

## To Confront or to Collaborate? Reviewing the State-Protestant Relations in Post-1997 Hong Kong

Lam Tsz Hang

### *Abstract*

The relationship between Christian churches and the government authorities are categorized into three major forms: the contractual relationship with the situation of the church being channelized by the government, the critical opposition adopted by some progressive Christians for promoting sociopolitical reforms, and the active collaboration with the government authorities by a number of pastoral leaders. The qualitative study on post-1997 State-Protestant relations was conducted for the purposes of examining the maintenance of contractual relationship by the SAR government, the Protestants' responses to the SAR government, and progressive Protestants' activism for democratization in Hong Kong. An in-depth interview and a documentary content analysis from relevant newspapers, websites, and books were used. The results revealed that there are evident manipulations by the SAR government in their pursuit of centralizing its political influence. In response to the SAR government, active collaboration with government officials and even Mainland authorities has become manifest. Furthermore, the rise of pro-moral evangelical activism in post-1997 Hong Kong revealed the delicate relations with pro-Beijing politicians due to ideological coincidence. However, a number of progressive Protestants joined together and critically participated in the social and political reforms. The study implied the complicated model of post-1997 State-Protestant relations involving various parties, especially the complex camp of commonly called "religious right," as well as the importance of the churches as a component of civil society in Hong Kong.

### **Introduction**

In the spring 2010, the political dispute happened again on the issue of whether 'double universal suffrage' (Chief Executive and the whole Legislative Councilors) should be implemented in 2012; at the same time, Rev. Daniel Ng Chung-man (2010) delivered his speech in an open prayers' meeting, implicitly criticizing the rising radical democrats as 'mob politics', questioning the Western democratic system and appealing the Christians to 'be in the subjection to the governing authority' with reference to the Bible. Eventually, Ng's speech was criticized as toadying up the Beijing authority (Tam 2010) and angered the progressive Christians, leading to a small-scale protest rally (Lai 2010).

This incident has brought some inspirations about the contemporary state-church relations in Hong Kong. The church and the government are not two separate entities, involving power and ideological struggle. In theory, a set of faith-prescribed values and morals have been commonly constructed to guide the Christian churches' relationship with the State. However, in reference to the state-church relations, the Christian values and morals may come second due to the factors of self-interest and desire for power in the political environment (Leung and Chan 2003).

The state-church relations are one of the essential dimensions in studying politics in Hong Kong, particularly post-colonial Hong Kong politics. From the recent government statistics, there are around 843,000 Christians in Hong Kong nowadays, including Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestant followers (HKSAR Government, 2012), which takes about one tenth of Hong Kong's population. It indicates that the political affiliation among these Christian communities may play an important role in the SAR politics, particularly in social movements and elections. This can be illustrated by the increasing number of government officials and politicians openly declaring themselves as Christians (Catholics or Protestants).

The study of state-church relations in Hong Kong is complicated, particularly in the period after the handover to China. Apart from the vested interest, as mentioned, Leung and Chan (2003) also mentioned that the non-static state-church relations resulted from the constant changes of social environment and the various Christian denominations. Comparing the studies on the relationship of the state with the Catholics and the Protestants, the latter one would prove more complicated as the Protestant churches themselves are more diverse. In fact, the sociopolitical atmosphere in Hong Kong has experienced the drastic change within the past fifteen years, including the increasing Beijing intervention, structural economic changes, and the worsening social livelihood among others. Furthermore, the emergence of the Christian evangelical pressure groups (such as the Society for Truth and Light, STL) and the pro-liberal Protestants revealed this complication.

### **Research Objectives**

This independent study proposes to review the relationship between the Protestant churches and the HKSAR government (together with the Beijing government) since the handover of Hong Kong in 1997 in terms of three dimensions:

1. ***The Government's Approach to the Protestant Churches*** – In what ways does the HKSAR government maintain the contractual relationship with the Protestant churches? Is that State-Protestant relations different from that in the British rule?
2. ***The Protestants' Responses to the SAR Government*** – What are the differences among the mainstream churches, the evangelical activists, and the progressive Protestants in dealing with the State-Protestant relations? In what ways does the rise of evangelical activism influence the State-Protestant relations?
3. ***The Progressive Protestant Activism for Democratization*** – In what ways do the Protestants contribute to the post-1997 democratization in Hong Kong? What are the impacts of the Post-80s campaign and political radicalization to the progressive Protestants' activism in the SAR period?

## Literature Review

### *Previous Studies on State-Church Relations*

The political influence of Christian churches had gradually declined under the impact of the Reformation (sixteenth century), the waves of liberalist and nationalist revolution (the late eighteenth century), and the industrialization and secularization (nineteenth century) in Europe. However, churches (regardless if Catholic or Protestant) are still influential in the society. In the traditional Durkheimian perspective, religion is functional in reminding people of their shared identity, strengthening their interpersonal bonds for contributing to the group's solidarity (Neubeck and Glasberg 2005), and unifying them into a single moral community (Ritzer 2008); whereas the Marxist perspective argued religion as a form of proletariats' false consciousness helping legitimize the unequal system (say, the capitalist society) in terms of exerting control over potential disruption and rebellion from the proletariats (Neubeck and Glasberg 2005). Despite the fundamental ideological difference between Durkheimian and Marxist perspectives, their theses both coincidentally implied that the church, as a religious institution, plays a role in social control for maintaining social stability and oppressing the latent social disruption.

Leung and Chan (2003) summarized the state-church relations in the Western world into two major models—the separation model (from the State for ensuring religious freedom) found in Western democratic countries like the United States and the state-domination model found in the Soviet or totalitarian countries—pointing out that these categorizations are problematic when applied to the cases of Asian or Latin American countries because of diverse well-established religious traditions (11–18). In studying the case of Hong Kong, the theory of institutional channeling, suggested by McCarthy, Britt, and Wolfson (1991), was used to illustrate the indirect state manipulation by conditioning the activities and development of social movement organization (18) through the state power to own and distribute resources to the churches (44) (cited in Leung and Chan 2003).

Nevertheless, the contemporary sociological views argued that the religious institution (church) can also play a role in generating social conflicts/changes in issues of social justice, such as the U.S. Civil Rights Movement raised by Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the 1960s (Neubeck and Glasberg 2005). The contribution of the church on social movement and democratization is another dimension in studying state-church relations. For example, liberation theology, emphasizing the role of the church as a liberator to resist the social unjust in the faith of Jesus Christ (Hoy 1986), has been influential in the Latin American countries with older mass Christianization (Freston 2001). Lumsdaine (2009) summarized the case studies from different scholars in various Asian countries and implied that the evangelicals and churches played the leaven-like role to gradually build up the conscience and habits of responsible citizenship and civic participation (40); several studies showed that the Christian churches are influential in promoting democratization in South Korea (Hong 2009) and in the Philippines (Lim 2009).

Some scholars see the church as a component of civil society that instigates economic interaction within the spheres of intimate groups (e.g., families) and (voluntary) associations, social movements, and forms of public communication (Cohen and Arato 1992, cited in Fleming 2000). When Jürgen Habermas introduced the concept

of “public sphere,” he pointed out that public sphere in civil society encourages discourse; the involvement develops individual autonomy and generates politically relevant public opinion (Fleming 2000). Chan Shun-hing (2008) pointed out that as a member of civil society, the church should be able to promote democratic compatibility, transform the authoritarian state and promote the development of democracy through rational criticism and discourse.

### ***Reviewing State-Church Relations till the Early HKSAR Period***

The case of Hong Kong is unique because the state-church relations did not merely involve two parties (i.e., the churches and the government authorities) but also the influence of the Beijing government. The attitude among the Beijing Communist authorities towards religious organizations, which had fundamental ideological contradiction with the Christian church, is ambivalent. On one hand, every citizen has a religious freedom after the Cultural Revolution in the normative sense (as written in the Constitution amended in 1982); but on the other hand, the Beijing authority has put all religious activities under government control by means of a registration system to prevent any uncontrollable elements that can cause the subversion of the socialist state (Ying 1997). Furthermore, the Beijing government has adopted “united front” strategies to formulate pro-Communist union in the Christian community and established the *National Committee of Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM)* and *China Christian Council (CCC)* for the Protestant Churches and the *Patriotic Catholic Association* for the Catholic Churches under the control of the *State Administration for Religious Affairs*; that was a good illustration of the Soviet model, revealing the politicized evangelicalism under the government’s control (Freston 2001). These religious policies had never been adopted in Hong Kong, but the Beijing government intended to reduce certain kinds of Hong Kong Christian support to those in the Mainland and call for the elimination of their socio-political involvement in Hong Kong (Leung and Chan 2003).

Reviewing the churches in Hong Kong under the British rule, whether Catholics or Protestants, they played an important role in the sociopolitical development in Hong Kong and even in China (such as the late Qing revolutionary activities). Though Rev. C. K. Lee (1987) argued that the political role played by the (Protestant) churches (such as consulting the colonial government) was limited to those led by Western missionaries rather than that of local Chinese, the Chinese-led churches have actively participated in the social issues (apart from providing educational, charity, and medical services), especially in the “anti-keeping handmaid campaign” in the 1930s. Leung and Chan (2003) explained this State-Church relation as “contractual relationship.” Churches played the role of assisting colonial government administration, and this relationship had also lasted to the post-WWII society. In order to prevent infiltration from the newly established Communist regime in China and tackle the great influx of refugees from Mainland due to the political instability, the colonial government intended and encouraged the churches to offer educational and social services (ibid.).

Starting from the 1960s through the 1970s, reduction of Western missionaries and lack of forethoughtful local missionaries caused a losing sense of mission, and the (Protestant) churches were unable to respond to the needs of a society facing drastic socioeconomic change (Lo 2002). In addition to the influence of the Lausanne Congress in 1974, first noticing the Christian responsibility of social involvement rather than the

mere evangelism (Lausanne Covenant 2013), a number of progressive Christians adopted different approaches from the mainstream churches and respectively established various kinds of evangelical organizations/parachurches with the purpose of pioneering social involvement work (*sheguan*). Moreover, apart from the Catholic's *Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese* (DCJP), the Protestant's *Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee* (HKCIC), established within the 1960s–1970s, was a form of early Protestant activism promoting social reform in Hong Kong. It played a role as a “friend of the workers” and applied the Christian faith by empowering the workers through education, assisting them organize trade unions, and bridging different trade unions (whether pro-Communist, pro-Kuomintang, or independent) to fight for the legislation of labor-friendly ordinances, such as the statutory holiday and the paid maternity leave (Lo 2002).

The 1980s was the watershed of state-church relations in Hong Kong because of the Hong Kong sovereignty issue raised in the 1980s. Due to fear of the Communist's restriction of religious freedom after 1997, on one hand, a number of Protestant leaders drafted and signed a series of position papers openly declaring their views on the sociopolitical circumstance in Hong Kong, including the *Statement on Religious Freedom*, the *Statement of Faith*, and the *Beijing Delegation Statement*; on the other hand, prominent church leaders were invited to visit Beijing to interact with Chinese authorities (Leung and Chan 2003, Lo 2002). Furthermore, a number of progressive Catholics and Protestants participating in Hong Kong democratic movements and supporting the Beijing students' democratic movement in 1989 had emerged. Despite the constraints from the conservative church leaders and the implicit warning from the Beijing authorities<sup>1</sup> (Leung and Chan 2003), the progressive Christian activism for social and political reforms still persisted.<sup>2</sup>

Near the handover in 1997, the churches started to reexamine the relations to the pro-Communist SAR government and critically collaborate with her; for example, a group of Protestant church leaders attempted to host the Chinese National Day celebration in 1996 and actively participated in the election committee in 1998. These actions had brought great controversies among the Christian community and had been interpreted as a sign of the churches' support for the undemocratic political arrangement by the SAR government (Leung and Chan 2003). For the Catholic Christians, they adopted a contrasting approach in dealing with the SAR government. Under it, they played a more critical role and even have disputes with the SAR government on the issues of the rights of abode; reforms in education, launching the School-Based Education Administration; and the Basic Law Article 23 legislation (Leung, Tam and Chu 2007).

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<sup>1</sup> In 1986, an article was issued by an author ‘Xin Weisi’ from New China News Agency, the quasi-Chinese consulate in Hong Kong, warning that the churches in Hong Kong should follow the state-church separation (*zhengjiao fenli*) principle and avoid engaging in the political (*zhengzhi*) participation; the article was criticized by the church leaders and clarifying the separation of ‘zheng’ and ‘jiao’ into the separation of government (*zhengfu*) to the religious institution and the government non-intervention to the religious activities, rather than the church avoidance of political participation (Wu C. W. 2010, Leung and Chan 2003).

<sup>2</sup> This can be illustrated by the higher turnout rate among the (Catholic) Christians in the LegCo elections, the establishment of pro-democratic Hong Kong Christian institutes, and the victory of Rev. Fung Chi-wood in the 1991 LegCo direct election (Leung and Chan 2003).

The state-church relations in the pre-1997 Hong Kong induced the three main approaches adopted by the church leaders to the government authorities: (1) the channelized partnership (or contractual relationship) approach, referring to the passive role of church as a contractor of the government by offering education and social service; (2) the critical opposition approach, meaning the active participation in sociopolitical reforms by the progressive Christians; and (3) the organized dependence approach, stating that the church tends to accept the political reality of the Beijing authorities and actively respond to the governments' affairs via active participation in the election committee and the National Day celebration (Chan 1999). These three approaches had been adopted by Christian churches in Hong Kong in different periods.

Previous studies on the state-church relations imply that the Christian churches in Hong Kong, both Catholic and Protestant, play a role in establishing social order by collaborating with the government and in advocating social changes by participating in social movements. In reviewing the previous studies on the state-church relations in Hong Kong, three major issues arise:

First, in reviewing the state-church relation in post-1997 Hong Kong, most studies focused on the relations with the Catholic Church, showing the tense relation between them under the leadership of Bishop Zen (Leung 2009; Leung, Tam, and Chu 2007; Leung and Chan 2003). However, the studies seldom examined the relationship between the state and the Protestant churches, which are more diverse.

Secondly, the drastic sociopolitical changes in post-1997 Hong Kong has made the state-church relations to become complicated such as the July 1 Protest Rally in 2003, the rise of Post-80s campaigns and radicalism as well as the dramatically pass the constitutional reform proposal in 2010, proposing increase number of Election Committee members and the Legislative Councilors; for the latter one, the alleged constitutional reform is not likely to create a new political landscape, but introduce the political uncertainty (Hung 2010).

Lastly, the rise of evangelical pressure groups such as the STL did influence the post-1997 state-church relations; these pressure groups are usually morally conservative and often raise the petitions and the social actions, urging for protecting the traditional moral values in the society, such as the opposition of the soccer betting legalization in 2002, the protest against the Sexual Orientation Discrimination Ordinance (SODO) legislation in 2005 and 2012, etc. This evangelical activism has been criticized as 'religious right', as similar to the Christian Right in the US, referring the Orthodox Christians' movement mobilized around the conservative social causes (Shields 2007), collaborating with the conservative power and the government authorities, even the Beijing authorities (Law 2010).

All of these factors make this research a timely project, for it aims to explore the relations between Protestant churches and HKSAR government and between evangelical activists and the progressive Protestants.

### **Conceptual Framework**

In reference to the previous study on the State-Protestant relations in Hong Kong, the State-Protestant model after 1997 is summarized as follows:

As mentioned, the State-Protestant relations involve at least three parties: the

Beijing authorities, the SAR government, as well as the Protestant churches. The Beijing authorities would indirectly manipulate the church affairs, and the SAR government would strengthen the control of the churches through resources distribution. In response to the SAR government or even to the Mainland, the Protestant churches often have three main approaches: (1) channelized contractual partnership, (2) active collaboration with the government, and (3) opposition to the SAR authorities. Within the Protestant churches, apart from the pastoral leaders, the pro-Beijing camp, the pro-moral evangelical activists,<sup>3</sup> and the progressive Protestants may attempt different approaches to the state under the influence of Post-80s campaign, and -radicalism may influence the Protestants' responses (figure 1).

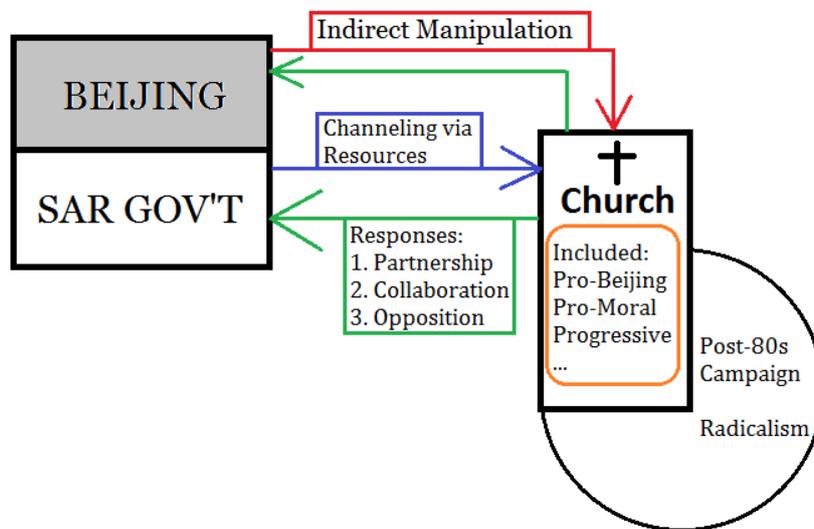


Figure 1. Post-1997 State-Protestant Relations Model in Hong Kong

### Methodology

The study on the State-Protestant relations in post-1997 Hong Kong was conducted using the grounded theory approach, intending to “fill this gap by offering a systematic way of producing theory” with careful attention to empirical materials, including interviews, documents, and archived materials (Packer 2011). The study was a qualitative research consisting of two main methods: documentary content analysis, the major method used for studying the issues and the incidents related to the State-Protestant relations, and in-depth interview of Protestant church leaders who provided a supplementary explanation that the existing documentary has not mentioned on the issue of State-Protestant relations.

The target group in this study is the Protestant church/community. The church, defined in a broader sense, not only refers to those under the traditional Christian denominations but also the parachurches seeking to achieve particular goals for social

<sup>3</sup> In describing a group of Protestants specifically engaging in the social ethics, such as prostitution and homosexuality (Leung & Chan, 2003), the term “evangelical activists” is to be used rather than “religious right,” as “religious right” may refer to the whole conservative Christian camp.

concerns, moral reforms, etc. (Hadden 1999).

For the in-depth interview, the snowball sampling technique was used. Those Protestant churches that are actively involved in political activities and social movements, whether as conservative evangelical activists or as progressive Protestants, were selected as sample. These targeted churches were contacted directly, by phone or e-mail, and indirectly, through relevant people/stakeholders. Four parachurches were successfully interviewed from February to April 2013.

Each of the interview lasted for 60–90 minutes, and the scopes of the semi-structured interview guides consist of the following sections: (1) the background of the churches/parachurches, including their objectives, goals, and work plans; (2) the issues related to their participation in social movements or actions and their observation of sociopolitical participation of other Protestant churches in Hong Kong, aiming at understanding the rationale of their participation; (3) the issues related to the relationship between the churches and the HKSAR government (or even the Beijing government) based on their experience and their observation, including cooperation with and disputes to the government; and (4) their attitudes towards some prevalent political issues, its impact to their social involvement work and the state-church relations in Hong Kong, such as the rise of evangelical activism/“Christian Right,” the Post-80s campaigns, the rise of radicalism, etc. Because of the difference in the nature of church/organization (such as the areas of the social issues concern), their well-known political affiliation and the current issues happened during the period of time, some sensitive or outdated questions in the interview guide have been modified. The interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the interviewees; the principles of anonymity and confidentiality were adopted in the in-depth interview.

For the documentary content analysis, the types of documents included were news reports, editorials, reviews or commentaries, position papers issued by Protestant leaders, etc.; and the sources were mainly websites, Protestant-issued newspapers (such as the *Christian Times* and the *Christian Weekly*), periodicals from Protestant churches/social movement organizations, etc. The purposes were to analyze the patterns and the rationale of the actions or responses taken by the Protestant churches leaders in related to some prevalent issues happened since 1997: the School-Based Management Policy, the Article 23 legislation, the universal suffrage, the Sexual Orientation Discrimination Ordinance (SODO) legislation, the Post-80s campaign, the rise of radicalism and the five-constituency referendum, etc.; the articles were found through entering the relevant keywords from the search engine.

For the data analysis, the audio-recordings from the in-depth interviews were transcribed to Chinese, and the transcripts were analyzed together with the collected documents. Theme-identification strategy was used to categorize and sort the repeating and contrasting patterns of State-Protestant relations.

### **Findings and Discussion**

To address the three objectives of the study, which are the SAR government’s approach to the Protestant churches, the Protestants’ responses to the relations with the state, and their participation in the democratization of post-1997 Hong Kong, the collected materials were categorized in the following themes and sub-themes:

### ***The Post-1997 Protestants' Contractual Relationship with the SAR Government***

More than 639 schools (including all kindergartens, primary schools) and 127 nurseries have been run by the Protestant community in Hong Kong as of the year 2011. They have also provided more than 109 community service centres, 11 children's homes, 169 elderly services organizations, and 59 rehabilitation centres. (HKSAR Government 2012). The wide range Protestant-run educational and social service institutions revealed the SAR government's contractual relationship with the Protestant churches. It is nominally maintained, allowing them to provide educational and social services as the colonial government did. Despite the nominal maintenance, a number of informants and other observers are still doubtful of the SAR government's intention and approach to the Protestant churches.

### ***The Different Mentality of the SAR Government from the Colonial Government***

A number of the Protestant observers, including the informants in the in-depth interview, pointed out that the mentality of the SAR government is not the same as the colonial government in relation to the Protestant churches:

During the period of British rule, the Hong Kong government was relatively tolerant [to opposing values], and was relatively friendly to the Church . . . the trust gained from government was better than nowadays; yet after 1997, the Chinese government has no such a tolerance and you will get trouble if you criticized her . . . (Informant from Protestant Social Movement Organization A; established in the 1980s)

“The early situation of social welfare is that, through pointing out more social problems for raising the public concern, the organizations would be given more resources from the government for organizing the relevant programs . . . yet the [SAR] government could no longer be fear for the organizations; she doesn't fear for everything except the riot . . . and could no longer follow the institution set from the previous British government. (Informant from Protestant Social Movement Organization B established in the 1980s)

During the British colonial administration, the government intended to maintain the contractual relationship with the church because of the considerably higher-quality social and educational services offered by the churches at lower costs (Leung & Chan 2003). That is the British idea of cost-benefit consideration, whereas the SAR government is more intent on centralizing government influence in the society and undermining the influence of non-governmental social service organizations. An editorial from a Protestant media was also doubtful of the intention of the SAR government's social policies towards the social services sector, especially those with Christian background:

“The approaches adopted in the government policy-making since the handover have made people to perceive that the government intends to “de-power” them. In the education, medical and the social service sectors, the government has become the largest stakeholder and the service providers have been constrained by the government through the distribution of resources . . . it undermines the characteristics, visions and missions of the organizations . . . these policies behind is the trend of “de-religionization,” or specifically, the trend of “de-Christianization . . .” (Christian Times 2004)

### ***Strengthened Manipulation from the SAR Government***

The intention of centralizing the government influence in the social sectors could also be

shown in some incidents that happened in post-1997 Hong Kong, particularly the implementation of School-Based Management Policy (SBMP) in 2004, the regulation on the charitable organizations, and the National Education implementation in 2012.

*a. The SMBP Controversy*

In July 2004, the Legislative Council passed the “Education (Amendment) Ordinance 2004.” It required all primary and secondary schools to establish the Incorporated Management Committee (IMC) with 40% of non-sponsoring body board member in the IMC by 2010. The government claimed that the purpose of IMC is to increase transparency, accountability, and democratic participation in school management (Pang 2007), yet there was a great opposition from the Catholic and Protestant school-sponsoring body. The Catholic and Protestant churches both argued that the establishment of IMC would undermine the autonomy and influence of the church in educational institutions; Pang (2007) also pointed out that the SBMP may lower the status of the Christian churches in education institution. The comment from one of the pastoral leaders showed the concern of the church:

The problem [of the SBMP] is that the government at this stage rigidly required the school management committee to add the board members from parents, the alumnus, and so on . . . Why can't the progress of constitutional development be accelerated, but can the SBMP? We shall not oppose the School-based Management in respect of the accountability and the transparency to the society . . . What the author worries is that policy originally aiming for the creation of [development] space would become dogmatized under the hand of the rigid government officials. (Wu C. W. 2004)

*b. The Proposed Strengthened Regulation on the Charitable Organizations*

The charities in Hong Kong are regulated by the Inland Revenue Department, qualifying them as eligible organizations exempting people's donation from taxation, as well as by the Social Welfare Department, approving their donation activities (Wu S. H. 2011).

In 2011, the Law Reform Commission of Hong Kong issued a consultation paper for regulating the charities in Hong Kong; the consultation paper led to great controversies among the charitable organizations, especially those founded by the Christian churches. Two of the controversies were (1) in defining the natures of charities, the consultation paper intended to separate the purposes of advancing “human rights, conflict resolution, or reconciliation” from the category of charitable purposes as it was “too political” (Law Reform Commission of Hong Kong, 2011: 5.102), and (2) the consultation paper suggested to establish a “one-stop” supervisory commission for regulating the work of the charities (12.11). As the churches in Hong Kong are registered as charitable organizations and are undeniably involved in the proposed legislation, the consultation paper was criticized as restricting the churches' involvement in political issues. The proposed establishment of supervisory commission was also criticized as same as the *State Administration for Religious Affairs* in the Mainland, wherein the churches would be directly manipulated by the commission. The following comments from the pastoral leaders showed the controversy:

The church organizations may have no say to the public affairs as the proposed charities commission has power to reject the registration of the relevant organization to be a charity . . . the memorial activities of June Fourth and the concern of the constitutional progress or the

relevant issues would be constrained under the supervision of the Charity Law . . . The author greatly opposes the establishment of the charity commission; as the power of the commission may decide the life and death of the church. It is similar to the church opposition of establishing religious affairs commission to deal with the religion . . . (Wu C. W. 2011)

The two policies from the SAR government did not specifically target the Protestant churches or the whole Christian community, yet these two incidents revealed the intention of the SAR government to strengthen its manipulation of every social sector, including education, charity work, and so on. Those are the measures to centralize the power of the government: de-powering the nongovernment sectors and undermining the civil society. As a member of the civil society, the churches would never be independent from the government manipulation. Under this constraint, those Christian-based education and social service sectors may have to facilitate the government policies. The implementation of National Education was a typical example. One of the informants criticized those Protestant-based schools implementing the National Education, yet the informant mentioned the constraint on these schools despite the disagreement:

Certainly there must be a problem to those church-sponsored schools [implementing National Education] . . . The problem is, with considering their contexts; their hands have held a numerous staff members and these staff members involve a numerous families [livelihood] . . . We need to consider whether these schools have free choice or not . . . (Informant from Protestant Social Movement Organization B established in the 1980s)

#### ***Organized Dependence Approach Adopted by the Protestants—Manifest Active Collaboration with the SAR Government Authorities***

Another phenomenon observed is that the ‘organized dependence’ approach becomes manifest around the Protestant churches. This approach is different from the traditional contractual relationship; these two approaches, in political stance, are both pro-establishment, yet the organized dependence approach is more active in mobilizing members in churches to cooperate and compromise with the government (Chan 1999). In 2004, a number of Protestant pastoral leaders signed the statement *Inclusion and Reconstruction: A Pastoral Letter on Church Mission in Hong Kong* (pastoral letter for short) in response to the political circumstance, advocating resolution of the cultural conflicts and differences between Hong Kong and the Mainland (Chan S. H. 2008). This revealed that after the handover, active collaboration and facilitation with the SAR government has become manifest among the Protestant churches.

#### ***The Open Evangelical and Prayers’ Meetings— the Symbols of Collaboration***

One of the informants criticized the Protestant leaders getting close to the government, citing the attendance situation in the prayers’ meeting:

I go to the prayers’ for the memorial of June Fourth every year as I can, yet there are fewer church leaders participating in and most of them are the members of the Christian Patriotic Democratic Movement . . . whereas when there is a prayers’ meeting with the official participation like Stephen Lam, many of them would join. . .’ (Informant from a Christian organization C, focusing on Christian observation, established in the 1980s)

Compared with the National Day Celebration Service before the handover, similar evangelical meetings involving the implicit acceptance of the state’s power appeared to

be more acceptable after 1997. The existence of a number of evangelical meetings unwittingly involved the interaction with the SAR government authorities, in spite of the non-political purposes (such as to pray for the society in Hong Kong or in purpose of evangelism). A number of senior Christian (Protestant) government officials were often invited to participate in such large evangelical meetings. For instance, in the meeting of the *Global Day of Prayer* organized by Linda Ma, wife of Fredrick Ma (former secretary of commerce and economic development), apart from Stephen Lam, Wong Yan-lung (secretary of justice) and Ambrose Lee (secretary of security) were invited to participate and announced the prayer on behalf of the SAR government (Lee Y. T. 2008).

Furthermore, as Chan (1999) mentioned, this kind of evangelical/prayers' meetings had a strong national sentiment. One obvious example was the "China Prayer Day" held in 2008, the year of the Tibetan Rebellion, the Sichuan Earthquake, and the Beijing Olympic Games. The following advertisement showed the national sentiment:

The snowstorm, Train Crash Accident, the Tibetan Independence Riot, as well as the Sichuan Earthquake in 5.12, the serial disasters happen in this land of China; every heart of the sons and daughters of China is crashed . . . being a Chinese Christian, what should we response to this? Bless our fatherland and pray for her, and let China to recover and rebuild their homes!  
(*Gospel Herald* 2008)

The wordings of the above advertisement, "the sons and daughters of China" (*Zhonghua Er'nu*), "Chinese Christian," and "pray for the fatherland," emphasized the national sentiment. Furthermore, the list of the organizers in the advertisement included a number of pro-Beijing politicians, such as Priscilla Leung and Maria Tam.

#### *Supporting the Pro-Beijing Candidates in the Elections*

The political affiliation among the Protestant churches have become manifest after 1997, and the open support of the pro-Beijing candidates among the Protestant leaders has been prevalent. In the Protestants' suffrage of the Protestant representatives in the CE election committee in 2006, there were a number of candidates who showed their strong pro-establishment/pro-Beijing political stance. Some reports pointed out that those candidates were actively supported by the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government (LOCPG) (Law 2010). In 2008, a number of Protestant pastoral leaders openly endorsed Priscilla Leung, the alleged independent pro-Beijing candidate. There was a report that a reverend implicitly expressed his support of Leung in Sunday worship with apparent avoidance of mentioning her name so as not to violate the election ordinance (Yeung 2010). Another example of the implicit or nearly open support of the pro-Beijing candidates was shown in the open prayer issued by the *Jireh Fund*, a prominent Protestant foundation:

The public opinion polling from HKU showed that the supporting rate of four DAB heavyweight candidates from different constituency are all fell sharply; and the decreasing rate from Jasper Tsang is the greatest, falling from 19% in the last week to only 6% . . . May the LORD rule over the election, and the governing people with the desire of thee may be elected. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.' (*Jireh Fund* 2012)

The above extract has shown that it was not merely a religious prayer but involved an implied political endorsement by intentionally mentioning the disadvantages of pro-Beijing candidates. Although the *Jireh Fund* pleaded that they were politically insensitive and they had not supported any candidate after the issue of the prayer (*Christian Times* 2012), this incident revealed the more and more brazenly political endorsement for the pro-Beijing candidates among the Protestant leaders in the elections after the handover in 1997.

#### *The Active Interaction or Collaboration with the Beijing Authorities*

In 2004, the Chinese Communist authorities introduced the ruling direction of building “harmonious society” (*hexie shehui*), intentionally using the various cultural and religious sectors for stabilizing the Communist’s rule in China (Law 2010). Under this proclamation, the increasing interaction between the Protestant churches and the Beijing authorities appeared to become prevalent. Certainly, the experience on interacting with Beijing had happened since the raising ‘1997 Question’ in the 1980s such as the Pastoral travelling to Beijing in purpose of expressing their viewpoints to Beijing (Leung and Chan 2003), but that travelling was fairly passive under the ‘force’ of the great ‘1997 Question’ in Hong Kong; after 1997, the number of Protestant leaders are more willing to attempt an active response to the Beijing authorities’ direction. One of the typical examples is the proposed construction of Harmony Land in Liaoning province promoted by Rev. Patrick So; the name “Harmony Land” coincidentally “fitted in” the ruling direction of the Beijing authorities. The press release from the Harmony Land showed this delicate relationship between some Protestant leaders and Mainland authorities:

The *Harmony Land* is an un-precedent large tourist integrative project with the blueprint of biblical and Chinese civilizations, showing the harmonious message shared by these two civilizations . . . “Harmony is one of the important messages from the Bible, and also is the ideal of what the Chinese society seeks for. I truly believe the birth of the Harmony Land must be contributive to the national construction” said Rev. So. (Harmony Land Construction Ltd. 2009)

Apart from the case of Harmony Land, there was also the frequent traveling to Beijing to interact with the authorities, such as the “Exchange Trip among the Middle-Aged and Young Pastoral Leaders in Beijing” organized in 2007, with interaction with the senior party secretary and the government officials, especially Liu Yandong from the United Front Department (Chan T. C. 2007). An informant from the in-depth interviews expressed that this interaction may involve the united front strategy from the Beijing authorities:

[The Chinese government] has planted many powerful church ministers [whom the authorities favor]; some of them are the representatives of CPPCC, or some have business in the Mainland . . . To the Communist [government], there are two great potential threats: the religion and the education, thus she would tightly control . . . (Informant from Protestant Social Movement Organization A established in the 1980s)

Certainly, the organized dependence approaches adopted by the Protestant churches involved different intentions, not merely the vested self-interest but also the desirable intention in maintaining or even expanding their evangelical work. Some informants

expressed their observation and perception on this close relation with the authorities:

Before '97, the Protestants had gained many privileges [in social service] from the government due to the sovereignty of Britain; yet after '97, Britain has retreated and churches have to think about how to maintain the current services and how to gain more resources from the government . . . Some of them may sincerely go over to the Communist, whereas some of them may not have this intention and they think that they only have trade with the government under the cautious consideration . . . (Informant from a church D established after 1997)

It is different to say that they are not sincerely doing the holy work; they will perceive themselves as doing a great work . . . to [some of] them, they [the interaction with the Mainland] are not in purpose of pro-government, but probably in purpose of the widespread of Gospel in the Mainland; of course this kind of Christian beliefs is too cheap . . . Yet some of people are really strange, especially those in the Business Men's Fellowship; they gain benefits for business through the networking in the Mainland; and then tell the people that how the God bless them, but in this sense, they could no longer to focus on democracy and rights, etc. (Informant from Protestant Social Movement Organization B established in the 1980s)

### ***The Rise of Pro-Moral Evangelical Activism***

The pro-moral evangelical activism did not originate from the establishment of the Society for Truth and Light (STL) in 1997. Since the 1980s, a number of Protestant pastoral leaders have started to be concerned about the moral delegation in the Hong Kong society, especially the prostitution culture as illustrated by the view of an informant:

[Aside from the social involvement work in the 1970s,] they started to rethink about the cultural issue . . . the so-called Christian right is actually a kind of cultural war, which means they think that the culture in the society would influence whether the people would confess; thus besides the basic needs of the mankind, they are also concern about the soil in the society . . . (Informant from Protestant Social Movement Organization B, established in the 1980s)

The term “religious right” is borrowed from the concept of Christian right in the U.S. A number of scholars and commenters pointed out that the defense of “Natural Family” is the fundamental ideology of the Christian rights. Under the influence of globalization, the idea of Christian right was brought to Hong Kong (Wong 2010, Law 2010). After 1997, the evangelical churches have shown action by strong opposition in response to some moral issues. They opposed the legalization of soccer-betting in 2002, the legislation on sexual-orientation discrimination (SODO) in 2005 and 2013, and the amendment to the Domestic Violence Ordinance <sup>4</sup> in 2009 (Cho 2010, Chan S. H. 2008).

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<sup>4</sup> In the amendment of the “Domestic Violence Ordinance” in 2009, the non-marital cohabitation relationship would be included under its protection. This provoked great opposition from the Christian churches and organizations, worrying that the amendment involving the inclusion of cohabitation relationship into the definition of “family” would challenge the traditional family value and indirectly accelerate the legislation on homosexual marriage (Society for Truth and Light and Hong Kong Sex Culture Society 2009). Finally, the government separated the cohabitation relationship and renamed the ordinance into “Domestic and Cohabitation Relationships Violence Ordinance.” Eventually, the renamed ordinance passed by the LegCo.

### *Supremacy of Family Values over Universal Values*

Evangelical activists were concerned with moral issues mostly involving family values. This family value is shown in the *Declaration on Defending Family* issued by the Hong Kong Alliance for Family, the STL, and the SCS in 2008:

Request for the government and the LegCo candidates to firmly support the policies on defending the family and the monogamy marriage: We believe that marriage is a connection of one man and one woman; it is the basis for the continuous development and the re-generation of the mankind society . . . Once the basis of family is disintegrated, the whole society would also be in harm. (Hong Kong Alliance for Family, Society for Truth and Light and Hong Kong Sex Culture Society 2008)

Wong (2010) described the phenomenon of the pro-moral movement in Hong Kong as not a unique case but under the influence of the worldwide campaigns. Despite the Christian belief, the Christian rights in the U.S. intend to ally with religion, including the Islam, in defense of family value (47–48). Law (2010) had a similar viewpoint and argued that the “religious right” in Hong Kong undermines some dogma and Christian beliefs for the purpose of allying with the conservative camp to tackle the enemies of the society. Some of the examples have shown the supremacy of family values. They have defended that these values, such as heterosexuality and monogamous family system, are not merely of the Christian faith but are also regarded in Chinese traditions. In a website, one Christian pressure group expressed its opposition to the SODO in terms of Chinese traditions rather than Christian faith:

As most of us are Chinese, we value harmony, mutual respect and the Confucian principles . . . This so-called Sexual-Orientation Discrimination and its relevant “equalization” bills will bring about the affiliated discrimination . . . Furthermore, the expansion of sex liberation and the “gay activism” has threatened and challenged the traditional marriage and families . . . (Parent for the Family Association 2012)

### *The Bourgeois Culture—Fostering the Pro-Moral Activism*

Some reviews from the Protestant commenters and the informants revealed that the pro-moral activism has also been fostered by the bourgeois culture in Hong Kong. Undeniably, the bourgeoisie in Hong Kong has already been raised after the economic growth in the 1970s. An informant observed that the culture of the bourgeoisie was introduced to the Protestant churches:

As most of the believers are the middle class, the concern from the middle class has naturally become the concern of the church . . . [Like the middle class in Hong Kong], they tend to emphasize their own effort to their success, whereas perceives the problem of poverty as the result of personal laziness . . . they often care about their children, family and the sexual issues, and concerning whether their children would become unmarried parent or the homosexual . . . (Informant from a Christian organization C, focusing on Christian observation, established in the 1980s)

The extract revealed that apart from the long-lasting Protestant tradition on obeying social order, the bourgeois culture in Hong Kong have brought about political and moral

conservative mentality among the Protestant churches. Chiu (2011), another pastoral leader, also observed the bourgeois mentality among the Protestant churches, including the supremacy of economic prosperity over the values of democracy and liberty and fear for socioeconomic instability due to democratization (21–23), implying the core idea of “maintaining status quo” may be coincidentally similar to the moral conservatism promoted by the evangelical activists.

*“Unholy Alliance” between “Religious Right” and the Pro-Beijing Camp?*

The debate on the issue of ‘Religious right’ has raised with the manifest collaboration with the government authorities; a number of scholars often included the pro-moral evangelical activists into the camp of ‘religious right’ like in case of the US and argued that they have allied with the camp of the neo-conservatism, including the pro-Beijing camp (Law 2010). Some examples undeniably showed that there has been an active interaction between some evangelical activists and government authorities as well as pro-Beijing politicians, such as the district carnival organized by the DAB with the cooperation of the evangelical churches and activists (Tsui 2007). In another case of the SODO legislation and the large opposition assembly held on January 13 by a number of evangelical churches and activists, some informants in the interviews expressed the delicate relations with some the government officials:

Someone has mentioned that in the 1.13 assembly, some government officials expressed to the pastoral leaders that CY [the chief executive] had intended to mention about the homosexual issues [the legislation] in his policy address; otherwise, they wouldn’t insist to organize that assembly . . . (Informant from a Christian organization C, focusing on Christian observation, established in the 1980s)

There are many similarities to them [the evangelical activists and the pro-Beijing camp]: maintaining status quo . . . their actions may probably be based on their comprehension to the Christianity, but when transferring their beliefs to the public action, they have to seek the [political] tools for help . . . (Informant from a church D established after 1997)

Nevertheless, in terms of the political spectrum in Hong Kong, it is fairly overgeneralized to assertively categorize the evangelical activists into pro-Beijing/pro-establishment as some of the pro-moral evangelical activists tended to be affiliated with the pro-democrat camp; in response to the criticism of the pro-establishment political stances, the SCS defends herself as follows:

The label [of the collaboration with the State] is not applicable to the SCS. Despite a society not for concerning the political issues, since the foundation of the SCS, we have participated in the June Fourth memorial activities, the opposition of Basic Law Article 23 legislation, and expressed our support on universal suffrage; our chairman and the staff have openly requested for release of Liu Xiaobo . . . (Mak 2012)

The author does not intend to doubt the Christian faith held by the pro-moral evangelical activists. Undoubtedly, the above discussion showed that it was too assertive to generalize the whole evangelical activists into the “religious right” or even the conservative camp in Hong Kong. Unfortunately, there was a coincidence between the value promoted from the evangelical activists, the conservatism among the evangelical churches (especially the attitude of political apathy yet enthusiasm on moral concern) and

the ideologies of the pro-Beijing camp. Additionally, the evangelical activists did use political means (intentionally or not), such as the large assembly or the lobbying with pro-Beijing politicians for their non-political purposes (defending family value). It would not be difficult to uncover the delicate relations between the “religious right” (including the evangelical activists and the conservative Protestant leaders) and the government authorities with the whole conservative camp.

It was argued that there has been an “unholy alliance” among the church, the government, and the merchants in Hong Kong (Lee T. S. 2008). It may be explained in terms of the social polarization brought by the socioeconomic change after 1997. In maintaining the capitalism in Hong Kong under the direction of “one country, two systems,” the Beijing government intended to maintain the political domination of businessmen via small-circle election committee of the CE and the Functional Constituencies maintenance in the LegCo and formed the politically conservative CCP-Business ruling coalition (Hung, 2010). Nevertheless, the Asian financial crisis and the economic recession brought about the class polarization with the blockade of social mobility, causing the grassroots’ social discontent and the popular mobilization against the rule coalition in 2003 (ibid.).

As mentioned, under the CCP ruling direction of “harmonious society,” the Beijing authorities attempted to manipulate the churches using “united front” strategy. At the same time, the pro-Beijing politicians did more or less utilize the evangelical activists for increasing their bargaining chips. Despite the desirable intention among the evangelical activists, their social actions were eventually utilized by the pro-Beijing/pro-establishment politicians:

The pro-establishment [LegCo members] opposed the [SODO] legislation, yet what are their rationales? They cannot provide and they have no religious background; thus they would utilize the religious groups as a backup in order to make themselves to be convincing . . .”  
(Informant from Protestant Social Movement Organization A, established in the 1980s)

### ***Unconventional Responses Adopted by the Progressive Protestants***

In spite of the active collaborative approach adopted by the mainstream Protestant churches to relate with government authorities, a number of progressive Protestants who have actively engaged in the issues of social justice, human rights, and democratization in Hong Kong, attempted the critical and opposing approach to the SAR government: On one hand, the progressive Protestants actively participated in social movements promoting social and political reforms. On the other hand, those progressive Protestants started to criticize the collaboration with the government authorities among a number of Protestant churches and attempted various measures for the purpose of checking this situation.

### ***Platform of Civil Human Rights Front—Unifying the Progressive Protestants***

Since the 1980s, a number of Protestant pressure groups and social movement organizations have emerged in response to the 1997 Question and the democratization in Hong Kong, such as the *Christians for Hong Kong Society* (1987) and *Hong Kong Christian Institute* (1988). In the few years after the handover to China, those Christian organizations (whether Catholics or Protestants) founded an interdenominational alliance, the “July-1 Linkage,” advocating public participation in democratization and seeking the

international concern (Wu R. 2008). After the handover, the increasing socioeconomic problems provoked social discontent. In addition to the legislation of the Basic Law Article 23, i.e., the National Security Ordinance that started in 2002, the original “July 1 Linkage” members allied with other pressure groups and pro-democrat parties and founded the *Civil Human Rights Front*. Rose Wu, the general director of the Hong Kong Christian Institute, became the convener of this new alliance. The following is her witness for the foundation:

Playing the role of prophet, we [the Christians] are required to be brave in standing to the side of the powerless and say no to the unjust authority . . . For playing the role of prophet, the (former) members of “July 1 Linkage” prior choose the poor people and the groups intending to promoting human rights and social justices to form an alliance . . .” (Wu R. 2008)

Since the mass July 1 demonstration in 2003, there has been a protest rally held on July 1 every year, advocating universal suffrage of the chief executive and all LegCo members as well as concerns on human rights, especially the recent tight control of assembly and petition rights and the increasing political prosecution from the police. The Civil Human Rights Front provided a platform to unify the progressive Protestants with the Catholic groups to organize collective actions, such as prayers’ meetings. An informant from one of the member organizations of the front expressed their experience in organization:

We would unify other organizations with the same belief, such as the DCJP, and organize the joint prayers’ meeting or the conference . . . If there is a single organization [mobilizing the public to social action], only a few hundred people would be called . . . In the July 1 demonstration and the June Fourth [memorial] every year, we would organize the prayers’ meeting together . . . (Informant from Protestant Social Movement Organization B established in the 1980s)

#### *Challenging the State-Church Collaboration*

Apart from the active social activism for social and political reforms, a number of progressive Protestants started to criticize the problems of the Protestant churches, such as the close relations with the government authorities and the powerful pro-Beijing Protestant leaders, as well as the anti-homosexual action and speech from the evangelical activists/“religious right.” They founded the Facebook group “Back to Christ Alliance” in response to the Gospel Day of Prayer in 2010:

On the date 31 May 2009, a group of Christian demonstrate the banner in the *Global Day of Prayer*, and proclaim the declaration, showing [our] discontent to the tangling relationship between the mainstream churches and the influential people and those in the establishment . . . (Back to the Christ Alliance 2009)

This group of people adopted a relatively radical approach to protest the state-church collaboration. For example, the alliance allied with another group, “Actions for Concerning Religious Hegemony,” and organized the petition to Kongfuk Church under the leadership of Rev. Daniel Ng and protested his speech on being subject to the governing authorities (Lai 2010).

#### *Impacts of Post-80s Campaign and the Rapid Political Changes*

Chiu (2011) responded to the discourse of ‘four generations’ from Lui T. L. and argued

those Post-80s activism including the conservation campaign of the Star Ferry Pier and the Queen Pier (2006–2007) and the Anti-XRL campaign (2010) did challenge the individualistic and conservative value (i.e., emphasizing social order and stability yet neglecting the values of liberty and democracy) among the middle class/ the ‘Baby boom’ generation in Hong Kong (19-20). The Post-80s campaigns and the rapid political changes (including the Five-Constituency referendum and the recent Anti-National Education campaign) did not merely challenge the bourgeois in Hong Kong, but also the approaches adopted by Protestant churches’ in relations to the State as the youngsters/ the Post-80s brought about the new ways of thinking towards the social involvements:

It is desirable. Be honest, we feel tired when we have participated in social involvement for many years . . . the participation of Post-80s/Post-90s can supplement our limitations in social movement involvement . . .” (Informant from Protestant Social Movement Organization A established in the 1980s)

The Post-80s campaign also challenged the existing avoidant attitude of the mainstream churches towards politics in Hong Kong society:

I won’t foresee the churches can stop the believers going to protest rally; you can see that in the assembly of more than 100,000 practitioners against the National Education implementation, many of them are the Christians . . . When the believers participate in the political activities, what the church should do is the pastoral care, rather than avoidance in talking this . . . (Informant from Protestant Social Movement Organization B established in the 1980s)

### **Implications and Limitations**

The State-Protestant relations in post-1997 Hong Kong were summarized as follows:

Due to the mentality of centralizing power in the Hong Kong society, the SAR government intended to de-power various social sectors/the civil society by introducing SBMP to undermine the church’s influence in the education sector as well as the proposed legislation for regulating the charities (including churches) for further manipulation, which means that the traditional contractual relationship in operation would no longer be maintained. In response to the handover to China, more and more Protestant pastoral leaders adopted the organized dependence approach in actively interacting with the SAR government authorities or even the Mainland authorities. A number of the Protestant leaders openly support pro-Beijing politicians. The rise of the pro-moral evangelical activism after 1997 has also been a concern. Despite the nonpolitical intention, the ideological basis of the evangelical activists coincidentally matched with the conservatism among the bourgeoisie in Hong Kong and the pro-Beijing camp, and there was mutual utilization between them. Nevertheless, the number of progressive Protestants adopted contrasting approach in critically advocating social justice and reforms. The increasing Protestant criticism and -drastic political changes also challenged the State-Protestant relations. From this pattern, there are four main implications in this study:

1. The State-Protestant relation in Hong Kong is a complicated model, involving different parties with various vested interests and different ideological bases. First,

under the SAR governance, what the churches face is no longer merely the government in Hong Kong but the Beijing authorities as well. Moreover, even within the Protestant churches, due to differences in denomination, vested interest, theological bases, the political stances, etc., they would adopt different approaches in relating to the state.

2. The intended “de-powerment” measures by the SAR government and the foundation of Civil Human Rights Front revealed that the church, as a component of civil society, is powerful in changing the society or even shaking the stability of the ruling authority because of the religious supremacy in the public space. However, the Protestant churches wittingly avoided the involvement in some politically sensitive issues (like the human rights and universal suffrage) due to vested interests and/or theological bases. The author does not intend to ask the Protestant churches for more political involvement, but the increasing criticism on selective social concerns on moral issues yet not on social injustice needs to be addressed.
3. In discussing the phenomenon of “religious right,” despite the ideological coincidence between the evangelical activists and the conservative camp, it is arbitrary to simply classify them into “religious right” or pro-Beijing camp. However, there is a delicate relationship between the evangelical activists and the conservative camp as well as the government officials in Hong Kong.
4. In predicting whether the collaborative State-Protestant relations will be intensified or not, one should not neglect the response of the progressive Protestants. The experiences shared by the informants and the other commenters have shown the numerous Protestants participating in the demonstration or the social campaign without the mobilization from the church, meaning the Protestants’ participation in advocating human rights and democracy is a bottom-up mode rather than the top-down one (except the church mobilization for collective social action because of the moral issue). In some cases, the non-pastoral Protestants may also bring the challenge to the church to reflect on their political affiliation. One typical example is the “Occupying Central” action advocated by Benny Tai, a moderate democrat and a Protestant law expert, bringing about the widespread discussion on the civil disobedience within the Protestant churches.

This study is not a theological discussion on which approaches in dealing with the state-church relations is more appropriate in the basis of Christian faith, but this study intends to illustrate the importance of the Christian church in bringing the social changes and reforms, especially in post-1997 Hong Kong.

As expected, the study is limited by the following: The limited successful cases of interview showed that it is challenging to gain rapport with the organizations and the mainstream churches for this kind of politically sensitive issues. It is unsuccessful to interview more community churches and pro-moral evangelical organization, and their stories could only come from their published documents. Moreover, this study involving documentary analysis may be handicapped by the restricted access to confidential sources from the government authorities and the churches. Thus, only indirect feedbacks from the interviewees can be used for analysis. Despite the limitations, it is expected that the study will bring inspiration for the further academic research on the issue of state-church relations in Hong Kong.

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### Biographic Note

Lam Tsz Hang is the 2013 graduate of Bachelor of Applied Sociology (Honours) in Psychology at City University of Hong Kong.

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