



BOOK TALK

Hong Kong's Past, Present and Future

Six years after Hong Kong's National Security Law went into effect, we convened a panel of authors to discuss what has changed since.

JULY 2, 2026

HONG KONG



Six years after the implementation of Hong Kong's National Security Law, at midnight on June 30, 2020, the city remains at the center of debates about identity and governance. Once celebrated as a gateway between China and the world, Hong Kong has undergone profound political, social and economic changes in recent years. Since the mass protests of 2019, its institutions, civil society, media, demographics and business environment have radically shifted, making Hong Kong a markedly different city from before 2020, let alone before the handover in 1997.

On occasion of three recent books on the topic, we convened a panel at Asia Society in New York bringing together disparate authors and observers of Hong Kong to reflect on the city's past, consider its present, and speculate about its future. How has Hong Kong changed since the protests and the enactment of the National Security Law? How do residents and the international community view the city's transformation? What is the role that Hong Kong has played, and will play now, in between China and the world?

Four speakers joined us to discuss these issues: Xu Xi, author of *Horizon Hong Kong* (2026), a collection of short stories spanning decades of life in Hong Kong; Mark Clifford, author of *The Troublemaker* (2024), a biography of media mogul Jimmy Lai; Anna Kwok, Board Director of the Hong Kong Democracy Council; and moderator Simon Elegant, author of *City on Fire* (2026), a thriller set during the 2019 protests. Watch the video of the event below:



“ It's hard to know what the future will be, but I do know that Hong Kong is a city with a very rich past full of people who are really tough, and that's not going to change. ”

— Xu Xi

Speakers



[Xu Xi](#) (許素細) is one of Hong Kong's leading fiction writers. She is the author of 16 books of literary prose, and editor of four anthologies of Hong Kong writing. Her newest collection is *Horizon Hong Kong: Selected Stories* (2026). She splits her time between New York state and the rest of the world.



Mark L. Clifford is an author focused on Hong Kong. His most recent book is *The Troublemaker* (2024), a biography of Jimmy Lai. Clifford lived in Asia from 1987 to 2020 and holds a PhD in Hong Kong history. He was the editor-in-chief of the *South China Morning Post* and of *The Standard*.



Anna Kwok is a Washington-based policy analyst. She is the Board President and former Executive Director of the Hong Kong Democracy Council (HKDC), a nonprofit organization promoting democracy and human rights in Hong Kong. She has testified before the U.S. Congress, and has been interviewed by *The New York Times* and other outlets.



Simon Elegant spent more than two decades as a foreign correspondent in Asia. He was formerly China bureau chief of *The Washington Post*, and before that Beijing bureau chief and Southeast Asia correspondent for *TIME* magazine. He is the author, most recently, of *City on Fire* (2026). He is now at work on a fourth novel, set in Beijing.

The video of this event was also posted at [Asia Society](#).