

# In Hong Kong's Olympic glory, a glimpse of a hopeful new future

**Michael B. Wong** | August 4, 2021 | SCMP

In the past few days, as Hong Kong's malls erupted in joy at our Olympic victories, there has been not only pride and solidarity, but also temporary relief. It was only very recently that the same venues were the stage for discontent, anger and violence. For the moment, we can forget about the collective trauma of protest and pandemic that we have struggled through for the past two years, to celebrate our own hometown champions.

In many ways, our Olympic medallist Siobhan Haughey symbolises what has always made Hong Kong so special in the world. Siobhan grew up on Hong Kong TV, was educated at a local school, and speaks fluent Cantonese.

With an Irish father and a Chinese mother, Siobhan is both East and West. Siobhan turned down recruitment by Ireland and achieved excellence at the highest level possible on our behalf. She dreams of some day becoming a child psychologist.

Siobhan's story helps us to remember who Hongkongers are as a people. We are a unique mixture of cosmopolitan and native culture, dedicated to excellence, loyal to our city, and focused on our next generation.

A former British colony, built by hardworking Cantonese migrants to become one of the world's most international cities. This collective identity has already been fashioned by more than a century of shared experiences and is not easily destroyed.

However, since the recent violent confrontation in our streets over our identity and future, we have faced an uncertain economic future and shifting geopolitical winds.

There is incessant talk of emigration and of Hong Kong as a "broken piece of jade". Every day, it seems, there is a new opinion piece that mourns the death of Hong Kong.

How has Hong Kong arrived at this point? In fact, discontent has simmered as Hong Kong's economy grew increasingly integrated with the mainland. Although 1997 marks the transfer of sovereignty, the trend towards economic integration began to accelerate in 2003 when Hong Kong started opening our borders to our northerly neighbours and cued the arrival of mainland visitors and capital.

Open borders brought many economic benefits, but the massive influx of tourists and soaring housing prices also bred disgruntlement. Streets became unrecognisable due to disruptive visitors. Public hospitals were overwhelmed. Border crossings became congested with parallel traders. While property owners saw their bank accounts fattened by rising rents, youths found themselves ill-prepared to secure a future in the new economy.

The complacent attitude of our leaders meant that many issues were left unresolved. Surveys by Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute (formerly the University of Hong Kong's public opinion programme) show that the share of Hongkongers who identified as Chinese had risen from 35 per cent in 2000 to the peak of 50 per cent in 2008, but it reached a nadir of 21 per cent by 2019.

Those who felt alienated by societal changes increasingly took to radical action. Eventually, a devastating confrontation exploded.

This year's sweet victories at the Tokyo Olympics, however, give me hope for a future that can be forged here in Hong Kong, if only we could give up the vitriol and infighting, like the petty dispute over the colour of our athletes' clothing, and instead confront our challenges with humility and solidarity.

For the sake of our youth who face a world chock-full of adversity, we cannot continue down a self-destructive path of complacency and division.

Siobhan Haughey and Edgar Cheung Ka-long have shown us that even in the brave new era of the national security law, we can find ways to reclaim and rebuild the community we love. We can reaffirm and strengthen our cultural heritage.

We can rededicate ourselves to the pursuit of excellence. We can work together to invest in our city's children. We can bind up our wounds and reimagine our city.

If we remember these lessons, the glory earned at this year's Olympics will be not just an historic achievement in athletics, but a turning point for the whole of Hong Kong.