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# Stanley Hauerwas and ‘Chan Tai-man’: an analysis of Hong Kong laypeople’s lived theology and Hong Kong theologians’ engagement with Stanley Hauerwas’s political theology from a practical theology perspective

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## ABSTRACT

Hong Kong Christian communities often draw upon theological resources from the West. But can Western theological sources be meaningfully applied to Hong Kong? Western theological sources stem from Western epistemologies, which may not necessarily resonate with the values or cultural assumptions of Hong Kong Christians. The lived experiences of ‘Chan Tai-man,’ a placeholder name for average Hong Kong Christians, can be a source for exploring Hong Kong Christian epistemologies. ‘Chan’s’ lived theology has significance for the field of practical theology in considering how majority world epistemologies can impact the Western world, especially regarding Christianity in individualistic societies. This paper analyses Hong Kong theologians’ engagement with Stanley Hauerwas’s theological convictions and makes a critical comparison to ‘Chan’s’ lived theology. First, the article will address (1) why Hauerwasian theology resonates with Hong Kong theologians and (2) why Hong Kong Hauerwasians think Hauerwas’s ideas would be useful in the Hong Kong context. Second, after explaining the author’s ethnographic research methods, the article will illustrate ‘Chan’s’ lived theology, followed by a comparison between the two approaches. In conclusion, while Hong Kong theologians’ engagement with Hauerwas makes an adequate start, Hong Kong Christian communities’ understanding of political theology will eventually have to be broadened through a critical self-reflection of Hong Kong lived theology.

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## Introduction

It is a sore point for many non-Western academics that Western scholars are seen as theory producers, while the majority world academics are theory consumers or field data providers (Connell 2007, vii–xiv). Hong Kong is no different. Hong Kong Christian communities often draw upon theological resources from the Western world, such as

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Huen Wai Yan (2022, 219–231) in her use of Miroslav Volf in the Hong Kong context. Many Hong Kong scholars have applied Volf to the Hong Kong context, such as Hong Kong's Anglican Archbishop Emeritus Paul Kwong (2012), who quoted Volf's thoughts in *Identity in Community*. However, I have yet to see Western theologians embrace a Hong Kong Chinese theological theory *en masse* in a Western context. This is due to an assumption that the West is somehow culturally neutral and that theories they generate can be universally applied, while the majority world is culture-specific, and their theories would only work in their specific contexts.

A possible issue with using Western theological resources is that they stem from Western epistemologies and contexts, and that may not necessarily resonate with the shared values or cultural assumptions of Hong Kong Christians. Hong Kong Christianity necessarily builds on the work of previous theologians and Christian traditions, especially from the West. It is akin to a ladder we are standing on. While I am not proposing we remove this ladder, perhaps it might help to begin with investigating and understanding this ladder more. Who made it? Where was it made? Do Hong Kong people have the suitable know-how to use this ladder safely, as it was intended to be used?

This paper reflects upon two research projects I conducted over the past five years. I investigated how Hong Kong Christians understand their faith and civic identity, first through the framework proposed by Stanley Hauerwas, an American Methodist theologian and public intellectual (Callahan 2001, 537), then through ethnographic research on the lived theology of Hong Kong Christians. In this paper, I analyse the engagement with Hauerwas's theological convictions among selected Hong Kong theologians and make a critical comparison with the lived theology of 'Chan Tai-man,' a placeholder name for average Hong Kong Christians. This critical comparison reveals that Hong Kong Hauerwasians and 'Chan' both faithfully apply their interpretations of Christian theology in the Hong Kong context. The lived experiences of 'Chan Tai-man' can thus be a source to explore Hong Kong Christian epistemologies.

This paper analyses Hong Kong Christian stories through a practical theology perspective, which can be understood through John Swinton and Harriet Mowat's (2006) definition: finding the primary focus of research not simply as a way of gaining new knowledge, but also enabling new and transformative modes of action. They understand practical theology as being involved in challenging current practices through raising consciousness, so that Christian communities are enabled to move closer towards faithfulness. Swinton and Mowat see their role as mediating between the practices of the Christian faith and the practices of the world. As Todd Whitmore (2019, 2) argues, theology 'itself seek[s] to reenact and instigate others to reenact Jesus the Nazarene the Christ.' As such, the sort of theological reflection I attempt to illustrate of 'Chan Tai-man's' lived theology necessarily has to be done in the midst of the community, what Whitmore calls 'mimetic theology,' with all its mess and contradictions, carrying all the historical and political baggage of the community, rather than in a removed state of theorisation.

### **Why do Hong Kong theologians resonate with Hauerwas?**

The conversation on Hauerwasian theology in Hong Kong's Christian communities coincided roughly with the beginning of the small-scale Occupy Central Movement on 27 March 2013 (Occupy Central with Love and Peace Movement 2017) and the much

larger Umbrella Movement that lasted from 28 September 2014 until 15 December 2014 (Russel 2017) and paralysed strategic areas of Hong Kong for its duration<sup>1</sup> (Kwok 2016, v–vi). Hong Kong theologians, such as Freeman Chi-wai Huen and Andres Tang from the Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary, with a solid grasp of Hauerwas's theology, analysed these movements primarily by referencing Hauerwas's works. By living in Christ's narrative and seeking to bring forth the Kingdom of God, these theologians see love and peace not as a means but as an end in itself, integral to the Kingdom of God. Huen, Tang, and Vincent Lau, together known as the Hong Kong Hauerwasians, although they use the theology of an American theologian, have attempted to exegete his ideas and thoughtfully contextualise them for Hong Kong. Their use of Hauerwasian theology is useful and representative for the Hong Kong context.

Hauerwas's theology likely first entered this debate because it is perceived as easy for middle-class Hong Kong Christians to accept. Hong Kong middle-class Christians are generally presented as comprising Western-educated professionals who are inward-looking in their faith confessions, and as such, may not wish to participate in political actions that would advocate for the voiceless. As Chan Sze-chi (2010, 143–152) argues, Hong Kong's Christian religious right are educated, professionals, and middle-class. Chan suggests that, for these Westernised middle-class Hong Kong Christians, Christianity is an obvious faith, morality, and community choice outside of traditional Confucianism and folk Buddhism-Taoism. When these professionals choose to attend a Christian church community, they did not only take up the Christian faith; instead, they also become part of an enclosed community that maintains traditional Confucian morality of 'not looking at what is contrary to propriety,' working within their imagination of what the world and society is like, rather than fulfilling what Chan considers to be the 'real' Christian mission and responsibility, that is, for example, to care for the poor. There is a version of Hauerwas in Hong Kong that attempts to represent his ideas faithfully to the Hong Kong people in an effort to convert Hong Kong Christians to his theology, but there is another that twists Hauerwas's theology into an inward-looking and passive reaction to a society that discourages action of any sort. This will be further demonstrated in my illustration of 'Chan Tai-man's' lived theology.

First, according to Hauerwas, Christ's narrative determines the pattern of Christian lives. He writes that 'Christian convictions take the form of a story [...] Christian ethics does not begin by emphasising rules or principles, but by calling our attention to a narrative that tells of God's dealing with creation' (Hauerwas 1983, 859). Hauerwas also argues, 'The salvation that Christians believe is ours in Christ is, after all, a narrative about the rule of God that necessarily subordinates all other narratives and their corresponding polities' (Hauerwas 1999, 38). Therefore, in Hauerwas's view, Christians can focus on understanding who they are and who they are meant to be when they bring about the Kingdom of God.

Huen argues that Hauerwas's persistent questioning of what makes someone Christian reveals that not all Christians are Christ's disciples and not all of what the church does is for Christ (Hauerwas and Willimon 2014, 88–101). Christian ethics and, by extension, the Christian perception of justice demand that Christians live according to the model of how Christ conducted himself. Thus, Huen suggests that Hauerwas would argue that the church cannot pursue a political agenda with a timetable based on the world's definition of justice (Huen 2017, 31–48). Tang also argues that, even though many Christians talk

about justice, they do not consider what justice means to the Christian faith; rather, they simply accept how society defines justice. The full name of the Occupy Central Movement is Occupy Central with Love and Peace; its organisers intentionally emphasised the perceived Christian values of love and peace as means to achieve their political ends. In agreement with Huen, Tang argues that Christians who begin to act on their Christian faith cannot treat love and peace as a strategy or an abstract concept, but rather, as the way Christians witness Jesus Christ in their daily lives, in which being and acting cannot be separated (Tang 2013, 173–181). Huen and Tang understand and affirm Hauerwas's proposal that Christ's narrative dictates how Christians live their lives, and that they are not simply using Christianity as an end to achieve political means.

In terms of ecclesiology, Hauerwas argues that the church as a community can effect changes in language by focusing on bringing forth God's Kingdom as a slow witness to the world. Huen sees Hauerwas's definition of Christian ethics as a way to teach Christians how to live their daily lives according to Christ's will, so that church life shapes the character of the individual Christian and creates an environment of daily immersion in ethics. For Huen, the question is not whether the church participates in political power, but how the church proves itself faithful to Christ by its unique participation in society. For this reason, Huen would consider activism as it is in Hong Kong in 2013–2014 as coercive from the perspective of Hauerwasian theology, as he perceives the use of Christian concepts in Hong Kong activism as attempts to coerce the Hong Kong government to grudgingly agree to the demands of the protestors rather than actually convincing the government of Christian values that they propose (Huen 2017, 9–30, 243–279).

In short, Hong Kong Hauerwasians use Hauerwas's thinking as a way to reframe what Christianity can mean in the Hong Kong context. One's Christian faith should be the worldview that undergirds a Hong Kong Christian's life and decisions, and Christians should not attempt to make Christian values conform with secular or political values. Neither should Christians only contain Christian values and actions within a church context.

Nonetheless, all theologies are contextual by nature, and Hauerwas's context in America and 'Chan's' context in Hong Kong are significantly different from one another. Hauerwas addresses America from 1970s to the present 2020s, where the liberalist society edged the Christian church away from the centre of its social institutions. While the Hong Kong context is vastly different from America, its faith identity was significantly impacted by how the West thinks religion should work within civic society, especially during its time as a British colony from 1841 to 1997. As Tanya B. Schwarz and Cecelia Lynch (2016) observe, there has been a shift in Europe toward a worship of rationality, reason, and scientific knowledge to counter past processes of knowledge production linked to the monarchy and the church. Intellectual elites increasingly criticised religion and its role in public life, as Enlightenment thinkers viewed religion as primitive and antithetical to modern scientific methods and reason. As a result, this constrained faith confessions to the private sphere. This limiting of faith to a private sphere has affected Hong Kong as well. Hong Kong Christian churches are generally thought of as not encouraging independent thinking both by the general public who interact with them and their own congregants who are part of the church communities. In part, this is because of the experience of being a British colony, where the locals were trained to be functionaries rather than critical thinkers (Yan 2013, 122–129). The Chinese parental approach is also

prominent in churches, where congregants are expected to follow and not question the church leaders. This, alongside limiting faith to the private sphere, affected the growth of the church, which therefore focused on personal moral issues rather than politically charged topics. While the reason for the development of an individualistic faith is different than that in America, Hong Kong has nonetheless moved towards that trajectory. These approaches, both in America and in Hong Kong, are informed by their experiences of faith in action in society.

### Why do Hong Kong theologians find Hauerwas's thinking useful in the Hong Kong context?

Hauerwas's theology is widely cited and interpreted by different sides of the civil disobedience debate because in Hong Kong, where 'Christians [...] are not in control even of their own lives' (Hauerwas 2017, x–xi), it is easier to conceive and implement a theology of living daily life as a nonviolent, noncoercive form of witnessing than it is to be a political actor. To act politically on anything is so difficult in this context that Hong Kong Christians perceive a great barrier between themselves and political participation. Hauerwasian theology holds great appeal because it is enacted through long-term, communal relations rather than through radical actions that directly and immediately challenge the government (Hauerwas 1983, 2980–3115). However, Lap-yan Kung (1999, 93–127) claims that the people of Hong Kong are pragmatic in nature and financially driven. Hong Kong Christians are no different, and Kung argues that the perceived sectarian temptation of passivism is appealing to Hong Kong Christians. In the face of this temptation, that which appears to be doing something by doing nothing, and which does not affect one's current economic success, is of great interest.

Hauerwas asks Christians to be more rigorous in contemplation of their actions, not that they be less involved. He asks Christians to reflect truly on whether the church, as a community, effectively demonstrates to the world what it means to live in Christ. To exemplify Christ's teachings is no easy feat because Christian beliefs merit self-sacrifice (Hauerwas 2012, 2103–2339; 1983, 413–606). Huen argues that beliefs must be followed by practice, not by advocacy in writing or armchair theologising. Hauerwas's theology certainly involves action, although the form that action takes may not be as dramatic as riots or revolutions. Instead, Hauerwas demands a deeper conviction in order that one may endure the continuous suffering that results from participating in a new form of political community – a commitment that is slow and painful precisely because it requires long-term perseverance and constant discernment (Hauerwas 2010, 3311–3696).

Having said this, it is important to ask, to what extent is Hauerwasian theology relevant to Hong Kong's Christian communities? This theology is relevant if it leads Christians to collective self-reflection on their daily lives; but if it is a way for Christians to escape their role of speaking God's truth and justice to the world, then it is not a positive force. The problem with Hauerwasian theology in Hong Kong is that the Hong Kong church frequently imports the ideas of foreign theologians and promotes these ideas to locals as if they were engaging in advertising. Without the effort to contextualise the arguments, many in Hong Kong's Christian communities misrepresent the foreign theologians' ideas. According to Kung (2014, 102–124), currently, Hong Kong evangelical church communities place too much focus on personal piety and personal

moral issues, ignoring a social justice perspective on society. Alternative models may directly speak to Hong Kong Christians, shifting their paradigm away from the inward-looking, pietistic approach influenced by Hong Kong's economy-driven society and toward a justice-seeking approach that seeks to align the world with the values of the Kingdom of God.

I find Hong Kong Hauerwasians' theology to be a genuine form of Hong Kong theology, as it is through their reflective posture and thoughtful application of Hauerwasian theology in the Hong Kong context that they build their lived experiences and theories. While Hauerwasian theology was developed in and for American Christians, Hong Kong Hauerwasians, who are based in Hong Kong Christian communities, are able to take the crux of Hauerwasian theology and reinterpret it specifically for the Hong Kong context. Nonetheless, the lived experiences of average Hong Kong Christians and their ways of knowing are important for understanding epistemology from their perspectives. We will now explore a composite example with 'Chan Tai-man's' lived theology.

### **Methods of ethnographic field research in Hong Kong**

The data from which I draw the lived theology of 'Chan Tai-man' came about from ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in Hong Kong in 2019–2020. I chose ethnography as a method of inquiry for studying people in their natural environments over an extended period of time, to provide an understanding of a particular slice of social life. It focuses on shared patterns of cultural groups, that is, Hong Kong Christians (Smartt Gullion 2016).

I utilised several techniques to gather primary data and probe the participants' views on post-Umbrella Movement (2014 onwards) discussions in Christian communities. I engaged two distinct discursive communities: members of a politically conservative church, and members of a politically liberal divinity school, where I observed, took fieldnotes, and conducted interviews (Chan 2016). I used snowball sampling through the recommendations of the gatekeepers at each site. One benefit of this technique was to assemble interviews from those whom the head of their respective organisations considered to be paradigmatic of their institution, and those people would introduce me to others whom they considered to be of the same opinion. Moreover, I utilised secondary data from Hong Kong Baptist University's oral history database of Hong Kong Protestant Christians (Kwok 2019), and cross-checked the narratives of these 19 interview video recordings with the 18 interviews I conducted over the course of four months. I find that the secondary data triangulated the data I conducted, and 'I could observe consistencies in the speakers' theological interpretations of actions and events between my primary and secondary data sources' (Chu 2022, 14–21).

The data used to draw the portrait of 'Chan Tai-man' is based on the data I collected in the politically conservative church community. While there are middle-class Hong Kong Christians who participated in democratic movements and other activism efforts, those who are from this church community are generally more politically apathetic, so this vignette illustrates the experience of an inward-looking, individualistic faith in Hong Kong. Ethnographic writings are not meant to be generalisable, but rather, provide a point of resonance for readers, 'a certain kind of evocative and provocative vividness because it engages the physical senses' (Whitmore 2019, 4).

## Lived theology of 'Chan Tai-man'

Through my ethnographic research on how Hong Kong Christians conceptualise their faith and civic identity in the midst of protests from 2013 to 2020, I created a composite narrative of the lived theology of 'Chan Tai-man,' a name commonly used in illustrations and examples in Hong Kong. This is a name synonymous with Joe Bloggs, John Doe, and the like. Ethnography started off with a colonial and empirical undertone, having been used as an investigative tool for white male academics to investigate the exotic with unwarranted claims of objectivity. This left Christianity, as a Western religion and culture, relatively unexamined (Van Maanen 1988; Singer, Christophe, and Dakowski 1990; Stuart and Thomson 2015). By contrast, I have access to Hong Kong's Christian communities as an insider, and I use ethnography to demonstrate that the current conversation is being driven by the language of democracy and rights.

Hong Kong churches, starting as a colonial arm for aid, medicine, and education, were very much an upwardly mobile community. Given the British colonial government's vision of cost-effectiveness as its main goal of ruling its colonies, Christian missions taking up the role of social service provider might have been more for the benefit of the British colonisers. Christian missions dominated education for indigenous populations to the extent that the term 'native elite' was synonymous with 'Christian-educated' (Etherington 2008, 261–284). Even to the present day, due to the historical background of Christian churches in Hong Kong, Hong Kong Christian churches are made up of the middle-class or those aspiring to be (Kung 2014, 102–124).

Therefore, I have chosen to compare Hong Kong Hauerwasian theology with 'Chan,' a Hong Kong Christian and middle-class repatriate social elite, because this category of Christians is most prone to misinterpreting Hauerwas's ideas, seeing daily witness as an opt-out of participating in discussions of civic participation. I have previously illustrated different Hong Kong Christians with different political stances (Chu and Perry 2023, 422–434). 'Chan' is illustrated here as his theology can be directly compared with the use and misuse of Hauerwasian theology in Hong Kong. This is only one portrait of a Hong Kong Christian. 'Chan,' of course, does not represent all Hong Kong Christians, just as Hauerwas does not represent all American Christians. But like Hauerwas, 'Chan' is a type of Christian that is common enough that if a Hong Kong Christian read my description, he or she would immediately be able to name someone just like that.

'Chan' is a Managing Director of an American Investment Bank, something he takes pride in. If you asked him to introduce himself, often he would start with that rather than his identity as a Christian, father, husband, brother, son, or even Hong Konger. While he is a Gen Xer, he still enjoys talking about his time studying at an Ivy League University in America, the only time he lived away from Hong Kong. He is involved in his traditional, conservative evangelical church as the leader of his cell group and even occasionally preaches. He takes pride in being open-minded, as he claims that he often chats with youths in his church about life, work, and politics. He is interested in Hauerwas' daily witness, which, as he interprets it, coincides with his idea of workplace ministry. He thinks that workplace ministry is more important than political theology, because it is a daily witness of his faith. He took a course on workplace ministry in a local seminary and also started an angel investment fund for professing Christian social enterprise ventures. He encourages his staff members at his investment bank to join a Bible study group



that he started in his office. He expresses frustration with his non-Christian staff members, who are vocally against what they consider to be an abuse of his position in forcing his faith on others. Similarly, he is upset that his friends compare his evangelism to a pyramid scheme in the way he talks about and coerces them to come to his church. 'Chan' took classes in evangelism methods such as three gospels and four spiritual laws (三福四律), which are common in the Chinese Christian community, if a bit dogmatic, and he applied them religiously in his evangelism.

In 'Chan's' theology, the concepts of submission and long-suffering are prominent. When 'Chan' talks about democracy, he means Athenian classical democracy, where all citizens gather to discuss, propose, and decide policies, rules, and actions in the government of the city. This leads to his critique of America's liberal democracy, where individual rights and freedoms are officially recognised and protected, and the exercise of political power is limited by the rule of law. As such, he argues that America is not democratic as Athens was, which is why America is not really democratic, and also that democracy does not work. 'Chan' argues that people who want democracy are self-centred, because democracy means the majority wins, and the majority is people and not God. Christians should submit to God's will, and the external circumstances, unjust or otherwise, happen because of God's will, so Christians should not create a political regime to resist that. 'Chan' argues that Christians should be good Christians, which means that Christians must show love, compassion, acceptance, and tolerance because it is God's duty to judge, not individual Christians', and everything happens for a reason. If God lets things happen, Christians cannot fight it in pursuit of democracy and justice.

'Chan' also argues that Christians should just stick to pietism and inward-looking faith rather than focusing on what is going on in society. He argues that democracy should not be what Christians strive for, and especially not with extreme means, since democracy does not represent the viewpoint of all Christians. He argues that the Bible does not state what form of government or political party is God's will, as Jesus only taught the Father's matters, not politics. His interpretation of the *Exodus* is that it did not touch upon Egypt's political system or use of violence, as Moses did not change its political system, propose rule of law, introduce democracy, or promote universal suffrage. Therefore, there is no need to act justly on a topic such as political reform, which God did not teach about, but instead, we can act justly in the workplace, about which God has taught. He sees Jesus as submitting to authority, even if the laws are unreasonable or unjust, and not protesting against authority or using force, so he thinks Jesus' actions set the example, that his disciples should also obey authority, since the political system is necessarily not ideal. He concludes that God's standard is not universal values, equality, democracy and freedom, equal opportunities, or human rights (Wong 2021, 82–97). While 'Chan' refuses the universality of democracy and rights, he instead emphasises the universality of workplace ministry. He argues that we need to do every day well, and he thinks it is important that Christians take up positions of authority, such as a legislator or district councillor, from which they can make structural changes from within. There are many Christians who see imperfections in society, and he does not want them to become more radical, but instead, through their professions, they can make changes – in the business world, they are closer to the Central government and can exert their voices.

## A critical comparison between Hong Kong Hauerwasians and 'Chan Tai-man' on practices of faith and democracy

'Chan' would agree with the Hong Kong Hauerwasian idea of witnessing Christ through daily lives, but the lived expressions of that witness are fundamentally different. 'Chan' would use it as a means of justifying his inward-looking faith, seeing his workplace ministry as a better way to be a Christian than protesting or practising civil disobedience. Huen and Tang would disagree with that interpretation of daily witness, as they would assess every scenario separately, and if an event calls for protests, they will not hesitate to do the same rather than offer a blanket yes or no to civil disobedience.

As such, it may be more helpful for Hong Kong Christians to stop thinking of Hong Kong as approaching democracy. The British colony of Hong Kong was never a democracy, even if Hong Kongers experienced relative freedom due to a *laissez-faire*, low-intervention government policy. Under the undemocratic British colonial rule, Hong Kong Christians did not strive for democracy but, instead, with a realistic assessment of their environment, were able to witness God's Kingdom to their society. A realistic assessment of the current post-handover environment in Hong Kong will help Hong Kong residents formulate their thoughts and actions as citizens and as Christians.

Additionally, as the Hong Kong Hauerwasians have argued, democracy cannot be an end for Christians. Therefore, a discussion of the desirability of democracy cannot be the focus of Christians and churches, as democracy is not equivalent to the Kingdom of God. Ideally, these movements of civil disobedience could act as a civic education for Christians, leading to theological reflection about how the church can conduct itself in the public sphere rather than attempt to achieve a concrete timetable for universal suffrage, especially when this effort is understood to be coercive. Once Christians look past doing what is possible, since it limits their imagination, they will have more clarity on how to bring about the Kingdom of God through the church. This will, in turn, help Hong Kong Hauerwasians dialogue with 'Chan' about how church can be imagined.

Although Hauerwasian scholarship presents a spectrum of responses toward civil disobedience and universal suffrage, none of these arguments stands strictly against civil disobedience. Rather, these approaches stand only against the rationale that coercive actions can also be nonviolent. The self-proclaimed Hong Kong Hauerwasians are against the protest movements only because they are coercive and, therefore, violent, but they are not necessarily against the concept of civil disobedience itself. Conversely, 'Chan' is against civil disobedience due to Hong Kong Christians' tendency towards stability. Kung asserts that Hong Kong churches, and Christians within those churches, hold a middle-class mentality: specifically, the culture values personal gain and stability, does not challenge the establishment, leans more towards personal moral values than social justice, and responds to societal needs through almsgiving and not from a social justice lens (Kung 2014, 120–122). Kung sees this as a legacy of misunderstanding the Puritanism and Pietism movements, which results in building a pietistic life without basing it on the historical contexts in which it developed and using apologetics rather than caring for the poor to respond to challenges that the Western Enlightenment brought to the Christian faith (Kung 2016, 14–15). Kung believes this leads to an anti-public theology that is politically inclined towards conservative moral issues and ignores issues of poverty, injustices of capitalism, and humanitarian concerns. Stereotypical

preconceptions and deep-seated valuing of order and stability such as 'Chan's' might be seen by Kung as not necessarily biblical but, rather, conditioned by the British colonial government and reinforced by the Chinese communist governance.

Conceptual dilemmas have emerged in the scope of this analysis. Is democracy biblical? It is difficult to pinpoint an example in the Bible suggesting that democracy is God's ideal governmental structure. However, it is reasonable to say that the Bible was written within a specific context and that, because the text is bound by its worldview, it did not consider issues of democracy. Hauerwas argues that the church community cannot hold democracy as an ideal, as it is part of the secular rather than the ecclesiastical world (Hauerwas 2012, 2103–2349). As human nature is sinful, there is still much injustice stemming from the populist systems that lead to the tyranny of the majority, even within existing Western democratic societies. It is crucial to emphasise that the will of the majority may not be the best choice, and that the majority's will does not replace God's will or the truth of God's Word. Hauerwas also points out that democracy domesticates religious convictions in order to give way to societal peace, seducing Christians into thinking democratic ideals make them free and in control. In democratic societies, such as America, where it may seem that freedom and Christian virtues are implied, and therefore Christians might feel less urge to witness faith in their God. If the imagination of Christians is determined by the presupposition of democracy, he worries that they may lose their unique voice and role, becoming less capable of contributing to social justice issues (Hauerwas 2013, 67–86). Hauerwas argues that the Christian goal is to bring the justice of God found in the cross and the resurrection of Christ to the world, rather than simply to secure more equitable forms of life for members of society. The focus is always on Christ (Hauerwas 2012, 1777–2090).

The above-described misconception of Hauerwas's thought illustrates the way in which theology may be unconsciously misinterpreted within contemporary political debates, particularly in the context of pseudo-democratic Hong Kong. Democracy is not consubstantial with bringing forth God's Kingdom. While democracy is a more humane way of governing a nation than, say, a totalitarian dictatorship, the outcomes of these societies are still entirely dependent on God's providential guidance (Luther 1961, 190–192). However, Hauerwas argues that the church as a community must focus on bringing forth God's Kingdom, not on supporting or resisting political regimes (Hauerwas and Willimon 2014, 388–440). Huen echoes the view that daily life is a form of civil disobedience, as Christians stand against the secular way of life in all areas, not just with regard to the government. As such, Christians cannot be seduced by political debates or regimes; rather, they focus on God's Kingdom. Nonetheless, this is a tricky debate to enter, as 'Chan' would take this Hauerwasian idea and argue that it supports his argument against civil disobedience and towards social stability through daily witness in one's workplace.

Christians should not simply say that democracy is inherently Christian but critically question in what way it is Christian and in what way it is not. That creates a more robust theology than simply leaning on the clichéd idea that *democracy is good*, and *communism is bad*. I do not think that democracy is inherently Christian. In fact, the reason modern democracy (liberal democracy or social democracy) came about is directly related to questions of whether Christianity still had a place in a secular Enlightenment society. As Hong Kong did not experience the Enlightenment, nor was Christianity ever

a majority or state religion, it is difficult to talk about the concept of democracy and the secular state in Hong Kong. The language of democracy and rights has been co-opted uncritically into the lexicon of Hong Kong and, by extension, Hong Kong Christian communities. As such, the experience of political correctness, rather than how such language fits logically in the Hong Kong narrative, is employed in Hong Kong communities' discussions. As Stout (2003, 4) observes, '[o]f course, nearly every nation makes grand democratic pronouncements nowadays. Empty rhetoric is hardly an adequate basis for political community. Commitment to democratic values, to be worth anything, must reside in the life of the people, in the way citizens behave.' Rather than trying to make democratic values work for Hong Kong Christian communities, I propose Hong Kong Christian communities instead think from their Christian convictions. Allowing their Christian convictions to be the basis of their worldview, rather than being dominated by the secular values of democracy and rights, will reposition their understanding of their Christian identity in the Hong Kong context. Nonetheless, I am aware that this proposal can be misconstrued by 'Chan' to support an inward-looking theology. I find that for Christian worldviews to be pervasive is the opposite of an inward-looking theology. Christianity should instead be the cornerstone of all decisions and the worldview that undergirds them.

This is why Hong Kong Christians should not focus on simply debating whether Hong Kong should be democratic but, instead, focus on what it means to be Christian. This is where dialogue with Hauerwasian theology would be helpful in the Hong Kong context, a focus Hauerwas also encourages. 'Chan's' theology may present a similar gap in Hong Kong church communities, specifically in the language of how to express one's faith, as 'Chan' may see that his church community only talks about an inward-looking spirituality but not about comprehending God through reason. Hauerwas's theology, contextually applied, can serve to reorient 'Chan's' tendency of seeing faith as something that should remain in the private domain alone, and begin to dialogue with society, science, reason, and the like.

Nonetheless, 'Chan's' theology is also helpful for Hauerwas and his context in contemporary America. 'Chan's' middle-class mentality and inward-looking faith resonate with many of those in America whose views are saturated by individualism and who consider Christianity as something of a personal choice. On the other hand, Hong Kong society has done away with the façade of liberal democracy, while America still clings to such a façade but is, in effect, moving towards a more populist society. In Hong Kong, what secular governance would mean in relation to the Christian faith is clearer. Perhaps this is something American Christians can also reflect on, with Hong Kong as a stimulus for new ways of thinking about the same issue.

The theological values of this discussion would be to critically question and reflect on all actions of church communities, rather than be afraid of rocking the boat. Perhaps the lack of stability can be uncomfortable and unfamiliar, but these feelings of discomfort are valuable prompts for Christian communities to rethink whether their current, established practices are faithful to their Christian convictions. Another theological reflection from this discussion is not to let societal discussions determine the agenda for the Christian faith, but rather, Christian communities should be able to co-develop a faith identity, and as a community consider how they would interact with their society. Finally, this discussion demonstrates the pressing need in Hong Kong Christian communities to consider

voices from a spectrum of faith convictions, instead of demonising the other as being simply naïve or manipulated. 'Chan's' voice is generally undermined as he can be considered to be too eager to please the Chinese government or to bend backwards for pragmatics. However, he has a theology too, and when his voice can be heard fully, he adds to the full spectrum of voices for the Christian communities in Hong Kong to consider what being faithful means. It is not that all Christian communities must accept 'Chan's' theology, but rather, it is through interacting and taking his theology seriously that one can be more certain of one's own convictions, be they similar or different to his.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Hong Kong theologians' engagement with Hauerwas's work makes a suitable starting point for Hong Kong Christians communities. Nonetheless, they will eventually have to broaden their understanding of political theology through critical self-reflection of their own lived theology. There is nothing wrong with using already established tools. It is a reflection of past and present experiences of dominance and the power dynamics of the Anglophone world in Hong Kong. However, we must be aware that tools are never neutral. They always carry ideologies and persuasions that, if we are not critically engaging with the underlying assumptions, we are led to believe must be universal. Cross-checking our use of Hauerwas with the experience of the present context helps shape the way Hong Kong Christians see the world and construct theologies based on the interaction between culture, social location, and social change. This is what Swinton and Mowat (2006, 6) call critical faithfulness, where in the field of practical theology, one would (1) identify a practice or situation that requires reflection and critical challenge (Current Praxis), (2) apply qualitative research methods by asking new questions (Cultural/Contextual), (3) critically reflect on the practices of the church in light of scripture and tradition (Theological), (4) revise forms of faithful practice (Formulating Revised Practice), then circle back to (1) and continue this journey of being faithful yet critical. This is where 'Chan's' lived theology comes in. 'Chan's' lived experience in Hong Kong Christian communities can serve as a reflection of underlying assumptions we may have on what being Christian means, and that, in turn, can be a sounding board for other Christians in different contexts.

Examining 'Chan's' lived theology in Swinton and Mowat's framework, it is apparent that 'Chan' understands Hauerwas based on his experiences of the world, his multifaceted identities, and the religio-political history of his context, Hong Kong. It is his 'particular understanding of the relationship between church, civil society, the market, and the state' (Bretherton 2010, xii) that shapes his lived theology. One might ask how Hauerwas's American cultural context affects how 'Chan' understands and applies his work in the context of Hong Kong. In questioning the current practice of othering those with different political stances, critical thinkers must consider scripture and tradition: the point is not whether the Bible explicitly mentions democracy or rights, but rather, how does Jesus' actions reflect his stances on such issues, and how can Christian traditions inform our reflections and actions? As Luke Bretherton identifies, '[f]or Christians, the challenge is whether there is a specifically Christian response to these questions or whether they can simply accept the responses derived from other, non-Christian ways of framing politics' (Bretherton 2010, 1). If Christians are to be understood as one body and one Spirit,

working together to build up the body of Christ, that is, the church (*Ephesians* 4), then the debate over the meaning of concepts like democracy should be secondary to how Christians can build up one another. Hong Kong Christians, and by extension, Christians in general, can revise their forms of faithful practice. For example, Hong Kong Baptist University has a cultivating peace initiative, ‘which aims to promote the idea of peacebuilding in the society for reconciliation and transformation’ (Centre for Sino-Christian Studies and CEDAR Fund 2021). Through social media engagement, conversations with opposing parties, communal reflections, artistic expressions, and other methods of engagement, they aim to bring communities together for deeper conversations. This is their response to the current circumstances in Hong Kong church communities, and an example of Swinton and Mowat’s ‘Current Praxis’, a necessary step in the journey of being faithful yet critical.

Hong Kong’s Christian communities need a more comprehensive way of thinking about political theology, which they currently lack. Yet Hong Kong’s Christian communities are generally too pragmatic and too consumed by the city’s hectic lifestyle, which produces a variety of explanations for avoiding reflection on political theology. The existing debates make an excellent starting place for Hong Kong Christians to contemplate becoming more conscious of the public nature of their collective thoughts and actions within their daily lives. In this way, they can bring forth the Kingdom of God and eventually broaden their understanding of political theology through knowledge of the thoughts of other theologians and lay Christians in their lived theology. The process of understanding ‘Chan Tai-man’s’ theology has resonance as an illustration of lived theology, as it equally illustrates the potential of valuing the lived theology of the laity in other contexts, as well as critically reflecting on individualism and inward-looking faith in Christian communities. Through such reflection, I would expect to see more thoughtful conversations on political theology in Hong Kong’s Christian communities. Hong Kong is a fast-paced society. In a city that never sleeps, time for reflection seems like a luxury that no one can afford. I hope that this study will encourage the people of Hong Kong, as well as others from Anglophone megacities, to step back and deeply contemplate what they stand for and whether their arguments make sense. To think before we act makes us human – that is, the image of God.

## Note

1. ‘Occupy Central Movement’ is shorthand for the Occupy Central with Love and Peace Movement, a campaign for universal suffrage in Hong Kong that entailed acts of civil disobedience, including the occupation of Central, the central business district of Hong Kong. The Umbrella Movement, also known as the Umbrella Revolution, was a series of independently organised illegal demonstrations in several major districts of Hong Kong.

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