The Goal for Cross-Cultural Theological Education Is to Produce Indigenous Theologians

Grace Martyn

In the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20), Jesus commanded his disciples to go to the ends of the earth to make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them to obey all his commands. Because of this Commission, many Christians leave their homes and go to faraway lands to take the good news to those who have not yet heard it. When considering this missionary task, some people emphasize only sharing the gospel, planting new churches, and discipling new believers. However, another component of the missionary task that is equally important is theological education – to train the next generation of church leaders and pastors. When the church is young and underdeveloped, though, it might require outsiders to come in and train the new leaders. The fact that this training is cross-cultural in nature presents difficulties when compared with the traditional approach of theological education.

In light of these difficulties, this article will first present some challenges facing cross-cultural theological education. Then, it will look to mission history and the indigenization movement and argue that, though the indigenization movement focused on church planting, the basic principles also

apply to cross-cultural theological education. Finally, the article will present some applications for cross-cultural theological education in Southeast Asia based on the indigenization movement.

Challenges in Cross-Cultural Theological Education

While it is difficult to define theological education, this article refers to degree-granting, formal institutional theological training programs when using the term. On a similar note, there can be numerous perspectives on what situation can be considered a "cross-cultural" experience. In this article, cross-cultural theological education points to an educational experience in which the educator is the outsider who enters a new culture to teach and train in local theological institutions like seminaries or theological training centers. Thus, when cross-cultural theological education is mentioned in this article, it imagines missionaries or theologians from one cultural context (mostly Western contexts) coming into a new cultural context (mostly majority world contexts) to teach and train in the area of theology.

Why is cross-cultural theological education so difficult? Craig Ott explains that the culprit is "culture" when he states, "When a teacher and learners come from different cultures, divergent expectations and ensuing frustration or conflict are preprogrammed."[1] This section of the article will discuss some common challenges for cross-cultural theological education caused by the cultural conflict between educator and students.

Cultural Challenges Related to Relationship

In a cross-cultural situation, cultural values affect many interactions. They affect people's communication, their relationships, and their ability to build trust with others. According to Paul Hiebert, culture is "the more or less

[1] Craig Ott, *Teaching and Learning across Cultures*: *A Guide to Theory and Practice*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), Ch. 1. Available at: https://www.perlego.com/book/2063294 (Accessed: 20 September 2024).

integrated systems of ideas, beliefs, and values and their associated patterns of behavior and products shared by a people who organize and regulate what they think, feel, and do."[2] From this definition, one can see that an outsider from a different culture will embody ideas, beliefs, and values that are likely not aligned with those from the local culture. As a result, outsiders will be driven to think and act differently from the local people, and these differences can affect their relationship with them.

With this definition of "culture" in mind, a few challenges exist when considering how culture affects relationships. For example, we can consider some Western–Eastern cultural differences: people who come from Western cultural backgrounds tend to be direct communicators, task-oriented, and individualistic, while people from Eastern cultural backgrounds tend to be indirect communicators, relationship-oriented, and collectivistic.[3] In her book, Sarah Lanier divides cultures into "hot-climate" (relationship-based) cultures and "cold-climate" (task-oriented) cultures.[4] Thus, when a person crosses over to a culture in which most people possess different cultural values, conflicts and misunderstandings can create relationship-building challenges.

Addressing the important dynamic between culture and relationship, Lingenfelter explains:

> Culture, like language, is a powerful tool for communication and interaction.... Culture in its complexity, then, is positive, negative, and sometimes neutral in regard to a relationship with

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[2] Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 30.

[3] For example, see E. Randolph Richards and Richard James, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Patronage, Honor and Shame in the Biblical World* (Grand Rapids: Intervarsity Press, 2020), esp. Introduction; Sherwood Lingenfelter, *Transforming Culture: A Challenge for Transforming Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); Sarah Lanier, *Foreign to Familiar: A Guide to Understanding Hot- and Cold-Climate Cultures* (Evanston, IL: McDougal Publishing, 2000), 20-21, though Lanier states that the Southern United States often has more of the cold-climate values.

[4] Lanier, *Foreign to Familiar*, 16.

> Christ. . . . ministering cross-culturally places special demands on us; we must, to paraphrase Paul, become all things to all people so that by all possible means we might win some (1 Cor. 9:22).[5]

Indeed, culture affects many areas of people's life, especially people's relationships with one another.

One can envision a scenario where a direct communicator tries to build a relationship with a group of indirect communicators. This person's directness in his communication style could be seen as strange, rude, or even disrespectful by the group. And vice versa, to the outsider, the group's indirect communication style could be seen as indecisive, ignorant, or lacking integrity. As a result, confusion, frustration, and misunderstanding could arise, potentially destroying trust and damaging the relationship. This is just one cultural encounter scenario among many other possibilities. Lanier described the cultural differences this way: "Cultural differences among us provide both the richest color to our lives, and the harshest wounding. Simple communication creates conflict. Innocent comments produce withdrawal and gossip."[6]

Building good cross-cultural relationships is essential if one wants to do well in cross-cultural theological education because a successful educational experience depends on a trust-based working relationship between the educator and students.[7] With this thought in mind, the next section will consider some cultural challenges related to education.

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[5] Sherwood Lingenfelter and Marvin Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally: A Model for Effective Personal Relationships*, 3rd ed (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), Ch. 9. Available at: https://www.perlego.com/book/2051086 (Accessed: 20 October 2024).

[6] Lanier, *Foreign to Familiar*, 12.

[7] Stephen A. Grunlan and Marvin K. Mayers, *Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), Ch. 4, Sec. 8, para. 10.

Cultural Challenges Related to Education

Different cultures have different educational expectations, which creates challenges for education, especially when the educator and the students do not share the same cultural background. If students' learning expectations are different from the teacher's desired learning outcomes for students, frustration and confusion will no doubt appear, and in more serious cases, this conflict in educational expectations will affect trust between teacher and students.

To give one example, students in Asia often have the educational expectation that the classroom will be focused on content delivery and that teachers will primarily use lectures to deliver that content. This expectation grows from their educational experience, where education is often focused solely on exam preparation, and a teacher's objective is to provide the necessary content for the exam. If a cross-cultural teacher is unaware of this expectation and organizes the course around discussion or other learning activities, students could end up confused and may even consider that the teacher has failed to meet his or her objective.

Even for an experienced teacher, if he does not teach in culturally appropriate ways, he will not build trust with his students. As a result, education fails. One scholar puts it this way when considering what cross-cultural educators should do regarding different educational expectations: "Cultural values powerfully influence expected educational objectives. Effective cross-cultural teachers are aware of different expectations even as they attempt to broaden them."[8]

Another cultural challenge related to education is the different teaching and learning styles between educators and students. Ott articulates: "While individual differences remain – that is, diversity within a culture – collective preferences and expectations are shaped by generally accepted

[8] James Plueddemann, *Teaching Across Cultures* (Grand Rapids: IVP Academic, 2018), Ch. 8. Available at: https://www.perlego.com/book/3009118 (Accessed: 30 October 2024).

cultural norms regarding teacher-student relations, appropriate teaching and learning methods, and other educational factors."[9] One can imagine this scenario: a teacher from an individualistic culture teaches cross-culturally. The teacher assigns students an article to read and asks them to critique the article and state their individual position on the topic.

What are some challenges that will arise in this scenario? First, if the students are not used to an analytical teaching style, they will lack the critical thinking skills they need to critique the article. Pushing students to critique others will embarrass the student and frustrate the teacher. Second, students from a collectivist culture will be hesitant to express their thoughts as an individual in a group setting because they value the group's opinion more than their individual opinions.[10] Finally, all these conflicts can damage the student-teacher relationship. In Southeast Asian culture, people value relationships above all things, but if teachers use methods that require students to function in ways contrary to their cultural context, it could damage the relationship. This distrust will make students skeptical about the teacher's ability to teach in the future.

When we think about cross-cultural theological education historically, it has involved missionaries from Western countries going to mission fields in the majority world to teach theology and train church leaders and pastors. This is because the church in these mission fields is not yet well developed, and they do not have any existing theological education in place. However, when missionaries go to the field, they often lack awareness of the cultural differences and end up teaching in ways they were taught in the West.[11]

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[9] Ott, *Teaching and Learning across Cultures,* Ch. 3.

[10] Harry C. Triandis, *Individualism & Collectivism*, 1st ed (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), Ch. 3. Available at: https://www.perlego.com/book/1595824/individualism-and-collectivism-pdf (Accessed: September 28th, 2024).

[11] Ken Coley, "The Perspective of Mind, Brain, and Education Research," in *Transformational Teaching: Instructional Design for Christian Educators,* ed. Kenneth S. Coley, Deborah L. MacCullough, and Martha E. MacCullough (Brentwood, TN: B&H Academic, 2023), 114.

Cultural differences cause these problems and create many challenges in relationship-building and theological education. One scholar addresses this problem well when he states: "When teaching faculty and curricula are not grounded in a cross-cultural understanding of the world, a cross-cultural theology and reading of the Bible, and cross-cultural ministry experience, they will fail to meet the needs of twenty-first-century theological education."[12] Pursuing a solution that alleviates these problems is not only relevant but also urgent since it will move the church toward effective theological education on the mission field. In the next section, this article will look to the history of the indigenization movement to seek principles to help alleviate these problems.

Insights from the Indigenization Movement

Historian Kenneth Scott Latourette referred to the period from 1800 to 1900 as the "Great Century" of Christian mission.[13] It was during this period the Protestant mission "came into its own and became a significant global movement."[14] Cross cultural theological educator Brooks points out that during this century, "the two aims of the mission enterprise were evangelization and civilization."[15] As the European nations began to civilize their colonies, missionaries moved there to plant churches and set up schools. Initially, they planted churches and schools that looked just like the ones in the West, where the missionaries were from. Many missionaries realized they needed

[12] K. K. Yeo, "Made in the USA: A Chinese Perspective on US Theological Education in Light of the Chinese Context" in *Locating US Theological Education in a Global Context*, ed. Hendrik Pieterse (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2019), Ch. 7. Available at: https://www.perlego.com/book/1377182 (Accessed: 29 September 2024).

[13] Kenneth Scott Latourette, *The Great Century: North Africa and Asia 1800 A.D. to 1914 A.D*, vol. 6 of *A History of The Expansion of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).

[14] Edward L. Smither, *Christian Mission: A Concise Global History* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 103.

[15] Will Brooks, *Interpreting Scripture across Cultures: An Introduction to Cross-Cultural Biblical Interpretation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2022), 41.

to emphasize planting churches that suited the local context and focused on training local church leaders. As some missionaries began to write and teach on this topic, this movement became known as the indigenization of missions movement. Among many leaders who contributed to this movement, Henry Venn is one scholar who introduced a principle regarding planting and training native church leaders.[16]

Venn's Three-Self Policy

Both Henry Venn of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and Rufus Anderson of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions had concluded that for the gospel to advance in the field, missionaries need to build churches that are self-governing, self-supporting, and self-extending (the three-self policy). Though both Anderson and Venn came to the same conclusion around the same time separately and independently,[17] this article looks only at Venn's writing on this topic. Venn was appointed as the general secretary of the CMS in Loddon in 1841. He held the position for nearly thirty years (1841-1872). During these thirty years, his writing and understanding of the need to plant native churches "exercised a direct influence on so many of those who were actually taking the opportunities for evangelizing the world."[18]

In terms of self-supporting, Venn argued that the financial support of the native churches should eventually come from the native churches them-

[16] For Venn's writings, see: Henry Venn, "Three–Self Principles," in *Classic Texts in Mission & World Christianity: A Reader's Companion to David Bosch's Transforming Mission*, ed. Norman E. Thomas, 207–09, American Society of Missiology Series, no. 20 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998); *To Apply the Gospel*: *Selections from the Writing of Henry Venn,* ed. Max Warren, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971); "On Steps Towards Helping a Native Church to Become Self–Supporting, Self–Governing, and Self–Extending," in *Classics of Christian Missions*, ed. Francis M. DuBose, 243–49, (Nashville: Broadman, 1979).

[17] Max Warren, ed., *To Apply the Gospel: Selections from the Writings of Henry Venn* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1971), 51.

[18] Warren, ed., *To Apply the Gospel*, 23.

selves, not from the missionary organizations. He stated that this principle would "sensibly and permanently relieve the Society of a large expenditure incurred in the maintenance of schools, in buildings and other matters, which should more properly be charged to the account of the Native Congregations themselves."[19]

He explained the importance of this principle to both the missionary and the mission-sending organization. He explained that organizations have limited funds, and if it falls upon the organization or missionaries to financially support all new works, missionaries will decide not to enter new fields simply because they lack the funds to support new churches. In fact, this reflection was not just hypothetical; it was an actual situation his organization dealt with. He explained that "with such limited means at their disposal, the Committee of the Church Missionary Society might have declined to extend their missions and have been content with carrying on the missions which they had already formed, upon the plea that the means furnished to them would not be more than sufficient."[20] In this sense, the principle of self-support served to advance the gospel into new areas.

On the self-governing policy, Venn realized a weakness in church-based mission organizations of his day since it was hard for the missionaries to balance evangelizing unbelievers and ministering to the native church. Thus, he proposed "introducing into the native church that [the] elementary organization which may give it 'corporate life,' and prepare it for its full development under a native ministry and an indigenous episcopate."[21] In other words, the goal of the missionary should be to start the church in such a way that the church had its own leaders who could evangelize and minister to the local believers. Doing so would enable missionaries to focus on other unevangelized areas.

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[19] Warren, ed., *To Apply the Gospel*, 96.

[20] Warren, ed., *To Apply the Gospel*, 122.

[21] Warren, ed., *To Apply the Gospel*, 68.

He believed that in order for the native church to develop and thrive, missionaries needed to train local teachers and church leaders and help them develop towards eventually governing the church on their own. This policy was evidenced in many of Venn's writings, one of which stated, "It is expedient that native converts should be trained, at as early a stage as possible, upon a system of self-government, and of contributing to the support of their own native teachers."[22]

Finally, on self-extending policy, Venn proposed to introduce the missionary spirit in the native church as he wrote:

> Every convert should be instructed from his conversion in the duty of labouring for his self-support, and for the support of Missions to his Countrymen, and to lay himself out as a Missionary among his relations and friends to bring them to the truth. . .. the Native Converts were in many cases ready and willing to do far more themselves than we expected.[23]

This policy encouraged the native church to take on the task of evangelism among unbelievers and help the native church to grow. Venn also believed this policy would bring new effectiveness to the mission because if the native believers took on the task of sharing the gospel with their countrymen, it would free the missionaries to move on to other evangelized regions. It would also help the native church establish independence.[24] To help the native church to become self-supporting, self-governing, and self-extending was Henry Venn's "supreme aim" because he believed that was the best way to spread the gospel to the end of the earth.[25]

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[22] Warren, ed., *To Apply the Gospel*, 68.

[23] Warren, ed., *To Apply the Gospel*, 64.

[24] Brooks, *Interpreting Scripture across Cultures*, 43.

[25] Warren, ed., *To Apply the Gospel*, 52.

The Fourth Self: The Addition of Self-Theologizing

Many native churches were established under the three-self policy. However, as these churches continued to develop and grow, other issues regarding church health arose, especially those related to doctrine and theology. Melvin Hodges raised the need for the churches to add a self-theologizing element to their development plan when he wrote:

> The standard of doctrine and conduct must be an expression of the believers' own concept of the Christian life as they find it in the Scriptures. Knowing the missionary's belief is not enough. This is a vital distinction. Nothing is gained by taking our ideas and forcing them on others as if to say, "Here is our set of rules. If you are to be a member of our church, this is what you must do."[26]

Essentially, Hodges proposed the need for the native church leaders to learn to do theology on their own: self-theologizing.

Building on other missiologists' discussion on this concept, Hiebert echoed the need for this concept and gave a more detailed explanation of this "fourth self" principle for indigenous church planting. Hiebert noted that while scholars wrote extensively about the three-selfs:

> little was said about the fourth self: self-theologizing. For the most part, national leaders were not encouraged to study the Scriptures for themselves, and to develop their own theologies. Deviation from the missionary's theology was often branded as heresy. To young, nationalistically minded leaders this was theological colonialism. . . . Whether we like it or not, young theolo-

[26] Melvin Hodges, *The Indigenous Church and the Indigenous Church and the Missionary*, 1953 reprint (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2009), 37. Available at: https://www.perlego.com/book/2050297 (Accessed: 20 October 2024).

> gians around the world are reading Scripture and interpreting it for their own cultures.[27]

Not only did Hiebert understand the need for indigenous church leaders to develop their own theologies, but he also explored the connection between people's cultural backgrounds and the way they understand theology. In his book *Anthropological Insights for Missions,* Hiebert wrote,

> We think that our studies of the Bible are unbiased, that our own interpretations of the Scriptures are the only true ones. It disturbs us, therefore, when we begin to discover that theologies are influenced by culture. . . . The fact is, all theologies developed by human beings are shaped by their particular historical and cultural contexts – by the language they use and the questions they ask.[28]

Hiebert encouraged missionaries to train native church leaders to think theologically and try to help the native church produce theologians who could wrestle with doctrinal and theological questions in their native cultural context.

To summarize the importance of self-theologizing, Brooks points out that all missionaries eventually leave the mission field. Thus, it is crucial to include the self-theologizing element in the church indigenization process. Another reason this addition is crucial is that the newly planted church "is in a unique cultural context," and "believers in this context must be able to evaluate their own existing cultural norms and patterns to determine which aspects are biblical and permissible and which aspects are not."[29]

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[27] Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 46-47.

[28] Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries,* 198.

[29] Brooks, *Interpreting Scripture across Cultures,* 50.

The three-self policy and the later self-theologizing addition of the church indigenization movement helped missionaries worldwide to plant churches led by local believers and existing for local believers. Missionaries should not plant churches that look exactly like their home church because each cultural context on the field is unique. Training people who are experts in their local culture to be church leaders and theologians is a more effective and healthier way for church planting.

How, then, does understanding the church indigenization movement help alleviate the problems in cross-cultural theological education mentioned in the first section? In the next section, this article will unpack this question by examining the Southeast Asian cultural context.

Applications for Cross-Cultural Theological Education in Southeast Asia

The previous section of the paper discussed principles of planting indigenous churches. However, these principles, especially self-theologizing, can be applied to cross-cultural theological education to alleviate cultural problems and challenges related to relationships and education. The indigenization movement helped the church to be self-supporting, self-governing, and self-extending. It helped to train native church leaders to be self-theologizing because missiologists recognized cultural context was a key component that affected many aspects of the church's health. Likewise, if seminaries in Southeast Asia can produce more indigenous theologians and faculty, it will be a more effective way to do cross-cultural theological education than solely providing the seminaries with Western theologians as faculty support.

Following the principles of indigenization, this author proposes that the goal of cross-cultural theological education should be to produce indigenous theologians. Drawing inspiration from the indigenization movement in missions history, one can see that if seminaries produce more indigenous theologians, it alleviates challenges in theological education caused by cul-

tural differences. This last section of the paper provides practical application as to how cross-cultural teachers can help seminaries in a Southeast Asian cultural context to produce indigenous theologians.

Teach with Humility

The indigenization movement of the church speaks to the importance of the humility missionaries should have as they help local churches gain autonomy. Missionaries need to have a humble attitude and treat native leaders and believers as equals so that they can walk alongside them on the journey to church indigenization. In the same way, cross-cultural theological education also requires cross-cultural teachers to be humble learners if they want to help seminaries in Southeast Asia produce more indigenous theologians. As one cross-cultural teaching expert remarks, "Effective teaching demands that the teacher be as well versed in the learner's culture as in the subject matter. To be a teacher of students, one must first be a student of students."[30]

When cross-cultural teachers adopt this posture of humility, it alleviates the challenges related to both relationships and education. Humility leads the educator to learn how people think and then communicate in culturally appropriate ways, building trust and strengthening relationships. Moreover, a posture of humility leads educators to study and learn about cultural modes of learning, thus increasing their ability to teach in ways that help students achieve course objectives.

How does this humble learner's attitude translate into practical actions for cross-cultural teachers? First, cross-cultural teachers need to be aware of their cultural dynamic and avoid falling into the pit of cultural ethnocentrism. If a cross-cultural teacher who teaches in a seminary in Southeast Asia does not come into the culture with a humble learner's attitude, he might be in danger of becoming culturally ethnocentric, which will hinder his interaction with the students.

[30] Plueddemann, *Teaching Across Cultures*, Ch. 3.

Ott explains that ethnocentrism is "the tendency to see one's own culture or ethnicity as superior or right and to see others as inferior or wrong."[31] The danger of cultural ethnocentrism is that the teacher will think his approach to education, or his understanding of the learning content, is superior to that of the local teachers or students. Therefore, he will only teach in the ways in which he is used to learning. Thus, he will easily miss the opportunity to learn the more effective ways the local students learn.[32] Furthermore, he may end up thinking that these students will never be good enough to be teachers one day themselves.

Also, with a humble learner attitude, cross-cultural teachers will be more mindful of their teaching methodology and more proactive in utilizing culturally appropriate teaching methods. Adopting the attitude of a humble learner will encourage the teacher to do some research about his students; he will want to learn about what cultural background his students are from, what kind of educational methodologies they are used to in learning, and what approach he should take if conflicts occur in class. Cultural context matters in any educational approach, but it is crucial in a cross-cultural educational setting. When Plueddemann writes, "the key problem for many cross-cultural teachers is assuming that their subject matter expertise can be transmitted to their students without taking into account the context and cultural values of the learner,"[33] he highlights the importance of teaching in context.

Teaching in culturally appropriate ways can ease cultural problems related to both communication and education. It is a more effective way to approach education and meet students' needs, and to build trust between the cross-cultural teacher and students. It will lay a solid foundation for the

[31] Ott, *Teaching and Learning across Cultures,* Ch. 2.

[32] Liyun Brooks, "Improving Students' Critical Thinking Ability in a Cross-cultural Teaching Environment in Southeast Asia," (Ed.D. research paper, Southeastern Seminary, 2023).

[33] Plueddemann, *Teaching Across Cultures,* Ch. 3.

students to one day grow into the next generation of indigenous educators and theologians.

Raise Up Indigenous Scholars

During the indigenization movement, a pivotal principle was to help the native church leaders develop the ability to self-theologize because it can ensure the church's health even long after the missionaries leave. This principle, when applied to the cross-cultural theological education sphere, reminds cross-cultural teachers to help seminaries raise up indigenous scholars – scholars who can both master the content in their subject fields and can think critically about theological problems that arise from their local culture. In other words, seminaries need to raise up scholars who not only *know theology* but also can *do theology* in their local cultural context.

However, what specific process can seminaries use to produce such scholars? One significant step is for the seminaries to help students improve their critical thinking ability. On the importance of critical thinking ability, Marty MacCulloug articulates:

> Biblical worldview thinking is a form of critical thinking. . . . Critical thinking is more than a process. It includes the understanding and use of knowledge. Therefore, one who understands the big ideas and the general organization of a subject area should be able to connect related facts better than one who does not and be able to critique new information as well.[34]

Critical thinking ability equips students with the ability to reason, evaluate, apply, and create.[35] Thus, for cross-cultural teachers who seek to train

[34] M. MacCullough, K. Coley, and D. MacCullough, (2023) *Transformational Teaching* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2023), Introduction to Sec. 4. Available at: https://www.perlego.com/book/3837705 (Accessed: 10 October 2024).

[35] Peter A. Facione, *Think Critically* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: 2011), 6.

indigenous scholars who can think through complicated theological problems in their own cultural context, equipping students with the ability to think critically will be a strong starting point.

That said, developing students' critical thinking ability is not always the primary objective in the Eastern educational approach. One cross-cultural teacher who taught in Singapore noted, "In the East, the emphasis seems to be on preserving time-tested truth as passed on by 'the master' – but adapting these truths to changing circumstances. In the West, the education system seems to promote the creation and discovery of new ideas."[36] Shaw also describes differences in educational approach between the West and the rest of the world when it concerns critical thinking:

> The linear-analytical thinking of Greek philosophy and Enlightenment, which has so shaped the educational systems of the West, is globally atypical. While the specifics differ, the general pattern of information processing throughout most of the world tends towards holism and networked thinking, in contrast to the tight specificity so typical in the Western "analytic-critical" approach.[37]

For a cross-cultural teacher from a Western educational system, trying to help students in a Southeast Asian seminary develop critical thinking ability requires much cultural understanding and creativity in course and curriculum design. Since critical thinking ability was not the main focus in most students' previous educational experience, cross-cultural teachers need to explain the importance and usefulness of critical thinking to students without being seen as arrogant or ethnocentric.[38]

They also need to design classroom activities and assignments that emphasize developing students' critical thinking abilities but do not contradict

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[36] Perry Shaw, César Lopes, Joanna Feliciano-Soberano, and Bob Heaton, *Teaching Across Cultures: A Global Christian Perspective,* (Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2021), 145.

[37] Shaw, *Teaching Across Cultures*, 145.

[38] L. Brooks, "Improving Students' Critical Thinking Ability."

students' cultural preferences. For example, asking students to critique the teacher's teaching or other students' work in front of the whole class is a common class activity to test students' critical thinking ability in the Western educational approach. However, doing so will make students uncomfortable in a Southeast Asian classroom because they are from a collectivistic, honor-shame culture, and they value relationships above all things. To publicly say something negative about the teacher or other students' work will shame them and, thus, damage their relationship.

Produce Indigenous Theological Resources

A final application of the indigenization movement is that cross-cultural educators should help indigenous scholars produce their own theological resources. Cross-cultural teachers need to equip students with skills and abilities to exegete Scripture and do theology so that they can produce resources that speak to the needs of their culture. Doing so can help alleviate the need to always rely upon resources from outside of their culture.

Generally speaking, more theological resources are produced by theologians from the West for Christians in the West. Tennent addresses this situation in his book when he points out the fact that Christianity continues to grow in the Majority world while declining in the Western world, but "Western theological writings and reflection somehow represent normative, universal Christian reflection whereas non-Western theology is more localized, ad hoc, and Contextual."[39]

This situation is understandable considering the timeline of church history and how the gospel spread worldwide since the European countries (the West) have a longer history of Christianity than the Majority world. Yet, this situation is not ideal since many theological resources written in the

[39] Timothy Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2009), Ch. 1. Available at: https://www.perlego.com/book/558244 (Accessed: 30 October 2024).

West do not speak to issues confronting the church in other parts of the world. Yeo understands the reality of this situation as it relates to the lack of theological resources in Chinese culture, for he writes, "Most Chinese Bible commentaries do not relate to Chinese culture, but simply 'reincarnate' the humanity and divinity of the commentator's Eurocentric mentors."[40] While reproducing theological content from another location may be a helpful starting point for a newly planted church, a long-term goal and an indicator of a healthier local church is when they have locally produced theological resources that speak to the needs of that particular context.

Students in Southeast Asian seminaries can access many theological resources. However, similar to the situation in the Chinese context mentioned by Yeo, limited resources are produced by indigenous theologians and address theological problems specific to their local ministry context. Thus, helping the local church produce more indigenous theological resources is a worthy long-term goal for cross-cultural theological education in Southeast Asia.

Conclusion

Cross-cultural theological education encounters challenges arising from culture. Many of the challenges related to relationships and education are difficult for cross-cultural teachers to navigate. Insights from the indigenization movement teach the four-self principles (self-supporting, self-governing, self-extending, and self-theologizing) that missionaries utilized for church planting. These principles are helpful for cross-cultural theological education and can alleviate some challenges created by cultural differences between cross-cultural teachers and local students.

These principles helped native churches in the mission fields to gain autonomy and become self-sufficient, healthy churches. Likewise, if educators apply the principles in cross-cultural theological teaching and adopt a

[40] Yeo, "Made in the USA," Ch. 7.

humble learner's attitude, they can achieve the goal of helping local seminaries raise up indigenous theologians and produce indigenous theological resources.

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Grace Martyn is an EdD student at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, where she is writing on the issue of cultivating critical thinking in Asian educational contexts. In addition to this, she is mother to three, teaches and mentors

ladies at the local seminary, and is also involved in several social and evangelistic ministries.