

## Theological Education of Diaspora Leaders in the Asian Region

Tereso C. Casiño

*Torch Trinity Graduate School of Theology, Korea*

Theological education of diaspora leaders is crucial to the effectiveness, growth, sustainability, and success of mission across the Asian region.<sup>1</sup> Reports claim that close to 200 million people move around the globe each year.<sup>2</sup> Asia is home to millions of itinerant and migrant peoples, and this situation poses great challenges to the missionary task.<sup>3</sup> Ministering to the diasporas across the Asian region is fraught with difficulties and challenges because they come from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. Meeting the needs of these people requires, on the part of leaders, a rigid, up-to-date, in-depth knowledge of the Bible, theology, and a myriad of intercultural studies, not to mention the technological, legal, and socio-economic aspects of the diaspora ministry.<sup>4</sup> In many parts of Asia, particularly where the host culture is hostile to Christian missionary work, there are leaders who serve among diaspora

1. "Theological education" is used comprehensively in this paper and includes the traditional study areas in biblical studies (OT/NT/hermeneutics), systematic theology, history, missiology, practical theology (e.g., preaching, theology and practice of ministry, counseling, etc.), ethics, apologetics (including philosophy in general and philosophy of religion), Christian education, among others. However, in this essay, theological education also covers study fields that relate to the whole essence of truth and reality, whether it is psychology, technology, or other relevant sciences.

2. For specific statistics, see <http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/about-migration/facts-and-figures/global-estimates-and-trends>.

3. The 2005 reports states that the migrant population in Asia stood at 55.3 million which amounted to 1.4% of the area's population. For further discussion, see n. 2.

4. The study of migration involves globalization with apparent implications for theology and missiology. See Gemma T. Cruz, "Between Identity and Security: Theological Implications of Migration in the Context of Globalization," *Theological Studies* 69 (2008): 357-375; William T. Cavanaugh, "Migrant, Tourist, Pilgrim, Monk: Mobility and Identity in a Global Age," *Theological Studies* 69 (2008): 340-356.

communities without adequate theological education.<sup>5</sup> The presence of diaspora communities and their potential for missionary work across the Asian region cannot be underestimated.<sup>6</sup>

This paper seeks to discuss some of the current major issues in theological education that concerns the leaders in diaspora settings across the Asian region, covering mostly the diaspora communities in Singapore, Hong Kong, Macau, Bahrain, Kuwait, Korea, Japan, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Taiwan.<sup>7</sup> It will first identify major stereotypes in training diaspora leaders and present observations on why diaspora leaders quit theological education. The rest of the essay will identify common attitudes toward theological training in diasporic contexts and types of theological training available to diaspora leaders across the region.

### Common Stereotypes in Training Diaspora Leaders

Stereotypes abound regarding theological training of leaders in the diaspora. These vary from the attitudinal to the theological, and then from the practical to the circumstantial. Each stereotype depends on the leader's personal convictions about equipping, not to mention the theological priorities of their sending churches or organizations.<sup>8</sup>

5. At a consultation on diaspora missions in Qatar on February 2007, it was reported that 98% of leaders serving the diaspora congregations and communities in the Gulf Region lacks formal theological training. Many simply become leaders because of the need without access to intentional theological education.

6. The burgeoning diasporas in the 1970s in Asia and their potential for missionary work has gone unnoticed by "The Seoul Declaration on Christian Mission," which was a product of a missions consultation held in Seoul, Korea from August 28 to September 1, 1975. See Asia Theological Association, *Asian Missions—Asian Methods!* Asian Perspective 12 (Taipei: Asia Theological Association, n.d.), 7-17.

7. Observation-participation and ethnographic research were used for this study. The nature of this study requires a narrative presentation in order to maintain the common thread that binds the realities of theological education in the diasporic setting.

8. An informant estimates that 98% of diaspora leaders in the Middle East have not gone through formal theological education. Most of them serve as pastors without theological training simply because they are the most educated professionals in their field (e.g., engineering, health science, etc.).

*“I’m a Professional so I Don’t Need Training”*

John<sup>9</sup> holds an engineering degree and went overseas to work for an oil company. Shortly after his arrival, he made friends with his fellow engineers, some of whom were Christians. Arthur, his friend, invited him to attend a Bible Study during weekends, and thereafter John made a commitment to follow Christ. Later, John begins to serve as the “pastor” of a fast growing multiethnic congregation.<sup>10</sup> After a year of ministry, John refuses to undergo theological education because, as a professional, he thinks it is unnecessary. He simply uses the Bible Study materials found on the Internet for preaching.

*“I Don’t Have a Degree so Training is Not for Me”*

Jane has been working as a nanny for several years. Having served as an usher at her local church back home, she became active in a fellowship of Christian nannies. Soon, the group decided to organize themselves as a worshipping community with Jane as “pastor.” While Jane reads the Bible and studies it in-depth, she rejects the idea of theological training because she does not have a university degree. The highest formal education she had in the past was Grade 10. Her feeling of inadequacy reduces significantly her desire for further training.

*“I Already Received Training so I Don’t Need More”*

Prior to her assignment as a missionary overseas, Elena received all sorts of short-term education in Bible, preaching, doctrines, and church leadership. Her church sent her overseas as a nurse and to serve as a leader of an existing congregation. Leading a professional group overseas with members from different countries, Elena soon discovered that diaspora people in a multicultural environment have varied problems and needs. But she refused additional theological education because she does not want to be overqualified and “overtrained.”

9. Names used in the narrative sections in this study are simple “representations” of real persons to protect anonymity although the circumstances described throughout this paper were based on real-life experiences.

10. Some diaspora churches tend to rush into appointing leaders as “pastors” even without receiving appropriate ministry training or theological education. I once attended a pastors’ meeting in Qatar and met a group of praise team leaders with six members who introduced themselves as pastors. When I asked about the size of their congregation, the leader confidently said they have between 20 and 25 members.

***“I’m Aware of My ‘Spiritual Gifts’  
so Theological Education is Unnecessary”***

Meet Barry who works in an electronics company and leads a small group in a diaspora church overseas. Barry has a servant’s heart and is sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. He attends the daily early dawn prayer meeting before going to work, and leads a ministry team on weekends. He is good at serving people and is much aware of his spiritual gifts. So, he thinks that theological education is not for him because his spiritual gifts are sufficient to carry out his tasks as a leader of a diaspora congregation.<sup>11</sup>

***“I’m Too Busy so I Don’t Have Time  
for Theological Education”***

Friends call him “Boy Scout Mel” because he is always willing to serve on the leadership team, but he refuses to undergo theological training due to his workload. Mel works part-time jobs after his 9-to-5 full-time work schedule. He leads the Bible Study even without preparation because he does not have the time to do it. He does his ministry in full dependence on what God would tell him each time he opens the pages of the Bible.<sup>12</sup>

***“I Don’t Like the Curriculum so I Quit Studying”***

You may have met Maggie who once registered in a special theological education program at her local diaspora church but quit because she did not like the courses being taught. She wanted to select only the subjects that suit her personality and those that fit her view of what diaspora ministry is and how it should be done. Maggie watches her favorite TV evangelist from the USA nightly because she thinks he is

11. The communication of the gospel in multi-faith environments requires knowledge of other religious systems. If, for instance, a diaspora leader serves in a Muslim country, then he or she has to receive training in apologetics that is appropriate to that particular context. This may require a study, for example, of the essence of dawah or even dreams in Islamic thought. See Al-Hadi Al-Hosein Shebili, “Dawah: A Contemporary Approach,” *Junad Al-Ula* 1429 36 (2008): 26-28; Randall Scott, “Evangelism and Dreams: Foundational Presuppositions to Interpret God-given Dreams of the Unreached,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 44 (2008): 176-184.

12. This is a good example of dissonance between “faith which believes” and the “faith which is believed” as noted by Alister McGrath in “Theological Education and Global Tertiary Education: Risks and Opportunities,” *Journal of Asian Evangelical Theology* 14 (2006): 26.

funny, and, besides, she always likes the things she hears on TV, that is, blessing, healing, and prosperity.

*“I Grew Up in the Local Church so I Already Know  
Much about Bible and Theology”*

As a pastor’s kid, Asher grew up in Sunday School and summer camps where he was exposed to the stories of the Bible and the doctrines of the church. When his diaspora church tried to enlist him in an advanced theological program, he refused it claiming he already knew enough about the Bible and theology. To him, theological education involves only the study of Bible and doctrines.<sup>13</sup>

**Why Do Diaspora Leaders Quit Training? –  
Preliminary Observations**

Some diaspora leaders think of theological education as something that could be done overnight and quit too soon because of the demands of the curriculum. As a matter of fact, theological education faces many challenges because of the “shifting paradigms” it faces across the Asian region.<sup>14</sup> Those who serve as tentmakers find it hard to integrate their regular employment with regular leadership ministry in diaspora situations. Then theological education goes to the back burner after a few tries. Some of the factors are noted below.

*Low Motivation*

A lack of personal motivation may rank first in the reasons for quitting theological education. Reasons for the lack of motivation vary. Some are personal while others are practical. The rest simply owes to the lack of opportunities or meager resources for training diaspora leaders.

13. In many cases, a diaspora missionary leader could spend 80% of his or her time providing counseling to people or running errands for church members and contacts. This is especially true to diaspora ministries in countries where human rights violations are high among workers or where the expatriates do not care so much about observing the local immigration laws and policies.

14. Vinay K. Samuel identifies these shifts in terms of “conditions of religious belief,” “the understanding of persons,” and “understanding of society.” See his article, “Shifting Paradigms in Theological Education—An Asian Perspective,” *Journal of Asian Evangelical Theology* 15 (2007): 8-11.

### ***Heavy Work Schedule***

Diaspora leaders always face the prospect of integrating regular employment with daily ministry tasks. This is especially true for bi-vocational ministers and tentmakers.<sup>15</sup> If their workload is heavy, then they get physically and mentally exhausted at work and eventually lose steam in undertaking any form of theological training. However, “full-time” diaspora missionaries may regard further theological education simply as an appendage to regular ministry functions.

### ***Family Financial Pressure***

Most theological education programs require financial support. Some diaspora leaders find themselves choosing between earning more money to send back home, or earning much and sending less to pay for theological education. If the spouse, for example, does not see the strategic need to invest in theological education, then the diaspora leader could be told to quit the program and focus on saving up for the family. At times, the reason for the spouse to tell the diaspora leader to quit is practical: the leader does not have quality time with either spouse or family. At other times, it is simply a practical reality as some diaspora leaders do not hold job tenure in their workplace.<sup>16</sup>

### ***Lack of Support from Leaders***

Some senior leaders are not happy about others getting advanced theological education. They sometimes view theological education as a threat to their leadership. Thus, they discourage other staff members from taking up further theological training stressing that what the local church provides is more than adequate. In many cases, this kind of atti-

15. Bi-vocational missionaries are those who have been assigned as “regular” or “professional” missionaries but for some reasons (e.g., visa status, support base, among others) have to take other jobs outside the church-based or institution-based ministry. Tentmakers are “non-professional” or “non-regular” missionaries who serve in various positions in companies or other employment agencies and then serve in local church-based or institution-based ministries during their spare time.

16. Across the Asian region, many leaders of diaspora communities lack job security. They can lose their job anytime which could result in losing their legal visa status which would then jeopardize ministry tasks. The employment of those who work as caregivers or nannies depend so much on the economic stability of the families they are working for. For a study on employee’s economic stability, see Alvin Y. So and May Yeuk-Mui Tam, “Flexible Employment in Hong Kong: Trends and Patterns in Comparative Perspective,” *Asian Survey* XLVIII (2008): 673-702.

tude is most evident in ministry situations where diaspora leaders serve under the control of a mega church back home or centralized missions organizations.<sup>17</sup>

### *Overemphasis on Academics against Practice*

When a diaspora leader perceives the teacher as someone without a pastoral heart, discouragement is most likely to strike. This occurs whenever theological education mainly stresses the theoretical rather than the practical. While quality assurance is important to successful and effective theological education, academic performance could sometimes overshadow ministry practice. In this case, the theological educator becomes more interested in the grades rather than the practical result of the training program itself. This results in having a teacher who is academically rigid but lacks the pastoral heart for ministry.<sup>18</sup>

### *Unqualified Teaching Staff*

Some diaspora leaders give up theological education because their teachers lack teaching and communication skills, do not vary methods of instruction, or manage the training program like a coffee shop (Customer is always right!). When teachers become more interested in routine and fail to demonstrate creativity and imagination in theological education, they only encourage leaders to quit. In many cases, teachers come to class unprepared. They simply read from photocopied materials with no personal reflection and dynamic interaction with class members.<sup>19</sup>

### *Lack of Customized Textbooks*

Textbooks and training materials are important to the success of theological education. Training centers may be flooded with books and other resources but many diaspora leaders still find them difficult to understand. Many Asian diaspora leaders struggle with the expressions and idioms that western theologians or scholars use in their works and

17. For a critique on the shortcomings of this approach to ministry, see Millard Erickson, *Where is Theology Going?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 46-49.

18. McGrath, reflecting on his Oxford University setting, stresses academic excellence but presses on an "emphasis upon personal formation." See McGrath, "Theological Education," 15.

19. Teachers have the responsibility to model leadership to their students. As they teach, their students expect them to live out what they teach. On this particular theme, see J. Kevin Bage and Gail T. Fairhurst, "Living Leadership: A Systemic Constructionist Approach," *Leadership 4* (August 2008): 227-251.

find them less helpful in their studies.<sup>20</sup> In many cases, the illustrations or anecdotes used by non-Asian writers do not have relevance to the social, political, religious, and economic realities of the Asian region where diasporic communities converge.

### *Lack of Time to Study*

Like their counterparts in the residential program, many diaspora leaders struggle with time management. The common expression is, “I don’t have enough time to study.” Juggling multiple tasks alongside educational training is not easy. However, with patience and good planning, this can be overcome. Leaders need to understand that theological education is an investment for ministry effectiveness; hence, time and schedules have to be carefully managed and planned.

### *Lack of Funds*

In many cases, funding of theological education remains a challenge to diaspora leaders in training. A diaspora leader says, “I do not have funds to pay tuition fees.” This may call for a dole-out, which results in a lack of initiative to sacrifice financially for one’s theological training. This could also be an evidence of a deficient understanding regarding theological education as an important investment. On the other hand, if the program uses a western-based curriculum, chances are that the fees are high and unaffordable. One way to solve this problem is to encourage diaspora churches to allocate funds in their annual budget for the continuing education of their leaders.

### *Lack of Study Discipline*

Over the years, not a few diaspora leaders would admit to their lack of discipline for study. Some simply quit because they do not have the discipline to study. It is not surprising that their sermons and Bible study materials are cut and pasted straight from the Internet or available books. However, if leaders lack the discipline to study, they should not assume authority to serve as leaders. Ministry leadership requires discipline even in diasporic environments.

20. This has been the concern of evangelical scholars and institutes for years. For further discussion, see Bong Rin Ro and Ruth Eshenaur, eds., *The Bible & Theology in Asian Contexts: An Evangelical Perspective on Asian Theology* (Taichung: Asia Theological Association, 1984); Yung Han Kim, ed., *A Suggestion of Korean Evangelical Theology to Western Theology* (Seoul: Korean Evangelical Theological Society, 2001).



### *Adequacy of Spiritual Gifts over Theological Education*

Some diaspora leaders disdain theological education because they view it as something unspiritual. The mantra is, “I possess enough spiritual gifts so theological education is unnecessary.” Others claim that theological education only confuses the minister of the gospel.<sup>21</sup> Some claim that the “School of the Holy Spirit” is enough to carry out their duties and tasks in diaspora ministry.

### **Attitudes toward Theological Training in the Diaspora Setting**

Attitudes toward theological education vary. Diaspora leaders view theological education through their denominational lenses.<sup>22</sup> But some attitudes develop out of failure to regard the importance of integration between theology and the practice of ministry, which theological education so requires.<sup>23</sup> The table below shows common attitudes among diaspora leaders regarding theological education.

*Figure 1: Attitudes toward Theological Training*

1. Self-Sufficient Diaspora Leader	<i>“I can serve diaspora people without proper theological training.”</i>
2. Self-Styled Diaspora Leader	<i>“I am my own man. I’ll study theology if it fits my taste.”</i>
3. Self-Taught Diaspora Leader	<i>“I can learn theology without assistance from others.”</i>

21. In most cases, the reverse is true. A key diaspora leader in the Middle East laments the acute need to provide adequate theological education to leaders of various congregations in the region. A pastor of a local congregation approached him one day and asked, “When are you going to lay your hand on me so I can receive the Holy Spirit?”

22. Ideally the theological education of aspiring diaspora missionaries should begin before their assignment overseas. Prior to any formal seminary training, the best place to obtain theological training is the local church. For an easy-to-follow manual on training leaders for overseas assignment, see Dennis Lane, *Turning God’s New Instruments* (Singapore: World Evangelical Fellowship, 1990).

23. McGrath, “Theological Education,” 19-38. He proposes three major themes for discussion involving integration in theological education, namely, priesthood of all believers and the leadership of evangelicalism, the importance of a Christian worldview, and the importance of Christian spirituality.

4. Anti-Intellectual Diaspora Leader	<i>"Theological education is unnecessary. Faith in God is all that matters!"</i>
5. Narrow-Minded Diaspora Leader	<i>"Ministry is enough. Theological education is a waste of time, energy, and resources."</i>
7. "Neo-Orthodox" Diaspora Leader	<i>"If God speaks to me through a biblical text today, then I don't need to train in theology."</i>

### **Factors behind the Failure of Theological Education Programs in the Diaspora Setting**

In most cases, theological education in diasporic environment fails because of lack of planning, both short-term and long-term.<sup>24</sup> However, there are other reasons for the failure of theological training among diaspora leaders, some of which are practical while others socio-political. In some instances, the multicultural landscape where diaspora leaders live is too complex to handle even in the face of cooperation among states like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).<sup>25</sup> This section outlines seven major reasons, although the list is not exhaustive.

#### *Lack of Vision for a Sustainable Theological Education Program outside the Residential Comfort Zone*

For years skepticism abounds regarding the effectiveness of theological education outside the residential campus. Some disdain non-residential programs for fear of compromising quality assurance. Thus, denominational and institutional leaders do not see the need to set up a long-term plan for theological education outside the campus, especially overseas. In contrast, others do not simply see the need of establishing professional training programs but restrict it to the local church setting.<sup>26</sup>

24. For a short but insightful article on training diaspora leaders with a special reference to the Filipino diaspora see Henry H. Tan, "The Necessity of Training the Filipino Diaspora," in *Scattered: The Filipino Global Presence*, ed. Luis Pantoja, Sadiri Joy Tira, and Enoch Wan (Manila: Life Change Publishing, 2004), 173-179.

25. See Sheldon Simon, "ASEAN and Multilateralism: The Long, Bumpy Road to Community," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 30 (2008): 264-292.

26. Cf. Siga Arles, "Each Congregation a Seminary—The Need for Team Ministry," *Journal of Asian Evangelical Theology* 15 (2007): 3-6.

### ***Lack of Commitment to Invest Financially in Non-Residential Theological Education***

Funding theological education outside residential programs is always a challenge. It is easier to raise funds for student scholarships that would be spent for theological education on campus than to ask donors to support a study program that meets at McDonalds or KFC during weekends. To other church leaders, the only legitimate education can be obtained within the walls of a beautiful residential campus. This accounts for the lack of resources, including library, personnel, and necessary equipment for providing theological education to diaspora leaders serving overseas.

### ***Lack of Motivation to Accelerate Training of Diaspora Leaders***

Some sending organizations and denominations do not see the need of accelerating the training of their diaspora missionaries abroad. They are more interested in the fruits, not the tools that produce them. Whenever the “numbers game” (e.g., huge attendance) becomes the motivating factor for diaspora missions rather than the quality of theological training of the leaders, then the long-term effect in terms of sustainability of the diaspora ministry becomes problematic. However, many of the leaders in diaspora ministries are laypersons with less or no formal theological training at all before working overseas. As a matter of fact, the key to the growth and expansion of multicultural congregations across the Asian region is the commitment and leadership of lay leaders.<sup>27</sup> While the presence of professionally trained leaders in diaspora communities is ideal, their number overseas is relatively insignificant compared to the needs of the diasporic communities. The training of lay leaders for diaspora ministries could be a key to solving this acute need of raising up leaders for ministries among itinerant peoples and immigrants. Theological education should speak to their contextual needs and be able to prepare them for a ministry in the marketplace.<sup>28</sup> The

27. The assumption that churches do grow when lay people are developed into leaders have been documents in many parts of Asia. For example, in Taiwan and Korea, see Robert Bolton and Allen Swanson, *Why Churches Do Grow in Asia*, Asian Perspective 15 (Taipei: Asia Theological Association, n.d.), 11.

28. “Just as the marketplace was a kaleidoscope of everyday life in the ancient agora and in the forum,” argues Quek Swee-Hwa, “so theological education for the marketplace will need to prepare a Christian to reflect on how he can deal with the routine of daily life from the standpoint of education, religion, music, food, recreation, work, etc.” Quek, “Theological Education for the Marketplace,” *Journal of Asian Evangelical Theology* 15 (2007): 72-73.

intricacies of diaspora ministries require what Keun-Won Park calls “pluralistic leadership,” a combination of “specialized doctors” and “general practitioners.”<sup>29</sup>

### *Lack of Customized Theological Education Curriculum for the Diaspora Setting*

As always, complaints are plenty regarding the use of study materials that are foreign to diaspora leaders.<sup>30</sup> There is an evident lack of sensitivity regarding the contextual needs of diaspora leaders in the field as if the expression of and the condition on which people’s needs are being shaped is universal.<sup>31</sup> However, needs vary in different settings and environments. Thus, the curriculum should consider the contextual needs of people and their leaders.<sup>32</sup> In fact, needs in the local church and contemporary society should be considered when designing a curriculum for the training of diaspora leaders, with educators (theorists) and missionaries (practitioners) working collaboratively.<sup>33</sup>

29. See Keun-Won Park, “Viability of Ecumenical Ministerial Formation in Northeast Asian Context,” in *Viability of Ministerial Formation in Asian Context*, ed. Joon Surh Park (Seoul: NEAATS/Yonsei University, 1995), 37-38.

30. A good example of addressing this issue is R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1998). See also Amos Young, “The Future of Evangelical Theology: Asian and Asian American Interrogations,” *Asia Journal of Theology* 21 (2007): 371-397.

31. The last three decades produced debates on the contextual character of theological education in response to the “canned curriculum” from the West. It is the point of departure in theological education whether Asian theological institutions move from the text to context or from the context to the text. David Kwang-Sun Suh, for example, critiques the Western traditional method and contents of theological education and asserts, “We must wake up from the illusion that there is the text which is the Bible and the Western theological traditions and assert the fact that all theology is contextual and historical. We must reverse the trend of contextualizing our theology and our theological education, and rather begin with our own context and move toward the text. Our direction should not be from the text to context, but from context to the text.” See Suh, “From Viability to Vitality of Theological Education in Korea,” in *Viability of Ministerial Formation in Asian Context*, ed. Joon Surh Park (Seoul: NEAATS/Yonsei University, 1995), 73-74.

32. On a practical note, the same fact applies to the tasks of diaspora leaders from different countries. For example, diaspora leaders from Myanmar have to find ways to help their people send funds “safely” back home other than the regular means, while a Filipino diaspora leader can simply instruct a Filipino migrant worker to go to Metrobank in Seoul without much difficulty.

33. Cf. David C. Hester, “The Common Vocation of Curriculum Building,”

### ***Lack of Information about Current Theological Training Program in Diaspora Environments***

The lack of information regarding available programs and resources for theological education can result in duplicating efforts and activities. In this case, resources, time, and energy become wasted because each diaspora community sets up its own educational program even with less resources, lack of qualified teachers, and no library facilities. This is happening despite the fact that a diasporic congregation could simply “piggy-back” on other existing programs.<sup>34</sup>

### ***Lack of Collaboration among Missions Organizations in Theological Training for Diaspora Leaders***

The lack of information regarding existing theological education programs can lead to non-cooperation and absence of collaboration among sending bodies and mission organizations.<sup>35</sup> There are times when local diaspora congregations offer “distinctive” programs that they proudly call their “own,” and yet do not share the same with others in need. In so doing, competition arises with regard to the offering of theological education programs, and those who cannot afford to offer one may simply set up one that is substandard.<sup>36</sup>

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*Theological Education* 43 (2007): 39-46. A customized curriculum for diaspora leaders should also consider the economic aspect of migration and globalization as they pose challenges to theological education. See Yahya Wijaya, “Economic Globalization and Asian Contextual Theology,” *Theological Studies* 69 (2008): 309-320.

34. One solution to this problem is the formation of networks among different diaspora communities for information sharing and program cooperation. In the Middle East, for example, several organizations band together to establish a massive network with an objective to provide training programs to diaspora leaders.

35. Mark Avery identifies three factors that influence collaboration in mission, namely, spiritual unity, organizational scheme, and contextual complexity (“Collaboration in Mission,” in *Missions in Action in the in the 21st Century*, ed. Sadiri Joy Tira and Enoch Wan [Portland: Filipino International Network/Western Seminary, 2008], 127-145).

36. In the Middle East, leaders of a pan-Gulf network agreed to share information, resources, and personnel to set-up a unified accredited theological education program. This led to the offering an accredited degree program in cooperation with a seminary in the Philippines. A Master of Arts in Intercultural Studies program is now available to diaspora leaders in the region regardless of their denominational background or nationality.

### *Lack of Local Partners for Diaspora Mission*

The strong tendency for some diaspora congregations to go solo with little or no connection with a local church in a host country affects the development and sustainability of theological education for leaders in diasporic congregations. Some diaspora leaders refuse to work with host churches or mission organizations for fear of being dictated upon or choked by denominational bureaucracy.<sup>37</sup> Others dislike the idea of partnership with local hosts because of cultural or denominational differences. Realistically, however, the burden of offering training programs can be shared with local partners so that host churches and organizations would be able to appreciate the biblical model of ministry partnership.<sup>38</sup>

### **Delivery Modes of Theological Education for Diaspora Leaders**

Diaspora leaders face a huge but doable task to equip disciples among their countrymen, and to do the same among other expatriates and eventually local hosts amid fast-changing religious, socio-economic, and political conditions across the world. With millions of people moving around the Asian region every year, the task of producing theologically trained leaders is great. The birth of information technology, the worldwide web, and the increasing efforts of many governments around the world to establish long-term relations in terms of politics, commerce, trade, education, cultures, tourism, and even military technology, among others, create vast opportunities for cooperation among diaspora communities to provide theological education and training to their leaders. Across the Asian region, theological education for diaspora leaders are provided through ecclesiastical, institutional, technological, and organizational modes.

37. Partnership in ministry and missions cannot be underestimated and has been a big concern among ministry leaders and missions agencies. For a fresh outlook on this theme, see Lee Behar, "Reflections on a Missions Partnership," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 44 (2008): 236-239.

38. Missiologists typically allude Paul's teamwork with Barnabas and Mark as a model for partnership in missions. Felicísimo Vestidas Jr. observes, "Paul's partnership with Barnabas and Mark enabled each other to complement one another's weaknesses while maximizing their strengths for greater ministry work, scope, reach, and effectiveness" ("Church Planting Principles from Paul's Missionary Journey," *Asia-Pacific Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 1 [2004]: 138).

### *Ecclesiastical Mode*

In many parts of Asia, the local church remains the most effective instrument in delivering theological education. Most diasporic congregations offer various programs for the training of their leaders. Most of the courses, however, can be completed between a week or two, depending on the level of ministry competencies of the leaders involved. These courses meet very practical and urgent needs in the ministry. This mode of providing theological training to leaders is necessary as local theological schools find it difficult and almost impossible to obtain government approval. This is particularly true in countries where the church lacks strong state recognition.<sup>39</sup>

### *Institutional Mode*

Across Asia, offering theological education by an established institution like a Bible college or a seminary remains popular. The normal route here is residential training although the non-residential system or distance education is fast catching up. Recently, the “on-site” aspect of this approach has received serious attention because of its stress on “experiential learning.”<sup>40</sup> Of course, providing “experience” only over “theoretical learning” can be extreme because both the theoretical and the experiential aspects are integral to effective theological education.<sup>41</sup> A combination of both residential and off-campus program is also available and can be done on a full-time, part-time, or “extended-time” basis.

39. The ecclesiastical mode is also effective among international students scattered across the Asian region. Foreign students normally stay overseas within a determined period of time (2–4 years); hence, the type of training that they need is basically short-term and focuses more on the “how-to’s.” The same case applies to businessmen and itinerant professionals. For ideas on ministering to these types of diaspora community, see David Claydon, ed. *The New People Next Door: A Call to Seize the Opportunities* (Delhi: South Asian Concern/Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 2005), 55–67.

40. For a good treatment on this approach, see Charles A. Cook, “On-site Study Abroad: A Nonformal Experience Oriented Model for International Missions Training,” in *Missions in Action in the 21st Century*, ed. Sadiri Joy Tira and Enoch Wan (Portland: Filipino International Network/Western Seminary, 2008), 101–126.

41. In calling for the choice and training of missionaries, David Cho seems to emphasize one over the other. He writes, “We must provide our personnel with practical knowledge rather than theoretical, and on-the-spot training with right evaluation.” See Cho, “Can Asians be Missionaries?” in *Asian Missions—Asian Methods! Asian Perspective 12* (Taipei: Asia Theological Association, n.d.), 5. This dichotomy does not address the realities in diaspora ministries where leaders need both theories and practice of ministry.

In Korea, Torch Trinity Graduate School of Theology offers both full-time and part-time programs for diaspora leaders. Interestingly, the newly developed part-time residential route called the “Expat Program” is now gaining popularity among the foreigners involved in diaspora ministries in Korea.<sup>42</sup> Under the “Expat Program,” foreigners can register for a course or two while working full-time.

In Hong Kong, a collaborative effort between the Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary and Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary produced the Theological Education for Filipino Leaders (TEFL).<sup>43</sup> TEFL was born out of a vision to train Filipinos while working in Hong Kong for church leadership and to prepare them for ministry functions when their work contract expires. Established in 2003, TEFL uses a 2-year-cycle theological education system. By 2006, the program had more than 200 students who were registered either in diploma or certificate programs. On its second graduation in 2007, 25 students graduated with a diploma, while 20 received their certificates.

### *Technological Mode*

Another mode of delivering theological education other than the traditional residential and extension programs is on-line studies or e-learning. Most institutions that provide this type of program are based in the West, thereby taking advantage of the booming cyber technology across the Asian region. In some parts of Asia where Internet connection is good, a combination of on-line resources, DVDs, and workbooks have been used for this mode of delivering theological education. There is an increasing number of theological schools in Korea that feels a sense of urgency to train specialists not only for missions but also for providing quality theological education.<sup>44</sup>

### *Organizational Mode*

Missions organizations or para-church agencies play an active role in providing theological training to leaders in diaspora settings.<sup>45</sup> Like

42. Envisioned by Steve Chang, Associate Dean for Academics at Torch Trinity Graduate School of Theology, the “Expat Program” offers flexibility and enables non-Korean citizens to pursue graduate education and non-degree programs at their own pace, thereby removing the “unnecessary barriers” to those who would like to pursue theological education while serving in Korea.

43. See [http://www.hkbts.edu.hk/News/3564/200708\\_news\\_eng.pdf](http://www.hkbts.edu.hk/News/3564/200708_news_eng.pdf).

44. See Gwi-Sam Cho, “A Korean Perspective of Theological Education as Mission,” in *Theological Education as Mission*, ed. Peter F. Penner (Germany: Neufeld, 2005), 103-110.

45. Some church leaders are suspicious of the role of para-church organiza-



their ecclesiastical counterparts, they offer training programs that can be completed on a short-term basis—from one week to four weeks, with six or 12 months as the maximum training time. The effectiveness of these training programs depends on the context, need, and qualifications of the leaders involved. While some of the education providers lack the capability, personnel, and resources to provide accredited and in-depth theological education compared to what residential programs offer, they certainly meet specific needs and cover a good range of topics necessary for ministry leadership in diasporic environments.<sup>46</sup>

### Conclusion

The importance of theological education for diaspora leaders cannot be understated. In many cases, this is even acute, especially in areas where the host country is hostile to the proclamation of the gospel. Theological education for diaspora leaders is crucial for missiological, doctrinal, methodological, practical, and spiritual reasons. Diaspora leaders need training in the nature (*what*), reasons (*why*), scope (*who*), and methods (*how*) of disciple-making, which is central to the fulfillment of the Great Commission. They need training in the handling of God's Word and the historical and contextual formulations of biblical doctrines. Sound biblical doctrines are essential to the spiritual growth of diaspora believers; hence, leaders need to be deeply rooted in God's Word and be able to teach spiritual truths to others. Aside from learning the content, diaspora leaders need to know how to transfer knowledge, develop leadership skills, and understand the major theories and dynamics of the teaching-learning encounter.

Life in the diaspora is both complex and challenging. Leaders need to know, grasp, and strategically assess basic issues in life and the struggles of diaspora people. Most important, diaspora leaders need to go

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tions in missionary work and their relationship with local churches. Reflecting on his own local experience in India relative to rivalry and suspicion regarding para-church agencies, P. T. Chandapilla writes, "The churches were afraid of losing their young people, or afraid that their meagre offerings and collections would dwindle still further, because people would give to the para-church agencies. The agencies, on the other hand, often regarded the churches as 'dead' and did not try to work with them." Chandapilla, *Local Churches and Evangelism, Asian Perspective* 13 (Taipei: Asia Theological Association, n.d.), 10.

46. A good example of this type of training is offered by The Apollos Project. For further information on The Apollos Project, visit <http://theapollosproject.org>. In the Middle East, two prominent organizations offering short-term programs are Study by Extension for All Nations (<http://www.sean.uk.net/index.html>) and Agape Life (<http://agape-life.org>).

through spiritual formation and personal development so they can be most prepared and effective in doing their tasks in various diaspora environments. While residential training is ideal before the missionary is sent overseas, the offering of non-residential programs is equally important, and, at times, more beneficial to diaspora leaders and their congregation. This paper contends that no single mode of training applies universally to diaspora ministries, given the intricacies of host cultures and worldviews. However, an all-out cooperation among organizations and institutions is necessary for the success of training diaspora leaders across the Asian region.