



# ISAC REPORT

*Initiative for the Study of Asian Catholics*

**2021-2025**

This document presents Phase 1 of the ***Initiative for the Study of Asian Catholics*** (ISAC), spanning the period from 1 October 2021 to 8 December 2025. This report serves to provide a comprehensive account of ISAC's accomplishments, collaborative efforts, and research projects, and to invite institutional partners to participate in a prospective Phase 2 through support, contributions, or hosting opportunities.

## PHASE 1 IN NUMBERS

**340+** IDENTIFIED SCHOLARS

**56** PODCAST EPISODES

**18** ONLINE ROUNDTABLES

**11** RESEARCH CONFERENCES

**11** PANELS AT MAJOR SCHOLARLY SOCIETIES

**8** SPECIAL ISSUES

**7** PILOT RESEARCH PROJECTS

**4** EDITED VOLUMES

**4** COORDINATORS

**1** OFFICE FOR DIGITAL COLLECTIONS

**1** BOOK SERIES

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# 1. Mission & Vision

## Objectives

The *Initiative for the Study of Asian Catholics (ISAC)* was established to support and develop **social scientific research on Asian Catholics** in contemporary societies. As an international association, it functions as a public, multi-centric research platform for scholars and associates interested in social scientific approaches to Asian Catholic populations. Ultimately, it advances scholarly inquiry into the contemporary intersections and mutual reconfigurations of Asia—the world’s most populous continent—and the Catholic Church, the largest global religious institution.

## Responding to a need

Asian Catholics constitute a growing and dynamic segment of the global Catholic Church. While public and multidisciplinary research centres exist for major contemporary Asian religions such as Hinduism, Taoism, or Islam, no similar entity exists for Asian Catholics. There are, of course, schools of theology and pastoral institutes, but their approach is essentially theological, pastoral, and historical. These entities primarily operate within a national framework and serve pastoral functions assigned by ecclesial leaders. Consequently, there is **no common venue for public, transregional, social-scientific research on Asian Catholics**. This renders over 230 million people effectively less visible and understandable. ISAC seeks to change this situation by providing the scientific community, policymakers, and religious leaders with more tools to understand the realities and current developments among Asian Catholics.

## Strategy

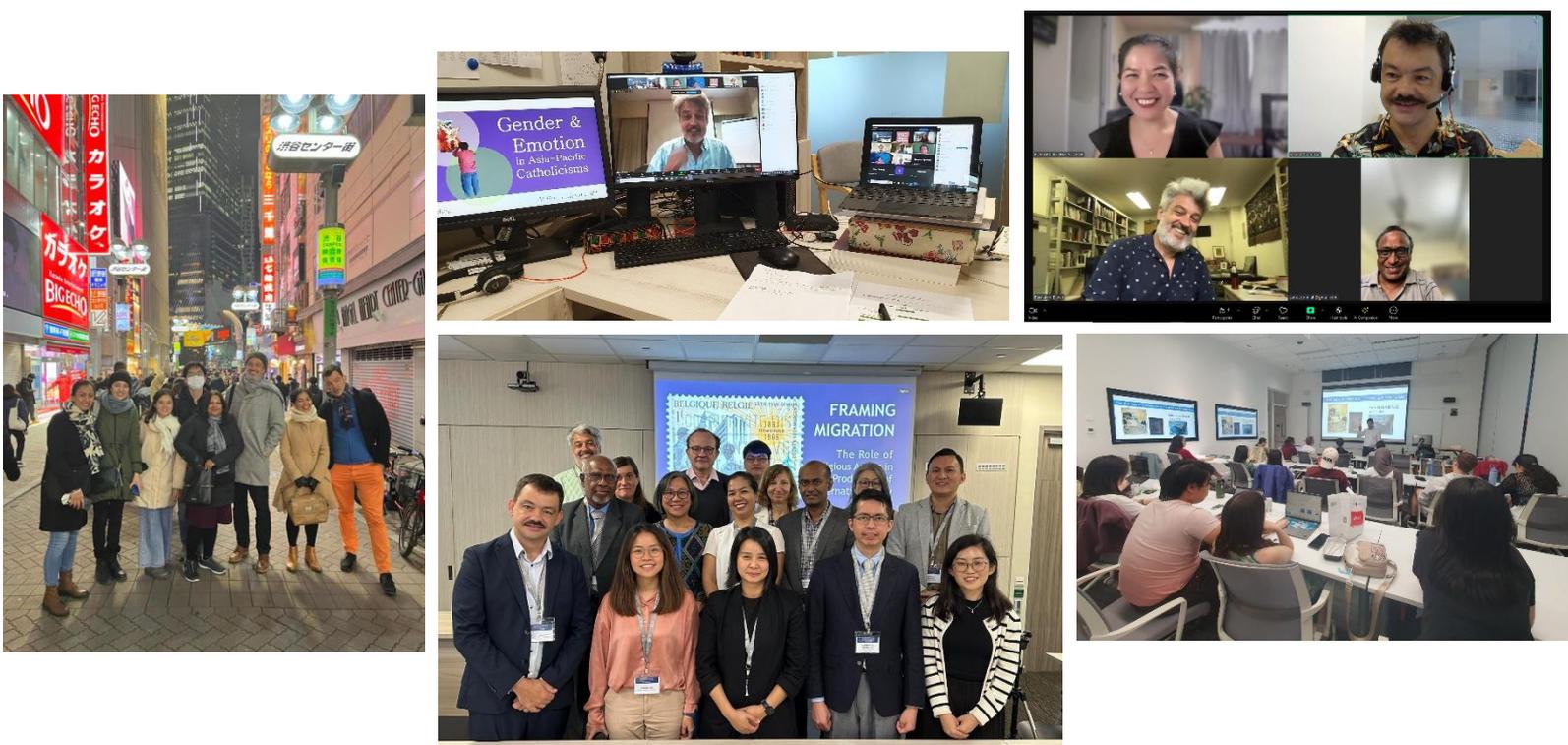
ISAC seeks to cultivate a **research ecosystem dedicated to the study of Asian Catholics**. It welcomes both conventional academic research and innovative collaborations to advance public understanding of Asian Catholic individuals, communities, and institutions. While grounded in the social sciences, the initiative actively fosters intellectual dialogue with other disciplines—particularly the humanities, including history and theology. ISAC prioritizes support for early-career scholars based in Asia but is open to individuals of all backgrounds, irrespective of geographical location, age, or institutional affiliation. Geographically, ISAC’s primary focus encompasses the vast region spanning Pakistan to Japan and Kazakhstan to Timor-Leste. Recognizing the global diaspora of Asian Catholics; the initiative maintains an inclusive approach to migration, with no strict geographical limits on research or partnerships.

## Timeline

The *Initiative for the Study of Asian Catholics* (ISAC) was founded in 2021 by Dr. Michel Chambon (National University of Singapore) in collaboration with Dr. Bernardo Brown (International Christian University, Tokyo). Officially launched on October 1, 2021, ISAC was hosted by the [Asia Research Institute](#) at the National University of Singapore (NUS) during Phase 1. Its early activities quickly established a foundation through a range of informal collaborations, online events, and exploratory research.

As scope of ISAC expanded to include pilot research projects, research conferences, online roundtables, and podcast series, the coordination team grew accordingly. In February 2023, Dr. Bubbles B. Asor (University of the Philippines Diliman) and Dr. Fr. James Ponniah (University of Madras) formally joined as ISAC Coordinators. Institutional growth continued in 2024 with the establishment of a dedicated [Office for Digital Collections at the University of De La Salle Manila](#), the launch of a dedicated book series on [Contemporary Asian Catholics](#) with the University of Pittsburgh Press, and the formal registration of an ISAC Association in France.

Following four years of intensive activity and development, the coordinators have initiated a planned period of strategic dormancy. This interval is designed to provide participating scholars and institutions with the necessary time to consolidate Phase 1 outputs and strategize for a sustainable future. Consequently, on December 8, 2025—the 60th anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council—ISAC formally transitioned into a *State of Dormition* (see Annex H).



## 2. Achievements

Below are five key outcomes produced by ISAC, which we regard as five major achievements highlighting the initiative's value and impact.

### Publications

Through its collaborative partnerships, events, and conferences, ISAC has generated the successful production of **4 edited books, 8 special issues**, and 1 collaborative research paper on contemporary Asian Catholics. The following list details our main publications:

Type (Venue)	Title	Author(s) / Editor (s)	Status (1.03.26)
Edited Book (UPP)	<a href="#">Asian Catholicism &amp; the Remaking of Contemporary Families</a>	Michel Chambon & James Ponniah	Published
Edited Book (ISPCK)	The Pan Asian Heritage of St. Francis Xavier: Between Memory & Contemporary Appropriation	Bubbles B. Asor, Michel Chambon, James Ponniah	Manuscript Sent to Production
Edited Book (ISEAS Publishing)	Asian Interreligious Diplomacies: Catholic & Other Perspectives <sup>1</sup>	Michel Chambon, Lucas Farrow, Paul Hedges	Final Editing
Edited Book (UPP)	Contemplating the intersections of Tourism & Catholicism in Asia	Michel Chambon, Jaeyeon Choe, Maribeth Erb, Hendrikus P. Kaunang	Proposal Submitted
Special Issue (IJAC)	<a href="#">Asian Catholic Materials &amp; Spaces</a>	Michel Chambon	Published
Special Issue (SJKS)	<a href="#">Diversity &amp; Difference in Korean Catholicism</a>	Franklin D. Raush, Jieun Han	Published
Special Issue (Maria)	<a href="#">Mary Among Asian Religions</a>	Sarah Boss, Cathy Jones	Published
Special Issue (JAS)	Gender & Emotion in Asian Catholicism	Michel Chambon, George Radics	Papers Submitted
Special Issue (JCS)	Sovereignty, Border-drawing, & Asian Catholicism	Michel Chambon, Chia-Yu Liang	Proposal Accepted
Special Issue (APMJ)	The Catholic Church as a Key Protagonist in Framing Migration	Michel Chambon, Phi Van Nguyen	Papers Submitted

<sup>1</sup> This edited volume emerges from a conference organized in Singapore (Aug. 2024) and titled “The Vatican’s Interreligious Diplomacy in Asia.” While the event was not officially co-organized by ISAC, Dr. Michel Chambon served as a key organizer, reflecting the intellectual alignment and collaborative spirit between the conference themes and ISAC’s mission. This conference and its subsequent publication are therefore included in this report.

Special Issue (Material Religion)	Missionary Museums in the Global South	Bernardo Brown	Proposal Accepted
Special Issue (Issues & Studies)	Asian Catholics in International Relations	Michel Chambon, Chia-Yu Liang, Thomas Tu	Proposal Accepted
Research Paper (Religions)	<a href="#">Lateral Synodality: Academics of Asian Catholicism &amp; Organizational Change</a>	Bubbles B. Asor, Michel Chambon, Renchillina J.G. Supan	Published

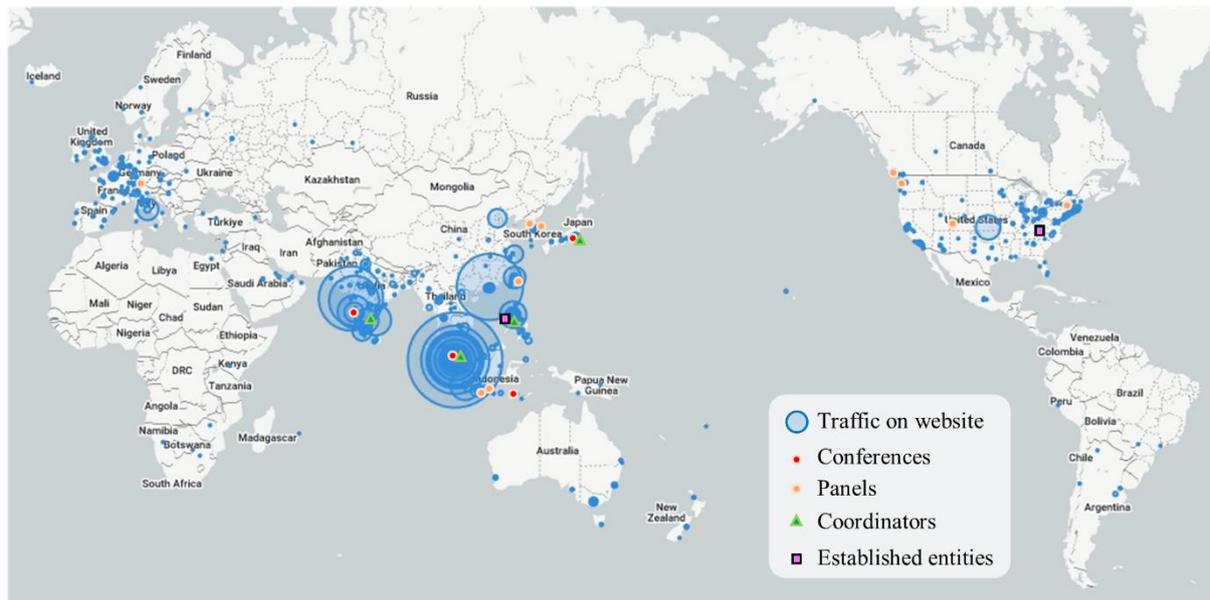
Beyond facilitating the production of scholarly texts through various academic presses, ISAC has also played a pivotal role in establishing **a specialized book series** dedicated to the social scientific study of contemporary Asian Catholics. Following our first conference on “[Catholicism, Family, and Asian Societies](#)”, held in Singapore in February 2022, the question of publishing the conference proceedings was promptly raised among the contributors. Rather than produce an edited volume, we decided to leverage the opportunity to launch a formal book series aligned with ISAC's core mission. Dr. Brown and Dr. Chambon subsequently approached approximately twenty university presses and submitted a formal proposal to six of them. After evaluating two strong offers, they ultimately selected the University of Pittsburgh Press. It was also decided that Dr. Bernardo Brown and Dr. Rowena Robinson (Indian Institute of Technology Bombay) would serve as the series co-editors. The book series ‘[Contemporary Asian Catholics](#)’ is now published by the **University of Pittsburgh Press**, where it operates as an autonomous and enduring scholarly venture. The first volume was successfully published in January 2026, with additional manuscripts currently under contract.

Furthermore, through the contributions of Bryan Goh and Dr. Anu K. Antony, ISAC developed [a blog](#) to publish short research papers. In addition, the coordinators engaged with the wider public by publishing opinion pieces and articles in the press. Our goal was to communicate key research issues and themes to a broad, non-specialist audience, extending ISAC's impact beyond traditional scholarly circles:

- The Diplomat “[Catholicism’s Overlooked Importance in Asia](#)” Brown & Chambon, Feb. 2022
- The Diplomat “[The Vatican’s Diplomacy in Central Asia](#)” Chambon, Oct. 2022.
- ARIscope “[Questioning Biases about Asian Catholicism: Lessons from East Timor](#)” Chambon, Apr. 2023
- UCANews “[Revisiting Catholic history in Singapore, Korea, Thailand, and beyond](#)” Chambon & Ponniah, Apr. 2023
- UCANews “[Catholic studies in Asia, a Way of the Cross?](#)” Chambon & Ponniah, Oct. 2023.
- The Diplomat “[Pope Francis Returns to Asia-Pacific Frontlines](#)” Chambon, Aug. 2024.

## Geographical Reach

The map below illustrates how ISAC has **successfully built its presence across Asia and beyond**:



The blue circles indicate the geographic distribution and relative volume of traffic to the ISAC website, [www.isac-research.org](http://www.isac-research.org) (sample from March to May 2025). This data indicates that ISAC has attracted attention from a wide range of locations across Asia, as well as from Australia, Europe, and North America. Notably—and a limitation for the research scope—South America and Africa remained underrepresented in this traffic, an issue earmarked for attention in Phase 2. Importantly, engagement with ISAC was not confined to any single Asian country or region, nor was it limited to Western audiences. Instead, the Initiative has successfully cultivated interest across the breadth of Asia.

The 11 orange dots represent instances where ISAC participated in major academic platforms—such as the American Academy of Religion, the Association for Asian Studies, and the European Academy of Religions—to present focused panels on Asian Catholics. These panels reflect ISAC scholars' commitment to **integrating scholarly discourse on Asian Catholics into broader interdisciplinary and international academic debates** (see Annex C). Similarly, the four red dots denote locations where ISAC organized in-person research conferences (see Annex B), highlighting the initiative's regional embeddedness and commitment to place-based scholarly exchange.

The two purple boxes indicate the location of our Office for Digital Collections and the Book Series. The four green triangles represent the location of the coordinators, illustrating how ISAC's leadership was genuinely rooted in Asia, operating on a transregional, pluricultural, and fundamentally collegial model.

Finally, through numerous online events in Phase 1 and monthly newsletters, ISAC has gradually built a database of approximately 2,900 individuals who have expressed interest in its work, including 673 newsletter subscribers. While no direct scholarly network benchmark is available for comparison, it is important to emphasize that ISAC extends beyond a traditional academic association. It has consistently engaged broader global audiences and advanced social-scientific dialogue concerning Asian Catholics.

## Questioning Tourism: A Strategic Conference

This conference stands as an exemplary model for future research initiatives. Titled “[Questioning Tourism: The Role of Catholicism in Asian Tourism](#),” it was convened in Ruteng, Flores (Indonesia), from September 17–20, 2025, and was made possible through the intensive collaboration of *Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng* and ISAC.

Conducted bilingually (Bahasa Indonesia and English), the conference gathered 24 scholars from 10 countries over three days to present critical research on the intersection of tourism and Catholicism in contemporary Asia. The presentations were delivered to an audience of over a hundred students, tourism developers, and policymakers.



The economic boom unfolding across Flores—driven by the development of premium tourism in the Komodo Islands, Labuan Bajo, and other localities—is challenging the island's entire economy and its socio-religious fabric. While tourism presents a significant opportunity for development, the prospect of Flores becoming the 'New Bali' carries substantial risks. These pressing concerns formed the vital socio-economic context that inspired the conference and underscored its critical relevance.

The conference was originally conceived by Mgr. Maksimus Regus (former rector of Santu Paulus and Bishop of Labuan Bajo), with the support of Dr. Fr. Agustinus Manfred Habur (current rector of Santu Paulus) and Mgr. Siprianus Hormat (Bishop of Ruteng). *Universitas Santu Paulus* provided hosting and logistical support, while ISAC oversaw the scientific program and academic contributions. This partnership represented a novel form of collaboration between Indonesia's newest Catholic university and ISAC—an entity hosted by one of Asia's most prestigious universities, NUS. Furthermore, its thematic focus **addressed an issue of vital relevance** to many Catholic communities across Asia.

While full recordings of the event are publicly accessible online, efforts are currently focused on producing a high-quality edited volume from the conference proceedings. Due to its distinctive collaborative framework, thematic focus, and public-engagement model, this conference serves as **a replicable and inspiring paradigm** for advancing scholarly work on Asian Catholics. Hopefully, similar collaborative initiatives will be developed elsewhere in the future.

## Framing Migration: An Innovative Research Collaboration

This research project (October 2023 – September 2025) examined the participation of Catholic actors in the international negotiation of norms and principles concerning migrants, refugees, and displaced persons. While focusing particularly on the dynamics between Southeast Asia and Europe from 1950 to 2000, [the project](#) maintained a global perspective. It convened a dozen scholars from France, Italy, Belgium, Canada, the Philippines, and Singapore to analyse how specific Catholic entities responded to and engaged with migration and displacement issues.

The project's innovative nature was distinguished by several features. Over the two-year period, the research group regularly convened online to discuss the project's theoretical framework and to develop individual papers addressing the core research agenda. In January 2025, the team met in person in Singapore, joined by additional scholars, to present and discuss preliminary findings. This workshop was followed by an internal peer-review process, culminating in the submission of 12 research papers for a special issue of the *Asia Pacific Migration Journal*.

Furthermore, under the leadership of Professor Paul-André Rosental (Sciences Po Paris) and strategic support of Mariana Losada, the project received research funding as part of a strategic initiative to foster scientific collaboration between academic institutions in Paris and Singapore. 40,000 SGD was used to organize the workshop in Singapore and provide a small research stipend to involved scholars.

The convergence of dedicated research funding and a multidisciplinary, international team over a two-year period created particularly favourable conditions for sustained and intellectually productive scholarly exchange. Throughout the collaboration, team members were able to develop substantial individual research outputs while simultaneously elaborating a shared analytical framework applicable to a broad range of scholarly inquiries, including the study of Asian Catholicism. These elements position this pilot project as **a compelling model for future interdisciplinary and cross-institutional research initiatives**.

## Office for Digital Collections

Attentive to the technological transformations reshaping both social interactions and research methodologies, ISAC organized a conference on [Digital Humanities](#) at the International Christian University in Tokyo in February 2023. Building on the discussions generated by this event, and mindful of the initiative's limited resources, the coordinators continued to reflect on how emerging digital technologies might be strategically mobilized to advance research on Asian Catholic communities.

After evaluating various options, we signed an agreement in February 2024 with De La Salle University Manila (DLSU) to establish an office dedicated to creating digital collections. With the generous logistical and financial support of DLSU, the long-term goal of this office is **to facilitate the creation of digital archives on contemporary Asian Catholics**. Through particular individuals, groups, and Catholic institutions across Asia playing essential roles in shaping modern Asia, the documents and records they produce are often overlooked and at risk of being lost. ISAC@DLSU serves as a bridge between DLSU's extensive library resources and these Asian Catholic entities to ensure their writings, data, and archives are properly digitized and carefully preserved for future generations of researchers.

Consequently, Dr. Bubbles Asor has joined DLSU to develop the ISAC@DLSU office on a part-time basis. A series of administrative and legal procedures were completed during 2024-2025. In parallel, a European foundation has awarded a research grant of 15,000 Euros to this office to facilitate its initial operations and the creation of its first collections (Oral History of Asian Catechists, Chinese Christian Couplets, Scalabrini Exodus Series, etc).



### 3. From an Initiative to an Institution

ISAC began as a relatively small, informal, and flexible scholarly association. However, recognizing the multifaceted nature of its assigned mission, the interest of scholars, and the challenges ahead, the coordinators have consistently worked to gradually transform ISAC into something more than just an informal initiative.

#### Institutional Outreach

From 2021 to 2025, the coordinators engaged key academic and ecclesial stakeholders. The objective was to introduce and promote ISAC's mission and strategic approach, with the aim of fostering new collaborations and expanding the research network.

##### Academic

- Coordinators introduced ISAC to members and/or representatives of major academic entities across Asia through various channels. Institutions contacted include Ateneo de Manila University (Manila), Atma Jaya University (Yogyakarta), the [Catholic Research Centre](#) (Kuala Lumpur), the Department of Catholic Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (Hong Kong), Fu Jen University (Taipei), the Holy Spirit Centre (Hong Kong), Sanata Dharma University (Yogyakarta), the University of Saint Joseph (Macao), University of Santo Tomas (Manila), Sogang University (Seoul), Sophia University (Tokyo), Singapore Management University (Singapore), Rosary College of Commerce & Arts - Goa University (Goa), and Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus (Ruteng).
- To promote the social scientific study of Asian Catholics beyond Catholic Studies *per se*, ISAC organized 11 dedicated panels at the annual conferences of 7 major scholarly associations. These panels were central to increasing the academic visibility and scholarly recognition of this emerging field of study (see Annex C).

##### Ecclesial

- On 16 August 2021 and 30 May 2023, ISAC coordinators held online meetings with the secretaries of the *Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences* (FABC) to present detailed reports on ISAC's research activities and ongoing projects.
- To introduce the academic vision of ISAC, Dr. Chambon was granted audiences with several church leaders, including Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrão (Goa), Cardinal Francis Sebastian (Penang), Cardinal Tarcisio Kikuchi (Tokyo), and Cardinal Stephen Chow (Hong Kong). Efforts to arrange a meeting with Cardinal William Goh (Singapore) to present ISAC have not yet come to fruition.

- Our multiple efforts to collaborate with the archdiocese of Singapore on various projects and fundraising were unsuccessful.
- In Rome, Dr. Chambon met with Sr. Helen Alford, President of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, to present ISAC.



Dr. Chambon, Dr. Asor, Card. Ferrão, Dr. Ponniah

Decembre 2024, Goa

## Budget and Finances

ISAC has operated primarily through the thousands of hours of unpaid work contributed by its coordinators and associated scholars. However, although ISAC has never received a major research grant or significant donations capable of establishing an endowment, it has directly benefited from financial support that merits acknowledgment:

### Singapore:

- For five years, Dr. Chambon was employed by the Asia Research Institute (ARI) with the freedom to dedicate himself to his research and to ISAC. Furthermore, ARI provided 10,000 SGD on two separate occasions to fund ISAC conferences ("[Catholicism, Family, and Asian Societies](#)" and "[Asian Catholic Materialities](#)"; see Annex B).
- Through the National University of Singapore's donation platform ([NUS Giving](#)), ISAC was able to collect contributions from individuals in Singapore. Over four years, 14 donors contributed a total of 21,291 SGD to ISAC (of which 15,000 SGD was donated by a single family over three years).
- Through its affiliation with ARI, ISAC secured a Paris-NUS collaboration grant (40,000 SGD), which funded the [Framing Migration](#) project (p.9).

### **The Philippines:**

- In addition to providing logistical and administrative support for digital collections, De La Salle University Manila (DLSU) committed to employing Dr. Asor with a significantly reduced teaching load, allowing her to focus on coordinating [ISAC@DLSU](#) and the creation of digital collections.
- A European foundation that wishes to remain anonymous provided 15,000 euros to our Manila office, ISAC@DLSU.

### **Japan:**

- In Tokyo, the International Christian University (ICU) granted its ‘Social Science Research Institute Symposium’ twice for ISAC conferences organized by Dr. Brown (¥ 800,000 for the 2022 conference “[A Digital Humanities Approach to Asian Catholic Culture](#)” and ¥ 500,000 for the 2025 conference “[Missionary Museums in the Global South](#)”)

### **India:**

- Through their logistical support, Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrão, the Archdiocese of Goa and Daman, St Xavier's College and Rosary College of Commerce & Arts (affiliated to Goa University), and the St Joseph Vaz Spiritual Retreat Centre shared the financial burden of the 2024 conference “[The Pan Asian Heritage of St. Francis Xavier](#)”

### **Indonesia:**

- Through its logistical support, the Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng made it possible to co-organize the 2025 conference “[Questioning Tourism: the Role of Catholicism in Asian Tourism](#)”.

### **Asia at large:**

- Via its PayPal account, ISAC received two donations totalling 79.08 SGD.
- The press agency UCANews regularly provided free publicity for roundtables organized by ISAC. Additionally, beyond the professional support for the production and diffusion of all our [podcasts](#), UCAN directly funded two of the four podcast series produced through ISAC.

## Personal Acknowledgments

The establishment and growth of ISAC in its inaugural phase depended not only on the extensive contributions of our affiliated scholars—notably those who spearheaded specific pilot projects, events, and collaborative initiatives—but also on the pivotal roles played by several key individuals. We extend our deepest gratitude to:

- Dr. Tim Bunnell (former director of ARI) and Dr. Kenneth Dean (cluster leader of the Religion & Globalisation cluster at ARI), who played a key role in hosting ISAC at ARI and in providing logistical support throughout Phase 1.
- Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrão, Archbishop of Goa and Daman, who was instrumental in organizing the conference on the legacy of St. Francis Xavier.
- Br. Bernard Oca, President of De La Salle University Manila, who played a key role in establishing our office for digital collections.
- George Iype, executive director of [UCANews](#), and its colleagues for their active and multifaceted support to our work.
- Yohannes Widodo and the [Katolikana](#) team for the promotional video they graciously produced for ISAC in 2024.
- An anonymous European foundation for its support to ISAC@DLSU.
- All partner institutions that made our conferences in Japan, India, and Indonesia possible.



## 4. Research Activities & Collaborations

ISAC was established as a multifaceted initiative designed to foster a comprehensive ecosystem for scholarly research on Asian Catholics and to engage diverse, global audiences. Over time, the initiative's efforts have crystallized around two primary strategic pillars: (1) generating new original research projects and (2) disseminating enhanced academic knowledge concerning Asian Catholics. The following outlines the core components developed under these two pillars during ISAC's first phase:

### Research Development

#### Research Conferences

Drawing inspiration from the workshop model employed by the Asia Research Institute in Singapore—which convenes 10 to 20 researchers for two to three days to examine a specific research theme through individual paper presentations—ISAC organized 11 [conferences](#) during Phase 1. Adopting a pragmatic approach responsive to opportunities and thematic needs, the locations and formats of these conferences varied considerably, although their core objective remained consistent: to foster collective scholarly advancement through the discussion and comparison of case studies (see Annex B). Four of these conferences were held entirely online, while seven were conducted in person—in Goa, Ruteng, Singapore, and Tokyo.

These conferences served as a **platform to highlight innovative research themes, cultivate interpersonal connections among scholars, generate high-quality publications**; and broaden public access to research by live-streaming proceedings via Zoom. The majority of ISAC's publications are direct outcomes of these conferences (see p. 5).

At an institutional level, the conferences facilitated collaboration with diverse partners—such as the Archdiocese of Goa and the Catholic university in Flores—and strengthened ISAC's professional network. In terms of ongoing scholarly development, they brought together researchers from across the globe and enabled them to engage directly with diverse social, cultural, and ecclesiastical realities in various Asian locations. Despite the logistical challenges involved, these conferences proved essential to the intellectual, institutional, and human development of our academic community.

## Pilot Research Projects

During Phase 1, coordinators engaged with a wide variety of scholars interested in Asian Catholic populations to identify their research interests, specializations, and key questions. From these discussions, seven small working groups were formed as ‘[Pilot Research projects](#)’, involving a total of 44 researchers. Each group adopted distinct formats, objectives, and methodologies. The overarching aim was to **foster mutual encouragement in exploring specific research themes**—such as Global Chinese Catholicism, interfaith families, and Catholic tombs & cemeteries (see Annex D).

For example, one group of six scholars met regularly online over a two-year period to investigate Marian devotions and representations in contemporary Asia. This group not only generated the online conference [Mary among Asian Religions](#) but also piloted new digital humanities techniques and convened panels on Marian themes at broader academic conferences.

With the assistance of the coordinators, the fundamental ethos of these pilot research projects remained intentionally experimental and collegial. The purpose extended beyond merely testing research hypotheses and novel methodologies; it encompassed fostering mutual scholarly support and collaboratively pioneering new avenues of intellectual inquiry.

## Perbualan & Online events

While ISAC was established in the immediate aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, its coordinators saw an opportunity to leverage the newly normalized practice of online meetings (via Zoom) to facilitate scholarly exchange. Responding to the expressed needs and requests of researchers, we organized a diverse array of online gatherings. These sessions enabled participants to present ongoing research or article drafts to **receive critical and constructive feedback from peers and experts**.

These online research conversations—or [perbualan](#) in Malay —functioned as intimate seminars designed to transcend strictly national or local academic confines. Characterized by flexible formats and frequencies, these virtual meetings served to highlight a wide spectrum of research topics and scholars, thereby actively cultivating and sustaining a vibrant intellectual community.

## Panels at international scholarly associations

To actively engage with broader academic debates and research agendas, ISAC-affiliated scholars organized 11 panels specifically focused on Asian Catholics (see Annex C) at the annual conferences of major scholarly societies. These included, among others, the

American Academy of Religion, the Association for Asian Studies, and the European Academy of Religion.

Each panel served as a platform to develop focused scholarly dialogue on a particular dimension of Asian Catholics within the wider research ecosystems of these international forums. While several of these panels resulted in contributions to special journal issues, their primary impact was **to increase the visibility and scholarly legitimacy of our academic field**—not only within Asia, but also across North America and Europe.



Panel on “Catholicism and Korean Nation-Building”  
Seoul, November 2024

### **Survey on Synodality**

ISAC was established during a period when the Catholic Church was fully engaged in the Synod on Synodality (2021–2024). A structural and spiritual reform effort aimed at fostering a culture of prayerful listening and renewing approaches to decision-making, authority, and inclusion within Catholic institutions. As this Synod entered a new phase in December 2023, ISAC’s coordinators deemed it timely to conduct a rigorous and **systematic sociological survey examining the participation of academics** of Asian Catholicism in these synodal processes.

To this end, a modest sum of donations raised in Singapore was allocated to the project. This funding supported the recruitment of a research assistant and enabled the design and implementation of a detailed quantitative survey, which received approval from the National University of Singapore’s ethics review committee (NUS-IRB-2024-398). The three-week online survey, which identified 325 scholars, subsequently yielded [a comprehensive report](#) that was widely disseminated, as well as a peer-reviewed [academic publication](#).

Beyond its focus on synodality, this sociological study provided an opportunity to develop a more precise mapping of scholars specializing in Asian Catholicism, to capture their demographic and professional profiles, and to gain deeper insight into their relationships with Catholic institutions.

## Communicating beyond academia

While ISAC has fostered the production of new academic research on Asian Catholics, it has also sought to **enhance the dissemination of existing knowledge and to increase the visibility of scholars** working in this field of study. Owing to the immense cultural, linguistic, and political diversity of Asia, these researchers are often isolated, and their expertise remains largely unrecognized. There exists a genuine challenge in improving access to academic knowledge concerning contemporary Asian Catholics. Below, we list five examples of communication and outreach initiatives developed by ISAC Phase 1.

### Online Roundtables

When the Filipino presidential elections were in full swing in May 2022, ISAC coordinators decided to establish a new public contribution, "[ISAC Online Roundtables](#)." Our intention was to enable scholars to provide live, nuanced, and public commentary on recent events affecting Catholics in Asia. The format of these roundtables was relatively straightforward: three to four experts discussed a significant and timely issue pertaining to Asian Catholics over a 90-minute session, which included a question-and-answer period with the online audience. During Phase 1, these roundtables addressed a wide variety of topics (such as political development, sexual abuse, and institutional crises) and were held every two to three months (see Annex E).

With gratitude for the active promotion of these events by UCANews—the largest news agency covering Asian Catholics—we observed genuine interest, with each session attracting between 30 and 120 participants. These roundtables have become a strategic endeavour, not only for fostering public discussion of important and sometimes sensitive subjects but also for **publicizing the existence of a rich and diverse community of scholars working on Asian Catholics**.

### Podcast series

With the assistance of UCANews, Dr. Chambon recorded an initial podcast series (18 episodes) highlighting recent scholarship on contemporary Asian Catholics (see Annex F). During Phase 1, three additional series were produced in partnership with UCANews. Each of these series was hosted by a different scholar—James Ponniah, Hisako Omori, and Bryan Goh, respectively—and focused on a specific theme—Catholic families, Marian studies, and migration studies, respectively. In total, 56 episodes were recorded and made freely available to the public via podcast streaming platforms. Beyond the substantial effort and knowledge dissemination this represented, [these podcasts](#) also provided an opportunity to **introduce scholars—through their own voices and personalities—to audiences interested in Asian Catholicism**.

## Online Presence

The coordinators developed a suite of digital tools to establish and enhance ISAC’s online visibility and presence. They remain consistently attentive to integrating ISAC within the technological transformations shaping contemporary modes of social interaction and knowledge production. This constituted an essential effort to transcend the national, linguistic, and geographical boundaries that isolate scholars affiliated with ISAC and, more broadly, social scientific research on Asian Catholics.

In addition to the [podcasts](#), our [website](#) became a strategic platform for communicating ISAC’s activities and disseminating current developments. Under the weekly supervision of Dr. Chambon, the site grew considerably in both scope and complexity over the course of four years, reflecting the dynamic vitality and research potential of ISAC. Maintenance costs were offset in part by Dr. Brown, Dr. Chambon, and donations received by ISAC through NUS.

Beyond the website, ISAC also launched accounts on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [Bluesky](#). Although this social media presence—demanding in terms of management—had limited impact, it proved valuable for promoting research and researchers focused on Asian Catholics. Moreover, in June 2022, a dedicated [YouTube channel](#) was created to archive and provide access to recordings of select ISAC events. During Phase 1, 35 videos were made available, accumulating a total of 5,300 views as of March 1, 2026.

While lacking the requisite expertise and the human and financial resources necessary to cultivate a high-calibre online presence, ISAC Phase 1 nonetheless took care to **diversify its digital outreach** in order to increase the visibility of scholars working on Asian Catholic populations, and of the broader academic research in this field.

## Media Interviews

As a result of ISAC’s online presence and major events within global Catholicism, the coordinators received an **increasing number of media inquiries** from CNN, BBC, [CNA](#), South China Morning Post, Le Monde, New York times, etc.

For instance, during Pope Francis’s extensive visit to Southeast Asia in September 2024, Dr. Chambon devoted over a month of full-time work to responding to media requests concerning Catholicism in Timor-Leste, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and Singapore. The primary objective was to connect journalists with scholars possessing expertise on these regions. Similarly, in April 2025, following the death of Pope Francis and the subsequent conclave, the media sought numerous interviews and analyses—not only to assess Francis’s legacy in Asia but also to obtain accurate information regarding Asian cardinals. ISAC thus became a valuable interface for enhancing the visibility of scholars

working on Catholicism in Asia and for assisting the media in their pursuit of reliable and balanced information.



Dr. Fransiska Widyawati interviewed on the BBC



Dr. Michel Chambon interviewed on CNA

### ISAC Anniversaries

ISAC was officially launched on October 1, 2021—a symbolic date. Accordingly, each year on October 1, the coordinators organized events not only to [commemorate this anniversary](#) but also to stimulate dialogue on scholarly research and Asian Catholicism. The most extensive anniversary celebration took place in 2024, through a collaboration with Dr. José Casanova and Dr. Peter Phan. Following the publication of their major opus “[Asian Pacific Catholicism & Globalization](#)”, ISAC co-organized with them a series of 12 in-person events across Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Singapore, to highlight their scholarship, and foster reflection on Global Catholicism.

The ISAC anniversary is **an occasion to advance the visibility of scholars** working on Asian Catholics and to promote deeper social scientific research on contemporary Catholicism.



Bubbles B. Asor, Peter Phan & Jose Casanova (centre)  
At the University Santo Tomas (Manila) with Filipino colleagues  
*Asian Book Tour & ISAC Anniversary 2024*

## 5. Moving Forward

As ISAC continued to evolve into a complex network of projects and scientific collaborations, our structural and financial limitations became increasingly evident. The projects we have envisioned for the next steps of ISAC require a different kind of infrastructure and operational budget, with a solid institutional foundation and a stable system of support. For this reason, the coordinators deemed it timely to pause, reflect on the progress made, **evaluate available options and recalibrate our network**. Amongst the lessons we learnt, is that an initiative like ISAC will work best in a country with more ecclesial support, so we endeavour to bring our primary driving hub to a different location. ISAC has therefore entered a *State of Dormition* since December 8, 2025, to allow all involved time to plan Phase 2 (see Annex H).

ISAC has successfully validated the academic and societal value of applying social science research to the study of Asian Catholics. This foundational work has not only identified a broad and compelling spectrum of topics for inquiry but has also helped to define the methodological frameworks needed for this emerging field. Such research constitutes a vital public good, generating essential knowledge for Asian societies, Catholic communities, and the global scholarly landscape. ISAC is now positioned to build upon this proven foundation and address the significant research potential that awaits.

To continue our mission, we **hope that institutions and/or individuals will come forward to fund and/or host a Phase 2**. The institutional framework and scientific priorities of this new step are to be negotiated, informed by the lessons of Phase 1 and according to available opportunities. This report demonstrates that ISAC has already developed substantial expertise and a complex transnational research ecosystem. Ultimately, we hope to secure the necessary conditions to launch a Phase 2 able to truly support the many young Asian scholars interested in the social scientific study of Asian Catholics.

If you know of individuals or institutions potentially interested in supporting, funding, collaborating with, or hosting ISAC, please contact us at [research.isac@gmail.com](mailto:research.isac@gmail.com)



## ANNEX A: List of involved scholars

The following list presents the scholars directly involved in Phase 1 of ISAC. Some served as academic members, others led specific projects or events, and several contributed as members of the scientific committee.

Emanuele Angiola

Anu K. Anthony

Maruja MB Asis

**Bubbles B. Asor (coordinator)**

George Bayuga

Michael Bistis

**Benardo E. Brown (coordinator)**

Jose Casanova

**Michel Chambon (coordinator)**

Jaeyeon Choe

Alan Chong

Jayeel Cornelio

Abhijit Dasgupta

Kenneth Dean

Marlon De Luna Era

Maribeth Erb

Meghan Rose Donnelly

Aristotle Dy

Dominic Fan

Shaikh Farid

R. Michael Feener

Eduardo Gabriel

Song Gang

Bryan Goh

Karen Goh

Patrizia Granziera

Jieun Han

Robert Hefner

Tuan Hoang

Junhao Huang

Catharina Indirastuti

Elsa Mary Jacob

Hendrikus Paulus Kaunang

Darlene Kasten

Mikyoung Kim

Karrie Koesel

Lina Koleilat

Youngpa Kwon

Sin Wen Lau

Anthony Le Duc

Chia Yu Liang

Royston Lin

Lancy Lobo

Namita N. Manohar

Gwyn McClelland  
Horikazu Miyazaki  
Askok Mocherla  
Catherine O'Brien  
Seil Oh  
Hisako Omori  
Yuga Orita  
Sarah G. Ortiz  
Lawrence S. Pedregosa  
Johann Peiris  
William Peterson  
Peter Phan  
Shanthini Pillai  
**James Ponniah (coordinator)**  
Finsensius Purnama  
George Baylon Radics  
Nao Rémon  
Rowena Robinson  
Eva Salerno

Catherine Scheer  
Titi Susilowati  
Jeremy Ashwin Tabensky  
Mark Inigo Tallara  
Jonathan Tan  
Andre Theng  
Johanna Tan Si Min  
Claire Tran  
Thomas Ching Wei Tu  
Thien Huong Villarreal  
Lezhi Wang  
Justin Wejak  
Fransiska Widyawati  
Angeline Wong  
Toru Yamada  
Leonard Yeo  
Zhang Jie  
Ines Zupanov

## ANNEX B: List of conferences

In Phase 1, ISAC scholars convened 11 academic conferences across diverse geographical locations and in multiple formats. Each conference was structured around a specific thematic focus pertinent to the social-scientific study of Asian Catholics, **bringing together scholars to present original research papers.**

Title	Date	Format	Number of research papers
<a href="#"><u>Catholicism, Families, and Asian Societies</u></a>	10-11 Feb. 2022	Online through the Asia Research Institute (Singapore)	18
<a href="#"><u>A Digital Humanities Approach to Asian Catholic Culture</u></a>	16-17 Feb. 2023	In-person at the International Christian University (Japan)	10
<a href="#"><u>More Universal than Catholicism? Mary among Asian Religions</u></a>	10-12 May 2023	Online with the Centre for Marian Studies, St Mary's University (UK).	18
<a href="#"><u>Asian Catholic Materialities</u></a>	31-31 Aug. 2023	In-person at the Asia Research Institute (Singapore)	13
<a href="#"><u>Gender &amp; Emotion in Asia-Pacific Catholicisms</u></a>	28 Feb. 1 March 2024	Online	9
<a href="#"><u>The Vatican &amp; Inter-Religious Diplomacy in Asia</u></a>	29-30 Aug. 2024	In-person in Singapore with RSIS & ARI	15
<a href="#"><u>The Pan-Asian Heritage of St. Francis Xavier: Between Memory &amp; Contemporary Appropriations</u></a>	12-15 Dec. 2024	In-person in Goa (India) with Xavier's College Rosary College of Commerce & Arts, the St Joseph Vaz Spiritual Retreat Centre	18
<a href="#"><u>Framing Migration: The Role of Religious Actors in the Production of International Law</u></a>	8-9 Jan. 2025	In-person at the Asia Research Institute (Singapore)	12
<a href="#"><u>Questioning Tourism The Role of Catholicism in Asian Tourism</u></a>	17-20 Sept. 2025	In-person at the Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng (Indonesia)	17
<a href="#"><u>Missionary Museums in the Global South: Narratives of Conversion &amp; Modernity in Southeast Asia &amp; Latin America</u></a>	6-7 Nov. 2025	In-person at the International Christian University (Japan)	10
<a href="#"><u>Asian Catholics in International Relations</u></a>	11-13 Nov. 2025	Online	14

## ANNEX C: List of panels

Between 2021 & 2025, ISAC scholars organized 11 thematic panels at major international conferences. Each panel was tailored to the host conference’s scope, thereby enhancing the visibility of research on Asian Catholics and deepening ISAC's intellectual **engagement with broader scholarly communities.**

Academic Society	Year of the conference	Title of ISAC’s panel	Number of contributions
American Anthropological Association	2022 (Seattle)	<b>Christian Possibilities &amp; Asian Futures</b>	5
American Academy of Religion	2021 (San Antonio)	<b>Does Asian Catholicism Exist?</b>	5
	2022 (Denver)	<b>Global Circulations of Asian Catholics &amp; the Making of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Catholicism</b>	5
	2025 (Boston)	<b>Catholicisms in Urban Asia</b>	4
Association for Asian Studies	2023 (Daegu)	<b>The Many Faces of Asian Mary in Asia and the World</b>	5
	2024 (Yogyakarta)	<b>The Glocalization of Catholicism in Southeast Asia</b>	4
	2026 (Vancouver)	<b>Catholic Connectivities: Building Bridges between Asian Catholicism &amp; the Modern World</b>	4
European Academy of Religion	2025 (Vienna)	<b>Euro-Asian Flows &amp; the Making of Catholicism</b>	4
International Convention of Asian Scholars	2024 (Surabaya)	<b>Catholic Studies in Asia: State of the Field</b>	5
Kyujanggak International Symposium on Korean Studies	2024 (Seoul)	<b>Catholicism and Korean Nation-Building: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives</b>	5
Asian Borderlands Research Network	2026 (Taipei)	<b>Sovereignty, Border-drawing, and Catholicism in East Asia: From the 17th Century Onward</b>	5

## ANNEX D: List of pilot research projects

Between 2021 & 2025, ISAC coordinators gathered seven groups of scholars to explore facets of Asian Catholicism. The research topics of these groups were as follow:

### 1. **Global Chinese Catholicism**

Initially coordinated by Dr. Eva Salerno and Dr. Angeline Wong, this pilot research project investigated manifestations of Chinese Catholicism beyond mainland China. From December 8–19, 2021, the project convened a virtual workshop featuring six research papers. Subsequently, between February 2022 and October 2025, a series of nine online seminars was conducted to present original scholarship pertinent to the study of global Chinese Catholicism.

### 2. **Asian Marianism**

A working group of six scholars convened regularly in virtual meetings from August 2021 through spring 2023 to examine methodologies for researching Marian devotions and narratives across Asia. During this period, the group organized one [international conference](#) and two conference panels, while also piloting novel digital technologies for data collection.

### 3. **Asian Catholic Tombs & Cemeteries**

A working group of six scholars convened regularly in virtual meetings from August 2022 through April 2023 to examine methodologies for researching Asian Catholic tombs and cemeteries. These cultural and religious sites were identified as strategic loci for investigating cross-cultural comparison, social change, and interreligious dynamics. The group concluded that available resources and extant methodological frameworks were insufficient at that time to pursue this research direction in depth.

### 4. **Global Vietnamese Catholicism**

Initially coordinated by Dr. Tuan Hoang, this pilot research project investigated manifestations of Vietnamese Catholicism within diasporic and transnational contexts. Between August 2022 and May 2023, a series of four virtual seminars was conducted to present original scholarship on the development and characteristics of global Vietnamese Catholicism.

### 5. **Digital Collections**

As part of ISAC efforts to establish an office for digital collections at De La Salle University, Manila, the project coordinators launched a series of pilot digital collections to evaluate new methodologies and research frameworks. Each

collection responds to distinct methodological constraints and pursues specific theoretical objectives. For example, in collaboration with local colleagues, Dr. Brown oversaw the launch of the “Oral History of Asian Catechists” collection, beginning with the recording of a series of interviews in Sri Lanka. This fieldwork has been extended to India under the supervision of Dr. Ponniah with research assistant support, while Dr. Asor manages the subsequent formatting and digital preservation of these recordings. Concurrently, Dr. Chambon, supported by Dr. Eva Salerno, developed online tools to crowdsource photographs of Chinese Christian couplets displayed during the Lunar New Year. And in Manila, Dr. Asor has supervised the complete digitization and preservation of the Scalabrini Exodus Series. Please refer to page 10 for further details on these collections.

#### **6. Framing Migration**

The Role of Religious Actors in the Production of International Law; please refer to page 9 for more details on this successful pilot research project.

#### **7. Interfaith Families**

A significant number of Asian Catholics live in households where multiple religious traditions coexist. Thus, a group of five scholars convened online between August 2023 and August 2024 to discuss this understudied dimension of Asian Catholicism and to explore research methods pertaining to it. [A small workshop](#), open to all, was held online on May 8, 2024, to enable each of the affiliated researchers to present their work. Although the relevance of the topic remains unquestionable, the absence of funding and of a principal investigator has led the group to suspend its activities. The theme of this pilot research project constitutes one of the research avenues that a potential Phase 2 should seriously consider.

## ANNEX E: List of online roundtables

ISAC regularly convened online roundtables to generate timely academic analysis of recent developments affecting Catholic communities in Asia. Designed to **disseminate scholarly perspectives beyond the university**, each roundtable typically featured a panel of four scholars engaging in a structured 90-minute discussion. During Phase 1, a total of 18 such events were organized, receiving generous publicity from UCANews. All recordings are available on Youtube.

- June 2022: [The Philippines 2022 Presidential Election and the Catholic Church](#) with Joseph Peter Calleja, lawyer, journalist for UCANews and editor for Bayard publications; Dr. Dean Dulay, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Singapore Management University; Dr. Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr., Professor of History, Ateneo de Manila University; and Dr. Jayeel Cornelio, Associate Professor, Development Studies Program and Associate Dean for Research and Creative Work, Ateneo de Manila University.
- July 2022: [The GotaGoGama Crisis in Sri Lanka: What does it mean for Catholics?](#) with Dr. R.L. Stirrat, Professor of Anthropology, University of Sussex; Mr. Jehan Perera, Executive Director, National Peace Council of Sri Lanka Ruki Fernando, Human Rights Consultant, Center for Society and Religion; and Dr. Bhavani Fonseka, Senior Research Fellow, Center for Policy Alternatives, CPA.
- August 2022: [Creating 6 new cardinals from Asia and sending many more messages](#) with Dr. Fr. Felix Wilfred, Chief Editor of the International Journal of Asian Christianity; Dr Josh Trindade, Timor Leste Presidency of the Council of Ministers; Mr. Gerard O'Connell, America's Vatican correspondent; and Dr. Michel Chambon.
- October 2022: [The Sino-Vatican Agreement and its Geopolitical Significance](#) with Dr. Karrie Koesel, Associate Professor of Political Science, University of Notre Dame USA; Dr. Sr. Beatrice Leung, Honorary Research Fellow, National Chengchi University, Taiwan; Mr. Giorgio Bernardelli, Editor-in-Chief, AsiaNews, Italy, and Dr. Michel Chambon.
- December 2022: [The Crisis in Myanmar - Its Impact on Catholics and Other Minorities](#) with Fr. Vinai Boonlue s.j., Xavier Learning Community, Thailand; Dr. David Moe, Rice Postdoctoral Associate in Southeast Asian Studies, Yale University and Dr. Elliott Prasse-Freeman, Assistant Professor in Anthropology, NUS.

- February 2023: [A New Catholic Prime Minister in Taiwan, Domestic and International Implications](#) with Dr. Paul Jobin, Associate Research Fellow at the Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica, Taiwan; Dr. Magdaléna Rychetská, Department of Chinese studies at Masaryk University; Dr. Sr. Beatrice Leung, Honorary Research Professor of Taiwan Studies Centre of National Cheng Chi University Taipei; and Mr. Louis Chen, Former Director of the Hsinchu Diocese's Social Services Taiwan.
- May 2023: [The Difficulties of Radio Veritas Asia: Catholic Information and Communication](#) with Fr. George Plathottam SDB, Executive Secretary of the FABC Office of Social Communication; Mr. Christopher Joseph, UCANews Editor; Fr. Shanil Dinuka Jayawardena OMI, General Service of Oblate Communications; and Dr. Jamason Chen, School of Communication, Loyola University Chicago.
- July 2023: [The Never Ending Korean War & Catholicism](#) with Mr. Paul Hwang, Director of Asian Lay Leaders Forum, lecturer of Catholic University of Korea; Fr. Munsu Park s.j, Emeritus Professor at Sogang University; and Dr. Franklin Rausch, Assistant Professor in History at Lander University.
- September 2023: [Facing Sexual Abuses in Catholic Asia](#) with Mrs. Tjitske Lingsma, Independent Journalist; Mr. Matthieu Lasserre, Journalist, La Croix; Dr. Fr. Hans Zollner, sj, Director of the Institute of Anthropology. Interdisciplinary Studies on Human Dignity and Care at the Pontifical Gregorian University; and Dr. Fr. Yosuke Sakai, Clinical Psychologist and Theologian, Sophia University.
- December 2023: [The Warming Trend of the Vietnam Vatican Relations](#) with Dr. Claire Tran, Ass. Prof. Political Science, Université Paris Cité, France; Dr. Fr. Anh Tran s.j., Ass. Prof of Theology, Santa Clara University. USA; Dr. Sr. Marie Le Hoa, Research Associate, IFRAE, France; Dr. Lan Chu, Prof. of Political Science, Occidental College, USA.
- February 2024: [Discerning the Dissent in the Syro-Malabar Church of India](#) with Dr. Pushpa Joseph, Chief Editor, Magnet and Research and Development Officer, Conference of Religious India; Mr. Shyju Antony, Freelance Journalist and Former News Presenter of National TV Channel, Doordarshan; Dr. Anthony Kalliath CMI, Founder-editor of Asian Horizons and Former Dean of Faculty of Theology, Dharmaram, Bangalore; and Prof. Felix Wilfred, Founder-Director of Asian Centre for Cross-cultural Studies, Chennai.
- June 2024: [The Results of India's General Election and their Significance for Christians](#) with Mr John Dayal, Journalist and public intellectual; Fr. Cedric Prakash sj Founder of PRASHANT, a Jesuit human-rights centre in Ahmedabad; Fr. Sebastian M. Michael svd

Director, Institute of Indian Culture, Mumbai; and Dr. Kham Khan Suan Hausing, Professor & former Head, Department of Political Science, University of Hyderabad.

- August 2024: [The Crisis in Bangladesh and Its Impact on Local Christians](#) with Mr. Rock Rozario, Journalist for UCANews; Dr. Syeda Rozana Rashid, Professor International Relations at the University of Dhaka ; Dr. Md Shaikh Farid, Professor in the Department of World Religions and Culture at the University of Dhaka; and Nasima Akter, Peace Studies about Rohingya refugee communities.
- September 2024: [Pope Francis in Southeast Asia](#) with Pastor Elga Sarapung, Protestant Pastor from Sulawesi, Executive Director of INTERFIDEI – Indonesia; Bishop Clement Papa, Catholic Coadjutor Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Mount Hagen - Papua New Guinea; Prof Michael Leach, Professor in Politics and International Relations at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne, Australia, and Prof. Jonathan Tan, Theologian, Case Western Reserve University, USA.
- February 2025: [Trump Policies & their Implications for Christians in Asia](#) with Prof. Robert Hefner, Boston University, USA; Prof. Mathew Schmalz, Professor of Religious Studies, College of the Holy Cross, USA; and Revd Kim-kwong Chan, Ph.D., D.Th., J.P., Chairperson of Christian National's Evangelism Commission - Hong Kong.
- May 2025: [The Asian Legacy of Pope Francis, Interreligious Dialogue, Migration & Geopolitics](#) with Prof. Peter C. Phan, The Ignacio Ellacuria, S.J. Chair of Catholic Social Thought, Georgetown University; Dr. Maruja MB Asis, Senior Researcher, Scalabrini Migration Centre; Prof. Bernard D'Sami, Professor of History at Loyola College Chennai; and Prof. Jose Casanova, Senior Fellow at the Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, Georgetown University.
- May 2025: [Why Does the Council of Nicaea Matter for 21st Century Asia?](#) with Dr. Stephanie Ann Puen, Assistant Professor, Department of Theology, Ateneo de Manila University; Mr. Charles Bertille, Ecclesial Analyst, Student in Theology, Synodality in the Malaysian Church context; Dr Joseph Prabhakar Dayam, Dean of doctoral studies, Gurukul Lutheran Theology College, Chennai; and Dr. Yang Fenggang, Professor of Sociology, Purdue University.
- October 2025: [Shaping Public Conversations about Catholicism & the Role of Academics](#) with Dr. Heidi Campbell, Texas A&M University; Dr. Fr. Anthony Le Duc, SVD, Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication (ARC) Bangkok; Dr. Andrea Gagliarducci, Monday Vatican, Catholic News Agency & NCR; and Dr. Michel Chambon.

## ANNEX F: List of podcasts

Below is the detailed list of the 56 podcast episodes produced by ISAC in partnership with UCANews and aimed at **making academic research on contemporary Asian Catholics more accessible.**

### Series I: “Scholarship on Asian Catholics” with Michel Chambon

1. Thien Huong Ninh on her book [‘Race Gender and Religion in the Vietnamese Diaspora’](#)
2. Jayeel Cornelio on his book [‘Being Catholic in the Contemporary Philippines — Young people reinterpreting religion’](#)
3. Brandon Vaidyanathan on his book [‘Mercenaries and Missionaries Capitalism and Catholicism in the Global South’](#)
4. Anthony Clark on his book [‘China’s Catholics in an Era of Transformation: Observations of an Outsider’](#)
5. Liana Chua on her book [‘The Christianity of Culture Conversion: Ethnic-Citizenship and the Matter of Religion in Malaysian Borneo’](#)
6. Marco Lazzarotti on his book [‘Place, Alterity and Narration in a Taiwanese Catholic Village’](#)
7. Judith Bovensiepen on her book [‘The Land of Gold: Post Conflict Recovery and Cultural Revival in Independent Timor-Leste’](#)
8. Bernardo Brown on the book he co-edited with Brenda Yeo [‘Asian migrants and religious experience from missionary journeys to labor mobility’](#)
9. William Peterson on his book [‘Places for Happiness: Community Self and Performance in the Philippines’](#)
10. Michael Rose on his book [‘Indigenous spirits and global aspirations in a Southeast Asian border and Timor-Leste’s Oecussi enclave’](#)
11. Bagus Laksana on his book [‘Muslim and Catholic pilgrimage practices explorations through Java’](#)
12. David Radford on his book [‘Religious Identity and Social Change: Explaining Christian Conversion in a Muslim World’](#)
13. Julius Bautista on his book [‘Figuring Catholicism: An Ethnohistory of the Santo Nio de Cebu Quezon City’](#)
14. Giuseppe Bolotta on his book [‘Belittled Citizens: The Cultural Politics of Childhood on Bangkok’s Margins’](#)
15. Jonathan Tan on his book [‘The Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences: Bearing Witness to the Gospel and the Reign of God in Asia’](#)

16. Hisako Omori on her book '[From situated selves to the self: conversion and personhood among Roman Catholics in Tokyo](#)'
17. Pia Jolliffe on her book '[Learning Migration and Intergenerational Relations: The Karen and the Gift of Education](#)'
18. Gëzim Alpi on his two books '[Mother Teresa: Saint or Celebrity?](#)' and '[Mother Teresa: The Saint and Her Nation](#)'

**Series II: “Changing Families”** with James Ponniah

19. Shanthini Pillai on her research '[Saints and the Shifting Sands of Sacred Landscapes in Malaysian Tamil Catholic Faith Practices](#)'
20. Fransiska Widyawati on her research '[From Enemy to Family Marriage: Religious Conversion and Identity among Catholic and Non Catholic Families in Flore, Eastern Indonesia](#)'
21. Marco Lazzarotti on his research '[We-Are-All-Children-of-God-Conversion-as-a-Re-semantization-of-the-Chinese-Family-Structure](#)'
22. Ashok Kumar Mocherla on his research '[Caste and Denominational Endogamy in Opposition to the Catholic an Anthropological Study of Marriage and Family Structures](#)'
23. Allen J. Kim on his research '[Food in a time of Pandemic: Belonging, identity and Remaking Home Among Jesuit Scholastics in Japan](#)'
24. VJ Varghese on his research '[Fear of Becoming Minor among the Indian Minorities](#)'
25. Anu K Antony on her research '[The Imagination of a Catholic Family and the Syro-Malabar Women's Congregations](#)'
26. Sin Wen Lau on her research with Shu Ling Yeh on '[How the Amis rework their indigenous socialites through Catholic faith](#)'
27. Agustina Zaros on her research '[Diverse phenomenon of mixed marriages between foreigners and Chinese from the standpoint of Catholic beliefs](#)'
28. Brendan A. Galipeau on his research '[We Are All Children of God: Conversion as a Re-semantization of the Chinese Family Structure](#)'
29. Bryan Benjamin Goh on his research '[The Church in their House A Glocalization of Priestly Celibacy in Singapore's Chinese Catholic Families](#)'
30. Suman Rawat on her research '[Women, Childbirth, and Catholics: A Study on Rituals, Illnesses and Treatments in Eastern India](#)'
31. Aldrin B Rodriguez on his research '[Marian Devotion and its Influences on the Filipino Family and Society](#)'

### **Series III: “Mary in Asia” with Hisako Omori**

32. Introduction of the conference ‘Mary in Asian Religions’ by its organizers [‘Introduction to the Series’](#)
33. Tuan Hoang on his research [‘Our Lady of Fatima in South Vietnam and Its Diaspora’](#)
34. Michel Chambon on his research [‘A Chinese Religious Movement: The Origin of the Self and Mary’](#)
35. Jamil Akhtar on his research [‘Muslim and Catholic Pilgrimage in Mariamabad, Pakistan’](#)
36. Qi Wang on her research in history [‘The Rosary Meditation during Ming and Qing China’](#)
37. Janet A Hoskins on her research [‘Three Faces of Mary in the Vietnamese Diaspora’](#)
38. Argene A. Clasara on her research in history [‘Regulating the Marian Devotion in Macau’](#)
39. Brian Reynolds and Marco Lazzarotti on their research [‘Holy Mary and Inculturation in Taiwan’](#)
40. Patrizia Granziera on her research in religious art [‘Mary and Divine Feminine in South Asian Art’](#)
41. William Peterson on his research on performance studies [‘The Peafrancia Festival in the Philippines’](#)
42. Teruyuki Tsuji on his research [‘Dressing the Madonna in Trinidad’](#)
43. Mary Josefti Nito on her research [‘Marian Devotion and Narratives of Identity and Place Making in Philippines’](#)
44. Shanthini Pillai and Angline Wong Wei Wei on their research [‘Tamil and Chinese Catholic Diaspora Communities in the Nineteenth Century Malaya’](#)

### **Series VI: “Framing Migration” with Bryan Goh**

45. Paul André Rosental and Luisa Dolza on their research [‘The Role of Catholic Organizations in the Transformation of Migrants’](#)
46. Phi Vân Nguyen on her research [‘The Southeast Asian Refugee Crisis through the Eyes of French-Canadian Jesuits’](#)
47. George B Radics on his research [‘God’s Children on the Move Christian Support of Internal and External Migration for LGBT Communities’](#)
48. Joanna Si Min Tan on her research [‘Refugee Redefined Through the eyes of the Hong Kong Catholic Church 1950s-2000s’](#)
49. Claribel Sin Yee Low on her research [‘Making a Home for Migrants The Paris MEP and the Teochew Catholics of Hougang’](#)

50. Bubbles Beverly Asor on her research '[The case Study of the Scalabrini Migration Centre in Manila](#)'
51. Maruja Asis on the collective report '[The Migrant Ministry by Catholic Sisters in Asia Report](#)'
52. Lawrence Santiago Pedregosa on his research '[Two paradoxes faced by Filipino migrants in Belgium](#)'
53. Md Shaikh Farid on his research '[Caritas Bangladesh and its Role in Shaping Migration Policies and Support Systems 1971-2000](#)'
54. Agnès Desmazières on her research '[Feminine Eurasian Solidarities 1959-1992 Catholic Women's Assistance to the Boat People](#)'
55. Karen Goh on her research '[Faith Promoting Justice: The Jesuit Refugee Service and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines](#)'
56. Michel Chambon presenting the '[Concluding remarks on Framing Migration and other projects](#)'

## ANNEX G: List of undelivered projects

ISAC succeeded in sustaining a remarkably high level of engagement and research activity over four years, and in cultivating a rich research ecosystem that generated events, collaborations, and publications. However, certain tentative projects and experiments could not come to fruition. Below, we outline four examples of projects that were not be fully realized.

### ➤ **Asian Catholics Outside of Asia**

During the first two years of ISAC, the coordinators approached various academic institutions to explore the possibility of organizing research conferences examining the socio-religious realities of Asian Catholics present outside of Asia. The ultimate aim was to organize one conference per continent, in partnership with a local university, following a model similar to the conferences later held in Indonesia and Goa. Specific contacts were established in Europe and North America, and the scientific framework for one such conference was even prepared. After a potential partner university in the USA withdrew from the project, the initiative was suspended, and the coordinators decided to concentrate their efforts on Asia, postponing the project of continent-based conferences to a later date.

### ➤ **Audrey Donnithorne Small Research Grant**

At the launch of ISAC in 2021, the coordinators sought to establish a small research grant aimed at encouraging young Asian scholars to focus more extensively on contemporary Asian Catholics. The figure of Professor [Audrey Donnithorne](#), an economist and a model of both academic and ecclesial life, was selected to embody the ideals promoted by this grant. However, the challenge lay in identifying an institution capable of hosting donations to fund the grant, while simultaneously navigating the technical and taxation issues inherent in such a transcontinental operation. After identifying a Belgian entity capable of hosting potential donations and consolidating the project's foundations, the hosting institution subsequently withdrew its support. Consequently, it was decided to award a single grant in 2022 and to suspend the project until the institutionalization of ISAC could be established.

➤ **Pilot Research Project on Asian Catholic Tombs & Cemeteries**

The working group on Asian Catholic tombs and cemeteries met online for several months to discuss the significance of Asian Catholic burial spaces and sites (see Annex D-3). These places constitute extremely valuable resources for studying not only the history of Asian Catholics but also their social embeddedness within a multi-religious and rapidly transforming Asia. Nevertheless, after exploring various research methodologies and potential collaborations, the group concluded that the conditions were not yet conducive to advancing the project further. This project was therefore suspended.

➤ **In-person Conference on Global Chinese Catholicism**

The working group on Global Chinese Catholicism proved relatively dynamic, organizing a series of online events during entire Phase 1 (see Annex D-1). However, the group leaders, together with Dr. Chambon, had hoped to conclude this four-year collaboration with an in-person conference at the Asia Research Institute in Singapore. Contacts were established to prepare for this important gathering, and a formal funding application was submitted to ARI in the summer of 2025. Unfortunately, the criteria for obtaining this funding appeared to have changed. Moreover, Dr. Chambon considered that the changing conditions for obtaining this funding, particularly with respect to research themes and the appropriation of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), were problematic. Consequently, as the date of ISAC's dormition approached, the prospect of holding an in-person conference to conclude the Global Chinese Catholicism initiative was abandoned.

## ANNEX H: State of dormition

The Press Statement below, published on December 8, 2025, announces the hibernation of ISAC and the reasons for this new phase. With the present report, it formally concluded Phase 1:

On 8 December 2025, the [Initiative for the Study of Asian Catholics](#) (ISAC) entered a “State of Dormition”, a period of relative silence, public absence, and inner transformation. After four intense and fruitful years of research collaboration supporting social scientific inquiries into Asian Catholics in contemporary societies, the ISAC coordinators have determined that it is time to transition into a new mode of operation.

While ISAC@DLSU, the book series, and our internal communication channels continue, all other activities are placed on hold. For the time being, ISAC will not initiate new [pilot research projects](#), academic collaborations, [international conferences](#), [online roundtables](#), or other [public-facing events](#). Our monthly newsletter is likewise suspended.

This State of Dormition is intended to encourage thoughtful reflection on what has been accomplished since 1 October 2021—our research outputs, collaborations, [podcast series](#), and [publications](#)—while also allowing us to carefully consider the logistical challenges and institutional indifference we have sometimes encountered. As a scholarly initiative such as ISAC cannot be taken for granted, this period will be devoted to assessing our resources, promoting our vision, and developing our partnerships in preparation for the eventual launch of Phase II.

Nonetheless, our office at De La Salle University Manila—[ISAC@DLSU](#)—continues its mission to develop and produce new digital collections that support the social scientific study of Asian Catholics. Likewise, the book series [Contemporary Asian Catholics](#), which we initiated with the University of Pittsburgh Press, continues to welcome, edit, and promote high-quality scholarship on Asian Catholics.

Furthermore, to better document and reflect on all that has been achieved over the past four years, we will release a detailed report on ISAC Phase I (2021–2025) in late February 2026. This document will recapture ISAC’s overarching mission, review the various components of Phase I, and outline the challenges that remain to be addressed.

We are convinced that ISAC offers significant value to scholars, policymakers, and Asian peoples. Yet it must continue to grow both institutionally and academically, requiring a more stable structure and reliable funding. We therefore welcome your [Letters of Support](#) describing how ISAC has benefited you, as well as any recommendations you may have. We also invite you to remain connected by subscribing to our [mailing list](#) for future announcements. Should you, your academic institution, or your local church wish to participate in ISAC's mission, we warmly encourage you to [contact](#) Dr. Michel Chambon directly.

Finally, we wish to extend our sincere gratitude to all colleagues, institutions, and sponsors whose contributions made ISAC Phase I a genuine blessing and a resounding success. We remain profoundly grateful for all that has been accomplished.

*Obedientia et Pax,*

**The coordinators**

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Dr. Bernardo E. Brown, *International Christian University*

Dr. Michel Chambon, *National University of Singapore*

Fr. Dr. James Ponniah, *University of Madras*

*Singapore,  
8 December 2025*



# ISAC

Initiative for the Study of Asian Catholics

