

**SOUTHEAST ASIA**

# Theological Publishing in SOUTHEAST ASIA

*Journalist and editor Soonim Lee, with the Christian Literature Society of Korea, sketches the pluralistic context that influences evangelical theological publishing in the region.*

**D**espite over 150 years of Christian evangelism, the Gospel has not been widely embraced by Asia's people. From Pakistan to Japan, from Mongolia to Indonesia, the publishing of Christian theology in Southeast Asia is set against this background.

There are millions of Muslims in Malaysia and Indonesia, and smaller numbers in most other countries. Buddhism is strong in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, South Korea, and Japan. Shinto followers are a majority in Japan. In other countries there is some mix of these religions plus Confucianism and Communism. The Philippines calls itself the only "Christian country in Asia" but there is a strong Muslim element in the southern region. In South Korea, more than a quarter of the population is Christian. Both the Philippines and South Korea send missionaries to other Asian countries.

### *General observations*

A growing Church needs theological teach-

ing, especially where other religions are practiced, but in most Asian countries the Christian market is quite small. The buying power of Christians is often limited, especially if they face hardships due to their faith. Distribution is a problem as general bookstores are reluctant to carry titles for a minority group. The audience for theological books consists mainly of seminary students. To be financially viable, most Christian publishers in Asia produce small print-runs of brief, low-priced books, usually in the majority language to reach as many readers as possible. Even so, churches have limited resources and often see publishing as an "expensive extra" on top of their regular needs.

### *China, Singapore and Taiwan*

The Chinese culture has had a long history of scholarly writing and the Christian Chinese Church continues this tradition. Though missionaries began Christian publishing in China and the work officially closed

under Communist rule, publishing was transferred to Hong Kong and Taiwan and other parts of the world as the Chinese people have dispersed.

Several Hong Kong publishers produce theological books written by local scholars and these are beginning to be officially allowed into mainland China's seminaries and libraries. Reference works such as the *IVP Illustrated Bible Dictionary* have been published in Chinese. In addition to translated reference works, some original theological works are now available. For example, Christian Communications Limited in Hong Kong publishes Chinese titles like *Chinese Culture and Christianity*, or *The Blessing of Filial Piety*, where ancestor worship is discussed from a Christian perspective.

In addition to publishing in Chinese, some organizations in Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan also publish notable titles in English. ATESEA, in Singapore, for example, published Yeow Choo Lak's *Doing Theology with*

*the Spirit's Movement in Asia*.

### *Japan*

More than 70 Protestant publishers serve Christians in Japan. The Christian publishing industry in Japan is well-developed and resources are available in multiple formats. Still, the majority of the theological books are translations of commentaries and Bible reference works, though titles from NavPress, InterVarsity and Lion are also published. Two examples from Word of Life Press of contextual theology include *Communicating the Gospel to the Japanese Heart*, by Masami Katsumoto, and *First Look at Christianity*, by Kazuhiko Uchida.

### *The Philippines*

In general, the Philippines seems to have an enthusiastic group of Christian publishers. In this country the Christian publishing industry is thriving.

Many theological works published in this country are translations of English or American

authors, but editors are enthusiastically recruiting national authors. New Day Publishers report that of 41 titles in their theological range, 30 are by foreign authors and 11 are by Filipinos. Beزالie Bautista Uc-Kung, director of New Day, and Denia Pascua, her chief editor, hope there will soon be more women theological writers. Relevant titles published by New Day include: *Theological Themes for the Philippine Church*, and *What Asian Christians Are Thinking: A Theological Source Book*.

Melba Maggay and Evelyn Miranda-Feliciano. OMF Literature has published several theological titles in Tagalog and in English, including: *Filipino Values and Our Christian Faith*, *Developing an Asian Evangelical Theology* and *The Gospel in Filipino Context*.

### South Korea

Korea has had a Christian publishing ministry for over one hundred and fifty years. When missionaries first came to Korea, they translated the Bible. In the early days of the industry, the aim was to

help people understand what it meant to follow Jesus. Theology was clearly published to build up Koreans in their faith.

These days, Korean Christian publishers face many challenges. There are more than 400 publishing houses in South Korea competing for readers. In addition, secular publishing houses are producing competitive resources for

Christians. Nevertheless, most theological titles are developed by the smaller Christian publishing houses. To more effectively reach readers, many Korean publishers are researching electronic publishing and com-

merce. Though many titles are translations, a number of publishers are developing contextual theology books for the Church.

### Divine call

Theological publishing and marketing is being transformed in many ways throughout Asia. Production difficulties, paper supplies and distribution problems limit the range and number of works available. In Laos, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, Myanmar and Thailand, publishing—when it exists—is mainly restricted to texts needed for internal church programs. In other countries, theological products still reach a very small market.

Publishers in all Asian countries must think of how they can make their products better known. Increasingly, Christian publishers are using the internet, exploring partnerships and participating in local and international book fairs. They are also increasing publicity and promotional efforts by arranging speaking engagements for their authors and increasing visits to churches and theological seminaries.

Christian publishers must accept their responsibility to be literature missionaries to help Christians in their understanding of the faith and to promote the Gospel to others. This is their task as Christians today. ❖



*More churches are needed to proclaim the Gospel to the people of Southeast Asia.*

Ramon Rocha III, president of OMF Literature, now the largest Christian publisher in the Philippines, agrees more men are writing theological books. He also points to such outstanding women theological writers as



## International PUBLISHING EVENTS

### October 3-6, 2001

Feria Internacional del Libro - LIBER  
Madrid, Spain  
[www.federacioneditores.org](http://www.federacioneditores.org)

### October 10-15, 2001

Frankfurt Book Fair,  
Frankfurt, Germany  
[www.frankfurt-book-fair.com](http://www.frankfurt-book-fair.com)

### October 19-20, 2001

Expolitec Christian Products Fair,  
Unilec, Mexico City, Mexico  
[bibabba@prodigy.net.mx](mailto:bibabba@prodigy.net.mx)

### October 17-21, 2001

Balkans Editorial Training and  
Publisher Consultation, Media  
Associates International, Bulgaria  
[www.littworld.org](http://www.littworld.org)

### October 23-29, 2001

International Book Fair  
Belgrade, Yugoslavia  
[www.beobookfair.co.yu](http://www.beobookfair.co.yu)

### November 4-9, 2001

Editorial Training, Media Associates  
International with OMF, Philippines  
[www.littworld.org](http://www.littworld.org)

### November 4-10, 2001

Letra Viva Regional Conference,  
Buenos Aires, Argentina  
[www.letraviva.com](http://www.letraviva.com)

### November 7-9, 2001

Sales Strategy, CCMI Regional Work-  
shop with ABEC, Sao Paulo, Brazil  
[www.ccmi.org](http://www.ccmi.org)

### November 12-17, 2001

Editor and Children's Literature  
Training, Media Associates Interna-  
tional with Bina Kasih, Indonesia  
[www.littworld.org](http://www.littworld.org)

### November 15-19, 2001

Salon du Livre  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada  
[www.slm.qc.ca](http://www.slm.qc.ca)

### November 24-December 2, 2001

Guadalajara International Book Fair,  
Guadalajara, Mexico  
[www.fil.com.mx](http://www.fil.com.mx)