

A History of Evangelical Theological Education in Asia (ATA): 1970–1990

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Working for the Asia Theological Association (ATA) for the first 20 years since its establishment was unexpected since I had planned to be a professor. Nevertheless, God had His plan for me and my family. It all started when my wife Alma and I, with our three-year old twin boys, went to Singapore in March 1970 as missionaries under the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF) to teach at Discipleship Training Centre (DTC), a graduate seminary started by OMF in 1968. I had just graduated from Concordia Lutheran Seminary in St. Louis in June 1969 with a Doctor of Theology (Th.D.) degree in Historical Theology after spending 13 years in four different colleges and seminaries in the United States (including Columbia Bible College, Wheaton College, Covenant Theological Seminary). We subsequently served in Asia for 30 years under OMF, and are deeply grateful to OMF leaders for seconding me to ATA. OMF supported us financially during my work for ATA.

Visiting some 200 Bible colleges and theological schools throughout Asia for 20 years opened my eyes to see the importance of evangelism by the Asian Church to the vast non-Christian population in Asia. I discovered the uniqueness of each country with its own historical background and the various stages of development in theological education. After the many years of western colonialism in most Asian nations (with the exceptions of Japan and Thailand), each Asian nation has built its own national leadership in political, socio-economic, educational, and religious spheres. The Asian Church was also involved in training the national leadership by establishing many theological insti-

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tutions throughout Asia. God chose the right time to establish the ATA to strengthen evangelical theological education in Asia.

The purpose of putting on paper the first 20 years of ATA's history is to show how God has been using the ATA to start and promote a number of ministries in theological education in Asia such as evangelical theology, accreditation, Center for Advanced Theological Studies (CATS), theological consultations, Theological Education by Extension (TEE), Christian Education, Asia Theological News, Asian Perspectives, Theological Directories, theological textbook production, Asia Graduate School of Theology (AGST), and video and filmstrip production.

The ATA's office has had three locations: Singapore (1970–1974), Taipei, Republic of China (1975–1979), Taichung, ROC (1980–1990). My work with the ATA in Singapore was part-time, due to my teaching position at DTC and Singapore Bible College (SBC). However, from 1975, I was brought on to the ATA full-time and also had a part-time teaching ministry. We are thankful to God for providing a group of fine national Christians and long-term and short-term western missionaries on our staff. I am also deeply grateful to ATA leaders for their prayers and cooperation, particularly to the executive committee members, accreditation and AGST leaders, TEE and Christian Education leaders, and many others who gave their support to ATA.

I. History of TAP-ASIA (ATA)

A. Theological Education Fund's (WCC)

Third Mandate Period (1970–77): Contextualization

It is important to understand the theological trends in the 1960s and 1970s during which the cooperative evangelical theological education movement began. The Theological Education Fund (TEF), which was the theological arm of the World Council of Churches (WCC), advocated the "Third Mandate Period (1970–1977)," which emphasized the theology of "Contextualization." TEF appropriated \$3,300,000 during this period to provide full scholarships to the theological faculty of the mainline denominational seminaries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, so they could earn their doctoral degrees in theology and Christian Education. TEF also provided funds to mainline seminary libraries to purchase modern ecumenical and liberal books for theological students.¹

The central issue was contextualization as TEF described:

1. Shoki Coe, *Ministry in Context: The Third Mandate Programme of the Theological Education Fund (1970–1977)* (Bromley: New Life Press, 1972), 17-18.

It may be stated that contextualization should be the focal concern because through it alone will come reform and renewal. Contextualization of the Gospel is a missiological necessity. But there are dangers, one of which in the Third World is that such contextualization might not take place in response to the really urgent issues of its own context, in its own time, and in its own place, but in those times and places which are out of date and out of place in the Third World, and so irrelevant.²

When the ATA movement started in 1970, the mainline ecumenical theological schools in different countries of Asia were already well developed and organized with their well-trained faculty and had 30,000–40,000 theological books in their catalogued libraries. The ecumenical theological association such as the Association of Theological Schools in South East Asia (ATSSEA), North East Asia Association of Theological Schools (NEAATS), and Board of Theological Education (BTE) in India were functioning effectively with their respective theological journals, theological consultations, and offering of post-graduate level of theological degrees. In comparison with the ecumenical seminaries in Asia in 1970s, most evangelical Bible colleges and seminaries were in their infant stage of development.

B. First TAP-ASIA Consultation in Singapore, 1970

The beginning of the Asia-wide evangelical theological education movement goes back to the Asia Pacific Congress of Evangelism which was held in Singapore in November, 1968 with 5,000 participants. During the Congress, approximately 50 evangelical church leaders and theologians met to discuss how to promote evangelical theological education and to formulate evangelical theology in Asia. They decided to meet again in Singapore in July 1970 in conjunction with the Association of Theological Schools in South East Asia (ATSSEA) Consultation. Some of the *First TAP-ASIA (ATA after 1974) Consultation* participants first attended the ATESEA Consultation at Trinity Theological College in Singapore with the theme, "Judgment and Hope," and came to the TAP-ASIA Consultation on July 5–7, 1970.³

Two key Indian evangelical theologians from Union Biblical Seminary in Yeotmal, India, organized the first TAP-ASIA Consultation. Dr. Saphir Athyal, Vice Principal of UBS and Dr. Bruce Nicholls, a veteran missionary theologian from New Zealand teaching at UBS and the Director of Theological Assistance Program (TAP) International of the World Evangelical Fellowship. They played a dominant role at this consultation. There were 51 delegates from different countries of Asia as

2. Coe, *Ministry in Context*, 30.

3. Bong Rin Ro, "ATA Picture History," 1979, 1.

well as Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and Europe. Their main concerns for discussion were: 1) closer evangelical cooperation in theological education, 2) more advanced residential theological education in Asia, 3) better training of Asian faculty members, 4) Theological Education by Extension (TEE), and 5) production of indigenous theological textbooks. Five commissions were set up to do more research and to report their suggestions at the *Second TAP-ASIA Consultation* in Singapore, on June 8–12, 1971.⁴

The delegates finally decided to establish the Theological Assistance Program in Asia (TAP-ASIA), which is associated with TAP International, the theological arm of World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF). Dr. Bruce Nicholls was the director of TAP International. Therefore, the foundation of TAP-ASIA was laid by Drs. Saphir Athyal and Bruce Nicholls of Union Biblical Seminary in India.

I came to Singapore in March 1970 to participate in the orientation program for the new OMF missionaries and to prepare for my teaching ministry at DTC. I attended the First TAP-ASIA Consultation to meet some Asian theologians, and met several renowned Asian and western theologians for the first time and began to understand issues in theological education in Asia. At the end of the consultation, they decided to set up the TAP-ASIA office in Singapore, the crossroads of Asia.

An Asian theologian residing in Singapore was needed to manage and promote the TAP-ASIA office. They asked whether I would be interested in working for TAP-ASIA on a part-time basis with a secretary. I had come to Singapore to teach at DTC and I needed to get permission from OMF. Our OMF leaders granted me permission to teach at DTC and work spend part-time for TAP-ASIA.

At that time, I was not aware of what the next 20 years of my life for the ministry of ATA would entail. While I was teaching at DTC and Singapore Bible College, I set up an office for TAP-ASIA in my DTC office in the fall of 1970 and hired a part-time Singaporean secretary for TAP-ASIA.

C. TAP-ASIA's Office in Singapore (1970–1974)

Since the First TAP-ASIA Consultation had pinpointed five areas of concerns about the theological education in Asia, I had to have clear objectives for TAP-ASIA in order to achieve these goals.

- 1) To learn more about the problems of theological education in Asia. At DTC we had over 23 graduate students from 12 Asian countries and I had many opportunities to learn about Asia through my stu-

4. Ro, "ATA Picture History," 2-3.

dents. I also traveled to different Asian countries to gain first hand knowledge of Asian theological education.

- 2) To create relevant projects to assist theological schools in Asia. My simple formula was “No Project—No Money; No Project—No Need for TAP-ASIA.” I tried to find suitable projects for evangelical theological seminaries in Asia. TAP-ASIA projects at this time were the establishment of Center for Theological Studies (CATS) in Seoul, Korea, the promotion of TEE, evangelical accreditation, theological consultations, and theological textbook production.
- 3) To bring close cooperation among evangelical seminaries in Asia. I saw the need to produce theological newsletters/papers, directories, brochures, and other written materials in order to inform theological seminaries about the various activities of the Asian Church, particularly evangelical theological education.
- 4) To finance various TAP-ASIA projects. I had to raise money mainly from the United States and Europe since I saw the limits of raising funds within Asia. Since OMF provided our living expenses and TAP-ASIA did not have to pay my salary, I had to raise money for the projects, salary of the office staff, and my traveling expenses.

II. Development of ATA in Three Different Periods

A. Foundation Period (1970–1990):

Dr. Bong Rin Ro, Executive Secretary

I knew that I had to lay down the foundation of various areas of the ATA ministry. For the first four years of TAP-ASIA ministry in Singapore, I visited theological schools in West and East Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Korea, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. Many theological leaders hoped that the ATA would be able to help in three main areas: 1) upgrading their standard, especially faculty training program, 2) assisting their TEE program by setting up Program Instruction Material (PIM) workshops to produce more TEE textbooks, 3) sharing information about evangelical theological education in different countries of Asia. The 2nd ATA Consultation in Singapore in June 1971 focused on post graduate programs in Asia to train more Asian evangelical theologians. The ATA also helped to set up PIM workshops in eight different countries.⁵

My full-time effort to develop the ATA began in the summer of 1975 when ATA's office moved to Taiwan. We had four or five full-time staff members including one or two western missionaries at dif-

5. Ro, “ATA Picture History,” 3.

ferent times. We began to publish the quarterly Asia Theological News (ATN-24 pages) and distributed it along with other ATA brochures to hundreds of theological schools throughout Asia. ATN continued for 14 years and provided information on the development of theological education, Asian theology, ATA theological consultations, accreditation, church growth, TEE, Christian Education, and Asia Graduate School of Theology. Many evangelical theological institutions had shown their deep interest in ATA's ministry, particularly activities in four areas: accreditation, Asia Graduate School of Theology, TEE, and Christian Education along with ATN which carried information on these four areas of ministry.

B. Consolidation Period (1990–2000):

Dr. Ken Gnanakan (of India), General Secretary

After 20 years of ATA's ministry, I stepped down from the ATA to accept the position of director of the International Director of World Evangelical Fellowship Theological Commission (WEFTC). Dr. Ken Gnanakan of India, who had served on the ATA executive committee and had been active in ATA ministry for many years, succeeded me at the ATA in September, 1990 and moved its office to Bangalore, India. He expanded the ministry of ATA and regionalized the organization of ATA into North East Asia, South East Asia, and South Asia regions for the accreditation and AGST programs.

During my time in the ATA, I took a number of positions within the ATA such as executive secretary, accreditation secretary, AGST Asia dean, and editor of ATN and Asian Perspectives (monographs). ATA's ministry had grown to such an extent that we needed to divide the work into different areas. Therefore, the ATA appointed two Indian theologians: Dr. Narandra John as the Accreditation Secretary and Dr. Brian Wintle as the Dean of AGST.

C. Mature Period (2000–Present):

(2000–2007) Rev. Derek Tan (Singapore), General Secretary

After Dr. Gnanakan retired from the ATA in 2000, Rev. Tan of Singapore took the responsibility of carrying out the ministry of the ATA on a part-time basis and also served as the President of CTA College in Singapore. However, Rev. Tan passed away because of cancer in 2007 and ATA had to look for another person to be the general secretary.

(2007–Present): Dr. Joseph Shao (Philippines), General Secretary

Dr. Shao is the son of a very well-known Chinese pastor in Manila and has served as president of the Biblical Seminary of the Philippines

(BSOP), which is mainly for the Filipino Chinese congregations. I met him in the 1980s as a young Old Testament scholar in the Philippines, and he has been deeply involved in the work of ATA for many years. He was elected to be the next general secretary of ATA at the General Assembly in Manila in July 2007 and moved its office to his seminary in Manila and has been trying to revive the work of ATA.

III. ATA Theological Consultations

The ATA has conducted 16 theological consultations during my time with them (1970–1990). These consultations provided opportunities for many Asian theologians to discuss issues in theological education and Asian contextual theology. These consultations also produced top quality theological papers that were later used in theological textbooks.

A. Theological Consultations

- 1st TAP-ASIA (ATA) Consultation: July 5–7, 1970 in Singapore – Discussed five main areas of evangelical theological education in Asia
- 2nd TAP-ASIA (ATA) Consultation: June 8–12, 1971 in Singapore – Decided to establish a joint post-graduate level theological seminary in Asia, known as the Center for Advanced Theological Studies (CATS) in Seoul, Korea
- 3rd ATA Consultation: December 27, 1973–January 4, 1974 in Hong Kong – Themes: Development of TEE, Biblical Concept of Salvation, and Establishment of ATA Accreditation
- 4th ATA Consultation: October 10–14, 1976 in Hong Kong – Themes: Christian Suffering and Persecution and Finalization of ATA Accreditation
- 5th ATA Consultation: November 10–15, 1978 in Singapore – Theme: Gospel and Culture
- 6th ATA Consultation: August 23–31, 1982 in Seoul, Korea – Theme: Bible and Theology in Asian Contexts
- Third World Theologians Consultation: August 18–22, 1982 in Seoul, Korea – Theme: Contextualization and Theology⁶
- ATA Consultation on Christian Response to Ancestor Practices: December 26–31, 1983 in Taipei, Taiwan
- 7th ATA Consultation: January 21–26, 1985 in Manila, Philippines –

6. *Asia Theological News (ATN)*, VIII:4 (1982).

Theme: God the Creator and Redeemer⁷

8th ATA Consultation: October 28–November 1, 1987 in Singapore –
Theme: Theological Education for Urban Ministry in Asia

9th ATA Consultation: September 1–4, 1990 in Seoul, Korea – Theme:
Salvation in Asian Contexts

B. Pan Asia TEE Consultations

1st TEE Consultation: December 27, 1973–January 4, 1974 in Hong
Kong

2nd TEE Consultation: January 27–31, 1985 in Quezon City, Philip-
pines

Accreditation Manual for Extension Education (TEE) Meeting: June
1986 in Singapore⁸

C. Pan-Asia Christian Education Seminars

1st C.E. Seminar: November 10–15, 1978 in Singapore – Theme:
Asian Church: Called to Teach

2nd C.E. Seminar: October 28–November 1, 1987 in Singapore –
Theme: Asian Church: Called to Ministry

3rd C.E. Seminar: September 1–4, 1990 in Seoul, Korea – Theme:
Christian Education and Current Trends in Asia⁹

IV. Center for Advance Theological Studies (CATS) to ACTS in Seoul

At the Second ATA Consultation in Singapore, June 8–12, 1971, the 35 delegates and observers heard the reports and recommendations of five study commissions of the First ATA Consultation. The dominant theme at this consultation was to work together, to avoid fragmentation and duplication in evangelical theological education in Asia. They decided to set up two post graduate level seminaries in Seoul, Korea and India, and later establish more graduate seminaries in other countries of Asia. Six ATA representatives went to Seoul in April 1972 to discuss with Korean theologians how to establish CATS. They were Drs. Saphir Athyal (India), Bruce Nicholls (India), John Pao (Hong Kong), Gadiel Isidro (Philippines), Lawrence Cha (Singapore), and Bong Rin Ro (Sin-

7. ATN, X:1 (1984).

8. ATN, VII:4 (1981), 22; and XI:3 (1985).

9. ATN, V:1 (1979), 12-14; and XIV:2 (1988), 2, 8-9

gapore). These six men met with eight key Korean theological leaders in Seoul. The Korean leaders were Drs. John Eui Whan Kim, Chul Ha Han, Byung Se Oh, John Chong Nam Cho, Yun Chan Kim, Young Bae Cha, Samuel Moffett (Presbyterian), and E. Kilbourne (OMS). The ATA representatives and Korean leaders agreed to let the international board oversee the work of CATS under the leadership of Dr. John Eui Whan Kim as president. There was an official inauguration service of CATS in a local church with the presence of the Minister of Education in South Korea and hundreds of other Korean church leaders.¹⁰

Dr. Kim was a Korean member of the ATA's executive committee and a professor of Church History at Chong Shin Presbyterian Seminary (Hap Tong). At this time, some very conservative church leaders in the Hap Tong denomination accused the ATA of being a neo-conservative theological organization because the ATA had accepted evangelical seminaries in Asia which belonged to the WCC ecumenical theological association such as ATSSSEA and BTE (India). They also accepted the evangelical ATA Faith Statement. Dr. Kim was accused of being a neo-evangelical theologian for his association with ATA and CATS, and his own Hap Tong Presbyterian denomination officially asked him to terminate his association with the ATA and CATS. Consequently, Dr. Kim resigned from the presidency of CATS, and CATS's leadership became vacant for two years.¹¹

Dr. Chul Ha Han, dean of the Graduate School at the Presbyterian Seminary (Tong Hap) in Seoul, was interested in assuming CATS's leadership and started the Asian Center for Theological Studies and Missions (ACTS) in 1974. Dr. Han established the Korean board of ACTS replacing the CATS international board. Thus, ACTS independently developed its own program apart from the original CATS and has become one an important theological seminary in Korea. ACTS still continues to train Korean, Asian and African church leaders up to the present time.

V. ATA Accreditation Program

A. Ecumenical Accrediting Associations: *ATSSSEA and BTE (India)*

Until 1977 there were only two accrediting associations for main-line denominational seminaries in Asia, the Association of Theological

10. Ro, "ATA Picture History," 4.

11. Kyu-Oh Chung, *A History of the Korean Presbyterian Church*, vol. 2 (Korean language) (Seoul: Korean Evangelical Literature Society, 1983), 75-87.

Schools in South East Asia (ATSSEA) and Board of Theological Education (BTE) in India. In the 1970s, ATSSEA had granted accreditation to approximately 30 seminaries in South East Asia, and the Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College, which was the sole accrediting body for theological schools in India, had given accreditation to some 25 theological seminaries. The North East Asia Association of Theological Schools (NEAATS) in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan was not an accrediting body like ATSSEA and BTE. The 1994 Report of the ecumenical theological education indicated that ATSSEA had 67 member schools whereas BTE had 32 members. NEAATS had 50 members (19 in Japan, 28 in Korea, 3 in Taiwan).¹² These three ecumenical theological associations are related to their respective National Council of Churches (NCC) and to the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and WCC.

B. Beginning of ATA Accreditation

On the one hand, many evangelical Bible colleges and seminaries in Asia that did not want to associate with the ecumenical accrediting associations for fear of being influenced by liberal theology wanted to have evangelical accrediting recognition in Asia. Yet, some evangelical theologians, on the other hand, opposed the formation of ATA accreditation and ridiculed even the thought of starting an evangelical accrediting system. These opponents suggested that our evangelical schools should join the existing accrediting associations of ATSSEA and BTE. I remember one incident in Bangalore, India in August 1973. When I mentioned the need of ATA accreditation in Asia to an Indian theologian, his reply was, "What is the ATA? I can give accreditation to the ATA." Of course, ATA was not well known throughout Asia at that time.

However, the ATA executive committee decided to discuss the question of evangelical accreditation at the Third ATA Consultation in Hong Kong from December 27, 1973 to January 4, 1974. 78 delegates from 15 Asian countries came to the consultation to discuss three different areas: 1) TEE ministry in Asia, 2) the biblical concept of salvation, 3) the establishment of an evangelical accreditation system. Consequently, ATA published the first book, *Voice of the Church in Asia* in 1975.¹³

There was an extensive debate among the delegates about accreditation in two main areas. First, are we in Asia simply following the western pattern of an accreditation system which focuses mainly on academic excellence? Second, do we need a separate evangelical accreditation system or should we join the existing ecumenical accreditation

12. A list from "Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College," *Asia Journal of Theology* 3 (1994): 418-428.

13. Ro, "ATA Picture History," 5.

associations of ATSSEA and BTE? For the first question, the delegates started to list the necessary courses in theological education in Asian contexts and decided not to simply accept the western curriculum without critical evaluation. For the second question, some delegates opposed the establishment of ATA accreditation and recommended joining the ATSSEA or BTE. On the other hand, many other theologians preferred to have an evangelical accreditation system because most of the 915 theological institutions were theologically conservative. Therefore, the delegates finally voted to find out where the majority of delegates stood on this issue. The majority of the delegates voted to have a separate ATA accreditation program. Consequently, the delegates elected the Accreditation Commission members and a working committee in Singapore to produce the Accreditation Manual under the direction of the executive secretary.

The Accreditation Working Committee in Singapore, which consisted of Drs. Ernest Poulson of Singapore Bible College, Sidney Schmidt of Baptist Theological Seminary and myself, met a number of times in order to produce the tentative Accreditation Manual and the Self-Evaluation Questionnaire. Ten Accreditation Commission members met in Hong Kong from April 28 to May 1, 1977 and finalized both the Manual and the Questionnaire.¹⁴

ATA's office in Taipei, Taiwan immediately published the Accreditation Manual and the Self Evaluation Questionnaire and notified over 900 theological schools in Asia about ATA accreditation through Asia Theological News (quarterly) and brochures. Responses for more information on ATA accreditation began to come in asking for the Accreditation Manual and Questionnaire. I was assigned to become the Accreditation Secretary.

C. Visitation Evaluation Teams' (VET) Visits to Theological Schools

From the beginning of ATA's accreditation program in 1977, within a year some 60 theological schools had expressed interest. The first VET visits took place in July 1978 in three countries: Singapore Bible College (B.Th.), Asian Center for Theological Studies in Seoul (M.A., M.Div., Th.M.), China Graduate School of Theology in Hong Kong (M.C.S., M.Div., Th.M.), and Concordia Lutheran Seminary in Hong Kong (B.Th.).¹⁵

The number of schools accredited by the ATA gradually increased each year: 10 schools (1982), 15 schools (1983), 24 schools (1986), 30

14. ATN, III:1 (1977), 6.

15. ATN, IV:3 (1978), 18-19.

schools (1987), 37 schools (1988), 46 schools (1989).¹⁶ The accreditation secretary organized a VET, which consisted of four or five theologians including two from other countries and the other two from other seminaries within the country. VET usually spent two full days for evaluation, and at the end of the second day the VET members produced a written document of their evaluation of the institution with specific recommendations for improvement. The document was read to all faculty members present. Then, VET sent the evaluation document to the Accreditation Commission members (ATA executive committee members) with a recommendation for or against receiving ATA accreditation. If the majority of the Accreditation Commission members voted for their approval, the seminary passed. The accreditation secretary notified the school of ATA approval of accreditation. Unfortunately, several schools could not get the ATA accreditation, and others received probational accreditation. ATA accreditation to a school lasted for 5 years after which the school had to be re-evaluated.

From 1978 to 1990, I organized 68 VET for first and second visits for accreditation evaluation, and 46 schools were accredited by ATA. The number of ATA accredited schools has sharply increased under the new accreditation secretary, Dr. Narandra John, and the ATA Manual for Accreditation (July 2004) lists the names of 116 accredited theological schools.¹⁷

D. The ATA Accredited Schools in Korea

Korea had more than 220 theological institutions with 60,000 theological students, and some 10,000 students graduated from different seminaries in 1983. The Ministry of Education in South Korea gave accreditation to only 22 seminaries; therefore, the vast majority of theological schools did not have any accreditation. Many of these smaller Bible colleges and seminaries wanted to improve their academic standards and to receive some kind of recognition from a reputable accrediting association. Although the Ministry of Education controlled the enrollment rate for each seminary, many seminaries received more students than the government allowed; therefore, these seminaries had to have some form of recognition for those students who could not get government accredited degrees. This was another reason why some seminaries in Korea were interested in ATA accreditation.¹⁸

16. ATN, VIII:3 (1982), 24; XII:1 (1986), 19; XIII:1 (1987), 24; and XIV:3 (1988), 24.

17. Narandra John, *ATA Manual for Accreditation* (Bangalore: ATA, 2004), 51-56.

18. ATN, IX:3 (1983), 16.

ATA granted accreditation to four Korean theological schools from 1978 to 1985.

- A. *Asian Center for Theological Studies and Missions (ACTS)* which ATA initiated through CATS in 1972, officially commenced in 1974. Although ACTS received government accreditation, it also received ATA accreditation in 1978 for the Master of Arts (M.A.), Master of Divinity (M.Div.) and Master of Theology (Th.M.) degrees and again in 1983 for the Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) degree. Dr. Chul Ha Han, president of ACTS, supported the ATA from the beginning and served in the ATA executive committee and promoted ATA to theological schools in Korea.¹⁹
- B. *Haptong Presbyterian Seminary* in Suwon received ATA accreditation in 1983 for the Bachelor of Theology (B.Th.) and M.Div. degrees. Dr. Myung Hyuk Kim, president of the seminary, supported ATA and was deeply involved in the ministry of the Korean Evangelical Fellowship and the Evangelical Fellowship of Asia (EFA), which is the Asian branch of World Evangelical Fellowship (now World Evangelical Alliance).²⁰
- C. *Korea Church of God Theological Seminary* associated with the Church of God denomination in Cleveland, Tennessee was evaluated by VET and received accreditation for the B.Th. degree. Dr. Young Chul Han, president of the seminary and the bishop of his denomination, attended the ATA consultations faithfully.²¹
- D. *The Full Gospel Theological Seminary*, located near Seoul, of the Korean Assembly of God denomination (not Rev. David Cho's Full Gospel Central Church in Seoul) was evaluated by VET in June, 1985 and received accreditation for the B.Th. degree. A few years later Rev. David Cho's Full Gospel denomination (Assemblies of God) took over the seminary and renamed it Han Se University.²²

ATA accreditation has been extended to seven other seminaries under the most recent accreditation secretary, Dr. Narandra John (1991–Present), while Korea Church of God Seminary and Full Gospel Theological Seminary dropped the ATA accreditation status. The 2007 ATA Manual for Accreditation lists nine seminaries in Korea:

- 1) ACTS (B.A., B.Th., M.A., M.Div., Th.M., D.Miss., Th.D., Ph.D.–2006)

19. ATN, VII:3 (1981), 3; and IX:3 (19830, 16-17).

20. ATN, IX:3 (1983), 16-17.

21. ATN, X:1 (1984), 13.

22. ATN, XII:1 (1986), 16.

- 2) Haptong Presbyterian Seminary (M.Div.–1998)
- 3) Chongshin University & Theological Seminary (B.A., M.A., M.Div., Th.M., D.G.M., Th.D.–2002)
- 4) Reformed Theological Seminary (B.Th., M.Div., M.Min., Th.M., D.Min.–2007)
- 5) Sungkyul Christian University
- 6) Taeshin Christian University (B.Th.–2004)
- 7) Christian Divinity School, Cheonan University (B.Th., M.Div.–2003)
- 8) Torch Trinity Graduate School of Theology (M.A., M.Div., Th.M.–2006)
- 9) Westminster Graduate School of Theology (B.Th., M.A., M.Div.–2004, Th.M.–2007)²³

All nine seminaries are also accredited by the Ministry of Education. All theological institutions in Korea, including the ones accredited by the Ministry of Education of South Korea, must realize the importance of ATA accreditation for their theological training for three basic reasons:

- 1) ATA accreditation provides an Asia-wide evangelical theological education network. Since the Korean Church is very large and can take the leadership in theological education in Asia, the Korean seminaries must take the lead in influencing theological education in Asia and not isolate themselves from other seminaries in Asia. ATA accreditation is a very positive way of encouraging Korean seminaries to be involved in the Asian evangelical theological education movement.
- 2) The ATA accreditation system is the largest one in Asia along with two other accreditation associations of ATSSSEA, BTE. Through ATA accreditation the degrees and credits of the ATA accredited schools can be recognized by other seminaries in Asia and the West.
- 3) The Korean Church has sent out some 18,000 Korean missionaries, many of whom are involved in theological education not only in Asia but in Africa and Latin America. The Korean missionaries who graduated from the ATA accredited seminaries can relate better to theological seminaries on the mission fields.

23. Narandra John, 54.

VI. Asia Graduate School of Theology (AGST)

A. *South East Asia Graduate School of Theology & BTE Serampore College (India)*

Sponsored by ATSSEA, South East Asia Graduate School of Theology started in 1966 and established the Doctorate of Theology in 1972 and the Doctorate of Pastoral Studies in 1981. SEAGST in 1984 had 96 Th.M. students, 9 D.Th. students and 14 Doctorates of Pastoral Studies.²⁴ Rev. Wang Hsien-chih of Tainan Theological Seminary in Taiwan received the first doctoral degree from SEAGST in 1978.²⁵

The United Theological College in Bangalore, India, which is known as the most liberal theological institution in India, received its accreditation from the BTE of the Senate of Serampore College in India for its Th.D. and D.Th. program. There was not a single evangelical theological seminary in India that was able to offer the theological doctoral degree accredited by Serampore College. This meant that SEAGST and Serampore College practically controlled the post graduate theological degrees in Asia. This created interest in the formation of Asia Graduate School of Theology.

B. *Formation of AGST*

Before the Asia Graduate School of Theology began in 1985, several evangelical seminaries in different Asian countries were already planning to offer their own post-graduate degree programs. Asia Baptist Graduate School of Theology in Baguio, Philippines offered the Th.M. and D.Min. degrees in 1979. Asia Theological Seminary in Manila advertised to recruit 15 students for its Th.M. program in New Testament and Systematic Theology and discussed a possibility of starting a joint Th.D. program in cooperation with ACTS in Seoul, China Graduate School of Theology in Hong Kong, and Union Biblical Seminary in India. The Association of Evangelical Theological Education in India (AETEI) offered a Th.M. in Missiology in July 1982. Since the Korean government gave accreditation to the Th.D. program which was jointly sponsored by four main denominational seminaries (Presbyterian, Hankook, Methodist, and Seoul), evangelical theologians were also planning to start an evangelical Ph.D. program at ACTS in 1981. Chinese evangelical theologians were planning to start a Th.M. program in Hong Kong. Union Biblical Seminary in Pune, India planned to offer a Th.D. in Old and New Testament in June 1988.²⁶

24. ATN X:3 (1984), 14.

25. ATN, IV:2 (1978), 23.

26. ATN, V:1 (1979), 22; VI:3 (1980), 19; VII:2 (1981), 21; VII:4 (1981),

One basic question connected with the post-graduate degree programs of these individual evangelical seminaries was whether or not they would be able to maintain the academic standards of SEAGST and Serampore College in India, which had an adequate faculty and theological research library. Instead of having so many individual post-graduate degree programs without meeting the academic standards, the ATA executive committee proposed that ATA start a joint cooperative AGST program in different countries offering four post-graduate degrees: Th.M., Th.D., Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) and D.Min. After much discussion in 1982 on the possibility of establishing the AGST, the executive secretary called a meeting of nine evangelical representatives from Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Philippines, Indonesia, and India at China Evangelical Seminary in Taipei, December 28, 1983. We decided to start AGST after the pattern of SEAGST of ATSSSEA. The executive secretary drew up the first draft of the AGST Catalog which included the academic standards and graduation requirements for the Th.M. and Th.D. degrees.²⁷ AGST was officially inaugurated as 19 delegates from 15 countries met at China Graduate School of Theology from June 21–22, 1984.²⁸ The executive secretary recommended to the executive committee the possibility of having AGST in four countries (Indonesia, Philippines, Japan, and Korea) and agreed to report to the committee the progress of AGST in these countries.

C. “Train Asians in Asia”

The ATA started to strongly emphasize the importance of training Asian theologians and church leaders in quantity and in quality within Asia. The Asian Church had depended on western seminaries and churches too long, and the time had come for us to be independent from the West in theological education; otherwise, we would not be able to grow ourselves. While there was rapid growth of the Asian Church, there was also a tremendous shortage of Christian workers. For example, a Lutheran denomination in North Sumatra, Indonesia (GKPI) with 117,000 members and 600 churches in 1982 had only 68 ordained pastors and 23 evangelists. Among 2,200 churches in Taiwan, over 500 churches did not have pastors.²⁹

5-6; and VIII:3 (1982), 20.

27. ATN, X:1 (1984), 14; and X: (1984), 18-19.

28. ATN, X:3 (1984), 12.

29. Bong Rin Ro, “Train Asians in Asia: A New Mission Strategy,” *Asian Perspectives* 35 (1987), 5.

We had to stop the “brain drain” of Asian Christian workers to the West by establishing enough graduate seminaries in each Asian country. Therefore, AGST had four objectives.

1. To supply evangelical faculty for 915 theological schools in quantity and in quality.
2. To curtail the “brain drain” to the West. It is a paradox that while thousands of Asian pastors were immigrating to America and Europe, thousands of western missionaries were coming to Asia to plant churches. The National Youth Commission in Taiwan showed that of 80,000 Taiwanese students who studied overseas from 1950 to 1983, more than 69,000 of them (86%) failed to return to Taiwan.
3. To provide more cost-effective training for Asians. Training a Filipino theologian in the Philippines in 1986 cost one-fifth of what it cost to train him in the West (36,000 U.S. Dollars or 26,000 British pound).
4. To encourage cultural adaptation of theological education. Asian students needed to study theological training within their cultural contexts of poverty, suffering, injustice, non-Christian religions, and communism.³⁰

D. AGST in Four Countries

1. AGST in the Philippines

Twenty representatives from nine Filipino theological seminaries and a representative of the Philippine Association of Christian Education (PACE) met in Quezon City, April 9, 1984 to hear the presentation of AGST from Dr. Ro. The result of this meeting was that five seminaries and PACE all located in Manila would participate in AGST; consequently, the academic deans of Alliance Biblical Seminary, Asia Theological Seminary, Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, Far East Advanced School of Theology, and Biblical Seminary of the Philippines as well as a representative from PACE met at Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary on April 23, 1984 and discussed the academic standards and graduation requirements for the Th.M. and Th.D. programs.³¹

For the AGST Christian Education program Dr. Betty Javalera, executive director of PACE, organized a meeting for Dr. Ro on April 10th with twenty Christian Education leaders. The Filipino CE leaders met

30. Ro, “Train Asians in Asia,” 9-11.

31. ATN, X:3 (1984), 8.

with Dr. Edith Woods, the ATA Christian Education coordinator, to set up the curriculum for the Ed.D. program in Manila. The whole AGST concept in the Philippines was to draw faculty and library resources of these five seminaries and PACE in order to provide the Th.M. and Ed.D. degree programs in the Philippines. If there were not enough CE professors in the Philippines, ATA would bring other CE professors from other parts of Asia and the West.

The first AGST commencement service was held at Union Church of Manila on July 9, 1989. Initially, the AGST in the Philippines started a Th.M. program in Biblical Studies at Asia Theological Seminary and an Ed.D. program at Alliance Biblical Seminary. Dr. Rodrigo Tano, president of Alliance Biblical Seminary, was appointed by ATA executive committee to become the Philippine AGST Dean working closely with Dr. Ro, Asia AGST Dean.

2. AGST in Indonesia

AGST in Indonesia was handled by the Indonesian Evangelical Theological Society (PASTI) in cooperation with ATA and offered a Th.M. in New Testament to seven students at Evangelical Theological Seminary in Indonesia (ETSI) in Yogyakarta from January 1986. Five seminaries participated in the AGST Indonesia: Evangelical Theological Seminary in Indonesia, Institute Alkitab Tiranus, Institute Injil Indonesia, South East Asia Bible Seminary, and Sekolah Tinggi Theologia Jaf-ray. Dr. Chris Marantika of Evangelical Theological Seminary in Indonesia became the Indonesia AGST Dean and Rev. Puranawan Tanibenas of Institut Alkitab Tiranus became the registrar.³²

The Asia-wide AGST's M.A. and Th.M. in Asian Religion (Islamic Studies) in Indonesia was very significant because of the rise of Islamic influences throughout Asia required Islamic study centers in different countries of Asia. Therefore, there was a dire need to establish at least one Christian training institute where Christian teachers could be trained about Islam. I visited Singapore, Malaysia, South Thailand, and Mindanao (Southern Philippines) to talk to church leaders and to find out whether the AGST in Islamic Studies could be set up in one of these countries, but every one of them declined for the fear of opposition and government retaliations.

I finally found a person in Indonesia, Dr. Chris Marantika, who was willing to set up the AGST Islamic Studies program at his seminary (ETSI) in Yogyakarta, if ATA would provide qualified Islamic scholars from Asia and other western nations and also the required books and

32. ATN, XI:1-2 (1985), 19; and XIII:4 (1987), 18.

resource materials on Islam for his seminary library. Therefore, I went to Pakistan in 1987 and spent \$500 to purchase many Islamic books and resource materials and mailed them to Indonesia. Most of the Islamic books in Asia were published in Pakistan. The AGST's M.A. and Th.M. in Islamic Studies program was inaugurated in June 1989 and lasted for two years. They trained over 10 students from different countries in Asia.³³

3. AGST in Japan

Five evangelical seminaries in Tokyo and Osaka/Kobe areas formed the AGST Japan Committee with Dr. Gyoji Nabetani, president of Kobe Lutheran Seminary, and a Japanese member of the ATA executive committee, to be the Japan AGST Dean. The participating seminaries were Tokyo Christian University, Tokyo Biblical Seminary, Kobe Lutheran Seminary, Osaka Christian College & Seminary, and Immanuel Bible College (observer). The Japanese AGST started in 1985 with two Th.M. students at Kobe Lutheran Seminary and had five more Th.M. students in 1987. AGST in Japan had 13 D.Min. students in Tokyo and Osaka/Kobe in 1987.³⁴

4. AGST in Korea

ACTS in Seoul and Haptong Presbyterian Seminary in Suwon were originally interested in starting the AGST Korea program with Dr. Chul Ha Han of ACTS as the Korea AGST Dean. Nevertheless, the AGST in Korea did not succeed due to the lack of cooperation among the evangelical seminaries in Korea. Dr. Han of ACTS alone was trying diligently to start AGST, but his school alone could not succeed. This lack of cooperation among seminaries for AGST was due to the fact that several mainline seminaries received government accreditation for their Th.M. and Th.D. degree programs. Eventually, ACTS also received government accreditation of their Ph.D. program and did not need AGST degrees.³⁵

5. AGST Today

Dr. Brian Wintle, Asia AGST Dean, continues to develop the AGST. Four Ed.D. programs have already been completed and the fifth Ed.D. program was started at Asia Theological Seminary in Manila in 2007. The Ed.D. in Christian Counseling also started at Alliance

33. ATN, XIV:4 (1988), 16.

34. ATN, XIII:3 (1987), 15; and XIII:4 (1987), 21.

35. ATN, XII:4 (1986), 15.

Graduate School in Quezon City, Manila in January 2008. The D.Min. in Biblical Peacemaking is offered at International Graduate School of Leadership (formerly ISOT) in Quezon City. AGST in Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand is offering a Th.M. and Ph.D. in Education and Theology from 2007.³⁶

VII. ATA Publications

“If you fail to produce communicating materials for your programs, your programs will not succeed.” The ATA has tried to produce theological magazines, monographs, directories, and theological textbooks for theological institutions in Asia. We are very fortunate to have several well-trained personnel in journalism on our ATA staff: Dr. Ruth Eshenaur (PhD in Journalism), Mr. Mark C. Albrecht, Mrs. Alma Ro and a few other short-term missionaries. We also had three or four Chinese co-workers to help in the production of ATA materials.

A. *Asia Theological News & Asian Perspectives*

Asia Theological News was published quarterly for 14 years (1975–1988) providing information on theological education in Asia. Asian Perspectives (Monographs) from No.1 to No. 35 were published to deal with specific issues in theological education, Asian theology, TEE, Christian Education, and church growth. Bound volumes of these are available today.

B. *ATA Directories with Statistics:*

- 1972 Directory of Theological Institutions in Asia and South Pacific
- 1978 Directory of Theological Schools in Asia (Revised)
- 1979 Directory of Theologians in Asia
- 1979 Directory of Christian Education in Asia
- 1988 Directory of Theological Schools in Asia (Revised)

C. *ATA Theological Textbooks*

- Bong Rin Ro. *The Voice of the Church in Asia*. 1975.
- Metosalem Castillo. *The Church in Thy House*. 1975.
- Bong Rin Ro & Marlin Nelson, eds. *Korean Church Growth Explosion*. Vol. 1. 1983.
- _____. *Korean Church Growth Explosion*. Vol. II. 1995.
- Bong Rin Ro & Ruth Eshenaur, eds. *The Bible and Theology in Asian Contexts*. 1984.

36. AGST Brochures, 2007–2008.

- Bong Rin Ro, ed. *Christian Alternatives in Ancestor Practices*. 1985.
Bong Rin Ro & Mark C. Albrecht, eds. *God in Asian Contexts*. 1988.
Bong Rin Ro, ed. *Urban Ministry in Asia*. 1988.
Tissa Weerasingha. *The Cross and Bo Tree*. 1989.
Ken Gnanakan, ed. *Salvation in Asian Contexts*. 1992.

Conclusion

God raised the ATA at the right time in Asia to strengthen evangelical theological education and to promote evangelical theology during a time when liberal theology and theological education were making their impact upon theological institutions in Asia. The vast majority of the 915 theological institutions (1988) were evangelical in theology and yet, they were not unified and were often controlled by western missionaries with their financial support.

The Korean Church has a strong spiritual vitality with 12 million Protestant believers and over 50,000 churches. It also has the strongest theological education in Asia in terms of number of theological students, well-trained theological faculty, and theological textbooks. Nevertheless, Korean seminaries have a tendency of isolating themselves from other countries, partly due to the language barrier. The Korean Church and theological schools must have a missionary vision to reach out to other churches and theological education in other countries. The future growth of the Korean Church and Korean theological education depends upon this missionary outreach to other nations of the world.