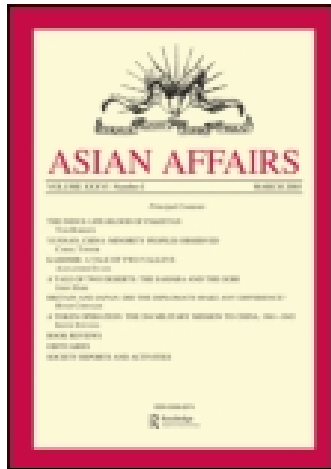


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THE UMBRELLA MOVEMENT AND HONG KONG'S PROTRACTED DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS

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The Umbrella Movement is the culmination of Hong Kong's protracted democratization process. This paper uses a historical perspective to explain the present situation. Students, who had been at the forefront of political activism in the 1970s, have yet again taken a leading role in the current movement. This has occurred as the democracy movement, which was buoyed by modest democratic reforms since the 1980s, has become deeply divided in recent years. Political parties of the pan-democratic camp, which played an important role in the 1990s, have been eclipsed by more assertive protest movements. The very slow progress of democratic reforms in Hong Kong is, however, due to the ruling elite. On the one hand, there is the authoritarian government in China which is worried about greater autonomy in its Special Administrative Region as well as potential spillover effects that could threaten one-party rule. At the same time, the powerful business elite in Hong Kong, Beijing's key ally, is worried that greater representative politics could lead to more substantial social redistribution.

Introduction

When in late September 2014 thousands of people started to occupy a number of important streets in Hong Kong, it surprised not only the government but even the organizers of the Occupy Central with Love and Peace movement, which had since January 2013 called for civil disobedience if the government did not allow genuine universal suffrage.

Surveys had shown that there was only lukewarm support for blocking the roads in the central business district. Moreover, a massive propaganda campaign by pro-establishment forces had tried to paint a dire picture of the potential outcome of the proposed illegal activity. Chaos, violence and even economic crisis had been potential scenarios. Organizers themselves were also not sure whether a significant number of people would actually join an illegal protest as most Hong Kongers are known to be law-abiding. Only when the National People's Consultative Committee announced the extremely conservative reform proposal did organizers move carefully by announcing their first 'banquet' (code-named to avoid legal action in advance) on 1 October, a national holiday, which they registered with the police.¹

Eventually it was not Occupy but students who were at the forefront of the movement as they became increasingly unhappy with the government's response to their demands. Following a week of boycotting classes, the students attempted to enter Civic Square, which had until very recently been a public square, and were repelled with pepper spray. The organizers behind the Occupy movement announced that they were joining the movement as students had been able to mobilize thousands of people. A massive rally was then met with tear gas, which protesters repelled with their umbrellas, thus giving the new movement its name. Once the violence had occurred, many more Hong Kongers joined the movement, upset about the violent response to peaceful protests. Eventually, hundreds of thousands of people blocked major roads as the movement expanded beyond the central district around the government headquarters to Causeway Bay, Mong Kok and for a short time even Tsim Sha Tsui.

The Umbrella Movement is deeply rooted within Hong Kong's political history and its protracted democratization process. While the British colonial administrators envisioned democratization immediately after World War II, opposition from the Chinese government brought these early attempts to an end. As Hong Kong experienced rapid economic development that enhanced the economic inequality within society, the business elite became much more powerful and a *laissez-faire* policy guaranteed their support for the unelected government. At the same time, the rapid growth and economic transformation created social mobility for many Hong Kongers and thus provided significant legitimacy for the colonial government. To maintain the economic success and ensure political stability, the Chinese government early on aligned itself closely with the business elite, which was promised that it could retain its central role

in the political system after the handover. This cooperation, however, also contributed to the increase in economic inequality, which is the highest among developed economies. Moreover, as social mobility declined, the salaries of many stagnated, and the living costs skyrocketed, the undemocratic government was faced with a massive legitimacy crisis.

In the following, I will look at the history of each of the actors that have contributed to the recent Umbrella Movement. I will begin with the role of the Chinese government, which has had the greatest impact on the political development. Then I will turn to the close relationship between the business sector and the government. Thirdly, I will analyse how the democracy movement has developed over time. While it started as a strong and largely unified force, it has fragmented both as a result of diverging interests but more importantly due to a divide-and-conquer strategy by the government. The recent developments, however, have brought their common goal back into focus. Finally, the driving force behind the Umbrella Movement has been the students, who were also the first group to mobilize for political change in the early 1970s. While they did not play an important role throughout the political reform process, they have now become one, if not the most, important player in the democracy movement.

The role of China in Hong Kong's political development

The Chinese government has always been the most important actor in determining the political development of Hong Kong. As the city depends heavily on food and water from the mainland, the rulers always needed to pay close attention to the mainland even during colonial times. While China was engaged in a bloody civil war between the nationalists and the communists, the British administrators actively considered the introduction of democracy in Hong Kong. After all, British policy had been to initialize democratization prior to decolonization.² After the civil war had ended, however, the Communists, who had emerged as the winner on the mainland, began to assert control over the British colony. The Chinese government saw Hong Kong as an integral part of its own country as the colonization had been the result of the Opium Wars and thus part of the country's great humiliation. Worried about the survival of the colony, the British abandoned their plans to democratize the colony in 1952. According to recently released documents in the British National Archives, if the colonial government had allowed popular representation, the Chinese would have threatened to

take back the city by force because this would have been seen as a step toward self-governance.³

As politics in China became more volatile, the direct influence over Hong Kong affairs waned. However, the city was regarded as a refuge for many displaced Chinese who were fleeing the political turmoil on the mainland and sought nothing more than a quiet life. Unfortunately, the living conditions in Hong Kong were precarious at the time and could not handle the massive in-migration, which led to a number of social conflicts. Particularly noteworthy is the 1966 riot, which was in part driven by the poor living conditions of low-income residents, who still lived in shanty towns. The colonial government saw it as a crisis of communication and sought to introduce new mechanisms that were aimed at defusing social conflicts.⁴

The Chinese Cultural Revolution threatened to engulf Hong Kong in 1967, when a labour dispute resulted in riots and violence that lasted for more than half a year and resulted in the deaths of 52 people.⁵ These riots are widely seen as a watershed moment because they led to fundamental changes in the way the colony was run. The colonial government became worried about subversion and sought to develop greater links with society to avoid a hostile takeover. The violence turned many away from the leftist activists and created much support for the colonial regime. In addition, a great number of social programmes were started in the 1970s which sought to help low-income residents. At the same time, the rapid economic development during this period created a sense of opportunity for many who were now hoping to climb the social ladder. The high degree of social mobility, which was reflected in the 'Lion Rock spirit' that encapsulated the ability to achieve economic success through hard work, reduced the pressure on political reform; the rapid economic growth also provided legitimacy for the government.

While Hong Kong's development occurred largely outside China's orbit, when Mao's rule came to an end in 1976 and the new Chinese administration decided on its 'reform and opening up' policy, it turned yet again to the question of Hong Kong's future. Deng Xiaoping, the new supreme leader, brought the end of the 99-year lease of the New Territories, the largest part of the colony, to the attention of the colonial administrators. As a consequence, Governor Murray MacLehose agreed to discussions with the Chinese government about what should happen to the colony after 1997. The outcome of the discussions was the 1984 Sino-British

Joint Declaration, in which the Chinese were clearly able to dictate most of the conditions, as the British had realized that their bargaining powers were limited. It was the hope of the British to exert some influence on the future political reform process but the agreed-upon language clearly shows that a full democracy was not enshrined. Still, the Chinese leadership used rhetoric that made many believe that they would ultimately support democracy.⁶

Despite creating hopes of eventual democratization, the Chinese leaders were and still are worried that genuine democracy could both reduce its control over the city as well as create a potential model for political reform that might threaten the control of the Communist Party. China was deeply opposed to the modest democratic reforms under Chris Patten, the last governor of Hong Kong, who came to office in 1992. In response, the Chinese government promoted a united front that was supposed to create sufficient support after the handover. As part of this strategy, the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB) was founded in 1992. Because the democrats had actively supported the Chinese democracy movement in 1989, they were regarded as an enemy by the Communist Party. Even though the Democratic Party (DP) enjoyed widespread support from the Hong Kong public, it was not included in any negotiations of post-handover politics.⁷

In 2004, the Chinese government again demonstrated its opposition to the democratization of Hong Kong when it ruled out the introduction of universal suffrage for the chief executive before 2012. In 2007, it was finally resolved that universal suffrage should be implemented by 2017. The slow process of democratization is specifically permitted in the Basic Law, Hong Kong's mini-constitution, which stipulates that "the method for selecting the Chief Executive shall be specified in the light of the actual situation in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and in accordance with the principle of gradual and orderly progress".⁸ After it was postponed once, it became more difficult to do it again. However, instead of giving true universal suffrage, reformers were only willing to allow Hong Kongers a choice between two or three preselected candidates. This was based on the Basic Law's requirement for the existence of a nominating committee but ignored the fact that essentially all Hong Kongers should be able to run for office regardless of their political convictions.

As Hong Kongers have become more interested in democracy in recent years, the Chinese government has tried to counter these attempts as

much as possible. In 2014 it released a White Paper that asserted full control over political development as the central government would have “comprehensive jurisdiction” over the city; thus they made it clear that the promise of a “high degree of autonomy” came with significant limitations in regard to the political rights of the population. The Chinese government would have the final say over any political reforms. During the Umbrella Movement, it became clear that the Hong Kong government was entirely dependent on central authorities for the way in which it dealt with the movement. Unlike in previous protest movements, the government was unable to make any concessions and was instead forced to resort to repression.

The symbiosis of the Hong Kong government and the business sector

In addition to the decisive role of the Chinese government, another reason for the lack of significant democratic progress is the extremely close relationship between the government and the powerful business sector in Hong Kong, which dates back to the early days of the colony. Not surprisingly, there was a joke that said “Power in Hong Kong resides in the Royal Hong Kong Jockey Club; Jardine, Matheson & Co; the Hong Kong & Shanghai Banking Corporation; and the Governor – in that order”.⁹ It highlighted the supremacy of the private sector (mainly the owners of key banking institutions and the industrial, commercial and property tycoons) in any decision-making, with some power also resting with the heads of public industries and important professionals.¹⁰ Because the colonial government did not enjoy the legitimacy of an elected government, it sought to coopt this business elite instead. The political development of Hong Kong also reflected this close marriage as key members of the private sector were always assured of significant political influence through appointment.

Despite the close relationship between business and government, the colonial administration could retain some independence. For instance, attempts by the business sector to get special assistance for their own businesses were rejected. Moreover, for the colonial administrators it was very important to maintain the appearance of a neutral administration which did not favour any particular social sector. For this reason, the Civil Service was accorded a special role in the political system which was clearly separate from political interest groups. The establishment of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) in 1974, which

made the city one of the least corrupt places in the world, significantly strengthened this perception. The Governor, who was selected by the British government, was seen as able to act in the interest of the colony on his own. The legitimacy of the governor grew with the implementation of social programmes such as free health care and education.

The Chinese government realized that it needed to gain the support of business leaders for the negotiation of the terms of the handover. As the business sector was deeply worried about their future following the 1984 Sino-British Declaration, the Chinese government sought to assuage those fears by including many key business representatives in the discussions of the post-handover political system. Over half of all the members in the Basic Law Consultative Committee were drawn from business and professional sectors. It is thus perhaps not surprising that the main goal of 'one country, two systems' stresses the preservation of the capitalist system and entrenches Hong Kong's modest welfare system in the mini-constitution.

During the transition period, the Chinese government also relied on a close alliance with the business sector as well as key professional groups for its United Front effort that preceded the handover because they were regarded as the 'traditional pillars of Hong Kong society' and could thus ensure social peace after the handover.¹¹ An important goal was to allow the members of the establishment to transfer their loyalty from the colonial power to China.¹² The irony was that the Chinese Communist Party had to accept an 'unholy alliance' with the business sector in order to avert democratization.¹³ This, however, was no longer problematic as economic reforms on the mainland had transported the country far away from its original socialist roots, something which is euphemistically called 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'. In order to reduce the opposition against the dominant role of the business sector, professional groups were coopted by giving them positions within the government. In addition to gaining the support of the local elite, the Chinese government was also worried any loss in confidence could lead to a massive exodus of capital as foreign investors might withdraw their assets from Hong Kong.

The dominance of the business sector in post-handover Hong Kong is best exemplified by the fact that all chief executives have been closely tied to the business sector, with two of them former businessmen: Tung Chee Hwa, a former shipping magnate, and the current Leung Chun-ying, a former executive in the real estate business. While Donald Tsang had a long-time career with Hong Kong's civil service since

1967, a corruption probe in 2012 following his term alleged that he had received beneficial treatment from tycoons to finance his expensive lifestyle.¹⁴ While the case is still under investigation, it highlights the close connection between the Civil Service and the business sector. It thus comes as no surprise that *The Economist* ranked Hong Kong number one in their index of crony capitalism in 2014.¹⁵

While the tycoons kept a low profile during the Umbrella Movement, key executives went to Beijing to discuss the occupation of the streets, which they feared could have significant influence on business confidence. They were also deeply worried that any form of resolution could mean the possible expansion of social redistribution, more powerful unions, and more business regulation.¹⁶ A similar concern has always been raised in regard to the development of a representative democracy. The chief executive, a former businessman, made these concerns explicit when he told the *Wall Street Journal* on 20 October 2014, in the middle of the protest movement: "If it's entirely a numbers game and numeric representation, then obviously you'd be talking to the half of the people in Hong Kong who earn less than US\$1,800 a month."¹⁷ This essentially meant that if you had representative democracy, the poor might dominate in politics, which would do harm to the economy. Hence the business sector has become staunchly opposed to any form of democratization that would empower the majority of the population.

The growth of Hong Kong's democracy movement

Under the influence of massive political upheaval in China, the majority of Hong Kongers, many of whom were refugees from the mainland, sought a peaceful non-political life. It is thus not surprising that in the 1970s, the democracy movement was relatively small and largely driven by a small minority of social activists. They concentrated largely around the Urban Council, which was partially elected through direct elections of a highly limited number of eligible voters. Despite these restrictions, urban councilors often saw themselves as the voice of the public and sought to promote the idea of democracy.¹⁸ This was also the era of a rapid increase of pressure groups, which formed the basis for the democracy movement in later years. The demands for greater political representation and democracy were, however, not heeded. Instead, the government took the low turnout in the Urban Council elections as a sign that Hong Kongers were not really interested

in elections.¹⁹ This was despite the fact that not only were there significant restrictions on who could register but also Urban Councilors did not have any significant power over important issues.

The democracy movement was strengthened in the 1980s as the government introduced direct elections for the District Boards in 1982 and indirect elections for the Legislative Council in 1984. Democrats formed the Joint Committee on the Promotion of Democratic Government (JCPDG) to fight for greater democratic representation.²⁰ Even though this was the beginning of functional constituencies, two democrats, Martin Lee and Szeto Wah, were also elected, which allowed them to serve on the Basic Law Drafting Committee. While there was some progress toward democratization, activists showed their disappointment with the speed of the democratic reforms. In 1988, Martin Lee and other activists burned the White Paper entitled "The Development of Representative Government: The Way Forward". They declared that the reforms fell far short of its aims, as it lacked specificity in the democratic procedures as well as a clear timetable for future reforms. At that time, the democracy movement was a united force. Inspired by the hope for political reform on the mainland, democracy activists showed their support for the Chinese democratic movement in 1989. In May of that year, the activists were able to mobilize the largest protest in Hong Kong history when 1.5 million people went on to the streets.

The violent crackdown of the Tiananmen protest movement in Beijing on 4 June 1989 had a deep and lasting impact on Hong Kong. After China had opened up its economy and experienced rapid growth, many had hoped that China could become a democratic country and integration would become less problematic. The student protests offered the Chinese government with an opportunity to establish reforms that would make the two move closer to each other. These hopes were shattered when the People's Liberation Army forcefully removed the students from Tiananmen Square, where they had camped for weeks. Many people lost their confidence in the Chinese government and feared for the worst and it is no surprise that this marked the first large emigration wave. However, not everyone who was worried about the future of Hong Kong's liberal system under a draconian Chinese dictatorship had the ability to leave and thus democratic parties enjoyed widespread support from the population. In the 1991 direct elections, 15 of the 18 seats were won by liberal groups: 12 by the United Democrats, two by Meeting Point, and one by the Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood. The former two united to form the Democratic

Party (DP) in 1994 and consequently won the 1995 direct elections to the Legislative Council.

In order to weaken the pan-democratic camp, the Chinese government reformed the electoral system after the handover. Geographic constituencies were changed from the first-past-the-post system to proportional representation and as a consequence the once powerful Democratic Party soon split into many different smaller parties. It also saw a continued decline at the polls, while at the same time many of the newly established radical parties gained in support. Overall, the pan-democrats also lost some votes in the Legislative Council but they managed to retain a significant vote share to block any constitutional changes, which require a two-thirds majority. The key problem for them is the fact that as a permanent minority in the executive-dominant system, they are only able to delay government legislation and not make any positive change. In Hong Kong, only the executive can initiate laws that make significant changes, while elected members can only introduce members' bills, which not only are not allowed to involve public expenditure but even need the majority of both geographic and functional constituencies. The latter are dominated by the business sector and thus overwhelmingly interested in maintaining the political status quo.

Initially after the handover, there was guarded optimism about the future development of Hong Kong. Unlike the pessimistic predictions, Hong Kongers were still accorded with high civil and political liberties in contrast to people on the mainland. However, only a few years after the handover they were seriously threatened in 2003, when the Hong Kong government introduced an anti-subversion law that was to fulfil the requirement of Article 23 of the Basic Law.²¹ Because many activists saw in this vaguely formulated law a threat to the city's basic rights, a protest was organized on 1 July, the anniversary of the handover, which drew about 500,000 people and became the largest protest since 1989. The massive turnout led to the suspension of the law, which has not yet been brought back to the agenda. In addition, a year later following yet another massive protest, Tung Chee Hwa, the chief executive, also resigned. Since then, the 1 July protest has become an annual affair, drawing tens to hundreds of thousands of people to the streets. This has significantly invigorated the democracy movement, which uses the protests to draw attention to its goals and collect donations from ordinary people.

Within the democracy movement, the role of political parties has decreased over the years. In particular, moderate reforms proposed in

2009 led to a deep split within the pan-democratic camp. The Civic Party and the League of Social Democrats attempted to use a forced by-election of five seats to create a de facto referendum on democratic reforms, which was deeply opposed by the Chinese government.²² This was not particularly successful as the five candidates ran unopposed after Chinese pressure had resulted in a boycott by pro-establishment candidates. In 2010 then, the Democratic Party cooperated with Beijing to allow the reform, which created a directly elected functional constituency, to pass. As a consequence, the divisions among pan-democratic parties deepened even further.

Instead of party politics, mass protests have become the main arena in the fight for greater democracy, with social movement organizations such as the Civil Human Rights Front (CHRF). Unlike parties, they are loosely organized and lack strict hierarchies, stressing instead collective decision-making processes.²³ The most recent example for such an organization is Occupy Central with Love and Peace, which was founded in January 2013 and is led by academics Benny Tai, an associate professor of law at the University of Hong Kong, Chan Kin-man, an associate professor of sociology at Chinese University, and Reverend Chu Yiu-ming.²⁴ The Umbrella Movement reinforced the fact that political parties are no longer the central force in the democracy movement. Only into the fifth week did they start to set up their tents in the protest sites. As political parties usually work from within the institutional constraints, their lack of leadership is not surprising. Nevertheless, the pan-democratic parties have come together to pledge to veto the undemocratic reform proposal, which no democratic party, not even the most moderate, can support.

Occupy Central carefully planned its nonviolent disobedience movement with workshops and a detailed manual that was posted online. They were, however, worried about gaining broad-based support should they eventually have to follow through on their threat.²⁵ They were thus very cautious in calling for the illegal activity and, as mentioned above, they carefully code-named their first protest a '*banquet*' and registered the beginning of their occupation with the government on a public holiday, 1 October, which is the Chinese National Day. This stood in contrast to students from secondary schools and universities who were much more aggressive in their position and eventually became the driving force of the movement. They had already tested an occupation during the 1 July protest earlier in the year and they would also spearhead the Umbrella Movement.

The student movement as a vanguard of political activism in Hong Kong

The student movement has a long history in Hong Kong's political development. It emerged in the late 1960s as the first left-leaning political movement following the 1967 riots. A broad coalition of civil society groups had condemned the leftist groups which had been involved in the violence. While the government sought to depoliticize society through the creation of new feedback channels, few were inclined to participate in any political activism. In this environment, students came to play a vanguard role in promoting important social issues. At the time, many students sympathized with the Communist revolution on the mainland and opposed the colonial regime. One of their first campaigns was to get Chinese declared an official language. The colonial government under the reformist governor Murray MacLehose was willing to listen and acceded to the students' demands in 1974.

While the students successfully promoted a number of social issues, they were greatly divided over the issue of nationalism. The majority of the students considered the colonial government as illegitimate and thus saw no need to push for institutional reforms. When the Cultural Revolution came to a sudden end with the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, the movement fragmented severely as many students became disillusioned. Only the 'social-actionist' faction of the students, who had been more interested in the governance of the colony, remained active.²⁶ However, the overall strength of the movement had declined and student activism no longer played a major role from the late 1970s onwards.²⁷

In the growing democracy movement of the 1980s, politically active students joined other civil society groups to press for democratization. In 1984, the year the Sino-British Joint Declaration was signed, the Hong Kong Federation of Students (HKFS), for instance, made it clear that it favoured direct elections. Similarly, student organizations backed the early pro-democracy activists during the Basic Law drafting process. Finally, students were also active in the organization of protests in 1989 to support fellow student activists in Beijing and other cities across China. The activists also joined other important social movements after the handover. This was evident in mass protests such as the 1 July protests which attracted large number of young people. Even though the student organizations actively participated in these movements, they were no longer the driving force.

Only in recent years have students again taken a more central role in the democracy movement. Much has been written about the ascent of the post-80s generation, which cares less about materialist values and seeks more fulfilling goals.²⁸ In 2009–2010, young people were mainly behind the movement to protect Choi Yuen Village from destruction. The village was slated for removal for an express rail link project between Guangzhou and Hong Kong that will speed up the travel time between Hong Kong and other cities on the mainland. While the activists could not prevent the resettlement in 2010, the anti-capitalist movement revealed growing dissent against business interests among young social activists.²⁹ Moreover, it also demonstrated the power of new forms of political activism that are still very relevant today, such as social media, which play a crucial role in the mobilization of supporters.³⁰ Finally, the young generation are not only opposed to conservative pro-establishment organizations, but they have also become suspicious of pan-democratic parties and organizations, which are viewed as overly hierarchical and centralized around a political leader.³¹

In May 2011, secondary-school students were at the forefront of a movement against the introduction of Moral and National Education, which was proposed by the Education Bureau as part of its ongoing reform of the curriculum and was under consultation in that year. Worried about the new course, students formed a pressure group called Scholarism. The subject, which was supposed to strengthen core values such as perseverance, respect for others, responsibility, national identity, and commitment, was controversial because of the one-sided representation of the Chinese political system. A teaching manual that was published by the National Education Services Centre was overly positive in regard to the 'China model' and the Chinese Communist Party. Not surprisingly, students saw the curriculum as indoctrination and 'brain-washing' as they started to organize protests.³² Together with parents and other civil society groups, they eventually joined the Civil Alliance Against the National Education, which mobilized tens of thousands of protesters for a march on 29 July 2012. On the following day, Scholarism then started an occupation campaign of the government offices in Admiralty. Students and other activists also organized a hunger strike. The campaign ended successfully with the government backing down on making National Education mandatory and instead allowing schools to introduce the new subject voluntarily.

The anti-National Education movement also revealed the development of a strong Hong Kong identity especially among the youth. Surveys

consistently show that a growing number of people no longer see themselves as Chinese. The student activists emphasize Hong Kong's civic and political freedoms, stress anti-communism, and distance themselves from the negative behaviour of Chinese mainlanders, ranging from the misbehaviour of uneducated Chinese tourists to the negative outcomes of China's unbridled economic development, which has not only been increased by cross-border trade but has also been linked to the rising living costs in Hong Kong. A 2012 advertisement, which was paid for by crowd-sourcing, compared people from the mainland with locusts that drain the city of resources.³³ In addition, reports from China about fake products, massive environmental pollution (which is also affecting Hong Kong) and an overly materialist society seemingly deprived of moral values have increased the sense of distance. Protests have increasingly featured the colonial flag as a symbol of resistance against the Chinese dictatorship. Moreover, stickers propagating the idea that Hong Kong is not a part of China were posted in public places. These sentiments are, however, not surprising as the idea of the nation is deeply embedded in the concept of democracy, which means the rule of the people.

In 2014, university students again became central actors in the popular mobilization for electoral reforms. The Hong Kong Federation of Students (HKFS) played a key role in developing alternative proposals over how universal suffrage should be implemented. Active student mobilization ensured that the HKFS proposal was one of three to be chosen for a civil referendum, which was held between 20 and 29 June 2014. While the proposal was narrowly defeated, with 38.4 percent in comparison to the winning one by the Alliance for True Democracy which garnered 42.1 percent, students still played an active role in getting people to vote. The poll, which was carefully conducted through both real polling stations and the Internet, attracted 787,767 people. The number of participants increased rapidly after the Chinese government released a White Paper on Hong Kong, which raised questions over Hong Kong's supposed high degree of autonomy.

The Chinese government not unexpectedly ignored the unofficial civil referendum because they considered it as both unrepresentative and illegal.³⁴ Instead, the Chinese National People's Congress Standing Committee released a decision on electoral reform on 31 August 2014, which was more restrictive than even a number of suggestions made by conservative groups. Both secondary and university students thus jointly called

for a boycott of classes starting on 22 September while a group of professors and university lecturers held a series of lectures at three sites near the government headquarters in Admiralty. As the week progressed, students gave an ultimatum to the Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying to meet them and discuss universal suffrage by Thursday 25 September. Because there was no willingness to engage in dialogue, students decided to increase the pressure by climbing over the fence to recover the Civic Square, which had been blocked off following another protest. As students moved forward, they were met with a tough response from the police, who used pepper spray to repel the students. Following student calls for an early start of the occupation campaign, the organizers of Occupy Central decided to start the occupation of streets near the government headquarter at 1:45 am on Sunday morning, 28 September. As the number of people participating in the blockade grew on Sunday afternoon, the police again used pepper spray and tear gas against the protesters. The violent reaction by the police led to a backlash because it led to a massive increase in the number of protesters who began occupying the streets. The occupation spread from Admiralty to Central, Causeway Bay, Mong Kok and even for a short time to Tsim Sha Tsui.

While students were not in control of the movement, they were still regarded as the main protagonists. Attempts to start negotiations, which failed repeatedly, always involved the student leadership. Eventually, there was a televised 90 minute dialogue on 21 October between five leaders of the Hong Kong Federation of Students and five government officials which only highlighted the huge gulf between the two sides but did not lead to any substantive change. As the government made clear there was no room for any discussion about the electoral reform decision, the best they could offer was to send a letter to the Chinese government, which the students rejected as insufficient. Despite promises that this would be the first discussion, no other forums took place.

As the movement dragged on, many students remained in the tents and behind the barricades. The government's approach to create fatigue among protesters showed success as public support for the movement dwindled. For this reason, student leaders were motivated to send a delegation of three students to Beijing to negotiate with the Chinese government directly, which failed as they were denied permission to board a plane on 15 November.³⁵ Instead, only 11 days later, two prominent student leaders were arrested when the government, following a court order, cleared the Mong Kok protest site. This again led to an increase in the number of protesters.³⁶

At this point, the future of the movement as well as democracy remains highly uncertain. The Chinese and Hong Kong governments' reluctance to engage in more substantive dialogue stands against the determination of student activists as well as other people who have joined the movement. While students have called for the occupation of government buildings, many protesters in the volatile Mong Kok area have changed their strategy and are now engaged in non-violent but confrontational walkabouts (code-named '*shopping*'). Because this was initially regarded as an attempt to reoccupy the protest site, it has tested the patience of the police and has resulted repeatedly in violent reactions against participants and even bystanders of these 'illegal gatherings'.³⁷ At the time of writing, the end of this political crisis is not in sight as the government has shown no willingness to make any concessions on genuine universal suffrage.

Conclusions

The Umbrella Movement is the culmination of the democracy movement in Hong Kong but, as history indicates, it faces an uphill battle. On the one hand, the enemy is a very powerful combination of the Chinese government and the business sector, which are closely aligned. Neither of them wants a truly representative government, which could potentially alter the city's economic structure by introducing greater redistributive measures. China moreover is worried that a democratic Hong Kong would be hard to control. Being the only place with an elected government inside China would give the local government greater legitimacy in the struggle over internal resources in contrast with other localities and perhaps even the central government. Moreover, a successful democratic system in Hong Kong could also prove to be a challenge to the undemocratic rule of the Communist Party. The rulers in Beijing fear that the idea of democracy could spread across China, where people, especially in other big cities, could demand similar rights. Finally, China is also worried about the growing sense of independence in Hong Kong. Chinese leaders fear that a popularly elected government could possibly strengthen this sentiment.

Many activists in the Umbrella Movement have, however, been unperturbed by the hopelessness of their cause and continue to demand full democracy. Some activists believe that the time has come not to compromise any more and to fight until this goal has been achieved. While they acknowledge that the fight is a long and difficult one, they feel that it is necessary to guarantee a future for Hong Kong, a future that is beyond the

capitalist foundations and involves a more caring society with respect for those left behind. Most evidently, this sentiment was voiced in the hanging of a banner on Lion Rock to redefine its spirit for a better future. In the light of this demand for a fundamental rethinking of the basis of what Hong Kong stands for, it is thus no surprise that many activists have called this protest movement the Umbrella Revolution.

NOTES

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