Political Grievances and Aspirations Flooded 2019 Hong Kong Protest Art

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Abstract

This paper is an analysis of the contrasting discourse that Hong Kong and Mainland China are trying to control the narrative of 2019 Extradition protests. The paper will give space for the analysis of the causes of the different protests since the handover, the 2003 sedition bill, 2012 educational program, the 2014 umbrella/Occupy Central protests and the 2019 extradition bill all supported by China. The analysis will take into consideration the one country, two systems approach that China maintains and the concepts of Hong Kong citizens national identity, how social media plays a part in organizing the protests, how elements of art and theater play a role in protests. There were no “leaders” of the protest movement and some protests over the decades were more successful than others, example, the 2014 Umbrella revolution fizzled out after 79 days but the 2012 educational protests were successful in preventing Chinese culture from Hong Kong schools. The 2019 protests are still ongoing even amid the Covid-19 virus, at times it flares up even with social distancing. Hong Kongers are passionate about their identity politics but in the end Beijing will bring Hong Kong in the fold sooner than 2047.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Abbreviations

PRC	People’s Republic of China
SAR	Semi-autonomous region

1. Introduction

Civil unrest is in the belly of Hong Kong and is challenging the Beijing backed government. The 2019 protests began with an extradition bill in early June. This bill would have allowed for suspected criminals to be extradited to mainland China. It triggered reactions of suspicion and anger because if people in Hong Kong can be taken across the border and tried in mainland China's questionable, opaque, and dubious court system (Barron, 2019). Hong Kong people feel that mainland China is encroaching upon the freedoms of the city that guaranteed autonomy. The People's Republic of China has violated its promise.

Hong Kong was a British colony for over 100 years, and in 1997, it returned to mainland China. The country is managed under a One Country, Two Systems policy, a promise wherein the city can enjoy liberties but not democracy. The policy devises that Hong Kong would continue to enjoy a great degree of autonomy for 50 years. There was a genuine belief in the West that in 2047, 50 years after the handover, China would have reached economic stability and prosperity, causing growth towards a western liberal democracy (Ip, 2019, pp. 133–134). However, in the 20 odd years left until the end of the autonomy grace period, it is exceeding unlikely that China will be less repressive or authoritarian.

Beijing's need to fully acquire Hong Kong to has to do with two factors. Firstly, mainland China's integration into the global market. Hong Kong has its own currency which not only attracts many firms but also provides channels for foreign direct investment into China (Lü et al., 2019, p. 66). Secondly, its ability to hold on to the rest of its territory. Two territories that may be emboldened to break away, concerning Hong Kong pro-democracy efforts, include Tibet

and Xinjiang. Taiwan, which China still regards as a rogue state, may be fortified (Millard, 2019). As a rising superpower, the People's Republic of China is under tremendous pressure to manage its projected state image through means of response, official remarks, and framing events in their favor. The optics of the territories mentioned above test the legitimacy of the Chinese state.

Beyond China's scope of territory, language is another standard variable of perusing soft power. Mandarin [1]is the particular dialect that Beijing has tried very hard to popularize across China. Nevertheless, it is perceived as a method in which Beijing is trying to erase local culture (Ip, 2020, pp. 109). For example, in the cosmopolitan city of Hong Kong, children grow up speaking three languages, English, Mandarin, and Cantonese, while exposed to people of every nation who come to do business. The education system further allows students to question the world they live in, much more so than in China (pp. 126). So, Hong Kong identity, for many, is an immense sense of pride and cosmopolitanism. Their vastness of identity is, in a sense, that they can contain being culturally Chinese, as well as a person who holds many liberal-western values.

Shenzhen is the city that looms north, beyond the borders of Hong Kong, with a population of thirteen million people, whereas Hong Kong has five million people. The power of modern China is pressing at the border. But not just power, also people. Every day 150 mainland citizens are allowed into Hong Kong through one-way permits. Estimates sum that there have been a million new arrivals since 1997 through this permit. Some of the things Hong Kongers say about mainlanders are xenophobic, calling migrants locusts (Ip, 2020, pp. 60-65). Hostility towards China has been building for years, immigration and language play a part. However, it is

[1] Also referred to as "Putonghua" in some literature.

also, because Hong Kongers feel that China is trying to impose its will. The city is at the front line between the freedom world and the greatest dictatorship.

In the 1960-80s, many economic refugees from coastal villages in China fled from the political chaos and dire poverty. They termed Hong Kong “the city of light” because they could see the glittering skyscrapers (Loh, 2010, pp. 118). Their one goal was survival and therein, the ability to find a job, and create a better life. The protestors today are the children of China’s economic refugees. These children are likely to ask their parents about the lengths they endured to fight for opportunities. That is what the 2019 protestors feel, in juxtaposition, they, too, are fighting for the opportunity to make a better future for themselves. Students who are protesting now will be middle-aged when the 50-year grace period of the handover finally ends. They are likely thinking of their kids and whether they will be on the barricades or if China would have won this long and unequal battle for the heart and soul of Hong Kong.

Comprehending the meaning of identity in today’s world requires assessing nationalism. Hong Kong, at this point, is not a nation. Nonetheless, because it feels so imperiled by the PRC and besieged by outside forces, it wants to hold on to its sense of native Hong Kong identity (Lü et al., 2019, p. 462). The need to perform identities, both in the context of a protest on the streets and with the dawn of social media, is simultaneously the need to broadcast individual political and social standpoints. Identity through performance is something that continually needs to be affirmed and confirmed (Burns, 1991, pp. 133-138). Perhaps the induction of social media and its platform to display identity is the break from the previous generations.

It has been thirty years since student protests in Tiananmen Square 1989, have dared challenge the communist party. One image has been smeared into the global consciousness: a

lone man defiant against a column of tanks and an entire system[2]. More than a million Hong Kong residents took to the streets several times in 1989 to show support for the protestors in Tiananmen (Tai, 2019, p.65). While under Britain, Hong Kong was free from repressive forces that resulted in a bloody massacre until 1997 when Britain returned the control of the city to China.

Figure 1.“Tank Man” temporarily stops a column of tanks, Tiananmen, 1989. Source: Jeff Widener, Associated Press

Residents in Hong Kong feel immense pressure, amounting from previous fights for liberty, to protect their democratic values. China has been accused of rolling back Hong Kong freedoms through means of legislation, education, and election several times since the 1997 handover. Each time, the political consciousness of Hong Kong residents developed to become

[2] Displayed in Figure 2

more aware of their system. In 2003, protests were against legislation that would have threatened free speech (Sing, 2009, p.10). In 2012, the government tried to change the school curriculum to embrace a patriotic PRC history (Ip, 2020, p.13). Next, in 2014 Beijing wanted to influence Hong Kong's elections heavily (Tai, 2019, p.68). In 2015 China was accused of abducting five men from their bookshop where scandalous accounts of communist life in China were sold (Palmer, 2018). Most recently, in 2019, a bill would have allowed the extradition of criminal suspects to the mainland (Barron, 2019). Each time, the protestors reaped victory, and the threats above were withdrawn.

Although the initial demand for the 2019 protest was answered, the withdraw of the extradition bill, the protests demands have become broader. Protestors have now defined "five demands, not one less", a stubborn ultimatum. The demands now address the injustices and atrocities that occurred while protesting the initial bill. Five demands are: retract extradition bill, open investigation into police misconduct, retract the label of riot, release arrested protestors. These demands are not forgotten amongst escalating violence. However, it is similar to violence other conflicts, like the Gaza strip, it is difficult to identify which side escalated tensions. Therefore, this paper will not address in great detail the responses and the lengths taken to respond to violence and stabilize the protests.

Nevertheless, 2019 demonstrations have captured the attention of many. Partly because a wave of protest culture occurred around the free world, like Beirut and Chile. Such a global trend was enabled through the use of traditional methods (i.e., occupy a space, placards, chants, journalism) and new methods (social media, digital art). That being said, demonstrations in Hong Kong are most notable, beyond the escalation of violence, because they allow us to reflect on issues that are key to understanding today's political environment: the rise of the People's

Republic of China and its increasingly authoritarian/repressive nature; the crisis of liberal values across the world. Academics speculate that the new cold war is indeed being fought in Hong Kong (*One Country Two Systems*, 2019).

As the protests roll into 2020, it is worth asking how the movement manages to maintain momentum for almost a year among tens of thousands of people. Considering that we live in a visual era where identity politics plays a key role, how visuals unveil feelings and imaginations that are not (often cannot be) expressed verbally, is a variable worth exploring. This thesis will analyze the intersection between visual arts and politics.

The research question of this thesis therefore being: how has protest creativity, like performance art and images circulating on social media networks, help better understand the grievances and the aspirations of people in Hong Kong? Possible hypotheses include that protest art: has not renovated the movement; helped to rewrite the local narrative outside of media networks; created sympathy through creative documentation; cross-community communication to the opposition; documented atrocities; refueled the momentum of the movement; communicated to the wider liberal democracy community. To explore these potential hypotheses this paper will explore the background of Hong Kong as a political entity, then discuss what literature has been written regarding pro-democracy movements, and then suggest some new methods to analyze the impacts of the 2019 movement.

2. Background

General history of Hong Kong is challenging to find so for the purpose of this paper, the fictional publication of the last governor, Chris Patten, will serve as the entire foundation for this background chapter. The author, Johnathan Dimbleby, concisely address the transition, the negations. This 2018 book includes the political drama that Patten encountered while having discussions about the handover of Hong Kong, however that will not be mentioned in this thesis. Nonetheless, this book about the last colonial governor of Hong Kong has contextual information regarding what Hong Kong is and why it is so.

Although Hong Kong has been a part of China since 1997, this city has its own laws as well its own political system. While China defines itself as a socialist one-party state, Hong Kong is consistently ranked as the world's freest economy in the World Press Freedom Index (*Press Freedom Index*, 2020). It also has greater civil rights for its citizens and an independent media.

In the introduction of the 2018 book about the last governor of Hong Kong, the landscape of the relationship is introduced. China and Hong Kong are different because of the colonial period. In 1842, China ceded Hong Kong Island to Britain after it invaded Chinese territory in what is known as the first opium war. Hong Kong island became the first British colony. Later, in 1860, the Kowloon peninsula also came under British rule under the second opium war. The British set up the colony as a commercial center and a gateway between east and west, the population boomed as a result. At the time China was weak after the Qing dynasty saw defeat in the first Sino-Japanese war (). The British took advantage of this and negotiated to secure its

foothold in the region. An agreement was put into place. Britain gained a new territory on a 99-year lease agreement and thus, Hong Kong got its modern shape.

In the years followed by world war II, followed by a brief occupation of the Japanese, Hong Kong saw a massive influx of immigrants from mainland China, fleeing Mao and the nationalist civil war. The city's population more than doubled. Still, Hong Kong became a reliable business hub over the next few decades, welcoming international companies who feared economic instability in nearby China.

Dimbelby address the reactions towards the crackdown of China's freedom in 1989 in chapter four. the world watched hundreds of student protestors massacred in Tiananmen square, Beijing, the importance of safeguarding Hong Kong's future grew even more critical. The following year the Hong Kong basic law was adopted a constitutional document that included protection of freedom of speech, press, and assembly, in addition to articles regarding the democratic election of political leaders.

The lease was set to expire in 1997 but was preceded by years of negotiations between China and Britain. It resulted in a new agreement with the handover of not only the new territories, but the entire Hong Kong, in exchange for China's pledge to preserve the city's capitalist system, for 50 years. In 2047 Hong Kong is set to fully be within China's rule which has always sparked controversy in mainland China and made Hong Kongers nervous.

In chapter 16 of Dimbelby's 2018 book, he illustrates how in 1996, the last governor of Hong Kong stepped aside, making room for the first post-colonial leader, Tung Chee-Hwa. He was chosen from a 400-person selection committee. Handover day arrived on July 1st 1997. Hong Kong was a special autonomous region of China (SAR) and afforded more liberties than the residents of the mainland. Soon enough, Beijing asserted its control. In April of 2004, China

ruled that they must approve changes made to Hong Kong's elections laws. Beijing now had veto power over Hong Kong's voting and direct elections.

By 2007, China's national people's congress reversed itself. Which once again opened possibilities for direct elections but not until 2017. Some expressed skepticism that those actions would actually happen. In 2014, 500 people were arrested in July during a prodemocracy sit-in. The following month, Beijing accounted a cap of three candidates for the 2017 Chief Executive election. Open nominations were off the table. Each candidate would need approval from more than half of Hong Kong's 1200 person nominating committee. The protestors would like to see the nominating committee gone for good. But beyond the next election, if it even happens, there are longer term anxieties ahead. In 2047, the 50-year period of mainland non-interference of Hong Kong will end. How China's socialist legal system will impact Hong Kong by then, remains unknown. In the face of oppression and uncertainty, the people of Hong Kong have a strong history of taking a stand.

The Hong Kongers are mostly divided into two groups. Those who call for impendence from China and those who favor Beijing rule. The first group demands greater democracy, including a one person one vote system, which they were promised when the city was handed over to China. Currently, the Chief Executive is chosen by a nominating committee of twelve hundred people, who while being Hong Kong residents also need to keep rapport with Beijing.

Ever since the 1997 handover, anti-Beijing protests have taken place regularly. Half a million-people marched in 2003 when they were angered a proposed national security legislation. Them, the 2014 occupy movement was huge in Hong Kong to demand universal suffrage from Beijing (). Again in 2019, ends of thousands of protestors are rallying against the controversial bill. The bill would have allowed suspects accused of criminal wrong doing to be

extradited to mainland China. Hong Kong also has a pro-Beijing camp who wants to see the city brought closer to the capital. They have Chinese nationalistic sentiments. There are still 29 years until the full 2047 integration deadline.

3. Literature Review

The academic literature with regards to pro-democracy movements in Hong Kong is limited. More or less, there are key authors who have publish in set of academic journals that are have more content. The publication of pro-democracy movement has increased within the last year. Most movement analyze the attitudes among Hong Kongers, including nativism, or events that have added up to the total frustration. Some literature discusses how the media impacts the protests. No literature regards the impact of protest art.

This literature review will acknowledge how media effects the portrayal of the protests. Then attempts to discuss how identity plays a role in both the media networks and among the protests. Then continues to discuss important protest tactics from the 2014 movement, consequences of occupy and the creative empowerment. Since there is no literature about how pro-democracy movements have been affected by protest art, visual theory is added to provide a lens to provide an entry way to seeing visual and political intersecting.

Francis Lee and Joseph Chan, both Professors at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, have published two books and several articles together. Their first book, published in 2011, *Media, Social Mobilisation and Mass Protests in Post-colonial Hong Kong*, examines the ramifications from the 2003 protests. They use a multitude of interviews and surveys from academics and protestors to explore how participants understood their actions in the political environment, assessing the aftermath of the 2003 protest. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the 2003 protests were to maintain Article 23, which protects the liberty of Hong Kong. Lee and Chan concluded that the public discourse frequently referenced the events of the 1989

Tiananmen massacre (Lee, Chan, 2011). Although this book captures the public opinion from 2003 until 2010, the social movement and rally analysis disregard any mode of artistic expression.

More recently, in 2018, Lee and Chan examined the trends and impacts of conventional media institutions and their digital media platforms in their book Media and Protest Logics in the Digital Era: The Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong. Essentially, the authors were trying to understand the increase in civic participation from 2003-2014. Survey participants revealed that Facebook was the most important media platform, in comparison to mobile chat apps, online forums, and mainstream news. Therefore, Facebook was the most significant contributor to the rise in civic participation.

Moreover, Facebook provides easily accessible data that illuminates engagement. Baring a threshold of 10,000 pages, Lee and Chan included Facebook pages of two prominent creatives, Sampson Wong (illustrator and curator) and Denise Ho (singer and actor), and hardly expanded upon their impact. Sampson Wong organized many groups, one example is projecting international messages of support onto government buildings, and another group to document the art scene that arose. The influence of these two creatives was attributed to their "social, cultural, and symbolic capital they held," especially considering that they come from different backgrounds. Sampson Wong was able to build a broad outreach from social capital, whereas Denise Ho had a preexisting fan base. In addition to briefly mentioning two creative influencers, Lee and Chan also recognized the lesser-known individuals and groups engaged in creative "experiments" (Chapter 5, 2018). Artistic means were recognized, but the 2014 pro-democracy protests were, again, analyzed in comparison to standardized methods, deriving from the 2003 protest.

The Arab Spring brought a great deal of attention to social media. Suddenly sites such as Facebook and Twitter were more than methods to connect with friends but were seen to have major political ramifications (Werbner et al., 2014). Social media brought attention to first anti-government uprising of the Arab Spring in Tunisia. Although initially misinterpreted as clash of clans, it was eventually understood that the people were fed up with the inequality perpetuated by oppressive regimes. Undoubtedly, social media provides an outlet to voice injustices and inequalities. Media activism involves publishing news, creating video and audio investigations, promptly sharing protest information, Crucially, revealing like-minded people exposed gaps in the pre-established status-quo, comforting people of different identities.

While Lee and Chan mainly analyze various media impacts on pro-democracy mobilization, they analyze how participants access information regarding the pro-democracy movements between 2003-2014. However, they did not explore the qualities of self-censorship or propaganda in the media. Alexa Robertson, Professor of Media and Communication at Stockholm University, proposes a characterization for media self-censorship concerning pro-democracy protests.

In chapter three of Roberston's edited book, *Screening Protest Visual Narratives of Dissent across time, space, and genre,* published in 2019, she analyzed broadcasting tactics of the 2014 Umbrella Revolution. To do this, she compares Chinese state-owned CCTV news in comparison to non-China television stations, Al Jazeera English and BBC World, within the context of the 2014 Umbrella Revolution. Unsurprisingly, the media on both sides promoted their perception of events. For example, "the depiction of protesters as childlike and naive – another marginalization strategy familiar from the literature – is a key theme in CCTV's strategic

narrative" (Roberston, 2019, p. 66). While Robertson asserts how broadcasting networks employ bias tactics, more importantly, she acknowledges how the visual narrative transcends borders.

While there are two sides of pro-democracy movements are presented through competing television networks, Hong Kong based publishing firms can receive complaints if they are too radical. Central Government's liaison has filed complaints against reports deemed too critical of China or violate the "one country, two systems" principle. In addition, letters of recommendation for appropriate replacement editors are issued from the the Chief Executive or Beijing based politicians (Nossel, 2015). Reporters Without Borders publish an annual Press Freedom Index, and Hong Kong has declined from 58th in 2013 to 80th in 2020 (Press Freedom Index, 2020). Without a free press, truth is not reported, power is not held accountable, and democracy cannot survive. However, Hong Kong liberties permit space for online platforms to encourage movement outreach, as Lee and Chan explored, and can offer balance in response to controlled media groups.

Benny Tai Yiu-Ting, an associate Professor of Law at Hong Kong University, is one of three co-founders of the 2014 Occupy Central with Love and Peace (OCLP) campaign, that turned into the Umbrella movement. Tai validates activists who peacefully breach the law in response to a system that does represent the people. When the system is inconsistent, in history many people began with civil disobedience movements. Tai agrees that at times, laws are wrong, laws do need to be rewritten, and laws need to be broken to achieve that.

In January 2013, Tai published an article called *The Most Lethal Weapon of Civil Disobedience,* outlining "effective civil disobedience". He listed a seven-step plan, highlighting accountability for the consequences of the upcoming Occupy movement. In the fifth point he stated, "civil disobedience is illegal…after the movement participants should surrender

themselves to law enforcement" (Tai disobedience 2013). The goal however, is to develop tension on the government, and hold a space for democratic forums and discussions.

Aside from accountability, Tai defined the strength of popular movements as less about the mass of the rallies, a common indicator or strength, but more about their continuity and ability to disrupt until negotiations are possible (Tai, 2013). This idea may be attributed to 2011 anti-austerity international Occupy movements, as well as the Arab Spring. Both movements involved continuous upkeep that signaled the seriousness of such cause. Although Tai initially advocated for continuity, one lesson learned from the 2014 Umbrella movement is that pro-longed protests occupying the city can eventually lead to failure when public support dwindles.

Tai's 2013 article came to life within a year of publication and welcomed the Umbrella movement. Tai's spirited defense of free speech and his peaceful intentions of the 2014 Umbrella movement supported young activists like Joshua Wong and Nathan Law, both prominently known activists, to adopt peaceful methods of protest.

Within the current government elected in 2017, Regina Ip releases the most statements and interviews on behalf of the government. Regina Ip is an advisor to Hong Kong's chief executive, Carry Lam. While Lam is visually villainized in protest art, Ip is forwardly harsh and blunt. Ip recognizes that the CCP is worried that the mass demonstrations can be very infectious (Creery, 2019). Controlling the narrative and media representation can be a tool of the Central government.

Hong Kong has long had a vibrant ethnic community. Many factors contribute to what makes an identity. An individual may be identified by beliefs, looks, and the collective, family or social, may be distinguished by race, religion, and occupation, as maintained in sociology. Loh describes the population to have been made up of "waves of traders, refugees and immigrants,

brought by ambition or to escape war, civil war and revolution" (Adler & Gielen, 2003, p. 12). Considering the current stereotype of the city being an economic power house, bankers, expats, immigrants, and refugees make up the current population, in addition to local born or Chinese migrants.

Gordon Mathews, Professor of Anthropology at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, works with many refugees and migrants. His published works include *Ghetto at the Center of the World, Chunking Mansion and Hong Kong*, China and *Learning to Belong to a Nation*. Mathews highlights how arbitrary identity can be. In other words, identity can be hard to describe. On the one hand, people choose to present specific labels as their identity. Nevertheless, power to label lays within the eyes of the beholder, subjecting people upon their external qualities. Furthermore, Mathews maintains in all of his work that residents are subjected to false labels, reflecting the multicultural environment.

Jonathan Haidt, a social psychologist and Professor of Ethical Leadership at New York University analyzes the strategies of identity politics. Politics can be based on any distinction or group interest. While identity politics defines social cleavages, isolating gaps within the status quo can create tension. For example, minority groups like the LGBTQ community or ethnic groups to organize is legitimate identity politics but the status quo may pose resistance. The organizational framework is what defines the openness and therefore outreach. Haidt suggests two methods of approaching group framework. The first example is that of civil rights leaders like Mahatma Gandhi or Martin Luther King. Both leaders emphasize what a larger group has in common; then proceed to highlight that some members of this larger group are being "denied equal access, equal opportunity, or equal dignity" (Haidt, 2012, p. 225). Overall, these fundamental civil leaders focused on the shared commonality. These citizens were able to

illuminate the overstepping of the jurisdiction ‘one country two systems principle’. Another way of pursuing identity politics emphasizes the common enemy, such as Mandarin speakers. This approach of uniting a ‘us’ against a defined ‘them’ is dangerous in a multiethnic society because it damages openness to new ideas.

A range of opinions fluctuate and contrast amongst the seven million-plus inhabitants of Hong Kong; around 1.2 million are mainland Chinese who have moved to the city, prompting curiosity regarding motivations to migrate. CSD results presented the growth of the Chinese demographic, specially place of domicile other than Hong Kong, has had a sharper growth between 2011 and 2016 studies (Population By-Census, 2017). The next CSD study is due to be released in 2021. The growth of the Chinese demographic is meditated through schemes like the 2003 Mainland Talents and Professionals act that functions as a one-way permit. However, alarming rate of mothers giving birth in Hong Kong for residency raises the issue of anchor babies (Ip, 2019, p. 63). In response to growing rates, a sense of nativism is growing.

Hong Kongers often express that, they worry that the mainland Chinese reap the benefits of the city without appreciating the infrastructure of the semi-autonomous region required to provide such services. Ip Iam-Chong, a Professor of Contemporary China Studies at Lingnan University, discusses the growing sense of nativism. Fundamentally, nativism does not support immigration. More specifically, Hong Kong locals are riled at the increasing flux on Chinese nationals moving to Hong Kong. In his book *Hong Kong’s New Identity Politics: Longing for the Local in the Shadow of China*, he illustrates the offsets from incidents that agitated the nativist-mainland conflict, indicates their political and legislative impact, and discuses signs of “mainlandistion” (Ip, 2019, p. 124). Moreover, the incidents that are described in his book do not

include landmark mass rallies, as Tai highlights, but attempts to illuminate tensions in their undercurrents.

While social media has essential impacts like organizing like-minded people, it also has its limits. As the Arab Spring protest moved beyond Egypt and Tunisia, where the movement had first begun, to other Arab countries, dictators were prepared and able to reduce the impact or use social media to their advantage (Werbner et al., 2014). For instance, counter-protests were organized through Facebook and Twitter, or they could create firewalls. While social media had unprecedented impacts on initial protests, Werbner argues that it is a value-neutral tool since it can be used to fight for or against democracy.

Streets are one of many battlefields for protestors, and others include computers, smartphones, and cameras. Communication applications help like-minded people organize. Facebook and Twitter were banned in mainland China before the 2014 Umbrella movement. Instagram, however, was banned following the first weekend of movement. Furthermore, keywords like “occupy central” or “Hong Kong students,” became banned on Chinese based servers. However, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are all platforms where countermeasures and messages can be disseminated outside of the mainland’s firewalls, reiterating a value-neutral tool. “The drive for secure and controllable technologies are heightened,” both for China’s encryption policy and democratizing citizens (Segal, 2016, p. 10). Telegram, an instant-messaging application for computers and mobiles, has gained popularity because of the security features provided for its users. Digital platforms provide a space to document, share, and organize information.

Art is a powerful entry point to collective organizing. In addition, the creative process can instill participation in activism. Art translates abstract concepts into tangible, like love, freedom,

and justice. Abstract identities such as activist or ally mean little unless paired with concrete action that brings those labels to life. Art is about illuminating the conversation between personal and universal, the micro and macro, the individual, and the collective. Visual culture is a hybrid enterprise, and creative minds profoundly impact the cultural scene.

Kevin Tavin, Professor of International Art Education at Aalto University, discusses the prominence of imagery in regard to cultural conditions. In 2018, he suggests three interrelated definitions of visual culture. The first suggests a cultural condition where human experience is profoundly affected by images, technologies, and in response to how we see, show, and picture that condition. Art is composed of symbolic and material manifestations that together, create room to understand how visual culture molds into ontology.

The next definition concerns the set of ideas, instruments, devices, and tools that mediate our relationship with the surrounding world. A variety of coinciding tools shape our identity expression; for example, the act of using a camera has implied expectations, attachments, and a relationship is defined within that experience. While many academics restrict contemporary life to a mediated swirl of imagery, black screens, satellite images, magazines, and a host of other multimedia, it only depicts people who have access to these tools. There are power dynamics in the privilege to be seen or not. Donna Haraway, a Professor of Feminist Studies at the University of California, states that “the visual is always of the question of the power to see – and perhaps the violence implicit in our visualizing practices” (Haraway, 1988). Multimedia devices enhance our sight, represent our ideas, and help human beings see and be seen. The qualities of power and knowledge fill out questions for the viewer.

Tavin’s third definition involves critically questioning the spectator position (Tavin, 2018). William John Thomas Mitchell, an internationally known theorist on iconography and

visual culture, expands Tavin's third idea of investigating the spectator position of said visual. Micthell provides critical questions to evaluate the spectator position: "what does the picture want, who is the target of the demand/desire/need expressed, what does the image lack, what is the blind spot, [and] what is the angle used" (Mitchell, 2005, p49). These are fundamental questions when analyzing and interacting with art. In Micthell's book, *What Do Pictures Want*, he pushes the reader to consider whether the picture is an entity in itself that demands attention through desire or aggression or, consuming a "social or psychological power of their own" (p32). The image may even be living. Mitchell dilutes the significance of artists' intentions, shifting the focus to the interaction between the art and the beholder. Art allows participants not to have the answers, detaching from binary thinking of good or bad, but rather encourages curiosity.

4. Art Analysis

Creativity is a soft power that cannot be controlled or repressed within the scope of liberal systems. The law enforcement is powerful yet a slow machine composed of police at the front line, and it takes time for them to react to new ideas. Whether it is a new protest taking place on the streets with fresh fluidity or the way that people reinvent themselves, the government system needs time to counter it and find solutions. “Be water” is the mantra that protestors have adopted. To be water is how it feels to be immersed in mostly peaceful protests and broad-based movements. People flow to a protest by foot, bus, and aboard subway trains, just as they flow away.

“Be water” is crowd intelligence symbolized by a quote from action hero and local icon Bruce Lee. His maxim “be formless, shapeless, like water...be water, my friend” has become the narrative thread of the 2019 pro-democracy movement to embrace flexibility and over obstacles (Li & Ives, 2019). Unlike previous pro-democracy movements, like the 2014 Umbrella[3] movement, the 2019 movement has no model, no leader. However, leadership qualities are employed to organize thousands of people. Digital networks help the activist crowd discover various organizational actions on social media. Active Hong Kong citizens follow dozens of public and internal groups and decide where to participate. The protestors flow through the city streets like water, seemingly unpredictable, therefore surprising, and always before the police can react.

[3] 2014 Umbrella movement occupied major intersections for 79 days regarding an upcoming Chief Executive election

Due to the fluid nature of the protests, the artistic expression must also be mobile. Digital works, like illustrations or shorts, are instrumental because a wider audience can have access to them. Additionally, performative art transforms the space and energy. Many mediums of art can energize, heal, and connect the movement. For example, Kacey Wong, local curator, believes that through his vibrant preformances, he can illuminate a blind spot, generate feelings, and encourage others to talk about something (Bragaglia, 2019).

The multiplicity of art is prevalent in protests, in part, because the popular culture is dense and complex, yet lively. Artists are needed to communicate the situation, what is at stake, and what is happening. Since there is a new demand for articulating the current heightened political climate, artists are emancipated from their other employed work, like cartoonists in a newspaper. While the workplace censored certain political taboos because of liability implications, independent art is otherwise liberated. Moreover, legal and political pressure from Beijing's liaison office has been exerted on press agencies before[4].

Although artists gained a certain degree of freedom, they still may face repercussions from people who strongly oppose the perceived message the work of art. Knowing that repercussions still exist, like hate mail or other threats, many artists do not attach their name to their work. Nonetheless, the vast amount of content created in relation to the 2019 protests is full of satire, humor, and insurmountable emotion.

Cartoonist establish icons, as Justin Wong a political cartoonist for Ming Pao newspaper and art Professor says at the Hong Kong Baptist University. He studies the art that is produced during the period and maintains documentation. An example of a protest icon is the yellow raincoat appeared after the first protestor committed suicide. In the middle of June 2019, the

4

young man in the yellow raincoat climbed scaffoldings to hang a poster. This man was on the scaffoldings for several hours before jumping down to his death. He is seen to be the first fatality of the protest. Many illustrators have made the raincoat a symbol of the protest. The young man is a sacrificial icon for the movement, highlighting the validity of emotions and the propensity of mental health dangers.

Another example of an icon that emerged was lady whose eye was shot, causing permanent blindness. This woman was a medic at a demonstration, tending to someone who had been hurt, when a tear gas bullet penetrated through her goggles. Interpretations of her bloodied eye featured on rally posters. This icon led to international support in a viral challenge to post a picture covering one eye in support of the movement. Justin Wong, however, applies this idea of bloodied eyes and applies it to a picture of Carrie Lam, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, another icon commonly depicted in protest art.

Figure 2 Bloodied Eye Carrie Lam, by Justin Wong

Initially, Carrie Lam was a beacon of hope for mending the Hong Kong and China relationship. However, many protestors are now ignited with rage and feel anything but hope for Carrie Lam. She is a frequently villainized government official. Below she is depicted with her face falling apart. Protestors dressed in black hanging up a sign saying, “Hong Kong add oil” on her forehead, while another protestor is yelling into her ear with a megaphone. This image may be presenting the idea of Goffman’s performed self. Here we see that Carrie Lam’s mask is being deteriorated, almost as if she is either being dehumanized or exposed as a puppet. In both cases, her preformed self is being attacked by protestors.

Figure 3: Destroying Carrie Lam, by Elyse Leaf

While Carrie Lam is sometimes portrayed as passive, like a puppet, she is also represented as the main antagonist. However, not everyone is as brave as Elyse Leaf to release artwork with political satire in their name. Other artists fear retaliation or repercussions of producing controversial art. Therefore, some artists publish works under a dubbed name. An iconic example is an anonymous artist who goes by Harcourt Romanticist on Instagram. They depict Carrie Lam in work titled *Justice in Compromise*, shown below. This work is in reference to Paul Delaroche's *Execution of Lady Jane Grey*, a debatably high emotional painting that seeks to make the viewer grieve for the young, beautiful queen. It is a significant reference for strong emotional artwork.

Figure 4 Execution of Lady jane Grey, by Harcourt Romantiscit

Justice in Compromise depicts Lam holding back the sword-hand and silencing the mouth of defeated Justice. Furthermore, Justice's scales are askew, and she is neither standing proudly nor fully robbed like she is traditionally displayed. In this depiction, Justice is not only unable to do her job, but she is also vulnerable, with sexual overtones, which may reference the sexual misconduct accusations of the Hong Kong Police Force. Harcourt Romanticist has stated that justice, as promised in the basic law, cannot be upheld.

Images by Elsye Leaf, Harcourt Romanticist, and Justin Wong are three of many online-offline creative cycles. This phenomenon requires a reference to popular culture that is then propagated into a digital-creative field. The digital representation is then shared with groups on platforms like Telegram, and Apple's Bluetooth enabled tool called AirDrop. Next, digital artworks are distributed via posters or stickers, appearing on placards or murals. Many artworks found on the streets are shared via social media, tracing back into cyberspace. These artworks turn a blank space into an art gallery.

Artist's digital works find their way into the physical world via posters, stickers, or templates for spray paint, and even on to Lennon walls. Art repurposes an otherwise empty corner, into a safe and friendly gathering place to express ideas. Tunnels, bridges, and streets have exploded with all types of creative support. Locals call them Lennon Walls, and the name pays homage to the John Lennon wall in Prague. After Lennon died in 1980, people covered a wall with lyrics and graffiti-inspired by the Beatles in defiance to the communist regime.

Similarly, the Hong Kong walls are hotspots for people to vent their grievances against the government and express their views. The main difference between the Lennon Wall in Prague versus the wall in Hong Kong is the use of less permanent materials, being sticky notes over spray paint because they do not intend to deface property. Though this is a more considerate

approach, the risk of a temporary form of protest is that anyone can tear them down, including people who disagree with the protestors. One volunteer I talked to says that even if she sees people tearing down notes, she will respect their right to do so. Another protestor says that reading the words of encouragement, support, and love for the city gives her a feeling of strength. Imagination has transformed public space into a community place.

Figure 5: Viral mural by anonymous

Creative outputs, like mantras and posters, forge the movement into collective action. Lennon walls first emerged in 2014 with demands for universal suffrage. However, they were posted on government spaces rather than public spaces and therefore lived up to the lifespan of

the 79-day movement (). Like water, the tactics of the 2019 movement are not limited to a location. Therefore, protest art can pop up in various places, like water, eliminating timeframe, or physical space limitations. Furthermore, Lennon walls evolved from memos on post-it notes to two-story-high murals. A collaboration that goes into constructing, maintaining, adding to the Lennon walls radiates momentum towards the overall movement.

To "think about the role of art, images, visuality, or creativity in the movement… [it is clear that] crowd creativity becomes very important" comments Sampson Wong, local illustrator and curator of the Add Oil Machine. Crowd creativity eludes to the collaboration to create, build, design, and share. Nevertheless, "it is not just about posters, not just about a particular image; it is more about how to sustain the energy of the movement" (Chan, 2018). Here, Sampson ranks the benefits of collective action over the quality of the artwork produced.

Conversely, the Umbrella movement recognized the additive value of protest art. Moreover, the Umbrella movement fortified the presence of art in subsequent movements. While collective action is essential in making a statement, higher the quality of work transcends to a broader audience. Crowd creativity is more than tangible art pieces, as Sampson states above.

Singing has become another source of crowd creativity. It has become a familiar scene in Hong Kong to see people on the streets suddenly stopping in their tracks, coming together to sing a song proudly. This song is Glory to Hong Kong, otherwise known as the Hong Kong anthem. It has made an appearance in the most unconventional ways: sung in protest, at graduation ceremonies, and shopping malls, together with thousands of Hong Kongers. Written and released anonymously, this song embeds the spirit of the 2019 movement.

The story of the song Glory to Hong Kong began with a melody on the internet, then at some point, an unknown person wrote a narration, and people started to sing their new anthem

spontaneously. Subsequently, a music video[5] was produced, which was also put online anonymously, with lyrics on the left side, and footage of hundreds of peaceful protestors dressed in black, in solidarity, marching through Central at night. Rapidly, *Glory to Hong Kong* became the battle anthem of the current protest movement. It was sung and whistled at demonstrations and in underground stations. It is not about melody, seldom the lyrics, but more so about the action that it produced (Victor, 2019). Creativity in performance, such as singing the anthem in seemingly random places, is the essential trait of this leaderless movement. This song represents how people can sustain their attention to the movement and their motivation to come out through collective performances.

Performance art gives room to think about who the spectator is, where they are, and how they relate to others and contemplate the rules of any given space or place. Kacey Wong is likely the pioneer in Hong Kong, pushes the boundaries for his performative disguises. He adds that "hiding one's identity becomes tactical" (Chow, 2019). Kacey Wong has many disguises where he transforms himself into someone else. This act of becoming someone else is experimental, thought-provoking, and formless, like water.

For example, Kacey Wong dressed up as a stereotypical triad member. After the July 21st, alleged police and gang collaborated attack on the protestors. Kacey Wong created a project called Brother Choi, where he dressed up as a gang member from the 1970s. This project occurred seven days after the alleged attacks. To embody this project, he had long grey hair, sunglasses, and an armpit bag. This look, pictured below, shows that no one was willing to engage with him because he mimicked the look of violence. His other disguises involve more spectator interaction. However, this character experiment was likely daring and contrasted to his

[5] The original music video can be found on the channel *Black Blorchestra* YouTube. English version can be found by searching Glory to Hong Kong.

other highly involved disguises. On the one hand, he explores what it is like to be particular identities or characters. On the other hand, spectators are confronted with how to engage with his characters.

Xxx Kacey wong xxx

Performative elements can increase the lasting impacts of a rally as seen through singing Glory to Hong Kong to seemingly random places, and creating a human chain around the city and up to Lion's Rock. These images help to consolidate how activists are understanding these events.

Maintaining the momentum of the movement, to demand change, and resist or defy government entities can be extremely draining. Especially when violent responses from the police and radical protestors are escalating. The pattern of violence has been, at least at the time of writing this paper, a never-ending cycle, feeding into itself. The authorities take more suppressive approaches to disperse masses of people, wherein radical protestors take increasingly aggressive measures to defy being suppressed. But by having diversity in the modes of protest, reinjecting creativity, protestors refuel themselves, becoming flexible. This resilience creates new possibilities for protestors and also opens a new realm of probabilities to those who thought it was impossible; therefore, keeping the pro-democracy fight ongoing.

By exercising flexibility, the movement brought out bravery and selflessness, especially in the face of police brutality. Courageous character strengths brought people together in new levels of solidarity. That is how the movement endured months of challenges.

Small victories were reassuring as well. Two strong examples are election turnouts and international recognition. A district election was overturned with more than 85% of seats in favor of pro-democracy parties, flipping 452 seats, out of 479 total, from pro-Beijing to pro-

democracy. Not only were seats overturned, but voter turnout and registration broke a record hit since the first district election in 1999 (Bradsher et al., 2019). Furthermore, district elections are the most democratic bodies because they are directly elected, as opposed to electing half of the legislature.

In 2019, the U.S. Congress passed the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act and signed it into law, which enhances the Hong Kong Policy Act authored in 1992. The bill pressures both Beijing and Hong Kong government by implementing an annual assessment of autonomy. Results of the annual assessment will justify whether Hong Kong is able to maintain its special status, which has shielded it from the ramifications of the US-China trade war, and bypasses visa restrictions otherwise applied to Chinese nationals.

Through rethinking the tools, the protestors already had on hand like phone apps, airdrop, online forums, they improvised new ways to counter the disproportionate crackdowns, so that protestors were able to consolidate and gather. Furthermore, they used everyday items like traffic cones, steamed fish dishes, thermals, leaf blowers, and even tennis rackets to disperse the excessive use of tear-gas. They built the most impressive roadblocks, organized lunchbreak protests in the financial district, created Lennon Walls, and a human chain of people holding hands on the iconic lion rock mountain. This image of protestors lights at Lion's rock won international recognition. Furthermore, beautiful illustrations and designs made anonymously, helped people express their thoughts in a productive. All of these innovative tactics of turning emotions into art, then humor, and finally protest, made detestable moments bearable for the people.

5. Conclusions

Battle, democracy, and freedom are the language protestors used in 2019. I fear that the protestors' distrust of the Hong Kong and Beijing governments are binding them to the foreign interest who benefit from their chaos, anarchy, and unrest. The anti-extradition protest in 2019 was not the first clue of anti-government sentiments in Hong Kong. The first wave was the 2014 occupy movement which blocked significant intersections for 79 days in order to dissuade the election committee nomination of the current Chief Executive Carrie Lam. This occupy movement exhibited fear, through means of occupation fueled by protest art, that the Chief Executive would favor Beijing's interest over Hong Kong's. Five years later, the tactics were different. Protest methods and art were better coordinated, well-funded, and more violent. It cannot be denied that these protests are popular, it is a wakeup call that hundreds of thousands of people attended these rallies.

Yet, not enough has been done to combat the constant smearing of the Beijing and Hong Kong governments, both of which are under immense internal and regional pressure. For instance, when the Hong Kong governments obeyed the initial demand, the withdrawal of the extradition bill, the protestors extended their efforts. Whereas, when the United States Senate passes a Hong Kong Freedom and Democracy Act, that debatably serves the economic interest of the U.S. and does little to further the freedoms of Hong Kongers, the protestors are delighted.

Benny Tai, co-leader of 2014 occupy movement, expressed his hopes that the U.S. act would penalize people who actively deteriorate any freedoms in Hong Kong (Tai, 2020). Swimmingly, the act does grant U.S. President, Donald Trump, visa and asset blocking abilities upon Chinese citizens that he deems unfit. However, this act mainly protects the more than 1,300 United States businesses that benefit from Hong Kong's proximity to China: an independent judiciary, the rule of law, and special trade status. How does the U.S. act increase the freedoms of Hong Kong citizens? The protestor support for external governments suggests the desire for the Hong Kong narrative to go extend the limitations of the rule of law.

Despite any foreign countries' external interest, the internal security of Hong Kong is threatened. Mostly by the distress protestors feel towards the government. The Hong Kong protestors are being led to believe false promises of freedom and democracy made by countries that actively profit off of their unrest. I only hope they realize this before it is too late.

Fortunately, protestors can seek comfort within their own pro-democracy camp. Protestors express their yearning through art. Messages and meanings are propagated from the Spring of Prague, Occupy Wall Street Movement, French revolution, and the Umbrella movement. The quality of the art is not for high culture but for popular culture. Each has a meaning within itself that adds to the current articulations of the protest.

This paper has explored a few mods of art, including social performance art and resistance art. Other modes that can be explored furthermore is how the movement is coordinated via hand gestures. For example, when demonstrators organize a random demonstration, usually on streets, they have created hand gestures that are used communicate what is needed. Maybe somewhere in the mass movement somebody got injured, they have a specific hand gesture that they can show in the air to have medic come and assist the need. In the imagination, it's almost

like a school create bigger shadows to communicate a message. This may be further type of crowd intelligence within the idea of being water.

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