

**Report on a consultation to improve the documentation of Christianity in Asia
& proposal to establish a pilot program**
(Extract)

On October 5-6, 2005, a consultation was held at Trinity Theological College in Singapore with the support of the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia. The purpose of the consultation was to carry out a needs analysis to determine whether or not a program should be developed to improve the documentation of Christianity in Asia. This is a report on the work of that consultation, together with a proposal that the United Board fund a pilot program to carry that work forward.

Those in attendance: Paul Stuehrenberg (Yale Divinity Library), Martha Smalley (Yale Divinity Library), Michael Poon (Trinity Theological College), Michael Mukunthan (Trinity Theological College), Irene Wong (Hong Kong Baptist University), William Yoder (McGilvary Divinity School, Payap University), Chayan Hiranpan (Payap University Archives)

1. What is.

Yale Divinity Library. Paul began with an overview of the Day Missions Collection and the Kenneth Scott Latourette Initiative for the Documentation of World Christianity. He highlighted the archival and manuscript collections held at Yale that document Christianity in Asia.¹ Martha related recent initiatives for improving the documentation of world Christianity, including the IAMS Rome consultation (2002), the month-long documentation workshop at United Theological College (Bangalore, India) held in June 2004, and the consultation Michael Poon organized on documenting Christianity in Singapore and Malaysia held in March 2005. The present consultation grew out of and built upon these initiatives. Our primary objective for this consultation was to find ways to improve the documentation of Christianity in Asia, perhaps through the development of collaborative relationships. Secondly, we sought to determine if there were initiatives for which we might seek outside funding.

Hong Kong Baptist University. Irene reported that the Archive on the History of Christianity in China was created in 1997.² The Archive is one of the HKBU Library's special collections and receives regular funding from the Library, as well as grant funding. The Henry Luce Foundation gave them a \$200,000 collection-development grant and the

¹ The Divinity Library holds the archives of American School of Kikungshan, Asian Women's Institute, Associate Board of the Women's Christian College (Madras, India), Chinese Students Christian Association in North America, Church of Christ in China Border Service Department, Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia, Japan International Christian University Foundation, Shanghai American School, United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia, and the World Student Christian Federation. Through the China Records Project, sponsored by the National Council of Churches, the personal papers of some 300 missionaries to China were added to the Yale Divinity Library collection. The Library now has more than 1,600 linear feet of manuscript material documenting missions to China.

² See Kylie Chan, "The Archives of the History of Christianity in China at Hong Kong Baptist University Library: its development, significance, and future," *International bulletin of missionary research*, 29 (2005), 32-34.

United Board gave them a grant to support three-month internships for librarians from the former Christian universities in China over a three-year period. HKBU has arranged to film 19th and 20th centuries books relating to Christianity held in Chinese libraries, particularly the Shanghai Public Library, East China Normal University Library, and Beijing Normal University Library. They sponsored an archival training workshop for church leaders in Hong Kong that had 155 participants, with funding from the Hong Kong Chinese Christian Churches Union. The Union also underwrote an oral history project carried out by the HKBU history faculty. The Archive has sponsored several digital projects. They want to document Christianity in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macao, and China regardless of language or denomination.

Irene reported that the Catholic diocesan archives of Hong Kong has well-organized archives. Michael added that the Anglican Diocese of Hong Kong archives up to 1930 are in the Public Records Office. Records for the period after WWII were destroyed. More recent Anglican records are at the Bishops House.

She also reported that the East China Theological Seminary (outside Shanghai) houses historical theological books in poor environmental conditions. The Shanghai Municipal Archives has some documentation of pre-1950 Chinese Christianity.

Payap University. Bill reported that Payap University was created in 1974 by the merger of McGilvary Divinity School and the McCormick School of Nursing. They have subsequently added several faculties. The University is owned by the Church of Christ in Thailand. Herbert Swanson began their archival program in 1978. The Payap University Archives includes the archives of the University and of the CCT, and includes missionary material dating from 1828. They also have personal papers and oral histories. They have an ongoing microfilming project and a sophisticated conservation program. Their staff of 11 includes three processing positions and three conservators. They have 3,000 linear feet of material with finding aids and folder-level descriptions, stored in acid-free containers. Each year they add ca. 100 linear feet. Each summer they sponsor training sessions for archivists.

The CCT is the main Protestant presence in Thailand. It is a merger of missions sponsored by Lutherans, American Baptists, Presbyterians, Disciples of Christ, and United Church of Christ. The other denominations that are allowed permanent visas to Thailand are the Roman Catholics, Southern Baptists, Seventh Day Adventists, and the Evangelical Fellowship. In recent years missionaries have come from Korea and the United States on short-term visas. The churches they have founded are not well organized.

Michael asked about the relationship between Thailand and the rest of Indochina. Bill said he thought it would be wonderful for Payap University to serve as a center for documenting Christianity in Indochina. For that to happen the University and the CCT would have to agree on this expansion of their mission.

Trinity Theological College. The Centre for the Study of Christianity in Asia was founded in 2001 as the research arm of TTC. Its primary focus is on Christianity in Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia. The Centre works closely with the TTC Library. Their main emphasis is on collecting books, serials, theses, and official publications of church bodies. They do not have an archival program, in part because the National

Archives has an active program of collecting such material, and in part because they do not have the resources to do so. The Centre's three emphases are: a. documentation; b. Asian theologies; c. the impact of socio-economic policies on the mission of the church. They have a growing web presence. They are implementing the recommendations Martha made during her visit there in March, in brief:

- to provide a consolidated repository for publications related to local churches and denominational bodies.
- to re-organize the published materials gathered from the churches in an archival manner, and develop "collection-level" records and links in the OPAC to draw attention to the availability of the material.
- to produce a repository guide, both in print and online form. This guide would clarify and provide an overview of the types of materials collected by the Centre.
- to develop web presence that would guide researchers to what is available in the College and the region.
- to provide a channel for cooperative action for churches in the region on archives preservation.
- Specific tasks that the CSCA should undertake in the next few years:
 - a. Define the parameters of the material it will collect to document the four sponsoring church bodies in Singapore and Malaysia.
 - b. Institute the processes needed to obtain this material, including reports, periodicals, souvenir booklets, etc.
 - c. Develop systems of organizing and describing this material in an archival manner.
 - d. Develop the content of the CSCA web site.
 - e. Sponsor regular meetings of the Committee of the Archival Preservation Initiative, which will encourage the church representatives to take the specific steps towards the long term goal of archival preservation .
 - f. Help the churches formulate grant proposals for specific projects.

2. What needs to be done?

Discussion next focused on the broad picture of what needs to be done to improve documentation of Christianity in Asia. We identified the following:

- Create a collaborative web presence that would guide researchers to what is available. Web pages for each region within Asia might emulate the efforts of the CSCA. An umbrella site would help coordinate consortial efforts.
- Prepare an inventory of primary sources for each region that would identify what church bodies and other ecclesial agencies are publishing and the status of their official records/archives.
- Encourage denominations and other ecclesial agencies to develop archives through consultation and training.
- Identify documentation, including archives, that are at risk.
- Develop a collaborative preservation microfilming program for at-risk materials.
- Identify gaps in the historical sources (e.g., Vietnam after 1975, China during cultural revolution).
- Develop oral history projects to help fill in those gaps.

- Identify gaps in holdings of libraries in the regional centers (e.g., published works about Hong Kong Christianity not held in Hong Kong libraries).
- Coordinate efforts at documenting Asian Christianity in order to make the best use of scarce resources.
- Identify partner institutions with whom to work, including seminaries, universities, and other institutions that gather such documentation.
- Space needs for building archival collections.
- Funding for Asian archivists/librarians to travel to European and Australasian repositories to identify materials relating to Christianity in Asia.

We defined “documentation” to include (more or less in order of importance):

1. Secondary literature, including monographs and serials, scholarly and more popular.
2. “Official” publications of denominations and other ecclesial agencies, including, but not limited to, annual reports, directories, periodicals, and newsletters.
3. “Grey” literature, including printed material with limited distribution (e.g., literature sent out by denominations to congregations and clergy) and ephemeral material (e.g., brochures, flyers, pamphlets, etc.)
4. Archival material, including the archives of mission agencies, denominations, church-related agencies, ecumenical agencies, and congregations.
5. Personal papers of church leaders.
6. Oral histories.
7. Electronic resources, especially those that are “born digital.”

We next focused on what each institution would like to accomplish as a result of this collaboration.

Hong Kong Baptist University. Irene said HKBU is interested in building its collections in all areas. In addition, she said they want to focus on training and preservation.

Trinity Theological College. TTC is interested in building collections in areas 1-3. Retrospectively, they want to fill in gaps in documentation of Christianity in Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia. They seek to provide training workshops for local church leaders and to develop partnerships with institutions in the region. They will develop their website, including guides and indexes to resources.

Payap University. Payap will develop its website, especially getting its finding aids on-line. While it is currently narrowly focused on the CCT, they would like to develop regional partnerships—to “internationalize” their program.

3. Who should be involved?

We spent considerable time discussing what other institutions should be involved in this initiative to improve the documentation of Christianity in Asia. Clearly the three Asian institutions that took part in the consultation do not represent all of Asia. Missing are

institutions that would document South Asia, China (although HKBU does a certain level of collecting for mainland China and Taiwan), Taiwan, Japan, Korea, and the Philippines. A comprehensive program should include centers for each of these regions.

We also discussed what existing organizations might undertake support of such a documentation project as a part of their on-going program initiatives. Possibilities include the Christian Conference of Asia, the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia (although this does not cover all of Asia), and the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia office in Hong Kong.

We concluded that we should submit a proposal to the United Board to fund a pilot program, one that would establish regional centers that would work together to improve the documentation of Christianity in Asia. The three Asian institutions represent three very different types of institutions, so the pilot program would help to demonstrate the feasibility of such collaboration. After a trial period, their experience should provide insight into how to expand coverage across Asia.

4. Next steps.

There was general consensus that current efforts to document Christianity in Asia are inadequate. Payap University has an excellent archival program, but most of its archival holdings are currently limited to the Church of Christ in Thailand; this program is one of a kind. Some denominations have archival programs, but they appear to be in the minority. If the churches in Asia are to have a record of their history, the documentation of that history must be improved.

We identified six activities divided into three categories that would comprise a pilot project for improving the documentation of Christianity in Asia.

I. Collaborative Web Presence.

Establish Hong Kong Baptist University, Payap University, and Trinity Theological College as a consortium, with Yale Divinity Library as an interested partner. In order to facilitate their work, this consortium would establish a web presence, with each of the partner institutions providing access and links to resources for Christianity in their region. These might include, but not be restricted to, archival finding aids, library catalogs, digital resources (maps, photographs, selected texts), databases of theses, links to other institutions in the region, and other regional resources. Yale Divinity Library would prepare an umbrella site with links to the participating institutions.

This web presence would enable the consortium to collaborate electronically, while at the same time providing improved access to their resources to scholars around the world. Scholars would be able to use the consortial website as a portal through which they might identify resources documenting Christianity in Asia. The consortium would also investigate ways to provide electronic access to primary resources.

II. Collection Development.

- A. In collaboration with Yale Divinity Library, members would develop a survey instrument to facilitate the gathering of information from regional church bodies and other ecclesial organizations. The survey would seek to determine what these organizations publish and the state of their archives. Members would seek to collect published material on a continuing basis and would consult with the organizations about best practices for building and preserving their archival collections.
- B. Members would identify material “at risk” (books, periodicals, and archival collections) as candidates for a preservation microfilming program, with funding from the Kenneth Scott Latourette Initiative for the Documentation of World Christianity.
- C. Using standard bibliographies, members would identify gaps in their holdings of monographs and periodicals, and seek to purchase copies, with having microfilm copies made as a last resort.
- D. Members would identify archival documentation of historical missionary activity in their regions, and purchase those that are commercially available; those that have not been microfilmed will be candidates for filming using funds from the Latourette Initiative. Identifying this documentation might require some travel to Europe and/or Australasia.

III. Building Bridges.

- A. Each of the member institutions would conduct a regional consultation, similar to the one held in Singapore, to which theological colleges, seminaries, universities, and other institutions that collect the documentation of Asian Christianity would be invited. The purpose of the consultations would be to raise awareness of the need for collaboration and to lay the groundwork for collaborative relationships.
- B. Each of the member institutions would conduct one or more workshops for church leaders in their region to raise awareness of the need to collect archival resources and to teach the basics of archival management. One possible outcome of the workshops would be to encourage institutions to deposit their archives with an agency equipped to handle them.

We believe this pilot program falls within the mission of the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia. First of all, it is a collaborative program, bringing together four institutions, three of which are in Asia, with the possibility of expanding the collaboration further. Indeed, the three regional consultations will themselves provide additional collaboration. This collaboration clearly falls within the United Board’s “support for linkages and networks among institutions of higher education” that “cross national, religious, and institutional borders.” Furthermore, the program is focused on developing a structure and providing the needed material basis, i.e. the gathering of library and archival resources, for theological colleges in Asia to offer postgraduate degree programmes on the study of Christianity in Asia. This would enable churches in the region to offer fresh interpretations of contemporary Christianity that missionary

archives in the West are unable to provide. And, finally, this program fits within the parameters of “Asian theologies,” for without the primary documentation of Christianity in Asia, Asian theologians have to rely on Western sources for their history.