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## Review of Supracultural Gospel: Bridging East and West by Mary Lou Codman-Wilson and Alex Zhou

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## Book Review

### *Supracultural Gospel: Bridging East and West*

By Mary Lou Codman-Wilson and Alex Zhou

William Carey Publishing, 2022

214 pages

US\$9.99

Reviewed by Mark D. Wood, PhD., Director of Kingdom Leadership Training Center, Darhan, Mongolia.

Each year as international students come to the United States, they encounter the good news and some decide to follow Jesus. However, after they return home, many of these converts walk away from the faith. The challenge of helping international students — particularly those from Asia — to navigate the transition home is the focus of the book *Supracultural Gospel: Bridging East and West*. Codman-Wilson (Ph.D., Northwestern University), has served Asian international students in the United States for many years. Alex Zhou (JSD, City University of Hong Kong; LLM, Northwestern University) was an international student who participated in cross-cultural student ministry. He currently resides in Macau.

The book is organized into five parts. Part one, the Introduction, frames the problem of discipling Asian international students, and it describes the cultural struggles that the East and West have when it comes to understanding the gospel. “Both Christianity in the East and Christianity in the West have significant distortions that do not represent the core of the gospel” (3). To address the need for connection between East and West, and avoid any distortions of the gospel, the authors assert that “the supracultural gospel is that bridge. We call this bridge the supracultural gospel because it can transcend the limited cultural and

theological understandings of the gospel in both the West and East” (4).

Part two, chapters 2-4, examines the cultural barriers between the East and West. For example, the authors observe, “Western Christianity not only emphasizes a me-centered Christianity (that is being exported globally), but it also violates the biblical values of community that are central to Asian identity and to biblical teaching” (22). The section then goes on to explore Chinese, Japanese, and Thai perspectives of Christianity.

Part three, Chapters 5-11, continues with the concept of “boxes” (which form cultural barriers) and explores bridges between East and West. This is the heart of the book. “The supracultural gospel is above all cultures. It is not limited to one worldview or one set of religious constructs” (43). The section goes on to discuss concepts of salvation, sin, grace, the Holy Spirit, and the body of Christ.

Part four, Chapters 12-17, focuses on “Discipleship Essentials That Undergird Thinking Outside the Box.” It addresses the subjects of a Christian mind, lordship, scripture memorization, prayer, and spiritual warfare.

Finally, Part 5, Chapters 18-22, shares practical examples of how Christians from China and Asia have transcended the East/West boxes through gospel living. Chapter 19, entitled “A Bridging Faith,” was very helpful in understanding the overall concept of a supracultural gospel.

*Supracultural Gospel* is strongest when the voices of international students or believers in Asian contexts are heard through their stories. These voices comprise strong qualitative evidence supporting the authors’ suggested approach. The subject of helping Asian international students retain and flourish in their faith as they return home is very important and I appreciated the passion of the authors for this subject.

However, the book has some significant weaknesses. The term supracultural is a tricky one to use. Invoking the term supracultural, the authors want to argue for a gospel that is free of cultural constraints; but I do not think they take seriously enough the bias that we inevitably bring to the Gospel because of our cultural backgrounds. Also, I do not think the term supracultural in the title communicates the intent of the book. Instead, the subtitle “*Bridging East and West*” is more accurate. Throughout reading the book I struggled with “YBH?” (Yes, But How?). I often agreed with the concepts being discussed but I did not understand how the concept would be applied. There were also aspects of the book that are still too strongly rooted in the West. For example, the authors did not address deliverance from spirits, curses, or dedication to spirits (To paraphrase a seminary professor, if we struggle with discipleship, could it be because we are trying to disciple those who are not converted?). Unfortunately, conversion is also an area that needs to be explored further

but is not mentioned.

This book is best suited for those working with Asian international students, whether in contexts abroad or in the United States. It covers a wide range of issues and will prompt the reader to think about how to best disciple these students.