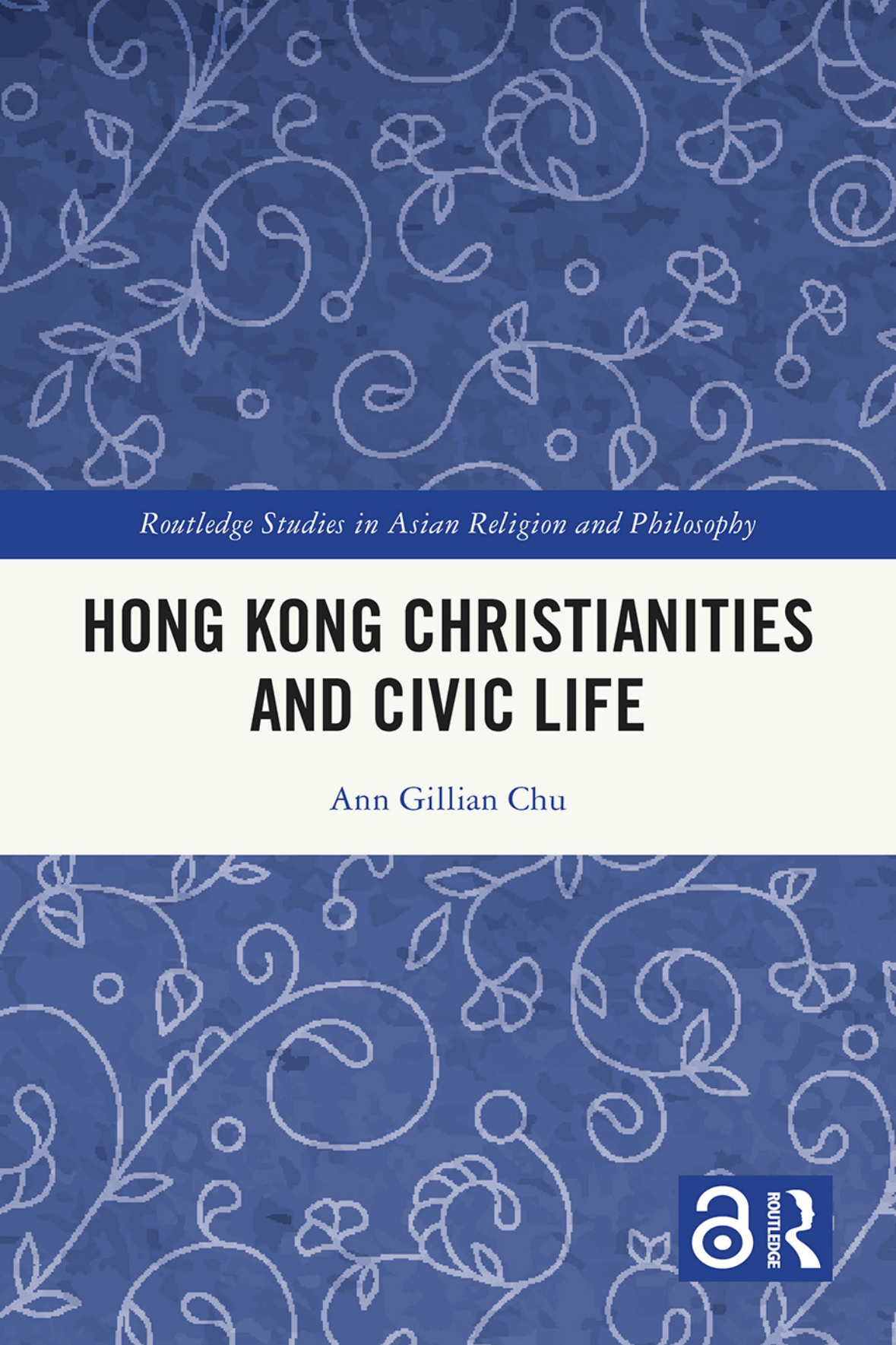




Routledge Studies in Asian Religion and Philosophy

HONG KONG CHRISTIANITIES AND CIVIC LIFE

Ann Gillian Chu



‘Through in-depth interviews, this book offers a mosaic of the lived theology of Hong Kong Christians as they responded to political transformation and social movements in Hong Kong in the past decades. It enriches and complexifies our understanding of identity, religion, and politics in the changing relationship between Hong Kong and China. I highly recommend it.’

Kwok Pui-lan, *Distinguished Scholar, Episcopal Divinity School, United States of America*

‘Ann Gillian Chu’s new book, *Hong Kong Christianities and Civic Life*, presents a thoughtful and passionate exploration of how evangelical Christians in Hong Kong conceptualise democracy, human rights, and civic identity. The author, who is from Hong Kong, utilises ethnographic observations and interviews with local HK Christians to create an innovative “grounded theology” that is not beholden to “imperialist” concepts like democracy and human rights. Chu proposes that the “incarnational humanism” of Jens Zimmerman presents the most appropriate framework for understanding the dilemmas of Hong Kong Christians who suffer division between pro-establishment and pro-democracy factions. *Hong Kong Christianities and Civic Life* provides an “insider’s view” of the political turmoil in HK today; this well-researched book represents a milestone in the study of Global Christianity.’

Sabine Hyland, *Professor of World Religions, the University of St Andrews, United Kingdom*

‘For some time now, a new world order has been emerging from the still-burning ashes of an expiring colonial culture. From the Indian subcontinent to the island metropolises of the global south, something previously impossible has made its presence known, an Asian counterpart to what Paul Gilroy called “the Black Atlantic.” The Yellow Pacific arrives with Hong Kong as its headquarters, expressing anew Christ as the desire of the nations. Showing how faith grows here from the ground up, Gillian Chu’s new book both describes this new order, and embodies it.’

Jonathan Tran, *Professor of Theology and Asian American and Diasporic Studies, Duke University, United States of America*

‘One does not have to agree with the author’s views on decolonization or Western identity to profit from this immensely important study, based on personal experience and careful social analysis, of Hong Kong Christianity. Gillian Chu’s use of Christian, incarnational humanism to move us beyond confining racial and ethnic categories frames this study in the more helpful, genuinely biblical terms of our common humanity in Christ. I recommend this book to anyone interested in how Christians should think about their inevitable civic engagement in an increasingly perilous world.’

Jens Zimmermann, *J. I. Packer Professor of Theology, Regent College, Canada*



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Hong Kong Christianities and Civic Life

This book explores Protestant Christianity in Hong Kong through an ethnographic study of Hong Kong Christians at a time of societal change (2013–2014 and 2019–2020).

Revealing how selected published theologians and average lay Christians in Hong Kong understand ideas of democracy, human rights, civic identity, and civil disobedience, this book draws on the works of Hong Kong theologians, alongside the lay theologies of Hong Kong Christian interview participants and, by extension, those in the diaspora. It provides a critical examination of how pro-democracy and pro-establishment Christians understand and negotiate the relationship between national identity, democratic values, and Christian convictions. The book also explores the concept of the ‘third way’ for Hong Kong Christians, an alternative space than either pro-establishment or pro-democracy Christians, ultimately revealing that human rights and democracy concepts cannot be understood in the same way in Hong Kong as in Western contexts.

This book will be a valuable resource to students and scholars of Hong Kong studies, World Christianity, theological ethics, and practical theology.

Ann Gillian Chu is an Assistant Professor in the Academy of Chinese, History, Religion and Philosophy at Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong, and a Visiting Research Fellow in the Centre for Religion and Public Life at the University of Leeds, United Kingdom.

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Hong Kong Christianities and Civic Life

Ann Gillian Chu



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For Priscilla Pue Ho Chu (朱何珮) and Chu Kwan-lam (朱鈞林)



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Acronyms and Abbreviations

Anti-eLAB	Anti-Extradition Legislation Amendment Bill
BNO	British National (Overseas)
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
HK	Hong Kong, China
HKers	Hong Kongers
HKSKH	Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui (Anglican)
KOL	Key Opinion Leaders
MTR	Mass Transit Railway
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NSL	National Security Law
PDC	Pro-Democracy Christian
PEC	Pro-Establishment Christian
PTW	Christians Who Propose a Third Way
SAR	Special Administrative Region
UN	United Nations

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Writing a book takes a village. This book has been the culmination of years of research and writing, as well as a lifetime of being immersed in the field. I thank everyone who has helped me in shaping this book and myself. John Perry and Priscilla Pue Ho Chu (朱何珮) take the most credit for shaping me as a researcher and an academic. I thank them for their patience and wisdom. Sarah Costantino Harding, Katharine Keenan, Alyssa Stalsberg Canelli, and Claire Hiu-ching Cheung (張曉晴) provided much-needed copyediting support. While there are, of course, mistakes in this book, they are undoubtedly all mine. I thank Stephanie Rogers and Routledge for their faith in this project. Financial support is hard to come by, and I thank Hong Kong Baptist University's Research Office for supporting the open-access fee of this monograph through their Book Publication Grant 2024/25. I am grateful to have Chu Kwan-lam (朱鈞林) and the late Winnifred Wai Ho (何瑋)† in my life. They provided me with unwavering love and always believed in me. I am grateful to all the Hong Kong Christians I interviewed and observed for generously sharing their time and valuable insights. Whenever I find the present task at hand to be impossible, thinking about their courage and sacrifices often encourages me to continue to push forward. Finally, I thank God for the guidance and steadfast love (חסד) I have received throughout my life. *Soli deo Gloria.*



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Introduction

Hong Kong, China from a Christian's Perspective – My Intentions for This Book

Hong Kong, China (HK) is synonymous with change. To say the past decade in HK is unprecedented is not saying much, since, throughout the decades, if we think about the Leftist Riot, Tiananmen Square Vigil, July 1 protests, Occupy Movement, the Umbrella Movement, and the Anti-Extradition Amendment Bill (Anti-eLAB) protests, all that has happened has always been unprecedented. The aim of this book is to capture a snapshot in time of HK Christianities from 2014 to 2024 so that future researchers, theologians, and HK watchers can conduct meaningful comparative studies of the responses of HK Christian communities towards major societal events.

My Positionality: Who Am I?

In order to make my argument, I must position myself before the start of this project because, as the researcher, I am perhaps the most important part of the conversation in the research process. As Grace Kao and Ilsup Ahn (2015, 1–17) argue,

Scholarly self-reflection in explicitly contextualist approaches now abound in liberation theologies, biblical hermeneutics, sociology, pastoral ministry, and other fields of study. Ethicists have likewise “spoken” from their particular and historically specific standpoints as opposed to from a purportedly impartial “view from nowhere” and have accordingly rooted their ethical analyses in ways that situate their claims to knowledge and normativity.

There is no such thing as *objective* research or an unpositioned gaze; there is no neutrality, and one can only be more or less aware of one's own biases. As John Swinton and Harriet Mowat (2016, 28–72) claim, ‘reflexivity is a mode of knowing which accepts the impossibility of the researcher standing outside of the research field and seeks to incorporate that knowledge creatively and effectively.’ Therefore, while I dwell on the experiences and meaning systems of others, I need to be aware of how my biases and preconceptions may influence what I am trying to understand, knowing that my context as a researcher,

2 *Hong Kong Christianities and Civic Life*

affected by my gender, class, and ethnicity, is part of the narrative interpretation, even if I am largely similar to my participants in many ways. The relationship between myself, the research project, and the academic world is an especially tricky one to illustrate since I am an insider researcher (Fetterman 2008, 249), and so I share experiences, underlying assumptions, and meaning systems similar to those of the published theologians and interview participants. While my position as an insider greatly helped me understand and construct the meanings that underlie the surface of the participants' lives, a key challenge is to convey their viewpoints to the academic world. This is because their viewpoints may include underlying assumptions that I assume do not need explanation since, as an insider researcher, I consider these assumptions to be common knowledge and I expect everyone else to also hold the same assumptions (Dwyer and Buckle 2009, 54–63). However, the oversimplification of insider–outsider researcher separation needs to be considered as well since it is more of a spectrum than dualism, and every researcher is somewhere on the scale in between the two ends. As such, it requires me to constantly reflect on what I have perceived.

Who I am as a researcher starts with who I am as a person. I was born in HK as ethnically Chinese and spent my childhood in HK. I completed my primary and secondary education at an international school in HK and went to the University of Edinburgh to pursue my undergraduate degree. After graduating with a Master of Arts (Honours) in English Language, I worked in HK as a certified public accountant for almost a decade, both in the private sector and in the public sector. I experienced Occupy Central in 2013 and the Umbrella Movement in 2014 as a civil servant of the Government of the HK Special Administrative Region (SAR). My interest in theology was cultivated by my part-time postgraduate studies at the Alliance Bible Seminary in HK. After almost a decade of work as an accountant, I, as a third-generation Chinese Canadian, moved to Vancouver, Canada to pursue my Master of Divinity at Regent College, a confessing Christian graduate school, and graduated in 2018. The Master of Divinity programme is considered a vocational degree for those who intend to work as pastors. I completed my Doctor of Philosophy at the School of Divinity in the University of St Andrews in 2022 and began my academic career at the Academy of Chinese, History, Religion and Philosophy at Hong Kong Baptist University as an Assistant Professor, a move considered by HK academics in the diaspora as controversial given that, at the time, it was the height of outward migration, especially to Britain, because of the British National (Overseas) (BNO) visa (Chu 2026).

Growing up in HK where my peer group from the international school spoke English and shunned those who spoke Cantonese, the local Chinese dialect, means that I have been subconsciously indoctrinated with a Western imperialist idea that *the West is the best*. This shaped who I have become, and I struggle on a daily basis between being proud of being ethnically Chinese and my somewhat distant Western education and citizenship roots. HK means home and roots to me, but as an ethnic Chinese who grew up in a British

colony and underwent Western education, I also carry a sense of shame – in that being Chinese is viewed as being backward and uncivilised, and I have the need, which is common with the rest of HK, to cling to something Western to justify my existence. This is a dynamic with which I have been struggling: While I am proud to be Chinese and proud of China's achievements, I feel conflicted when people see me as *Chinese*. My need to not just be a local is common in the HK mentality, but the fact that I have also lived abroad gives me a sense of understanding that I am indeed a local Hong Konger (HKer), even as I struggle with that identity marker. Someone who has always lived in HK but associates only with the expat circles can fool themselves into thinking the rest of the world sees them as *Western*, but from first-hand experience, I find it is unrealistic to expect this to be the case.

While my Western education and living on different continents might make me sound very different from other HKers, I am not unique in that sense because HK is an immigration city, so overseas experience and career changes are common – there is no such thing as a cookie-cutter HKer, so while I am not the same as everybody else in HK, neither is anyone else. The difficulty I have is that, because I have direct experience with Britain and North America, my experiences challenge my perception of HK. However, my education was fundamentally Western and would have been so even if I had attended the local HK education system rather than the international one, since it is still largely shaped by church schools and the British colonial education system. Chiang Mon-lin (1947, loc. 333), the President of Peking University between 1919 and 1927, who studied at the University of California, Berkeley and obtained his doctorate degree from Columbia University under John Dewey's guidance, said that, in America, he liked to use China's ruler to measure things, but when he returned to China, he used his American ruler; sometimes, it is a mixed measurement, neither Chinese nor Western and both Chinese and Western or, rather, moving between the two. I find that Chiang's phrasing can also be a suitable description of HK.

In terms of my relationship with Christian faith, my maternal grandfather was baptised in the 1950s and my parents both studied in Protestant Christian schools. As a family, we were not practising Christians until the 2000s. Nonetheless, Christianity is my default definition of faith and religion, so when talking about spiritual development, I think not of other religious practices that might be considered more indigenous to HK, such as Buddhism or Taoism, but only of Evangelical Protestant Christianity. My identity fostered my experience as an insider researcher with the discourse communities in which I conducted my primary data collection. It has been lamented by renowned field researchers Sherryl Kleinman and Martha Copp (1993, 2) that 'fieldworkers share a culture dominated by the ideology of professionalism or more specifically, the ideology of science. According to that ideology, emotions are suspect. They contaminate research by impeding objectivity, hence they should be removed.' However, it is specifically emotions that make me who I am: an insider. I share the characteristics, roles, and experiences of the participants. As a HK Christian who is

familiar with the Cantonese Chinese language, was raised in a similar cultural background, confesses similar religious beliefs, belongs to the same ethnicity, and belongs to a similar social class and level of education as most of my participants, I expected my participants to behave rather differently than they would if they were to interact with others outside of their community. Nonetheless, rather than making me a better or worse researcher, being an insider made me a different type of researcher. This is a lens and an identity that I, the researcher, and you, my readers, need to be aware of.

Purpose: How to Read This Book?

One crucial point made in this book is the prioritisation of lived theology, namely how average HK Christians live and act and how, through their unconscious actions, they reflect their underlying beliefs. Through my study, I find that the lived theologies of the laity may be very different from Christian leaders', including pastors and theologians, even if these lived theologies are being shaped by Christian leaders' teachings. By comparing the theologies of the two side-by-side, I aim to demonstrate the similarities and differences. While the voices of Christian leaders are important, they are already well represented, which is why I am committed to lifting up the voices of lay Christians in HK. I argue that the lived theology of average Christians is a more accurate articulation of Christianity in practice in a particular context, compared with published works of theologians. The case of HK Christians provides an illuminating example and a strong argument for academics of theology and religious studies to shift their focus from Western, colonial sources to majority world, post-colonial sources of knowledge. I reveal the existing power imbalance in emphasising knowledge generated in the West and attempt to subvert that through lifting up knowledge from the margins, which would be of interest to academics of religious studies and sociology of religion. The majority of the Christian population lives in the majority world, and so it is important to highlight our knowledge rather than that of traditional colonial powers. HK Christians and Christianities are the focus of my academic trajectory. Since writing this book, I have researched dechurched HK Christians, HK Christians in the diaspora, HK older adult Christians, HK digital theologies, HK theological education, Christian medical missions in HK, and more. I hope that, by faithfully representing our lived theologies, I can provide much-needed documentation for other researchers, pastors, and churchgoers.

The findings from this research matter in our current historical moment, in which a new world order is forming from the rise of China and India and the decolonisation of European power. These changes raise questions about 'universal' ideals regarding citizenship, engagement, politics, and religion. Since the majority of the world belongs to some form of religion, the interactions of religious and political orders are major factors in determining future events. There is a need to explore the interlinkages between religion and national consciousness, which frame current debates over citizenship. As such, we need to

think of religion's engagement with the world alongside non-democratic versions of political power. Otherwise, we will not have adequate tools to understand current political events. This book is a timely reflection on societal events that are still unfolding, making sense of and collating mixed voices and messages. By the end of the text, readers should understand that the voices of average Christians can also be a source of theological knowledge and should be read and valued alongside our engagement with theological giants like St Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, and the like.

The identity of HKers is both social and political. In British HK, the identity of HKers, through cultural and mass media influences such as *Under the Lion Rock* (獅子山下) and *Enjoy Yourself Tonight* (歡樂今宵), creates a separate identity from the Chinese Mainland to suit the colonial rule. Even though it was politically motivated, it also took shape from the bottom up, and HKers, including HK Christians, cultivated their own meaning with this label. I also investigate this identity and meaning making; in particular, I attempt to reclaim a racist English label *Chinaman* (中國人), giving my take on the label. In my other writings, especially those for North American audiences, the readers push back hard on this label because of its racist history. However, I hope to start reclaiming this label – instead of just negative connotations, I believe we can give it a new meaning, just as *Christians* as a label started as derogatory, said by attackers of Christians and early Christianity, but is now a reclaimed label by Christians themselves. In the turn of the last century, there was a label of Chinese as *East Asian Sick Man* (東亞病夫). Words carry power, and by reclaiming labels that were previously used in a negative way, I hope to start evoking new and different connotations. As a self-identified Chinese and *Chinaman*, I want to show that I also identify with forerunners who were negatively treated because of simply being Chinese.

While, from my point of view, what I have written is not controversial, this book has received attention from the senior management of HK Baptist University, my place of employment, about its content, especially for sections related to Andrew Wai-luen Kwok, who, at the time of publication, is the Associate Vice President (Curriculum and Pedagogies) of the university (Hong Kong Baptist University n.d.-a, n.d.-b). Hong Kong Baptist University's Research Office has generously supported the open access fees for this monograph through their Book Publication Grant 2024/25, but during the publication process, the senior management of HK Baptist University expressed concerns, asking why I wrongly stated that Kwok is a protester as I analyse the works of my esteemed colleague in Chapter 4. However, I stated no such thing, merely arguing he uses a *third way* to engage with Christian communities. Thus, I wish to take the time to state that Kwok is in no way, shape, or form a protester. Even if my arguments are not an advocacy for protests, civil rights, or liberal democracy, the mere discussion, or even use, of such terms seems to be perceived as problematic. This is unfortunate, as I view China as a place of diversity in terms of ethnicity, dialects, beliefs, and more. I sincerely wish this diversity will continue to be reflected in our academic outputs.

Incarnational Humanism: What Is It?

Other than lived theology, a key aspect of this book is advocating for using incarnational humanism to replace using secular language in HK Christian communities when discussing civic actions. When HK Christians talk about democracy and rights, they seem to implicitly think that their Christian stance necessitates being either for or against these secular ideas, without being able to explore how Christian narratives support their thinking. Incarnational humanism, a theory best known from the works of Jens Zimmermann, could enrich their way of thinking and their language through providing a framework to think of the world grounded in a Christian perspective. Incarnational humanism is important as it emphasises that

true humanity, human dignity, and genuine community were found only in Christ. [...] personhood and genuine sociality are the result of Christianity's transformative power. Only with the incarnation and its Trinitarian implications could human thought plumb the fullest depth of selfhood, combined with a sense of community that allows for the precious balance between individualism and collectivism.

(Zimmermann 2019, 296)

As such, incarnational humanism centres the focus on the incarnated Christ and His humanness in the theory rather than secular humanism. Incarnational humanism is important for HK Christians' self-understanding since secular humanism and its religious roots are important to the Western culture, and Western culture strongly influences HK society, which shaped our collective understanding of human dignity, human rights, and social responsibility (Zimmermann 2017, 1). Incarnational humanism, as such, is intrinsic to how Christians see themselves, and Christians need to be critically aware of how much humanism shapes their implicitly held assumptions on what it means to be human. The Christian argument should not centre on whether democracy or rights is suitable for the HK context, as this antagonism does not give a space for each side to listen to the other. Liberal democracy came about in the rise of the modern nation-state, which in essence attempts to sideline religion, specifically Christianity, and move it into a private domain. To bring incarnational humanism into this conversation is to bring the Christian conversation back into the public sphere by empowering the Christian language. HK Christians primarily use democracy and rights language as part of their understanding of their HK Christian core values, be they for or against these concepts. I want to counter secular concepts of democracy and rights language with ideas from incarnational humanism, so that HK Christian communities can explore their thoughts, values, stances, and theologies using a language that has its core values in line with their faith. As I believe language shapes one's thoughts, having a discourse available within Christian theology helps one's articulation of Christianity in modern and post-modern settings.

I am proposing the use of incarnational humanism as a constructive tool in HK Christian communities' context because it offers (1) a Christian language to discuss issues regarding civic lives; (2) an incarnational lens to interact with fellow humans, who also have the potentiality to mind and reason, thus different voices should also be seen as HK theology; and (3) a framework that facilitates human flourishing. Through field observation, I found that HK Christians are keen to receive a set of rules that tell them what is Christian and what is not, as well as how to act and how not to act. However, deontological ethics – that is, a set of moral rules for what to do (or not) based on the actions being right or wrong – is only one way to understand theological ethics. Incarnational humanism, in turn, can lead HK Christians into a Christian-based worldview, making decisions by immersing themselves in the grand narrative of Christ's incarnation. As such, incarnational humanism can be a way of disrupting HK Christians' current ways of thinking and provoking them to embrace Christian humanist approaches to understanding and interpreting their political and social realities.

Chapter Synopsis: Why Is This Book Structured in This Particular Way?

This book begins with a historical overview of how HK Christians interact with society. Building on that foundation, I explore and compare how selected published theologians and average Christians in HK understand ideas of democracy, rights, and civic identity at this juncture in time. Finally, I land on the point that lived theology should be the focus of academic researchers and Christians who wish to decolonise their ways of knowing, and I emphasise the importance of Christian communities in the revelation of God.

Chapter 1 ('Hong Kong, China's History of Protests') provides background on Christian involvement in HK civic society. I analyse how HK's relationships with Britain and China have shaped its political landscape, trace the history of protest in the city, and highlight the ways in which HK's identity has been forged through these unique historical circumstances over the past 50 years. By means of this, I investigate the mutually transformative relationship between HK Christianity and the city's broader social development. I conclude by exploring recent Christians' involvement in civic activism and charting how the evolution of secular values such as democracy, rights, and identity among HKers has informed and influenced the Christian community's responses to these social justice issues.

Chapter 2 ('Pro-Establishment Christians') aims to illustrate a more holistic picture of Pro-Establishment Christians (PECs) in HK, arguing for the validity of their lived theology. To contextualise the broader discussion within the volume, I begin with a conceptual analysis of how different groups of HK Christians imagine China, the differences between Mainline and Evangelical theology, and the importance of lived theology, human dignity, and the capacity for reason. Drawing on ideas from notable PEC figures Daniel Ng and Paul

Kwong and interviews with active lay members of the Christian community, I then explore how PECs engage with theology, religious beliefs, and public civic action, and I critically examine their use of the terms *rights* and *democracy*. To conclude, I argue that Christian imagination should be shaped by core Christian convictions rather than constrained by secular notions of what is deemed possible.

Chapter 3 ('Pro-Democracy Christians') aims to illustrate a more holistic picture of Pro-Democracy Christians (PDCs) in HK, where I also argue for a lived theology. Drawing on the works of HK theologians John Wai-on Chan and Kung Lap-yan, alongside the lay theologies of HK Christian participants and, by extension, those who have migrated to Britain, I critically examine how PDCs understand and negotiate the relationship between democratic values and Christian convictions. Building on the findings in Chapter 2, I demonstrate that, although both PDCs and PECs use the language of democracy and rights, their differing definitions have led to communication challenges that intensify political polarisation within the local Christian community. Ultimately, I offer suggestions to bridge these divides, enabling both groups to better articulate and make sense of their respective stances.

As *PEC and PDC* is too stark a dichotomy, Chapter 4 ('Christians Who Propose a Third Way') reveals a fuller picture of lived theology in HK. I draw from the work of HK theologians Freeman Chi-wai Huen and Kwok and the lay theologies of the HK Christian participants to present a more complete picture of lived theology in HK. Arguing against the reliance on secular, Western democratic language as the primary framework for HK Christians to discuss religion and politics, I propose the concept of incarnational humanism, articulated by Zimmermann, as a Christian ideal and a worthy proposal that transcends the political polarisation within the HK Christian community. Unfortunately, this point of a *third way* is often misunderstood. As previously mentioned, from my analysis of the works of my esteemed colleague Kwok, I argue that he uses a *third way* to engage with Christian communities, and I do not say that Kwok is a protester in any way. The response from the senior management of my place of employment demonstrates how an alternative way of engagement, or even the description of such, can be easily misunderstood, even, or especially, by academics. I find it important for HK Christians to propose third ways, since they are different paths of imagining civic engagements, which are important for civic societies to dialogue and flourish.

Chapter 5 ('An Argument for Lived Theology') demonstrates that both Christian leaders and lay Christians contribute to building HK's civic and faith identity through the integration of grassroots voices from Chapters 2 to 4. The lived experiences of HK lay Christians, which can never be fully represented by Christian leaders alone, are an essential part of theology-in-the-making and should be channelled in theological conversation. My hope is that HK Christians' experiences can resonate with other Christians in non-democratic societies. Bringing together the evidence from Chapters 1 to 4, if we are to take lived theology seriously as a way to contend with the messy experiences of real

humans, the field of World Christianity or Global Christianity cannot exist in the same way. World Christianity scholars need to complicate the neat categories of the field.

You: Whom Is This Book Written For?

This book is particularly helpful for HK Christians who want to acquire tools to articulate their experiences within a framework that can be understood by the rest of the world. This book is also aimed at those interested in practical theology, not necessarily those with extensive knowledge of HK. In this way, I want to create a framework from HK Christianities so that we are not only data-generating but also theory-making. At the same time, I wrote it in a way that those interested in HK area studies, with limited knowledge of Christianity, would also benefit from reading it. As a professor who teaches a methodology course for doctoral students, I strive to be clear in my use of qualitative methods so that graduate students can learn from this research project as an example of qualitative research. As such, as a specific piece of research on a particular group of people, this book can serve as a graduate course textbook in many academic contexts, including HK studies, sociology of religion, and practical theology. This book will have increasing interest outside of HK, since HK Christians are moving abroad, and pastors will want to know how to serve them, academics and policy makers will want to learn how to plan for them, and institutions from regions with sizeable Hong Kong diasporic communities will want to have a starting point to discuss their identity and struggles.

This book contributes to the *Routledge Studies in Asian Religion and Philosophy* series as an essential conversation partner. The series is multidisciplinary, just like this book, which combines HK studies, World Christianity, political theology, and practical theology. It uses HK as a case study to make a theoretical contribution to its respective fields, highlighting the relevance of HK as a case study for other geographic areas. This book adds to existing volumes on Asian Christian theology in this series, such as those by Simon Kwan and Francis Kheh Gee Lim. I hope you enjoy reading this book, and I look forward to further interactions on the contents and matters discussed.

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1 Hong Kong, China's History of Protests

A Summary of Relevant Historical Milestones in Hong Kong, China

As Hong Kong, China's (HK) Christianity is obviously situated in the city of HK, its theological reflections necessarily reflect what is happening in the larger social context of HK society. Caught between China and Britain, HK has an in-betweenness that can be witnessed through its historical brokering of Western enlightenment and free-market theory to China and of Chinese indigenous culture to the West. The British government claimed sovereignty of HK Island in 1841 with the Qing dynasty government's cession *in perpetuity* in the Treaty of Nanking, which was ratified in 1843 and declared HK a British colony. Then, in 1861, the British government occupied the Kowloon Peninsula in accordance with the 1860 Convention of Peking. The 1898 Convention of Peking leased the New Territories to the British government for 99 years. This series of events changed the course of HK's identity: Instead of a mere fishing village in an obscure part of China, it came to the centre of the world stage as an Asian financial hub where *East meets West* (Carroll 2007, 13–54). At each major socio-political milestone in HK up to 2020, the Christian Church had been present and responded in a variety of ways, reflecting cultural hybridity as a core part of the HK identity. To illustrate, one of my interview participants, Ivana (alias),¹ identifies first as an ecumenical Christian without country boundary; then she grounds her citizenship in heaven, which is boundary-less. As for Chinese or HK Chinese (Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute n.d.),² she prefers to describe HK as a hybrid identity, and she believes that her identity is more than just being a Hong Konger (HKer), because she believes HK is not static. Ivana sees hybridity as a description of HK identity, as citizenship is only one part of her identity, which is not static, either. This articulation of HK identity is not unusual. Before diving into the post-Umbrella Movement, or post-2014, theological discussions in HK, I will sketch relevant milestones in HK's history which illustrate the changes in HK's relationship with China, especially before and after the Handover (Figure 1.1).

I will now give a brief overview of events leading up to HK's transition from British colonial rule to Chinese rule. In the wake of the 1966 Cultural Revolution in China, a movement that aimed at bringing Mao Zedong, a

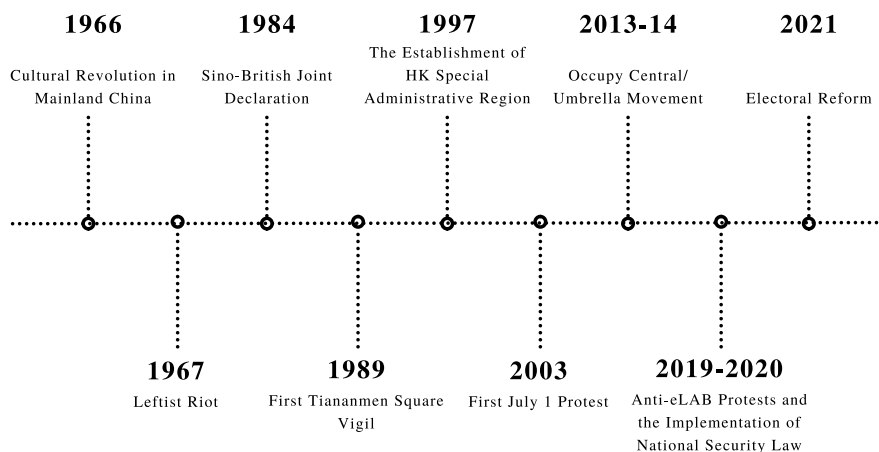


Figure 1.1 Relevant Historical Milestones in HK.

founding member of the People's Republic of China, to power, actions by local Leftist groups led to violent confrontations with colonial police forces in HK between 1966 and 1968, resulting in the deaths of about 50 residents, including civilians and members of the police force. In 1972, as China was admitted to the United Nations (UN), the UN's General Assembly, owing to China's petition, removed HK and Macau, China from its list of colonial territories, and the British government subsequently changed HK's status from Crown Colony to Dependent Territory. This removed HK and Macau, China's possibility of independence and sparked the process of their return to Chinese rule. In 1979, the governor of colonial HK, Baron Murray MacLehose of Beoch, visited Beijing to discuss the end of the 1997 New Territories lease. In these conversations, the Chinese government discreetly stood firm in its repossession of HK in 1997 while overtly conveying the ambiguous message that HK investors could 'put their hearts at ease' (Carroll 2007, 239–250). In 1981, the British Parliament passed the British Nationality (HK) Act, which excluded more than 2.5 million HK Chinese from the right to abide in Britain. In 1982, Deng Xiao-ping, the de facto leader of China at the time, informed the British prime minister at the time that only HK natives would be allowed to hold the highest office in HK after 1997 and that HK would become a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China. In 1984, British Prime Minister Baroness Margaret Thatcher of Kesteven and Deng Xiao-ping signed the Sino-British Joint Declaration in Beijing, and in 1985, the HK Basic Law Drafting Committee was established. In 1988, a permanent office of the Sino-British Joint Liaison Group opened in HK. These events signalled the inevitable future of HK coming under Chinese rule. No two societies in the world presented a greater contrast in governance than the People's Republic of China and the British Crown Colony of HK (Garside 2021, 190), and so, understandably, HKers, being caught in between the two powers, were very uneasy because they were

uncertain as to what extent their ways of life, social support, and governmental structures were going to change, and they had very little say in any of these matters.

I will now give a brief overview of events in China and HK that led to HKers' current civic engagement. In 1989, the Chinese government declared martial law in Beijing as more than one million people in HK protested the alleged Tiananmen Square massacre, what was considered the Chinese government's attempt to stop a student-led democratic movement. In 1990, the Basic Law, HK's *mini* constitution, was approved by the Chinese government after public consultations in 1988 and 1989. In 1991, the HK Bill of Rights was enacted, although the Chinese government still maintained the right to repeal any laws that violated the Basic Law. In 1997, HK reverted to Chinese sovereignty, and, later that year, the Asian Financial Crisis began. During this period building up to the Handover, HKers experienced a booming economy, and at the same time, they were concerned with the future of Chinese rule. As such, they were divided between two courses of action: staying in HK for economic gain or migrating abroad to what they would consider a safe haven.

In 2003, the first July 1 (Handover Day) rally occurred when about 500,000 people marched against the government of the HK SAR's proposed security legislation according to Article 23 of the Basic Law and began a tradition that was ongoing until the placement of pandemic restrictions and subsequent implementation of the National Security Law (NSL) in 2020 (Carroll 2007, 239–250). In 2013, Benny Y.T. Tai, a law professor at the University of HK at the time and a Christian, published an article in a local newspaper proposing civil disobedience as a method to pressure the Chinese government to give HK the right to universal suffrage, establishing the Occupy Central with Love and Peace Movement. In 2014, the Chinese government published the 831 Framework (Chong and Chui 2016, 160–184),³ which significantly restricted the right to a free vote and triggered a series of protests that culminated in the Umbrella Movement, lasting 79 days and involving the occupation of HK's central business districts and shopping districts, such as Admiralty, Causeway Bay, Mongkok, and Tsim Sha Tsui. The HK police used tear gas against protesters and were even seen with boxes of rubber pellets (Ng 2016, 303–306). From 2019 to 2020, the Anti-Extradition Legislation Amendment Bill protests (Anti-eLAB) occurred in reaction to the government of the HK SAR's proposal of the *Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation (Amendment) Bill 2019* regarding extradition to amend the *Fugitive Offenders Ordinance (Cap. 503)* after an uncharacteristically short consultation period (Chu 2019). This bill is understood to 'have allowed criminal suspects to be extradited to Communist China. Many HK people feared that the bill would erode civil liberties in HK because people might be extradited without due process' (Kwok and Yip 2021, 10–16). Over 25 years into the Handover, this turbulent period continues for the HK–China relationship, especially since China is a rising powerhouse on the world stage and HK seems to be falling into obscurity in comparison.

While many protests and riots have occurred in HK, I will here discuss what I consider to be the most relevant protests between 1960 and 2020, including the 1967 Leftist Riot, the 1989 protest, the July 1 protest, the Occupy Central Movement, the Umbrella Movement, and Anti-eLAB. HK academic Ackbar Abbas (1997, 1–15), renowned HK studies scholar, observes that ‘[i]nteresting times are periods of violent transitions and uncertainty.’ This history illustrates the evolution of the concepts of freedom, democracy, and identity among HKers as well as how the perspective of the public shaped the reaction to these events in the Christian community. As we can see in the case of HK, the secular mindset affects even the internal dialogue of the Church. Yet, throughout history, the Church had always aimed to influence the world rather than the reverse. What has changed?

Hong Kong, China’s History of Protest: 1960–2020

1967 Leftist Riot and 1989 Protest: Is Protest Part of Hong Kong, China’s Culture?

Ivana finds protest movements important for culture-shaping, as it makes room in society for discussions and provides a space for understanding and dialogue. It is curious that HK, in the 21st century, sees mass protest as part of its tradition. Is protest really an indigenous and authentic form of civic engagement in HK? Throughout the colonial period of HK, laws regarding unlawful assemblies and public nuisances (Public Order Ordinance 1967) prohibited the citizens of HK from voicing their opinions in situations such as the Guangzhou-HK labour strikes from 1925–1926 and in the 1967 Leftist Riots (Cheung 2009, 1–8). In over 150 years of colonial rule, lawful protest rallies only came about in the 1980s, and the trigger was the 1989 protests that followed the alleged Tiananmen Square massacre (Gopalan 2017; The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government n.d.). The drafting of the Basic Law took place in the 1990s immediately preceding the Handover to China, and in the constitution, freedom of assembly is protected (The Constitution of the People’s Republic of China 2018, “The Basic Law Chapter 3, Article 27”). This is of note because protests were under greater scrutiny in the rest of China (Qian Wang 2012), with some exceptions in Macau, China, the now-former colony of Portugal, which became a SAR after its Handover in 1999 (Reuters n.d.). The constitution gives the citizens of HK the legal means to argue that protests, which occurred almost every weekend prior to the implementation of the NSL, are a way of life in HK (Hong Kong Police Force n.d.). The NSL has deterred protests because, enacted by the Chinese government in Beijing rather than locally in HK, it is seen by some as a draconian law that may limit civic rights, such as protests.

It is also of note that the Western world now considers the rights of HK citizens to be important, even though HK lacked any broad laws protecting human rights during its British colonial era (Gittings 2016, 263–306).

This tension illustrates how HK occupies a specific space in the Western worldview as somewhat of a pro-democracy symbol, but this symbolic ideal is imposed on HK by the West rather than HK actively taking up this symbolic role. Dissatisfied with the materials drafted by China and HK in the Basic Law, the colonial HK government, headed by the Queen-appointed governor Baron Chris Patten of Barnes, passed the *Hong Kong Bill of Rights Ordinance* (Cap. 383) abruptly in 1991, at a much quicker pace than the usual law-making process, even though human rights were already guaranteed in the Basic Law (Chow 2016, 120–121). While the discussion of bills and the drafting of the constitution in the 1990s might have instigated awareness of rights language, the new awareness is also likely due to the exposure of mass media, especially the sensationalised reporting of America's condemnation of what is considered a violation of human rights in China, such as their condemnation of the Chinese government's alleged treatment of the Uyghur people in Xinjiang (Cumming-Bruce 2019). Rights language now infiltrates the general public's consciousness, although the definitions of what constitutes these *rights* are not consistent. Therefore, it is difficult to have any sort of meaningful conversation about rights, especially between those with different positions on the issue.

The concept of collective peaceful protests may have arrived in HK from the West. In the Chinese Mainland, individuals would more commonly travel to Beijing, the capital of China, to 上訪 (*appeal to authorities*). This practice comes from historical precedents in imperial China, that is, 擊鼓鳴冤 (a system of appeal in ancient China, meaning *hitting the drum to announce their suffering under injustice*) (Zhao 2009). However, HK can legitimately frame collective protest as an authentic part of its culture because of its history of *in-betweenness* between China and Britain, since there are cross-regional grassroots protests such as the Guangzhou-HK labour strikes. HK is, as previously mentioned, historically a broker of Western enlightenment and free-market theory to China and of Chinese indigenous culture to the West because HK inhabits both cultures in a cultural hybridity that is part of the HK identity.

Nonetheless, it is crucial that we ask this: Is protest a feasible form of civic engagement in HK? Many HKers consider protests like the Umbrella Movement and Anti-eLAB to have been an ineffective method to accomplish anything other than antagonising the Chinese Mainland. This result becomes especially clear when comparing HK with Macau, China, which has less protest activity and, as a result, a better relationship with China, which makes China more willing to fulfil Macau, China's needs in consequence. Paradoxically, it is HK's democratic demonstrations that make space for its freedom prior to the introduction of NSL (C.C. 2017).

This pragmatic and consequentialist approach to civic engagement has slipped into the consciousness of the Christian community, and some in this community would argue the importance of its effectiveness. Works of contemporary American theologian Stanley Hauerwas have been key to HK Christian discussions of how to interact with civic society during Occupy Central and the Umbrella Movement (Chu 2023). As self-proclaimed HK Hauerwasian

Freeman Chi-wai Huen (2017, 49–75) argues, non-violence is not a strategy for resistance but rather a way of living or a lifelong training. His argument suggests that considering the *effectiveness* of certain actions before we perform them negates the point of *doing the right thing*, because doing the right thing might not yield the intended results. For example, the use of violence is more than simply a means to an end. Hauerwas (1983, loc. 2534–2610) argues

the problem with these attempts to commit the Christian to limited use of violence is that they too often distort the character of our alternatives. Violence used in the name of justice, or freedom, or equality is seldom simply a matter of justice – it is a matter of the power of some over others. [...] For true justice never comes through violence, nor can it be based on violence. It can only be based on truth, which has no need to resort to violence to secure its own existence.

In other words, the means of justice are as important as the end. There are other factors to consider, such as the desire for electoralism (Case 2017) rather than democracy and the pervasive influence of consumerism. Newly emerging democratic countries' democratic chaos is the consequence of America and its democratic allies' electoralism – one-size-fits-all – democratic strategy. The underlying presumption is to measure social progress through electoral competitiveness and freedom to vote and dismisses other elements of a democratic society (Wong 2018, 11). While the voting system is embedded in the constitution, Chiang Mon-lin (1947, loc. 473), previously a principal of Peking University and John Dewey's doctoral student at Colombia University, argues

Chinese constitutional law came from America, which is a manifestation of the American people's thoughts and beliefs, and developed through the people's lifestyle, while the Chinese constitutional law is just a copy of the Western concept without taking into consideration the Chinese people's lifestyle, habits, or worldview.

This limited understanding of democracy affects how HK citizens pursue what they consider to be a democratic society by focusing most of their energy on the fight for universal suffrage. As American religious studies scholar Jeffrey Stout (2005, 19–41) argues,

There is no reason to expect democratically elected presidents and legislators to be better vicars of true piety than the kings and queens of centuries past. We are not inclined to put the nature and existence of God to a vote.

If striving for a voting system alone does not create a just society, then is radical civic action⁴ a sustainable or necessary form of civic engagement? While some may want to quickly determine that it is not, HK's history shows that this

may be wrong, as there has been a landmark case of radical civic action in almost every decade since the founding of the SAR. We will now explore each of these cases in greater detail.

July 1 Protests

The annual July 1 protest (Chan 2018) is an example of the post-Handover culture of protest. The protest originated after the government of the HK SAR's attempt to pass national security laws under Article 23 of the Basic Law, which required HK to pass a law that safeguarded against treason, secession, sedition, or subversion against China (The Constitution of the People's Republic of China 2018, "The Basic Law Chapter 2, Article 23"). Many feared that the passage of this law would restrict their freedom in HK, since the definition of treason is ambiguous and defined by the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China. Yet it is worth noting that Macau, China had already passed such a law on 3 March 2009 and that its use has not yet been warranted (Ching 2008). Since the first protest in 2003, the July 1 protest became an annual event until the implementation of the NSL in 2020. The long-recurring protest did not focus on a specific request but posed a variety of appeals in a decentralised manner, including demands for democracy, universal suffrage, rights of minorities, protection of freedom of speech, and a variety of other political concerns. The protest grew into a large-scale, ongoing, decentralised, and legal assembly that demonstrated the progress of HK's protest culture, shaping the way the government of the HK SAR interacts with its citizens.

In addition to subtly encouraging HKers to develop a protest culture near the end of the colonial period, the British colonial government had enormous influence on the development of the existing government of the HK SAR structure. The current post-colonial government structure can be described as *executive-led*, meaning that the executive branch of HK's political structure, led by the chief executive, exercises significant power without the need for approval from the Legislative Council or the judiciary (Gittings 2016, 94–151). The Basic Law provides only guiding principles, and religious freedom and other rights are subject to the interpretation of the Chinese government. While the West and the democratic parties of HK have criticised the Chinese for limiting HK's freedom and for exercising undue control, it is worth remembering that this system was set in place by the British colonial government. As HK-based German social scientist Stephan Ortmann (2016, 199–219) illustrates,

Hong Kong has never progressed beyond partial democratization and instead a liberal authoritarian regime has persisted for a long time. Despite lacking representative institutions, the city-state has maintained freedom of speech and assembly, rule of law, judicial independence, as well as the checks-and-balances that are supposed to constrain governments.

This raises several crucial questions: Why, then, are the democratic Western world and those who admire Western democracy not critiquing the ways in which the British colonial government historically limited individual and collective freedom in HK but are upset that the Chinese government exercises the same power? How is the dictatorship of the proletariat any less of a Christian ideal than the American version of democracy? This may be because the promise of *HK People Govern HK* (港人治港), meaning that HK governance will be dictated by locals rather than officials in Beijing, has been limited in certain ways, whereas there were no such expectations in colonial times. Moreover, HK's economic relationship with the Chinese Mainland has undergone a profound economic transformation, where HK is no longer needed in the same way by rising Chinese cities (Beeson 2017). HK has difficulty seeing the Chinese Mainland as their overlords because the two groups are ethnically similar and because, prior to the Handover, some HKers saw themselves as culturally and economically superior to the people of the Chinese Mainland. As such, HKers may struggle to accept this perceived reversal of roles.

While the British colonial government had an undeniable influence on HK's existing worldview and its governmental structure, HK's Chinese culture and the People's Republic of China have also influenced HK's conception of activism and its current political framework. Contemporary Chinese history has seen many revolutions. For example, those led by Sun Yat-sen, which led to the formation of Taiwan, China, and those led by Mao Zedong, which led to the establishment of the People's Republic of China (Horayangura 2011, 48–51; “Mao Tse-tung or Mao Ze Dong (1893–1976)” 2003). Owing to the unique position of HK being close to China yet established as a British colony, HK had been considered a safe haven for revolutionaries to convene. Thus, HK had a fundamental role in the formation of the People's Republic of China. The citizens of HK still have certain free access to news in a way that the Chinese Mainland do not, and as a result, they are more concerned with socio-political events in China and how these events affect them. Historically, HK has had a front-row seat to political activism in the Chinese context. Despite being known as a city that is concerned only with finance, HK has evidenced an intimate understanding of political activism in Chinese terms, from the physical warfare of Sun and Mao to the later resistance of Ai Wei-wei and Liu Xiao-bo (Dunn 2016; Béja et al. 2013).

Meanwhile, China has exercised substantial power in HK after the Handover, as the Liaison Office in HK is the de facto Chinese embassy. The Office coordinates Beijing's policies with the government of the HK SAR, surveying HK's affairs and unobtrusively intervening if necessary to avoid a violation of Article 22 of the Basic Law (Ng 2016, 36–54). The People's Liberation Army arrived from China in HK on the day of the Handover and has since been stationed in HK, and all defence affairs are deferred to the Army (Research Division 2011, para 2.4). After the Handover, the Chief Executive was appointed by the Chinese government, despite the voting process in HK, because *unsuitable* candidates who openly disagree with China and its policies

will not make it to the election process because their nominations will not be approved by authorities. China makes known their preferred candidate, and the electoral committee, whose members are mostly unofficially *approved* by the Chinese government, votes in alignment with the Chinese government, even before the electoral reforms in 2021 (Chen and Zhao 2017, 41–52). HKers inevitably come face-to-face with situations in their daily lives in which they find they are restricted by the invisible boundaries of HK's autocracy. In face of perceived oppression, one of the interview participants, Paul (alias), notes how Rose Wu, a teacher at the Divinity School of Chung Chi College of the Chinese University of HK, founded and convened the now-disbanded Civil Human Rights Front that organised the July 1 Protests. Paul sees the Civil Human Rights Front as made up mostly of Christian organisations, so he finds the core platform of these protests to be inherently religious. He finds that, at that time in 2003, religious organisations that talked about socio-political issues were respected, as that meant they were not about financial gain. This was the beginning of HK's first protest, which led to later decentralised protests.

The Occupy Central Movement

It is this history that gave rise to the Occupy Central Movement in 2013 (Occupy Central with Love and Peace Movement n.d.). Struggling with the complexity of the HK national identity and the clash of Western liberalism and Chinese authoritarian worldviews, the Occupy Central Movement began as a Christian movement inspired by both the American Occupy Wall Street Movement and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s *Letter from the Birmingham Jail*, to which Tai (2013), one of the three founders of the Occupy Central Movement, brought attention in his article which formed the basis of the movement. The Occupy Central Movement campaigned for universal suffrage in HK through the occupation of Central, the central business district of HK, and Tai coined these sit-ins *civil disobedience*, although several theologians have questioned whether this constitutes an act of civil disobedience, as some see coercion of the government as a form of violence.

The Christian community's considerations of the Occupy Central Movement were based on the 831 Framework, a common name for the

Decision of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress on Issues Relating to the Selection of the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region by Universal Suffrage and on the Method for Forming the Legislative Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in the Year 2016,

and also on theological discussions regarding whether Christians should participate in the Chief Executive election given that the candidate is considered to be effectively appointed by the Chinese government. The movement emerged from the belief that a genuinely harmonious society could be built only upon a

just political system and that such a system begins with establishing universal suffrage in HK (Occupy Central with Love and Peace Movement n.d.). Although HK citizens paid little attention to the movement because it did not disrupt their daily lives, the movement had a significant political impact. The campaigners garnered only mild interest, yet they aimed to build awareness of non-violent resistance and to raise the consciousness of issues such as justice and freedom in a relatively pragmatic society in which people are generally more concerned with personal welfare and economic gain than justice. This increased awareness among the HK public sparked the Umbrella Movement in 2014, which is seen as having ‘served as a practical lesson in civic affairs’ (Ortmann 2020).

The Umbrella Movement

While the Umbrella Movement (*Evaluating the Impact* 2014) was built on the foundation of the Occupy Central Movement, it differed from this and other movements in that it was formed entirely from the bottom up and decentralised. The Umbrella Movement began as a series of independently organised illegal demonstrations in several major districts of HK, and the protests did not represent a single collective aim. The goal of each protester was different, although the achievement of universal suffrage in HK, disapproval of national education, and general dissatisfaction with the opportunities available to the youth were among the issues that the protesters contested. This heterogeneous crowd made it difficult to mobilise or define collective goals (*Evaluating the Impact* 2014). However, although the Umbrella Movement did not directly cause the government of the HK SAR to take legislative or executive action, it directly impacted the government’s attempt to subdue younger generations by offering more opportunities for young people to participate in policy discussions as well as forming several new political parties made up mostly of the younger generation to continue efforts in the Umbrella Movement (Home Affairs Bureau n.d.).

The Christian community’s reaction to the Umbrella Movement, much like the reaction in the rest of HK society and the diaspora, was divisive. There were those who supported the cause and believed that Christians should be a prophetic voice in society, arguing that this was a Bonhoeffer moment. That is, like Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s opposition to the Nazi party, this was a moment in which a radical form of ethical discernment attuned to concrete reality, historical urgency, and the desperate cries for help from victims of the state was required (Wu 2013). On the other hand, there were also those who stood against the cause, citing Romans 13 to support submission to governing authorities.

The Umbrella Movement seemed to represent personal convictions rather than collective participation because those who participated were not from any particular political groups, and the individualistic participation led to mobilisation difficulties. As one of the interview participants, Obadiah (alias), recalls,

HK was very polarised after the 2014 Umbrella Movement, not just between pro-establishment and pro-democracy but within pro-democracy camps. Obadiah finds himself to be a moderate voice, and he finds moderate voices to be suppressed. However, the July 1 annual protest and the Occupy Central Movement are forms of political involvement and civic engagement that have always been familiar to HK churchgoers. HK Christian communities struggle to link faith and faith communities with civic rights and duties. David Chi-wai Wu, a HK pastor currently residing in Bristol, UK, and the retired director of HK Church Renewal Movement, argues that most church leaders understand the principal mission of the church organisation as evangelism or participation in overseas missions, which leads local churches to focus on *spiritual* rather than *worldly* affairs. Wu (2016) cites the *2014 Census and Statistics on Hong Kong Churches* (2014 香港教會普查統計數據集), which notes that only 27.4% of HK churches have issued joint statements in newspapers and that only 11.3% have participated in protests or demonstrations. Charles Taylor (Habermas and Taylor 2009), a Canadian political philosopher, argues that this sacred–secular dualism is unhelpful because it places religion in its own special category that cannot engage in dialogue with the rest of the world in a meaningful manner. This issue can be observed in HK, as Christians see their primary duty as evangelism. While almsgiving and other altruistic acts, such as visiting the poor and needy and, to a certain extent, coercing the needy into converting to the Christian faith, are encouraged, the focus of the Church is on evangelism rather than on social justice. As HK pastor Nelson Lam (2015, 91–98) said, HK churches, when it comes to social issues, focus only on social services and lack discussion on political policies, livelihoods, and implementation of the constitution. Some conservative churches simply use a misguided understanding of church–state separation to deal with these issues, and since HK had always been *stable*, the Church is even more awkward in response to current situations. Stability has been a factor in which HKers pride themselves, a sign of being civilised. This has been perpetuated by the British colonial government as a way to better manage this crown colony, and this narrative has extended to present-day HK, where chaos is frowned upon and seen as uncivilised. This is why, in the face of such pervasive issues as the Umbrella Movement, some Christians chose to channel their energy into campaigning against gay rights because it is still a social issue without being *too political* in the HK context (Tang 2014).

Anti-Extradition Legislation Amendment Bill

HK and Taiwan, China do not have mutual extradition policies since the Chinese government does not recognise Taiwan, China as an independent state; thus, in response to an incident on 17 February 2018 where a HK man allegedly murdered his pregnant girlfriend during their holiday in Taiwan, China and returned to HK alone, the government of the HK SAR proposed the *Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters*

Legislation (Amendment) Bill 2019 regarding extradition. This amended the *Fugitive Offenders Ordinance (Cap. 503)* after an uncharacteristically short consultation period. However, this bill would also be mutually applicable to other countries that currently do not have extradition agreements with HK, including the Chinese Mainland, leading to the possible extradition of HK dissenters to the Chinese Mainland. This bill sparked fear among HKers because China's legal system is vastly different from HK's, with the former sanctioning capital punishment and perceived to be lacking rights to open and fair trials. At first, the protest began as a legal and peaceful civil action with allegedly over two million people participating, but it quickly descended into decentralised violent protests with significantly fewer participants. These violent actions led to a severe division of opinion in the city regarding the protests. The protests reached an abrupt conclusion when the COVID-19 pandemic hit HK in January 2020, and the establishment of NSL in June 2020 led protests, both legal and illegal, and, indeed, political activism to shut down entirely (Figure 1.2).



Figure 1.2 Lennon Wall (17 February 2020).

Photograph by the author.

While relatively few churches openly expressed their stance towards the Umbrella Movement, many, at the beginning of the current campaign, issued statements condemning the Extradition Bill and the police brutality exercised during protests, and relatively few condemned the protesters. As HK-American theologian Kwok Pui-lan (Kwok and Yip 2021, 4) observes,

A notable phenomenon of the [Anti-eLAB] protests has been highly visible involvement of Christian leaders, pastors, and the Christian community. Clergy and leaders of religious organizations have spoken at public forums and church events, visited protest sites, and mediated conflicts between the protestors and the police. They enjoyed high-profile coverage in the mass media and social media. They also participated in the protests and provided guidance and pastoral support for parishioners, students, and others in need. Different Christian denominations also issued public statements urging the government to withdraw the extradition bill. Christians organized prayer meetings as well in churches, public spaces, and in front of government buildings. Unlike public protest, religious meetings enjoy more protection from interference from the police, and the organizers do not have to apply for a permit to gather in public. Christians sang hymns and offered prayers for the city and for government officials and elected representatives. The Christian hymn 'Sing Hallelujah to the Lord' emerged as a unifying anthem during the early stage of the protests, sung by Christians and non-Christians alike.

Likewise, HK theologian Albert Sui-hung Lee (2021, 88–98) observes that

progressive churches and conservative churches have closer positions on the 2019 protests. [...] In the past, these three large evangelical denominations publicly championed their moral concerns on same-sex marriage but seldom on political topics. Their new strong position against the government's policy symbolizes a dramatic change in the evangelical community.

This difference in response is due to the context of the protests. Whereas the Umbrella Movement strived for universal suffrage in HK, a right that HKers had never enjoyed, the Anti-eLAB protests are perceived to be protecting existing freedoms, such as freedom of speech and religion. One of my interview participants, Isaac (alias), sees Anti-eLAB as *dog jumps over the wall when it is frustrated* (狗急跳牆) because he finds that the amended *Fugitive Offenders Ordinance* (Cap. 503) violates HKers' personal safety and freedom and touches the bottom line of *one country, two systems*, eliminating the remaining hope of most people in HK, which is why many came out to protest against it. Even so, as the initially peaceful protest descended into constant violent protests, the Christian voice has changed from full-throated support to a more ambiguous position.

Analysis

The major difference between the pre- and post-Handover protests is this: Prior to 1997, HKers had a sense that there was still potential for self-determination and idealisation once the Handover arrived. However, after the Handover, many became disillusioned with the process of HK's Chinese assimilation because of the reversal of power between HK and the Chinese Mainland. As Kwok (Kwok and Yip 2021, 2) argue,

During the protests in the 1960s and 1970s, leftist students looked to China and studied Maoist thought for inspiration to fight the colonial government. Today more and more people assert their local identity as Hongkongers, as being separate and distinct from that of the Chinese. Around the time of the handover, there were a few people who wanted Hong Kong to remain a British colony, but there was no push for Hong Kong independence. In recent years, however, young activists have become so disillusioned by both the Hong Kong and Chinese governments that they have advocated for independence or self-determination for Hong Kong's future.

Accordingly, protests became a desperate cry rather than a look forward towards a hopeful future. Despite the differences in response pre- and post-Handover, there has always been a part of the Christian community that considers social justice to be a core concern of Christians, while there are those who consider social issues to be *earthly* concerns and urge the Church to focus on evangelism alone (Chu 2019).

Post-Handover activism in HK is distinct from pre-Handover political activism in HK. The 1967 Leftist Riot was a demonstration of Chinese identity and the desire to assimilate with China, and protesters rioted against the pervasive corruption of the colonial government and the Star Ferry price hike (Liu 2019; Cheung 2012, 19–37). This event was called a *riot* rather than a *protest* because Leftist unions went on strikes in which the police killed protesters, which led to the retaliatory assassination of police officers; the rioters planted homemade explosives targeting Caucasian colonial government officials (Cheung 2012, 119–131); and gun wars occurred near the HK–China border between the Chinese Mainland and the HK colonial police. These violent events resulted in the colonial government imposing curfews. The Christian response to the 1967 Leftist Riot was to establish more social services and labour unions to improve living and working environments, because the primary reason for these union strikes and protests against price hikes and government corruption was that the colonial government did not provide enough social services to support the HK community (He 2017). This is a more positive approach than the response to the post-Handover protests, although, admittedly, many contemporary social systems had not yet been established in the 1960s, whereas in the 2000s, HK had quite comprehensive social support systems in place.

Unlike the protests mentioned above, the 1989 protest did not begin with HK's immediate circumstances, as these protests were ignited by the alleged Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing, and the protesters in HK stood in solidarity with the students who were considered to be persecuted (Cai 2017). However, the protest was organised not only to stand in solidarity with the Chinese students in Beijing but, perhaps more importantly, because of the uncertainty and uneasiness surrounding the future 1997 Handover. Much like the reactions to the 1967 Leftist Riot, the Christian reactions to the 1989 protests were more proactive than to the post-Handover protests. Many agreed that the proper response was to evangelise more earnestly in China, as seen in the increased outreach efforts in the 1990s (Feng 2019). These efforts were a way for HK Christians to reconcile their faith, national identity, and mission in the midst of a political crisis. The colonial HK Christians were hopeful in the face of great adversity, but for post-colonial HK Christians, what changed? It seems to be the element of hope that has shifted the posture of HK Christian communities.

While HK and China legal studies scholar Carol Anne Goodwin Jones (2017) argues that '[o]ver the last 20 years [from 1997 to 2017], Hong Kong has become "a city of protests",' the protest culture of HK is more nuanced than this proposal suggests. In pre-Handover HK, there were still many opportunities for immigration to Western countries because of the abundant wealth in HK created by the economic structural upward cycle from the 1960s to the 1990s. However, after the Handover, with the economic downturn in 1998 and 2008 (Carroll 2007, 239–250; Ng 2016, 303–306) and the disillusionment with HK's Chinese assimilation due to the reversal of power between HK and China, everything had been realised, and there was no illusion of what was to come left, so protests became a desperate cry rather than a look towards a hopeful future.

This shift is reflected also in the Church's actions, which moved away from the focus on social welfare and spreading the gospel to China in the 1980s to avoid controversial political issues in the Christian community (Liang 2014). Context inevitably informs theology, but in the case of HK, the language of rights and democracy is so pervasive that the Christian understanding of the proper religio-political stance is informed by the secular narrative rather than the Christian narrative. This raises a crucial question: How should individual Christians, individual churches, and Christian denominations in HK respond to social justice issues? We shall continue to explore this question in the final section of this chapter. Meanwhile, we shall delve deeper into how HK's relationships with Britain and China not only affect the political state of HK but also shape the HK identity. It is through the lens of the HK identity that we can best understand the HK Christian stance on social activism.

Shaping the Hong Kong, China Identity: 1960–2020

Now that we have considered the history of protests in HK, I will elaborate on how the HK identity took shape. How did HKers, as a group of people known

for living on borrowed time in a borrowed place, develop their own unique identity despite their *in-betweenness* (Wang et al. 2017, 54–76)? As HK studies scholar Stephen Yiu-wai Chu (2016, 10–27) articulates, HK's *in-betweenness* prior to the Handover positions HK culture between China and the West. This allows HK scholars the unique ability to analyse Chinese and Western discourse respectively from various angles:

Identity, despite essentialist claims about belongingness, is in fact relational, fluid, multiple, and changing. Identity builds on a cultural construct that simultaneously establishes commonness and difference, signifying what it means to be part of an imagined collectivity [...] In Hong Kong, there exists no single brand of Hong Kong-ness; rather, one finds a variety of identity claims based on a multiplicity of intersecting and competing discourses.

(Ku 2019, 451–461)

The various protests that took place from 1960 to 2020 have been described by HK theologians Rose Wu (n.d.), John Wai-on Chan (2017), and Kung Lap-yan (2016, 107–130) as *kairos* (契機), also known as *God's time* (Chan 2008, 41–54) – a moment in time that is the perfect opportunity to invoke monumental change because, by contemplating the need for change, these moments identify and highlight the values and ideals with which HKers do and do not want to be associated.

It can certainly be argued that the HK identity has not been explicitly crafted by HKers themselves. Rather, in the nation's colonial and autocratic political environments, HKers have reacted to and against socio-political realities and labels that were externally imposed. HK's regional identity formation was less proactive than reactive, especially against colonial and political powers such as Britain or China and against labels that originated with political organisations such as the UN. For example, the UN removed HK from their colonies list in 1972 under China's petition, even as many HKers continue to consider themselves non-self-governing today (Wong and Ngo 2016). As Australian international politics scholar Mark Beeson (2017) argues, 'Hong Kong's existence and its subsequent history is a reminder of how the fate of small states, colonies and communities are shaped by forces over which they have little control.' The HK identity has been shaped not by positive internal self-determination but by the reactionary identity formation manifested in the forms of protests, riots, and migration at several points of so-called *kairos*. At the same time, HKers have embraced certain aspects of British and Chinese identity. For instance, the British colonial government created a legacy of *laissez-faire* government and the ideological foundation for rights language, while the pervasive use of the Chinese language has created enduring linguistic and cultural bonds.

With that said, the HK identity has not always been constant and has transitioned through different forms throughout the period of 1960–2020.

The HK identity can be interpreted as built on previous cultural understandings. When a monumental change becomes the new normal, society lives with this new normal for a period until another monumental change adds new reactions to this new *normal* to create an even newer normal. This process continues to repeat itself and continuously redefines the HK identity closer to the current socio-political climate. As Chiang (2000, 274) summarised his experiences from the May Fourth Movement,

What needs to be avoided must be avoided, what needs to be preserved must be preserved, what needs to be improved must be improved, and what needs to be overthrown must be overthrown. Refusing to forget the old, yet unable to learn the new, is a common issue for those living in a period of transition. We are neither left nor right nor central, and this is our form of pain.

To illustrate, in the 1980s, the citizens of HK began to consider how democracy should play a role in their civic lives, whereas in the 2000s, the citizens of HK took for granted that democracy exists as a civic right because of decades of cultural reinforcement of this idea. It is critical to understand the development of the HK identity from 1960 to 2020 because we cannot fully understand how Christians and Christian churches developed their social activism, or lack thereof, in HK without also understanding the worldview and self-identification of HKers. One cannot articulate the theological ethics of civic engagement in HK without taking into consideration its political and historical contexts. An authentic and locally rooted theological perspective must be formed and can be formed only in consideration of local self-identification (Pavey 2005).

There are two key indicators of the development of the HK identity. When faced with the lack of internal political self-determination (Petersen 2019), some HK citizens chose to leave through migration. Those who remained in HK did not necessarily agree with the regulation imposed on them; rather, they did not have the means to leave. However, people from HK who migrated abroad retained a strong connection to their HK identity even in the diaspora – they identified as *HKers* (香港人) because the alternative was to identify as *Chinamen* (中國人), a connection they might not wish to foreground. Yet, in an interesting contradiction, many people living in HK claimed they were from a Western country, even if they had only spent a university semester abroad. If they had not studied abroad, they would emphasise their global travel experiences. This pattern of claiming difference is precisely characteristic of HK identity, which connotes a need to feel different or unique from what others consider *HKers* to be and which emphasises distance from the imposed national identity. For someone from HK to tell you they are different from all the other HKers makes them a real HKer (Huang 2018).

In addition to migration, a key indicator of HK identity development was HK's major protests, such as the 1967 Leftist Riot, the 1989 protest against the

Tiananmen Square massacre, and several key protests after the Handover (the July 1 protest, the Occupy Central Movement, the Umbrella Movement, and Anti-eLAB). In these three moments in time, the so-called *kairos*, it can be said that the Leftists, the Democrats, and the Localists respectively shaped the HK identity.

The 1960s: Influenced by Britain

HK historian John Carroll (2007, 167–189) argues that '[t]he social, economic, and political changes of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s had important consequences for the growth of a distinctively Hong Kong identity.' HK sociologists like Lui Tai-lok and Ng Chun-hung and HK communication studies scholar Eric Ma all trace the beginning of HK identity to the post-1960s Leftist Riot (Ip 2020). The Cultural Revolution in China is often seen as the catalyst for HKers beginning to grapple with elements of the HK identity. Soon after the Revolution, the 1967 Leftist Riot was considered a reaction against financial and civic repression by the British colonial government, emphasising HK's connection to its Chinese identity. HKers are primarily ethnically Chinese, and during this riot, some HKers chose to stand in solidarity with China to rebel against their colonial oppressors, following the Chinese rhetoric against the *Western imperialists* and *capitalists* (Li 2019). This rhetoric came to HK from the prominence of Leftist schools, unions, and newspapers, which were prominent around the time. It created a faction in HK that considered itself Leftist and romanticised Chinese communism rather than British rule. It is less likely that the riot reflected an ideal of patriotism towards China than an expression of frustration at the rioters' ongoing oppression with no realistic possibility of independent statehood.

I do not intend to disregard the actual financial and economic concerns that likely instigated the 1967 Leftist Riot, such as the price hike in Star Ferry fares or the union strikes. The Star Ferry is now an iconic and almost exclusively tourist means of taking in the beauty of the Victoria Harbour, but in the 1960s, without the cross-harbour tunnels and the Mass Transit Railway (MTR), both of which were built in the 1970s, Star Ferry was the only way to travel from HK Island to the Kowloon Peninsula (Carroll 2007, 168–172). This was why Star Ferry's proposal to raise its prices was considered a major financial burden. Protests and hunger strikes were common in HK from the 1980s onwards, but the price hike in Star Ferry fares caused the first public demonstration in HK (Cheung 2012, 19–28). This era also saw several Leftist union strikes, which were reported by the Leftist media as a response to premeditated political suppression. The protest was not just politically motivated, as the cost of many inferior goods increased significantly, so it is likely that the locals felt frustrated, lost hope in the future, and experienced a post-liminal feeling much like that experienced by the Localists in the 2000s (34–37). This is a clear example of the pragmatic needs that pushed the people of HK to ponder who they were rather than to create an identity formed from a conscious, detached decision to

write a collective manifesto about their collective identity. The reaction of the HKers is common in contexts in which people are denied internal political self-determination, as self-interest is usually heightened when self-determination is denied.

The Church had little to contribute to the formation of the HK identity but played a very strong role in the creation of infrastructure to support social welfare. During this period, HK churches were not prone to identity reflection and, instead, focused on delivering pastoral and social care to the locals, as the president of Our Hong Kong Foundation Jane C.Y. Lee (2014, 1–6) argues. One of the interview participants, Leah (alias), finds that God calls Christians to be salt and light and to witness to the world, so Christians need to carry out God's will on earth as it is in heaven. She finds that Christians are responsible for noticing the needs in society, whether it is injustice, hurt, or loneliness, and for being involved in addressing them. She finds that to say 'I will pray for you' is not enough and that Christians need to do something actual to lift others up from desolation to hopefulness. This is why Leah believes exploring strategies to care for the poor should be a key role of Christian organisations. The Christian identity of almsgiving in HK is enforced by societal expectations of Christians and Christian organisations, which were built from the earlier colonial era. Indeed, the Church's understanding of HK identity was driven largely by secular reflections and definitions.

The 1980s: Influenced by China

Much like the relationship between the 1967 Leftist Riots and the 1966 Cultural Revolution, the 1989 protest in HK against the Tiananmen Square massacre was not the first situation in which HKers began to reflect on their collective identity. As Carroll (2007, 190–216) describes,

The Tiananmen Square massacre also helped strengthen the existing sense of Hong Kong identity. It reminded many people that although they were ethnically Chinese, they did not identify with the Communist government of China. "Hong Kong people," argue political scientists Lynne White and Li Cheng, "became more fully Chinese in that year, even while their disaffection with the Chinese government soared and while they looked internationally for safe havens they might later need."

This wave of reflection began before 1984, when the Sino-British Joint Agreement was negotiated, as the negotiations meant HK would certainly return to China and HKers needed to consider their own Chineseness (Petersen 2019). The 1989 protest was, however, a catalyst for the reflection on HK identity that led to the active protest against China, as HKers feared that an event similar to the alleged Tiananmen Square massacre could occur in HK as China's rule became inevitable. In this period, the Democrats who shaped the HK identity had grown up under British colonial rule in HK and were well

acquainted with Western ideals, such as freedom and democracy, but still saw themselves as Chinese and, indeed, wanted China to be great again. This desire is reflected in their linguistic employment of the self-label *Chinaman* (中國人) rather than *ethnically Chinese* (華人), two terms that are vastly different in meaning in the Chinese language. The former term identifies the individual as part of the country of China, and the latter is a nationality-neutral term that can refer to all ethnically Han Chinese people of any nationality, be they from China, Singapore, or elsewhere in the diaspora. British Sinologist Gregory B. Lee (2018, 15) argues that *Chinaman*, which he transliterates as *Zhongguoren*, ‘may refer to a Chinese (person) or the Chinese (people), and may more specifically refer to a citizen of the People’s Republic of China, and thus include Tibetans and Uighurs,’ whereas *ethnically Chinese*, which he transliterates as *Huaren*, ‘is an inclusive term meaning “a Chinese person” or “Chinese people” and may refer to all those in China proper while denoting those outside China proper in the diaspora.’ Lee also asserts that “‘Han’ is generally equal to “Chinese” – a convention maintained by the current [Communist] regime. Han is used in China today to refer to what the authorities have defined as the main ethnic group in China.’ There is a sense that, like China, ‘authoritarian regimes commonly conflate the nation with the government, [and] they cannot allow criticism of the nation. Generally the state seeks to use “objective” criteria such as race or an essentialised culture’ (Ortmann 2020). HKers largely identify with the values of free market and capitalism and support HK’s status as a free trade port with a small *laissez-faire* government, which Zhang Zan-guo (2016, 9–13) would call neoliberal.

Indeed, the permissive cultural approach of the British colonial government created favourable conditions for the Chinese in HK to preserve Chinese culture in HK, perhaps even more so than in the Chinese Mainland, which has largely eradicated Chinese culture through the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Cultural Revolution. HKers did not want to identify with the CCP, who they consider to have turned their backs on Chinese culture after the Cultural Revolution. However, they still wanted to identify as Chinamen since they did not wish to identify eternally as a British colony and much preferred to be part of China. These HKers aimed to attain a *democratic reunification* (民主回歸) with China (Wang et al. 2017, 12–37). The maintenance of relative political freedom is important to HKers, which is why the Chinese government’s perceived extreme measures during the Tiananmen Square massacre violated the HK sense of rights, freedom, and values that had been instilled by the Western education system.

In this national crisis, the Church found hope in a hopeless situation by focusing on mission work in China. The church leadership and members viewed themselves as Chinamen, and they wished to evangelise China as much as possible before the Handover so that, when the Handover occurred, China would be *Christianised* enough to ensure a smooth political transition (Feng 2019). One of my interview participants, Katrina (alias), finds that HKers and Chinese are tied in fate, so if China does not change, then the space for HK to

grow will be limited, which is why if HKers want China to become better, HKers must facilitate democracy in China. Looking back, she finds that thinking HK's democracy can influence China is a naïve thought, but in the 1980s, many were united to think about this issue. However, some Christian institutions such as the Overseas Theological Seminary (海外神學院) decided to move their mission work to America in reaction to the alleged Tiananmen Square massacre (Choy 2019). Nonetheless, those organisations that left China are fewer than those that stayed. By evangelising China, the Church demonstrated its HK identity: HK will become part of China; therefore, HK Christians viewed themselves as Chinamen and considered the welfare of China and HK as a single entity.

The 2010s: Further Influenced by China

While the riots and protests that prefaced the Handover caused a struggle between HK, Britain, and China, the major protests that followed, such as the July 1 protests, the Occupy Central Movement, and the Umbrella Movement, are largely considered the result of HKers' resistance to ethnic Chinese identity or Chinese national identity. In the post-Handover protests, one can argue that it was the Localists – primarily millennials who had not lived in British colonial HK but who were born into Chinese HK – who most shaped the HK identity (Kwong Ying-ho 2016, 63–68). The Localists, who lacked first-hand experience of colonial HK, romanticised the idea of the *good ol' days* and argued that HK as an independent state or even as a protectorate of British colonial rule would be better than HK in its current state. The Localist, as East Asian studies scholar John Lim (2017, 133–134, 55) argues, sees 'Hong Kong's gridlock position after the Handover and the deep level conflict as the result of the Chinese Communist structural rejection of democracy,' and the Localists strive for autonomy (自主), self-help (自救), self-determination (自決), and independence (港獨). This is not to say that the Democrats did not participate in the post-Handover protests. On the contrary, the Democrats began the post-Handover protests, but the Localists hijacked the narrative of these protests (Ng 2016, 135–145). One of the political parties formed (and now disbanded) by the Localists was Scholarism, famously founded by Joshua Wong, one of the leaders of the Umbrella Movement, when he was merely 14 years old. As international politics scholar Malte Phillippe Kaeding (2015) argues, '[s]ocial movements such as Scholarism have dominated the democratisation debate and effectively monopolized support for the pan-democratic parties – making any party or individual who opts for a compromise unelectable.' While Democrats continued to participate in these protests, their rhetoric was the same as in pre-Handover times, acknowledging Beijing's sovereignty and authority over HK (Lim 2017, 133–134). Unlike the Leftists and even the Democrats before them, the Localists did not see themselves as Chinamen and criticised the Democrats' *democratic Handover* argument that the Democrats had misplaced their trust in China moving towards democracy after its

economic success or honouring its word in democratising HK (Lim 2017, 133–134). This is quite a bizarre notion, considering they are the only group in the last century of HK’s history that is Chinese by both nationality and ethnicity. Prior to the Handover, HK citizens held either a British National (Overseas) (BNO) passport or an HK Certificate of Identity (Lui 2018), but everyone born in HK after the Handover, including Localists, has the right to hold the People’s Republic of China HK SAR passport (The Constitution of the People’s Republic of China 2018, “The Basic Law Chapter 7, Article 154”). Localists tended to label themselves HKers (香港人), a unique group that stands apart from other Chinese people in the same way that some people from Taiwan, China might call themselves Taiwanese (台灣人) rather than Chinamen (中國人). This is often considered a method to push against China exercising authority and imposing the identity of the Chinaman onto the people of HK (Petersen 2019; Chung n.d.).

After the Handover, the Leftists were firmly in power. They had expressed their loyalty to the Chinese government after the 1967 Leftist Riot and thus were rewarded with government appointments after the Handover. As they were firmly in power, they saw no reason to revolt against the government (Beeson 2017). While the Democrats were arguably the most prominent opposition group in the protests after the Handover, they were also primarily middle-aged and therefore were less inclined to join radical movements and more likely to try to work within the system. The Localists were youths at the time of these uprisings and were considered the new revolutionaries. This is not to say that the Leftists and the Democrats did not make significant contributions to the HK identity as well; rather, their contributions have become a new normal over time, as each society necessitates a radical change periodically to develop a new understanding of its identity that is consistent with its current context. Those like the Leftists and the Democrats who aimed to reach an ideal must accept that, one day, their revolutionary ideas will become part of the institutional status quo that the next generation will overthrow. In turn, the Localist ideology will be overthrown by the next wave to make way for another interpretation that aligns with the future HK identity.

The Localists may reject the China-imposed identity because the perceived authoritarian approach of China appears undesirable to a group of people who are inclined towards a *laissez-faire* government. But this rejection may also be due to a role reversal. Prior to the Handover, HK was financially stronger than China, but now the roles have been reversed, and some HKers may find that shift difficult to swallow. Many HKers were frustrated with their lack of political self-determination. Because they were all ethnically Chinese and because their head of the government, the Chief Executive, was required to be an HKer (The Constitution of the People’s Republic of China 2018, “The Basic Law Chapter 4, Section 1, Article 44”), it seemed as though they had political self-determination. For instance, the UN did not list HK among the non-self-governing territories since HK is not viewed as under colonial rule or in need of political support for independence (The United Nations and

Decolonization n.d.). Yet some have argued that the *remedial right of secession* can be applied to HK, as this framework skips the issue of sovereignty and focuses on injustice, but this proposal is academic and less popular among the general public (Wang et al. 2017, 126–159).

One of the ways in which the Localists aimed to make the HK identity more pronounced was to emphasise their Britishness and to cling to what they considered the international standards of democracy. Yet the term *democracy* is used differently by different people, especially among those with authoritarian notions of democracy. The Chinese government would argue that HK has what they consider to be a democracy, and the general public in HK is familiar with notions of democracy mainly through the mass media rather than from the educational system. Thus, it is difficult to discern what each individual hopes to achieve when they refer to *democracy* (Yang and Chang n.d.; Kirsch and Welzel 2018, 1–33). Moreover, HKers' uptake of Western democracy can be considered most prominently a reaction against China. Nevertheless, there is no legitimacy to the claim of British colonial rule or even independence from China since Britain passed the HK Act in 1985, relinquishing their legal and sovereign relationship with HK in 1997. In short, the differences among HKers can be seen as a *war of values*. Abbas (1997, 1–15) argues

that while 98 percent of the population is ethnic Chinese, history (both colonial history and history on the mainland) has seen to it that the HK Chinese are now culturally and politically quite distinct from mainlanders; two peoples separated by a common ethnicity [...] This has produced many instances of mutual mistrust and misunderstanding, with one side demonizing the other. It is not true, as some might wish to believe, that if you scratch the surface of an HKer you will find a Chinese identity waiting to be reborn.

The Church's approach to this situation today is diverse, unlike in 1967 and 1989, when the HK Church presented somewhat of a consensus amongst the Christian community. In post-Handover times, there are those in the Church who side with China, those who argue against China, and those who struggle to find a third way. These voices debate with each other and have created a divergence within the Church. Those who argue against China are the most vocal, and as such, it seems as though the Church is largely against China. However, through my interviews, I found there is in the Church a silent crowd who either approves of China or is impartial but does not make their positions known since they fear they will be verbally assaulted.

The 2020s: Cross-Pollination between Hong Kong, China Christian Residents and Diasporic Christian Communities

HK is a former colony of Britain, and before returning its sovereignty to China, the British government offered BNO passports to those born in HK

before the Handover in 1997. The government of the HK SAR established the NSL in 2020, and the British government has since offered visas to BNO holders to resettle in Britain (Benson 2021, 1–19). As such, many HKers, including Protestant Christians, have recently relocated to Britain. Many British churches attempted to become #HongKongReady, with many Christian services facilitating new migrants to settle in, and non-denominational churches in HK attempted to organise cell groups for HKers in the diaspora remotely. As Michaela Benson points out, the rhetoric of HKers being ‘good migrants’ and the colonial entanglements of the ambiguity of British citizenship for HKers, vested in the newly established BNO visas, raises the question of how newly arrived HK migrants identify with being HKers and British citizens.

In previous waves of migration, once HK Christians migrated overseas, it was difficult for them to continue attending church services and fellowships based in HK. As the COVID-19 pandemic moved church activities online, migrants can continue to participate in HK church services, which would not have been streaming live before the pandemic. This in-betweenness raises the question of whether they continue to associate their faith identity with being grounded in their HK identity, such as attending HK church services online or joining HKers-only churches in Britain rather than joining local British congregations with predominantly non-Chinese congregants. As made available by technological advancements, there is an expected cross-pollination between HK Christians who continue to reside in HK and those who have moved abroad, particularly to Britain. Diasporic theology has been a hot topic in HK Christian communities, both within HK and in the diaspora (Alliance Bible Seminary n.d.).

This move also surfaces the question of HK Christian migrants’ relationship with HK’s former coloniser, Britain. HK American ethicist Lai Tsz-him (2022, 153–162) considers,

Christianity and [the British] empire have had a complex and ambiguous relationship throughout history. [...] The history of being intermediaries and contractors to the colonial state established Hong Kong churches as part of the colonial matrix of power. Their political and social privileges positioned the churches in a place of sustaining the status quo and restrained them from challenging it. [...] Hong Kong churches are divided, just as society itself is divided. Some Christians choose to live in their inherited colonial privilege, while others do not.

Lai’s comments demonstrate the difficulty of discussing mass HK Christian migration to its former coloniser. HKers and, by extension, HK Christians may have complex emotions and attachments to Britishness, which is not simply them self-inflicting a colonised mentality. In addition, there have been recent studies on Chinese Christians in Britain, an area that has been understudied. This includes ‘The Bible and the Chinese Community in Britain,’ conducted by sociologist Huang Yin-xuan from the London School of Theology,

as well as 'Weaving a Sacred Canopy: Stories from Chinese Communities in Yorkshire' by Sinologists Caroline Fielder and Liu Ya-chun with historian Caroline Starkey, all from the University of Leeds. These studies strive to capture the changing diasporic landscape in Britain.

The Making of the Hong Kong, China Identity

As we can see through these four so-called *kairos* moments, the HK identity was determined by a reactive formation rather than a proactive formation. Since HKers were generally considered weak in their knowledge of their local history and history of China – which might be due to the fact that HK history was not generally taught in the school system, neither before nor after the Handover – there have been few systematic reflections on the local identity until pressing circumstances have arisen (Morris and Sweeting 1991). Reflecting upon this, Laurie Pearcey (2014), the Advisor to the President and College Master of the Chinese University of HK (Shenzhen), cites the television series *House of Cards*: 'Nothing lasts forever – even the longest, most glittering reign must come to an end someday.' Perhaps societies and states need protests and riots to recalibrate and reassess what they have been doing well and poorly. Or perhaps, even though democracy is best suited to voicing prophetic speech, this prophetic speech will still come about if necessary, regardless of political circumstance. Yet because of the struggles and loss of lives in protests and riots, the lessons learned from protests might be more memorable and lasting, and therefore, it will be long before the next revolution is necessary. Is this a suitable model with which to consider the shaping of the HK identity? Further consideration of the HK identity and its development would detract from the focus of this project, but perhaps this short analysis may draw a fuller picture of the HK identity and prove helpful for understanding the rest of this research project.

As we see through these three points in time, HK churches that are active in assessing how to situate the Church in the socio-political climate of HK tend to follow the lead of secular society in the determination of the character of the HK identity, which in turn shapes how the Church thinks about the formation of its HK *Christian* identity. While it could be said that the Church did not act as a prophetic voice in HK society because of its weak understanding of church–state relations, it could also be said that understanding HK identity must occur within the political and social context of HK. Having never gone through the social movements of Christendom and the Enlightenment, HK's Church and lay Christians may lack the historical background that encourages systematic reflection on self-identity and the relationship between faith convictions and citizenry. Especially considering the weak denominational affiliation in HK, the senior pastor of a local church might be given the responsibility to process events in the socio-political order and to direct the congregation to think about these issues. The result is not a systematic reflection among the Christian body but a dependence on each local senior pastor. Even when

academics study topics such as Sino-Christian theology, it is critical to note that this theology was imported into China by social sciences academics who investigated Christianity as an academic subject, so while such study was somewhat indigenous to the Chinese race, it was not indigenous to HK specifically (Jason Tsz-Shun Lam 2016, 13–18). The people of HK are primarily ethnically Chinese, but given the differences in culture between Chinese in the Chinese Mainland, Singapore, Malaysia, and the rest of the world, a theology for the Chinese people is not specific enough to fit HK's circumstances. The history of HK and its ongoing unique relationship with the Chinese Mainland means that Christians in HK need a more contextualised theology to better fit their circumstances. HK has an incredibly complex and contradictory identity position, and that position affects how HK Christians and Christian churches wrestle with and are involved in HK's social activism, especially in the period from 1960 to 2020.

Hong Kong, China Christians in Civic Action: 1960–2020

In contemporary history, Christians and Christian churches are often seen to be deeply engaged in issues of social and political activism, such as the Civil Rights Movement in America. Why is this the case? Is it because of the conviction that being Christian necessitates supporting democracy and rights, as HK sociologist of religion Seguire Shun-hing Chan suggested (2016, 135–157)? As we have seen at the beginning of this chapter, Christians and Christian churches in HK have expressed diverse approaches and reactions to protests in different eras of HK's history, depending on the nature of the protest and the knowledge of the people at the time about politics and its relationship with the Church, which shaped these individuals' political lenses. Earlier, we explored the history of protest in HK, how HK's relationship with Britain and China respectively affected HK's politics, HK's mutually transformative relationship with the development of HK Christianity, and how the HK identity was shaped by its unique history in this 50-year period. Regarding the post-Handover HK church context, the Anglican Archbishop Emeritus of HK, Paul Kwong (2011, xi–xxxi), asserts,

As an integral part of the Hong Kong community, Christians could not exclude themselves from the identity crisis. The political change forced the Church to reconsider its identity in relation to both the new government and the Chinese central government, and conflicts about contested identities were critically felt. The identity of the Church in its relation to the government has evolved over the years from being a 'collaborating community' in British Hong Kong, to becoming a 'concerned community' during the transitional period leading up to the Handover, then a politicized community in the post-Handover period. [...] Thus, the Church, like other sectors in the community, struggled to learn how to give allegiance to the national identity, while making efforts to affirm its

own. In addition, the Church was trying to seek a new identity in relation to the HKSAR government, which was already committed to redefining its relationship with the Church.

As we can see from Kwong's statement, the Church, like the rest of HK society, also struggles with its identity in the new HK context. We will now consider how Christians and Christian churches in HK engaged with civic action between 1960 and 2020 and will emphasise the issue of the language of rights and democracy that dominates the Christian conversation about religio-political issues. I argue that Christianity influenced HK's civic action, because Christianity's call to civic action is pervasive in its ideology. This is the case despite that the language in which Christians express their ideology is the language of rights and democracy.

To investigate how Christians and Christian churches engage in civic action in HK, we shall first briefly revisit how Christianity was brought to HK: through British colonisation in 1841 when Western missionaries arrived in the British colony. While the Anglican Church was the national religion of the coloniser and thus was given paramount favour by the colonial government (Kwong 2011, xi–xxxi), the focus on evangelising HK by other foreign missionaries of different denominations occurred due to a wave of missionaries in the Chinese Mainland being forced to leave shortly after the takeover of the CCP in 1949. Most of these missionaries chose either to stay in HK (Leung 1999) or to establish their Asian branch in Singapore (OMF n.d.). For the purpose of this chapter, we will focus our attention on Evangelical churches and congregations.

Individual Christians Engaged in Civic Action

The ideology of civic action is pervasive among those HK Christians with whom I have engaged, even though this is not a concept consciously promoted by the Christian Church in HK that I have observed. It is important to separate the Christian Church as a community and Christians as individuals when we consider civic engagement in HK, because the approaches taken by the Church and the individual towards civic engagement can be very different and should not be grouped as one. On an individual level, some Christians can be very vocal about their political viewpoints, erring on the side of worshipping the power of the sovereign state and proposing radical changes, much like what led to the Occupy Central Movement (Chan 2016, 135–157). However, the churches in HK I have observed generally advocate evangelism, and rare expressions of political viewpoints tend to be generally conservative. So how did these churches that reject social activism as a Christian attribute become home to individual Christians concerned with social activism?

On the surface, it seems as though some of the individuals in these churches have been influenced by the language of rights and democracy, while some Christian institutions in HK are focused on institutional survival.

However, biblical and theological teachings emphasise bringing change to the world rather than experiencing only an inward-looking spiritual change. Kung Lap-yan, a self-proclaimed liberation theologian in HK, argues that, from the perspective of the poor, liberation theology's understanding of sin is not limited to the spiritual or personal level but proposes the concept of social sin; therefore, involvement in society does not make it politically oriented but rather relies on the spirit to give direction to a Christian community (Chan and Zhang 2014, 102–124). HK Christians are familiar with the teachings of Bonhoeffer, Karl Barth, Jürgen Moltmann, Miroslav Volf, and Hauerwas due to the frequent citation and application of these theologians by local HK theologians, although the grasp of these concepts and the degree of contextualisation varies among individuals (Pavey 2005, 127–134; Chan 2016, 135–157). While these theologians are inevitably shaped by their dialogue with or resistance to modernity, they still pursue Christian values in their thinking, so the use of theories by these theologians not only emphasises how Christianity should influence socio-political issues but also strengthens the correlation between Christianity and the promotion of democracy and rights.

Even when Christianity arrived in HK as a coloniser's religion and even as it erred on the side of appeasing the colonial government, colonialism did not stop individual Christians from engaging in civic action, because the ideology of civic action is pervasive in the Christian faith. Christianity as it exists in HK Evangelical churches leads people to think about issues such as justice and liberation, even if these thoughts become tinted with the language of democracy and rights. If one's local church or denomination might discourage activism, theology still brings the topic to the attention of the congregation, and those with discerning powers decide for themselves whether they wish to participate in civic action.

Conclusion

The above analysis reveals that HK Christians throughout the ages have been looking for a resource to reconcile their faith confession and civic identity in the midst of various socio-political issues. HK Christians tended to lean towards using secular language in explaining their stances and rationale. While Christianity in HK might not actively promote social activism, and while the post-Umbrella Movement discussions are generally seen as influenced by rights language, Christianity in HK challenges the status quo by attempting to be prophetic in nature. As American theologian Ted Peters (2018, 153) argues, 'public theology can and should be prophetic because it measures today's world situation against the eschatological standard of the Kingdom of God.' Even considering the reluctance of many church leaders to associate themselves with social activism because of the interaction between democracy and Christianity, both of which arrived in HK from the Western world, Christianity still manages to heavily influence HK's protest culture and its current political

climate. This lens of HK Christians might lead to their active concern for social issues by disrupting their existing status quo.

There might be conversations about democracy afterwards, but I think currently HK Christian communities are missing a step; that is, they debate the political forms without first thinking about the common definitions and having a common language. HK Christian communities can move on to talking about democracy and rights but not before defining these terms in a Christian narrative first. It should be through being grounded in Christian convictions that HK Christians can argue their understanding of socio-political issues.

HK identity and, by extension, HK Christian identity have been formed through socio-political narratives. For example, after the 1967 Leftist riot, many British colonial government initiatives sought to separate HKers from their Chinese Mainland identity, such as HK Week, which promoted locally produced products to enhance local pride, or creating a sitcom *Under the Lion's Rock*, which aligned certain values like hard work and pulling oneself up by the bootstraps as core HKer values (Tong 2016, 40–66; Chow 1998, 93–108). These narratives enable easier British colonial rule, and these ideas of local identity continue to persist in post-colonial HK. While localism is authentic, the origins of such are lost in HKers' current understanding of who they are and, of course, by extension, who HK Christians are. As such, our investigation of HK Christians' understanding of faith and civic identity, in Chapters 2–4, will rely on the lived theologies of average Christians and published theologians to give a fuller exploration of how different Christian voices express and represent themselves, as well as how they understand their representation of their faith. HK Christians do not generally think of themselves as having a theology, as that is something that theologians and pastors do. Acknowledging that average Christians have a theology empowers the average Christian in HK.

Notes

- 1 I often refer to my interview participants throughout my writings. This can be identified by the format [pseudonym] (alias), such as Abigail (alias).
- 2 HKers may consider themselves to be HKer, Chinese, Chinese/HKer, or Chinese in HK. This depends on how they identify with the Chinese Mainland.
- 3 'The Decision of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress on Issues Relating to the Selection of the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region by Universal Suffrage and on the Method for Forming the Legislative Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in the Year 2016' is commonly known as the 831 Framework.
- 4 While protests are not the only form of civic action, that is often the first type that comes to mind for HKers.

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2 Pro-Establishment Christians

How would you attempt to explain concepts like *democracy* and *rights* to a friend? It might seem obvious, almost patronising, to be asked if one understands such simple concepts, but in fact, people do not all perceive and define *democracy* and *rights* the same way. It is common, for example, to associate *democracy* with the West, especially with America. Also, when people talk about *rights*, they usually assume it is universally defined since they are generally considered to be inalienable. However, in Hong Kong, China (HK), or even for many Chinese in diaspora, *democracy* and *rights* are loaded terms, since they are seen as a stark contrast to communism or socialism. Some from the baby boomer (Dimock 2019) generation have direct experience with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and, as such, may have developed personal resentment towards the political regime. It is not that they misunderstand the terms; rather, their experiences colour their perception of them. For these people, *democracy* represents everything the CCP is not (Figure 2.1).

Rights language and the concept of democracy have been used casually in conversations within HK society and, thus, HK Christian communities; nevertheless, despite the widespread usage of the words *democracy* and *rights* in this society and amongst the Christian community, these words are used without a consensus yet also without an incentive to explore how the perception of these words differs from one person to the next. So, rather than having meaningful conversations, people merely talk over each other. There was a time, in HK, if someone dares to suggest that democracy may not be the only political regime that respects human dignity, they are often shunned and deemed puppets of the CCP. Advocating for so-called democracy is considered the basis of a rational, educated individual. Even as these statements belong to the general public, this phenomenon reflects the general assumption of HK Christians. Yet does everyone in HK Christian communities use words like *rights* and *democracy* in the same way?

I will delve deeper into this phenomenon and consider how pro-establishment Christians (PECs) engage with theology, religious beliefs, and public civic action, and through this, I shall problematise their use of *democracy* and *rights*.



Figure 2.1 Causeway Bay (13 June 2020).

Photograph by the author.

Setting the Scene

Before I begin analysing the themes of PEC perspectives, I will set the scene in the following ways: discussing how each group imagines what China is, the difference between Mainline and Evangelical theology, the emphasis on lived theology, and the importance of human dignity and potential to reason (Figure 2.2).

How Does Each Group Imagine What China Is?

As a concept, China means different things to different people, and this must be acknowledged in any HK research. As British sinologist Gregory Lee (2018, 3) aptly observes, ‘Europeans and American sinologists and novelists have imagined their own China, and have narrated and imposed China according to this imaginary. [...] this Western imaginary of China has been globally dominant.’ The same could be said for how Hong Kongers (HKers) perceive China, be they PECs or (pacifist or valiant) pro-democracy Christians (PDCs).

Lee (2018, 79) tries to separate a cultural China from the CCP, as

the conventional story of the emergence of China as a modern nation-state is ... fundamentally flawed because it takes for granted that “Chinese people” are *inherently* a nation and that “China” is *inherently* a

Leung's depiction is reminiscent of how PDCs talk about China, that if there is a relation between HK and China, it is a relation of pain rather than belonging. One of my interview participants, Leah (alias),¹ recounts her decision to stay in HK as a loyalty towards HK, even though she fully recognises the government of the HK Special Administrative Region (SAR) is now about 'bad money drives out good,' in that the *good* people have all left. There is a sense of powerlessness in how she expresses herself and a resentment towards what she considers to be China's meddling hand.

In general society, there are those who mix the perceived messages of the Chinese government to mean identifying as ethnically Chinese, pride in geographic China, inheriting cultural China, and more. In Pro-Establishments' view, the

Central government has fixed the objective of constructing and imposing an official standard version of "China" to be propagated internationally. [...] the authorities and their agents frequently dress up this China as the "natural" descendant and inheritor of an ancient and eternal China [...] the premodern existence of a culturally and societally homogenous and monolithic "China" which somehow naturally gave rise to the contemporary, harmonious and homogenized China desired and narrated by China's regnant power.

(Lee 2018, 33–34)

PECs buy into this narrative, as they often talk about *China* as the cultural China and identify with their *Han* Chinese identity. One of my participants, Katrina (alias), observes that, during the open and reform stage, China had an atmosphere that influenced the Han Chinese in diaspora to look forward to a beautiful motherland, hometown. But she noticed that this emotional bond from the 1980s has become distant, where if one asks her now if she is patriotic, she will need to set many conditions; she would not instantly agree to the motherland because the government has much conflict with HK now.

Katrina demonstrates the mentality and struggle of those who have lived through a relatively open China and are now reconciling their national identity with what China is now. Lee (2018, 8–10) also explains,

the existence of a Han identity was in part due to the Manchus' emphasizing their own exclusive difference. [...] the establishment of this nation-state in the space that we now call China never was, except for a sprinkling of idealists, a project of Renaissance, of rebirth, of rising from the ashes of an eternal China. [...] China can be seen as having been created, its national identity forged, during the twentieth century.

Chinese-American sociologist Yang Feng-gang (2021, 16–43) likewise argues to separate the *Sinicisation* of Christianity from *Chinafication* of Christianity, where *Sinicisation* is a cultural indigenisation, localisation, or enculturation

from below, while *Chinafication* is a policy from above, namely the CCP. My participant Leah also argues to separate Chinese as an ethnicity from China as a political regime. She argues that the CCP is not the entirety of China, and it does not equate with 5,000 years of Chinese history. Therefore, this struggle of separating the two is both in the intellectual debate and in the laity's conversations. I would argue to further separate *Sinicisation* from an academic, cultural assimilation of Christianity, such as Sino-Christian Theology or interfaith dialogues between Buddhism, Christianity, Taoism, and so on, and join it to a lived theology of how actual Christians practice their faith, be it in Three-Self churches² or unregistered house churches.³ Often, Sino-Christian theology is thought of as an exploration of how Confucianism or Taoism is embedded in, or perhaps even synonymous with, Chinese culture.

PDC pacifists who believe they have some responsibility towards China feel '[e]verything good about China was projected onto its past, its now decadent, decrepit and sickly population deemed unsuited to the challenges of modernity' (Lee 2018, 6). Again, PDCs think on those lines as they often are not willing to see how China is reacting against the Western narratives. One of my participants, Bernice (alias), argues that politicians create unnecessary fear towards China, and in her experience, China is improving gradually, and whether China is inherently bad depends on how one perceives China. I can see where her argument against PDCs comes from, as her argument exhibits signs of other HK Christians who are quick to paint the other with a different stance as ignorant and easily manipulated. In writing up qualitative interviews, the editors of *Encounter the Others in Umbrella Movement* consider HK to be a civilised, democratic, just, and free society, while the Chinese Mainland is represented as authoritarian, corrupted, and unjust (Choi et al. 2015, 18). This dualistic understanding of China is something I want to challenge.

Another of my participants, Uzziah (alias), recounts how some people are repulsed by anything related to China while others think everything is good. These two extremes co-exist: Some think everything China does is bad, while some think anything China does is good. In his interview, Uzziah explains that, whenever he is in China interacting with his classmates and relatives, he asks himself 'Are they in a better position now? Are they smiling more often?' He uses these as yard sticks to measure whether living in China at the time is better or worse through his experience with those he is acquainted with. He thinks this experiential understanding, while not always correct, is a much better yard stick than simply reading the news at arm's length. Likewise, I agree with Uzziah's nuanced, experiential approach to thinking about China in comparison to a dualistic good–bad dichotomy.

Mainline and Evangelical Theology and Actions

In HK's church history, Ecumenical/Mainline churches emphasise social services and social actions. On the other hand, Evangelical churches emphasise spreading the gospel, and social involvement is less important, with some

conservatives considering social action a distraction from evangelism (Lau 2018, 247–249). One of my participants, Timothy (alias), observes that some from HK churches want to spread the gospel in China so much that as long as they are able to spread the gospel, in whatever form, they can ignore everything else happening around them. Moreover, as Sino-Christian theologian Jason Tsz-Shun Lam (2021a, 170–193) points out,

There are grey areas in all expressions of social activism. Due to their conservative Chinese cultural background, many Christians in HK are attracted to the Evangelical tradition. As a result, most churches in HK have rarely been socially or politically active in the past. In addition, as the Christian community in HK is relatively small, churches tend not to focus too much on social affairs for the sake of reducing bifurcation.

While there are always outliers, in general, Mainline theology leans towards being politically liberal, and Evangelical theology leans towards being politically conservative. This research is not comparing or identifying the values of collectives (i.e., church, divinity school, action group/learned society); rather, it is framing and analysing individuals of faith who belong to communities and their experiences or impressions.

Through my field observations and my interview with Faith (alias), I find that my church participants generally belong to Evangelical Christianity, and in contrast, my divinity school participants generally belong to Ecumenical/Mainline Christianity. As Lam (2021a, 170–193) observes, ‘To date there are not many churches in Hong Kong declaring their political position, but many Christians have joined in the protests.’ PECs are generally church-attending, while the pro-violence protesters are generally not but may have a relationship with the divinity school in some way, such as being alumni. The nonviolent civil disobedience participants fall somewhere in between, and so they could exist in both field sites. In addition, quantitative data support my method of choosing a pro-establishment church and a pro-democracy divinity school to conduct my field research. The *2019 Hong Kong Church Census*⁴ found that 358 churches (34.1% of churches surveyed) feel that youth are dissatisfied with their current church community and find it difficult to fit into a church. Compared with the *2014 Hong Kong Church Census*⁵ of 216 churches (16.8%), we can assume that youth might not be church-attending, so they might not be reachable through a church setting. In terms of churches’ social action efforts, the 2019 census also found that only 111 churches (10.6% of churches surveyed) have participated in protests/marches, compared to the 2014 census of 146 churches (11.3%) and the 2009 census of 2.7%. These figures are surprisingly low, and these statistics mean that, if I were to reach those who have participated in legal or illegal protests, the Church might not be the ideal place to find such participants (Research Group on 2019 Hong Kong Church Survey 2020, 52–53).

Lived Theology

As I have demonstrated, there are some similarities and certainly many differences between average Christians and published theologians; thus, I have focused on analysing primary and qualitative secondary data to capture these theologies. Similar to Helen Cameron's (2004) motivations, 'I want to take seriously the desire of congregations to reflect what they believe in the way that they act.' While some laity may cite theologians in the formation of their theology, their theologies are more based on their daily experiences as HK Christians and how their experiences shape their values, rather than on the systematic analysis of how theologians' theories may be applicable in the HK context, as seen in the theorisation found in my analysis of published theologians. One is more experiential, while the other is more theorising. That is not to say that one is more real than the other. Instead, I wish to demonstrate the differences in theologies between published Christian leaders and unpublished laity and that, perhaps, it is not suitable to say that published theologians in HK can represent the laity's viewpoints in general. Lived theology in HK's Chinese culture is its own theology, which mixes Chinese tradition with British influence and globalisation effects. In fact, the lived theology of my PEC participants pushes back the narratives imposed on them, especially on their stance regarding HK and China.

Human Dignity and Potential to Reason

How does the language of democracy and rights influence Christian theology in HK? In short, the secular language of democracy and rights has penetrated the Christian community, and whether they are for or against democracy/rights, Christians and Christian communities feel they need to address these concepts. In conducting my fieldwork, I expected more clarity about where this language came from and how to see it as separate from Christian doctrine/theology, but that was not the case. After interpreting my data, I found that my participants muddled secular concepts with Christian ones. While there is an argument that rights language inherently comes from Christian values, it is ultimately a reaction from the secular period to distance the state from religion, and so it is not correct or appropriate to assume Christianity must address democracy/rights. This point will be further illustrated in the analysis section. My participant Paul (alias) argues that, in the experience of foreign and authoritarian governments, the role of faith is to provide substantial support to society as a moral compass. Christianity can be more powerful as a language than democracy or rights, especially in such a situation as in HK.

As a result, instead of viewing democracy and rights as concepts Christians must address, we need a different proposal. Christianity sees others as humans, as Jesus incarnated into the world as a human, and respects others' individuality and viewpoints, understanding their actions are motivated by their theology, rather than promoting conspiracy theories like 'others are motivated by monetary gain' or 'they are naïve and manipulated' or 'they just want to be

different.’ Respect for human dignity and affirmation of humans’ potentiality to reason are what HK Christians wish to strive for, but in lieu of such concepts, they return to secular ideas like democracy and rights. This emphasis on potentiality to reason is embedded in Chinese culture, as Chinese legal and political theorist Jiang Shi-gong (2017) argues,

I also dived into the Confucian classics in order to understand what it meant to be a Chinese and the value of our current existence, and furthermore values of our lifestyle. I am increasing [*sic*] more convinced that the most essential part of the Chinese civilization lies in the concepts of “emotion” and “reason.” [...] the Confucianism values highly the natural emotion because it reflects profound “reason” behind the emotion. Chinese civilization is held together by the “emotion” and “reason.”

Moreover, inspired by Mother Teresa, Paul points out that he sees social concerns in recent years face the challenge of individualism, where everyone thinks they are right and reasonable, and he instead advocates for listening and tolerance, accepting different methods. Timothy likewise critiques HK as becoming a society that is less suitable for humans, where individualism trumps relationships and pragmatism, which to an extent is not normal, and he sees that his authentic self is grounded in his relationship with God. This context makes for a good start to respecting humans’ potentiality to reason.

Pro-Establishment Christians’ Perspectives through Primary and Qualitative Secondary Data, and a Theological Critique

I explore PEC perspectives through the ideas of Daniel Ng and Paul Kwong, notable PECs, but my analysis is rooted in the voices of my PEC interview participants, who are laity, not theologians, and are active in a Christian community. The two notable figures in HK are seen as pro-establishment and may sound like they have the same viewpoints, but they are, in fact, subtly different. More importantly, I hope to highlight voices of the laity in this volume, demonstrating the lived theologies of HK Christians; these laity are where lived theology comes to life. As such, I collected my primary data between December 2019 and March 2020. Moreover, I chose to use qualitative secondary data to supplement my current primary data.⁶ The first source is *After the Protest: A Vancouver Archive of the Umbrella Movement* (Hong Kong Studies Initiative 2022). The second, from an online video archive, is *An Oral and Documentary History of Hong Kong Protestant Christians: Religious Discourse, Social Participation, and Identity Construction from 1970 to 1997* (Kwok 2020).

Is Democracy Christian?

One of my main questions was whether HK Christians think democracy as a concept is inherently Christian and an unquestioned good in HK Christian

communities. It appeared to me that PDCs automatically assume Christians must strive for a democratic regime, while PECs argue that either HK is already moving towards that or HK already has a Chinese-style *democracy*, and it is not a concern for Christians, who should focus on evangelism. So, I wondered, why are HK Christians so obsessed with the idea of democracy, regardless of whether they are PECs or PDCs? Do they think democracy is a theological doctrine? Or inherently Christian?

Through the answers participants provided, HK Christians' reactions are not that different from non-Christian HKers, in that their lean towards democracy is simply a reaction to Chinese communism. In polite conversation in HK, rarely do HKers and, by extension, HK Christians refer to themselves as CCP or CCP sympathisers. This cultural stigma comes from a historical legacy, which affects how language is used in HK. As New York-based academic Lucas Kwong argues about what he coined 'sanctifying Sinophobia' in referring to post-COVID-19 American politics,

It's not enough to call it communist China; it must be a *godless* communist China. Really, that trope predates communism. It predates the 1949 revolution and dovetails, of course, with the figure of the 'heathen' Chinese in the 19th century. [...] Whether it's conscious or subliminal, I think in these times, when there are these perceived threats to the social order, particular to a white-dominated social order, people draw on these reflexes that are embedded in the cultural memory. And I think one of them is looking at the specter of the godless East, particularly the godless Chinese.

(Borja 2021)

Lucas Kwong's portrayal of America's cultural narratives resonates with those in HK. When the CCP is mentioned, people are either vehemently against it or apologetically for it. Those who are apologetic would say the government is moving in a good direction, such as Bernice repeating a common argument that China is improving gradually, even if there is still corruption, but it has improved greatly in comparison to, say, ten or 20 years ago. Her argument is that it is unfair to simply measure China with the West's ruler, when in fact China should be measured against its own growth. This is a common argument among PEC narratives. Moreover, HK-American academic Rey Chow (1998, 93–108) coined

'King Kong syndrome' to refer to this structure of cross-cultural, cross-racial representation aimed at producing 'China' as a spectacular primitive monster whose despotism necessitates the salvation of its people by outsiders. It is important to remember that although many countries lack 'democracy' and 'liberty,' it is China that, simply because it is not the United States' ideological ally, regularly bears the brunt of this process of palpable demonization (along with countries such as Iraq and

Iran, as well as Islamic political groups in general). For many in the United States, China is, first and foremost, that ‘other country’ where violence erupts.

While Lucas Kwong’s and Chow’s context of America is different from my context of HK, the reaction and cultural memory they indicate are similar: Communism is bad, and democracy is good. This can be seen in HK disqualified legislator, now in exile in Britain, Nathan Law’s (Law and Fowler 2021, 136) argument that ‘Beijing no longer only seeks to protect its interests at home: it aims to convince people everywhere that authoritarianism is superior to liberal democracy.’ Law’s labelling of China as selling *authoritarianism* precisely reflects Lucas Kwong and Chow’s arguments. I will now explore how Christian leaders Ng and Paul Kwong, as well as my participants, consider the relationship between democratic values and Christian convictions.

Daniel Ng’s Arguments

Ng is the retired Senior Pastor of the Evangelical Free Church of China – Kong Fok Church, described as ‘a mega church of the Evangelical Free denomination located in Admiralty near one of the protest site [*sic*]. This beautiful church is known for both its architecture and its upper middle-class membership with political and entertainment connections’ (Tsang 2014). He is commonly considered to be politically conservative (Chen and Chen 2019), though he did co-sign a manifesto for democracy 40 years ago in response to the possibility of HK returning to China. He believes that universal suffrage in HK should be undertaken in an orderly progression according to the Basic Law rather than through civil disobedience, such as in the Occupy Central Movement or the Umbrella Movement.⁷ In responding to the Occupy Central Movement and the Umbrella Movement, he cited Romans 13 and Karl Barth’s (1933) *The Epistle to the Romans*. His church shut down its functions during the protest in order to avoid protesters using the church’s facilities, since it is the church that is most closely located to the protest area (“Daniel Ng: Universal Suffrage” 2013).

Ng is an important figure in the typology of PECs, mostly because of his publicity. His sound bites have been prominently featured in mainstream media, and the general public knows him as 維穩牧師 (a ‘pastor advocating societal stability’) (Yu 2013), though he positions himself as the silent majority, representing the moderate majority who are not against democracy but only against violent protests.⁸ He is also an important figure because he writes a great deal and gives many talks on the topic of religion and politics, so it is easy to find texts, audio recordings, and videos of his arguments. One of my participants, Obadiah (alias), reflected on why he decided to major in politics for his bachelor’s degree, and one of the reasons was Ng, who was pastoring in his church at the time and who he considers to be a mentor who enlightened him in religion, philosophy, and politics. Obadiah describes Ng as a scholar-style pastor, and he finds Ng’s discussion of Handover issues to have been

revolutionary in the church context at the time. Finally, Ng has a specific context to which he is speaking: He was the senior pastor of a local church whose congregants are mainly high-ranking government officials and influential business people, so it is interesting to see how he formulates his arguments, which would have been intended to address this specific audience – his congregation.

Ng (2014) challenges the way in which people attempt to pursue democracy without considering whether the concept of democracy itself is suitable for HK. He questions whether Western democracy is the only path for HK society and the government's development (Catherine Lin 2014a), and citing Hebrews 11:13–16,⁹ he argues that Christians should not be fascinated by worldly political order but instead should yearn for the city that God in heaven has prepared for us (Ng 2019). Yet ultimately, he concludes that freedom, human rights, and democracy all need to be built on the foundation of rule of law. HK's society already has democratic society's unique lifestyle, such as allowing protest, news reporting, academic freedom, and freedom in economy and lifestyle, and so it should be treasured. The power of the concept of democracy in HK is that there is a general underlying assumption that democracy is assumed to be good, even for those like Ng who are not for pro-democracy movements. This assumption shapes how HK thinkers begin to conceptualise and process local actions and reactions. Ng's commentators draw attention to his position through his perceived loyalty to the secular state which is manifested in his emphasis on the importance of social stability and order. Their overarching point is that Ng's theology serves the secular state, despite lacking a clear and consistent definition of this term, even though both Ng and his commentators argue for a *democratic society*.

While Ng can arguably be perceived as interested in promoting social order and stability, he makes the assumption that democracy is the norm and the only problem with democracy in HK is that HKers and society are narrow in their perspective, and therefore, their understanding of concepts like democracy is limited by their knowledge of the world. For example, in his interview with *Angel's Heart*, a local Christian magazine known for being politically and religiously conservative, Ng (2017, 50–53) says that 'Hong Kong society is not democratic enough and politicises, polarises, and extremises everything. Argument and political viewpoints are not of a broad spectrum. Society is like that, and the church circle is also like that.' In other words, he appears to assume that PDCs are not *democratic* enough and do not measure up to his definition of democracy, rather than arguing against democracy entirely. In another issue of the same magazine, addressing the changes in HK 20 years after the Handover, Ng argues most Christians in HK misapply their theology in three ways: First, mistakenly believing that democracy only means *one person, one vote*. According to Ng, democracy is a process and not a system of absolute good that we must all implement. Second, believing that *anything goes* is freedom. Third, testing the bottom line is *rights*. Ng (2017, 50–53) argues that this is a one-dimensional view of Western values, not contextually applied. But, in the HK context, *democracy* is mostly used as a stand-in to mean

anything that is not CCP. In *Tai Kung Pao*, a local newspaper known to be associated with China sympathisers, Ng also argues not only that Occupy Central too narrowly and authoritatively defines democracy but that those who Occupy Central hold the presupposition that democratic justice is the standard and becomes a standard for everyone to pursue justice, and this method is inappropriate. Ng emphasises that, in the rest of the world and other countries, democracy is not just *one person, one vote* (“Daniel Ng: Occupy Central” 2013). Again, he is arguing that democracy, as advocated by PDCs, is too Western and not Chinese enough for HK. He also argues that democracy and the rule of law require citizens to listen to each other, respect each other, forgive each other, and protect law and order. Therefore, the Church should not facilitate the breaking of law and order, such as participating in civic action, because he sees civic action as an eye for an eye; furthermore, Christians should not idealise and absolutise certain political regimes, because this is idolatry (Ng 2017, 50–53). He states that the ideology of democracy is not God’s will, is not the ideal political regime (for any country), and cannot solve all problems, which is why democratic regimes should not be idealised or absolutised (Alliance Bible Seminary 2019). However, he does spend most of his time arguing for better models of democracy rather than turning his back on it entirely.

Why does Ng not simply speak against democracy entirely? It is because the concepts of democracy and rights language are so entrenched in the HK narrative and discourse that even Ng, who is not necessarily PDCs, finds it difficult to reject it outright. This point will be further illustrated after discussing Paul Kwong’s stance. As Ng points out, democracy is more than just its textbook meaning but also a sentiment against the CCP, which many older generations in HK have suffered from and deeply resent. Because of the connotation democracy carries, it is difficult to reject it outright. Ng argues that democracy must evolve naturally through due process rather than through revolutionary actions. This language comes from the Chinese Government officials in reference to HK’s progression towards democracy (*The Constitution* 2018). Ng discusses the necessity of the evolution of democratic development. HK churches should consider their own identity and roles in societal development, but they also need to consider the Bible, recent history, and China’s contemporary problems. He thinks the contextual analysis of HK churches is not comprehensive and needs to take into account the long-term development of God’s Kingdom, society, church, and country (Ng 2016). This is in line with the Anglican narrative, which I will analyse in the section about Paul Kwong, in which their focus is on providing social welfare and spreading the gospel, and that involves getting along well with the current political regime.

Ng helpfully identifies that democracy is more than just universal suffrage because there is also a consultative part, with a spectrum for discussion. He argues that democracy is not the solution to all of HK’s problems. Faith should be the ultimate goal, and striving for democracy or an ideal political regime should not replace that (Catherine Lin 2014a). Christianity is not just a

specialised profession like sciences or politics or cooking but a worldview that helps make judgements of the external world (Ng 2016); as such, currently popular political ideology might be outdated in the near future, so Christians should have a balanced view and blend into the society in which they are currently living (Ng 2013).

Ng's commentators also criticise his argument that, if the church commits any offence against the law, there might be the risk of deregistration from the Business Registrar, and if pastors encourage others to commit criminal offences, they should not do so in their official capacity ("Intense Debate" 2013). Nevertheless, Ng had since then repeatedly clarified that he did not say 'excommunication' but instead argues that HK churches should not be involved in or affiliated with progressive political parties but rather support social stability and bear witness to society through abiding by the law and praying for the government, as was the case for the early Church because of its status as a charitable or religious organisation. In saying so, Ng can be interpreted as putting the authority of Christian churches under the secular nation-state, and his actions demonstrate that he finds obeying the nation-state more important than his Christian convictions. David Chi-wai Wu,¹⁰ a HK pastor who migrated to Bristol, England, argues, without naming Ng directly, that Ng's comment was 'overboard' and 'vague,' because excommunication needs to follow the rulebook. In the rulebook of the Evangelical Free Church of China (2020), the denomination which Ng was pastoring in, there is no article that specifies whether pastors or believers who are arrested because of involvement with social ethical issues need to be excommunicated. Moreover, Wu listed many in church history who were labelled as committing a crime by the political regime of their time because of faith and justice. However, he emphasises that he is not encouraging pastors or congregants to challenge what they consider to be unjust law and ignore the consequences of their actions. He also points out that underground churches in China and missionaries in Creative Access Nations are also committing an offence, so why is Ng not challenging them? Wu's (2013) argument is against the double standards of who is committing an offence and who is not.

Of all the people who analysed Ng's stance, Ng thinks Ip King-tak¹¹ represents him well in his work.¹² Ip argues that, as a Christian, all decisions should be directed to one's Christian faith, so even though Christians might take different factors into account, Ip disagrees with Ng's commentators in stating that Occupy Central is only the individual's judgement on society or political issues and unrelated to faith. Ip also points out the fallacy in the argument of Ng's commentators: Electoralism does not solve all problems; even if, as Ip points out, he is for a fair election, the main point falls on economic policies in solving the poverty gap. Ip also aptly points out that Ng never said he is against civil disobedience, but rather, he supports investigating when civil disobedience is suitable, and that Occupy Central is not a suitable situation on the grounds that the organisers of Occupy Central are striving not for religious freedom but for universal suffrage. The crux of his argument is that universal suffrage does not equate to justice. Ip (2014, 55–75) delivers his final argument, stating

The ultimate question is: why do Christians strive for democracy? Democracy against Communism? If Communism is our threat, is our salvation democracy? Or God? Even if all Christians believe God will save us from the threat of Communism through democracy, do all Christians agree there is only one way to strive for democracy?

(my translation)

I agree with Ip that the underlying assumption is that democracy is good, and HK Christians are arguing how to best implement democracy in the HK context, rather than asking how to be faithful Christians, instead condemning those they perceive as having different opinions from them as against democracy. Those like Ng who have been *condemned* as anti-democracy are also trapped in the rhetoric of arguing that they are not anti-democracy rather than addressing that democracy is not necessarily the Christian ideal.

Paul Kwong's Arguments

Paul Kwong, the Anglican Archbishop Emeritus of HK and a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, sees embracing the post-Handover Chinese identity as a necessary step to the reconciliation of those with different views and standpoints (Wickeri 2016). He is commonly considered to sympathise with the Chinese government, arguing that many people romanticise democracy and universal suffrage, and considers universal suffrage an ineffective method to conclude all issues of society. Regarding the Christian sector representatives voting for the Chief Executive, he finds it irresponsible to give up the Christian seats. He also argues that HK citizens need to take up their social responsibility and not just critique and destroy the current regime (Wickeri 2016).

Kwong is a prominent figure among PECs because of his status within the political institution and his connection to the worldwide Anglican Church. Like Ng's, Kwong's sound bites are notably featured in mainstream media, and his position is quite clear to the general public because Anglicans are disproportionately high-profile because of the previous colonial status and the many prestigious church schools in HK, so their influence goes beyond their immediate religious community. What is interesting is the tension between his membership within the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and his role as the chair of the Anglican Consultative Council. The HK Anglican Church has had a good relationship with the CCP all along, and Kwong is known to have 'good relations with civic authorities' ("New Anglican Archbishop" 2007). Some see the appointment of Kwong into the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference as 'making the church a subject of the Communist Party's rule' and believe it 'implies that the Anglican Church is no longer an independent Christian church but a part of the Communist Party' (Yeung 2016). However, the positioning of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and its relationship with the HK Anglican Church, teachings of the late

Anglican Bishop of Zhejiang and Chairperson of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement Ting Kuang-hsun, and the enormous enterprise of the Anglican Welfare Council in HK receiving large sums of government money all interact with Kwong's theology. Moreover, it is interesting because, unlike the Evangelical churches in HK where denominations are small and individual churches are big, the Anglican Church still has one figurehead – the Archbishop of HK. While Kwong is speaking to a very specific group, 40,000 Anglicans out of 500,000 Protestants in HK make for a large group, especially in comparison to Ng addressing his church of 4,000 (Cheung 2016).

I will now analyse and critique Kwong's perspective and demonstrate how his understanding of democracy and how HK's pervasive use of rights language affect his theological conception, even though he is not PDC. This assumption is pervasive, and Kwong is an example of those who do not believe in democracy but still mobilise the concepts of democracy and rights language as their rhetorical platform.

Like many in HK, Kwong's focus is on universal suffrage as the defining condition of democracy, and he has made many statements in public on the topic. Kwong argues that HK Christians cannot focus on civic voting rights and ignore the task of educating citizens to be responsible to society and sacrifice for it (Zhang 2016, 2–3). This reference to educating citizens could possibly mean the moral and national education proposed by the government of the HK SAR in 2014. He calls for HK citizens, while seeking universal suffrage, to demonstrate civic literacy, bear civic building responsibilities, and not just criticise and destroy ("Paul Kwong Disagrees" 2013). This is a false dichotomy that Kwong is making. His underlying assumption of electoralism, the focus on the election system only rather than the rest of what democracy means, influences his positions about whether universal suffrage is necessary and whether to participate in the existing voting system (Case 2017). His understanding of democracy equates to universal suffrage and leaves out other aspects of civic duties, such as freedom of the press. This conception is common among those who think about democracy in a non-democratic setting; Helen Kirsch and Christian Welzel (2018, 1–33) argue that those who live under the rule of authoritarian regimes understand *democracy* differently from those who live under democratic governments. Kwong's use of *democracy* in his own writing demonstrates this position.

Kwong's critique of the Occupy Central Movement and, subsequently, the Umbrella Movement stems from his understanding of democracy as signifying only the voting process, even though his direct comments on the matter were scarce. Kwong criticises the protesters for 'thinking only about their own interests and not considering the good of the public' (Yeung 2016). His loyalty to the state, which is linked with his desire for social stability, is made explicit here. While he notes that HKers are keen on making their voices heard (Jing Lin 2014b), Kwong urges the city to keep quiet as 'Jesus remained silent' in the face of crucifixion (Kao 2014). Kwong advocates for the protesters to be like Jesus in the face of oppressing political regimes, where Jesus remained silent when he

was sentenced to crucifixion, as Kwong interprets. Kwong's view is that the protesters, especially Christians, are vocalising their needs too much and are not long-suffering like Jesus. Kwong does not view the lack of universal suffrage as the impetus for civil disobedience, because not all channels of communication have been exhausted, and Kwong considers that the general public still has many different ways of expressing their concerns on socio-political issues to the government (Liang 2013). So, in theory, Kwong would argue that civil disobedience would be acceptable if there is no other way of communication and that civil disobedience works in certain contexts, but not this one, though Kwong did not state in which situation he finds civil disobedience to be necessary or appropriate. These comments demonstrate Kwong's underlying assumption that HKers, even Christians, should be subservient to the state in order to create state stability – an environment that would allow for the Church to continue its work in welfare, education, and evangelism.

I argue that Kwong falls into the trap of the ancient Chinese notion of using knowledge of the spiritual realm and the wisdom of the ancients as a strategy to bind the common person to the state (神道設教) (Li 2014, 95–134). This concept is a trap because, as British Canadian ethicist John Perry (2011) asserts, there are competing loyalties between faith and state, and using faith as a strategy to bind a common person to the state makes faith the servant of the secular state. Why is the HK Anglican Church able to function only when there is a façade of state stability? The Christian Church was built not in a stable secular state but rather through a series of turbulent revolutions and wars. Why should HK be any different? The Anglican Church hopes to thrive in a state of stability, despite the lack of universal suffrage, because the stability affords the chance of evangelism and providing welfare and education, yet this stability depends entirely on the goodwill of the secular government rather than on God or the will of the people. There is no guarantee that, by sacrificing universal suffrage, the Anglican Church will achieve the long-term stability they so desire.

Kwong's theology causes him to argue against what he considers to be a democracy, because he sees democracy as a disruption of the Anglican Church's work in HK and, by extension, China. The current *stability* in HK allows for continuous work in welfare, education, and evangelism, which would be disrupted if the locals strive for a different political regime:

Here in Hong Kong, we see a growing localism and even calls for Hong Kong "independence." [...] this has resulted in a retreat from an embracing globalism and interconnectedness, in favour of a self-centred isolationism. In the Anglican Consultative Council, [...] Our very purpose is to work for co-operation with one another as we seek the common good in the church and in the world.

(Kwong 2017)

I argue that Kwong believes universal suffrage will lead to division and chaos, not because of the nature of universal suffrage itself but because of the CCP's

resistance to granting it to HK. Kwong's main concern is to work well with the Chinese government. Kwong (2016) does not see his work as bowing down to the Chinese government; instead, he views it as a form of collaborative, communal work that is in line with Christian values:

People are sick and tired of the damage done to our country, society and human relations. What they hope for is a harmonious, stable and happy environment in which to live, a place where people treat each other with respect and deal with issues based on humane values.

Kwong argues for social stability, and while he complains about how HKers simplify problems and relationships between people and the government, he commits the same fallacy by othering the protesters and PDCs within HK Christian communities. For example, while calling for consultation and the spirit of repair, he also sarcastically disparages the protesters in his sermons by suggesting they bring their Filipina domestic helpers to the protests (Xu 2013). If he does indeed argue for embrace and inclusivity, why is he not also embracing the protesters who also happen to be his congregants?

Kwong (2011) questions whether democracy is necessary for Christians to live well in society. He particularly points out that HK was not a democracy under British rule, yet many seem to relish that experience:

Interestingly, the lack of democracy was viewed positively and held by the business community, the professions and the civil service to be the most important of the three major essentials contributing to the success of colonial Hong Kong. The other two were "laissez-faire" and "little welfare."

Kwong (2011, xvi) asserts that, in pledging allegiance to the Chinese government, 'it was not political change itself that worried and divided the Church, but the events to which it must respond.' Yet the way Kwong (2011, 17) categorises PDCs and PECs makes it seem like they are simply preferences of how to deal with situations rather than fundamental moral values that diverge:

For pro-democracy people, the desire was to have a say over their own future, even though they were divided as [to] what was the best way to achieve their goal. To them, democracy would be an answer. But to the pro-China people, the best way was to co-operate with the prospective sovereign in order to maintain the status quo.

While his argument throughout is to cooperate with and embrace the secular government, he also, on occasions stated above, downplays the importance of state allegiance by stating how HK society was flourishing during the British colonial (non-democratic) times, and one's allegiance is determined by working preferences and fundamental values. This attempt for a way out weakens

his original argument of embracing the secular government because he also is essentially saying that HK was more free during colonial times, given the laissez-faire government with minimal interference in the economy. Nonetheless, Kwong's narrative represents many of those who enjoy a close relationship with the (British colonial or Chinese communist) government and who understand the nuance of working within the system and quietly almsgiving and evangelising as part of their theology.

Pro-Establishment Average Christians' Thoughts: An Argument Against Liberal Democracy and for Pietism

LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

The PEC perspective tends to equate democracy with 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 a critique of America's liberal democracy as not being Athenian classical 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, they argue that America is not (Athenian) democratic, which is why America is not really democratic, and thus democracy does not work.

In my findings, Bernice and Adam (alias) argue against democracy. Bernice argues that people who want democracy are self-centred because society should be *man against God*, wherein democracy is *the majority wins*, and the majority are people and not God. In her argument, 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. Adam 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'; everything happens for a reason, so if God lets things happen, we cannot say it is wrong and fight for democracy and justice. In his theology, the concepts of submission and long-suffering are prominent. Even though he might not have the exact words of an expert, this is a sound and considered worldview and theological stance. As American theologian Stanley Hauerwas (2014, loc. 99) argues, 'the church does not so much have a political mission as her very existence is a political mission; it provides an alternative to the politics of the world.'

Quartus (alias) argues that democracy is one of the best possible systems in a very imperfect world, and most democratic countries, such as America or Britain, are in political decay because of an irrational hung parliament, where bills are stalled from being made into legislation as the legislators who are pro-democracy utilise techniques such as filibuster. His argument is that, while the democratic system is better, what it values – such as checks and balances and drawn-out debate to discuss issues – might lead to what he sees as inefficient governance. This is very much in line with how Chinese generally praise

China's system over the Western democratic system – they see the Chinese government as meritocracy and the Western system as inefficient (Nathan 2013, 65–76). But that misses the fact that people disagree about what makes a society democratic: For some, it is not about efficiency but instead about each having a voice, even if you might not think that voice contributes to the discussion in a positive way.

Law and Fowler (2021, 164) also observe the deviance of definitions: 'China's closed system of information allows for words and concepts to take on meanings that are detached from how they are commonly understood in the rest of the world.' I think the Chinese translation of democracy 民主 (*the people ruling* or *people be their own master*) is the reason for the above perspectives, because they subscribe to the simplistic propaganda slogan of people being the master rather than thinking more deeply in terms of how democracy would look as a lifestyle in society. HK-based German social scientist Stephan Ortmann (2020) defines democracy thusly:

Participation is a defining element of democratic citizenship because public deliberation of policy options is essential for the functioning of a democratic [decision-making] process. Although it includes voting in regular elections, participation can and should involve many different aspects of life. [...] liberal democratic systems thrive on the ability to criticise the government and reflect on the ideal structure of government. A sense of patriotism increases the sense of responsibility to contribute to the development of the country by participating in various ways, including elections, volunteering and protests.

Therefore, it is important to realise PECs' proponents are not actually understanding the full range of what democracy involves and that there are already many types of democracy, and the only one they know and object to might be because it is not actually the most suitable to HK. HK legislator Christine Loh and HK law professor Richard Cullen (2021, 40–41) call this 'political meritocracy'; this hybrid political form of a 'dictatorship country with democratic characteristics' would work because it could have 'democratic characteristics,' such as accountability, competition, and limitation of power, even if universal suffrage is impossible for China. Perhaps a suitable democracy for HK already exists, and there is no reason to reinvent the wheel by saying HK needs a new *Chinese-style democracy*.

I tried to probe deeper with Bernice on the difference between Athenian and liberal democracy, but she did not seem to comprehend the difference. Bernice said,

Why I do not believe in democracy is because the majority wins. But [the] majority may not be right; [the] majority may not be full [of] justice. If you ask me, I'm actually looking for a world or society – it may be not that comprehensive at first – a society which is as just as possible.

There is no perfect justice; it's as just as possible, but as just as possible may not be [what the] majority [wants].

Without using the term, Bernice is describing the tyranny of the masses, which liberal democracy attempts to address; nonetheless, Bernice seems to think America cannot deal with it effectively.

PIETISM

Other than attempting to discredit American liberal democracy as a be-all and end-all of all democracies, there are also arguments that Christians should just stick to pietism and inward-looking faith rather than focusing on what is going on in society. Just like in Britain, HK 'congregations have been pushed increasingly into the private sphere. Despite the visibility of their buildings, what goes on in them has largely escaped the attention of policy-makers and academics' (Cameron 2004, 139–151). However, HK's privatisation of the Christian faith can also be attributed to congregants who wish to maintain an inward-looking faith. In a survey conducted by the Ray Bakke Centre for Urban Transformation (2020b), popular Christian personal responses towards social movements, like prayer [survey participants on average scored it as 3.53 out of 4] and signing online petitions [3.13 out of 4], resonate with my field research respondents' arguments that faith is personal and that any action needs to be within the parameters of the law, such as signing petitions. Claudia (alias) argues that democracy should not be what Christians strive for, especially using extreme means, since democracy does not represent the viewpoint of all Christians. She argues that striving for justice and democracy still needs a bottom line, which I interpret as her arguing against vandalism. She argues against a democratic system based on her negative experience in the West. This is a common argument among PECs, citing their personal negative experience in democratic countries and then questioning whether democracy is a Christian ideal. While I also agree that democracy does not equate to Christian doctrine, it must be emphasised that, in a system where political power can transition peacefully with the participation of many in this decision, such as a democracy in comparison to authoritarian regimes, democracy provides a more fertile soil for Christianity to flourish.

In further amplifying the voices of average Christians, Wong Tit-shing, an HK Christian businessman and layperson, also talks about this in an article he wrote for his church's bulletin. Wong argues that the Bible does not state what form of government or political party is God's will, as Jesus taught only the Father's matters, not politics. Wong interprets that the exodus 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; instead, we can act justly in the workplace, about which God has taught. Wong sees Jesus as submitting to

authority, even if the laws are unreasonable or unjust, and not protesting against authority or using force, so Wong thinks Jesus's actions set the example, that His disciples should also obey authority, since the political system is not necessarily ideal. Wong (2021, 82–97) concludes that God's standard is not universal values, equality, democracy and freedom, equal opportunities, or human rights. He sees a theocracy as an ideal system, as something that Jesus will establish after the eschaton. Similarly, one of my participants, Quartus, argues that politics require people to take sides, but he thinks for Christians, the Bible sees those in authority as subject to God and also God's servants, and Christians should hold them accountable to truths in the Bible, which include moral values, justice, and compassion, while God will judge those who judge on earth.

While Wong and Quartus raise questions regarding the universality of such concepts as democracy and rights, it does not follow that the remaining options are either *obey authorities* or *found a theocracy*. While PECs refuse the universality of democracy and rights, they instead emphasise the universality of workplace ministry. Any universally applied rules can serve the interest of power, whether it is democracy, rights, or workplace ministry (Connell 2007, x). Claudia argues that we need to do every day well, and she thinks it is important that Christians get into the establishment, because if you are not in the position, you cannot do the work. Many Christians have the heart and see imperfections in society, and she does not want them to become more radical, but instead, in their profession, they can be involved in the establishment to make changes – in the business world, they are closer to the Central government and can reflect their voices. She believes the establishment is important, and those who are pro-democracy cannot simply say that the CCP-sanctioned government of the HK SAR is definitely bad; the government could have taken some pro-democracy actions, but owing to possible backlash, they cannot shout about such actions on rooftops. That in itself is a problem because an inward-looking church is still part of society, so when things go downhill in society, there is no escape for Christians. Wong's narrative is similar to what anthropologist Ong Aihwa (1999, 1–2) depicts in quoting Raymond Chin, a founder of the Better HK Foundation, a pro-China business group:

Freedom is a great thing, but I think it should be given to people who have earned it. We should take the long view and see the long-term returns on our investments in the mainland. Self-censorship and other kinds of responsible behavior may be necessary to get the kind of freedom we want.

Loh and Cullen (2021, 40–41) believe that political stability is the most important value of China, and the focus should be on abolishing absolute poverty and on progressive development rather than on the discontinuity of policies in democratic countries. They also believe that democracy's value of one-person-one-vote actually covers over social inequality and that voting does not mean

the voters will vote for the greatest benefit for society as a whole. However, one of my participants, Timothy, pushes back on what he calls ‘false stability,’ citing the 1967 Leftist Riot. He acknowledges that many are concerned about social stability, and if he were to say anything remotely against the state, he would be rocking the boat. While he understands where these stability advocates are coming from, he disagrees with them, as he finds this to be simply sweeping conflicts under the rug instead of resolving them. As an example, he cited how business people said there were no reasons for strikes leading up to the 1967 Leftist Riots, but what they did not understand is that things were not okay, as the workers had been suffering silently for a long time.

The narratives above demonstrate PECs’ reverence for the secular state that compromises individual human dignity. Christians need to value individuals at least equal to, if not more than, the state. Christians should not bow to responsible behaviour or the greatest good for the whole of society simply for the betterment of the state – the individual humans within the state are equally important in their own sovereignty.

Nonetheless, I want to affirm the theology in PECs’ stance and that they do represent some HK Christians. Judith (alias) argues that mainstream churches and church leaders are embarrassed when the HK Christian Council pushes for public policy or gets involved in social welfare because they have many relationships with the establishment in law-making, and mainstream churches have many social services and education initiatives, so they do not want to stand in opposition to the government and the CCP’s United Front. While this may be true, perhaps the question to ask is, what is the point of Judith stating such? Is it simply to ostracise the PEC voice and make them seem irrelevant? It is unfair to simply say that PECs cannot represent HK Christians and that they are only acting out of financial motivation and thus are not genuine Christians. If Judith wishes to challenge PECs, she needs to explore their underlying theological motivations and argue against that instead. Similarly, Isaac’s (alias) argument is that we all read the same Bible, but different people interpret the Bible differently; therefore, people may receive different messages from the same Bible. In his church, his pastors believe their faith’s focus should be on evangelising rather than social justice. I think this is a fairer interpretation of PECs from a PDC perspective, but it is made possible only because he knows these PECs on a personal level and respects them as individual humans rather than recognising them as a faceless other. Isaac’s perspective is actually more common among HK Christians, even though it is the voice of conflict that is more prominently featured in the media. In Table 2.1, we can see parts of the results of a quantitative study on HK Christians’ views on social involvement after 2019 conducted by the Business, Economic, and Public Policy Research Centre, HK Shue Yan University, commissioned by the Society for Truth and Light (Lee et al. 2021, 26).

The statistics shown above demonstrate that more respondents (83.94%) agree that Christians can have different callings in their lives, and as such, it can be inferred that the manifestation of their faith need not be in the same exact way.

Table 2.1 Christians' Views on Social Involvement After 2019

Rating (1 = Extremely Disagree, 6 = Extremely Agree)	Number and Percentage of Total Respondents for Each Rating of Agreement/Disagreement with the Statement 'Christians' Most Important Calling Is from God, and It Is Different for Everyone
1	14 (1.39%)
2	51 (5.09%)
3	96 (9.58%)
4	210 (20.96%)
5	314 (31.34%)
6	317 (31.64%)

Through my analysis, I will show that these individuals have thought through their theology and beliefs, and while they may be quite different from mine, I want to affirm their existence as legitimate.

Reflection: Democracy Is Not Inherently Christian

Democracy is used as a signifier to reject all things communist. In polite societies, even for those who are PECs, there is a tendency to deny being CCP members. HKers in general have bought into the post-war narrative that democracy is good and communism is bad. So, in fact, when someone says they support democracy, they are really just saying they are not a bad person. American religious studies scholar Jeffrey Stout (2005, 3) puts forth,

Democracy, I shall argue, *is* a tradition. It inculcates certain habits of reasoning, certain attitudes toward deference and authority in political discussion, and love for certain goods and virtues, as well as a disposition to respond to certain types of actions, events, or persons with admiration, pity, or horror. This tradition is anything but empty. Its ethical substance, however, is more a matter of enduring attitudes, concerns, dispositions, and patterns of conduct than it is a matter of agreement on a conception of justice in Rawls's sense. The notion of state neutrality and the reason-tradition dichotomy should not be seen as its defining marks.

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 idea of *democracy is good* and *communism is bad*.

I do not think that democracy is inherently Christian. In fact, the reason that 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 HK has never gone through Enlightenment

or Christendom, it is difficult to talk about the concept of democracy and the secular state in HK. The language of democracy and rights has been co-opted uncritically into the lexicon of HK and, by extension, HK Christian communities. As such, the experience of political correctness, rather than how such language fits logically in the HK narrative, is employed in HK communities' discussions. As Stout (2005, 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 HK Christian communities, I propose HK Christian communities instead think from their Christian conviction. This is what both PECs and PDCs consider themselves to be doing already, and allowing their Christian conviction 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 HK context and make room for meaningful conversations.

This is why we should focus not on simply debating whether HK should be democratic but instead on what it means to be Christian. Human dignity should be valued, and human reason should be trusted. If the aim of democracy is to empower the powerless, then the aim of Christianity is not to advocate for democracy and focus on the secular language of democracy but rather to ground the conversation in a language within Christian theology that helps Christians articulate a transformative culture. One of my participants, Obadiah, observes a similar gap in his experience of HK church communities, specifically in the language of how to express one's faith, as he sees that the current HK church language talks only about an inward-looking spirituality but not about comprehending God through reason. As such, the need to talk about how to be faithful Christians should replace the debate of whether Christians necessarily need to support a democratic HK.

Are Rights Christian?

Another question I explore is whether rights are universal and undisputed in HK Christian communities. There is a tendency of 'modern social science embed[ding] the viewpoints, perspectives and problems of metropolitan society, while presenting itself as universal knowledge' (Connell 2007, vii–viii). While many values and moral issues are enculturated, they are often discussed as if there is a single universal solution. Key indicators of how rights enter the language of HK Christians are first through the discussion of violent/non-violent resistance. There are discussions among HK Christians on whether violent/non-violent resistances are a human right, which is curious as they discuss whether such resistances violate others' rights, and often the rhetoric is that

non-violent resistance can be seen as Christianly while violent resistance, for most, cannot be Christianly. Second, the use of rights language among HK Christians can be seen through the debate on the rule of law versus simply abiding by the law. Often, HK Christians see it as their civic duty to comply with the law, but there has been a wider debate on whether Christians should simply follow unjust laws.

The HK Church Renewal Movement conducts a survey every five years. In the data they collected between June 2019 and January 2020, in comparison to the last time they conducted the survey in June 2014, they found that HK-wide societal concerns increased in religious freedom (31.6%), social justice (31.3%), and the Umbrella Movement (29.5%) (Research Group on 2019 Hong Kong Church Survey 2020, 52). These statistics show that, in comparison to 2014, there are more church discussions on issues such as China–HK tension and human rights but less on social justice and democratic progress in 2019. See Table 2.2 for the churches' participation in HK-wide societal issues.

However, statistics do not explain why these issues are discussed less, which is why there is value in the qualitative research I have undertaken. Below, I will elaborate on why rights are discussed in Christian communities through illustrating the arguments of Christian leaders Ng and Paul Kwong, and of my participants.

Daniel Ng's Arguments

Ng discusses rights much less than he does democracy; nonetheless, rights are still deeply entrenched in his language. He emphasises that Western political theories such as human rights, freedom, populism, and rule of law are shaped by their historical context, from the Greeks to the Western Enlightenment. This is what has influenced the mainstream of HK thought. In saying this, Ng (2019) thinks that something valuable has been left out that could be recovered from some Eastern political theories. What has replaced it is a Western theory of rights, which is not fully compatible with Christianity, as he sees it.

Table 2.2 Churches' Involvement in HK-wide Societal Issues

<i>HK-Wide Societal Issues</i>	<i>Percentage of Participating Churches/ Institutions that Explored These Issues</i>		
	<i>2009 (%)</i>	<i>2014 (%)</i>	<i>2019 (%)</i>
Religious Freedom	N/A	N/A	31.6
Social Justice	18.2	31.9	31.3
Umbrella Movement	N/A	N/A	29.5
China–HK Tension	N/A	8.9	9.0
Human Rights	5.2	4.4	6.5
Democratic Progress	5.7	21.9	5.3

One area of tension is that Ng thinks PDCs treat all rights as absolute. According to Ng, from the Christian tradition, not all rights are absolute. Ng is setting up the PDCs as a strawman in this argument, as I have yet to find PDC arguments that find all rights absolute. In referring to the support of civil disobedience in *Angel's Heart*, he also says that he does not negate political rights, but rights should be categorised into two groups: Some rights are absolute and basic, such as the right to life and rights of faith, and some rights are derived from the previously mentioned rights, and are thus not absolute, or from societal changes leading to different standards, such as economic rights and political rights ("Heated Discussion" 2013). In arguing against rights as absolute, or that rights should not be a guiding principle in a Chinese society, Ng demonstrates that the concept of inalienable rights is entrenched in his worldview, even if he does not express it in those words. So how can Ng tell the difference between absolute and non-absolute rights? Ng asserts that civil disobedience is suitable only when religious freedom is compromised, and he states that universal suffrage does not fall within religious freedom. In referring to inalienable rights, Hauerwas (2015, 402–13) asserts that '[n]ot unrelated to the overdetermination of rights language in our current moral vocabulary is my worry that once the language of inalienable rights is introduced there is no way to control their multiplication.' Hauerwas comments that, while not discounting the usefulness of rights language, he is concerned with overreliance on such that it threatens the common good. Unlike Hauerwas, Ng (2016) expresses his concerns through rights being *not Chinese enough*, conflates the cultural China to encompass the CCP, and assumes that something with *Chinese values* would be more suitable for a place such as HK. He also questions whether Christians should fully agree with the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and declares that, in authoritarian countries, the Church needs to give up certain rights to survive.

Ng's arguments about democracy demonstrate how the pervasive use of rights language in HK affects his own theology, even when he would not identify as PDC. This pervasiveness is explicit even when those who do not believe in democracy still mobilise it as their rhetorical platform. I argue that Ng and other PECs should attempt to restructure the social imagination and move away from ideas of democracy and rights language when they express their theological views, rather than arguing against it or arguing that there is slow but sure progress towards democracy. In addition, in arguing for Romans 13 as a message for Christians to submit to authority and that order is important, rather than having a worldview informed by his Christian conviction, his foremost concern is the nation-state and his role within it.

Paul Kwong's Arguments

In analysing Kwong's use of rights language, I discovered that Kwong's views are similar to that of the Democrats because, much like the HK Christians after the alleged Tiananmen Square massacre vigils who wanted to influence

China through evangelism and use democracy as a tool to resist communism (民主抗共), Kwong also considers himself Chinese and wants to influence China subversively. Kwong asserts that

[t]here has been a growing sense of discrimination, xenophobia and Hong Kong people first attitude among many people. [...] As I have said publicly on more than one occasion, I deplore such views, which stand in opposition to family reunion and are not in line with the *basic human rights* and justice.

(“Hong Kong Anglican Archbishop” 2016, emphasis mine)

Rights language is thus part of his assumed narrative. However, in his published works and interviews, he has emphasised only family reunion as a basic human right, so what else would Kwong define as basic human rights? Furthermore, Kwong sees family reunion as a basic human right yet urges his congregation to be silent as Jesus was silent; in his controversial sermon where he argues against the Occupy Central Movement, he said the protestors were always making their voice heard, questioned whether their voice being heard was really so important, and argued that Jesus was silent in the face of persecution. Does that mean freedom of speech and religious freedom are not basic human rights to Kwong?

Kwong (2011, 111–12) critiques PDCs’ interpretation of democracy, as well as their use of *rights* in substituting God’s work:

In general, the problem with the theology of this [PDC] group was that they saw social justice, *human rights* and democracy as the primary mission agenda in response to the political change. In so doing, they were in danger of substituting *human rights* or democracy for the redemption of God, and identifying the Church with political groups.

(emphasis mine)

In this line of argument, Kwong is dichotomising the two: In his mind, social justice, human rights, and democracy are in no way related to the redemption of God. He limits his imagination of God’s redemption to otherworldly evangelism or salvation, and the only worldly matters involved are almsgiving. For Kwong, whether this world is just or not is unrelated to Christian values. Many would argue against Kwong’s interpretation, especially liberation theologians such as Gustavo Gutiérrez, who argues that salvation emphasises the importance of achieving justice in this world. Gutiérrez understands theology as a critical reflection of the Church and society, both of which are subject to change. Hence, Gutiérrez (1973, 3–12, 83–105) argues that communion with God means service to others, and theology entails critical reflection on human principles. So Kwong’s interpretation of the meaning of God’s redemption is only one of many, and it cannot be taken as a truth for all.

HK sociologist of religion Seguire Shun-hing Chan notes that PECs, including Kwong, benefit from their relationship with the government through a large number of resources channelled to those churches for education and social welfare purposes. In doing so, these churches will attract congregants and pastoral leaders who are PECs, as the church becomes a beneficiary of the government's resources. It is a self-reinforcing cycle. While Chan and others may question whether benefitting from the system creates conditions for people to be afraid of criticising the government because they are afraid of losing financial support, there is also a more nuanced reason to their approach. PECs consider evangelising (the Great Commission) as the most important task for all Christians, so for the sake of entering the Chinese Mainland community, they are willing to avoid antagonising or critiquing the government in order to maintain a good relationship (Seguire Shun-hing Chan 2016). Kwong would see no problems with this stance because he would consider his ends of evangelism and providing welfare to the masses achieved, whatever the means. Kwong's approach directly contradicts Hauerwas's notion of means being as important, if not more important, than the ends. Hauerwas (1983, loc. 2534–610) argues that the Christian cannot perform an unjust act in service of a perceived just result, as the act could distort the character of his or her Christian witness. The late HK Methodist pastor Yuen Tin-yau† also argued against the fallacy Kwong pursues by saying that, if he spread a gospel that ignores human rights, he would rather not spread this gospel; Yuen† considered life in this world as part of the eternal life Christians look forward to, so the quality of this life, the restoration of human dignity, is also part of eternal life. The gospel cannot just emphasise eternal life but needs to address repentance and liberate the oppressed (Yuen 2017, 37–41).

In a different context, Yuen† also argued that one cannot simply say that the Church's mission is to spread the gospel and save souls and that therefore the Church does not involve itself in politics or should be politically neutral, because this is not the Bible's interpretation of the Church's mission or what spreading the gospel means. The gospel Christians believe in is one that saves people from social or institutional evil and oppression, so it necessarily involves society and politics (Yuen 2015, 27–31). HK pastor Lam Ka-yin (2015, 91–98) also echoes Yuen's† thoughts by illustrating that, in the post-Umbrella Movement times, there will be churches that push conservatism to the extreme and dualistically separate spiritual and secular matters, and the church and its congregants' only pursuit should be for saving souls and disregarding all else, including things happening in the society. Yuen† and Lam's interpretation of the gospel includes what they consider to be social justice, and that involves standing up against the tyranny of the secular government and for the Church to be the prophetic voice to society. Kwong, on the other hand, focuses on almsgiving and social welfare in his interpretation of the gospel; they would take issue with each other's actions because their fundamental understanding differs.

Aside from Kwong's general stance with regard to the secular state, there was a specific backlash to Kwong's sermon at St Paul's Church on 6 July 2014

in which he referred specifically to the Occupy Central Movement. His statement was controversial because he made fun of the protesters and their cause, demonstrating that he backs the Chinese government, a stance with which many Anglicans disagree. Anglicans and those from other Protestant denominations asked him to retract his statement because they consider striving for universal suffrage a just cause, and furthermore, they believed that Kwong siding with the Chinese government offends God (Seguire Shun-hing Chan 2016). Chan recounts that on 20 July 2014, 132 clergy, preachers, and church members issued a public statement titled, ‘The Speech of Archbishop Paul Kwong of the Anglican Church Does Not Represent Us’ in *Christian Times Weekly* (“132 Pastors” 2014), criticising Kwong’s use of Matthew 11:29¹³ to ridicule protesters. In his sermon, Kwong held that protesters spoke out too much because they lacked peace in their hearts, and he ridiculed those who asked for food after their arrest by police, adding that they should have their Filipina domestic helpers brought to them as well. Chan (2017, 23–48) argues that this incident vividly illustrates that Protestants competed for Christian representation and the authority of biblical interpretation regarding civic engagement during the Occupy Central Movement, and the joint statement of the church members also hinted that Kwong was speaking for the Chinese government and the suppression of the Occupy Central Movement. Responding to the same sermon, Britain-based HK pastor David Chi-wai Wu argues it would be ‘unfair to use Jesus to fit some personal values and orientation [...] According to the Gospel of John, Jesus had challenged Pilate on whether his power is bigger or the truth is bigger.’ David Chi-wai Wu adds, ‘So Jesus wasn’t silent – he spoke when he needed to, while his silence was in protest against the Roman regime.’ In response to the same sermon, HK theologian and democracy activist Rose Wu (2016, 87–106) said,

Just as not all the religious leaders were supportive of the original Pentecost when it happened in Jerusalem, many of Hong Kong’s church leaders want to keep the status quo and have nothing to do with the new political consciousness. Because of their pro-government stance, it may not actually be inappropriate also to talk about how the institutional churches participated in the Umbrella Movement. Instead, the new Pentecost applies to the individuals who were directly involved in the protests and had their faith transformed in such a radically inclusive way that it also affects their understanding of Hong Kong identity.

Rose Wu’s argument would be what Hauerwas argues against – using democracy concepts and rights language in arguing theology. Nonetheless, Chan, David Chi-wai Wu, and Rose Wu all seem to agree that Kwong has misinterpreted the Bible in order to support his personal agenda.

A scholar who dialogued with Kwong’s monograph in light of the Occupy Central Movement and the Umbrella Movement is HK-American biblical scholar Sam Tsang, who accuses Kwong of twisting the prescription of a

Euro-American theologian with roots in liberation theology, Miroslav Volf, to create harmony with the post-Handover establishment in line with China's ideology of the harmonious society. Tsang labels Kwong an 'anti-liberation liberation interpreter' because Tsang sees Kwong's use of theology originating from liberation sources (i.e., Volf's *Exclusion and Embrace*) as a means to argue against the liberation of HK. Tsang argues that Kwong's main thesis is the importance of accepting and even embracing the present reality of HK as a SAR while trying to move forward in a relationship with the Chinese government, and Tsang states that Kwong positions himself as the representative mediator between the Church and the government. But Tsang asserts that whether his previous effort to embrace China has earned him the ear of Beijing remains to be seen, because Tsang sees that Kwong himself admits that the Church now is subservient. Tsang interprets Kwong's approach in his 2014 Christmas pastoral letters as different in comparison to his monograph in 2011; in his updated stance, Kwong does not blame the government for injustice in allowing the political occupation of HK and puts the responsibility squarely on the shoulders of protesters who are disputing the occupation, offering zero resistance to the government's oppression of the people. According to Tsang, Kwong puts the burden on HKers to not be xenophobic and discriminatory but fails to consider the seriousness of the Chinese Mainland invasion and the government of the HK SAR's own violation of the Basic Law. Tsang sees Kwong's interpretation of Volf's model of embrace as constructing the Chinese Mainland as the *other* as problematic, because Volf's *other* is usually the oppressed and politically weak, which does not reflect the relationship between HK and China. He argues that Kwong has misread his great influence of Volf because Volf says that reconciliation is not possible without justice first. Tsang (2016, 131–162) claims that Kwong is guilty of selling out the Church to a government that does not represent the people, leading to the wholesale occupation of people both inside and outside of the Church. In short, Tsang argues that Kwong is only writing how he interprets Volf, yet it is against Volf's wishes. However, John Wai-on Chan, a staunch PDC advocate, argues that localism and protectionism should not be reasons to hate others (in this case, the Chinese Mainland people), as it is not biblical. John Wai-on Chan (2018, 64–69) cites Hannah Arendt in that to make politics a tool is to create authoritarianism, as a tool leads to hatred.

Pro-Establishment Average Christians' Thoughts: Rights as an Imperialistic Power over Former Colonies

Through my interviews, I came to see that PECs and PDCs have different ideas in mind when they refer to *rights*. PECs see rights as for themselves, namely how others have offended their rights and how they can use rights as a means to protect themselves and their property, contrary to how PDCs think of rights, which I will elaborate on later. Adam argues that vandalism is not a human right,

because at the end of the day, it's your right. What about mine? I'm sorry. You know? So you're talking about freedom. Is it your freedom? Or my freedom? Because you are impinging upon my space. I guess this is totally unacceptable, and I believe that, you know, as a citizen of a country, as a citizen of SAR, I think we should abide by the law. Law and order are there for a reason, and anything that is outside the law should be punished. You should take responsibility for your action. I have no sympathy for that, I'm sorry.

Most of my interview participants from the Church argued that asserting rights offends God's sovereignty. Bernice argues that there is always a great deal of unfairness, because this world is unfair, citing the parables of the Prodigal Son and the Workers in the Vineyard. She first grounds the legitimacy of her argument by citing the Bible, something PECs often do. Additionally, she asserts that PDCs are not doing God's will in striving for justice, as the world is unjust. As a good Christian, she sees that Christians should surrender to whatever external condition God places them in. In PECs' minds, China is still reacting to the Western imperialism and invasion of World War II, which is why China reacts badly to Western powers discussing its human rights issues. They see this as the West invading China, using human rights as an excuse, even though Western powers might not be thinking that. But it is important to understand the hurt and pain that China carries from the previous two centuries and their perception of the West. There is nothing inherently contradictory between rights and God's sovereignty, as PECs might argue.

Reflection: Christians Should Advocate for Human Dignity Instead of Rights

Should Christians use rights language? I think it depends on whether you consider yourself a subject or an object of rights. While PECs think of rights as for themselves, PDCs think of rights as for others. Rights and rights talk have been a much-discussed topic in recent theology, especially political theology. John Milbank and Hauerwas have been among the leading voices to caution Christians from using rights talk, as they see it as selling out the Church to secular reason, complicit with secular ideologies (Tierney 1997, 1–12).¹⁴ PECs and PDCs are caught in a problematic view of rights; PDCs think rights is the Christian way forward, and PECs see it as not. I find that both are wrong because both are not arguing using Christian language. As such, using the Christian narrative to talk about issues of human dignity will aid PDCs and PECs in their understanding of HK Christians' role in HK civic society. In the HK context, I conclude that rights are indispensable, but they should be understood within the idiom of Christianity. While the origins of rights are disputed, from the beginning of the conception of modern-day rights, when the secular government was developed to secure these rights, God was written out of the interpretation of such rights. Thus, rights, as they are understood generally, are no longer Christian, even though many of their values resonate with Christian values.

Therefore, HK Christians need to articulate an interpretation where God is prominent in human dignity through emphasising the shared humanity between humans and Jesus through His incarnation. As such, HK Christians can reject rights language enforced by a secular government appointed by those being governed and instead base human dignity on Christ having incarnated as human and having human nature.

Does a Citizen-Christian Identity Lead to a Conflict of Interest?

In general, the idea of citizenship is weak in HK. Because of the transience of HKers, HK identity and citizenship have been seen more as a function, such as their ability to permanently reside in a region. Nationalistic patriotism has been less common among HKers until recent years, especially because many HKers hold dual citizenship (Lui 2018). To which of the two countries will they be patriotic, given they are citizens of both? Likewise, religious conviction is also weak, as the term *rice Christians* (Debrecht 2008) came about when HK Chinese converted to Christianity during colonial times for church aid. As such, to ask HK Christians whether their HK citizenship and Christian identity have any conflict is very difficult, because in their minds, neither is so strong that it must be mutually exclusive. As Lai Pan-chiu observes, the rise of modern-day states usually is made up of a single ethnic group, and so the idea of patriotism is wrapped up in ethnic nationalism; thus, patriotism usually advocates or cultivates a single ethnic identity, such as being from the same root or ancestry, living in the same area, with the same language, culture, history, and even religion. With each political entity or state, they are legally, politically, and even morally considered a self-contained entity, with each person being a citizen of a country where state and citizens have exclusive responsibility to each other, and each state's legality comes from its citizens, with a sole purpose of increasing citizens' collective interests. However, this idea of a state/citizen relationship is seriously challenged from the 17th century onwards through the Peace of Westphalia, in which the treaties were 'providing the foundation of the modern state system and articulating the concept of territorial sovereignty' (Augustyn 2022). Moreover, many contemporary nation-states are multi-ethnic from colonisation and migration. Nonetheless, Lai's observations reflect the Chinese expectations of how its citizens should behave towards its secular state.

Quartus, who has dual citizenship (HK-Western country), previously lived in several Western countries, and completed all his post-secondary education overseas, argues that he first sees his identity as an HKer, then as ethnically Chinese, then as Christian. This argument seems to work as it mitigates nationality and citizenship and focuses on geographical ties and ethnicity, but in reality, it perpetuates the idea of Han chauvinism (Li and Teng 2021). China is a multi-ethnic country, even though the majority are Han Chinese, and other ethnic groups, if they promote ethnic or religious identity, can be considered separatists. HK as a cosmopolitan city both is multi-ethnic and has a majority

(90+%) ethnically Han Chinese population. Even though the Chinese government does not acknowledge dual or multi-citizenship, many ethnically Chinese repatriates and other ethnic minorities still have both foreign and HK citizenship. If these people are required to be patriotic, to which country should they be patriotic (Lai 2014, 263–309)?

One of my participants, Hannah (alias), argues that Christians' ultimate identity should lie with their heavenly identity rather than as Chinese or HKer, as she sees HK as a hybrid rather than a fixed identity; as with globalisation, people are immigrating and fairly geographically mobile, so it is hard to talk about patriotism when one has immigrated, and she advocates looking at the HK identity in a broader sense.

Leung Chun-ying, a former HK Chief Executive and Vice Chairman of China's National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, looks at HK citizenship from yet another lens. In response to the recent wave of migration to Britain, Leung mentioned that those who carry the British National (Overseas) (BNO) passports are only *moving* and not *migrating*. He has never heard of those who have moved away from HK forfeiting their HK SAR passports. While many HKers live abroad for extensive periods of time, and because HK's legal system does not define what permanently migrating abroad means, as long as one does not voluntarily give up one's HK-Chinese citizenship, one will always be regarded by the Chinese government as a Chinese citizen (Lin Jian 2022).

In the HK Church Renewal Movement survey, church efforts on societal care (joining a street protest or march, co-signing a joint statement in a newspaper, and encouraging believers to run for public office) have dropped from 2014 to 2019. However, there has been an increase in encouraging believers to vote, reflect their opinion to government departments, and establish concern groups to respond to societal issues (Research Group on 2019 Hong Kong Church Survey 2020, 51). See Table 2.3 for the churches' participation in societal care work or activities.

Table 2.3 Churches' Involvement in Societal Care Work or Activities

<i>Societal Care Work or Activities</i>	<i>Percentage of Participating Churches that Conducted These Activities</i>		
	<i>2009 (%)</i>	<i>2014 (%)</i>	<i>2019 (%)</i>
Encourage Believers to Vote	51.9	25.4	36.6
Join Street Protest or March	2.7	11.3	10.6
Co-sign Joint Statement in Newspaper	26.2	27.4	6.1
Reflect Opinion to Government Departments	1.9	2.5	3.8
Establish Concern Groups to Respond to Societal Issues	5.6	2.7	3.7
Encourage Believers to Run for Public Office	5.9	4.3	3.1

While these statistics demonstrate an indication of where the Church is moving in societal care work, statistics alone cannot indicate why it is the case. I will now move on to exploring the reasons why through qualitative data.

As Ng and Kwong do not speak directly about a citizen-Christian identity, I have not been able to include their writings in this part of the analysis. Ng and Kwong are both pastors by vocation, and while they occasionally write for academic settings, most of their writings are directed to their congregants, and so they generally engage with ideas of democracy and rights when they do talk about politics, as the idea of geographic citizenship clashes with their more conservative theology of understanding a Christian's citizenship to be in heaven. This is why lived theology is important: because the writings of Christian leaders do not fully represent the conversations between laity. The dynamics between laity and positionality are fully demonstrated in this section, where prominent leaders' voices are absent.

Pro-Establishment Average Christians' Thoughts: A Unique Understanding of Church-State Separation and Working within the Institution

POLITICALLY NEUTRAL

PECs believe that, because they are Christian, they should strictly follow church-state separation, however misguided. That is, instead of the state not meddling with church affairs, they think the Church should not comment on state affairs and should practice an inward-looking theology. As such, they consider that their public citizenship should not be affected by their privately practiced faith and religion. Isaac observes that their focus is on evangelism because they think that is God's work, so everyone should have church-state separation. One of my participants, Judith, also observes that Evangelicals do not like to participate in politics, but they do not disregard social injustice, for which some Evangelical pastors still believe Christians have social responsibility. HK businessman and paradigmatic PEC Wong Tit-shing (2021) believes that Christians should learn about politics outside of the Church, and the Church should not host any political platform, nor should it have any political stance or talk about politics. Believing there is a space Christian theology cannot reach is a misguided understanding brought out by secularisation, where the secular state is seen as an all-encompassing being, whereas faith identity is limited to a private domain. Moreover, Jason Tsz-Shun Lam (2021a) observes that

Some clergy even joined the front-line protestors in order to offer additional support. In most cases they did not declare their own political orientation but stated that they were just providing pastoral care for the crowd, hoping to lessen the conflicts. But for some people this provided moral legitimacy to the protests. Consequently, some pro-Beijing media outlets published negative comments on the churches in Hong Kong.

Apart from the usual strategy of linking them to hostile foreign influence and picturing them as agents of infiltration, some even employed smear tactics.

Lam’s observations demonstrating this idea of the secular state being all-encompassing while faith is limited to the private domain are also prevalent in China’s state and media outlets.

Wong argues that people who belong to a heavenly Kingdom do not belong to any worldly country, and all worldly systems do not fit God’s heart; therefore, theocracy is the correct way, and people of the heavenly Kingdom would feel contented only if they lived in a place with theocracy. However, all expats (i.e., Christians in secular society) must follow the local laws and regulations and endure the pain. Jesus asks us to pray for the Father’s Kingdom to come, which means a theocracy. Before God’s Kingdom comes, the people of God should see themselves as expats in these lands, and when the time comes, Christians can hold onto their heavenly passport and repatriate to heaven (Wong Tit-shing 2021). While Wong uses secular state discourse in his argument, eventually he separates the secular world and faith in a clear-cut manner. This resonates with PECs’ theology in that they wish to justify their inaction or non-participation in civic society through their faith conviction by seeing the two on two different planes.

Their arguments can also be seen in how HK Christians think about evangelism. In Table 2.4, we can see how the respondents of the survey *Hong Kong Christians’ Psychological State, Spirituality, and Social Involvement: A Research Report* think of the role of Christians in evangelism (Lee et al. 2021, 26).

As we can see, more respondents agree that it is most important for Christians to evangelise (92.01%). While Christians are indeed called to evangelise, in the HK context, sometimes this focus on an exclusivist evangelism is at the expense of other core Christian values. I find their stance very problematic, since faith should undergird one’s worldview. Wong treats Christian conviction as a highly personal and individualistic hobby, which can be seen as in line with nominal Christianity. Nominal Christianity is not something Wong

Table 2.4 Christians’ View of Their Role in Evangelism After 2019

<i>Rating (1 = Extremely Disagree, 6 = Extremely Agree)</i>	<i>Number and Percentage of Total Respondents for Each Rating of Agreement/Disagreement with the Statement ‘Christians’ Most Important Mission Is to Evangelize and Lead People to Christ</i>
1	8 (0.80%)
2	7 (0.70%)
3	65 (6.49%)
4	222 (22.16%)
5	334 (33.33%)
6	366 (36.52%)

wants to be associated with, as he would consider himself a devout Christian. Instead, Wong would argue that there is a strong secular/spiritual divide in his understanding of the world. Moreover, this long-suffering Christian idea is rather common. Hannah also states that she sees this to be a grace-filled vision, as you can look at things critically. Even though she can see darkness and difficulties, she thinks that if she can resolve the problems, then she does not need God. She thinks that faith is about if one has nobody to rely on, then one would know who is the Lord and who to believe in. She asserts that God's grace is adequate, and God is not making His believers' lives difficult through trials and tribulations but rather is shaping them through challenges. This sort of masochistic faith is quite common in PECs' language, as they view striving for their rights as somewhat mitigating surrender to God's will.

Quantitative data from various sources also support my theory of this inward-looking theology. In response to the Occupy Central or Umbrella Movement, 43.5% of churches at the beginning of the movement (27 September 2014) already were performing activities related to social movements, such as communal prayer in Sunday service (37.5%) and teaching (21.9%). After 27 September 2014, related activities increased by 67%, with communal prayer at 58.8% and teaching at 36.6% (Research Group on 2019 Hong Kong Church Survey 2020, 53). This significant increase in communal prayer and teaching demonstrates the inward-looking mentality; in response to the state's action against active involvement in civic society, the Church looks inward to pray more. A participant, Rufus (alias), likewise recounts that, before the trials for Occupy Central, he found that non-Christians told him they needed to pray and rely on God. He found it interesting that even non-Christians think a situation like this where nothing else can be done calls for prayer. See Table 2.5 for the churches' participation in Occupy Central or Umbrella Movement-related activities.

Table 2.5 Churches' Participation in Occupy Central or Umbrella Movement-related Activities

<i>Occupy Central or Umbrella Movement-Related Activities</i>	<i>Percentage of Participating Churches that Participated in These Activities</i>	
	<i>Before 27 September 2014 (%)</i>	<i>After 27 September 2014 (%)</i>
Communal Prayer	37.5	58.8
Teaching	21.9	36.6
Discussion Forums	8.6	18.8
Express Political Stance within the Church	7.8	15.2
Co-sign Joint Statements	2.6	5.3

Moreover, in response to Anti-eLAB, the Ray Bakke Centre for Urban Transformation (2020b) conducted an online survey, and in response to social movements,

the most frequent response of their churches regarding this social movement include holding prayer meetings [the church attendees on average scored 2.94 out of 4], discussing and sharing in fellowship and small groups [2.86 out of 4], and preaching sermon messages that respond to the social movement and teaching believers how to respond [2.80 out of 4].

This finding is in line with the HK Church Renewal Movements' findings. The Ray Bakke Centre for Urban Transformation (2020b) says these data also align with how Christians expect the Church to respond: 'Christian respondents and pastors mostly hope for church to hold prayer meetings [the church respondents on average scored 3.46 out of 4] and offer counselling services [3.41 out of 4].' While holding prayer meetings gives PECs a sense that they are doing something, Ivana (alias) critiques that if the Church does not walk into society and just stays within the church and prays, they cannot experience the shock of those who have experienced tear gas, and they would have no way to comprehend why protesters would act a certain way. Law and Fowler (2021, 12) assert that

Companies will often justify censorship by claiming they are against the expression of any political opinion. But when a whole civilization becomes the domain of one political party – when, as Beijing says, only the CCP can represent the Chinese people, and to love China is to love the Party – everything about China becomes political. Unlike in democratic countries, there is no distinction between what is political and what is not political, nor between Party and state. In such a situation, companies don't have the luxury of simply sitting back and claiming to be apolitical.

Law's argument can extend to churches and Christian organisations, whereby 'claiming to be apolitical,' they are already sending a strong message of what they consider their Christian convictions to be, namely having no power in secular society.

The above study also found that '[p]ro-establishment church members and those with neutral views mostly believe that churches should not mention politically-related messages in sermons or even in prayers in worship services' (Ray Bakke Centre for Urban Transformation 2020a). In their focus group, participants also said,

We don't understand and we can't see our path ahead, but we know God is in all these and we can definitely still pray. What's the source of peace for our brothers and sisters? CCP? Protests? We have to go back to the foundation of true peace from our God.

(2020a)

In separating this *true peace* from the secular world, it is PECs who are able to hold onto their conviction of inaction or non-participation in civic society. They do not see that they hold the secular government higher than their faith; rather, their theology conceptualises faith and the secular world on different planes.

These analyses demonstrate the type of inward-looking Christianity that my PEC participants embrace. This fundamentalist idea of religion in relation to the modern state is misguided. The way PECs consider church–state separation is not the traditional sense of the state not interfering with church affairs but rather the constitutional principle of *laïcité* that emphasises discouraging religious involvement in government affairs, especially religious influence in the determination of state policies. *Laïcité* indicates an innate suspicion of religion and favouring of atheism or agnosticism, and those with faith convictions feel they need to be apologetic or at least quiet about their religious beliefs. Through the establishment of the French Republic, ‘the church and the state were legally separated. The state was declared neutral with respect to religion, and people were free to believe and practise any religion or none’ (Kelly 2020). What that traditionally means is that religion should not be state-mandated. PECs, in contrast, understand it as religion should not interfere with the state, which is why issues arise during genuine attempts at dialogue between PECs and PDCs or, indeed, those from the West.

ADVOCATING FOR CHRISTIAN VALUES WITHIN THE INSTITUTION

As I have previously argued,

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 relationship, which in turn creates more room for further evangelical and almsgiving work. This hope for expansion compels HK churches to cooperate with the government to gain access to China.

(Chu 2021)

I find this way of thinking common among Christian elites in HK society. From a different standpoint of this inward-looking faith, Quartus argues that his experience working with youth is that their voices are going into the government, and so, they cannot affect or be involved in the institution. He asserts that ‘barking outside’ of the system, such as writing articles, is useless, but instead, they need to engage in different capacities, like as politicians or members of governmental consultative groups. He states that engagement means dialogue and listening to others, being evidence-based. Aside from the blatant scientism, a view that science is the only objective means by which society should determine normative and epistemological values, what Quartus argues

is that a prophetic voice outside of the system is useless. In response, Quartus argues that Kwok Nai-wang, founder and first general secretary of the HK Christian Institute, emphasises that the Church and individual Christians both need a prophetic role, as society needs a prophetic voice and a practical vision, seeing the long-term vision in HK's societal context. Timothy likewise argues that a Christian voice needs to be different from the mainstream voice as an alternative, because without this alternative voice, there is no way for society to advance.

Quartus puts down those who speak outside of the institution prophetically, even though all forms of civic expressions have their purposes. For example, Victor (alias) presents his role in history as being present in society as a Christian voice. He asserts that Christians providing social services alone is not sufficient; Christians should also be speaking up in relation to sensitive topics, such as politics and human rights. While I tend to criticise PDCs for disregarding PECs as representatives of HK Christians, I think similar criticism can be made of PECs for downplaying the prophetic efforts of PDCs. PECs must acknowledge that PDCs are also doing God's work, and it is also effective, albeit not how they think it should be.

Reflection: Perhaps Always Feeling Slightly out of Place Is Helpful

PECs are slightly murky about citizenship and faith, seeing it on two planes, therefore resulting in non-participation. As Stout (2005, 1) argues,

The solidarity of an aggrieved people can be a dangerous thing. No lesson from recent history could be more evident. Any nation united mainly by memories of injustices done to it is likely to behave unjustly in its own defense and to elicit similar responses from its neighbors and enemies. A cycle of self-righteous violence will then ensue.

While his sentiments are about America, the same could be said about China's reaction to the West still being that of the World War I mentality. Chow (1998, 101) also observes this:

China's frequent objections to the West's "meddling in Chinese internal affairs" – an excuse the P.R.C. [People's Republic of China] has notoriously used to justify all kinds of repressive political practices – must be seen as logical. This logic is the hysteric's logic of a historical memory, a symptomatic resistance to the West, based, as it were, on an inability to forget.

PECs not only fall in line with the Chinese government's narratives; moreover, many prominent Chinese Christian figures from the late 19th and early 20th centuries – Watchman Nee, Calvin Chao (Philip S. Leung 2002), Jia Yu-ming (Kwok 2014), Ting Kuang-hsun, and Wu Yao-zong (Yuan 2016) – are

fundamentalists, and this specific understanding of Christianity has influenced HK Christians, especially PECs, in their theology and how their faith is on a different plane from the socio-political context in which they live.

Secular society and citizenship came about from Western ideals. Seguire Shun-hing Chan and Jonathan Johnson (2021, 1) explain

the complexity that Chinese adherents of Christianity face as a result of their dual identity. [...] this duality between earthly and heavenly allegiance becomes further nuanced and complicated by the particular earthly region in which the believer lives as well as the particular view of heavenly responsibilities that believer holds. [...] “civil society” itself is a contested term, and this contestation takes place not only over its history and meaning – how civil society came into being and what it describes – but over the applicability of a potentially Western concept in non-Western contexts.

As we think about how HK Christians wrestle with their faith and civic identity, how should Christians reconcile such? In contemplating this idea, Timothy argues that, as a Christian, we must admit that we have a specific identity, and Christianity does not just come from thinking about it but, more importantly, is grounded in a culture, in a specific historical context and, yet at the same time, under a bigger framework. His point gestures towards situating HK Christians first within the framework of the Christian story’s grand narrative, then from understanding that God is the God of all and how we, in our very specific historic context, such as HK here and now, care for the world.

As I reflect on what PEC and PDC participants said, I find that perhaps it is most helpful when Christians do not feel quite at home, feeling slightly uncomfortable and challenged in whatever context they are in. While not advocating for asceticism for all, I find that in a comfortable setting where resources are abundant and dignity is adequately preserved, Christians may become complacent with their setting and perhaps engage less in critical thinking about the state of the world and how that relates with their faith. Timothy likewise argues that it is through a crisis that we are forced to think. This is a state where the Christian conviction is made prominent and their faith is most reflective for the benefit of themselves and society. For example, throughout the decades, HK Christians have always been in a state of uncertainty, from the Leftist Riots in 1967, to the United Nations’ (UN’s) removal from the Non-Self-Governing Territories list in 1972 (Wong and Ngo 2016), to the Sino-British Joint Agreement of the Handover in 1984, to the Handover in 1997, to the protest against the implementation of Article 23 in 2003 (Jeffie Lam 2021b), to more recent events and everything in between; HK has always been in a state of uncertainty and turmoil. My participant Paul recounts HK in the 1990s, when the Church faced a great crisis which stemmed from thinking about how Christians could practice their faith in the future, and the conclusion was that one must suffer if they were to seriously practice their faith. As such, he sees

that life derives suffering, and death leads to security. This, in turn, has produced fertile soil for theological reflections of belonging, identity, and faith, whether it is inward-looking piety or social actions.

Perhaps HK socio-politics, in remaining a challenge to the Christian community, is helpful for fruitful engagement with theology and faith. As Paul describes his experience reflecting on Christian involvement in social issues, Christians need to discern how the unjust system was set up and how to change it. Thus, he asserts that he prefers to work outside the institution, especially when he reflects, so while he sees the importance of being involved in the institution, that is not the role he wants to take, as he thinks he can continue to be an independent voice only if he works outside the system. Likewise, Victor asserts that, as part of the laity with no calling for full-time church ministry, he and his friends see the Church as a place where, owing to many limitations, they cannot practice socio-political involvement. As the Church is absent in the discussion of social issues, such as democracy and rights, the laity can play this role outside of the institutional church. That sort of tendency to feel slightly uncomfortable with the status quo perhaps is helpful for probing deeper into what is wrong with a current situation.

Analysis: How Faith Interacts with Secular Society

Through my analysis, I see the problems in communication within HK Christian communities as seeing democracy and rights as a replacement for dignity and respect, as well as the confusion about how faith should inform in secular society. The major dispute between the PEC leaders and those who critique them is whether social justice is a concern of the Christian Church, Christians, or Christ. At first glance, it does seem that PEC leaders set an example of inward-looking piety (Alex Ho-hon Ip 2015) or attempting to maintain their physical establishment (Kung 2016, 107–30). However, that is a superficial read of their theology and their praxis. There are commonalities between Ng and Kwong: While on the surface, it may seem like they are both PECs because they are both for societal stability, Ng does not at any point acknowledge he is not the prophetic voice of the Church in society. He does not see his theology as a compromise for practicality but instead firmly believes in evangelism and works within the Church rather than striving for social justice as his major mission. Kwong, on the other hand, is clear that he is giving up being the prophetic voice of the Church and instead is focusing on evangelising and providing welfare and education through the Anglican Church's good relationship with the secular government. His emphasis is on the Church and the secular government's mutual tolerance and embrace.

My critique of PECs' stance is that their entire argument is dependent on the existence and goodwill of the secular state. Whether it is Ng's progressing democracy that works for China or Kwong's working with the state, it all depends on the secular state. While I am not saying one can simply ignore the existence of the secular state since HKers all live within one, should that be the

central concern of the Church or individual Christians? Should it not first be what is God's will and what is considered right conduct, depending on God first, before considering the secular possibility? I argue that the Christian imagination should be shaped by Christian convictions first, rather than restricted by what is perceived as possible by secular society.

As for average PECs, when they conform to the status quo or *go with the flow*, this does not mean they are not exercising their capacity to think critically. Their perceived non-action should be understood as a form of action as well, and it is by acknowledging the importance they place in the secular state that we can begin to understand their theology. The PDCs' perspective wants to wrestle with a flurry of local/national identities (British, Chinese, or local HKer). It is through their resistance against the secular state that they figure out who they are as HK Christians, so it is through these actions that they define and consolidate their theology. While that seems clear cut, I think it is more likely that it is a spectrum. Katrina's struggle exemplifies this: She says that her political ideas have many twists and turns, and while she has many friends in social movements, she does not participate herself, even if she supports the cause. It is because she is very pessimistic about HK's politics; especially after the Umbrella Movement, she feels powerless. Similarly, Abigail (alias) states that she does not see herself as a front-line protester, but she does not oppose others participating. It is important to embrace diversity in expressions of faith and citizenship, not treat them as if it is a cookie-cutter civic society.

As such, in line with respecting human reason, we need to affirm both faith and the secular state being on different planes (PEC) and faith informing civic action (PDC) as HK theologies. Paul recounts his experience with a Christian community made up of some who are high-ranking government officials and many more who are not and how they still find their community a safe space to discuss and interact because they trust each other as fellow Christians. Such spaces are important in the growth of Christian and civic discussions, as there is an ongoing narrative that only action can be HK theology and that perceived inaction or non-participation is a way to protect assets and other interests. That perception is not helpful for conducting a meaningful conversation.

Notes

- 1 I often refer to my interview participants throughout my writings. This can be identified by the format [pseudonym] (alias), such as Abigail (alias).
- 2 A definition of the Three-Self churches:

In the 1950s, the newly established People's Republic of China underwent a socialist transformation, including the nationalization of all private sectors and de-Westernization of all institutions. The Chinese churches had to cut off links with the West and join the only government-sanctioned Protestant organization: the Chinese Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) [self-support, self-propagation, self-governance]. Churches that joined this movement were considered politically patriotic and were allowed to operate openly, albeit subjected to strong political control by the government.

(Chan Kim-Kwong 2019, 44)

- 3 A definition of unregistered house churches: ‘Those who refused to join the government-sponsored Protestant body – often referred to simply as the Three-Self Church – chose to have their own worship or meetings, often clandestinely, at homes as a spontaneous expression of their devotion to their faith. These Protestant groups were later known as “family gatherings” and eventually referred to as the house church or family church’ (Chan Kim-Kwong 2019, 26).
- 4 This census was conducted before March 2019 and, hence, does not cover the Christian community’s reactions towards Anti-eLAB (Research Group on 2019 Hong Kong Church Survey 2020, 42).
- 5 This census was conducted between June and December of 2014, so it covers the period of the Umbrella Movement (Research Group on 2014 Hong Kong Church Survey 2015, 38).
- 6 Despite the vast investment made by research institutions in the collection of data, pre-existing datasets are typically underused. This does not make for the best use of public resources. My reanalysis from a new angle will allow for new research to be facilitated by existing data, as well as triangulating the themes arising from the interviews I conducted (Greenwood 2020, 2–3).
- 7 To be consistent with the biographies of other theologians I shall refer to, I searched for Ng’s views on the Christian sector representatives voting for the Chief Executive and have not been able to find any of his comments.

8

The Rev. Daniel Ng of Kong Fok Church’s [*sic*] says society has alienated and marginalised religion, and there is a perception that the religious should not voice their opinions publically [*sic*]. “When people have already spoken on issues that we agree with, we don’t need to add to [the discussion],” he says, “But when our views on moral issues are not expressed, then we, the silent majority, need to speak out”.

(Sit and Li 2013)

9

All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better homeland, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

(NRSV)

- 10 David Chi-wai Wu 胡志偉 is a retired ordained pastor (see Reformed Evangelical Ministries 2018).
- 11 King-tak Ip graduated with a Master of Divinity from the Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary in 1984 and received his Master of Theology from Yale University and Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Manchester, with his research interest in theological ethics. He is the chaplain emeritus of the Hong Kong Baptist University and previously a researcher in the University’s Centre for Applied Ethics (see “Ip King-tak” n.d.).
- 12 Ip briefly describes Ng’s argument in being against Occupy Central because, from his observations from the Bible and from human history, he sees abiding law and protecting societal order as God’s expectation of human lifestyle, and resistance is not the normal course of action, followed by a selection of critiques by Ng’s commentators. Finally, Ip offered his critique on Ng’s argument.
- 13 Matthew 11:29 (NRSV): ‘Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.’

- 14 While Milbank argues that rights discourse is secular and anti-religious, Brian Tierney, in *The Idea of Natural Rights*, finds rights discourse in the Americas as derived directly from Spanish Catholic theologians, grounded in medieval theology. Tierney depicts diversity in contemporary debates on the evolution of natural rights and emphasises the relationship between natural law and natural rights, drawing from his accounts of how rights developed in the Americas, especially by indigenous thinkers. Tierney argues that there was a concept of natural rights before the Enlightenment, while Milbank, as he writes against liberalism, focuses on rights as generally discussed in the contemporary world, derived from the Enlightenment and secular. There is much that Hong Kong Christians can learn from how rights were used in the Americas in the colonial period. Hong Kong Christians can learn another way, such as of that in the Americas, to frame rights.

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zung1 waa4 jan4 man4 gung6 wo4 gwok3 hin3 faat3: zung1 waa4 jan4 man4 gung6 wo4 gwok3 hoeng1 gong2 dak6 bit6 hang4 zing3 keoil geil bun2 faat3 gap3 soeng1 gwaan1 man4 gin2 中華人民共和國憲法:中華人民共和國香港特別行政區基本法及相關文件 [The Constitution of the People's Republic of China: The Basic Law and Related Documents of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China]. 2018. Joint Publishing (H.K.) Co., Ltd.

3 Pro-Democracy Christians

In the midst of the Anti-Extradition Amendment Bill (Anti-eLAB) protests, America-based Christian media *Christianity Today* interviewed me for their podcast, *Quick to Listen*, where I responded to current events at the time and dialogued with their previous episode with Hong Kong, China (HK) theologian Andrew Wai-luen Kwok (Lee 2020). To my surprise, as *Christianity Today* publicised my episode, the comments in response were overwhelmingly ‘yay democracy.’ For example, on *Christianity Today*’s (2020) Facebook platform, user Cha AI commented, ‘National security law pass[ed] by [the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)] CCP will supersede all HK civil rights laws and protection in common law. CCP administers & CCP court will be the one to interpret the law, enforce & punish.’ User Twila Finkelstein Joy shared the post, stating, ‘Yet [T]rump told Chian [*sic*] to go ahead and build concentration camps. Who do you think will occupy them? China hates Christians.’ More bluntly, user Riggins Rights Management shared the post, stating, ‘Please pray for our publishing partners and Christians in Hong Kong! This is one of many articles circulating about their troubles.’ This particularly confused me, as that was not what I recalled saying. I listened to the podcast again and confirmed that none of their comments reflected what I had said. That is when I realised it was not *what* I said; instead, it is the keywords *Hong Kong*, *China*, and *Christians* that generate a certain narrative to Americans and, to a certain extent, Western audiences (Figure 3.1).

This example from my own experiences shows how Christians from the Western world are inclined to support pro-democracy Christians (PDCs) in HK, seeing them as the *right kind of Christians*. In Chapter 2, we looked at the subtle differences between different HK pro-establishment Christians’ (PECs’) stances, thinking through how they engage with the secular state. In this chapter, I will illustrate PDCs’ perspectives, from the works of HK theologians John Wai-on Chan and Kung Lap-yan¹ to the lay theologies of my HK Christian participants.²



Figure 3.1 Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (30 November 2019).
Photograph by the author.

Pro-Democracy Christians' Perspectives through Primary and Qualitative Secondary Data, and a Theological Critique

Is Democracy Christian?

We continue to investigate whether HK Christians consider democracy an inherently Christian concept, switching our focus from PECs to PDCs. I will now explore how Christian leaders Chan and Kung, as well as my participants – who are laity, not theologians – consider the relationship between democratic values and Christian convictions.

John Wai-on Chan's Arguments

Chan, an Associate Professor of Theology at the Alliance Bible Seminary in HK, often does his thinking within the HK context using Karl Barth's framework, as we can see from his monograph, *Prayer as Christian Being, Living, and Doing: The Meaning and Function of Prayer for the Theology of the 'Analogy of*

Faith of Karl Barth (in German).³ He also founded 流堂 (Flow Church), an alternative form of church that positions itself as non-traditional and targets the grassroots Generation Z, who generally consider themselves more educated and informed than their parents (Mai et al. 2020).

Chan employs various mediums to disseminate his arguments, including social media posts, journal articles, popular books for the laity, and Christian newspaper columns. Chan's main theme is unity in Christ and what that should look like, namely not homogenous. He does not talk much about democracy and rights, mainly because Chan focuses on discussing how the HK Church separates the spiritual and the worldly rather than what the two contain and how they can and should interact. Throughout his works, Chan assumes democracy and rights are an unquestioned good within HK Christian communities, and he generally regards those who work well with the establishment as not being true to Jesus or being motivated by politics and not theology. His topics are usually very clear cut and dualistic, which might be shaped by the mediums he employs, perhaps assuming a general public audience which tends to prefer to be told what to think rather than sieve through nuances when they consume content from, for instance, a Facebook post.

I will now analyse Chan's use of the concept of democracy in his underlying assumptions. The word *democracy* does not occur very often, but he criticises denominational churches as being silent and not caring for society, and this, assuming it concerns church participation in civic society, can be taken to signify his disapproval of the existing non-democratic regime and belief that the Church needs to have a hand in changing this. At the same time, while he advocates for Christian churches to hold onto their ten seats in voting for the Chief Executive to maintain influence in a so-called evil regime, he also asserts that it is pointless to pray for the election because he is not a stakeholder with say in who can run for the election and cannot influence policymaking, which shows his separation of the spiritual and the secular. There are two main strands in his addressing of democracy in HK Christian communities: (1) how churches and pastors should act and (2) how individual Christians who attend denominational churches are acting.

Chan's main concern is how the Church and pastors should function in civic society. In many of Chan's assertions in his Facebook posts, he downplays the denominational contribution to civic society by those with close relationships with the government who, owing to trusting relationships between church and state, were able to provide social welfare and education services alongside evangelism. Instead, Chan considers such denominational churches to be a cause of Christians' disloyalty to Jesus and being PECs. This demonstrates Chan's assumption that he is loyal to Jesus by being anti-establishment. Chan argues that the brick-and-mortar church stifles Christians who care about society (Theologia Autumntas Rosea Est 2017c), and the *correct* way for the Church to do political theology is with an eschatological lens, focusing on how God's Kingdom comes into this world (Chan 2016c, 135–154). Moreover, Chan's understanding of *What Would Jesus Do* (WWJD)

illustrates his underlying assumption of the failure of liberal democracy and tolerance. Chan asserts that the same passages about Jesus's life can have entirely opposite ethical interpretations. He creates the example of 'in the face of the Umbrella Movement, WWJD?' Chan notes that some see a law-abiding Jesus in the Bible whereas others see an anti-evil regime Jesus from reading the same Bible. At the end of the day, Chan sees WWJD as virtue ethics, meaning prioritising having good character rather than, say, doing the correct action or having the right intention, so the emphasis is not on the rule of the ethical decision but on the right character in response to the tolerance issue. Thus, he suggests that WWJD is not objective but rather contextual, meaning the thought process of ethics varies in different contexts (Theologia Autumnitas Rosea Est 2018). However, the problem still exists: What is *right character*? While Chan points back to the Bible, denominational interpretation, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it is different people who derive different types of Jesus in the first place.

How this *right character* is implemented through action or inaction is also up for debate. On the flipside, in another Facebook post, Chan argues that if the Church is not distant from the *real world*, then it is not acting on its unique qualities as being apart from the world (Theologia Autumnitas Rosea Est 2017a). He simultaneously bemoans how the Church is not helpful in the world, and what is happening in it should guide Christians, while arguing that the Church being irrelevant is exactly what makes it unique. Even though Chan claims he wants to 'reform the Church' (Luo 2019), Chan frequently laments the state of HK Christian communities without providing any solutions and instead voices the frustration and anger of his readers so they might feel they are understood and heard. This concept, 「圍爐取暖」, is common in both HK secular and religious societies, namely for those with similar views to huddle in small cliques and validate each other's ideas in an echo chamber so that, in the end, they think everyone thinks like they do as they cannot hear different voices.

In one of his posts addressing what the Church's social involvement should look like, Chan finds many issues with churches that are not speaking up, do not act upon issues, or remain neutral. In another of his Facebook posts, he writes that he commonly receives Facebook messages from churchgoers saying that their experiences of HK churches are 'peace-centred,' meaning they feel that church sermons are unrelated to real life and ignore the world, just praying for peace, and fellow churchgoers are only enjoying each other's company (Chan 2016a, 159–160). He argues these are problems of the Church as an establishment and that this reflects that individual Christians and institutional churches are standing against one another. According to Chan, institutional churches' silence does not have to reflect Christians as a whole, since church action is not limited to the actions of institutional churches. He calls for individual Christians to be involved in social actions and not just wait for established churches to change their ways (Chan 2017). Chan (2018b, 18–19) argues that, while churches want to stand on the side of God, they are not apt in deciphering which is God's side, since 'dictators no longer come in uniforms

and moustaches' – presumably Chan is referring to Adolf Hitler and the difficulty of spotting dictators in the current times.

The picture that Chan draws of denominational churches is pretty bleak. However, is Chan's assertion true? In terms of churches' social action efforts, the *Hong Kong Church Survey* found that only 146 churches, roughly 11.3% of churches surveyed, have participated in any protests/marches, and 327 churches, roughly 25.4% of churches surveyed, encouraged their congregants to vote, while 55 churches, roughly 4.3% of churches surveyed, encouraged their congregants to run in elections (Research Group on 2014 Hong Kong Church Survey 2015, 47). Thus, while there might be some truth in Chan's statement, he is undermining what is accomplished in institutional churches, both in participation in civic action and by those he considers to be PECs, who conduct the kind of work that cannot be publicised if it were to be continued, as it would touch the nerves of the ruling party.⁴ The works of these churches have to be surreptitious by nature, and Chan does not acknowledge this in his writing. His writing is, therefore, divisive and focuses on building a straw man (i.e., the Church he has in mind), only to tear it down rather than debate his arguments for democracy.

The way Chan sees how the Church and state should interact can be observed through his interpretation of Luther's *Doctrine of Two Kingdoms*, which, as he cites Jürgen Moltmann, is getting the worldly government and the heavenly Church to work together against the third kingdom, the demonic domain. Chan (2016b) argues that Luther's theology should be the basis of resistance rather than a rationale for stability or the Church being politically apathetic. Chan's underlying assumption is that Luther's theory is now being touted by the PECs as a tool of the institution to promote stability instead of PECs having an actual theological standpoint that fuels their current actions. Furthermore, Chan argues that pastors should be concerned with society as it is not separate from evangelism and argues against pastors hiding their political stance, that they should be honest in expressing themselves. Chan asserts that faith is not only spiritual and that spiritual matters and worldly matters are not dualistic. He argues that, while evangelism should be their priority, the Church should consider caring for society as a form of evangelistic care. Chan argues that pastors caring for politics does not mean that those pastors cease to care for heavenly matters, as caring for society can be out of faith convictions. He writes that pastors should be evaluated not on their political stance but instead on whether he or she loves those he or she pastors. As such, Chan says that a spiritual, church-loving pastor is not one without a political stance; Chan (2018b, 248–250) finds that having convictions would be more difficult than pretending to be neutral, which is why most pastors are not representing one. Chan assumes every pastor must have a strong political stance, concluding that those who are not communicating such are just hiding their stances. Moreover, Chan notes that a confrontational political manifesto made by pastors makes them more genuine, ignoring the possibility of pastors who might not have a strong political stance or whose political stances are similar to those of their congregation.

However, Chan downplays the importance of theological convictions for PECs, assuming it is out of apathy or personal financial gain that they co-operate with the government. As Daniel Ng and Paul Kwong, in Chapter 2, would argue, it is the resistance that causes missed opportunities of working with the government to provide social services, education, medical services, and evangelism. Thus, simply seeing Ng and Kwong as advocates of stability is like seeing conscientious objectors as *doing nothing*. In relation to reflections on the political ethics of the Church in response to the Umbrella Movement, Chan sees Stanley Hauerwas as advocating for an inward-looking, waiting, patient, and defining personal identity through separating the Church from the world, while Chan sees Barth as viewing church political theory as resistance – outward, active, and creating order by resisting the world. Chan (2016c) argues that the Church is not meant to exercise God’s justice, but at the same time, the Church needs to strive for justice in this world. This reflects his view of the current HK political system as unjust and in need of the Church’s influence. Even though Chan said he also appreciates Hauerwas’s theology of waiting, he does not tolerate inactivity and instead asks for both the waiting and the action to occur concurrently (Christian Times 2019).

Some would argue the rise of Chan’s fame within the HK Christian community is through his debacle with Andres Tang, Vincent Lau, and Freeman Huen. Chan labelled them ‘Hong Kong Hauerwasians,’ to which Tang, Lau, and Huen issued a collective rebuttal. So what happened to cause this debacle? In July 2015, Chan wrote a series of columns in the *Christian Times* titled, ‘Should the Church Give Up the Chief Executive Election Seats?’ (in Chinese; two posts dated 2 and 31 July 2015) and ‘Why Do I Like Hong Kong Style Milk Tea More Than Hong Kong Hauerwasians?’ (in Chinese; three posts dated 9, 17, and 23 July 2015). The latter was especially provocative since Chan was seen as being condescending towards Tang, Lau, and Huen, all of whom are his senior, and that is quite unusual in HK culture. After the end of the Umbrella Movement, Chan engaged in the popular discussion of whether the HK Christian community should abstain from participating in the non-democratic Chief Executive election, as the religious community, like other sectors, elects representatives to vote for the Chief Executive (Electoral Affairs Commission 2023).

Chan sees the popular narrative for withdrawing as follows: This is not a just election, so the Church should not participate. Chan argues against this popular narrative, stating it mistakes *justice* for *justice in practice*, as justice in practice can occur only when a situation provides that opportunity to practice justice, namely an unjust situation. Chan (2015a) argues for upholding the idea of justice and trying to minimise the unjust in a situation of injustice rather than simply washing one’s hands of a situation of injustice and claiming that at least one did not participate. Chan then assumes this stance will not be supported by the HK Hauerwasians, who Chan defines as wanting the Church to be a small community of Christ followers that does not need the approval of the world and as believing that political ethics are not to change political

status, since Christendom, making Christian values expand to a societal level, is not necessary. Rather, Chan sees HK Hauerwasians as advocating for the daily practice of witnessing God. As such, Chan interprets HK Hauerwasians as supporting withdrawal from voting in the Chief Executive election committee, since the Church should not expect to change the political status of the fallen world. Chan sees their views as witnessing to the world through living out Christian ethical values, such as being upright, kind, compassionate, reconciling with others, and speaking truth, rather than changing the world through participating in policy or political structures.

After setting the HK Hauerwasians up, Chan argues against this setup by redefining ‘witness’ to mean speaking up in the face of injustice rather than the narrow view of life as a witness. Chan responds that lived politics cannot be separated from structural politics, and involvement in social policy is not about establishing God’s Kingdom on earth or seeing democracy as a cure-all but rather about bringing kindness and goodness to a dark world. Chan argues that the Church needs to witness to the world through action, because eschatological views as presented in Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* suggest that true eschatology does not deny the current situation but affirms Christian actions, living here and now under Christ’s light. Chan (2015b, 2015c, 2015d, 2015e) argues for participating in the Chief Executive election committee nomination as a way to increase PDC bargaining power rather than what he considers to be the HK Hauerwasians’ approach: a personal, feel-good Christian ceremonial act of withdrawing and feeling like justice has been served by not participating in an unjust regime.

In response to Chan’s series of posts, Tang, Lau, and Huen wrote an article in the *Christian Times* on 13 October 2015, titled ‘Ethics, Theology, and Witness of the Anabaptists: A Response to Dr John Chan on the Chief Executive Election 10 Seats.’ They believe Chan aimed to set up HK Hauerwasians as, in their own words, an ‘empty signifier’ so that Chan could just beat the straw man down instead of responding and critically engaging with their previous public engagement pieces on the Chief Executive election committee in the *Christian Times*, written in 2011, 2014, and 2015, respectively (Tang et al. 2011a, 2011b, 2014; Huen 2015). Therefore, they wanted to state clearly what their stance actually is, contrary to this straw man that Chan created. They criticise Chan for equating withdrawing from the Chief Executive election committee with HK Hauerwasian theology, and they criticise the incorrectness of the statement ‘being a small number of people,’ since a joint statement was co-signed by 152 Christians who are neither HK Hauerwasians nor a small number of people. From their observation, the reason for withdrawal is that universal values such as democracy require all citizens to have universal suffrage, not simply HK Hauerwasians (Tang et al. 2015).

From my understanding, Chan has only ever worked in a church and seminary context, while Huen has been an Administrative Officer of the government of the HK Special Administrative Region (SAR), a position that is comparable to the British government’s Civil Service Fast Stream (Luo 2008).

It is unclear why Chan thinks he participates more in the secular world and evokes more change in the political structure while Huen, an ex-government official, is more withdrawn. I cannot say for sure whether Chan is a studious observer, but as Huen has worked closely with the legislative council and other policymaking bureaux before, I am inclined to say Huen would have more substance in what he proposes. Moreover, Tang, Lau, and Huen try to engage with the actual text that Chan wrote, while Chan vaguely draws up a straw man to tear down, and when that straw man is indeed rebuked, he refuses to engage further; he simply thanked them and moved on, saying it was merely a public engagement piece, not meant to be a critical deep dive. In short, Chan succeeds in getting the general public and laity to be interested in theology and think more, but if he wishes to engage on an academic level, it would be to his advantage if he could accept constructive criticisms rather than hide behind the platform of social media for a public audience. British theologians John Milbank and Nigel Biggar frequently send controversial tweets, and neither excuses their statements with the platform being ‘just Twitter’ and people should not ‘take them too seriously.’ Perhaps this is a lesson for Chan as well: One can both be on the ground *and* do theology – see liberation theology, discussed later. I do not think theologising well and making it accessible and applicable to the general public must be either/or. Neither should Chan.

Chan’s second core argument is that those who attend denominational churches are the uninformed masses. Chan considers them to co-opt the institutional narrative and not want to *rock the boat*. Chan would not consider them to be individuals with enlightened minds or the capability of understanding abstract concepts such as democracy. In illustrating how Chan views these denominational church attendees, he considers democracy an unquestionable good in Christian communities, and Christians who do not support democracy are *uninformed*. Chan mischaracterises the general approach of these churches, as their praxis is also informed by their theological convictions, even if their actions differ greatly from what Chan would advocate. Chan also fails to consider the individuals who may deviate from the majority and assumes Christians who attend a denominational church do not want churches to speak up on political issues (Theologia Autumnitas Rosea Est 2016). Chan (2018a, 14–16) also sees these Christians as thinking of themselves as trying to wake up others who pretend they are sleeping. That is, other people consider themselves enlightened, and those who ignore them are intentionally obtuse. While Chan’s patronising attitude is not conducive to productive conversations, it is clear he sees democracy as a given, and whoever sees differently from him is, put simply, ignoring the facts laid bare before their eyes.

Nonetheless, I find Chan’s voice to be useful in considering what HK theologies can be, as he interacts frequently online, a platform HK is moving towards. Prior to the rise of social media, star preachers were the only voices that were heard and valued. The decentralisation in HK protests (2014–2020), facilitated by the digital age, has spilled over to different aspects of HK communities, specifically Christian communities. They have creatively imagined a

decentralised, collaborative, bottom-up, ‘priesthood of all believers’-style Protestant Christian community through a hashtag: #deltaδmovement. HK lay Christians began posting with #deltaδmovement, starting a digital trail of HK Christians’ lay theologies. This hashtag movement began with the younger generation and continues to be self-initiated, creating narratives controlled not by star pastors or theologians but by a multitude of average Christians. Moreover, Protestant Christianity-focused Facebook groups and YouTube channels have been created by and for HK Protestant Christians, with content posted by influencers and key opinion leaders (KOLs) who would otherwise lack such a prominent voice in these mainstream communities (Chu 2023). Chan has a great stake in this social media conversation as well, as he is an interesting blend of both star preacher and KOL on these platforms. While I have some reservations on his theology, it nonetheless represents many of those in the church he pastors, the seminary in which he teaches, and others with whom he is acquainted. As such, his viewpoints should not be discounted but rather taken into account as we read the voices of the laity.

Kung Lap-yan’s Arguments

Kung is a self-identified HK liberation theologian, and he often cites the works of Gustavo Gutiérrez and Jon Sobrino. Kung says he is deeply influenced by the theological traditions of Lutheran theology, liberation theology, and Hauerwas. Therefore, grace, social justice, and church life guide his actions (Kung 2017a, 187). Kung is currently an Adjunct Associate Professor at the Divinity School of Chung Chi College of the Chinese University of HK, and he has co-signed many public letters that urge the government of the HK SAR towards or against policy decisions. He can be considered a Democrat based on his associations and the political leanings of the co-signatories of these public letters.

Regarding universal suffrage and the Christian Church’s representation in the Chief Executive electoral committee, his position is against Christian churches participating in the electoral committee because this would be letting the secular state determine what constitutes *church* and *Christians* (Kung 2016e). To participate in the electoral committee is to accept the government’s intervention in the Church; the government would then have the power to define who is a Christian and what organisations belong to the Christian sector (Kung 2016a). Kung states that the Church should live out Kingdom values because the Church does not have a single political tendency, and the church representatives cannot represent individual Christians. Kung argues that the Church should be its own politics, or have its own politics, which is in line with Hauerwas’s theory. Only when the Church is impartial is it credible to the public. Kung (1999, 118–123) believes that the nature of representatives who cannot represent the Church is an unresolvable contradiction. In arguing his stance, Kung demonstrates his commitment to virtue ethics, in which there are no hard and fast rules on what to do and what not to do, such as deontological ethics or consequential ethics. Rather, when someone is in a specific situation,

they pursue a character-based approach to morality, emphasising an individual's character as the key element of ethical thinking.

Kung (2015b, 107–119) considers the Umbrella Movement and Occupy Central to be fundamentally the same: striving for universal suffrage through non-violent means, even though the Umbrella Movement exceeded Occupy Central's original plans. Kung sees his role as a theological worker, and his responsibility is to present the Umbrella Movement's theological importance, namely God in human history. He aims to explore the Umbrella Movement theologically and challenge its content, pointing to eschatology for a societal common good (107–119). While most of Kung's arguments are published in peer-reviewed journal articles, he also delivers his arguments through non-academic books for the laity, Christian newspaper articles, mass media, panel discussions for the general public, and even the occasional blog and Facebook post shared on his personal profile with privacy settings set to public.

Kung makes an intriguing proposal and astute observation: Hong Kongers (HKers) and, by extension, HK churches are obsessed with order. This obsession stems from colonial rhetoric since the end of the 1967 Leftist Riot, when the colonial British HK government began to promote law and order as a core value of HK. After decades of the push of such rhetoric, order is now commonly thought of as a civilised, cultured way of living, while chaos is condemned as barbaric. This is why actions that seem to be quite mild in Western protests, such as vandalism, are frowned upon in HK's general narrative (Yang Zi-qi 2019). Occupy Central focused on being 和平, 理性, 非暴力, 非粗口 (*peaceful, rational, non-violent, no swearing*), but at the time, the Umbrella Movement was frowned upon by churches mainly because it took over public spaces, which is seen as breaking the law and therefore *bad*. In the Anti-eLAB protests, vandalism and arson did not adhere to the core values of orderliness in HK and, hence, justified police use of excessive force in the views of PEC churches (Kung 2016d, 141). In my qualitative secondary data, Victor (alias)⁵ describes performative protests, such as carrying props like coffins to protests, as something that civilised and refined people would not engage in. Rather, he said, handing in petitions and participating in legal protests are a suitable course of action for polite society. This could be related to Stephen Yiu-wai Chu's (2011, 46–58) argument that

Hong Kong citizens were led to believe that if the *status quo* of Hong Kong could be retained after the Handover, Hong Kong's autonomy, democracy and economic prosperity would be automatically secured. This has contributed directly to the visibility of "Central District Values," which the HKSAR government uses to characterize Hong Kong core values. "Central District Values" [...] correspond only to growth, efficiency and prosperity.

The idea of what is proper and what is not has been largely shaped by British ways of ruling a crown colony, Chinese ideas of propensity through

contentedness with one's status in society, as well as capitalist ideas that those with money get to speak (and vice versa).

Kung thus challenges anti-protester rhetoric by pointing out how HKers have been indoctrinated by this concept of order. Kung observes that those who argue against Occupy Central protesters state such actions cannot be peaceful since they disregard the disruption of civilians' livelihoods and set a bad example. Yet Kung (2013b, 259) pushes back on such rhetoric, arguing that Occupy Central challenges the representation of space. Kung (2016b, 121) states

that the movement itself does not need to have divine justification, but rather both God and the churches are being moved by human initiative. The Umbrella Movement interrupts and challenges the political and daily life of the people, which has been characterized by cynicism, pragmatism, and superstition with regard to law and order. The movement's importance lies in inspiring the people to have the imagination to live differently.

This is a tough sell for HKers, since what Kung is arguing against is essentially their preconceptions and deep-seated value of order and stability.

Moreover, Kung (2010a, 56–57) observes that, in a society that is perceived to be lacking in democracy, liberalism challenges the authority's legality, so he finds that, in HK, the government needs social stability to sustain its governance. Kung (2014, 120–122) asserts that HK 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 (2016c, 14–15) 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 Western Enlightenment brought to the Christian faith. Kung believes this leads to an anti-public theology that is politically inclined to conservative moral issues and ignores issues of poverty, injustices of capitalism, and humanitarian concerns. However, HK Evangelical Christians, such as Ng, would argue that it is not because those issues are unimportant but that the Church has limited resources, which means it can focus only on certain issues (Kung 2010a, 56–57). But it is precisely where resources are devoted that demonstrates what these churches value, namely almsgiving in an orderly manner over social justice which may look chaotic.

Universal suffrage is Kung's idea of democracy, and he has mentioned democracy in many comparative contexts. He sees that HK Christians do not believe democracy can save them, but rather a democratic system provides a greater possibility for spiritual salvation (Kung 2013a). Kung understands that the root of HK's societal problems stems from not having a just system to

establish trust and authority in the government, and hence, a democratic system can resolve this (Zheng 2013). With regard to universal suffrage, according to Kung (2015b, 109–110), the problem with this arrangement is that the existing nomination committee is structured in a way that the majority will be pro-establishment; therefore, if there is not a direct vote from the people, the voting is only for show. In this situation, Kung (2016c, 28) acknowledges that, even though HKers do not have a choice, they are forced to choose. He also equates the want for universal suffrage to the process of seeking truth, since he sees a restricted voting process as toleration of lies (Kung 2021a, 133–148). Kung talks about universal suffrage as a system in a democratic society that can handle the differences in a pluralistic world, and it is a way to respond to conflicts due to differences in values. While voting does not lead to a satisfying result for everyone, at least under a democratic voting system, the losing side can vote again next time (Kung 2008, 57–58). Here, Kung lays out the arguments from both sides so that his readers can follow the rationale behind his choice, as opposed to assuming democracy and voting are some sort of unquestionable good to which Christians must adhere.

I argue that PDCs and PECs both use democracy and rights language, but their definitions of the two are very different. The frustration in their communication is due to the fact that they assume the other to understand the terms the same way they do. As such, when the other comes to a very different conclusion, they state that the other is illogical. Similarly, Kung (2019c, 1–19) also laments that terms relating to universal values are thrown around casually: ‘Socio-culturally, both the pro-democratic camp and the Hong Kong government agree that the rule of law, human rights, freedom of press, democracy, and clean governance are the core values of Hong Kong.’ So how does Kung conceptualise democracy?

Kung’s idea of democracy is not just voting but includes dialogue, participatory government, and reconciliation. Political dialogue in a democracy for Kung resembles Benny Tai’s democratic consultative forums, civic nomination through a voting process, charters, and so on. Kung (2015b, 116) sees the Umbrella Movement as an enlightenment, where dialogue is no longer monopolised by politicians and elites in the debate chamber in the legislative council but also exists in the streets among concerned citizens. Moreover, Kung (2016b, 121) states that ‘Dialogue with a spirit of hope, patience, and humility is the practice and the message of the church that it must share with the people.’ However, Kung argues against dialogue as simply a bargaining chip to resolve conflicts, as that would mean those in dialogue see each other as a statistic or a stance rather than as a person, and any consensus they come to would be superficial since no actual communication and understanding occurred. As such, Kung (2015a, 191–192) claims that dialogue must be transformative, co-exploratory, and ongoing.

Kung also explores the idea of the common good, whereby he contends that if politics is the arena in which to manage the affairs of everyone, then politics should be about seeking the common good and creating a shared worldview

for people to realise themselves more easily, which means restraining those organisations whose profit stands in the way of the common good of humanity. And the most effective way to experience the common good is to have participatory, rather than representational, discussion and governance. However, how should the common good be defined? American political scientist Cecelia Lynch (2020, 15) argues that the common good should not be

a definable, normative goal, but, rather, as riven by assumptions and values that are often not completely spelled out and that may be internally contradictory. [...] The common good, then, is aspirational in nature; it wants to work toward harmony and well-being, but in practice, any definition of it is open to all critiques of both communitarian and pluralist forms of cosmopolitanism or universalism.

Kung sees that currently the PEC narrative is that HK must rely on China to survive, so any anti-Chinese government is seen as harming the welfare of HK, and only by believing in China can HK be redeemed. From this argument, Kung (2015a, 195–206) sees the Umbrella Movement as not just about a democratic life through universal suffrage but also about overthrowing the false god that is the Chinese government.

For reconciliation, Kung argues (2019c) ‘that the Christian ministry of reconciliation has to be a matter of bringing about an environment for the emergence of healthy scepticism in which striving for a democratic political structure and maintaining an independent judiciary are fundamental.’ However, Kung notes several weaknesses in HK’s consideration of reconciliation post-Umbrella Movement; namely, while it is true that HK society needs reconciliation, we need to go to the root of the phenomenon of the divided society, which is the *Mainlandisation* of HK. A fair and accountable political structure can enhance reconciliation among people rather than just remain at the level of personal and emotional dimensions. Additionally, another weakness is the failure to recognise that a divided society is not necessarily a bad thing if this division is the result of doing justice and making peace. Kung (2019c) maintains that a ‘theology of reconciliation is a Christian attempt to respond to the emergent social imaginary. It emphasizes connecting the disputed parties, addressing misunderstandings and building up mutual respect, but it says nothing about the transformation of an unjust socio-political structure.’ Kung proposes that, if reconciliation is about rebuilding relationships, then on a systemic level, there needs to be a mutually trusting societal system, which is not present in current HK society, as it is filled with conspiracy theories motivated by an undemocratic electoral system. While healthy scepticism is needed, destructive scepticism comes from an unpersuasive electoral system. In this regard, Occupy Central is actually a path to reconciliation, as Kung (2010a, 56–57) proposes, since it is about a reconciliation of the societal system through universal suffrage.

Kung (2019d) reasons that not all societal confrontations are bad social actions because, in many democratic countries, civil disobedience is an

acceptable form of critique of the law, since the law is a legal form of violence. So how does Kung label Occupy Central and the Umbrella Movement? Kung (2018a, 8) sees social movements as a collective action for social change, not focused only on success or failure but also on what participants gain from the experience, such as identity building and how they define the movement. Social movements for Kung (2017c) are liminal spaces that challenge the status quo, build and consolidate the social imaginary, and impact the society regardless of its success. Kung sees democratic movements like the Umbrella Movement not as revolutions but as awakenings towards individual autonomy and value reflection. Kung (2017b) says, 'Seeking for true-ness is the core concern of the people of Hong Kong during the Umbrella Movement. That search starts from the political structure (true universal suffrage) and continues through into the formation of identity (true Hongkongese).' In fact, Occupy Central and the Umbrella Movement are political reforms under the idea of accepting the legality of the Central Government (Kung 2013b, 252, 2015b, 111). Kung (2016f) sees that Localists 'accept the framework of "one country, two systems" (this is how the political relationship between China and Hong Kong is officially defined) but strive for the implementation of democracy in Hong Kong.' As Kung (2016b, 107–119) observes, 'the Umbrella Movement is actually a political movement – a revolution in the consciousness of the people that goes beyond the issues-based nature of social movements – that has reshaped the everyday life of the people of Hong Kong.' However, Kung sees that most churches are inclined to interpret the Umbrella Movement not as an increase of consciousness but instead as an individualistic issue, leaving the decision on the movement for individual Christians to decide on their own. Kung (2017b) asserts, 'though the implementation of Occupy Central faded away within a day, it had laid down a good foundation for the public to understand the idea of universal suffrage, deliberative democracy and non-violence.'

Kung (2019d) claims that, in the previous decade, HK churches' concerns are not just on evangelism or debate about social issues but striving to witness God's Kingdom manifested through social action, which he sees as a prophetic role. Other than the Methodists, the Christian churches' response to Occupy was to remain silent with regard to universal suffrage, and even those who responded mainly asked Christians to respect those with different views, instead of addressing the core concern of Occupy Central, which is universal suffrage. Though more churches were openly condemning police brutality during the Umbrella Movement, they were in the minority (Kung 2015b, 112–113). Kung (2016b, 113–115) points out,

Despite all these Christian engagements, though, it is also worth emphasizing that most churches are hesitant to respond to the [Umbrella] movement. They have a mistaken understanding of the separation of church and state, because they consider the church's criticism of politics and even the discussion of political issues in the church as the signs of a violation of the separation of church and state.

Additionally, Kung sees the Christian Church's response to Anti-eLAB as being one who awakened, breaking away from the narrative of submitting to authorities and dealing with internal conflicts with regard to the relationship with the government. Kung (2020b, 171) observes that the Church has participated more in Anti-eLAB than it did in the Umbrella Movement, or at the very least, it spoke up more, providing more theological hermeneutical support and building a fuller narrative for the movement.

With regard to individual Christian protesters, Kung (2021a, 133–148) relates their experiences with Jesus's experience of being 'betrayed, arrested, beaten, and crucified because he was committed to the Kingdom of God, and challenged the anti-Kingdom' and sees the resurrection of Jesus as justice prevailing, correlating oppressed people with the crucifixion of Christ, grounded in liberation theology. Kung (2021a, 133–148) also relates Christian protesters' experience with that of the early Church, describing 'themselves as sojourners or exiles rather than permanent citizens of cities in which they dwelt.' Kung (2020b, 182–184) argues that the Christian Church, as a messianic community, should live a new value and lifestyle that represents freedom, truth, grace, and unity to counteract the reality of politics; they should focus on the *already but not yet*, rather than obsessing over when the movement will end, and have the patience to wait for justice and see hope through the unity of action, communication, and living life seriously. Kung critiques the *Global Times*, a Chinese government-controlled media outlet, as misunderstanding the role of the Christian Church in HK protests, which reflects the Chinese government's fear of Christianity's role in democratic transition. Kung (2020b, 170–171) claims that individual Christians are not just blind followers without critical thinking, but rather, in a decentralised political movement such as the Umbrella Movement and Anti-eLAB, everybody needs to exercise their judgement in whether to participate or not, and in what way. However, since the implementation of the National Security Law (NSL), Kung (2021b) criticises religious leaders for not speaking up effectively enough. Kung (1991, 211–213) argues,

Hong Kong churches should help the people of Hong Kong to see the vast possibilities in their future. Christian hope breaks through all kinds of fatalism. [...] The best way to overcome fatalism is to hold a constructive attitude, to participate in society; that is, a commitment to humanization and democratization.

Kung defines democracy as participatory and emphasises the importance of civic participation in decentralised demonstrations (Peng 2020). This resonates with liberation theology's meaning of the praxis of group involvement, protests, labour unions, and so on as defined by Myles Horton and Paulo Freire (1990). As such, Kung sees that HK Christianity must necessarily commit to humanisation and democratisation if it desires to bring hope to HK, which does not sound like a Hauerwasian view.

HK American biblical scholar Sam Tsang talks about Kung's work and, in particular, his use of Hauerwas, Sobrino, and Gutiérrez in the HK context. Tsang finds 'Kung has constructed a local liberation theology in Hong Kong' by fusing 'Latin American liberation theology with an Anabaptist model of ethics in his public theology,' bringing together Hauerwasian 'Anabaptism's strong view of the priesthood of all believers' with Sobrino's liberation theology, which is an 'activist model with strong eschatological implications.' While Tsang (2016, 131–162) approves of Kung's use of Hauerwas and Sobrino in the HK context, his assessment of Kung is actually quite similar to Kung's self-assessment. Kung himself calls it his free association of the theological traditions of Lutheran theology, liberation theology, and Hauerwas, and Kung (2017a, 187) also considers it a form of interpretation and expression rather than an entirely different faith.

Pro-Democracy Average Christians' Thoughts: Empowering the Voiceless and Developing Democratic Values

PDC advocates tend to want social democracy without naming it explicitly, even though when they talk about democracy, they usually think of America's liberal democracy first. Unlike PECs, PDCs generally do not think democracy necessarily means Athenian classical democracy. PDCs tend to see Christianity as advocating for the voiceless and powerless, as well as a support for Western democratic values.

EMPOWERING THE VOICELESS

In a qualitative interview in *Encounter the Others in Umbrella Movement*, a Roman Catholic university law undergraduate student talks about his experiences of social action during the Umbrella Movement. Kang Zai (康仔) reflects that, whether this action was a success or a failure, he knows what he is doing is correct and that God is by his side, since Kang Zai considers Catholic social teachings to greatly emphasise a democratic regime and clearly support democracy. He sees his faith as having an important impact on his involvement in social movements (Choi et al. 2015, 144–151). In his narrative, it is precisely his Christian identity that leads him to be involved in social movements rather than withdrawing from them, because God is the God of the poor. His narrative channels both social teaching and liberation theology. This tendency towards liberation theology is common among PDC: One of my participants, Paul (alias), also recalls being in touch with liberation theology, which stimulated his thoughts, even though he positions himself as an Evangelical Christian. However, as liberation theology emphasises reflection through practice and combines convictions and worldview with practice, he sees this as being different from Evangelicals' systematic theology tradition, especially through social criticism with a Marxist lens, not just knowing society but changing society. Likewise, Victor asserts that Christian faith should be a holistic expression that requires a

social dimension to practice one's faith, not just in a personal or spiritual realm. He sees that, through theological education, Christian communities are moving towards the trajectory of a holistic faith.

In another qualitative interview from the same volume, Martin, a seminarian who majored in international relations in his undergraduate studies, advocates for incarnational humanism, without going too much into the theory. He might not know what he is advocating for, but his thoughts expand into my argument. Martin argues that seminarians always talk about learning from Jesus Christ, who was incarnated and walked with the weak, so when all HK citizens face an unjust decision (i.e., about national education), seminarians should walk with them. He considers being involved important, as faith is a vital push factor since Jesus Christ is also incarnated, so we cannot just watch events unfold, avoiding the possibility of tear gas and getting hurt, but have to be among the weak and the voiceless (Choi et al. 2015, 153–161). I see that Martin is trying to think through how Jesus as an incarnate human-God would act in a situation such as HK, and he thinks participating with the powerless is what Jesus would have done.

DEVELOPING DEMOCRATIC VALUES

Most of my PDC participants would say that democracy is part and parcel of being Christian. Judith (alias) argues that nobody is against democratisation but questions how fast the pace should be. Gabriel (alias) claims that the Occupy Movement gave him an idea of what striving for democracy can look like and a framework to explore his thinking and how to respond as a citizen in his daily life and work. From this framework, he sees democracy as something everyone can build into their lives through social involvement, politics, economics, voting, and so on. As such, Gabriel sees democracy as a way of life more so than simply universal suffrage or a political system. What he wants does not have to be democracy necessarily, but it seems like, for the language he has, *democracy* best expresses what he wants to strive for. Obadiah (alias), reflecting as a Christian and university student, wrote about the conflicts between HK's Handover and ethnic nationalism in a Christian magazine for his university, where he disagrees with HK Han Chinese having to be patriotic towards the People's Republic of China, and he considers China's system to be vastly different from HK. To Obadiah, if one wants HK to be a modernised, democratic, and liberal society, HK must move further away from China. In his description, *modernised*, *democratic*, and *liberal* seem to be core values of HK. Moreover, he argues that democracy is involvement which leads to a sense of belonging, so Christians should not just focus on the political system but on the values reflected in the political system and how the system moulds a community's characteristics. This reveals that democracy to Obadiah is a value rather than simply a system.

I do not disagree that democracy has its benefits, namely that it allows for a frequent and smoother transition of power for necessary checks and balances.

However, that is not necessarily what HK Christians want, and it may be the case that they have not developed the lexicon to express it more fully. Timothy (alias) asserts that, in the 1988 electoral reform, HK Christians wished for someone from the Christian sector to say something to represent the Church, which would send a message of Christians endorsing HK's democratic progress. However, he says the democratic system is not the best. It might be a better way of governance in comparison to colonial or communist rule, because the people can be involved, but the electoral reform in 1988 does not have any biblical basis; it was just the right place, right time. While that may be advantageous for furthering Christianity in a less hostile social environment, it in no way makes democracy Christian.

Reflection: How to Understand Democracy as Separate from Christianity

While American Christianity – or, indeed, that of other, mostly Western countries – ties Christian faith with its political structure (in America's case, liberal democracy), does it have to be so? American religious studies scholar Jeffrey Stout (2005, 2–3) argues that democracy is a tradition which inculcates certain habits of reasoning, certain attitudes towards deference and authority in political discussion, love for certain goods and virtues, as well as a disposition to respond in a certain way, and

[i]f we were not committed to the legitimacy of constitutional democracy, we would invest much more energy than we currently do in attempts to alter our basic arrangements. If we were not committed to continuing a discussion that perfects and honors our democratic norms, we would happily accept more restrictive and exclusionary ways of conducting political deliberation.

As such, it would be helpful for HK PDCs to be able to articulate their Christian conviction and their political inclination to a democratic regime somewhat separately. To say that the Bible endorses liberal democracy is not conducive to conversations, especially with PECs, as their underlying assumptions are different, so there is no way for them to come to a starting point in conversation. If democracy can be separated from Christian convictions at the beginning of the conversation, while PDCs can still hold onto their democratic inclinations through, say, using the language of justice and love, there is a chance that PECs and PDCs can come to some sort of understanding of each other's viewpoints.

It is clear that both sides consider themselves to be doing what is best for HK and following biblical teachings most faithfully. What has obscured their understanding of each other is their use of rhetoric. Is it possible for both sides to be invested on equal footing? I propose that it is possible, though not simply through a change of language but a change of perspective. It is through seeing someone as the other, as having less ability to comprehend than oneself, that justifies ignoring the other's arguments and concerns. Of course, a discussion

of what language to use and defining the language used would be helpful for comprehension, but ultimately, both sides have to come to the table in good faith, genuinely wanting to engage, for dialogue to be possible. Pang Lai-kwan sees Hannah Arendt's concept of 'appearing,' humans existing, acting, and speaking in a space, to be a slow and largely ineffective process of negotiation, deliberation, self-expression, and mutual understanding (Chu 2021a, 7–13). That is also how I see HK PECs and PDCs – their existences and their self-understanding are ineffective ways of negotiating and mutual understanding. Nonetheless, I find this slow and frustrating process a natural and necessary way of communication and self-expression.

Are Rights Christian?

Continuing the investigation from Chapter 2, we now explore whether PDCs consider rights to be universal and undisputed in HK Christian communities. I will now elaborate on how rights are discussed in Christian communities through illustrating the arguments of Christian leaders Chan and Kung and of my participants.

John Wai-on Chan's Arguments

The word *rights* does not appear very often in Chan's writing, but he mentions violence in the assumption of the right to use force to protect oneself and overthrow institutions, which signifies his approach involves one's right to protect ideology by using violence. Chan argues that peace and nonviolence are actually what cause violence to exist in the first place, citing Barth: Pacifism is not possible in theory, but only martyrdom is possible, since not allowing violence to overthrow tyranny but hoping that tyranny is overthrown miraculously is not possible. Thus, Chan sees Christians' idea of pacifism as even more unjust than those inflicting injustice. Chan (2018b, 23–25), citing Hauerwas in *Peaceable Kingdom*, argues that asserting force in necessary situations is a way to live for others who cannot assert force themselves in a world filled with violence and injustice. Chan argues that the regime now knows to maintain its citizens' bare necessities so that they have no reason to want to sacrifice for an ideal, and he defines sacrifice such as self-immolation, which may be considered non-violence, to still be a form of violence, as it is self-inflicted violence. Therefore, Chan (2018b, 41–43) asserts that it is important for HK Christians to focus on sacrifice rather than whether violence should be used or not, as Chan says peaceful protests are an excuse for those who are lazy, and he states that any form of resistance without sacrifice will only lead to self-destruction and make way for a tyrannic government.

In addition to voicing out his ideas about violence and pacifism, Chan discusses how the government of the HK SAR silences the voices of dissent by bringing in more voices that align with their agenda, making the voices of

dissent weary and likely to accept the status quo, and Chan (2018a, 78–79, 95–96) encourages his readers not to lose their passion for resistance. This shows how Chan considers the right of free speech to be a given. While there are no further instances where Chan even indirectly infers on rights, Chan indirectly refers to rights by citing Arendt in one of his Facebook posts (Theologia Autumntas Rosea Est 2017b), where he articulates her concept of the banality of evil to criticise Christians' and Christian leaders' loyalty to denominational heads, a person of authority, rather than to Jesus. This comment demonstrates that Chan considers the theories and experiences of a Jewish political theorist such as Arendt in Nazi Germany to be of relevance to the HK people, and Chan, in particular, sees that HK churches are complicit with the CCP the way the state churches in Germany were complicit with the Nazi regime and argues for freedom of religion.

A possible reason as to why Chan rarely directly talks about democracy and rights, even though he is a PDC, is his Evangelical stance, which makes him focus more on what is happening in the church context. As we shall see later in Kung's writings, Kung's Mainline persuasion would cause him to be more involved in the socio-political context, seeing God in all things.

Kung Lap-yan's Arguments

Kung has mentioned rights in many contexts. I will now elaborate on how he defines rights, then how he sees HK churches dealing with issues regarding rights, and, finally, his proposal.

Kung often critiques the government for misusing the term *rights* for its own purposes. Kung (2019c) argues,

Maintaining the rule of law is central to safeguarding human rights. However, the rule of law does not necessarily serve the common good, since laws can be manipulated in the interest of power. This is why there is always a role for civil disobedience. The Umbrella Movement itself is an example of civil disobedience. The church who believes in God as the God of life should obey law, but also should acknowledge the need at times for civil disobedience.

In this case, Kung argues for civil disobedience as a defender of rights, above rule of law.

Kung (2019c) often emphasises that his readers should not let reality limit their imagination, since he also asserts that

[i]n Hong Kong, there are the people who care for their own survival and benefit rather than for the common good, siding with ideology instead of truth, and committed to the ideology of *aiguo* ("patriotism") rather than human rights. Through conscientization hypocrisy is unmasked and through resistance liberation is possible.

As such, Kung (2019c) creates a dualism between patriotism and human rights, as he argues against ‘a kind of ethnic nationalism which is inclined to be exclusive and chauvinistic, as opposed to a sense of civic nationalism that adheres with traditional liberal values of freedom, tolerance, equality, and rights.’ ‘As opposed’ in Kung’s phrasing carries an either/or mentality, such that one can either take pride in their ethnicity or adhere to liberal values and not both. According to Kung, these arguments made by the government of the HK SAR and police force are slippery slope arguments, viewing rule of law as meaning *law-abiding* and superimposing this onto HKers. Kung’s argument that patriotism and rights are mutually exclusive, however, is less convincing. There is often a tendency to link the CCP with *godlessness* and, as such, to see their actions as evil and those who condemn them as right and just (Borja n.d.).

I will now move on to analyse how Kung sees the HK Church dealing with rights issues. Kung (2019c) observes, ‘The Christian churches are generally apolitical though two of the three initiators of the movement of “Occupy Central with Love and Peace” openly confess that they are Christians. Churches have become more politically active in recent years.’ Kung asserts that it is because HK churches are inward-looking and focus on evangelism that they are ill equipped to handle pervasive socio-political issues. Perhaps Kung is right that the HK Church ‘lacks the language to articulate what the issue at stake is and engage in the consequent discussion.’ It may be that the current circumstance is not the best moment to talk about reconciliation because of the power imbalance and mistrust, as Kung (2017b) states that ‘it is a reconciliation maintaining the status quo’ and that ‘the church cannot play a neutral role.’ Instead, I propose a common understanding of what *the other* thinks and feels first rather than going directly to a reconciliation model. As I argue,

If nothing else, many in Hong Kong feel angry, tired of being misunderstood, and exhausted by too much news. Pro-establishment groups might have imagined a smooth and stable transition into Chinese rule, while the pro-democrats might have imagined a democracy or even independence. Can we grieve together for these socio-political futures we all imagined that will never come to fruition, even if each person’s wish for Hong Kong’s future is very different?

(Chu 2021b)

However, Kung’s reason for coming to this conclusion is different from mine. Kung argues that reconciliation needs to come with the genuine acknowledgement of the harm done by PECs instead of a cheap reconciliation. I argue from a constructivist-interpretivist perspective that everyone’s reality is different even if they come from the same context and witness the same events, so at present, without a common language or consensus, there is no reason to talk about an artificial reconciliation just for the sake of moving on.

Kung (2020b, 169–170) further elaborates on how some churches use political neutrality or focus on societal prosperity and stability as a reason to stay

silent and not express their stance. This is because of the deep-seated HK culture of valuing order against chaos. As discussed earlier, Kung pushes back against those who critique the protesters for creating chaos, trouble, and inconvenience as well as illegally occupying public spaces as a form of resistance and promoting anarchy. Kung (2015b, 116–117) argues this obsession with order points to the status quo rather than justice, and if justice can be achieved through slight chaos, the law should not be the ultimate endgame. Kung points out that megachurches need to support themselves, and their main source of income is from their members, who are usually financially stable and beneficiaries of the existing system, so they would be reluctant to rock the boat (Yang Zi-qi 2019). While this may be true, it does not make for a strong argument, as what Kung is essentially saying is all those who are from megachurches are in it only for their material existence. It would be much more helpful if Kung debated against HK megachurches' theology on a theological level rather than simply attacking them as money grabbers.

Kung also helpfully describes the Chinese government's appropriation of rights language for their own agenda. He observes that, while '[t]he Chinese government has launched two "Five Years Human Rights Action Plans" (2012–2016 and 2016–2020) and signed various United Nations Human Rights treaties,' these human rights action plans have in no way obviously improved the human rights conditions in China. He also asserts that Christian freedom and resistance, as well as Christian responsibility for society, is to '[unmask] the narrative of the empire, which is characterized by the rule by law and the culture of *mien-tzu* [face]' (Kung 2020a, 82). While I can see how Christianity's striving for justice would urge one to challenge institutional injustice, I wonder how Kung proposes individual Christians or churches should *unmask the narrative*. Kung proposes that the Church's role is not just to wait for salvation to come, but the Church holds a responsibility to the world, which can be expressed in different ways: evangelism, social service, social advocacy, building worship communities, and so on. Kung argues there are no priorities in these different tasks, but they are decided by the calling, denominational tendencies, and resources of different churches. However, Kung (2018b, 247–264) argues that if a church focuses too much on contributing to the world in a single way, it loses sensitivity to the work of the Holy Spirit. As such, it could be seen that Kung would likely argue for churches to be more involved in educating their congregants in how rights language has been used by the government and how the Church should respond.

As a response against current churches' inaction, Kung maintains that God is a God of mission, which means that humans should live a fruitful life, and social action is a testimony to such a life. Kung asserts that humans cannot live a fruitful life not only if they lack material needs but also if their human dignity is violated. Kung emphasises the social Trinitarian aspect, namely the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit providing a perfect model of being in relationship, when considering ethics such as rights, noting our responsibility for others, such as PDCs protesting for freedom and justice for others. On the

other hand, PECs could be seen as emphasising their own rights, in that their rights were violated when protesters blocked the road. For example, in my primary data, Bernice (alias) expresses that words like *human rights* do not mean much to her and that she does not believe in it, even before she studied theology. She believes human rights are about *you having your rights* and *me having my rights*, so if we have different views, then there will be arguments. She raised the example of protesters occupying the roads; she finds that the protesters see it as their right to be in the driving lane. She asks then, why would there be the need for traffic lights if protesters think it is simply their right to be on the road? Bernice sees protests as a violation of her right rather than how she can act for the sake of her neighbours. Bernice's comment directly reflects Kung's concern about how PECs see rights as a way to defend themselves rather than to care for others who are in need.

Kung (1991, 180–181) proposes how HK churches should act in the current context:

Pastorally, Christian hope cares for people's suffering and frustration and consoles their grievance. It takes each person's suffering seriously. [...] Christian witness should have the courage to take sides. The Church often prefers to be neutral in all controversial matters because taking sides could easily be understood as conformism or opportunism and bears the risk of making mistakes. But its neutrality is already a form of taking sides; that is to say, indifference, and sitting on the wall.

As Kung (1991, 176–177) observes,

Christians are apt to fall into the tendency of privatizing the Gospel, and thus disregard any of its direct political and social relevance. This tendency can be explained by the need, on the one hand, of persons who suffer from unfair treatment for inward comfort and consolation, and by the fact, on the other hand, that it is inadvisable to have a direct confrontation with on [*sic*] unjust government.

As such, Kung argues that Christians and churches need to relate their faith to both personal and social dimensions and avoid becoming abstract and vague. Citing Czech statesman Václav Havel and German philosopher Martin Heidegger, Kung argues that the Church should be a parallel polity in a society where it is not accepted, namely a community in suffering (Hong Kong Baptist Church Live 2021).

Pro-Democracy Average Christians' Thoughts: Rights as a Way to Love Your Neighbour

PDCs see rights as for others, namely how we respect other people's rights and how we can strive to protect others' rights, not for our own good but for loving

Table 3.1 Christians' Views of Justice and Care for Others After 2019

Rating (1 = Extremely Disagree, 6 = Extremely Agree)	Number and Percentage of Total Respondents for Each Rating of Agreement/Disagreement with the Statement 'Christians' Most Important Mission Is to Strive for Justice and Respond to Injustices	Number and Percentage of Total Respondents for Each Rating of Agreement/Disagreement with the Statement 'Christians' Most Important Mission Is to Care for Those in Need
1	13 (1.29%)	5 (0.50%)
2	23 (2.30%)	9 (0.90%)
3	147 (14.67%)	47 (4.69%)
4	325 (32.44%)	237 (23.65%)
5	295 (29.44%)	370 (36.93%)
6	199 (19.86%)	334 (33.33%)

one's neighbours. This can be seen through Timothy recounting that he does not see himself as having any sort of political insights; instead, he asserts that as a Christian one should strive for a more just, more equal society. He sees that striving for justice and equality for one's neighbour is part and parcel of Christian values. His argument can also be seen in the wider context of HK Christians. In Table 3.1, we can see how the respondents of the survey *Hong Kong Christians' Psychological State, Spirituality, and Social Involvement: A Research Report* think about ideas like justice and care for others (Lee et al. 2021, 27).

As we can see, most respondents agree that it is important for Christians to strive for justice (81.74%) and care for those in need (93.91%).

Victor asserts that universal suffrage and human rights are fundamental human values in which one must persist. Keith (alias) argues that it is incorrect for Christians to talk about conflicts between human rights and God's will. In a place where human rights are respected, people should understand their responsibilities more. He identifies with the mentality that rights are for others. In contrast to church participants, most divinity school participants would argue that rights are intrinsic to being a Christian.

Most of my participants said they do not see any change in their views over time, because they had a very strong stance from the beginning. However, some say their understanding strengthened, such as Keith, who said that his participation in government consultation groups on human rights strengthened his understanding of different types of rights, what is inalienable and what is not. Katrina (alias) argues that the older generation, having lived through the world wars, civil war, and cultural revolution, believes that standing up for political issues is life-threatening and that keeping your head down will keep you alive. She recounts that, during the Umbrella Movement, she wore a yellow ribbon signifying support for the movement, and in a local eatery, a retirement-age man lectured her and told her not to make a fuss. From recounting her experience, I find that her understanding of the PEC viewpoint, while sympathetic, is

based on their life experience of minding one's own business rather than being motivated by theological conviction. This is something I continually want to argue against with PDCs: PECs also have a theology, and one cannot simply dismiss it as out of touch or not suitable for the current context.

Reflection: How to Talk about Respect and Character, Not Rights

While it is true that biblical teachings do focus on loving one's neighbours, does that translate to what we mean by rights in the socio-political context? And does that have to be necessarily universal? And what does *universal* mean? The Western way of thinking? Morality and ethics are often somehow seen as ahistorical and acontextual, but in reality, everything has to be applied in a context, not conceptualised in a vacuum. Thus, it is more important to think through how the Christian faith manifests itself in HK rather than hoping some universal values apply to HK the same way they do in, say, America. In the HK context, John Perry and myself (2023, 422–434) challenge the use of rights as biblical languages, citing an example from the late Yuen Tin-yau†, who was a senior pastor of Methodist Church, HK:

Yuen critiques the Christian legislative councilor for, as he sees it, prioritizing an otherworldly salvation over this-worldly needs. But the way he puts this point causes problems. Instead of saying 'needs' or even a more biblical phrase like Isaiah's 'seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan' (1:17, NRSV), Yuen equates the gospel with human rights. This is common among PDC, where rights are seen as tantamount to Christian doctrine. Problematically, some looser translations of Isaiah even render the English as, 'Defend the rights of the widow' (New English Translation). But can the gospel be so simplistically equated with it? Perhaps some of the values protected by the human rights tradition are also principles promoted by Christian ethics?

Seeing human rights as intrinsically Christian and inherently universal is problematic, as human rights also includes Western and European secular values and assumptions that cannot simply be taken for granted.

The way Kung argues for civil disobedience as a defender of rights, above rule of law, is problematic for me, as I argue that following God does not necessarily equate to defending human rights as understood by secular society. Nonetheless, it can be appreciated that rights are still somewhat of a helpful benchmark under autocratic regimes. The critiques of the misuse of rights language in America can be harmful when uncritically applied to other contexts, especially those where basic human rights are violated. While in democratic countries Christians can say, for example, that rights are not biblical, in autocratic or authoritarian countries, saying the same thing can be interpreted as the Bible being against human rights, which is equally, if not more, problematic. Jonathan Tran asks, what if PDCs began with character rather than rights? In a diverse democracy,

perhaps rights, as a lowest common denominator approach to communal life, is a best bet. Yet this approach negates the meaning of thinking together about difficult questions, despite differences in views. Tran (2023) finds that an integrated moral life might actually ground rights, gathering a people around a common good. He calls for Christians to live in communities of character rather than be held at stake by individual rights.

Does a Citizen-Christian Identity Lead to a Conflict of Interest?

Before we delve into the narratives of Christian leaders and of my participants on citizen-Christian identity, we will reflect on the citizen-Christian identity of those who have migrated to Britain. While this book does not cover HKers in Britain, as their theologies are extensions of the theologies of HK PDCs addressed herein, I wish to briefly cover this topic. According to Hong Kong Christian Council and Divinity School of Chung Chi College – The Chinese University of Hong Kong’s (2023, 12–13) *Focus Group Analysis on the Situation of Protestantism in Hong Kong 2023*, over 49.7% of their participants are pessimistic about HK’s future, and 14.3% plan to migrate within the next two years. For the churches interviewed, about 10–30% of their congregants will be migrating elsewhere, especially young middle-class families. The *Christian Times* has featured many voices of those who have moved to Britain because of the British National (Overseas) (BNO) visa established in 2020 and their reflections on citizenship and their Christian faith. They featured a research project conducted by Huang Yinxuan, titled ‘The Bible and the Chinese Community in Britain,’ which demonstrates church growth in Britain, such as a church in Manchester with congregants growing from 200 to 1,200 since HK arrivals. Huang found that four-fifths of HK migrants are Christian, with the remaining non-Christian migrants being open to Christian faith, which increased the ministerial work of British churches. Nonetheless, Huang sees that 80% of Christian migrants regularly pray and 90% regularly attend weekly church gatherings and read the Bible to be close to God, while less than 50% would exegete or share the Bible with others (Yang 2022). Huang also sees a China-HK tension in Chinese churches in Britain, as Christians from HK and the Chinese Mainland would refuse to pray for each other or sit together (Yang 2022). This demonstrates that their faith is inherently tied to their citizenship affiliation, and though they moved away, they continue to associate themselves as HKers rather than British Chinese, for example. The *Christian Times* interviewed Fong Fong, who migrated to London in August 2020 with her husband and daughter and said they first continued their worship online in HK’s Evangelical Free Church of China (Hu and Chen 2023). This blurs the line of who are HK Christians, since Fong’s family, though migrated to London, continued to be a meaningful part of the congregation in HK. How would their migration narratives interact with those who remained in HK? And when they finally chose to be part of the Chinese Church in London Colindale, how did they continue to identify with being an HK Christian? (Chu and Cheung 2026).

These are questions to hold up as we explore the narratives of those before this juncture in time, as my interviews were conducted before April 2020.

John Wai-on Chan's Arguments

Chan's arguments on citizen-Christian identity are more recent, based on the BNO visa migration. Reflecting on migration stories he heard, Chan (2021b) finds that Chinese Christian communities are not currently equipped to take on so many HK migrants, which is why he started a new initiative, 'Outflow Mission,' which connects HK migrant pastors with HK migrant congregants in Britain (Flow Church 2022). This strongly reflects Chan's Evangelical background, because even though both Chan and Kung could be considered PDCs, Kung is more ecumenical and looks outside of the Church for social justice, while Chan looks inward towards building a perfect model of the Church, even outside of HK. His idea of this perfect model of the Church is still based on a largely HK community, even when it is based outside of HK; his idea of citizenship is still very much anchored in being an HKer, despite no longer being in HK. In fact, he argues that Britain needs more Chinese churches, which reflects his presupposition that HKers necessarily attend ethnic churches rather than local churches with mostly Caucasian congregants (Chan 2021a). He does not struggle with the idea of HK Christians needing to become part of local British communities. Of course, he is also not in Britain, yet this reflects his idea that citizenship is firmly in HK.

Chan (2022) is also developing a diasporic theology through the development of a Master of Arts programme topic (Alliance Bible Seminary n.d.) and preaching on this topic, emphasising that diaspora is not just geographic or contextual but rather reconstructing God's mission for Christians grounded in their Christian identity (Flow Church 2023; Editorial Office/Reporter 2023). He finds diaspora for Chinese communities to be covered by Chinese Canadian intercultural studies scholar Enoch Wan, yet for HKers it is a unique topic, where one can learn more from the experiences of the Jewish people. I find it unlikely that Chan is ignorant of HK migration waves in the 1980s after the Sino-British Joint Declaration and in the 1990s before the Handover. Rather, it might be a hyperbolic way of emphasising the uniqueness of today's situation, such as online communities acting as continuous influences. His idea that, whether they are migrating to Britain or staying in HK, Christians need to live a missional life somehow negates the historicity and situatedness of those who migrated or stayed. While saying your mission remains the same might have a feel-good factor and, to a certain extent, it does, the ahistoricity aspect of this statement is not helpful for either community.

Kung Lap-yan's Arguments

For Kung, cultivating peace is the church's responsibility, yet HK churches want to maintain neutrality, but neutrality is just sitting on the fence. Even

when HK churches do express their opinions on certain matters, they tend to seek majority support before doing so. This is because churches do not want to be in the middle of a quarrel, but Kung finds that insisting on resistance is not making the church more political, but rather, it is because justice and truth cannot be neglected that Christians and churches need to stand against the government and society when they are doing wrong. Kung argues that stability should not come by sacrificing judicial justice or taking advantage of the poor or oppressed. This is because, unlike Chan, Kung comes from a strong liberation theology stance, as he self-identifies as an HK liberation theologian. From the perspective of a liberation theologian, Kung argues that contextual theology is necessary to contemplate what it means to be a Christian, an HK resident, and an ethnic Chinese. He states that a believer's life begins with contemplating the relationship between faith and life. Certain elements are missing from a church that provides oppressive governmental powers with legitimacy and only provides salvation in an otherworldly manner. As an Ecumenical rather than Evangelical Christian, he believes God's work should not be limited to the church context. Rather, one is more likely to see works within the church context only because of the awareness of the Holy Spirit, which is why he approaches the concept of liberation theology so eagerly, as he believes God works in secular contexts as well as church contexts. Kung's critique of local HK churches, especially megachurches in HK that host a large, predominantly middle-class congregation, is that these churches feel the need to maintain their relationships with the local government to guarantee their continued existence (Chu 2020, 137–149).

As such, Kung's arguments are for Christian advocacy of social justice in the world, as opposed to Chan's concept of expanding the Church's circle of influence. Kung's (2019a) idea of effective social justice is a society where the government does not need to use excessive force to deal with social conflict. He conceptualises this:

Both Occupy Central and the Umbrella Movement have pushed the Hong Kong churches to rethink their identity and relevance to society. The church is the church of Jesus Christ and it is the gathering of the followers of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. The church is a missional church, for it is sent in the framework of the Father's sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The church sees itself in the framework of God's history with the world, and discovers the content of its mission within this history. Therefore, the church has to be aware of the history, the culture and the people, to which it is sent. Otherwise, the church is simply alien to the place, and has no substantial content to proclaim God's kingdom. Thus, Hong Kong is a very important qualifying term for the church in/of Hong Kong in order to articulate better the *missio Dei*. This is not [a] secondary matter.

(Kung 2017b, 431–454)

Moreover, Kung (2016b, 121) argues that as

God's agent in history, the churches cannot bypass the movement, for the people are asking God to respond. The churches do not necessarily have a vantage point to interpret the movement and project the future of Hong Kong, but the presence of the church reminds the world that the kingdom of God is with us, in the midst [of] us, and for us.

It is evident that Kung's theology is less connected with what is done within the church and more with how ecclesial theology affects its immediate surroundings. Kung advocates for religious leaders of faith-based organisations to be involved in humanitarian advocacy because Christian values can direct the mission of the organisation. Local and overseas churches can lead with ecumenical values while connecting with other organisations and can be involved more actively in humanitarian issues (Kung 2021b). On this point, Kung is not consistent with Hauerwasian theology.

Pro-Democracy Average Christians' Thoughts: Advocate for the Voiceless

A 2023 study found that HK Christians and churches do care about societal issues. However, the ways it manifests are different: For Evangelicals, they see that as running schools and social services, using these as platforms for the community to have a path to converse with the Christian faith, but ultimately, evangelism is through language, such as large-scale evangelical events. For Mainline Christians, even though they also run schools and social services, they emphasise practicing the Great Commandment through application; therefore, these schools and social services in themselves are already the demonstration of the gospel because, in practice, people can feel the love of Christ (Hong Kong Christian Council and Divinity School of Chung Chi College 2023, 9–10). PDC advocates believe that, because they are Christian, they should advocate for systemic justice and structural changes, because their faith motivates them to seek change when they see injustice done to others. As we can see in Timothy's statement, if pressed, he identifies as a Chinese in HK, and being a Christian is to practice one's faith somehow. Paul reflects on the relationship between his faith and social participation: He sees it as more than just involvement in specific movements, as that seems compartmentalised. Rather, Paul thinks of his social involvement as his career, as this has become a major part of his life. Obadiah explains that the reason he chose to major in politics for his bachelor's degree was because, as a Christian, he cares about people and society, and he thinks people are more important. As such, he considers his tendency to be concerned for people and society to stem from his faith conviction. Moreover, Gabriel said that, for him, there is no conflict as a citizen and as a Christian, even though he is a divinity school student. Judith sees her Christian identity as changing and internalising some values and concepts, defining what is important or not, and these become the basis of her core

values, which regard more than just heaven, the next life, eschatology, ecclesiology, saving souls, and so on but rather this life's social justice, political system, and economic system. Similarly, Leah (alias) considers God's calling for Christians in this world to be salt and light, witnessing God's will on earth as in heaven. Therefore, when Christians see needs, injustice, sadness, and loneliness in society, they cannot act as if they do not see it; they have a responsibility to become involved. Christians cannot say, 'Have peace and go' or 'I'll pray for you' but must do something substantial to help others, experience communal existence and hope, and, in experiencing despair, transform lives.

How my PDC participants talk about their convictions resonates with the observations of the editors of *Encounter the Others in Umbrella Movement*, who see that many of those involved in the Umbrella Movement are coming from their identity as followers of the Christian faith, and they see faith as something that one has to practice in social life. The editors believe the pursuit of spirituality can be expressed in religion and faith, as these give *telos* and value to existence. In the Umbrella Movement, participants expressed their pursuit of democracy and justice through faith expressions. They consider faith not just a personal spiritual journey but also an expression of compassion and care for others in society, a testimony through one's life. One of the movement's participants, Tian-en (天恩), argues that the church without civic identity spreads a selfish gospel and testifies to something very different from Jesus, which is why they follow Jesus's model of putting the Kingdom and justice above one's own gain (Choi et al. 2015, 18–19).

Moreover, I found it difficult to ask my participants the question about faith and citizenship because I needed to give examples; I usually used gay marriage, pacifism, mandatory conscription, and China's Three-Self churches and House churches, which are non-issues in HK. If they had not thought about it before, it was difficult to lead them to think about it in-depth on the spot. The very framing of the question made it difficult to understand. However, it might also be useful to discuss the translation of concepts such as citizen-Christian not being a meaningful dichotomy for the participants. As Fei Xiao-tong (1992, 71–79) theorises,

The basic structure of Chinese rural society is what I have called 'a differential mode of association' (*chaxugeju*). This pattern is composed of distinctive networks spreading out from each individual's personal connections. It is quite different from the modern Western organizational mode of association (*tuantigeju*). In such a pattern, personal relationships depend on a common structure. People attach themselves to a pre-existing structure and then, through that structure, form personal relationships. The concept of the citizen, for example, necessarily follows the development of the state. [...] In the Western pattern, the fundamental concept of morality is built on the relationship between the organization and the individual. [...] Extending out from the self are the social spheres formed by one's personal relationships. Each sphere is sustained

by a specific type of social ethic. [...] In the organizational patterns in Western society, public service, in the sense of fulfilling obligations towards a group, is a clearly defined social norm. In Chinese traditional society, however, there is no such norm.

I can see how Fei's idea of *chaxugeju* resonates with how *inward-looking* Christians in HK understand their Christian identity and how they relate to the secular state. They associate as a Christian in a private capacity with other individual Christians and less so with a specific collective Christian Church. They also tend to advocate for making changes to secular society as an individual in their occupational role, familial role, and so on. However, Fei's *chaxugeju* does not quite work for the *social justice* PDCs, since they are able to gather as a group to sign joint statements, start new parachurch organisations based on their convictions, and work together towards a common goal:

For brothers and sisters who are more concerned about justice and democracy, they hope for more responses from their churches but they also understand churches' limitations. Under such circumstances, they usually liaise and express in their own ways as they join different protests and online petitions with other brothers and sisters.

(Ray Bakke Centre for Urban Transformation 2020)

Even in recent protests when they advocate for each person making their own contribution (兄弟爬山), the focus is ultimately so that their differences do not detract from the fact that they are all aiming for a common goal, which is why 'respondents who are radical and moderate democrats have relatively higher expectations and lower satisfaction towards their churches; centrists/those with no political affiliation have a relatively higher satisfaction level towards church' (Ray Bakke Centre for Urban Transformation 2020). Nonetheless, it is unclear whether *chaxugeju* is a Chinese phenomenon or simply how the passive middle class relates to the social activist and can be relatable elsewhere.

Reflection: How to Develop Meaningful Engagement

For PDCs, rather than not engaging with PECs on their theological arguments, PDCs can lift up the individual over the collective good and ask them to imagine what that might be like. Katrina comments in a similar fashion: If we criticise others for using faith as a tool to domesticate others, if you turn faith into an ideology to push forth a social movement, it is also a confinement of faith. It would be helpful to think about a balance between individuals and the collective. A way to engage with someone who has a different understanding of faith and political tendencies would be to agree on a common understanding first. That is not to say you have to agree on all things, but rather, you understand where the other comes from, so that when you exchange ideas, you do not misconstrue their arguments and set them up as a straw man for the sake

of building up your own arguments. This is difficult, but as we will see in Chapter 4, Kwok, interviewed in *Quick to Listen* and supported by his institution, HK Baptist University, in a project titled ‘Cultivating Peace,’ attempts to dialogue with those who hold very different views and are in very different geographic locations from him, seeking to understand their rationale and dialogue on an equal footing (Academy of Chinese, History, Religion and Philosophy n.d.; Hong Kong Baptist University 2022).

Both PDC and PEC narratives argue they are following Jesus’s teachings, but their conclusions are vastly different. Judith argues that Christians, whether in the legislative council or other parts of civic society participating in movements, should still fulfil their responsibility in their role. I want to advocate for this diversity of participation. One point I want to emphasise is how PDCs pin financial gain as a motivation of PECs’ actions or lack thereof. That shows a lack of generosity. PDCs should try and get in PECs’ heads and see how it looks from their perspective. It could be true that profit plays a role in their thinking – So what? Unless PDCs try to see from their point of view, they will not be able to converse. It is unfair to simply disregard experiences different from our own. Hannah recalls that her experience with Chinese government officials requires communication and an understanding of their culture, which is different in every city, and making friends and partners takes time. PECs also have theological convictions, which PDCs are welcome to disagree with, but just saying they are looking for financial gain is a form not of engagement but rather of disengagement. In this instance, it would be productive both to see each other as rational human beings made in the image of God and to respect each other’s reasoning, even if there is disagreement.

Another example is from Ng. While Ng is not specifically responding to Kung’s (2019b) model of peace making, peace building, and peace keeping, Ng (2017, 50–53) said that the Church today is in a pluralistic society and should play the role of arbitrator rather than being involved in the fight and sparking conflicts. Ng comes from an Evangelical background, and he holds the view of a private religion, so he considers that the focus of a Christian should be on evangelism and not social justice. What Ng advocates for is quite common in Chinese culture, since confrontations are frowned upon. This kind of inward-looking mentality is exactly what Kung (1991, 208) argues against:

Hong Kong churches should have the courage to take sides even though no one can know exactly what historical events will mean. The Hong Kong churches should have the courage to make mistakes, and to be blacklisted in order to be the voice of the voiceless. In the coming years, I believe that this courage is particularly important; that is, not to be afraid of losing one’s privileges, but to be the witness of the Word at that particular time. On the contrary, the Hong Kong churches should note that they are not a pressure group. They should be aware of the fact that ‘taking sides’ is not a political stand against this or to support that, but calls men back to humanity which is their contribution to modernisation.

Kung's illustration makes a valid point: To call someone like Ng advocating for what he does as simply being afraid of losing his privilege is unfair – from Ng's standpoint, it is not because of privilege that he holds his stance but rather because of his theological convictions. Kung seeing the other as having ulterior motives and making his arguments against the other based on such is not a strong argument. It makes a stronger argument if Kung could acknowledge Ng's standpoint first, and then base his arguments against Ng off of that. To set Ng up as simply pastoring for monetary gain undermines Kung's arguments.

On the other hand, Kwong (2011, xi–xxxi) specifically responds to Kung's work:

Lap-yan Kung suggests the methodology of Latin American Liberation Theology be adopted as a framework for constructing a Hong Kong Liberation Theology. He contends that theology should be articulated in a particular situation and in relation to social justice. In the case of Hong Kong, the poor were the neighbors of the theologians. The exploitation and deprivation of the dignity of the poor could be treated as subject for constructing Hong Kong theology. While these theologians were working very hard to construct theologies for Hong Kong, we have found their efforts were by no means adequate. The deficiencies in their works were not too difficult to detect. The focus of their theological reflections was on the preparation for the political change, but failed to address adequately the resulting rise in anxiety and fear among the people.

Kwong (2011, 202) finds that Kung sees empowerment of the poor as a means of restoring their dignity as human beings. Kwong elaborates on Kung's work not as a way to praise his theology but instead to demonstrate that he thinks Kung's work is too biased towards the poor and not enough towards HK's abundant middle class, which Kwong sees is the majority of HK's population. As Kwong argues (2011, 204–205),

For African theologies, concerns may involve nation-building, liberation and the struggle for freedom. However, the concerns of these places have made few relevant contributions to the theological development of the HKSAR. In order for an authentic HKSAR theology to emerge, it is vitally important to set our own theological agendas and focus our theological position rather than to borrow them from others. [...] Since the HKSAR is a different context with its own concerns, theologians should try to work out their own theological positions and follow their own agendas. It is to be hoped that HKSAR theological reflection will begin to emerge as the result of choosing its own themes and developing its own methods.

This middle-class majority might be the experience of Kwong, since in his daily experience he does encounter those who are middle class. But Kung's experience is different from Kwong's, as he works with first-generation educated

university students and pressure groups that champion the rights of the working class. Also, the reason why Kwong writes about Kung is to build up a case that theologians also need to consider that those who are from China, and who are rich and powerful, are being discriminated against as well. It is indeed important for HK to have its own contextual theology, but theology needs sources, and there is nothing wrong with using diverse sources, including those from Europe, Africa, or Latin America. HK theologians have over-emphasised European theology, mainly because many of them studied in either Britain or Germany. As such, including African and Latin American theologians in the mix is an improvement. However, Kwong's idea of HK theology largely resonates the Chinese state rhetoric of a Sinicised Christianity. Chinese American sociologist Yang Feng-gang criticises such rhetoric as attempts to conflate the CCP to include the people of China, the geographic China, and a cultural China, namely philosophy and religious concepts throughout history. Yang sees no problem in making Christianity more Sinicised, if that is to think of theology through cultural Chinese lenses, directing 'people's attention to the Han Chinese language, cultural customs, and spiritual traditions.' However, I find that Kwong's argument falls into how Yang (2021, 16–43) defines 'Chinafication,' namely 'the political domestication of all religions to the present political system.' Moreover, what Christianity is and what the Church is evolve as socio-political issues evolve, so it is a matter that requires constant reflection (Hong Kong Christian Council and Divinity School of Chung Chi College 2023, 13).

Analysis: Christians as an Abstract Ideal?

The writings of Chan and Kung demonstrate two ends of the spectrum of PDCs. While Chan's focus is mostly church based as he is Evangelical, Kung's focus is less so. Kung sees God's revelation in all things, not just the brick-and-mortar church, as he is Ecumenical/Mainline. Chan and Kung share the idea that the current system is broken, and it is Christians' prophetic duty to point that out to those in authority. They share the conviction that a democratic system is something that HK should work toward, a system that aligns with Christian values. They both consider that, unless values are respected, democracy will not work. However, Chan's position is really electoralism, an idea that elections are the be-all and end-all of what democracy is instead of other democratic values and lifestyles such as freedom of speech and civic participation. Electoralism does not respect human dignity, as it is imposing only a superficial structure as opposed to shared values. Structures can be implemented, but if concepts like democracy, rights, and rule of law are not fully explained and have a common consensus, the motivation of people to strive for a common goal is unlikely. While Kung may not see universal suffrage as the be-all and end-all of democracy, perhaps it might be the case for Chan.

Kung does say specifically that his advocacy for rights is not for incarnational humanism (i.e., not because humans are created in the image of God or

Christ incarnated as human); rather, it is because of social interactions that we have a moral responsibility to the community and the rights of those who are suffering. It seems like he endorses the social Trinity and is an epistemological constructionist. I push back against Kung's perspective in that I do not think moral responsibility to community and Christ incarnating as a human are in any way mutually exclusive. In fact, I think all the more because Christ incarnated as a human and lived the way he did, it presents a paradigm of how Christians have a moral obligation to their community.

My main critique of the PDC stance is that they are campaigning for abstract ideals, paying less attention to how to concretely realise those ideals. Often, PEC advocates offer concrete steps on what to do, but PDC advocates offer more flowery, abstract language without actual guidance for those looking up to them. Their tone and approach can be one of superficial condescension: feel-good rhetoric combined with superiority over PEC advocates, who they think are sell-outs or just plain stupid or manipulated by the institution. However, both PECs and PDCs are motivated by their theological convictions, so seeing the other as intellectually inferior is in no way helpful in creating any sort of communal understanding and appreciation of different stances. I imagine a suitable way forward is for genuine listening:

Both see themselves as being faithful to God, and both feel like they are victims in this situation. [...] For PEC and PDC, what they both want is being heard as they intend and for their fellow churchgoers to support, or at least understand, their theology

(Chu and Perry 2023, 422–434)

Nevertheless, PDCs are of a certain persuasion that imagination should not be limited by possibility, while PECs focus on what seems possible, so I believe it is helpful for both sides to appreciate the other's effort to faithfully follow Christ in their own way.

A Comparison Between Pro-Establishment Christians and Pro-Democracy Christians

Victor sees that those growing up in the 1980s are from a similar background, in an HK that is striving for democracy and building a respect for human rights. He sees his work towards promoting democracy and rights as part of the trend of the times, and he sees his calling from God as working within such a trend. Victor's description of his involvement in promoting democracy and rights as being part of a societal trend is precisely what I want to address. Through quotes from my participants, I aim to prove that democracy and rights language are not suitable narratives for HK Christians to talk about their values, challenging the status quo of how

secularism remains a default position for much public debate, especially in Western-style liberal democracies. As a whole, society is nervous about

those who “do God” in public, since it is unused to thinking about whether it is right to (re)incorporate the vocabulary of faith into our common life.

(Graham 2018, 206–217)

Yang (2021, 16–43) observes,

During the Occupy Central or Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong in 2014, Zhuo Xiping made comments on multiple occasions, criticizing the position of Christian leaders and supporters of, or participants in, the movement. He said that those Christians lacked the correct accommodation to the present political system in China and led to a fundamental contradiction with the socialist system. Meanwhile, he pointed at and praised those Christian leaders in Hong Kong who expressed opposition to the Umbrella Movement. Apparently, Zhuo’s *zhongguo hua* [to make it Chinese] is primarily about political domestication, i.e. Chinafication.⁶

But why let the state define what Christianity is for Christians? Christians should be able to define what Christianity is within the current context. Human dignity, the value of tradition as an interpretative tool, and the affirmation of humans’ potentiality to reason provide a language for Christians to speak into civic society, and Christianity binds us together in the humanity we share with others. Christianity has the potential to make sense in a collectivist society. On one hand, Jesus took on and dignified human nature, so because Jesus shares our human nature, it is important that we identify together as a group. On the other hand, Jesus becoming an individual human shows us that the individual counts. This aspect can help Christians see that the collective is more important while maintaining the value of individuals.

As such, Christian language is suitable for HK Christians at this juncture in time because this emphasis can bring them towards a further understanding of what being in communion with God means and, by extension, what being in communion with other humans who are also in communion with God would mean. Therefore, Christianity allows HK Christians to move away from a ‘justification by faith or even to mere obedience’ to the gospel, to a collective human flourishing. Discussing God–human communion using Christian language based on Christian traditions disrupts HK Christians’ existing ways of thinking and allows for HK Christians to take back the power of defining the terms used to discuss civic issues in HK. This is not to say conversations about democracy are not necessary or should not happen in the future in HK. What I hope to point out is that, in talking about democracy, HK Christians need to ground their worldview in Christianity before approaching topics in relation to civil society, because if their worldview is not informed by Christianity, then the conversations will be undergirded by the assumptions and agenda of the secular society. Seeing fellow humans as also having the potentiality to mind

and reason, HK Christians can begin to embrace different voices and should also be seen as having HK theology.

I understand that the contemporary concepts of democracy and rights have origins intertwined with Christianity and are influenced by Christian values. However, in HK and, by extension, the Chinese Mainland, these words have become empty signifiers and a barrier to communication since each side interprets these words differently. As Chow (1998, 93–108) observes, ‘If it is indeed Hong Kong’s economic prosperity that has led to its current democracy, this democracy is itself a by-product of colonialism – of a form of government that was not at all democratic.’ Meanwhile, Ma (2020, 330–331) argues that, in earlier years, HKer identity conceptualisation was based on daily lives, institutional rationality, freedom, consumer experience, and plebian culture; these are built on the experiences and innovation of HKers who were living between the cultures and politics of the East and West. But since the first July 1st protest in 2003, HKers have been reshaping their political identity, and as the Chinese government interferes and manipulates HK, the HK identity is more political, resisting China’s control, with HK becoming *Sinicised*. While Ma did not intend for this comment to be a criticism of PDCs, it precisely reflects what I argue: PDCs resist something simply because it is seen as *China* rather than the nature of the thing itself. The same could be said for PECs: They resist any sort of localism rather than the nature of the ideology or the event. This is not conducive to conversations, and the way forward for HK Christian communities is to use the language of human dignity and human reason rather than democracy and rights.

My participants used similar language in expressing what they hope the HK Christian response will be, and I tried to ask them flesh their ideas out more fully. Ivana (alias) used the word *incarnational* to sum up her worldview. She argues that faith in praxis must be incarnational, meaning she must be present in the situation, and she needs to see herself in context, willing to be changed, willing to present herself at a level that commits to where God wishes her to be. For her, *incarnational* means living in the present, through meeting and experiencing each other. This allows her to redefine what the gospel, when incarnated, is like, as she brings Christ’s image here, as everyone brings Christ’s image here differently, which is why meeting is important. For her, theology is a methodology, a tool, a second articulation to enter the situation, a life context, and a start of the first phase of understanding.

HK Christians have shared identities as Christians and HKers, which means that PECs (inward-looking, Evangelical) and PDCs (social engagement, Mainline) are all from the same context, albeit their experiences of the context are very different. Their respective theological convictions are all representative of HK Christianity, even if what they wish to present is very different. How do we understand this plurality of theological approaches in HK?

Lo Lung-kwong and Carver Yu argue that HKers should take off their HK lenses and put on Chinese Christian lenses when looking at the Chinese Mainland, examining both harmony and conflict; consider whether that is closer

to the truth; and explore whether there is *Daemonic power* behind the advancements (Lau 2018, 110–113). According to the logic of their argument, it seems that they presume there is an absolute, positivistic truth out there, and we need to make sure we grasp that. However, I argue that the world is more constructivist-interpretivist than they assume, and how one can know is directly influenced by who they are and their experiences. Uziah (alias) asserts that, with regard to theology, it is only natural and normal for different people to have a different understanding. So how someone understands the Chinese Mainland and Christianity directly results from how they experience the two, and that experience directly results from their presupposition of what the Chinese Mainland and Christianity are. Through acknowledging different experiences and realities, I wish PECs would write and talk more rather than just say they are neutral, argue *church-state separation*, or repeat the government's talking points. On the other side, I wish PDCs would not just say they represent all HK Christians but acknowledge that PECs also exist and that they are also representing an HK theology, not just that they are stupid or lack the mental faculty to process complex concepts. This is precisely where I come in – my role is to find out what HK Christians think and make sense of their theology.

HK Christians can emphasise the importance of individuals through one's shared humanity with Jesus and other humans. This gives room for the respect of both the individual and the collective. HK theology can be many things. It can be PDC. It can also be PEC. To say you must be PDCs or must have lived in HK for a certain amount of time to have HK theology is unfounded. In the next chapter, I will elaborate on the stance of Christians who propose a third way and draw the conclusion as to why lived theology is essential in the HK Christian context.

Notes

- 1 These are two notable figures in HK who are seen as pro-democracy. I chose to elaborate on the theology of Chan and Kung because they are prolific in their publishing on this topic and are also an active and influential part of the movement. They participate in legal, police-approved protests; they converse with activists; and they engage in public dialogue. However, Chan's Evangelical background and employment in a private seminary and Kung's Mainline background and employment in a public university determine with whom they engage publicly. Their theological convictions may also determine their course of action and means of interaction. While both are prolific writers, Chan, as an Evangelical whose theology is about working within the church context, mainly engages with the Christian community, so he is well known within his immediate circle and also maintains social media presence for his followers. On the other hand, owing to his Mainline theological conviction that sees God in all things rather than just within the Church, Kung engages with all walks of life: He presents in public forums to a general audience, and he has been interviewed by the local newspaper for the general public. Often, if any breaking news on Christianity requires comment, Kung is one of the go-to interviewees for media outlets. Moreover, Kung teaches in a publicly funded university, while Chan teaches in a private seminary, which might also affect the types of speaking engagement invitations each receives.

- 2 I have not separated Democrats from Localists in this analysis. Broadly speaking, Localists tend to see Democrats as too idealistic and identifying too much with the Chinese identity, whereas Democrats tend to see Localists as too radical, as evidenced in their use of vandalism and arson as protest means and for wanting independence from China.
- 3 The original German title is *Gebet als christliches Sein, Leben und Tun: Die Bedeutung und Funktion des Gebets für die Theologie der 'analogia fidei' Karl Barth*.
- 4 This is a sentiment commonly expressed among the management team of the Sheng Kung Hui (Anglican) church, though it would be difficult to cite them on this matter as they wish to maintain anonymity to continue their works.
- 5 I often refer to my interview participants throughout my writings. This can be identified by the format [pseudonym] (alias), such as Abigail (alias).
- 6 Yang argues to separate the *Sinicisation* of Christianity from *Chinafication* of Christianity, where *Sinicisation* is cultural indigenisation, localisation, or enculturation from below, while *Chinafication* is a policy from above, namely the CCP.

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4 Christians Who Propose a Third Way

Just months before the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Dr Howson Lee (1949), in his letter on 12 March 1949, regarding the two schools on the Baptist Compound in Shanghai, noted that

These two schools were established by Baptist friends in the Southern Baptist Convention and they are now under the auspices of the Kiengsu Baptist Convention with the specific purpose of administering Christian Education. We try to be faithful to that purpose. Our central aim is to glorify God and work for His cause. *We have been non-partisan throughout these years and we will try to be so in the future.*

(emphasis mine)

In the midst of war, Baptists in China emphasised their wish to remain non-partisan, and that sentiment remains very much the same in Hong Kong, China (HK). But how does non-partisanship work? (Figure 4.1).

Given that pro-establishment Christians (PECs) were addressed in Chapter 2 and pro-democracy Christians (PDCs) in Chapter 3, this dualism may seem unnuanced. That observation is, of course, correct, as HK Christians are neither simply PECs nor PDCs. As with any spectrum, there are as many stances as there are people. That being so, to demonstrate how people are neither simply PECs nor PDCs, I will now present one more way HK Christians think by illustrating and analysing the works of those who propose a third way (PTW), from HK theologians Freeman Chi-wai Huen and Andrew Wai-luen Kwok to the lay theologies of my HK Christian participants.¹ By *a third way*, I mean that, besides PECs or PDCs, Christians can contemplate other ways to be true to their Christian faith and their citizenship identity, such as through daily witness and advocacy through education.

Through this chapter, I aim to argue that rights and democracy concepts cannot be understood in the same way in HK as in Western contexts. I see myself as PTW as well, so as I analyse my participants in their manners of articulating a third way, I will also interject with what I find to be a third way as an insider researcher: that is, through the incarnational humanism proposed



Figure 4.1 Centennial Campus, the University of Hong Kong (21 January 2020).

Photograph by the author.

by German Canadian philosopher and theologian Jens Zimmermann (2017), which I find makes the case for HK Christians to understand that, regardless of who is ruling and in what form, Christian identity and citizenship will always be in conflict.

Perspectives of Christians Who Propose a Third Way through Primary and Qualitative Secondary Data, and a Theological Critique

Is Democracy Christian?

I continue to investigate whether HK Christians consider democracy an inherently Christian concept, now focusing on PTW. I will explore how Christian leaders Huen and Kwok, as well as my participants, who are laity, not theologians, consider the relationship between democratic values and Christian convictions.

Freeman Chi-wai Huen's Arguments

Huen is a retired Assistant Professor of Practical Theology (Social Ethics) from HK Baptist Theological Seminary. After graduating from the University

of Cambridge with a Doctor of Philosophy in Social Anthropology, he went on to work in the government of the HK Special Administrative Region (SAR) as an administrative officer, subsequently taking an editorial position in the Chinese University of HK, before his position at HK Baptist Theological Seminary. He identifies as Baptist, and his research focuses on American theologian Stanley Hauerwas and British priest and Hauerwasian theologian Samuel Wells. Huen sought a third way to approach Occupy Central and the Umbrella Movement, for example, through prayer, as he translated Wells's work on communal prayers. Having been trained as an anthropologist, he enjoys taking an ethnographic approach to conducting his theological work. I see Huen as a PTW because he uses academic writing and interactions with others online as his engagement, unlike PECs' way of working within the institution or PDCs' method of engagement. He writes about witness and prayer and focuses on theological ideas and their application in HK.

In Chapter 3, I described the exchange between Huen and John Wai-on Chan on HK Hauerwasians. 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. 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 understands and affirms 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. Huen interprets Hauerwas's definition of Christian ethics as teaching Christians how to live daily 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, from the perspective of Hauerwasian theology, would consider the activism of the Occupy Central and Umbrella Movement in 2013–2014 as coercive, as he perceives the use of Christian concepts in HK activism as attempts to coerce the government of the HK SAR to grudgingly agree to the demands of the protesters rather than actually convince the government of the Christian values they propose. Huen argues that beliefs must be followed through 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 (Chu 2023b).

Huen argues that Christian social responsibility is not about speaking for the powerless or striving for social welfare for others, which is quite different

from PDCs' stance. In fact, Huen believes the Church should not look to the government to resolve all social problems but instead should understand the limitations of secular politics. When the Church participates in society as a political actor, it must, in his view, resist being weaponised by the political regime or following others' political agenda. This sets Huen apart both from PECs' practice of working with the government and PDCs' political activism.

Huen sees Western representational democracy to be democratic in name only, because he believes a truly democratically constituted people would have more political agency, a more pluralistic 'we.' Huen finds futility in political action, whether it is social elites leading parliamentary parties or political activists on the streets, as nobody can be sure whether what they do is correct. Therefore, Huen proposes embracing the radical tension between the eternity of God's Kingdom and the momentariness of civic society. Huen advocates for listening together as a civic virtue, which is also reflected in Kwok's Cultivating Peace project (Hong Kong Baptist University n.d.). Huen argues for an everyday politics, a way to collectively discuss how we wish to live together instead of just living every day according to what has always been, giving citizens agency to co-create civic lives. Huen perceives everyday politics as not simply serving democracy or making governance more effective but instead as reconstructing citizens' actions without the assumption of belonging or allegiance to a country or political system. Huen believes that, based on the 'Jeremican model' (i.e., under an unjust system), Christians should be involved all the more in the unjust system, even if Christians must also participate in an unfair game. Huen sees that churches cannot simply preserve themselves. For Christians, being powerless and in the minority should be seen as a normal state, and their powerlessness should be a guide as to how to interact with political regimes; Christians should not simply submit to authorities to protect their religious existence but should reconcile themselves to a life of not being in charge. This is different from assimilation or collaboration, but neither is it withdrawal or sectarianism. Huen argues that non-resistance is not passive, not immune to the unjust, and not misanthropic. Rather, it calls for active reflection from moment to moment (Huen 2016). This differs from PDC beliefs, as Huen does not give a full-throated endorsement of civil disobedience, while differing from PECs because he is open to that option.

Thinking about democracy from a theology and faith perspective is not about finding a path to long-lasting peace in the world but about finding a politics beyond the extremes of either radical activism or submission to authorities. Huen argues that democracy is not the cure-all solution, because there is a risk of democracy failing and a price to pay due to that failure. There is no perfect political regime, and democracy in Western countries still results in very few people holding power. When supporting democracy, Christians must prioritise the kind of values and testimony for Christ that reflect their Christian identity (Sharon Chan 2010). Huen argues that politics and policies cannot bring true salvation to society. He maintains that when HK Christians think a democratic system is the most suitable for the Christian faith, they are lacking

critical thinking. Jesus changes society by changing peoples' hearts: first through how small church communities live, then through those with common faith but different opinions living together. This is living an alternative politics, as seen in 1 Corinthians 14:26–33.² Huen finds a more suitable system than democracy: When someone in the parliament is speaking, others can discern their truth according to the Holy Spirit, and voting does not have to depend on majority rule. Welcoming conflicts and protecting minorities would allow for the discovery of one's insufficiency (Zhong 2014). This is in line with what I hope for, as one who is for a third way, because it is important for Christians to ground their values in the Christian faith rather than secular ideas.

Further, Huen believes Christians should not use unjust means to strive for just aims, though he acknowledges that democracy is attained through striving and is not given by those in authority (Lian 2014). Huen thinks it is a problem when Hong Kongers (HKers) begin to view democracy as the only way; there are other choices than democracy or authoritarianism (Zhong 2015a). Huen reasons that being in a non-democratic society demonstrates people's patience, as political regimes will not last forever, so Christians should not lose patience nor should they use violent means, which would put them on the same level as those evil doers (2015b).

Huen demonstrates thoughtful critical thinking – I wonder how this can be more pervasive in HK Christian communities. Huen was educated in Cambridge, which we cannot expect all HK Christians to have access to. How do we lead them into thinking, moment to moment, guided by their faith? This is where Kwok's *Cultivating Peace* work comes in, as it is meant for widespread public engagement, especially for secondary school and university students who were experiencing their first civic actions in the Occupy Central, Umbrella Movement, or the Anti-extradition Legislation Amendment Bill (Anti-eLAB) protests. As I have repeatedly emphasised in my introduction, Kwok himself is not a protester; *Cultivating Peace* can help the students reconcile the trauma and pain they have faced and provide them with points of action to go forward.

Andrew Wai-luen Kwok's Arguments

Kwok is a Professor in the Academy of Chinese, History, Religion and Philosophy, the Associate Vice President (Curriculum and Pedagogies), and the Director of General Education at HK Baptist University. He identifies as a philosopher of religion and a systematic theologian. According to Leung Ka-lun (2018, v–vi), a president emeritus of Alliance Bible Seminary, Kwok is an academic, professor, and theological worker with strong convictions of faith, caring deeply for people. He received his Doctor of Philosophy in systematic theology from King's College London. After his graduation, he joined Alliance Bible Seminary as a faculty member before his current position. His aim after the Umbrella Movement has been to educate the public on the importance of understanding socio-politics, which he has done through co-founding

the organisations 使命公民運動 (Missional Citizens Movement) and, subsequently, Cultivating Peace.

As a public intellectual, Kwok performs a quiet public engagement that is gaining traction in a society increasingly closed to physical forms of engagement in public spaces. Kwok chooses to conduct talks and seminars and write op-eds, which are backed by his research. He holds constituencies in dialogue (in HK and the diaspora), striving to dialogue with churches, seminaries, Christians, secondary schools, non-profit organisations, and, of course, university students. This puts him in a unique position to be at the forefront of how people are thinking, acting, and reacting to him. In my journal article in *Hong Kong Studies*, 'Rethinking Hong Kong's Theological Education: An Argument for Lived Theology,' I analysed his public course on YouTube and commenters' resistance to his teachings (Chu 2024). I view Kwok as a PTW because his teaching and public engagement are through academic and social work rather than PECs' method of working within the institution or PDCs' method of engagement.

For example, on 25 January 2021, he co-founded the Cultivating Peace project, organised by the Centre for Sino-Christian Studies of HK Baptist University and the CEDAR [Christian Education, Development and Relief] Fund, which aims to promote societal peacebuilding for reconciliation and transformation. The programme allows secondary school and university students to reflect on the meaning of peace by participating in social service initiatives, social studies projects, and art activities, and then they apply what they learn in the community. He often posts captivating images with links to *Christian Times* articles he wrote on social media platforms. One such post on 2 September 2022 had more responses than others: Kwok posted on Facebook about peacebuilding, using the phrase 'sleeping with the enemies,' meaning to continue to live with pain and hurt alongside those considered to be enemies. It garnered over 40 comments at the time of publication, many over a thousand Chinese characters. Many HK Christians in the diaspora condemned Kwok's efforts, calling the project 二次傷害 (*secondary victimisation*) of those who participated in the Anti-eLAB protests. Some of the identifiable commenters no longer live in HK, however: For example, Chow Yin-ching now lives in Taiwan, China and Andrew Ka-pok Tam now lives in Japan. It can be argued that, because they no longer live in HK, they are less in touch with how local HKers feel and think; perhaps some might even say they no longer have a stake in HK issues because they are not willing to remain in HK and invest themselves locally. Nonetheless, Kwok does not dismiss the commenters as haters or say they have no right to speak to the HK context. Instead, Kwok thoughtfully and peacefully engages with these commenters on Facebook, and together, they create an intriguing digital log of HK theologies in-the-making, with local and diasporic theologies meaningfully influencing each other.

Specifically, Facebook user Kawabata H Yasunari argues against Kwok on the basis of the following: (1) Kwok made three incorrect assumptions about those against cultivating peace, (2) Kwok sees those against his methods as

being against cultivating peace entirely, (3) Kwok's understanding of reality is skewed, and (4) living with oppression cannot lead to cultivating peace. Kwok responded to Kawabata H Yasunari with these points: (1) He is trying to point out the difficulty in praxis, not dismissing the importance of compensation; (2) Kwok disagrees with calling it *defamation* to say certain people are against cultivating peace; (3) Kwok acknowledges that oppression is ongoing and proposes peacebuilding as a process; and (4) he argues that suffering communities can empower each other. At the end of the 25 comments between Kawabata H Yasunari and Kwok, they certainly did not come to an agreement; Kwok nonetheless thanked Kawabata H Yasunari for responding and commenting, as he finds it important to clarify and discuss these points, and invited further discussion at the end. Kwok understands that his theologies might lead to negative responses, but being able to clarify and build on the negative is a form of cultivating peace as well.

I find this sort of approach to be in line with #deltaδmovement's outcomes, namely providing a level playing field for the participation of all, including HK-based theologians with HK pastors, theologians, and lay Christians in the diaspora. These engagements represent HK Christian communities as they transition towards a more decentralised religio-social movement where participants consciously strive to respect one another as equal partners in decision-making (Chu 2023a). As an insider researcher who advocates for PTW, I hope that HK Christian communities can move towards respecting the voices of others and engaging them as equal partners rather than dismissing them.

The Cultivating Peace project aims to encourage HK people to think about what they can do in a context where actions, especially those supporting democratic movements, may seem futile. From Kwok's perspective, HK people's desire for democracy came earlier than the Handover. Kwok proposes,

many Hong Kong people they want to have democracy for a very, very long time. Since the 1980s, Hong Kong people start to ask for direct election, both legislation and also for the executive head. We want to have that kind of democracy. [...] We have the first indirect election for the legislature in 1984. And then we have the first direct election in 1991. So it is very late. And the British document that released recently, one of the factors that we cannot have direct election in 1988 because the communist government, the Chinese government want to stop that direct election by that time and give a diplomatic pressure to British government. So that stopped the direct election proposal in 1980s. [...] Just before the handover, that is the first direct election is in 1991. So this is the first direct election year in Hong Kong. So a very short time. But in 1980s, British government, they already want to have some kind of so-called localization process. So in Hong Kong we have some basic self-governing councils. For example, district boards or the urban council, that's the local governing body. The British government, they start direct election

in 1980s, so this is the starting point that you can say that the Hong Kong people have democracy in legislature or the local government.³

(Morgan Lee 2019)

In addition, Kwok noticed a way of talking about democracy in HK, especially among PECs, which he finds to be problematic, and this has three implications. First, Kwok observes that PECs find that democracy is not a necessary good, nor will it solve all problems, so civil disobedience is not required as the government of the HK SAR is not violating human rights, nor is it a very oppressive regime. Second, PECs think that Occupy Central is not civil disobedience, as the law they are intentionally violating is not directly related to their objective, nor is it a Christian practice. Third, PECs think China is on the road to becoming better and better, so there is no need for an oppositional and violent movement against the government. Kwok would describe PECs to be living in an alternative reality, as PECs find HK to be prosperous, stable, safe, and just, though this is only a partial truth, according to Kwok; because of their wealth, PECs enjoy much privilege (Lee 2019). The way Kwok illustrates different forms of PECs is very helpful. It demonstrates how PECs are not homogenous; their views and reasons for being pro-establishment can be different. However, I would push back against how Kwok views PECs as living in a false reality, because ‘everybody’s reality is informed by their experience. And so their experience informs this particular reality, just as protesters who have been in the front line and have been pepper sprayed have a different reality’ (Lee 2020). This may be due to our differences in epistemology, where I consider Kwok to be a critical realist, while I consider myself to be a constructivist-interpretivist.

Nonetheless, Kwok also points out how different people have different experiences of HK, and as such, their idea of what democracy is and why democracy is suitable for HK or not can vary greatly. Kwok argues,

you will find that for example, Benny Tai and Rev. Chu, they all come from so-called evangelical denominations. So I think for them, they will think that they just want to support democracy and to support good, and this is the Christian duty to do good. And the Bible told us that if the authority has done something bad, Christians should be bold enough to say no to the government. I think that’s all. And then you’ll find that even from Benny Tai’s exposition, you will find that he does not have a kind of liberation theology to think about whether Christianity can join in communism or go against communism. [...] The protest is not successful. We cannot achieve what we want – that is the universal voting right – but you find that actually during the movement a lot of people in Hong Kong were being awakened. They awaken from, even Christians they wake up. For example some very well-off Christians, professional Christians, they realize our society is not so good. We have a lot of problems and social issues that we need to address, the government policy that we are also

need[ing] to look for. So I think the Occupy Movement, or Umbrella Movement, is just a starting point of the Hong Kong democratic endeavor.

(Lee 2019)

Kwok's description is representative of what PDCs want. Most advocates do not think they will achieve universal suffrage; instead, their aim is to create awareness of their cause, namely what they believe Christianity finds important: democracy, rights, and so on.

Kwok (2015) also responds to discussions by lay Christians in HK. He finds that

Internet media, such as Facebook, blogs, Internet radio, and Internet newspaper[s] also enabled lay Christians to respond quickly to the leaders' theological discourse and generated their own political theologies. [...] From the blogs and discussion boards, one can see that opinions on the Movement are deeply divided. One may easily find debates in these discussion boards where the participants offer their own theological reflections and biblical expositions on the Movement.

Internet discourses are a large part of Christian discussions, as there is an increased decentralisation of lay Christians leading the conversation (Chu 2023a). Kwok engages with internet discussions thoughtfully, which demonstrates his third way. He does not ignore 'keyboard warriors,' nor does he label them as haters. Instead, he wants to meaningfully engage with them as equal conversation partners, with equal stakes in the issues, demonstrating the Cultivating Peace project's emphasis on dialogue. This is what I consider to be a meaningful third way.

Kwok (2015) argues his idea of a third way, which is through a deepened understanding of what others mean by exploring their different ideas and concepts and walking in their shoes:

If Hong Kong Christians of opposite positions could learn to understand the concerns of their opponents empathetically, we may breakthrough [*sic*] our deadlock in supporting or opposing the Movement and thus move towards a deeper understanding of what we mean by justice, peace, and welfare for each other.

He argues that the focus should not be on political agenda but rather on Christian conviction. This is similar to my advocacy for Zimmermann's idea of incarnational humanism, where the focus is on Christian conviction based on a shared humanity between Christ and humans.

Like Huen, Kwok grounds his understanding of self and public issues in Christian identity. Kwok thinks that debates on the HK political system since 2013 have revolved around whether there is universal suffrage, and when

Christians think about these questions from a faith perspective, they should first think about why HK needs universal suffrage and reasons for why it has not yet come to be. To Kwok (2018a, 121–126), the argument over HK's political system is under the grand scheme of the Chinese government's transition. Kwok grounds his discussion of political regimes in the bigger picture of *Sinicisation* versus *Chinification* (Chow 2018).⁴

Order is by God's grace, but the government's order is always twisted, imperfect order. Citing Reinhold Niebuhr, Kwok says that evil in the system will cause virtuous people to become the tools of evil. In HK's debate on universal suffrage, we need to see the seriousness of evil in the system to be able to find a better system and policies for our society. If we live in a vibrant community, we should be able to welcome different opinions and let the system make changes. No system is perfect, but each policy is value-laden and, when implemented, will have a life of its own. Those who are protesting are pointing out the problems of the current system. HK's recent years have shown us that letting a policy fly free will not lead to long-term prosperity in HK, because every system has its limitations or even immoral consequences (Kwok 2018a, 130–132). If we insert faith into a regime in hopes that it will be more effective and have contemporary values, it will only be more dangerous because it will make faith ancillary to politics, lacking in passion and vitality. The Christian faith's view of salvation is about God's Kingdom, which demonstrates the imperfections of this world, but it is not a mode of ruling. Salvation is not about a copy of a certain system, and Christians do not need to judge certain regimes as just and others as evil (Kwok 2018a, 134–135). Kwok sees there is no system in the world that can guarantee a society to be free of violence; we can only depend on values such as the renewal of hearts, revival of trust, openness, taking responsibility, and being loving for society to have hope. Knowing the powerlessness of systems and the importance of human hearts allows for living in reality, having inner peace, and finding humanity in suffering (Kwok 2022b). Kwok's reflection on an ideal order resonates with Huen's in critically thinking about every situation and every action and matching it with their Christian faith.

Thoughts of Christians Striving for a Third Way: Living Up to What They Preach

The term *champagne socialists* describes those considered to be liberal elites, a term commentators may use to criticise centrists who hold left-wing views but live luxurious lifestyles. They are seen as involved in politics but only paying lip service, not acting upon what they advocate. On the other hand, individuals like these *champagne socialists* might use non-involvement as a form of involvement. That can also be a third way. Historian of China Timothy Cheek observes that Chinese culture prioritises printing and writing, and this has been endorsed by the Chinese government (University of British Columbia n.d.). Thus, through interview data and social media posts, I hope to overcome the prioritisation of Christian leaders' understanding and give voice to lay

Christians in HK. Additionally, living a daily witness as Huen suggests is also something for which many PTW strive, though perhaps differently from what Huen considers to be authentic to Hauerwas.

In a polarised context where PEC positions are immediately labelled stupid (Fong et al. n.d.)⁵ and PDC positions are accused of manipulation by the West, HK Christians need to understand that there will necessarily be those who think differently and that they have certain reasoning that leads to differences. I think incarnational humanism can provide such a bridging tool. Incarnational humanism emphasises confidence in human reason and encourages both sides to start to try to understand where others are coming from rather than immediately judging and dismissing their position.

This sort of demeaning of others is illustrated by Stephan Ortmann, an HK-based German social scientist whose research focuses on political transformations, civil society, and contentious politics in HK. Ortmann (2020) categorises those who advocate for ‘political activism that has fostered a burgeoning local identity’ and the ‘critical evaluation of the nation-state’ as having a *constructive identity*. In comparison, he sees those who avoid ‘political participation and citizenship-identity in authoritarian regimes’ as a ‘non-challenging, depoliticised population’ with a *blind identity* or *blind nationalism*. He argues that a *constructive identity* is built from bottom-up political participation, while *blind identity* responds to authoritarianism and populist mobilisation by supporting the government ‘without questioning its actions’ and entrusting ‘decision-making to the political leadership.’ Ortmann perceives the problem in HK as one in which ‘the local state has struggled with the demand to inculcate a blind national identity within a system that sought to maintain liberal elements of education including critical thinking.’ While the concept of United Front Works is widely known among communist countries, those who Ortmann describes as ‘blind’ are also exercising judgement to choose what Ortmann perceives as ‘blindly following.’ Calling someone ‘blind’ in this pejorative way removes any possibility of genuine conversation. At the very least, one must be able to point out that both are blind in some ways.

For example, while I do not necessarily subscribe to PEC arguments, I try very hard to understand where they are coming from and converse with them from their perspective. I do not judge their inaction or their active sympathy with the government as a result of their inability to think. Rather, I perceive them actively exercising their mental faculties and deciding on becoming PECs based on their own critical reasoning. All humans are uniquely created. Just because ‘there is strong resistance to the forced imposition of identity’ for some does not mean this has to be the case for all who hear the state-mandated propaganda (Ortmann 2020). Christian identity rests in God, not in oneself, and that enables an ethics based on a hermeneutical theology of discernment aimed at wisdom rather than on moral principle, connecting personal identity with responsible ethical agency (Zimmermann 2018, 629). Discernment is part of incarnational humanism:

Obedience to God's command to be fully human and to live out Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection is an intrinsically interpretive exercise of constant discernment. [...] participation in Christ sets us free for "realistic responsibility," that is, for realizing in an ongoing effort of discernment, both within the church and the public realm, the world's reconciliation to God in Christ.

(629)

Through acknowledging and affirming their shared human reason with the opposing side, HK Christians can encourage a genuine understanding of others' stances. One interview participant, Obadiah (alias),⁶ recommends dialogue: He has a strong feeling that getting involved in politics involves interacting with people, and his first thought is, can these people be saved or are they hopeless? Is dialogue useless? He advocates for dialogue, which can close the gap between differences. Although Obadiah knows that humans are also motivated by power and greed, he still believes that human nature is not that bad, and conflicts do not need to be solved with violence, and therefore dialogue can rekindle humanity's hope. He is often frustrated because he does not know if he is being too naïve and if this naïve perspective can be involved in politics. He questions whether the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is a hopeless organisation. Within Obadiah's worldview, incarnational humanism is a gateway for him to hope, because believing in human reason can bring hope to his naïve expectation of dialogue: 'The basic human rights to life and justice are discernible by human reason, reason that is clouded but not totally disabled by sin' (Zimmermann 2015, 116). Perhaps Obadiah might see that the CCP is a hopeless organisation because he might consider it to be 'disabled by sin'; however, Zimmermann argues that reason should not be totally mitigated simply because we are in a fallen world. While taking 'seriously the reality of sin, the need for redemption and the inevitable uncertainty and fickleness of human knowledge and understanding' (Swinton and Mowat 2016, 10), perhaps an answer to Obadiah's question about whether the CCP is a hopeless organisation might be 'no.'

Lai Pan-chiu (2014, 263–309) also argues that the CCP is a *de facto* state religion, and that China has a form of cultural nationalism. Owing to this common view of Chinese communism, it is understandable that those who are perceived as CCP sympathisers are generally shunned in HK and regarded as being naïve or manipulated. For example, in 1956, Anglican Bishop Ronald Owen Hall† and his wife visited the pre-cultural revolution and pre-open and reform China, made possible because he was seen as a CCP sympathiser. After his visit, in an interview with HK media, he remarked that religious freedom was guaranteed in China; afterwards, he was labelled China's propagandic voice. Hall† was not *manipulated* per se, because his visit occurred at the height of China's political freedom, and people are inclined to see what they expect. Because Hall† was accepting of socialist ideologies, it is not surprising that he saw good in China, and being attacked by others about his logic and reason

would only strengthen his conviction (Lau 2018, 96–97). Therefore, Obadiah's proposal of dialogue between those with different perspectives is not naïve at all but entirely necessary. Disregarding the viewpoints of Hall† and those like him who try to understand the CCP only pushes them further away, and they perceive themselves as being victimised. Likewise, disregarding their viewpoints only creates an echo chamber for those who think they are standing against a large institutional machine such as the CCP. Genuinely trying to understand the other's viewpoints – which is to say not that all should have uniform ideas but rather that they should try to have a conversation based on what the other actually means – creates space for genuine understanding of the other's stances, without which no further progression within civil society can happen. Reconciliation of sorts cannot occur without a common definition of ideas and concepts. Acknowledging the differences as rational choices and expressions of ideas must come first.

While this may seem like a proposal of reconciliation, I want to emphasise that I am not proposing reconciliation. It might happen at some point, but now is clearly not that point. The Archbishop for the Anglican Church of HK, Andrew Au-ming Chan (2021), in his 2021 Christmas message, said that for the past few years, classmates, colleagues, friends, and even families have broken relationships because of different understandings of world politics and local conflicts. He says it is tragic when everyone absolutises their own views above all else, creating societal conflict and chaos which affects interpersonal relationships, mutual understanding, and mutual trust; therefore, the Anglican Church aims to help families, society, and the world find a path of reconciliation to create happiness. That is not what I am saying at all. While I agree with Chan's observation that HK Christians are indeed setting their own views above others, I disagree with the solution of reconciliation as an immediate step. The first step, as in incarnational humanism, is to acknowledge that HK Christians are speaking a different language from one another and that it is a secular language that shapes their Christian worldview and not the other way around. Therefore, HK Christians need to reset in a Christian language, as well as acknowledge that the other has human reason as the incarnate Christ did, before they can consider any other step. While reconciliation could potentially be the next step, it is not the only path, or perhaps there might be more intermediate steps before HK Christians can reach reconciliation. Merely pushing reconciliation for the sake of it creates the opposite effect.

By proposing incarnational humanism in the context of HK, I am not saying it can replace the lived theology I explored in my project. I want to lift up the value of the theology of the average Christian in HK. Instead, I observe that HK Christians use democracy and rights language, be it for or against, as part of their understanding of their HK Christian core values, and I want to counter-propose incarnational humanism in place of democracy and rights language for these communities to explore their thoughts, values, stances, and theologies. As I believe language shapes one's thoughts, having a body of

language and discourse upon which to draw within Christian theology helps HK Christians articulate their Christianity.

Reflection: Reclaiming the Label 'Leftard'

When posting on social media about his ventures, Kwok, and other people like him, is sometimes accused of being a 左膠 (*leftard*), a derogatory term for someone with left-wing political views⁷. In his conversation with HK theologian Scott Ying-lam Yip in a public lecture about Paul Ricoeur, Kwok commented that he does not identify with the label *leftard*, because if the church does not do things like cultivating peace, then what is it supposed to do (Kwok and Yip n.d.)? I would push further by redefining, and even reclaiming, this label. By proposing something entirely outside of the spectrum, Kwok and other PTW are reframing our imagination of what can happen. Occupying a middle ground is unpopular because both sides view those in the middle as traitors. But life is not so clear cut – innovatively imagining new ways to hope should be the new definition of this negative connotation.

This form of labelling turns the situation into a hostile environment in which dialogues are no longer possible. In HK as it is in many other contexts, 'it was easier [...] to tap into a historic framework of xenophobia and scapegoating of those who are othered as opposed to critiquing a biased and discriminatory system' (Reddie 2018). While blaming, othering, demonising, and patronising may make one feel better about a situation outside of one's control, it is unhelpful for building consensus. This challenged me as a researcher, since my interview participants often assumed I must also fit neatly into one of these oversimplistic categories, simply based on my age, social class, and research interest. This made a meaningful understanding of the others' stances challenging to facilitate and sustain (Chu 2021a).

The experience of division between those with different convictions can be found with the interview participants as well. From my qualitative secondary data, Obadiah speaks about the ways in which, after 2014, HK was polarised not only between the pro-establishment and anti-establishment sides but also within the anti-establishment faction. Especially during the two years before and after the Umbrella Movement, there were organisational and interpersonal conflicts, with much mistrust and blame. Obadiah considers himself to be a moderate voice, but he asserts that moderate voices cannot come through, and one must just accept the circumstances. He sees that young people are rising up very fast in HK, and they are unwilling to accept different viewpoints and cannot work with people from other age groups. He presumes young people think they are replacing him, a baby boomer, and he believes that this replacement is incomplete, as it is not sustainable, since young people are too hot-headed and blind. Because he is older, and his viewpoints are conservative, he thinks there is nothing else for him to do other than reconciliation and peacebuilding.

As we can tell from Obadiah's story, he sees himself as rational and frames others as irrational. Obadiah said,

I like to think. When facing faith or more important matters in life, I think about the big questions, such as what is the meaning of life, what is truth, what do I believe in, does it have rational basis, etc. It is natural for those who like to think to think of these, and I find that I like to think. In comparison to stirring up others, I like to think more, even if my friends like to stir up things; I like to read books and think by myself.

This is a common strategy; framing faceless others as scapegoats makes one feel good because it is easier than blaming something one cannot fix on a concrete person with whom one has an ongoing relationship. I am not claiming I am above this. On the contrary, what was happening in HK during the large-scale protests made me uncomfortable, because, being born and raised in colonial HK, I also value the stable secular state, and what is happening offends my middle-class sensibilities because I feel so powerless. But those like Obadiah add to this problem when they label the young protesters as naïve or manipulated, because it stands in the way of genuine dialogue. Nathan Law (Law and Fowler 2021, 103), an HK activist in exile who might fit Obadiah's definition of *young people*, argues,

I knew as a student activist that my perspective was reflective of the overwhelming majority of my generation. So-called "pragmatists" and loyal Beijing elites deride us as spoilt, materialistic and apolitical – a charge that reflects not on the young but on themselves, and ironically on the type of citizen Beijing seems keen to promote.

Law's view is problematic in the same way Obadiah's is, as it also frames the others as the antagonist. Both sides present their points as self-evident, which is why they display a sort of arrogance towards the other, as if the other is lacking in intellectual capacity and that is why the other cannot discern what is so obvious. Yet what is particularly obvious for one side is not for the other, since the *facts* displayed for both sides are vastly different because of the way information is disseminated, confirming one's biases through an echo chamber.

There is a relational aspect of truth, where knowledge is not self-evident but rests on reasonable evidence within an intelligible interpretive framework, a knowledge conveyed by attestation (Zimmermann 2018, 630). Incarnational humanism advocates for respecting humans' potentiality to reason, because Christ also incarnated as human, and we should see humans' potentiality to reason through this lens. As such, incarnational humanism resets one's bias by emphasising a shared humanity so that one must first accept that the other also has the potentiality to reason and that what the other argues can also be logical, making that a basis for conversations.

Incarnational humanism focuses on the individuality of HK Christians. Zimmermann (2012b, 315) asserts, ‘the church is the quintessential expression of common humanity, a communion whose rootedness in a personal, communal God founds a humanity that avoids either individualism or collectivism.’ In focusing on how Christians are called into a community where an individual’s humanity is best expressed in organic, communal unity, HK Christians can reframe their perspectives away from addressing larger historic forces and infrastructures, which are out of an individual’s control. HK Christians need to consider each individual Christian’s beliefs and value formation in their community. Incarnational humanism can facilitate this consideration, as it asserts

the important role of tradition in the formation of one’s consciousness through history. Participating regularly in the liturgy that is itself a continuation of the first apostolic tradition shapes our theological imagination, and we form a sense of belonging within a meaningful world.

(Zimmermann 2012b, 292)

By regarding individuals as being formed in both their immediate Christian community and engaging with Christians throughout the ages from their writings and traditions, and by engaging deeply their own beliefs and ideally enacting changes to their worldview, Christians will in turn change the system, albeit slowly. As an academic familiar with Christian theology, Obadiah states that the grassroot workers he has talked to quickly understand abstract concepts and values, but few educated people in power and privilege care for or speak up for the grassroots movement. I think – likewise for PECs and PDCs – one should not assume others are incapable of understanding one’s concepts and stances.

Therefore, it is important to consider the other not only as an opposing voice but as a multifaceted person: a Christian, a grandmother, a mother, an aunt, a sister, a daughter, an employee, a patron, and more. Complex subjectivity, as the University of Oxford’s Professor of Black Theology Anthony Reddie (2018) suggests, ‘provides critical insights into the many ways in which we name ourselves and how those various forms of subjectivity give rise to differing perceptions of self,’ which demonstrates that ‘our notions of self are ones that are transcendent of the privations of fixed identity and the constrictions of objectification.’ Reddie suggests we understand ourselves in more than one way. Anyone is more than just their political opinion; as political scientists Tanya Schwarz and Cecelia Lynch (2016) argue, ‘[b]oth contextualization and understanding the range and tensions among meanings allows a richer understanding of religious interpretation and practice, and assists in preventing an oversimplification of complex contexts and identities.’

An example of this oversimplification is how Lai observes that during the anti-national education movement, which led to the Umbrella Movement in 2014, many Christians were involved in the protests, believing that national

education was brainwashing young students by glorifying the CCP. However, patriotic Protestant pastors supported this national education and were sceptical of the motivations and reasoning of those who were against it, suspecting they were brainwashed in a different way in that they were blindly supporting liberalism and capitalism. These patriotic pastors argued against what they found to be a dualistic concept equating liberal democracy with good and communism with bad (Lai 2014, 263–309). Another example – Leung Wing-tai (2021) argues PDCs have no knowledge of China’s history, that they need to acknowledge HK as part of China and should not consider China to be the *other*. All parties are setting up the *other* as having ignorant standpoints, but in my experience, the so-called *others* actually understand the opposing arguments quite well, so rather than just assuming others are unsympathetic, perhaps one should start with common ground.

The labels of PECs and PDCs need to be interrogated, nuanced, and redeveloped: ‘We need to hear and understand people in the languages they themselves speak, for every language contains irreducible subtleties of meaning’ (Klassen and Zimmermann 2006, 65). This is why incarnational humanism’s emphasis on language as more than just a medium is important in this context, because

fields of interaction intersect and are not insulated from each other. [...] What we learn to do in one place can spill over in other places. As a result, for example, action can be both religious and political at the same time.

(Ammerman 2021, 17)

By using incarnational humanist language rather than a secular discourse of rights, HK Christians can allow their faith convictions to take the reins of their ways of thinking rather than being driven by secular democracy language. As ‘every human inquiry is motivated by questions, and these questions always originate in a tradition or worldview in which we already participate’ (Zimmermann 2012b, 310), HK Christians need a Christian-based worldview, making decisions through immersion in the grand narrative of Christ’s incarnation. Using incarnational humanism as a constructive tool in HK Christian communities’ context offers a Christian language to discuss issues regarding civic lives and an incarnational lens towards fellow humans, who also have the potentiality of mind and reason. In accepting that different voices can also represent HK theology, HK Christians can together build a framework that facilitates human flourishing.

Incarnational humanism also provides some relief from feelings of helplessness and powerlessness. Katrina (alias), from my qualitative secondary data, recalls many situations in which she found the results of her actions, or lack thereof, dissatisfying, yet she does not regret them, as different times call for different levels of participation, which have a specific meaning at the time. She believes this is important for her own personal growth rather than achieving

some political agenda, and so she has borne the responsibility as a person and as a Christian to connect with and understand society. Obadiah, in recounting HK's Handover, found that the prospect was worrisome, but he felt powerless to do anything. He was idealistic when he was young, and as he grew up, he discovered that the power of the individual is minimal and the course of history does not change because of the work of one person. From these two accounts, one can see the sense of helplessness and powerlessness prevalent among the participants, even if they are confessing Christians and have a stable and consistent Christian community with which to share their concerns.

With the uncertainty of action, perhaps now is the time to consider non-action, which also requires thinking and theory. Non-action is often thought of as what someone does without deeply engaging with a matter, but non-action does not equate with apathy. Thoughtful non-action takes courage and the application of hermeneutical reasoning in understanding the Bible in HK's context. Incarnational humanism argues non-action should count as a form of action, as Zimmermann (2012b, 275) argues that '[t]he most basic goal of responsible action in interpreting the one Christ reality is therefore to live in the mode of the Christ even as "being-there-for-others."' Zimmermann calls for thinking about the actual goal of good human action, which is to fully restore humanity to life. What that entails is not necessarily a push for immediate or specific actions but rather asking Christians to reframe their dilemma and contexts with Christ's incarnation in mind, as such, through thinking and working out how Christ's incarnation can inform their understanding of themselves, others, and their contexts. This *being-there-for-others* thinking alleviates the sense of powerlessness and helplessness by focusing on what can be potentially meaningful and fruitful theological and philosophical investigations.

I agree that some people's role is to resist to create room for religious freedom and some people's role is to work with the government's 統戰 (United Front Works) to create room for limited, controlled, government-sanctioned freedom. As an HK Christian researcher, I view my role leaning towards the latter, as my personal and professional connections make me more suitable to advocate within the institution. This does not mean I condemn the former, and I propose that the former should not simply assume I am someone who would condone a draconian government either. In this case, incarnational humanism is a suitable narrative because the point of the Christian religious framework is for communion with God and self-renunciation, and the flourishing of self and others is more of a side effect. This is in contrast with secular humanism, as Zimmermann (2017, 139–140) presents it, where in excluding religion and making the pursuit of happiness and pleasure an end goal, 'the fullness of human experience can become dangerously narrowed and the door opened to totalizing, inhumane ideologies.' By making one's religious conviction absolute and condemning any other forms of interpretation or expression, the environment suffocates human flourishing. Alternatively, through incarnational humanism, HK Christians are encouraged to ponder their similarities instead of their differences. Their connecting point is their Christian faith and shared

humanity with the incarnated Christ rather than political preferences. One way to do this, perhaps, is to rethink how they can create new meaning from the slander *leftard* in their own terms so that the popular understanding of the word would move from a negative to positive connotation.

Are Rights Christian?

Continuing the investigation from Chapter 3, we now explore whether PTWs, Christians who propose a third way, consider rights to be universal and undisputed in HK Christian communities. I will now elaborate on how rights are discussed in Christian communities through illustrating the arguments of Christian leaders Huen and Kwok and of my participants, whose views I have discussed in prior sections.

Freeman Chi-wai Huen's Arguments

Huen argues that the Church should not regard itself as simply part of a system or a stakeholder of civic society. At the same time, the Church should not be engaged in counter-cultural resistance; rather, the Church should define for itself what 'real politics is' in order to contribute to the good in communal life. Huen argues that churches need to share what is considered good in common as a form of faithful particularity, seeing this as creating a common world of meaning and shared action. To make an increasingly just, wise, and faithful political judgment, Huen (2016) recognises that good is not in aggregation but instead in the flourishing of all. Huen's idea is similar to Zimmermann's idea of incarnational humanism, where his emphasis is on human flourishing.

Huen argues that to talk about public theology is to see Christian faith as privatised and excluded from the public square, with Christians having to force their way back, bringing the gospel 'out of' the church and 'into' society. Huen finds that to be problematic because, unless Christian faith enters into a society on its own terms and is made politically relevant, it remains private and inferior or incomplete. What is overlooked by advocates of public theology is that the Church as a way of life, a people, and a polity is a public in its own right (Huen 2013). As such, Huen would be against advocating for human rights as being Christian.

Huen has an in-depth understanding of what rights are and how the concept is being misconstrued and misinterpreted. When HKers talk of using violence in striving for social justice, Huen argues there is no biblical evidence to support that approach. Huen sees it as an oxymoron to use any means, including violence, to strive for justice. Huen argues that biblical justice is different from social justice because real justice belongs to the Trinitarian God, not an impersonal system or policy. The way Christians talk about justice necessarily depends on God and comes from God and is not made up of any principles, order, or rules outside of God. Huen sees true justice only in God's Kingdom under God's rule. He also discerns that justice is lived, not administered, so he

views social justice used by Christians citing Micah 6:8 (NRSV) – to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God – to be problematic, because the point is not to be just but to walk with God. Huen believes God's justice is covenantal, relational, and embodied, while secular justice is less personal and procedural, only administering to each what is due. Huen finds that distributive justice, including the rights concept, is understood in the secular world as requiring social capital to protect. When individual rights are against one another, it creates distributive problems; as such, the distribution is often a balance of interests of different parties, and the distribution ends up being a struggle between different parties in the name of justice (Huen 2017a). Huen (2017b) notes that justice is about not only distribution but sharing; not about retribution but reconciliation.

Huen instead sees worship as a communal action which speaks to society about Christian faith in a public manner, which provides more justice than what the secular world can provide. Even if society has set up a just system, the world still needs citizens who know what justice is and follow such principles for the system to work; for there to be a just society, there needs to be a group of just people living their faith. Christian worship is the way to explore what real justice is, because it gives praise to God who is just. Public prayer is a public witness, demonstrating the entire church testifying in front of God that they are working together, lifting up their resources for God's use, and obeying God's will ("Explore the Nature" 2019). Again, Huen advocates for grounding understanding in Christian faith.

Huen questions whether violence is less evil than not doing anything at all. During the Anti-eLAB protests, Huen observed that the Church had been dichotomised by the debate about whether to use violence in protests. Some think, 'If you are not on my side, then you are against me.' So much that no questions can be raised, as raising questions about forms of protests can be seen as anti-protest. He advocates for Wells's *Nazareth Manifesto*, namely being with others is more important than doing things for others, because that assumes others are problems needing to be solved and that they lack the capacity to do so on their own, and thus, they are unable to just enjoy each other's presence. The assumption to *do something* results in others being blamed for not doing anything. In HK, the most common social action is to co-sign statements. But if these statements are just to demonstrate a stance, and not followed by action, then that is just meaningless self-justification (Huen 2019). In this, Huen thoroughly demonstrates his understanding of non-resistance and pacifism, as it is not merely for or against protests or simply not doing anything but rather to thoughtfully engage in each decision-making process, considering why and how to best be a Christian and a human.

Andrew Wai-luen Kwok's Arguments

In his own words, Kwok states that 'Hong Kong churches still have some kind of advantage in terms of freedom of information, freedom of speech, and freedom

of movement' (Lee 2019). He further elaborates that the state tolerates religion in the private realm, which is why churches become stagnant organisations, sanctioned by the government's regulations; become centres of political dissent; or become fanatic folk religions (Kwok 2019b). Kwok demonstrates that freedom, usually considered to be a right, is actually granted and regulated by the state. How do Christians understand themselves in this situation? Kwok (2016) would 'believe that traditional Christian theology has resources for being both relational and free,' especially for a relationally bounded culture like Chinese culture. In Kwok's public engagement project, *Cultivating Peace*, he advocates for reclaiming a right that is given by the state to something that can be bottom up. It gives participants a way to connect their daily experiences and their own narrative of such experiences in their faith journey.

The Occupy Central movement allowed Kwok to think about his own theology and his role therein. Kwok (2015) says, 'pursuing theological reflection on the concepts of justice, peace and welfare of the society can help Hong Kong Protestant Christians regain a sense of public shared values to meet the challenge of coming political crisis.' In reviewing media reports on Occupy Central, Kwok (2015) finds that

one can see that in the Occupy Central Movement, public theology is not unidirectional from the Church to the public. Non-Christian writers also theologized their support or opposition to the Movement. More importantly, their discussion can be considered as a kind of mobilization or counter-mobilization. This phenomenon showed the media press as a promoter of a certain theological discourse, rather than as a platform for debate and dialogue. In this sense, one may doubt that these discourses could contribute to a healthy development of civil society, and might lead to division and conflict, and indeed this finally surfaced in 2014.

Kwok sees that, in using media to create a Christian narrative, Christian narratives are also shaped by the secular media, meaning the vehicle can also have its own agenda. Nonetheless, Kwok, in *Cultivating Peace*, frequently uses social media to disseminate their messages. His understanding of media also leads to his frequent use thereof.

Kwok thinks different cultures and religious affiliations peacefully co-existing, respecting one another, dialoguing, and serving under a common good is the only way forward. Dualistic treatment cannot create true co-existence. Kwok sees that dialogue and respect, as well as having a *glocal* (global yet local) lens, can lead to long-term, stable development. Kwok (2018a, 17–18) recognises Sinicisation in Christianity not as a political but as a social task; if we let Chinese churches freely express their faith and encourage them to dialogue with other faith communities overseas, then their voices will be included in the Chinese Christianity narrative. Kwok argues that Christians participating in civil disobedience should not simply join political protests, but more importantly, they should *obey* the government's penalty, to demonstrate the *injustice* of the *law*. They should not see themselves as the destroyer of the law

but instead need to show that the current structure has been misused. They should not deny the political order but accept the (mis)use of the law and call people's attention to how that order has become twisted and impel their conscience to correct the injustice. This is an obedience rooted in suffering that respects the existing order and sacrifices one's welfare to point out injustice. If society's disorder is a sign of sin, and sin's nature is human selfishness and self-interest, then the authorities and the general public cannot blame societal issues on each other. Instead, *repentance* can create more space for consensus (Kwok 2018a, 128–129). In this manner, Kwok's discussion is grounded in Christian faith rather than in a secular language of rights.

Kwok proposes peacebuilding in HK, even during times of social tension, because peace is not without conflict, nor does it require reconciliation between conflicting parties. To define peace as some sort of stable order is different from how the Bible describes peace, which is created by humans not through order but through salvation by God. Salvation reminds humans that the world needs peace because it is in the hands of evil, causing people to suffer injustice. Reconciliation is not humans' work but the result of Christ identifying and carrying our sins, so that we can have eschatological peace and reconciliation. Peace in the Christian faith is not about a stable political structure but about people facing their own sins and, through grace, repenting (Kwok 2021).

Kwok (2022e) sees the current desire for punitive justice and retributive justice as people continuing to want to live in victimhood; restorative justice and transformative justice are real peacebuilding, as they focus on daily lives, creating a safe environment, reducing harm, taking responsibility to listen and communicate, and creating a community of care. For Kwok, peacebuilding is a practical proposal for dealing with conflict. Instead of peace-keeping and peace-making, which have their limitations, peacebuilding emphasises the individual as the subject of action. As people are co-dependent, their actions demonstrate that they need others to exist. As such, the aim of co-existence is to minimise hurt and conflict, to rebuild trust, and to live together. This is a bottom-up social movement (Kwok 2022c). Kwok (2022a) values empowerment in peacebuilding, as it is through networking across class divides that one can pursue harm reduction and common good. Kwok proposes viewing peacebuilding as a process, as conflict has different stages which call for different peacebuilding missions. The long-term goal is to explore a common vision and find the root of conflict, discovering how conflicting communities can transform into positive communal life. Peacebuilding is about not 'being nice' but pragmatically facing societal conflicts (Kwok 2022d). Kwok's argument is controversial, as netizens often call him a sell-out to the CCP. However, he would argue that if the Church does not do this, there is nothing they can do at all.

Thoughts of Christians Striving for a Third Way: Christian Humanism, Not Human Rights

HK PDCs understand rights as an innate form of Christianity. But is that the case? As a PTW, I propose incarnational humanism rather than democracy or

rights as a Christian ideal. In part, this is because a proposal on an individual humanistic level is more suitable than a macro-scale political structure, which is not universal, as is the case in HK. However, individual human suffering is universal and can be understood across cultures, which is what incarnational humanism addresses. Furthermore, the identity of HKers usually includes another identity marker, such as HK Canadian or HK Christian, so something uniform for all is unrealistic (Chu 2021c).⁸ Assuming human rights and universal suffrage work universally is like a window display – to make a dress look good and tight fitting on a mannequin, you can pull the extra cloth back at the waist with a crocodile clip, but that does not make the dress miraculously fit the mannequin. It is merely for show. For example, Zacharias (alias) said, ‘China’s democracy, especially politics related, leads to many protests, gatherings, prayer meetings. We [Christian churches] thought we needed to care about China more, care more about democracy, freedom, rule of law, and human rights.’ In saying so, Zacharias demonstrates that he sees these values as somehow understood universally and should be universally applied. Likewise, to claim that the way liberal democracy works in America will work the exact same way in HK is ill conceived. At best, one would get only a façade of American liberal democracy in HK.

Without a common understanding of the HK context and the overarching Christian story, the Enlightenment concepts of democracy and rights do not give a full picture of human flourishing in HK. There are tendencies to compartmentalise the world – a trend deriving from Enlightenment humanism – where rigid divisions between reason and faith, fact and value, are encouraged. I propose that Zimmermann’s theology of incarnational humanism, a holistic worldview inclusive of faith and reason, can recast the dignity of humanity and nature – both of which are created – through the overarching grand Christian narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration (Klassen and Zimmermann 2006, 19). Framing divergent political views as evil does not resonate with the Christian values of sisterhood – Christians are called to this: ‘speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ’ (Eph. 4:15, NRSV). This means not demonising fellow Christians. As such, rather than trying to convince others to think like us, HK Christians could try to gain a common understanding of the current socio-political circumstances and personal experience of hurt collectively. This could begin with an appreciation that those with different views are also created in the image of God and equally deserve human dignity. This shift in perspective could bring HK Christians a step closer to communal mutual understanding (Chu 2021a).

If the goal of HK Christians is merely to blame others for everything they perceive as wrong in society, then the current state of affairs will serve. But if members of HK Christian communities desire to understand others – who might be their mothers, sisters, and daughters and might hold slightly or very different opinions from their own – then further changes in mindset within the community are necessary. How can HK Christians begin to regard each other as people and respect each other’s dignity, like Jesus, who incarnated in human

form to redeem humanity? This approach considers human flourishing – and all efforts towards freedom, sociality, and relationality – as based on the *imago Dei*, the image of God. HK Christians can acknowledge the pain and hurt of each human being, rather than succumbing to conspiracy theories of political interference by foreign agencies or the Chinese Mainland and seeing those different from themselves as a faceless mass. Theology and politics affect one another, as God is in everything, so not only is it unfair to say that people with divergent opinions are motivated by political agendas or monetary gain alone, but it is inaccurate and unhelpful. Can they begin by bracketing their disbelief (*epoché*) of positions different from their own for genuine togetherness and common grief (Chu 2021b)? Incarnational humanism proposes that suffering can be turned towards self-knowledge; the current situation in HK makes for a good starting point to contemplate how incarnational humanism can work on the ground (Klassen and Zimmermann 2006, 161).

Zimmermann's proposal of incarnational humanism argues that Christ's incarnation in human form affirms the dignity of nature and humanity and that only through the restoration of communion with the Maker do people begin to live an abundant life that is fully human in their present historical-cultural situation and their particular vocation (Klassen and Zimmermann 2006, 16, 151). This means HK Christians need to think of how their humanity can be understood within the context of HK, their tradition as Christians, and their role as humans in God's creation. As Henri Nouwen (1972, 8–9) argues,

When we wonder why the language of traditional Christianity has lost its liberating power for nuclear man, we have to realize that most Christian preaching is still based on the presupposition that man sees himself as meaningfully integrated with a history in which God came to us in the past, is living under us in the present, and will come to liberate us in the future. But when man's historical consciousness is broken, the whole Christian message seems like a lecture about the great pioneers to a boy on an acid trip.

Even when humans are critical thinkers, their thoughts and ideas do not come about in a vacuum but rather through their experiences in their socio-political context and from their shared tradition.

If nothing else, many in HK feel angry, tired of being misunderstood, and exhausted by too much news. Pro-establishment groups might have imagined a smooth and stable transition into Chinese rule, while the pro-democrats might have imagined a democracy or even independence.
(Chu 2021b)

PEC Benjamin (alias) said,

If HK is a sovereign country, then anything can be strived for, but we need to accept the fact that [HK] is ultimately a special administrative

region. Within this framework, we can strive for the most we can. I think this is what we should be doing in HK.

On the flipside, PDC Gabriel (alias) said, ‘I am thinking HK independence. Yes, only destroy everything and start afresh would work. Yes, their fundamental system is not peaceful.’ Each of their stances is so different, but can they ‘grieve together for these socio-political futures we all imagined that will never come to fruition, even if each person’s wish for Hong Kong’s future is very different?’ (Chu 2021b). This conversation can start in the Church first, where they have more than one common identity.

The reason I do not like the use of democracy or rights in HK Christian discussions is not because it is problematic in itself but because it lures Christians into thinking democracy and rights are some sort of Christian value that they must uphold, which lifts up the secular state, giving it power through worship and letting it dictate the narrative. Proposing incarnational humanism gives HK Christians and Christian churches a language that is not based on Western democratic societies to talk about the Church and the political realm. Instead of democracy and rights language that comes from reactions to Enlightenment, they can ground their conviction within the incarnated *Logos*. This is a better response to PECs’ argument of people’s *rights* versus God’s sovereignty. For example, Claudia (alias), in talking about rights, asserts that in the Bible, human rights are not the highest priority, but God’s sovereignty is. She argues that human rights must exist within certain parameters; it is not like one can assault others and justify it because of human rights. She condemns using violence against those with different political opinions, even if it is an extreme case. She says that, in general, if society does not respect human rights, citizens should stand up for rights, without using extreme methods, which do not equate to expressing human rights. Claudia’s perspective is still firmly grounded in human rights. When she mentions ‘God’s sovereignty,’ it is simply a symbol rather than a thought-through reasoning of how divine rule can or should be in opposition to human rights. I argue that if PECs want to enter the discussion on their own terms, then perhaps they should move away from rights language and towards an incarnational humanist language.

The Christian argument should not centre on whether democracy or rights narratives are appropriate for the HK context, as this antagonism does not give space for both sides to listen to the other. Liberal democracy came about in the rise of the modern nation-state, which, in essence, attempts to side-line religion, specifically Christianity, and move it to a private domain. At present, HK Christian communities seem to think that the discussion of their role in civil society has ended simply because large-scale protests have ended, and those who are concerned about the implementation of democracy or rights in the HK context have now either migrated abroad or focused on other concerns. However, to dismiss conflicts because they are not immediate problems is not a suitable way forward. As such, in continuously thinking about these issues, HK Christians should bring Christian conversation back into the public sphere by

empowering the Christian language. In this case, incarnational humanism can lead first to understanding what the other thinks and, perhaps second, to dialogue. Starting from the respect of human reason, as Jesus incarnated as human, this perspective encourages an understanding of one another that not only is between the different parties in HK but also involves patristics and others in the long line of Christian tradition.

Conversations about democracy might occur afterwards, but currently, in HK Christian communities, a step is missing; that is, they debate the political forms without first thinking about the common definition and having a common language. HK Christian communities can move on to talking about democracy and rights, but not before defining the existing terms in a Christian narrative.

How do the findings of this project influence policy change? The need to have something to look forward to is important, more so than just democracy. The lack of rights inspires desperation. Resources can be distributed towards promoting a shared humanity and faith among Christians, which in turn will promote awareness of the different voices within Christian communities and respect for differences. HK Christian communities are small in population but influential in the public sphere because of missionary efforts in colonial times to establish schools, hospitals, and social welfare organisations, so HK Christian communities are in the position to influence policymaking. Moreover, it is hard to consider transitional justice or reconciliation right now because that would need government support or, at the least, governmental approval. I think now is the time not to talk about reconciliation, however defined, but to acknowledge human reason, especially in the other.

In order for incarnational humanism to take hold in HK Christian communities, HK Christians should be aware that ‘genuine Christian humanism is generous by nature, interested in all sources that contribute to human flourishing’ (Zimmermann 2017, 11). What this means is that HK Christian communities’ interest in human flourishing is motivated by their faith conviction, and suitable education and social engagement serve to restore our full humanity as intended by God, humans living the fullest life to their own capacities.

Reflection: Secular Language Should Not Define Christianity

Christians also live in the secular world, and inculturation and enculturation can be easily mixed up (Hastings 2012, loc. 374–378).⁹ However, it is important not to lose sight of how Christianity can use language to define its own terms rather than allowing the secular world to define Christian terms. H. Richard Niebuhr’s (1975) *Christ and Culture* demonstrates just that. His model breaks down to the frames (1) Christ against culture: Christ as opposition to culture; (2) Christ of culture: Christ uncritically accepts culture; (3) Christ above culture: Christ sees culture as basically good but needs to be perfected by Christian revelation; (4) Christ and culture in paradox: Christ sees tension in culture

because of sin; and (5) Christ the transformer of culture: Christ can redeem culture, which is corrupted by sin.

In the HK Christian communities studied here, there seems to be an innate distrust of the *other*, with a tendency to view those who think differently as somehow intellectually inferior and unable to comprehend basic facts. Isaac (alias) argues that

Some people like to interpret [the Bible] in their own liking. Even when it is the same Bible, but there are so many places that can be cited. So there are people who, based on their own likings or stances, I do not want to use the phrase eisegesis, but there are different ways of understanding the same Bible.

Jacob (alias) finds that, 'In Hong Kong, there are a majority of church leaders who might have some financial ties, which is why they are unwilling to strive for what the Bible really teaches.' Isaac and Jacob demonstrate some of these innate distrusts. There have been attempts to reconcile with those with different views, but owing to the existing political climate, it has had little effect. Mistrust, among other reasons, may be why PECs and PDCs come to different conclusions on how HK should move forward. Since we know both sides can have informed opinions, there must be a way for the two to at least accept the other as rational beings capable of reason. As such, incarnational humanism can help bridge the communication gap between PECs and PDCs by moving away from the conceptual and linguistic frames of secular rights and democracy and instead moving towards the Christian tradition of human dignity through respect and affirmation of human reason. Incarnational humanism centres on the experience of shared humanity with the incarnated Christ, meaning each person deserves dignity because of the sacred state of embodiment of the mind and body. This is helpful in disrupting HK Christians' existing modes of thinking, as the existing use of rights language in HK Christian discussions confuses secular humanism's idea of human self-ownership with the Christian ideal of human flourishing. For example, in my primary data, Claudia sees the freedom to protest as impeding her right to go out freely in a safe society. Her comment demonstrates that her language to talk about socio-political issues is bounded by a misguided sense of rights rather than informed by her Christian conviction. The focus of her complaint is on human self-ownership and tort law rather than on human flourishing. As such, within and among communities in HK Christian churches, incarnational humanism is a suitable tool for cultural renewal and transformation which, in turn, could transform societal culture.

I argued that Western post-Christendom democratic language hinders discussions of religion and politics in HK Christian communities, although HK Christian communities often fails to note this hindrance and continues to use such language to justify their Christian faith in their socio-political convictions and actions. I realise, however, many Western theologians object to rights language. I agree with their arguments, but beyond their assertions, using rights

language causes even more problems in HK Christian communities than in Western contexts. Rights and democracy concepts are not understood in the same way in HK as in Western contexts, since there is a greater sense of collectivism in HK contexts. Furthermore, this project proposes incarnational humanism as an answer to the challenges posed by contemporary models of thought based on rights language, as incarnational humanism challenges Christians to consider the true meaning of human dignity and justice through the narrative of Christ's incarnation. Incarnational humanism, instead of advocating for being patriotic or revolutionary, makes the case for HK Christians to understand that, regardless of who is ruling and in what form, Christian identity and citizenship will always be in conflict. The focus is not on a specific change in action but rather a realignment of mindset where understanding this concept will lead one to understand that uneasiness and contradictions are the norm and not the exception.

PDCs need this proposal of incarnational humanism because they need to stop using rights language as if it is Christian doctrine. For example, Faith (alias) said, 'Human rights is inherent in Christian doctrine, because religion provides fertile soil to strive for human rights, and respect humanity.' But why does respecting humanity necessitate human rights? Incarnational humanism can also be a solution. Moreover, PDCs need to stop seeing themselves as being the only representatives of HK Christianity, as they generally do not consider PECs as *real* HK Christians. PDCs' current narrative can be challenged by shifting from using rights language to an incarnational humanist worldview, as what they wish to achieve with rights language can be fulfilled by the humanist aspect of incarnational humanism (e.g., the respect of human dignity) while being situated in Christianity.

PECs, on the other hand, also need this proposal of incarnational humanism, as they need to understand their Christian faith in the HK context, situated during all the socio-political issues, as they currently practice an inward-looking, privatised Christian faith. The faith they promote is ahistorical, or at least regards Western Anglophone Christianity as somehow universal and, thus, also applicable to the HK context. PECs' current praxis and theology can be disrupted by recognising that incarnational humanism is a Christian-rooted worldview, just as they are keen to uphold their commitment to Christianity.

Several facets of incarnational humanism can aid HK Christians' current discussions. As Zimmerman (2012b, 321–323) lays out,

First, based on the belief that Christ is the incarnate Logos and new humanity, incarnational humanism unites church and culture based on a common humanity without blurring the church-world boundary. [...] Second, because of this unity of a common reason and humanity in Christ, incarnational humanism stresses an interpretive Christian life in the common public sphere. [...] Third, incarnational humanism expects the Christian to apply hermeneutic reasoning in freedom and

responsibility. [...] A fourth reason for recovering incarnational humanism is the realization that it is not diluted Christian doctrine, but only the fullest Christology that brings out the humanistic nature of Christianity by reflecting God's passion for humanity in the sense of 'suffering,' empathic endurance.

First, HK Christians need to recognise that everyone has the potential to be rational and 'to mature, to the measure of the full stature of Christ' (Eph. 4:13, NRSV). In participating in Christ, 'the more we are drawn into him, the more we are pointed toward others, for this is the very pattern of Christ's work' (Zimmermann 2012b, 321). Therefore, incarnational humanism, in pointing towards the incarnate Christ as our foundation of knowledge, connects 'all of our professional and everyday lives because we are to live in service to the humanity for whom Christ gave himself' (321). Therefore, HK Christians, in adopting incarnational humanism, can understand *the other* as also being from the same source of God's transcendental rationality and therefore having the potential to grow into the same humanness in which Christ incarnated.

Second, I plea for an HK-based theology, as the mediation of truth is through tradition and language, and 'knowledge and self-knowledge are tradition dependent' (Zimmermann 2012b, 322). If any theology attempts to be a theology for all, it will end up being a theology for no one. There should be no pursuit of a theology for all; instead, what HK Christian communities need is a theology for *us* in this particular juncture in history in the world, as 'Christians in particular are required to develop a historical consciousness and shape their self-understanding based on God's work within the Christian tradition' (322). Therefore, as 'our human consciousness is historically affected' (322), HK Christians need to develop a hermeneutical lens that is faithful to their context, using their Christian language and faithful interpretation of Christian tradition.

Third, in the PECs' and PDCs' struggle with rights language, 'becoming like God also means being shaped in Christ's character of "being-for-another"' (Zimmermann 2012b, 322). What this means for HK Christians is that participation in Christ sets them free for ongoing and continuous discernment within both the church and the public realm. Thus, HK Christians, whatever their stances, need to continuously apply hermeneutical reasoning rather than assume any set of rules can encompass all of what Christianity is and what it is not as well as how to act and how not to act.

Fourth, in a fast-paced world where things are expected to happen instantaneously, patience needs to be encouraged for HK Christians to embrace 'only the fullest Christology that brings out the humanistic nature of Christianity by reflecting God's passion for humanity in the sense of "suffering," empathic endurance' (Zimmermann 2012b, 323). HK society and, by extension, HK Christian communities expect quick fixes to what are perceived as problems, which may itself be the problem, as there are no quick fixes for long-term, deep-seated dissatisfaction in society. Constant reflexivity based on Christian conviction and tradition is necessary, as '[t]he more Christians understand

their humanistic heritage correctly, the more they deepen their understanding of the mysteries of the faith and enrich their Christological doctrine, the more they will contribute to the good of society' (323). Therefore, it is not that HK Christians should avoid engaging in discussions in civic society but that they need to base their worldview on their Christian heritage.

Does a Citizen-Christian Identity Lead to a Conflict of Interest?

Each person has their own concerns and focus. As such, how do HK PTW think about their identity in Christ? How do Huen, Kwok, and my PTW participants think about such ideas?

Freeman Chi-wai Huen's Arguments

Huen finds that HK lacks theological resources to facilitate meaningful discussion of social issues, such as Occupy Central. Christians are not just doing nothing; instead, knowing God's timing is different from humans' timing, they learn to be patient and live in the way of God's Kingdom through the Church (Zhong 2015a). Huen sees patience as a prayerful action and actionable prayer. Because Christ has already reigned victorious, Christians can live knowing that the end of the world and destiny does not depend on whether the Church wins or loses. Citing Hauerwas, Huen considers that the end of the world is in God's hand, so Christians can still strive for change, but the process requires more patience; the world will change but not necessarily because of the Church (Zhong 2015b).

Huen explores the common life of the Christian church and non-Christians in a secular state and commercial market, figuring out an 'everyday politics' through churches' participation 'in the organizing and empowerment of ordinary people in their daily life to regain their civic agency.' Huen advocates for being a faithful witness through acting and living as a church, channelling his inner HK Hauerwasian in saying something like 'let church be church.' A 'faith lived out' does not require language to explain or convince others because it is visible through praxis. In engaging with James William McClendon, Jr.'s writing, Huen thinks Christians change the world through witness, by living in a way that witnesses Jesus, re-enacts God's story, and invites others to join this story. Christian witness is not just for the benefit of the other; rather, Christians need the other to be able to live out their faith; witness is an ethical practice, as the Trinitarian God is missional, so authentic Christian existence is necessarily missionary. Huen sees daily witness as a political non-resistance, a choice that stands outside of being engaged with or withdrawn from society, or submitting to or resisting authority. Taking from English theologian Luke Bretherton's work, Huen (2016) views the priority of the Church to be faithful as a church, not engage in how to participate responsibly in politics, contribute to society, or be responsible for others. Huen's argument bases his identity firmly in his Christian faith.

Huen, criticising public theologian Max Stackhouse, critiques public theology as emphasising citizenship at the expense of discipleship and discipline and therefore ending up churchless, disembodied, and unembedded. *God* figures into public theology as an empty cipher for abstract transcendence, mistaken as a guarantee for the convenient publicness of theological discourse rather than the actual agent of Trinitarian economic activities. Huen finds that HK Christian communities' taking up of public theology is problematic, as they also unassumingly take up the American agenda of liberalism and secularism in doing so. In talking about public theology, one must define what is public and what is private, and Huen critiques how public theologians use a secular definition of what is public. For Huen, defining public and private as dichotomous is problematic because it is structured based on Western experiences that devalue the private sphere and thus limits theological discussions. When religious involvement in the public can only be for building a peaceful consensus, Huen critiques it as domesticating religion. Religion must enter public discourse on its own terms. Huen (2013) views current civic society as a place where people gain social capital and discover how their own interests might align with others, and he finds this privatisation of public interests troubling. As such, Huen finds Christianity engaging with a secular society to be problematic, forcing Christian faith to engage on secular terms.

As a previous Administrative Officer of the government of the HK SAR, Huen also knows that working in the government is a struggle, because what if civil servants make a wrong decision that affects the welfare of civilians? He ponders what it means to be decent, which is a requirement above not breaking laws (Luo 2008). Coming from the Baptist tradition, Huen finds Baptists emphasise church-state separation, which means Baptist churches, theology, and ethics focus on how their churches and communities are faithful to Christ. In this view, all political regimes are striving for allegiance away from Christ, so churches should strive to maintain a critical distance with the government. Based on his experience as a Christian in the system, Huen finds that, under an unjust system, Christians can be involved in politics but need to maintain their Christian identity and hold onto such principles while serving this unjust regime (Zhong 2014).

Andrew Wai-luen Kwok's Arguments

Kwok's arguments are mainly about generational differences and address the China factor, as he finds that Christians from different generations have different ideas of what being a Christian means, and the proximity of the Chinese government affects how HK Christians think about their faith and civic identity. Kwok argues,

I think now in the Church in Hong Kong, we are still talking about two very important issues. The first issue is the division's still there. And then, now somehow politics has become a kind of taboo in ordinary church

life, unless your church is quite active already in social movement. Then maybe, everyone maybe just shut up and do not talk about politics. And this is what ordinary church life [has] happened. But on the other hand, you will find that Christians are very, very active. Those Christians want to support the social movement. They are very active outside the church. And then you will find that for the young generation, because they are very disappointed with the church leadership that they are conservative politically, they left the church. So in Hong Kong recently, a big topic is about the young generation [leaving] church. I think this is a big problem that we face.

(Lee 2019)

After the Umbrella Movement, the two generations have been in conflict, and Kwok pleads for them to have honest conversations and discussions. The older generation sees the younger as unrealistic, but Kwok (2017b) understands it is just because they receive different information that they have different value systems. If they are able to share information and views, we may find that those unrealistic outlooks may actually be possible. Kwok discerns technology to be a major issue fuelling generational differences, similar to the effect print media had in the Reformation in 16th-century Europe. Information on the internet weakens traditional teaching methods like preaching, teaching, Sunday school, and fellowship, so those who had ‘spiritual authority’ in these educational frameworks no longer have such authority. It also gives the younger generation a platform to share half-formed ideas, creating a new image-driven culture of experientialism, participation, and connectedness (Kwok 2018b). As such, Kwok is focused on cross-generational collaboration, demonstrated through co-founding *Citizen Mission*, which focuses on spiritual reform and church participation across generations. Their view is that everyone is together in sin (co-sin), so Christians need to be vigilant in being together in Christian virtue (co-virtue), in order to hope together (co-build) to transform and renew communities. As with the idea of incarnational humanism, humans are to respect each other as humans, just as Christ was human.

Like the other theologians we have discussed, Kwok talks about the idea of Chineseness in exploring Christianity in HK. Kwok (2019b) finds that

The Chinese Communist Party is now presenting itself as the leader of everything that unites the glorious past culture and the future success of China. It will achieve both “harmonious equilibrium” and “historical progress.” At the same time, the Chinese communist government demands that Christian churches in China should be sinicised. Chinese Christianity is considered by the government as living in a mentality of aggressive western ideology and cannot accommodate itself well to the Chinese culture of the communist regime. [...] Christianity has been condemned by the government as a Western political threat.

As such, Kwok argues that, when we talk about a Chinese Christianity, one needs to be conscious that it might lead the listener to think about the narrative the CCP has been pushing, linking everything *Chinese* to the current political regime. When we talk about making Christianity more contextual and suitable for HK congregants, it might be misconstrued as appeasing the CCP rather than simply making Christianity contextual. However,

The church should not become a subordinate or political device of the state. [...] If the church is in exodus, it will inevitably come into conflict with the society, and in the Chinese context, with the state. But it does not mean that Christians are in enmity with or separate from the society and its people for their radical difference. Instead, the radical difference offers a hope for a new life. This hope allows Chinese Christians to “enter into a conflict-laden, but fruitful partnership” with the society

(Kwok 2019b)

Kwok advocates for a nuanced way of thinking about what *Chineseness* means. It is not simply that he wishes Christians were more Christian or more Chinese; it is not as dualistic as that. What being a Christian means and what being Chinese means can be very different to different people in different circumstances. Kwok advocates for thinking about these terms based on the value-laden meaning that is in the specific contexts.

Kwok (2015) finds that

[s]ince the hand-over of sovereignty of Hong Kong to the People’s Republic of China in 1997, Hong Kong churches (both Catholic and Protestant) have been considered as increasingly politicized. [...] Hong Kong pastors and theologians have become heavily involved in a public theology discourse with an unprecedented intensity.

With this path forward, Kwok attempts to situate what public theology could mean in the HK context, which is vastly different from that of Western contexts:

The attractiveness of public theology for theologians is that it promotes the public influence of Christian faith in understanding public issues and formulating policies. However, in the Occupy Movement, I find that Hong Kong theologians were not well prepared for engaging in a highly contested public realm. If we analyze their discourses in terms of content, we find that most of the theologians formulated normative accounts. Though they have descriptive discourses on biblical teachings and historical church practices, their intention descended into providing arguments for or against the Movement. Thus, they were working out a theological ground for or against Occupy Central, but not providing a normative account for a just political order.

HK Christian communities, as Kwok observes, are more invested in analysing phenomena such as the protest (Occupy Central) than investigating what addresses the phenomena (a just political order).

Kwok (2017c) proposes a practical theology of pastoring each other, being in fellowship, and praying for each other, linking any changes in spiritual communities for discernment, support, testing, and practice. He thinks this is a new point of renewal for HK churches. Kwok (2017a) finds that, as Christianity invests in evangelism, such as spreading the gospel across the globe, religious interactions and influences will inevitably cross geographic boundaries, and it is difficult to classify something as a foreign influence and others as indigenous.

Thoughts of Christians Striving for a Third Way: Daily Witness and Incarnational Humanism

It is true that daily witness is far duller than the big bang that is a full-blown protest. It is also easy to lose sight of the importance of daily witness in the middle of mundane daily life. However, daily life makes up most of our lives, as we can see in the discussion of *kairos* and *chronos* in Chapter 3. As Gabriel argues,

I am a citizen, I live my daily life, my work, how do I respond [to societal issues]? I cannot just respond through going to Occupy Central. They [the leaders] can also do daily resistance. So that is how I have changed, where I continue to, in my own workplace, think about how to practice [my beliefs].

Knowing how to live our daily lives well and faithfully takes more effort, and this is a powerful witness too.

In responding to societal conflicts in HK, HK Christians need to foreground the question of why the collective good should be placed above the individual good. This tension is experienced particularly in HK as it moves from a more individualistic expectation inherited from having been a British colony to a more collectivist tendency expected by its current Chinese governance. As such, incarnational humanism can be a solution for HK Christians to avoid the relativisation and absolutism that might be associated with fundamentalist Christianities and Christian involvement in civil society, respectively. HK Christians need to do their own ethical thinking and not just try to look for someone in authority to give them a set of rules on how to be a good Christian. In the 1970s, it was common to have a parental figure in churches that people just listened to. For example, Quartus (alias), in recounting his encounter with Josephine Yan-pui So, remembered switching from practising a prestigious profession to doing youth ministry under her influence. This sort of top-down approach had its time and place in the 1970s, but it does not fit the context in HK here and now. In the face of ethical issues, HK Christians should be encouraged in 'pursuing wisdom deriving from a unified ethical ground that allows

one to do what each concrete situation requires' (Zimmermann 2018, 640–641). Zimmermann argues that, in the face of a crisis of ethics, it is not about grounding one's identity in principle, conscience, or duty. This is because uncertainty is prevalent in situations of crisis. What if the ethical thing to do is to abandon one's duty? An ethically responsible Christian necessarily lives with the tension between legitimate moral principles and ethical wisdom. As such, HK Christians' identity should be not in their ability to follow rules but in their willingness to deeply engage in complex ethical issues through an incarnational worldview and come to a course of action or non-action based on such in-depth engagement. Thus, standing firm in one's Christian faith requires certain *interpretive fluidity*, which can exist only within an ethical framework that transcends moral rules, moving towards acquiring wisdom.

My use of incarnational humanism is meant to provide HK Christians who hold different or even opposing positions with a bridge to view others with respect and dignity. Zimmermann would probably not agree with PECs' inward-looking theology, and I make no claims that he does. However, I believe there should be a balance between co-operation and advocacy, and we must acknowledge the need for different voices and actions in HK Christian communities and respect the reasoning of both. In my explanation of incarnational humanism, I emphasised not only human dignity but also the importance of reason. This is not to say that I am completely ignoring the place of emotions, especially given the affective turn in the humanities disciplines, including religion and theology. Aaron (alias) observes,

in teaching students, we [the teachers] do not do everything for them, but instead, would train them to do things for themselves, because if it were not by their own initiatives, or say, if God did not move them to do things, then their ministry will not last.

This connection with God is the most important one, according to Aaron. In the discipline of theological ethics, Joshua Hordern (2013, 16–17) talks about how

emotions are commonly reckoned as dangerous in political life, threatening our ability to deliberate about and perform duties to self and society. [...] alongside suspicion of emotion, popular discourse also suggests that emotion plays a constructive and reasonable role in political institutions, identities, and shared activities.

The CCP are considered by some to use emotion as a tool to steer the masses, and so emotions are perceived suspiciously in HK and other Chinese communities (Sorace 2021, 29–51). Moreover, in the discipline of cultural studies, Hui Po-keung (2018, 161–167) asks how to channel negative emotions to explore one's potential to question the abnormality of society rather than just advocating for positive vibes without groundedness. I find that, often, '[o]ur society is

interested in the dualism of knowledge or choice, and desire or reason' (Chu 2020, 231–232). While I am interested in exploring HK's and, by extension, China's emphasis on reason and devaluation of emotion, it is outside the scope of this research project. However, what I want to underscore is that we as humans should respect other humans and consider them to be rational beings rather than incompetent or susceptible to conspiracy theories. My use of incarnational humanism is for the purpose of respect and conversation. Zimmermann (2018, 645) suggests that Jesus becomes the conscience of Christians: 'Consequently, since all of humanity is summed up in Christ, obtaining a unified self through "the surrender (*Hingabe*) of my self to God" includes my surrender to others.' What this means is that humans, especially those with Christian convictions, have a non-moralistic obligation to other humans, as Jesus cares for all humans. The emotive part and the reasoning part of being human are both grounded in Jesus.

Additionally, while incarnational humanism highlights the universality of rationality to generate political empathy and open political conversation, it needs to be noted that articulate self-representation is challenged by disability studies-influenced political philosophy. Martha Nussbaum (2006, 1–8), in *Frontiers of Justice*, discusses how Western theories of social justice, especially the Rawlsian theory of social contract, neglect those with physical and mental impairments, those in parts of the world where the idea of nation-state is not part of their social imagination, and those who are non-human animals. Similarly, Stacy Simplican (2015, 1–24), in *The Capacity Contract*, asks what it means when only those who can represent themselves verbally get to be real citizens in modern democracies. She finds,

anxiety emerges from the discordance between the ways we as democratic citizens idealize cognitive capacity as a trusted democratic resource and our realization of the profound vulnerabilities besetting our cognitive abilities. Democracy entails that we imagine that the most important political duties are cognitive tasks, such as reasoning, reflection, judgment, and deliberation. For political decisions to be legitimate, we expect people to reason sufficiently about themselves, the world around them, and the political futures they desire.

As such, Simplican argues for rethinking the relationship between disability and democracy. This involves emotions as an engine of political empathy, as there have been discussions on being sensitive to the diversity of rationalities and non-discursive forms of rationality in other creatures in modern liberal democratic political theories, promoting a new way to imagine citizenship. Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka (2011, 1–18) further the discussion on animal advocacy, thinking about how we theorise political community, citizenship, justice, and human rights. They wish to move beyond the basic moral framework (i.e., welfare, ecological, and basic rights) to a moral framework that connects directly to fundamental principles of liberal democratic justice and human rights.

Those who might not be able to express themselves rationally as we know it or represent themselves in democratic processes will also need to be considered in the proposal of incarnational humanism, and further investigation of their representation is needed to include all in the political deliberation process. Representation, especially for those who cannot represent themselves, is an important aspect that needs to be addressed (Chu and Robertson 2026).

Reflection: Not Intertwining Political and Theological Convictions

In *Yes, Minister*, Humphrey Appleby, the Permanent Secretary of Administrative Affairs, told Bernard Woolley, the Principal Private Secretary of Administrative Affairs, that ‘A cynic is what [the] Idealist calls a Realist’ (Lynn and Jay 1982). That may be what PTW looks like to PECs and PDCs. From my analysis of how HK Christians conceptualise their faith and civic identity, the two do not have distinct boundaries or clear statements of conviction; however, HK Christians still have their own political theory and theology, because contradicting thoughts can still be part of someone’s theories. In HK Christian communities, political convictions are very much tied to one’s theological convictions and vice versa.

PECs, who side with the government, want access to China for evangelical and human welfare goals. They believe that, without a good relationship and mutual trust with the Chinese government, this essential pastoral and almsgiving work cannot happen. From their perspective, governments come and go, but the gospel is here to stay, so Christians cannot bypass opportunities for evangelism to bring about a worldly government that *might* be more just and democratic. Among those who hold this perspective are some laypersons and leaders from the Anglican Church (*Sheng Kung Hui*) and the Evangelical Free Church of China. They often cite Romans 13, on being subject to earthly authorities, in mandating that Christians should submit to the established government (Chu 2021b). On the other side of the divide, some PDCs view the current governmental structures as unjust. Some Anabaptists, a subset of Baptists distinguished by their nonviolent convictions, believe they cannot participate in the current government structure as pacifists and conscientious objectors. Meanwhile, some from Methodist and other Mainline denominations work towards systemic reforms of the existing regime to make it more just through civic participation and other forms of activism. Lucas (alias) summarised it as this:

The question at the time [of the Umbrella Movement] was who is in power, and whether we should submit to the authorities. The argument was clear: One side used the fundamentalist, literal understanding of Romans 13, where you must listen [to the authorities], and doing anything illegal has no room for discussion, so civil disobedience is off the table. The other side would argue that the former interpreted the Bible wrongly, saying that Romans 13 should be read together with Revelations

13, where in Revelation 13, it says when the political regime is evil, then it is the beast from the earth, so we cannot obey it.

Some of these PDCs would rebuke PECs, asking why they do not read Revelation 13 instead of Romans 13, since Revelation 13 calls for Christians not to bow down to the beast with ‘great authority’ as the beast is blasphemous and its powers are evil, and the dragon is understood as being in opposition with God. PDCs cite Revelation 13 to highlight that PECs are cherry-picking Bible verses to suit their political agenda by playing the same game. They instead advocate for understanding the current situation in HK through the overarching Christian story (Chu 2021b).

In each group, political and theological convictions are intertwined, leading to a hardening of perspective. Each views the other side as not grounded in biblical teachings or not *real* followers of Jesus. From this fragmented state, can Christians be considered a community unified by faith? If HK Christians believe in ‘one body and one Spirit, [...] one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all’ (Eph. 4:4–6, NRSV), then different political stances and somewhat varied statements of faith should not be barriers to the unity of HK Christian believers (Chu 2021b). In fact, the two share concerns for HK, albeit in different ways. The possible problem is the translation of what is important; people with different aspirations, needs, and circumstances discern what is important and necessary in a society differently, not only through a China-HK dichotomy but also through the haves and have-nots. Maybe the proposal is first to see and acknowledge the differences rather than trying to *fix* things.

Kung (2021) argues similarly that now is not the time to create a theology of the diaspora but to broaden practical experience, walk with those in pain, and sort through history so that we can develop a different theological imagination. He does not see the need for a full set of theological theories to guide HK Christians in responding to society; instead, he argues, we should employ different theological ideologies to help ignite critical thinking as a way for praxis and theory to interact with each other. Currently, some HK Christians are advocating for political unity, and Kung’s proposal leads to my proposal of incarnational humanism, as I intend to use incarnational humanism to demonstrate advocacy ‘for a unified purpose of the polis in the one Christian reality’ (Zimmermann 2019, 291). Religious convictions should not be privatised; instead, religious convictions should lead to peaceful political coexistence. What this means is that Christians are not pursuing some sort of theocracy or privatised faith; HK Christians should focus on human flourishing – not rights, democracy, or even evangelism. As Zimmermann (2015, 115) proposes, incarnational humanism also addresses human flourishing:

the government too derives its authority from Christ, yet it does not enact specifically Christian politics but serves all citizens in conducting humane politics in accordance with the orders of creation. Consequently,

the Christian citizen can live out his faith holistically without a private-public dichotomy, but his responsibility for the polis requires nonetheless great political vigilance, engagement, and, if necessary, dissent. There is, in other words, no clear cut solution on how a Christian should be political, or, put more precisely, there are neither distinctly Christian or secularist solutions to political problems but in seeking the most humane solution, the citizen is in fact pursuing ‘Christian’ politics.

Therefore, the focus is not so much on political inclinations but instead on how to live out a Christian conviction, which should spread across all facets of life.

This proposal of incarnational humanism is not meant to be another theory but rather a modality through which HK Christians can think critically of their praxis and how it relates to their identities as Christians and as HKers. Incarnational humanism, then, pushes against relativism and fundamentalism in the current conversations among HK Christians:

Christology thus resolves the opposition of individual and collective. The individual exists only in the context of humanity as a whole, which is itself united and defined by the transcendent God in His unique humanity as the God-man Jesus the Christ. Thus any human interpretation of our common humanity is itself always relativized by the ideal human being, the incarnate Word. [...] to protect uniqueness against totalizing sameness and yet talk about a common humanity.

(Zimmermann 2012a, 79)

Instead of simply assuming that one has a correct faith and others are heretics or that understanding biblical concepts in the context of HK is relativising the Bible and thus not *true* faith, incarnational humanism encourages thinking of the issue of individualism and collectivism through a shared humanity, which is necessarily understood through the incarnated Christ.

Analysis: Various ‘Third Ways’ Demonstrate the Need to Study Lived Theology in Hong Kong, China

As a PTW, I propose lived theology as a third way. My lived theology is through my consideration of how Christian humanism can be helpful to understanding the HK context. I appreciate the way Cecelia Lynch (2020, 8) describes HK’s PEC and PDC dilemma, albeit for a different context:

One way in which intra- as well as interdenominational differences are exposed concerns “realist” versus “prophetic” interpretations of Christian ethics. Realists tend to agree that Christians have to live in an imperfect world and make the best of it, which means understanding that choices often become the lesser of two evils. For those who insist on prophetic interpretations, realist acknowledgement of the existence of sin in

the world too often means accommodating such sin in ways that fall into active complicity with evil.

This reflection resonates with how PECs and PDCs talk over each other. But what about PTW? We are also talked over, as both PECs and PDCs see us as traitors, trying to appease everyone.

Should Christians work within the system or outside the system? Theological ethics is thus not about the observance of pre-set rules or moral principles but is rather about the response to Christ's call for living out the reconciliation of God and the world in every sphere of life, which requires a hermeneutic effort and the difficult exercise of wisdom (Zimmermann 2018, 640). Through my primary data collection process, as well as my own interactions with HK Christians, I find PECs and PDCs have many commonalities, such as thinking they are acting in HK's best interest and that the other side does not have the capacity to grasp what is happening in the current context, which is why the other makes flawed decisions. In this situation, we need to first start with acknowledging that humans have the potentiality for reason and a full capacity to understand what they advocate for. We must believe that people are acting in good faith as guided by how they interpret the example of Jesus, rather than viewing the other as influenced by conspiracy theories.

Another point I am making is that HK Christian communities have been using undefined and unsuitable labels in trying to make sense of what is happening in HK, which is why it results in misunderstanding and frustration. I am arguing that rights language is not a good fit for the current situation because it is not contextualised within HK's particular history. Western influence is very dominant in HK because of its status as a post-colonial city as well as a world financial hub with few, but influential, expats. HK theological scholars and pastors are heavily influenced by the democracy narrative and the use of rights language, which is the only way we know how to talk about civic action and political theology. However, HK never went through the historical and political changes that brought forth concepts of democracy and rights language in Europe and the Americas, so attempts to apply ideas such as Jürgen Habermas's post-secularism are problematic (Kwok 2019a). Rights language becomes shorthand for what I am questioning: Rights have become an assumed Christian ideal. For many HK thinkers, the only language available is a language rooted in Western liberal democracy. HK Christians can perhaps talk about democracy later, but currently, HK Christians are talking about democracy without being grounded in their own Christian convictions; that is, their worldview is being shaped more by secular values than Christian values. HK Christians need to move away from the need for a set of rules that tells them what is Christian and what is not as well as how to act and how not to act.

While I question the perceived universality of democracy and rights, I see the value of demonstration, protest, and, to a certain extent, riot and revolution. Democracy is valued as a means to reform, because no secular regime is

perfect, but at least systematic change is built into modern-day democracy. The right to protest ensures we constantly rethink what we are doing and, perhaps, recognise when the system is overdue for a change. While I do not wish for chaos, I value the change protest brings to society, leading to renewed vigilance. However, I am not for sacrificing the greater good, either. Protests, movements, and, to a certain extent, riots are necessary to keep the government in check and balance. I do not think for the sake of *peace* HKers need to have false unity; disruption of unity can be good, but I question the use of democracy concepts and rights language within HK Christian communities. Unless the human reason of *the other* is respected, it is difficult to envision a path forward from existing frustrations. Transitional justice, reconciliation, and the like cannot happen if one continues to demonise those whom one considers to be different. Moreover, rights and democracy usually depend on a secular state for enforcement and would be informed and adjusted depending on the interest of the secular state.

One reason I advocate for the work of Daniel Ng and Paul Kwong (see Chapter 2) is because they keep their communications with the government open and are able to make small but meaningful changes to legislation and policies, which remain under the radar of media coverage. I also advocate for their voices to be heard because I argue that both PDCs and PECs have a stake in HK theology. It is fine for PECs to champion the status quo if they have thought through it theologically, and I can affirm they have the ability to do so. To silence Ng and Kwong as unrepresentative of HK Christians, while Chan and Kung are, is a mistake since each represents at least some HK Christians. Without Ng and Kwong's voices, the picture of HK Christians is incomplete.

It is important to acknowledge that the realities of PECs and PDCs are real to each of them, respectively. It is a problem that people think of HK theology simply as pro-democracy. HK American theologian Lai Tsz-him casually inferred that HK theology is for everyone who is for democracy and diversity (Hong Kong Christian Institute 2020). Kwok (Lee 2019) suggests that those Christians opposed to the Occupy Central Movement

are living in a quite alternative reality with those in the social participation. [...] They think, okay Hong Kong is quite good. Hong Kong is prosperous; Hong Kong is stable. Hong Kong compared with maybe other Asian regions is safe and "just." [...] Well, I think for them this is not a false reality, but maybe this is the reality that they can enjoy, and they are living in.

Kwok is wrong to call what Ng and Kwong advocate for an 'alternative reality,' since the use of such phrasing suggests that Ng and Kwong are in a parallel universe, namely something that could have happened but did not. In contrast, for PECs, what Kwok advocates for can also be called an alternative reality. But what is the point in each calling the other's experience fake? These theologians need to construct their arguments based on an understanding of the

other's argument rather than setting up others as straw men. The two sides have a shared discourse through the shared experience of living in HK, but they do not seem to feel that they exist in the same context or talk about the same thing.

The purpose of my fieldwork is to compare and analyse the theologies of trained theologians and laypeople. An ethnographic-anthropological underpinning can help demonstrate what people think, how they respond, and what they do, even if it is at times contradictory. I consider how Christians in HK engage with theology, religious beliefs, and public civic action through an ethnographic approach that offers the subjective viewpoints and experiences of laypeople rather than published theologians. As my participants do not write theses or monographs about their theologies, my role is to organise and analyse their statements, giving voice to their perspectives and understandings. Rufus (alias), one of the interviewees from my qualitative secondary data, inadvertently affirms the importance of my approach as he says he acts and does not theorise since he rarely writes; instead, he uses his life and action as a testimony for God, which are his strengths. My strength, I hope, is to take his and others' testimonial actions and represent them faithfully.

This is also reflected in Ivana's (alias) interview, where she finds that it is dangerous if the traditional church stays in a form or structure that becomes the entire basis of our theology. She argues that theology should be based on human nature and how one experiences God in one's life. Ivana says that everyone's experience of God can be different, and these different experiences of God can develop dialogue, conversations, sharing, and prayer, in which we can see the abundance of God. Otherwise, we are limited to understanding God within existing structures. I hope we can take the experiences of those we encounter seriously.

I compare the written theologies of published theologians and non-publishing congregants' lived theologies, as religion should be understood as historically situated and politically embedded:

Essentialist approaches to the study of religion and politics often view religion through the lens of doctrine – ascribing causal force to particular dogmas and norms. [...] scholarship on religion and politics benefits by moving beyond approaches that treat religion, and given religious traditions, as discrete and reified categories of analysis.

(Schwarz and Lynch 2016)

Further, I hope to demonstrate that Christian leaders are by no means representative of the laity in all aspects and that further research is necessary to understand the laity's theologies. While laypeople generally do not write extensively or probe deeply into their beliefs, they still have theologies through the way they act and how they understand their actions, and it is my role to analyse what these are and how they contribute to the existing conversation. As Raewyn Connell (2007, 228) maintains, 'it is helpful to think of social science not as a settled system of

concepts, methods and findings, but as an interconnected set of intellectual projects that proceed from varied social starting points into an unpredictable future.' I argue that the laity's theologies should contribute more to the Christian communities' conversation than the church leaders', since there are usually more lay-people than leaders.

Notes

- 1 I chose to elaborate on the theology of Huen and Kwok because they are prolific in their publishing on this topic and make attempts to think about alternative approaches to topics of social movements.

2

What should be done then, my brothers and sisters? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three and each in turn, and let one interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let them be silent in church and speak to themselves and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If someone sitting receives a revelation, let the first person be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged (and the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets, for God is a God not of disorder but of peace), as in all the churches of the saints.

(NRSV)

- 3 Verbatim wording has been used in this quote, and other quotes from the same source, preserving grammatical errors, so as to reflect the way Kwok spoke, making his voice more prominent in this context.
- 4 Chinafication of Christianity is focused on political developments and the need to adapt to a Chinese socialist society; Sinicisation of Christianity is focused on understanding how Christianity can be a Chinese religion from theological and philosophical viewpoints, through Chinese themes of (1) Heaven and Humanity in Unity, (2) Transcendence, (3) Causation, and (4) Collectivism.
- 5 For example, the slogan '人一藍 腦便殘' means 'Once you turn blue, you will become mentally retarded.' Protesters and pro-movement citizens use this slogan to mock government supporters (blue ribbon) for lacking analytical ability and blindly listening to what the HK government says.
- 6 I often refer to my interview participants throughout my writings. This can be identified by the format [pseudonym] (alias), such as Abigail (alias).
- 7 I understand this is an offensive term in English, and its offensiveness reflects the corresponding term in Cantonese.
- 8

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.

- 9 Enculturation describes the process whereby an existent, prevailing culture influences an individual or community to imbibe its accepted norms and values so the individual or community is pressured to find acceptance within the society of that culture. Inculturation is a missiological term which refers to ways to adapt the communication of the gospel for a specific culture being evangelised.

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5 An Argument for Lived Theology

For me, Christianity is necessarily contextualised. In Hong Kong, China (HK), where an ahistoric, acontextual Christianity seems to be the common way for HK Christians to see Christian doctrine, I find context to be all the more necessary. Christians of other cultures cannot represent the experiences of HK Christians, nor can the experiences of HK pastors and Christian leaders, though situated, fully represent the experiences of HK lay Christians. Their viewpoints and experiences can be very different from the laity, and by elevating the lived experiences of HK Christians from different angles, I hope I have drawn a fuller picture of the HK Christian experience. For example, pro-establishment Christian (PEC) Abigail (alias)¹ argues that her church fellowship does not discuss why Christians are instigators of the Umbrella Movement, because they do not want to create awkwardness if people within her fellowship have different opinions. Yet PEC pastors Daniel Ng and Paul Kwong clearly do not conform to such an approach, as both frequently discuss politics and religion in the public sphere. Despite Ng and Kwong's political views as PEC leaders, in practice PEC congregations avoid discussing politics, as demonstrated by Abigail's recollections. This is my aim: to demonstrate that while theologians and celebrity pastors have a stake in HK Christianity, so too do the 'average Joes and Janes' (Chu and Perry 2023). In this book, the laity's voices are analysed in parallel with those who already have a public platform so that these lay Christians' theologies can be valued and studied as well (Figure 5.1).

The lived experiences of the laity are important, as theology should not come from the abstract, from someone who does not ground their theologies in the experiences of Christian communities. That sort of distance prevents their theology from connecting with Christian communities, and '[a]s an academic discipline, theology has often ignored the lived consequences of its commitments' (Marsh et al. 2016, vii). After all, dogmatics comes from experiences, too. As I have argued elsewhere,

While accounts of religion historically focus on cerebral phenomena, such as concepts, beliefs, and doctrines, many religious educators around the world have come to base their understanding of religious education



Figure 5.1 Tsim Sha Tsui Star Ferry Pier (20 December 2019).

Photograph by the author.

on anthropological views. If we think about it, where did concepts, beliefs, and doctrines come from? The Council of Chalcedon and the Council of Nicaea, responsible for coming up with important creeds in Christian tradition, in response to divergent beliefs at the time, are a prime example of basing one's understanding of theology and religion from their communities: Aspects of religion cannot be conceived of independently of the body, and indeed the bodily aspects of religion, such as ritual practices, have their own cognitive import. Working out one's theology in community with others is crucial, as it is in communities that the emotional and affective dimensions of religion are accounted for and theologies are cross-checked with lived experience.

(Chu 2024)

I hope to demonstrate that lived theologies are negotiations of theological participation and reification, which interplays between the old and the new, and meaning-making through negotiation (Tveitereid 2022, 142–159).

Additionally, as PECs and pro-democracy Christians (PDCs) are too stark a dichotomy, I seek to draw a fuller picture of lived theology in HK by presenting those who propose a third way (PTW). Through the integration of lay voices in Chapters 2–4, I demonstrate that both Christian leaders and lay Christians contribute to building HK's civic and faith identity. This can resonate with other Christians in non-democratic societies. For example, Elaine Graham (2018) found that, in the post-secular United Kingdom,

We are constantly told that religion is marginal; that it is part of the problem, not the solution; and that faith is so far removed from the realities of everyday living as to be irrelevant [...] hold in a tension these threads of religious resurgence with an appreciation of how far secularism remains a default position for much public debate, especially in Western-style liberal democracies. As a whole, society is nervous about those who 'do God' in public, since it is unused to thinking about whether it is right to (re)incorporate the vocabulary of faith into our common life; and yet, religion is an ever-present reality and often manifests itself in new, unfamiliar ways and spaces, local and global. [...] This new apologetics for a postsecular age entails cultivating a reflexive, self-aware understanding of what it means to be a person of faith in a world in which that is deeply countercultural (and often suspect).

This observation is in line with my findings in HK, where there is a sense of nervousness for average Janes and Joes to discuss religion in the public sphere. My proposal to counteract this nervousness is for Christians to fully embrace their religious identity, starting with subverting the use of secular *rights* language by, instead, using incarnational humanism as a language.

Public Value of the Laity's Theological Knowledge

Through this book, I hope to have represented prevalent ways that HK Christians talk about their faith through lived theology, which I have defined as 'the scholarly attempt to bracket and study theology and theologizing shaped by ordinary people's experiences in everyday life' (Tveitereid 2022, 142–159). Lived theology is a deeply meaningful strand in this investigation. The overwhelming voice defining discussions of HK Christianity tends to be PDC since this is the one that Western Christians can stand behind, as they would like to pit the suffering Christian communities against the 'godless Communist China' (Kwong 2022). There are other voices, like PEC or PTW, however, that are just as common but less favoured by the West, because they do not fit their overarching narrative. Unfortunately, as the West formed the basis of the contemporary education system and academia, they often get to control what is the right kind of knowledge-making. As such, it is hard for HK Christians to discuss what they find important without heeding to the West's perception of HK. Often, in analysing HK, academics and the general public alike have to

justify the deviance of their narratives from common Western perceptions. While PEC and PTW perspectives are represented widely within HK Christian communities, their respective perspectives often remain in HK communities. It is less usual for those in the West to know about PEC or PTW at all. PDC is the only voice that makes it to the West, so for those outside of HK, it may look like PDC is the only HK Christian voice. Just because certain perspectives do not align with Western, anglophone ideologies does not mean they do not exist. I hope to represent each of them equally here, to reveal a more complete picture of the conversations happening in HK Christian communities.

Additionally, my research reveals HK Christians' major distrust in non-verbalised forms of religion. Most people do not spend much time discussing what they believe in or the theory behind it; rather, they focus on going through the actions or motions related to religion, such as attending Sunday service, praying, tithing, and almsgiving. These actions make up a large part of how people are living their theology, but rarely do they attribute value to them. Instead, theology is defined mainly by those who preach and what they preach, because *the Word* is so highly valued in post-Reformation societies. The saying 'actions speak louder than words' seems to be lost in the post-Enlightenment, post-Reformation Christian Church. Western countries have experienced the 18th-century Enlightenment, which affects how Christians in those countries think about faith and civic identity. As Tanya Schwarz and Cecelia Lynch (2016) observe, there has been a shift in Europe towards 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 rationality. Thus, owing to the European Reformation, Protestant Christianity in HK places a great deal of trust in the written word, so much so that there does not seem to be a language to express the non-verbal aspects of religion. However, non-verbal actions like service in the church make up a large part of what people are doing in the church, so it is unreasonable to say that only words have an impact on people's faith but that their actions, conscious or unconscious, have none. It is problematic to believe 'that abstract theology has priority over lived theology, and that abstraction is the purest form of communication' (Ward 2017, 68–80). Christians may not identify handing out flyers, cleaning the bathroom, or even just sitting in the pew on Sundays as what constitutes their theology, or identify themselves as theologians, but that is what they are. Practicing Christians are theologians.

Through this book, I argue that lay people's actions are also significant though understudied because such practices are difficult to categorise and theorise. Even if lay Christians do not think they have the capacity to theologise, they are already creating their own theologies by being in a faith community and acting as such. The liminal space in which lay Christians dwell provides a bridge between daily Christian faith and action and Christian theology (Tveitereid 2022, 142–159). Brian Brock, in his work on disability theology,

talks about the non-verbal expressions of faith from people who are mostly able to demonstrate themselves through action. Brock (2019) describes disability as happening in the gloriously repetitive stuff of the day-to-day. We often give too much credit to the fireworks and not nearly enough to the mundane: ‘Christians confess to a *living* faith. Giving emphasis to the lived dimension of faith means a commitment to embodiment and practice that testifies to the presence of Christ at work in one’s soul as well as in the world’ (Law 2023).

However, it is impossible to simply remove what is traditionally called theology and simply focus on lived theologies alone. The laity’s actions start somewhere, and knowing the context of traditional theologies and how they inform lived theologies is also crucial. We can elevate lived theology by scaffolding it over the written, often Western, theological source and make a space for it to dialogue with lay and other less ‘prestigious’ theologies. As I have written elsewhere,

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.

(Chu 2023)

It is not that removing traditional forms of theologies is necessary; instead, I find that the disconnection between the two is problematic and, as such, leads me to argue that lived theologies should be studied in academic settings;

The weakness *and* the strength of lived theology lies in its particularity, making it neither better nor worse than any other type of theology – just different and interesting as a conversational partner. [...] lived theology is “an apt expression for the foregrounding of embodied particularity in theological narrative.”

(Tveitereid 2022, 142–159)

It is through studying the lived theologies of HK Christians that we may access the basis of their faiths and the theologies behind their actions.

The faith identity of HK, a colony of the British Empire from 1841 to 1997, was significantly impacted by how the West thinks religion should work within civic society. HK Christian churches are generally thought of as not encouraging independent thinking, by both 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 indigenous population was trained to be functionaries rather than critical thinkers

(Yan 2013). The Chinese ‘parental’ approach is also prominent in churches, where congregants are expected to follow church leaders unquestioningly (Chu 2020). This is why, even to this day, those in power, such as celebrity pastors, seem to hog the limelight and claim to represent all HK Christians. That is simply not true. It is critical to ‘exchange the ideological nature of elite theological discourses for an empirical sensibility paired with epistemic humility’ (Law 2023), where lived theology allows us to see faith embedded in private and public life amidst personal reflection and community practice.

Concluding Thoughts

From a historical perspective, it is inevitable to start with the assertion that

Christianity, Christian theology, and Christian mission are part of the colonial project. The imposition of Christianity and Christian theology, through militarism and conquest, on the lives of Indigenous and other minoritized people across the world causes other religions, theologies, and beliefs and practices to undergo erasure and to be reframed as heretical or anathema.

(Hong 2022, 360–380)

Christianity, in its history, determines what are culturally acceptable ways of knowing and acting, making the Christian faith a hegemonic power. Even though I critique the use of Western theology, I, too, am trained in Western academia and am often guilty of the same colonised thinking. For instance, I studied under Jens Zimmermann, and I find his use of German idealism helpful in HK Christian communities’ current understanding and articulation of self. Can colonial use of theology eventually be nativised? Can elevating German idealism or, indeed, any other German or Western theologians or philosophers eventually represent an authentic Hong Konger (HKer) way of understanding? I argue that it can, because not only colonialism and imperialism but also globalisation move ideas back and forth, so the cross-germination of thought is inevitable. To illustrate, *nata* is a traditional Portuguese pastry, but Macau, China, a former colony of Portugal, has since reimaged it and made egg tart its signature dish. So, is it still inherently Western? Can it be considered Chinese? Perhaps a bit of both? There are many foods, languages, and practices that are like this. How can we clearly label anything Western, Eastern, or any one label to the exclusion of others?

Nevertheless, I am against elevating Western ideas, including German idealism, over local lay knowledge. The Chinese auntie, who attends HK Cantonese-speaking Sunday services every week, baking cookies, brewing coffee, and offering other hospitality, is also part of theology-in-the-making, and this should be channelled in the theological conversation, both locally and in World Christianity: ‘Not all colonialisms are created equal, and the experience of colonialism does not have a cookie cutter impact on colonized people, places,

histories, and futures’ (Hong 2022, 360–380). From my research on post-colonial HK Christianities, I find it important for knowledge-making to be grounded in the laity’s ways of knowing. Focusing on the lived experiences of HK lay Christians is essential because ‘Lived experiences are the sites of ongoing and transformative theologies and practices that emerge from those theological commitments. Lived experiences also emphasize not only the individual’s history and life, but the communal history and life together’ (Hong 2022, 360–380). By allowing lived experiences to facilitate the understanding of a theology, lived theology ‘takes seriously the image of God and the work of the Spirit in everyday life, making exegesis of human experience just as important as the exegesis of Scripture’ (Law 2023).

As we come to the end of this book, my concluding thoughts are two-fold: One is theoretical, in that incarnational humanism is a worthy proposal for HK’s current context, and one is methodological, in that the lived theology of average Christians should be elevated in the investigation of theology as opposed to relying only on published thinkers.

First, incarnational humanism is a suitable proposal for HK’s current context. Throughout this project, a question I have always had in the back of my mind is what is the actual faith of HK Christians: HK as a nation-state or Christianity? I ask this question because it seems like PDCs and PECs express their faith convictions on socio-political issues only by being either for or against democracy and rights. Neither Evangelical nor Mainline Christians place more importance on their Christian identity. They either submit to the system or place so much importance on the system that they want to change it. As such, having a language for HK Christians to talk about issues, including socio-political ones, that starts from their faith convictions rather than as a tag-along influence is valuable. This is why the use of Christian language, such as incarnational humanism, to challenge the existing use of secular concepts, such as democracy and rights language, makes for a suitable proposal for HK Christian communities. Discussions on democracy and rights are perhaps necessary for HK contexts, but they must be undergirded by a Christian worldview. Through this research, I find that incarnational humanism challenges an ahistoric Evangelicalism, as universals are developed in specific historical movements, with inequality, exploitation, and oppression. Incarnational humanism’s starting point is the incarnation, the start of human knowledge of God, in combination with *this-worldly* Christianity, in which one refuses to see the integrity of the finite somehow disrupted or diminished by the infinite (Zimmermann 2019, xi). This language is appropriate for HK Christians to reflect on their identities and positions.

It is pivotal for people in a society or community to have a consensus on what they mean by terms like democracy, rights, and citizenship, without merely assuming they are referring to the same thing or relying on the Western perspective – treating the West as the cultural ground zero against which all other cultures are measured (Nye 2019). This is to say not that HK Christians cannot think about or use concepts like democracy and human rights, but that

HK Christians need to stop assuming that the other has no mental capacity to process complex ideas or that their beliefs are out of ill will. HKers must start with the assumption that their interlocutors have the full capacity to understand their position, particularly when arguing about Christian values and what they truly believe is beneficial to the collective good. My use of incarnational humanism is a reaction against universal values and ideals. Humans are the interpreters of the Christian faith, and no person ever lives in or enters ‘an atemporal realm of eternal ideas’; rather, the way that God’s work in history is understood is through Jesus Christ in the incarnation (Cummins and Zimmermann 2018, 119). So, instead of applying democracy and rights as universal values, incarnational humanism is helpful because it focuses on the contextual and how HK Christians can understand their contemporary context through Jesus Christ’s incarnation.

I acknowledge that the origins of Christianity are rooted in Jewish, Greco-Roman, and Western societies, and the concept of humanism comes most directly from the Renaissance. The theoretical influences on incarnational humanism are those of German theologians who push against the focus on Jesus’s spirituality and divinity and who instead focus on Jesus as a human: His teachings, relationships, and experiences. While these ideas are not indigenous to HK, the point of theorising HK theology is not to maintain ideological purity by simply tossing what is Western and keeping what is Chinese. HK has experienced over 150 years of British colonisation, and most people in HK have been exposed to Western-style education, since the existing education system was set up by Westerners. In fact, as I have argued,

it is impractical to simply remove any British colonial influence in Hong Kong’s intellectual pursuit, as this would be akin to removing the ladder on which we are standing. Instead, as a constructivist-interpretivist, I would argue that a suitable course of action is to acknowledge both the British colonial past and Chinese cultural influence in addressing our “Asian problems”.

(Chu 2021a)

It is unreasonable to say simply that because something is not indigenous, it cannot be used to theorise about HK. Instead, we can acknowledge where ideas come from, as I did with Christianity and humanism, respectively, and acknowledge those genealogies. There are precedents for contextualising theories from outside sources in the HK context, such as Paul Kwong’s (2011) use of Miroslav Volf and Kung Lap-yan’s (1991) use of Josef F. Hromadka and Jan M. Lochman, and it is through reflection, honesty, and transparency that we move forward from previously colonised, or perhaps still colonised, epistemologies.

Second, bringing together the evidence in Chapters 1–4, taking lived theology seriously enables us to contend with the messy experiences of real humans. The lived theologies of average Christians make up most of the theology in

practice but are rarely discussed in published writing. According to Nancy Tatom Ammerman (2021, 5–6),

historical knowledge about religion had been limited because scholars had largely focused on ideas, and the ideas of elites, no less. [...] But what were ordinary people actually *doing*? [...] Long preoccupied with the thoughts of philosophers and preachers, a few began to wonder what theologies might look like in action and what the lived theologies of ordinary people might have to tell us.

Like those Ammerman described, the believers I presented through this project demonstrated that ambivalent, conflicting, and contradictory moments should be included as part of any analysis, since they are part of the theologies of my participants. As I have previously found in another qualitative research project,

Caleb [alias] confirmed that Adam [alias] understood evangelical Christianity much better than folk Taoism and considered Adam's faith to be solid, so perhaps Adam found it difficult to express eloquently. [...] many like Adam and Benjamin [alias] would struggle to speak meaningfully about their conversion experience.

(Chu 2021b)

While my interview participants, Adam and Benjamin, were not able to tell me why they converted to Christianity in a compelling way, as perhaps a trained theologian would, they nonetheless had conveyed reasons for their conversions and what is important to their faith and their lives. That is important, as Adam and Benjamin are doing theologies through their life choices.

Average Christians are not trained to give eloquent speeches and assign meaning to their faith at all times, but that does not mean their theology is any less relevant than that of published theologians:

Lived theology employs qualitative research to strengthen a theologian's capacity to listen attentively to God's voice and movement in the grounded experiences of everyday lives, translating it for the world as testimony and witness to God's alternative culture and way of being.

(Law 2023)

As such, lived theologies are every bit as valid as doctrinal, systematic, or any other form of theologies traditionally engaged by trained theologians. More importantly, by engaging ordinary people, we can see 'their presence as integral both to the method and to any resultant "God-talk"' (Reddie 2008). As to defining who is an HK Christian, I found it is more commonly expressed as a negation, such as 'not the Chinese Mainland' and 'not communist.' Moreover, I found that such an identity is defined by shared values instead of ethnic and geographic belonging. This synthesis is difficult, but necessary, to document

the theologising that is actually happening on the ground. An interview participant Uzziah (alias) said,

It will be difficult for you to imagine...I haven't even finished high school; I only studied one or two months of it. Even now, I don't know any English. [...] But I try to do everything, I feel that God is really...my experiences are...I am very ordinary, I don't have any strengths [laughs], but God uses me in certain arenas, I always think, perhaps many people think it is serendipitous, a miracle, but I don't think so. As long as you love your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and love your neighbors as yourself, then that's enough.

Uzziah, though feeling inadequate because of his limited education, obviously has a well-developed theology from his lived experiences in HK, even if he is not able to articulate it like a trained theologian. My hope is that, through demonstrating the validity of lived theologies in HK in these turbulent times, more academics will take lay Christian theologies seriously, in HK and elsewhere.

Note

- 1 I often refer to my interview participants throughout my writings. This can be identified by the format [pseudonym] (alias), such as Abigail (alias).

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Appendix

I often refer to my interview participants throughout my writings. This can be identified by the format [pseudonym] (alias), such as Abigail (alias). A list of my participants is as follows:

- Adam
- Benjamin
- Caleb
- David
- Elijah
- Felix
- Gabriel
- Hosea
- Isaac
- Jacob
- Keith
- Matthew
- Noah
- Obadiah
- Paul
- Quartus
- Rufus
- Samson
- Timothy
- Uzziah
- Victor
- Wayne
- Xerxes
- Yehu
- Zacharias
- Aaron
- Boaz
- Abigail
- Bernice

- Claudia
- Deborah
- Esther
- Faith
- Grace
- Hannah
- Ivana
- Judith
- Katrina
- Leah

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