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# FINDING OUR VOICE

*A Vision for Asian  
North American Preaching*

Matthew D. Kim & Daniel L. Wong

*Foreword by Ken Shigematsu*



LEXHAM PRESS



*Finding Our Voice: A Vision for Asian North American Preaching*

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*To Ryan, Evan, and Aidan—  
May you embrace your Korean American identity  
and embody your Christian identity to the glory of God.  
—Matthew D. Kim*

*To my wife, Flora, for her loving support and encouragement  
and to our children, Joshua and Tiffany,  
for the way you bring perspective, hope, and love  
to your own and future generations.  
—Daniel L. Wong*

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*Matthew D. Kim and Daniel L. Wong*

## PREFACE

The sixth grade commences an unquestionably awkward time in any maturing boy's life. It was during this precarious season that I (Matthew, a second-generation, American-born Korean) learned this sometimes hard to swallow, but very necessary, life lesson about living in the United States: I was not white.

Prior to this epiphany, I had grown up in Park Ridge, a suburb of Chicago, where my brothers and I were oblivious to this as one of two Asian families in our town. My younger brothers, Timothy and Dennis, and I naturally identified as being white. The only people we knew in school and in our neighborhood were white kids. My best friend, Nicky, was white. We spoke English with a standard, white, Midwestern accent, played white sports, and had crushes on white girls. We were white, or so we thought.

After my fifth-grade year, however, our parents moved us seventeen miles northwest to Palatine, Illinois, so that they could live closer to their dry cleaning business and transition us into a higher-quality school district. Post-relocation, my perception of my identity slowly began to shift. I noticed fellow Asians like Koreans, Chinese, Japanese, Indians, Filipinos, and others in our middle school and high school who looked more like my siblings and me. My brain

slowly transformed as I witnessed a new reality of a Korean American existence. It became increasingly clear that I was not white. In fact, I was a strange hybrid of American and Korean. I was not either one exclusively; I was both/and.

To be both American and Korean required a new identity. I discovered that I couldn't self-identify as Caucasian. My countenance and physical features were unlike those of my white friends. My father awakened me to this reality when he had me look in the mirror one day, asking, "What do you see?" He answered his own question: "To the dominant culture, you're Korean, and you'll always be Korean." Yet the breakdowns in my ability to feel completely at home in the Korean language and cultural context simultaneously exposed an inability to self-identify as entirely Korean. Rather, I was a strange mixture of American and Korean. Over time, I began to appreciate the ability to eat pizza one evening and kimchi and ramen on another. I could converse in English at school and communicate in my very limited Korean at home to my grandmother and parents.

Today, living on the North Shore of Boston in a very white New England suburb, I sadly continue to face bouts of insecurity. I sometimes still feel a sense of shame for being Asian and wish that I was white. Shortly after moving here, I heard a mocking voice shout out *konnichiwa* ("hello" in Japanese) from a neighbor's window while I was walking down the street. When I spoke back to him in perfect English, he kept repeating *konnichiwa* in a fake, exaggerated Asian accent. This experience of being called out for my difference reminded me of my youth in Park Ridge. However, I try to remind myself that I needn't be embarrassed for being ethnically Korean or for my skin color. In many ways, what I want to communicate in this book is that God desires for us Asian North Americans (ANAs) to celebrate our hybrid, hyphenated, both/and, bicultural, liminal, or perhaps even third-culture self-confidence—a distinct voice and experience reserved by God just for people like me and perhaps you.



My (Daniel's) story is similar, but also different from Matthew's. I was born a third-generation Chinese in San Francisco and raised in Oakland, California. As one of the few Asian Americans in my elementary school, echoes of "Ching-Chong Chinaman" are engraved on my heart and mind. My parents took my older brother and me weekly to a Chinese church in San Francisco's Chinatown in my formative years. I vividly recall sitting in worship services where the preacher would preach in Cantonese, which I did not understand. The sermon would be translated into English by someone with such a thick Chinese accent that I couldn't understand that either. Ventures into Chinatown were scary. Strangers chided my parents that their children didn't speak Chinese. I am sure I received looks of horror when I poured sugar into my Chinese tea. After various negative experiences from inside and even outside the Chinese community, I would cry out to God, "Why didn't you make me one way or the other?" I look Asian, but I feel Caucasian. Some use the term "banana" to describe people like me: one who is yellow on the outside but white on the inside.

My journey swung from loathing my Chinese heritage to embracing it. I eventually found my roots. I took my first Chinese language lessons in college and enrolled in courses like "The Relationship between the US and China" as well as "Chinese Arts and History." In retrospect, I can see how God used some of these experiences to shape my perspective on life, ministry, and preaching. My both/and existence equips me to serve in a both/and world. Particularly, I appreciate the body of Christ analogy, where each person can have and express gifts with a different culture, language, and experience while being a part of the whole.

#### PREACHING AND ANA IDENTITY

How do these self-revelations relate to the matter of preaching? Every preacher possesses an identity and communicates out of his or her identity. If you were driving your car and surfing stations, you might

stumble upon some different radio preachers. Most of us can distinguish between preachers from African American, Hispanic American, and European American backgrounds based on their distinct preaching traditions, styles, accents, and cultural traits. However, could the same be said of Asian North American (ANA) preachers? Do ANA preachers have a preaching voice? Is there anything that makes ANA preachers and ANA preaching distinct? How does our preaching reflect our both/and identity? What does ANA preaching look like today, and what could it look like in the future? These are the questions at the heart of this book.

We contend that ANA preachers are in need of a unique homiletical voice akin to other minority groups such as African American and Hispanic American preaching traditions. Preaching to listeners who embrace this both/and identity as ANAs requires apt contextualization with a culturally aware hermeneutic and homiletic. For this reason, we seek to name the hermeneutical, theological, and homiletical distinctives of ANA preaching in order to help preachers understand the specific characteristics and challenges that distinguish preaching in ANA contexts.

In order to clarify how to preach to ANAs, first we need to clarify what it means to be ANA, for that term encompasses a diverse group. Much of the literature uses the term “Asian American” to refer to those who emigrated from Asia or who are people of Asian descent born and raised in the United States. The term was coined by the historian and activist Yuji Ichioka and was “initially used to describe a politically charged group identity in ethnic consciousness movements of the late 1960s.”<sup>1</sup> While this is a convenient and recognized term, few identify themselves as generically Asian or Asian American.

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1 Min Zhou and Jennifer Lee, “Introduction: The Making of Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity among Asian American Youth,” in *Asian American Youth: Culture, Identity and Ethnicity*, ed. Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou (New York: Routledge, 2004), 11. See also Andrea Bittle, “I Am Asian American: Uncover the True Diversity beneath the Asian American Label,” *Teaching Tolerance*, vol. 44 (Summer 2013), <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/summer-2013/i-am-asian-american>.

Most identify with their ancestral country of origin or ethnic group and their current country of residence (e.g., Chinese American), especially for the second generation and beyond.

The term “Asian North American” has more recently been adopted by social scientists to identify those of Asian descent living in the United States or Canada. Unlike the older concept of “Asian American,” “‘Asian North American’ is a more useful umbrella term because Asian subjects who reside in the United States and in Canada face many of the same issues regarding identity, multiple cultural allegiances, marginalization vis-à-vis mainstream society, historical exclusion, and postcolonial and/or diasporic and/or transnational subjectivity.”<sup>2</sup> A number of Christian authors have also taken up this newer nomenclature to describe those born and raised in North America whose parents and ancestors are from Asian countries.<sup>3</sup>

Along with a few others from Canada, Daniel was once invited to take part in a consultation at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School outside Chicago. He learned from this consultation that issues faced by ANA churches were similar whether one resided and ministered in the United States or Canada. There were also unique issues facing each congregation related to the geographic locale, the history of the group, and other factors. He came away with a greater awareness of the need to collaborate across congregations and learn with and from the larger family of ANA churches.

Within the broad category of ANAs, there are two distinct subgroups: “(1) first-generation Asian [North] Americans, that is, foreign-born Asian immigrants and refugees, and (2) second- and

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2 Eleanor Ty and Donald C. Goellnicht, “Introduction” in *Asian North American Identities: Beyond the Hyphen*, ed. Eleanor Ty and Donald C. Goellnicht (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 2.

3 These include David Ng, ed., *People on the Way: Asian North Americans Discovering Christ, Culture, and Community* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1996); Russell Yee, *Worship on the Way: Exploring Asian North American Christian Experience* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 2012); and M. Sydney Park, Soong-Chan Rah, and Al Tizon, eds., *Honoring the Generations: Learning from Asian North American Congregations* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 2012).

multi-generational US-born [or Canadian-born] Asian [North] Americans.”<sup>4</sup> Some have used the label “Asian American” to describe predominantly those in the first generation. A preaching book from a first-generation immigrant’s perspective is Eunjoo Mary Kim’s *Preaching the Presence of God: A Homiletic from an Asian American Perspective*.<sup>5</sup> This book is helpful for understanding immigrants’ experiences, in particular with reference to Korean preaching.

The focus of our book, however, is on the second category of ANAs: English-speaking, second- and multi-generational, US- and Canadian-born Asian North Americans. Further, because of our own experience in these contexts, we will primarily address those from East Asian backgrounds like our own, namely ethnic Koreans and Chinese. However, we hope that other ANAs will find we are describing their experiences as well.

#### THE NEED FOR ANA VOICES

This book arose from a deep burden for the ANA church and for its future vitality. We saw a dearth of literature on preaching to English-speaking ANAs, and so we decided to step into this gap. Over the years, we have found that many ANA pastors have not considered the ethnicity of themselves and their listeners with respect to their preaching and the uniqueness of what it means to preach to ANAs in a full-orbed sense. Rather, many ANA preachers sound “white,” whether intentionally or not, because they write sermons that speak to the “generic American” based on the homiletical instruction they have received in Bible colleges and seminaries from European American preaching professors.<sup>6</sup> We believe that ANA preachers

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4 Matthew D. Kim, “Asian-American Preaching,” in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today’s Communicators*, ed. Craig Brian Larson and Haddon Robinson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 200. See also <http://www.census.gov>.

5 Eunjoo Mary Kim, *Preaching the Presence of God: A Homiletic from an Asian American Perspective* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1999).

6 See Matthew D. Kim, *Preaching to Second Generation Korean Americans: Towards a Possible Selves Contextual Homiletic* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 1.

require a contextual homiletic that speaks to the bicultural and even multicultural needs of ANA listeners. In short, the ANA church needs its own distinct preaching voice. We seek to find and shape our unique voice in the world of homiletics.

We are not alone in recognizing this perspectival shift and the need for ANA voices. The evangelical Christian movement is sensing this ripe and necessary transformation in leadership as well. We are slowly witnessing the emergence of ANAs embracing international Christian leadership positions as evidenced by Michael Oh becoming the Global Executive Director/CEO of the Lausanne Movement, Tom Lin's presidential selection to lead InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, and Sharon Koh taking the helm of American Baptist International Ministries. ANA ministry programs dedicated to cultivating the spiritual well-being and future of ANA congregations are surfacing at seminaries such as Fuller Theological Seminary, Talbot School of Theology, and Seattle Pacific University. ANAs are the dominant and majority ethnic group on many college and university campuses as well as in some mainline and evangelical seminaries. Books on ANA ministry and leadership written by ANA authors, both male and female, are steadily filling library shelves.<sup>7</sup> There are vibrant discussions about ministry in the ANA context on the internet. ANA preachers such as Eugene Cho, Ken Fong, David Gibbons, Soong-Chan Rah, Ken Shigematsu, and Ravi Zacharias are becoming household names in the dominant culture. However, we are saddened that there aren't even more touted ANA preachers' voices in North America, with ANA preachers headlining conferences being the norm rather than the exception. How we respond to the particular

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7 See, for example, the growing body of literature from ANA authors such as: Eddie Byun, Peter Cha, Francis Chan, Simon Chan, Eugene Cho, James Choung, D. J. Chuang, Chris Chun, Sung Wook Chung, David Leong, David Gibbons, Young Lee Hertig, Albert Hsu, S. Steve Kang, Kathy Khang, Grace Ji-Sun Kim, Daniel Lee, Gregory Lee, Helen Lee, Paul C. H. Lim, Tom Lin, M. Sydney Park, Adrian Pei, Soong-Chan Rah, Ken Shigematsu, Benjamin Shin, Sarah Shin, Sheryl Takagi Silzer, Jonathan Tan, Siang-Yang Tan, John Teter, Al Tizon, Tim Tseng, Cindy Wu, Jenny Yang, Allen Yeh, Amos Yong, Ravi Zacharias, and others.



concerns facing ANA Christians will invite significant conversations and require well-conceived strategies.

Besides being ANAs ourselves, we are grateful that God has called and equipped us to write on this important topic. In addition to our personal backgrounds mentioned above, Matthew wrote the first PhD dissertation related to ANA preaching.<sup>8</sup> He served in pastoral ministry as a youth pastor, college pastor, and senior pastor in Asian congregations in Massachusetts and Colorado for nearly a decade. He now serves as a professor of preaching and ministry and as the director of the Haddon W. Robinson Center for Preaching at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts. He also is the author and editor of a number of books on preaching and ministry.<sup>9</sup>

Daniel has served Chinese American and Canadian churches for decades. He is a leading voice on the topic of ANA preaching and has spoken at various ANA conferences and gatherings. Today, he serves as a professor of Christian ministries at Tyndale University in Toronto, Canada, and writes about multicultural issues in preaching and ministry.<sup>10</sup>

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8 See Matthew D. Kim, "Preaching to Second Generation Korean Americans: Towards a Possible Selves Contextual Homiletic" (PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2006); the published version is *Preaching to Second Generation Korean Americans: Towards a Possible Selves Contextual Homiletic* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007).

9 Matthew D. Kim's books include: *7 Lessons for New Pastors: Your First Year in Ministry* (Chalice, 2012), *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence: Understanding the People Who Hear Our Sermons* (Baker Academic, 2017), *Homiletics and Hermeneutics: Four Views on Preaching Today* (coeditor, Baker Academic, 2018), *A Little Book for New Preachers: Why and How to Study Homiletics* (IVP Academic, 2020), *The Big Idea Companion to Preaching and Teaching* (coeditor, Baker Academic, forthcoming), and *Preaching to People in Pain* (tentative title, Baker Academic, forthcoming).

10 See, for example, Daniel L. Wong, "Preaching in a Multicultural World," *Preaching: The Professional Journal for Preachers*, 23:5 (March/April 2008): 12–16; "An Intercultural Homiletic: Preaching Amidst Cultures," a paper presented at the 39th Annual Meeting of the Academy of Homiletics, Memphis, Tennessee (2004): 308–16; and "Multicultural Preaching and Its Implications for Pedagogy," a paper presented at the 36th Annual Meeting of the Academy of Homiletics, St. Louis, Missouri (2001): 171–83. Other writing on preaching includes the "Homiletical Perspective" on John 3:22–30, 3:31–36, 4:1–6 in *Feasting on the Gospels, John, Vol. 1*, ed. Cynthia A. Jarvis and E. Elizabeth Johnson (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015).

You, as readers, also bring much to the conversation. We appreciate your continuous effort to preach faithful and relevant sermons for your people. The primary audience for this book is our fellow ANA pastors, elders, church leaders, parachurch workers, missionaries, and others who are interested in preaching to your own cultural and congregational contexts. But we hope this book will be relevant to others as well; perhaps you are one of many non-Asian pastors ministering and preaching to ANA listeners or you are a guest preacher in an ANA congregation. This book is also written with you in mind. As ANA preaching professors, we often receive questions from non-Asians about what it means to preach contextually for ANA congregants. Our hope in writing this book is that it will answer some of your theoretical and practical questions about your ANA hearers. A third audience is readers who are interested or involved in multicultural ministry and exploring ways that ethnicity affects preaching and ministry. A fourth readership may be first-generation Asian immigrant pastors seeking to join the conversation about how to preach more effectively to their children and their grandchildren. Finally, we have also written this book as an academic and practical resource for Bible college and seminary professors who are seeking a textbook for teaching on the topic of ANA ministry and preaching or multiethnic concerns.

#### THE PLAN OF THE BOOK

This book navigates five major conversation points. In the first four chapters, either Matthew or Daniel will take the lead and serve as the primary voice of the chapter. When Matthew uses the term “ANA,” he is primarily speaking from an Asian American perspective, while Daniel employs it mainly in relation to Asian Canadians. At times, ANA will be used interchangeably for Americans or Canadians.

In chapter 1, Daniel describes the ANA experience and cultural narrative. Although persons of Asian descent have called America and Canada home for well over two centuries, ANAs remain “perpetual

foreigners” and experience marginalization in the eyes of the dominant society. In chapter 2, Matthew addresses ANA hermeneutics and provides a short taxonomy of the common approaches by which ANAs interpret Scripture. He then shares a basic template for contextualized ANA hermeneutics. In chapter 3, Matthew continues with an overview of some of the major Asian and ANA theologies that have influenced ANA pastors and their doctrines, and he shows us a way to consider ANA theology going forward. In chapter 4, Daniel names common characteristics of today’s ANA preachers and preaching. The final chapter, chapter 5, provides an opportunity for both authors to present a vision for the future of ANA homiletics. Each chapter articulates practical suggestions to help navigate the experiences, hermeneutics, theology, and preaching, respectively, in our both/and context. Questions for individual reflection and corporate discussion are provided at the conclusion of each chapter. Lastly, in the appendices, you will find a worksheet that will help you think through what it means to preach a sermon in an ANA context as well as two sample sermons we have preached to ANA audiences.

If you have ministered in an ANA context for a long time, preaching with ANAs in view might seem like a no-brainer. You may be saying, “Of course, Matthew and Daniel, that’s what I do every Sunday!” However, may we submit to you that we might still be able to identify creative pathways to increase your contextualization for ANA listeners? You’ve probably heard the old Japanese proverb that says, “A nail that sticks out gets hammered down.” Well, the good news is that we are not holding hammers in our hands, asking you to conform. Rather, we hope to give you a few more tools in your toolbox to preach the most effective sermons possible for your ANA congregants. Thank you for investing your time and energy into reading this book. We hope that by the end you will feel a little more equipped to put into practice some concrete homiletical skills to communicate effectively to ANAs and other hearers to the glory of our triune God.

Let the journey begin.