



## THE NEXT IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION: MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER!

The ICETE- C25 Gathering in Tirana, Albania

It was nothing short of momentous! With 600 participants from about a hundred countries, it was, to date, the largest and most diverse in the 45- year history of ICETE- that is C-25! Held in Tirana, Albania from March 3 to 7, ICETE C-25 drew in quite a crowd, with more than a quarter of the

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participants women, a tenth younger leaders, and a great percentage of the attendees from the Majority World!

Yet more momentous than the crowd it drew was the challenge it gave to all those who came: “How do we move forward together to have theological education become more alive, more vibrant, more relevant?” Ortiz asks. As the church continues to grow at an unprecedented rate so is the need to train Christian leaders in ways that are relevant and responsive to the needs and challenges of the times. Such an enormous task is not something that one organization, institution, or school can do on its own. It is something that must be done hand in hand- in collaboration and partnership with one another, regardless of whether it is formal, informal, or non-formal theological education.

Yet more than just simply raising new leaders, these collaborations should lead to more relevant ways of doing theological education. Undoubtedly, theological education has been sluggish in adapting to the times. Ortiz further states: “We must help each other to [stay] tuned to what's happening. What are the current realities of the church, the people of God, that they're facing... We must help the Church be anticipatory, understand what's working, what's coming down the road because theological education traditionally has been far too reactive.”

But the move to make theological education more vibrant and relevant goes beyond just simply starting new training programs. In fact, new training programs are not the solution to this gnawing problem. Rather, what is needed is for leaders and educators to step back to assess whether these programs “have real-life impact on students”. Ortiz further states: “We do not need more training programs. We need transformed lives through transformed training programs.”

Of course, ICETE C-25 did not linger on those challenges, but instead provided a space for leaders to work together to move toward solutions through Impact Teams. For each challenge identified, there is an Impact Team. Impact teams have become the core strategy of ICETE and are “communities of practice that facilitate global relationship building, research, publication, advocacy, cross-pollination of ideas, and innovative best practices for what's next in theological education.” In fact, these were called “Impact Teams” because they are expected to “impact the way that we do theological



*The ICETE board which includes our very own Drs. Theresa Lua, Graham Aylet, and Jessy Jaison. The board met prior to C25*

## The most vital missiological endeavor of our time is Theological Education

- Michael Ortiz, ICETE Executive Director, in his opening address

education into the future.” During the ICETE C-25 gathering, 20 Impact Teams gathered 2 hours each day to pray, brainstorm, and discuss ideas and initiatives necessary to keep theological education relevant and effective at its calling.

In addition to the Impact Teams, all throughout the week, speakers from various parts of the globe gave messages that revolved around themes of resting, reflecting, and recalibrating- which are equally needed to face the enormous task before each theological leader and educator.

Finally, there was one prayer that opened and closed C-25 and it fully captures the heartbeat of the gathering. It is likewise with that prayer that we end: “Lord, may ICETE C-25, Tirana propel us forward together in our common aim – strengthen the Church for its mission.” ♦

### Sources:

Most diverse global theological education conference kicks off with vision to see millions prepared for ministry - Christian Daily International Forward Together - ICETE



# CONGRATULATIONS TO THE AUTHORS ADVANCING TO FULL PAPER SUBMISSION!

Late last year, we released a call for papers that explore institutional approaches to the holistic formation of leaders, focusing on strategies and practices as well as the underlying theories and

principles. We were deeply encouraged by the strong response and the high quality of submissions received from our member institutions.

Originally, only eight abstracts were to be selected. However, due to the impressive quality of submissions and with generous support from the Templeton Religion Trust, the number was expanded to 14. All abstracts were carefully assessed and ranked by the selection committee based on the evaluation criteria, and the final selections were confirmed by external reviewers. These 14 selected abstracts will now move into the next stage of development – writing the full manuscript.

Title of paper:	Author's Name(s):	Institution:
Integrating Theological Education with Spiritual Formation—A Case Study of SAIACS	G. John Daniel	South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies (India)
As Iron Sharpens Iron: Exploring the Factors of Spiritual and Relational Formation for Asian Seminary Students at IGSL	Jezreel Kay Leones	International Graduate School of Leadership (Philippines)
Equipping Christ-like Leaders for Turbulent Times: A Multiple Case Study of APNTS Students and Alumni and their Ministries of Peace in Places of Conflict	Marie Joy Pring Faraz Lynne Bollinger Rebecca Davis Cing Sian Thawn	Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary (Philippines)
Communities of Pastoral Support for Doctoral Education: AGST Alliance Case Study	Wai-Ling Ng Melanie Lim	AGST Alliance (Malaysia)
Imagining the Future of Christian Evangelical Theological College in Indonesia: A Case Study of STT Amanat Agung	Yeremia Y. Putra & Yohanes K. Susanta	Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Amanat Agung (Indonesia)
An Integrative Approach to Spiritual Formation in the Challenging Context of Hong Kong	Annie Pan Yi Jung	China Graduate School of Theology (Hong Kong)
Empowering Transformation: Holistic Pathways to Growth at Berachah Institute of Higher Education and Research, Palampur, Himachal Pradesh	Parakulathu Abey Thomas & Rev. Robin C Varughese	Berachah Institute of Higher Education and Research (India)
In Pursuit of Healthier Seminarians: Fostering Well-Being in Future Ministers at China Evangelical Seminary	Lily K. Chua	China Evangelical Seminary (Taiwan)
Seminary Formation for Social Transformation: The Experience of Asian Theological Seminary (working title)	Raniel Gallardo & Kevin Yau	Asian Theological Seminary (Philippines)
A Global and Contextual approach to Holistic Formation: from Every Nation, for every nation.	Ma Teresa Del Rosario Vanguardia	Every Nation Seminary (Philippines)
"Mentored Formation" and More in and outside of Curriculum - Torch Trinity Graduate University Case	Jung-Sook Lee	Torch Trinity Graduate University (South Korea)
"Theological Education in Community for Holistic Formation of Ministerial Leaders."	Sanyu Iralu & Ketouseno Iralu	Shalom Bible Seminary (India)
Holistic Spiritual Development	Mark Wood, Cinda Wood, & Otgontuya Bold	Kindom Leadership Training Center (Mongolia)
Spiritual and Leadership Formation in a Seminary for Marketplace Christians	Lai Pak Wah	Biblical Graduate School of Theology (Singapore)

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# Might Orality be What's Next for Theological Education?

By Cameron D. Armstrong  
Program Director, ThM/PhD Orality Studies  
Asia Graduate School of Theology – Philippines  
Asian Theological Seminary

## Introduction

The recent International Council of Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE), held in Albania on March 3-7, 2025, was indeed a historic gathering. Over 600 formal and non-formal theological educators from nearly 90 countries deliberated the question: “What’s Next for Theological Education?” Like many delegates, the conference in Albania was my first ICETE experience. I was especially excited to hear conversations from all directions converging upon, whether or not they used the term, my own discipline of orality. Let me give an example.

One evening, I found myself sitting across the dinner table with a fascinating academic who lives in the UK but spends several months each year in his home country in South Asia. I will call him Raj. Burdened by the fact that Christians in his home region will never afford accredited, high-quality education from Western seminaries, Raj and his organization bring the courses to the people via hybrid models. Yet Raj has noticed something over the years: their graduates often need re-educating in the language of the people. After a few years of frustration, these men and women slowly transition from the pastorate to focusing on teaching in the formal non-formal seminary space. “We have to figure out how to teach our students in the language of the people, so that they’ll produce *that*,” lamented Raj. “I’m tired of people entering our programs excited about the Church and then leaving excited about the seminary.” I couldn’t help but smile and ask, “Can I tell you about my work in orality?”

**Ok, so what is orality? A bird’s-eye view**



In all honesty, “orality” is a loaded term. It encompasses multiple disciplines. At its etymological root, orality refers to verbal communication over against written communication. In 1982, Walter Ong’s *Orality and Literacy* posited cognitive differences between oral cultures and print cultures, such as a preference for interconnected holism in oral-preference cultures versus abstract, linear understandings in print-dominated cultures. Ong gave us the term “secondary orality,” meaning culture groups that can read and write but prefer more oral forms of communication such as songs and stories.<sup>1</sup> This concept of “secondary oral cultures” is helpful because the dualistic distinction between completely oral-based and print-based is too sharp a contrast. Since Ong’s time, scholars have moved toward speaking of oral and literate preference as more of a continuum present in every culture.<sup>2</sup>

Research indicates that 80% of the world’s population prefers more oral methods of learning.<sup>3</sup> These mediums use communication forms in addition to the printed word, mediums such as story, song, proverb, dance, drama, and role-play to embody the message. Instead of asking the inherently negative question of what is wrong with these semi-literate people and how can we teach them to love books again, orality practitioners ask how can we integrate all mediums to advance more effective communication? Further, such integrative teaching hits closer to that of our Lord Jesus Christ, who himself used concrete narratives and interactive dialogue that reached the hearts of both highly literate and highly oral audiences.

How might this look in our classrooms? Fifty years ago, if someone wanted to learn a new skill, such as how to run a marathon or overhaul an engine, their first stop was most likely the library. While libraries still exist, people are increasingly turning to other sources like

*Continued on page 5*

YouTube videos to receive, process, and pass on information. Why? Because such sources are often seen by students as more engaging, more memorable, and less time consuming. Such realities certainly pose implications for theological educators.<sup>4</sup>

### Orality Studies: The Need

Undergraduate students at a large university don't read textbooks, claiming a five-minute YouTube video contains the same information.<sup>5</sup> A PhD student in a megacity in Central Asia states flatly that he hates reading.<sup>6</sup> Christian communities in Southeast Asia do not consult their newly produced Bible translations, due to both literacy and cultural challenges.<sup>7</sup> Such are a few of the challenges, often unspoken, facing theological educators today. As our Orality Impact Team gathered in Albania, led by Spoken Worldwide's Director of Field Innovation Ray Neu and SRV Partners Founder/CEO Mark Overstreet, we reflected on these challenges. How might orality help reposition the Church to impact people facing these realities?

While no easy answer exists, we are encouraged by the stories of what organizations exploring more oral pedagogies are seeing. Let me give three examples which we highlighted in our Impact Team, two from the non-formal and one from the formal sector.

**Church of the Nazarene (Non-formal).** Ray Neu traveled to one of the least literate nations in West Africa to consult with Nazarene missionaries who for years struggled with little fruit. Persecution, environmental issues, and highly literate teaching curricula left churches cautious or even discouraged in evangelism, discipleship, and church planting. Yet the team grasped the oral teaching methods, particularly reproducible Bible stories with hand gestures, and began teaching local churches with built-in accountability procedures. Before long, the mission organization leaders began receiving reports of seventh and eighth generations of believers teaching the Old Testament survey course. The growing result is a transformed ecclesial landscape as church members contagiously shared the stories with their neighbors. Today, the same course is taught in some 13 African countries.

**Saleng Leadership Institute, Mindoro, Philippines (Non-Formal).** Filipino academics Edwardneil and Doreen Benavidez on the island of Mindoro opened a Bible school that uses orality principles to offer holistic ministry training. Courses

incorporate storying and ethno-arts principles to be used in church planting, which each student must do before graduating. Students learn to plant crops for sustainable income. As such, Saleng operates more as a competency-based than grades-based system.<sup>8</sup>

### AGST-ATS ThM/PhD Orality Studies (Formal).

Beginning in August 2022, the Asia Graduate School of Theology – Philippines, in partnership with Asian Theological Seminary and the International Orality Network, launched the world's first graduate program in orality from a missiological perspective. Students serving in multiple countries across Asia and Africa design and reflect upon orality ministries through the lens of four concentration tracks: church planting, ethno-arts, Bible translation, and narratology.<sup>9</sup> By God's grace, we will have our first graduate in June!

### Conclusion

In Ephesians 4: 11-12, the Apostle Paul reminds that God gave the Church teachers to "equip the *saints* for the work of the ministry." All the saints must do the work of the ministry. All the saints must be equipped. Therefore, the burden of ICETE to fling wide the doors of theological education for the masses is indeed a holy burden. The task demands innovation, imagining and testing new possibilities among the oral majority. Might orality play a key role in this next era? We believe it must. ♦

<sup>1</sup> Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> W. Jay Moon, "Understanding Oral Learners," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 15, no. 1 (2018), 29-39.

<sup>3</sup> Grant Lovejoy, "The Extent of Orality," *Orality Journal* 1, no. 1 (2012), 11-40.

<sup>4</sup> Cameron D. Armstrong, "Orality Reality: Implications for Theological Education in Romania and Beyond," *Transformation* 40, no. 1 (2018), 16-33.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Don Barger and Grant Lovejoy, *Unreadable: Another Book You Probably Won't Read* (Richmond: International Mission Board, 2024).

<sup>7</sup> Hannu Sorsamo, "What have I learned about Bible translation?" Wycliffe Global Alliance, <https://www.wycliffe.net/what-have-i-learned-about-bible-translation/> (accessed April 1, 2025).

<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WO5IL0AmgEo> for an excellent introduction to Saleng Leadership Institute.

<sup>9</sup> Visit <https://www.agstphil.org/orality-studies/> for more information.



# Asia Theological Association Head Discusses Contextual Education, Partnership With Churches and Biblical Grounding Amid Changing Times

By Chris Eyte, Timothy Goropevsek, Apr 2, 2025 16:10 EDT

Dr. Theresa Lua, ATA General Secretary, was interviewed by Christianity Daily International while she was in Albania for ICETE C-25. Part of the article appears below.



Theological education in Asia is gaining strength as local institutions increasingly take ownership of training future leaders, according to Dr. Theresa Lua, general secretary of the Asia Theological Association (ATA). ATA includes 393 institutions across 33 countries in Asia and beyond and is considered the largest network of theological schools in the evangelical world.

Lua spoke to Christian Daily International during the 19th [Global Consultation of the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education \(ICETE\)](#), held March 3–7 in Tirana, Albania. She discussed Asian educators' efforts to contextualize curriculum, strengthen church partnerships, adapt to online learning and maintain biblical grounding in an evolving world.

As Western influence receded, Asia took ownership of training its own leaders

Reflecting on the developments and changes in Asian theological education over recent decades, Lua notes how the region has increasingly taken ownership of leadership training as Western influence has declined. She recalls a moment at an ATA general assembly when a visiting missionary remarked, "This is so different from many years ago when I used to attend. During that time, a majority of the participants were missionaries. Now I can say these are all mostly Asians."

This shift, Lua explains, came from a deliberate emphasis on "ownership of our own training." In the

past, theological education in Asia was shaped largely by external mission movements, with curricula imported from the West. Over time, however, faculty members in Asian institutions recognized that these frameworks often lacked cultural relevance and failed to address local realities. This realization sparked a movement to contextualize theological education—leading to a "battle cry" in the 1980s to "train Asians in Asia," as Lua puts it.

"Of course, one reason for that was because we were sending people to the West for faculty development, and many of them did not come back," she says. "And also because there was a need for contextualized training because these people who were training in the West, when they came back, they were just passing on what they learned from the West."

In response, ATA launched the Asia Graduate School of Theology, a consortium of seminaries offering doctoral programs designed to highlight the relevance of the Asian context. Lua acknowledges that Western influence remains, but she is quick to add, "and I am not saying it's bad."

To continue reading, access the full article in this link: <https://www.christiandaily.com/news/asia-theological-association-head-discusses-contextual-education-partnership-with-churches-and-biblical-grounding-amid-c>

# Pray for Myanmar

It is not unbeknownst to all of us that a 7.7 magnitude earthquake hit Myanmar, with the epicenter near Mandalay, the country's second largest city, last March 28. It was so strong that tremors were felt from 600 miles away in Bangkok. The earthquake has caused extensive and incalculable damage.

ATA has two member schools in Myanmar: Myanmar Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (MEGST) and Bethany Theological Seminary (BTS). While both schools are in Yangon, their leaders have been involved in relief efforts, mobilizing alumni and pastors to help the affected communities.

Let us remember to pray for Myanmar and here are some of the ways we can do so:

## 1. Comfort for the grieving

Pray for families who have lost loved ones, that God may console them and give them strength.

## 2. Healing for the injured

Pray for those wounded, that they may receive medical care and experience God's healing touch.

## 3. Provision for the displaced

Tens of thousands are without homes, food, and clean water. Pray for God's provision and protection over them.

## 4. Strength for relief workers

Pray for the Myanmar Evangelical Alliance relief team to provide shelter, food, medical aid, and spiritual support. May God grant them wisdom, endurance, and protection.

## 5. Restoration and hope

Pray that Myanmar may find hope and strength to rebuild, trusting in God's faithfulness.

## 6. Spiritual strength and revival

Pray that, in this time of suffering, many will turn to God and find salvation and hope in Jesus Christ.

## 7. Peace and stability in Myanmar

Pray for peace and stability in this nation, that communities may come together in love and unity to rebuild and recover.

## 8. Churches' response

Pray for the churches in Myanmar to effectively and collaboratively respond to the needs and suffering of the people due to this earthquake, to bring the Kingdom of God in the midst of the people.

## 9. The leadership of MECA (Myanmar Evangelical Christian Alliance)

Pray for unity among the church leaders in Myanmar. Pray for protection, wisdom, courage, and discernment as they provide prophetic voice for the nation in this difficult time.

*These prayer points were taken from the prayer gathering for Myanmar organized by the MECA, AEA, and WEA.*

## A message from MEGST, a member school in Myanmar:

The MEGST community plans to come alongside the suffering people in the Mandalay and Sagaing regions. So, they are raising funds through their connections. While they are doing so, they would greatly appreciate assistance from anyone who can lend a helping hand. *If you wish to help the victims of the recent Myanmar earthquake you may connect with Dr. Ronald Laldinsuah via email ([dinancerte@gmail.com](mailto:dinancerte@gmail.com)) and/or WhatsApp: +959260050177.*

### Prayer request:

Please pray that relief work can continue to flow to the affected regions without restriction or intimidation from the military government. ♦







## Call for Papers

for the joint symposium of the **Center for Theological Inquiry in Asia (CTIA)** and **ATA's Journal of Asian Evangelical Theology (JAET)**

## Formed & Sent

SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND MISSION

CTIA and JAET invite submissions for a joint symposium on the theme: **"Formed and Sent: Spiritual Formation and Mission,"** to be held on February 5-7, 2026 in the Philippines. This symposium explores the vital intersection of spiritual formation and mission, particularly within the Asian context.

We welcome papers exploring the multifaceted connections between spiritual formation and mission, broadly construed. We are particularly interested in papers that examine these concepts from **Asian perspectives** or within **Asian contexts and communities**, including explorations of their definitions, relevance, and interplay.

### Topics of interest

Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- Theological and/or biblical foundations of spiritual formation and mission
- Spiritual disciplines and their impact on missional engagement
- Contextualized approaches to spiritual formation and mission
- The role of spiritual formation in leadership development for mission
- Spiritual formation and social justice/transformation
- Case studies of spiritual formation and mission
- Challenges and opportunities in integrating spiritual formation and mission
- The impact of culture and tradition on spiritual formation and mission
- Interfaith dialogue and spiritual formation for mission

### Prize and Publication

**Ten (10) winning papers** will each receive a prize of **USD 2,000** and will be published in future volumes of JAET. While non-winning papers will not receive a cash prize, they may still be accepted for presentation at the symposium and considered for publication in JAET.

### Eligibility

The contest is open to graduate students, early career scholars, and established scholars working primarily in Asia.

### Submission Guidelines

- Papers must conform to JAET's submission guidelines, available at [www.jaet.asia](http://www.jaet.asia).
- Submitted work must be between 6,000-8,000 words (inclusive of footnotes), original and not previously published or submitted for publication elsewhere. It must be formatted according to the latest editions of Turabian and the *Chicago Manual of Style*.
- Papers will undergo double-blind peer review.
- The ten (10) winners are **required** to present their papers at the symposium. A modest travel stipend, in addition to the cash prize, will be provided.



Full paper submission deadline:  
**September 15, 2025**



Announcement of winners:  
**December 1, 2025**



Symposium:  
**February 5-7, 2026**

Please submit your complete paper (without any identifying information in the body of the article) in Word (.doc) format to [editor@jaet.asia](mailto:editor@jaet.asia). Indicate in your submission that the paper is for consideration for the "Formed and Sent" symposium.



# tearfund

## CONGRATULATIONS TO THE NEW RECIPIENTS OF THE ATA-TEARFUND SCHOLARSHIP!

Name: Thawn, Cing Sian  
(Myanmar)

Program: PhD in Transformational Learning

School: Asia Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary/Asia Graduate School of Theology-Philippines.

Research Title: *The Influence of the Hidden Curriculum on Formation in Theological Seminaries in Myanmar and its Impact in Church and Society: A Qualitative Inquiry*

Name: Mesir, Aliza (Malaysia)

Program: Doctor of Education (Child and Family Development)

School: Asia Graduate School of Theology- Alliance (Malaysia)

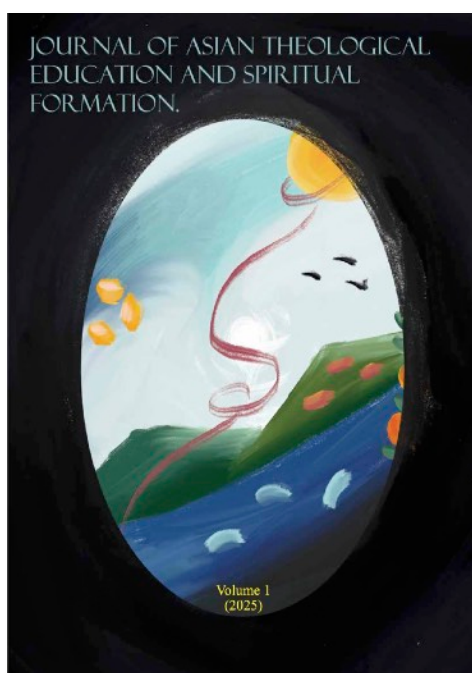
Research Title: *How can the Orang Asli mothers at Kampung Tisong, Perak, be trained to pass down the gospel of Jesus Christ to their children through chronological storytelling?*



## INTRODUCING THE JOURNAL OF ASIAN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION (JATES)

We are excited to introduce to you the newest journal of the Asia Theological Association, the Journal of Asian Theological Education and Spiritual Formation (JATES).

JATES is a subscription-based, peer-reviewed journal dedicated to enhancing the practice and knowledge of theological education and spiritual formation within Asian theological institutions.



The aims of the journal are to: (1) stimulate reflective thinking, integration, and application from critical perspectives in the fields of theological education and spiritual formation in Asia; (2) share examples, best practices, and insights from Communities of Practice; (3) provide reviews of books, dissertations, and theses in the field of theological education, spiritual formation, and related disciplines that impact education in Asia. The editors of JATES are Drs. Sooi Ling Tan and Justin Peter.

Be enriched by the very first volume at JATES Vol 1 (2025) – Asia Theological Association! ◆

*Congratulations to the authors advancing to full paper submission!*

*From page 3*

Apart from moving on to writing their paper, these authors will present their work in person at the upcoming General Assembly to be held on August 11 to 15 in Taiwan. If the paper has multiple authors, at least one of them needs to attend and present at the General Assembly. Each paper is given up to USD 750 travel subsidy, regardless of the number of authors and it will be given to the institution after the we have received both the first draft of the paper and the air ticket receipt.

As for the prize money (USD 2000), it will only be awarded when the full paper is accepted for publication in the JATES- to be in the first quarter of 2026. The prize is given to the institution, which may determine how to allocate it among the contributing authors.

For more information, you may reach out to the Editors of JATES ([jates.ata@gmail.com](mailto:jates.ata@gmail.com)).

Congratulations once again to all the authors and their institutions! We look forward to hearing your presentation in the General Assembly this August! ◆

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