

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

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This paper addresses the Yellow Umbrella movement in Hong Kong and the Sunflower or 318 movement in Taiwan. The two movements occurred around the same time, the first being that in Taiwan in Spring 2014 ; the Hong Kong movement in December of that year .. Both movements were primarily organized by students and young people. From a political science perspective, the concepts of policy windows which permit opportunities for political and policy change a la Kingdon, Baumgarnter and Jones, as well as Tarrow and Cobb and Elder, among many others , will help to explain the trajectory which led to movement activism and protest. Of even greater importance may be the theories of movement mobilization, seeking to aid in understanding the conditions that facilitate group consciousness . The resources mobilized may include material aid, large numbers of participants, media coverage, and public support. In the case of Taiwan, the theory of advocacy coalitions (Sabatier, 1999,9) in which those pressuring for change were able to gain support for their goals from members of government , may be applicable. The paper will seek to explain what is similar and what is different about mobilization and outcomes in the two Asian nations under assessment here.

Protest in Taiwan In contrast to the Umbrella or Occupy movement in Hong Kong , the Sunflower movement –intended to have sun and light shown into “black box” (or closed)agreements and politics - operates within a democratic context . This movement is also known as the 3/18 movement in honor of the day

the protests began. or “Occupy Taiwan legislature “. (Rigger, 2014) It was organized by charismatic leaders, students , professors and ordinary citizens. It was supported by the left party in Taiwan , DPP, (Democratic Progressive Party)which has just regained political power after a number of years . A new third party, the New Power party, also provided support. The trigger for the protest was the perceived lack of parliamentary due process by the KMT (Kuomintang) , the then ruling party in Taiwan .The agreement that was the catalyst for the protest was signed in July 2013 (Rowen, 2015) On March 18, , 2014 ,students stormed the legislature to protest the secret free trade agreement that had been negotiated with China. In violation of a prior commitment , the legislature railroaded the bill through without the line by line assessment that had been promised (Ming-sho Ho, 12/2/2014) Shortly before , massive demonstrations had opposed the sale of a major Taiwan newspaper to Chinese ownership , reflecting concern about a free press and ability to criticize China in it (2012), Rowen , 2015, 9, 10) . Media and government vilification of the demonstrators only strengthened the resolve of the students, supported by academics and DPP (Democratic Progressive Party) legislators. A third party , the Green party, also provided support. A 3 week standoff led to a brief occupation of the legislative Yuan (parliament) and nearly a half million people rallied on March 30 in front of the President’s office - with the broader perspective of Taiwan ‘s relations with Beijing: re cross straits ties- as the focus.. This was the largest rally ever recorded in Taiwan. (Rowen, 2015,). At most times, there were approximately 10, 000 protesters at the three sites at which they demonstrated . Surveys taken at the time revealed that there was apprehension about the trade in services agreement and also the impact of a greater Chinese presence on business, media freedom and freedom of expression Participants in the 2014 movement , were also concerned about the potential impact on the working class and increased inequality if the pact was implemented. (Ibid) (Rigger / Wasserman , 2014); Rowen , www.occupy.com ,\4/2/4014), as well as fear related to a sense of increasing closeness with the

mainland and concern about its intentions . They also demonstrated support for the student's objectives and criticism of the government's approach . (Rowen 2015, 9) Prior social movements in Taiwan - Wild Lilies which advocated for pro democratic reform in the 90's) - and Wild Strawberries (2008), in the 90's were possible models for the Sunflower groups. (the latter name meant that the movement was beautiful but weak and fragile (Rowen, 2015) The 2008 group protested the removal of Taiwan's symbols and real name and restrictions on protest during a Chinese official's visit in that year. (Rowen, 2015, 10) The group is also called the 318 movement in honor of the day the protest began. The sit in ended on April 10 , having begun on March 18, 2014. The protestors wish to stay aloof from China and retain their democratic, reinvigorated civil society . (4/2/4014). The students (400 in all) barricaded themselves into the halls of the legislative assembly (*yuan*) and the few policeman stationed there were quickly overwhelmed. The movement was referred to by Tsai Ing Wen , who gained the presidency of Taiwan, when declaring victory within the last month. . Cooperation between the movement's on both sides was significant . (Cole, 2015). A florist's gift to the protesters helped to provide the Sunflower symbol. The occupation enjoyed high poll support, which led the government to exercise restraint and not physically oust the protestors.. In addition, On April 18, the legislative speaker intervened by agreeing to enact a special law governing negotiations with China , before resuming the review process (Ho, 12/2/2014) . Protesters were joined by their Hong Kong and mainland China compatriots living in Taiwan.

The movement's Facebook Page generated 50,000 likes. Crowdfunding support helped to pay for a full page ad in the New York Times. (Rowen, 2015,15) .) Although President Ma never agreed to meet with the protestors as they requested , leaders of the the legislative *yuan* , negotiated an agreement with the students , which provided that no cross straits agreement would be passed without review and supervision mechanisms . (Ibid, 15)

While there was internal concern about the mechanisms employed to gain a truce among the group, the students cleaned and cleared the space and vacated on April 10. Subsequently, there were conflicts among Sunflower participants and the movement has fragmented. Many retained their connections to the DPP.

Dissatisfaction with then president Ma highlighted by the movement, helped to defeat KMT incumbents in the elections of November 2014. (82% of those surveyed indicated unhappiness with then President Ma.; 58;32% opposed legal action against the protesters.) (Taipei Liberty Times 4/12/

14) Members of the Sunflower movement also assisted their comrades in the Umbrella movement in Hong Kong, soon to mobilize, a reflection of the closeness between the two groups, both under China's thumb to varying degrees.

Concrete outcomes in of the sit-ins were the changes in legislative procedures, success in defeating the then ruling party at midterm elections and inspiring protest in neighboring Hong Kong.

The Protest Movement in Hong Kong

Based partially on the ideas of Benny Tai, a law professor at Hong Kong University, the Umbrella or Occupy movement was one of the largest protest movements ever in Hong Kong, (even larger than the one at the time of Tiananmen Square) primarily formed to object to the failure of the Beijing government to live up to its commitment to implement universal suffrage as well as to protest increasing dominance over the city by Beijing. The United Nations Human Rights Committee had urged free elections in the preceding October. Conflicts within opposition party groups, e.g. the Democratic Party, who had held secret negotiations with the government and agreed to some modest reforms without consultation with the party's members and others, created concern among those seeking change. Prior to the organization of the

movement, in 2013 , Occupy Central with Love and Peace (OCLP), announced its plan to occupy one of Beijing's main arterial roads in the city's main business districts in order to bring pressure on the government which had announced restrictions related to the election of the Chief Executive . Protestors also initiated several public deliberations, an unofficial but highly effective referendum, and instances of civil disobedience. (Chan, 2015)

One impetus for the protestors was concern about the opposition party's (Democratic Party) failure to challenge government rulings regarding a delayed time period for the implementation of universal suffrage and the continuance of functional seats , as arranged through secret meetings and lack of transparency. (Ibid, 2) } The Democratic Party's defeat in the 2012 elections helped to set the state for the emergence of civil society groups. The Umbrella movement or revolution, as it came to be known, sought to gain public response and participation for any electoral reforms to be accepted. Initially founded by Joshua Wong and other high school students, they were joined by other students and members of the populace at large as the siege unfolded. Protesters made good use of social media and also created art to represent their struggles.

A series of D-days (deliberation days) were held beginning on June 9 2013, , based on the suggestions of US political scientists Bruce Ackerman and James Fishkin. 700 people gathered , and having had access to web based information prior to the event, Moderate and radical democrats attended the event. Day 2 expanded the participants to 3000 and now included members of civil society , church members , women's and workers groups. Day 3 involved over 2500 attendees. (Ibid, 3). A seven day and night protest march followed, while the government put forth a White Paper entitled " One Country , Two Systems". Voters could express their views via the internet (mysteriously attacked during the deliberations by hackers) or at polling stations in churches and

public service centers. Over 800,000 voters turned out to vote in the (unofficial) referendum.

Many students and others were dissatisfied with the Hong Kong government 's lack of response and also rejected the leadership of the OCLP . After a huge rally, about 500 students stayed behind to have a sit- in in a busy section of the city. When the 831 report issued by the government in August 2014 basically ruled out any change in the electoral system , blocking a more democratic approach this provided a catalyst for protest. The opposition groups announced that on October 1, protests would begin. Civil disobedience was advocated. In an effort to stop the protest , the police fired into the crowds with tear gas and the participants used umbrellas to try to shield themselves – hence the name of the group (Umbrella movement) was born. (Ibid, 5). {they used plastic and any other method of defense against police attacks) . Conflicts among protestors, from the right and left, created difficulties for the group as the protest went on though it went on ahead . As considerable disruption did occur, the government sought to develop a “wait and see” strategy, largely rejecting the use of force to end the protest. Many members of the community were split on the efficacy of protest, often reflecting generational differences with polls showing just 30% of the public approved of the movement . (Ibid, 5). An anti occupy petition organized by the government gained 1/8 milion signatures. Chan,, 2014) Other surveys showed far more support for the protesters, particularly among young people (So, 9/22/2014 In addition splits between the members of the group regarding use of civil disobedience as opposed to more aggressive action, emerged. One result was an attack on government headquarters on November 30, which was greeted with police batons. Casualties resulted. Many protestors turned themselves into the police . The occupation was finally cleared by the government in two locations on Dec 11. Over 100 protestors were arrested and some of their cases are still pending.

A reform proposal released by the government on June 17 permitted direct election of leaders , but from a list proposed by the government , not freely chosen. This plan was rejected by the

protestors though there were disagreements among them, with some leading more toward acceptance of the government's plan. As an indication of the splits both within the government and society, some bookstores refused to stock books supportive of the Umbrella movement. A threat by the government to enact a more draconian security law, Article 23, to exert more control over potential protestors in the wake of the Occupy movement has not been implemented. Another bill to "reform the process" by having voters select from a list chosen by a party committee failed to pass for lack of support. A number of parliament members carried yellow umbrellas to show their support for the movement. Polls suggest that young people in particular are opposed to proposed national security laws which will further restrict democratic elections.

The history of the Umbrella movement demonstrates the gradual radicalization of elements of the population in particular, first mobilizing through an opposition party and then through civil protest led by students and white collar professionals as the former did not seem effective to many. The future of the Umbrella movement is in question at the time of this writing. . To Phillips, 9/28/15) given the authoritarian nature of the Hong Kong government and its backer, the PRC., there can be few concrete gains possible

Nonetheless, the protest lasted for 79 days before the police moved in with tear gas to remove the crowds. However, the same detested leader, CY Leung, remains in power, so the goal of ousting him was not achieved. The status quo has been maintained through a vote.; Hong Kong legislators rejected a reform instituting universal suffrage but also opposed a slate of candidates preselected by the Beijing. The present electoral system is in place until 2017. (CNN,com) (Yuen and Cheng, 7/1/2015). Clearly, universal suffrage not been attained. Protest leaders are fighting their detention on grounds of unlawful assembly. This year, efforts to commemorate the 1 year anniversary of the Umbrella

Movement were repulsed by armed police (Tom Phillips, 9/28/15) It is undeniable that , however, that the largest demonstration against Chinese rule since Tiananmen Square did much to rouse the democratic impulses of Hong Kong youth . The numbers participating in the Umbrella far outflanked their colleagues ‘ movement in Taiwan , though their goals were not achieved. It is estimated that about 18% of the Hong Kong population joined in the protests in some way – though students were among the initial organizers they were joined by white collar professionals –and virtually all indicated that they were motivated by a desire for a free electoral system.

In many ways the student uprising in Hong Kong may be deemed a success . The protest lasted for weeks and generated mass participation , sympathy from the public and international support. And, the largest demonstration against Chinese rule since Tiananmen Square did much to rouse the democratic impulses of Hong Kong youth .

Both the Sunflower and Umbrella movements represent mass participation to protest lack of commitment to democratic processes by their respective governments, albeit in different ways. . Both were able to attract adherents from a wider public after organization by young people, although opposition to disruption was also manifest in each case.. The differences lie in the numbers who participated in each movement and the pre-ordained outcome for the protestors in Hong Kong. The repression of the Umbrella movement has been a cautionary tale for the people of Taiwan who want to maintain the democratic , progressive system they have created. The slogan “one country two systems” applied to Hong Kong seems a mockery of reality and contributed to the victory of the anti Beijing DPP forces in Taiwan last month, with an avowed desire to keep independent of the PRC and inclusion of some Sunflower participants.

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