

From Colonialism to Communism

The Christian Church's Response to Hong Kong's 1997 Handover

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Abstract

This paper explores the case study of how Christianity has shaped the ethical outlooks of Hong Kong around the 1997 handover. It addresses the question of the role of theology and ethics in the public sphere, especially how Christianity informs political realities in Hong Kong. The Christian Church's varied response raises the question of how the Church in Hong Kong can improve its approach to socio-political issues and interactions with the post-colonial Hong Kong government. This paper argues for Hong Kong theologians to develop a theology that is most suitable for the Hong Kong context because its decolonisation process is unique compared to other former colonies. The effects of Hong Kong's colonisation and subsequent decolonisation on the Christian Church and society at large are discussed, followed by an analysis of the Church's attempts to react to the handover, pointing out several different approaches, such as migrating to the Western world, perceiving China as a mission field, and participating in social demonstrations. This paper acknowledges the heavy borrowing of foreign theology, and the pragmatism of the Hong Kong people, which leads to a lack of systematic teaching on how Christians should interact with socio-political issues. There is a need for the Church to take a more critical role in society, which requires collaboration with local theologians to shape a theological view that is suitable for Hong Kong Christians and society. Processing politics through the Christian ethical outlook allows for a dialogue with the government for the Christian Church to perform its prophetic role in society.



In 1997, Hong Kong's sovereignty was transferred from Britain to China. How did Hong Kong churches respond to this change? What is a thoughtful, Christian way to respond to this change of sovereignty? The Christian Church's response to the handover of Hong Kong around 1997 brings forth the question of how the Church in Hong Kong can improve its approach to socio-political issues and interactions with the post-colonial Hong Kong government. This paper discusses the church-state relationship in Hong Kong before and after the handover, and I will interpret the theological responses of the Church in two ways: those who argue against the Chinese government on socio-political issues and those who focus on personal piety and moral issues. Through this paper, I analyse and critique the Protestant response to work within the system and the approach of standing out of it as a prophet.

I argue for Hong Kong theologians to develop a theology that is most suitable for the Hong Kong context because its decolonisation process is unique compared to other former colonies. Unlike many other former colonies, Hong Kong has not made a transition from colonial to post-colonial, but rather, it continues to be under the rule of another, that is, China. The extensive borrowing of foreign theologians' ideologies and applying it to Hong Kong cannot function as a Hong Kong theology, even with thoughtful contextualisation.¹ Many regions in the world are without self-determining powers,² and with the possibility for them to transition to another phase, such as Hong Kong from Britain to China, the Hong Kong Christian Church's response could exist as a reference for other regions, making for an interesting academic comparison.

Christianity came into Hong Kong around the same time as the British colonisers and enjoyed the prestige of a close relationship with the British Hong Kong colonial government.³ Over the century, even while Christians only made up a small proportion of Hong Kong's community, because of its influence on a structural level, such as in education, medicine, and social welfare issues in Hong Kong,⁴ Christian rhetoric has been pervasive even in this non-confessionally Christian state.

The colonialism and decolonisation of Hong Kong are unique. The Treaty of Nanjing in 1842 ceded Hong Kong Island to Britain. In 1984, the Sino-British Joint Declaration stated that, in 1997, Hong Kong's sovereignty would be handed over to China.⁵ In general, Christian colonisers saw themselves as benefiting the colonised by bringing them Western civilisation and Christian faith;

¹ Stephen Carl Pavey, "Envisioning/Embodying Christianity in Hong Kong: Theologies of Power and Crisis," *EBSCO*, accessed October 22, 2016 (dissertation, University of Kentucky, 2005), 127-34.

² United Nations, "Non-Self-Governing Territories," *The United Nations and Decolonization - Committee of 24*, accessed March 23, 2021, <https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/nsqt>.

³ Kim-kwong Chan, "Multi-Faith Dynamics in Hong Kong: From Pluralism to Politicization," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 19, no. 1 (2021): 27-41.

⁴ Norman Etherington, ed., *Missions and Empire* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 261-84.

⁵ Henry Rowold, "The Reunification of Hong Kong with China: Why? What's at Stake? What about the Church?," *Concordia Journal* (1998): 53-62.

this racial and cultural arrogance produced the anticolonial reaction during the twentieth century.⁶ As Stephen Chu argues, ‘Hong Kong is a good example to illustrate the limitations of postcolonial discourse in the context of Hong Kong.’⁷ Hong Kong does not fit classical patterns of colonialism because the colonial government involvement in Hong Kong has had minimal intervention since the 1970s, giving society a sense of openness and opportunity compared to the post-handover Hong Kong.⁸ The *laissez-faire* policy of the colonial government and social non-interventionism reduced the potential for conflict in a city with a population of ninety-five percent ethnic Chinese.⁹

Due to the colonial past, Hong Kong churches held prominent positions in society, enjoying a close relationship with the Hong Kong government because of the special status of the Anglican Church in British politics.¹⁰ Although the Christian community makes up less than ten percent of the population, their disproportionate influence in Hong Kong enabled Christians and Hong Kong churches to initiate social actions to influence government policies for the betterment of society.¹¹ For example, the Church was instrumental in supporting various social welfare structures, including schools and hospitals.¹² In providing social services, the Church had always strove to consider social justice in terms of facilitating dignified living and social welfare conditions for the local people. However, the Christian Church’s unique status in colonial Hong Kong was challenged when the transfer of Hong Kong’s sovereignty came about in 1997.

The transference of Hong Kong’s sovereignty is unique: Hong Kong was not heading towards decolonisation, but re-colonisation, and Hong Kong’s future was never in the hands of the locals, yet the changes created an identity crisis for them.¹³ The Sino-British Joint Declaration stated there would be one country, two systems. Hong Kong would retain much of its economic, political, and social structures, deferring to the Chinese government in Beijing only for matters of defence and national security.¹⁴ On the whole, the Hong Kong people exhibited a seemingly unexplainable

⁶ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Reformation to the Present Day*, vol. 2 (New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 2010), 6534-42, Kindle edition.

⁷ Stephen Yiu-wai Chu, “Brand Hong Kong: Asia’s World City as Method?” *Visual Anthropology* 24 (2011): 46-58.

⁸ Rowold, “The Reunification of Hong Kong,” 53-62.

⁹ John M. Carroll, “Colonialism and Collaboration: Chinese Subjects and the Making of British Hong Kong,” *China Information* 12, no. 1/2 (1997): 12-33.

¹⁰ Shun-hing Chan, “Christian Social Discourse in Postcolonial Hong Kong,” *Postcolonial Studies* 10, no. 4 (2007): 447-66.

¹¹ Lung-kwong Lo, “Hong Kong,” in *Christianities in Asia*, ed. Peter Phan (Singapore: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 183-8.

¹² Chiu-wan Lam, “A Concise History of Social Work in the UK,” in *What Is the Value of Social Work? A Deep Reflection of Professionalism* (translation from Chinese), ed. Chiu-wan Lam and Chi-keung Chu (Hong Kong: Aradia Press, 2014), 184-205.

¹³ Chan, “Christian Social Discourse,” 447-66.

¹⁴ Chung-wah Kwong, *The Public Role of Religion in Post-colonial Hong Kong: An Historical Overview of*

sense of apathy and an attitude of indifference towards the handover, yet the post-colonial experience of the Hong Kong people is marked by anxiety, ambivalence, and uncertainty.¹⁵ The identity of the Hong Kong people is highly hybridised: being culturally Chinese and yet pragmatically British. Thus, there is both a strong sense of identification with China and a fear of being nationally Chinese. Being the periphery in vast and powerful China, creates difficulty for the Hong Kong people in locating themselves and fostering their own cultural identity which, at best, is still in the making and will remain fluid. In this process, there are significant dilemmas: the inability to assimilate to the Chinese culture and, simultaneously, no option to cling to the legacy of its colonial past.¹⁶

As a result, the Church was hugely affected by the transfer of power. After the handover, the historically close ties between Hong Kong's Church and the government loosened because China, as a communist state, approaches religion cautiously.¹⁷ The Basic Law, drafted by representatives from China and Hong Kong jointly after the Sino-Britain Joint Declaration, states that 'the government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall not restrict the freedom of religious belief, interfere in the internal affairs of religious organisations, or restrict religious activities which do not contravene the law of the Region.'¹⁸ The Church is wary of the wording of the law, as it is the National People's Congress of China who has the authority to determine what it means to 'contravene the law of the Region.' China tolerates churches in Hong Kong as secular charitable organisations since there is a legacy of colonial church involvement in running schools and other charitable organisations that provide social welfare. Many Hong Kong Christian leaders have wanted to redefine the church-state relationship since the handover, and questions arise as to whether the Church needs to be within the state and work with it, or whether the Church needs to stand apart from the state and be critical of it.¹⁹

Different responses arise in different denominations due to the different teachings of social involvement and their different concepts of identity. For example, Catholics and mainline churches have social directives for the entire denomination, even if the directives are not necessarily studied by the laity, changing the entire conversation within the Church and the approaches to social

Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and Christianity (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2002), 135-40.

¹⁵ Pui-lan Kwok, "Response to Archie Lee's Paper on 'Biblical Interpretation in Postcolonial Hong Kong,'" *Biblical Interpretation* 7, no. 2 (1999): 182-6.; Archie C. C. Lee, "Returning to China: Biblical Interpretation in Postcolonial Hong Kong," *Biblical Interpretation* 7, no. 2 (1999): 156-73.

¹⁶ Wai-luen Kwok, *Self-Defense or Social Concern? The Social and Political Participation of Hong Kong Church* (Hong Kong, SAR: China Alliance Press, 2014), 98-106.

¹⁷ Nai-wang Kwok, *Hong Kong After 1997: The First 1000 Days* (Hong Kong, SAR: Hong Kong Christian Institute and Asian Human Rights Commission, 2000), 142-64.

¹⁸ Rowold, "The Reunification of Hong Kong," 53-62.

¹⁹ Kwok, *Hong Kong After 1997*, 142-64.

activism.²⁰ In general, Catholic and mainline Protestant churches wish to uphold the principle of one country, two systems and have repeatedly spoken out on the issue of political reform.²¹ Most Catholic laypeople expect the Church to take up a prophetic role and advocate for justice and morality in politics. This prophetic role is to speak God's truth into society, and because of this role, the Church must stand apart from the world to be able to speak into it from a unique, God-given light. The Catholic Church will have to find channels to establish warmer relations, to lessen suspicion of the Chinese government, before the Church can begin to effectively serve the Hong Kong community in its prophetic role in the post-colonial period.²²

In comparison, Protestant Evangelical churches, in general, emphasise working within the structure provided by the government. Their teachings are more inwardly focused on their personal experience and engaging society by taking up a few personal or moral issues and generally avoiding societal structural issues.²³ The laity rarely expects ethical and social guidance on public and contemporary issues from the church leadership of Evangelical churches and, at times, resent such teachings should they arise.²⁴ Unlike the Catholic Church, Evangelical churches attempt to foster a strong relationship with the government without carrying the baggage of China-Vatican relations, allowing them to continue their evangelical work not only in Hong Kong, but also in China.²⁵ In either case, many churches in Hong Kong have become an interest group due to their tremendous power and privileges, as opposed to many churches in other regions. This could be because some Hong Kong churches exist to fight for their own privileges and not the rights of the masses, which could be one of the reasons that has resulted in them losing their distinct identity and prophetic voice.²⁶

Decolonisation is a time where a nation struggles to find identity in new circumstances. With the sovereignty of China, any actions, or lack thereof, express a political stance of Hong Kong churches.²⁷ As there is no way for the Church to avoid politics, how can Hong Kong churches

²⁰ Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong, “社會訓導文獻 [Social Directives Doctrine],” *Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong*, accessed March 20, 2019, <https://catholic.org.hk/%E7%A4%BE%E6%9C%83%E8%A8%93%E5%B0%8E%E6%96%87%E7%8D%BB-2/>.

²¹ Chan, “Christian Social Discourse,” 447-66.

²² Beatrice Leung, “Church-State Relations in the Decolonisation Period: Hong Kong and Macau,” *Religion, State & Society* 26, no. 1 (1998): 17-30.

²³ Chan, “Christian Social Discourse,” 447-66.

²⁴ Raymond Fung and Keith Tennis, “The Struggle to Speak: The Christian Church in a Time of Historic Change in Hong Kong,” *American Baptist Quarterly* 15 (1996): 120-34.

²⁵ Chan, “Christian Social Discourse,” 447-66.

²⁶ Kwok, *Hong Kong After 1997*, 142-64.

²⁷ Fung and Tennis, “The Struggle to Speak,” 120-34.

thoughtfully critique the socio-political situation while being in dialogue with authorities? Although most Hong Kong churches do not enjoy the privilege they had with the colonial government after the handover, this may be a blessing in disguise, as the generally conservative and inward-looking church must re-examine its own identity and reposition itself as Jesus would with the oppressed. The Church must try to reinterpret its faith in God, from which derives real-life implications.²⁸ I would argue that, following Jesus' example, Christians are to care for the poor. To adequately care for the poor, Christians need to consider social justice. Without doing so, Christians cannot fulfil an essential aspect of Jesus' teaching. This is a weak point of Hong Kong Christian churches because of the long history of pragmatism and capitalism in Hong Kong – a history that seems to promote superficiality and vanity. When faced with an undemocratic and, at times, authoritarian regime, Christian churches need to choose: do they play the role of 'prophet' in accordance with their religious principles or keep silent to preserve their organisational interests?²⁹ This is not to say the two are necessarily mutually exclusive since church and culture interact in complex ways. H. Richard Niebuhr, in his work *Christ and Culture*, suggests that there are five possible models of how Christians might engage in culture, that is: 1. Christ against culture; 2. Christ of culture; 3. Christ above culture; 4. Christ and culture in paradox and; 5. Christ the transformer of culture.³⁰ I would refrain from suggesting that either way is a correct way, but rather, that how Christ can be seen engaging with culture is necessarily complex. Moreover,

Not only does God in Christ take people as they are: He takes them in order to transform them into what He wants them to be. Along with the indigenising principle which makes his faith a place to feel at home, the Christian inherits the pilgrim principle, which whispers to him that he has no abiding city and warns him that to be faithful to Christ will put him out of step with his society; for that society never existed, in East or West, ancient time or modern, which could absorb the word of Christ painlessly into the system.³¹

As Andrew Walls suggests, standing outside a culture prophetically and standing inside it redemptively requires a complex and delicate balance for Christians and Christian communities. It is my suggestion that the Protestant Christian approach in Hong Kong is unbalanced in that it needs, at this time in history, to be standing more outside of the culture in order to address it prophetically.

Although Christian churches may be keeping silent because they want to preserve their organisational interests, they may also believe this is an effective way to spread the gospel indigenously in their culture, since co-operating with the government can lead to a trusting

²⁸ Kwok, *Hong Kong After 1997*, 142-64.

²⁹ Chan, "Christian Social Discourse," 447-66.

³⁰ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1975).

³¹ Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: T & T Clark, 1996), 18-20.

relationship, which in turn creates more room for further evangelical and almsgiving work. This hope for expansion compels Hong Kong churches to cooperate with the government to gain access to China. Another reason could be due to the situation they faced with the impending handover determined in 1984, combined with witnessing the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989. Hong Kong churches had to adapt to their unsettling wariness and uncertainty of the upcoming political situation in Hong Kong. They did this by seeing China as a mission field. They attempted to spread the Gospel in China with the hope that the power of the Gospel would be able to work within the country and influence the Chinese government so that when the handover proceeded, Hong Kong would be reunifying with a somewhat Christianised country.³²

However, while this approach has its merits, it does not sufficiently address the current political context facing Christians in Hong Kong. After the handover, Hong Kong is still under the rule of a communist-socialist country, and thus, the highly pressurised way of ruling differs greatly from the British *laissez-faire* style. This causes Hong Kong people to be highly suspicious of the Chinese government-appointed Hong Kong government. The attempt to implement Article 23 of the Basic Law, which affects freedom of speech and freedom of association and assembly, led to several approaches from the Church in their relationship with the government.³³ Under these circumstances, working within the system can be less effective than standing outside of it, since by standing outside of the system Christians can take on the role of watchdogs and pressure groups rather than legislators and government officials. Catholics in Hong Kong have taken this more prophetic approach of 'passive compliance.' They tolerate individual Catholics participating in the regime in a personal capacity, yet the Catholic Church does not participate in the political regime but instead continues to object to the government and does not endorse the decisions of individual Catholics who wish to participate in the system. Most Protestants, on the other hand, would participate in the existing Chief Executive election system by representing the religious sector, however unrepresentative of the Hong Kong people for whom the system is set up.³⁴ Although there are ambiguous and overlapping approaches to socio-political issues, these are views held by individual Christian Church leaders and academic theologians rather than a denomination directive or instruction. Moreover, these views are rarely taught or directed towards the congregants, resulting in confusion about how to thoughtfully approach socio-political debates and arguments

³² Ka-lun Leung and Fuk-tsang Ying, *Weary Yet Passionate: Discussions of Hong Kong and Chinese Churches 1* (Hong Kong, SAR: Alliance Bible Seminary, 1997), 101-11.

³³ Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, "The Basic Law," *The Basic Law*, last modified July 17, 2020, accessed February 26, 2017. <http://www.basiclaw.gov.hk/en/basiclawtext/index.html>.

³⁴ Justin Kin-hung Tse, "Religious Politics in Pacific Space: Grounding Cantonese Protestant Theologies in Secular Civil Societies," *Circle UBC*, accessed March 2, 2017 (dissertation, University of British Columbia, 2013), 488-519.

on a personal and a church-wide level. In a sermon on 6th July 2014, Archbishop Emeritus Paul Kwong ‘poked fun at young protesters arrested after a Chater Road sit-in on 2 July 2014, who complained that they could not eat or use the toilet while in detention. He mocked them by asking why they did not “bring along their Filipino maids.”’³⁵ The church leaders tend to react to social issues without guiding their congregants in the thought process, and as a result, their actions reflect a scattered array of responses rather than a thoughtful, collective process of theological reflection, making it difficult for the congregants to learn how to think through socio-political issues systematically with a Christian lens.

The laypersons are informed only by snippets of personal stances projected by the church leaders in specific situations, and as such, it is difficult for them to formulate a holistic Christian view towards socio-political issues. The reason for the Church’s lack of direction for laypersons and lack of depth in reflections in theology and politics in Hong Kong—reflections that would lead to an indigenous Christianity suitable for post-colonial Hong Kong—is partly due to the emigration of many church leaders and Christian elites right after the announcement of the Sino-British Joint Declaration.³⁶ The mass emigration was triggered by the fear of the unknown: they did not know how China would exercise their sovereignty in Hong Kong, and thus many assumed the worst and fled from their homeland. In their absence, the new leaders who were forced to step up were relatively inexperienced. Due to this inexperience, plus the additional work due to the absence of experienced pastors, Church leaders—clergy and lay alike—had less time to reflect theologically or map out directions and priorities of action for the whole church.³⁷

I would argue that the Church must demonstrate its concerns for society in its prophetic role, yet currently, the Church takes a problem-oriented rather than a vision-oriented approach in expressing its concerns for socio-political issues. This approach is not helpful for the Church to grow in maturity in its faith. Given the unjust and demoralising forces in the political, economic, social, and cultural spheres, as well as the oppressive, enslaving, and damaging institutions, the Church, previously focused on preaching a Christian faith that is only personal and ahistoric, needs to spiritually maintain its discerning and analytical powers.³⁸ At this juncture, Hong Kong churches must be involved in the building up of civic society through demonstrating appropriate and specific

³⁵ Lap-yan Kung, ‘The Umbrella Movement and *Kairos*: The Church’s Theological Encounter with a Political Movement,’ in Tse, Justin K. H., and Jonathan Y. Tan, eds. *Theological Reflections on the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 107-130.

³⁶ Leung and Ying, *Weary Yet Passionate*.

³⁷ Kai-chi Leung, “香港第一課 [A First Lesson on Hong Kong],” in *Voices*, vol. 13 (Taipei, TW: Spring Hill Publishing, 2020), 82-96.

³⁸ Kwok, *Self-Defense or Social Concern?*, 1-5; 107-19.

attention to communal moral issues: freedom, democracy, the development of human rights, and the rule of law.³⁹

A wave of emigrants returned to Hong Kong once they saw the tentative stability that has occurred post-handover. However, because they have the security of citizenship abroad by having migrated to a Western country and can leave Hong Kong permanently whenever they choose, they may lack the same incentive to think deeply, theologically, and politically about Hong Kong and its churches compared to lifelong Hong Kong residents. For example, a Protestant church located close to the Central Government Offices has congregants who would fall under the category of middle-class repatriates holding nationalities of Western countries and would consider themselves removed from the current political situation; they see protests and demonstrations, such as the Occupy Central Movement⁴⁰ and the Umbrella Movement,⁴¹ as an inconvenience instead of a chance for them to engage thoughtfully and theologically on whether each social action is Christian or otherwise. Many Hong Kong churches pride themselves on being mainly made up of middle-class repatriates, and it is difficult for the Church to criticise the establishment when it has so much to gain from the government and its congregants having an escape route should religious freedom in Hong Kong be suppressed.⁴²

The concept of 'Christ as Lord' informs Christians in their daily lives to care for the poor, which informs social justice, which informs political stances, which informs the Church's position towards the government. Christians have responsibilities both as citizens of a nation and as members of a church. If the government forgets its responsibility to the people, Christians as citizens have a duty to call officials to account. The dual identities of Christians as members of a church and citizens of a nation do not contradict each other, but rather the former supports the latter.⁴³ Key figures to whom the government will listen and trust are critically needed. For these reasons, Hong Kong churches need to map out their agenda for social development.

State and church separation does not mean the Church cannot think politically and socially because, by virtue of being in a society, the Church participates in both. Dialogue with anyone, given all parties have the opportunity to define terms used to enable a levelled ground for communication, is never wrong, and every small change is a step forward. It is difficult, if not impossible, to expect a governmental structure to change completely overnight. This supports the

³⁹ Chan, "Christian Social Discourse," 447-66.

⁴⁰ Occupy Central with Love and Peace Movement, 'Manifesto,' http://oclp.hk/index.php?route=occupy/book_detail&book_id=11.

⁴¹ Bureau of East Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State, *Evaluating the Impact of the 'Umbrella Movement'*, 3 December 2014.

⁴² Kwok, *Hong Kong After 1997*, 142-64.

⁴³ Chan, "Christian Social Discourse," 447-66.

argument that the Church needs to think thoroughly and deeply, acting within the constraints of the current structure, to affect its influence on society. More importantly, current events highlight the Church's responsibility to educate the congregants to think maturely about how their faith interacts with society.

More than a decade after the handover, during a time when Hong Kong society is perceived to be spiralling downwards, there have been continual reflections on the city's unique socio-political situation. As a result, many younger academic theologians who are trained both locally and internationally are rising to evoke discussions of public theology and political theology in Hong Kong.⁴⁴ They contest the role of the Christian Church in relation to secular public space—a tool of the state or a voice of the people—and they attempt to develop a theological method to use the language of the Church for secular public discourse, which was previously avoided for the sake of a superficial church and state separation.⁴⁵

Some may argue that there is no indigenous Hong Kong theology because people are simply citing Karl Barth or Dietrich Bonhoeffer. There are those who criticise Hong Kong theology for being colonised by foreign theology that is abstract, remote, and makes little sense to the everyday Hong Kong people, not specifically addressing the needs of Hong Kong and making it exclusively for theologians. Some may also argue that the foreign theological stance perceives itself as teaching a universal theological position, yet the position originates from the West, and hence it is able to deal with Western contexts more capably, and less so with Hong Kong's unique context.⁴⁶ However, Christian theology is always, in a sense, culturally foreign, as the church is both always incarnated in an indigenous culture, and also always a pilgrim of this world that calls for the world to repent.⁴⁷ After all, the Bible is a translation from Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts based on stories from the Hebraic culture. How is the culture from the Bible any closer to the Chinese culture with British colonial influence in Hong Kong than it is to, say, a church in Los Angeles? It is not surprising that Chinese Christianity borrows Western Christianity to express its culture. Why would Hong Kongers take away the ladder on which they stand? The point is not to create

⁴⁴ It is possible to challenge why Hong Kong academics who have studied elsewhere are suitable voices in producing indigenous theology. However, in Hong Kong's transient context, studying abroad is rather commonplace, especially for theologians. Moreover, even those who have completed their entire education in Hong Kong would have been taught by those who studied abroad. Additionally, university as a contemporary institution is an inherently product of Western Enlightenment, so the argument that those who have studied abroad automatically disqualifies from speaking into this context would not hold. Hong Kongers are usually proud of being from a place where 'East meets West,' so rather than attempting to take out the Western influence in Hong Kong, it is all the more important to consider how Hong Kongers have made the Western influences indigenous.

⁴⁵ Tse, "Religious Politics in Pacific Space," 488-519.

⁴⁶ Pavey, "Envisioning/Embodying Christianity in Hong Kong," 127-34.

⁴⁷ Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, 18-20.

ideological purity by separating what is Western from what is Chinese, but rather, to acknowledge that different theologies and their underlying epistemologies come from certain contexts, recognising each's structural location within the disciplinary history and academic institutions.⁴⁸ It will take time and generations of indigenous Hong Kong Christians before thoughtful indigenous theological reflections manifest and, at present, it is through reflexivity and transparency on the genealogies of theories and epistemologies that we can push forward.

The purpose of developing an indigenous theology is for Hong Kong to be able to reflect and convey its inherent theological views. Meanwhile, working within the system is necessary in engaging with the public sphere because the current narrative, such as use of rights language, is shaped by Western Enlightenment, yet Hong Kong has never gone through such a process, and as such these concepts cannot fully express what is happening in Hong Kong. Those who emphasize on the development of an indigenous theology might argue that working within the institutional framework of a country is more indigenising than standing outside of the culture as a prophet. Nonetheless, by standing outside these institutions, one is still indigenising Christianity through inculturation, prophesying to a culture to which one belongs. Developing theological views is not necessarily solely reactive to current affairs. Rather, it can also be based on the conviction that the Church's role is to teach their congregants how to think about socio-political issues through the Christian lens and to form rational arguments and rationally converse with those with different socio-political stances.⁴⁹ The Church is missing opportunities to lead society to think thoughtfully and to engage in conversation as a means of social justice. To develop a thoughtful and coherent indigenous theology, the Church is slowly moving towards working closely with local theologians to engage in thoughtful reflections, grounded in biblical hermeneutics and contextualised theology, from the ground level rather than superimposing Western theologians' work alone.

During the colonial period, the Hong Kong people faced many economic hardships and social tribulations and have collectively developed an 'under the Lion's Rock' mentality, where the people are hardworking and think of themselves as riding in the same boat and together can achieve the Hong Kong version of the American dream. After the handover, the 'Hong Kong dream' has collapsed due to actual and perceived political oppression and financial monopolisation.⁵⁰ How does the Church lead its congregants and exercise its influence in an increasingly distrusting society? First, Christian churches need to further collaborate with local theologians to shape a theological view that is suitable and helpful for Hong Kong society to process socio-political matters through

⁴⁸ Malory Nye, "Decolonizing the Study of Religion," *Open Library of Humanities* 5, no. 1 (2019).

⁴⁹ Tse, "Religious Politics in Pacific Space," 488-519.

⁵⁰ 'Spirit of Lion Rock,' *Radio Television Hong Kong*, 24 Oct. 2014, http://www.liberalstudies.hk/daily_concepts/?word=903. Accessed 9 March 2017.

the Christian lens, establishing a thought system that clarifies long-term issues.⁵¹ Second, Christian churches need to attempt to maintain a dialogue with the government for it to perform its prophetic role in society in a manner that will be heard by intended recipients, the Christian community. Hong Kong may have a minuscule church population, but its undeniable influence on its society may be a paradigmatic presence to the rest of the world at this particular juncture.

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⁵¹ Kwok, *Self-Defense or Social Concern?*, 107-19.

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