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A Historical Overview of the Impact of the Reformation on East Asia

Christina Han¹

The Reformation 500 Jubilee and the Shadow of the Past

The celebratory mood is high throughout the world as we approach the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Themed festivals and tours, special services and conferences have been organized to commemorate Martin Luther and his legacy. The jubilee *Luther 2017*, planned and sponsored by the federal and municipal governments of Germany and participated by churches and communities in Germany and beyond, lays out the goals of the events as follows:

While celebrations in earlier centuries were kept national and confessional, the upcoming anniversary of the Reformation ought to be shaped by openness, freedom and ecumenism. In 2017, we aren't just celebrating 500 years of the Reformation, but we are also reminded of the role the Reformation played in the development of the modern age ... What started in Wittenberg in the 16th century changed Germany, Europe and the whole world.²

The statement outlines the organizers' desire to remember Luther's nailing of the 95 theses and the ensuing flood of events not as an occasion of German national pride and Lutheran righteousness, but rather as a chance to celebrate religious and cultural tolerance, liberal and democratic ideas, and global community, summed up in the three words "openness, freedom and ecumenism." The statement also presents the Reformation as a revolution, much like the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, that shaped the course of the modern world and downplays its religious connection. "Perspectives 2017," a document produced by *Luther 2017*, introduces the Reformation as the beginning of the birth of culturally diverse Europe.³

Another organization that has taken leadership in the special commemoration of the Reformation is the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). Around the theme "Liberated by God's grace," the LWF invites the Lutherans and Christians of other denominations to renew their commitment to the gospel's liberating message preached 500 years ago by the great reformer Martin Luther. Inspired by Luther's renunciation of the sale of indulgences, the LWF set up three subthemes – "Salvation not for sale," "Human beings not for sale," and "Creation not for sale" – to address the negative impact of consumerism on Christianity, human rights, and the environment.⁴

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² "Reformation Anniversary," *Luther 2017*, accessed August 18, 2017, <https://www.luther2017.de/en/2017/reformation-anniversary/>.

³ "Chonggyo kaehyŏk 500 chunyoŏn: Rut'ŏ 2017," *Luther 2017*, accessed August 18, 2017, <https://www.luther2017.de/fileadmin/luther2017/material/Grundlagen/perspektiven-koreanisch.pdf>.

⁴ "Reformation 2017," *Lutheran World Federation*, accessed August 18, 2017, <https://2017.lutheranworld.org/>

Despite their different focus, it is evident that both the German state and the LWF have made conscious effort to connect the Reformation to the contemporary issues of the globalized world of the twenty-first century. Yet their explicit and deliberate efforts to distance themselves from the past celebrations of the Reformation characterized by German nationalism and Protestant supremacy remind us of the dark shadow cast over the joyous jubilee, a nightmare both the state and the church wish not to repeat. Exactly one hundred years ago, in 1917, the 400th anniversary of the Reformation honoured the uniqueness and dominance of the German race and nation. Luther was heralded as the eternal German who embodied the true spirit and morality of the German race.⁵ Not long after, the Lutheran Church in Germany collaborated with the Nazi regime, and in keeping with the political ideology of ultra-nationalism and anti-Semitism, members of the church called for the completion of Luther's Reformation by which was meant total and complete eradication of Jewish elements from Lutheranism and the transformation of Christ into the supreme Aryan warrior.⁶ We are reminded that ecumenism as well as the foundation of the Lutheran World Federation were consequences of the endeavours to make up for the horrors committed during WWII.

The deliberate distancing from this past by the German state and the Lutheran church is certainly understandable. At the same time, however, their intentional reinterpretation of the Reformation in light of globalism and environmentalism raises the question whether this is yet another instance of the church succumbing to the rhetoric of contemporaneity and relevance. Has the Reformation indeed cut its ties with the history of nationalistic Protestant pride? How global is this message of globalized Reformation? Can the Reformation speak against the ills of rapid modernization while being recognized as a revolutionary force in the modernizing process?

The truth is, despite the claims of global impact, the history of the Reformation's influence on non-Western world has not received due attention. To fill this gap in the current scholarship and to assess the influence of the Reformation outside of Europe, this paper investigates the history of the Reformation's effects in East Asia, more specifically, the changing discourse of the Reformation in the region from the nineteenth through the twenty-first century. It explores the different ways in which Christians and non-Christians of China, Japan, and Korea came to interpret the Reformation based on their unique historical experiences. The tensions and incongruities in their understandings reveal that the Reformation was and continues to be a contested history and discourse in the region. On the whole, the discussion of the Reformation in East Asia over the past three hundred years makes evident the persistent influence of the Reformation discourse in its modern, capitalist and nationalistic forms as well as recent attempts to challenge and overcome that influence.

⁵ W.R.A. Klän, "Reformation Jubilees: Is There Cause for Celebration in 2017? – What Remains?" *HTS Theologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 71, no. 3 (2015), 5.

⁶ Lena Berggren, "Completing the Lutheran Reformation: Ultra-Nationalism, Christianity and the Possibility of 'Clerical Fascism' in Interwar Sweden," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 8, no. 2 (2007), 308-309.

Keeping Out the Ghost of Luther: Introduction of the Reformation through Catholic Missionaries (pre-nineteenth century)

The Reformation did not have as powerful and extensive an impact in East Asia as it did in Europe. To the people of East Asia, at least initially, the Reformation was a foreign event, taught by Western missionaries whose lives were directly and indirectly transformed by the sixteenth century religious and political revolution. The forceful waves of change resulting from the Reformation swept across Europe and also reached far to the Catholic mission fields overseas.

By the sixteenth century, Catholic missions established a visible presence in China and Japan. Franciscan missionaries entered China in the late thirteenth century and were active throughout the fourteenth century. The Jesuit mission in China started in the late sixteenth century and enjoyed great success. In Japan, Spanish and Portuguese Jesuits were active in the mid- sixteenth century. Thanks to Francis Xavier (1506–1552)'s aggressive proselytization, the number of churches and converts grew significantly throughout Japan. The sixteenth century Catholic missionaries in China and Japan were keenly aware of the troubles faced by their church back home as a result of the Reformation movement. They did not openly discuss the Reformation in their mission fields, but like a taboo or like a dark cloud hanging over them, the “ghost of Luther” began to affect the Catholic missions in East Asia.⁷

In reaction to the Reformation, the Catholic Church strengthened its commitment to the importance of good works as opposed to Luther's idea of justification by faith. It also reaffirmed the authority of the Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible and denounced the translation of the Bible into other languages advocated by Protestant reformers. Both moves by the church affected the Catholic missions overseas which, with rekindled passion, pursued aggressive proselytization as a way to counter the growing Protestant influence.

The Jesuits in Japan, for instance, regarded “Lutheranism” as a catchall term for Protestant and humanist movements in Europe. In order to prevent the incursion of the evils of Lutheranism, Francis Xavier opposed the translation of the Bible and liturgical texts into Japanese and relied heavily on religious icons and rites to communicate the Christian message to the Japanese believers. Soon, the younger and more humanist-minded Jesuits arrived into the scene. Alessandro Valignano (1539–1606) emphasized the importance of understanding the local language and context for successful proselytization. But his efforts, which included the publication of the Portuguese-Japanese grammar and dictionary (*l'Arte da Lingoa de Japam* and *Vocabulario da Lingoa de Japam*) by the Jesuit Mission Press in Japan in Nagasaki,⁸ did not lead to the translation of the Japanese language Bible. Rather than making the Scriptures accessible to the Japanese through translation, the Jesuits, following the instructions from Rome, demanded that the Japanese acquire Latin should they wish to read the Word of God in person.

In China, another Jesuit missionary and Renaissance man, Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) saw a huge success in his mission by facilitating dynamic cross-cultural and cross-religious dialogues with the Chinese elites. The Jesuits in sixteenth and early seventeenth century China mastered literary Chinese and translated numerous Christian religious texts from

⁷ A reference to Jacques Proust's article. Jacques Proust, “Le Fantôme de Luther au Japon,” *Nouvelle Revue du XVIe Siècle* 16, no. 1 (Jan. 1998): 143-154.

⁸ Proust, “Le Fantôme,” 148.

Latin into Chinese. Their translations included catechetical writings, prayers, preaching, liturgy, passages from the Bible, and even theological works such as the *Summa* by Thomas Aquinas.⁹ Yet, as was the case in Japan, because of their sacredness, the Scriptures were not translated. The achievements of Ricci and his successors were cut short following the declaration by Pope Clement XI in 1616 that outlawed the practice of Confucian ancestral rites for Chinese Catholics. While Ricci and other Jesuit missionaries in China considered these rites as social, rather than, religious commitments, the church in Rome decided otherwise. The pope's decision was met with a hard pushback from the Chinese Emperor Kangxi who banned Christianity and expelled Catholic missionaries.

In Korea, before the arrival of any missionaries, Catholicism started as a lay movement of Korean Christians who came to faith through the Chinese language Christian texts. One of them, official named Yi Sŏnghun (1756–1801), travelled to Beijing in 1784 and received baptism. Upon his return, Yi established prayer-houses and trained lay-priests. Later, European and Chinese priests joined in, and the Catholic community in Korea began to grow rapidly. Soon, however, the ban on Christianity was issued by the Korean state in response to the Catholic Church's ban on Confucian rites reaffirmed by Pope Benedict XIV in 1742.

In the end, the deliberate attempts by the Catholic Church to discourage local contextualization of Christian faith to counter the effects of the Reformation led to containing and constraining the missionaries' efforts to bridge linguistic barriers and seek culturally sensitive expressions of Christianity in East Asia. The decisions made by the Catholic Church eventually cost thousands of lives in the state-led persecutions of Christians in East Asia. In due course, the prohibition against Christianity was lifted in China and the Jesuit mission was resumed. Soon, missions from other Christian traditions entered China. The Russian Orthodox mission started in 1686 and the Eastern Orthodox mission in 1715. In Japan, however, Christianity, which was viewed as a political threat, was effectively banned until Japan was forced to open its doors in 1854 under the pressures of American gunboat diplomacy. In Korea also Christian missions were declared illegal until the late nineteenth century.

Reformation Wave 1: Bible Translation in nineteenth century East Asia

So where were the Protestants? The first European Protestants to reach East Asia were the sailors of the Dutch ship, the *Liefde*, which in 1600 landed in Usuki Bay in Kyushu. Four decades later, the Dutch East India Company struck an exclusive trade deal with Japan's Tokugawa regime and set up their permanent trading post in Nagasaki port. The Dutch were able to obtain this special trade privilege, which the Japanese denied to other European merchants, because only the Dutch merchants, mostly Calvinists, agreed to the condition of non-proselytism. The other European powers were not willing to separate religion from trade.

It took two more centuries for the beginning of the Protestant mission in East Asia. The first Protestant missionary to arrive in the region was Scottish Presbyterian Robert Morrison (1782–1834), who, sponsored by the London Missionary Society, set sail to China

⁹ Nicolas Standaert, "The Bible in Early Seventeenth-century China," in *Bible in Modern China: The Literary and Intellectual Impact*, eds I. Eber, S. Wan, and K. Walf. (Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica, 1991), 31 and 53.

in 1807. Upon arrival, he learned that no foreigners could stay in China unless involved in trade, and hence he had to retreat to Macau. Unwelcomed by the Catholic missionaries in Macau, Morrison eventually settled in the American factory in Canton and began devoting himself to language training.

The early Protestant mission work in East Asia was driven by a clear and urgent goal, that is, to translate and disseminate the Bible in East Asian languages. This approach, which distinguished the Protestant mission from its Catholic counterpart, followed the direction set by Martin Luther and the subsequent Reformation movement in Europe. Zealously advancing the Reformation ideas on the East Asian soil, early Protestant missionaries embarked on ambitious translation projects. Morrison spent twelve years to translate the Bible into Chinese and sixteen years to compile the first Chinese-English and English-Chinese dictionary. Both the Bible and the dictionary were completed in 1823.¹⁰ The Bible translation project in Japan was initiated by James Hepburn and Samuel Brown and later evolved into a project sponsored by a number of different mission agencies. Their joint effort led to the publication of the first Japanese language Bible in 1887. That same year, Scottish missionaries John Ross and John MacIntyre and Korean translators completed the first Korean translation of the New Testament. The Korean translation of the complete Bible was published later in 1911.

While the task of Bible translation was no easy feat and was marked as a turning point in the history of Christian mission, as splendid as this accomplishment was, it certainly did not come without controversy and conflict. Although the intentions of individual translators might have been apolitical – as was claimed by many Protestant missionaries who believed what distinguished their mission from the Catholic mission was their disengagement from local politics—translation by nature was a political act, entailing a delicate negotiation between power and representation. As Richard Duerden notes since the beginning of the Reformation movement, in their own Bible translation projects, Protestant reformers had to struggle through the paradox of being subversive yet fundamentalist, anti-institutional yet absolutist, and anti-colonial yet nationalistic.¹¹ Very quickly the seemingly simple task of sharing the gospel in the language of the people in East Asia was faced with questions regarding the style and authority of translation.

As for style, the Bible societies that supported translation projects demanded the translators to follow certain guidelines. For example, as George Kam Wah Mak's study shows, the British and Foreign Bible Society that financed the Chinese Bible translation project insisted that the translators conform to their "without note or comment" principle. The translators and missionaries in China, however, felt that notes and comments were necessary for the Chinese readers to understand the historical and cultural context of the biblical narratives and wished to incorporate them in some form into the Chinese Bible. The conflict between the ideals of missionary societies and the reality of mission fields led to impassioned discussions and negotiations, and, in the end, the translators adopted a

¹⁰ Fuk-tsang Ying, "Evangelist at the Gate: Robert Morrison's Views on Mission," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 63, no. 2 (2012): 306-330.

¹¹ Richard Duerden, "Equivalence or Power? Authority and Reformation Bible Translation," in *The Bible as Book: The Reformation*, edited by Orlaith O'Sullivan (London: The British Library & Oak Knoll Press, 2000), 20.

minimalist approach to add explanatory notes, which they called, “translational helps.”¹² The tensions in this case erupted when the view of the Scriptures as an inviolable and closed text collided with the endeavour to make them comprehensible to the readers in a new cultural context.

Next came the issue of competing translations and the challenge of determining the authorized version. In China, three different missionary societies (Baptist, British and American) simultaneously carried out the translation projects, and, as a result, by the 1860s, three different translations of the Bible in Chinese were in circulation, causing confusion among missionaries and new believers.¹³ Eventually, a committee was formed in an effort to create a canonical translation. The process was complicated by the fact that multiple languages were spoken in China, and after a lengthy heated debate, the committee agreed upon Mandarin as the language of translation. It was no little effort to consolidate different translation principles and resolve detailed questions and discordances rising from translation. To create one version that most could agree upon was indeed a monumental task. The result of all their efforts was the Union Version which took three decades to produce. Similar developments also occurred in Japan. The translation project initiated by Hepburn and James was later succeeded by a joint committee consisting of translators from the American, the British and Foreign, and the Scottish Bible Societies, and together they produced the Meiji Version in 1887. The three Bible Societies also formed the Bible Committee of Korea and translated the first official Korean Bible which was published in 1911.

These developments in East Asia closely followed the patterns of similar developments earlier in Europe. The disputes surrounding the issue of style and canonization were the very challenges that the Reformers in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe struggled with in their translation undertaking. It is well-known that the King James Version of the English Bible ascended to the status of the Authorized Version through a highly political and controversial process. Backed by royal support, the King James Version silenced previous translations and curtailed future translation projects. Its dominance in the English-speaking world was enabled and sustained by royal copyright monopoly and mass production and distribution systems used by the British and Foreign Bible Society.¹⁴ It is important to note that the British and Foreign Bible Society was one of the key agencies involved in the translation, printing and distribution of the bibles in East Asia. In collaboration with two other Bible Societies from the English-speaking world, it monitored the production of canonical bibles in East Asian languages and thus replicating the development in England two centuries ago.

Reformation Wave 2: Missionary Press in nineteenth century East Asia

Another parallel development from the Reformation in Europe that was introduced to East Asia was the rise of modern printing press. Luther’s Reformation and its indebtedness

¹² George Kam Wah Mak, “To Add or Not to Add? The British and Foreign Bible Society’s defence of the ‘Without note or comment’ principle in late Qing China,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 25, no. 2 (2015), 329.

¹³ Jost Zetsche, “The Work of Lifetimes: Why the *Union Version* Took Nearly Three Decades to Complete,” *Bible in Modern China: The Literary and Intellectual Impact*, 78.

¹⁴ Neil Hitchin, “The Politics of English Bible Translation in Georgian Britain,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 9 (1999), 68-69.

to the Gutenberg press needs not be elaborated here.¹⁵ The Printing Revolution played a seminal role in the distribution of Reformation ideas throughout Europe. As Mark U. Edwards observes the Reformation witnessed “the first major, self-consciousness attempt to use the recently invented printing press to shape and channel a mass movement.”¹⁶ Following the vernacular translations of various religious books, non-religious publications were quickly produced. As Brad S. Gregory explains in his book *The Unintended Reformation*, in various ways, the Reformation influenced the transmission of knowledge in early modern Europe and laid the foundation for the rise of secular learning and educational institutions, including the universities.¹⁷ In 19th-century Europe, although the Protestant and secular presses often clashed over various issues, both shared in their endorsement of Enlightenment ideals, particularly, the idea of the “liberty of the press,” and in their criticism against the Catholic Church whom both regarded as “the special adversary of freedom and enlightenment.”¹⁸

Early Protestant missionaries to East Asia brought this journalistic fervour to the region. They enthusiastically introduced the gospel but also enlightenment ideals and news about the Western world, hoping to demonstrate the superiority of their religion and culture. They tried to increase the impact of their message via modern printing press and mass-produced bibles and religious tracts as well as newspapers and thereby ushered in the birth of modern journalism in the region.

It is worth noting that East Asia had advanced printing technology prior to the arrival of modern Western printing press. Historically, East Asia had been the hotbed of world's printing technology. Woodblock printing was first invented in China and widely used by the seventh century. Movable type printing began in China in the eleventh century. The world's first metal movable type was invented in Korea in the thirteenth century, three centuries before the invention of the Gutenberg type, and from Korea quickly spread to China and Japan. Metal movable type printing greatly increased the flow of publications of all kinds and improved literacy throughout the region. The Jesuits made use of local printing technology and established and ran missionary press to disseminate their message throughout East Asia.¹⁹ In other words, the impact of the Protestant missionary press in East Asia laid primarily not in the technology but the new types of publications it brought to the region, namely, the Bible and periodicals.

In tandem with his Bible translation project, in 1815 Robert Morrison established the first Chinese periodical, *China Monthly Magazine*, which featured Protestant content along with world news and information about western science and technology.²⁰ More periodicals were started by later missionaries. The most influential of them was a monthly periodical *A*

¹⁵ See Andrew Pettegree, *Brand Luther: 1517, Printing, and the Making of the Reformation* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015).

¹⁶ Mark U. Edwards, *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 1.

¹⁷ Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 329.

¹⁸ T. W. M. Marshall, *Protestant Journalism*, (London: Burns and Oates, 1874), vi and 86.

¹⁹ Johannes Laures, “The Jesuit Mission Press in Japan,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 13, no. 1/2 (Apr.-Jul., 1957): 163-165.

²⁰ Xiantao Zhang, *The Origins of the Modern Chinese Press: The Influence of the Protestant Missionary Press in Late Qing China* (London: Routledge, 2007), 3.

Review of the Times, edited by the American Methodist missionary Young John Allen (1836–1907), and it ran for thirty-nine years and enjoyed wide readership. Some periodicals by liberal-wing missionaries, who focused less on religious conversion but more on social changes for China through western-style modernization, had reduced religious content.²¹ Missionary periodicals influenced the creation of modern Chinese newspapers by reform-minded scholar-officials.²² Leading reformers such as Wang Tao (1829–1897) and Liang Qichao (1873–1929) recognized the vital role of journalism in China’s modernization and founded and edited reputable newspapers. Wang’s *Xunhuan Ribao* (Cyclical Daily) and Liang’s *Zhongwai Gongbao* (Sino-Foreign News) and *Shiwu Bao* (Contemporary Affairs) advocated for swift political, social and economic reforms in late imperial China. Although their readership was largely urban and educated populace, these early modern newspapers provided alternative and progressive voices different from the official periodical *Di Bao* (Imperial Gazette) published by the state for the purpose of announcing imperial edicts and government news.²³

Reformation Wave 3: Transplanting the Catholic-Protestant Conflict in East Asia

Another important role of the Protestant mission press was to inform non-believers and new converts of the history and truth of Protestantism. Naturally, the discussion of Protestantism entailed the criticism of Catholicism, and in this way the Catholic-Protestant conflict that scourged the Western world was introduced to East Asia. From the beginning, the Catholic and Protestant missionaries in East Asia were in disagreement with each other. They saw each other as a threat to their missionary work and warned the believers of the dangers of the other.

Yun Kyōng-no’s study investigates the gravity of the Catholic-Protestant discord in Korea and its connection to mission press in the early twentieth century.²⁴ The arrival of Protestant missionaries in Korea in the late nineteenth century rang an alarm bell to the Catholic clerics and believers in the country. Catholics in Korea had suffered state-wide persecutions between 1791 and 1888 that resulted in the deaths of nearly 10,000 martyrs. Despite the adversity, Catholic missions remained and created close-knit religious communities throughout the peninsula. Some Western Catholic priests gained leverage by working closely with local government officials. The contacts between Catholics and Protestants in Korea were marked by mutual hostility, but the situation exacerbated and developed into a full-blown confrontation when Protestant missionaries began producing anti-Catholic news articles and publications. For example, on April 14, 1889, *Hwangsōng Sinmun* (Capital Gazette), a newspaper owned by Protestant believer Namgung Ōk and others, published an article that criticized the Catholic establishment in Korea. Enraged by the critique, a group of Korean Catholics stormed into the newspaper office, abducted Namgung, and demanded the cessation of anti-Catholic coverage. The incident was followed

²¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

²² Yong Z. Volz, and Chin-Chuan Lee, “From Gospel to News: Evangelicalism and Secularization of the Protestant Missionary Press in China, 1870s–1900s,” *Journalism* 10, no. 2 (Apr., 2009): 171-195.

²³ Zhang Tao, “Protestant Missionary Publishing and the Birth of Chinese Elite Journalism,” *Journalism Studies* 8, no. 6 (2007), 879.

²⁴ Yun Kyōng-no, “The Relationship between Korean Catholics and Protestants in the Early Mission Period,” in *Korea and Christianity*, ed. Chai-Shin Yu (Seoul: Korean Scholar Press, 1996), 7-38.

by an exchange of letters of mutual complaint between Catholic Bishop Gustave Mutel (1854–1933) and Protestant missionary H. G. Appenzeller (1858–1902), and eventually the issue was resolved when Mutel apologized for the actions of the Catholic abductors.²⁵

Early Protestant missionaries and believers in Korea presented themselves as the true followers of Christ and denounced the Catholics as the followers of Rome.²⁶ Important for our discussion was the ways in which the Reformation and Martin Luther were discussed by Korean Catholics and Protestants in conflict. Protestant publications, such as the *Yesu T'yŏnnyu Ryanggyo Pyŏnnon* (Doctrinal Controversy between Catholic and Protestant) and *Nut'ŏ Kaegyo Kiryak* (The Story of the Conversion of Luther),²⁷ explained the Reformation as a revolutionary event that restored the true spirit of Christianity and Martin Luther as a true reformer who courageously fought against the corrupt papal authority. In the *Nut'ŏ Kaegyo Kiryak*, the author Canadian missionary James S. Gale (1863–1937) compares Luther's impact in the West to that of Confucius in the East:

God sent Luther to break down a great evil power in the West. If God had not sent Confucius to the East, the East would have become a dark world. If God had not sent Luther to the West ... the West also WOULD have become a dark world, and the truth of the cross would not have widely spread.²⁸

Gale's description highlights the Protestant support for Confucianism as opposed to the Catholic disapproval of it. In fact, Gale and other Protestant missionaries tried to portray Protestantism as a rational and moral teaching, akin to Confucianism, and rejected Catholicism, Buddhism, and Daoism characterizing them as religions based on superstition and immorality. In their defense, the Catholics in Korea also issued a series of publications. The *Ryanggyo Myŏngjŭng Mundap* (The Catechism of Both Religions) and *Singyoji Kiwŏn* (The Origin of Protestantism; a.k.a. An Authentic Record of Luther).²⁹ outlined the Catholic criticisms of Protestant theology and denominationalism and denounced Protestantism as a religion of the ignorant and the dividers. They condemned Luther for falsifying the Bible and described him as an arrogant and immoral deceiver.³⁰

Thus, the animosity between Catholics and Protestants that plagued the Western world centuries earlier was transplanted to Korea. Fortunately, most of the time, their acrimony stopped at the battle of words and did not lead to a carnage like the Thirty Years' War in Europe. In a foreign land, the reality required Western missionaries to seek coexistence rather than mutual destruction. Yet, while the relationship between Catholic and Protestant missions in Japan was described by Protestant missionary H. A. Ritter as "peaceful rivalry, without any open warfare,"³¹ the message of Protestant supremacy was never

²⁵ Ibid., 10-13.

²⁶ Ibid., 22.

²⁷ Ch'oe Pyong-hŏn, *Yesu T'yŏnnyu Ryanggyo Pyŏnnon* (Doctrinal Controversy between Catholic and Protestant) (Seoul: Chŏngdong Christian Church, 1908). James S. Gale, *Nut'ŏ Kaegyo Kiryak* (The Story of the Conversion of Luther) (Seoul: Kwanghak sŏpo, 1908).

²⁸ Yun, "Korean Catholics and Protestants," 30. Original citation Gale, 155-158.

²⁹ Anon., *Ryanggyo Myŏngjŭng Mundap* (The Catechism of Both Religions), 1908.

An Se-hwa, *Singyoji Kiwŏn* (The Origin of Protestantism also called An Authentic Record of Luther) (Catholic Church Press, 1923).

³⁰ Yun, "Korean Catholics and Protestants," 27-29.

³¹ H. Ritter, *A History of Protestant Missions in Japan* (Tokyo: Methodist Publishing House, 1898), 236.

questioned. Indeed, Ritter and many others asserted that the most convincing proof of the truth of Protestantism was found in the success of modern Western civilization, “the true civilization” of the nineteenth century which was created by the “spirit of the Reformation.”³²

Reformation Wave 4: Protestant Missions and Colonialism

The next Reformation connection in East Asia, one that set the background for the three previous points, is the Protestant missions’ powerful and undeniable link to Western colonial expansion in the region. The Reformation contingently influenced the development of Western colonialism. As the situation in Europe became more volatile due to the violent aftermath of the Reformation, various Protestant groups emigrated to New England in large numbers seeking religious freedom. Yet, it is important to remember that the European settlers’ pursuit of liberty and property came at the cost of colonizing the native peoples of North America. Indeed, the Catholic-Protestant conflict born out of the Reformation laid the ideological foundation for English colonialism. As early as in the sixteenth century, following the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew’s Day in France (1572), leading politicians and intellectuals of England came to support English colonization of America, seeing the continent as a new battleground between Protestants and the Catholic Antichrist as the world braced for the Apocalypse.³³

Colonialism was not seen as evil in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe. Most Europeans, colonists and non-colonists, regarded it as a natural process, one that raised no moral qualms. There certainly was very little concern for the colonized whose existence was denied when America was declared the “New World,” a vacant and fruitful land, ready to be occupied and exploited. Throughout the eighteenth century, commerce and Christian mission were intimately linked, and most Protestant missionaries, who were equipped with rationalism and providential theology, endorsed colonialism.³⁴ Surely, the “normalcy” of colonialism persisted well into the mid-twentieth century as demonstrated in numerous missionary literature. For example, in *The Lutheran Church in Colonial America* (1940), Lars P. Qualben describes the significance of American colonization as “the discovery and the settlements of the new world for mankind in general and for the Christian Church in particular.”³⁵ Claiming the innate and perpetual supremacy of Western civilization throughout world history, he explains American colonization as a unique, God-given opportunity to Protestants when he said:

the amazing possibilities of the new world were hidden for many millenniums until the “fullness of time” had come. Civilized man was not permitted to enter into the new world before he was prepared to control it... As it was, all attempts to begin a Christian civilization in America proved futile until a revived Christianity could be

³² Ibid., 237.

³³ Andrew Hadfield, “Late Elizabethan Protestantism, Colonialism, and the Fear of the Apocalypse,” *Reformation* 3, no. 1 (Jan., 1998): 303-322.

³⁴ Roy Bridges, “The Christian Vision and Secular Imperialism: Missionaries, Geography, and the Approach to East Africa, c. 1844-1890,” in *Converting Colonialism: Visions and Realities in Mission History, 1706-1914*, ed. Dana Lee Robert (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 44-45.

³⁵ Lars P. Qualben, *The Lutheran Church in Colonial America* (New York: T. Nelson, 1940), 111.

transplanted. The beginning of Protestantism and the beginning of American colonization were contemporaneous events.³⁶

The concurrent and intertwined development of Protestantism and colonialism was carried out in the rest of the world. The British colonial expansion played a particularly influential role in the nineteenth century Protestant missions. Missionaries from the British Empire were convinced that their imperial expansion was “part of God’s providence and design to spread the Gospel to the heathens.”³⁷ While there was a degree of individual resistance, on the whole, the colonial mindset greatly shaped the attitudes of Western missionaries toward the people and land of East Asia.

One of the most salient historical events that demonstrated the intricate connection between Protestant mission and colonization of East Asia was the Opium War (1839–1860). In order to solve huge trade deficit with China, the British Empire, through the East India Company and private corporations such as Jardine, Matheson & Co., began smuggling opium into China where the drug was illegal. Within years, China was faced with a serious economic and social problem of opium addiction, and when the Chinese government demanded the British to end opium smuggling, the British responded with a war.

Protestant missionaries’ involvement in opium trafficking and negotiation of unequal treaties has been studied by scholars. Initially, their participation in opium trade came out of necessity to stay in the mission field. In the early nineteenth century, due to the ban on Christianity, the only Westerners allowed to reside in China were merchants. This reality forced Protestant missionaries to seek employment in trading factories based in port cities like Canton. Robert Morrison, translator of the Chinese Bible, was an employee of the East India Company. Karl R. A. Gützlaff (1803–1851), a German Lutheran missionary and a talented linguist who translated the Small Catechism into Chinese in 1843 and later was involved in the Bible translation projects in Korea and Thailand, was also a translator for Jardine, Matheson & Co. and an active member of an opium trafficking and espionage ring.³⁸ Even the Medical Missionary Society became engaged in opium distribution in China.³⁹ There were voices of disapproval. American missionary E. C. Bridgman (1801–1861) and his printing assistant S. Wells Williams spoke against opium trade in China, characterizing opium “as greatest ills affecting the Chinese society,” but when American trading firms, such as Russell and Company, began profiting from the sale of opium in China, their voices were silenced.⁴⁰

Surely, as Peter W. Fay explains, many Protestant missionaries in nineteenth century China wished for the Opium War and saw it as “God’s intervention to open China,”⁴¹ a triumphant act of *Christus Victor*.⁴² They wanted to travel freely within China to preach and

³⁶ Ibid., 112.

³⁷ Ambrose Mong, *Guns and Gospel: Imperialism and Evangelism in China* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2016), 6.

³⁸ Ibid., 88.

³⁹ Peter W. Fay, “The Protestant Mission and the Opium War,” *Pacific Historical Review* 40, no. 2 (May, 1971), 160.

⁴⁰ Michael Lazich, “American Missionaries and the Opium Trade in Nineteenth-Century China,” *Journal of World History* 17, no. 2 (Jun., 2006), 200-202.

⁴¹ Fay, “The Protestant Mission,” 146.

⁴² Mong, *Guns and Gospel*, 10.

convert even if it meant opium addiction, loss of lives, and colonization for the locals. Hence, as the only people capable of communicating with the Chinese, the missionaries assisted the British troops during the Opium War with administration and interpretation.⁴³ They also provided translation assistance during the negotiation process following China's defeat. In the end, China was forced to sign The Treaty of Nanking (1842) which granted foreign missionaries the right to proselytize and the merchants the right to sell opium without restriction. Following the end of the Opium War, the London Missionary Society celebrated the "opening of China" and the beginning of a new chapter in China mission.⁴⁴ The missionaries now gained access to China inland and began setting up churches and mission presses with great zeal. Starting in the 1890s, over three decades after the end of the Opium War, Protestant missionaries in China began raising consolidated concerns against the problem of opium trade and addiction. Their anti-opium lobbying efforts, however, were too little too late.⁴⁵ The missionaries' role in opium trade and gunboat diplomacy deeply marred the message of salvation preached by those willing to sacrifice the Chinese body to save the Chinese soul. Eventually, Protestant missions lost to the nascent Communist movement in their struggle to win the hearts of the Chinese people. Protestant faith was carried on by the nationalistic indigenous churches whose message better reflected the Chinese religious and communal sensibilities.⁴⁶ In the end, under the Communist regime, the Three-Self Protestant Church based on the principles of self-government, self-support, and self-propagation forged "Christianity with Chinese characteristics."

Reformation Wave 5: Ethnolinguistic Nationalism

Luther's seminal contribution to the development of the German language and literature has been widely recognized. The Bible translation undertaking that followed the Reformation facilitated the rise of vernacular languages and literature in Europe which in turn laid the foundation for eighteenth century ethnolinguistic nationalism.⁴⁷ Spreading the Reformation spirit throughout the world, nineteenth century Protestant missionaries promoted vernacular language and literature in East Asia through their translation and printing ministries. East Asians learned from their European contacts that Luther was a great reformer whose vernacular literature movement created and advanced German ethnic, cultural, and political identity. In a similar manner, vernacular movements in East Asia motivated the development of ethnolinguistic nationalism in the region. As it will be shown, vernacular movements in China, Japan, and Korea reflected each country's political reality as well as efforts toward modernization in the turbulent twentieth century.

As the first non-western country to modernize successfully following the Western model, Japan under the Meiji government exerted a tremendous effort in the promotion of

⁴³ Fay, "The Protestant Mission," 158.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁴⁵ Kathleen L. Lodwick, *Crusaders against Opium: Protestant Missionaries in China, 1874-1917* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1996).

⁴⁶ Lian Xi, "A Messianic Deliverance for Post-Dynastic China: The Launch of the True Jesus Church in the Early Twentieth Century," *Modern China* 34, no. 4 (2008): 407-441.

⁴⁷ William Safran, "Language, Ethnicity and Religion: A Complex and Persistent Linkage," *Nations and Nationalism* 14, no. 1 (Jan., 2008), 174. Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion, and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 24.

vernacular language and literature in an effort to forge a new national identity.⁴⁸ In practical terms, this meant ending the use of literary Chinese, which had been the lingua franca of East Asia for millennia, and the severing of traditional Sinocentric diplomatic ties with China. Thanks to rigorous state-led education initiatives, the vernacular movement in Japan quickly expanded and advocated ethnolinguistic nationalism that preached the uniqueness of Japanese race and language.

In China, the vernacular movement faced greater challenges due to China's multilingual environment and the prestige of literary Chinese. The Protestant mission press in China demonstrated the power of vernacular literature in reaching out to the mass. Just as Luther's publications shaped the German language, Protestant missionary publications in China played an important role in the invention of modern vernacular Chinese.⁴⁹ Many Chinese reformers came to believe that language reform was a top priority in China's modernization. Hu Shi (1891–1962), an American-educated reformer and a leader of the vernacular movement in China, drew his inspiration from Luther and regarded him as an inspirational reformer “who inaugurated the substitution of a living language for dead Latin.”⁵⁰ Hu claimed literary Chinese was a dead language whose formalistic requirements did not reflect the spoken language of the people and, more importantly, acted as a barrier to modern education. Through the promotion of vernacular literature, reformers like Hu tried to educate and mobilize the people in order to consolidate efforts to strengthen China against growing foreign infiltration.

The vernacular movement in Korea was also closely related to Korean nationalism. In the late nineteenth century, similar to the case of Japan, the effort to forge and advance independent Korean identity led to the rejection of literary Chinese which had been used as the official written script in Korea for hundreds of years. Although the Korean alphabet (*hangul*) was invented in the sixteenth century under the leadership of King Sejong, its use was largely limited to elite women and commoners. The nineteenth century vernacular movement in Korea elevated the status of the Korean script which became imperative in the construction of Korean ethnolinguistic nationalism.

The vernacular movement in Korea took an even more political turn when Korea was colonized by Japan in 1910. The Japanese colonial government, hoping to transform Koreans into loyal subjects of the Japanese Empire, banned the use of Korean language in schools. In the context of colonial cultural policy, the Korean language became a site of struggle and a heart of colonial resistance. Those fighting for Korean independence strove to promote Korean language education. Similar to the language reformers in early modern China, Korean nationalists looked to Luther's Reformation as an example to be emulated. The Korean language newspaper *Tong-a Ilbo* (East Asia Daily) published a number of articles in 1920 that closely examined the legacy of Luther's Reformation and its implication for colonial Korea. One article “One way of transmitting Korean culture”⁵¹ describes the Reformation as

⁴⁸ Wakui Takashi, “The Vernacular Movement in Japan and the Formation of Selfhood,” *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 6 (Dec., 1994): 1-9.

⁴⁹ Jin Yuan, “The Origin of the Westernized Vernacular Chinese Baihuawen: A Re-evaluation of the Influence of Western Missionaries on Chinese Literature,” *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China* 3, no. 2 (2009): 247-269.

⁵⁰ Wm. Theodore de Bary and Richard Lufrano, eds. *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From 1600 through the Twentieth Century*, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 357-360.

⁵¹ Anon., “Chosŏn munhwa pogŭp ūi il pangbŏp – chung (One Way of Transmitting Korean Culture – 2),” *Tong-a Ilbo* (Sept. 21, 1920), 1.

the “first outcry to break away from the old life of the Middle Ages” and a movement that ushered in the modern era. It identifies that Luther’s production of the German translation of the Bible as a deliberate act to “liberate the German people from the suppression by Latin,” an achievement that “allowed the light of the truth shine in the German language” for the people of Germany. The article praises Luther’s translation project as a pioneering accomplishment not only for Germany but for the world civilization. It concludes with a remark that independence of language is crucial for attaining independence of knowledge and mind, and that the transformation witnessed in sixteenth century Germany could also be realized in colonial Korea. Elsewhere, the newspaper portrayed Luther as a great liberator, who through youthful energy, passion, and perseverance fought for human liberation from oppressive religious authority.⁵²

On the whole, the advocates of the vernacular movement in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth East Asia recognized the movement’s historical connection to the Reformation. They realized the vital role of the vernacular in the nation-building process and wished to create in their country the kind of ethnolinguistic nationalism which transformed Western European countries into imperialist powers. As the vernacular movement turned into state-led reform, its Protestant connection and influence gradually faded away in China and Japan. The situation in Korea, however, differed. Protestant missionaries’ support for vernacular Korean placed them at odds with the Japanese colonial administration that accused the missionaries of supporting Korean nationalism. In fact, many Protestant missionaries in colonial Korea became vocal supporters of Korean independence and fierce critics of Japanese colonial regime. Canadian medical missionary Dr. Frank W. Schofield (1889–1970) was labeled as “the arch agitator” by the Japanese administration for his participation in Korean independence movement.⁵³ As many have pointed out, the success of the Protestant mission in Korea was due in part to the missionaries’ integration into Korea’s endeavour for independence and nationhood. On the contrary, in China, although Protestantism grew among young and educated urban professionals, its impact was largely limited as a result of missionaries’ support for Western imperialism.⁵⁴

Reformation Wave 6: Modernization: Spirit vs. Capital

The complex relationship between the Reformation and modernization has been the topic of discussion since the seventeenth century. Seen by many as a defining event in the development of the modern age, the Reformation was expounded by modern Western philosophical minds as a key contributing factor in the creation of the spirit of modernity, characterized by individualism and liberalism.⁵⁵ Learning about the Reformation from the Western literature, early modern reformers of East Asia came to believe the kind of religious and spiritual transformation that proceeded from the Reformation was also needed in their

⁵² “Kot’ong kwa sulp’um (Pain and Sorrow),” *Tong-a Ilbo* (May 11, 1920), 4. “Nanun ch’ongnyon ul oehanora (I Revere the Youth),” *Tong-a Ilbo* (May 12, 1920), 4. “Nodong cheil Ilbon nodongja ui kaksong (The Labour Day Awakening of the Japanese Labourers),” *Tong-a Ilbo* (May 6, 1921), 1.

⁵³ B. Legault and John F. Prescott, “The Arch Agitator”: Dr. Frank W. Schofield and the Korean Independence Movement,” *The Canadian Veterinary Journal* 50, no. 8 (Aug., 2000): 865-872.

⁵⁴ Ryan Dunch, *Fuzhou Protestants and the Making of a Modern China, 1857-1927* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), xvii-xviii.

⁵⁵ Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 189.

countries. Protestantism became a model of modern religion that broke away from corrupt religious tradition and established itself as a powerful moral and social force in the new age. Koreans under the Japanese colonial rule, for example, traced the origin of Western notions of individual liberty and democratic principles to Luther's Reformation and the French Revolution, and argued a movement of similar revolutionary fortitude was necessary in Korea's struggle for independence and modernization.⁵⁶ Protestant missionaries in Korea, who introduced themselves as the "heralds of modern Western civilization," emphasized the modernness of their faith and cultural values.⁵⁷

In China, the Reformation inspired moral and social reforms based on the principles of modernity and nationalism. Early modern Chinese reformers saw in the story of Luther and the Reformation a successful precedent of transforming an ancient religion into a dynamic force of social and political change. Tan Sitong (1865–1898), a leader of the Reform Movement of 1898, who commented that "the decline of Christianity was caused by the Popes, and its rejuvenation depended on Luther," wished for the emergence of a Luther-like figure in China who could revive the original spirit of Confucianism.⁵⁸

Kang Youwei (1858–1927), the most influential of early modern reformers and the mastermind of the 1898 Reform Movement and the Self-Strengthening Movement in China, was a true enthusiast for Luther and wrote extensively about the impact of the Reformation in Europe and its implications for China. As an official, he had the rare chance to visit Germany and pay homage to Luther's house and museum in the late nineteenth century.⁵⁹ Greatly moved by his visit, Kang impressed on young Chinese reformers to learn from the example of Luther. He believed China needed more than scientific and economic reform, but a more fundamental moral and spiritual reform. Following Luther's footsteps, Kang was determined to reinterpret Confucianism in a progressive light, presenting Confucius not as a traditionalist but a reformer of his time. He developed a new theory and vision of modernity based on his reformed Confucianism and with it wished to counter the growing influence of Western Imperialism and Christianity in China.⁶⁰ As Gan Chunsong notes, despite Kang's opposition to Christianity, he used the institutional framework of Protestantism (particularly, the symbiotic relationship between the state and the church and the missionary expansion of the church) to modernize Confucianism in an effort to resist the growing Christian influence in China.⁶¹ In his reform proposal presented to the emperor, Kang recommended the establishment of the Confucian Church sanctioned by the state for the citizens of China. He openly acknowledged the Protestant source of his vision.⁶² Luther's influence on Kang's philosophy was evident to his students. His most distinguished student Liang Qichao explained that the Reformation could be successful thanks to the collaboration

⁵⁶ "Kuju sasang ūi yurae 77 (The Origins of European Thought)," *Tong-a Ilbo* (Jun. 10, 1922), 1.

⁵⁷ Cho Hyeon Beom, "A Study on the Protestant Discourse of Civilization," in *Critical Readings on Christianity in Korea*, edited by Donald Baker, Vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 287.

⁵⁸ Lei Yutian, "China's Luther Research and the Project of Chinese Edition of Luther's Works," in *Theology and Life: Luther in Asian Context* 25 (2002), 109-110.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁶⁰ Wei Leong Tay, "Kang Youwei, The Martin Luther of Confucianism and his Vision of Confucian Modernity and Nation," *Secularization, Religion and the State* 17 (2010), 97.

⁶¹ Gan Chunsong, "Kang Youwei, Chen Huanzhang, and the Confucian Society," *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 44, no. 2 (Winter 2012-2013), 17.

⁶² Kuo Ya-Pei, "'Christian Civilization' and the Confucian Church: The Origin of Secularist Politics in Modern China," *Past and Present* 218, no. 1 (Feb., 2013), 235.

between the “two great emancipators of the modern world,” Martin Luther and Johannes Gutenberg, “one a moral leader and the other a pioneering entrepreneur.”⁶³ Liang described the Reformation as the grandmother and the French Revolution the mother of the 19th century.⁶⁴ Moreover, Liang referred to his teacher Kang Youwei as the “Martin Luther of Confucianism” and described Kang’s life-long mission in following terms:

[Kang] spoke of religious freedom and did not advocate any one religion over others; he argued for the holy trinity and equality among religions. Since he was born in China, he wished to first save China. To save China, he had to use the historical customs of the Chinese to guide them. Also, since the Chinese people lacked public morality and their civic groups were badly organized, they could not become a force in the world. To unify them, someone had to be found whom most Chinese would respect and truly follow to unite their emotions and develop their identity. So he started with the restoration of Confucianism.⁶⁵

Unfortunately for Kang, his grand vision to revive Confucianism as part of the Self-Strengthening Movement did not come to fruition due to resistance from inside and pressures from outside. But his universal and salvific concept of Confucianism influenced later Chinese reformers who explored Confucian modernity as an alternative to its Protestant counterpart.⁶⁶

The Reformation also impacted the formation of the New Buddhist Movement in late 19th-century Japan. Beset by the nationalization of Shinto and infiltration of Christianity, Buddhist clerics in Japan initiated a religious and spiritual reform that included institutional and theological changes. The leader of the movement was Zen priest Mizutani Jinkai (1836–1896) who sought to make the salvific truth of Buddhism more accessible to the lay people.⁶⁷ Regarded as the “Japanese Luther,” Mizutani envisioned the New Buddhism to be radically different from the “old” Buddhism in the vein of Protestantism’s divergence from Catholicism.⁶⁸ Through close collaboration with the Theosophical Society, the US-based esoteric organization that introduced Eastern religions and philosophies to the West, Mizutani endeavoured to spread the teachings of Japanese Buddhism to the West.⁶⁹ Altogether, he and other Japanese Buddhist reformers strove to fashion a new kind of Buddhism that would buttress and harmonize with and “modern Japanese national identity.”⁷⁰ Repudiating the Christian accusation of Buddhism as a superstitious religion,

⁶³ Tang Xiaobing, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: The Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), 135.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁶⁵ Tay, “Kang Youwei,” 22.

⁶⁶ Susan Daruvala, *Zhou Zuoren and an Alternative Chinese Response to Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000).

⁶⁷ Jiryu Mark Rutschman-Byler, “Sōtō Zen in Meiji Japan: The Life and Times of Nishiari Bokusan,” MA Thesis (UC Berkeley, 2014), 17.

⁶⁸ Notto R. Thelle, *Buddhism and Christianity in Japan: From Conflict to Dialogue, 1854-1899* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), 195-196.

⁶⁹ Akai Toshio, “Theosophical Accounts in Japanese Buddhist Publications of the Late Nineteenth Century: An Introduction and Select Bibliography,” *Japanese Religions* 34, no. 2 (Jul., 2009), 118.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 189.

they presented Buddhism as a “scientific” religion and at the same time exposed the irrationality of Christian beliefs.⁷¹

The Confucian and Buddhist reform movements in early modern China and Japan bring to light the Reformation’s influence on the modernization of East Asian philosophical and religious traditions. Without embracing the Protestant message, East Asian reformers adopted the spirit and strategy of the Protestant reform to ensure their own survival and development in the modern world.

If the spirit of modernity was the Reformation’s unequivocal brainchild, capitalism was its unintended byproduct. Although Luther himself had no interest in capitalism,⁷² or one can even argue that Luther’s primary goal in starting the Reformation was “to uproot the capitalist spirit and to detain the cultural secularization which threatened the most sacred values of the Christian tradition,”⁷³ ironically Protestant theology and literature came to be regarded as “moral wellsprings of capitalism” by later thinkers.⁷⁴ The most influential among such thinkers was Max Weber (1864–1920) whose book, *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), became chiefly instrumental in advancing this viewpoint. According to Weber, Luther’s expanded notion of the “calling (*Beruf*)” engendered the Protestant worldly asceticism focused on diligence and frugality that provided the moral foundation for the spirit of capitalism.⁷⁵ Weber’s thesis enjoyed great popularity throughout the 20th century, especially among Protestant capitalists who came to view their economic success as a divine reward for their ethical lives. By extension, the successes of Western Imperialism were morally justified, and the colonies were seen as God’s gifts to virtuous Western capitalist powers.

The Weber thesis affected the perception and reception of Protestantism throughout the world. His major works were translated into East Asian languages and were read by intellectuals and reformers in the early twentieth century. Their responses varied. Among Japanese economists and sociologists of the 1920s, there were skeptics like Kawada Shirō (1883–1942) who questioned the validity of Weber’s linking of the spirit of capitalism with Protestant asceticism. However, Protestant intellectuals, like historian Ōtsuka Hisao (1907–1996), whole-heartedly embraced the Weber thesis. Ōtsuka found purely materialistic explanation of the origin of capitalism dissatisfying and concurred with Weber that an understanding of ethos (both religious and cultural) was crucial to comprehending the true nature of capitalism.⁷⁶ He wrote extensively about the relationship between modernity and capital in Weberian terms, tracing the root of modern capitalism to the Reformation, Puritan ethic and Luther’s notion of vocation.⁷⁷ Ōtsuka belonged to the Nonchurch Movement in Japan, founded by Japanese Christian evangelist Uchimura Kanzō (1861–1930). Renouncing

⁷¹ Yoshinaga Shin’ichi, “Theosophy and Buddhist Reformers in the Middle of the Meiji Period,” *Japanese Religions* 34, no. 2 (Jul., 2009), 121.

⁷² John Singleton, ““Money Is a Sterile Thing”: Martin Luther on the Immorality of Usury Reconsidered,” *History of Political Economy* 43, no. 4 (Winter 2011): 683-698.

⁷³ Luciano Pellicani, *The Genesis of Capitalism and the Origins of Modernity*, James G. Colbert, trans. (New York: Telos Press, 1994), 80.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Routledge, 2001).

⁷⁶ Wolfgang Schwentker, “The Spirit of Modernity,” *Journal of Classical Sociology* 5, no. 1 (2005), 76 and 79.

⁷⁷ Ōtsuka Hisao, *Shūkyō Kaikaku to Kindai Shakai* (The Reformation and the Modern Society) (Tōkyō: Misuzu Shobō, 1964), 19.

Western missionary institutions, the movement explored Japanese forms of Christianity and hoped to establish a meaningful connection between Christian faith and Japanese moral ethics. While rejecting the Western colonial expressions of Protestantism, members of the Nonchurch Movement accepted Weber's rhetoric of the Reformation and endorsed capitalism. Economist Yanaihara Tadao (1893–1961), another prominent member of the movement, criticized the harsh Japanese colonial policies in Korea and Taiwan and promoted the idea of “global civil society” based on the Protestant worldview.⁷⁸ Yet, concurring with the Weber thesis, he too approved of the capitalist enterprises by the Japanese imperial administration. Indeed, Japanese Christian intellectuals like Ōtsuka and Yanaihara, much like Western missionaries and colonists of the time, were Christian liberals and nationalists who supported capitalist colonial expansion.⁷⁹ By and large, these developments reveal the impact of the Weber thesis both in the West and the East in securing the tie between Protestantism and capitalism.

To be sure, the Protestant-Capitalist bond survived throughout the 20th and into the twenty-first century, advancing both global capitalism and Protestant mainline culture under the leadership of the United States of America. In East Asia, the idea was particularly influential in South Korea which experienced concomitant growth of capitalism and Protestantism since 1945. As Jean-Paul Baldacchino notes the “logics of the market and Puritanism in Korea exist in an elective affinity” with both “demand[ing] the utmost dedication” and “promising limitless rewards.”⁸⁰ In China, the paradoxical and contested combination of Protestant spirituality and capitalism has drastically increased in demand since the beginning of the country's economic liberalization in the 1980s.⁸¹ The blend of Protestantism and capitalism, combined with liberalism and democracy, proved appealing in other parts of post-Cold War world undergoing rapid modernization and capitalization, such as the newly formed states of Eastern Europe.⁸²

Remembering the Reformation: Critiques and New Visions from East Asia

I have tried to sketch the many faces of the Reformation that stimulated an array of actions and events throughout the tumultuous history of East Asia in the nineteenth and twentieth century. The developments examined above show that East Asians critically engaged with the information about the Reformation and Protestantism they were receiving from Western sources. While aspiring to the spirit of the Reformation, many intellectuals and reformers of twentieth century Korea also recognized the futility of attempting to replicate

⁷⁸ Yanaihara Tadao, “Problems of Japanese Administration in Korea,” *Pacific Affairs* 11, no. 2 (Jun., 1938): 198-207. Nakano Ryoko, “Uncovering “Shokumin”: Yanaihara Tadao's Concept of Global Civil Society,” *Social Science Japan Journal* 9, no. 2 (Oct. 2006): 187–202.

⁷⁹ Nakano Ryoko, *Beyond the Western Liberal Order: Yanaihara Tadao and Empire as Society* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 11 and 29.

⁸⁰ Jean-Paul Baldacchino, “Markets of Piety and Pious Markets: The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Korean Capitalism,” in *Critical Readings on Christianity in Korea*, edited by Donald Baker, Vol. 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 1343.

⁸¹ Joy Tong and Yang Fenggang, “Trust at Work: A Study on Faith and Trust of Protestant Entrepreneurs in China,” *Religions* 7, no. 12 (Dec., 2016): 136 (1-12). Gao Shining and Yang Fenggang, “Religious Faith and the Market Economy,” *The Ecumenical Review* 67, no. 1 (Mar., 2015): 120-140.

⁸² Sabina Mihelj, “Faith in Nation Comes in Different Guises”: Modernist Versions of Religious Nationalism,” *Nations and Nationalism* 13, no. 2 (Apr., 2007): 265-284.

a similar event in their historical and cultural context. Yi Kwan-yong (1894–1933), a leading Korean nationalist, argued that imitation would only lead to a schizophrenic outcome and stressed the need to delve into the issue of identity and genuineness of faith expression.⁸³ Pointing out the negative consequences of the Reformation, Ko Hyōnggon (1906–2004) argued that Luther’s emphasis on individual religious experience led to the denial of common religion and eventually gave rise to atheism and impotent modern religion.⁸⁴ Catholic priest Yun Pyōnghŭi (ca. 1960) criticized the Reformation for creating the culture of protest and division and eventually nihilist modernism.⁸⁵ In his article “The Lutheran tasks for contemporary religion” (1933), written for the occasion of the 450th birthday of Martin Luther, philosopher Sin Namch’ōl (b. 1903) condemned the nationalistic ills of Protestantism, in particular, the German Lutheran Church’s cooperation with the Nazi regime and its support of anti-Semitism.⁸⁶ When the Communist movement spread throughout East Asia, its members embraced the Marxist critique of the Reformation and denounced Luther for opposing the peasantry in the German Peasants’ War (1524–1525).

Since the mid-twentieth century, academic studies of Luther and his Reformation theology have made great strides throughout East Asia. Japanese and Korean theologians educated in the West studied the writings of Luther and other Reformation leaders in their original languages and produced in-depth scholarship on Reformation theology and history. Japanese Luther scholar Isao Kuramatsu (b. 1928), who studied Lutheran theology at Heidelberg University, published profusely in both Japanese and German on Luther’s Reformation theology.⁸⁷ Korean Luther theologian Ji Won-Yong (1924–2012), who received Th.D. from Concordia Seminary in Missouri where he taught systematic theology for years before returning to Korea, published in both Korean and English and introduced Lutheranism to postwar South Korea.⁸⁸ Early Chinese publications on Lutheran theology came mostly from Hong Kong where Lutheran churches of different denominations established themselves during the British colonial era. Overseas Chinese contribution was also influential, including Chinese-Canadian scholar Jason Hing Kau Yeung’s Chinese language publication on Luther’s theology.⁸⁹ The Luther scholarship in mainland China has

⁸³ Yi Kwan-yong, “Sahoe ŭi pyōngjōk hyōnsang 13 (The Pathological Phenomena in the Society),” *Tong-a Ilbo* (Oct. 17, 1922): 1.

⁸⁴ Ko Hyōnggon, “Hyōndaeh munhwa ŭi punyōl 4 (The Division in Contemporary Culture),” *Tong-a Ilbo* (Apr. 12, 1939): 3.

⁸⁵ Yun Pyōnghŭi, “Chōngsin hyōkmyōng i ūimi hanŭngōt 2 (The Significance of Psychological Revolution),” *Kyōnghyang sinmun* (Apr. 24, 1961): 4.

⁸⁶ Sin Namch’ōl, “Hyōndaeh chonggyo e isōsō ŭi Rut’el chōk kwaje 4 (The Lutheran Tasks for Contemporary Religion),” *Tong-a Ilbo* (Nov. 30, 1933): 3.

⁸⁷ Isao Kuramatsu, *Rutā to Gendai* (Luther and Our Times) (Tōkyō: Shinkyō Shuppansha, 1968). Isao Kuramatsu, *Rutā Shingaku no Saikentō* (Restudy on the Theology of Luther) (Ageo: Seigakuin Daigaku Shuppankai, 1998.) Isao Kuramatsu, *Shūkyō Kaikaku to Gendai no Shinkō* (The Reformation and Contemporary Faith) (Tōkyō: Nihonkirisutokyōdanshuppanyoku, 2017). Isao Kuramatsu, “Die gegenwärtige Kreuzestheologie und Luther, besonders in Rücksicht auf die Theologie des Schmerzes Gottes von Kazo Kitamori,” *Kerygma und Dogma* 36, no. 4 (Oct., 1990): 273-283. For a general discussion on the history of Luther studies in Japan, see Masuda Kenji, “Luther Studies in Japan,” *Church History* 31, no. 2 (1962): 227-230.

⁸⁸ Ji Won-Yong, *Mat’in Rut’ō ŭi Sasang* (Ideas of Martin Luther) (Seoul: Kōn Korŭdiasa, 1961). Won Yong Ji, *A History of Lutheranism in Korea* (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1988). Ji Won-Yong, *Rūt’ō Sōnjip* (Selected Works of Martin Luther) (Seoul: Kōn Korŭdiasa, 1993).

⁸⁹ Hing Kau Yeung, *Mading Lude Sixiang Yanjiu* (A Study of Martin Luther’s Thought) (Xianggang: Jidao, 2002).

seen an exponential growth in the past two decades, but as Miikka Ruokanen also observed, there is still much room for original research.⁹⁰

Besides critical evaluations and scholarly examinations of the Reformation, great efforts have also been made to reinterpret and transmit the Reformation spirit and story through the lens of historical and cultural experiences of East Asia. As Maria Erling points out “Luther’s influence on the rise of World Christianities is an important element in the vitality of contemporary churches in Africa and Asia.”⁹¹ The following section will investigate twenty-first century East Asian Christians’ diverse creative ways of engaging with the Reformation. As it will be shown, recent developments manifest the enduring influence of the various types of Reformation discourse examined throughout the paper.

Nationalistic Christianities

The theme of ethnolinguistic nationalism associated with the Reformation movement remains relevant to this day in China and Japan. In both countries, indigenous Christian evangelists and theologians have exerted great efforts to unveil and establish the link between Christian faith and traditional Chinese and Japanese culture to show that Christian God was present and at work in East Asia prior to the arrival of foreign missionaries.

In his book, *The “Inscrutably Chinese” Church: How Narratives and Nationalism Continue to Divide Christianity*, Nathan Faries provides a detailed look at the continuing effects of ethnolinguistic nationalism in Chinese Christian discourse.⁹² Indeed, nationalism has been a defining feature of Chinese Christian identity both in the state-endorsed official churches in China and in denominational and independent Chinese churches overseas. The discourse of nationalism in Chinese Christianity is complex and multilayered, but in general it is based on the idea that a special covenantal relationship exists between God and the Chinese people. The idea was popularized among Chinese-American Christians through the work of evangelist Yuan Zhiming (b. 1955), a democracy activist and Tiananmen dissident who became Christian in the US in the early 1990s. In 1997, Yuan published three books on the comparative study of Christianity and Daoist philosophy.⁹³ His *Lao Tzu and the Bible* lays out the similarities between Daoist philosopher Laozi (a.k.a. Lao Tzu 604–531 BCE)’s Daoist canon and the Bible and argues the former illuminates certain Christian concepts, such as the idea of divine creation, holiness, and Trinity. In the second book, *Lao Tzu and Jesus*, Yuan claims Laozi was a seeker of the Way and that his philosophy gives glimpse of his knowledge of the Christian God. He asserts how sages throughout Chinese history sought the truth that was revealed eventually through Jesus Christ. He also published his Christian reading of Laozi’s Daoist canon in the *Tao Te Ching*. Despite his ahistorical and acontextual reading of the Daoist text and his amateurish discussion of the subject, the books quickly became popular in the Chinese Christian world for their novelty.

⁹⁰ Miikka Ruokanen, “Luther and China,” *Dialog* 47, no. 2 (Jun., 2008): 167-171.

⁹¹ Maria Erling, “Martin Luther and the Rise of World Christianities,” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1.

⁹² Nathan Faries, *Inscrutably Chinese” Church: How Narratives and Nationalism Continue to Divide Christianity* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2010).

⁹³ Yuan Zhiming, *Laozi yu Shengjing: Kuayue Shikong de Yinghou* (Lao Tzu and the Bible) (Taipei: Yuzhouguang chubanshe, 1997). Yuan Zhiming, *Laozi yu Jidu* (Lao Tzu and Jesus) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1997). Yuan Zhiming, *Laozi Yuanwen yu Yiwen* (Tao Te Ching) (Taipei: Yuzhouguang chubanshe, 1997).

In another book *China's Confession* (1998), later published as a seven-part video series, Yuan presents a history of China as part of the grand narrative of God's plan for the salvation of the world. According to him, China, known as "*Shenzhou*" (lit. God's land) in the ancient time, had a special relationship with the Creator God who revealed his message of salvation in various ways, particularly, through the ancient Chinese script. He argues that the God of the Torah was known to the ancient Chinese and argues that certain Chinese characters (often, compound pictograms) illustrate the stories in Genesis, such as the great flood and God's covenant with Noah and his family. Throughout the book, Yuan traces God's footprints in China's 5,000-year history, from the beginning of Chinese civilization to the present time. Another important theme in his argument is the vision of Christian history as a westward development, an idea he adopted from the 1920s Chinese Christian movement known as the Back to Jerusalem Movement.⁹⁴ Their basic belief states that the gospel has travelled westward over time from the Middle East through Europe and America and finally to Asia. It is proposed that at this particular historical time, God has chosen the Christians of Asia to bring the gospel westward back to Jerusalem to realize the great commission of bringing the gospel to the ends of the earth. The proponents of this view believe that once the gospel movement returns to Jerusalem and completes the cycle of transmission around the globe, Christ will return. In light of this grand narrative, Yuan claims that Chinese Christians have a special eschatological mission to fulfil. Clearly evident in this rhetoric is nationalistic fervour and a sense of empowerment for the Chinese as God's chosen people. While Yuan's theological and historical views have been disputed, thanks to the effective publicization work of his organization, The China Soul for Christ Foundation, these ideas have gained ground among Chinese Christian population globally, especially among transnational migrants from mainland China.⁹⁵

In Japan, Uemura Toshifumi (b. 1959), a professor at Japan Lutheran College, has been a leading voice in similar endeavour. His own faith journey has been essential to his theological explorations. First trained as a Shinto priest, Uemura states that his conversion to Christianity was mediated by a Shinto priestess. His unique passage to Lutheran faith has allowed him to act as a bridge between Shinto and Christianity and facilitate meaningful dialogues between the two faith traditions. In his 2003 article "Who is the God that Christians believe in?: Between *Kojiki* and the Bible," Uemura compares the accounts of the divine Creator found in the oldest extant Japanese historical record *Kojiki* (Records of Ancient Matters) with those found in the Bible. He highlights corresponding themes and ideas in the two texts to prove the presence of the God of the Bible in ancient Japanese history. Uemura writes "Christianity is a religion of words" which has "developed within diverse cultural contexts."⁹⁶ He argues that the uniqueness of Japanese language made special revelations of divine truth possible, the fact that was ignored by 19th century missionary-translators of the

⁹⁴ Tobias Brandner, "Trying to Make Sense of History: Chinese Christian Traditions of Countercultural Belief and their Theological and Political Interpretation of Past and Present History," *Studies in World Christianity* 17, no. 3 (Dec., 2011), 219.

⁹⁵ Pál Nyíri, "Moving Targets: Chinese Christian Proselytising among Transnational Migrants from the People's Republic of China," *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 2, no. 2 (2003): 263-301.

⁹⁶ Uemura Toshifumi, "Who is the God that Christians Believe In?: Between *Kojiki* and the Bible," *Theologia Diakonia* 37 (2003): 130.

Bible.⁹⁷ While emphasizing Christianity's connection to ancient Japan, Uemura also acknowledges Protestantism's contribution to Japan's modernization in his more recent publication that reiterates Protestant missions' impact on modern education and women's movement in Japan.⁹⁸

A number of non-academic sources that survey the links between Christianity and Japanese tradition have also emerged. *God's Fingerprints in Japan* (2005), a popular two-part video series written and produced by Japanese-American evangelist Daniel Kikawa, traces the evidence of the Christian God in Japan's history and culture and tries to tell Japanese Christians that they can be fully Christian and fully Japanese at the same time.⁹⁹ The video has won the approval and praise of scholars like Uemura.¹⁰⁰ *The Soul of a Nation: Japan's Destiny* (2009) by Japanese-American Christian author Dianna Mastumoto covers a wide range of topics, including her own faith journey, parallel themes in the Bible and traditional Japanese chronicles, and general theological reflections.¹⁰¹ The production of popular works of these kinds denotes the continuing influence of ethnolinguistic and nationalistic discourse in the Japanese and Japanese-American Protestant circle.

As part of the special commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, Uemura has written and produced a theatrical performance *Luther*, a traditional Japanese Noh play based on the story of the Reformation. "I composed the poetry and prose [of the Noh play] by aiming principally at letting the Bible speak, as in Handel's Messiah. ... And in the second half, I used a portion of a Lutheran hymn, A Mighty Fortress is Our God." – Uemura said in an interview.¹⁰² His much anticipated production retells the story of Luther using traditional poetry, prose, and theatre of Japan, transforming the Reformation into a cross-cultural event and experience for the audience. These recent developments in Chinese and Japanese Christianity attest to the desire to reconcile Christian faith and ethnic and national identity. We are reminded that similar developments occurred in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe under the premise of creating nationalistic Protestant churches.

Envisioning an Inclusive and Expansive World

Despite its popularity, however, the nationalistic trend in Chinese and Japanese Christianity has not been endorsed or accepted by everyone. In fact, it has been criticized and condemned and even labeled as an evil to be eradicated in an effort to build a more inclusive and pluralistic vision of Christianity inspired by the Reformation. The most compelling argument in support of this view was made by renowned Japanese theologian Kosuke Koyama (1929–2009). In his paper "Reformation in the Global Context: The Disturbing Spaciousness of Jesus Christ" (2003), Koyama states that the spirit of the

⁹⁷ Uemura explored this problem in his M. Th. thesis titled "Between God and *Kami*: Kyoushu Mita: An Attempt of Contextual Theology" (M. Th. Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN, 2003).

⁹⁸ Uemura Toshifumi and Kasaya Kazuhiko, *Nihon no Kindaika to Purotesutantizumu* (Japan's Modernization and Protestantism) (Tōkyō: Kyōbunkan, 2013).

⁹⁹ "God's Fingerprints in Japan 1 & 2," *Aloha Ke Akua Ministries*, accessed August 18, 2017, <https://sites.google.com/site/alohakeakuaministries/resources/dvd-video>.

¹⁰⁰ Uemura Toshifumi, "God's Fingerprints in Japan II: What is the Name of God in Japanese Context," *Theologia Diakonia* 41 (2007): 61-66.

¹⁰¹ Dianna Matsumoto, *The Soul of a Nation: Japan's Destiny* (Garden City, NY: Morgan James Publishing, 2009).

¹⁰² "Japanese Play Based on Luther," *Presbyterian Record* 136, no. 10 (Nov., 2012): 13.

Reformation invites Christians to “build a universal blessed community.”¹⁰³ He stresses that Luther’s theology of the cross illuminates Christ’s lowliness and universality, “completely free of imperialism, authoritarianism, paternalism, and colonialism.”¹⁰⁴ Denouncing nationalistic Exceptionalism, Koyama asserts Exceptionalism, “a hallmark of the empire complex,” goes against the spirit of Luther and is hostile to “pluralism and tolerance.”¹⁰⁵ He declares Exceptionalism will only breed tribal gods who will wage war against each other.

A tribal god, whether it speaks Japanese or English, has no understanding of the line between self-defense and aggression. A tribal god is immensely popular because it requires no self-examination and encourages self-justification. It is a crusading god.¹⁰⁶

Growing up in WWII Japan, Koyama came to Christian faith as a youth when American bombers were burning down major cities throughout Japan. He writes: “When I was baptized during the war, the minister told me that God loves everyone, Americans as well as Japanese. I was baptized not into the religion of the enemy country but into the God of all nations.”¹⁰⁷ These early memories had a lasting impact on Koyama’s life and theology, inspiring his fervent rejection of a crusading tribal god and his lifelong dedication to ecumenism. In contrast to the nationalistic rendering of Japanese Christian identity examined above, Koyama saw himself primarily as a global citizen and a Christian from Japanese heritage. Japanese tradition and culture remained important to him as his interreligious and intercultural scholarship reveals. Yet he was a fierce critic of nationalism and imperialism and believed the Reformation warns us against “the abuse and misuse of transcendence” that often lead to the “domestication of God.”¹⁰⁸

As Koyama’s example illustrates, the violence and devastation suffered by the people of Japan in the first half of the 20th century generated strong impetus for pacifist and environmental movements in which Christian groups took active part. Pacifism led by Christians and Socialists was present in wartime Japan but was brutally suppressed by the military regime.¹⁰⁹ Christian pacifists in Japan were influenced by the idea of “unconditional pacifism” that emerged as a part of Reformation theology.¹¹⁰ After WWII, many Japanese theologians studied the life and theology of Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945), particularly, his fight against fascism and his interpretation of Luther’s theology of the cross and the idea of suffering God, to reflect critically on the social and political responsibilities of Christians.¹¹¹

¹⁰³ Kosuke Koyama, “Reformation in the Global Context: The Disturbing Spaciousness of Jesus Christ,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 30, no. 2 (Apr., 2003), 119.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 125-126.

¹⁰⁹ Nobuya Bamba and John F. Howes, eds., *Pacifism in Japan: The Christian and Socialist Tradition* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1978).

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹¹ Kazuaki Yamasaki, “Bonhoeffer’s Social Ethics and Its Influence in Japan,” in *Interpreting Bonhoeffer: Historical Perspectives, Emerging Issues*, edited by Clifford J. Green and Guy C. Carter (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013).

As the only country in the world to have suffered the deadly effects of atomic bombs, postwar Japan has been an active advocate of nuclear nonproliferation. Christian groups in Japan have endeavoured to raise public awareness of the dangers of nuclear weapons by promoting the message of nonproliferation in international conferences such as the Christian Conference of Asia.¹¹² More recently, the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster (2011) once again brought to reality the dangers of living in the nuclear age. The disaster and the government's attempt to conceal the facts motivated theologian Yuki Shimada to revisit Bonhoeffer's theology in the present-day Japanese context to remind Japanese Christians the importance of telling and standing up for truth.¹¹³ The President of Japan Lutheran College, Eto Naozumi, also responded to the nuclear disaster in his paper "Contextualizing Luther in Contemporary Japan" (2015). The paper points out the significance of Luther's eschatological understanding of life and calls all Christians in Japan to become "dutiful servants to all."¹¹⁴

Postwar Japan also underwent rapid reindustrialization of its society and unfettered capitalization of its economy. The negative consequences of rapid development included environmental destruction and widening economic disparity. Christians in Japan became involved in environmental activism since the 1980s ahead of Christians in other parts of the world. Members of the Japan Evangelic Lutheran Church focused on eradicating PCB poisoning "as a battle of faith," and fought against government and corporations. The Japan Baptist Convention took on the issue of pollution, and the Japan Roman Catholic Church advocated for victims of arsenic poisoning.¹¹⁵ Christian publications like *Living Together with Everyone on the Earth* (2000) published by Research Group on Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation preach the message of disarmament, economic justice and ecological protection as duties of every Christian.¹¹⁶

Reflecting on Japan's modern history and drawing on the spirit of the Reformation, Christian thinkers and groups in Japan have strived to create an inclusive and expansive vision of Christianity and the world that stands in contrast to the nationalistic vision. That both visions were inspired by the Reformation points to the paradox within the Reformation discourse.

A Continuous Reformation of the Church and Society

In Korea, the Reformation has been explored as a model of church and socio-political reform among Protestant believers and thinkers. Following the example of Luther, they exposed abuses and misuses of power and sought to revive the Reformation spirit to bring about far-reaching social and political changes. Korean Christians' experiences of growth-centered economy under repressive political dictatorships in the 1960s and 1970s became the background of their struggle for reform. In the early 1960s, Christian leaders in Korea

¹¹² Masaki Yokoyama, *Japan and the Nuclearization of Asia-Pacific* (Singapore: Christian Conference of Asia, 1981).

¹¹³ Yuki Shimada, "Truth and Truth-telling in Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reconsidered after 3.11 and "Fukushima," *Theology Today* 71, no. 1 (Apr., 2014), 130.

¹¹⁴ Eto Naozumi, "Contextualizing Luther in Contemporary Japan," *Theologia-Diakonia* 48 (Mar., 2015), 17-19.

¹¹⁵ Yasuda Haruo, "Environmental Issues," in *Christianity in Japan, 1971-90*, eds. Yoshinobu Kumazawa and David L. Swimme (Tokyo: Kyo Bun Kwan, 1991), 122.

¹¹⁶ Research Group on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, *Living Together with Everyone on the Earth* (Koishikawa Bunkyo-ku: Tomisaka Christian Center), 2000.

began calling out to churches to join the fight for social justice. Presbyterian pastor and theologian Yi Yŏnghŏn (1917–2003) wrote in his paper “The Spirit of Martin Luther’s Reformation” (1962) that Luther’s Reformation started with personal and expanded to the transformation of the church and society. Yi states if Luther were alive today, he would again demand the church and the clergy to critically examining themselves first. Yi invites all Christians to become responsible citizens and contribute to public welfare rather than remain complacent bystanders.¹¹⁷ In the 1970s, Protestant leaders in Korea searched for a radical shift in theology to find ways to communicate the message that reflected and spoke to the social and political realities of the time. Harking back to the Reformation, Protestant political scientist Han Paeho (b. 1931) called attention to Luther’s cooperation with secular political authority for a much needed social reform while maintaining the separation of church and state. Han called upon Protestant thinkers in Korea to theologize the politics following the example of Luther.¹¹⁸

The most important development in this regard was the emergence of the Minjung theology and movement. Characterized as an Asian contextual theology and often compared to Latin American Liberation Theology, the Minjung theology explores “Minjung” (people or mass) – representing the destitute and the marginalized – as the focus of theological and political struggle. Building on Luther’s idea of suffering God, the Minjung theologians spoke of Jesus’ solidarity with the “marginalized, suppressed, and outcast.”¹¹⁹ The Minjung theology explores ways to interpret the gospel in the particular socioeconomic and political realities of the ostracized people in Korea. Members of the movement took the gospel of the suffering God in solidarity with the suffering people out of the church to factories and prisons and lived and worked among them. In this sense, the Minjung theology was a public theology which envisioned salvation as liberation on multiple levels.¹²⁰ Minjung theologians drew their inspiration from Luther, more specifically, from Luther’s contextual translation of the gospel, his theology of justification, his fight against abuses of power and authority, and his message of political and economic duty of Christians.¹²¹ Indeed, as Paul S. Chung aptly put, the Minjung theology “refines a contextual and constructive interpretation of Martin Luther and Reformation Theology in East Asian perspective.”¹²² Many Christians in the Minjung movement spoke openly against capitalism’s systematic abuses of the vulnerable and the government policies that restricted and suppressed basic freedom and human rights, and some, as a result, suffered torture and incarceration.

In the twenty-first century, Korea has been enjoying the benefits of economic growth and political stability. Protestant churches in Korea became world-renowned for their size and international influence. Despite the visible successes of Korean churches, concerns and criticisms also began to surface. Many expressed frustrations over the increasingly wealthy

¹¹⁷ Yi Yŏnghŏn, “Mat’in Rut’ŏ ūi kaehyŏk chŏngsin (The Spirit of Martin Luther’s Reformation),” *Kidokkyo Sasang* 6, no. 10 (Nov., 1962), 22-23.

¹¹⁸ Han Paeho, “Rut’ŏ chŏngch’i sinhak ūi hyŏndae chŏk ūiŭi (The Contemporary Significance of Luther’s Political Theology),” *Kidokkyo Sasang* 15 no.3 (Mar., 1971): 37-44.

¹¹⁹ Paul S. Chung, “Martin Luther and Reformation Theology: An East Asian Perspective,” in *Radicalizing Reformation*, edited by Karen L. Bloomquist, Craig L. Nesson, and Hans G. Ulrich (Zürich: LIT, 2016), 94.

¹²⁰ Volker Küster, *A Protestant Theology of Passion: Korean Minjung Theology Revisited* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 148.

¹²¹ Küster, *A Protestant Theology of Passion*, 100-102.

¹²² Chung, “Martin Luther and Reformation Theology,” 91.

church, the growing influence of prosperity gospel, and the self-righteous middle-class mentality of Christians. The problems arising from wealthy and powerful churches in Korea have caused Christian leaders and thinkers to bring to mind the problems of the Roman Catholic Church of the sixteenth century and Luther's heroic struggle against the Church's corruption. And many began to call for the reformation of the Korean church rooted in the spirit of Luther's Reformation.

In his paper "Luther's Reformation and the Reformation of the Korean Church," (2013) Yi Sanggyu makes comparison between the problems of contemporary Korean church and the problems of the Catholic Church in Luther's time and suggests lessons drawn from the Reformation for the revival of Protestant churches in Korea. Yi states that the church as a whole became the target of criticism for its authoritarian leadership and hierarchical structure. The church's hierarchical structure in the country with the highest clergy per population ratio (1:450) has created serious economic disparities and heightened competition among clergy. Such competitive environment, Yi argues, has not only produced inequality and injustice but also affected the clergy to neglect their call to service and focus on personal gains.¹²³ The competition led to the problem of growth- and program-oriented ministries and even unethical practices in church leadership.¹²⁴ Yi asserts that these problems within church leadership further strengthen the bourgeois mentality in laypeople and cause them to be indifferent to social, political, and economic realities of others.¹²⁵ Citing the historical Reformation, Yi then calls for a fundamental reform (both individual and institutional) of the clergy as the first step in the reformation of the church in Korea.¹²⁶ Many agreed with Yi that a true reformation of the Korean church has to begin at a personal level. Pak Chongch'ön noted when individual Christians become transformed by God's saving grace, as Luther did 500 years ago, the desired reformation of the church would follow suit.¹²⁷ Ko Chaegil pointed out that the Korean church must reevaluate their faith from the point of lowly Christ as expounded by Luther and Bonhoeffer.¹²⁸ Kim Tongju asserted that the church in Korea should adopt Luther's public social programs as a new paradigm for education, charity and welfare in twenty-first century Korea that is experiencing increasing privatization and commercialization of basic social services.¹²⁹

All in all, the critiques and new visions of the Reformation from East Asia illustrate East Asian Christians' critical engagement with the Reformation and their endeavours to make it a relevant and transformative force in their reality today. The wide range of religious, social and political reforms – nationalistic and universal, conservative and reformist – influenced by the Reformation show its memory remains divided and contested in East Asia.

¹²³ Yi Sanggyu, "Chonggyo kaehyök kwa Han'guk kyohoe kaehyök (Luther's Reformation and the Reformation of the Korean Church)," *Worldview* 26, no. 11 (Nov., 2013), 2-4.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹²⁷ Pak Chongch'ön, "Onül üi chonggyo kaehyök ül üihan Marüt'in Rut'ö üi t'ongch'al (Insights from Martin Luther for Today's Reformation)," *Sinhak kwa Segye* 66 (Dec., 2009), 70.

¹²⁸ Ko Chaegil, "Bonhoeffer's Understanding of Luther and Korean Church," *Changsin Nondan* 48, no. 4 (Dec., 2016): 37-62.

¹²⁹ Kim Tongju, "Christian Diakonia and Martin Luther's Reform: New Paradigm Shift in Education, Charity, and Welfare," *Kidokkyo Kyoyuk Chöngbo* 11 (Aug., 2005): 283-307.

Closing Remarks

This paper presented a brief historical overview of the changing discourse of the Reformation in East Asia over the past three centuries. The Reformation was introduced to East Asia in many forms, including Bible translations, missionary presses, Catholic-Protestant conflicts, colonial Protestant missions, ethnolinguistic nationalisms, modernity, and capitalism. East Asians struggled with and against these various modes of the Reformation, forged their own responses to them, and incorporated them into their own realities through dynamic contextualization. Perhaps the most important observation one can draw from this history is that East Asians were not passive recipients of knowledge from the West but rather active agents in the creation of the Reformation discourse. They did not simply let the legacy of the Reformation transform their lives but instead energetically transformed their own world through the Reformation spirit. The result was an array of religious, social, and political changes that continue to impact the region as we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Understanding the history of the Reformation in the non-Western world allows us to grasp the extent and depth of its global impact. It also reminds us that the legacy of the Reformation lives on to touch and transform the lives of many with considerable force.