

Security Law in Hong Kong, but *Challenging Beijing's Mandate of Heaven* serves as a much-needed, informative and insightful analysis to two of the most recent and important political events that have reshaped the political trajectories of East Asia, serving as an important addition to the studies of the two movements, especially in English-language texts. Given that Hong Kong's socio-political terrain has changed a lot in the last two years with the enactment of the National Security Law, it now remains to be examined how the anti-Extradition Bill protests of 2019 speaks to or against Ho's analysis in this book.

***The Umbrella Movement: Civil Resistance and Contentious Space in Hong Kong.*** Edited by Ma Ngok and Edmund W. Cheng. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019. 355 pp. Hardcover. ISBN: 9789462984561.

Reviewed by Justin Wu

Until 2019, the Umbrella Movement (UM) of 2014 was the most significant protest in contemporary Hong Kong history. This edited volume, largely drawing from papers presented at a workshop at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in June 2015, aims at analyzing different aspects of the 79-day occupation movement that attracted much international attention. Compared to other studies on the UM, this volume stands out for its use of rich empirical data. Most of the contributors began conducting fieldwork research at the occupation sites since the early days of the UM, and the volume concludes with a section comparing the UM with protests in Taiwan, Macau, and Shanghai. As Ma Ngok and Edmund Cheng note in the introductory chapter, the "peculiarity of Hong Kong's new social movements lies in their transgression of stagnant repertoires in an apathetic society performed by rational spectators" (18). "Old" demand for democracy was infused with "new" tactics and a sense of identification that posed a challenge to the ruling regimes in Hong Kong and Beijing.

*The Umbrella Movement* is divided into four parts. Part A, “Trajectory and Contingency,” begins with Ma Ngok (Chapter 1) providing a brief overview of the history of social movements and the quest for democratization in Hong Kong since the 1970s. In particular, he notes the 2006 protests against the demolition of Star Ferry Pier, a landmark in Central, as activists trying to “rewrite and redefine the historical narrative of Hong Kong – and in the process fostered a new political identity for Hong Kong” (33). Edmund Cheng (Chapter 2) looks at how the planned Occupy Central movement was transformed into, or was usurped by, the spontaneous UM, detailing the episodes happening a month before September 28. Another chapter by Ma Ngok (Chapter 3) asks why the protesters were committed to the UM. Oral interviews with committed occupiers, many of whom had no prior social movement experience, suggest that police brutality in the early days of the movement compelled their participation.

Part B, “Repertoires and Strategies,” focuses on protest tactics during the 79-day occupation. Francis Lee and Gary Tang (Chapter 4) find that most participants were actually not optimistic about what the UM could achieve. They suggest that the likelihood of achieving major concessions, and not incremental outcomes, led people to continue participating in the occupation. A creative analysis by Leung Cheuk-hang and Sampson Wong (Chapter 5) looks at the role of art and space during the occupation. They analyze artworks produced during the UM to suggest that “art-making and leaving traces at the occupied zones became not only the natural options for the participants, but also an implicit and minimal mechanism that held the participants together” (133). In the same vein, Sebastian Veg (Chapter 6) turns to textual and visual materials produced during the UM to argue that “the UM represented an attempt to articulate a culturally hybrid democratic community, which struggled to define deliberation as a political mechanism with which to regulate both its internal differences and its interactions with the broader polity of Hong Kong” (151). These materials draw inspiration from classical and modern

Chinese culture (such as Guandi and Lu Xun), Western popular culture (such as George Orwell and Pink Floyd), lyrics from contemporary Canto-pop songs, and textual and visual satire on local politics.

Part C, “Regime and Public Responses,” turns to public and government reactions to the development of the UM. Samson Yuen (Chapter 7) studies how the government chose to wear out the UM while actively discrediting it. Utilizing the idea of “attrition,” he suggests that the government made use of legal interventions and its institutional strength to mobilize its own supporters and discredit the UM participants. Cai Yongshun (Chapter 8) looks at the UM leaders’ tactical escalation. By the end of November, the (radical) tactical escalation, poorly organized and ill-prepared, led to further confusion and alienation among participants and supporters amidst the movement’s declining momentum. Sing Ming (Chapter 9) analyzes why some people supported the UM. His interview results show four major factors: pessimistic view of upward social mobility, dissatisfaction in the Hong Kong government’s ability to resolve Hong Kong–China tension, decline in confidence over “One Country, Two Systems” and the Chinese government’s willingness to allow high autonomy, and support for democracy. In contrast, Stan Wong Hok-wui (Chapter 10) looks at why some people disapproved of the UM. He asserts that those who opposed the UM were not necessarily politically ignorant or uninformed, but they saw civil disobedience as undermining the rule of law and questioned the merits of democracy in solving social and economic problems. He also finds that it was then Chief Executive C. Y. Leung that divided public opinions, and not necessarily the government as a whole.

Part D, “Comparative Perspectives,” builds on experiences from other Chinese-speaking societies. Ho Ming-sho and Lin Thung-hong (Chapter 11) study Taiwan’s Sunflower Movement, which broke out just months before the UM. They contend that the leadership of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) “had not anticipated [...] that it was costly, if not impossible, to

purchase a democracy once its citizens were accustomed to freedom” (305). Eilo Yu Wing-yat (Chapter 12) turns to activism in Macau. Many in Macau saw the UM as counterproductive for economic growth, and since pro-Beijing forces have largely dominated the socio-political scene for decades, dissenting voices are hard to come by. Hence, some Hong Kong protesters used a particular slogan, “Today Macau, Tomorrow Hong Kong,” in their protests. Concluding the volume, Jeffrey Wasserstrom (Chapter 13) recounts how the protests in Hong Kong remind him of student protests in twentieth-century Shanghai. He points out the irony of how a “laudable Chinese tradition is now more alive in the SAR than in any mainland city,” following the May Fourth spirit of speaking out “against abuses of power” and challenging “officials who seem to care more about lining their pockets, pleasing people in a distant capital, or both, than in serving the interests of the people of a beloved community – be that a nation or a city” (344–45).

This edited volume’s main strength lies in the fact that most chapters utilize data collected during the UM. As no one could have foreseen how the movement would end at the time, the interviews conducted during this period provide a comprehensive synthesis of how the UM unfolded, why it could gather much sympathy and strong support at the beginning, and how the government’s tactical response managed to wear out the movement. The contributors also seek to challenge the theoretical framework of understanding social movement under a hybrid regime. For examples, Samson Yuen (Chapter 7) builds on Charles Tilly’s concept of “toleration” to suggest that “attrition” is a better way to understand such social movements. The government did not “tolerate” by inaction, but rather it proactively employed strategies to delegitimize and wear out the protests. Stan Wong Hok-wui (Chapter 10) also shows that improved public understanding “may not necessarily lead to an increase in public support,” contrary to the claims that more would have supported such pro-democracy protests had they been “awakened” (273). This implies that if pro-

democracy activists want to attract more “politically neutral” people to support their claims, they might need to do more to address the rational concerns of those who oppose them.

Another notable aspect of this volume lies in the comparative perspectives rooted in three other Chinese-speaking societies. The comparison with Taiwan is obvious and increasingly common nowadays, given the shared sentiment that the PRC is trying to assimilate both entities. The case of Macau is noteworthy. While Macau is the only other special administrative region of the PRC, it is “conditioned to have pro-Beijing sentiments” because of contrastive historical development (320). In recent years, some Hong Kong pro-democracy activists have been denied entry to Macau, likely due to the Macau government’s determination to tighten control over the city and stop youth/democracy activism from growing. The intriguing comparison between the protest scenes of contemporary Hong Kong and twentieth-century Shanghai points to the role of Hong Kong as a hub for preserving “cultural China,” when mainland China underwent turbulent times for much of the twentieth century. Further comparative analysis could compare and contrast places like Japan (anti-security legislation movement in 2015) and South Korea (Candlelight Struggle of 2016) to see how youth activism and protest tactics differ across contemporary Asia. One might even assess protests within mainland China to see how people across the border viewed different protests privately.

The UM was such a complex movement that this edited volume, understandably, could not cover all aspects. With the rise of social media apps and platforms, the spread of (mis)information became a notable aspect of the UM, often leading to conflicts between family members with different political orientation. The creative use of images from movies or TV dramas to satirize Hong Kong’s situation became very popular among netizens. The police press conference, which was held every day at 4 pm for over a month and broadcast live by the press, became an internet meme in itself, but it also provided a platform for

the government/police force to discredit the occupiers. There also existed much ideological, political, and strategic divide between different participating groups within the UM, as Ho Ming-sho addresses in his monograph, *Challenging Beijing's Mandate of Heaven*.<sup>1</sup>

The specific mechanisms behind each of these merit further exploration. The aftermath of the UM is also worthy of further discussion. In the local election of 2015 and the Legislative Council election of 2016, some candidates would directly reference the UM as a reason for their participation in elections or to discredit their opponents. The unrest in Mongkok in 2016 and the disqualification of localist candidates in the 2016 Legislative Council election led to further discontent among many in the population. The distrust of the government's ability – or willingness – to deliver universal suffrage and safeguard Hong Kong's autonomy would only intensify in the aftermath of the UM.

Yet for understanding the UM as a social movement and watershed moment in contemporary Hong Kong, *The Umbrella Movement* is a significant contribution. Selected chapters could be used for undergraduate teaching in understanding particular aspects of the UM. It also offers perspectives on how protest strategies have evolved since, with protesters in 2019 improving on certain tactics used during the UM and coming up with new tactics that put Hong Kong on the radar of international media outlets. The old demand for democracy and introduction of new protest tactics have, for better or worse, become a recurring theme in contemporary Hong Kong.

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1. Also reviewed in this issue—Editor's note.