The history of the Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia (FTESEA) is a complex tapestry woven from many distinct but closely related threads. The primary thread, of course, is the institutional history of the foundation itself and of its predecessor, the Board of Founders of Nanking Theological Seminary. Yet as the change in name suggests, this story is comprehensible only within the wider framework of the tumultuous historical developments in China and South East Asia\(^1\) during the twentieth century. Thus, the first focus of this work must be on the history of Protestant theological education in China and the emergence of Nanking Theological Seminary as an interdenominational training school for leadership within the Chinese church. Another early focus must be the generous bequest of the Swope–Wendel family of New York for the benefit of Nanjing Theological Seminary.\(^2\) This bequest led to the creation of the Board of

\(^1\) While it is customary in American English to spell \textit{southeast} as a single word, around the world, practices vary. In this volume, for the sake of consistency with the names of the organizations under discussion, the region will be referred to as South East Asia.

\(^2\) Nanjing Theological Seminary had several names during the course of
Founders as an entity to receive and disburse income from the bequest by the denominations participating in the seminary.

Another theme is the development of the relationship between the Board of Founders and Nanjing Seminary. This relationship stretches from the creation of the board through the difficult years of World War II to the creation of the People’s Republic of China, reorganization of the seminary as the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, and a subsequent break in relationship.

Still another is the decision of the Board of Founders, after it became impossible to continue its relationship with Nanjing Seminary, to seek relationships with other theological institutions in South East Asia, a decision that required both court approval and a new name for the foundation. Understanding of this extended work of the foundation in South East Asia requires consideration of the history of the Association of Theological Schools in South East Asia (ATSSEA), later reorganized as the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA). Encouraged and supported by the FTESEA, the ATESEA developed into an institution critical to the development and sustenance of theological education among the Protestant churches of the region. Finally, this volume examines the renewal of relationships with the Chinese church beginning in the early 1980s and FTESEA work with the seminary in Nanjing directly and with the many other Chinese seminaries through the Commission on Theological Education of the China Christian Council.

The city of Nanking (now transliterated as Nanjing) on the lower reaches of the Yangtze River became a focal point for Protestant missions early in the twentieth century. From 1911, steps were taken that led to the merger of Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Methodist Episcopal Church, and Presbyterian Church (both U.S.A. and U.S.) mission schools into an interdenominational seminary that adopted the name Nanking Theological Seminary in 1917. This cooperative endeavor won widespread support, and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and Northern and Southern Baptist churches were soon invited to affiliate. Southern Methodists accepted this invitation quickly and the Northern Baptists a bit later. With the combined resources of several denominations, the seminary quickly became one of the strongest Protestant theological schools in China.
though it continued, like the others, to struggle with inadequate financial resources. Harry F. Rowe, a Methodist missionary teacher who served for a decade as the seminary’s president, solicited funds for the school while in America. Among those whom he visited were Rebecca Swope and Ella Wendel.³

While living quite frugally, the Wendel family of New York had accumulated real estate, mostly in Manhattan, for four generations. Consequently, the last surviving members of the family, Rebecca Wendel Swope, who died in 1930, and Ella Wendel, who died the following year, left a fortune for distribution to charities. Among the beneficiaries of their bequest was Nanking Theological Seminary, which was to receive income from a portion of the legacy to be administered by the Board of Foreign Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

China was the largest mission field of American Protestantism by the early twentieth century, but the church in China remained largely a mission church, dependent on the West both for personnel and for funding. This was particularly true with regard to seminary education, which enjoyed little Chinese church support, and Nanking Seminary had developed as a cooperative, interdenominational school in part because the participating denominations lacked the resources adequately to staff a mission seminary of this quality except through the cooperation of several mission boards. Therefore, it was almost incredible to the American and Chinese faculty at Nanking to learn that their seminary would become the beneficiary of a massive bequest from the Swope–Wendel estate to be held in trust for the maintenance of seminary operations.

To meet the terms of the grant, the Board of Founders of Nanking Theological Seminary was established under the laws of the State of New York to receive income from the endowment held by the Board of Foreign Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, to guide its spending by and on behalf of Nanking Theological Seminary, and to develop a continuing relationship with the seminary. The board was initially composed of representatives of those denominations participating in the seminary. Generally, board members were individuals who were personally familiar with the seminary’s work. Many of them had visited the seminary. Consequently, a very personal

³ Accounts of Rowe’s contact with Wendel family members vary; it is likely that he met with the two sisters, but the memorial adopted by the Board of Managers (BM) of Nanking Theological Seminary at the time of his death states only that “he aroused the interest of Mrs. Swope.” Minutes, BM, NTS, May 4 and 5, 1948, Abbe Livingstone Warnshuis papers, Burke Library, Union Theological Seminary of New York (hereafter ALW).
relationship developed. Personal relationships between board members and Nanking Theological Seminary became especially significant during the years of World War II when the seminary faculty relocated, some to Shanghai and others to Chengdu. Following the end of the War, the Board of Founders was active in supporting the re-establishment of the seminary in Nanjing. However, the victory of Communist forces in the long Chinese civil war created new challenges both for the seminary and for the board.

With the liberation of Nanjing by Communist forces and the collapse of the Nationalist government, which fled to Taiwan, the seminary was faced with the necessity of defining its position in an officially atheist state. The failure of the United States to recognize the new government of China and the U.S. entry into the Korean police action under United Nations auspices, together with the subsequent sending of Chinese volunteers onto the Korean peninsula, resulted not only in a generation of hostility between China and the United States but also in the effective termination of all contact between the Board of Founders and Nanking Seminary for more than twenty years.

When it became clear that for an indefinite period the Board of Founders would be unable to disburse funds to the Nanking seminary, it explored appropriate alternatives for use of its resources. The board turned its attention not only to Taiwan, which had been considered a part of the China mission scene and whose missionaries had participated in China’s National Christian Council, but also to South East Asia and especially to the Chinese Christian communities living there. In an effort to honor the stipulations of the trust under which it operated, the Board of Founders originally offered financial help to South East Asian seminaries specifically to assist their Chinese students. However, when some in Indonesia objected that this policy fostered ill-feelings on the part of other students and appeared inappropriate in the context of Christian ideals, the board reconsidered the situation and turned to the court in New York for a modification of its charter. The court approved the new purpose: “and to receive and disburse funds (1) for any purpose contributing to Christian theological education (a) in China, or (b) in areas of Asia and of the Western Pacific beyond the confines of China, and (2) for educational assistance to Chinese and other Far Eastern students preparing in these or other lands for the ministry or other services in the Christian church when the said corporation shall deem the same advisable because of conditions existing in China.”

Though

this expanded purpose suggested the need for a name change for the Board of Founders of Nanking Theological Seminary, it was not until 1963 that the current name, the Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia (FTESEA), was formally adopted.

During and immediately following World War II, the Board of Founders had stretched the terms of its charter to assist other seminaries in China, especially one in Chengdu that hosted a portion of the Nanking Seminary faculty and students after that city fell to the Japanese. However, with this enlargement of its mission, the number of theological schools that it might appropriately assist increased from one or a few to many. Consequently, the operations of the Board of Founders became more institutionally oriented, and its relationships with recipient institutions and their personnel became less personal than had been the case when it worked almost exclusively with Nanking Seminary. This difference is well reflected in changes in the work of C. Stanley Smith, who represented the Board of Founders in South East Asia in the 1950s. Smith, a Presbyterian missionary, had taught at Nanking and served for a time as the seminary’s president. In the earlier years, when he had written the Board of Founders from China, many reading his letters were familiar with the people and the campus about which he wrote. He then became the first regional representative of the Board of Founders in South East Asia. In his new role, Smith corresponded with the board regarding a multitude of theological schools scattered throughout South East Asia. There, responding annually to requests from an ever increasing list of theological institutions, his and the board’s participation in theological education was mostly from afar. In South East Asia, too, it became apparent that the Western style of theological education generally involving post-baccalaureate study by residential students was inappropriate to the needs of Asian Christians working in a different culture and facing different political issues. The immediate need in the area was for lower-level institutions, including Bible schools for those with only basic education. The Board of Founders responded to this need, changing its focus from a Western model of ministerial education to a model shaped by and preferred by Asian Christians that appeared better suited to regional needs.

Through its South East Asia office, the Board of Founders assisted in developing a regional sense of Christian community that transcended national boundaries. The mission period had seen the development of both European and American models of Christianity, but the postcolonial period witnessed the emergence of an Asian model of Christianity. The board funded a critical conference on theological
education in 1956. Held in Bangkok, Thailand, this was the first conference of its kind in the region and resulted in the formation of the Association of Theological Schools in South East Asia, later reshaped and renamed the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia, the second such international organization in the world. Additionally, resolving the question of graduate level theological education for Asians in Asia, the Board of Founders assisted in creating the South East Asia Graduate School of Theology (SEAGST), which draws on the resources of a variety of regional seminaries and places students from participating countries with the most appropriate faculty mentors within the consortium.

In China, the Nanking Theological Seminary became the site of a reorganized Nanjing Union Theological Seminary (Jinling Xiehe Shen Xueyuan) in 1952, when several additional Protestant seminaries in China merged with the old school, and Bishop K. H. Ting (Ding Guangxun) was appointed president. For more than twenty years there was essentially no contact between the FTESEA and the seminary, but, in the late 1970s, as China began to open to the West and as diplomatic relationships were restored between the United States and China, renewed contact between the two organizations became possible. Since the early 1980s, Nanjing Union Theological Seminary has again been a major beneficiary of FTESEA grants. Other Chinese seminaries have also received special grants on the recommendation of the Commission on Theological Education (CTE) of the China Christian Council (CCC), the official organization of Chinese Protestantism. Thus, while the FTESEA continues its support of theological education throughout Southeast Asia, a major focus of the recent past has been the restoration of relationships with Nanjing Seminary and the Chinese church. Today the foundation works most closely with three partners in South East and East Asia: Nanjing Seminary, the Commission on Theological Education of the China Christian Council, and the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia. As is appropriate for a new relationship with indigenous churches, the FTESEA relies increasingly on the recommendations and oversight of its partners in the region in its work to strengthen theological education.

As was the case with NTS, the Chinese name for the seminary uses an older, traditional place name, Jinling. However, in the interest of clarity, the English name is always shown as Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. Clarity, however, produced the unfortunate English acronym NUTS; and I have therefore continued to use NTS for citations that refer to the post-1952 seminary.