55). As helpful as this framework is in following Choi’s analysis, it also betrays the inherent limitations that such a reading places on the possible contributions of this study. Accepting the “hidden assumptions” of leadership offered by Choi’s analysis could lead a researcher to fall prey to too narrow a scope of investigation, a divisive ideological orientation and sometimes uncharitable generalizations. In contrasting “white leaders and leadership” (p. 55) with that of African American and Latinx counterparts, the texts then sets the stage to explore the realities and challenges that face “Asian immigrant leaders” (p. 107) in the US. Choi’s following descriptive analysis of Asian immigrant Christian leadership (pp.139-180) is the heart of this text and as such makes an original contribution to the field. It is well-written, with strong support offered for the clear and persuasive arguments presented. However, two odd choices in framing detracts from the valuable contributions this section makes: (a) proposing that the gender of Jesus of Nazareth is somehow socially constructed (p. 141), and (b) the presentation of Asian cultures and experiences as a monocultural expression.

The book ends with a final chapter exploring the critical features of a postcolonial leadership. It is in this concluding chapter that Choi presents a vision for what Asian immigrant Christian leadership could be. It is a hopeful and insightful vision, but unfortunately so heavy with the burden of postcolonial critique that it fails to fully capitalize on the very best of Christian and American traditions - traditions that give hope of a united people “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Rev 7:9, ESV). *A Postcolonial Leadership* is a good and original contribution to the emerging field of Christian Leadership but for all its good is significantly hindered by its strong ideological commitments.

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