

“Christianity in Asia”

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Cross-Cultural Flows and Pan-Asian Movements of Asian Christianity

“Orthodoxy presence in Asia: Churches and NGO’s (Korea, Hong-Kong, Singapore, Japan, India)”

1. Introduction

The Asian continent has served as the cradle of the world’s religions, each of which is interwoven with the social and cultural features of the environment in which they were born and developed. The contours of the local religious traditions until the modern era, as well as their prevalence and dominance, were connected with the political and social factors of the ruling class of each place.¹ Diverse ethno-racial groups lived side by side, each with its own cultural and political characteristics, traditions, religions, and linguistic idioms. Southeast and South Asia in particular feature a “mosaic” of religions, cultures, and religious-philosophical systems of thought, such as Hinduism, the oldest religion, and Buddhism, as well as smaller groups of believers subscribing to Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Judaism, and Sikhism.²

According to scholars, the existence of Christianity in Asia dates back to the Nestorians (5th century AD), who began their missionary work in China and later went to Korea. In modern times, Christianity has constituted a minority religion in the Far East, with Protestantism as the predominant Christian denomination, having spread primarily just in the last few centuries (particularly Korea in the 19th century).³

The Orthodox Christian witness, which continues today, has a long history of tradition and missionary activity. In some parts of the Asian continent, there has been

¹ A. Cheliotis, *Orthodoxy in Korea*, Athens: Patriarchal Institute of Far Eastern Orthodox Mission, (in Greek), 2005, p. 21.

² N. Papageorgiou, “Religious Identities in the late modernity: Conflict or Reconciliation?”, in: *Scientific Annals of the School of Theology*, Thessaloniki, 2004, vol. 14, p. 181.

³ C. Vantsos, *Missionary*, Thessaloniki: Kornilia - Sfakianaki, (in Greek), 2011, pp. 233, 235.

an Orthodox presence since ancient times, as evident from the existence of old historic Eastern Churches. In other places, the Orthodox Church exercised missionary activities beginning in the modern era (19th c.), which has since been buttressed by the establishment and activities of Orthodox Metropolises, initially in Korea and later in Hong Kong and Singapore. The nature of the missionary activities in these Metropolises has expanded to include a social, humanitarian and philanthropic dimension, inspired by a spirit of reconciliation, giving, and ecumenicity. These activities, spearheaded by the appropriate ecclesiastical hierarchy (either the Ecumenical or the Russian Patriarchate), have strived to meet the social needs of individuals, in cooperation with the local community and the local religious traditions.

Since the 3rd century AD, “Eastern Christianity”, having spread to the countries of the Asian continent, such as the Far East (e.g., Japan, Korea) and Southeast Asia (e.g., Singapore, India, Hong Kong), has made great efforts to co-exist and interact with the local religious-historical traditions.⁴ This coexistence, within diverse cross-cultural and political environments, has sometimes manifested as a relationship of acceptance of different cultural and religious traditions and other times as a confrontational relationship with local religions’ dominance over Christianity. In recent decades, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople has strengthened the missionary work of the Metropolises, dioceses, parishes, and local Orthodox Churches, promoting a climate of reconciliation and dialogue. Understanding the needs of the faithful and attempting to open itself up to the world, the Ecumenical Patriarchate has fostered communication, both with other Christian denominations, as well as with the local Asian religious traditions.⁵

The purpose of this paper is to survey the presence and evolution of the Orthodox Christian faith in Asia. I will detail the activities of the three local Orthodox Metropolises and Churches in Korea (today, North and South), Hong Kong, and Singapore, as well as the Orthodox presence in Japan, and their respective non-governmental charities. I will begin with a historical overview of the Orthodox presence in these countries (19th-20th c.), followed by a presentation of the activities and the missionary work of the Metropolises from their foundation until today.

⁴ G. Ziakas, *Religion Essays*, Thessaloniki: Vanias, (in Greek), 2004, vol. A, p. 401.

⁵ N. Papageorgiou, “Christianity in an intercultural environment”, in: *Scientific Annals of the School of Theology*, Thessaloniki, 2005, vol. 15, pp. 259, 265-266.

Finally, I will attempt a historical review of the Orthodox presence in India, up to and including the vital ecclesiastical life there today. For a more thorough study of the relationships between the Orthodox Churches, I will examine the objectives and activities of the newly created governmental organization “OCP Society” (2007). It is particularly interesting for our purposes here to note the ways in which this organization, as a pan-Orthodox institution, promotes Christian unity and faith between the Eastern Orthodox Church and other the local historical Oriental Orthodox Churches in the region.

A comprehensive analysis, including accurate data, of the modern missionary work of the Orthodox Church in Asia has proven particularly difficult. This can be attributed first to the fact that there have been no systematic studies on this issue, because the brunt of the current literature on mission focuses on Africa, and secondly to the lack of a relevant bibliography.

2. Korea – Orthodox presence

The history of the Orthodox presence in Korea is barely one hundred years long, beginning essentially after 1897, when social and historical-political changes were responsible for a noticeable shift in the religious landscape.⁶ Nonetheless, both Russian and Greek missionaries have made tremendous and multifaceted efforts to promote and maintain an Orthodox witness there. Today in Korea, Christianity predominates over local religions, starting with the Protestant mission. The number of Protestant communities amounts to 100, while the Roman Catholic Church has 16 dioceses. Recent research (2005) shows that the majority of the inhabitants are Christian (8,616,000 Protestants and 5,146,000 Catholics), followed by Buddhists (10,726,000) and other smaller religious groups, such as Won Buddhism (130,000), Confucianism (105,000), and other religions (247,000), such as shamanism. While several ancient religious traditions coexist today in South Korea, the state has turned primarily to western models.⁷

⁶ J. Stamoulis, *Eastern Orthodox Mission Theology Today*, West Broadway-Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001, pp. 42-43.

⁷ I. S. Anastasopoulos, doctoral thesis: *The contribution of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the missionary work of the Church in the Far East*, Pastoral Department - Faculty of Theology A.U.T.H.: Thessaloniki, (in Greek), 2009, p. 374.

The presence of Christianity in Korea can be traced back to the 17th-18th centuries, when the first missionaries from the Roman Catholic Church arrived. During these early years, Christians faced persecution by the sovereign state, which reached its apex in the late 19th century. It is estimated that, through 1870, 12,000 Korean Christians were martyred⁸ while 1864 witnessed the persecution of a Roman Catholic mission team. The first systematic missionary activities of various Protestant denominations appeared just before the start of Orthodox missionary work in the late 19th century. In 1885, the Northern Presbyterians and the Methodist Episcopal church arrived, which by 1910 numbered 30,000 faithful. The Anglican Mission arrived in 1890.⁹

The first Orthodox mission in Korea began under the auspices of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church on 2 July 1897. The first Russian missionary who arrived in Seoul in 1899 was Fr. Nicholas Alexeyef (who remained until 1903). A year later, on 17 February 1900, the Patriarchate of Moscow appointed Archimandrite Chrysanthos Setkofsky as head of the Orthodox mission. That same day, Fr. Chrysanthos celebrated the first Divine Liturgy, which to this day is celebrated as the birthday of the Orthodox Church in Korea. In Seoul, in 1923, construction began on the first Orthodox church, that of St. Nicholas.¹⁰ According to sources, in 1912, the Orthodox congregation in Korea numbered 1,127 persons (634 men and 493 women).¹¹

The task of organizing the “first church” in Korea was undertaken by Fr. Chrysanthos, who managed to gather a congregation consisting of Korean and Russian Orthodox. His work was primarily liturgical and educational. Desiring initially to minister to the liturgical needs of the faithful, he translated the Scriptures into Korean, while also establishing private schools. With the outbreak of war between Japan and Korea (1904-1905), however, these activities ceased until 1906. With the conclusion

⁸ A. Cheliotis, *Orthodoxy in Korea*, Athens: Patriarchal Institute of Far Eastern Orthodox Mission, (in Greek), 2005, pp. 22-23.

⁹ S. Neill, *Christian Missions (1792-1962)*, (Transl. D. Papadimitrakopoulos), Thessaloniki: Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of Foreign Missionary “Friends of Uganda”, (in Greek), 1987, pp. 343-344.

¹⁰ “Korean Orthodox Church – Historical Background”, *Korean Orthodox Church*. Posted on website: http://www.orthodox.or.kr/html/include2.php?inc=ehin_01_03. Recovery: 23/07/2014.

¹¹ I.Voulgarakis, *The mission in the Greek texts from 1821 until 1917*, Athens: Poreuthentes, (in Greek), 1971, pp. 215-216.

of hostilities, the Russian Mission returned to Korea, sending the missionaries Pavlo Ivanovski and Vladimir Skrekalin.¹²

After the defeat of Russia in the Russo-Japanese War (1905), Korea was under Japanese occupation from 1910 until the end of World War II (1945). With the annexation of Korea to Japan and the Japanese government's policy of assimilation—with the ultimate objective of establishing their own tradition and religion—, Koreans faced limitations on the social level. These policies also had a negative impact on the Orthodox Church in Korea, whose relations with the Church of Japan, as well as with the Patriarchate of Moscow, were disrupted. During this time, the Orthodox community of Seoul did not belong to any ecclesiastical jurisdiction, managing only in 1946 to re-establish itself as a parish.¹³

During the civil war between North and South Korea (from June 25, 1950 until July 27, 1953), the Orthodox community suffered a heavy blow, as many Koreans migrated to the south. Not knowing the fate of the last Korean priest, Fr. Alexei Kim, the liturgical needs of the faithful were served by Greek military priests following the entrance of Greek troops as part of NATO. The foundations for the reconstruction of the Orthodox church edifice were laid at this time. At the urging of Archimandrite Andreas Halkiopoulos, Fr. Boris Moon was ordained in 1954.¹⁴ Despite the difficulties he faced at the liturgical and theological level, he offered considerable charitable work, and, one year later (1955), established schools, such as a girls' middle school, with 18 teachers and 500-600 schoolgirls.¹⁵

The Orthodox Church in Korea, cut off from the Orthodox Church body since 1945, unanimously decided on December 25, 1955 to ask the Ecumenical Patriarchate to take it under its jurisdiction, which it did. In 1970, the Patriarchate passed jurisdiction of the Church of Korea to the Metropolis of New Zealand. Particularly important are the years 1995 and 1996. The former witnessed the historic first visit of the Ecumenical Patriarch to Korea (the second visit followed in 2000). A year later, with

¹² C. Vantsos, *Missionary*, Thessaloniki: Kornilia - Sfakianaki, (in Greek), 2011, pp. 235-236.

¹³ I. S. Anastasopoulos, *The contribution of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the missionary work of the Church in the Far East*, Pastoral Department - Faculty of Theology A.U.T.H.: Thessaloniki, (in Greek), 2009, pp. 377-378.

¹⁴ C. Vantsos, *Missionary*, Thessaloniki: Kornilia - Sfakianaki, (in Greek), 2011, p. 236.

¹⁵ "Boris Moon" in: *All nations*, Athens: Apostolic Diakonia of the Church of Greece, (in Greek), 2007, vol. 103, p. 5.

the help of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, the Orthodox Church gained legal status, being recognized by the Korean government as a “legal person” through the “Foundation for the Conservation and Preservation of the Property of the Orthodox Church in Korea”.¹⁶

Apart from the local Orthodox Church in Korea, private charitable organizations, such as the “Orthodox Eastern Mission”, have undertaken important pastoral work with spiritual and social dimensions. This particular organization was founded in Seoul in 1986 with the consent of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to coordinate missionary activities so as to meet the spiritual needs of the faithful in the countries of South-East Asia. In its ten years of operation (1986-1996), the agency developed important charitable works, serving the needs of Korean residents. It founded schools, Orthodox churches, and trained clergy, while also funding missionary activities.¹⁷

A milestone in the history of Orthodox missionary work occurred in 2004, when the Exarchate of Korea was converted to a Metropolis, with its see in Seoul.¹⁸ The purpose of this move was to unite the Koreans of the North and the South (split since 1945), during a hopeful period of political initiatives for reconciliation and understanding between the two countries. Archimandrite—and, later, Bishop—Sotirios Trampas, who had been working tirelessly in the local community since 1970, was elected the first Metropolitan of the newly created Metropolis.¹⁹ In 2005, the Ecumenical Patriarch made his third visit to Seoul to celebrate 50 years of pastoral care under the guidance of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.²⁰ In 2008, His Eminence Metropolitan Sotirios was succeeded by the second Metropolitan of Korea, His Eminence Ambrosios Zographos.²¹

¹⁶ “Korean Orthodox Church – Historical Background”, *Korean Orthodox Church*. Posted on website: http://www.orthodox.or.kr/html/include2.php?inc=ehin_01_03. Recovery: 23/07/2014.

¹⁷ A. Cheliotis, *Orthodoxy in Korea*, Athens: Patriarchal Institute of Far Eastern Orthodox Mission, (in Greek), 2005, pp. 195-196.

¹⁸ A. Zografos, “The establishment of the Metropolis Korea and the enthronement of the first Bishop”, in: *All nations*, Athens: Apostolic Diakonia of the Church of Greece, (in Greek), 2004, vol. 91, p. 6.

¹⁹ A. Cheliotis, *Orthodoxy in Korea*, Athens: Patriarchal Institute of Far Eastern Orthodox Mission, (in Greek), 2005, pp. 187-188.

²⁰ A. Kontogiannakopoulou, “The celebration of 50 years of pastoral care of the Church in Korea under the Ecumenical Patriarchate”, in: *All nations*, Athens: Apostolic Diakonia of the Church of Greece, (in Greek), 2005, vol. 95, pp. 22-24.

²¹ “The enthronement of the new Bishop of Korea Mr. Ambrose”, in: *All nations*, Athens: Apostolic Diakonia of the Church of Greece, (in Greek), 2008, vol. 107, pp. 3-5.

Today, the Holy Metropolis of Korea includes in its jurisdiction both North and South Korea, as well as Japan. There are approximately 3,000 Orthodox believers in Korea.²² It includes seven Orthodox communities, in Seoul (Cathedral Church of St. Nicholas), Busan (Church of the Annunciation), in Incheon (Church of St. Paul), at Jeonju (Church of the Dormition of the Theotokos), in Palang-Li (Church of St. Andrew), in Chuncheon (Church of St. Boris) and Ulsan (Church of St. Dionysios of Aegina). It also has two monasteries (the Monastery of the Transfiguration and the Monastery of St. Andrew the First-Called), an Orthodox cemetery, and two chapels (St. Maximus the Greek and St. Anna).²³

The Metropolis conducts pastoral, catechetical, missionary, and charity work, mostly in South Korea. It operates a publishing house, Korean Orthodox Editions, a library, a workshop for Byzantine icons, a workshop for ecclesiastical woodwork, and a bookstore. Since 1979, a Missionary Center and an Orthodox Asian Educational and Conference Center have operated in Seoul for charitable projects. All the Orthodox parishes have Sunday School from pre-school age until middle school. A day-care center, dedicated to the Annunciation, operates in Busan. Particular emphasis is given to the spiritual development of young people, for which many group youth activities are organized. The Orthodox Youth Organization of Korea was founded toward this end,²⁴ while the Cathedral in Seoul organizes summer and winter camps every year.²⁵ Metropolitan Ambrosios is also in the process of trying to establish an Orthodox Theological School, a truly pioneering venture, as it will be the only Orthodox Theological Faculty not only in Korea, but also in the whole of East Asia.²⁶

²² A. Cheliotis, *Orthodoxy in Korea*, Athens: Patriarchal Institute of Far Eastern Orthodox Mission, (in Greek), 2005, p. 189.

²³“Holy Metropolis of Korea”, *Ecumenical Patriarch* (in Greek). Posted on website: <http://www.ec-patr.org/dioceses.php?lang=&id=11>. Recovery: 22/07/2014.

²⁴ See, op. cit. Also see, “Prospects and challenges for the Orthodox Church in Korea”, *Orthodox Brotherhood of Foreign Missionaries* (in Greek). Posted on website: <http://ierapostoles.gr/2012/04/%CF%80%CF%81%CE%BF%CE%BF%CF%80%CF%84%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%AD%CF%82-%CE%BA%CE%B1%CE%B9-%CF%80%CF%81%CE%BF%CE%BA%CE%BB%CE%AE%CF%83%CE%B5%CE%B9%CF%82-%CE%B3%CE%B9%CE%B1-%CF%84%CE%B7%CE%BD-%CE%BF%CF%81%CE%B8/>. Recovery: 20/07/2014.

²⁵ A. Kontogiannakopoulou, “Events from the life of the Church in Korea”, in: *All nations*, Athens: Apostolic Diakonia of the Church of Greece, (in Greek), 2005, vol. 93, pp. 10-11. See, A. Kontogiannakopoulou, “The fruits of a missionary camp”, in: *All nations*, Athens: Apostolic Diakonia of the Church of Greece, (in Greek), 2009, vol. 111, pp. 18-20.

²⁶ A. Kontogiannakopoulou, “12 Questions and Answers on Orthodox Witness and Worship”, in: *All nations*, Athens: Apostolic Diakonia of the Church of Greece, (in Greek), 2010, vol. 116, p. 9.

While the Orthodox Church in North Korea is under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, access to this area is practically impossible. These same political restrictions, however, do not apply to the Russian Orthodox Church, which has operated in North Korea since 2006.²⁷

3. Japan – Orthodox presence

Japan today is a modern and cosmopolitan country of East Asia. It features both high rates of technological civilization as well as a long cultural tradition (from the 6th-7th century AD). Its religious map is composed of a syncretistic mix of the Buddhist and Shinto traditions. Christianity is a minority religion. Its modern presence began in the 16th century with the missionary activities of the Catholic Church, as well as the Dutch Protestant confessions (1600, 1945 and thereafter). The Orthodox presence became manifest only in the 19th century through Russian missionaries.²⁸

Nicholas Kasatkin (1836-1912) was instrumental in disseminating the Orthodox faith. In 1861, Kasatkin was called by Innocent Veniaminov to go to Japan, where he began his missionary work as ecclesiastical head of the church in Hakodate, in the Russian Consulate, where he founded the first Orthodox church community.²⁹ During the period from his arrival up until 1872, the spread of Christianity was viewed with disfavor by the Japanese government, and the free exercise of it was strictly forbidden and punishable by death.³⁰ Of course, although the subsequent regime upheld a policy of religious freedom, there was still a degree of difficulty until the end of World War II in 1945, when much of the imperial political rhetoric in Japan was overturned and

²⁷ I. S. Anastasopoulos, doctoral thesis: *The contribution of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the missionary work of the Church in the Far East*, Pastoral Department - Faculty of Theology A.U.T.H.: Thessaloniki, (in Greek), 2009, p. 381.

²⁸ G. Ziakas, *Traveling in religions and cultures of Asia*, (Edited by A. Ziaka), United Kingdom: Harptree Publishing, (in Greek), 2014, pp. 549-551.

²⁹ C. Vantsos, *Missionary*, Thessaloniki: Kornilia - Sfakianaki, (in Greek), 2011, pp. 236-237.³

³⁰ S. Neill, *Christian Missions (1792-1962)*, (Transl. D. Papadimitrakopoulos), Thessaloniki: Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of Foreign Missionary "Friends of Uganda", (in Greek), 1987, p. 326.

the country opened up, at least in part, to the West.³¹ Nevertheless, with Kasatkin's efforts, missionary work experienced an upward trend from 1873 until 1912.³²

Inspired by his zeal for social service, Kasatkin, immediately upon his arrival, undertook studies in the Japanese language and history, and translated the books of the Bible into Japanese. Prioritizing the concept of "person", he focused his missionary efforts on private visits with families of believers.³³ Initially, he managed to bring only three Japanese into Orthodoxy. In 1871, ten years after his arrival, the number of believers had grown to thirty. In 1869, the Holy Synod of the Russian Church founded the "Orthodox Mission" organization in Tokyo, which aided his efforts. Kasatkin, now an archimandrite, served as the head of this organization. After the legalization of Christianity in 1873, the number of believers increased significantly. By 1875, there were 500, and that number doubled the next year; by 1878, the number had grown to 4,000. Fr. Nicholas's missionary team was staffed by 78 catechists and 6 Japanese priests. In 1879, the Holy Synod of the Russian Church established an Orthodox diocese in Japan and Kasatkin was promoted to "bishop of Revel". His group of missionaries continued to increase, as did the number of believers, which reached 6,000. They created, in total, 69 chapels/churches and 263 classrooms.³⁴

Apart from his liturgical and philanthropic activities, Kasatkin had a special zeal for young people, which was demonstrated by his considerable educational work. The first step in these efforts was the creation of a Russian-language school. With the passage of time and the creation of schools in Tokyo, Sendai, and Hakodate, the percentage of young Orthodox began to increase.³⁵ After 1873, he established four schools of higher learning, one for catechists, another for women (both 1875), a third for church readers and chanters (1877), and finally a seminary for training priests (1878).³⁶ The Cathedral of the Resurrection ("Nikolai-do") was consecrated around

³¹ E. Anastasiou, G. Gaitanos, I. Karadedos, P. Mitkidis, N. Rosios, *Eastern religions*, Thessaloniki: Kornilia – Sfakianaki, (in Greek), 2005, p. 90.

³² A. Giannoulatos, *To the ends of the earth*, Athens: Apostolic Diakonia of the Church of Greece, (in Greek), 2009, p. 225.

³³ See, op. cit.

³⁴ M. S. P., "Saint Nicolas (Kasatkin)", in: *All nations*, Athens: Apostolic Diakonia of the Church of Greece, (in Greek), 2012, vol. 122, pp. 5-6.

³⁵ A. Giannoulatos, *The Matins of Orthodoxy in Japan*, Athens, (in Greek), 1971, p. 53.

³⁶ I. Voulgarakis, *The mission in the Greek texts from 1821 until 1917*, Athens: Poreuthentes, (in Greek), 1971, pp. 209-210.

1891. At that time, there were approximately 20,000 believers in Japan, with 216 Orthodox communities, 219 churches, and 22 priests.³⁷

Kasatkin's work was complicated by the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), as Russia curtailed its missionary support.³⁸ After the conclusion of the war, however, Kasatkin was promoted to Archbishop of Japan (1906). He died in 1912, leaving a large ecclesiastical inheritance, with 266 communities and 33,000 Orthodox believers. In 1914, he was succeeded by Sergius (Tikhomirov).³⁹ The period between 1913 and 1945, the end of the Second World War, was a painful one for the Orthodox community in Japan, first because Japanese Shintoism was considered the official religion of the state, and, secondly, because the communist revolution in Russia had derailed relations with the Patriarchate of Moscow.⁴⁰ In 1970, the Orthodox Church of Japan proclaimed Nicholas Kasatkin a saint. That same year, the Moscow Patriarchate recognized the autonomy of the Japanese Orthodox Church.⁴¹

Today, Christians in Japan are a religious minority of 1,050,000 (2010 census, total population of 128,057,352).⁴² The Greek Orthodox faithful belong to the Metropolis of Korea.⁴³ Since 2000, His Eminence Daniel (Nushiro) has served as Archbishop of Japan. The Japanese Orthodox Church is comprised of three Metropolises: the Archdiocese of Tokyo, a diocese in eastern Japan and one in western Japan.⁴⁴ Archbishop Daniel has endeavored to bring the Japanese faithful closer to the Orthodox tradition and its liturgical life. Moreover, the local church has, through donations, engaged in social work. Finally, special emphasis has been given to

³⁷ M. S. P., "Saint Nicolas (Kasatkin)", in: *All nations*, Athens: Apostolic Diakonia of the Church of Greece, (in Greek), 2012, vol. 122, p. 7.

³⁸ C. Vantsos, *Missionary*, Thessaloniki: Kornilia - Sfakianaki, (in Greek), 2011, p. 238.

³⁹ M. S. P., "Saint Nicolas (Kasatkin)", in: *All nations*, Athens: Apostolic Diakonia of the Church of Greece, (in Greek), 2012, vol. 122, pp. 8-9.

⁴⁰ A. Giannoulatos, *To the ends of the earth*, Athens: Apostolic Diakonia of the Church of Greece, (in Greek), 2009, p. 225.

⁴¹ "Orthodoxy in Japan Today", *Mystagogy*. Posted on website: <http://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2012/09/orthodoxy-in-japan-today.html>. Recovery: 23/07/2014.

⁴² E. Anastasiou, G. Gaitanos, I. Karadedos, P. Mitkidis, N. Rosios, *Eastern religions*, Thessaloniki: Kornilia – Sfakianaki, (in Greek), 2005, p. 90. Also see, "Population Count based on the 2010 Census Released", *2010 Japan Census*. Posted on website: <http://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/kokusei/pdf/20111026.pdf>. Recovery: 31/07/2014.

⁴³ "Holy Metropolis of Korea", *Ecumenical Patriarch* (in Greek). Posted on website: <http://www.ec-patr.org/dioceses.php?lang=&id=11>. Recovery: 22/07/2014.

⁴⁴ "The modern history of the Orthodox Church of Japan", *The Orthodox Church in Japan*. Posted on website: <http://www.orthodoxjapan.jp/h-n.html>. Recovery: 24/07/2014.

improving education, as well as supporting local Orthodox parishes, with the aim of strengthening collective (rather than individual) missionary activities.⁴⁵

4. Hong Kong – Orthodox presence

Hong Kong is a city of Southeastern Asia, in which a vast array of religions coexist; the most obvious influence, however, is from the West. The main religious currents are those of Buddhism and Taoism (total 700,000). There are also significant numbers of Protestants (320,000), Roman Catholic (240,000), Muslims (90,000), as well as smaller communities of Hindus, Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, and followers of Confucianism. From 1997 onwards, with the end of British colonial rule, Hong Kong was annexed to China, resulting in a system of dual governance. Because of this semi-autonomy, Christian denominations, especially the Protestants and Roman Catholics, began to face pressure from the administration in Beijing.⁴⁶

The Orthodox presence in Hong Kong dates to the early 20th century, when it is believed the first Orthodox community, made up of Russians, was established. The Russian priest Fr. Dmitri (Oultreski) assumed pastoral care of this group of Orthodox until 1972. After his death, the community dissipated. It was revived, however, in 1986, when a couple, Louka and Theodora Chow, encouraged by Metropolitan Sotirios of Korea, assumed the “ministry” of the faithful. In 1986, they transformed a room of their house into a chapel, where the first Divine Liturgy was celebrated in Hong Kong in 16 years. The following year, the Orthodox community of “St. Luke” was recognized by the authorities in Hong Kong as an official religious institution. From then on, both Greek and Russian missionaries carried out important missionary work. Their activities were both spiritual and educational, establishing catechetical schools to provide courses for the study of the Bible.⁴⁷

Originally under the jurisdiction of the Metropolis of New Zealand, the Orthodox Metropolis of Hong Kong and the South East was established in 1996 by decision of

⁴⁵“Orthodox Church in Japan”, *World Council of Churches*. Posted on website: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/orthodox-church-in-japan>. Recovery: 24/07/2014.

⁴⁶ I. S. Anastasopoulos, *The contribution of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the missionary work of the Church in the Far East*, Pastoral Department - Faculty of Theology A.U.T.H.: Thessaloniki, (in Greek), 2009, pp. 350-351, 354.

⁴⁷ A. Cheliotis, *Orthodoxy in Korea*, Athens: Patriarchal Institute of Far Eastern Orthodox Mission, (in Greek), 2005, pp. 200-201.

the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Its ecclesiastical jurisdiction extended far beyond Hong Kong to include countries that are distant not only geographically, but also culturally and religiously, such as the Philippines, Taiwan, China, Laos, Vietnam, Burma, Indonesia, Singapore, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Thailand, Nepal, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Bhutan, and Afghanistan. On 2 December 1996, Nikitas Lulias was elected the first Metropolitan of Hong Kong, with his enthronement taking place on 12 January 1997.⁴⁸ The Metropolis' formation was formalized in 1997 with the visit of the Ecumenical Patriarch. The faithful, which numbered 200, hailed from different ethnicities (Greeks, Americans, Australians, Romanians, Russians, Serbs, New Zealanders). For their worship needs, they were allowed to use a chapel belonging to a Roman Catholic order of nuns.⁴⁹ Immediately after its organization, the Metropolis dedicated itself to charity work, with the establishment of organizations for both women and men, while also publishing a monthly spiritual journal entitled "The Censer" for all the churches of the Metropolis.⁵⁰

On 9 January 2008, Nektarios Tsilis was elected the second Metropolitan of Hong Kong, a position which he holds to this day. The jurisdiction of the Metropolis of Hong Kong today includes China, Macao, Cambodia, the Philippines, Taiwan, Laos, Vietnam, Mongolia, Myanmar and Thailand. After eighteen years of work, the Metropolis now contains 47 Orthodox communities and has established two monasteries (in the Philippines and Indonesia). Its work has spiritual, educational, and medical dimensions. It organizes missionary trips to perform services, but also for seminars and theological lectures at universities. At the same time, in cooperation with the Holy Metropolis of Toronto, it facilitates the provision of scholarships to children of poor families. It has established eight medical clinics (India), four orphanages for girls (three in India and one in Indonesia), and twenty schools (India, the Philippines, Indonesia). Today, the main objective of church leaders is to meet the

⁴⁸“Who we are”, *Orthodox Metropolitanate of Hong Kong and South East Asia* (in Greek). Posted on website: <http://greek.omhksea.org/%CF%80%CE%BF%CE%B9%CE%BF%CE%AF-%CE%B5%CE%AF%CE%BC%CE%B1%CF%83%CF%84%CE%B5>. Recovery: 24/07/2014.

⁴⁹ A. Cheliotis, *Orthodoxy in Korea*, Athens: Patriarchal Institute of Far Eastern Orthodox Mission, (in Greek), 2005, pp. 201-202.

⁵⁰ C. Vantsos, *Missionary*, Thessaloniki: Kornilia - Sfakianaki, (in Greek), 2011, p. 239.³

worship needs of the Orthodox in other countries which belong to the Metropolis by establishing new parishes and charities (in Macao and Thailand).⁵¹

5. Singapore – Orthodox presence

Singapore is a country in southern Malaysia. According to the government census (2000), about 85% of the total population professes some religious affiliation. The majority of these embrace Buddhism, Taoism or some form of ancestor worship (51%). Then follows Islam (15%), Christianity (15%), Hinduism (4%), and other smaller religious groups. Most of the Christians are people of Chinese ethnicity, first Protestants and then Roman Catholics.⁵²

The Metropolis of Singapore was established by the Holy Synod of Constantinople on 9 January 2008, after the Orthodox Metropolis of Hong Kong and Southeast Asia was divided into eastern and western portions. Apart from Singapore, the new Metropolis also includes Indonesia, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Nepal, the Maldives, Timor, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan.⁵³

Constantine Tsilis was elected Metropolitan of the newly created Metropolis on 3 November 2011. The Metropolis, apart from its spiritual and liturgical work, namely the celebration of the holy services (in West Bengal) and the translation of the liturgical books into local dialects, also tries to meet the needs of the local community through philanthropic works, such as medical care and free education. It maintains an orphanage for girls (Bakeswar) with medical facilities and an eye clinic, and provides free local medical and pharmaceutical care. The Metropolis also has primary schools, technical schools, and schools for blind children. It attends to the basic needs of needy and disadvantaged children for food and clothing. To meet the worship needs of the faithful, the Metropolis has: in Singapore, the Church of the Resurrection of the Lord;

⁵¹“Holy Metropolis of Hong Kong”, *Ecumenical Patriarch* (in Greek). Posted on website: <http://www.ec-patr.org/dioceses.php?lang=&id=9>. Recovery: 24/07/2014. Also see, “The celebration of anniversary events in Hong Kong”, in: *All nations*, Athens: Apostolic Diakonia of the Church of Greece, 2011, vol. 120, p. 22.

⁵² I. S. Anastasopoulos, *The contribution of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the missionary work of the Church in the Far East*, Pastoral Department - Faculty of Theology A.U.T.H.: Thessaloniki, (in Greek), 2009, p. 383.

⁵³“About us”, *Orthodox Metropolitanate of Singapore and South Asia*. Posted on website: <http://www.omsgsa.org/about-us>. Recovery: 24/07/2014. Also see, Office of Overseas Mission, “Election and consecration of the first Bishop of Singapore Mr Constantinou”, in: *All nations*, Athens: Apostolic Diakonia of the Church of Greece, (in Greek), 2011, vol. 120, pp. 8-10.

in India, the Church of the Transfiguration, six parish churches, and a chapel; and, in Indonesia, the Church of St. Eudokia, nine churches, and two chapels. Finally, Metropolitan Constantine of Singapore also hopes to soon establish parishes and charities in Pakistan and Malaysia, as well as provide liturgical services for the faithful in the other countries of the Metropolis' spiritual jurisdiction.⁵⁴

6. India – Orthodox presence/NGO “Orthodoxy Cognate Society”

India is a traditional South Asian country. It was the cradle and crossroads of many races, cultures, and religions. Today, it has high demographic indicators, while a large percentage of the population still lives below the poverty line, in conditions of poverty. The dominant religion is Hinduism (82.41%) with its so-called “caste system”, although it has been officially banned since 1960. Other groups include Muslims (11.67%), Christians (2.32%), Sikhs (1.99 %), Buddhists (0.77%), and Jainists (0.41%). Despite the existence of various religions, Indian society has been resistant to any form of “secular democracy”, as well as religious proselytism, particularly as it pertains to Christianity and Islam.⁵⁵ With regard to Christianity, this attitude is justified, in part, by its reservation to anything “foreign” because of the long colonial rule in the country; in the case of Islam, the reservation stems from its rivalry with Islam, which sprang up after the departure of the British, when the country was split into East and West Bengal (later Pakistan and Bangladesh), but also from an emerging Hindu fundamentalist movement.

As for Christianity's presence, the local historical churches trace their roots back to the Apostle Thomas, in the earliest Christian period (2nd-3rd c. AD).⁵⁶ In modern times, the origins of Orthodox missionary activity can be traced to 1980, when Archimandrite Athanasios Anthidis arrived in Arambagh, West Bengal. By the time of his repose in 1990, he had managed to establish 24 Orthodox communities.⁵⁷ After

⁵⁴ “Holy Metropolis of Singapore”, *Ecumenical Patriarch* (in Greek). Posted on website: <http://www.ec-patr.org/dioceses.php?lang=&id=9>. Recovery: 24/07/2014.

⁵⁵ N. Papageorgiou, *India, myth and reality*, Thessaloniki: Methexis, (in Greek), 2006, pp. 31, 39, 62-63, 65. For the religions in India, see: T. N. Madan, *India's Religions*, India: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 7. See, V. Das, *Handbook of Indian Sociology*, India: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 220. Also see, R. Sharma, *Indian society, institutions and change*, India: Atlantic, 2004, p. 260.

⁵⁶ C. Vantsos, *Missionary*, Thessaloniki: Kornilia - Sfakianaki, (in Greek), 2011, p. 241.

⁵⁷ A. Kotadakis, *Lovers Cross Missionary - In Africa and Asia*, Athens: Tinos, (in Greek), 2005, pp. 134-172.

1991, a missionary team of Greeks, led by Fr. Ignatios Sennis, came to Calcutta, where, in cooperation with the nun Nektaria, they performed charitable work, establishing clinics, schools, and orphanages.⁵⁸ The dynamic nature of the Orthodox mission reached fruition two years later, when they managed to change the Greek community of Calcutta into an ecclesiastical one. Thus, in 1993, they established the “Philanthropic Organization of the Orthodox Church”, which continues until today to perform various services, both educational and charitable. Today, the missionary group of ten priests in Calcutta operates with the blessing of Metropolitan Constantine of Singapore, and performs a multitude of tasks. Besides the Church of the Transfiguration in Calcutta, there are nine Orthodox churches, with the faithful numbering approximately 3,000.⁵⁹

An innovative unifying initiative for all the Orthodox Churches of the country is the work of a local NGO. This non-governmental organization, which began in June 2007, operates in India and especially around Kerala with jurisdiction all over the world. Inspired by the Chor-bishop Rt. Rev. Kyriakos Thottupuram of Chicago, it was initially founded as the “Orthodoxy Beyond Limits Forum” by George Alexander, Subin Varghese, and Boaz John. In 2010, the forum’s name was changed to the “Orthodoxy Cognate PAGE Society” and was registered under the Societies Registration Act. K. C. Jacob became chairman and the governing board was formed, with ten members.⁶⁰

The Orthodoxy Cognate PAGE Society is an independent pan-orthodox organization focused on Eastern and Oriental Orthodox conciliar unity, “creating a common platform for all Orthodox Christians to come together and exchange their views, to interact and to come to know each other. The OCP aims at promoting dialogue between the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches.⁶¹ The organization is purely

⁵⁸ A. Cheliotis, *Orthodoxy in Korea*, Athens: Patriarchal Institute of Far Eastern Orthodox Mission, (in Greek), 200, pp. 197-198.

⁵⁹ N. Papageorgiou, “The emergence of a local Orthodox community: The Greek-Orthodox Church in India”, in: *Friendship and Society*, Thessaloniki, Festschrift G. D. Ziaka, (in Greek), 2008, pp. 407-408. Also see, N. Papageorgiou, “Education and evangelism in India”, in: *All nations*, Athens: Apostolic Diakonia of the Church of Greece, (in Greek), 2003, vol. 87, pp. 16-17.

⁶⁰ “History”, *Orthodoxy Cognate Page*. Posted on website: <http://theorthodoxchurch.info/society/about-us/history/>. Recovery: 25/07/2014.

⁶¹ The *Oriental Orthodox Churches*, called as *non/anti/pre Chalcedonian*, or *Monophysite churches*. They are “ancient churches”, of the Coptic, Syrian, Ethiopian, Indian, Eritrean and Armenian Churches (founded in Apostolic times). They accept the first three ecumenical councils (Nicea 325,

pan-Orthodox in nature, but with an ecumenical respect. The goal is to restore full sacramental communion between the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches, which will change the face of the world, because it has greater dimensions than just a federation of churches, but will positively help other Christians and non-Christians as well. The Society also urges to open dialogue with non-canonical, traditional, old believers and new generation Orthodox Churches. It aims at creating a united, conciliar voice for Orthodoxy. The OCP Society is a very special and unique initiative, which brings the world closer to the true values of Orthodoxy and aims to promote Orthodox Christian unity and faith through dialogue and action”⁶².

For this purpose, the OCP Society has held conferences, visits, and meetings with several Orthodox Church delegations, most notably with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the British Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church in Lebanon, the Armenian Church – Mother See, and the Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Cypriot Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church and the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. In February 2008, the OCP delegation met, after its meeting with Metropolitan Abba Seraphim Primate and the British Orthodox Church delegation, and it paved way for mutual cooperation particularly in the area of works related to Christian persecution in Eritrea. In November of 2009, the society’s delegates visited the “Brahmavar Orthodox Community” in India. It played a vital role in raising concerns about this neglected mission of the Indian Orthodox church and was instrumental in the re-establishment of a specific episcopal diocese for Brahmavar after a gap of eighty-seven years. Other historical visits, which resulted in discussion on the need for Eastern-Oriental Orthodox unity, was with the delegation of Armenian Orthodox Church, in Lebanon (2010) and the meeting with the Syrian Orthodox Delegation of Antioch and All East (2011), which was for the first time ever the representations of Syrian Orthodox Church and the Indian

Constantinople 381, Ephesus 431). Their doctrine is based on the teachings of Saint Cyril. Most members of these Churches are found in India, Syria, Armenia, Lebanon, Egypt, Eritrea and Ethiopia. See, G. Kondothra, “General introduction into the dialogue between Oriental Churches and other Churches and Christian traditions”, in: *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism*, Volos - Greece: Volos Academy/WCC/Regnum Books International/Oxford Publications, 2014, pp. 545-546. Also see, “Orthodox Churches in the Indian Sub Continent and South East Asia”, *Orthodoxy Cognate Page*. Posted on website: <http://theorthodoxchurch.info/blog/articles/2011/03/orthodox-churches-in-the-indian-sub-continent-and-south-east-asia/>. Recovery: 26/07/2014.

⁶² Part from an interview with the Co-Founder and Secretary of OCP Society, George Alexander.

Malankara Orthodox Church met on the same platform ever since the schism between both churches. In 2013, the Executive Council of Orthodoxy's Cognate PAGE Society approved two new projects, the "Metropolitan Alvares Julius Research Project" ("MARP") and the "Orthodox Christian Educational Institutions" ("OCEI"). The first is related to the missionary work of the famous Indian Orthodox and Syriac Orthodox Church Fathers, and the second is a publication of Eastern and Oriental Orthodox educational institutions worldwide, which is considered to be the largest ever list of Eastern and Oriental Orthodox educational institutions published online till date. Apart from these, the OCP Society has made a campaign for the case of detained Patriarch Abune Antonios of Eritrea and the persecuted Christians in Eritrea. Updates on the status of the detained Primate of the Church Eretria and conditions of Christians in the country are broadcasted through OCP Media Network to generate global awareness. In particular, the Society's Secretary, George Alexander, published an article entitled "Detained Patriarch, Persecuted Christians, and a Dying Church", which was published several global media and enlightened masses on the sad situation in Eretria. Since 2007, the Society's department of "Charity and Social Welfare" has provided assistance for education and health care in India.⁶³

Today, in 2014, the work of the OCPS includes organizing meetings and conferences for dialogue toward unity between the historic Eastern and Oriental churches. Some of these include the meeting on Mount Athos⁶⁴ of representatives of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria, as well as that of the Patriarch of Alexandria and the Archbishop of Finland in Helsinki.⁶⁵ Finally, the OCP Society has a supporting role in the organization of the Addis Ababa Conference Portal, which in 2015 will mark 50 years since the historic conference of the Primates of the five ancient Eastern Orthodox Churches (1965).⁶⁶

⁶³"Activity Gallery", *Orthodoxy Cognate Page*. Posted on website: <http://theorthodoxchurch.info/society/activity-gallery/>. Recovery: 25/07/2014.

⁶⁴"High Level Coptic Orthodox delegation pays historic visit to the Monastic Republic of Mount Athos", *Orthodoxy Cognate Page*. Posted on website: <http://theorthodoxchurch.info/blog/news/2014/05/high-level-coptic-orthodox-delegation-pays-historic-visit-to-the-monastic-republic-of-mount-athos/>. Recovery: 25/07/2014.

⁶⁵"Archbishop Leo of Finland: Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches form fullness of Orthodoxy", *Orthodoxy Cognate Page*. Posted on website: <http://theorthodoxchurch.info/blog/news/2014/06/archbishop-leo-of-finland-eastern-and-oriental-orthodox-churches-form-fullness-of-orthodoxy/>. Recovery: 25/07/2014.

⁶⁶*Addis Ababa Conference Portal*. Posted on website: <http://www.theorthodoxchurch.info/aacp/>. Recovery: 25/07/2014.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, despite the political and social turbulence in the vast geographical region of Southeast Asia, Orthodoxy has managed to make a visible witness over the course of history, albeit in a rather discreet and modest way. Sometimes it has lived together in harmony with the prevailing local religious traditions, while other times it has simply tried to survive, thanks to the efforts of Orthodox missionaries—primarily Greek and Russian, depending on the region, the historical period, and the political context. In modern times, the function and organization of the churches—with the exception of the three Metropolises in Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore—has been based on each state’s recognition of the Orthodox group as a private agency or organization with humanitarian goals. Besides the faithful’s religious needs, the local Orthodox churches, adopting the doctrine of a “ministry of reconciliation”,⁶⁷ also care for the social needs of their followers. Their work covers health, welfare, and education, putting into practice the words of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, that “the basic Christian concept of the human being as a person is the foundation of social life”.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ P. Vassiliadis, *Unity and testimony*, Thessaloniki: Epikentro, (in Greek), 2007, pp. 64-65, 367.

⁶⁸ Address by His All-Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to the Panteion University, May 22, 1999. See, G. Tsaltas, “Development and the Third World: The Role of Non-Governmental Organisations”, in: *Orthodoxy and Third World*, Athens: European Centre for Development and Environmental Studies, (in Greek), 2002, p. 59.

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