

# ATS Global Awareness and Engagement Initiative proves to be continuing journey

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*The ATS Global Awareness and Engagement Initiative collaborated on two recent opportunities for learning and research in the context of a trans-Asian conversation on theological education as ministry—the Association for Theological Education in Southeast Asia (ATESEA) Doctoral Colloquium held June 26–28 at Trinity Theological College in Singapore, and the ATESEA 2023 Asian Christian Spirituality Conference held July 25–28 at the YWCA Hotel in Bangkok, Thailand. This article will cover the ATESEA Doctoral Colloquium, and the ATESEA 2023 Asian Christian Spirituality Conference will be summarized in a future issue of Colloquy Online.*

The primary purpose of the ATESEA Doctoral Colloquium is “to provide a contextualized approach to theological education that is meaningful to Asia and its contexts.” Notably, ATESEA’s “Guidelines for Doing Theologies in Asia” includes “The Critical Asian Principle”—a nearly 30-year-old document that has served not only as a substantive, methodological, and institutional framework, but also as a site of engagement for ATESEA member schools as they have sought to re-articulate these guidelines in light of the challenges faced by its schools.



This year’s colloquium was held for ATESEA member school students engaged in research and writing of their PhD or ThD dissertations. Sixteen doctoral students represented the Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana (Indonesia), the Divinity School of Chung Chi College (Hong Kong), Silliman Divinity School (Philippines), China Graduate School of Theology (Hong Kong), Institute of Myanmar Graduate Studies (Myanmar), Jakarta Theological Seminary (Indonesia), Lutheran Theological Seminary (Hong Kong), and Taiwan Theological College and Seminary (Taiwan). ATS provides resource persons from its member schools to serve as respondents to the student presentations and sometimes as formal outside readers for the dissertation committees.

Some of the presentations included:

- Ideology, Ethnicity and “*al ami Ysrael*”: Critics ideology from 1 Chronicles 11:1-3 (Indonesia)

- Analysis of Submission and Resistance in the Book of Esther through Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation (Hong Kong)
- Analysis of the Holistic Curriculum: The Nation Building Curriculum of the Kachin Baptist Convention (Myanmar, Philippines)
- Faith or Conversion: Cohesion of Christians and Muslims in Lease Islands, in the Second Half of the 19th Century (Indonesia)
- Ambivalence as Revelatory: An Islander's Interpretation of Revelation 21:1-22:5 (Taiwan)
- Theosis According to Catherine M. LaCugna and Jhon D. Zizouls (Indonesia)
- Combatting against Thoughts: A Hermeneutical Study of the Practice of Watchfulness in the Philonic Tradition (Hong Kong)

Participant observations noted the passion about the dissertation proposals; the commitment to research and rigor; the insight into previous and existing scholarship of different topics; and the creativity expressed both in the papers and in the responses of presenters to the comments of the faculty respondents.

Other important discussion points included: (1) the challenges posed by the lingering dominance of historically-Western and Mediterranean languages as the preferred languages of legitimate scholarship, (2) the expectation, real or imagined, of demonstrating scholarly competence through the mastery of Western European and/or North American oriented rituals, procedures, and styles as markers of excellence,

and (3) the deficits of resources, including accessibility of research materials, and the deprivations that arise out of political, economic, cultural, institutional, and historical situations that scholars in the global South find themselves. One example acknowledged by many during the colloquium was the ongoing militarized conflict in Myanmar and its effects on the quality of the educational life of the country.

The colloquium also creates an environment for collegiality, dialogue, and friendship across in-person, virtual, and hybrid formats. ATS faculty respondents and their ATESEA counterparts noted that this year's colloquium was a

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welcome form of both "professional development" and self-care—elements helping to create and nurture human and scholarly flourishing.

Faculty respondents from current and former ATESEA member schools included: **Simon Chan**, Trinity Theological College, Singapore; **Menghun Goh**, Taiwan Graduate School of Theology; **Lap Yan Kung**, Divinity School of Chung Chi College; **Robert Setio**, Duta Wacana Christian University; **Tony Siew**, Sabah Theological Seminary; **Zakali Shohe**, Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung; **Tan Kim Huat**, Trinity Theological College, Singapore; and **Sonia Kwok Wong**, Divinity School of Chung Chi College.





ATS and ATS member school representatives included: **Jeffrey Kuan**, Claremont School of Theology; **James R. Moore**, ATS; **Emanuel Naydenov**, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School of Trinity International University; **Lester Edwin J. Ruiz**, ATS; **Carla Mae Streeter**, Aquinas Institute of Theology; **Chloe Sun**, Fuller Theological Seminary; **Christopher M. The**, ATS; and **Sunny Wang**, GETS Theological Seminary.



"The much-appreciated contributions of the ATS scholars were made evident in their commitments to the rigors of academic research and interest in encouraging innovative approaches to theological scholarship that are culturally and significantly grounded," said Limuel Equiña, executive director of ATESEA and founder of the ATESEA Doctoral Colloquium. "The colloquium has created a community of ATS and ATESEA scholars that fosters academic excellence that is attentive to the diverse contexts, committed to the ministry of transformation, and faithful to the biblical tradition," he said.

The ATESEA Doctoral Colloquium is crucial in "cultivating scholarly and programmatic 'trade routes.'" The first doctoral colloquium was held more than a decade ago in Singapore and it focused on providing resources for doctoral students to identify, clarify, and articulate their methodological perspectives and dispositions. Now, the colloquium is one of the long-term expressions of the partnership between ATESEA and ATS, and it has been hosted in Hong Kong, Indonesia, Philippines, and Thailand. The future of theological education worldwide depends on multilateral and mutually acceptable flows of scholarship, resources, and expertise between the global North and South. Collaboration with ATESEA in its doctoral colloquium is one of the concrete ways that ATS

accomplishes its mission "to promote the improvement and enhancement of theological schools to the benefit of communities of faith and the broader public."

This year's colloquium invited ATS to again reflect on the relationship between North American theological education and theological education in the majority world. New and better pathways must be established. To find our way into the future, the following questions should be asked:

- What can be done to enrich and strengthen the flow of scholarly information?
- What criteria should govern such flows?
- What role should an association of schools play in identifying them?
- Could ATS provide an organic structure for the movement of scholarly knowledge, like the doctoral colloquium, that it could support through its collaboration with ATESEA and yet-to-be-identified partners outside North America?

For more information about the Association's commitment to global awareness and engagement, please email [Lester Edwin J. Ruiz](mailto:Lester.Edwin.J.Ruiz@ats.edu).



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