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**READING THE MATTHEAN APOCALYPSE (MT 24-25)
IN THE GLOCALIZATION CONTEXT OF
HONG KONG'S BOURGEOIS SOCIETY AND MIDDLE-CLASS CHURCHES**

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1 INTRODUCTION

This paper adopts a glocal public approach (Chia, 75-108) for interpreting the Bible. It aims at recontextualizing the so-called “Matthean Apocalypse” (Mt 24-25) in the glocalized Hong Kong. As highlighted by her governmental brand line – “Asia's world city” (The Brand Hong Kong [database on-line]), Hong Kong is an international financial hub, a regional gateway to the Mainland and Southeast Asia as well as a cosmopolitan city of China, wherein local-regional-global interactions interplay. The brand line, which can be seen as a typical social-semiotic sign, crystallizes Hongkongeses' global consciousness. Thus, from a Hongkonger's point of view, the context embedded in Mt 24-25 could be economic globalization, or precisely glocalization (Robertson, 173-4), rather than *Pax Romana*. Such a recontextualization invites Hong Kong's bourgeois society (middle-class churches in particular) to a mutual dialogue with the ancient, but decontextualized episode, i.e. Mt 24-25.

On the one hand, a middle class basically did not exist in ancient Roman Empire and hence we, who belong to this class, may ask the text from our own contemporary context: What is the relevance of the apocalyptic vision of alternative world order for us, who are neither those lamented in the front line nor those being harshly criticized behind the text? We are definitely neither the most serious global victims, nor the greediest global predators, but simply successful survivors in a globalized economy. As middle-class Christians, we conjecture that we have already learnt some survival tactics, like numerous contemporaries in Hong Kong. Consequently we tend to be indifferent with, or even reluctant to, any alternative future!

On the other hand, the apocalyptic message goes unheard today: What was the social-historical function of the Matthean text for the Christian groups amidst the political economy of the Roman Empire? What kind of alternative voice could be heard from Mt 24-25 when the Matthean community was facing the imperial ideology? Was the apocalyptic text merely an unfulfilled eschatological aspiration? In other words, what did the text of an ancient context mainly concern: Eschatological or futurological? Staring at the End or aspiring alternatives here and now?

Mutual dialogue can revitalize the “Matthean Apocalypse” (Mt 24-25). It can be perceived as a recurring yearning for change. Despite both the marginalization of the Matthean community and our powerlessness in global governance, it still generates hope for a risk society (Beck, 6-9) in aid of apocalyptic scenarios, in which God himself will make the impossible possible. Apocalyptic readers can thus be empowered as agents of social change, irrespective of the actual mode of fulfillment.

In the following, the life-context will be firstly analyzed, and afterwards the biblical text in this new context. The glocal public approach adopted in this paper belongs to the ideological criticism or the so-called “critical theory”.

2 ANALYZING THE LIFE-CONTEXT

2.1 *The Economic Globalization Ideology in Hong Kong*

Like thousands of cities and billions of people under globalization, Hong Kongers struggled unavoidably with global crises too. However, our societal problems must be viewed not only in light of a globalizing context, but also a glocalizing economy. Concerning problems of “glocalization,” we refer not to glocal marketing of transnational firms, but emphasize both the global impact on Hong Kong’s societal issues and our socially-conditioned, local features. In other words, Hong Kong’s glocalization problems are not cast in the same mould as other parts of the global village. With the course of time, the bourgeois society and middle-class churches of Hong Kong became not only uncritical but even “proud” of our form of capitalism (previously termed as “laissez-faire capitalism”, recently as “big market, small government”). According to economist Milton Friedman, the economic policy in Hong Kong sets the best example of the benefits of laissez-faire capitalism (Friedman, 34; cf. Cheung, 291-308). The present HKSAR Chief Executive Donald Tsang was the first governmental voice to claim that the policy of Hong Kong was “big market, small government”. The implication is like that: Economic development is supported and promoted only within the limits of a small government. Aiming at sustaining the private sector on its own, the Government makes no attempt to intervene in the market. According to his response to Economic Summit, he wrote that in recent years the Government has preferred “big market, small government” as the description of Hong Kong’s style of capitalism (Tsang [press on-line]). Consequently, we are suffering from no dream of alternative futures and creating numerous glocalization problems.

2.2 *Suffering in a Risk society but Too Few Reflections on the “Hong Kong Lehman Brothers Crisis”*

If Hongkongers ever made any success in global competitions, we remain as vulnerable survivors in a risk society. Just recently, “Financial Tsunami”, uniquely the Hong Kong Lehman Brothers crisis, is a costly lesson in our collective memory. The bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers started in the United States on 15 September 2008 and it had impacts all over the world like a tsunami. With “guaranteed mini-bonds” (valued HKD 15.7 billion) from Lehman, more than 43,700 Hong Kong citizens have been affected (SCMP; HK Standard). According to Hong Kong Yearbook 2008, the HKMA had received about 20,000 complaints about “guaranteed mini-bonds” at the end of 2008. Over 4,500 cases had been investigated, but only 238 cases had been referred to the Securities and Futures Commission (SFC) for any follow-up action. There is no critical reflection from Hong Kong government; for instances, even our formal Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority Mr. Yam’s speech on “Reflections relevant to the banking profession in Hong Kong” had a few words mentioning Lehman Brothers.

Unfortunately, we Hongkongers do not learn the lesson. A significant change from traditional capitalism to alternative futures is not our dream. In local level, we are not ready to reorient our lifestyle and social values. Without any surprise, we do not echo globally with those

persistently suffered under world capitalism, even after the experience of the global Financial Tsunami.

2.3 *Not a Joke: Over Workload Burdens but Numerous Underemployed or Unemployed as one of Hong Kong's Glocalization Problems*

Hong Kongers are being frustrated by extraordinarily over workload burdens but lack of social security. According to the Hong Kong Yearbook 2008, there was a decrease in the unemployment rate from 4 per cent in 2007 to 3.6 per cent in 2008 (*Hong Kong Yearbook 2008*). A similar decrease was found in the underemployment rate from 2.2 per cent in 2007 to 1.9 per cent in 2008. The total employment increased from 3,483,800 in 2007 to a new high of 3,518,800 in 2008. At the same time, the Yearbook reports good news on the rise of the median monthly employment earnings from HKD 10,100 in 2007 to HKD 10,500 in 2008. The situation was however not as positive as reported in the Yearbook.

Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU) made a survey on 434 employees from more than 10 grassroots' occupations from August to September 2008 (HKCTU). Having experienced SARS in 2003, most employees were encouraged to help their employers by cutting their own wages and extending their working hours without any compensation. But when the economy improved, there was no increase in their wages. As Bucky K. H. Chan explained, "There is also no statutory requirement that an employee must be compensated for the overtime work rendered" (B. K. H. Chan) An employee in Hong Kong can easily suffer from overtime work. According to the survey by HKCTU, 20 per cent of the interviewees have experienced longer working hours than before and 48.7 per cent have personally agreed that the working time is too long for themselves, which their personal health and interpersonal relationship have been badly affected.

2.4 *Global Structural Poverty but None of Hongkongers' Business?*

According to the press release of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) on 27 September 2009, HKCSS had analyzed the data concerning household income and unemployment rate from C&SD, the poverty rate kept increasing. The poverty rate in the first half of 2009 was 17.9 per cent, that is, around 1.236 million people lived in low income or poor families. The poverty rate reached the new high. Comparing with the 1.21 million poor population in 2008, there was an increase of 20 thousand poor population within only half year's time. The definition of poor family: according to the number of family members, the income less than or equal to the half of the median of Hong Kong household income. For instances, the median of a one-person household in 2009 is HKD 3,300, two-person HKD 6,750, three-person HKD 9,150 and four-person HKD 12,650. Besides, the Gini Index had already reached 0.533 in 2006, having the most serious disparity between the rich and the poor amongst all the developed countries. The Hong Kong better-off is taking unsympathetic attitude towards structural poverty.

3 ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT I

The Matthean Apocalypse (Mt 24-25) was not only a reception but also a contextual reading of the Markan Apocalypse (Mk 13). This enlarged discourse criticized directly the uncritical attitude of the Matthean community towards the Roman imperial "Gospel" and indirectly the Roman socio-economic ideology.

Starting from Mt 24, the author built in the fifth discourse in the Gospel. This is the so-called "Jesus' Eschatological Discourse". According to the two-source theory, Mt 24:1-44 basically adopt a Markan structure, i.e. Mk 13:1-37. Mt 24:1-35 align with its Markan source. The unit announced an eschatological message, which the Roman Empire would not agree with. There was no way she could claim her own fatal fate. Thus the episode served not only as a critique, but as a deconstruction against the Roman imperial discourse.

However, the Markan Apocalypse has not been entirely adopted. The author altered the Markan content while preserving the basic idea of Mk 13,32-37. He modified the content by three similes – "The Simile of the Flood" (Mt 24:36-39), "The Simile of the Rapture" (Mt 24:40-42) and "The Simile of the Burglary" (Mt 24:43-44). The first two were most likely extracted from the Q source (Lk 17:26-27 and 17:34-35). In addition to the Mt 24:43-44, the three similes called a necessity for building up risk consciousness. This calling was insightful, especially when people were living in such a strong Empire.

Afterwards, the author expanded the Markan Apocalypse with three additional parables. Two of them – "The Parable of the Faithful or the Unfaithful Slave" (Mt 24:45-51) and "The Parable of the Three Servants" (Mt 25:14-30) – probably came from a Q source, which parallel to Lk 12:41-48 and Lk 19:11-27 respectively. In between he added his unique material, "The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids" (Mt 25:1-13). By means of the aforesaid three parables, the Markan eschatological scenario is enriched by Matthean decision-making alternatives in each parable. The focus is shifted from the End back to here and now. These three demanded the audiences' preparedness, for they were alerted to the return of Jesus. Implicitly speaking, they should prepare themselves, as the Empire was at risk.

At the last part of the entire discourse, he concluded with another peculiar passage, "The Story of the Sheep and the Goats" (Mt 25:31-46). Take this story into consideration alone, the reader could not know whether any wicked person will be punished or not. What the text proclaimed to the intended readers was the sin of indifference. People were not called to prepare himself or herself alone. Instead, they had responsibilities of taking care of the needy in a risk society.

After the prolonged discourse, the Passion narrative begins in Mt 26. Jesus is on the way towards his chosen destiny. Thus Mt 24-25 recall Jesus' forecast of his own leave of absence. The theme – the awaiting of the lord's return – recurs throughout the entire Matthean discourse. In other words, the text aspires not the prosperous sustainability of the Roman Empire, but an alternative future.

An overview of the Matthean Apocalypse is illustrated in a table as the following:

TABLE 1: THE OVERVIEW OF THE MATTHEAN APOCALYPSE (MT 24-25)

Scenario of Eschatological Signs		
24:1-35		
<i>Changeability: Ideology Critique</i>		
Simile (I) 24:36-39 Flood	Simile (II) 24:40-42 Rapture	Simile (III) 24:43-44 Burglary
The Son of Man's Arrival at Unexpected Hour	The Lord's Arrival at Unknown Hour	The Son of Man's Arrival at Unexpected Hour
<i>Immediacy: Necessity for Building Risk Consciousness</i>		
Social Activities: Daily or Occasional	Social Responsibility: Male or Female	
<i>Living in a Risk Society: Everywhere at Risk</i>		
	Risk Negligence in Daytime Activities	Risk Management in Nighttime Crimes
<i>Living in a Risk Society: 24-Hour at Risk</i>		
The Flood came	Left Behind	(Property Loss)
<i>Risk Consequence(s)</i>		
Parable (I) 24:45-51 The Faithful or the Unfaithful Slave	Parable (II) 25:1-13 The Ten Bridesmaids	Parable (III) 25:14-30 The Three Servants
Absence of the master	Absence of the bridegroom	Absence of the master
<i>Unpredictability: Necessity of Preparedness</i>		
Early Arrival of the master	Later Arrival of the bridegroom	
<i>Risk due to Unpredictability of the Arrival Time (Unpredictable Duration of Preparation)</i>		
	Underestimation of the Degree of Preparedness	Overestimation of the Degree of Preparedness
<i>Risk due to Unpredictability of the Degree of Preparedness</i>		
Weeping & Gnashing of the Teeth	The Door is Shut	Weeping & Gnashing of the Teeth
<i>Consequence of Unpreparedness</i>		
Story of the Sheep & the Goats at the Last Judgment		
25:31-46		
<i>Sin of Omission / Sin of Indifference in a Risk Society</i>		

Nowadays, however, the Matthean Apocalypse is filtered by those beneficiaries from the global capitalism and has therefore mutated into a capitalistic form of Christian stewardship. Recently, in Hong Kong dozens of ad hoc books and articles are published by Christian

financial experts due to the global financial crisis. They all quote Mt 25:14-30 in their publications for supporting their stewardship principle at the heart of the Western capitalism. Such a Hong Kong middle-class churches' prevalent contextual reading of the Matthean Apocalypse might have made ourselves one day become those who are being criticized by the suffering Third World. Our Hong Kong's bourgeois society urgently needs an alternative contextual reading of Mt 24-25, no matter we are still amidst the "Financial Tsunami" or in a "Post Financial Tsunami" or facing the coming of the so-called "Financial Tsunami II".

4 ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT II

4.1 *Contextual Reading of Mt 24:1-35: Critique towards the Economic Globalization Ideology*

For the post-70 reader, Mt 24:1-2 are perceived as Jesus' fulfilled prophecy. He appears in the text as a prophet who can see the future (Davies & Allison, 333). In some sense, the apophthegm is still valid today. Hongkongers may neither feel interest in the fallen Jewish Temple, nor believe in any religious, nonscientific prophecy. However, in the public domain, the entire Matthean Apocalypse can be interpreted as a vision with futurological insights. Undoubtedly, ancient Jesus would not apply a quantitative approach for trend studies. Nevertheless, the Christians' reception of Jesus' prophecy was reinforced by their perception of the social trends in the Imperial Roman history. From a futurological perspective, the ancient text may still be insightful in our glocalized economy.

Unlike those Markan readers, the Matthean disciples concern not only the Fall of Jerusalem, but also the sign(s) of the Parousia and the End (cf. Luz, 420). Nowadays, this latter concern is secularized and transformed to become a quest for the global sustainability. In modern context, anti-globalists criticize globalization as an ideology harmful to the sustainability. In similar way, Mt 24:3 implies a critique on the Roman ideology. Thus, the Fall of Jerusalem indicates the problem of local sustainability within the Roman political economic system. The verse questions also on a glocal level.

Noteworthy is the "gospel of the kingdom" in Mt 24:14. It reveals none of its content in the discourse, but discloses those facts (Mt 24:6-12, 15-22) which depict a catastrophic picture contrary to the ideological propaganda of the ruling authority. People should not trust her "messianic" claims uncritically. The ruling ideology was denied because it resulted to military ambitions (Mt 24:6), inter-ethnic conflicts (Mt 24:7a), international chaos (Mt 24:7b), human-induced calamities (Mt 24:7c), natural disasters (Mt 24:7d), persecution of minorities (Mt 24:9), interpersonal hatred (Mt 24:10), higher crime rate (Mt 24:12a), undermining universal value, i.e. (Mt 24:12b), cultural heritage damage (Mt 24:15), loss of homeland (Mt 24:16-22) and so on. Thus, the "gospel" has an unmasking power. It can no wonder function as an antithesis to the Roman ideology at that time and any other ideology in history (Common Chan, chap. 2). In our case globalization comes to the fore. It does not mean that all anti-globalization movements deserve the title of the "gospel". Like the past, some messianic movements (Davies & Allison, 338-9) should not be counted as "messianic" (Mt 24:4-5, 23-26). What does the "gospel" really means, it is "critical" in nature – a critique to other critiques, an antithesis to other antitheses.

At the end of Mt 24:1-35, the changeability of a political economy (in this case, *Imperium Romanum*) comes to question. The text depicts an ultimate scenario of the sudden, dramatic coming of the Son of Man. Up to now, the literal fulfillment of the scenario has not yet come

true. But it has already served as a social-historical relief for the Matthean community. Being kept in their collective memory, the (western) ruling power was too super that those (eastern) revolutionaries had become corpses. The memory was visualized in the text: the eagles will gather wherever the corpse is (Mt 24:28). The scene may refer to the destruction of the temple or Jerusalem in AD 70 (Bengel / Brown / Lightfoot / Alford). Nonetheless, no superpower is too super. The Son of Man, who also comes from the East (Mt 24:27), is even more powerful, and consequently, the worldwide Roman political economy cannot resist the divine change (Mt 24:27, 29-31). Hope of change gives reason for endurance under the evil superpower (Mt 24:32-35). Is such a guarantee applicable to our modern case of world capitalism? The Son of Man has not yet returned and hence it is legitimate for any global loser to identify himself or herself with the "generation" (Mt 24:34), who hopes the arrival and those corresponding changes. Every generation should indeed believe that no existing political economic system is unchangeable. Is the transcendental vision just a utopia or "opium" for the losers? At least, the vision declares the standpoint of the transcendence, and thus marks a judgmental standard for Hongkongers, who may not be direct losers in the unfair global competitions?

In light of the aforesaid discussion, Hong Kong middle-class churches should not conform ourselves to the economic globalization ideology uncritically. We should rediscover our unmasking power and revive our critical nature.

4.2 *Contextual Reading of Mt 24:36-44: Echo of the Financial Tsunami in a Risk Society and Awakening of the Middle Class*

The three similes – "The Simile of the Flood" (Mt 24:36-39), "The Simile of the Rapture" (Mt 24:40-42) and "The Simile of the Burglary" (Mt 24:43-44) – have a common theme: the immediacy of the Parousia (Mt 24:36, 39, 42, 44). People seem to have no readiness for any change in life. They engage in daily social activities (e.g. meals) as usual (Mt 24:38a). They also accustom to any occasional social gathering (e.g. wedding in Mt 24:38b). Each gender has been socialized to take up his or her social responsibility in a society (Mt 24:40-41). Life is so ordinary. The "eschatological" event of the three similes says the opposite: stability is not the true picture of the Roman society. The society is at risk, for the Son of Man or the Lord can end it unexpectedly. In this sense, everywhere (Mt 24:36-39, 40-42) and every time (Mt 24:40-42, 43-44) there are hidden "risks" if people would like to pursue a stable life in the Roman world. Risk consciousness should be built up. Is modern society safer than the ancient one? Hongkongers hope so. Two core values, i.e. stability and prosperity, serve as standards of our Hong Kong bourgeois society and middle-class churches. Actually, aiming at complexity, system differentiation becomes characteristics of the modern society. This is what Niklas Luhmann told us. Modernity does not equate risk minimization. As Ulrich Beck's saying goes, we are now living in a risk society. Hong Kong is by no means exceptional.

In accordance with the three similes, risk has at least three forms: (i) natural catastrophe, e.g. flood (Mt 24:39); (ii) divine intervention, e.g. rapture (Mt 24:40, 41); and (iii) human induced calamities or loss e.g. burglary (Mt 24:43). In other words, risk is either caused by nature or by God or by human beings. Hong Kong publics may not accept divine intervention as a universal explanation for risk. Besides, severe natural catastrophe hardly occurs in Hong Kong. Human induced loss is our main concern. Due to the relatively low crime rate in Hong Kong, her citizens generally have no great fear of personal evil, e.g. burglary, robbery, etc. Structural evil endangers us. Our economy relies too much on the financial sector. Under the

recent financial crisis all over the world, we feel our vulnerability in the global village. Our economy cannot be listed amongst those most seriously damaged. However, the crisis has an impact on us collectively at a social-psychological level. Our relatively higher frequency of naming the global crisis as “Financial Tsunami” reflects the impact. Hongkongers have great fear of this economic flooding, by which the text has an echo on our glocal anxiety.

Does the text only function as an echo? While Mt 24:40-42 illustrate risk negligence, Mt 24:43-44 may put an emphasis on risk management. Normally, risk management means loss avoidance or damage control. At first glance, loss or damage refers to flood, separation or burglary in the text. Then the problem arises: Why does the text make an analogy of the Son of Man’s arrival (a positive event at least from the Christians’ point of view) with these destructive images? Whoever belongs to one of the beneficiaries from the Roman political economic system, he or she may conform to the dominant ideology uncritically for the sake of risk management. Finally, he or she will experience loss at the time of the Lord’s arrival. Unless he or she stayed awake for the awaiting of the Son of Man, the antithesis to the Roman imperial ideology, he or she will be the losers at the final stage. For Hongkongers, risk management means keeping alert to one’s own properties and investments. However, the text alerts us: the Son of Man can act as if a thief against our possessions. To avoid this, now we need to discern who the “thief” in the world capitalism is. Whoever plays the capitalistic game unfairly, he or she is the “thief” against others’ possessions. Furthermore, is the game structure of world capitalism itself a “thief” in the Third World?

In short, Hong Kong middle-class churches exist in a risk society, together with other Hongkongers. Global Financial Tsunami, especially glocal “Hong Kong Lehman Brothers Crisis”, brings worries to numerous Hongkongers. We should echo our neighbors’ anxiety. Even more important, we need to reflect on how economic globalization takes the act of burglary against millions and millions of Third World neighbors.

4.3 *Contextual Reading of Mt 24:45-25:30: Actions and Reactions to Glocalization Problems*

Similar to the three similes, the three parables – “the parable of the faithful” (Mt 24:45-51), “the parable of the ten bridesmaids” (Mt 25:1-13) and “the parable of the three servants” (Mt 25:14-30) also have their own coherencies: absence of the host. All of them show the necessity of preparedness during the awaiting of the master or the bridegroom. The text calls for human actions in the interim period. Alternative life philosophies are juxtaposed for the comparison of their destinies. In aid of implicit speech-act force, all three parables urge every audience or reader to opt for his or her own mode of living. In the Roman society, most Matthean community members belonged to the lower class such as slaves and maids. Even so, the text reminds them their freedom despite the limitation, either faithful or wicked (Mt 24:45 vs. 24:48), wise or foolish (Mt 25:2b vs. 25:2a), trustworthy or lazy (Mt 25:21, 23 vs. 25:26). At last, their final appraisals will be given by the coming Lord rather than their earthly hosts. Modern middle class in Hong Kong can definitely enjoy far greater freedom than those ancient slaves. In a pluralistic Hong Kong society, everyone can pursue his or her own lifestyle. Nonetheless, the text speaks to us: we must lead a responsible life in a glocalized society.

Comparing the first parable “the faithful or unfaithful slave” with the second parable “the ten bridesmaids”, both (wicked) slaves and (foolish) bridesmaids encounter risk due to unpredictability of the host’s arrival time. On the one hand, the texts dealt with a problem of

the earliest Christian communities, i.e. the uncertain time of Parousia. On the other hand, they handled a dilemma between freedom and responsibility. Ancient slaves pursued or even fought for their freedom. Frequently, they experienced no freedom to do (or not to do) whatever they like. Life of Roman slavery or lower class was neither before-hand calculable nor fully controllable by oneself. In spite of lack of freedom, the two texts warned them that they should keep in their mind a persisting responsibility, which was accountable not only to their earthly host, but also to the divine one (cf. Mt 25:13). Unlike those ancient slaves, nowadays Hongkongers enjoy our own autonomy. Regardless of autonomy, a persisting commitment is still what we generally lack of. One-off economic behavior (for instance, using disposable utensils, upgrading electronic devices in a very short period, and so on) characterizes Hong Kong culture. Are we aware how ecologically unfriendly our one-off glocal behavior is? Responsible commitment in terms of earth sustainability should not be one-off, but persisting.

Next, let us compare the second parable with the third one. Both (foolish) bridesmaids and (lazy) servants are under risk because of unpredictability of the degree of preparedness. As a result, both parties had too few in preparations. Undoubtedly, roman slaves were very vulnerable to punishment, due to the inestimable demand of their earthly hosts. In spite of this, they had no right of excusing their own inactiveness. In fact, the texts dealt with how the earliest Christian communities prepared for the Parousia. The Matthean community should be very enthusiastic for preparing the coming of the divine host. Nowadays, do Hongkongers also show essential zealously in preserving earth sustainability?

The above-mentioned discussions illustrate how the three parables give challenges to Hongkongers, i.e. persisting responsibility and essential zealously for the benefits of earth sustainability. Now, we turn our questioning to the texts.

In the third parable, the “talanton” (τάλαντον) can be interpreted in association with economic activities. The association is obvious when the master queried why the slave did not invest his money with the bankers for the purpose of earning interest (Mt 25:27). In this parable, the unbalanced distribution and reward (i.e. five, two, and one talents) intend to motivate the reader to be faithful to the master. The apparent result is: the rich becomes richer and the poor becomes poorer, which in turns support the prosperity theology. Literally speaking, this parable seems to justify wealth accumulation or to reinforce the mechanism of economic globalization. This kind of capitalistic interpretation however covers up the dark side of glocalization.

In fact, the parable is not really attractive to modern readers particularly Hongkongers, for there are no true rewards; the master was the only gainer of the capital and interest. What the first two servants got after their faithful work were just more and more obligations without gaining more payment. In a contextual reading, the case would be quite similar to the experience of nowadays Hongkongers: the workers become ever more overloaded or need to work overtime but their wages keep decreasing. What Hongkongers experience are not any incentives for recognizing our contributions, but just an excuse of a structural exploitation from those wealthy entrepreneurs. Capitalistic game rules legitimate such kind of exploitations. In contrast, a contextual reading sympathizes with the third servant, i.e. the servant with one talent. He is as if a Hongkonger who is not as competitive as other workers and is then fired from his job for poor performance.

In the first parable, rewarding the faithful slave with more obligations may be perceived as another evidence of the exploitation (Mt 24:47). Furthermore, in Mt 24:49, Hongkongers see the wicked slave beating his fellow slaves. The parable does not provide enough information for further interpretation. But the slave's awareness of the delay of his master seems to be a crucial point (Mt 24:48). We cannot explain his psychological change, but he definitely has no right of his act. Only his master owns the right of doing this act at that time. In other words, he performs a role of master. If such an interpretation is feasible, it reflects also one of our glocalization problems. Middle-class employers are subconsciously abusing their foreign domestic helpers in Hong Kong, when they perform the role of an employer. News about foreign domestic helpers being emotionally, physically or even sexually abused can sometimes be heard.

Last but not least, the master of the last parable has never concerned from where the other two servants got their interest, or more precisely, who would be the debtors of the bankers. We could imagine, the debtors should be those who were in need of money, and most probably, they were the peasants. Originally, the peasants hope to get rid of their poverty and so they became debtors. But the social-historical vicious cycle was: the peasants often could not escape the poverty merely because of their debt. From this perspective, we may construct a critique on the structural evil of the political economy.

4.4 Contextual Reading of Mt 25:31-46: From Glocalization Problems to Globalization Care

Sin of omission (or so-called sin of indifference) in a risk society equates to the keynote of "the story of the sheep and the goats at the last judgment" (Mt 25:31-46). However, in the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the story, Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) rewrote a short novel, *Where Love Is, God Is* (1885) based on it. The short novel cites "I was a hungered, and you gave me meat: I was thirsty, and you gave me drink: I was a stranger, and you took me in" (Mt 25:35) and "Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these brothers, you did it unto me" (Mt 25:40) without its counterpart, i.e. Mt 25:41-45. Though the author highlights successfully the imminent presence of Jesus as reward to the righteous, the sin of omission unfortunately lost sight during the history of reception. If the sin of omission was not the keynote, it would be a redundancy in the Matthean passage. Furthermore, Tolstoy's imminent presence of Jesus can be understood as a positive reinforcement to the righteous, while the Matthean separation of the sheep from the goats in the last judgment condemns those who show apathy to others. Noteworthy is that those being condemned are not the evil-doers, but only indifferent to the needy.

As global villagers, Hongkongers may learn from the story to beware of the sin of omission towards our neighbors all over the world. We cannot presume that every Hongkonger will be encouraged to do charity by seeing the fate of the sheep or the punishment of the goats. The awareness of the sin of omission summons us for a moral conscience towards the glocal losers and the global victims.

5 CONCLUSION AND CONTEXTUAL REFLECTIONS

In Mt 24:1-35, Jesus criticizes the materialistic Temple in light of obvious, eschatological signs. Does the canonical text not criticize Hong Kong middle-class churches from paying too much attention on our "Temple" (e.g. church buildings, church growth, and so on) but too little concern on global trends? Today, the traditional apocalyptic discourses should be

upgraded to empirical, scientific forecasts, with religious concerns always in sight. If Hongkongers may have any standpoint in world capitalism, let us stand by those global victims! For their good sake, we should keep earth sustainability in mind. It is a secularized concept of the Parousia. The Parousia does not occur yet. Is the disciples' ideologically critical question concerning the End also meaningful for Hong Kong middle-class churches? If our answer is no, does it mean that we are ideologically blind? Should global sustainability not be discussed at higher priority of our church agenda? Should the dark side of the economic globalization not be unmasked amongst us?

Noteworthy, Mt 24:36-44 is not talking about the poor, but those who have properties (Mt 24:43) and lead a stable life (Mt 24:38, 40, 41). In modern case, they are more or less equated to the middle class. Like those figures in the text, the middle class lives in a society with hidden risks everywhere and every time. Like other Hongkongers, Hong Kong middle-class churches have the same fear of Financial Tsunami (i.e. the modern flood). That's why we play the game of risk management (i.e. alert of "burglary") like the First World. Our end justifies our means: we need to maintain our churches' financial sources abundant, or at least stable. Throughout the past, we have already learnt well the survival tactics of playing the global investment game. When we have no reflection on the dark side of the world capitalism, the Son of Man will come to us, as if he is a thief. In the modern world, the metaphor can proclaim an ironic warning to those who plunder the Third World as if an act of burglary of others' homeland.

How do Hong Kong middle class churches act and react to the glocalization problems? Traditionally, we prefer the teaching of stewardship (Mt 25:14-30), which in turn make us submissive to the capitalistic game rules. Other Christian financial experts may take an aggressive approach on the interpretation of the text. This approach legitimates the investment activities of our churches or individual Christians. However, we seldom echo to the structural evil resulting over workload and overtime problems. Academic institutions should be subsidized and professionals should be teamed up for doing critical researches on and against the dark sides of world capitalism. But churches show very little interest on the reflection of the existing political economy. Undoubtedly, churches, like the world, sometimes exploit our employees too.

To a certain extent, Hong Kong middle class churches can be proud of our involvements in numerous local, regional and worldwide social welfares. These contributions should not be neglected, but Mt 25:31-46 reminds us from another perspective. Are there any shadows in our glocalised Hong Kong or in other parts of the global village, to which our churches have seldom paid attention? If we do not outreach those glocal losers or global victims, are we committing the sin of omission? If we neglect their needs or marginalize them, does it mean that our social contribution serves only as a window dressing function for the economic globalization ideology?

With the alternative contextual teaching of the Matthean Apocalypse, Hong Kong middle-class churches can be revitalized as one of the proactive forces of social change in this glocalised society and even her motherland - China, which is economically growing but still in a societal mess. Indeed this Apocalypse as a whole echoes felt needs and emotional insecurity of the Hong Kong's bourgeois society and middle-class churches. We are suffering from the economic globalization and glocalization. Unfortunately, we are also "left", "evil", "foolish", "lazy" and "cursed", but not because our beings are intrinsically so. Instead, we will be labeled in this way, if we are still uncritical towards the world capitalism, unprepared

for any reformation or even revolution and immobilized to be an ideology critical force in the glocalized context. Finally, if we keep unchanged before the “eschaton”, we will experience “double sufferings” (i.e. financial suffering under globalization and conscience suffering of being accused by the suffered Third World).

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