

# INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDY IN ASIAN CULTURES AND THEOLOGIES (IASACT)

*Inviting you to join an online forum for collaborative research, reflection, and writing*

**Theme: The Intertwining of Culture, Religion, and Environmental Education**  
**August 1-October 31, 2021**

## Rationale & Objectives

While many social ills emerged in the world because of the pandemic, several occasions of hope, healing and meaningful civil engagements also sprang up in many parts of the world. Specifically, many academic and civil society initiatives have been directed to mitigate the environmental crisis. Foremost among them aims at scientific and technological interventions. However, the Institute for Advanced Study in Asian Cultures and Theologies (IASACT) 2021, organized by



Divinity School of Chung Chi College and funded by the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia, will highlight, instead, the contribution of culture, religion, and environmental education to address the crisis. In Asia, the plurality and diversity of spiritualities and cultures can be a well-spring of resources, strategies, modalities, and instruments to address the environmental crisis in the world. Taking the success of the virtual IASACT 2020, IASACT 2021 will be an online forum aiming to support scholars to carry out action research on the subject despite the pandemic.

From project to praxis, the program will provide the following opportunities:

1. To be part of a community of Asian scholars of different academic disciplines;
2. To work with a mentor on transformational, collaborative, and multidisciplinary research that orients towards local community building; and
3. To develop an action research methodology that works with the community, not as a physical entity but systems and organizations with which researchers would regard as home.



The IASACT 2021 invites proposals on “The Intertwining of Culture, Religion, and Environmental Education” using action research or community-based participatory research. It is data-driven, working in equal partnership with the community, and transformational in the process and result. Interested applicants should consider the following questions:

- How can arts and humanities projects assist, expand, or enrich the scientific efforts of the STEM disciplines in addressing the environmental crisis?
- What methodological innovations or multidisciplinary approaches are available to research on the intersections of culture, religion, and environmental education?
- How to avail cultural, spiritual, or religious resources to address environmental problems in Asia?
- How can the ecological knowledge embedded in Asian cultures be utilized to address the intertwined effects of the climate crisis and social inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic?

### Action Research: The Mangrove Model

The mangrove is ubiquitous in Asia’s coastal areas and shorelines. It is a shrub or small tree that grows in saline or brackish water. It usually intertwines with other mangrove trees as they together provide ideal conditions for small flora and fauna to thrive. In recent years, the mangrove has become increasingly threatened by climate change, rapid urbanization, and economic activities that rely on tourism. The mangrove symbolizes the vulnerabilities as well as the resilience of Asians amid the challenging conditions that the region confronts today.



As a metaphor, the mangrove describes the intertwining of religion, culture, and environmental education. Applying the Mangrove Model to action research highlights

1. Contact points: Places where mangrove branches and trunks intertwine across academic areas, where collaboration, cooperation, and interdisciplinarity occur;
  2. Community: Like mangrove’s existence as part of the biotic community, action research depends on the community to determine the problems and solutions to the environmental issues they face;
  3. Action researchers: The community is not only a physical area but also a living microcosm of human and nonhuman beings where action research is based. Action researchers must work with the community as home to find the “niche” and the “sense of place” where philosophy, spirituality, and religion converge; and
  4. Preservation: The vulnerability of the mangrove tree highlights how life is precarious, and the fact of its precariousness makes life worthy of preservation.
- The metaphor of mangrove aims to illustrate the connectivity of action research to its context, environment, people, and the communities involved. It means to inspire and stimulate researchers to conceive and develop their action research frameworks.



## Deliverables

- A mid-term presentation on the research progress (framework, methodology, plans, difficulties, and findings or tentative conclusion);
- Written commentaries to at least two other research projects upon their mid-term presentation;
- One of the three: a) a final project proposal ready to be submitted to a funding agency, b) a final policy paper ready to be submitted to a government or responsible unit, or c) an action plan and education program ready to be launched with an identified community.



## Program Activities

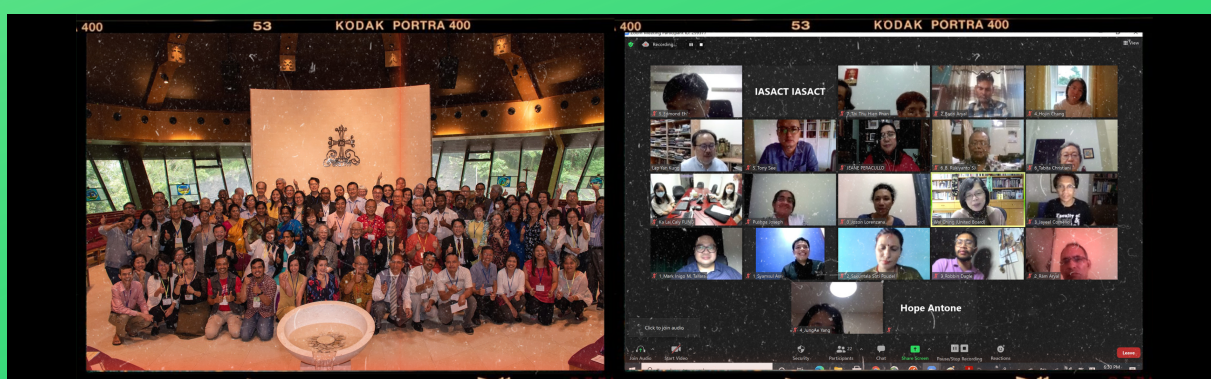
All activities will be conducted online due to the pandemic restriction to travel. Selected scholars should be available for all activities. They include:

- Early August: an orientation webinar on “Doing Action Research in the Time of COVID-19”;
- Late August: a mid-term progress report by scholars online;
- Mid-September: a webinar led by a senior scholar in the field;
- Mid-August to end of September: individual meetings with the assigned mentor; and
- End of October: submission and presentation of a final proposal for funding, a policy paper, or a community action plan and education program.



## Subsidy & Support

- A modest grant of up to USD1,500 will be available to support research activities during the program period;
- A mentor will be assigned to provide ongoing academic advice for research and publishing throughout the program;
- Additional advice by relevant resource persons may be arranged where available;
- Online access to the University Library System of the Chinese University of Hong Kong will be made available.





## Eligibility

IASACT 2021 accepts applications from scholars working on the intersection of religion, culture, and environmental issues in Asian society, using a community-based action research method.

Applicants should have already started their research and seek advice and support to develop the research to an advanced stage. Priorities will be given to the following:

- Asian scholars working in Asia;
- Professional affiliation to an Asian higher education institution;
- Early to mid-career faculty or researchers.

Due to the virtual nature of all activities for IASACT 2021, applicants should have stable access to internet connectivity for participation. For proper communication with the mentor and among the scholars, a good level of English proficiency is required.



## Application Procedures

Applications must be submitted online and should include the following attachments:

- an updated CV (not exceeding two pages);
- a project abstract with objectives and description of no more than 1,500 words, not including footnotes and bibliography;
- a brief outline of the expected output, no more than 500 words, in either of the three categories:
  - a. a fundable project proposal;
  - b. a policy paper, or
  - c. an educational program for community action, conscientization, and advocacy.

Specific targets for the expected outcomes—a funding agency, a government or responsible unit, or the community intended for research and action—should be identified.

**Deadline of application: June 30, 2021**



## Enquiry

Website: <http://www.theology.cuhk.edu.hk/academics/iasact>

Email: [iasact@cuhk.edu.hk](mailto:iasact@cuhk.edu.hk)

Phone: +852 3943 6706 (Ms Caly Fung)

If you encounter difficulty in accessing the online form, please register by email and send the required documents to [iasact@cuhk.edu.hk](mailto:iasact@cuhk.edu.hk).

