

Asian Intersections: Dispersed, Diverse, Different

—Kwok Pui-lan

—Lester Edwin J. Ruiz

The *Journal of Asian/Asian American Theological Educators (JANATE)* was launched in 2015 to promote Asian/North American scholarship and leadership in theological education in collaboration with Asian counterparts. We are honored to be the guest editors for the second issue with the theme “Asian Intersections: Dispersed, Diverse, Different.”

In the past several decades, the sociopolitical situations of Asian countries have changed dramatically. With economic development on the Pacific Rim, the rise of China as the world’s second largest economy, a heightened arms race in many Asian countries, war and conflicts in West Asia, and recent South China Sea disputes, Asia Pacific has become a strategic political, economic, and military geopolitical area. Globalization, migration, and immigration have presented new social and economic challenges.

On the other side of the Pacific, Asian Americans are the fastest-growing racial group and they are largely responsible for the growth of religious diversity in the U.S. Since the U.S. changed the national quota system in its immigration policy in 1965, the total population of Asian Americans has increased from less than 1% to 5.8% (18.2 million) according to the 2011 census. Nearly three-quarters of Asian Americans were foreign born. Although Asian Americans have higher educational attainment than other groups in the U.S., many of them face marginalization and alienation as racial minorities. New immigrants especially face cultural, linguistic, and economic barriers.

It is important for theological educators across the Pacific to discuss challenges to theological education amidst the changing geopolitical situation in the region. In this issue, we probe the diversity and difference in Asia/North America and explore the intersections. We are pleased to include contributions from seasoned colleagues as well as emergent scholars from Northeast, Southeast, and South Asian backgrounds. They are from diverse theological disciplines, including theology, biblical studies, practical theology, mission studies, ethics, and art.

This issue begins with **Peter C. Phan**’s keynote address, presented at a meeting of the Congress of Asian Theologians held in Kochi, Kerala, India in April 2016. The essay describes the diversity of Asia and analyzes different forms and expressions of Asian Christianities. Phan reminds us that in carrying out God’s mission, we must remember the “mind-boggling diversities of God’s *oikos* in Asia.” He notes that the contemporary period has been dubbed “the age of migration,” a phenomenon that has changed the face of Asian Christiani-



ties. Phan proposes a model of doing theology ecumenically and interreligiously in response to Asia's religious, cultural, and ecclesial diversities.

Contributors to this issue employ different theories and concepts to analyze fluid identities and diversity, as well as to negotiate difference within Asia/North America. **Courtney T. Goto** critically evaluates the concept of "hybridity" as deployed in Asian American theological discourse. Noting that "hybridity" has different shades of meanings when applied in Asia and Asian America, she argues that while the term may be useful for articulating commonalities of Asian American experiences, it can also obfuscate particularities and differences when the lived experiences of different ethnic groups are ignored. Her article is a helpful reminder to avoid using a concept to generalize pan-Asian American identities.

While Western theorists have theorized about difference and alterity for decades, **Jin H. Han's** essay contributes to the conversation by turning to Asian resources for insights. He plays with the resemblance of the terms "difference" and "deference" and argues that the Asian understanding of deference to the Other has rich potential to address the question of alterity. As a biblical scholar, Han shows that deference to and caring for the Other are also at the heart of the biblical message.

The following three articles focus on specific contexts in Asia—Taiwan, Nagaland, and the Philippines—while bringing out common concerns for churches in Asia. **Su-Chi Lin** from Taiwan discusses the pedagogy of using Christian art in theological education. As someone who has studied art and theology, Lin uses the works of two Taiwanese female artists as illustrations. Christian art in Asia in general and the work of Asian women artists in particular are areas that would need much further exploration.

Biblical scholar **Zakali Shohe** from Nagaland mines Paul's discussion on Jewish-Gentile relationships in Romans 15:7-13 for insights to address the issues of economic migrants in Nagaland. She shows that Paul's call for acceptance to the Jews and Gentiles is highly relevant today, because migration has caused tensions and conflicts in Nagaland and other parts of Asia.

Arun W. Jones's essay interprets the history of Protestantism in the Philippines through the local agency of Filipino Christians, instead of from the lenses of mission and imperialism. He offers examples of how Filipino Christians have articulated and expressed their religion in theory and practice. The study of the interaction between local Christians and their particular Asian milieus broadens our understanding of world Christianity.

We have included four essays in the Columns. **Lester Edwin J. Ruiz** discusses the challenges of globalization to theological education through re-telling the story of the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS). He describes the work of the ATS in promoting global awareness and engagement through programs and partnerships. He argues that we need to use intersectional analyses to understand the complex body-politics of our world shaped by dispersal, displacement, and dislocation.

Nami Kim's essay discusses the role of a feminist woman of color scholar-teacher in seeking social transformation. She highlights the multiple belongings of and demands on an Asian scholar as a result of her national origin and her racial minority status. Through critical reflections on one's teaching and the use of subversive pedagogy, a teacher can turn the American academy into a site of contestations of knowledge and power relations.



Paul H. B. Chang describes the life and career of Witness Lee (Li Changshou), a Chinese American minister who established a post-graduate training center in Southern California in 1989. Today, the training center has become one of the largest post-graduate theological institutions in the U.S. In addition, there are about twelve such schools in other parts of the world, which can be traced to the same minister. Yet until now, the story of Witness Lee and the school he founded is little known.

The last essay in the Columns is a Bible study presented by **vanThanh Nguyen** at the inaugural meeting of the Global Forum of Theological Educators held in Dorfweil (near Frankfurt), Germany, in May 2016. Several leading Asian theological educators attended the meeting. By means of a creative re-telling of Acts 17:22-31, through the lens of Dionysius the Areopagite, Nguyen points to Paul's tolerance and respect for the culture and philosophies of the Athenians. Paul's attitudes and his cross-cultural preaching skills have much to offer to theological educators, preachers, and mission workers.

The Roundtable features a panel discussion on the book *Asian American Christian Ethics: Voices, Methods, Issues* at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in 2015. Divided into thirteen chapters, this groundbreaking anthology showcases the work of the subfield of Asian American Christian ethics. The Roundtable presents an intergenerational conversation between the commentators—**Kwok Pui-lan**, **Rita Nakashima Brock**, and **Andrew Sung Park**—and the coeditors **Ilsup Ahn** and **Grace Y. Kao**. By discussing the nature, scope, sources, and methodology of the emerging subfield, this Roundtable provides food for thought not only for Asian American ethicists but also for others who want to introduce an Asian American lens to their respective fields of study.

As we were writing the editorial in July 2016, the ambush and killing of five police officers in Dallas at the end of a peaceful protest organized by Black Lives Matter was much in our minds. The incident underscores the need to have much more conversation on racial tension, gun violence, police profiling and brutality, and healing as a nation. In the Symposium, we are very pleased to be able to broaden our conversation and explore wider intersections by including contributions from African American scholars **Willie James Jennings** and **Emilie M. Townes**, Jewish scholar **Santiago Slabodsky**, and Chinese American theologian **Kwok Pui-lan**. Jennings's article was the opening statement at the plenary on "Theological Education after Ferguson" at the ATS biennial meeting in St. Louis, Missouri, in June 2016, while the other three essays were delivered at a panel on "Race, Ferguson, and the Future of American Democracy" at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in 2015. We hope the Symposium will spark further conversations in churches, faith communities, seminaries, and divinity schools among different racial groups.

Asian and Asian North American scholars have produced a significant number of new books in the last couple of years. We are indebted to **Russell Jeung** for his work in reviewing a selected number of these books in the Book Review section.

Finally, in the process of editing the issue, we are deeply grateful to **vanThanh Nguyen**, managing editor of the Journal, for his advice and assistance in the editing, reviewing, and production processes. We appreciate the meticulous work of the staff of the Journal. It has been a learning experience for us, as the Journal is in its infancy, and we thank the contributors for their scholarship and their support for the Journal.





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