

Tears without Tear Gas: The Failure of the Umbrella Revolution and Hong Kong's Youth

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Abstract

Hong Kong's recent Umbrella Movement was caused by factors dating back to the British invasion and occupation of the port of Canton. Though on the outside, it looked as though these protests dealt with the upcoming elections of the Chief Executive, they were ultimately protesting the fundamental system of governance in place in Hong Kong. Had the protests merely been concerned with electoral reform, they would have had no legal standing upon which to make their claims, with both the Joint Declaration and Basic Law supporting the system proposed by the People's Republic of China. Though the protests gained some footing early on, they ultimately dispersed, and no electoral reform has yet taken place. The Umbrella Revolution, i.e. the spirit of disbanding and reshaping the current system of governance in Hong Kong, what the protesters were hoping to achieve, will ultimately fail, due to movement's overreliance on youth. Young people in Hong Kong simply do not have enough political efficacy, nor enough economic or militaristic means, to institute any major changes, and with the Basic Law's provisions ceasing in 2047, time is running out.

Our saga begins in a port city enwrapped in a state of turmoil, teeming with life and wealth, yet lacking in liberty and equality. The city was fought over, controlled, and traded between world powers, erasing it of any identity it might once have had, leading to an ideological struggle over its true nature, what it is and what it might become. In the legislature, lawmakers must choose between what they believe is right, what the citizens want, and the pressures of an overarching and somewhat oppressive state government, which holds nearly ultimate authority. The leader of this town, elected by the authority state, feels not only a sense of allegiance to those who gave him power but also a fear of what might happen should he disappoint them. Instead of listening to the members of his city, he ignores them to protect himself. Because of this, pacts that are beneficial to the sovereign are made between the leader of the city and private corporations, and a combination of unbridled capitalism and government instated monopolies drive up real estate prices, making the tycoons richer, and the disadvantaged middle-class poorer. The citizens, sensing disconnect in the legislature, a leader not willing to listen, and collusion between the state and private corporations, react in the only way they can: revolution. Students, teachers, and workers gather outside the central government building in the middle of the city, and on one fateful day breach a security barricade, sparking a social movement. In the days that follow, police use pepper spray and tear gas on civilians, but because of civic outcry, the size of the mobs becomes even larger. The resistance movement adopts a symbol to represent their hope – the yellow umbrella – to protect them from oppression in the way their actual umbrellas protect them from the gas being used by the police forces to suppress them. They fight, retreat, rally, and fight some more, for some months onwards. Eventually, however, the state and its collusion with private entities prove too strong, and the rebellion is quelled. But the spirit that awoke the movement lives on, especially in the youth of the city, those who witnessed, participated, and were molded by the events which transpired. Although the root of these conflicts was born in 1984, this is not an Orwellian piece of fiction. This is a story of Hong Kong.

The following tale of Hong Kong explains why the Umbrella Movement occurred, from the pressure felt by the youth of Hong Kong over the collapse of their political efficacy, to the more recent attempts by the People's Republic of China of gaining greater sovereignty over the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, to modern Hong Kong's governmental roots set forth by the *Joint Declaration* and *Basic Law*. It not only claims that the citing

of supposed provisions for free and fair elections in the *Basic Law* were grossly misinterpreted, and that the PRC was never planning on allowing Hong Kong to function as a true democracy, but that the PRC is, however, allowing for a more democratic Hong Kong than the United Kingdom ever allowed, thus being chastised by the West for giving Hong Kong more autonomy than a Western state ever did. Finally, it discusses that though the *Umbrella Movement* was still a social movement, it was a movement asking for revolution, and explains how Hong Kong's *Umbrella Revolution* is destined to fail.

I

September 26, 2014 – Exactly thirty years after the United Kingdom and the People's Republic of China released the historic *Joint Declaration*, hundreds of students rushed over the security barricades of the central government building in Hong Kong with anger, tenacity, and fear in their eyes. Many were still youths, students from local secondary schools exercising their disappointment of modern Hong Kong in the only way they believed they could: protest. Thus began a series of events now known as “The Umbrella Movement.” Four days earlier, however, hundreds had begun gathering around that building, unhappy with the current political system in place in Hong Kong, furious at the way the Beijing government of the PRC seemed to be closing in and suppressing their social and political freedoms. Though the protests were meant to be relatively peaceful demonstrations, the large collections of people disrupted traffic and business throughout Hong Kong. Soon Hong Kong police forces were called in to disperse the crowds, and when protesters refused to leave, the police resorted to the use of pepper spray and tear gas, causing an uproar among witnesses.¹ To protect themselves from the tear gas, protesters began carrying umbrellas to use as shields, thus the movement was dubbed “The Umbrella Movement.” In the following months, the protests fluctuated in numbers, and changed locations many times. However, the large number of youths who stood as the backbone of the movement remained constant. The young men and women of Hong Kong kept the Umbrella Movement alive until December 15, 2014. At this time the crowds dispersed for good, but those involved continued to be discontent with their lack of political efficacy

1 “Police fire tear gas and baton charge thousands of Occupy Central protesters,” South China Morning Post (International Edition), last modified September 29, 2014, accessed August 11, 2015, <http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1603350/police-fire-tear-gas-and-baton-charge-thousands-occupy-central>.

in Hong Kong's political system.

The current political system of Hong Kong is composed primarily of the Chief Executive, the Executive Council, and the Legislative Council, along with the Administration, the Judiciary, and the District Councils. However, apart from the District Councils who have no legislative power, only 35 of the 70 members of the Legislative Council are selected through free elections.² In addition to this, the Chief Executive, who arguably has more power than the entire Legislative Council, is elected by a 1,200 member committee composed primarily of pro-Beijing aristocrats and corporate leaders.³ Because of this, the youth of Hong Kong in particular feel that they have no way of influencing the affairs of the government. In a *Time* article entitled "Hong Kong's Youth Are Venting Economic as Well as Political Frustration" David Zweig, professor of politics at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, says "The young people of Hong Kong are very worried that the Hong Kong their parents knew is not going to be the Hong Kong to which they grow up."⁴ To many of the older generation, Hong Kong went through rapid economic growth, and transformed from being a Western colony to a more culturally independent and economic capital. But for the youth, economic stagnation can only be blamed on those in control. Because of this, they feel that the current economic woes of the city, rising property values, middling wages, and an acceptance of nepotism are not being accurately combated by the government. "Hong Kong is in a bind," writes Carsten Holz, a professor of economics at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, "the economy is dominated by a few tycoons closely affiliated with the aristocratic families of the mainland regime and with the mainland regime's Hong Kong puppet regime."⁵ In other words, corporatism, through ties with the PRC, has a strangle-hold on what the HKSAR government can and cannot do. Therefore, the youth find no way to influence political matters, except through social movement. Previous to the Umbrella Movement, they manifested their yearly griefs through the

2 "Government Structure," GovHK, last modified March 2015, accessed August 11, 2015, <http://www.gov.hk/en/about/govdirectory/govstructure.htm>.

3 "Hong Kong Lawmakers Reject Electoral-Reform Proposal Backed by Beijing," TIME, last modified June 18, 2015, accessed August 11, 2015, <http://time.com/3923968/hong-kong-election-reform-bill/>.

4 "Hong Kong's Youth Are Venting Economic as Well as Political Frustration," TIME, last modified October 7, 2014, accessed August 11, 2015, <http://time.com/3477757/hong-kongs-youth-are-venting-economic-as-well-as-political-frustration/>.

5 Ibid.

July 1 marches.

Citizens' malcontent with portions of the *Basic Law*, a malcontent which reoccurred in the Umbrella Movement, began inciting wide-spread social movements in 2003. Though the "July 1 Marches" officially commenced in 1997, with The Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements in China at its forefront, the marches gained significant support on July 1, 2003. During this time, the marches grew to anywhere from 100,000 to 500,000 marchers in reaction to an anti-subversion law proposed to the Hong Kong legislature on September 24, 2002.⁶ This law regarded Article 23 of the *Basic Law* which reads:

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall enact laws on its own to prohibit any act of treason, secession, sedition, subversion against the Central People's Government, or theft of state secrets, to prohibit foreign political organizations or bodies from conducting political activities in the Region, and to prohibit political organizations or bodies of the Region from establishing ties with foreign political organizations or bodies.⁷

The proposed law would have allowed for anyone found guilty of acts of treason, sedition, secession, or subversion against the People's Republic of China to be imprisoned for life.⁸ The law was believed to be set to pass through Hong Kong's Legislative Council. However, in the aftermath of the July 1 marches, two Executive Committee members resigned, and the bill lost much support within the chief executive's cabinet and was eventually withdrawn.⁹ This was an extreme victory for pro-democracy citizens of Hong Kong, and culminated in larger support for annual July 1 marches in the future. With themes such as "Striving For Universal Suffrage in '07 and '08 ..." and "Oppose government collusion, striving for universal suffrage," these yearly reminders of the great support for democracy in Hong Kong only strengthened the idea for future

6 "Huge protest fills HK streets," CNN, last modified July 2, 2003, accessed August 12, 2014, <http://edition.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/asiapcf/east/07/01/hk.protest/>.

7 "Basic Law Full Text," GovHK, last modified July 13, 2012, accessed August 12, 2015, http://www.basiclaw.gov.hk/en/basiclawtext/chapter_2.html.

8 "Huge protest fills HK streets," CNN.

9 "Hong Kong leader abandons fight to pass anti-subversion laws," The Telegraph, last modified July 8, 2003, accessed August 12, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/hongkong/1435551/Hong-Kong-leader-abandons-fight-to-pass-anti-subversion-laws.html>.

social movements in the minds of young, aspiring protesters. Growing up around such strong ideals could only influence the youth of Hong Kong in one-direction: toward democracy.

The most recent attack of note by the People's Republic of China on Hong Kong's sovereignty was a 23,000 word document released by the China State Council Information Office in which the PRC declared "comprehensive jurisdiction" over Hong Kong. The paper essentially declared that the PRC holds ultimate sovereignty over the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong, which, according to the *Joint Declaration*, was supposed to be guaranteed a "high degree of autonomy" until 2047. This announcement made on June 11, 2014 was immediately met with backlash from Occupy Central with Love and Peace, an organization known for promoting democratic reforms throughout Hong Kong. In the following days, Occupy Central, along with other pro-democracy advocates, organized a civil referendum for the people of Hong Kong to demand democratic reforms of the political system of Hong Kong, and for the direct nomination and election of the Chief Executive by the citizens of Hong Kong. Though the referendum gained 787,767 votes, with 42% agreeing that the Chief Executive should be nominated by the people of Hong Kong, it ultimately failed due to its unofficial status.¹⁰ The People's Republic of China reacted to this with an article in the state-run newspaper calling it an "illegal farce."¹¹ Then, on August 31, 2014, the PRC proposed an electoral system in which those nominated and appearing on the ballot for the position of Chief Executive would be selected by a 1,200 member nominating committee, although election itself would still technically take place through "universal suffrage." That nominating committee would be selected and appointed by the People's Republic of China, and will be instructed to only nominate individuals who "love the country, and love Hong Kong" to appear on the ballot.¹² Naturally, this enraged pro-democracy groups throughout Hong Kong, who believed this meant only "pro-Beijing" candidates would have any chance at becoming the Chief Executive. The public's reaction to this 1,200 member nominating committee ultimately led to the crowd of

10 "Hong Kong's Occupy Central democracy 'referendum' – What you should know," CNN, last modified June 30, 2014, accessed August 12, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/06/24/world/asia/hong-kong-politics-explainer/index.html>.

11 Ibid.

12 "China restricts voting reforms for Hong Kong," The New York Times, last modified August 31, 2014, accessed August 13, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/01/world/asia/hong-kong-elections.html?_r=0.

demonstrators outside the central government building, and therefore sparked the Umbrella Movement.

While the People's Congress in Beijing officially proposed this new electoral system, the Legislative Council of Hong Kong was still required to pass the bill for it to go into effect. To much of the world's surprise however, on June 18, 2015, the bill failed in dramatic fashion. On that day, after the Speaker rejected the pro-Beijing camp's request for a 15-minute suspension, the group of lawmakers believed they could buy enough time with the walkout to suspend the vote.¹³ But due confusion among members, an insufficient number of lawmakers walked out, and the attempt failed. Where there should have been many more votes in favor of the new system, only 8 legislators were present who supported the bill when the vote took place.¹⁴ Thus only 37 out of 70 lawmakers were present for the vote, with only 8 affirming the bill, far less than the 47 needed for it to pass.¹⁵ The failure of the bill and the grand display of disconnect within the pro-Beijing camp caused the whole event to be extremely embarrassing for the bill's supporters, including the PRC. Because the bill failed, the election of the Chief Executive in the 2017 election will continue to be carried out by a 1,200 member electing committee, the same system previously in place in Hong Kong. What is notable to point out, however, is that the current system, the system voted *for* by many pro-democracy legislators, is much less democratic than the system proposed by the Beijing government. While this would have allowed citizens to cast their votes in who became the next Chief Executive, they would be choosing from a list compiled by a pro-Beijing nominating committee. Still, Hong Kong voters would have had more political efficacy had the bill passed. Instead of the election committee, a nominating committee would have been in place, and the voters could have had some say in who they wanted to be Chief Executive. But pro-democracy supporters in Hong Kong are still pushing for more drastic reforms to be made by the Beijing government. They looked at the proposed system as too great of a compromise, which they believed would have created a stagnant system of unchanging structure in Hong Kong. Even so, the new system would have been more democratic

13 "Hong Kong lawmakers reject Beijing poll plan," BBC, last modified June 18, 2015, accessed August 13, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-33179247>.

14 *Ibid.*

15 *Ibid.*

than the old system in China's Hong Kong, and much more democratic than the system in place when Hong Kong was under British rule. It was ultimately this British system that laid the foundation for the modern political system of Hong Kong, but interestingly enough, there were never any grand protests during British rule.

II

The current political system in Hong Kong, *i.e.* the semi-sovereignty the PRC has over that system, was structured through two documents: the Sino-British *Joint Declaration* and the *Basic Law*. However, the influences over the composition of these documents began during the age of colonialism, and the First Opium War.

In the early nineteenth century, Britain supplied China with opium in exchange for silver and tea, but in 1839, after the emperor of China named a new imperial commissioner for the port of Canton, all opium trade ceased.¹⁶ Naturally the British were enraged, as they were dependent on selling opium to receive tea, which was (and is) very popular in England. In a short period of time, Britain had invaded, under what it claimed as its “responsibility to protect British citizens,” demanding that China open its ports back to the English opium trade.¹⁷ Having underestimated the British force, China soon conceded, and thus reengaged in trade with England. In the *Treaty of Nanking*, which ended the conflict, China also ceded the small island of Hong Kong to the British.¹⁸

Hong Kong was then officially a British territory, and had no real government or constitution separate from that of the United Kingdom. In the years following the Treaty of Nanking, however, some rudimentary laws were set in place. Three basic constitutional documents were written and approved: the *Charter* of April 5, 1843, which constituted the island of Hong Kong as a colony; the *Order in Council* of October 24, 1860, which annexed the peninsula of Kowloon to the original colony; and the *Order of Council* of December 27, 1898, which added new territories to it.¹⁹

The *Charter* of 1843, which included the *Letters Patent* and *Royal Instructions*, formulated the system of government that remained in place

16 Norman Miners, *The Government and Politics of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1991), 8.

17 *Ibid.*

18 *Ibid.*, 9.

19 *Ibid.*, 55.

during Hong Kong's colonial era. It founded the office of Governor and defined its powers, which were to make laws for the peace, order, and good government of the colony.²⁰ The *Letters* also authorized the creation of the Executive and Legislative Councils. The Executive Council was to be composed of chief government officials, all of whom were appointed by the Crown. Dr. Norman Miners, Professor of Political Science at the University of Hong Kong, writes that the Executive Council was “the authoritative final decision maker for the whole of the government machine, and though many of [its] conclusions were legally subject to ratification elsewhere ... in practice this was normally achieved without much difficulty.”²¹ The Legislative Council was composed of 57 members, who were appointed by the Governor.²² The true purpose of the *Letters* was to make sure the governance of Hong Kong continued to be subject to the British Crown and Parliament. The system contained almost no characteristics of a democracy until 1985, when 24 of the 57 members of the Legislative Council were allowed to be elected through competitive election.²³ This relatively undemocratic system of government remained in Hong Kong until 1997, when it was returned to the PRC.

The reason why Britain ceded sovereignty of Hong Kong back to the PRC instead of retaining the port as a colony began with *The Order of Council* of 1898. This document leased the “New Territories” surrounding Hong Kong for 99 years, a lease which ran out in 1997. Because of this, in the late-1970s, individuals living in or owning land in the New Territories began feeling nervous about what would occur when that land would be handed over to the communist PRC.²⁴ These land owners urged the British Government to come up with an agreement with the PRC that would allow them to retain property rights over their land. China realized this was an opportunity to regain sovereignty over the island of Hong Kong and the Kowloon peninsula, and therefore reacted accordingly. The result of this was the *Joint Declaration* of 1984.

After many talks and conferences between the UK and the PRC, the *Joint Declaration* was signed on September 26, 1984. The document

20 Ibid, 56.

21 Ibid, 75.

22 Ibid, 114.

23 Ibid.

24 William McGurn, *Perfidious Albion* (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1997), 43.

outlined what would happen to the British Colony of Hong Kong on and after July 1, 1997. The main sections of the *Joint Declaration* pertinent to our story of Hong Kong are the following:

i. 3. (1) Upholding national unity and territorial integrity, and taking account of the history of Hong Kong and its realities, the People's Republic of China has decided to establish...a Hong Kong Special Administrative Region upon resuming the exercise of sovereignty over Hong Kong.

ii. 3. (4) The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region will be composed of local inhabitants. The chief executive will be appointed by the Central People's Government on the basis of results of elections or consultations to be held locally. Principal officials will be nominated by the chief executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region for appointment by the Central People's Government...

iii. 3. (5) The current social and economic systems in Hong Kong will remain unchanged, and so will the lifestyle. Rights and freedoms, including those of the person, of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of travel, of movement, of correspondence, of strike, of choice of occupation, of academic research and of religious belief will be ensured by law in the Hong Kong Special Administrative region. Private Property, ownership of enterprises, legitimate right of inheritance and foreign investment will be protected by law.²⁵

The government of the United Kingdom relinquished its sovereignty over the island of Hong Kong and the Kowloon peninsula to ensure that the property rights and freedoms of those living in the New Territories were protected from the potential communist agendas of the PRC. The *Joint Declaration* makes clear that Hong Kong would be considered a Special Administrative Region with rights and privileges distinct from the PRC. The new governmental system of Hong Kong would be very similar to the old government, with the only

25 "Text of Joint Declaration," GovHK, accessed August 13, 2015, http://www.legislation.gov.hk/blis_ind.nsf/CurEngOrd/034B10AF5D3058DB482575EE000EDB9F?OpenDocument.

changes being that the Governor would then be called the Chief Executive, and all appointments would be made by the PRC instead of the British Crown. These rights were later solidified in the *Basic Law*.

The *Basic Law*, adopted on April 4, 1990 by the People's Congress of the PRC, serves as the current "constitution" of Hong Kong. Article 11 of the document clearly states, "No law enacted by the legislature of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall contravene this law." Though many of its sections restate portions of the *Joint Declaration*, the *Basic Law* also includes details pertaining to the future of Hong Kong. Article 5 states, "The socialist system and policies shall not be practiced in the Hong Kong Special Administrative region, and the previous capitalist system and way of life shall remain unchanged for 50 years." In relation to the Umbrella Movement, however, there is one article in particular that needs to be analyzed: Article 45. It reads:

The Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall be selected by election or through consultations held locally and be appointed by the Central People's Government.

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. The ultimate aim is the selection of the Chief Executive by universal suffrage upon nomination by a broadly representative nominating committee in accordance with democratic procedures.²⁶

The *Basic Law* gives autonomy to the government of Hong Kong for domestic procedures, but grants no electoral autonomy on the subject of the Chief Executive to the city. It clearly states that "The ultimate aim is the selection of the Chief Executive by universal suffrage upon nomination by a broadly representative nominating committee in accordance with democratic procedures." There is no clear definition of what a "broadly representative nominating committee" is, but the 1,200 member committee based upon a wide range of social groups seems to fit the description. In the new system, universal suffrage would still take place. Though interpretations of the phrase in different contexts may vary, the words "universal suffrage" themselves simply

26 "Basic Law Full Text," GovHK, last modified July 13, 2012, accessed August 13, 2015, http://www.basiclaw.gov.hk/en/basiclawtext/chapter_4.html

imply that every adult citizen has the freedom and opportunity to vote, which, in the new system, would be the case. The proposed electoral system was also in accordance with the *Joint Declaration*, which was ratified and accepted by the United Nations and states “The chief executive will be appointed by the Central People’s Government on the basis of results of elections or consultations to be held locally.” With the proposed electoral system, the elections that would have occurred would have been held locally, in Hong Kong, and the PRC would have appointed the Chief Executive based on the results of those elections. The PRC did not violate any laws or constitutions in their creation of an appointed nomination committee. They were actually allowing citizens of Hong Kong more political efficacy than in previous years in regards to who becomes the next Chief Executive. The PRC never intended for Hong Kong to function as a true democracy, but has been chastised by the West for attempting to give Hong Kong more autonomy than the United Kingdom ever did.

Obviously these sections of the *Basic Law* and *Joint Declaration* are extremely detrimental to the Umbrella Movement’s cause. Near the beginning of the movement, there was some disagreement over whether to call it the “Umbrella Movement” or the “Umbrella Revolution,” and this concrete legality of the new system is precisely why. While most people claimed that the two terms were synonymous, they really refer to two fundamentally different things. Encyclopedia Britannica defines a social movement as a “loosely organized but sustained campaign in support of a social goal, typically either the implementation or the prevention of a change in society’s structure or values.”²⁷ Based on this definition, the Umbrella Movement is certainly a social movement, composing of an organized and sustained campaign supporting the prevention of the Beijing-proposed governmental system and the implementation of a new, completely democratic system. In contrast, the Merriam-Webster defines a revolution to be “a fundamental change in political organization; especially the overthrow or renunciation of one government or ruler and the substitution of another by the governed.”²⁸ The Umbrella Movement was protesting for a revolution to occur, but it was not a revolution itself. Because of this, the events of September 26 to December 15 of 2014 should be considered the true “Umbrella Movement,” and the ongoing struggle

27 “Social Movement,” Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed August 13, 2015, <http://www.britannica.com/topic/social-movement>.

28 “Revolution,” Merriam-Webster, accessed August 13, 2015, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/revolution>.

for a truly democratic Hong Kong, because it involves not only a change in government, but a change in constitution, to take place, is the true “Umbrella Revolution.” Thus these terms should, in fact, refer to different things, and though the Umbrella Movement of 2014 has ceased, Hong Kong’s *Umbrella Revolution* is ongoing. However, due to the revolution’s abundance in proportion of youths to elders, it will ultimately fail.

III

As we touched upon earlier, the younger population of Hong Kong are much more dissatisfied with their current situation than those of middle to late age. A recent survey conducted by the University of Hong Kong found that though 40% of Hong Kong citizens aged 50 or above held trust in the Beijing Government, only 27% of those aged 30–49 and only 11% of those aged 18–29 trusted the PRC.²⁹ Perhaps even more notable is that 85% of the youngest group (18–29), a staggering majority, answered that they had no-confidence in the “one country, two systems” policy set forth by the *Joint Declaration* and *Basic Law*. 59% of those in the middle group (30–49) agreed.³⁰ Perhaps even more interesting is that according to a study published by two academies on *Ming Pao*, over 75% of Umbrella Movement protesters were under the age of 39.³¹ Coupling these two statistics together, it is easy to see that a majority of the protesters were not just unhappy with the new electoral standards set forth by the PRC, they were unhappy with the “one country, two systems” philosophy altogether. The revolution is not about the new system the PRC proposed, or what “universal suffrage” actually means, it is about the fact that the *Basic Law* itself is a flawed document, and that the citizens of Hong Kong deserve greater political freedom than it allows. Because so many protesters were under the age of 39, it can be assumed that a large portion were born near or after the signing of the *Basic Law*, and through social contracts were “born”

29 “HKU POP releases the latest trust and confidence indicators,” HKU POP SITE (Public Opinion Programme, The University of Hong Kong), last modified September 23, 2014, accessed May 24, 2015, <http://hkupop.hku.hk/english/release/release1186.html>.

30 Ibid.

31 “After umbrella sports, farewell politically apathetic age,” *Ming Pao*, last modified November 28, 2014, accessed May 24, 2015, http://news.mingpao.com/pns/後雨傘運動：告別政治冷感的年代-作者：鄭煒、袁瑋熙/web_tc/article/20141129/s00012/1417197542046, (obviously this broken-English title of the article is not what the authors intended, but as I do not speak Chinese, through a little help from Google Translate I was able to read the article, and I have thus given the “translated” article title).

into consenting to it. Though this is the case for everyone around the world, with the signing of the *Basic Law* being so recent, it has created an ideological cleavage. On one hand, the young are very discontent with the document, but on the other, the elders can recall how undemocratic the British system was, and therefore accept the *Basic Law* for what it is. But for these youth of Hong Kong, the only outlet they have for voicing their malcontents is through revolution, for the very system they revolt against is the one which prevents them from taking political action. Unfortunately for them, however, the deck is stacked against them, and democratization will never occur in Hong Kong.

Before a democracy can be instated in any authoritarian country, a very specific and significant process must occur. Sonny Shiu-Hing Lo, professor of Political Science at the University of Waterloo, writes in *Competing Chinese Political Visions* that there are six factors that determine the course of democratization: elite, class, cleavage, geopolitics, political culture, and social movement.³² Naturally, no political theory can predict the outcome of certain events with absolute certainty. If only one or two of the criteria for democratization are met, as is the case in our Hong Kong, it would truly take a miracle for democratization to occur. Since we have already touched on ideological cleavage between age groups in Hong Kong, and we have obviously covered social movement, the remainder of this section will discuss why the youth of Hong Kong (and therefore the revolution as a whole) fail the remaining four criteria for democratization.

Concerning the political elite, Shiu-Hing Lo writes, “In the event that the dominant elite, or the soft-liner, adopts a liberal-minded and tolerant attitude toward public criticisms and citizen protests, and that it accepts the electoral defeat of the ruling party, a threshold in democratization – the rotation of political party in power – is reached.”³³ In other words, those who are currently in power must be willing to convert their government from an autocracy to a democracy, because without their willingness, in the absence of a coup, any change in regime would be impossible. But in Hong Kong, because of the political system set up by the *Joint Declaration* and *Basic Law*, the People’s Republic of China had and has the most political power and is largely in charge of the how the system of governance functions. Yes, the Legislative Council of Hong Kong still has to *approve* whatever changes the PRC makes to the

32 Sonny Shiu-Hing Lo, *Competing Chinese Political Visions: Hong Kong vs. Beijing on Democracy* (Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 2010), 2.

33 Ibid.

functionality of HKSAR, but as we saw earlier this year, with the Legislative Council's rejection of the proposed electoral system, nothing changed. The PRC announced they would not attempt to revamp the system in favor of what the pro-democracy supporters had in mind. Since the Legislative Council cannot do anything itself to change the electoral process, Hong Kong is stuck with a 1,200 member election committee and controlled by the PRC. Thus, the political elite in Hong Kong do not have enough efficacy themselves to change the system to become more democratic for the citizens of Hong Kong, and, even if they did, might not even listen to the qualms of the youth. In a fact sheet released by the Research Office of the Legislative Council Secretariat on October 23, 2014, the average age of a Hong Kong legislator is listed as 57 years old, with the oldest member being 78, and the youngest 35.³⁴ From here it is easy to draw the conclusion that the Hong Kong Legislative Council is much more content with the *Basic Law* and the governing procedures set forth by it than the youth and protesters of Hong Kong are. What is truly detrimental to the revolutionaries' cause, however, is the fact that the closer they get to becoming the age group in power in Hong Kong, the closer the end of the 50 years of semi-autonomy promised by the *Joint Declaration* looms. 2047 is barely 30 years away, and in the nearly 20 years which have already passed there has been no significant change. It's difficult indeed to then imagine anything great changing in that near future. By the time Hong Kong's current youth are being elected into the Legislative Council, even if they can issue in some sort of reform, it will be extremely short lived. Whatever change they can usher in will die when their lease on autonomy runs out.

The second factor influencing democratization, class, is well described by David Potter, who stated that, historically speaking, "democratization has been both resisted and pushed forward by the changing dynamics of class relations and different classes pursuing their separate interests. Subordinate classes have usually pushed for democracy, dominant classes nearly always have resisted it."³⁵ The land-owning class has historically been the most anti-democratic because democracy is seen as harmful to profits. In retaliation the peasantry or farm laborers have often been pro-democracy, but are usually too unorganized and uneducated to make any viable push for change. The urban

34 "Legislative Council in Figures," GovHK, last modified October 23, 2014, accessed August 22, 2015, <http://www.legco.gov.hk/research-publications/english/1415fs02-legislative-council-in-figures-20141031-e.pdf>.

35 Ibid, 4.

workers on the other hand are both pro–democracy and organized, and typically contribute the greatest force for democratization. Finally, the bourgeoisie are often ambiguous, for democracy will tend to allow them more freedom for their capitalism, but also more protection for the labor of the working class. However, historical analyzations of class democratization simply does not apply to the modern world, and especially not in Hong Kong.

The recent Umbrella Movement and the resulting Umbrella Revolution are composed almost entirely of the disadvantaged middle class and youths, and led primarily by academics, students and professors who are well-educated about the current political process and who understand why it needs to change. Though the protests themselves disrupted economic activity in the city, the fact that they have ceased means no part of the revolution is currently affecting how the economy functions. According to Richard C. Bush, director of the Center of East Asia Policy Studies, this is the most important factor in a revolution succeeding. Bush writes in his article “The Roots of the Hong Kong Protest” that:

In most advanced societies, democracy provides a check against excessive wealth and market concentration. Not in Hong Kong. Beijing designed the territory’s political system to limit the scope of democracy and give preferential access to political power to its supporters (mostly wealthy businessmen, some members of communist trade unions) ... the question is whether middle class protest cause enough damage to business that the tycoons themselves decide that more democracy will actually enhance stability rather than undermine it.³⁶

Without protests which disrupt their profits the tycoons have who have the power in Hong Kong have no reason to lobby for democracy. More importantly, because so many of Hong Kong’s youth are either in school or cannot find employment, forcing the hand of the corporate oligarchs without major support from the upper-middle class would be extremely difficult. To give an idea of how much power these oligarchs actually have, in 2014, the top 45 billionaires in Hong Kong had a combined net worth of \$214 billion, nearly

36 “The Roots of the Hong Kong Protest,” Brookings Institution, last modified September 30, 2014, accessed August 22, 2015, <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/up-front/posts/2014/09/30-roots-of-hong-kong-protest-bush>.

80% of Hong Kong's total GDP in 2013.³⁷ It would be nearly impossible for one of Hong Kong's revolutionary youths to gain enough wealth to actually gain enough efficacy to influence political events through lobbying. Indeed even if one did, 2047 is only 32 years away when all hopes of democracy may very well be dashed.

The third factor leading to the failure of the Umbrella Revolution, geopolitics, affects democratization in a very direct way. Just as Vietnam and North Korea fell to communism after China's revolution, states surrounded by democratic regimes have tended to become more democratic. In the past, ideologies quickly spread, by word of mouth or mail, and across state borders, allowing those who were oppressed to hear about newer, more egalitarian political systems. While in the current age of the internet the geographical spread of ideology is not as common, the economic dependence of countries close to one another forces cooperation between regimes, which tends to come in the form of similar political structures.

Hong Kong is at a dynamic place geographically, economically, and internationally. The most notable aspects of its geopolitics are its history as a British colony and China's political and economic strangle-hold over it. As previously touched upon, the British rule of Hong Kong as a true *colony*, with all the lack of rights and privileges granted it thereof, forced its citizens to become accustomed to colonial rule. This is essentially the same rule that the PRC currently has over them. Because of this, the older citizens are more content with the current system, and the younger citizens are stuck without enough pressure to place by themselves on those in power. In addition, China's grip on power within Hong Kong can only be bolstered through its growing power over Hong Kong's economy. Since 2005, not only have Hong Kong's exports to the PRC decreased, its imports from the PRC have been steadily *increased*.³⁸ With such a one-sided economic relationship with mainland China, Hong Kong cannot afford to antagonize a government that clearly desires that the Umbrella Revolution fail. So unless Hong Kong's youth can fix Hong Kong's growing economic dependence on the PRC, the revolution cannot hope to gain footing.

Finally, political culture pushes democratization through a state's core

37 "Beyond The Umbrella Movement: Hong Kong's Struggle With Inequality In 8 Charts," *Forbes*, last modified October 8, 2014, accessed August 22, 2015, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/liyanchen/2014/10/08/beyond-the-umbrella-revolution-hong-kongs-struggle-with-inequality-in-8-charts/>.

38 *Ibid.*, 2.

ideology. Western civilizations evolved to place stress on individuals, and in contrast the East exalted collectivism. It is, therefore, no surprise that democracy, and liberal democracy at that, succeeded greatly in the West, but struggled to find footing elsewhere. Capitalism, individuality, and even the definition of property itself grew out of Western philosophy and religion. By contrast Eastern philosophies stress respect, peace, harmony with the world, and further the idea that it is better to simply be an average laborer, a cog in a larger machine, than to push back, and break the machine as a whole.

Since we are discussing the subject of political culture, it seems only appropriate to quote Samuel Huntington, who wrote in his *Clash of Civilizations* that:

China's Confucian heritage, with its emphasis on authority, order, hierarchy, and the supremacy of the collectivity over the individual, creates obstacles to democratizations. Yet economic growth is creating in South China increasingly high levels of wealth, a dynamic bourgeoisie, accumulations of economic power outside governmental control, and a rapidly expanding middle class. In addition, Chinese people are deeply involved in the outside world in terms of trade, investment, and education. All this creates a social basis for movement toward political pluralism.³⁹

Unfortunately, Huntington's 1996 essay now seems out of date. The "dynamic bourgeoisie" he spoke of now collude with the Chinese government to only grow richer instead of using their wealth to push back against political oppression. In addition to this, as stated many times before, Hong Kong's older age groups' "political culture" is still more Confucian, and more accepting of both their "place" in the world and their submission to authority. Only the young, who were born near or after the return of Hong Kong to the PRC, seek liberalization. But again, by the time all of Hong Kong will have this new political culture, 2047 will have come and gone, removing any autonomy the new political culture could have ushered in.

To conclude, the Umbrella Movement is the most recent in a series of social movements that have occurred in Hong Kong since its return to PRC rule in 1997, with the other main event being the July 1 marches of 2003. The July 1 marches have been used to show the populous' support for increased political autonomy every summer. Half a million citizens showed up in 2003, and a smaller but still confidently large number attended every year since. These

39 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 228.

movements have given hope to many who believed that a peaceful solution could be reached in which Hong Kong would be given democratic elections of the Chief Executive and legislative Congress. The Umbrella Movement took the same idea, but on the anniversary of the signing of the *Joint Declaration* used a more forceful protest to make their point clear. For days, weeks, and even months, the movement looked as though it had a solid footing. But a year has now passed, and the results of the protests are thoroughly disappointing. No change has been made in the election process of the Chief Executive, and many citizens of Hong Kong have cried tears for the oppression of their autonomy, with or without the use of tear gas. The Umbrella Movement and the current Revolution has attracted support from the young, but it has simply not attracted enough of the middle-class or elite to gain the numbers or power needed to be truly effective. Perhaps a significant will occur on some eventful day this year or in the years to follow, but as of right now, the Umbrella Movement was a failure, and the current struggle for a democratic Hong Kong will be a failure as well. There are too many obstacles that Hong Kong must overcome in order to change the *Basic Law* and receive the true democracy it desires.

With an individualistic and liberal culture, Western states looked at the protests occurring in Hong Kong and still believe Hong Kong should be guaranteed a right to free and fair democratic elections. But in doing this, they ignored the history behind what Hong Kong is: a piece of land that was traded from one state to another, and that has been stepped on by superpowers for its economic prosperity. They completely ignored the constitution and foundational documents that modern Hong Kong was founded upon. The Basic Law provided many rights to the citizens and property owners of Hong Kong, but it protected the sovereignty of the People's Republic over that Special Administrative Region. Hong Kong never had democracy, its constitution shows that it never legally should, and the result of this revolution are that it never will. It was a colony, is a colony, and will remain a colony, as long as China's red flag flies.

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