Hong Kong Protestant Theologies in the 1980s and 1990s
Responding to the Handover of Hong Kong to China

WONG Ho Lun Donald
Divinity School of Chung Chi College, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Abstract
By closely studying primary theological works in Hong Kong during the 1980s and 1990s, this article argues that a uniquely local Hong Kong theology emerged during that period. This local theology developed in response to an unprecedented fear and an ambiguously hybrid identity in face of the imminent transition from British colonial rule to the Communist Chinese administration. Moreover, it was stamped by three distinct marks: first, the negotiation between two competing theological visions, the “prophetic” and the “priestly” voices; second, the shadow of liberation theology and its Asian progeny; and third, the seeds of postcolonial theory, which commanded increasing influence toward the turn of the century.

Keywords
Hong Kong theology, 1997 handover, liberation theology, Asian theologies, postcolonialism

Introduction
"Strictly speaking, in the past we did not have a ‘Hong Kong Theology,’ yet we did have theological consciousness which has gone through two periods.”

1 Fung Mow, Hui ho, ji jian yu Hong Kong qu (Hong Kong: Tu po chu ban she, 1988), 21. Translations of Chinese sources are done by the author of this essay.

Corresponding author
WONG Ho Lun Donald: dwong@link.cuhk.edu.hk
Writing in 1988, Arnold Yeung recounted the period of the 1960s to the early 1970s, when theological efforts centered around dialoguing with the Chinese culture. He also recounted the period of the 1970s to the early 1980s, when Hong Kong theologians started appropriating insights of liberation theology from overseas proponents. Yet these were only “theological consciousness.”

One can detect an intense theologizing effort in the Hong Kong of the 1980s. Such theologizing effort carried its distinctively local marks and emerged out of a particular local context. The flurry of theological productions was all produced by an emerging generation of theologians. They were neither the middlemen between the British and the Chinese nor the immigrants who flooded the Hong Kong churches upon the 1949 change of regime in China. They came from a generation who were likely locally born and who started to claim a local Hong Kong identity.

The phenomenon of unique theological elements in Protestant Christianity arising out of a specific local context—Hong Kong in the 1980s and the 1990s—deserves close examination. The first part of this article analyses such context. The second part organizes these theological elements around two metaphors—the priestly and the prophetic—and also offers an assessment on how they interacted. Part 3 asks how liberation theology and its Asian variations shaped the theological endeavor in Hong Kong. The fourth part examines traces of postcolonial thoughts that

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2 楊牧谷, 前途, 22-26.
3 These two themes—Chinese culture and liberation theology—dominated theological reflections in the 1960s and the 1970s respectively. Yeung regarded them as fruitless (楊牧谷, 前途, 25) and hopeless (楊牧谷, 前途, 32). They failed to lead theologians in constructing a unique and contextually relevant Hong Kong theology. Thus at most there existed only a “theological consciousness” in the 1960s and 1970s instead of a well-articulated theological system.
5 Carl T. Smith, Chinese Christians: Elites, Middlemen, and the Church in Hong Kong (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press), 10-11.
emerged in the same period. The concluding section attempts to evaluate whether a local “Hong Kong theology” did emerge in the 1980s and the 1990s.

To the context we now turn.

THE CONTEXT

The Context: The Fear of the 1997 Handover

“‘Theology arises out of some concern which is shaped by a sense of importance ... significant in the living and meaning of Christian life for a time and place.’”8 As with Philip Shen, the intense theologizing effort in Hong Kong during the 1980s did arise out of a particular context. This article argues that the context was an atmosphere of fear triggered by the 1997 handover and, together with it, an identity crisis. Here, we first deal with the “fear” aspect.

The Sino-British negotiations started in the early 1980s. By 1984 when the Joint Declaration was signed, the people of Hong Kong recognized the inalterable fact of a 1997 handover. Change became inevitable and, together with it, fear. In his 1987 theological treatise, Yeung recounted what compelled him to deep theological reflection. During the “black September” of 1983, there was chaos in banks and supermarkets; the picture of an old lady grabbing cans of milk powder and bags of rice, running worriedly, moved even the calmest.9 A USD to HKD exchange rate went beyond 9.55, and the selling-out of air tickets for the last flight before June 30, 1997, certainly did not ease the sense of fear.10 Pastors were not immune to fear; an unprecedented number of people aged between thirty and fifty emigrated between 1985 and 1993.11 It was against this background that Hong Kong theologians reflected on why and how the forthcoming “implicit oppression,” masked under the promises of “stability” and

10 温伟耀, “「終極意識,” 105.
“prosperity,” could shake Christian conviction to its core. It was a test. Yet it was also an opportunity for theologization, as Shen had rightly predicted.

At this juncture there were two immediate theological reactions. First, theologians reaffirmed God as the God of history; nothing was left to chance. This was even the inaugural proclamation of the landmark 1984 statement that addressed Christians in the anxious city. Knowing God as the master of history, Christians should neither fear nor shrink from building up the community.

The second immediate reaction was a rally for human rights and freedom in the public realm. Drawing on how Moses elected leaders, Archie Lee highlighted the indispensability of human rights and the principle of justice. Samuel Tang even argued for “the holiness of freedom.” Behind such rally for human rights and freedom was the plain fact that “some countries constitutionally protect the ‘freedom of religion,’ yet its interpretation is extremely narrow.”

While the above were the immediate reactions from the theological community drawing upon biblical precepts and metaphors, a more sustained reflection dealt with the issue of identity. A hybridity of identities

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12 陳士齊, “天國的信仰與安定繁榮的信仰,” 收基督教信仰與香港社會發展, 黃美玉編 (香港:基督教學會, 1995), 105
16《香港基督教會有關宗教自由的聲明》[1984], 《香港基督徒北京訪問團對香港前途意見書》[1984], 陳海文, 香港教會與社會運動, 153-162. (Full English translation in Leung and Chan, Relations, 166-174.
17 李熾昌, “從五經看信徒(上帝子民)的社會角色,” 收一九九七與香港神學 (香港: 崇基神學組, 1983), 14-21
18 唐佑之, 從聖經看人權、自由、民主、法制 (香港: 證道, 1984), 11-18
19 余達心, 註釋, 41
was woven with the 1997 issue to form the fabric of theologization at the time.

The Hybridity of Identities as a Contextual Fabric

There existed two dualities when Hong Kong Christians reexamined their identities in the 1980s, a period of intense “soul-searching.”

The first duality was the dual citizenship of both a secular political state and a religious “kingdom of God.” Hong Kong would soon be ruled by a Communist, atheistic state. Should, and how should, the citizen of God’s kingdom participate politically in an earthly kingdom that refused to recognize God?

While theologians affirmed the value of political institutions, most were cautious of an overactive engagement in politics and a confusion between the two kingdoms. Jesus did not come as a political messiah; he did not even have a systematic teaching on politics. Coming from the Galilean hotbed of revolutionaries and living in a highly politicized environment, he “transcended” his politicized environment and the material world.

The second duality concerns the “hybrid identity of being culturally Chinese and yet pragmatically British.” This duality had long existed, yet it was only in the face of the negotiation between China and the United Kingdom—in the absence of Hong Kong representatives—that the question of cultural allegiance became prominent. On the Western side, the tradition of human rights and freedom was strongly affirmed. So was democracy. What stood out was a strongly patriotic identification of being a Chinese in theological works, sermons, and statements of the 1980s.

20 Wong, “Postcolonialism,” 60.
21 For example, 余達心, “基督徒看公民責任,” 收公民與公民教育：從基督教信仰與實踐的角度作回應, 江大惠編 (香港: 崇基神學組, 1987), 69.
Hong Kong people shared “a common historical fate” with the Chinese race; “responsibility” and “gratitude” should be the responses. They should opt for the greater good of China over personal comfort. After all, it was not a coincidence that God had placed them as Chinese—emigration to the United States or Canada under “God’s guidance” was, to say the least, doubtful. A suspicion against the Communist regime should be replaced by an appreciation of the goodwill from China, after reading the “many guarantees” in the Sino-British Joint Declaration.

Such hybrid identities paved the way for postcolonial reflections, which will be addressed in the fourth part of the article. Before that, it suffices to highlight three additional points concerning the nationalist sentiments in theological works of the time. First, the emotional attachment to the motherland did not die down after the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests. While some “felt called upon by God to judge the violent suppression,” solidarity with the suffering students, workers, and ordinary citizens on the mainland marked the common response. Second, there was no sharp separation between the Communist state and Chinese nationality or ethnicity. This was not to say that the atheism or its past dealings should be overlooked—far from that. Rather, a strong ethnic identification was married with a pragmatic attitude. After all, Hong Kong churches had been investing heavily in mainland ministries. Last but not least, although there was an emerging sense of “Hong Kong-ness,” such a sense was not prominent until the turn of the century—only then could this “Hong

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26 Yuet-Hiung Yu,注释, 45.
29 楊牧谷, 復和神學, 30
30 Lida V. Nedilsky, Converts to Civil Society. Christianity and Political Culture in Contemporary Hong Kong (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2014), 181.
32 Concluding section of 前途意見書 [1984]
33 Carroll, Concise History, 167-189. “Hong Kong-ness” refers to a deep sense of belonging to the city of Hong Kong, often in contrast to a sense of belonging to mainland China.
Hong Kongness” be contrasted with “Chinese-ness.”

Not a few Hong Kong theologians of the 1980s and the early 1990s exhibited a strong emotional attachment and sense of belonging to the Chinese mainland. As Rose Wu observed, it was even a “fashionable trend to glorify the motherland” during that period; mission acquired a “more patriotic tone.”

**THE CONTROLLING METAPHORS**

The Controlling Metaphor: Prophet or Priest?

Having analyzed the context, this section argues that there were two *controlling metaphors* that guided theologization in Hong Kong during the 1980s and the 1990s: the *prophetic* and the *priestly*.

Beatrice Leung and Chan Shun-hing, historians of Hong Kong church-state relations, characterized the 1980s as a period when churches took the role of an “outspoken prophet.” From activist campaigns against rising bus fares and the price of electricity to proposals on political reforms, Christians joined other public voices in admonishing the administration. Christians following such a “prophetic model,” according to Wu, “express their faith in the community beyond the confines of the institutional church structure.”

The prophetic voice roared so loudly that even a pro-Beijing watchperson warned of the return of a medieval Christendom.

Behind the prophetic voice one found a “prophetic” theology that spoke to, if not against, rulers on issues of social justice. Theologians found

34 Wong, “Postcolonialism,” 60. Carroll’s assessment of the 1980s and the 1990s does not argue for a distinct Hong Kong identity vis-à-vis a Chinese one.

35 Rose Wu. *A Dissenting Church* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Christian Institute and the Hong Kong Women Christian Council, 2003), 22.

36 This article borrows the images of a prophet and a priest to describe two different theological *emphases*. The former focuses on challenging injustice and speaks out against the powerful. The latter focuses reconciling people to God. The following paragraphs explicate how these two different emphases played out among Hong Kong theologians and pastoral workers.


39 辛維思（Xin Weisi）, “再談基本法與宗教自由,” 明報 (1987年2月3-4日); 參辛維思, “基本法與宗教自由,” 明報 (1986年12月5日)
ready support from the Old Testament, while Jesus was also seen as a prophet speaking against the political authorities of his time. Moreover, such a prophetic voice was spoken for and on behalf of the poor and the neglected, whom God especially favored. The prophet also stood in solidarity with the oppressed; Bonhoeffer and the German Confessing Church were the heroes not long ago. Contemporary Hong Kong “prophets” worked toward transformation of the prevailing sociopolitical structure. The messianic figure in the Hebrew Bible can even serve as the ideal for a transformed society. At the same time, serving as the social conscience unavoidably implied a critique of political power, especially its unequal distribution.

Yet the prophetic voice was not the only voice. Some preferred a priestly role of reconciliation, most notably Arnold Yeung. Yeung called for a holistic reconciliation between the people in China and Hong Kong, and among God, humanity, and nature. Why reconciliation? In addition to biblical supports, Yeung claimed that both China and Hong Kong people were deeply hurt. China was hurt by the suspicion and phobia of the motherland among Hong Kong citizens. Hong Kong people, like their counterparts in the mainland, were traumatized by calamities such as the Great Leap

44 余達心, “公民責任,” 71.
48 Rom 3:24-26, 5:8-11; Eph 2:11-22; Col 1:19-22; 2 Cor 5:17-21. (楊牧谷, 復和神學, 25)
49 楊牧谷, 復和神學, 419-420.
Forward and the Cultural Revolution. Both sides needed to be healed. The Chinese ideal of “harmony” thus came first. This sense of harmony implicitly preferred consensus over confrontation. Yeung effectively opted for a pragmatic route. The “lowly people” had been fighting for survival; with enough milk and bread, they would be utterly grateful. The church should be ready to choose between these “lowly ones” and her “political ideology and conscience” if needed—thus a reconciliatory instead of a confrontational approach.

While one might question whether Yeung has presented a false dichotomy, he built his case through extensive dialogues with eminent theologians and a penetrating analysis of the China–Hong Kong relation. To fully appreciate Yeung, he wrote with a keen attention to those struggling for survival, including those “who cannot leave and who do not want to leave after 1997.”

The Pragmatic Prophet, the Progressive Priest

Yeung’s emphasis on priestly reconciliation and evangelism instinctively attracted the “Evangelical” Christians, who regarded evangelism as the primary mission. While exceptions abounded, they were usually perceived as taking the backseats on such issues as democratization and political reform. The “Ecumenical” Christians, on the other hand, had reservations about the conservativeness and “narrow-mindedness” of the Evangelicals. The Ecumenicals held that the gospel was not merely individualistic and moralistic; the social dimension should never be neglected. Christians were meant to prophetically denounce evils in society. Wu saw in this “prophetic path” numerous “authentic and responsible Christians labouring in various

50 杨牧谷, 復和神學, 417-418.
51 杨牧谷, 復和神學, 25.
52 杨牧谷, 復和神學, 21.
53 杨牧谷, 復和神學, 21.
54 杨牧谷, 復和神學, 34, 554.
55 Noted exceptions included Christian Sentinels for Hong Kong; the Society for Truth and Light has also been outspoken on social moral issues. (Leung and Chan, Relations, 97, 140).
56 Leung and Chan, Relations, 140.
57 余達心, 註釋, 75.
sectors of society.”58 The conflicting views represented a source of disunity among Protestant Christians in the 1980s.59 Obviously, this Ecumenical-versus-Evangelical picture was simplistic, yet it was a picture even held by the drafters behind the 1984 Statement of Faith.60

One might expect that the difference between a “prophetic” and a “priestly” theological outlook would have split the church irrevocably, but it did not. On one side, the prophetic voice became less pronounced at the beginning of the 1990s. Many factors were in play. For example, as social issues became less black-and-white, a definitive prophetic stance was becoming difficult to establish.61 The emergence of fulltime elected legislative councilors called for professional politicians; the need for opposition from the ecclesial circle diminished.62 Yet the most important factor was a pragmatic one: an intensifying political pressure. Xin Weisi’s (辛維思) accusation, as recounted previously, was one among many warnings by the Communist regime. Within Protestant circles, there was a pragmatic consideration that the Chinese government would eventually control the social and educational resources dear to churches. The Protestant community thus attempted toning down the prophetic voice. Kwok Nai-wang lamented the “unholy alliance,” a term coined by the social critic Emily Lau, between the church and the Hong Kong government.63 The prime example was the replacement of progressive delegates in the Hong Kong Christian Council. The outspoken Kwok eventually left the council in 1988 as well. For the sake of the thousand schools and social welfare centers, the church has, according to Wu’s

58 Wu, The Dissenting Church, 24.
60 余達心，註釋, 74-75.
61 For example, whether and how to join the 1996 Selection Committee, which was not fully democratic, probably presented a bigger ethical dilemma than the Mui-Tsai issue in the 1920s and 1930s.
62 劉紹麟, 解碼香港基督教與社會脈絡: 香港教會與社會的宏觀互動 (香港：基督教文藝, 2018), 262.
analysis, “lost its independence” and “forfeited its prophetic vision and voice in Hong Kong.”

When the prophets became more pragmatic, the Evangelicals who tasked themselves with the priestly work of evangelism and reconciliation started to take a more progressive stance. The Lausanne Covenant was taken seriously in the 1980s, not least for its recognition that social participation fell within an evangelical framework. The “theology of the kingdom of God” should not be reduced to a “theology of the church.” Christian actions in the secular realm needed to be rescued from an unbalanced theology. The dismantling of a false dichotomy between a “theology of creation” (for social care) and a “theology of salvation” (for evangelism) marked a theological “breakthrough” of the time. This rediscovered theological insight by the Evangelicals, together with the toning-down of the prophetic criticisms by others, made the bond of unity between the Ecumenicals and the Evangelicals possible.

Before we draw a conclusion, the discussion on a Hong Kong theology in the 1980s and the 1990s would not be complete without considering its relation to liberation theology and postcolonial thought.

**The Comrade**

The Comrade: Liberation Theology and Asian Theologies

How has liberation theology and its progeny in various Asian regions influenced the theologizing efforts in Hong Kong during the 1980s and the 1990s?

To start, one notes a general resistance against foreign theologies. Carver Yu cautioned against an overreliance on Western “systematic theology,” “pedagogy,” “model,” and “theological categories and methodologies.” Shen found “so little that is interesting in foreign theological discussion”

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64 Wu, *A Dissenting Church*, 21.
65 劉紹麟, 解碼, 248.
because their context was definitely different from that of Hong Kong. Latin American liberation theology was specifically cited as an illustration. Local elements had even been “coopted” to foreign theological agenda. For instance, the oppressive Cultural Revolution was bizarrely interpreted by certain Western theologians as “an attractive affair.”

However, the reality was that, implicitly, there was much borrowing from liberation theology and its Asian offshoots. This was especially true for the theological circles that shaped the prophetic voice in the 1980s. The theme of liberation from slavery—political, cultural and economic—was prominent; Exodus and the entry into Canaan stood out as oft-quoted texts; people were sometimes polarized into two camps: the oppressors and the oppressed. Hong Kong theology at the time also bore a resemblance to the Asian progeny of liberation theologies, such as the theology of the homeland in Taiwan, minjung theology in South Korea, and grassroots theology in the Philippines, differing only in its intensity. The ethos of the Hong Kong Christian Council of the 1970s and the early 1980s echoed these Asian voices.

While the Hong Kong theology of the 1980s and the 1990s might not have explicitly attempted to do theology from the perspective of the underprivileged, there was an unmistakable emphasis on the poor and the oppressed. Luke, the “Gospel of the underdog,” reminds readers that God especially cared for the poor. The compassionate God behind the Book of Covenant (Exodus 21–23) protected the wandering foreigners, the hired hands, the orphans and the widows, as well as those “imprisoned or persecuted because of their dissident views.” The implicit critique against an asymmetry of power matched that of the liberation theologians. These insights were not only gleaned by Ecumenical Christians or the prophetic

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69 Shen, “Concerns,” 130, note 1.
70 Shen, “Concerns,” 131.
72 Kwok and Yip, Hong Kong Protests, 5.
73 杨牧谷, 前途, 26.
74 周天和, “福音,” 11-16.
voices. Even Yeung, who forged the priestly orientation, also recognized that such “prophetic spirit” had wakened the church. Liberation theology and its Asian variations has unmistakably shaped Hong Kong theology during this period.

An Incomplete Liberation, or a Liberating Insight?

The impact of liberation theology, however, has received mixed assessments. While identifying with the oppressed was certainly welcomed, Yeung asked a searching question: “When the people are ‘liberated from’ oppressions, what are they ‘liberated for’?” More pointedly, apart from a “cheap” “martyrdom complex,” what legacy was left for the coming generation? Yeung criticized the proposal by liberation theologians for being incomplete. The church of the New Testament lived under the injustice of slavery, economic disparity, and gender inequality, yet the apostles did not bank their hopes on social transformation. As ambassadors of reconciliation, Christians should proactively live within “the given situation” and promote “repentance and return”; these were what people should have been “liberated for.”

Against the downplaying of liberation theology, Kung Lap-yan, on the other hand, regarded it as the most welcome insight on how Hong Kong theologians could do theology. The Latin American audience of liberation theology—helpless and hopeless to the point of being “non-humans”—resembled those in Hong Kong, if one could recognize how “culturally oppressed” Hong Kong had been. Looking back, it was Yeung’s reconciliatory proposal that was seen to be incomplete. Kung found the political dimension of Yeung’s reconciliation missing; while “psychological and emotional healing” were needed, nothing was said about transforming

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79 杨牧谷, “芻議,” 111.
80 杨牧谷, “芻議,” 111.
an unjust sociopolitical structure.\footnote{Kung Lap-yen, “Parent-Child and Center-Edge Metaphors: A Theological Engagement with the Social Imaginary of ‘One Country, Two Systems,’” \textit{Political Theology} 20, no. 5 (Aug. 2019): 401-402.} At its core, the avoidance of conflict rendered Yeung’s proposal untenable: “real reconciliation has to face confrontation, not avoid it.”\footnote{Kung, “Metaphors,” 401. It is noted that Kung wrote in a later time under different political circumstances. Yet his critique of Yeung remains valid—Yeung may have indeed overlooked the element of confrontation. \textit{How} such constructive conflicts and healthy confrontation may be carried out, though, is another question.}

Has liberation theology guided Hong Kong theology in a wayward direction, as per Yeung, or has it offered an invaluable inspiration, as per Kung? This article suggests that there is a distinctive theological contribution from Hong Kong that amalgamates the insights from both sides. It is the notion of “sinned againstness” by another local theologian, Raymond Fung.

In Fung’s observation, a person is inadvertently both the subject and object of sin—simultaneously he or she “sins and is sinned against.”\footnote{Fung, \textit{Gospel}, 197.} The gospel addresses the problem of sin not only by highlighting mistakes that one has made, but also by recognizing the reality of being sinned against—especially as experienced by the poor.\footnote{Fung, \textit{Gospel}, 199.} Reminiscent of liberation theology, the sinned against, certainly including those in Hong Kong, are remembered by God; pastoral workers “choose to stand with the poor because God is with the poor, and works among them.”\footnote{Fung, \textit{Gospel}, 168.} Yet this recognition is made in the context of evangelism. If the fate of being “sinned against” lies outside of the gospel, the faith and reconciliation evoked by evangelistic efforts are merely “serving as an opiate.”\footnote{Fung, \textit{Gospel}, 199.}

The industrial mission of the Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee (“HKCIC”) under Fung’s leadership in the 1980s addressed this “sinned against” aspect in concrete ways. On one hand, HKCIC advocated labor rights in the public realm and offered their expertise in labor disputes.\footnote{Fung, \textit{Gospel}, 56-74.} HKCIC was an agent of liberation and empowerment to
the blue-collar class. It was also one of the foremost prophetic voices of the period to such an extent that it was criticized by Xin Weisi in 1986.91 On the other hand, HKCIC actively shared the gospel with the workers, setting up fellowship groups, Bible camps, and even a labor church.92 For Fung, the gospel brought forth both practical liberation from societal oppression and spiritual reconciliation with God. The prophetic and the priestly roles were indeed one.

**The Cry**

The Cry: The Seeds of Postcolonial Theology in Hong Kong

In addition to liberation theology, another important trend, postcolonialism, saw its nascent emergence in Hong Kong during 1980s and the 1990s. While 1997 was literally a “post”colonial transition for Hong Kong, postcolonialism referred more broadly to discourses reclaiming indigenous voices, usually in resistance to foreign, Western dominance.93 This section highlights early evidence of such postcolonial approaches appropriated by notable Hong Kong theologians, especially in biblical hermeneutics. Again, Hong Kong’s unique identities prepared the ground for postcolonial theology with its own bent.

Kwok Pui-lan proposed a postcolonial interpretation of Mark 7:24-30 in 1995 that exposed the danger of “anti-Judaism, sexism, and cultural and religious imperialism” and created room for a “poor, lowly and ragged Jesus.”94 However, her use of dialogical imagination, an integral part of such strategy, emerged even earlier in 1989.95 While the term “postcolonial” was not explicitly used, the dual notions of indigeneity and resistance were

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91 辛維思, “基本法與宗教自由”
92 Fung, Gospel, 96-115.
apparent. According to Kwok, we need to read the Bible against “the Asian reality” with its suffering and aspirations.96

Archie Lee made use of postcolonial theory in his landmark essay in 1999, “Returning to China: Biblical Interpretation in Postcolonial Hong Kong.”97 His work even won acclaim for contributing to postcolonial criticism.98 Lee adopted a “cross-textual” interpretative strategy, which he first proposed in 1993,99 in the book of Isaiah. Hong Kong’s postcolonial situation was the “social text” to be read alongside the prophetic book.100 Where did Lee’s insight come from? In a later essay, Lee recounted his experience pastoring a local congregation in the 1970s. The reality of and respect for indigenous religio-cultural texts challenged the validity and success of the “many years of Christianization and modernization.”101 His early observation of local practice developed into a postcolonial hermeneutics seasoned with notions of indigeneity and resistance.

The seeds of postcolonial insights germinated into more explicit postcolonial critiques by Hong Kong theologians at the turn of the millennium. Kwok Pui-lan102 and Wong Wai-ching’s103 postcolonial feminist theologies come to mind. Simon Kwan’s Postcolonial Resistance and Asian Theology was a project that started even before Hong Kong’s 1997

97 Lee, “Returning to China,” 156-173.
103 Wai-ching Angela Wong, “Negotiating for a Postcolonial Identity: Theology of ‘the Poor Woman’ in Asia,” Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion 16, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 5-23; see also Wong, The Poor Woman.
handover. Kwan also astutely pointed to a “colonization” by “the want of the market” over and against “the need of the vulnerable”—a “pathology” prevalent in Asia, of which Hong Kong is a part. Philip Chia’s postcolonial reading of Daniel 1 in commemoration of the 1997 handover shrewdly discussed colonial subjugation in the (re)naming of Daniel and his youthful companions. Daniel’s insistence on food and drink was rightly read as his resistance under colonial and neocolonial power. In summary, the works by Kwok, Lee, Wong, Kwan, and Chia evidenced the early use of postcolonial theories during the 1980s and the 1990s.

The “Post”colonial Situation of Hong Kong

Why did postcolonial theology gain traction among Hong Kong theologians? For two reasons at least. First, postcolonial notions influenced Asian theologies, which, in turn, shaped the thoughts of Hong Kong theologians. Second, and more importantly, it was Hong Kong people’s uniquely hybrid identities that postcolonial thoughts found a natural home. Regarding their roots, Hong Kong people are ethnically and culturally Chinese, yet they are at the margin of the motherland both geographically and politically. Regarding her colonial history, Hong Kong simply cannot write off its colonial legacy, not least for its free-market economy and its tradition of individual freedom and human rights. Such an ambiguously hybrid identity proves to be a hallmark of a postcolonial subject.

Given the ready identification of a postcolonial status, one wonders why postcolonial theology did not attract the wide attention it might have deserved. To start, there was never a full-blown anticolonial sentiment.

107 Chia, “On Naming the Subject,” 181, see also 179.
The British colonial rule was careful to garner enough support among local elites. Neither was there a full-fledged nationalistic resistance. People were skeptical of an eventual Communist governance and economy. A strictly Chinese cultural identity was eclipsed by a “cosmopolitan world-city” ethos. Ultimately, pragmatism ruled. Any national or ethnic identification with the motherland was counterbalanced by a colonial legacy that protected Hong Kong as the place of East-West exchange in trade, finance, ideas, culture, and politics. In addition, Hong Kong’s affluence made it difficult to identify with the Third World “poor,” one of the primary loci of postcolonial theologies. Hong Kong was culturally too Western and economically too developed to identify with the stereotypical candidates under postcolonial struggles.

However, closing the case of a Hong Kong postcolonial theology may be premature. In fact, it is much alive and ongoing. Some argued that Hong Kong was transitioning from a colonial rule to a neocolonial administration. According to this line of thought, Hong Kong might even have fallen under an internal colonization: the “formerly colonized became colonizers of their own people.” Such a unique in-between-colonizers setting calls for further postcolonial reflections.

**Conclusion**

This article has demonstrated how the unique context of the 1997 handover, together with a unique hybridity of identities, triggered unique theological reflections in and for Hong Kong. The two controlling metaphors, the prophet and the priest, spoke beyond church-state relations. They were metaphors for distinct theological and pastoral orientations. The interaction between these two guiding themes, and their dialogues with liberation theology and postcolonial thoughts represented a theologization unique to Hong Kong in the 1980s and the 1990s. It could even be the first

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time for Hong Kong to witness a local theology, after periods of theological consciousness.\textsuperscript{113} The 1980s and 1990s were a period in which Hong Kong theologians, preachers, and lay people struggled to remain faithful in a time of change. Their articulated reflections were nothing less than a Hong Kong theology.

**About author**

WONG Ho Lun Donald is a graduate student at the Divinity School of Chung Chi College, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

\textsuperscript{113} 楊牧谷, 前途, 21.