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Chan, Keith Ka Fu; Mak, George Kam Wah; Chan, Benedict Shing Bun

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Eastern and Western Perspectives on the Reformation and Its Impacts

KEITH KA FU CHAN, GEORGE KAM WAH MAK,
AND BENEDICT SHING BUN CHAN

The Reformation in sixteenth-century Western Europe, whose genesis is often associated with the 1517 publication of Martin Luther's Ninety-five Theses, represents not only a critical turning point in the history of the church but also a decisive shift in recorded history more broadly. The religious, cultural, and political transformations precipitated by the Reformation fundamentally challenged the Roman Catholic Church, reshaped the entire Christian landscape, and, in the course of subsequent missionary activities and the global expansion of Christianity, impacted cultures far beyond Renaissance Europe. Jointly organized by the Department of Religion and Philosophy and the Centre of Sino-Christian Studies of Hong Kong Baptist University, the international conference "Celebrating 500 years of the Reformation"¹ was held at Hong Kong Baptist University from September 22 to 23, 2017. It brought together scholars in religious and philosophical studies from Australia, Mainland China, Germany, Hong Kong and the United States to discuss the Reformation's transformative influences in the

Keith Ka Fu CHAN is professor of Centre for Judaic and Inter-religious Studies, School of Philosophy and Social Development, Shandong University. Both George Kam Wah MAK and Benedict Shing Bun CHAN are assistant professor of the Department of Religion and Philosophy, Hong Kong Baptist University.

¹ The full title of the conference is: "Celebrating 500 years of the Reformation: The Reformation's Culturally Transformative Influences and Impacts—European and Asian Cultural Perspectives."

context of Eastern and Western cultures. The contributions to this special issue are the revised versions of selected papers presented at the conference, representing different areas of interest but sharing the same concern, namely, an interrogation of how the Reformation has contributed to the development of ideas and values over the past five centuries.

The first two papers examine topics related to the Reformation from global and theological perspectives. Philip JENKINS's paper examines the inter-dynamics within Catholic and Protestant traditions in the global context of the missionary horizon. He asserts that, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Roman Catholic Church undertook formidable worldwide ventures of mission and evangelism, which effectively laid the foundations for sixteenth/seventeenth-century global Christianity. Essential to the success of these extra-European endeavors was the passionate commitment to vernacular languages, which ironically offered a close echo of the principles of the Protestant Reformation. While Protestants at the time remained firmly rooted in parts of Europe, Catholics built a thriving global church.

LAI Pan-chiu's contribution adopts a critical perspective towards the ecological dimension of Protestantism by analyzing (1) the prevalent evaluations of the Protestant ecological heritage in the Western context; (2) Chinese perceptions of the Christian heritage; and (3) Chinese Protestant discourses on ecology. His essay argues that despite its doctrinal "ambivalence" regarding issues such as the traditional anthropocentrism of Protestant soteriology and other relevant doctrines, the "Protestant *spirit*" of ongoing progress and reform contributes to contemporary discourses on ecological ethics in meaningful ways and is uniquely relevant to such discourses in present-day Chinese contexts.

Two further contributions focus on historical perspectives. Lauren F. PFISTER's paper tries to explore the historical connections and direct influences of the Viterban Spirituality influencing Michelangelo in the 1530s and a reference to Martin Luther in Liang Qichao's essays of 1902 published collectively under the title of *Xinmin shuo* 新民說 (New People Theory). Although Michelangelo's use of an Italian language Bible produced by radical Italian reformers in the 1490s was acknowledged early on, only later observers noted the influence of the published works of the Spanish religious reformer Juan de Valdes (c. 1500–1541) on Michelangelo, primarily through the artist's written interactions with a noble woman whom he considered to be a relative, Vittoria Colonna (1490–1547). Based on suggestions made more re-

cently by Sarah Prodan (2014) in her study of “Michelangelo’s Christian Mysticism,” Pfister explores Italian Reformation themes as they relate to images of the Last Judgment. The paper goes on to examine the brief but poignant reference to Martin Luther in the seventh chapter in Liang Qichao’s *New People’s Theory*. Published in 1902 while Liang was an intellectual refugee in Japan, to where he had successfully escaped in spite of the imperial coup that destroyed the 1898 Ruist Reform Movement headed by his teacher, Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927), and himself, Liang’s reference to Luther was unabashedly political in nature. Nevertheless, he made it amidst his studies of “Western” (that is, Western European) ancient and modern “heroes” who stimulated cultural, religious, and political reforms, and so set a precedent in Chinese contemporary writings that inchoately linked (among many others) the German Protestant Reformation to the Ruist reform efforts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Although other scholars have noted Kang’s and Liang’s connections to contemporary Protestant missionaries of the time, especially Timothy Richard (1845–1919), there is no study that has highlighted the role of Luther in Liang’s writings after the failure of the Ruist Reform Movement.

WU Kin-pan’s historical study on German sacramental theology in China explores how the Lutheran tradition was brought to the Rhineland and how the Lutheran scope of sacramental theology should be understood. Wu goes on to illustrate how this sacramental theology was developed in China by the efforts of nineteenth-century German missionaries. This development divides into three stages, that is, confessional, translational, and commentary, starting with the exhibition of the German Lutheran sacramental concepts introduced by Rev. Karl Gützlaff, followed by efforts toward theological standardization by Rev. Ferdinand Genähr (Ye Naqing 葉納清, 1823–1864), and lastly the incorporation of Chinese culture by Rev. Ernst Faber (Hua Zhi’an 花之安, 1839–1899). Overall, Wu’s study demonstrates how the early German sacramental theology survives in today’s Chinese Rhenish Church through the works of these missionaries.

The last two papers focus on the application of Reformed philosophy to human rights debates. KWAN Kai-man reviews the complicated relationship between Reformed traditions (covering different Reformed Churches in various countries and many brands of Reformed theologians) and the idea of human rights, which has significantly influenced the development of modern society. It surveys the evolving relationship between human rights and different Christian denominations, arguing

that, generally speaking, different Christian denominations have come to embrace the core idea of human rights despite varying interpretations. Kwan investigates the claim that Reformed traditions have, to some extent, contributed to the rise of human rights. If religious sources of human rights cannot be discounted completely, then the dialogue between religious thought and human rights should not be a one-way street. In the final sections of this paper, Kwan reflects on how the dialogue between Christian thought and human rights might develop in the future.

Last but not least, Benedict Shing Bun CHAN's paper focuses on a human rights debate in Christian ethics that centers on whether the concept of *imago Dei* provides a moral foundation for dignity and human rights. Chan suggests that the Reformed tradition might enhance the human rights debate by what he calls "the consequential evaluation of international human rights." By focusing on political rights and the human right to health as prominent examples of human rights, he argues that while many Christian scholars have confused absolute moral rights and international human rights in their writings, their works nonetheless contribute to the philosophical debate on human rights within the framework of consequential evaluation.

While the present journal issue does not exhaust the range of thematic concerns within East-West perspectives on the Reformation and its historical impact, the selections of voices and analyses presented here focus on key aspects of Reformation thought as it relates to issues in China and the world at large. Among these, the discussion of human rights informed by Reformed theology, uncovering startling connections between Protestant and Chinese intellectual history, as well as tracing the more immediate repercussions of the Reformation for the development of world Christianity, all draw attention to the complex nature of value formation and ideas exchanges across cultures in the context of global modernity from the Protestant Reformation onward. We hope the ideas presented here will spark further debate on the Reformation's religious and intellectual heritage in East and West.

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