



**Christian Missionary Museums
in the Global South
Narratives of Conversion and Modernity in
Southeast Asia and Latin America**

November 6-7, 2025

**Location: International Conference Room
Kiyoshi Togasaki Memorial Dialogue House
International Christian University**

Christian Missionary Museums in the Global South: Narratives of Conversion and Modernity in Southeast Asia and Latin America

Workshop co-sponsored by
ICU Social Science Research Institute and
Kyoto University Research Center for Indian Ocean World
ISAC- Initiative for the Study of Asian Catholics

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Along with global expansion of Christianity, the missionary enterprises to Asia and Latin America promoted a global project of knowledge creation. Catholic and later Protestant missionaries started to produce, systematize and circulate a great number of texts, images and objects, with the objective of understanding the diversity of customs, beliefs, languages and practices that they encountered around the world. This knowledge was a fundamental aspect of the missionary project, and became instrumental to demarcating territories, instituting colonial rule, promoting missionary vocations, and converting indigenous peoples to Christianity. Several missionary museums were established in Europe in the late 19th century to exhibit the ethnological findings and scientific achievements of religious workers in Asia and the Americas. They exalted missionary trajectories and narrated their histories as part of a modernizing project that brought Christianity and civilization to the colonies.

This workshop aims to examine how missionary museums in Latin America and Southeast Asia have dealt with the colonial encounter and the legacy of Christian missionary work in their societies. Most of these museums are run on limited budgets and do not host relics or valuable examples of material culture. Yet they are interesting mainly because they have to deal with their missionary origins and the complicated histories of violence, discrimination and power in postcolonial settings that they carry. Although some of these museums are curated and managed by the same Catholic religious orders and Protestant denominations that operate museums in Europe, the perspective of the colonized is incorporated in nuanced ways when exhibits are produced for native audiences who have a critical stance towards the relationship between mission and colonization.

DAY 1 – THURSDAY 11/6

10:00-10:30	Welcome and Introduction by Bernardo BROWN (ICU)
10:30-12:15	Panel 1
10:30-11:00	ASOR, Bubbles (DLSU Manila) Title: Negotiating Colonial Legacies: Evolution and Repurposing of Missionary Museums in the Philippines
11:00-11:30	YAMADA, Toru (Meiji University) Title: Reexamining Collections in Japan's Catholic Parish Museum
11:30-12:00	IKEGAME, Aya (Kyoto University) BATES, Crispin (Edinburgh University) Title: Tribal and Ethnographic Museums in India: Don Bosco Museum in Shillong
12:00-12:45	Q&A
12:45-14:15	Lunch Break
14:15-16:00	Panel 2
14:00-14:30	CHAMBON, Michel (NUS) Title: Missionary Museums and Ecclesial Memory in Singapore: a Dialogic Approach
14:30-15:00	SON, Suk Kyung (Museum of Busan Catholic Diocese) Title: From Memory of Persecution to Regional Dialogue: Framing Korean Catholic Museums and the Catholic Diocese of Busan History Museum
15:00-15:30	BROWN, Bernardo (ICU) Title: From Convent to Cultural Center: Constructing a Heritage site at a Franciscan church in Salta, Argentina
15:30-16:15	Q&A
16:15-16:50	Tea Break
16:50-18:00	Open Keynote Lecture by R. Michael FEENER (Kyoto University) Digital Cartography and the Cultural Contours of Catholicism in Eastern Indonesia

DAY 2 – FRIDAY 11/7

9:30-11:45	Panel 3
9:30-10:10 ONLINE	Fr. DE LUCA, Renzo S.J. (Twenty-Six Martyrs Museum, Nagasaki) Title:
10:10-10:40 ONLINE	WILDE, Guillermo (CONICET, Argentina) Title: Missionary Collections, Museums, and Heritage Sites in the forging of modern narratives on the indigenous peoples in South America
10:40-11:10	GONZALEZ MARQUEZ, Silvia Luz (ICU, Tokyo) Title: From Forbidden Text to Shared Heritage: Christianity, Colonial Memory, and Indigenous Experience in Mexico's <i>Maná, Museum of the Holy Scriptures</i>
11:10-11:45	Q&A
11:45-13:15	Lunch Break
13:15-14:15	Discussion, publications, networking, etc.
14:15-15:00	Tea break
15:00-15:30	Closing Remarks by Prof Mark WILLIAMS (ICU)

Abstracts and Participants

Presenter: FEENER, R. Michael, Kyoto University

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Digital Cartography and the Cultural Contours of Catholicism in Eastern Indonesia

This keynote opens a discussion of the potential of material culture and its digital mapping to reconceptualize ‘Catholic heritage’ in Asia. It outlines the ways in which an innovative approach to digital archive building affords multi-vectorized possibilities for curation and interpretation that challenge dominant narratives of colonialism and conversion. Drawing on the work of the Maritime Asia Heritage Survey (MAHS) in eastern Indonesia, this presentation introduces an innovative attempt to introduce new methodological approaches, data capture technologies, digital assets, and de-centralized frameworks for the identification, documentation, preservation, and dissemination of information related to the material cultural heritage of multiple and diverse Catholic communities in an under-documented region of maritime Asia. In doing so demonstrates the sort of new possibilities that can be imagined beyond well-established patterns of object collections assembled by missionaries and museum collections curated by local Christian communities to new possibilities for global projects of knowledge creation.

R. Michael Feener is Professor of Cross-regional Studies at the Kyoto University Center for Southeast Asian Studies, and an Associate Member of the History Faculty at the University of Oxford. He is also a Senior Associate of the Centre for Indonesian Law, Islam and Society at the Melbourne Law School and Director of the Maritime Asia Heritage Survey (MAHS). Prior to his move to Kyoto in 2020, he was the Sultan of Oman Fellow at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, and a member of the Oxford University History Faculty. Previous to that, he served as Research Leader of the Religion and Globalization Research Cluster at the Asia Research Institute, and Associate Professor in the Department of History at the National University of Singapore. He has also taught at Reed College and the University of California, Riverside, and held visiting professor positions and research fellowships at Harvard, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (Paris), the University of Copenhagen, The Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art (Honolulu), the University of Macao, and the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) in Leiden, the Netherlands. In his current work with the MAHS, Professor Feener directs full-time field teams working simultaneously in some of the most remote and understudied areas of the Maldives, Indonesia, and Thailand to digitally document archaeological and historic sites for the project’s open-access online archive.

Presenter: ASOR, Bubbles (DeLasalle University, Manila)

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Negotiating Colonial Legacies: Evolution and Repurposing of Missionary Museums in the Philippines

Missionary museums have been widely correlated with European colonial conquests and imposition of Christianity and colonial practices that led to the assimilation of indigenous knowledge and belief systems. These criticisms of missionary museums have been amplified by efforts to decolonise Christianity not only as a political agenda but as a form of de-centering knowledge production and circulation about colonial history, material culture and religious identity. Amidst these postcolonial or decolonial calls of Christianity, this paper explores how missionary museums in the Philippines as illustrated by San Agustin Museum, Museo de Santo Domingo and Archivo Franciscano Filipino have evolved from venues of missionary formation into repositories of rich history of European missionisation. Rather than losing their *raison d'être* in the postcolonial era, these missionary museums have undergone what I call repurposing and re-bending of their missionary function.

Focusing on collections exhibited and preserved in these missionary museums, based on historical sources and using observations as a visitor and researcher, this paper identifies three types of repurposed functions of missionary museums: (1) heritagisation or the selection, inclusion and curation process of missionary collections deemed to be relevant and valuable to the next generation; (2) indirect evangelisation through the missionary museums as spaces of social education to students and tourists; and (3) sharing of archival and digitised museum artifacts online. These missionary museums in the Philippines demonstrate the possibilities and limitations of negotiating the colonial legacies of exoticisation and cultural fetishisation by repurposing and retelling their civilising and evangelising mission using the repertoire of educating the general public.

Bubbles Beverly Asor is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Sociology and Behavioral Sciences at De La Salle University Manila, and one of the coordinators of the Initiative for the Study of Asian Catholics (ISAC). Her research interests include labor migration, religious and migrant organizations, migrant integration, urban diversity, international migration to South Korea, and Philippine international migration. Her publications include articles and book chapters on migrant organisations, religious communities, migrant incorporation and multiculturalism, urban diversity, and migration governance. She has just ended her research fellowship at the Academy of Korean Studies, Seoul, South Korea for her research project on migrant communities as appropriable social organizations.

Presenter: YAMADA, Toru, Meiji University

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Reexamining Collections in Japan's Catholic Parish Museum

In this paper, I examine the assessment of parish church museum collections. I do this by ethnographically reviewing the preparation tasks for the centennial anniversary event of a historic Catholic parish in Nagasaki's Goto Archipelago. I argue that the value attributed to parish museum pieces fluctuated as the parish leaders drew on their familiarity with the collections, on their understandings of their past, and on their relationships to non-Catholic neighbors. In the summer of 2007 in Nagasaki's Goto Archipelago, the leaders of a local Catholic parish were struggling as they were preparing the centennial anniversary of the consecration of Dozaki Church. Dozaki Church held a significant socio-religious meaning as it was the first church built in the region after the end of Japan's Christian prohibition. Located at the mouth of a local bay, the church not only served as the historic hub of Goto's Catholic missions, but also as a museum. The church did so by storing various materials from the local Catholics, many of whom preserved the documents and the artifacts from the era of "hidden" Christianity. As its centennial was approaching, the parish leaders reviewed the collections in order to organize the contents for the anniversary publication. Even though most of the leaders had a general knowledge of these collections, they thought their knowledge was insufficient to responsibly review them in order to write a history of Goto's Catholics. Like other community museums, Dozaki Church did not have any professional curators. Rather, the parish leaders were serving as the committee members for the anniversary in a voluntary capacity as part of their other community responsibilities of their parish. Trying to be more accurate and precise, the leaders sought out help not only from Catholic priests, but also from academics and retired grade school social study teachers to examine the collections regardless of their religious backgrounds. While they tried to be more historically accurate, the parish leaders also tried to make the review of the collections a collaborative endeavor with neighboring communities.

Toru Yamada is an associate professor of Meiji University's School of Arts and Letters. His research focus is on translation and policy implementation of international collaborative projects including heritage preservation, environmental protection, and educational exchanges.

Presenters:

IKEGAME, Aya (Kyoto University)

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BATES, Crispin (University of Edinburgh)

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Tribal and Ethnographic Museums in India: Don Bosco Museum in Shillong

Ethnographic museums in India originated from the connected histories of colonial rule, scientific interest, and missionary involvement with so-called “tribal” communities. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many Christian missionaries—particularly from Protestant denominations—made substantial contributions to the ethnographic documentation and collection of material culture among ādivāsi (original inhabitants) and hill populations. While colonial administrators often regarded ethnographic knowledge as a tool for classification and control, missionaries approached it through the dual aims of evangelism and cultural preservation. Their linguistic work, translations of oral traditions, and the establishment of mission schools, dispensaries, and local museums generated a vast body of ethnographic data, photographs, and artefacts that later formed the basis of regional ethnographic collections. In postcolonial India, these missionary-colonial legacies continue to shape the representation of tribal/ādivasi communities within ethnographic museums. This paper takes up an example of Don Bosco Museum in Shillong, Meghalaya, North-Eastern India and argues how its collection and exhibition reveal their entangled relationship with cultural preservation and developmental change.

Crispin Bates is a Professor of Modern and Contemporary South Asian History at the School of History, Classics and Archaeology in the University of Edinburgh. He is also an Honorary Professor at the Graduate School of African and Asian Studies in Kyoto University, Japan. Crispin researches in the History of India, the Indian Ocean and South Asia. His publications include *Subaltern and Raj: South Asian since 1600* (Routledge 2007), *Mutiny at the Margins* (7 volumes, Sage, 2013-2017).

Aya Ikegame is a Professor at the Graduate School of African and Asian Area Studies, Kyoto University. She is Social Anthropologist working on kingship, religious leadership, and sovereignty in southern India. She is the author of *Princely India Re-imagined* (Routledge, 2012), *The Guru in South Asia* (co-edited with Jacob Copepan, Routledge, 2012).

Presenter: CHAMBON, Michel (Asia Research Institute, NUS)

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Missionary Museum & Ecclesial Memory in Singapore: a dialogic approach

Abstract: This paper explores the material forms of ecclesial history in Singapore and discusses its missionary heritage. I present the physical layout and motivations behind two specific missionary museums of local Catholicism: the Heritage Room of Novena Church and the St Bernadette Space in the Church of St Bernadette. Although very different from each other, these two spaces function as museal environments with strong missionary dimensions. By comparing the two rooms, material and stable, I demonstrate that they contrast with other memorial efforts of the Archdiocese of Singapore, which are expressed through transient digital platforms, anniversaries, and festivals. This comparison reveals that Singaporean Catholicism is shaped by multiple missionary narratives, each occupying different types of spaces. Local Catholicism is in constant dialogue with its missionary past and its ongoing vocation as a missionary church—though this dialogue reflects two distinct visions of mission. I therefore argue that missionary museums must be understood within a broader ecclesial memorial dynamic—one that is neither homogeneous nor static, but rather deeply diverse and dialogic.

Michel Chambon is a cultural anthropologist and Catholic theologian specialized in the study of Chinese forms of Christianity. Since 2021, he is a research fellow at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore where he coordinates research on Asian Catholics in contemporary societies.

Presenter: SON, Suk Kyung (Museum Deputy Director, Catholic Diocese of Busan)

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From Memory of Persecution to Regional Dialogue: Framing Korean Catholic Museums and the Catholic Diocese of Busan History Museum

This study analyzes the current status and exhibition collections of Korean Catholic museums and discusses the structure and meanings of their curatorial strategies. Furthermore, through an ethnographic approach, the study examines the curatorial direction and preparatory process of the Catholic Diocese of Busan History Museum scheduled to open next May, to identify its characteristics.

Korean Catholicism has drawn attention as a rare case in global catholic history, where the faith was embraced voluntarily through scholarly study rather than through missionary evangelization. Subsequently, as Catholic beliefs clashed with the Confucian moral order of the Joseon dynasty, nearly a century of persecutions ensued.

Currently, the curatorial themes and exhibition narratives of approximately seventy Catholic museums in Korea are centered on this historical trajectory of reception and persecution. These museums preserve religious heritage, strengthen faith, and advance evangelization, while functioning as cultural arenas fostering communal identity, dialogue, and reconciliation.

The Catholic Diocese of Busan History Museum, in particular, seeks to move beyond religious memory by facilitating encounters among local, national, and church histories and cultivating creative dialogue with the community. In this context, the current study explores the potential of Catholic museums as sites where complex identities and historical memories intersect.

Suk Kyung Son is a former professor at Dong-A University and currently serves as the Deputy Director of the Catholic Diocese of Busan History Museum. She specializes in the study of Joseon Dynasty history, modern Korean history, local history, women's history, and the history of the Catholic Church in Korea. Her research primarily focuses on uncovering and utilizing local historical documents, and she has published numerous papers and books in this area.

Presenter: BROWN, Bernardo (ICU, Tokyo)

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From Convent to Cultural Center: Constructing a Heritage site at a Franciscan church in Salta, Argentina

Franciscans played a prominent role in the establishment of Spanish colonial settlements in South America since the second half of the 16th century. Almost five centuries later, the churches and convents built are found in central locations of modern cities, many of them becoming important tourist destinations. This paper examines the transformations undergone by the church of San Francisco, established on the location of the foundation of the city of Salta in northern Argentina in 1582. Known today as the “Complejo Cultural San Francisco”, the institution is located in the historic center of the city and offers a diverse range of activities like a museum and guided tours, film screenings, a restaurant, and 3D evening projections onto the façade of the Church.

Although Franciscan missions in the region continue to play an important social and evangelizing role with indigenous populations, their actions have moved away from urban centers to remote areas close to the border with Bolivia. Meanwhile, the old convent and church adopted a new role as heritage site and tourist attraction. The paper firstly reflects on the commodification of sacred spaces and the blurring of the limits between religious and secular spaces. Secondly, the project aims to examine the museum exhibition that reflects the technological, medicinal and artistic contributions brought by Franciscan friars to the region. Finally, the paper also aims to reflect on the audiences that these popular exhibitions and cultural activities aim to attract and how the historical narrative offered seeks to legitimize contemporary missionary projects.

Bernardo E. Brown is Associate Professor of Anthropology at International Christian University (ICU) in Tokyo. My work has mostly focused on Catholicism in Sri Lanka, particularly on religious vocations and transnational religious networks. My work has appeared in *HAU-Journal of Ethnographic Theory* (2023), *Religion* (2020), and *Anthropological Quarterly* (2018). With Brenda Yeoh, I co-edited *Asian Migrants and Religious Experience. From Labour Migration to Missionary Journeys* (AUP 2018). More recently, I have started working on a comparative approach to Christian missions in Southeast Asia and Latin America with a special focus on missionary collections in the Global South. Before moving to Tokyo, I obtained a Ph.D. in Anthropology from Cornell University and worked in postdoctoral positions at Leiden University and the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore.

Presenter: Fr. DE LUCA, Renzo S.J. (Twenty-Six Martyrs Museum, Nagasaki)

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Presenter: Guillermo WILDE (CONICET, Argentina)

Missionary Collections, Museums, and Heritage Sites in the forging of modern narratives on the indigenous peoples in South America

The history of Catholic missionary activity in South America developed and grew continuously from the 16th century to the early 20th century, covering the phase of Iberian colonialism and the emergence of independent republics. Throughout this long period missionaries, especially since the 18th century, became increasingly interested in a “scientific approach” to missionary regions, accompanying evangelical activity with research into geography, biology, indigenous languages, and the anthropological study of customs and religious rites. Even though texts were at the center of missionaries’ knowledge communication, the exchange of curious objects gradually became an important practices in the formation of collections at European schools and elite houses, some of which survived until present day. As a result of that legacy today we have three very different situations related to South America’s missionary past: 1) collections absorbed by secular museums in Europe; 2) museums of religious congregations both in Europe and in South America; 3) heritage sites and museums recounting the history of evangelization from the perspective of the secular modernity. Each of these situations guides public perceptions of the role of evangelization in the formation of the Western civilization. This presentation aims to reconstruct the genealogy of such situations and reflect on their contested reappropriations today.

Guillermo Wilde is Principal Investigator at the Argentinian National Council for Scientific Research and Professor of Anthropology and History at Universidad Nacional de San Martín. He is also Director of ICSOH-Institute for the Social Sciences and Humanities (CONICET) at the National University of Salta (UNSA). He is the author of numerous scholarly works on Colonial art and music, ethnohistory and religious conversion in the Iberian-American frontiers, including *Religión y Poder en las Misiones Guaraníes*, which obtained the “Premio Iberoamericano” Book Award from the Latin American Studies Association. Former Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and the Wenner Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, he has been visiting Professor at Sorbonne Université, Japan National Museum of Ethnology, Waseda University, and the European University Institute.

Presenter: Silvia Luz GONZALEZ MARQUEZ (ICU, Tokyo)

From Forbidden Text to Shared Heritage: Christianity, Colonial Memory, and Indigenous Experience in Mexico's *Maná*, *Museum of the Holy Scriptures*

This presentation explores how Maná, Museum of the Holy Scriptures in Mexico City functions as a space where Christian communities renegotiate their religious identities within a complex legacy: For over four centuries, access to the Bible in vernacular languages was prohibited in Mexico, entrenching linguistic and educational inequalities that aligned with colonial hierarchies. In response to this, and the supremacist ideologies introduced by 18th-century American missionaries, Maná was founded to counter exclusion and fundamentalism by presenting the Bible as a cultural, artistic, and philosophical artifact rather than a tool of domination.

Through its various national and international activities, the museum reframes Christianity as a force within intellectual and artistic heritage while advocating for human rights and religious tolerance. Specially, towards Mexican Indigenous Protestants, a particularly vulnerable minority group. It offers to them legal assistance and literacy programs, alongside collaborations between Hebrew and Greek scholars and Indigenous translators to produce more accurate Indigenous-language editions of the Bible published by Maná. In Mexico, where indigenous and mestizo traditions intersect, these initiatives demonstrate the museum's recognition of a shared and evolving spiritual heritage.

By analyzing Maná curatorial strategies and educational outreach, this presentation argues that faith-based museums reflect an ongoing negotiation between preservation, translation, and reinterpretation of the sacred. Demonstrating the potential of Christian heritage institutions to nourish critical engagement with their colonial past while cultivating new forms of intercultural understanding.

Founded in 2000 in Mexico City, Museo Maná is a cultural non-profit dedicated to preserving and promoting the Bible's historical and artistic legacy through research, education, and intercultural collaboration. Its collection of over three thousand Bibles, including early European and Indigenous-language editions, supports exhibitions and initiatives that link Christianity to Mexico's artistic and intellectual heritage while contributing to human rights and religious tolerance.

Silvia Luz González Márquez is an academic researcher and educator specializing in Peace Studies, a religious freedom advocate, a MEXT alumna and a member of the International Christian University (ICU) in Japan. Her research focuses on Human Security, Decolonial Methodologies, Religious Freedom, and Indigenous Christians. She has published on religious intolerance and has presented her work at international conferences.