Initiative for the Study of Asian Catholics (ISAC)
De La Salle University Manila Philippines

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DIGITAL COLLECTION PROJECT:
POPE-FRANCIS-IN-ASIA DATABASE

Since the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis has repeatedly visited Asia (2014: South Korea, 2015: Sri Lanka – Philippines, 2017: Myanmar – Bangladesh, 2019: Thailand – Japan, 2022: Kazakhstan, 2023: Mongolia, 2024: Indonesia – Papua New Guinea – Timor Leste – Singapore). Each apostolic journey has required extensive coordination and resources while generating rich and diverse media reports, documentaries, and conversations on social media, in Asia and beyond, within ecclesial circles and beyond. This massive production of text reflects how Pope Francis has cultivated a vibrant dialogue with Asian societies as well as the growing role of Asian countries in the making of the universal Church. However, besides official discourses, **most narratives and commentaries on Pope Francis in Asia** (newspaper articles, TV reports, press release, online media commentaries, etc.) **are rather transient and scattered** across numerous media outlet and languages.

Project Description

This project aims to **create an online database for the collection and storage of online information and media material on Pope Francis in Asia** (i.e. 7 papal visits in Asia, Pope's reference to Asian sociocultural realities and Asian people, Pope Francis and all his engagements with, about, in and for Asia, etc.). This database hosted by DLSU will be made searchable and public in order to allow **educators and researchers** around the world (theologians, historians, social scientists, etc.) to search thematic recurrence, quotations, buzzwords, and other material able to better appreciate the relationship between the papacy and Asia.

First the project intends to do **data harvesting** or web scraping from two online resources – (1) clipping from online newspaper sites of established and traditional media outlets across the world; and (2) social media data from social media platforms like Facebook, X, Instagram, etc. After the data extraction using web harvesting tool such as Octoparse, Data Scraper, ScrapingBot, BeautifulSoup, etc., themes and topics that emerged from the extracted data of online clippings from online newspapers and social media platforms will be generated and will be created into a taxonomy and indexing system (e.g. synodality in Timor Leste, democracy in South Korea, ethnic conflict in South Asia, etc). In short, the database will **create a system that can store information about newspaper sources, themes, topics, types of online materials and publishers** that allow us to ask and respond to questions like, "What did Pope Francis say about interfaith dialogues in Asia, or in a particular Asian country?"

This Pope-Francis-in-Asia Database will be an indexing system and repository that would allow for **efficient storage and retrieval of information** not only for educational purposes for teachers and students and for research on Catholicism in Asia but also the larger public whose need to retrieve information proficiently and instantaneously has become more complex. It will also

contribute to the **preservation of 'contemporary' data whose duration and lifespan may be more perilous to disappear** in an instant than traditional physical collections of data and scholarship.

Data Extraction and Preservation Goals

For this project, the web scraping and data extraction of online newspaper clippings and social media engagement on "Pope-in-Asia" will cover Pope Francis term from 2013 up to the present. It will comprise all his papal visits in Asia and all topics he directly or latently mentioned about Asia. A web scraping tool will be employed for the two data sources, and **two full-time staff will be hired** (preferably PhD students or Postdocs with computer science and/or social media skills). Web scraping tool must be purchased if it is not available at De La Salle University. The preferred software for web scraping is one that allows the exporting of data, content and other associated metadata for the textual taxonomy and indexes that will be created.

For the storage while the project team is actively working with them, the files and data will be saved in Google Drive and Dropbox. There will be file naming conventions to be implemented to ensure the security and efficiency in storage management. All data will be backed up as well (three copies on two different storage media). Once ready, the database will be hosted through **De La Salle University's Library, Animo Repository**.

How will this project be funded?

This project aims to be funded through grants or donations.
The name of **Pope-in-Asia Database will be named after the donor**.

The estimated fund needed for two years (2025-2027) is **60,000 USD (57, 323 Euros/3.5 million PhP**) for the following expenses:

Project Management: Who will be responsible for the Data Extraction and Preservation of the Project?

- Dr. Bubbles Beverly Asor, Coordinator of the **Initiative for the Study of Asian Catholics** at De La Salle University – overall supervision
- Two Full Time Staff – data extraction
- DLSU Library – preservation

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To support this project, please contact Dr. Asor at

bubbles.asor@dlsu.edu.ph

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