

A Study for an Integral and Holistic Theological Education in Asia

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1. Introduction: Globalization and Challenges to Theological Education

The word, globalization, seems to be the key word for the 21st century. The term refers to the increasing integration of economies around the world, particularly through trade and financial flows. It also refers to the movement of people (labor) and knowledge (technology) across international borders. The globalization process systematically interlocks people's lives, nourishing as well as destroying life on earth in unprecedented ways. It has enabled local communities not only to be aware of events and cultures on a larger scale, but also to be conscious of the implications of those events for distant places and societies. For example, they have become aware of consequences for them of environmental disasters many miles away. The inter-relationships within the global society are now seen as pre-eminently important and local cultures recognize the impact which global risks may potentially hold for them.

Particularly, in regards to theological education, globalization challenges our view on religions and theology and requires a significant response from all the theological schools. In a joint ATS-WCC discussion on theological education, it was said, "For those of us in the South, theological education needs to be transformed by indigenization. For those of you in the North, theological education needs to be transformed by globalization."¹ In response, Joseph C. Hough, the former president of Union Theological Seminary in New York City, points out three important features of globalization in theological education, particularly in the North.² First, globalization signifies "the contextualization of theological thinking." Theological thinking about what it means to be a Christian in the world can no longer be framed in any sort of normative universal terms. Second, globalization in theological education is the call for a change in Christian theological perspectives on other religions. In the past, Christians have understood other religions either as pagan to be overcome by conversion to the true religion of Christianity or as religions inferior that have some legitimacy in certain places and certain times but that are certainly not as advanced in their understanding of religiousness or faith as Christianity. Third, globalization in theological education is the overcoming of anthropocentrism in theological thinking. Anthropocentrism refers to the belief that human intelligence is capable of rearranging the world of nature and society so that human life will prosper over time. Theological anthropocentrism adds to this belief

¹ Joseph C. Hough, "Globalization in Theological Education," in *Teaching the Bible: The Discourses and Politics of Biblical Pedagogy*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004), 61.

² Joseph C. Hough, "Globalization in Theological Education," 61-65.

that all of nature has been arranged by God in order to benefit humanity. The features of globalization in theological education that Hough illustrated also apply to theological education in Asia. It is especially true when theological education in most Asian seminaries, if not all, is still locked into western academic debates and western resources.

Yet, pluralism in Asian culture and religions raises further critical questions about the adequacy of theological education in the area. In fact, theological schools in Asia have paid little or no attention to their own realities in formation of their own theological education. Choan-seng Song criticizes theological education in Asian seminaries, “The standard of theological education is judged by the standard prevailing in the West, especially in the long established seminaries with sufficient endowments. The form and content of theological education is very western in its orientation.”³ He suggests that theological education must be radically re-directed towards the need of training men [and women] who can lead, train, and live with lay Christians.⁴ Seminary students often express their struggle that the knowledge they have learned is lacking greater correlation between their studies and personal and communal experience.

Confronting the challenges of globalization to theological education in Asia, the present paper suggests developing an integral and holistic theological curriculum, which requires critical engagement in its own context. For this purpose, it begins with the current theological education that is held in a four-fold pattern and moves to (re)define the objectives of theological education in an Asian context. Then the study briefly reviews the attempts of critical engagement of theological education in Asia. Finally, it proposes an interactive and holistic theological curriculum for nourishing ecumenical leaders in Asia.

2. Theological Education in Asia

1) Fourfold pattern of theological education

Most theological educational curricula follow a “fourfold pattern,” which divides theological studies into four areas: biblical studies, theology, church history, and practical theology. The division, which itself is an inheritance of western approaches, is created by convictions about the structure of theological knowledge and the sources of theological authority, for instance the conviction that the Bible, explicated but critically unquestioned, is the sole and comprehensive source of norms for all other theological knowledge and for

³ Choan-seng Song, “Theological Education in Taiwan Today,” 14, in *Theological Education and Ministry: Reports from the North East Asia Theological Educators’ Conference* (Seoul, Korea November 28-December 2, 1966) Tainan, Taiwan: The Presbyterian Bookroom, 1967.

⁴ Choan-seng Song, “Theological Education in Taiwan Today,” 14.

religious action. The main problem of this division is that it prevents theological education from being in harmony with ministry and the life of people. In this pattern, the disciplines are so separate, self-contained, and autonomous, while the life of people is a whole and integral reality. It should be also noted that this kind of division is not evident in the teaching of other religions, where all areas are held together. Barbara G. Wheeler similarly offers a twofold criticism of the problems of this division: First, this structure of studies brings outmoded assumptions and norms to bear on our current educational practice. It forces us into the pattern of 'theory-to-practice procedure.' Second, it creates a problem for any proposed revision of theological education, because it has no currently convincing rationale or internal logic. At one time, it reflected with some precision the literatures and dimensions of theology fitting together. Now the division portrays not the order or unity of theology but its fragmentation.⁵

Theology is a living thing. A living theology must speak to the actual questions that people are asking in the midst of their hopes, aspirations, achievements, as well as of their doubts, despair and suffering. Theology, as 'expression, understanding and criticism of the life of faith,' is like that life itself in a critical situation.⁶ It is necessary to critically engage with various layers of life and faith traditions. Theological reflection involves integrated analysis of one's self, one's theology, and one's specific situation. Such a learning process engages with the practice of integration of personal experience with cognitive understandings of theological traditions and analysis of particular social and ecclesial contexts. New methodologies or inter-disciplinary and action-reflection pedagogies ought to crack down these walls between disciplines and become holistic in character. The integration of theological education can be accomplished through a contextual approach to subjects, overcoming the fragmentary approach to subjects following the fourfold pattern of theological education. "Contextual" education seeks to connect the cognitive and the normative via the practical. It requires an interdisciplinary approach to subjects and a team-teaching pedagogy.⁷

2) The Objectives of Theological Education in an Asian Context

⁵ Barbara G. Wheeler, "Introduction," in Barbara G. Wheeler and Edward Farley eds. *Shifting Boundaries: Contextual Approaches to the Structure of Theological Education* (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1991), 11-12.

⁶ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry: Reflections on the Aims of Theological Education* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 3.

⁷ There are some difficulties in building integrative or inter-disciplinary team teaching pedagogies in seminary settings. To point out some of the difficulties: (1) there is already an overloaded timetable and it is challenging to add more to it, (2) the capability of educators who themselves had been trained in the fourfold pattern and have an isolated knowledge of their own areas, (3) difficulty in preparation and performance of team teaching, and more.

Clarification of the objectives of theological education is important, because the goal defines the direction of its path. Theological schools in Asia tend to limit their objectives narrowly in their evangelical concerns. Typical descriptions of theological education are in such phrases as these: “Training Christian leaders who are committed to Jesus Christ and able to share his gospel in all its relevance through the Church and all agencies of God’s kingdom”; “the preparation of men for the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments.” These objectives do not reflect the fact that Asia is a non-Christian world in which great religious traditions are abundant and that very few of the general public may be familiar with Christianity. Furthermore, as already pointed out, a feature of globalization is that theological thinking about what it means to be a Christian in the world can no longer be framed in any sort of normative universal terms.⁸ The purpose of theological education in Asia, especially during the era of globalization, should not be limited within denominational interest nor be strictly church-oriented. Despite the denominational foreground, theological education needs to expand to raise ecumenical leaders who may serve not only church but also society through the teachings of Jesus.

Early in the 1980s, the WCC emphasized ecumenical learning, which connotes three definitions. First, ecumenical learning enables people, while remaining rooted in one tradition of the church, to become open and responsive to the richness and perspectives of other churches, so that they become more active in seeing unity, openness and collaboration between churches. Second, ecumenical learning enables people, rooted in their own faith traditions and complex experiences of culture, gender, nationality, to become open and responsive to the richness of perspectives in the struggle of others, together to know God and to be faithful to God’s intention for them in their world. Third, ecumenical leaning enables people to engage with personally relevant issues in the light of the scriptures, the traditions of their faith, worship, and global realities.⁹ The goal of theological education for ecumenical leaders in Asia, therefore, should not be limited to raising vocational church ministers but extended to nurturing Christian leaders who are open to other religions for dialogue, critically engaged in issues of church and society, and committed to working for changes in church and society. Such theological education begins with the religiously and culturally pluralistic contexts of Asia in which we find ourselves, and should pay particular attention to the voices of women, minorities and the marginalized. Such theological education leads a person to a holistic and harmonious experience of integration in which knowing and doing are united. In sum, the objective of theological education in Asia is to nourish ecumenical leaders who are open to

⁸ Joseph C. Hough, “Globalization in Theological Education,” 62.

⁹ Simon Oxley, “Ecumenical Perspectives in Religious Education: Looking Back, Looking Forward,” in *Religious Education in Asia: Challenges, Perspectives, and Visions for the 21st Century*, CCA Asia Religious Education Forum, 2001, 16-18.

critical thinking of life, committed to working for change in church and society through spiritual transformation, and engage in mutual life among people of different faith traditions.

3. Critical Engagements of Theological Education in Asia: A Brief Review¹⁰

Efforts to engage theological education with the holistic aspects of life in Asia have been made in various forms of international workshops, individual and institutional experimental attempts, as well as by establishing cooperative organizations. First of all, there were international and regional workshops on contextualizing theological education and curricula. As early as 1956, a consultation on theological education was held in Bangkok. As a fruit of this consultation, the Association of Theological Schools in South East Asia (ATSSEA) was proposed.¹¹ In this Bangkok conference (February 21 - March 5, 1956), 21 theological schools were represented and the meeting decided to (1) create a Higher Theological Education in Asia, (2) establish an Association of Theological Schools and Colleges in South East Asia, and (3) publish a Journal of Theology for South East Asia. In the following year, the first South East Asian theological study institute was held in Singapore according to the Bangkok decision.¹² 10 years after the first consultation of ATSSEA, the North East Asia Theological Education Consultation was held in Seoul, Korea.¹³ The conference was formatted in four groups: “Knowing your Own Situation,” “Re-thinking Essential Tasks,” “Seeking Excellence in Theological Education,” and “Planning for Joint Action in Theological Education.” The group papers were presented at plenary sessions: Group I: Ministry and Ministries. Group II: Aim and Purpose of Theological Education. Group III: Patterns and Curricula of Theological Education. Group IV: Plans for Joint Action in Theological Education. These were two groundbreaking conferences that accelerated critical engagements of theological education in Asia, by Asians. Since then, among many conferences on theological education in Asia, three recent conferences called my attention: A conference to evaluate the curricula of theology in an Asian context, held in Bangkok, 2004, in revising course syllabi or changing the teaching methods, for example, provides lots of insights.¹⁴ A

¹⁰ The review is brief and selective in the purpose of introducing the direction of critical engagement of theological education in an Asian context.

¹¹ In 1980 ATSSEA changed its name to the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA).

¹² Yeow Choo Lak, “Challenges and Opportunities facing Theological Education in Asia in the 1990s,” in Lak, Yeow Choo, ed., *ATESEA Occasional Papers No. 7. Challenges and Opportunities in Theological Education in Asia*, 1988, 6-7.

¹³ The actual meetings of the Consultation took place at Christian Academy House in Seoul, Korea, during Nov 28th – Dec 2nd, 1966 and the reports from the Consultation on Theological Education and Ministry were published the following year.

¹⁴ Programs in institutions or schools that reflect contextual curricula are abundantly introduced in the proceedings of the symposium in Bangkok, 2004, organized by the German Institute of Missiology, in

workshop on Critical Engagement in the Asian Context,¹⁵ was held at the Chung Chi College of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, 7-10 July 2005, discussing the teaching of the four core subjects—biblical studies, theology, church history, and religion—and the construction of curricula for theological education and Christian studies. And a panel on “Curriculum and Pedagogical Challenges to Teaching the Bible in Asia in a Global Context” in July 14-16, Seoul Korea,¹⁶ was held in the first gathering of the Society of Asian Biblical Studies.

There were also attempts to wrestle with Asian realities and their relevance for theological education in both individual and institutional levels. An example comes from Hanshin Theological Seminary, Seoul, Korea. The faculty of the school had revised school curricula in 2007 to be more interdisciplinary and theory-action related. In a course, entitled “Ministry and Cultural Contents,” for example, three faculty members each from areas of biblical studies, theology, and practical theology facilitated the discussions and put insights from their own areas. In the course, after watching a movie together, the class brought out current social and theological issues reflected in the movie and connected the issues with theological discourses. The basic idea of this class was to delve into current issues of life but not from the context of texts such as dogma, theological doctrines or the Bible. The starting point is not the doctrine but the faith experience of the believer, or the social issues such as violence, capital punishment, war, peace, and forgiveness.

Also, the Graduate School of Practical Theology, Icheon, Korea, shows a good example of breaking the fourfold pattern of theological education through applying the method of team teaching. In a biblical course, for example, professors from each Testament and a professor of practical theology join the team. All three attend the classes throughout the semester. Each in turn takes a role of resource person through lectures and facilitates the discussion; other faculty members participate in the discussion when they are not leading. The cost is high but is worth it.

partnership with the United Board. It includes valuable resources for discussions of theological education in Asia and needs to be seriously considered by those who are interested in contextualization of theological education in Asia. David Kwang-sun Suh et. al eds. *Charting the Future of Theology and Theological Education in Asian Contexts* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2004).

¹⁵ The outcome of the workshop has been published in a book edited by D. Preman Niles, *Critical Engagement in the Asian Context: Implications for Theological Education and Christian Studies* (Hong Kong: Asian Christian Higher Education Institute United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia, 2005). Challenged and encouraged by the workshop, I have been involved in a research project on theological curricula in Korea with my two colleagues. The workshop and the project were sponsored by the Asian Christian Higher Education Institute of the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia.

¹⁶ Participants and subjects are: *You Bin* (China, *Central University of Nationalities in China*) "Teaching the Bible and Religious Studies in a Multi-cultural Chinese Context"; *Jione Havea* (Australia, *United Theological College*) "The gifts that Oral Cultures offer for Teaching the Bible in Asia and Beyond"; *Daniel Rathnakar Sadananda* (India, *Karnataka Theological College*) "Teaching Bible in South Asia: Imagination, wonder and empathy in a culturally-relevant, contextual pedagogy"; *Kim Huat Tan* (Singapore, *Trinity Theological College*) "Crossing the Language Frontier"; *Yeong Mee Lee* (Korea, *Hanshin University*) "Beyond Fourfold Pattern of Theological Education in the Context of Korean Seminaries."

A course, named “project method,” at Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia,¹⁷ illustrates another good example. The course is designed to reflect the Indonesian church situation in the light of faith and proposes a pastoral agenda for such a situation. The course approaches the subjects in four stages: experience, faith-concern, theological synthesis, and pastoral planning. The four stages are again divided into twelve steps. In the first stage, students collect data of the experience, formulate the experience, consult other disciplines, and focus attention. In the second stage, students look at the moral and religious aspect of the experience and derive a faith-act (hypothesis). In third stage, students examine doctrinal tradition, practical tradition and other tradition and make a thesis, that is a theological synthesis. At the final stage, students apply it to pastoral care or worship or liturgy. This course focuses on helping students think critically and theologically.

The Board of Theological Education, Senate of Serampore, India¹⁸ spearheaded by Tamilnadu Theological Seminary, conducted a series of studies, under the sponsorship of the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) for four years. It had the programs in communication education both at the undergraduate (B.D./M.Div) level and at the graduate (M.Th) level, which had been reported in a handbook for communication education curriculum.¹⁹ After years of annual workshops and practice teaching, they have worked out seven modules for further experimentation. They are:

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| Module 1 | Introduction to Communication |
| Module 2 | Mass Media and Issues in Communication |
| Module 3 | Preaching as Communication |
| Module 4 | Indian Christian Spirituality - Communication Perspective |
| Module 5 | Interfaith Communication |
| Module 6 | Narrative Theology |
| Module 7 | Christian Communication for Community Action |

It is designed to be interdisciplinary, including fields of Media Technology, Culture, Telecommunication, Anthropology, Sociology, Linguistics, History, etc.

Finally, integrative theological education in Asia includes cooperative works of Asian seminaries to train

¹⁷ Matheus Purwatma, “Contextual Theology and Theological: Indonesia,” in David Kwang-sun Suh et al. eds. *Charting the Future of Theology and Theological Education in Asian Contexts*, 39-47.

¹⁸ The description of the curricula is cited from Albert D. Manuel, “Communication in Theological Education,” in Yeow Choo Lak ed., *Theology and Communication, ATESEA Occasional Papers No. 9* (Singapore: Viva Lithographers, 1990), 6-8.

¹⁹ Albert D. Manuel, “Communication in Theological Education,” in Lak, Yeow Choo, ed., *ATESEA Occasional Papers No. 9. Equipping the Saints in the 1990s. I: Theology and Communication*, 1989, 6-8..

Asian Christian leaders within Asia. The names such as FTE, ATESEA, IFACHE and NEAATS²⁰ represent some important cooperative bodies of theological education in Asia. Among many, ATESEA is most active and runs degree programs (SEAGST²¹).

The ATESEA was founded in August 1957 and now, under the name of ATESEA, has a present membership of 54 institutions. They set their goals as: (1) To promote creative relationships among institutions and agencies engaged in theological education and the churches in the region, (2) To facilitate regional efforts in theological education in the service of the churches in South East Asia, (3) To set guidelines and standards of theological education and to provide accreditation services to member institutions and to others requesting it, and (4) To work for the improvement and renewal of theological education in the region in such ways as it may deem appropriate.

In 1966, a constitution was drawn up which stated that SEAGST was founded by ATSSEA to operate on behalf of, and in cooperation with the accredited member schools. It offers a program of Advanced Theological Studies at the Masters level and grants the degree of Master of Theology, South East Asia (M.Theol., SEA). The purpose of the SEAGST is stated in the constitution, revised in 1972 as follows:

- (1) To assist in the intellectual and spiritual development of Asian theologians so that their Christian ministry will be enriched and be more effective.
- (2) To contribute to the emergence of an indigenous Asia-oriented theology by providing the facilities and opportunities for research into, and reflection upon, the Christian faith as it relates to the non-Christian religions, cultures and traditions of Asia.
- (3) To further the training of competent teachers for the theological faculties of the region.
- (4) To promote opportunities for the interchange of graduate students and faculty members between the different participating institutions with a view to enhancing both a regional consciousness and Christian fellowship across the barriers of race, culture, and nations.

In pedagogy, it is reflective and contextual. For example, the Doctor of Pastoral Studies (D.P.S.) program is based on the principle of “action-reflection.” Students carry on their studies in continuous reference to their pastoral experience and try to reflect theologically on issues and problems arising therefrom. The presence and theological education of ATESEA is important as it attempts to practice theological education with Asian

²⁰ F.T.E.- Foundation for Theological Education in South-East Asia; A.T.S.S.E.A. – the Association of Theological Schools in South East Asia; I.F.A.C.H.E.-International Forum of Associations of Christian Higher Education; N.E.A.A.T.S. – the North East Asian Association of Theological Schools.

²¹ SEAGST -South East Asia Graduate School of Theology

resources. C.S. Song emphasizes the strength of ATESEA as bringing scattered theological efforts to build a theology that is true to the gospel on the one hand and authentically Asian on the other, being supportive of one another in the construction of a theological community capable of speaking from within the cultural, religious, historical and social political realities of Asia.²² In its handbook, the purpose of SEAGST is stated as offering its degree programs as opportunities for graduate studies within South East Asia without them having to go to Europe or America.²³

As briefly reviewed, individual and cooperative actions of integrative theological education in Asia have already taken place long before. ATESEA has Master and Doctoral degrees in a joint faculty and institutions among seminaries. Asian seminaries need further to develop their programs in cooperation with institutions of international research and study. Especially, to raise international and ecumenical leaders, theological schools may join together to offer a one year educational program. For example, a joint faculty offers a short term degree program for ecumenical and multi-religious reflections on theology for students from various countries of Asia who have already finished their basic theological training.

Self-supported theological education in Asia is crucial since financial dependency and dependency in the power of knowledge leads to dependency in thinking as well. Intellectual exchange needs to be mutual and inter-respectful. The intellectual exchange between the West and Asia although based on mutual respect unfortunately subordinates Asian to Western. Asians themselves do not respect Asian scholarship as much as it deserves to receive. Asians must be equipped with self-respect for Asian scholars who are able to teach and guide advanced biblical studies in Asia. Asian schools may work together to accelerate the efficiency of utilizing financial and personal resources in teaching to raise ecumenical leaders who will serve Asian communities.

4. Development of an Integral and Holistic Theological Curriculum in Asia

Based on the discussions above, this section suggests an integral curriculum for a three-year theological education program (MA, BD or M.Div) in a seminary setting, with an optional extra year of cross-cultural leadership training. Although the overall frame of curricula remains in the shadow of the fourfold pattern of theological education, the approach of the courses and teaching method would overcome the limit of fourfold pattern of theological education by approaching subjects, crossing boundaries between the text and the context,

²² C. S. Song, "Let Us Do Theology with Asian Resources," in *ATESEA Occasional Papers No.2. Management and Accountability in Theological Education*. Ed. By Yeow Cho Lak, 1986., 85.

²³ SEAGST Handbook, 1984, 35, quoted in Yeow Cho Lak, ed. *ATESEA Occasional Papers No.2. Management and Accountability in Theological Education*, 1986, 94.

among disciplines, as well as between traditions and religions. The rationale of the model curriculum is to move from context to response and analysis, and finally into practice. The curriculum is designed in process of going on from experience to experience through communication with scripture and Christian traditions.

1) First year of study: the stage of reflection and acquaintance of knowledge

The first year of study consists of foundational and introductory courses in all areas, alongside this contextual and integral course on theological method in general. Along with introduction classes in each area, a pre-method class that I would call a pro-seminar on the methodology of theological study of life is required of all students.²⁴ It begins by dealing with subjects in their context, not from the text or doctrine. The main agenda for the first year of study is to bring out one's own experience and inform it in a constructive and critical way. Four stages can be distinguished: experience, faith-concern, theological synthesis and pastoral planning. In the first year, a contextual and reflective course brings students and faculty together around a range of resources, both biblical and contemporary, including the variety of experiences brought by the learners to develop a common foundation for ongoing theological education and for thinking creatively and responsibly about church and ministry in today's world. In Asia, the main ingredients of the context include the rich living religious traditions, the struggles of the poor for human dignity, and the cultural otherness of peoples which demands a theological formation.

In the first year, students focus on learning the world, history, and literature of the Bible and the method to expose the meaning from the text. In the introduction to the Bible classes, the approach is often purely historical-critical. Introduction means finding out what the text meant in its original context as scholarship can best reconstruct it. The concerns and interests of students are not reflected in the lectures. A reflective and interactive approach will not start with scholarly debate but with questions related to the given subjects and then look at the historical and literary debate on the texts. For example, the composition of the Bible is read not as a source for historical development, in light of which they are interpreted but as literary compositions arising out

²⁴ A course, called "Pilgrimage in Faithfulness" at McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago, USA is insightful for this matter. The course is designed as participatory and cooperative seminars with the leadership of faculty members. The course meets once a week for plenary sessions, small group discussion, a common meal and worship. After eating together, the students break into small groups and discuss about subjects given, like baptism, Eucharist, ministry etc. Small discussion begins with Bible readings that are related to the subject, and proceeds to lead and design worship. It states that the course has goals: 1) to enable students to become collaborative sharers and learners, developing skills in self-assessment, 2) to inquire together about the nature of theological education at the school, 3) to grasp a sense of the range of the church's ministry in the world, 4) to find an initial point of integration around call, baptism, communion, and spiritual development. In considering the Asian context, this preliminary course is devoted to help students to raise fundamental and pertinent questions, or sharpen the questions they already have, about the meaning of life through a critical engagement with Asian realities as experienced by Asian people.

of and addressed to communities struggling to find meaning and coherent moral behavior in light of the crisis of meaning caused by their religious experience.²⁵ The Bible is the source that shows how ancient Israelites confessed God and interpreted the acts of God in history. Here, the Bible is seen not as the only source of divine revelation, but as a reference with canonical authority. Teaching the Bible in a non-biblical world requires placing the Bible as the Christian canon within the context of a non-Christian and non-biblical world. Otherwise, Asians lose their historical and cultural value in their past history. The life of their ancestors would be totally ignored.

Acquaintance with the content of biblical texts is first needed when introducing the biblical ideas and faith to an Asian society which is not based on Christianity and thus unfamiliar with the text. The problem is, however, the Bible is often taught, drawing the meaning from the text itself but through the lenses of the church traditions and doctrines. An interactive teaching of the Bible, by removing teachings of biblical texts biased by doctrines and western church traditions, leads students directly to wrestle with the text itself to explore its meaning in response to questions that they come up with. The reflective questions driven from the life of people in Asia help them to interact with the stories and teachings of the Bible in reality.

2) Second year of study: the stage of analysis and construction

The second year of study consists of integrative courses that formulate theological/biblical subjects in dialogue with tradition and texts. It is to develop the initial response to the context and the foundational knowledge of each discipline in a constructive and critical way, in communication with Christian tradition and theology. Biblical studies, for example, may focus on interpretation of individual books of the Bible, based on biblical knowledge gained from foundational courses. Various contextual exegetical readings of individual books of the Bible are involved. The focus is not the biblical content but its theology and people's interaction with the divine and the society, through which students share their own life experience and social experience in relation to subjects. In this way, students meet social and cultural contexts that shape theological thinking in the past and influence theological learning in the present.

For a critical and holistic understanding of the Bible, the application of Asian biblical methods is important. The Bible does not reveal any meaning unless a reader asks questions or seeks meaning from the Bible. The reader will meet biblical characters and their life in the Bible, asking similar theological questions. So the

²⁵ Luke Timothy Johnson, "Exegesis as an Ecclesial Practice," in Theodore Brelsford and P. Alice Rogers, eds., *Contextualizing Theological Education* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2008), 154.

important step in interpreting the Bible is to know the foregrounding of one's own complex voice and position, in other words, the context of a reader. It includes not only the social and cultural dimension, but also the personal and spiritual dimension. Interpreters of the Bible, Segovia writes, are "fully foregrounding themselves as flesh-and-blood readers variously situated and engaged in their respective social locations."²⁶ The process of full foregrounding of oneself is not an easy task, especially if one really explores the interaction between a complex personal journey and the cultural dynamics of conditioning. The first task is to be aware of her or his own social location. Biblical studies, therefore, need to begin from articulating the social location of Asia, which can be identified as a non-biblical, multi-religious, post-colonial world. These characteristics of Asian context require approaching the Bible through inter-textual interpretation of the Bible, a hermeneutics of otherness and engagement, and perspectives of liberation, along with historical and critical reading of the Bible.

3) Third year of study: the stage of interdisciplinary and spiritual & practical application

The third year of study is devoted to collective, practical, and interdisciplinary courses, which emphasize a constructive approach to subjects. The fulfillment of preliminary course work in four of the disciplines of theological education is assumed at this final year of study. The courses in the final year need to be interdisciplinary and more general and practical, on a team teaching basis. This course teaches the "how-to" for effective argumentation and examines, criticizes and models selected methodologies from the biblical, theological, historical, and practical fields.

One of the particularities of an Asian context is its multi religious character. Reading scriptures of different traditions and texts in one's own culture is recommended in the final year of study. Suh Nam Dong, a Korean minjung theologian, suggests the emerging of two stories, biblical stories and folklores.²⁷ Archie Lee proposes a cross-textual reading in biblical studies.²⁸ R.S. Sugirtharajah urges the inclusion of a contrapuntal reading, in which students will have been effectively introduced to texts, critical tools and hermeneutical issues.²⁹ It sees connections and creates bonds between texts as engaging equal partners in the hermeneutical task. It avoids the

²⁶ F. F. Segovia, "And They Began to Speak in Other Tongues: Competing Modes of Discourse in Contemporary Modes of Biblical Criticism," in *Reading from This Place. Volume 1, Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 31.

²⁷ Suh Name-dong, "Historical References for a Theology of Minjung," in *Minjung Theology: People as the Subject of History*, ed. CCA (London: Zed Press; Maryknoll: Orbis; Singapore: CCA, 1981), 155-182.

²⁸ Archie Lee, "Biblical Interpretation in Asian Perspective," *Asian Journal of Theology* 7(1993), 35-39.

²⁹ R.S. Sugirtharajah, "Postcolonial Criticism and Asian Biblical Studies," in *Critical Engagement in the Asian Context: Implications for Theological Education and Christian Studies*, ed. D. Preman Niles, 73-84.

rhetoric of blame and the denunciation of other texts.³⁰ This contrapuntal reading has to be applied within and across disciplines.

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4) A joint post-masters program for international ecumenical leaders

For advanced studies, most still think that one must go to Europe or the United States. It is even true in the field of biblical studies. The rationale behind this belief is that biblical studies must be grounded in traditional historical study of the Bible, which had been anchored by western scholarship, especially in Germany. The long history of biblical scholarship in the West should not be ignored nor undervalued. Historical critical study of the Bible made biblical studies to be an independent discipline and contributed to a deeper and analytical understanding of the Bible. However, historical critical study of the Bible is a way to approach the Bible in the context of European history, in the wake of modernity since the renaissance movement. Contextual critical study of the Bible in Asia needs to be shared among Asian scholars and needs to be reflected in the theological curriculum in raising ecumenical leaders. Asian theological schools have personal resources to educate students. A joint degree may enrich our self-supporting theological education in Asia. This extra year is intended to exchange cultures and resources among Asian schools and so that we can learn from each other.

5. Conclusion

Globalization, systematically interlocking people's lives, challenges our view on religion and our approach to theological education in Asia. Globalization fundamentally requires the contextualization of theological thinking and practice and also a change in Christian theological perspectives on other religions. Globalization changes the notion about what it means to be a Christian in the world and that this can no longer be framed in any sort of normative universal terms. Other religions are no longer understood either as pagan to be overcome by conversion to the true religion of Christianity or as religions inferior that have some legitimacy in certain places and certain times. Confronting the challenges of globalization to theological education, this study suggests developing theological curricula to be contextual, which means to be integral with the life of the people and reflective of social realities. An integral and holistic theological education first needs to break the fourfold pattern in its structure of curriculum and teaching. The disciplines are so separate, self-contained, and autonomous. This pattern prevents theological education from being in harmony with the ministry and life of people, of which the reality is whole and integral. Such a learning process engages with the practice of

³⁰ R.S. Sugirtharajah, "Postcolonial Criticism and Asian Biblical Studies," 77.

integration of personal experience with cognitive understandings of theological traditions and analysis of particular social and ecclesial contexts.

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In a non-biblical world like Asia, the goal of theological education should not be narrowly limited to raising vocational church ministers, but to nourishing ecumenical leaders who may serve church and society with the teachings of the Bible. These ecumenical leaders, while remaining rooted in the Christian tradition, can become open and responsive to the richness and perspectives of other Asian traditions, both religious and national heritages, so that they become more active in seeing unity and openness in society. The leaders also are sensitive to the voices of minorities in terms of gender, culture, and nationality. The objective of theological education in Asia is to nourish ecumenical leaders who are open to critical thinking of life, committed to working for change in church and society through spiritual transformation, and engaged in mutual life among people of different faith traditions.

A brief review of the critical engagement of theological education in Asia that illustrated the attempts of developing contextual theological education in Asia through international conferences, workshops, and by individual and institutional experiments, shows the seriousness of Asian scholars and teachers for developing contextual theological education in Asia. Especially, cooperative efforts of theological education, such as ATESEA and SEAGST, show the strength that brings scattered theological efforts to build a theology as well as to be supportive of one another in the construction of a theological community capable of speaking from within the cultural, religious, historical and social political realities of Asia. Through this cooperative theological education, Asian theological schools would become the center of theological education for Asians, instead of them going abroad for advanced studies. The intellectual exchange between the West and Asia, although based on mutual respect, unfortunately subordinates Asia to the West.

Finally, this study concretely proposes a theological curriculum in three years seminary setting, with an extra year of cross-cultural leadership training. Although the overall frame of curricula remains in the shadow of fourfold pattern of theological education, the approach of the courses and teaching method would overcome the limit of the fourfold pattern of theological education by approaching subjects, crossing boundaries between the text and the context, among disciplines, as well as between traditions and religions. The rationale of the model curriculum is to move from context to response and analysis, and finally into practice. The curriculum is based on the process of going on from experience to experience through communication with scripture and Christian traditions. The first year is the stage of reflection and acquaintance of knowledge, in which students acquaint theological knowledge not from the doctrines or ancient texts but by reflecting on questions from life and

seeking its response in the texts. The second year is the stage of analysis and construction. The third year is the stage of interdisciplinary and spiritual and practical application. And for developing ecumenical leadership, schools exchange students for learning from each others' cultural and religious heritages.

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Key words:

Theological education, theological curriculum, contextual theology, biblical teaching

Abstract:

Confronting challenges of globalization to theological education, which calls for contextualization of theological education, this study proposes developing a contextual theological curriculum, which is integral with the life of people and reflective of social realities. For an integral and holistic approach, theological schools need to revise their theological curriculum which is basically built upon the fourfold division of theological areas. In this pattern, the disciplines are so separate, self-contained, and autonomous. A brief introduction of debates among Asian scholars and their attempts for contextual and integral theological education shows the seriousness of Asian scholars and teachers for developing contextual theological education in Asia. Especially, cooperative efforts of theological education, such as ATESEA and SEAGST, show the strength that brings scattered theological efforts to build a theology as well as to be supportive of one another in the construction of a theological community capable of speaking from within the cultural, religious, historical and social political realities of Asia. Finally, this study concretely proposes a theological curriculum in three years seminary setting, with an extra year of cross-cultural leadership training. The curriculum is designed as a process of going on from experience to experience through communication with scripture and Christian traditions: starting from the stage of reflection and acquaintance of knowledge, the stage of analysis and construction, and the stage of interdisciplinary and spiritual & practical application. And an extra year of ecumenical study would be ideal for raising international Asian leaders, who respect other religious and cultural heritages and deeply held concerns of Asian realities.

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