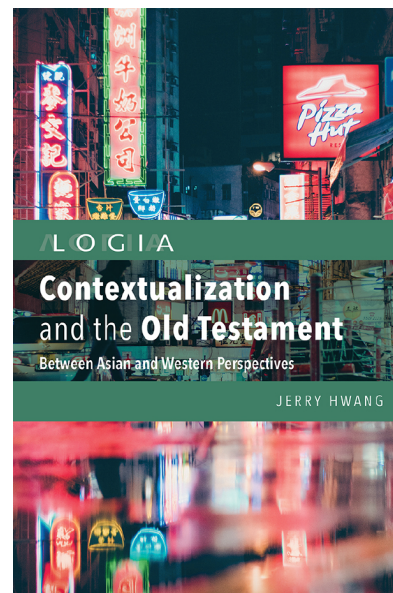


Jerry Hwang and Angukali Rotokha, eds. *Exploring the Old Testament in Asia: Evangelical Perspectives. Foundations in Asian Christian Thought* Cumbria, UK: Langham Global Library, 2022.

Reviewed by Jonathan McGrath, IMB Field Personnel, Asia Pacific Rim

As missionaries who seek to interpret the Bible well, we must first find the biblical author's intended meaning, and only then apply that meaning in contextually appropriate ways to a variety of cultural contexts. However, our cultural upbringing can affect our ability to interpret the author's intended meaning. Certain aspects of the meaning may come more naturally due to similar cultural norms with the original author, whereas other aspects may not seem clear or evident at all due to distance from the original author. Our cultural upbringing also affects our applications of the biblical text. Western readers have often applied Scripture in ways that relate particularly to their own experience. Western scholarship has not as consistently focused on issues more prominent in Asian contexts, such as "living as a religious minority, poverty, gender, syncretism, familial and societal relationships, superstition, violence, [and] corruption," or has not applied it in contextually appropriate ways for the Asian church (2). Furthermore, missionaries raised and trained in Western contexts may not appreciate the importance of interpreting and applying Scripture with such topics in view.

Jerry Hwang (Singapore Bible College) and Angukali Rotokha (Oriental Theological Seminary, Dimapur) have assembled a diverse group of Old Testament scholars to address this deficiency. The scholars originate from



and teach in Australia, India, Korea, Malaysia, Mongolia, the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Their contributions bring the Old Testament into dialogue with various Asian theologies—from Mongolian creation stories to Confucianism and prosperity theologies.

These contributions present a consistently evangelical perspective that desires to equip Asian churches to interpret and apply the Old Testament in their particular contexts. The first chapter sets the tone of the book. Bayarjargal Garamtseren shows how Genesis 1–11 gives a more complete and compelling story than Mongolian creation stories. He emphasizes that “all human problems go back to the original sin,” and that sin is the world’s greatest and foundational problem (13). Missionaries would agree. Thus, Garamtseren argues that all peoples need the Bible in their languages, so that “what God started in the OT and continued through Jesus Christ and his disciples in the NT [can] continue in every place and nation through . . . the followers of Jesus Christ” (15). Because the authors of this volume desire to see all people come to know Jesus Christ, they emphasize that the Bible must be interpreted and applied in culturally relevant ways.

The consistent quality of the contributions makes it difficult to highlight only a few, but in my context, the chapters by Jerry Hwang, Peter Lau, and Huu-Thien Tran and Daniel Owens were particularly insightful. Hwang’s chapter emphasized the integration of God’s blessing and wrath in his passionate concern for both Israel and the nations. He suggests that Asian interpretation may provide a corrective to a Western church tradition influenced by Greek philosophical ideas. Lau’s chapter highlighted kinship relationship in the OT and Asia, with a focus on how the OT speaks about gifts, bribes, and corruption. Huu-Thien Tran and Daniel Owen’s chapter spoke to the prominence of prosperity theology in Asia and evaluated it in light of the Old Testament. They note how good impulses of the movement—such as prayer for blessing and healing—can lead to excess and need for biblical correction.

The diversity of the authors and their contributions means that not every contribution in the work applies directly to my context. However, even contributions that do not directly apply may help readers to think more broadly about ways that the text may apply in a global context. Some readers may wonder if the cultural appropriations suggested at points go too far or not far enough and some may wonder why certain dialogue partners were chosen. But even when readers disagree, they will have new insights to ponder and think how they would apply the text in their ministry context. As an American who regularly teaches the Old Testament in Asia, the book has helped me to think more deeply about how the Old Testament applies to the Asian church.

This book is recommended to those teaching the Bible in South Asian, East Asian, or Southeast Asian contexts, as the contributors to this volume come from these regions. Those serving in Central Asian and Middle Eastern contexts would still find much to value in the book, but it will not be directly applicable. I plan to use various chapters in Old Testament survey courses and will use Hwang's chapter in courses on biblical missiology and theology. This book is not only for those who are directly involved in a teaching ministry but also for those who desire to think about fresh ways to apply the Bible's teaching in Asian contexts.