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From Singing "Out-of-Tone" to Creating Contextualized Cantonese Contemporary Worship Songs: Hong Kong in the Decentralization of Chinese Christianity

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Abstract: For over a century, Hong Kong Christians have sung Chinese hymns in an "out-of-tone" manner. Lyrics in traditional hymnals were translated or written to be sung in Mandarin, the national language, but most locals speak Cantonese, another Sinitic and tonal language. Singing goes "out-of-tone" when Mandarin hymns are sung in Cantonese, which often causes meaning distortions. Why did Hong Kong Christians accept this practice? How did they move from singing "out-of-tone" to creating contextualized Cantonese contemporary worship songs? What does this process reveal about the evolution of Chinese Christianity? From a Hong Kong-centered perspective, this article reconstructs the city's hymnological development. I consider the creation of national Mandarin hymnals during Republican China as producing a nationalistic Mainland-centric and Mandarin-centric Chinese Christianity. Being on the periphery, Hong Kong Christians did not have the resources to develop their own hymns and thus continued to worship "out-of-tone". With the decline of the old Chinese Christian center of Shanghai, the growth of Cantonese culture and Hongkonger identity, and the influence of Western pop and Christian music, local Christians began to create Cantonese contemporary worship songs. This hymnological contextualization reflects and contributes to not only the decolonization but, more importantly, the decentralization of Chinese Christianity.

Keywords: Chinese Christianity; contextualization; Hong Kong; Cantonese; contemporary worship

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1. Introduction

In local movies and TV dramas, Hong Kong Christians are often mocked as singing "out-of-tone"—they are not "out-of-tune", but "out-of-tone". Most local Chinese Christians speak Cantonese; as of 2019, 98.6% of Chinese Protestant churches in Hong Kong held Cantonese services, and 92.7% of Chinese Protestants attended Cantonese services (Research Group on 2019 Hong Kong Church Survey 2019 香港教會普查研究組 2020, pp. 23–24). However, many traditional Chinese hymns were written to be sung in Mandarin. While both Cantonese and Mandarin are Sinitic languages and use written Chinese script, they are also tonal languages, meaning that a change in the pitch of a word causes a change in its core meaning (Yip 2002, p. 1). Cantonese has six tones (Chan 1987, p. 27), and Mandarin has only four tones. Therefore, when Mandarin hymns are sung in Cantonese, following the same musical melodies, the lexical tones of most of the hymn text are distorted. Such distortions make hymns sound unnatural and non-local to Cantonese speakers—Chinese, yet still foreign. It also sometimes creates unwanted meanings (Chan 1987). For example, when the word "Lord" (主, Cantonese romanization: zyu2), which should be pronounced in the second tone, is pronounced in the first tone to fit the music, "Lord Jesus" (主耶穌, zyu2 je4sou1) would be sung and heard as "pig Jesus" (豬耶穌, zyu1 je4sou1). The situation gradually changed by the end of the last century, when Cantonese worship songs became popularized. Hymns are central to many Protestant traditions' religious and liturgical lives; they are also important tools for evangelization and Christian formation; why did Christians in Hong Kong sing in an "out-of-tone" manner that often

leads to meaning distortion? How did they move from singing "out-of-tone" to creating contextualized Cantonese contemporary worship songs (hereafter, "Cantonese worship songs")? What does this hymnological contextualization in Hong Kong reveal about the evolution of Chinese Christianity?

To answer these questions, we first need a comprehensive historical study of the hymnological development in Hong Kong. Some earlier parts of the history are covered by David Sheng (2010) in *A History of Christian Hymnody in China* and Fang-Lan Hsieh (2009) in *History of Chinese Christian Hymnody: From Its Missionary Origins to Contemporary Indigenous Productions*. Andrew Leung (梁納祈, 2015), in *The Emergence of a National Hymnody: The Making of Hymns of Universal Praise* (1936), tells the story of the making of an important national hymnal that many mainline churches in Hong Kong still use today. However, these works adopt a Mainland China-centric approach; they generally accept the nationalistic assumption that emphasizes the Chinese as one people, which makes them fall short in narrating the history from a local perspective and considering local needs in their analysis. This approach is even more problematic when it is used to write about post-1949 Christianity in Greater China.

Some studies focus on the development of Cantonese contemporary worship since the 1980s. Adopting the definition by Lim and Ruth (2017, p. 63) in *Lovin' on Jesus: A Concise History of Contemporary Worship*, I consider a "contemporary worship song" as music "geared for congregational singing", in contrast to "contemporary Christian music" (CCM), as a distinct genre "which steered toward concerts and albums and other forms of non-worship expression". This article focuses on contemporary worship songs. The master's thesis of Kwok-Hung Ko (2008), "The Development of Local Contemporary Cantonese Hymns (1980–1998)—Case Study of ACM", preserves a valuable record of the early stage of development of contemporary Cantonese worship in Hong Kong with the case of the Hong Kong Association of Christian Musicians (香港基督徒音樂協會, ACM). Bo Fang's (2017) "Worship Music Localization: A Case Study of the Revival Christian Church of Hong Kong" analyzes how praise and worship music was introduced to and localized in Hong Kong through globally connected Pentecostal churches. Yee-Lok Enoch Lam's 2002 Ph.D. dissertation, "Christian Musicking as Imagined Communities: Three Case Studies from Hong Kong", studies how contemporary worship contributes to the formation of multiple imagined communities among Hong Kong Christians. Joshua Ching-Yuet Kan's 2023 article, "Hong Kong Christian Songwriters' Dilemma: Juggling Sacred Music, Tonal Language, and Christian Faith", provides an excellent study on how Hong Kong Christian songwriters tackle the requirement of matching word tone and melodic contours when writing Cantonese worship songs.

While the above studies of traditional Chinese hymns and Cantonese worship songs are important, there is a lack of a comprehensive survey of the whole hymnological contextualization trajectory in Hong Kong in relation to broader Chinese Christianity. This article aims to fill this gap. From a Hong Kong-centered perspective, this article traces the hymnological development in Hong Kong from singing Mandarin hymns in an "out-of-tone" manner to creating contextualized Cantonese worship songs. Based on this survey, I argue that this hymnological contextualization not only contributes to and reflects the decolonization of Christianity in Hong Kong but, more importantly, the "local turn" and decentralization of Chinese Christianity, as it challenges the nationalistic Mandarin- and Mainland-centric form and understanding of Chinese Christianity.

This interdisciplinary research crosses and connects the fields of church history, hymnology, missiology, and Hong Kong study. The method is primarily historical. While the same phenomenon appears in the Catholic Church in Hong Kong, the scope of this study only covers Protestant Christianity. In the following historical sketch of hymnological development in Hong Kong, I focus on tracing the changes in songs used by Christians in Hong Kong. While recognizing that musicality is also an essential aspect of the contextualization of Christian music in Hong Kong, this study pays particular attention to the hymn text and the language used instead of the tunes, forms of music, or the general wor-

ship design and experience. I divide the history into six parts, focusing on post-1949 Hong Kong. North Point Methodist Church, a church that has undergone multiple worship renewals like many other Hong Kong churches since the 1950s, will be used to illustrate how the changes occurred in a local church's setting. Based on this historical survey, I discuss how the hymnological contextualization in Hong Kong helps us understand the greater trajectory of the development of Chinese Christianity in modern times.

2. A Historical Sketch of Hymnological Development in Hong Kong

2.1. Mandarin Hymnals Gaining Centrality (Before 1949)

Protestantism set foot in Hong Kong when Hong Kong became a British colony in 1842. At that time, the multiethnic and multilingual China did not have a national language. In Hong Kong, apart from Cantonese, other Sinitic languages like Teochew and Hakka were spoken by different groups of local people. To evangelize them, missionaries translated Western hymns into different Sinitic languages; sometimes they also wrote new lyrics summarizing Biblical messages and sang them with Western melodies. For example, Rev. John Chalmers (1825–1899) of the London Missionary Society (LMS) published a Cantonese hymnal Hymns for the Worship of the Lord (宗主詩章) in 1860 for the use of LMS congregations in Canton and Hong Kong (Hsieh 2009, p. 50). In 1873, the Hymn Book in the Swatow Dialect (潮音神詩), a Teochew hymnal, was published in Hong Kong by Rev. George Smith (d. 1891) of the Presbyterian Church of England for the growing Teochew-speaking congregations in Shantou and its hinterlands (ibid., p. 52). The primary concern of hymnal editors was to communicate the Christian message in the vernacular, and very often, they would keep the original melodies for translated songs. At other times, they used existing Western melodies so that missionaries would know the tune and be able to teach the congregation to sing. As such, the match between the musical melody and the lexical tones of the hymn text was almost always sacrificed.

During the Republican Era (1911–1949), Mandarin was promoted as the national language, and Mandarin hymnals were published and used throughout China. They include the famous Hymns of Universal Praise (普天頌讚, 1936), an ecumenical effort of six major denominations in China. These Mandarin hymnals gradually replaced vernacular ones. Back then, many denominations put their churches in Hong Kong under their South China districts even though Hong Kong was under British rule (Ying 2004, p. 30); Hong Kong churches thus adopted these Mandarin hymnals. Not knowing how to speak Mandarin, Cantonese-speaking Christians began to sing these hymns in their mother tongue in an "out-of-tone" manner. Many churches in Hong Kong still keep this practice today, as they are accustomed to singing songs from Mandarin hymnals in such a way.

The indigenization of Christianity in Republican China was largely influenced by nationalism and nation-building campaigns. The replacement of vernacular hymnals with Mandarin national hymnals paralleled the fall of regionalism and the rise of nationalism. According to Hong Kong sociologist Chun-Hung Ng (2002, p. 89), Hong Kong society at that time was basically an extension of South China society, and the collective identity of people in Hong Kong was more Chinese than local. Hong Kong cultural critic Loi-Fat Chiu (published under the pen name Yuet-Oi Cheung 2002, p. 221) suggests that pre-WWII colonial Hong Kong never established a cultural identity independent from China. Hong Kong church historian Fuk-Tsang Ying (2004, p. 193) further argues that before 1949, an independent Hong Kong Christianity did not exist. With this lack of localized Christian identity, Christians in Hong Kong naturally considered Mandarin hymnals good products of hymnological indigenization instead of asking for indigenized Cantonese hymnals.

2.2. A New Center of Production of Mandarin Hymnals (1950s–1960s)

During the Chinese Civil War in the late 1940s and early years after the Communist takeover of Mainland China, millions of migrants/refugees, including Christians, missionaries, denominations, theological institutes, and Christian organizations, moved to Hong Kong (Ying and Lai 2004). The number of Christians in Hong Kong rose from around

10,000 in 1942, to 53,917 in 1955, and 74,470 in 1958 (ibid., p. 145). A Hong Kong sociologist, Siu-Lun Lau (2018, p. 37), called this the "second laying of the foundation stone" of Chinese Christianity in Hong Kong. Among those who came were Christian musicians, publishing houses, and funding initially designated for the whole of China. These musicians and publishers continued to produce Mandarin hymnals for Chinese Christians in Hong Kong and the Chinese diaspora; many were reprints initially published during the Republican Era in Shanghai. For instance, former staff of the Shanghai-based Christian Literature Society for China (廣學會) established the Council on Christian Literature for Overseas Chinese (香港基督教輔僑出版社) in Hong Kong and continued to publish Hymns of Universal Praise. The Chinese Baptist Press (浸信會出版部) in Hong Kong continued the work of the Shanghai-based China Baptist Publication Society (中華浸會書局). In 1952, it reprinted the New Hymns of Praise (新頌主詩集), which was initially published in 1941 as the first national hymnal of Chinese Baptists (Hsieh 2009, p. 92). The Morning Star Choruses (晨星短歌), first published in the 1940s by The Alliance Press (宣道書局), also Shanghai-based, was reprinted in the 1960s in Hong Kong (ibid., p. 97).

New Mandarin hymnals were also produced in Hong Kong. A popular one was Youth Hymns (青年聖歌), which was edited by Rev. William Newbern (1900–1972), an American missionary who led the relocation of the Alliance Bible Seminary from Mainland China to Hong Kong. Between 1951 and 1981, he published Youth Hymns as a series of bilingual (English and Chinese) hymnals. Hymns included were mainly Western, co-translated into Chinese by Newbern and Richard Tung-Hung Ho (何統雄, 1920–2015). Although translated in Hong Kong, their translations did not consider the tonal issue for the hymns to be sung in Cantonese. In addition, unlike the Hymns of Universal Praise, no Chinese songwriter or lyricist was involved. As Calida Chu (2019, p. 232) comments, "Contextualization of Chinese hymnody was not Newbern's primary concern".

Mandarin hymnals were widely used by both local and migrant Chinese churches in Hong Kong during this period. The sample church in this article, the North Point Methodist Church, is a typical migrant church in Hong Kong. It was established in 1953 by missionaries and Christian migrants, mostly Methodists. Many of them were from Shanghai, including the founding missionary Dr. Sidney R. Anderson (1889–1978), who previously served at Moore Memorial Church in Shanghai. Unable to speak Cantonese and experiencing cultural and social barriers with local Cantonese-speaking churches, these newcomers established a new Mandarin-speaking Methodist church (Ward 1952). To help migrants feel "at home", the church built a service that closely followed the American Methodist worship tradition developed in Mainland China and used Hymns of Universal Praise in services as before.

During this period of political changes, Christianity in Mainland China was cut off from that in the Chinese diaspora, while Hong Kong experienced an influx of Christians and Christian resources. The influence of the old Chinese Christian cultural hubs like Shanghai declined, and Hong Kong rose as a new center of Chinese Christianity for the diaspora. However, in this phase of relocation and rebuilding, not much innovation was made in Chinese hymnological development. Christian migrants in Hong Kong, like most other newcomers, "still regarded themselves as Mainland Chinese immigrants rather than Hong Kong people" (Law 2018, p. 17). These Christian immigrants continued to reprint existing Mandarin hymnals and made new ones mainly by translating English hymns. As their target audiences were migrants/refugees in Hong Kong and the Chinese diaspora, who used Mandarin as their lingua franca, and many missionaries were still hoping and preparing to return to Mainland China, hymnological contextualization in Hong Kong and Cantonese was not on their agenda.

2.3. In Search of a New Voice (1960s–1970s)

In this embryonic period, several important internal and external factors paved the way for the later emergence of contextualized Cantonese worship songs. First, singing in Cantonese, although "out-of-tone", became widespread among Hong Kong churches.

With the rise of the second generation born and raised in a Cantonese-speaking society and the outreach of churches to local Cantonese-speaking people, the number of Cantonese speakers grew in many migrant churches. They started Cantonese services and began to sing "out-of-tone" like other Cantonese-speaking churches. For instance, NPMC began to hold Cantonese Sunday services in 1963 and sing hymns from Hymns of Universal Praise in an "out-of-tone" manner (Lam 2003, p. 56).

Second, Hong Kong Christian youth's encounter with secular Western pop music and gospel folks inspired them to make their own music in similar styles. The singing of English folk songs became popular among youth in the 1960s, and some Christian youth formed folk singing groups that mainly sang English gospel folk (Ho 2013, p. 67). For instance, in 1973, Youth for Christ (Hong Kong) (香港青年歸主協會) established the group "Joyful Sound" (歡樂之聲). In 1974, the influential youth ministry Breakthrough (突破機構) founded their folk song group (民謠小組) (Leung 2013, p. 15). In 1977, Good News Messengers (佳音使團) was established (Ying 2012, p. 8). A member of Good News Messengers retold that when invited to evangelical meetings and music-sharing events, they would perform two types of English gospel folk songs—those that were popular in the West and those that they wrote by themselves (Yeung 2020, p. 6).

Third, Taiwanese Christians's production of Mandarin gospel folk songbooks set the sample for Hong Kong Christian youth to write and sing their own songs in their own language. In 1971, losing the support of many Western countries, the Republic of China was replaced in the United Nations by the People's Republic of China. Anti-Western sentiment surged among colleges in Taiwan, and youth began to boycott Western music and raised the slogan "Sing our own song (唱自己的歌)". The "Campus Folk Song Movement (校園民歌運動)", which advocated the writing and singing of Chinese (Mandarin) folk songs, emerged in the mid-1970s and lasted until the early 1980s (Wong 2006, p. 60). Taiwan Christians produced Mandarin gospel folk hymnals, including Christ Is Lord Contemporary Hymnal (基督是主現代詩歌集, 1977) and Campus Joy Songs (校園歡唱, 1977) (Wen 2011). Both hymnals contain translated songs and original Mandarin songs. Before Cantonese worship songs were available, Christian youth in Hong Kong, including those in NPMC, widely sang these Mandarin songs (Lee 2021).

Fourth, the rise of Cantopop, which stresses the match between word tone and melodic contours, not only made singing "out-of-tone" strange in the ears of Hong Kong Christians but also stimulated Christians to create Cantonese worship songs. According to Hong Kong popular music legend James Wong (2003, p. 84), although Cantonese popular songs existed since the 1950s, until the end of the 1960s, they were generally considered artistically unrefined and of low culture. It was not until the Cantonese song "The Fatal Irony (啼笑因緣)"—the theme song of a popular television drama—became well-liked in 1974 that the age of Cantopop finally came (ibid., p. 94). The rise of Cantopop was the enlightenment for many young Christians who later became Cantonese worship song writers. Recalling the moments when they listened to Cantopop star Sam Hui (許冠傑)'s music, Calvin Chan (西伯) exclaims, "How did Sam come up with that?" and Corbet Ma (馬啟邦) calls Hui's Cantopop a "truly local sound" (Kan 2023, para. 20).

Last, the rise of local consciousness and eventually a Hongkonger identity made Hong Kong Christians want to find their own voice. During this period, postwar baby boomers who grew up and were educated in Hong Kong became youth. Rather than having a migrant mentality, they actively searched for their identity and sense of belonging in Hong Kong. They began to be concerned about the society they lived in and participated in waves of social activism, including the 1966–67 Riots. For Christian youth, how their faith and worship life relate to society and respond to social problems became a burning question, and the making of contextualized Cantonese worship songs was part of their answer.

From the 1960s to 1970s, Hong Kong Christians faced local demographical, cultural, and socio-political changes and were stimulated by developments in secular and Christian music around the world. Apart from adopting new music genres like gospel folks, they began to contextualize by singing hymns in Cantonese in an "out-of-tone" manner. How-

ever, this contextualizing attempt is only an intermediary—while the language and music were changed, the lyrics remained the same. Youth gradually found the old hymns unable to articulate and respond to social and personal issues they faced in this fast-changing and highly urbanized society. They soon embarked on the journey of self-theologizing—the "fourth self" to be added to the classical "three-self" formula, as suggested by missiologist David Bosch (1991, p. 451)—and began to create contextualized Cantonese worship songs.

2.4. From Cantonese Gospel Folks to Contextualized Cantonese Worship Songs (1980s)

Under the abovementioned influences, since the mid-1970s, a small group of Hong Kong Christians pioneered the creation of their own Cantonese worship songs, mainly in the form of gospel folk. Some started with rewriting Christian lyrics for pop songs. For instance, in 1977, Chi-Kong Siu (蕭智剛) wrote "Praise the Graceful Lord (主恩頌)", which borrowed the melody of Sam Hui's "Thousands of Layers of Longing (相思萬千重)" (Holyland Wonders 美地夢工場 2021). Soon, Christians began composing new melodies. At the "Night of Breakthrough '79 (突破之夜 '79)" variety show, Yee-Shing Chan (陳以誠) sang Cantonese songs that he wrote, including "How Can It Be Forgotten? (怎能忘記)" and "Breakthrough (突破)" (Yam 2021). A watershed moment for Cantonese worship songs was the 1980 "Hong Kong Contemporary Folk Writing Contest (第一屆香港現代民歌創作大賽 '80)" held by Breakthrough. It encouraged a generation of young Christians to participate and cooperate to create Cantonese worship songs (Ho 2013, p. 67). In 1982, Breakthrough released the cassette and hymnal of Come and Sing Hymnal 1 (齊唱新歌第一集), the first Cantonese hymnal in history with a match between musical melodies and the lexical tones of the Cantonese lyrics. In 1983, some musicians involved in the production of the hymnal established the Hong Kong Association of Christian Musicians (香港基督徒音樂協會, ACM). In 1985, another major pioneering organization in Cantonese worship, the City Song Association (城市旋律協會, CSA), was founded.

Cantonese contemporary worship presumes all the nine qualities of contemporary worship defined by Lim and Ruth (2017, pp. 2–3). The first two qualities, concerning language and hymn text, are particularly relevant here. First, Lim and Ruth state that "[f]or worship to be authentic… it had to be in the regular language of the people. The updating of worship language was the first and most critical domino that fell in the development that led to current forms of contemporary worship" (ibid., pp. 3–4). With the creation of Cantonese worship songs, Cantonese-speaking Christians could finally enjoy worship wholly conducted in their mother tongue. The second quality of contemporary worship is "a dedication to relevance regarding contemporary concerns and issues in the lives of worshippers" (ibid., p. 2). Many Cantonese worship songs written in the 1980s demonstrate high sensitivity to the social context. For example, "A New Song for the City (城市新歌)" (ACM, 1983) describes contemporary city lives. It mentions cottage areas, factories, and the Mass Transit Railway—the subway system in Hong Kong opened in 1980. "The Lord of Inventions (發明的主)" (ACM, 1984), a song on creation and providence, starts with a description of the construction of highways and the progress made in computer science. Furthermore, "Faith, Hope, and Love in Action (動力信望愛)" (ACM, 1986) describes the Christian commitment to serve and encourage the hardworking people in the busy city of Hong Kong.

Political turmoil in the 1980s, including the negotiation of Hong Kong's political future and the 1989 Tiananmen Incident, strengthened the Hongkonger identity and stimulated the creation of Cantonese worship songs that responded to political and social issues of the time. For instance, ACM released "Remembering Hong Kong in Storms (風雨念香港)" in 1984, the year when the Sino-British Joint Declaration that determined the future of Hong Kong was signed. And in 1989, ACM released "Mama, Don't Cry (媽媽不要哭)", which was inspired by students who joined the hunger strike at Tiananmen (Ko 2008, p. 21). In the same year, CSA included "The Call from China (中國的呼喚)" in its third album, which mourns the failure of the democratic movement and states that only God can bring true love and freedom to China—a missiological understanding towards

China that many Hong Kong Christians still hold today. Furthermore, in the 1990 album titled Resident Alien (異鄉人), CSA narrates the identity crisis of Hong Kong people; it also records the general social sentiment in the wave of post-1989 emigration in songs like "A Silent Goodbye (無言道別)".

2.5. Popularization and Challenges (1990s–2014)

After a decade of development led by pioneering parachurch organizations, Cantonese worship songs gradually entered church services in the 1990s. In the 1980s, Cantonese worship songs were generally only sung in fellowships. Hong Kong churches, largely evangelical, began heated discussions on whether contemporary worship songs were too secular and indecent to be sung in services or churches and whether the worship style was too Charismatic (Lo 1998). In the early 1990s, Cantonese praise and worship first started among Charismatic congregations (ibid.). As other churches began to see this genre's seeker-friendliness and attractiveness to youth, the controversy over Charismatic theology gradually faded, the local "worship wars" came to a truce, and more Hong Kong churches formed worship teams and held contemporary worship services (ibid.). By 1999, 61.5% of Hong Kong Chinese churches sang both traditional hymns and contemporary worship songs, and 13.1% only sang the latter (Wu and Liu 2002, p. 169). For instance, NPMC established its contemporary worship team in 1997 to lead the 9 a.m. service while continuing to hold its 11:15 a.m. service with traditional music and liturgy to cater to different needs within the congregation.

The increased need for Cantonese worship songs from the church led to the emergence of more parachurch Cantonese worship teams. They include the Crusade-affiliated The Worshippers (敬拜者使團, 1994, renamed One Circle 同心圓 in 2000), Amazing Grace Worship (基恩敬拜, 2004), and Playground Ministry (團契遊樂園, 2009). Songs they produced largely reflect evangelical theology and concern about urban Christian lives. In addition to making albums and songbooks, they constantly hold large worship meetings, play in evangelistic meetings, and train worship teams. They also conduct mission tours to serve global Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, Australia, New Zealand, North America, and Europe. To better serve Mandarin-speaking Chinese in the Chinese diaspora, they write Mandarin lyrics for some songs.

The development of contemporary worship in Hong Kong continues to be influenced by contemporary worship around the world. In 1993, some Taiwanese Americans established the Stream of Praise (讚美之泉, SOP) worship ministry in California. Their Mandarin worship songs quickly became popular in Hong Kong. Unfamiliar with Mandarin, many congregations sang SOP's Mandarin worship songs in Cantonese, and as a result, a new period of worshipping "out-of-tone" began. Only with mandatory school education and increased public education on Mandarin after Hong Kong's return to China in 1997, Hong Kong Christians were gradually able to sing Mandarin worship songs in Mandarin. It is worth noting that this rise in the popularity of Mandarin worship songs paralleled the rise of Mandarin pop music.

Furthermore, since the 2000s, Hong Kong churches have been hit by a new wave of the Charismatic movement from North America, South Korea, and Taiwan. Charismatic contemporary worship played an important role in this. Many Hong Kong Christians, especially youth, joined local or international Charismatic worship meetings held by worship teams like Joshua Band (約書亞樂團) from Taiwan, Hillsong, and Planetshakers from Australia, and IHOP from the United States. Through Charismatic contemporary worship, Charismatic theologies and practices were introduced into local evangelical and mainline circles.

Alarmed by the fact that Hong Kong churches were singing more and more Mandarin worship songs, some Hong Kong Christian musicians initiated the "Cantonese Worship Culture Restoration Movement (恢復粵語詩歌敬拜文化運動)" in 2010 and organized the group Cantonhymn in 2012. They observe that Hong Kong Christians unfamiliar with Mandarin find participating in worship that heavily uses Mandarin songs challenging.

They advocate that every Christian should have the right to worship God in their mother tongue, and more contemporary Cantonese worship songs should be produced (Worship Cyclone 敬拜風 2013, p. 11). Anthony Lee, convenor of Cantonhymn, states that "the frequent use of Mandarin songs in Hong Kong churches pulls our faith away from our culture", which is missiologically unpreferable (Xu 2017). Stressing the function of worship songs as down-to-earth evangelical tools and songwriters' role as missionaries, he encourages youth to write their own songs as users most familiar with the new generation (ibid.). Responding to the call or seeing the need themselves, some local worship teams that focus on making Cantonese worship songs were established, including Milk&Honey Worship (2013) and the Worship Nations (敬拜族/玻璃海樂團, 2014).

2.6. Cantonese Contemporary Worship Songs in the Post-Umbrella Movement Hong Kong (2014–)

In the 2010s, Hong Kong society experienced great political turmoil. Large-scale social movements like the Anti-Moral and National Education Movement (2012), the Umbrella Movement (2014), the "Fishball Revolution" (2016), and the Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Protests (Anti-ELAB Protests, 2019–2020) occurred. The relatively apolitical Hong Kong Christian community found facing the new sociopolitical reality inescapable. Such a new reality impacted Cantonese worship songs in several ways. First, against the growing political and cultural influence from Mainland China, localism grew. Many Hongkongers, seeing Cantonese as their cultural identity symbol, called for the revival of Cantonese songs. Second, the rise of youth activism in society encouraged Christian youth to voice out. Rather than waiting for existing worship teams to release new albums and singing translated songs by foreign worship teams, more and more Christian youth began to write their music and form new Cantonese worship teams.

The third impact of the recent social movements in Hong Kong on Cantonese worship songs is that an increasing number of pieces show concern about current affairs. Facing a city torn apart in political struggles, One Circle released "Love Your Enemies (愛仇敵)" in 2016. Mourning for the growing sociopolitical injustices and conflicts, in 2018, they released "Lamentation (哀歌)" and "Lamentation in the City (城裏哀歌)". Songs were even created based on movement slogans and visual symbols. For instance, the title of the song "Never Forget Why You Started (毋忘初心)" is a line Hong Kong activists often use to remind one another since the Umbrella Movement. Written by HeArtz in August 2019, when many areas in Hong Kong were covered in tear gas, the imagery of "smoke" runs through the song "Heterotopia (璀煙)". A common theme during this period is the hope for justice and the passing of darkness. For example, in 2018, Worship Nations released "Your Justice Come (願你公義降臨)", which references Amos 5:24. Amidst the Anti-ELAB Protests, in August 2019, ACM released the album Hope (黑暗中的盼望), featuring the song "Darkness Must Pass (黑暗終必過去)". A clear example of experience-led contextual exegesis is found in Raw Harmony's (2020) "Passover (逾越)", when the lyricist reads Exodus in light of the social movements and pandemic: "May the blood of the lamb be a sign on us and lead us through death, storms in lives, illnesses, and disasters". (My translation.) Even music videos demonstrate a higher level of contextualization. In the past, most Cantonese worship song music videos only showed the lyrics, some natural scenes, or the band playing the music. In contrast, some recent music videos of songs that show a concern for society feature protest symbols like anti-tear gas masks and the Lion Rock, as well as protest sites like Pacific Place in Admiralty and the Chinese University of Hong Kong. These visuals in Cantonese worship music videos further strengthened the connections between the worship songs, Hong Kong people, and current sociopolitical concerns.

2.7. Summary

This section surveys the hymnological contextualization in Hong Kong from the arrival of Protestantism in 1842 to the present day, focusing on its post-1949 developments. Since Mandarin became the national language of Republican China, Mandarin hymns be-

came widely used in Hong Kong churches under the influence of nation-building campaigns. After 1949, with the migration of Chinese Christians from Mainland China and the concentration of Christian resources in the city, Hong Kong grew into a production hub for Mandarin Chinese hymnals for the Chinese diaspora. The 1960s and 1970s were the embryonic period for worship reform as Cantonese became increasingly recognized even in migrant churches and as young Christians came into contact with contemporary developments in Western secular and Christian music. In the 1980s, thanks to the creativity of new Christian musicians and groups like the ACM and the CSA, Hong Kong witnessed the emergence of contextualized Cantonese worship songs. Many songs written during that period responded to current affairs and popular sentiments. From the 1990s to the early 2010s, contemporary worship became widely accepted by Hong Kong Christians. Worship teams within- and para-church were established, and many new Cantonese worship songs were written in response to the increased needs. Lastly, during the last decade of sociopolitical unrest, many Cantonese worship songs with strong social concerns were created, representing a highly contextualized voice by Hong Kong Christians.

3. From Hymnological Contextualization in Hong Kong to the Decentralization of Chinese Christianity

After providing the above historical sketch of the hymnological contextualization in Hong Kong, the following analysis situates this process in the development of Chinese Christianity. As Hong Kong was once a British colony, the lens of decolonization seems to be a natural choice. Indeed, the making of Chinese hymns and contextualized Cantonese worship songs contributed to the general decolonization of Chinese Christianity from Western influence, especially in their highlighting of indigenous experience in their theologizing efforts, and in their involvement of Chinese and Hong Kong cultural elements in their musicking. However, this point could be demonstrated in the case of many other Chinese hymns and hymnals. For me, the uniqueness of this case lies in the transition from singing traditional Mandarin hymns in an "out-of-tone" manner to creating Cantonese worship songs—a phenomenon that happened mainly within the boundary of Chinese Christianity. It is thus a perfect case to illustrate what I call the decentralization of Chinese Christianity—that the contextualization of Christianity in the local Hong Kong context reflects and contributes to the diversification and decentralization of Chinese Christianity. It should be noted that decentralization does not mean the absence of centers, as in the case of distributed networks. Rather, it means the presence of multiple centers without one single core. This analysis will be elaborated in two parts: the centralization of Chinese Christianity during the Republican Era and its decentralization with growing contextualization in Hong Kong.

3.1. The Centralization of Chinese Christianity during the Republican Era

The first part of the above historical survey revealed two forms of centralization of Chinese Christianity during the Republican era. Geographically, as Mainland China gradually opened for missionary activities, the influence of Chinese Christian communities in Hong Kong and overseas decreased, and Chinese Christianity became increasingly Mainland-centric. More specifically, while regional centers like Beijing, Fuzhou, Guangzhou, and Chongqing existed, Shanghai grew to become the national and even global center of Chinese Christianity. The city's foreign concessions, legal system, banking and financial facilities, transport and communication networks, as well as its central location in coastal China, made it stand out from other Chinese cities. Many national organizations and denominational churches moved or built their headquarters in Shanghai, and the city developed into a central hub for information exchange, decision-making, and resource provision for global Chinese Christianity. For instance, the four Mandarin national hymnals described above were all first produced in Shanghai by Shanghai-based publishers. While regional centers shared the burden during the Sino-Japanese War, Shanghai quickly regained its centrality when the War ended.

Linguistically, Chinese Christianity became more and more Mandarin-centric during the Republican Era. This is exemplified by the creation of Chinese national hymnals like the *Hymn of Universal Praise* (1936). These creations benefited the church and mission work in several ways, and Christian communities generally supported these efforts. Standardization by including the best translations raised the overall standard of Chinese hymns. It promoted hymnological indigenization by including hymns composed and written by Chinese. It encouraged ecumenism and cooperation among missions, denominations, and churches and achieved more efficient use of resources. It also helped less developed regions by providing readily available worship resources. The oneness in singing, in turn, strengthened solidarity and ecumenical spirit among Chinese Christians, and it contributed to the forging of a new Chinese Christian identity, a Chinese Christianity, and a Chinese nation independent of Western dominance (Leung 2015, p. 35).

Nevertheless, the use of these Mandarin national hymnals has limitations and problems. It fell into the trap of nationalism that prevailed back then and defined peoples, cultures, and experiences according to the newly invented nations. The emphasis on building one unified Chinese Christianity sacrifices diversity in experiencing, understanding, and expressing faith. It goes against the vernacular principle proposed by missiologist Lamin Sanneh (2003, p. 69): "The language of Christianity is the language of the people". Instead of just one Chinese language, there are at least ten main Sinitic languages (Chappell 2015, pp. 14–15). They use different terminologies, rhyme differently, and, most importantly, contain different lived experiences, cultures, and histories. Singing Mandarin hymns in Hong Kong was not too much of a problem when Hong Kong was still socially and culturally an extension of South China. However, as Hong Kong gradually separated from other parts of China politically, culturally, and socio-economically after 1949, the limitations of using Mandarin hymnals in Cantonese-speaking Hong Kong churches became increasingly apparent. Not only did local Christians find Mandarin hymns linguistically "out-of-tone", some also found these hymns theologizing unfamiliar experiences in another language. This "otherness" of Mandarin hymnals hindered local Christians' worship, their expressions of faith, and their mission to the local society.

The political implication of making national hymnals is even more troubling. Establishing a national language while suppressing the use of other languages is very often a tool for state-building and colonization, including internal colonization, especially for authoritarian and imperialistic regimes. From this lens, replacing vernacular hymnals with national ones constitutes a denial of local voices and experiences. On the one hand, translating Western hymns into Chinese and including hymns written by Chinese and in Chinese style were giant steps towards Christianity's indigenization. On the other hand, the creation of these Mandarin hymnals became part of the center-periphery-making process. They aided the making of a Mandarin-centric faith and nation and further marginalized non-Mandarin-speaking Chinese and their religious experiences, including those in Hong Kong.

3.2. The Decentralization of Chinese Christianity through Relocating to and Contextualizing in Hong Kong

As Christianity in Mainland China, with its major center in Shanghai, was largely cut off from worldwide Chinese churches since 1949, it lost its central position in theologizing, and Mainland China ceased to be the resource center in the global Chinese Christian community. Meanwhile, under the circumstances of the Cold War, the British colony of Hong Kong replaced Shanghai as the transport, financial, and information center in the Far East and in the Chinese diaspora. Many Christians, missionaries, missions, and Christian organizations relocated to the Colony, which initiated a shift in the center of gravity of Chinese Christianity. Continuing a lot of their previous work in the old center of Shanghai, they rebuilt a new center of Chinese Christian resources in Hong Kong to serve migrants/refugees and the wider Chinese diaspora. For instance, many missions and denominational churches made Hong Kong their regional center for personnel and resource

allocation, and some theologians restarted bible schools and seminaries to train pastors and missionaries. Additionally, some publishing houses reprinted Christian books and Mandarin hymnals previously published in Mainland China. At the same time, as many Mainlanders and Christian leaders followed the Nationalist Government and migrated to Taiwan, the primate city of Taipei also grew into a center for global Chinese Christianity. However, it did not become as influential a center as Hong Kong due to Cold War politics, its geographical separation from the Mainland of China, and restrictions imposed by the Nationalist Government. The development of coexisting Chinese Christian centers in Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Taipei during the Cold War is one reason why I call this process "decentralization" rather than a simple "relocation". How Taipei developed into a Chinese Christian center after 1949 deserves another thorough study.

With the separate developments between Hong Kong and Mainland China since 1949, Chinese Christianity in Hong Kong gradually underwent a new wave of contextualization in the local Cantonese language and the society of Hong Kong, especially when the city transitioned from a migrant society to one with a growing Hongkonger identity. As such, this new Chinese Christian center transformed from a copy of the old center to a re-contextualizing one. When the local born and raised generation took up the baton from migrant leaders, they brought in new experiences; interacting with the new context, they re-theologized and created new expressions of Chinese Christianity that are particular to Christians in Hong Kong. This "local turn" of Chinese Christianity in Hong Kong first appeared in language, then in its theological concerns. This intentional "local turn" also means that the resources produced would no longer fit in other Chinese Christian contexts. Eventually, the turn became a challenge to the notion of one Chinese Christianity, forged by earlier generations of Chinese Christian indigenous movement leaders.

This "local turn" is exemplified in the making of contextualized Cantonese worship songs in Hong Kong. At first, congregations sang Mandarin hymns in Cantonese in an "out-of-tone" manner. Then, new Cantonese worship songs responding to local concerns emerged in the 1980s. Turning to the local means that this branch of Christianity does not seek national influence; it aims to diversify rather than unify. If the *Hymns of Universal Praise* is a national hymnody that echoed the nation-building effort of the Chinese state and Chinese nationalist sentiments in the Republican Era, the rise of Cantonese worship songs challenges the imagination of a homogeneous Chinese nation and the hegemonic motive behind it. While the renowned Cantopop lyricist and scholar Yiu-Fai Chow asserts that Cantopop "question[s] rather than confirm[s] Chineseness", (Chow and de Kloet 2013, p. 5), I suggest that the same is true for Christianity in Hong Kong. To question does not necessarily mean to negate; it can also mean to enrich, expand, and queer—intentionally leaving open and inviting unorthodox answers. As Enoch Lam (2022, p. 207) argues in his dissertation, local Hong Kong Christians' musicking in different languages, Cantonese, Mandarin, and English, do lead them into multiple coexisting local and global imagined communities.

The decentralization of Chinese Christianity, furthermore, happens at the micro-level in Hong Kong. The above historical sketch of worship song development shows a gradual shift from a top-down to a bottom-up model. The production of hymnals was dominated by a small circle of church music scholars and theologians. However, since the 1980s, some worship ministries and Christian musicians, many without formal theological training, have joined to supply Cantonese worship songs. In the recent decade, various small-scale worship teams have produced an increasing number of songs. Articulating faith in the vernacular and bringing in local bottom-up experience, Hong Kong Christians theologize by making Cantonese worship songs. Instead of only singing a faith crystalized by Western or Mainland Chinese Christians, they finally join in worship with their own voices—that they can sing their own faith in their own context, in their mother tongue, and in the right tone.

4. Conclusions

In *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West*, Lamin Sanneh (2003, p. 24) argues that "indigenizing the faith meant decolonizing its theology". While the creation of Chinese hymns helped decolonize the Christian faith brought to China by Western missions, standardization through the creation of Mandarin national hymnals again ignored language and cultural differences within the invented nation and reinforced a new center-periphery power structure. The relocation of the Chinese Christian resource center to Hong Kong around 1949 and the subsequent creation of contextualized Cantonese worship songs in Hong Kong since the 1980s broke such domination. In the process, a new imagined community that embraces a new collective identity—the Hongkongers—re-theologizes with new local experiences. The creation and singing of these Cantonese worship songs by Hongkongers and those who identify with this identity, including overseas Hongkongers, in turn, forge and reinforce this collective identity and community. Therefore, this article argues that the making of Cantonese worship songs contributes to and reflects the "local turn" and thus decentralization of Chinese Christianity from a Mandarin-centric and Mainland-centric one to one that articulates more diverse experiences by Chinese Christians worldwide.

Migration and political separation since 1949 gave Chinese Christianity the time, space, and soil to contextualize in Hong Kong. Today, the environment is changing again. The growing exertion of Chinese state power in Hong Kong since 1997, including the implementation of policies to further promote Mandarin in Hong Kong, the incorporation of Hong Kong into the newly invented "Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macau Bay Area", as well as the direct enactment of the National Security Law by Beijing, all made Hong Kong more like the Mainland. The status of Cantonese, Hong Kong culture, the Hongkonger identity, and Christianity in Hong Kong are facing different degrees of challenge. In this "Post-National Security Law Era", how will Hong Kong Christians contextualize their faith in Cantonese worship songs? Will Hong Kong remain a major center of Chinese Christianity? How will the current wave of emigration from Hong Kong impact the further decentralization of Chinese Christianity? These are important questions for future research.

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