

A Tale of Two Movements: Student Protest in Hong Kong and Taiwan

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This article addresses the Yellow Umbrella movement in Hong Kong and the Sunflower movement in Taiwan. The two movements occurred about the same time, the first in Taiwan, and enjoyed a cooperative relationship. The paper will suggest that local identity has risen in each state. Younger people in particular have reflected on inequality in both venues, and resent elites who have failed to represent their interests.

Recent years have seen an increasing number of protests in both Taiwan and Hong Kong. While the details of the protests have varied, they have reflected a discontent with the rapid pace of integration with China, the consolidation of powerful local identities and a weakening of previous identification with China. Taiwan's Sunflower Movement in March 2014 protested against further economic liberalization with China, specifically the passage of a Services Trade Agreement. Soon after, Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement in September 2014 sought to persuade Beijing to modify its formula for nominating and electing Hong Kong's chief executive in 2017 and to air grievances arising from economic integration with mainland China. The Taiwan government yielded to the students' demands to delay the passage of the trade pact and to draft a mechanism to monitor future negotiations with China, while both Hong Kong and Beijing adamantly refused to amend the electoral proposal. The two governments responded to the students differently because of societal, institutional and external factors. An examination of these activities and outcomes provides both explanations of the outcomes of the student movements and forecasts about government-societal relations in both regions. Beijing has used

both soft and hard strategies to push back the youngsters and their supporters, but these strategies have backfired in the main.

In 2014, young people, particularly students, led the Sunflower Movement (SM) in Taiwan and the Umbrella Movement (UM) in Hong Kong. The SM organized social protests that clashed with government authorities on other issues, including textbook changes and education reforms viewed as promoting Chinese identity and costly infrastructure projects intended to facilitate integration with China. In addition to engaging in social protests, the younger generation has also become actively involved in electoral politics in order to bring about policy change. In the last two years, young activists have organized new political parties, competed for political office, and have launched movements supporting non-traditional candidates that will surely affect the future of both regions.

Rise of Local Identity in Hong Kong and Taiwan

Young people in both regions exhibit a distinctly more local sense of identity than the elder generations. For the last two decades, polls and surveys have been tracking whether people in both regions identify themselves as “Chinese,” or adopt an alternative local identity. Since the handover from Britain to China, a local identity has steadily grown. By comparison, a primarily Chinese identity sometimes gains strength as a result of specific events, such as the Olympics, but does not appear to grow more appealing over time. In December 2015, more than eighteen years after the handover to Beijing, the longest time-data survey conducted by the Public Opinion Programme of the University of Hong Kong (POP) found that nearly 68 percent still saw themselves as having primarily a Hong Kong identity, either a “Hong Konger in China” or simply a “Hong Konger.” This was an increase from the 60 percent in 1997. Only 31 percent called themselves a “Chinese in Hong Kong” or a “Chinese,” a decline from 39 percent in 1997, and a big drop from the peak of 52 percent during the 2008 Olympics.

Among the younger generation, the change in identity is even more notable. Despite increasingly China-focused education since 1997, 86 percent of people under 29 years old identified themselves as having primarily a Hong Kong identity. Only 13 percent of the young people identified themselves as primarily Chinese, down from 32 percent in percent) by seven times. In 1997, this ratio was merely three to one. A 2016 study by the Hong Kong Government's Central Policy Unit (CPU) focusing on young people showed that 84% of the people between age 15-35 felt exclusively "Hong Konger" rather than Chinese.

When asked about trust in the Central Government and the Hong Kong Government, the trend appears to be the same. According to polls by both POP and CPU, more than twice as many young respondents mistrust the Central Government and the Hong Kong Government compared to the older generation and wish for greater autonomy than older generations. (HKU [Pop Site](#), 6/13/17)

Protest in Taiwan

In contrast to the Umbrella or Occupy movement in Hong Kong, the Sunflower movement – intended to have sun and light shown into “black box” agreements and politics – operates within a democratic context. This movement is also known as the 3/18 movement or “Occupy Taiwan legislature” (Rigger). It was organized by charismatic leaders, students, professors and ordinary citizens. It was supported by the left/pro-independence party in Taiwan, DPP, (Democratic Progressive Party) which has just regained political power after a number of years. A new third party, the New Power party, also provided support. The trigger for the protest was the perceived lack of parliamentary due process by the KMT (Kuomintang), the then-ruling party in Taiwan. The agreement that was the catalyst for the protest was signed July 2013 (Rowen, 2015). On March 18, 2014, students stormed the legislature to protest a secret free trade agreement that had been negotiated with China. In violation of a prior commitment, the

legislature railroaded the bill through without the line by line assessment that had been promised (Ming-sho Ho, 12.2.2014). Shortly before, massive demonstrations opposed the sale of a major Taiwan newspaper to Chinese ownership, reflecting concern about a free press and ability to criticize China in it. (Rowen, 2015, 9, 10). Media and government vilification only strengthened resolve of the students, supported by academics and DPP legislators. A 3 week standoff led to a brief occupation of the legislative Yuan (parliament) and nearly a half million people rallied on March 30 in front of the President's office - with the larger perspective of Taiwan's relations with Beijing regarding cross straits ties as the focus. This was the largest rally ever recorded in Taiwan. (Rowen, 2015). Surveys taken at the time revealed that there was great concern about the trade in services agreement and also the impact of a greater Chinese presence on business, media freedom and freedom of expression (Rigger in Wasserman, 2014; Rowen, www.occupy.com, 4/2/2014). Additionally, fear related to a sense of increasing closeness with the mainland and concern about its intentions animated the protesters. (Rowen 2015, 9). Prior social movements in Taiwan – Wild Lilies which advocated for pro democratic reform in the 90s) and Wild Strawberries in the 90s- were possible models for the Sunflower groups (the latter name meant that the movement was beautiful but weak and fragile (Rowen, 2015)). A florist's gift to the protest helped to supply the Sunflower symbol. The Wild Strawberries protested the removal of Taiwan's symbols and real name and restrictions on protest during a Chinese official's visit in that year. (Rowen, 2015, 10). There was also concern about the potential impact on the working class and increased inequality if the pact was implemented. (Ibid). The group is also called the "318 movement" in honor of the day the protest began. The sit-in ended on April 10. The protesters wished to stay aloof from China and retain their democratic, reinvigorated civil society. (4/2/2014). The students barricaded themselves into the halls of the legislative assembly (yuan) and the few policeman stationed there were quickly overwhelmed. Cooperation

between the movements on both sides was significant. (Cole, Black Island). The occupation enjoyed high poll support, which led the government to exercise restraint and not physically oust the protesters. On April 18, the legislative speaker intervened by agreeing to enact a special law governing negotiations with China, before resuming the review process (Ho, 12/2/2014). Protesters were joined by their Hong Kong and mainland China compatriots. (Rowen, 4/2/14). Sympathetic protests occurred in international venues –from Paris to Berlin. (Ibid.). Some DPP legislators participated in aiding the student boycott.

On March 23, frustrated by a lack of response from then Taiwan president Ma, students stormed the Executive branch. (Rowen, 2015, 9). This demonstration was quickly suppressed, with numerous injuries, and protesters were detained.

The movement's Facebook Page generated 50,000 likes. Crowdfunding support helped to pay for a full page ad in the New York Times. (Rowen, 2015, 15). Although President Ma (then head of the KMT party) never agreed to meet with the protesters as they requested, leaders of the legislative yuan, negotiated an agreement with the students, which provided that no cross straits agreement would be passed without review and supervision mechanisms. (Ibid, 15). While there was internal concern about the mechanisms employed to gain a truce among the group, the students cleaned the space and vacated on April 10. Subsequently, there have been some conflicts among Sunflower participants, and the movement has fragmented. Many retained their connections to the DPP as well as initiating a new third party, to be discussed below. As noted, they did help to defeat KMT incumbents in the elections of November 2014. They also assisted their comrades in the Umbrella movement in Hong Kong, a reflection of the closeness between the two groups, both seeking resistance to Chinese domination to varying degrees.

The sit-in helped to defeat the then-ruling party at midterm elections and inspire protest in neighboring Hong Kong.

One outgrowth of the movement in Taiwan was the creation of the New Power Party (NPP); a new third political party in Taiwan formed in early 2015. The party emerged from the Sunflower Student Movement in 2014 and advocates for universal human rights, civil and political liberties, as well as Taiwan independence. The party is a part of the political phenomenon known as the "Third Force", in which new political parties, unaligned with traditional coalitions, seek to provide an alternative in Taiwanese politics; it combines social movement activism with partisan politics. The NPP cooperated with the DPP against the KMT in the 2016 elections, going so far as to run in traditional KMT strongholds to avoid competition with the DPP. The NPP ran celebrity candidates and elected five to the legislative yuan, several with DPP endorsements.

The party was started by Freddy Lim, lead vocalist of Taiwanese heavy-metal band Chthonic, veteran activist Michael Lin, human rights lawyers Lin Fong-cheng, Chiu Hsien-chih and other prominent figures of the Sunflower Student Movement. Lim headed the party-building process; on September 12, 2015, NPP was officially formed with the election of Huang Kuo-chang as executive leader, heading a leadership team of six deputy leaders. ("Rise of the New Power Party: Taiwan", FirstPost.com 1/18/16).

The NPP won 5 legislative seats in the 2016 general election, 3 from constituencies and 2 from proportional, beating out the long-time third party, the People First Party were among the victorious candidates. Two women were among those elected. It remains to be seen how it will fare in subsequent elections and how it will relate to the DPP in the future. (Gerber, Taipei Times, 1/17/16).

The Protest Movement in Hong Kong

Based partially on the ideas of Benny Tai, a law professor at Hong Kong University, the Umbrella or Occupy movement was one of the largest protest movements ever in

Hong Kong, primarily formed to object to the failure of the Beijing government to live up to its commitment to implement universal suffrage as well as to protest increasing dominance over the city by Beijing. Additionally, conflicts within opposition party groups, e.g. the Democratic Party, who had held secret negotiations with the government and agreed to some modest reforms without consultation with the party's members and others, created concern among those seeking change. Prior to the organization of the movement, in 2013, Occupy Central with Love and Peace (OCLP) announced its plan to occupy one of Beijing's main arterial roads in the city's main business districts in order to bring pressure on the government which had announced restrictions to the election of the Chief Executive of the city/state. Protesters also initiated several public deliberations, an unofficial but highly effective referendum, and instances of civil disobedience. (Chan, 2015).

One impetus for the protesters was concern about the opposition party's (Democratic Party) failure to challenge government rulings regarding a delayed time for the implementation of the universal suffrage and the continuance of functional seats as well as the holding of secret meetings and lack of transparency. (Ibid, 2). The Democratic Party's defeat in the 2012 elections helped to set the stage for the emergence of civil society groups. The Umbrella group, as it came to be known, sought to gain public response and participation for any electoral reforms to be accepted.

A series of D-days (deliberation days) were held beginning on June 9, 2013, based on the suggestions of US political scientists Bruce Ackerman and James Fishkin. 700 people gathered, and having had access to web based information prior to the event, moderate and radical democrats attended the event. Day 2 expanded the participants to 3,000 and now included members of civil society, church members, women's and workers groups. Day 3 involved over 2,500 attendees. (Ibid, 3). A seven day and night protest march followed, while the

government put forth a White Paper entitled “One Country, Two Systems”. Voters could express their views via the internet (mysteriously attacked during the deliberations by hackers) or at polling stations in churches and public service centers. Over 80,000 voters turned out to vote in the (unofficial) referendum.

Numerous students and others were dissatisfied with the Hong Kong government’s lack of response and also rejected the leadership of the OCLP. After a huge rally, about 500 students stayed behind to have a sit- in in a busy section of the city. The 831 report issued by the government in August 2014 basically ruled out any change in the electoral system, blocking a more democratic approach. The opposition group announced that on October 1, protests would begin. Civil disobedience was advocated. In an effort to stop the protest, the police fired into the crowds with tear gas and the participants used umbrellas to try to shield themselves – hence the name of the group (Umbrella movement) was born. (Ibid, 5). Many conflicts, among protesters, from the right and left, created difficulties for the group. As considerable disruption did occur, the government sought to develop a “wait and see” strategy, largely rejecting the use of force to end the protest. Many members of the community were split on the efficacy of protest, often reflecting generational differences with polls showing just 30% of the public approved of the movement. (Ibid, 5). In addition, splits between the members of the group regarding use of civil disobedience as opposed to more aggressive action, emerged. One result was an attack on government headquarters on November 30, which was greeted with police batons. Casualties resulted. Many protesters turned themselves into the police. The occupation was finally cleared by the government in two locations on December 11, 2014. The protest officially ended when pro government groups obtained court injunctions to clear some of the blocked roads.

A reform proposal released by the government on June 17 permitted direct election of leaders, but from a list proposed by the government, not freely chosen. This plan was rejected by the protesters though there were disagreements among them, with some leaning more toward acceptance of the government's plan. As an indication of the splits both within the government and society, some bookstores refused to stock books supportive of the Umbrella movement. Polls suggest that young people in particular are opposed to proposed national security laws which will further restrict democratic elections. A threat by the government to enact a more draconian security law, Article 23, to exert more control over potential protesters in the wake of the Occupy movement has not been realized. Another bill to "reform the process" by having voters select leaders from a list chosen by a party committee failed to pass for lack of support.

The case of the Umbrella movement demonstrates the gradual radicalization of elements of the student population in particular, mobilizing first through an opposition party and then through civil protest, as the former did not seem effective to many. The future of the Umbrella movement is in question at the time of this writing given the authoritarian nature of the Hong Kong government and its backer, the PRC.

Nonetheless, the protest lasted for 79 days before the police moved in with tear gas to remove the crowds. Clearly, several goals remained unmet. The same detested leader, CY Leung, remains in power, so the goal of ousting him was not achieved. The status quo has been maintained through a vote. (CNN.com). Nor has universal suffrage been attained. Protest leaders are fighting their detention on grounds of unlawful assembly. Last year, efforts to commemorate the one year anniversary were repulsed by armed police (Phillips, 9/28/15). However, the largest demonstration against Chinese rule since Tiananmen Square did much to rouse the democratic impulses of Hong Kong youth. The numbers participating in the Umbrella far outflanked their

colleagues' movement in Taiwan, though their goals were not achieved. Protest leaders were involved in legal proceedings on the charge of unlawful assembly. 1.3 million tweets were recorded during the first four days of the movement, suggesting that the battle would be waged on the internet as well as the streets. In 2016, the group Youngspiration was formed to educate more people about the issues involved. Another new party, Hong Kong Resurgence, is led by one of those who helped to create the philosophy behind the movement. A third group, Civic Passion, has also been mounting a campaign based on local issues. Domisisto is a party formed from members of Scholarism and the Hong Kong Student Federation, the two main student led groups during Occupy. (Steger, 9/1/2016). Some of these parties are advocating complete independence from China.. One problem is clearly fragmentation among the opposition groups. Punitive measures were urged by CY Leung and the ruling group in Hong Kong to intimidate students and their supporters. After the protests in the fall, there was no real dialogue with the government. The government has continued to block pro democratic reforms. Perhaps as a result of the more repressive atmosphere in Hong Kong, the protestors may have lacked the experience of their Taiwanese colleagues. Much of the public may have lacked interest in bringing about democratic goals. While the Hong Kong protest gained a great deal of international support, at home the population was more divided, although there is increased dissatisfaction and low support for the Basic Law as well as the concept of "one country, two systems." Additional protests were carried out by vendors whose stalls were cleared by the government in 2016 – they may have been galvanized by the student protests two years earlier. Booksellers who were detained in China also created continued attention to repression of free speech and ideas.

In many ways, the student uprising in Hong Kong may be deemed a success although it did not achieve its main goal of direct elections to the Hong Kong government. The student based Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong lasted from September 28 to December 15,

2014, before it was brought to an end by the Hong Kong government under pressure from the Chinese government. Although the “One country, two system” policy remains in effect , Numerous young people and others were politically awakened. As of 2016, two elected legislators to the legislative council refused to take an oath of loyalty to China, basing their ruling on the Basic Law governing Hong Kong and were barred from taking office. (Lui, Time, 11.4.2016). Also in 2016, riot police fired warning shots when they tried to remove illegal street stalls set up for Lunar New Year celebrations, the worst violence since the student protests in 2014, suggested above. Hong Kong Indigenous, one of the groups formed in the advent of 2014, had a role in the protest. (Reuters, Feb 9, 2016) In March 2016, several protest leaders who had been detained were sentenced to community service. On New Year’s Day 2017, thousands of pro-democracy protestors took to the streets to protest Beijing’s interference in their affairs. A hearing on May 5 was held regarding participation in a protest last year against the government’s use of the Basic Law to silence dissent. The trial based on unlawful assembly, disorderly conduct and assault on police officers, has been postponed until July 1. (Ng, May 5, 2017)

The saga continues. It seems clear that protesters in Hong Kong are not lessening their pressure on the system! In a heightening of pressure by the PRC and its installed leadership in Hong Kong earlier this year, two of Hong Kong’s most prominent democratic supporters were attacked by pro-Beijing protesters – they were returning from a conference in Taiwan and subject to assaults at the airport. (Kam, 1/19/17)

Conclusion

In both nations, the advent of social media has greatly strengthened organizational efforts, though in Hong Kong, these are far more subject to censorship and restrictions. However, the use of social media goes both ways: it was also used to try to smear the protesters. Facebook and other social media played a prominent role in spreading the word, particularly in uncensored

Taiwan. The events in Hong Kong may have inspired events in Taiwan and encouraged cooperation by activists from both nations. (Cole, 2015). The possibility of continued unrest in Hong Kong is significant, In March 2017, after the election of a conservative pro-Beijing as its leader, nine protestors were arrested. A protest is planned for July 1, the day the new leader Carrie Lam, is inaugurated. (Kaiman, 3/27/17 LA Times). The creation of new political parties reflecting desire for democratization and change parallel the developments in Taiwan.

In Taiwan, a democratic state, the Sunflower movement helped to create the momentum for the creation of the New Power Party, which has achieved some electoral success to date and has merged the social movement with electoral politics. In Hong Kong, though the Umbrella movement was unable to move the government and its controllers in the PRC to change policy, the movement was sustained for almost three months and created international attention to the problem of lack of democracy in the city state. Protesters were galvanized and for time enjoyed considerable support. However, the authoritarian system in which the Umbrella movement operated made lasting gains (other than consciousness raising which continues to the present) difficult to sustain over time, although the creation of new parties and continued protests suggests that the democratization movement in Hong Kong has a continued life.

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