

# Towards the Charting of Asian Theologies

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## ***Introductory Remarks***

To take seriously the many bodies of Asian theology is firstly, to recognize how very extensive the literature is and how rich are the theological traditions that have long been in our region. For although Asian Theologies have emerged as fields of study only in recent decades, they have themselves a full and ancient history. They exist in almost every known oral and written form and date from many different periods – some as early as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century – across the region between Persia, Japan and Austral-Asia.

### THE HISTORY

Although twentieth century theological reflection in Asian countries may be our particular concern, this can only be understood in the context of many centuries of Christian presence – within a dozen countries by the eighth century and in almost all the sixteenth century. From this long presence, extensive Christian writings and memorial remain from the early medieval to the contemporary periods – from Nisibis and Samarkand, Dunhuang and Xian, Trichur and Madras, Mongolia, Peking and Amoy, Anuradhapura and Pagan, as well as all the centers of nineteenth and twentieth century Christian activity.<sup>1</sup>

### THE FORMS

The very diverse forms of Christian theology also, which are multiplying in our countries today, must be seen in continuity with the diversity we can now study in pre-modern writings. The medieval collections of hymns, poetry, treatises, homilies, chronicles, scholia (commentaries), letters, liturgies, parables, biographies, inscriptions, stone carvings, crosses, seals, and frescoes,<sup>2</sup> prefigure much of the wealth of theological forms blossoming today in the region. But to them we can now add the many other contemporary forms of people-stories, manifestos,

meditations, essays, declarations of conscience, testimonies, songs, dialogues, protest liturgies, and Christian arts.

#### COLLECTIONS

In more systematic form we have, since the mid-nineteenth century, the collected works in many volumes, of Asian Christian theologians: including Keshub Chunder Sen and A.J. Apassamy in India, Uchiimura Kanzō and Kuwada Hidenobu in Japan, Yang Ju Sam and Kim Jae Jun in Korea, Wu Lei Chuen and Chao Tzu-chen in China, D. T. Niles and Lynn de Silva in Sri Lanka, Horatio de la Costa and Leonardo Mercado in the Philippines—not to mention the extensive collections by contemporary authors such as M. M. Thomas, J. L. Ch. Abineno, Vitaliano Gorospe, Ahn Byung Mu, Tissa Balasuriya, C. S. Song, and many more.

More than a dozen regional collections or surveys are now available (by G. H. Anderson, C. G. Arevalo, T. Balasuriya, D. Elwood, J. C. England, V. Fabella, V. Hinton, A. C. Honig, P. Niles, Oh Jae Shik, T. K. Thomas)

Bibliographical details of these collections, of the national studies and principal authors mentioned below, are given in the bibliography and basic writings published by the Programme for Theology and Cultures in Asia (PTCA).<sup>3</sup>

#### NATIONAL SURVEYS AND STUDIES

These have been published in all but a few countries in recent years. Among the most useful are those by Robin Boyd and Michael Amalados (with Gispert-Sauch and T. K. John) – India; Nicholas Abeyasinghe and Aloysius Pieris – Sri Lanka; Andreas Yewangoe and Eka Darmaputera – Indonesia; Batumalai Satayandy – Malaysia; Rodrigo Tano and Jose de Mesa – Philippines; Lam Wing Hung and Philip Wickeri – China; Charles Germany and Kumano Yoshitaka – Japan; Harold Hong (with Won Yong Ji and Kim Chung Choon) and Kim Yong Bok – Korea.

#### JOURNALS AND BIBLIOGRAPHIES

In almost every country of the region a range of theological journals is published (in 5 countries, more than 20 each) of which the most recent additions are listed in PTCA Bulletin 1/1 (1988). Major bibliographical projects have been undertaken in at least six countries, varying in size from a booklet (Payap College, Chiangmai; Center for Society and

Religion, Colombo) to 4 large volumes (the United Theological College, Bangalore). This is currently one of the most urgent tasks for many of us, so that the range and wealth of theological writings might be discovered and made known.

In at least eight countries, a major project has been begun for the rewriting of church histories in context.

The following chart covers some of the chief categories discernible in Asian theologies, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries only. It is offered as one guide to understanding the range and concerns of theological reflection in the region, within the last 180 years. It has been possible to include only a selection of representative examples in order to present something of the range and intentions of Asian theologies. National studies given above should be consulted for fuller details.

### *A Charting of Asian Theology*

#### A. PRE-NINETEENTH CENTURY ASIAN THEOLOGICAL WRITINGS

The extensive medieval collections referred to above have yet to be studied as an integral part of Asian theology, although recent bibliographical work provides a solid basis for this.

In the early modern period (sixteenth to eighteenth centuries), in addition to a wide range of individual works which are now known, a number of more prolific writers have emerged from recent studies, some of their theological works being also reprinted. Among those writers of whom a series of volumes have survived are Yang Ting Yun (1557–1627), Hsu Kuang-chi (1562–1633), Roberto de Nobili (1577–1656), Jacome Gonsalvez (1676–1742), Philippe de Rosario Binh (fi. 1740), and Chong Yak Jong (1760–1801).<sup>4</sup>

#### B. WESTERN FORMS ARE PRIMARY IN THE FOLLOWING:

##### 1. *“Prefabricated / colonial”*

A universal validity is assumed for western formulations, which are imposed as prefabricated models, upon Asian situations. This remains a colonial pattern, content with reprintings or translations of supposedly normative texts. Whatever the intention, the recent translation of Luther’s works into Korean, or the earlier translations of Barth into Japanese and of “Christian Classics” into Chinese, fall into this category.

## 2. *“Asia Studies the West”*

Often strictly academic in form, these writings analyze or interpret the thought of western philosophies and theologians. Only sometimes are these made the starting-point for comparative studies. Examples here would be the studies of Barth and Brunner by Kumano Yoshitaka, of Whitehead by Duraisinghe and Nobuhara, of Hendrik Kraemer by Peter Latuihamallo, of Wolfhart Pannenberg by Suh Nam Dong, of Wittgenstein by Mary John Mananzan, and of Bonnhoeffer/Marx by Poulouse Mar Poulouse.

## 3. *“Asian Garments for Theology”*

The content in this category is still fundamentally Western, but there is the attempt to express this in local terminology, using “Asian illustrations and color.” Pedro Sevilla in the Philippines, Paul Sudhakar in India, Takakura Tokutarō in Japan, Tien Liang and Yang Ku Cheng in China, and Harun Hadiwijono in Indonesia have all produced works of this kind.

### C. ASIA REJECTS THE WEST

A significant, though not systematic, rejection of doctrines, institutions, tradition, and socio-political relations. This may focus primarily on the trappings of institutional Christianity, as with Keshub Chunder Sen (d. 1884), Uchimura Kanzō (1861–1930), and Hsu Po Ch'en (d. 1940's); on questions of doctrine, as with Pandipeddi Chenchiah and Ebina Danjō (1856–1979); or on socio-political choices, as with Gregorio Aglipay (d. 1949), 5. Kuruvilla George (1900–1960), Wu Yao Tsung (1895–1980), and I.J. Kasimo (1890–1975?).

Contemporary examples are provided in the work of Yagi Seiichi, Edicio de Ia Torre, Tissa Balasuriya, Kim Yong Bok, Sebastian Kappen, Shen Yi-fan, C. S. Song, and others.

### D. THE ENCOUNTER WITH ASIAN TRADITIONS

#### 1. *Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*

Major aspects of a particular culture or religious tradition are studied sympathetically for parallels or contributions to Christian teaching. There are especially rich examples of this type in India (since the mid-nineteenth century. See for example Upadaya Brahmabandhab (1861–1907) and Aiyadurai Apassamy (1891–?); and in China those such as Francis C.M. Wei (1888–1975?) and Wang Chih-hsin (1888–?), along

with others since Takahashi Gorō (fi. 1881) in Japan and Lakdasa de Mel (1902–1976) in Ceylon.

*2. Accommodation/Acculturation: from mid-twentieth century*

Serious study of Asian tradition here leads to more systematic attempts at synthesis in theological construction. (These are sometimes open to criticism for lack of adequate criteria or methodology.) Prominent examples include Tien Liang's "The Establishment of Chinese Catholic Culture" (1959), P. David's "The Contemporary Debate on God" (1969), Yun Sung Bum's "The Korean Theology or Yellow Theology" (1972), and Leonardo Mercado's "Elements of Filipino Theology" (1975).

*3. Dialogue as mutual exploration*

The significant difference here is that the historical and religious experience of a particular people is both respected and received, and creative Christian response is made in pastoral dialogue with that experience and in mutual learning. Among those who have led in this field have been Paul Devanandan (1901–1962) and Stanley Samartha – India, Doi Masatoshi (1907–) – Japan, Lynn de Silva (d. 1982) and Aloysius Pieris – Sri Lanka, Ryu Tong Shik and Kim Sung Hae – Korea, and Fang Chih Rong and Yves Raguin – Taiwan.

## E. THE ASIAN CHURCH GATHERS ITS RESOURCES

*1. Ecumenical theology and strategy*

Note beginnings of the modern ecumenical movements, in the associations in India, China, and Japan since 1828, and of ecumenical theology in the early addresses of many like Kozaki Hiromichi (1856–1934?), Cheng Ching Yi (1881–1939), and V. Samuel Azariah (1874–1945). They would be followed by a stream of theologians and leaders who were concerned to express the meaning of local ecumenical mission, and selfhood, among them: T. S. G. Mulia (d. 1967), Kim Jae Joon (d. 1987), Lakdasa de Mel (1902–1976), C. H. Hwang (c. 1910–), David Moses (d. 1973); to vigorously promote regional fellowship and joint action for mission – Rajah B. Manickam (1897–?), Enrique Sobrepenna (d. 1972), D. T. Niles (1908–1970), U. Kyaw Than, and Takenaka Masao; to articulate Christian responsibility in the secular world – K. T. Paul (1876–1931), Johannes Liemena (d. 1973), Valentino Montes (d. 1973), Kang Won Yong; or to outline the essential marks of the world-wide church and mission – Liu T. Ting Fang (1891–1945?),

Paul Devanandan (1901–1962), D. T. Niles (1908–1970), M. M. Thomas (b. 1916), Kumazawa Yoshinobu (b. 1929), Catalino Arevalo.

2. *Studies of a particular people, culture, or Church (historical, anthropological, religious, sociological, etc.)*

These are found in the writings of, for example, Horatio de Ia Costa (d.1977) and F. Landa Jocano – Philippines; Harun Hadiwijono (d. 1985) and Peter Latuihamallo – Indonesia; Kiyoko Takeda Cho – Japan; Mm Kyung Bae – Korea; Kiang Wen Han – China, and in series such as that of the C. I. S. R. S. (Confessing the Faith in India ) and of the Kyōbunkan (Japanese Christian Writings). (Expatriate scholars have been especially active in this field, see e. g. the work of H. Kraemer and Frank Cooley – Indonesia; Charles Germany and James Phillips – Japan; Richard Deats and William H. Scott – Philippines; Francis Jones and M. Searle Bates – China; C. Osgood and S. J. Palmer – Korea; Stephen Neill and Francis Houtart – South Asia; D. Swearer and D. E. Smith – Southeast Asia.)

3. *Theological issues, regarded as having universal validity, but addressed from within the Asian Church*

The bulk of D. T. Niles's writing has this character, as does that of Chao Tzu-chen, J. L. Ch. Abineno, J. Chettimattam, Emerito Nacpil (until 1973), Noro Yoshio, and Suh Nam Dong (until 1975).

4. *Pastoral theology – questions of mission and ministry*

More immediate issues of ecclesiology and missiology are dealt with, often with strongly ecumenical, missionary or historical emphasis. Prominent examples here would be parts of Kim Jae Jun's work, that of Ichida Yochiro, Vitaliano Gorospe, T. B. Simatupang, D. S. Amalorpavadass, Celestine Fernando, along with extensive article series such as those in Tien Feng (1950s), Teaching All Nations (until the 70s), and many current journals. In terms of overall quantity, this category still accounts for the largest body of Asian Christian writing.

#### F. LIVING THEOLOGY

This is often an element within the work of many already mentioned and is of course enriched by work in many of the above categories. There are however significant differences both in approach and method in "living" or "local" theology.

1. *The leap from Israel to Asia*

Theology is reconstructed on the basis of a transposition of locus – the leap “from Israel to Asia” – using a wide range of historical and contemporary sources for Asian theologies. This is sometimes termed the discernment of “Yahweh’s controversy” with each people in its particular history and culture, within which the spirit of God has always been actively present. Among pioneers would have to be included K. Chunder Sen (India), Uemura Masahisa (Japan), Wu Yao Tsung (China), Kim Jae Joon (Korea), and D. T. Niles (Ceylon). Some of the strongest contributions to reconstruction have come from M. M. Thomas, J. Banawiratma, Arai Sasagu, Song Choan Seng, Carlos Abesamis, Aloysius Pieris, Samuel Rayan, and Suh Nam Dong (d. 1984). Note the annual (regional) Theological Seminar-Workshops “Doing Theology with Asian Resources.”

2. *The discernment of divine presence*

The concern of living theology is primarily missional or pastoral in motivation, as a response to the suffering and hope of women and men in particular life-situations, and a discernment of “what God is now doing in our midst.” Present dilemmas and jagged realities call forth declarations and stories, letters and meditations, prayers, affirmations and poetry in a Biblical diversity of form. There is a unity of life and reflection, faith and justice, social and personal transformation attempted. And it emerges from many diverse groupings: lay movements and study-centers, colleges and prisons, koinonia, team ministries, and basic communities.<sup>5</sup>

NOTES

1. See for example John Stewart, *Nestorian Missionary Enterprise* (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark: Madras, C. L. 5., 1928); A. C. Moule, *Christians in China before 1550* (London, SPCK, 1930); A. Atiya, *A History of Eastern Christianity* (London, Methuen, 1968); B. Colless, “The Traders of the Pearl: The Mercantile and Missionary Activities of Persian and Armenian Christians in South East Asia,” serialized in *Abr-Nahrain*, 9-18 (1969–1977); A. M. Mundadan, *History of Christianity In India*, vol. 1 (Bangalore, Church History Association of India, 1984).
2. For the medieval and early modern material, see W. A. Wright, *Short History of Syriac Literature* (London, A. & C. Black, 1894); P. Y. Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China* (Tokyo, Maruzen, 1951); J. Laures, *Kirishitan bunko* (Tokyo, Sophia University, 1957); Kaj Baago, *A Bibliography* (Library of Indian Christian Theology, Madras, C. L. 5., 196); Mar Aprem, *A Nestorian Bibliography* (Trichur, Mar Nasai Press, 1982); R. B. Mojares, *The Origins and Rise of the Filipino Novel* (Quezon City, University of the Philippines, 1983); J. Young, *Confucianism and Christianity* (Hong Kong University Press, 1983).

3. "A Select Reading List of Basic Sources," *PTCA Bulletin* 1/1 (1988):1 1–19, 1/2 (1988):11–19.
4. See for example the 1987–88 studies by N. Standaert and H. Diaz, annotated in the *PTCA Bulletin* 1/2 (1988):27–28; and Y. Perniola, *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: The Dutch Period*, Vol. 2, 1712–1746 (Dehiwala, Tisara Prakasakayo, 1983), pp. 352–56 et passim.
5. See J. C. England, *Living Theology in Asia* (London, SCM Press, 1981, and Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1982).