

# Sunflowers and Umbrellas

Social Movements, Expressive Practices, and  
Political Culture in Taiwan and Hong Kong



Edited by Thomas Gold  
and Sebastian Veg

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**Institute of  
East Asian Studies**  
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Front cover images: *Main:* Sit-in on Qingdao East Road, Fan-Fumao, Taipei, in front of the Legislative Yuan in support of its occupation by students, 20 Mar. 2014 (photo by Frank Muiard). *Bottom, left to right:* Printed poster in Admiralty referencing the Beatles song “Yellow Submarine,” combined with the symbols of a yellow umbrella and yellow ribbon (photo by Sebastian Veg, 13 Nov. 2014). Sunflower altar in Legislative Yuan assembly hall, Taipei, 28 Mar. 2014 (photo by Ian Rowen). The Big Yellow Umbrella in front of Hong Kong’s LegCo (photo by Sebastian Veg, 6 Dec. 2014). Awning made of recycled umbrella canopies above the “main stage” in Admiralty (photo by Sebastian Veg, 6 Dec. 2014).

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## Preface and Acknowledgments

This volume grew out of a conference held at the University of California, Berkeley (16–17 March 2018), that was financially supported by the France-Berkeley Fund, the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in San Francisco, and Berkeley's Institute of East Asian Studies and Center for Chinese Studies.

In addition to the contributors to this volume, several participants made particularly meaningful contributions to the conference. With regard to “expressive practices,” Sampson Wong presented the artwork of the Umbrella Movement as well as giving a paper, and Tze-woon Chan showed his film *Yellowing*, also about the Umbrella Movement. The current volume includes a number of links to music, photos, artwork, and ephemera from the two movements. Jieh-min Wu of the Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica, presented a paper on the making of Taiwanese identity. Two movement leaders, Lin Fei-fan from Taiwan and Alex Chow from Hong Kong (currently pursuing a doctoral program in Geography at Berkeley) engaged in a forum discussion about leadership and organization. Other discussants included, in alphabetical order: Weihong Bao (UC Berkeley), Andrew Jones (UC Berkeley), C. K. Lee (UCLA), Brian Kai-ping Leung (University of Washington), Chit Wai John Mok (UC Irvine), Kevin O'Brien (UC Berkeley), Jeff Wasserstrom (UC Irvine), Guobin Yang (University of Pennsylvania), and Mengyang Zhao (University of Pennsylvania). Political Science PhD candidate Phil Rogers did an excellent job as rapporteur. We thank Yike Zhang for his careful work compiling the index. We are also grateful to Christopher Pitts for his meticulous copy-editing as well as to Katherine Lawn Chouta, our editor, for expertly shepherding the manuscript to a smooth and speedy publication.

While the present volume focuses on two social movements that took place in 2014, subsequent events inevitably reshape understandings of the past. For this reason, we have tried to update chapters wherever relevant. Nonetheless, both events have now moved into history. The Sunflower

Movement played a role in Tsai Ing-wen's election to the presidency in 2016, as several chapters point out, but not directly in her reelection in 2020 after an unexpected reversal of popularity (she had lost support by trying to steer a middle course to domestic reforms, but regained it by standing firm against increasing pressure from Beijing). In Hong Kong too, the Umbrella Movement "left traces" by galvanizing a generation of activists and professionals to enter politics, as Ngok Ma's chapter documents. The Anti-Extradition Movement of 2019 was to some extent defined by its rejection of the perceived shortcomings of the Umbrella Movement, as Wai-Man Lam mentions. However, it proved no more successful than its predecessor at obtaining meaningful concessions from Beijing. As this book goes to press, the Central Government has imposed on Hong Kong a National Security Law that will probably have far more sweeping consequences for basic freedoms in Hong Kong than the Extradition Bill would have had. Taiwan too views this law as a sign of Beijing's new resolve to deal with what it calls the "Taiwan Issue" sooner rather than later. The two territories are thus increasingly seen as connected despite the growing geopolitical rift between them. As Beijing further asserts its power over its immediate periphery, societies in both Hong Kong and Taiwan continue to search for new ways that might enable democratic procedures to prevail over power politics, a quest central to the Sunflower and Umbrella Movements, and perhaps the most enduring traces of these two explosions of political energy.

# Introduction

THOMAS GOLD AND SEBASTIAN VEG

## **The Spring and Autumn Annals, 2014**

In the spring and autumn of 2014, two large-scale, prolonged social movements took place in the shadow of the People's Republic of China: Taiwan's Sunflower Movement (twenty-four days, from 18 March to 10 April 2014; see timeline in Hioe 2018) and Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement (seventy-nine days, from 26 September to 15 December 2014; see timeline in Cheng and Chan 2017, 237).<sup>1</sup>

The two movements shared some basic characteristics. They both used the tactic of occupying strategic locations—the Legislative Yuan in Taipei, and the area around the Central Government Offices (as well as two other locations) in Hong Kong (see maps in Ho 2015, 82, and Cheng and Chan 2017, 228). They were both supported by mass mobilizations of ordinary citizens: 350,000 people joined the 30 March rally during the Sunflower Movement (Rowen 2015, 14), and 1.3 to 1.45 million people took part cumulatively over the course of the Umbrella Movement (Cheng 2016, 383). The two protests followed similar arcs, beginning with an initial moment of spontaneous insurgency, continuing with a period of protracted entrenchment during which the government and the protesters envisaged negotiations with each trying to leverage public opinion, and culminating

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<sup>1</sup> By contrast, the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement in Hong Kong, which began in June 2019, had no clear leaders and no specified or occupied locations, relying instead on constant spontaneous movement and evasive action. These tactics were often described as “be water,” a phrase used by the kung fu actor Bruce Lee.

in failed attempts at escalation (the Sunflower protesters attempted to occupy the Executive Yuan on 23 March; the Umbrella occupiers tried to storm the Chief Executive's Office on 30 November). Both had iconic and unexpected symbols—the sunflower and the umbrella, two “disobedient objects” (Flood and Grindon 2014). Both saw the rise of a new generation of activists who replaced older pioneers of democratic movements in each territory. Finally, both made use of new telecommunications technology to mobilize domestic support and inform the outside world.

There were also notable differences between the movements. In Taipei, the perimeter of occupation remained limited to the Legislative Yuan and its immediate surroundings, while in Hong Kong the Admiralty site alone was far larger and harder to manage for the movement leaders, who also had to deal with two rival occupation sites in Mongkok and Causeway Bay. Most importantly, the Sunflower Movement obtained significant concessions from the government after a split took place within the governing elite (when Legislative Yuan speaker Wang Jin-pyng broke ranks with President Ma Ying-jeou), while the Hong Kong government remained united against the students' claims and was able to successfully mobilize social groups against the occupiers, ultimately using court injunctions to clear the sites (Yuen and Cheng 2017).

### **The Sparks that Lit the Prairie Fires**

Many of the similarities and differences in the movements are embedded in the respective political institutions of Hong Kong and Taiwan and their relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC).

Hong Kong became a British colony as a result of the Treaty of Nanjing, which marked the end of the First Opium War (1840–42), when Britain defeated the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). In 1898, Hong Kong was expanded to include the New Territories, which China leased to Britain for ninety-nine years. As the end of this lease approached, London and Beijing engaged in a protracted set of negotiations for the return of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty. The people of Hong Kong did not participate in their own capacity in these negotiations. On 1 July 1997, Hong Kong was handed over to the PRC as a special administrative region (SAR), to be governed with a “high degree of autonomy” in all areas except foreign affairs and defense. The Basic Law serves as the legal framework of the “one country, two systems” formula. The head of the Hong Kong government is the chief executive who is “elected” by a committee of 1,200 people, in which Beijing controls a structural majority. The citizenry does not enjoy universal suffrage in this matter. The chief executive answers to the

ONE

# Movement Leadership under a Polycentric Protest Structure

EDMUND W. CHENG

With catchy labels such as “Twitter Uprising” and “Facebook Revolution,” the social movements that have occurred since the 2010s have fueled an expanding body of literature on how digital communication technologies play a central role in modern-day protests around the globe. In theorizing this emerging organizational form, Manuel Castells (2015) coined the term *networked social movements* to characterize contentious actions that occur through Internet social networks and in occupied urban spaces. Often triggered spontaneously by indignation, these movements operate through multimodal and horizontal networks, both online and off-line, forming a space of autonomy that facilitates cooperation and solidarity, encourages deliberation, aims at cultural changes, and undermines the need for formal leadership. While they are rarely planned and programmatic in terms of their demands, they are highly reflective in that protesters constantly interrogate themselves on who they are and what they want to achieve. While Castells’s theorization seems to mirror protesters’ idealistic vision of leaderless movements, Bennett and Segerberg (2013) provide a more operationalized conceptualization of contentious action logics. The authors characterize the action logic observed in recent protests around the globe as “crowd-enabled connective actions,” which occur through the adjoining of individuals and the sharing of personalized content through digital networks. These scholars contrast these movements with conventional “organization-centered and brokered collective actions,” which are organized by leaders through collective frames and through organization affiliations.

By recognizing the pivotal role of digital communication technologies in contentious politics, these conceptualizations have resulted in many scholarly works showing how social media is a powerful tool for mobilizing the public. “Networked social movements” or “crowd-enabled connective actions” reduce the transaction costs of communication and

TWO

## The Sunflower Imagination

*The Movement Perception and Evaluation  
from the Grassroots*

MING-SHO HO, CHUN-HAO HUANG, AND LIANG-YING LIN

The Sunflower Movement of 2014 originated from a dispute over a free-trade agreement with China (the Cross-Strait Service and Trade Agreement; CSSTA), which Ma Ying-jeou's Kuomintang (KMT) government forcibly pushed through the legislature. To prevent its final passage, a student-led sit-in protest took place and unexpectedly evolved into an occupy movement that lasted for twenty-four days. The movement ended peacefully; in its wake, further trade liberalization with China was halted and the KMT suffered a major defeat in the 2016 election, conceding the presidency and legislative majority to the independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Newer political parties representing the younger generation emerged, and social movements concerning nuclear energy, same-sex marriage, and labor issues gained new momentum. In hindsight, the Sunflower Movement of 2014 belongs to an unusual category of "eventful protests" for its large-scale and intensive participation as well as radical transformation in consequences (Ho 2019, 3–8). It is one of the rare, albeit significant, moments when people are able to make their own history. Eventful protests differ from the routine ones that take place in an organized and prepared fashion and end predictably, usually with minimal disruption to the public order. Della Porta (2014) has used the term *eventful protest* to understand the massive uprisings in Eastern Europe (1989) and in the Middle East and North Africa (2011). In a sense, the scale of Taiwan's Sunflower Movement is comparable to these consequential events. Situated in Taiwan's context, there had been a noticeable surge of social protests in the preceding years (Fell 2017; Ho 2019, 71–94). Protest activism by younger Taiwanese on the issues of nuclear energy, media monopoly, and urban renewal were on the rise, and these campaigns

THREE

## Hybridity, Civility, and Othering

### *In Search of Political Identity and Activism in Hong Kong*

WAI-MAN LAM

In the months after June 2019, the protests against the Extradition Bill in Hong Kong fundamentally altered the territory's image as a place of political apathy. With leaderless, anonymous, and confrontational resistance, the protests also signified an important turn in social unity in Hong Kong, in which the opposing factions *wo lei fei fei* 和理非非 (peaceful, rational, nonviolent, and no profanity) and *yong mo* 勇武 (valiance) have stood and fought together without interfering with the other's approach. As the protests signify important changes in civil society and the local culture, it is worth looking back at the cultural trajectories that have led to these developments.

The political culture of Hong Kong has undergone significant changes in recent years, especially around the time of the Umbrella Movement, with the emergence of various brands of localism and activism, as well as enhanced social divisions due to different political beliefs and strategies in pursuing democratization in Hong Kong. Using the postcolonial concepts of hybridity and othering, this chapter reviews the development of political identity and political activism in Hong Kong from colonial times up to the period of the Umbrella Movement.<sup>1</sup> It assumes that the hybrid political culture of Hong Kong nourished during colonial times has created room for the growth of a distinctive dual Hong Kong identity

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the conference "Sunflowers and Umbrellas: Social Movements, Expressive Practices, and Political Culture in Taiwan and Hong Kong," organized by the Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, on 16 and 17 March 2018. The author wishes to thank Professor Thomas Gold and Professor Sebastian Veg for their kind invitation, and the participants of the conference for their helpful comments. The author would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their useful comments.

## FOUR

# Chinese Tourism as Trigger and Target of the Sunflower and Umbrella Movements

IAN ROWEN

This chapter addresses the role of Chinese tourism in the Sunflower and Umbrella movements. The Sunflower Movement was sparked by a trade deal that included significant tourism provisions, and the Umbrella Movement's major demand was for universal suffrage and election reforms, which had nothing directly to do with Chinese tourism. This presents a puzzle: the economic, social, and political effects of Chinese tourism were not a major explicit point of contention for Taiwan's protestors, but were, I will argue, much more of an issue in Hong Kong before, during, and immediately following the mass demonstrations. I explain this by contextualizing the different effects of Chinese tourism on both polities, as well as the structural differences in the capacities of Taiwanese and Hongkongers to determine their own political fates. My discussion is based on interviews, analysis of media reports, and extensive participant observation in both movements, including a total of two months residing within Taiwan's Legislative Yuan and Hong Kong's occupation sites.

Between 2008 and 2014, inbound Chinese tourism transformed from a purported breakthrough achievement of the Ma Ying-jeou administration into an unspoken but implicit target of the Sunflower Movement. The movement began as a student-led occupation of parliament, climaxed with a rally of nearly half a million supporters in front of the presidential office that quashed the controversial trade bill, and ended with the protesters' withdrawal from parliament after twenty-four days. Later in the same year, the Umbrella Movement, a call for democratic reforms, erupted into the biggest movement in Hong Kong history, involving a seventy-nine-day street occupation of three different urban sites, two of which were in areas visited by Chinese tourists.

Although the sovereign status of Hong Kong is fundamentally different from that of Taiwan, the Umbrella Movement was in many ways a response

FIVE

## Visuality and Aurality in the Sunflower Movement

*Precedents for Politics as Spectacle in Taiwan*

BRIAN HIOE

In looking back on the media reportage on the Sunflower Movement, what most affected the public was the protest's highly visual nature. Images of the occupation site inside and around the Legislative Yuan, which was filled with artwork, provided a jarring disruption to the normal political order. Similarly shocking were the images of police violence against demonstrators, particularly on the night of 23 March 2014 during the attempted occupation of the Executive Yuan. Such images were disseminated through the Internet, social media, television, and newspapers. The occupation of the Executive Yuan continues to be a contested event, with an April 2020 ruling finding sixteen guilty for their participation in the occupation attempt, overturning a previous ruling that found some participants not guilty. This ruling is also likely to be appealed.

Political spectacles are not unusual in Taiwan. In terms of electoral politics, for example, one thinks of the numerous stunts held by politicians within the Legislative Yuan in the hopes of attracting media coverage, or the numerous fistfights and tussles that take place on the floor of the Legislative Yuan. As such, social movements are sometimes seen in line with the tendency of Taiwanese politics toward visual spectacle.

So, it is no surprise that this was also the case with the Sunflower Movement. Yet the Sunflower Movement was on another scale of magnitude entirely, offering few comparisons to any other event in Taiwanese history, apart from the Wild Lily Movement (1990). Arguably, it was the Wild Lily Movement, a weeklong sit-in at what is now Liberty Plaza—then known only as the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial—that set the example for student activism that the Sunflower Movement followed (see fig. 5.1).

## Music in the Umbrella Movement

### *From Expressive Form to New Political Culture*

SEBASTIAN VEG

Music typically plays an important role in social movements, in particular in shaping a movement culture and subsequently a collective memory. In the aftermath of the “new social movements” of the 1960s and 1970s, a strand of sociology argued that social movements should not only be seen in terms of political opportunities; rather, forms of cultural expression also play a specific role. For some of these scholars, the symbolic or expressive dimension of social movements is the most significant, because it durably challenges established ways of understanding the world (Eyerman and Jamison 1991, 48). For example, the new social movements of the 1960s failed to abolish capitalism, but they initiated profound sociocultural changes (Kutschke 2013, 3). In this perspective, music is not only a functional device for recruiting participants or mobilizing resources, but also produces a common culture: the “construction of meaning through music and song is . . . a central aspect of collective identity formation” (Eyerman and Jamison 1998, 161). For these scholars, the strategic dimension of social movements coexists with the articulation of meaning and identity, two basic aspects of human life (162). While strategic calculation and political opportunities are predicated on the existence of rational-critical publics, music and other expressive forms contribute to constituting emotional publics.<sup>1</sup>

That is not to say that unrealistic expectations should be placed on music. While some (Brecht, Havel) have seen it as a force to change the world, others (Adorno) have viewed it as a form of trivializing entertainment that prevents people from taking social life seriously and breaks up

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Andrew Jones and Pierre Martin for their generous help in contacting the musicians discussed in this chapter.

SEVEN

## Protest Documentaries in Taiwan and Hong Kong

*From the Late 1980s to the Sunflower  
and Umbrella Movements*

JUDITH PERNIN

Chris Marker's classic documentary *Grin without a Cat* (1977) opens with a dizzying montage featuring footage of demonstrations in Europe and South America edited with excerpts from Sergei Eisenstein's fiction film *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). Revolutionary scenes staged by the Soviet filmmaker alternate with anonymous reports on riots from the 1960s and 1970s. Bombarded with images of marching crowds, police violence, clenched fists, and leaders giving speeches, the viewer soon loses track of the events' context and specificity, and even of the distinction between scenes recorded live and reenacted. Blurring the boundaries between these iconic images of public dissent, *Grin without a Cat* invites us to reflect on the commonality of protest modes and their representation over time, space, film forms, and the political spectrum.<sup>1</sup>

While the sequence simultaneously alludes to the universality of revolt and perhaps to the elusiveness of progress, it also reveals the importance of documentary *mise-en-scène*, for specific ways of representing protests can help identify and understand them, and in turn raise popular

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter is partly based on research conducted during a six-month stay at Taiwan National Central Library (Guojia tushuguan) facilitated by a grant from their Center of Chinese Studies. The École française d'Extrême Orient provided an additional four-month research subsidy spent between Hong Kong and Taiwan (April through July 2018). I am indebted to the Taiwan International Documentary Festival and especially program director Wood Lin for access to film resources in Taiwan. In Hong Kong, I wish to extend thanks to individuals interviewed for this chapter and to institutions such as Videotage, Visible Record, and the Hong Kong International Film Festival.

EIGHT

## From Sunflowers to Suits

### *How Spatial Openings Affect Movement Party Formation*

LEV NACHMAN

Why do some social movements result in the formation of new political parties while others do not? Despite Taiwan's long tradition of social activism, no new parties formed under Ma Ying-jeou's tenure as president. That is, until the 2014 Sunflower Movement, which erupted in a wave of what is now colloquially called Third Force parties. These new movement parties include the New Power Party, the Social Democratic Party, the Statebuilding Party (formerly known as the Radical Wings Party or Radical Party), the Free Taiwan Party, and the Trees Party.<sup>1</sup> Of these new parties, only the New Power Party gained initial success and currently operates as the third most represented political party in Taiwan. The other new movement parties now fight for their continued survival. While the full story of movement parties will be the subject of future research, this paper will specifically trace the historical background of the most successful Third Force parties, the New Power Party (NPP) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP).

What are the necessary conditions for new political parties to form out of social movements? In political science, this is a contested question that has been the center of heated debates. One of the most prominent explanations within party formation literature postulates that parties form when new issues arise, or when certain issues become inadequately represented by established parties (see Downs 1957; Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Harmel

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<sup>1</sup> Kitschelt (2006, 281) formally defines movement parties as "coalitions of political activists who emanate from social movements and try to apply the organizational and strategic practices of social movements in the arena of party competition. . . . [O]ne day, legislators of movement parties may debate bills in parliamentary committees, but the next day, they participate in disruptive demonstrations or the nonviolent occupation of government sites."

NINE

## The Plebeian Moment and Its Traces

### *Post-Umbrella Movement Professional Groups in Hong Kong*

NGOK MA

The seventy-nine-day Umbrella Movement did not bring about institutional changes in Hong Kong. It was, however, a major political awakening experience and a massive explosion of participative energy, and it left traces on subsequent movements and political developments in the territory. The experience with this unprecedented movement affected people in different ways. Some were disillusioned with Beijing and “one country, two systems,” and switched to support self-determination or even independence for Hong Kong. For many disappointed participants, the futility of the Umbrella Movement brought helplessness and demobilization. For some people, the movement was just the beginning of their participation in political and social movements.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter analyzes the experience of new professional political groups formed after the Umbrella Movement, as a study of the “traces” it left. It shows that the Umbrella Movement politicized some of these professionals and their respective sectoral elections. The participation and success of these politicized professionals in the December 2016 sub-sectoral elections for the election committee, which elected the 2017 chief executive, reflected a generational change in the professions, with the young generation of professionals more politicized and mobilized. This change, however, is still small in scope, much constrained by the institutional structure, and is limited to low-threshold participation forms. Some of these professional groups went on to play important roles in the 2019 Anti-Extradition Bill Movement of Hong Kong. The Umbrella Movement

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<sup>1</sup> The author would like to thank the General Research Fund (GRF) of the Research Grant Council of Hong Kong (project no. 14607416) for support in funding this project.

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“A fine and welcomed collection that sheds new lights on two iconic popular movements in contemporary Asia. Capturing the Sunflower and Umbrella Movements’ organization dynamics, expressive politics and political outcomes in granular details, this volume advances a much needed comparative agenda for social movement studies.”

—Ching Kwan Lee, University of California, Los Angeles

“This volume showcases fascinating new work by an engaging mix of established and junior scholars of the social sciences and humanities. The book opens with an exemplary introduction by the editors and is especially good at highlighting the expressive and symbolic sides of struggles for change. *Sunflowers and Umbrellas* shows how valuable it can be to place the 2014 events in Taiwan and Hong Kong side-by-side in a way that, while acknowledging the differences between the movements, points out their similarities and connections.”

—Jeffrey Wasserstrom, University of California, Irvine

“The chapters in this volume illuminate two important new social movements by focusing on their cultural and symbolic dimensions. Expertly edited by two distinguished scholars of youth, intellectuals and political activism, this book makes an important contribution to the meaning of media and political culture in contemporary social movements.”

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