

“One City, Two Systems”

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Abstract

In a culture of startups* like that of Hong Kong, the lines that divide economy, politics, and religious life are often blurred by common cultural practices. As I've written elsewhere (“The Liberalizing Role of Hong Kong Startups in Religion and Politics,” in *Citizens of Two Kingdoms*, Seguire Chan Shun Hing, editor, Brill, forthcoming), individual initiative in the form of the startup is common across Hong Kong's economic, political and religious spheres. In this paper for the Ricci Institute Symposium, I explore the generation of a yellow circle economy in Hong Kong.

On the face of it, the yellow circle economy is an expression of capitalist enterprise and free choice. It reflects Hong Kong's widely recognized economic model. In fact, it is only possible thanks to the innovation of smartphone apps (What's Gap) and Google maps. At the same time, however, the yellow circle economy exists as an expression of political empowerment and free choice. By selecting restaurants, shops, services according to classification of yellow versus blue, pro-democracy versus pro-establishment, the consumer reflects Hong Kong's aspirations as well as experience with democratic politics. Finally, as an expression of traditional patronage and charitable giving in a time of coronavirus, this economic model simultaneously reflects deeper moral and religious ideas. Patronage serves to offer thanks for support in the time of street protests from summer through fall 2019. And in the time of coronavirus, patronage becomes charitable giving as all small businesses struggle to survive under conditions of voluntary quarantine.

Together, the three models reinforce Hong Kong's distinct identity as well as its current identity politics. No longer is the city's future understood as a matter of One Country, Two Systems. The yellow circle has drawn a new boundary: one city, two systems.

*See the groundbreaking work of University of Chicago School of Business faculty Nicholas Baloff popularized in the mid-1960s.