Readings from the Book of Joshua

Terry Glavin - The Real Story on Substack - 2026-11-09

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"The only thing I worry about is that people will forget Hong Kong."

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Joshua Wong turned 30 on October 13.

Prominent Hong Kong activist Joshua Wong was sentenced to 10 years in prison on Thursday for his second conviction under a Beijing-imposed national security law. - Associated Press, November 5, 2026.

Roughly 400 Hongkongers have been prosecuted under the Chinese Communist Party's sadistic Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. It was imposed on the city-state on June 30, 2020, for the explicit purpose of crushing Hong Kong's democracy movement.

The law can be applied retroactively to cover political crimes and speech crimes and "terrorism" alleged to have occurred before the law was enacted. It's also extraterritorial, meaning that you can be charged under the law no matter who you are or where in the world you might live.

Last week Joshua Wong became the first Hongkonger to be convicted and sentenced under the law twice.

This newsletter is a preemption of the usual Sunday Real Story edition, which was intended to follow from the analysis I filed to the National Post last week, To restore the stature of the United States around the globe, Congress should start by decoupling the Trump-Putin alliance and last Thursday's Real Story newsletter, How Can Congress Fix The Mess Of America? I'd just finished putting that newsletter together when the news about Joshua's prison sentence came in.

In a recent letter to a friend, Joshua wrote: "The only thing I worry about is that people will forget Hong Kong, and that amid competition and struggles between great powers, they will forget the countless ordinary, unknown people in different places who have paid a price for their beliefs."

Today I will not be forgetting Hong Kong. I dropped what I intended to write Sunday and pulled this together instead. I also have a guest essay for you below, by our friend and occasional Real Story contributor Fred Litwin, about his effort to find a fitting home for an artifact of Hong Kong's severance from the free world in 1997.

"Amid competition and struggles between great powers."

I've been following the tribulations of the Hongkongers up close for more than a decade for the Ottawa Citizen, Macleans and the National Post. I've also been trying to stay out front of the Chinese Communist Party's globe-spanning cruelties, corruptions and subversions for longer than that.

It's hard to keep up with everything in the work I'm supposed to be doing as a journalist and to make myself

useful to Real Story subscribers. These days, among other things, making sense of Russia's war on Ukraine and the Trump administration's role in prolonging it is supposed to be my job. It's a file that's occupied a great deal of my attention over the past couple of years, and ever since Beijing's imposition of the National Security Law in 2020, Hong Kong has been slowly disappearing from the headlines.

It isn't an easy story to cover. Hongkongers need to be very careful about what they say to foreign journalists nowadays. You can go to jail in Hong Kong for merely organizing a candlelight vigil to remember the Tiananmen martyrs of 1989. Those vigils at Victoria Park used to draw tens of thousands of people every June 4. They're history now. At least 11 booksellers have been arrested since July for selling "seditious" books. The repression is absurd and cruel.

It hasn't helped that everyone I'd interviewed from my time in Hong Kong has ended up either in jail, on trial or in exile.

In Canada, it doesn't help that reporting fully on the subject of the Liberal government's ongoing intimacies with the Chinese Communist Party's ruling classes in Beijing and Hong Kong is exhausting work, and inevitably draws unpleasant comparisons with the greasy self-dealing among and between Trump's inner circle and Putin's oligarchs, slush-fund executives and the chief executive officers of Russia's corporations.

Things can get awkward. After all, the Carney government entered into a multi-faceted "strategic partnership" with the Chinese police state just days before his celebrated January speech in Davos. It's a cozy partnership that contrasts unhelpfully against the prime minister's carefully curated image as a middle-powers statesman who stands up to the bullying of the global hegemons.

And then there's the continuing influence of the Canada China Business Council and China's 575 "soft power" organizations affiliated with the Chinese Communist Party's United Front superstructure across Canada.

The years-long effort to establish an effective foreign influence registry appears to be dying a slow bureaucratic death. And remember those five illegal "Chinese police stations" operating in Toronto, Montreal and Metro Vancouver? In their latest report, the Safeguard Defenders organization reckons there are now at least 18 overseas Chinese associations operating police monitoring stations in Canada, sometimes with multiple sub-branches in a single city.

Then there's the Canadian Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong, where 300,000 residents have Canadian citizenship papers in their investment portfolios. The chamber is growing by leaps and bounds.

"We know other countries are under a lot pressure from domestic lobbies," Albert Ho Chun-yan, the former leader of Hong Kong's Democratic Party, told me. "The Communist Party in China has a very long hand in reaching into open societies, and they manage to corrupt politicians. But we all have to find the moral fibre to stand for democracy."

Albert spoke those words to me in October, 2016. At the time, he was the chairman of the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements in China. Back then, it was still possible to imagine such things, and to advocate for them. Now, it's against the law.

On September 11, Albert was sentenced to five years and two months imprisonment for saying such things out loud. His fellow alliance leaders were also jailed. Lee Cheuk-yan was sentenced to seven years. Chow

Hang-tung was sentenced to serve seven years and three months.

At The Close of the Octave of All Saints

Albert Ho, perhaps not concidentally, is a devout Roman Catholic. As with several of Hong Kong's better known champions of democracy's cause, Joshua Wong, too, was raised up in the Christian faith.

Jimmy Lai, the 78-year-old worldwide hero of press freedom and publisher of Hong Kong's pro-democracy Apple Daily, is widely understood among Roman Catholics to be enduring a form of living martyrdom. Back in February, after having been detained continuously since December 31, 2020, Jimmy was sentenced to 20 years in jail for violating the wide-open provisions of the sadistic National Security Law regarding "colluding with foreign forces."

That's the same charge that was brought against Joshua in order to put him behind bars for another decade. Back in 2024, Joshua was sentenced along with 44 other activists to four years and eight months for "conspiracy to commit subversion." Because of time served on the charge dating back to 2020, Joshua was due to be released in January. Instead, he's now looking at a decade in jail.

Joshua's alleged subversion involved opposition candidates joining in a kind of "primary" to more effectively contest Hong Kong's absurdly gerrymandered electoral laws, which usually guarantee control by establishment candidates backed by the Chinese Communist Party.

The later charge of collusion with foreign forces - Joshua pleaded guilty - involved organizing with the activist in exile Nathan Law and "other persons unknown" to encourage democracies to impose sanctions and other measures in response to Beijing's unlawful annexation of Hong Kong in violation of the terms of the 1997 handover agreement with the United Kingdom.

In the early days of his activism, Joshua told a reporter: "I believe in Christ. I believe everyone born equal and they're loved by Jesus. I think that everyone should get the equal rights in our political system. We should care for the weak and poor in our society."

Prayers for the dead, the imprisoned and the exiled

So there was that, and maybe it was partly because in the old liturgical calendar, Sunday concluded the Octave of All Saints, eight days associated with prayers for the dead, and I'd just happened to be trying to ballpark the millions of innocents slaughtered, imprisoned or exiled in the course of democracy's retreat around the world from The Long March of the Tyrants, which is now in its 25th year.

Today seems as good a day as any to not forget Hong Kong. The thing about the upheavals - the "Scholarism" protests of 2011-2012, the "Umbrella Revolution" of 2014 and the historic mass protests of 2019-2020 - everything about Hong Kong's democratic uprisings over the past decade and a half can be read as Joshua Wong's life story.

Years ago, Joshua had already been heralded as the voice of his generation. In 2014, Time magazine put his picture on the cover beside the headline "The Face of The Protests." He'd been at the vanguard of those protests since he was 14 years old.

The Scholarism protests of 2012 were aimed at the Communist Party's effort to introduce "moral and national education" in Hong Kong's school system, a curriculum of propaganda that praised the Communist

Party and ignored indelicate subjects like the Tiananmen massacres. The students fought it and won. At least for the moment.

Joshua went on to found the Demostiso political party alongside activists Agnes Chow and Oscar Lai. Within two years, the "Umbrella Revolution" was in full swing, a protest movement calling for a one-person, one-vote system in the Hong Kong Special Administration Region government, and against the Communist Party's pre-screening of candidates for the selection of Hong Kong's chief executive. The umbrellas were used to defend against pepper spray and tear gas. The protesters managed to shut down major intersections and key commercial districts for 79 days, but in the end, in 2014, Beijing won.

In 2019, Beijing's attempts to impose an extradition law on Hong Kong kicked off an unprecedented resistance that drew hundreds of thousands of Hongkongers into the streets and galvanized the attention of the world. In just one of the demonstrations, an estimated two million Hongkongers streamed along Hennessey Road from Victoria Park to the legislative grounds. Protesters assembled at China's diplomatic missions in cities around the world. Pro-democracy candidates swept Hong Kong's local elections in November.

The 2019-2020 protests rank among the great rebellions against tyranny of the past half century, from Poland's Solidarno ("Solidarity") movement that kicked off in 1980 and ultimately led to the downfall of Poland's pro-Moscow Communist government, to the Euromaidan protests that led to Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity in 2014 and the Ukrainian Parliament's ouster of the pro-Putin puppet Viktor Yanukovich.

But in the end, in the absence of meaningful support from the world's democratic states - effective sanctions, for starters - the Hongkongers of 2019 were defeated by Beijing. The "two-systems" promises from the handover in 1997 were broken with impunity. And everything has gone back to business as usual, only unfathomably worse. For the moment, anyway.

In 2021, Canada opened "pathways" to Hongkongers for permanent residency in Canada, and 48,500 Hongkongers applied for acceptance. By this past June, more than 13,000 people had obtained permanent resident status in Canada. The project was ended two months ago.

The usual expressions of disapproval, followed by the usual rebuke

Dozens of human rights organizations condemned Joshua's jail sentence. A sternly-worded communique was also issued by Canada, the United States, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Japan, New Zealand and Australia. Beijing spoke through its embassy in London: "We urge the UK to stop shielding and glorifying criminals, and to stop interfering in Hong Kong affairs and China's internal affairs under any pretext."

Back to the Ukraine war this week

The Democrats' renewed control Congress offers real hope for the reassertion of majority opinion in the United States, which is foursquare on Ukraine's side. There's a good chance that MAGA's losses in both the House and the Senate will mean a break in the logjam of bipartisan efforts on Ukraine's behalf, and a maybe even a forced decoupling of the Putin-Trump alliance.

The Kremlin is well aware of this and should be expected to take every advantage over the next two months; the new Congress won't be sworn in until January 3. Trump and his envoys Jared Kushner and Steven Witkoff are well aware of the closing window, too. There are billions of dollars' worth of business

deals at stake. The talks in Abu Dhabi this coming week are a high water mark in the peril faced by Ukraine and by Europe.

I'm afraid I barely cover the bases around Hong Kong today, and sometimes I wonder whether there's any point in trying. That was my mood after hearing the news about Joshua, anyway.

Enough out of me. Here's that guest essay I mentioned up at the top.

No time for mementos of democracy's downfall in Hong Kong

by Fred Litwn

The Nakba exhibit at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg has garnered a massive amount of attention. And for good reason - while the exhibit claims that it "is grounded in a rigorous process of research and curation," Jewish voices were excluded from the entire process. As a result, Palestine Uprooted: Nakba Past and Present was so one-side that Mark Berkin, the only Jewish trustee of the museum, resigned in protest.

I am now rethinking my intent to donate a human rights artifact to the Museum.

Back in the spring of 1997, I was working for Intel Corporation in Singapore managing its Networking Division's marketing for the Asia-Pacific region. One day my boss called me into a conference room and told me that upper management needed somebody in Hong Kong to market Intel's microprocessors in Asia. My boss wanted to know if I wanted the job.

It was a step up, but it meant that I would have to move to Hong Kong, Intel's Asian headquarters. I immediately accepted and my job transition started. I flew to Hong Kong to find a new place to live - and I knew that I was going to witness history since the handover was just a few months away.

I moved into my new apartment two weeks before the handover. It was in Happy Valley, an upper-income neighbourhood near the race track. Our offices weren't too far away in Central, and it was easy to hail a taxi to go to work in the morning.

I was invited to a party at a high-rise apartment building overlooking the harbour to watch the fireworks on the evening of June 30. After the fireworks, I left that party and met friends at Propaganda, the major gay bar in Lan Kwei Fong, an area with many restaurants and clubs. Everybody entering Propaganda was given a small Chinese flag and they televised the lowering of the British flag at midnight. I noticed that the only people waving the Chinese flag were the Caucasians.

Martin Lee, the leader of the Democratic Party in Hong Kong, had organized a demonstration at the Legislative Council building at 12:30 a.m., so there I went. Lee addressed the crowd of about 1,500 people in attendance. I was among them.

"We are proud to be Chinese, but we also want to ask why China cannot give us more freedom," Lee said. "If there is no democracy, there will be no rule of law; if there is no freedom, human rights will not be respected."

Lee chose the Legislative Council for his protest because China had decided it would be abolished and replaced with its own provisional legislature. As you can imagine, the rules were changed to ensure

pro-Beijing majorities. Face masks were given out to the people in attendance to protest the loss of freedom of speech. And I still have that face mask:

At about 4:30 in the morning, I walked home with a friend. Along the way, we met a young Hongkonger who was crying his eyes out. There was nothing we could say to console him.

In May of 2019, Brian Lee Crowley, the Managing Director of the Macdonald-Laurier Institute, asked me to chair an event in Ottawa on Hong Kong and democracy. Martin Lee was one of the panelists, and I brought my mask to show him. He told me that he had not kept his mask from the protest. I offered to give him mine, but he refused.

In January 2025, it struck me that the mask deserved to be in a museum somewhere. I emailed the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg, and I received a reply from a curator late that month. He wanted to know more about the mask, and he asked for photographs.

I immediately sent him a photograph along with answers to his questions. I also sent him a photograph with me and Martin Lee at the 2019 Macdonald-Laurier Institute event in Ottawa.

I was then sent an email informing me that there was potential for the mask "to be considered for addition to the museum's permanent collection." But there was a process to go through, and it would have to be approved by the Acquisitions Committee. Their email noted that "CMHR has a modest collecting program in comparison to a typical museum so we collect very selectively, with acquisitions focusing primarily on objects for which we can identify a long-term use in exhibits or programming."

On February 18, 2026, I received another email telling me that they "will be preparing a recommendation for the facemask for the committee to consider." They asked me if I was still interested in offering them the mask. I replied that my offer "still stands." They replied that they were starting "the work necessary to prepare our recommendation to the Acquisitions Committee over the next couple of months."

That is the last communication from the Museum. The mask is still sitting in my office.

Given the kerfuffle about the Nakba exhibit, I am now reconsidering donating the face mask to the Human Rights Museum. I am worried that it won't be given the respect it deserves in their collection, or that it might collect dust in a storage room.

Does anybody know a better place for this important artifact from the Hong Kong handover?

Editor's note: A year after Fred's meeting with him in Ottawa, Martin Lee was arrested, on April 18, 2020, along with several prominent pro-democracy figures. The charges related to their part in organizing the massive August 18, 2019 protest at Causeway Bay.

In April, 2021, Lee was sentenced to served an 11-month prison sentence, suspended for two years. Lee and the other defendants appealled their convictions and lost. On December 27, 2024, the Hong Kong government fired Lee from his position as a Justice of the Peace.