



CHRISTIANS
in the CITY

Christians in the City of Hong Kong

*Chinese Christianity
in Asia's World City*

TOBIAS BRANDNER

B L O O M S B U R Y

Christians in the City of Hong Kong

Christians in the City: Studies in Contemporary Global Christianity

Series Editor: Dyron Daugherty

Christians in the City looks carefully at Christianity in many of the world's great cities. It draws on interdisciplinary methods including anthropology, ethnography, sociology, phenomenology, and history. The series marks a significant contribution to the growing body of scholarship on world Christianity, lived religion, material religion, urban studies, and globalization as it engages people on the ground, in their local setting. The cities covered are drawn from around the world: North America, Latin America, Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and Oceania.

Books highlight how Christianity is changing particular metro areas, as well as how those areas are impacting the Christian religion. Most major forms of Christianity are discussed: Pentecostalism, Roman Catholic, mainline Protestant, non-denominational megachurches, Eastern Orthodox, immigrant forms, and house churches. The net is cast wide in order to understand what is happening with Christianity as it engages the great urban centers of the world.

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Christians in the City of Hong Kong

Chinese Christianity in Asia's World City

TOBIAS BRANDNER

BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC
LONDON • NEW YORK • OXFORD • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK
1385 Broadway, New York, NY 10018, USA
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, Ireland

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First published in Great Britain 2023

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-3502-6909-5
PB: 978-1-3502-6908-8
ePDF: 978-1-3502-6910-1
eBook: 978-1-3502-6911-8

Series: Christians in the City: Studies in Contemporary Global Christianity

Typeset by RefineCatch Limited, Bungay, Suffolk

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*To my wife Gabi, in gratitude for our life together in Hong Kong.
And to the people of Hong Kong, in admiration of their resiliency
and strength.*

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Abbreviations

AG	Assemblies of God	神召會
AO	Asian Outreach	香港亞洲歸主協會
BTJ	Back-to-Jerusalem Movement	回到耶路撒冷
HKCCLA	Catholic Commission for Labour Affairs	香港天主教勞工事務委員會
CEM	China Evangelistic Mission	中華福音使命團
CIM	China Inland Mission	中國內地會
CCM	Chinese Christian Mission	中國信徒佈道會
CPC	Communist Party of China	中國共產黨
CCCOWE	Chinese Coordination Centre of World Evangelism	世界華福中心
CPPCC	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference	中國人民政治協商會議
CUHK	Chinese University of Hong Kong	香港中文大學
CA	Christian Action	基督教勵行會
CMA	Christian and Missionary Alliance	基督教宣道會
CBN	Christian Broadcasting Network	視博恩
CCA	Christian Conference of Asia	亞洲基督教議會
CIC	Christian Industrial Committee	香港基督教工業委員會
CMO	Christian Mission Overseas	基督教華僑佈道會
CHSKH	Chung Hua Sheng Kung Hui (Anglican Church)	中華聖公會
CMS	Church Missionary Society	英國海外傳道會
CRM	Church Renewal Movement	香港教會更新運動
CHRF	Civil Human Rights Front	民間人權陣線
CCM	Contemporary Christian Music	當代基督教音樂
CWM	Council for World Mission	世界傳道會
CANs	Creative-Access Nations	創啟地區
DSCCC	Divinity School of Chung Chi College, Chinese University of Hong Kong	香港中文大學崇基學院神學院

ECC	Evangelical Community Church	
EFCC	Evangelical Free Church of China	中國基督教播道會
ELCHK	Evangelical Lutheran Church	基督教香港信義會
HKMLC	Hong Kong and Macau Lutheran Church	港澳信義會
ACF	Hong Kong Artistes Christian Fellowship	香港藝人之家
HKACM	Hong Kong Association of Christian Mission	香港差傳事工聯會
ACM	Hong Kong Association of Christian Musicians	香港基督徒音樂事工協會
HKCCCU	Hong Kong Chinese Christian Churches Union	香港華人基督教聯會
HKCC	Hong Kong Christian Council	香港基督教協進會
HKCI	Hong Kong Christian Institute	香港基督徒學會
HKCS	Hong Kong Christian Service	香港基督教服務處
HKCNP	Hong Kong Church Network for the Poor	教會關懷貧窮網絡
CTU	Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions	香港職工會聯盟
CCC	Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China	中華基督教會香港區會
PHC	Hong Kong Pentecostal Holiness Church	五旬節聖潔會
HKSKH	Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui (Anglican Church)	香港聖公會
HUP	Hymns of Universal Praise	普天頌讚
IM	Incubator Ministry	孵化箱事工
IEF	Industrial Evangelistic Fellowship	工業福音團契
ICA	International Christian Assembly	基督教國際神召會
IHOPKC	International House of Prayer in Kansas	國際禱告殿
JIL	Jesus Is Lord Church	
JHF	Jian Hua Foundation	建華基金會
JM	Jubilee Ministries	禧福協會
ME	Media Evangelism Group	影音使團

MCHK	Methodist Church Hong Kong	香港基督教循道衛理聯合教會
MIC	Methodist International Church	循道衛理會國際禮拜堂
NSL	National Security Law	國家安全法
OCLP	Occupy Central with Love and Peace	讓愛與和平佔領中環
OM	Operation Mobilization	世界福音動員會
OMF	Overseas Missionary Fellowship	海外基督使團
PHC	Pentecostal Holiness Church	五旬節聖潔會
P.I.M.E.	Pontifical Institute of Foreign Missions in Milan	宗座外方傳教會
RCCG	Redeemed Christian Church of God	
SDA	Seventh-day Adventists	基督復臨安息日會
SIC	Soccer in Christ	香港足球體育事工
SoCO	Society for Community Organization	香港社區組織協會
SMC	Sports Ministry Coalition	體育事工聯盟
SOP	Stream of Praise	讚美之泉
TBN	Trinity Broadcasting Network	三一電視台
TJC	True Jesus Church	真耶穌教會
TTM	Tsung Tsin Mission Church of Hong Kong	基督教香港崇真會
UFWD	United Front Work Department	中共中央統一戰線工作部
URM	Urban and Rural Mission	城鄉宣教運動
WKPHC	Wing Kwong Pentecostal Holiness Church	五旬節聖潔會永光堂
WCRC	World Communion of Reformed Churches	普世改革宗教會聯盟
WCC	World Council of Churches	普世教會協會
WMC	World Methodist Council	世界循道衛理宗協會
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association	香港中華基督教青年會
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association	香港基督教女青年會
YWAM	Youth with a Mission	青年使命團

Maps



The Hong Kong territory with Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, and the New Territories including the outlying islands (design Erin Hung).



KEY

1. Anglican St. John's Cathedral
2. Catholic St. Joseph's Church
3. Catholic Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
4. Anglican St. Paul's Church
5. Swatow Christian Church
6. Caine Road Baptist Church
7. China Congregational Church
8. Church of Christ in China Hop Yat Church
9. Hong Kong Rhenish Church
10. Tsung Tsin Mission Kau Yan Church
11. Saint Stephen's Anglican Church
12. Catholic Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church in Wanchai
13. Hong Kong Methodist Church
14. Hong Kong Union Church
15. Church of Christ in China Congregational Church
16. Anglican St. Mary's Church

A. Man Mo Temple

B. Shui Yuet Kung Temple

Northern part of Hong Kong Island, the historical center of the territory, between Causeway Bay and Sai Wan (design Erin Hung).



KEY

- 1. Anglican St. Andrew's Church
- 2. Roman Catholic Rosary Church
- 3. Kowloon Union Church
- 4. EFCC's Yan Fook Church
- 5. Wing Kwong Pentecostal Holiness Church in Lok Fu
- 6. Anglican Holy Trinity Cathedral
- 7. Roman Catholic St. Teresa's Church in Kowloon Tong
- A. YMCA Salisbury
- B. YMCA Waterloo Road

Kowloon peninsula (design Erin Hung).



KEY

- 1. Nam Wa Po, near Tai Po
- 2. Shung Him Tong
- 3. True Jesus Church on Ap Chau Island

Remote villages of the Sai Kung peninsula:

- 4. Hau Tin
- 5. Tai Long
- 6. Chek Keng
- 7. Yim Tin Tsai
- 8. Tao Fong Shan
- A. Chinese University of Hong Kong

Northeastern New Territories and the Sai Kung Peninsula, with some of the remote village churches (design Erin Hung).

Series Introduction

Dyron B. Daugherty, Series Editor

C*hristians in the City* is a fascinating and cutting-edge series that looks carefully at Christians in many of the world's greatest urban centers. It draws on interdisciplinary methods including anthropology, ethnography, sociology, phenomenology, and history. The series marks a significant contribution to the growing body of scholarship on world Christianity, lived religion, material religion, urban studies, and globalization as it engages people on the ground, in their local setting. The cities are drawn from around the world: North America, Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin America, and Oceania.

The Series' books highlight how Christianity is changing particular metro areas, as well as how those areas are impacting the Christian religion. Many different although often overlapping forms of Christianity are discussed in the volumes: Pentecostal, Roman Catholic, mainline Protestant, non-denominational, Eastern Orthodox, immigrant churches, megachurches, charismatic, evangelical, independent, and house churches. The net is cast wide in order to understand better what is happening with Christianity as it engages the great urban centers of the world. Christian organizations in the city—universities, private schools, and faith-based charities—will be explored as well.

The Series features established as well as rising scholars. We have taken great care to choose authors who live in the cities under consideration, or at least have lived in those cities in the past. There is an intimacy that comes through in these volumes, and readers from those cities will recognize the streets, the sounds, the vibe, and the cultural accents that make cities unique. The volumes are written with crossover appeal—for audiences both inside and outside the academy.

Each volume contains interviews with leading figures from the city under consideration—as well as a broad array of laypeople—in order to gain a well-rounded perspective on these cities. There will be no shortage of material, as Christianity is not only the largest world religion in terms of adherents, but is

also extremely widespread geographically, making it a diverse and complex religion that takes root in the soil of the cities it has been planted in.

The Series will consist of monographs on 25 of the world's great cities, with carefully chosen, exceptional authors who have an intimate understanding of the city they write about. As the list of books in the series expands, a global balance will be maintained. The current list of cities/volumes that have either been contracted or are under consideration are:

- ***In North America*: New York, Los Angeles,* Boston, Houston,* Montreal***
- ***In Asia*: Shanghai,* Hong Kong,* Seoul, Delhi, Manila**
- ***In Africa*: Cairo,* Addis Ababa, Kinshasa,* Lagos,* Johannesburg,* Nairobi***
- ***In Europe*: Moscow, London, Athens**
- ***In Latin America*: Sao Paulo,* Rio de Janeiro,* Havana, Santiago, Mexico City**
- ***In Oceania*: Sydney***
- ****Books already contracted.***

This Series has been several years in the making, and we are excited to see them now coming to light. Over half of the books are contracted, but the search continues for authors for the remaining volumes. We are open to proposals of other cities from potential authors.

Over half of the world's population lives in cities, and the expectation is that in coming years the number of people leaving the countryside for the city will only increase. Since its earliest days, Christianity was a religion of the city: Jerusalem, Alexandria, Antioch, Damascus, Corinth, Thessaloniki, and Rome. Established by the apostles themselves, that pattern continued. As Christianity expanded further, it gravitated towards cities: Aleppo, Edessa, Seleucia-Ctesiphon, Aksum, Etchmiadzin, and Constantinople.

The pattern continued, as the energy of the city attracted Christian missionaries, scholars, and laypeople in search of opportunity. As cities developed, Christians established bishoprics, cathedrals, and centers of learning in cities. Today, the great centers of Christian thought and influence are located chiefly in cities: Seoul, Addis Ababa, Rio de Janeiro, Dallas, Athens, Rome, and Moscow.

A series on Christians in the cities is timely, and promises to break new ground. There is an undeniable power in cities—a power to attract. And Christians continue to make their way, bringing with them manifold Christian

practices, routines, rituals, and beliefs. In all of their diversity, they are united in one thing—they consider themselves Christians. And they live in the city.

For more information about this series, contact the Series Editor:

Dyron B. Daugherty
Professor of Religion
Pepperdine University
dyron.daugherty@pepperdine.edu

Introduction

Storms are the reason Hong Kong has become a global city. Its harbor, offering protection from fierce typhoons, attracted British colonialists to seize it from China in 1842 after the First Opium War. Storms are a fact of life in Hong Kong, the natural storms approaching from the south and the political storms approaching from the north—and a gigantic one, whose impact still cannot be fully assessed, has engulfed the city over the past decade. Storms have made Hong Kong what it is. The city navigated storms and channeled its energy into a resilient society and a prosperous economy, and whether the most recent storms will continue to make Hong Kong, or eventually break it, is yet to be seen.

Christians are a minority in this city geared towards trade, but they are remarkably visible in all parts of society. Though rather conservative and inward-looking, they have significantly contributed to social change throughout the city's history; fragmented in a multiplicity of denominations, independent churches and small fellowships, they share a common identity that stubbornly stands apart from the values of mainstream society. This book offers a comprehensive portrait of Christianity in the global city of Hong Kong and tells some of the stories, past and present, of this dazzling faith group—its journey through 180 years of local history, its unique character today, its continuous passion for individual and communal change, and the amazing vitality of people who, through heavy storms, have remained anchored in their faith.

What is Hong Kong? A short note for non-local readers: Hong Kong is both a city and a small territory on the southern coast of China, politically part of China, but governed as a “special administrative region.” It consists of three parts: Hong Kong Island, the first location given the name “Hong Kong” and still the economic and political center of the territory; the Kowloon peninsula, the most densely populated part of the territory; and the New Territories, which include new towns, villages, large areas of mountainous uninhabited land and around 230 outlying islands. Nowadays, the name “Hong Kong” usually refers to the whole entity, both urban and rural, with the latter so strongly integrated into the urban infrastructure and lifestyle that they cannot

be separated. Hong Kong is a city that, for 155 years, belonged to the British Empire and was returned to China only in 1997. While some see Hong Kong's handover to China as a long overdue redress of colonial injustice, many locals see it as simply a transfer of power from one master to the next. Originally, the independent administration of Hong Kong—summarized in Deng Xiaoping's famous slogans "Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong" and "one country, two systems"—covered all areas of government except foreign and military affairs: currency, economy, taxes, judiciary, police, infrastructure, education, social welfare, and so forth. On this basis, post-1997 Hong Kong initially maintained a high level of civil and political rights. However, this administrative autonomy has been under increasing pressure, evidenced by the recent adoption of policies obviously designed by the central government.

In terms of economic and social development, Hong Kong is one of the world's most highly developed territories, ranking fourth worldwide in a combined measure of life expectancy, education, and per capita income.¹ Its stock exchange is the world's third largest in terms of capitalization, and it famously brands itself as the city with the most Rolls Royces. Yet, the city also ranks first among highly developed economies in terms of inequality. Indeed, elderly grannies pushing trolleys through the crowded streets to collect cardboard for a subsistence living are a common sight; government and NGO statistics show that more than 220,000 people (nearly 3 percent of the population) are living in sub-standard housing.²

Hong Kong is one of the most densely populated areas of the world, with around 7.5m people living on only 1,100 sq. km (410 sq. mi). In fact, the inhabited areas comprise only one-quarter of the whole land area. Large parts of the territory remain as untouched nature—pristine beaches, impenetrable forests, steep mountains, and outlying islands. Only a few minutes from the central business district are places of wilderness. Wild animals—monkeys, boars, and snakes—are frequently sighted, occasionally even in urban areas; migratory birds take rest in isolated areas of the territory; and attentive hikers may have a chance to come across rarer species of wildlife such as the porcupine, civet cat, or barking deer.

Culturally, Hong Kong is very Chinese (92 percent), yet also truly international. The most significant other ethnic groups are people from the Philippines and Indonesia (each 2 to 3 percent of the population), mostly employed as domestic workers; South Asians (around 1 percent), some of them descendants of colonial employees as well as more recent immigrants working in the construction industry; and Caucasians (less than 1 percent). The most commonly spoken language is Cantonese; other commonly spoken languages are English and Mandarin. While Cantonese and Mandarin both belong to the Chinese language family and have a nearly identical written language, the spoken languages are significantly different. Despite this

predominantly Chinese population, the city has an international feel. This has not only to do with its long colonial history, but with the self-understanding of many Hongkongers, who proudly see themselves as a distinctive people, a hybrid of Chinese and Western.

In short, it is a city that enralls its visitors with its pace and its contrasts: the urban jungle and the mountain peaks rising from the sea; the crowded streets, ubiquitous vendors, abundant eateries and street signs competing for attention; an amazing mix of tradition and modernity; and a hypermodern infrastructure permeated with remnants of traditional religion and culture. Woven into the complexity of this city is a Christian community that, although a minority, plays a disproportionately large role in social, political, and economic life.

The Many Faces of Christianity in Hong Kong

This book portrays the amazing diversity of Christianity in Hong Kong, introduces its people, and explains some of the factors that make this vibrant community move. Christians in Hong Kong stand at a crossroads of East and West, on the threshold of China, where they have witnessed unprecedented Christian growth in the last few decades. A looming shadow for some, a luring opportunity for others, China is part of what powers the people in Hong Kong and what drives Christian life. The book's eight chapters, then, approach Christianity in its diverse expressions of faith and in its manifold impact on society.

The first chapter provides a systematic overview of the material and spatial reality of local Christianity, discusses some of the underlying economics, and reflects on the different forms of Christianity as encountered in its material expressions. The second chapter introduces the large variety of denominational traditions, from spiritually progressive Christians to conservative evangelicals and Pentecostals, and discusses their places within society. It shows how these churches pragmatically live and work together while always maintaining a strong focus on their own congregations, and it identifies trends in local church life. The next chapter surveys international Christianity, from charismatic migrant churches to those catering to expatriates in the financial industry. It analyzes how these Christians contribute in unique ways to local society, and it examines why international churches attract many local Christians. The fourth chapter portrays the Christian presence in the cultural realm—entertainment, movies, music, and sports—and shows how the quest for identity has been a driving factor in Christians' cultural production.

Chapter 5 is especially important, as it introduces past and present Christian ministries in the social realm. It considers how Christian individuals, churches,

and NGOs have contributed to all aspects of social care; it explains why Christians, despite their minority status, have played such a huge role in the city's social, medical, and educational services; and it shows how Christians have successfully maintained a double role, partnering with the government to improve the people's welfare while speaking out for social justice.

Chapter 6 discusses the missionary vision of local Christians. It reveals how the unique position of Hong Kong brought local Christians a calling to spread the gospel in an environment that is difficult to access. It tells the story of how Hong Kong has always been a safe place for missionaries to China; how Hong Kong has been a hub for channeling Bibles and Christian literature on their way north; and how local Christians have contributed to the growth of Christianity in mainland China.

Chapter 7—on Christians in the political realm—has been looming over the writing of this book ever since the beginning. This chapter summarizes the political developments of the past decades and highlights how Christians have played leading roles on both sides of the political spectrum, among the political establishment *and* within the movements for political change. It explains why Christians, although deeply divided over the 2014 umbrella movement, which called for universal suffrage, converged in opposition to the 2019 extradition bill. The chapter concludes that the Christian resistance to the erosion of civil and political rights is deeply linked to the question of Christian identity. Finally, the concluding chapter offers a few signposts of local theology in Hong Kong. It identifies the features of a "lived theology," traces the emergence of a local theology, and shows how two different strands of local theological production, postcolonial and Sino-Christian theology, both contextually express the Christian faith in Hong Kong. While the latter continues the tradition of dialogue between Christianity and Chinese culture (including philosophy and religion), the former reflects the deep ambivalence of local people as both Chinese and British. It considers how this hybridity, beyond the false dichotomy of East and West, is local Christians' unique contribution to global Christianity.

A Short History of Hong Kong Christianity

This is not a history book, even though historical information is intermittently offered.³ As part of this introduction, it is enough to mention major historical developments in a few broad strokes so that the reader may find initial orientation. The history of Christianity in Hong Kong has, since the 1841 establishment of the first local Roman Catholic prefecture, been intimately intertwined with events in China. In the same way as British colonialists understood the island as a stepping-stone to China, the various mission societies saw Hong Kong as a logistical base and safe harbor. We may thus

link the history of Christianity in Hong Kong to certain periods in China and distinguish a first period from 1841–1949, when the People’s Republic of China was established; a second period from 1949–1978, when the churches in Hong Kong re-established themselves independently from China; a third period, 1978–1997, when China began to open up to the world and Hong Kong resumed its role as a hub for reaching out to China; and finally the last period from 1997 to the present.

During the first period, Christianity was spread through four major movements. The first movement was based on mainline churches and mission societies, which set up bases in Hong Kong starting in the 1840s. The first to start was the Catholic Church, followed by the American Baptist Mission (1842) as the first Protestant mission in Hong Kong; the next five years saw the arrival of the London Missionary Society, the (Anglican) Church Missionary Society, and German Pietists from the Basel Mission and the Barmen Mission. In the 1880s, the Wesleyan Methodist Mission and the American Congregationalists from the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Mission arrived. The Catholic Church and these seven Protestant missions are the eight mainline denominational churches that still play a major role in Hong Kong Christian life.⁴

The second movement was the arrival of non-mainline churches, beginning in the late nineteenth century: among them was the Seventh Day Adventists (1888), the Pentecostal Church (1907), the Pentecostal Holiness Church (1909), and the Assemblies of God (1928).

A third movement, beginning in the early twentieth century, was the emergence of indigenous churches in mainland China independent of Western mission societies. These churches also spread to Hong Kong, as Chapter 2 will explain. Finally, the deteriorating situation in China and the beginning of the Second World War in Asia led several missions to move their activities fully or partly from China to Hong Kong, among them the Evangelical Free Church (1937) and the Christian and Missionary Alliance (1940).

The second period began in 1949 with the establishment of the People’s Republic of China and the increasing political pressure on Christians, who were accused of complicity in China’s past colonial humiliation. During the Korean War, the international church community supported the U.S., and pressure turned into persecution, leading to the forced departure of foreign missionaries from China. Many of them withdrew to Hong Kong, where they hoped to wait for a return to China while supporting Chinese Christians from outside. Important among the churches that moved to Hong Kong during this period were several Lutheran denominations. Hong Kong churches previously linked to denominations in China now became separated and had to set themselves up as independent churches. The period from 1950 to the 1970s was a time of unprecedented hardship in China, with several political

campaigns aimed at purging Mao's enemies leading to the deaths of millions. This period brought a huge number of refugees to Hong Kong, which provided ample opportunity for Christians to serve locally, as Chapter 5 will show; from the Second World War until the 1960s, the city was largely a refugee society. Some mission agencies and Christian NGOs began to use Hong Kong as a base to reach out to the Chinese diaspora in other parts of the world, recalling the mission mode of the early nineteenth century, when missionaries were not yet allowed to serve in China and could only reach Chinese people through overseas Chinese communities.

The third period was made possible by the end of the Cultural Revolution and the death of Mao, both in 1976, and it truly began in 1978 with Deng Xiaoping's "reform and opening up" policy, which allowed a normalization of religious life in China. Churches in Hong Kong soon recovered their interrupted relations with their historical roots and reconnected with their fellow Christians on the mainland, and they contributed financially, logistically, spiritually, and theologically to the rebuilding of Christianity in China. In the 1980s many Christians in Hong Kong had high hopes for more significant changes in China, yet their excitement was increasingly overshadowed by the imminent handover to China and the uncertainty about future religious life in the territory. The fears of many Christians were realized with the violent crackdown on the 1989 democracy movement in China, and a wave of solidarity swept through Hong Kong, carrying many Christians along with it. However, the ensuing disillusionment with developments in China also led to the departure of many Hongkongers, including many Christians who found a warm reception in Chinese communities overseas. Many regard this third period as the transformation of a refugee society into a city of locally born residents—in other words, the time when Hong Kong acquired its unique local identity.

The years since 1997 have been an emotional rollercoaster for local Christians. First, there was hope, excitement and enthusiasm: about the tremendous growth of Christianity on the other side of the border, about the ministry opportunities enabled by this growth, and about China's entry into the global economy and its social opening up, which seemed to presage gradual changes in the social fabric. This positive wave crested with Beijing's hosting of the 2008 Summer Olympics, which filled many Hongkongers' hearts with a sense of national pride. Since then, however, the atmosphere has turned increasingly dark, with China's political intervention extinguishing most Hongkongers' hopes for democratization and the continuous development of civil and political rights. The growing repression of civil and religious movements in China, the intransigence shown towards the 2014 and 2019 social movements in Hong Kong, and the 2020 introduction of a National Security Law have made both Christians and non-Christians increasingly