

## Informed Perspectives: Rethinking the Spirituality of Hong Kong Protests

[00:00:01] **Kurtis Schaeffer** Welcome, everyone, thank you for joining Informed Perspectives, Rethinking the Spirituality of Hong Kong Protests with our esteemed guests Ting Guo, Antony Dapiran, Shirley Lin and Emanuele Berry. Today's webinar is hosted by the Religion, Race & Democracy Lab at the University of Virginia. I'm Kurtis Schaeffer, co-director of the Lab. This program is a continuation of the Lab's series Informed Perspectives, which brings journalists, documentarians and humanities scholars into conversation about issues concerning religion, race and politics. We'd like to thank the Luce Foundation and the ACLS program in Religion, Journalism and International Affairs for so generously sponsoring this event. We hope you will join us again on Thursday, March 4th, for the next program in our series featuring a screening of the Lab's newest documentary film, *God \$ Green: An Unholy Alliance*. This film is about religion, politics, race and climate change. For more information, go to [religionlab.virginia.edu/events](http://religionlab.virginia.edu/events). Now a few notes to our audience who I want to encourage to raise questions throughout our event. To do so, please use the Q&A function at the bottom of your screens. The chat and raise hands functions have been disabled. If we have time at the end we'll field some of your questions. Please note all attendees have the ability to upvote each other's questions. Also, we are recording today's webinar, which will be made available on the Lab's website next week. And now I'd like to turn it over to our hosts Clara Ma and Matthew Slaats. Thank you.

[00:01:52] **Clara Ma** Hello, everyone, I am Clara Ma, a Ph.D. candidate in the McIntire Department of Arts.

[00:01:59] **Matthew Slaats** And I'm Matthew Slaats, a PhD candidate in the UVA school of architecture. So if you arrived a little early, you may have heard some audio of Hong Kong. We wanted to start the webinar by kind of setting the scene and creating a connection, both mentally and emotionally with all that has been going on in Hong Kong over the last few years, though, we also want to start by playing another brief audio clip.

[00:02:38] **Audio Clip** (Audio clip, protesters singing "Sing Hallelujah.")

[00:03:15] **Clara Ma** What we're hearing is an audio from the 2019 protests, the protests that brought millions of people to the street in response to a proposed change to the extradition law in Hong Kong, which would allow Hong Kong to detain and transfer people suspected of crimes to jurisdictions which the city does not have existing bilateral extradition agreements before, including mainland China, Taiwan, Macao. So though it is the last bit of the audio that we just heard, like when protesters singing sing hallelujah to the Lord that piqued our interests. What is what is this mean meaning? And why would it become such a vital part of the protests?

[00:04:05] **Matthew Slaats** So we see this and other examples where religion and protest are mixing in Hong Kong. There were shrines, there were hymns, churches became a site of safety. So during the summer of 2020, with the support of the Religion, Race & Democracy Lab, Clara and I had this amazing opportunity to create a podcast that allowed us to dig a little deeper into what the protests of practices meant to Hong Kong.

[00:04:35] **Clara Ma** Our initial focus was on the hymns and also alters that were created in response to the death of several protesters. Though as we speak to people we realized that these activities were part of a larger picture. So we began to think about the

relationship between faith in religion and faith in democracy and how these form a spirituality that manifests in these protests.

[00:05:04] **Matthew Slaats** And so while we had this, we spoke to so many amazing people during the editing process of the podcast, we could only really share very small snippets of what were really amazing experiences of all that was going on in Hong Kong.

[00:05:22] **Matthew Slaats** So tonight or morning, if you're calling in, or listening in from Asia, we wanted really just to bring some of those voices back together and add a few new ones to more deeply engage the ideas and think about their connection around the globe, especially at this moment.

[00:05:43] **Clara Ma** So joining us are four great panelists, which I have the pleasure to introduce. Ting Guo, a scholar of religious studies based in University of Hong Kong, whose research focuses on political religion and postsecularism. Antony Dapiran, a Hong Kong based lawyer and author of two books on Hong Kong protests, including *City of Protests, A Recent History of Dissent in Hong Kong* and the most recent book, *City on Fire The Fight for Hong Kong*. Shirley Lin, professor of politics at the Miller Center of Public Affairs at the University of Virginia, an expert on China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, international political economy, national identities. And Emanuele Berry, executive editor of *This American Life*, who has covered stories in both the United States and Hong Kong.

[00:06:44] **Matthew Slaats** And so we want to start by turning to a conversation, turning our conversation over to Professor Ting Guo to set the stage, though we also we wanted to play one more short clip to get us moving forward.

[00:07:23] **Clara Ma** So I would like to first ask Ting, could you share to tell us a little bit about what we just hear or what in general, what are some of the religious activities that we saw in the protests and why we see such use of religious rituals and symbols in the protests? And further in general in Hong Kong, what is the relationship between religious identity and political identity?

[00:07:50] **Ting Guo** Yeah, sure, of course. Hi everyone, thank you for having me really excited to be here. As Clara already mentioned and as you've just heard from the audio clips, there's just a great diversity of religious elements throughout the protests. So I would like to introduce this notion of diffused religion, general religious diffusion, to describe this kind of great diversity, really heterogeneous diversity of religion in Hong Kong. So why do we see so many religious elements throughout the protests? It's because religion is everywhere. Religion is deeply embedded in everyday life, in the social life, political life, in everyday life. I think that's the nature of religious diversity, diffusion. is that religious activities or religious elements and religious rituals are not so divorced from social secular structures and secular elements. So in particular in Chinese societies, as these as sociologist C.K. Yang introduced this notion in the 60s to explain why it may be religion in China or Chinese religions and not so obvious compared to maybe Christianity in Europe, for instance. It is because so many of the elements are in the everyday life or in the secular life, for instance, in imperial China, using kinship, you see the structure of a society, how how things work in general. And these are all religious elements. And in today's Hong Kong, if you're walking in central Hong Kong in the most in the busiest financial political center in Hong Kong, but at the same time, you also see the little shrines, little offerings, maybe in the shadow of the big buildings and in the in the homes of people. Even for Christians, you also see the offerings maybe and the food we eat the festivals, the way we celebrate certain festivals. And that's also how religions are carried out as

practiced in Hong Kong and Chinese society in general. So that's the definition of diffused religion. And it is because religion and religions are so integrated, so intimately related to everyday life, to social life in the life that we see this kind of very interesting religious elements throughout the protests, I think. And the most obvious one and the most prominent ones maybe is Christianity, because Christianity is kind of such a marker. It's it's so it's a particularly organized and it's very it's easier to spot than other religions. So we see "Sing Hallelujah to the Lord" that we heard that just now from the audio clip, these organized form of religious activities, they are easier to spot. And quite often people would relate that to Hong Kong's colonial history because Hong Kong was once colonized by Britain. And that's why we see Christianity.

[00:11:02] **Ting Guo** Maybe, but it's not that simple. There's a longer history of the Cold War of Hong Kong social history that makes that has made Christianity a religion, with more social capital or easier to spot and more obvious organized form of religion in Hong Kong. And it wasn't until, for instance, the Cold War, when the colonial government wanted to curb the enthusiasm, nationalistic concerns of Hong Kong, the Chinese community in Hong Kong, and stand against the communism on mainland, on the mainland, in mainland China that they wanted to emphasize to give the church more power. And part of the reason why we are seeing Christianity as a more obvious religion in social life and sort of protest as well. But we also witnessed chants: Buddhist, Daoist with some religious elements in the protest as well.

[00:12:07] **Ting Guo** And quite often the popular or Buddhist Daoist religious elements are not that easy to distinguish from each other. That's again, the nature of diffused religions. So Han Chinese Buddhism and Daoism and vernacular forms of popular religions, various worship's they often diffusing to each other, and that's not that easy to distinguish from each other.

[00:12:31] **Ting Guo** So we see offerings of incense, of fruits, of sour milk, of various food, of drinks, of flowers outside a shopping mall where protesters where a protester died. So people had this makeshift shrine dedicated to him and offering there is food as if they are doing that, maybe a home or maybe of various activities at the various religious festivals. So that, again, that just shows how diffused religion is in Hong Kong's everyday life and social life and in political life as well. And so. And. Earlier that got mentioned there's a longer history, a political history of how religions take part in Hong Kong's political life, and that was in part mobilized Christianity, both Christianity and Chinese religions, including Buddhism, Daoism, popular religions, religions, were mobilized by different political parties in the history of Hong Kong. Christianity was mobilized by the colonial government. But at the same time, Chinese religions were also mobilized by the Communist Party or by the Nationalist Party in the early part of the 20th century.

[00:13:59] **Ting Guo** So religions, as an organized form of religions, were organized, mobilized by different political parties to serve that ideological purposes. But the same time people were also people were being mobilized. At the same time, what was being mobilized was people's own hopes and dreams, what they wanted for their lives, what they what kind of society or community they had in mind. So people were actively taking part in the process of mobilization as well, people organizing themselves through religious forms, secret societies or Daoist, Buddhist organizations, or even those associations with religious institutions in mainland China or in other parts of the world, as well. As people taking part in forming this community, their own community in Hong Kong through religion from the very start.

[00:14:58] **Ting Guo** So when we think of Hong Kong today, when the Chinese community first emerged in Hong Kong in the early colonial times, the the best way for them to organize themselves to serve their own community was through religion. Just had to have various rituals to have various societies, religious societies, secret societies. So today we see certain in Chen Wan, in Hong Kong, we see the Momo Temple.

[00:15:30] **Ting Guo** So that was a that was when Chinese hospitals, Chinese medical legal kinds of organization started. They all started from this Temple. And this temple served a purpose of organizing Chinese community in Hong Kong and providing the sort of really secular but also civil needs for the for the Chinese back then.

[00:15:58] **Ting Guo** So the Chinese the community in Hong Kong in the way started through religion. So that's how interrelated religions are with Hong Kong society in general. So I think in general, that's yeah. That's in as an introduction.

[00:16:27] **Matthew Slaats** Great, so so recognizing the diversity of religious identities at this local scale, we also wanted to kind of unpack the identity of Hong Kong protesters, particularly like how political protests become a means of expression. So now we want to bring in Antony, Shirley, and Emanuele into the conversation and to kind of hear a little bit more about about the protest more specifically. So, Antony, could you tell us a little bit more about why Hong Kong has such a strong culture of of political protests? Like what's that history and how do the acts of political protest relate to the identity of Hong Kongers?

[00:17:20] **Antony Dapiran** Sure. Thank you for the question and thanks for having me. So Hong Kong is is is somewhat unique in the world and is partly as a legacy of the British colonial era that Hong Kong has a very low level of representative democracy. We do have a legislature here called the Legislative Council, which is is is partially elected. Half of the seats are elected by a sort of system of universal suffrage with with seats or districts similar to what you would see in in Congress, in the US or in parliaments in the U.K. or elsewhere. But the other half of the seats are elected by small special interest groups called Functional Constituencies. And the design of this this this democratic system, pseudo democratic system is that the the pro Beijing parties will always remain in control. So it's a very low level of representative democracy. But at the same time, Hong Kong does have or has had up until now, and we can discuss the position after the introduction of national security law last year, but has had up until now a very high level of rights and freedoms. And these are constitutionally guaranteed in Hong Kong's constitution, the basic law. And these include all of the rights and freedoms that you would expect in a fully democratic society, things like freedom of speech and freedom of assembly and many other rights and freedoms. And so this is really a somewhat unique combination because normally you would expect those rights and freedoms to go hand in hand with it, with a democratic society and the societies that are lacking in democracy, they also similarly have those rights and freedoms constrained in some way. But Hong Kong uniquely has this combination of of what former Governor last Governor Chris Patten called liberty without democracy. So what that means is that when the people of Hong Kong have a grievance with the government, they can't effectively vote the government out of office. There's no mechanism through the ballot box to to air their grievances, but they can take to the streets in protest and exercise those rights and freedoms that they're constitutionally guaranteed in Hong Kong. And so political protest becomes an important means of of political expression and effecting political change in a system where where there's not a full level of democracy. But there's something I think more more fundamental and going more fundamentally, to to Hong Kong as identity that is part of this culture of political protest, and that is this. Uh these rights and freedoms, are something that have been

referred to as Hong Kong core values. And this is something that's referred to by the government themselves when they're trying to tout the benefits of doing business in Hong Kong for international businesses in particular, but but also trying to sell the benefits of Hong Kong society to the people themselves. And it's the system of Hong Kong core values. Are these rights and freedoms, the common law system, an independent judiciary, a relatively relatively transparent and a corruption free government. And all these things are wrapped up in this notion of Hong Kong core values. And this idea of Hong Kong core values has come to become something that distinguishes Hong Kong from the rest of mainland China and indeed much of the rest of Asia. And whereas in the past, going back 20 or 30 years, Hong Kong might have sought to distinguish itself on a on a material basis by saying that Hong Kong is a is a wealthy and developed modern city, whereas the rest of mainland China, it was relatively at the time, undeveloped and not advanced and much poorer. The advances in the Chinese economy and China generally have led China very much to catch up materially. But Hong Kong has still pointed to these Hong Kong core values as the things that distinguish Hong Kong. And so in many ways, in answer to the question, what is it that makes Hong Kong, Hong Kong? what is it that makes Hong Kong a different and special place? And what is it that makes Hong Kongers, Hong Kongers? This idea of Hong Kong core values has become very important as the central as a central aspect of Hong Kong identity. And so when Hong Kongers take to the streets to protest, often it is in defense of those Hong Kong core values. And at the very same time, they are they are exercising the rights and freedoms that are fundamental to those core values in the act of protest. And so in many ways, the act of protest becomes a performance of identity for Hong Kongers, that sort of leads to this this this sort of saying that where we are, Hong Kongers, therefore we protest. That this becomes something that is something that Hong Kongers do to express those those aspects of their identity to to exercise those rights of freedoms. And they do it in pursuit of protecting those rights and freedoms when they see them as coming under perceived attack, as indeed they did during the extradition bill protest movement of 2019. So that's sort of the structural and I guess identity factors that I see between Hong Kong's very strong culture of political protest that has developed in particular in the in the in the 20 years since the handover, but really goes back as far as a century ago throughout the British colonial rule as well.

[00:22:51] **Clara Ma** Thank you, Antony, for mentioning, like the the how like the core values that include Hong Kong people that really informs. Some of these protest activities that we've seen. so as we see, and I think you also mentioned the idea of democracy, all this dilemma, it seems like there is a low level of democracy, but it also became a main part of how Hong Kong people view themselves as different. So I want to I would like to also ask Shirley about these questions of how this all from your from your point of view, how does the desire of democracy relate to the maybe the formation or the development of the local identity of Hong Kongers? And we look at the protests in 2019, 2020, how do you see the emergence of a collective identity among protesters through a variety of protest related activities?

[00:24:04] **Shirley Lin** Thank you, Clara. First of all, it's really a great pleasure to be here, even though I'm not on Grounds, but it's great to see friends and be part of the Religion Lab. This is always a topic I wanted to talk about. But it's not my strength in terms of study of religion. But really what I do is very tied to our topic today. A collective identity is like religion. It requires faith in common values. And it is what I call consummatory. and it is above and beyond all values, especially material values. And that is the basis of my research, which has evolved also into discussions of high income economies. And what academically is intriguing is very few high income countries are non-democratic except for resource countries as well as, of course, in the case of Hong Kong, it is a special

administrative region. It is not a country. And so the issue, of course, of collective identity is first you have to identify who are your members and then you decide what are those values. And this is what makes Hong Kong very interesting. And as a scholar also of Taiwan, this is much more interesting if you actually think about it comparatively, because Taiwan also went through a period of, first of all, defining who is Taiwanese before it can discuss what are Taiwanese values. So the first issue of Hong Kong, of course, is many people came from China or predominantly came from China. So is China the community or is the Hong Kong community, is it the community that we care about? And I think that's very important because religion has a component to it, that is, we want to benefit all mankind from most religions. And so that sort of is at the core of a debate among a lot of the protesters. Do we care only about Hong Kong in exclusion of other people or do we care about other people and care about universal and liberal values? Now, on a personal level, I am also a Hong Konger. I've been living there for more than 30 years. I care deeply about it. But at the same time, I'm also a Taiwanese. And that begs the question of can we have multiple identities or are we forced to choose to have only exclusionary identity? I teach in Hong Kong, at University of Virginia the last ten years, half a year in each place. So I see the comparison. I also sometimes teach in Taipei, in Beijing and the generation of Hong Kongers we are talking about that I've been teaching for the last decade and who are protesting grew up very differently than others. They grew up after the handover. They were educated without any direct colonial influence, but still inherited what they regard as the positive legacy of a colonial Hong Kong with its distinctive history and identity formation. Lastly, on an abstract level, it is a negotiation which involves who you are as well as who you think you are not. And it's a narrative which requires consensus and discussions. It takes time and can be highly contentious. It usually is. And Hong Kong did not have a chance to do so slowly or through time as Taiwan did. The pressure came rather suddenly and then negotiation became very intense and at times violent, if you will. And I think this is understandable if you look at comparative national identity or identity formation. So let me go into a bit more detail about the question that Clara posed. In my book I discuss, of course, consummatory or ultimate values that instrumental values. Now, many people talk about this, that the protests originally originated in substandard economic structure with increasing inequality, high youth unemployment and lack of affordable housing. So some people say there are no values. It's all about the material comfort. Now, this debate, of course, started raging on, particularly over decades, but particularly since 2003 because of article 23, the national security law that was going to be legislated and that was in the shadow of the SARS economic crisis. So there is some understanding that there are economic pressures. But just like Taiwan, it is clear that with or without economic security, young people view freedom and democracy as consummatory, which involves a fundamental faith and they are worth dying for. And they are of the highest importance. So in essence, they are non-negotiable. The polls show the last two decades that Hong Kong identity has evolved rather quickly from 2008, at the height of people feeling Chinese young people have now seen themselves more and more as Hong Kongers and not Chinese. They are two different concepts. You can think of yourself self as both as I just said, or you could think of yourself as exclusively one and not the other. Now, according to the Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute, 30 percent of Hong Kongers, age 18 to 19, said they were exclusively Chinese. But that figure started slipping rather quickly over time. And between 2008 and 2020, Hong Kongers age under 20 and 29, self-identified as exclusively Hong Kong from 23 percent to now over 80 percent in 2020. By comparison, this kind of trend takes other communities much longer period of time. Taiwan took more than 30 years to move in this direction and Hong Kong really shortened this, accelerated this. In each case, young people focus on the same civic values such as democracy, freedom of speech, freedom of speech and press and pluralism. A survey by Hong Kong scholars in 2020, which echo many other surveys, at

Chinese U. at Hong Kong U., at Baptist U. investigated the values among Hong Kong youth who said that universal value was the most important value for them. Freedom of opinion, number one. Democracy, number two, freedom at any cost. They were the three most important values. And there is a huge generational gap. In older surveys you see that the older generation believe the most important value embodying Hong Kong is rule of law, and some would also say allowing for economic prosperity. So you see this gap, this fight at dinner tables in families everywhere, in communities between teachers and students. So someone can tend in the past, Hong Kong identity had always been a local or subnational identity. This is the word I use often too even when I talk about Taiwan. Is it a local identity or is it a national identity? What kind of identity are we talking about? This subnational identity, was actually most of the most of Hong Kong history compatible with pro-China sentiments, patriotism and opposed to colonialism in its earlier form. But now it is increasingly separated from China and even opposed to it. And here is where you start seeing the big differences, which is again, natural to be contentious in the formation of a narrative. The years of protest, which gather saw even more social integration, leading to more economic problems, whether it's tourists or residents pouring in from China without good public policy to address the repercussion and further inequality, the gap between the wealthy and the poor. And there are issues, of course, relating to the government's imposition of moral and national education. Over time, most protesters became united for the fight for universal suffrage. Today, being a Hong Konger becomes associated with universal values like freedom and democracy. So the identity starts to emerge, just like in other places. Now, I've always said that to have an advance progressive community, individuals should be respected for having multiple identities and for seeing who they are not. And in addition to a collective identity, for example, I'm also I can be a mother, a daughter, a wife and teacher, sometimes student. But why do we need to choose? And being a Hong Konger today means excluding yourself from being Chinese at times, which in the past didn't have to be the case. You could be culturally Chinese and political identity is an overlay on top of it. But Beijing, of course, wants to define Chinese in an exclusive and political way, which makes these surveys very hard to interpret because the surveys are rather rough ways of asking people what they think they are. But it doesn't go into exactly how one defines that. And this is very similar to surveys done in Taiwan over the last thirty years. Now, the protests have led to the development of this exclusive cultural and ethnic identity, at first in relation to the colonial era, then evolving into a civic one to focus on values and universal suffrage. And now because, of course, of I would say shockingly, excessive measures taken after the national security law, Hong Kong identity now is thrown in with many other elements that need to be negotiated. Anti-mainland localism, which is exclusionary in nature, but also which makes it difficult for older generations and new immigrants to be part of the movement, but also the draconian ways means that the Hong Kong judiciary has been diluted. And this is going to, I believe, backfire and result in more Hong Kongers wanting to redefine their Hong Kong identity. And this will actually, I pretend it will make it more difficult to actually have a collective identity in a consensual form, because everyone is going to disagree about how to achieve universal suffrage or freedom. Even if we have the same goals, everybody will have a different understanding as to how to achieve it. And again, it's similar to what many other places are experiencing all around the world. For example, if you're in Myanmar today, what do you really think one can do? This is a very, very large question. So I'm going to stop there for for my comment on Hong Kong. But I would just say lastly, there is light at the end of the tunnel. If you think about Taiwan, which is where I'm sitting here today, had been cut off from China for a century and then differently than what many people think, it actually was inundated with Chinese the last 30 years, tourists and actually more than half a million migrants, people who move to Taiwan, primarily espoused but later in different forms. But then these complicated questions of what Taiwanese was took time to resolve.

And the consensus today means Taiwan accepts anybody who loves democracy and freedom and accepts Taiwan's way of life. The distinctiveness of Taiwan is actually not exclusionary, but it's pluralism, embracing everybody who identifies with the culture and follows the rule and the system of governance.

[00:35:10] **Shirley Lin** Thank you.

[00:35:12] **Matthew Slaats** Thank you so much, Shirley. Now, for anyone living outside Hong Kong, which is most of the people on this call, from what we've heard, experiencing these protests primarily via media coverage, if it was your evening news, if you even watch that anymore. But the complexity of what was taking place can be a little bit hard to grasp. So I'm going to turn over to Emanuele. So This American Life produced to an initial episode, which you worked on, which you led, called "Umbrellas Down." And then a follow-up that received lots of attention in both both the US and Hong Kong. Could you tell us a little bit about why This American Life decided to do an episode on Hong Kong protests in 2018 and the follow-up? And then maybe a little bit about how the the the episode engages this idea of identity?

[00:36:13] **Emanuele Berry** Yeah, so the reason we did the episode is because I wanted to do the episode. No, the reason he did the episode is I think that there are huge implications for global politics going forward based off of what's happening in Hong Kong. And as someone who has covered protests in the US, I used to be a reporter in St. Louis. And so I had covered the protests following the shooting death of Michael Brown. The act of protest is just something in general that I am interested in.

[00:36:44] **Emanuele Berry** And so, yeah, to be honest, like a good thing about working where I work is we do get to pursue sort of our interest. And so I was watching what's happening in Hong Kong. I have friends in Hong Kong. I was having conversations and I feel like I kind of kept telling my coworkers like, hey, this there's this huge story happening in Hong Kong. And I kept getting ignored. But I was pretty persistent with it. And I kept sort of bringing bringing different angles or trying to think about it in different ways. And in part, the way that our show ended up being shaped in some ways was based off of sort of the non-reaction from my coworkers.

[00:37:24] **Emanuele Berry** Like I'd present them like all of these sort of like historical facts and all this background information. And it like it would it wasn't like calling to them until I started to put sort of like characters into place. And the thing that they felt like was missing or that we felt like was missing was allowing there to be space for for people for you to, like, understand the feelings of the people on the ground. And so that's the route that we took with the episode, rather than sort of doing a big historical swath. I think we tried to bring as much context and nuance as we could, but I think we really focused heavily on giving people the space to voice sort of their opinions and giving our audience people to relate to. And so I think that is that's sort of how how the episode took shape or how we thought about the episode. And for us, I think we talked to we had planned on, I think, like 40 different potential stories. We only did like five or six in the end.

[00:38:28] **Emanuele Berry** And the goal was really to talk to as many people as possible and try and try and cover sort of all of these different viewpoints and areas from the from the protest. And so in the end, we chose the stories that we chose because we felt like they best sort of like represented the things that we were hearing on the ground in the conversations that we were hearing on the ground when we were there.



[00:38:51] **Emanuele Berry** And, yeah, I mean, for for a US audience, the reaction to the episode, I think a lot of people felt like it served two purposes, I think. In one way, if you like, had read up on Hong Kong and you knew like a lot of stuff already, you might have listened to the episode and been like, but they didn't say all of these historical facts and these sort of things. Or, you might have said. Oh, like I actually haven't heard just people like talk at length about this. Like, this is nice is a nice compliment to the things I already know. And then I think the other sort of reaction is I had no idea about this. I didn't understand it, but now I'm really interested in it. But like the show and it in itself sort of served as a gateway for people who weren't paying attention, who who didn't have an interest in sort of this issue to to suddenly feel like more connected to it, more than they might read all the other things and like actually like pay more attention and invest in the story because they've invested in the characters and the time that we've spent with these different people.

[00:39:55] **Clara Ma** Thank you, Emanuele, and I think what I also like about the episode is that it really shows like, as we talk about the issues of like identities like I think in the episode, it just really shows like these contested identities you have like a family and then but also like police, like the father is the police and the son is the protester. Like all these contested identities, I think it's I think it's really nice that we have the episode to demonstrate all these dynamics.

[00:40:26] **Emanuele Berry** Yeah, I think it was really important to us that that it wasn't just like a focus on protesters, but that it was a focus, unlike so many protests, because when we talk to them, we're like, oh, my parents, they hate that they do this like they hate that I'm out there. So for us, it was important that that also be a part of it. The protests also became so much about police in a way too at one point and sort of animosity toward police. So it was important for us, I think, to also hear from someone who's associated with the police about what what they're sort of understanding was. And then also just the people who are sort of like caught in the middle and indifferent and like not really sure which way to direct their energies. We thought about doing a story where we would talk with some of the Filipino staff workers in Hong Kong. You know, they're on their days off, they're always sort of like around in those spaces now are like also like spaces where there's protests coming through. So we tried to think about all sort of like the different, you know, the different people who are trying to exist in the spaces, who all care about Hong Kong and are trying to figure out like what what that means for them in the way that they wanted to look at the future.

[00:41:38] **Clara Ma** Thank you again. So, yeah, like recognizing I guess we also want to expand this conversation a little bit and try to bring the connections between Hong Kong and the United States. So so I want to also turn the questions first to Shirley, because I think what you mentioned just now about the very limited mechanism of in Hong Kong for people to include all these, like all I negotiate is multiple identities. The idea was I was really interested in. So, and during the course of the protests, we also see that, like many protesters were trying to seek foreign attention, which we don't really see that in in the previous protests. So, for example, the United States also play a very key role and respond to the protests in various ways. So I would like to ask you, what are some of the US response and in your opinion, what are their significance to the protests?

[00:42:45] **Shirley Lin** Well, first, thank you, Clara. Yeah, I I think it's quite important to note this, although I would say on the research level, democracies usually must rely on people in a community wanting it themselves. And so the issue of whether there is, quote, "foreign interference" is one that Beijing would like to talk about.

[00:43:12] **Shirley Lin** But there is also no movement in contemporary history that does not have structural factors, meaning outside factors and endogenous factors. And therefore, we need to today in 2021, there is no doubt the world is a village. Even in the pandemic. The pandemic has actually made us rely much more on information from the outside while we're not traveling. So because of historical reasons, Britain has been the most active in voicing support for Hong Kong. But the US has played a central role in actually legislating. First, the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act, which included an annual review of Hong Kong's status. This is, of course, after many protesters and leaders and Democrats had actually visited overseas foreign political leaders. And then the U.S. followed up with the Hong Kong Autonomy Act, which sanctioned individuals who violated human rights in Hong Kong. And finally, import and export regulation, which is what I look at, has been extended to Hong Kong, especially with regards to sensitive technology products. These are all very important for the city. All of this is making a big difference in international attention to an issue which China insists is domestic. And I think this is where the ongoing debate will be. China has said that the Sino British Joint Declaration on Hong Kong is no longer valid. And this week on the national security law, the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeals also said it does not have to be subjugated to the framework of the Basic Law and Universal Declaration of Human Rights. So all of these pronouncements mean that international attention is necessary. Otherwise more tragedies could happen in Hong Kong and the world would be blind to it.

[00:45:06] **Shirley Lin** But the what the other countries have done on the other side, including Australia, Canada and the UK, is something different, is to grant Hong Kongers some kind of residency and work permit. Today in Taiwan, I, I can tell you in 2020, 10,800 Hong Kongers have relocated, not just apply successfully, but relocated to Taiwan, which is nearly double the annual number of the last five years. And these having such a choice to move is all very important for young people in Hong Kong who don't see a future.

[00:45:47] **Matthew Slaats** Wonderful. So just shifting back to Emanuele, so one thing we wanted to bring forward is especially with all the events that are going on in the US at the moment, many people have been making this comparison between the January 6th insurrection in Washington, D.C. and the takeover of the Legislative Council in Hong Kong, something that former council member and activist Nathan Law strongly challenged on on Twitter several weeks ago. So can you share a little bit about your thoughts on the role of journalism? And then in your case, like storytelling and giving people a better understanding of the complexity of the protests and again how you can see this US Hong Kong dialog taking place?

[00:46:42] **Emanuele Berry** Am I unmuted now? Ok. I think that journalism in this case can both muddy the narrative, right? Simplify it as well as clarify it. I think you can look at pictures of the events that took place at Ledge Co, and look at pictures of what happened on January 6th side by side and say same same thing. Right. Like, it's easy to sort of like, try and make those comparisons. But like, if you're getting to the root of what brought people to those spaces, which like responsible storytelling in journalism should, like, they're actually opposing thoughts. Right? One is this desire for a fair and free vote, and the other is an attempt to protest a fair and free election. So, well, they're both sort of around this like this idea of voting. One is like attacking that. Right. Which is why it's important to have, like, those nuances and details in place to give to give context, because, like I said, you could put those images side by side. But I think it's also so important to speak, to have characters and people to speak about what their motives are and what's driving them. Because I think it also made clear for clarification to the narrative

in the story that sort of at hand. And in terms of the the US Hong Kong like dialogue, like having covered Black Lives Matter protests, I see similarities in those protests in some ways and in tactics and animosity and frustration around police. Those protests feel more similar to me than than something that I witnessed on what I witnessed on January 6th.

[00:48:22] **Emanuele Berry** And I think in both cases, I think the other thing that maybe is in common is they both sort of feel like it's about like a belief in democracy. But in one case, it's about believing that democracy should only work for one group of people or for a certain group of people, whereas the other it's a more general sense of this desire and belief that that democracy is something that people in in Hong Kong should have. Yeah. I hope that wasn't confusing.

[00:48:59] **Matthew Slaats** That was great. So really quickly, just a note before we kind of go into our last little section. So for those attending, we would love to see any questions. I think what we will have some time at the end to maybe answer a question or two. So make sure to use the Q&A function in Zoom. We'd love to hear from you.

[00:49:23] **Clara Ma** And thank you to Emanuele again, so we want you in this section, I want to come back to the questions for the entire panel, the questions that we mentioned in the beginning of the webinar. So one thing that came out in this project and having some of the conversations that we just had is the idea of the relationship between religion and democracy. We have faith, values which in our work manifest itself with protests. And it's something that Matthew I asked you kind of struggling to come to terms with. And so there is a great moment in our piece where Jeffrey Choi, a Hong Kong organizer based in Washington, D.C., reinforced these ideas. And we want to play the clip a little bit to the audience.

[00:50:16] **Jeffrey Choi** Well, I think there is there is, I guess, a spiritual aspect to it. I don't mean like a religious spiritual aspect, but the spirit of the movement is penetrated in these events or it's manifested or it's amplified through these nontraditional methods.

[00:50:49] **Matthew Slaats** So having spent a little bit of time during my PhD digging deeper into the meaning of democracy, there's a lot to think about here. It's a terrain that, again, Clara and I were we're kind of trying to to think through as we were listening to the many voices we heard from. And it made us think a lot about, you know, Jacques Derrida's ideas on the democracy to be or especially in this moment reading Hannah, Nikole Hannah-Jones writing in The New York Times about how the Black struggle for racial justice is is like the clearest manifestation of democracy in the US. And we've all mentioned it either the the US Declaration of Independence or the basic laws of Hong Kong kind of both create the foundation for these demands for democracy. We want to think a little bit about more a little bit more about that with everybody.

[00:51:52] **Clara Ma** So I think the questions that we would like to ask is how what do you all see the connections between faith and religion and the faith in democracy as they realize in either in Hong Kong or globally as a protest seems to surround us? So I guess we can go with the order of the speakers so we can start from Ting and then Antony and then Shirley and Emanuele. Ting, would you like to share with us some of your thoughts on that?

[00:52:27] **Ting Guo** Sure, of course. I think as Jeffrey mentioned in the audio clip just now, I think there's a sort of the spirit of the movement, the spirit of democracy. That's something that people highly value. That's what Hong Kong protesters highly valued as

well. And think that spirit is. It doesn't have to be religious or purely secular. In fact, there's often a kind of religious or spiritual element in secular values that we know them today as well.

[00:52:57] **Ting Guo** Speaking of the democracy, democratic values in the US as well, we know, although the separation of church and state very clearly in the US, but there's such a kind of vibrant religious kind of appearance and diversity, all dynamics in the US in relation to issues of democracy, issues of value, and that so is the case in Hong Kong as well. And. In and it as the in this way, in this very again, in the very diffused way, we almost inform in the kind of form of a civil religion as we see emerging in Hong Kong. And as I mentioned, there was this kind of really makeshift shrine or commemoration of the protesters who died. And they were not just him and the protesters who unfortunately died in various ways during the movement. They are remembered as martyrs of the movement or martyrs of Hong Kong. And this is a very powerful way of recognizing the a kind of identity through the movement in relation to democracy. All of these big questions who identity and democracy and who are we as a community? What do we value in Hong Kong and that kind of commemorating and recognizing communities of martyrs. And this is a very powerful way of linking spirituality and democracy and spirituality and values, democratic values. So I think this is what we see in today's world, the very blurred line between religion and secular values, kind of a particularly in pursuit of faith. It doesn't have to be strictly religious means, organized form of religion, but there's always this element of faith. And I also like to point it out, the very important element of feeling or effect maybe as moral kind of holistic view or maybe an academic way of framing it, because power is something that we feel before we conceptualize it. And that's that's what all powers do, political powers. But for the people, identity is also something people feel before they could conceptualize it, before they could put it into words and religion and all the kind of spiritual or the the the kind of civic religion, if you like. They also manifest in very emotional, very effective forms. When we commemorate the protests from and that's how the collective identity and that's how the very strong, intense emotions are felt through this and through such very effective, very spiritual ways of commemorating and that kind of emergence of identity.

[00:56:23] **Ting Guo** I think that's where we see very important questions are being asked of a very also very important answers, the emergence through this. So, yeah, thank you.

[00:56:41] **Clara Ma** And I definitely remember in some of the interviews for the podcast, I'd some in interviews mentioned that when they went into these the religious Rojos, I like singing like like something that they remember strongly. Is that like the feeling or the emotions that emerge and that really that kind of feeling really changed the way they how they see the protests.

[00:57:04] **Clara Ma** And that's really interesting. Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah. And Antony, if you'd like to share with us your thoughts.

[00:57:15] **Antony Dapiran** Yeah, I mean, I guess along similar lines to to those just expressed by eating, but the one thing that I think is is very important is the role of ritual in the Hong Kong protests and in the protests of 2019. In one way, I guess in a slightly flippant way, you could argue that the pattern of the recurring weekly protests where every weekend people would turn up to a certain specified location and engage in a protest. And this went on sort of week after week, month after month in 2019 was somewhat like going to church. But that alone would turn up at the specific time on the weekend and and engage in this in this ritual together. But I think there are other really interesting rituals that

we're engaged in as part of the protest movement. One was very striking with these so-called shopping mall protests where protesters would gather in a shopping mall specifically to sing the protest theme song Glory to Hong Kong. And they would also chant protest slogans.

[00:58:21] **Antony Dapiran** But sort of the specific ritual was the gathering in malls and singing the song, which, you know, clearly is a ritual, a gathering of people to to sort of express this this this shared this shared belief and the role of other factors, as was mentioned there, which was incredibly strong hearing this this very powerful song being sung in that that echoing chamber of the shopping mall atrium, not unlike a church with its acoustic qualities. And this was something that would be regularly scheduled. And the ritualistic aspects of those shopping malls singing protest were very were very strong. I think another example with these these vigils outside Prince Edward Station, one of the subway stations where police had had attacked protesters and there were all sorts of conspiracy theories around that. There are, in fact, been people that had died in that attack and the police and the authorities were covering up the Death Star to say that that's fairly, I think, a fairly wild and an unlikely conspiracy theory. But nevertheless, people would then then set up an altar outside one of the subway station exits and had these these vigils, as Astin was mentioning, and rituals for rituals for the dead, burning of paper money, putting flowers and burning incense and these sorts of things. And this became a site of ritual where people would would gather, on the one hand, to to engage in mourning for the supposedly fallen protesters, but also, of course, to express outrage against the police and against the authorities. And as I think these these different kinds of rituals and these are just two examples and these sort of creation of sacred spaces as a part of that has been an important aspect of sort of the spirituality of the protest. And interestingly, that has these have been things that have been specifically targeted by the authorities in the in the year after the protest and in the wake of the national security law, they have sought to specifically target these these the expressions of faith, if you want to put it that way. So effectively, the slogans have been declared illegal and banned. The song Glory to Hong Kong has been banned in Hong Kong schools, and I think it has all those all but effectively being declared illegal by the authorities. I haven't heard. But it played or sung since the 1st of July last year. The the police went as far as saying recently that if anyone was caught putting flowers outside the Prince Edward Imtiyaz station on the anniversary of the events that happened there, they would be arrested immediately just for the act of of of placing flowers there. Just the act of commemorating or even attempting to engage in that ritual had was declared in arrestable offense. And so now that the government and the authorities are seeking to prevent any of these expressions of faith that are associated with the protest movement.

[01:01:22] **Clara Ma** Thank you so much, Antony. I like the idea of a recurrence of these type of activities and seems like people know like their roles around the world they have to do when they come into these activities is part of that aspect. Thank you for pointing that out. And maybe we can turn to Shirley remarks on that.

[01:01:45] **Shirley Lin** Thank you, Clara. I think in concluding this panel, this is a very good question because spirituality of the movement leads to implications and I want to address that in my book. I basically talk about the philosophical difference, as I said, between ultimate values, consumer choice, values and material values or instrumental values. And as John Dewey had, who used a term for the first time, consumer to value is one which in which the death and intensity of meaning is so heightened as to constitute a pervasive, qualitative and organizing whole. What this means is that debate over consumer values like identity will be more intense and future more extreme alternatives

than debates over instrumental values like housing or subsidy, basically resource allocation. This is especially true when policy does not respond to consumer values of the people. Hence you have mass protests were religious war. The importance is that is in believing now, believing in the value of a just fair and open society with freedom and human rights for all people, just like believing in a religion is all consuming. But it still leads to, as I said before, a debate as to what to do. And I want to just point out one fact. And many people, international observers have still been under the illusion that a great man, for example, drove democracy and gave Taiwan democracy. But others would contend that Taiwanese people are very hard over time, and that is the nature of religion, believing and fighting, even when you go through decades and decades of frustration and failure or tragedies, including people of faith, starting with the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, which are very hard for a very long time. And democratic institutions in Taiwan today continue to be very fragile. Today, Taiwanese society is supported by men and women of faith, ranging from Buddhist organizations like Didge, which one hospitals and Catholic institutions managing women's shelters and homes. So the lack of understanding, I think, by Beijing human beings are spiritual by nature and cannot be reduced to material beings who need nothing more than shelter and comfort. This gap of understanding is very hard to bridge. My current book about the high income trap in Hong Kong, and you can find my articles in Chinese and English about Hong Kong. The essence of an advanced and progressive society, of course, is the belief in equal rights to everyone, whether rich or poor, powerful or powerless, and that we are compassionate towards others in our community. At least that's what I define a progressive and wealthy community to be. Now, homeowners believe that they should be represented by a more responsive government, which treats all people with dignity and respect. And the faith and spiritual understanding in freedom, not oppression, will only deepen if it continues to be denied. Thank you.

[01:04:58] **Clara Ma** Thank you for the remarks, Shirley. And let's turn to you, Emanuele.

[01:05:04] **Emanuele Berry** Yes, I'm going to take a little bit of a different approach and talk a little bit about this idea in context of the US, so the idea of of faith in democracy or belief in democracy, I don't think I have had to think about that expression or those phrases until this year.

[01:05:23] **Emanuele Berry** Like it feels like it's something just as solid and has always been there. And it's interesting to hear the idea of faith and democracy, faith in democracy or belief in democracy as a thing. Because now because now it feels like a thing in a way that it hadn't before. And so I think echoing sort of, but it really has that. And also what Matthew is saying about the Nicole Jones piece, it just makes me think a lot about specifically the African-American community in this year's election. And, you know, democracy is not something that has necessarily worked in some ways for the African-American community right there, systems and structures and a lot of barriers being put up. But but echoing, Shirley, like the believing in the continuing to fight despite that. Right.

[01:06:18] **Emanuele Berry** And when I think about the images from this year's election that have stuck with me and I was talking with a reporter who's also named Emanuele, who works for BuzzFeed about this, but he was talking sort of about the images of this election are so many black people who are trying to make democracy work, whether that is people on Stacie's Abram's team, whether that vote counters in Detroit who had protesters yelling at them, gathered outside, telling them to stop counting, whether that's the black Capitol Police officers who were holding back Trump supporters on January 6th. And so I think for me, like at the core of these images is sort of me realizing and like looking at this idea of as democracy not being this guaranteed thing, but a thing that we have that that

there's a faith in and that there's a belief. And so I think that's something that just has, like, changed for me from where I'm sitting in the world this year.

[01:07:17] **Matthew Slaats** Thank you so much. That's a great way to end, but thank you to everybody else that Shirley Antony and anteing for everything you've brought up at the moment. I'm not seeing any specific questions in the Q&A. Maybe we've done such a wonderful job that everybody is so enthralled by what we're talking about. But we've got just a few moments if anybody has a quick question that maybe we could throw out. Otherwise, we're going to wrap up the event.

[01:07:58] **Shirley Lin** Can I just say it, Matthew, I wanted to say I really enjoy Emanuele's series, was listening to all of them and I wish there had been 40 interviews. But anyway, we got what we got. And I'm really pleased. And as as Emanuele said, it was a feature, the everyday story that I talk about as a political economist, but without the context that Emanuele has in going to the dinner tables, having discussions with protesters and their parents. And this is what I see every day with my students and engaging. They're trying to engage in discussions with older people like us, trying to tell me what they're doing. And I found the program to be invaluable. So the viewers should go look it up. Oh, thank you so much.

[01:08:41] **Matthew Slaats** Or maybe another option we could ask is we could maybe in one of the panelists, I want to ask another panelist a question.

[01:08:53] **Ting Guo** I could talk a bit more about the friendship between religion and democracy, religion and politics. There's also this very complicated relationship between religion and democracy, religion and politics. On one hand, religion could be a powerful form of the rich, spread themselves, express their political opinions. But on the other hand, religious organizations can also be a powerful form of mobilizing or taking advantage of people's desire to have the political voices heard. For instance, there's just an incredibly a large number of Trump supporters to the phone in Hong Kong, in Taiwan and China as well, who are evangelicals and Trump supporters. And that's just one complicated kind of manifestation of how religion and democracy and politics work together, that they are evangelicals, that they support Trump also because they believe in democracy. They believe only through a certain form of Christianity. And Trump is part of that, that they could attain democracy and fulfill the human kind even. And at the same time, we also see liberation theology, for instance. We also see, I think should be mentioned in Taiwan during the democratization process in Korea and South Korea as well. Religion was a big part of the process of democratizing.

[01:10:29] **Ting Guo** So I think this may be spirituality, as this panel is entitled spiritually is maybe is a better way of kind of showing guideposts on agency rather than maybe religion per say, as something that could be very easily about the organizational form or the power of the structure of such institution.

[01:11:01] **Matthew Slaats** So we do have one question that just came forward from the audience, and this is from from a wonderful conversation. I was wondering if the panelists could comment on what kind of impact this spirit, spirituality aspect of the protest will have for the religious situation in mainland China. That should go to Ting?

[01:11:37] **Ting Guo** Religious situation in mainland China? Mainland China has its own kind of religious activists, many of the activists in mainland China, religious, for instance, many of the human rights lawyers are Christians and many of the kind of Christian leaders.

They're active activists who are very kind of outspoken activists themselves. And I think this on top of that, this kind of.

[01:12:21] **Ting Guo** Kind of religion and democratic pursuits in Hong Kong and elsewhere think that has a definitely a positive impact and definitely kind of a strengthening their faith in what they believe, what they already what they've already been practicing already, because Christianity in particular, as a global religion, as a religion that, of course, has its own, their indigenous contextual form, but at the same time emphasizes this very almost universally a certain universal aspect to it. That is always this connection, very close connection between Christian activists in China and activists in Hong Kong. So, yeah. Definitely an encouragement, almost.

[01:13:19] **Matthew Slaats** Thank you Ting. So with that, we we actually are coming to an end of the event. So I just really wanted to say thank you again to everyone. Thank you to Emanuele Berry, Antony Dapiran, Ting Guo, and Shirley Lin. Thank you to everyone in the audience for being here today, no matter if you're in the US or in Asia. And a reminder to join the Religion, Race & Democracy Lab on March 4th for the next program in the series, again, the screening of the Lab's new documentary, God \$ Green: An Unholy Alliance. This will be joined by Katherine Stewart, a journalist and author of *The Power Worshipers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of the Religious Right* and Olufemi O. Taiwo, assistant professor of philosophy at Georgetown University.

[01:14:14] **Clara Ma** And if you're interested in learning more, please take a moment to visit the Religion, Race & Democracy Lab website and listen to the episode, *The Spirituality of Protest in Hong Kong*. And if you want to learn more about any of the speakers work, we like to share with you Ting's new article, "So Many Mothers, so Little Love," "Confucianism, Parental Governance and the Discourse of Motherly Love in 2019 Hong Kong Protests," which will be available soon, which we really look forward to read about it. You can also follow Professor Lin's work at the UVA Miller Center as well as listen to Emanuele's amazing work at *This American Life*, and Antony's book *City on Fire: The Fight for Hong Kong* is also available on your choice of online platform. But we also recommend you picking it up via your local bookstore so you can find us all on Twitter if you want to continue the conversation. Thank you for joining us again.