

**The Asian Ecumenical Movement in
Historical Perspective:
with Special Reference to its Contribution to
Ecumenism**

從歷史角度看亞洲基督徒合一運動及其貢獻

Kyo Seong AHN

[ABSTRACT] On the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee in 2017, especially significant in Asian culture, of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), which was established in Prapat, Indonesia in 1957, it may be the proper way of celebrating the historical moment to review the history of the Asian ecumenical movement, highlighting its contribution to ecumenism. Admittedly, like any other movements, the Asian ecumenical movement has merits and demerits, and yet it has some special features to contribute to the development of ecumenism in many ways. Firstly, it initiated the regional ecumenical movement which soon became the *trend du jour*, displacing the existing two-layered (international-national) structure of the ecumenical movement. Secondly, it paved the way

for cutting-edge ecumenical theologies which reflected the reality of Asian peoples including various types of theology of peoples. Thirdly, it opened new land for the innovative ways of theologizing such as 'contextualization', whose mastermind, Shoki Coe, was a famous Asian ecumenist, and became fertile fields for producing many other indigenous and ingenious theologians and ecumenical workers. Fourthly, it fleshed out the challenges of new theologies in the Asian society, resulting in the evolution of strategy from Urban Industrial Mission (UIM) to Urban Rural Mission (URM), etc. Lastly, it built up the close relationship between Asian churches, which previously clang to mother churches rather than sister churches, giving birth to the partnership in both ecumenical relation and ecumenical mission. In short, facing the diverse challenges of the Asian realities such as imperialism, post-colonialism and the Cold War, and neo-liberalism, the Asian ecumenical movement continued to make history, and the rest is history.

【摘要】 亞洲基督教議會（CCA）已於 2017 年慶祝鑽禧。與任何其他運動一樣，亞洲基督徒合一運動有其優缺點，也有促進合一發展的特殊貢獻。首先，它成為區域性的潮流，展現基督徒合一運動的兩層（國際——國家）結構。其次，它為反映亞洲人民現實的最新合一神學鋪路，包括各種人類神學。第三，它開闢了創新的神學國度：「情境化」，由著名亞洲合一主義者 Shoki Coe 推動，並培養許多其他土著和具智慧的神學家和合一工作者。第四，充實了亞洲新神學的挑戰，在策略上，造成城市工業團（UIM）到城鄉團（URM）等的演變。最後，建立了亞洲教會之間的密切關係，以前亞洲教會比較靠近母教會多於姊妹教會，現在彼此間在合一關係和合一使命中產生了夥伴關係。面對亞洲現實的各種挑戰：如帝國主義、後殖民主義和冷戰，以及新自由主義，亞洲基督徒合一運動繼續創造歷史。

I. Introduction

On the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee in 2017, especially significant in Asian culture, of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), which was established in Prapat, Indonesia in 1957, it may be the proper way of celebrating the historical moment to review the history of the Asian ecumenical movement, highlighting its contribution to ecumenism.¹ Admittedly, like any other movements, the Asian ecumenical movement has merits and demerits, and yet it has some special features to contribute to the development of ecumenism in many ways. Firstly, it initiated the regional ecumenical movement which soon became the *trend du jour*, displacing the existing two-layered (international-national) structure of the ecumenical movement. Secondly, it paved the way for cutting-edge ecumenical theologies which reflected the reality of Asian peoples including various types of theology of peoples. Thirdly, it opened new land for the innovative ways of theologizing such as 'contextualization', whose mastermind, Shoki Coe, was a famous Asian ecumenist, and became fertile fields for producing many other indigenous and ingenious theologians and ecumenical workers. Fourthly, it fleshed out the challenges of new theologies in the Asian

¹ For the history of the Asian ecumenical movement, see among others the following books. Hans-Ruedi Weber, *Asia and the Ecumenical Movement, 1895-1961* (London: SCM, 1966); Ninan Koshy, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement in Asia, I* (Hong Kong: CCA, 2004); ed., *A History of the Ecumenical Movement in Asia, II* (Hong Kong: CCA, 2004); Toshimasa Yamamoto, *Ajia-ekyumenikaru undoshi [The History of the Asian Ecumenical Movement]* (Tokyo: Shinkyō Publishing Co., 2007) (in Japanese); Kim Hao Yap, *From Prapat to Colombo: History of the Christian Conference of Asia (1957-1995)* (Hong Kong: CCA, 1995). The CCA has had a checkered history: after many twists and turns, the project to establish the Far Eastern Office of the International Missionary Council was fulfilled by forming the Eastern Asia Christian Conference (EACC) in Bangkok, Thailand in 1949, which evolved into a full-fledged organization, the East Asia Christian Conference (EACC, namesake in abbreviation) in Prapat, Indonesia in 1957, and then transformed into the CCA in Singapore in 1973.

society, resulting in the evolution of strategy from Urban Industrial Mission (UIM) to Urban Rural Mission (URM), etc. Lastly, it built up the close relationship between Asian churches, which previously clang to mother churches rather than sister churches, giving birth to the partnership in both ecumenical relation and ecumenical mission. In short, facing the diverse challenges of the Asian realities such as imperialism, post-colonialism and the Cold War, and neo-liberalism, the Asian ecumenical movement continued to make history, and the rest is history.

This study aims to put the Asian ecumenical movement centering on the CCA in perspective to clarify its characteristics and its contribution to the world ecumenical movement. To do this, it divides the history of the Asian ecumenical movement into three periods according to the evolution of the concept of ecumenism: ‘ecumenism in missions’ in the first half of the twentieth century, ‘ecumenism in Mission’ in the second half of the twentieth century, and ‘ecumenism in ecumenisms’ since the turn of the century.

II. Ecumenism in missions

As well-known, the ecumenical movement “has resulted from the missionary enterprise”², particularly the Western Protestant missionary movement, in the 19th and the early twentieth centuries, or the so-called ‘Great Century’ in K. S. Latourette’s term, which speaks eloquently the close relationship between the early ecumenical movement and the traditional missionary movement. In short, the context of the traditional missionary movement, the characteristic of which is epitomized as ‘missions’, predisposed the birth and development of the ecumenical movement, including that in Asia. Although the Asian Christians at the time were often seen as

² William Richey Hogg, *Ecumenical Foundations: A History of the International Missionary Council and Its Nineteenth Century Background* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1952), 1.

children or helpers rather than coworkers of expatriate missionaries, they at least won recognition in the missionary milieu. It is in this context that among the three mainstreams of the ecumenical movement such as Faith and Order (F&O), Life and Work (L&W) and International Missionary Council (IMC), the Asians could participate and have a voice in the IMC, while the visible presence of non-Western delegates in the F&O and L&W was modest to nonexistent in the first half of the last century.

As a whole, the ecumenical movement in that period can be summarized as ecumenism in missions, since its main interest was laid on the agenda of missions and its pivotal relationship was missions-church relationship in the so-called mission field. During these years, one witnesses the evolution of the missions-church relationship as it grew from a mother-daughter one to a sister-sister one. The relational change was detected in the modification of terminology in the IMC conference in Jerusalem in 1928, when the conference dealt with "the Relation between the Younger and the Older Churches".³ In that historical meeting, Asian delegates, including Asian women, became more active in having a voice, showing their will to share leadership.⁴ It must be remembered, however, that although the non-Western churches gradually began to see the missionaries' home church as a sister church, they in general still showed interest in their new sister church (their old mother

³ The International Missionary Council, *Volume III. The Relation between the Younger and the Older Churches, The Jerusalem Meeting of the International Missionary Council, March 24-April 8, 1928* (New York: International Missionary Council, 1928).

⁴ Helen Kim (Hwal-ran Kim, in Korean), a Methodist woman educator, who participated in the Jerusalem conference as one of the Korean delegates, made impressive speeches a couple of times at the conference, dealing with a number of critical issues at the time such as race, gender, etc. For the list of the delegates, especially Asian women, see The International Missionary Council, *Volume VIII. Addresses on General Subjects, The Jerusalem Meeting of the International Missionary Council, March 24-April 8, 1928* (New York: International Missionary Council, 1928), 159-170.

church), the Western churches, rather than their siblings, the Asian churches, which had already been there as their neighbors. In many cases, the Asian churches were more familiar with the Western churches than the sister churches in the same continent. In short, the Asian churches at the time seemed strange to each other, and not surprisingly the mutual relationship between them was underdeveloped. This underdevelopment in ecumenical relations among the Asian churches conveyed the message that the ecumenical movement itself needed to be deepened and widened to be an authentic and balanced one, overcoming many hindrances on the way to unity. It is also worth remembering, however, that it was at the IMC conference in Tambaram, India, in 1938, ten years after the Jerusalem conference, that the issue of the establishment of the Asian ecumenical body as a regional one was for the first time raised, although that was handled in earnest only after the end of the Second World War, which ushered in the period of post-colonialism.

III. Ecumenism in Mission

Although we cannot deal with the establishment of the Asian ecumenical body, particularly the CCA in the mid-twentieth century in details here,⁵ it is necessary to remember two lessons from the controversy on it mainly between Geneva and Southeast Asia: first, the development of ecumenism was itself an ecumenical issue since the formation of the Eastern Asia Christian Conference (EACC), the precedent of the CCA, was realized through a long-running feud among ecumenists due to different perspectives of ecumenism; and second, the experiment of the Asian ecumenical movement giving birth to the Asian ecumenical body, a regional ecumenical body, the first of its kind, proved successful in that the pattern of the regional

⁵ Kyo Seong Ahn, "The Asian Context and the Ecumenical Movement of the Korean Church", *Korea Presbyterian Journal of Theology* 45/3 (2013): 37-62, especially 47-51.

movement was reproduced widely both in religious and secular sectors. The rise of the Asian ecumenical body displaced the existing two-layered pattern of the ecumenical movement (international-national) by the innovative three-layered one (international-regional-national).

The church in the aftermath of the end of the Second World War found itself in a totally changed context, that is, the end of colonialism and the arrival of decolonization. The new circumstances required the transformation of the understanding of church and mission. It is in this historical background that the church attempted to revolutionize the concept of the nature and ministry of the church, which led to the emergence of a new missiological understanding, Mission.⁶ Mission written large and in singular is a more comprehensive and ecumenical missiological concept, which emphasizes the followings: first, partnership in mission, especially between the Western and the non-Western churches; second, the initiative of a local church in mission; third, mission by a local church where it is (mission in six continents and mission from everywhere to everywhere); and last, mission to flesh out the Kingdom of God in the world or *Missio Dei* (mission of God) beyond evangelization. In short, with the evolution from missions (a traditional type of mission) to Mission (a new type of mission), mission became the core of the nature and ministry of the church rather than a merely marginal and appendicular work of the church. In a sense, it can be said that in the new missiological context the words 'church' and 'mission' in effect became interchangeable.

⁶ For the contrast between missions and Mission, see "The People of God Among All God's Peoples: Frontiers in Christian Mission: Report from a Theological Roundtable Sponsored by the Christian Conference of Asia and the Council for World Mission", in *The People of God Among All God's Peoples*, edited by Philip L. Wickeri (Hong Kong: CCA; London: CWM, 2000), 9-57, esp. 43-47.

The expansion of the concept of mission posed two fundamental questions, one of which is related to the legacy of traditional mission and the other to the future of new mission: the former is whether the new type of mission will continuously pay enough attention to evangelization, which was the matter of stand and fall for the evangelicals, who were comprised of major force in the traditional mission; the latter is how the church will be effective in selection and concentration when implementing the vastly expanded new mission and what is the relationship between church and society if the gamut of works comes to be overlapped. As a result, the former triggered the mistrust and concern of the evangelicals, who finally decided to establish their own ecumenical body to customize their missionary agenda focusing on evangelization such as the Lausanne Movement; and the latter continued to experiment the new concept of mission to the extent that nowadays even the evangelicals began to use the word 'mission of God' in their own way. The question is what was and did the newly emerging Asian ecumenical movement, particularly the CCA, in the period under consideration. And was the regional ecumenical movement and its arm, the CCA, necessary and worthwhile?

1. Mission in Asia by the Asian church: a missiological question

First of all, the Asian ecumenical movement began to do mission by developing the relationship between Asian churches and by initiating mission work as a way of partnership, that is, mission in Asia by the Asian churches. This kind of mission resulted in two byproducts, perhaps unexpectedly: first, one needs to put ecumenical relations before ecumenical mission, and thus mission is to be understood as something that could and should not be pursued through conflict and competition; and second, any Asian churches can participate in mission if they will, since Mission or new mission

is available based on cooperation and common resources rather than on power and experience. In other words, even weak and young Asian churches can participate in mission by receiving mission workers from other Asian churches, since according to the new missiological concept mission was initiated with the inviting of the receiving church, not with the commissioning of the sending church; and thus receiving is important as much as or more than sending.⁷ Furthermore, although it was in general inhospitable to Christianity, Asia proved relatively fertile to ecumenism, which gave birth to numerous union churches such as the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP), the United Church of Christ in Japan (UCCJ), the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT), the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) and the Church of South India (CSI), etc. Those united and uniting churches were very conducive to the development of new mission by enhancing ecumenism. Indeed, now mission was gradually regarded as neither 'mine' nor 'yours', but 'ours' or common ownership.

However, this was a new experience and was carried out through trial and error. For instance, two Asian mission coworkers, both of whom were commissioned on the invitation of the CCT, bequeathed very different legacies. The Rev. Dr. Chan-young Choi from the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) was in the first instance shocked at the new ecumenical atmosphere and finally opted for a more evangelical ministry working for the United Bible Societies. Meanwhile the Rev. Dr. Kosuke Koyama from the UCCJ rose to prominence in Asian indigenous and ecumenical theology, mainly by reflecting his mission experience and giving a voice to the Asian people who did not adequately have. Perhaps this kind of vicarious indigenous theology (people's cultural theology by an

⁷ Lourdino A Yuzon, ed., *Called to Send and to Receive* (Singapore: Christian Conference of Asia, 1981).

expatriate mission coworker, not by nationals) was the beginning of more genuine home-spun theology or the hybridization of Asian theologies.

2. What is the identity of the Asian church? A historical question

As the Asian church began to take initiative in church and mission, was raised the following question: what is the identity of the Asian church? Perhaps the best way to answer this question begins with the historical study of its identity. In fact, Christianity as a historical religion *par excellence* thinks highly of history from the very beginning, which can be confirmed by the fact that historical books hold much of both the Old and the New Testaments and that church historians endeavored to write the history of Christianity from the Early Church.

It is significant that the World Council of Churches (WCC) started a cutting-edge project of new historiography from an ecumenical perspective since the 1980s.⁸ This project stimulated the birth of the history of the Asian churches. In the curriculum of the classical schooling-based theological seminary system, church history was in effect nothing but the history of the Western church, and the Asian seminarians were more conversed with the history of the Western church than their own, not to mention that of neighboring churches. In short, the Asian church in general suffered from the impoverishment of church history.

⁸ Lukas Vischer, ed., *Church History in an Ecumenical Perspective: Papers and Reports of an International Ecumenical Consultation held in Basle October 12-17, 1981*. Bern: Evangelische Arbeitsstelle Oekumene Schweiz, 1982; ed., *Towards a History of the Church in the Third World: Papers and Report of a Consultation on The Issue of Periodisation, convened by the Working Commission on Church History of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, July 17-21, 1983*. Geneva, Bern: Evangelische Arbeitsstelle Oekumene Schweiz, 1985; Ogbu U. Kalu, ed., *African Church Historiography: An Ecumenical Perspective: Papers presented at a Workshop on African Church History, held at Nairobi, August 3-8, 1986*. Bern: Evangelische Arbeitsstelle Oekumene Schweiz, 1988.

In fact, the issue began to be improved through diverse tracks relating to the history of Christianity in Asia. On the one hand, indigenous church historians made strenuous efforts to write their own history and those piled-up histories enabled to write a more comprehensive history of Christianity in Asia or the Asian church history. For instance, a book on the history of Christianity in Asia was published in the 1970s, with articles written by Asian church historians.⁹ On the other hand, expatriate ecumenical specialists, especially from the churches in New Zealand and Australia, which joined the Asian ecumenical movement in the 1940s, helped in great measure the construction (or reconstruction) of the ecclesiastical history in Asia. For example, together with his wife, Rita, who worked for the project to develop libraries, John England devoted himself to the advancement of the history of Christianity in Asia throughout his lifetime since he had joined the project as a young scholar.¹⁰ Now his collection is housed in the Hewitson Library in the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership, in Dunedin, New Zealand, waiting for scholars' touch. Besides, scholars such as the late S. H. Moffett, once a missionary to China and Korea, and emeritus dean of the Presbyterian College and Theological Seminary (now Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary) in Korea and emeritus professor of missions and ecumenics of the Princeton Theological Seminary in the United States, dared to walk into the uncharted territory of Asian church history. Quite recently, with the rise of the discourse of World Christianity, the mastermind of which is Andrew F. Wells and which found its home at many of the prestigious universities and colleges, scholars began to take it for granted to write a world church history taking notice whether church

⁹ T. K. Thomas, ed., *Christianity in Asia: North-East Asia* (Singapore: CCA, 1979).

¹⁰ R. M. England & J. C. England, *Ministering Asian Faith and Wisdom: A Manual for Theological Librarians in Asia* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers; Delhi: ISPCK, 2001).

history in different continents was dealt with in balance, and one even witnesses the phenomenon of the boom of the history of Asian Christianity. It is in this context that the genuine ecumenical history requires the more advanced Asian church history and vice versa, which enables mutual enrichment in history. In a similar vein, over the last decades numerous historical societies were established in different Asian countries to encourage the writing of the history of Christianity and churches in Asia; for instance, a jointed seminar on “The Inter-religious Conflict and Peaceful Co-existence in Asia” was co-hosted by the Historical Society of Asian Christianity (HSAC) in Korea, the Japanese Historical Society of Asian Christianity (JHSAC) and the CCA in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in 2014.

3. What is Asian theology and how one can construct it: a theological question

The Asian ecumenical movement was also the movement of churches and Christian organizations in Asia, and thus it raised the question: what is the thought and practice of the Asian church? To begin with, with the rise of the Asian ecumenical movement, major cities in Asia struggled to overtake Geneva, Tuebingen, Cambridge and New York to become the new, although modest, forges to mold their own theologies.¹¹ One characteristic of Asian theology is that since Asia suffered from rapid and radical social change, such change fundamentally influenced theologies emerging from the Asian context. One can easily detect such inclinations through the survey of the themes of Asian theologies ranging from theology of revolution, to theology of people including *Minjung* theology, to Homeland theology, and to theology of migration and diaspora.

¹¹ John C. England et al., eds., *Asian Christian Theologies: A Research Guide to Authors, Movements, Sources, Vols. I-III* (Delhi: ISPCK; Quezon City: Claretian Publishers; Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002, 2003, 2004).

Meanwhile one needs to pay attention to another characteristic of Asian theology, particularly theology of people. Different from South America, Asia was under the influence of the Cold War until recently and anti-communism was widespread in many Asian countries to the extent that complicity with communism was fatal and thus theologians were forced to criticize capitalist societies without openly resorting to the socialist (or communist) framework of criticism. For instance, *Minjung* theology from South Korea, a stalwart anti-communist country, made use of history and culture as new resources of critical tools.

However, it is worth noting that the issue of people in Asia is ethnicity as well as class and stratification. In this context, one needs to warn that Asian theologians have largely been neglectful of the Fourth World in their theological construction. The term "the Fourth World" was coined to reveal the embarrassing condition of the Native Americans, an under-represented or silenced ethnic group without their own nationality (not ethnicity) in the First World.¹² What differs between the Third and the Fourth World is that both are the disadvantaged politically and socially, but the former at least has its own national government to speak out their concerns, while the latter has none. The problem is that the Fourth World in the Third World is much more devastated than in the First World, and that Asia is teemed with countless Fourth World groups. It is true that over the last century, the Asian ecumenical movement centering on the CCA made efforts to deal with the issue of various minority groups, especially indigenous people.¹³ However, it is still necessary to

¹² Gordon Brotherston, *Book of the Fourth World: Reading the Native Americans through Their Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 4.

¹³ For example, Ron O'Grady, ed., *Third World Tourism: Report of a Workshop on Tourism, held in Manila, Philippines, September 12-25, 1980* (Singapore: Christian Conference of Asia, 1980); Christian Conference of Asia, *The Global Challenge: Report of the WCC/CCA Asian Refugee Meeting, December 1-5, 1987* (Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asia, 1989).

approach the issue more rigorously from the political viewpoint, and to pose a pregnant question whether now is the time for the Asian ecumenical movement to innovate the three-layered structure (international-regional-national) into the four-layered one with an additional subnational level (international – regional – national - subnational), as it did two into three in the mid-twentieth century.

One of the most significant contributions of the Asian ecumenical movement, particularly Asian ecumenical theology, to ecumenism is that it not only gave birth to numerous theologies, but also to a new paradigm of theology, namely, contextualization. The idea of contextualization conceived by Shoki Coe, originally planned for the Theological Education Fund (TEF) project to foster Asian theological education, proved a timely and worldwide-effective response to the question of new theological construction.¹⁴ In short, the concept of contextualization showcased how a local issue can find greater significance at the global level.

4. The Asian society and the Asian church: a socio-political question

The ministry of the Asian ecumenical movement including the CCA can be summarized as its engagement with tumultuous Asian societies. Asian countries in general were forced to accomplish the agenda of modernization within a relatively short span of time, and that under various types of pressure such as breakaway from colonial vestiges and nation-state building. Thus, it is no wonder that the vogue word to explain the situation of the Asian countries in the post-liberation period was ‘revolution’. Whether it was a war, a bloody revolution or a drastic reform what those nations had to pay to stand up, the cost of them was remarkable. It was in this context

¹⁴ Jonah Chang and Ching-Fen Hsiao, *Shoki Coe: An Ecumenical Life in Context* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2012).

that the Asian ecumenical movement acted as a beacon of industrial mission, which led to the birth of the Urban Industrial Mission (UIM) and then the Urban Rural Mission (URM). Why the former evolved into the latter explains clearly the agony of the Asian countries, which suffered both from the migration of labor from rural to urban areas and the resultant rapid urbanization and corresponding rural decline.¹⁵ Mainly due to the agenda of compressed development, difficulties such as rural collapse, labor problems, and urban social problems including the urban poor all came together. In short, the issues of industrialization and democratization met each other at the core. Furthermore, according to different historical backgrounds, some Asian countries also faced racial conflict, ideological confrontation, and/or national partition. It was against this backdrop that emerged an ecumenical umbrella theological concept to tackle overall socio-political problems, the 'Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation' (JPIC), which grew out of the 'Just, Participatory, and Sustainable Society'; and the topic of JPIC was consecutively dealt with in historical meetings, all of which were held in South Korea, the hotbed of national and regional conflicts.¹⁶

Moreover, the problems which confronted the Asian church and the Asian society were pressing and overwhelming to the extent that they occasioned the 'status confessionis' (confessional status; a make or break issue). Not surprisingly, the history of the Asian church was full of such confessions.¹⁷ Given that cutting-edge Asian theologies arose from the response to Asian social reality, it is no exaggeration

¹⁵ Interestingly, for quite a long time the majority of the staff of the UIM and URM, CCA, was peopled with the South Koreans who came from the country which is most famous for compressed development.

¹⁶ Those meetings were as follows: the 22nd General Assembly of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC, now the World Communion of Reformed Churches, WCRC) in Seoul, in 1989; the first JPIC World Conference of the WCC in Seoul, in 1990, and the 10th General Assembly of the WCC in Busan, in 2013.

¹⁷ For instance, see the following: United Church of Christ in the Philippines, *UCCP Statements and Resolutions (1948-1990)* (Quezon City: Education and Nurture Desk, United Church of Christ in the Philippines, 1990).

to say that theology, confession, and mission were inseparable in the Asian context. In reviewing the theme of the Asia Mission Conference of the CCA in Yangon, Myanmar, in 2017, “Journeying Together: Prophetic Witness to the Truth and Light in Asia”, Wesley Ariarajah maintained that different from theology and liturgy, mission has not been fully Asianized.¹⁸ However, if one chooses ‘Mission’ rather than ‘missions’ for what mission indicates, one may reach a different conclusion.

It is also necessary to mention a couple of aspects which need to be emphasized in relation to the ministry of Asian churches. On the one hand, the Asian church was the minority church in most of the Asian countries, and yet it gradually became the majority church in some nations. At the same time, not a few Asian countries became affluent, while a great portion of Asian nations remains poor. Furthermore, some Asian churches showed strong interest in initiating world mission as new non-Western mission force. Such new status caused some Asian churches to have different understandings of identity, theology and mission, which required a new ‘modus vivendi’: to develop the sophisticated relationship between church and state (even seeking the status of a quasi-state church), to meet the demand of ‘theology of the affluent’ as well as ‘theology of the poor’ (for example, the rise of Asian theology of prosperity), and to see mission from the missionary’s point of view rather than that of the ‘missionized’ (including the repetition of Western missions’ malaise such as cultural and economic imperialism). On the other hand, history tells us that ecumenical solidarity with the world church, particularly the Asian church, ensured the implementation and success of ecumenical ministries such as democratization and mission focusing on the marginalized in

¹⁸ Wesley Ariarajah, [Response to] “Journeying Together: Prophetic Witness to the Truth and Light in Asia” (Unpublished manuscript, [2017]).

Asia, while by and large the same cannot be said of emerging Asian missions or the so-called world mission by Asian churches. The Asian churches and missions participating in missions at least need to relearn the fact that the ecumenical movement emerged from the missionary movement and that in the aftermath of the end of the Second World War the Asian church began mission as a way of ecumenical mission.¹⁹ Now, considering contemporary rapprochement between missions and Mission, the question is how one makes the most of the new entente for synergic effect in mission.

IV. Ecumenism in ecumenisms: the plurality of ecumenism

Since the turn of the century, the ecumenical movement including the Asian ecumenical movement has been urgently required to transform itself from a family business to a business in partnership with the society. This signals the arrival of the plurality of ecumenism, which ranges from Christian ecumenism, to wider ecumenism, and to Oikumene ecumenism, together with grass-roots ecumenism.

1. Christian Ecumenism: current ecumenism

The CCA is the most representative ecumenical body in Asia. However, different from the WCC and the National Council of Churches (NCC) in different nations which are the 'council of churches', the CCA is the 'Christian conference'. The terms chosen for the title of the CCA is meaningful: first, the word 'Christian', not 'churches', enables the CCA to include both churches, other Christian organizations and councils as members, while the WCC

¹⁹ There also continued to be experiments of ecumenical mission in a new way. Bright (Myeong Seok) Lee, *Trilateral Ecumenical Partnership: Korea, Germany and Ghana*, translated by Enoch Lee (Seoul: Yeongdeungpo Presbytery, Presbyterian Church of Korea, [2013]).

and NCC permit churches to be full members, with others being associate members; and second, the word ‘conference’, not ‘council’, allows the CCA to have more flexibility as a loosely knit structure.

However, one of the characteristics of the Asian ecumenical movement is cooperation with other Christian communions, particularly the Catholics. For instance, the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) has been a faithful co-pilgrim on the road to unity, both in thought and practice. The entente between catholic and protestant is significant in that those communions are the two representative ones in Asia, particularly in Asian countries such as the Philippines and Korea where Christianity secured its status of a major religion. However, one also finds an interesting phenomenon that in many cases Asian churches find an ideological line more difficult to cross than denominational one.

One also needs to take heed to another characteristic of the Asian ecumenical movement: cooperation and synergic effect among ecumenical efforts. For instance, the Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth (AGAPE) process which was initiated in the WCC General Assembly in Harare in 1998, and then blossomed in Porto Alegre in 2006, came to have greater significance in the regional ecumenical movement in Asia and Pacific, which suffer most from economic globalization.²⁰

In addition, it must be noted that the resuming of an active role of China, once one of the major laboratories of ecumenism in Asia, is pregnant to the future of the Asian ecumenical movement. Besides, significant is the episode of M. M. Thomas who visited the Chinese church in 1983 as a member of the CCA delegation and met his “old

²⁰ Justice, Peace and Creation Team, World Council of Churches, *Alternative Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth (AGAPE): A Background Document* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005); CCA, PCC & WCC, *Poverty, Wealth and Ecology in Asia and the Pacific: Ecumenical Perspectives* (Chiang Mai: CCA; Suva: PCC; Geneva, WCC, 2010).

friends".²¹ They were the young ecumenists whom Thomas had met at different ecumenical meetings such as the World's Student Christian Federation in Kandy, Sri Lanka, 1948, the YWCA leader's conference in Mussouri, India in 1952, and the Indian NCC Triennial in Allahabad in 1956; and they now became the leaders of the Chinese church.²² This indicates that the future of ecumenism cannot come without the future generation of ecumenism. Thus, ecumenism must be expanded not only horizontally (or geographically) but also vertically (or generationally).

2. Wider ecumenism: interfaith ecumenism

With the awareness that human beings live in one and the same ecosystem, the earth, ecumenism began to take on a new significance: it moved forward from an 'endo'-movement to an 'exo'-movement. Among new partners with which the ecumenical movement was to cooperate, most important were religions and the society. To begin with, the neologism 'wider ecumenism' has been widely used to indicate the ecumenical endeavor to build up the relationship with other religions. Although controversy over the objective and method of such relationship has not been settled yet, one can summarize the rapport into two mainstreams: interfaith dialogue and interfaith solidarity. In fact, the issue of interreligious co-work has already been dealt with since the first half of the last century. The difference is that while in the early twentieth century the common foe was secularism, now it is the total annihilation of humankind threatened by nuclear weapons and ecological disaster.

²¹ Christian Conference of Asia, "Asian Christian Leaders in China: Impressions and Reflections of a Visit to China, June 1-14, 1983" (Pamphlet; Singapore: Christian Conference of Asia, 1983), 34.

²² Ibid., 34-36. Their names were Wen-zao Han, Wen-han Kiang, Susan [surname not identified], K. H. Ting, Fu-san Zhao, Cora Deng, and Shou-bao Li.

When reviewing the themes of the General Assembly of the CCA, one can divide them broadly into three groups: 'witness' from the 1950s to the 1960s; 'liberation' from the 1970s to the 1990s; and 'life' from the 2000s to present.²³ The change of the themes eloquently speaks in what the Asian ecumenical movement has had a great interest.

3. Oikumene ecumenism: public ecumenism or ecumenism and public theology

It is well-known that the word 'ecumenical' is derived from 'oikumene', which originally means the habitable world, and the meaning has been stretched to be an ecclesiastical term indicating the unity of the churches. This lexical history points to the fact that the ecumenical movement should be a movement from, with, and to the world as much as an ecclesiastical movement. As mentioned above, the church and the society were not far from each other in the meanings of the 'ecumenical', and thus the relationship of the ecumenical movement with the society was an essential one, neither secondary nor peripheral.

Since the end of the last century, there has been some doubts about the role and place of the church in the church-state or church-society relationship. Paradoxically, the church began to be

²³ See the CCA history for the themes of the Assemblies: *The Common Evangelistic Task of the Churches in East Asia* (Prapat, Sumatra [Indonesia], 1957); *Witnessing Together* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 1959); *The Christian Community within the Human Community* (Bangkok, Thailand, 1964); *In Christ All Things Hold Together* (Bangkok, Thailand, 1968); *Christian Action in the Asian Struggle* (Singapore, Malaysia [sic], 1973); *Jesus Christ in Asian Suffering and Hope* (Penang, Malaysia, 1977); *Living in Christ with People* (Bangalore, India, 1981); *Jesus Christ Sets Free to Serve* (Seoul, South Korea, 1985); *Christ Our Peace: Building a Just Society* (Manila, Philippines, 1990); *Hope in God in a Changing Asia* (Colombo, Sri Lanka, 1995); *Time for Fullness of Life for All* (Tomohon, Indonesia, 2000); *Building Communities of Peace for All* (Chiang Mai, Thailand, 2005); *Called to Prophecy, Reconcile and Heal* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 2010); *Living Together in the Household of God* (Jakarta, Indonesia). <http://cca.org.hk/home/cca-history>, accessed Feb.24, 2018. N.B. Singapore gained independence in 1965.

eclipsed by civil society groups in the leadership in socio-political issues. In the second half of the twentieth century, the church was an important or the only dissent to protest against the government in many Asian countries, and the ecumenical movement played a role of organizer to gather people to protest. However, the success of the democratization in Asian societies, mainly thanks to the ecumenical movement, resulted in the mushrooming of burgeoning civil society groups, which outgrew and even isolated the church. It is in this context that the church began to bring forth public theology, and in a similar vein the ecumenical movement is obliged to develop corresponding "public ecumenism" (my coinage) to be continuously of relevance to the world.²⁴ Public ecumenism requires the church to take on a new stance in socio-political issue: to be a part, not the leader, of the society working with other civil society groups in pursuit of common good, providing its unique ideas and legacies. On the part of the church, this will be a totally new experience, but perhaps will be the only option available for it. It is worth mentioning in passing that in some Asian countries such as Korea, the church failed to appreciate the significance of the changed context and attempted to have a strong influence on the society, and yet the society tended to interpret it as a special interest group's abusing the power.

4. Grass-roots ecumenism: glocal ecumenism

Whether successful or not, the ecumenical movement including the Asian ecumenical movement appears to have been inclined toward elitism rather than mass movement. Admittedly, the ecumenical movement has challenged the church and the world to be an inclusive society by insisting the balance of representation: West

²⁴ Ariarajah also raised the question of public theology in relation to the future of the Asian church. Wesley Ariarajah, [Response to] "Journeying Together: Prophetic Witness to the Truth and Light in Asia".

and non-West, clergy and laity, man and woman, and old and young. However, it is difficult to say confidently that the ecumenical movement succeeded in local ecumenism and grass-roots ecumenism. In the era of globalization or glocalization, the ecumenical movement should attend to locality and popularity to move beyond the winter of ecumenism, to which the Asian ecumenical movement is no exception.

V. Conclusion

The landscape, particularly the ecclesiastical landscape, of Asia is kaleidoscopic. Nowadays, the face of Asia becomes much more diverse, ideologically, ethnically, and economically, than in the early twentieth century, when Asian church leaders began to appear on the international stage. Such diversity points out numerous problems and matching opportunities in Asia.

By highlighting the importance of region, the Asian ecumenical movement became a forerunner of regionalism, on the one hand, and could detect and respond to their own problems in a very concrete way, on the other. Thus, emergent Asian theologies arisen from real life were diametrically different from the Western ones which were often censured as being created by armchair theologians shut up in an ivory tower. However, theology, confession, and mission were inseparable in the Asian context.

Furthermore, the Asian ecumenical movement through its own network and the support of the world ecumenical movement helped the Asian church to grow, especially in theology. It carried out various projects to develop library, history, and even theological framework, which all combined to provide infrastructure in the Asian church. The infrastructure enabled the improvement of theological studies in Asia, which in turn challenged and enriched the theological circles at the global level. At the same time, ever-accumulated

histories by Asian church historians enabled us to have a more comprehensive history of Christianity in Asia and the world.

The CCA, the favorite child of the Asian ecumenical movement, celebrated its Diamond Jubilee in 2017, and the centennial of the IMC conference in Jerusalem in 1928, where Asian delegates for the first time comprised the considerable amounts of participators, is coming up. Being authentic must come before doing authentic. To render authenticity requires genuine selfhood, and thus it is in this context that one needs to apply the three-self principle to the ecumenical body, as has been applied to the church. It is because an ecumenical body is vulnerable to the problem of dependency as much as the church. In other words, like mission in Asia by the Asian church, like ecumenism in Asia by the Asian church. As Robert Browning sang in his poem entitled 'The Last Ride Together', "The petty done, the undone vast", the Asian ecumenical movement centering on the CCA needs to go extra miles to reach the goal: bring forth the Kingdom of God in Asia here and now, and forever more.

Bibliography

Ahn, Kyo Seong. "The Asian Context and the Ecumenical Movement of the Korean Church". *Korea Presbyterian Journal of Theology* 45/3 (2013): 37-62.

Ariarajah, Wesley. [Response to] "Journeying Together: Prophetic Witness to the Truth and Light in Asia". Unpublished manuscript, [2017].

- Brotherston, Gordon. *Book of the Fourth World: Reading the Native Americans through Their Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Chang, Jonah and Ching-Fen Hsiao. *Shoki Coe: An Ecumenical Life in Context*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2012.
- Christian Conference of Asia. "Asian Christian Leaders in China: Impressions and Reflections of a Visit to China, June 1-14, 1983". Pamphlet; Singapore: Christian Conference of Asia, 1983.
- . *The Global Challenge: Report of the WCC/CCA Asian Refugee Meeting, December 1-5, 1987*. Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asia, 1989.
- CCA, PCC & WCC. *Poverty, Wealth and Ecology in Asia and the Pacific: Ecumenical Perspectives*. Chiang Mai: CCA; Suva: PCC; Geneva, WCC, 2010.
- England, John C. et al. eds., *Asian Christian Theologies: A Research Guide to Authors, Movements, Sources, Vols. I-III*. Delhi: ISPCK; Quezon City: Claretian Publishers; Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002, 2003, 2004.
- England, R. M. & J. C. England. *Ministering Asian Faith and Wisdom: A Manual for Theological Librarians in Asia*. Quezon City: New Day Publishers; Delhi: ISPCK, 2001.
- Hogg, William Richey. *Ecumenical Foundations: A History of the International Missionary Council and Its Nineteenth Century Background*. New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1952.
- The International Missionary Council. *Volume III. The Relation between the Younger and the Older Churches, The Jerusalem Meeting of the International Missionary Council, March*

24-April 8, 1928. New York: International Missionary Council, 1928.

———. *Volume VIII. Addresses on General Subjects, The Jerusalem Meeting of the International Missionary Council, March 24-April 8, 1928*. New York: International Missionary Council, 1928.

Justice, Peace and Creation Team, World Council of Churches. *Alternative Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth (AGAPE): A Background Document*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005.

Kalu, Ogbu U. ed. *African Church Historiography: An Ecumenical Perspective: Papers presented at a Workshop on African Church History, held at Nairobi, August 3-8, 1986*. Bern: Evangelische Arbeitsstelle Oekumene Schweiz, 1988.

Koshy, Ninan. *A History of the Ecumenical Movement in Asia, I*. Hong Kong: CCA, 2004.

———. ed. *A History of the Ecumenical Movement in Asia, II*. Hong Kong: CCA, 2004.

Lee, Bright (Myeong Seok). *Trilateral Ecumenical Partnership: Korea, Germany and Ghana*. Translated by Enoch Lee. Seoul: Yeongdeungpo Presbytery, Presbyterian Church of Korea, [2013].

O'Grady, Ron. ed. *Third World Tourism: Report of a Workshop on Tourism, held in Manila, Philippines, September 12-25, 1980*. Singapore: Christian Conference of Asia, 1980.

Thomas, T. K. ed. *Christianity in Asia: North-East Asia*. Singapore: CCA, 1979.

- United Church of Christ in the Philippines. *UCCP Statements and Resolutions (1948-1990)*. Quezon City: Education and Nurture Desk, United Church of Christ in the Philippines, 1990.
- Vischer, Lukas. ed. *Church History in an Ecumenical Perspective: Papers and Reports of an International Ecumenical Consultation held in Basle October 12-17, 1981*. Bern: Evangelische Arbeitsstelle Oekumene Schweiz, 1982.
- . ed. *Towards a History of the Church in the Third World: Papers and Report of a Consultation on The Issue of Periodisation, convened by the Working Commission on Church History of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, July 17-21, 1983*. Geneva, Bern: Evangelische Arbeitsstelle Oekumene Schweiz, 1985.
- Weber, Hans-Ruedi. *Asia and the Ecumenical Movement, 1895-1961*. London: SCM, 1966.
- Wickeri, Philip. L. ed. *The People of God Among All God's Peoples*. Hong Kong: CCA; London: CWM, 2000.
- Yamamoto, Toshimasa. *Ajia-ekyumenikaru undoshi [The History of the Asian Ecumenical Movement]*. Tokyo: Shinkyō Publishing Co., 2007. (in Japanese)
- Yap, Kim Hao. *From Prapat to Colombo: History of the Christian Conference of Asia (1957- 1995)*. Hong Kong: CCA, 1995.
- Yuzon, Lourdino A. ed. *Called to Send and to Receive*. Singapore: Christian Conference of Asia, 1981.