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PROTESTANT THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION, INDIGENISATION, AND CONTEXTUALISATION IN SINGAPORE AND MALAYSIA, 1948-1979

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From Indigenisation to Contextualisation

For Christian missions the idea of indigenisation has provided a marker for attention to the transformation of what is already there rather than the replication of foreign forms (Walls, 2004). Although the term indigenous has been important for valuing non-Western people and cultures and generally refers to those whose presence is pre-colonial,[1] which particular groups are regarded as truly indigenous can still be contested. In Singapore the term is commonly applied to descendants of Chinese and Indian migrants who arrived during the colonial era, not just to Malay and related groups who predated British acquisition. In the Malaysian constitution, Orang Asli in West Malaysia and tribal groups in East Malaysia are designated as "*bumiputera*" or "sons of the soil," but descendants of Chinese and Indians present in the country for generations, numbers of whom are Christian, are not. Since Malay nationalism attaches to an Islamic religious identity, other groups can see security in Christianity as a faith with an international reference (Chua, 2012). In both Singapore and Malaysia, a significant proportion of church members continue to experience multiple belonging across ethnic, political, and religious identities. Although for missions the call for indigenisation represented a significant development, after independence other terminology was needed to frame discussions about what local churches should look like, and contextualisation has been at least partially successful in providing that framework. In the post-War period, theological education in non-Western contexts, in the sense of intentional, institutionally-based education for local church leadership (Roxborogh, 2012), began to include concern for the reshaping of the forms and content of religious language, ritual, and symbol. It has provided an important arena for the implementation and testing of these policy frameworks.

Today indigeneity is commonly seen as intrinsic to Christian self-understanding, based on the belief that in Jesus of Nazareth, the God of creation shared not only the particularity of Jewish culture but also an identification with human cultures in general.

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1 "Definition [of indigenous] is contentious. International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines as tribal groups that are distinct from national majorities, or groups present before colonial conquest . . . also makes self-identification as indigenous a fundamental criterion" (Beban-France & Brooks, 2008, p. 54). For Indians and Chinese who migrated to Singapore and Malaya during the 19th and 20th centuries, what was indigenous in China and India was not originally indigenous in the Malaysian context.

This belief has not always been the case. While some sought to affirm indigenous groups, others sought to assimilate them into the assumed norms of their own concepts of civilisation or else to contain them within bounded cultures. Difficulties with commitment to diversity are still found in traditions of centralised authority and in links between the missionary movement, modernisation, and globalisation. The dynamic nature of cultural and religious identity is an ongoing challenge.

After World War I some saw that Western culture could no longer claim to define what a culturally-embodied Christianity should look like. If others carried on as if nothing much had changed, from the 1920s indigeneity entered mainline missionary language as part of a vision for internationalism (Robert, 2008, pp. 94-97). This vision echoed ideals of Woodrow Wilson, who in 1918 included the self-determination of minorities as part of his vision for a new world. Although his call for a League of Nations faltered, it helped stimulate an internationalist movement committed to peace and friendship. Many missions adopted the language of internationalism and indigeneity as an affirmation of both cultural difference and human unity (Fleming, 1925; Robert, 2008, pp. 105-122). This language reflected a growing sense that Christianity and Western civilisation were not the same thing.

The valuing of internationalism and interest in indigeneity helped enlarge the space in which it was possible for Christian missions to affirm the importance of local church leadership. For some the concepts were extended beyond just a change of personnel. An American Methodist missionary in India, E. Stanley Jones, became famous for his vision of the *Christ of the Indian Road* (Jones, 1925), by which it was possible to be Christian in an Indian way. Jones was a frequent visitor to Malaya and Singapore, and the idea that it was necessary for Christianity to be embodied in local cultures gained acceptance. In 1928 the Jerusalem conference of the International Missionary Council (IMC) encouraged indigenous voices in Christian art and architecture.

However, acceptance was not universal. Stanley Jones was a trusted figure, but some missions saw valuing the indigenous as a return to paganism. There were also some local Christians who feared that what it really meant was a re-introduction of the religious backgrounds they had turned from rather than an acceleration of steps towards local leadership and the more appropriate cultural expression of their faith (Robert, 2008, p. 115). In their 1938 meeting, held in Tambaram, India, the IMC reasserted the distinctiveness of Christianity and its mission, but used the image of being rooted in the local soil – Christianity should not be a pot-plant carried from place to place unattached to its context. Still, in the eyes of many, the local soil remained suspect. Events took over when the Japanese invasion of South-east Asia left local churches in the hands of their own leaders. After the War the prospect of political independence had implications for churches not just for colonial governments. If, for some decades, a priority for local churches and their supporting missions remained that of training an indigenous leadership, issues challenging past assumptions about what that meant for faith and culture were also starting to be recognised.

In the 1960s, theories of indigenisation were being influenced by issues raised by the translation of the Bible into local languages and by terminology being developed in linguistics generally. Critical approaches to bible translation came to prefer the idea

of dynamic equivalence to an earlier focus on literal translation (Nida, 1963; Smalley, 1991). Popularised through the success of what became the *Good News Bible*, the idea of dynamic equivalence influenced thinking about how Christianity generally should be translated from one context into another. By the 1970s it was more widely accepted that concern for indigenisation also required fresh thinking about how faith was expressed in local contexts, even if some of the old fears remained. A solution was found in the language of contextualisation, which was borrowed from its usage in linguistics and in 1972 was deliberately applied to funding projects supported by the World Council of Churches (WCC) through its Theological Education Fund (TEF). This approach was supported by the Association of Theological Schools in South East Asia (ATESEA),[2] founded in 1957 with the goals of developing Asian theologies and indigenous Asian leaders as well as providing funding and guiding policy formation through its accreditation programmes for theological schools in the region.

Contextualisation offered the possibility of being able both to pick up concern for indigenisation and to avoid the connotation of syncretism, which was regarded as a serious risk by Western church leaders, including those in the WCC (Poon, 2015, pp. 75, 79). Formulating criteria for assessing the value of beliefs and practices in new cultural contexts were later but necessary developments (Bevans, 1992; Schreiter, 1985). Contextualisation has now established itself as a significant term for addressing the relationship between Christian beliefs and their social and political environment (Gener, 2008). It has developed an extensive body of literature and is particularly important when the meanings of religious words and actions are contested in dynamic multicultural contexts (Lindenfeld & Richardson, 2011; Poon & Roxborogh, 2015).

International support through ATESEA and the TEF was strategic for the development of theological education in Malaysia and Singapore (Poon, 2010). The development of policy during the transition to independence can be traced through the funding mandates of the TEF between 1958 and 1977. The first mandate, from 1958 to 1965, focused on academic excellence and the development of libraries. Substantial library resources had long been seen as essential, including by the LMS mission in Melaka in 1815 (Daily, 2013), but they reflected Western assumptions about where sound theology was to be found and the level of scholarship needed to write it.

By 1965 assumptions about what excellence meant in non-Western contexts were being questioned (Theological Education Fund, 1966). Investment in libraries was still needed, and books on the shelves provided a readily quantifiable benchmark for accreditation, but if their contents were just Western, their relevance was at best partial. The second TEF funding mandate, covering the period 1965 to 1970, shifted attention to curriculum reform and concern for relevance. Recipients, not donors, were to specify the purpose of grants. Excellence now meant "a living dialogue between the church and its environment" (Theological Education Fund, 1966, p. 2). The reference of the term indigenous was expanded. Theological faculties were growing in "indigenous strength" (Theological Education Fund, 1966, p. 15), indigenous forms of worship were valued

2 In 1979 it became the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia.

(Theological Education Fund, 1966, p. 9), and there was an expectation that biblical studies would be taught "in concepts rooted in local language and thought."

The third mandate (1970-1977) introduced the new language of contextualisation (Lienemann-Perrin, 1981). The ATESEA accreditation requirements insisted on what it called the "Critical Asia Principle" as an expression of the same idea.[3] This principle duly appeared in seminary handbooks, although the word "critical" carried a connotation of criticism of authority in a way which was countercultural in Asian societies. Contextualisation might have been a happier choice except that for a time it struggled to get across a divide of popular liberal-evangelical suspicion. It was not helped by its being adopted first of all by those who saw its value in relation to social and political issues just at a time when newly independent governments were sensitive to any challenges to their programmes. However, a number of evangelical writers sensitive to issues of culture and faith affirmed its key concepts (Hesselgrave & Rommen, 1989; Nicholls, 1979), and it proved to have deeper and richer implications than perhaps even its original proponents expected (G. Anderson, 2006; Lak, 2004; Pearson, 2010). The development of Asian theology has in the longer term found the idea of contextualisation hugely significant (Chan, 2014; England, 2002-2003).

The fact that the language of contextualisation was linked to sources of significant funding meant it could not be ignored, at least as far as theological education was concerned. Being specified in grant applications literally gave it currency, but it was one thing to frame funding applications in terms of a well-meaning policy that went beyond the indigenisation of leadership to the localisation of theology, it was another to create the confidence needed for people to believe that contextualisation was part of the Christian faith itself and that it was in their own interests to engage with it. At a popular level the idea seemed to raise more problems than it solved. It represented a questioning of what was assumed to be a given, and its relevance needed to be translated into the life of congregations by people who were trusted. Although it became a common theme in the ATESEA *South East Asia Journal of Theology*,[4] and in official documents the "Critical Asia Principle" nudged curriculum development in the direction of Asian contextualisation, it was left to a few enthusiasts to champion the idea. Of course, Christianity was being contextualised anyway, simply because Malaysians and Singaporeans were making their own choices about how the bible was understood, the music of worship, and what prayer was about. What was lacking was a self-awareness about this process. It took some time for local leaders to emerge with the credibility to provide the necessary language and confidence to guide the process.

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3 The Critical Asia Principle was explained as a "situational, hermeneutical, missiological and educational principle" and related widely to the curriculum. What it meant in practice was not always obvious (Poon, 2010, pp. 382-383).

4 Now the *Asia Journal of Theology*.

Theological Education in Malaysia and Singapore

In 16th century Portuguese Melaka, conversion to Christianity meant identification with the Portuguese community and came about through intermarriage and relationships with household slaves. A shift of emphasis came with Jesuit missionaries, particularly Matteo Ricci in China, Roberto de Nobili in India, and Alexander de la Rhodes in Vietnam, who all maintained that converts did not need to become European in order to become Christian. Despite these policies being suppressed for some time, in the long run, the idea of accommodating to local cultures came to prevail. For Roman Catholics, this approach received fresh impetus following the Vatican II Council (1961-1963), the development of Liberation Theology in Latin America, growth in appreciation of the importance of anthropology and ethnography among key missionary orders, and the formulation of theories of inculturation as the intentional embodiment of Christian values in local cultures. Together these encouraged the localisation of belief and ritual alongside a less hierarchical view of the church.

Protestant thinking had its own trajectory, but there was more learning from Roman Catholic missionary theories than is generally acknowledged. The source of the first generation of Protestant missionaries to Malaya and then Singapore was the London Missionary Society (LMS), founded in 1795. The LMS sought to leave the forms of church government in the hands of indigenous converts, and key figures such as Robert Morrison and William Milne were concerned to understand and respect Malay and Chinese cultures. They studied the Jesuit missions in Asia and those who wanted to avoid the simple export of European forms of Christianity. By the 1880s it was becoming common to look for ways in which new churches could take responsibility for their own support, leadership, governance, and extension, ideals which were often summarised as "three-self" principles.[5] Though hardly applied consistently in Africa and Asia, they were influential in China and Korea, among Singapore's Chinese Presbyterians, and with Chinese migrants to British North Borneo (now Sabah).

References to indigenous Christianity in writings from the 1920s and 30s convey fresh enthusiasm for these three-self principles and in Singapore and Malaya for missions to non-Malay indigenous peoples, including the Orang Asli.[6] Despite the lack of success in seeking to create a Malay church from the sixteenth century, some form of indigenous church remained a hope. From the 1930s churches were coming to terms with the fact that, given the strong link between Malay identity and Islam, the future lay with other ethnic groups. By the 1950s hopes that the foundations of an indigenous church might be Malay were discarded. In Sarawak, Iban were becoming Christian in significant numbers. T. C. Gibson, an English Presbyterian China missionary, had written that "The real test of the success of any mission is not the patients in its

5 Key figures in developing these ideas included Henry Venn (Evangelical Anglican) and Rufus Anderson (American Congregationalist) as missionary society administrators and theorists, and William Taylor (American Methodist Episcopal Church) and John Nevius (American Presbyterian) as missionaries.

6 For example, Clark (1923); Means (2011).

hospitals, nor the pupils in its schools, nor even the number of converts baptized but the planting of an indigenous church. In that alone have you any guarantee of permanency." Recalling this in 1956, the English Presbyterian missionary George Hood added that "An indigenous Church is not just a Church which runs its own affairs but a Church which has roots in the country and is meeting the challenge and needs of that country" (1956, p. 31). An important implication was that just because the church was now seen as being indigenous to non-Malay local peoples, this did not mean that it could avoid being concerned with issues affecting Malays and the country as a whole.

From 1948 the Malayan Emergency in the face of a Communist incursion brought about the detention of rural Chinese in concentration camps designated "New Villages." The British administration encouraged missionaries expelled from China to relocate to Malaya. In China, the only churches to be tolerated were those which rejected foreign connections of any kind, and the "Three-Self Patriotic Movement" became the designation for Protestant churches recognised by the Communist government. The Three-Self Patriotic Movement in China was undoubtedly a form of indigenisation, but the association with communism made the three-self principles suspect for some overseas Chinese and Western missions, including those who relocated staff to Malaya and Singapore. Nevertheless, three-self principles still reflected the intentions of most Protestant missions in Malaya and Singapore, addressing the immediate needs of a growing Chinese church in both urban areas and the New Villages. What was not clear was how a church which was indigenous to Chinese culture might also be indigenous to Malaya and Singapore.

The valuing of the indigenous over the foreign also did not address issues when there were multiple groups occupying the same geographical, political, and religious space. The accusation that a religion is not indigenous may be powerful, yet what is foreign can have strong attractions, including of a sense of belonging to an international identity. The transfer of leadership can be frustrated when local groups are divided and foreign leadership may appear neutral. Both the Anglican and Methodist churches in Singapore and Malaysia found themselves making expatriate appointments of bishops for longer than they wished, and a few local congregations retained expatriate clergy long after independence. Similarly, one generation may express their faith through local languages, music, and architecture only to see the next generation prefer the globalised forms of international pop culture (Loh, 2005; Loh & Poon, 2012). Western models may be imitated at the same time as they are decried (Siew, 1996).

By the time of independence (1957 for Malaysia, 1963 for Singapore), the church in Singapore and Malaya which was indigenous to Asia was ethnically Chinese, Indian, Eurasian, Dutch Burgher, Peranakan (Chinese-Malay), and Anglo-Indian. In Sarawak and British North Borneo, it was tribal, particularly Iban, Bidayuh, and Kadazan among other groups. In this situation Christianity navigated not a single indigenous context but a complex multicultural one. A fresh commitment to theological education was needed to effect a transfer of leadership to local clergy and in due course to local theological teachers, and to navigate the complexity of a fragmented society where race and religion were often highly correlated.

From 1808 the Roman Catholic College General in Penang trained indigenous clergy for Southeast Asia (College General, 2010; Patary, 2015), and from the 1880s sporadic efforts were made by Anglicans and Methodists to develop local programmes. Similar developments were taking place in India, China, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines, where larger populations and greater interest from funding bodies made Christian universities and theological seminaries viable options. Singapore, Sarawak, and Malaya were hampered by resources, the availability and mobility of staff, the wide range of languages and dialects involved, and the pressing needs of local congregations who looked for practical experience and other markers of status in their leaders which did not always include academic training. Block courses and bible studies were better appreciated than institutional training and a Western theological curriculum.

World War II forced the realisation that a commitment needed to be made. Missionary leaders interned in Changi prison discussed plans for joint training of local Anglican, Methodist, and Presbyterian ministers, particularly Chinese. Once mission staff returned after the War, action was taken, and Trinity Theological College (TTC) began in October 1948 as the centrepiece of a project of greater co-operation between the churches and among their growing indigenous membership (Ang, Ang, Lee, Lim, & Ngoei, 2006, pp. 37-41). At first the faculty was part-time, and the curriculum was dependent on what missionaries and local clergy felt able to teach. Providing some openings for women in leadership, the initial courses included kindergarten science, home economics, and ministry in music as well as the three-year licentiate in theology.

The formation of TTC in 1948 was followed a few years later by Singapore Bible College (SBC), with a more evangelical and predominantly Chinese-speaking constituency (Ang *et al.*, 2006, p. 57). Political circumstances encouraged acceptance by congregations, and it was recognised that it was "imperative for the Malayan Church to raise an indigenous ministry" (Ang *et al.*, 2006, p. 41). The situation in China and the Emergency in Malaya meant that dependence on overseas training in China had come to an end. Parallel institutions to both the TTC and the SBC traditions followed over time. All these leadership training institutions represented situations of interaction for diverse local and international racial and linguistic groups, contested ideals and theories of relevance and authority, visions laden with cultural assumptions, and halting steps towards the transfer of economic and theological agency. Were curricula defined by the "best of the West"? How much should the academic requirements of an increasingly professionalised clergy be modified to reflect the state of post-War education in Singapore and Malaysia, and in what ways should it be adapted to its context? Chinese economic dominance made space for Mandarin-speaking Chinese, but provision for Tamil-speaking Indians was limited.

In the 1950s, the aspirations provided by economic modernisation, nationalism, and independence in a context of political crisis energised institutional development and a sense of the importance of transfer to local leadership. Part of the vision was for service to the churches of Southeast Asia generally, but the reality of realising the vision even just for Singapore and Malaya was challenging. Candid assessment of progress by 1952 noted that TTC was "still in a very elementary stage of its development" (Anderson, S. R., & Smith, 1952, p. 24). To its credit TTC took the criticism as an

agenda for development. The communist government in China and insurgency in Malaya forced the rapid development of the Chinese department, including of teaching in Chinese (Ang *et al.*, 2006, p. 53).

The needs were obvious, practical, and urgent. Ex-China missionaries helped staff the Chinese department, but the problem of dependence on expatriates and foreign funding seemed as intractable as it was "intolerable" (Ang *et al.*, 2006, p. 60). The Asianisation of the faculty became an early goal, followed by concern for a more relevant and academically credible curriculum.

Malayan Independence took place in 1957, and the formation of Malaysia with Sabah, Sarawak, and Singapore in 1963. In 1965 Singapore left the Federation of Malaysia, and over the next decade, churches which had their headquarters in Singapore created separate entities in both countries. Trinity Theological College continued to be the theological seminary for both countries prior to the formation of Seminary Theology Malaysia (STM) in Kuala Lumpur in 1979.

Independent Singapore and Malaysia shared many features and a common history yet presented different contexts. Singapore became a secular state, with tight social control and an educational policy of English plus a second language. Malaysia moved quickly to make Malay the primary language of education, though Chinese and Tamil schools continued. Malaysia's constitution favoured Islam as the religion of the majority population, and churches found themselves needing to adjust to a new political environment. Both TTC and STM catered to students from different Protestant denominations who were Chinese-speaking Chinese, English-speaking Chinese, and Indian students from a variety of backgrounds, but the Chinese dominance in Singapore and the Muslim-Malay environment of Malaysia affected attitudes as to what a programme of indigenisation now required.

In Singapore the SBC focused on its Chinese department, and the Chinese-speaking streams in both SBC and TTC worked with the theology, music, and view of the world with which Chinese Christians were familiar. Gradually, Malaya and Singapore became home rather than China, but the theology and piety of what had become an enculturated Chinese Christianity predominated. The old pattern of a conservative distrust of theories of indigenisation and fear that it meant the acceptance of a religion they had left meant that contextualisation was suspect. Even if some key Asian leaders had owned the term enthusiastically, having these ideas promoted by Western theologians perceived fairly or otherwise as being liberal was never going to help at a popular level. Nevertheless, numbers of individual students were inspired by the new ideas and the sense of the relevance of Christianity to the whole of life. In a sense the indigenisation of leadership had to have taken place before the discussion of further contextualisation was feasible. Even then, those championing these ideas needed local credibility, which could not be taken for granted. Nor were Chinese-speaking churches likely to take seriously the views of their English-speaking children who might be more open to this sort of language.

By 1970 many students at TTC were restless and concerned for social issues. Reflecting international trends in activism, they agitated for a less authoritarian culture

and a more rapid reduction in the proportion of expatriate staff (Ang *et al.*, 2006, pp. 88-89). In 1967 the first local principal had been appointed, but the reduction of expatriate staff to levels which suggested partnership rather than domination took rather longer. By 1975, expatriates were only just less than 50% of the faculty, but local churches were reluctant to release good leaders, and they were also reluctant to pick up a cost which had hitherto been met by mission boards. What was also an issue was that some of the first generation of local leaders in theological education had received their higher education in the West and were more in tune with the social emphases of the World Council of Churches than the more conservative piety of significant leaders among the Singaporean churches.

It helped somewhat that ATESEA was based at Trinity College from 1968 to 1974 and its director, the Japanese theologian Kosuke Koyama (who later taught at the University of Otago), was one who was making Asian theology more accessible through his evocative writings, such as *Water Buffalo Theology* (1974). Yet, in an era untrusting of theological innovation, many took refuge in the familiar. It was also hard for some students to bridge the gap between the spirituality of the youth movements and para-church organisations which had nurtured their faith and the somewhat alien theology which seemed to devalue the songs and scriptures which had become part of their Christian identity, however much it related its thoughts about God to the images and landscapes of Asia.

In the ATESEA meetings in October 1979, progress was reported in terms of teaching materials, courses, and exposure through field education and the use of indigenous art and music, but these things did not necessarily have an impact on the core of the curriculum itself, which remained dominated by classical subjects. Some wanted to replace German with Asian theology (Nacpil, 1979, pp. 31-32); what an Asian theology might look like was still a work in progress even for those most committed to its articulation who now included numbers of Asian evangelicals (Wiking, 2004).

The official history of TTC sees the 1970s as the decade of "Creating an Indigenous and Asian College." It was a period when the level of local ownership of what TTC was about needed to be addressed urgently. For some TTC was easily perceived as American, largely Methodist, and theologically liberal. By 1976 it faced financial difficulties, and fresh efforts were made to connect with local church leaders and make the case for their support. The move to Asianisation was one thing; what was also needed was a greater sense of linkage to local churches and congregations. This change required personal links and sensitivity to local churches not just to the vision of international agencies, however well-meaning. Relevance which, for one generation, was predicated on a social justice agenda did not give the confidence that was sought by the community itself. The decision of Malaysian church leaders to found their own seminary (STM) in 1979 reflected some of these issues, but it also worried TTC leaders who felt the potential loss of students even though they recognised Malaysia was a different country socially as well as politically. Interestingly, STM began at a time when indigenisation was no longer an issue, and by the 1980s contextualisation was accepted by both the local and expatriate teaching staff in STM without its being seen as a point of theological difference. It was an advantage that STM was not associated

with either liberal agendas or student agitation and that it was led by faculty appointed by a governance body which was fully Malaysian.

However, it was an added complexity that issues of contextualisation were found to be ones Christians could not decide simply on their own. In 1987 both the Malaysian and the Singapore governments detained politicians and Christian activists, and the Malaysian Government White Paper justifying their actions conveyed a deep sense of indignation about Christians using Islamic forms in worship. What was seen as legitimate contextualisation by some Christians was regarded by the authorities as intentionally confusing. This response was a reminder that religious demarcation was important to Muslims even if Christian theories of contextualisation might accept cultural forms from other traditions (Hesselgrave & Rommen, 1989; Nicholls, 1979; Schreiter, 1985). Christians were not the only people with a stake in religious symbols and practices. As these symbols and practices were also matters of cultural property, Christians could not just freely appropriate them to use within their own frame of religious reference.

By the 1990s, confidence in where TTC stood theologically had been restored. TTC saw its future in a solid theological curriculum and careful engagement with local issues. Government policy to cultivate religious harmony created space for Christians to be self-critical, and contextualisation came to be seen as but one tool among many for thinking through what it means to be Christian in an Asian society. Other aspects of the TEF funding mandates remain in evidence: the TTC library is a major asset; relevance remains a major category in questions about the curriculum; context is important for many things, but the content of the curriculum and its quality are recognisably international.

Conclusion

When I was teaching in Malaysia in the 1980s, the problem was not the idea of contextualisation but what it meant. Although it had been strongly advocated by the ATESEA and the leadership of TTC in the 1970s, contextualisation seemed less important in Singapore than it did in Malaysia. By tracing its origins not only to funding criteria and ideas promulgated by international ecumenism, but as a development of earlier programmes of indigenisation, one can see how the trajectories of these ideas worked out differently in Singapore and Malaysia. That Trinity College had such a relatively cautious approach to contextualisation may be explained by its being at first championed by those whose credibility among Singaporean congregations was not yet established, even if they were Asian. Its initial application to social programmes did nothing to alleviate suspicions about what it meant. Yet in the secular arena in Singapore today, issues of Christianity and culture can be talked about both in theological education, particularly in regard to ethics, as well as in academic settings, such as the Institute for South East Asian Studies and the Asian Research Institute of the University of Singapore (Eng, 2008). Now that the indigenisation of leadership is a long-accomplished reality, perhaps contextualisation itself has been decolonised and can be owned as a necessary dimension of the critical engagement with its environment to which education in general, not just theological education, aspires.

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