Athena Tong

Hong Kong advocacy, multilingual research, and digital resilience in Tokyo and Taiwan

Athena Tong (唐若凌) is a Hong Kong-born researcher based in Tokyo, working on political communication, information freedom, and the security of digital infrastructure. Before leaving Hong Kong in 2022, she worked in documentary production, a Legislative Council office, the political organization Demosistō, and human-rights campaigning. Her subsequent work connects Hong Kong's political experience with questions facing Japan, Taiwan, and other democracies: how information is restricted or manipulated, how communications systems fail, and what institutions can preserve public participation. She is a visiting researcher at the University of Tokyo, a research associate and programme lead at the China Strategic Risks Institute (CSRI), and a non-resident Vasey fellow at Pacific Forum. 1 16 6 7 12

Her career has developed through overlapping kinds of work. French-language study preceded documentary interpreting and political communications; campaigning involved preparing arguments for international audiences; research now appears as jointly authored reports, public fact-checking, policy commentary, and political-science scholarship. The range is easier to understand by following particular tasks—finding interlocutors, explaining context, testing a claim—than by reading the affiliations as successive promotions. 9 10 30



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French study and political participation, 2013–2017

At Hong Kong Baptist University, Tong studied European Studies in the French stream. The university's contemporary records show what learning a language involved beyond acquiring a credential. In her first year, she undertook French oral-expression and performance training and placed fourth in a competition. By 2017, she won second prize in an inter-university French speech contest, speaking about greener urban development in the Pearl River Delta. These were exercises in presenting an argument to an audience, years before international policy work became her principal public identity. 2 5

In a 2024 Hitotsubashi University interview, Tong described a relatively apolitical upbringing: her father encouraged independent judgment, while her mother discussed history, culture, and the British influence on Hong Kong's institutions. Peers and teachers also mattered. Participation in the 2014 Umbrella Movement belonged to a university environment where the meaning of freedom could be discussed and where other students were already becoming involved. 3

Her studies included time at Sciences Po. Back at HKBU, her 2016–2017 honours project was titled La lutte anti-terroriste en France— "The fight against terrorism in France"—with Dr. Tran listed as supervisor. The programme required independently researched work in French after the European study period. The thesis itself was not recovered for this profile, so its conclusions remain unknown. Its title does establish that security and state power were research subjects before her move to Tokyo. 4 6

A different kind of apprenticeship came through television. Tong recalls working for roughly six months as a fixer and interpreter on an ARTE documentary about Hong Kong, meeting people across the political spectrum and helping a visiting production understand its setting. That work led, in her account, to an invitation to join a Legislative Council office. The production was Alain Lewkowicz's Hong Kong, génération rétrocession, made with Little Big Story and documented in ARTE's 2017 programme magazine. 8 9

The fixer's tasks—finding people, interpreting speech, and explaining unfamiliar circumstances—are easily submerged beneath a documentary's finished story. In Tong's later publications, the same difficulty recurs: an account can travel internationally while losing the context needed to understand it.

Communications, campaigns, and overlapping organizations, 2017–2020

Tong’s self-reported chronology places her Legislative Council internship in April–August 2017, Demosistō communications and public-relations role in September 2017–June 2019, Hong Kong Civil Hub coordination in July 2018–August 2019, and campaigning for the China Human Rights Lawyers Concern Group in June 2019–June 2020. Several appointments overlapped, linking political organizing, civil-society exchange, and rights advocacy. 7

A June 2018 International IDEA conference programme supplies a contemporary external anchor. It describes Tong as responsible for Demosistō’s international campaigns, public relations, and communications, while pursuing a master’s in Political Communications at Goldsmiths, University of London. A later author biography records her completing the degree in 2018. The Brussels programme scheduled her in discussions of political representation and participatory democracy. A University of Geneva programme later that year placed her in a human-rights discussion about the relationship between economic interests and rights. The invitations show the kinds of rooms her communications work was designed to reach. 36 6 11

Writing for Le Monde in August 2019 as a campaign officer, she argued that repression of rights lawyers damaged civil society and information freedom. University-trained French now carried a Hong Kong organization’s concerns into a major newspaper. 10

These early activities complicate any sharp division between an activist past and a researcher present. International explanation, preparation of public arguments, and attention to the institutions supporting rights already belonged to the work. What changed later was the mix of materials, the available organizational settings, and the audiences to whom she could address them.

A management interval, departure, and a Tokyo base

Her CV records a management interval at Anhao Wellness, February 2021–October 2022. Public sources do not explain its responsibilities, economics, or relation to her other work. 7

A University of Tsukuba-hosted speaker announcement dates her departure from Hong Kong to October 2022. In a later podcast, Tong explained leaving as a judgment about political risk and the possibility of contributing from abroad. She also expressed respect for those who stayed. 12 9

An interview with Ai-men Lau for The Hong Konger in July 2024 makes the personal cost less abstract. Tong and her husband, former district councillor Sam Yip, had left together. She spoke about the uncertainty of return, grief, and guilt toward people who remained or could not leave. Her account places the uncertainty of displacement alongside the professional life she was building abroad. 13

By the 2023 webinar announcement, she was a University of Tokyo visiting researcher and academic specialist. Her current institutional home, the Economic Security Intelligence Lab—also called Igata Laboratory—places policy-oriented research on supply chains and technology governance within the university’s Research Center for Advanced Science and Technology. An October 2023 RCAST programme scheduled Tong alongside specialists on Ukraine, Uyghurs, and transnational repression, with Akira Igata moderating. Hong Kong experience was being positioned within a wider comparative conversation. 12 37 38

A subsequent visiting-scholar period at Taiwan’s Research Institute for Democracy, Society and Emerging Technology (DSET) brought her into another collaborative setting. In June 2025, DSET documented a jointly written Nikkei Asia essay with its policy assistant Cartus You on cross-border submarine power cables. Taiwan was becoming a place to produce work with local colleagues, while Tokyo remained her public professional base. 12 35 1

Legal texts, fieldwork, and the work of explanation

Tong’s most explicit account of her methods appears in the June 2026 Taiwan Human Rights Journal. In “The Site Is Not Only on the Street,” she describes three connected working settings: legal texts, fieldwork, and the desk. Comparing legal materials and preserving disappearing records makes changes examinable. Work in Taiwan brings Hong Kong experience into conversation with histories of authoritarian rule and transitional justice. At the desk in Tokyo, explaining Hong Kong requires reconstructing context for readers who do not share it. She argues that rights violations can become an enduring environment rather than a succession of isolated incidents. 14

The comparison with Taiwan has limits that she herself has stated publicly. A report of her March 2026 discussion at Soochow University records her warning against treating Hong Kong and Taiwan as interchangeable: their legal and military circumstances differ. Experience can generate questions and useful analogies without functioning as a transferable forecast. 15

Two CSRI publications show how those methods become policy products. The executive summary of Web of Control (November 2024) traces interactions among law, internet-service providers, platforms, and self-censorship. Its claim is that restrictions need not resemble a comprehensive national firewall to narrow information access; selective blocking and private intermediaries can matter. A June 2025 assessment of Hong Kong’s freedom-of-information arrangements turns toward administrative access, disappearing records, and the consequences for accountability and business due diligence. 18 19

The subjects connect her earlier rights campaigning with institutional audiences interested in risk. A lawyer, journalist, company, and foreign government may need the same record for different reasons. Identifying that shared dependence can widen an argument’s audience. It also changes its vocabulary: the damage becomes legible as uncertainty, institutional reliability, or exposure, as well as injustice. The US Congressional-Executive Commission on China’s 2025 report cited Web of Control, establishing circulation beyond CSRI. Citation alone does not show that Tong changed a government’s policy. 20

Cable maps, verification, and practical communications

Tong’s infrastructure interests have a history in ordinary communications failure. Speaking to the Open Culture Foundation in 2026, she recalled congestion during the 2014 protests, dependence on messaging services, and attempts to communicate through Bluetooth-based FireChat. An alarming, unverified rumor about tanks was especially difficult to assess when connectivity was unreliable. She traced her interest to the difficulty of checking frightening claims when communications failed, rather than to a cable break she had personally experienced. 23

A Taiwan FactCheck Center investigation in September 2025 provides a small, revealing example of her current contribution. Reporters Chen Pei-huang and Tseng Hui-wen examined claims that nine Taiwanese cables were down. Tong helped distinguish directions on a single cable from separate cables, older repaired faults from current incidents, and a Philippines–Singapore segment from a Taiwan connection. The decisive work involved reading dates and geography correctly. 21

In another TFC explainer, she insisted on a further distinction: even malicious damage does not by itself establish that Beijing directed it. Unsupported attribution, she warned, could damage Taiwan’s credibility. That expressed standard is important precisely because her work is openly concerned with PRC coercion. A security orientation creates no exemption from separating an observed fault, a suspected act, and an established perpetrator. 22

Her own short statement for TFC describes misinformation as a mixture of selective facts, technical confusion, and emotional mobilization. The cable-map case gives that general statement something concrete to stand on: correcting an inflated count may serve public preparedness better than repeating the more alarming interpretation. 24

This is also a practice with modest material counterparts. In the OCF interview she described preparations involving radio, printed documents and contact numbers, and knowledge of fixed-line access. 23

FactLink, GoLaxy, and Shielding Democracy, 2026

Much of Tong's work concerns organized efforts to shape information, but it is produced through different collaborations rather than one comprehensive theory. A February 2026 FactLink project credited Chen Hui-min, Lee Wei-ping, Ma Li-hsin, and Tong, using Doublethink Lab's monitoring dashboard. Three reports by Taiwan-based fact-checkers examined narratives, rumor scripts, and fabricated material; Tong contributed two on Japanese media and social responses. This is a concrete division of labor: technical monitoring, verification, and knowledge of an audience's language and institutions are assembled across organizations. The project's interpretation of a campaign's reception should not be mistaken for an experiment proving its electoral effect. 25

The March 2026 GoLaxy investigation, coauthored with Doublethink Lab's Digital Intelligence Team, makes the evidentiary problem unusually visible. Working from 399 leaked pages, the publication separates translation, commentary, and additional investigation. It examines vendor documents and commercial relationships alongside influence techniques. One purported US-election heatmap actually showed Hangzhou's West Lake. The mismatch became grounds for questioning the seller's advertised competence. The original discovery of the leaked material is credited to Brett J. Goldstein and Brett V. Benson, not Tong. 26

An internal sales claim is evidence that someone wanted to sell a capability; it does not establish the capability's successful deployment. Likewise, identifying suspicious accounts cannot by itself measure persuasion. This distinction matters to the vocation as much as to that particular investigation. Advocacy against manipulation can unintentionally advertise an operator's power if its publicity is accepted as performance data.

Andrew Yeh and Tong's Shielding Democracy, published with financial support from the Friedrich Naumann Foundation Europe in June 2026, confronts a related political problem. Drawing on Japan and Taiwan for European audiences, the report argues for democratic resilience while discussing the danger of allowing governments to become arbiters of truth. Its treatment of a controversial Taiwanese residency revocation stresses proportionality and freedoms; its recommendations preserve a role for civil-society checking. It also acknowledges that differences in law, media, and public attitudes constrain policy transfer. The production credits name Tau Yang for research and design and Chihhao Yu for expert review. This is comparative policy argument, not causal proof of effectiveness. 27

Satellite backup and trans-Pacific cable research, 2026

Tong’s August 2026 essay “Beyond the Seabed” examines the promise of satellite backup for Taiwan. Instead of stopping at the existence of satellites, it follows the problem through procurement, operational funding, terminals, ground gateways, and the jurisdictions of commercial operators. Preserving emergency coordination and replacing everyday cable-borne economic traffic are different service requirements. Her recommendations concern that distinction, including maintenance of usable capacity rather than simply acquisition of a national constellation. 28

The essay is a policy analysis of public records, not her own network stress test. Its useful contribution is a sequence of questions: which function must survive, what equipment makes it available locally, and whose cooperation remains necessary? Large aggregate capacity figures do not answer those questions on their own.

A larger collective undertaking followed in September 2026: Andrew Yeh, Zack Liao, Owen Au, and Tong’s China’s Gray Zone Threats to Trans-Pacific Undersea Cables, commissioned by the US–China Economic and Security Review Commission. The report combines document research, a weighted vulnerability index, and capacity and latency modeling. Its authors acknowledge data gaps and scenario-dependent weights; they even disagree over targeting incentives around Guam and Hawaii. They recognize accidental cable breaks and civilian uses of relevant technologies. 29

A planning index compares exposure; it cannot by itself establish intent or predict attacks. Trusted-vendor rules also increase equipment-demand pressure. The report therefore raises a practical question: do its assumptions expose trade-offs clearly enough to improve decisions?

Collaborators, teaching, and the economics of a distributed practice

Tong’s current work depends on institutions with different purposes. The university supplies a research affiliation; CSRI organizes policy research; fact-checking groups join technical investigation to public explanation; journals impose another format for evidence and argument. CSRI describes itself as independent and non-partisan while explicitly affirming human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. The Friedrich Naumann Foundation is a liberal political foundation. These commitments help explain the audiences and questions of the work. They neither demonstrate hidden interference nor make its conclusions institutionally neutral. 1 17 27

Some contributions are less visible than a report byline. NetMission’s record of a January 2025 academy session lists her as a guest speaker on geopolitical context and AI disinformation alongside legal and digital-rights specialists. Its June youth-led AI-governance report credits her as an advisory reviewer, not an author. At the Human Rights Foundation’s March 2026 youth retreat, she led “AI as a Tool,” examining authoritarian uses of AI for surveillance, censorship, and repression. Teaching, reviewing, and facilitation form another strand of her institutional work. 32 33 34

The public record establishes commissioned research and organizational roles, but it does not disclose her salary, report fees, grant shares, housing costs, working hours, or the paid–unpaid division of these activities. Multiple affiliations cannot responsibly be counted as multiple salaries. The economic structure is only partially visible: institutions commission or host outputs, collaborators share production, and public-facing work circulates through several outlets. The terms on which Tong sustains that arrangement remain a gap in the evidence.

The outputs reveal tasks rather than a verified daily timetable: comparing and preserving documents; checking maps and timestamps; translating and contextualizing claims; presenting models and their limits; adapting findings to different audiences; reviewing others’ work. How she allocates time among them remains undocumented.

Her 2024 Hitotsubashi interview also identifies a constraint that a productivity account would miss: gathering and circulating information may expose people or their families. Her stated concern to avoid harm limits what can be collected or made public. The resulting absences are not necessarily failures of diligence; in this field, some are part of the ethical conditions of doing the work at all. 3

Diaspora research and Japanese public life, October 2026

Two October 2026 publications show the practice’s range. Voice After Exit, in Political Behavior, was coauthored by Maggie Shum, Eddy S. F. Yeung, Ka Ming Chan, Sanho Chung, Tong, and Sam Yip. Its 2024 candidate-choice experiments involved 2,123 respondents across Australia, Canada, Britain, and the US. Respondents favored harder-line China policies over the domestic issues tested. Recruitment used advertising and trusted diaspora networks. 30

The nonprobability sample and hypothetical choices limit generalization; the experiment does not prove that authoritarian experience caused those preferences. Individual author contributions are unspecified. A community Tong had addressed politically had become a collaborative research subject, with her husband now also a coauthor. 13

In Nikkei Asia, Charles Mok and Tong approached Japan’s AI ambitions from another direction. Their essay begins with residents’ objections to data centers and follows planning classifications, electricity, workforce skills, adoption by smaller firms, and public disclosure. They argue that buying computing infrastructure is insufficient without the people and institutions able to use it, and that communities need a say before construction rather than only a legal dispute afterward. The subject here is Japan’s industrial strategy and residents’ participation in it. 31

These are different kinds of output: an experimental political-science article and a jointly argued newspaper essay. They also address people who do not necessarily enter the subject through Hong Kong activism—voters abroad, Japanese residents, planners, and employers. As of October 2026, that expanding set of audiences, together with continuing Hong Kong commitments, describes the current scope of Tong’s work more accurately than a single occupational label.

Selected chronology

Dates below distinguish contemporary records, retrospective accounts, and self-reported appointments. Overlapping roles are retained.

Period / Work or circumstance / Evidence and precision

Period: 2013–2017
Work or circumstance: European Studies at Hong Kong Baptist University; study at Sciences Po during this formation
Evidence and precision: Degree dates self-reported; university records corroborate French study and the honours project. 2 4 7

Period: 2014
Work or circumstance: Participates in the Umbrella Movement
Evidence and precision: Retrospective interview account, not a claim to movement leadership. 3

Period: 2016–2017
Work or circumstance: Documentary fixing and interpreting; entry into legislative-office work
Evidence and precision: Her account; documentary independently documented by ARTE. 8 9

Period: June 2018
Work or circumstance: Demosistō international communications; Goldsmiths postgraduate study
Evidence and precision: Contemporary International IDEA programme. 6

Period: August 2019
Work or circumstance: French-language advocacy for the lawyers' concern group
Evidence and precision: Dated Le Monde byline. 10

Period: February 2021–October 2022
Work or circumstance: Managing director, Anhao Wellness
Evidence and precision: Public CV; responsibilities and financial terms unverified. 7

Period: October 2022
Work or circumstance: Leaves Hong Kong for Japan
Evidence and precision: Departure month in a university-hosted speaker biography, which identifies her Tokyo research role by 2023. 12

Period: November 2024
Work or circumstance: Web of Control
Evidence and precision: Publisher record, 26 November. 18

Period: June 2025
Work or circumstance: DSET visiting scholar; coauthors on submarine power cables
Evidence and precision: Contemporary institutional publication record. 35

Period: September 2025
Work or circumstance: Contributes cable-map interpretation to TFC investigation
Evidence and precision: Published 3 September, updated 4 September. 21

Period: March 2026
Work or circumstance: GoLaxy investigation with Doublethink Lab
Evidence and precision: Published 4 March. 26

Period: June 2026
Work or circumstance: Reflective human-rights essay and Shielding Democracy
Evidence and precision: Journal issue date; policy report launched 30 June. 14 27

Period: August–September 2026
Work or circumstance: Satellite-resilience essay and collective trans-Pacific cable report
Evidence and precision: Published 14 August and 22 September respectively. 28 29

Period: October 2026
Work or circumstance: Japan data-center essay; Voice After Exit
Evidence and precision: Published 12 and 15 October respectively. 30 31

Sources and research limits

Research checked on 31 October 2026. The profile uses public institutional records, authored work, contemporary programmes, and interviews. Retrospective accounts are identified as such. Some direct pages were unavailable while their public search-indexed text remained readable; no access restriction was bypassed. Full text was read for the principal journal articles, the GoLaxy investigation, the satellite essay, and the openly republished data-center essay; primary PDFs were examined for Shielding Democracy and the trans-Pacific cable report. CSRI report discussion is limited to accessible executive summaries. The undergraduate thesis, specific postgraduate coursework or mentorship, the process of obtaining her Tokyo appointment, employment contracts, income, and an observed daily routine were not available.

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3. Sulastri and Sascha Hannig Nuñez, 18 November 2024. Defying Giants, Hitotsubashi GGR, interview conducted 10 April 2024.
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7. Athena Kerin Tong. Public professional CV. Self-reported chronology, read through publicly indexed text; direct page unavailable.
8. ARTE, July 2017. Programme magazine, week 27. Documentary existence and production, not an independent Tong credit.
9. Cody Ellingham, 18 December 2025. Understanding Chinese Psyops With Athena Tong, The Transformation of Value. Automatic transcript; early-work and departure discussion approximately 04:49–11:29. Transcript errors preclude treating its spellings as authoritative.
10. Athena Tong, 30 August 2019. Il est temps de mettre fin aux disparitions forcées orchestrées par le gouvernement chinois, Le Monde.

11. University of Geneva, November 2018. Human Rights Week, 13–17 November. Indexed programme; exact panel day not established.
12. University of Tsukuba, 30 October 2023. Discussion on Hong Kong and Human Rights Diplomacy, announcement of 17 November webinar; supplied speaker biography.
13. Ai-men Lau, 24 July 2024. Reminders of home felt like small catastrophes, The Hong Konger. Publicly indexed interview text; the author's opening first-person narrative is not Tong's biography.
14. Athena Tong, June 2026. The Site Is Not Only on the Street: A Hong Kong Researcher's Reconstruction of Advocacy, Taiwan Human Rights Journal 8(3), 173–188. Reflective essay; issue month, not a verified exact online-release day.
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19. Athena Tong, 29 June 2025. Assessing the Impact of Hong Kong's Freedom of Information Regime on Transparency and Accountability, CSRI. Public executive summary examined.
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21. Chen Pei-huang and Tseng Hui-wen, 3–4 September 2025. Taiwan submarine-cable fact-check, report 3810, Taiwan FactCheck Center. Tong interviewed as a specialist.

22. Taiwan FactCheck Center, October–December 2025. 海底電纜風險升溫：台灣如何避免成為「網路孤島」. Used for Tong's expressed attribution standard, not every technical claim in the explainer.

23. Li You-ru, 8 September 2026. 如果沒有網路：他們的「離線生活」, Open Culture Foundation. Interview; its illustrations are AI-generated, not documentary portraits.

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27. Andrew Yeh and Athena Tong, June 2026. Shielding Democracy, Friedrich Naumann Foundation; full report, particularly pp. 24–27 and 47.

28. Athena Tong, 14 August 2026. Beyond the Seabed: Building Taiwan's Satellite Resilience, Thinking Taiwan.

29. Andrew Yeh, Zack Liao, Owen Au, and Athena Tong, 22 September 2026. China's Gray Zone Threats to Trans-Pacific Undersea Cables; full report, especially pp. 17–26 and annexes D–H. Commissioned research, not necessarily commission endorsement.

30. Maggie Shum, Eddy S. F. Yeung, Ka Ming Chan, Sanho Chung, Athena Tong, and Sam Yip, 15 October 2026. Voice After Exit: the Prioritization of Homeland-Facing Foreign Policy Among the Hong Kong Diaspora, Political Behavior; replication materials. The pre-analysis plan and deviations are disclosed in footnotes 12–13.

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32. NetMission.Asia, 7 February 2025. Academy 2025 session 4 summary, event held 30 January.

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36. Anouk Wear and Athena Tong, 10 May 2024. Article 23 Legislation and the Export of Hong Kong's Human Rights Violations, China Brief 24(10), author biography p. 37. Used here to corroborate the 2018 master's degree.

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38. University of Tokyo RCAST, October 2023. Understanding Disinformation and Transnational Repression: Case Studies of Ukraine, Uyghurs, and Hong Kong. Programme for 27 October symposium.