

# COVID-19 and its Impact on the Changing World of Law

21–22 June 2025

On June 21–22, 2025, the Centre for Chinese and Comparative Law, City University of Hong Kong, hosted a conference titled “*COVID-19 and its Impact on the Changing World of Law*” at the Interdisciplinary Multifunction Room (G7603) in the Yeung Kin Man Academic Building. The event brought together renowned legal scholars from Hong Kong SAR, Mainland China, Singapore, Australia, North America, and Europe to discuss the profound legal challenges and opportunities posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The conference was convened by **Professor Liu Qiao**, and its aim was to foster discussions and inspire research on the legal implications of the pandemic, with a view to publishing a special issue in an internationally refereed journal or compiling a comprehensive volume.

## Highlights of the Conference

### Day 1: Opening and Thematic Sessions

The event began with a warm welcome by **Professor Lin Feng**, Dean of the School of Law, and **Professor Wang Jiangyu**, Director of the Centre for Chinese and Comparative Law, who emphasised the importance of interdisciplinary dialogue in addressing pandemic-related legal challenges at this special period. **Professor Lin Feng** particularly highlighted the significance of embracing change and fostering knowledge transfer in this unique era. He noted that the world is experiencing tremendous turbulence, and academics should remain adaptable and proactive in navigating these challenges.

The first day featured four thematic sessions:

#### 1. **Session 1: COVID-19 and Contract Law**

Moderated by **Professor Liu Qiao**, this session examined contract formation, performance, and risk management during the pandemic. Speakers included:

- **Professor Tan Cheng Han** (National University of Singapore) on *Covid-19, Agentic AI and Contract Formation*, emphasizing how the integration of agentic artificial intelligence into contract law could reshape traditional principles of contract formation.
- **Professor Ewan McKendrick** (University of Oxford) on *Dealing with Pandemics: The Role of Express Contractual Terms*. He underscored the importance of drafting special contractual terms to mitigate risks that may arise from unforeseen events, like a world-wide health crisis. His insights offered practical guidance for legal practitioners navigating contract disputes.
- **Professor Leon Trakman** (University of New South Wales) on *Managing Performance Networks in the Pandemic: From Discrete to Relational Contracting*. He stressed the shift from a rigid, discrete and distinct chain of contracts to more dynamic, relational, and interdependent approaches to manage contract performance and expectations amid unforeseen disruptions.

#### 2. **Session 2: COVID-19 and Chinese Contract Law**

Moderated by **Professor Ewan McKendrick**, this session focused on risk allocation and harmonization in Chinese contract law. Speakers included:

- **Professor Xiong Bingwan** (Renmin University) on *Contractual Obligations and Risk Allocation: The Loss Lies Where It Falls or Parties' Duty to Renegotiate* and Share Loss. He emphasized that the similar remedies involving the equitable sharing of losses could apply under quite exceptional circumstances, such as the pandemic.
- **Professor Liu Qiao** (CityUHK) on *Frustration, Force Majeure, and Change of Circumstances in the Chinese Mainland and Hong Kong: Prospects of Harmonization*. He highlighted the differences and potential harmonization of the legal doctrines governing unforeseen disruptions in Mainland China and Hong Kong, offering a comparative lens on legal convergence.
- **Professor Zhao Liang** (University of Southampton) on *COVID-19 in Shipping Disputes and Its Impact on Common Law*. His presentation shed light on the unique challenges, including force majeure and frustration, faced by the shipping industry during the pandemic and the evolving role of common law in resolving such disputes.

### 3. Session 3: COVID-19 Beyond Contract

Moderated by **Professor Leon Trakman**, this session explored broader legal implications of the pandemic, including digitization and dispute resolution. Speakers included:

- **Professor Hang Wu Tang** and **Edward Ti** (Singapore Management University) on *Precipitated by the Pandemic: A Comparative Study of Electronic Wills*. They highlighted how the pandemic accelerated the adoption of electronic wills, raising questions about their validity and the need for their legislative reform in various jurisdictions.
- **Professor Zhao Yun** (The University of Hong Kong) on *The Rise and Development of Online Dispute Resolution in Times of Pandemic*. He emphasized how the pandemic has catalysed the growth of online dispute resolution mechanisms, making justice more accessible while posing challenges related to procedural fairness and security.
- **Professor Tang Zheng** (Wuhan University) on *Post-Pandemic Digitization of Dispute Resolution*. She focused on how the pandemic has accelerated digitization in the legal sector and also the urgent need for updated legislation and translational cooperation to build trust, inclusivity and accountability.

### 4. Session 4: COVID-19 and International Law

Moderated by **Professor Wang Jiangyu**, this session delved into the impact of COVID-19 on international legal frameworks. Speakers included:

- **Professor Andre Janssen** (Radboud University) on *The Impact of COVID-19 on International Sales Contracts*. He analysed how international trade law has been tested during the pandemic, highlighting the inadequacies of existing frameworks in managing supply chain disruptions.
- **Professor Olaf Meyer** (Frankfurt University) on *COVID-19 and UNIDROIT*. He explored how international soft law instruments, like UNIDROIT principles, can promote consistency in addressing contractual challenges across jurisdictions during global crises.
- **Professor Jiang Hao** (Bocconi University) on *Voluntary Commutative Justice: A Unified Theory of Change of Circumstances*. He proposed a unified theoretical framework for addressing changes in circumstances, emphasizing the importance of balancing contractual obligations with fairness during emergencies such as pandemics.

## Day 2: Roundtable on Legal Teaching and Research

The second day featured a roundtable discussion conducted in Chinese, moderated by **Professor Liu Qiao**, on how the pandemic has reshaped legal teaching and research. Speakers included:

- **Professor Liu Qiao** (CityUHK)
- **Professor Tang Zheng** (Wuhan University)
- **Professor Xiong Bingwan** (Renmin University)
- **Professor Zhao Liang** (University of Southampton)
- **Professor Zhao Yun** (The University of Hong Kong)

## Conclusion

The conference concluded with closing remarks by **Professor Liu Qiao**, who expressed heartfelt gratitude to the participants for their valuable contributions and stimulating discussions. The event successfully fostered interdisciplinary dialogue, with the expectation of further significant research outputs.



