

**“Expressing my attitude and doing something
impossible to make it happen ...”
– Listening to the Voices of Hong Kong’s
Umbrella Movement Protesters⁺**

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Abstract

In autumn 2014 around 1.3 million mostly young citizens of Hong Kong occupied three districts of the city for 79 days. This movement became famous as the Umbrella Movement. Initially, the Umbrella Movement was almost exclusively perceived as a pro-democracy occupation because the democratization of the city’s polity was its core demand. However, over time the perception shifted and the movement was increasingly portrayed as part of a growing demand for more autonomy from mainland China. This rising “localism” is often associated with anti-Chinese sentiments including racism. This article aims to demonstrate that the Umbrella Movement’s call for democracy is indeed part of a broader agenda for more self-determination. This agenda, however, is not necessarily racist. Instead, the Umbrella Movement was a very plural one. The Umbrella Movement’s agenda does, however, comprise not only questions of democratization but also three additional

dimensions, namely socio-economic, identity-political and institutional issues. The article aims to present the plurality of the Umbrella Movement by referring to and quoting a multitude of interviews with protesters which are intended to give the occupiers a “voice” in all their diversity. Finally, the article aims to conclude on the achievements of the movement in all four dimensions and outlines possible future directions.

Keywords: *Umbrella Movement, democracy, self-determination, localism*

1. Introduction

It is the evening of 26 September 2014 in Hong Kong’s Admiralty (金鐘) district. A few thousand secondary school and university students strike because they demand a real democratization of Hong Kong’s elections for the city’s Chief Executive who serves as president or mayor of the city. At 10 pm the gathering is officially finished, but some half an hour later, a seventeen-year old boy re-enters the stage. His name is Joshua Wong (黃之鋒); he is the leader of a student protest organization called *Scholarism* (學民思潮). To the surprise of Hong Kong’s officials, police, the media and many protesters, Wong calls on the crowd not to leave but to re-take Civic Square located in front of the city’s parliament, the Legislative Council.

Civic Square is a symbolic place in Hong Kong. Once built as a public space in front of the Legislative Council that is open to all citizens, Civic Square was closed in July 2014 following protests against infrastructural projects in Hong Kong’s north, the New Territories. The square used to be a symbol of free speech in Hong Kong but the government decided without consulting the Legislative Council to build a 3-meter fence around it.¹ Although Civic Square was partly re-opened from 6 am to 11 pm in early September 2014, Joshua Wong’s

call to reclaim it is a symbol for the movement's desire for democracy and civil liberties of the Hong Kong people.²

About 3,000 students – most of them around the same age as Joshua Wong himself – spend this night in front of the Legislative Council and some hundred students climb the fences and retake Civic Square. The security forces react with a heavy-handed intervention using pepper spray and later on tear gas as well.³ One protester suffers a heart attack but the police deny the medics to enter Civic Square in the first place. Many other protesters suffer injuries including Joshua Wong who gets arrested at around 11 pm.⁴ He and many others are sent to hospital.

Local media reports about the police's actions and the news go viral on Facebook and other social media. As a result of that tens of thousands of young people – students, trainees and young workers – hit the streets in support of the protesters at Civic Square. They use their umbrellas to protect themselves against the police's pepper spray which gave the movement its name.

On 29 September the riot police withdraws and the situation calms down.⁵ But the streets of three districts in Hong Kong remain occupied by the young protesters for the next two and a half months (Ng, 2016).

This was the beginning of the Umbrella Movement that turned into the largest and most important demonstration for democracy on Chinese soil ever since the crackdown at Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1989.

For many of them the Umbrella Movement was not their first protest. Hong Kong is a contentious city with many demonstrations (Lee *et al.*, 2013). In the last years leading up to the Umbrella Movement, the city's youth was especially concerned about an education reform package that aimed to introduce a “national education” plan trying to enhance Hong Kong students' patriotic feelings towards the People's Republic of China (PRC). The most prominent means to achieve this goal was that students were prescribed to show emotions and cry when

the Chinese flag is raised and also the appraisal of the communist and nationalist ideology (Chan, 2014).

Thousands of students demonstrated against the government's plan to introduce the "national education" reform. Joshua Wong was one of them founding Scholarism. The movement succeeded and in 2012 the government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) withdrew its plans.

At first glance, both protests – the Umbrella Movement in 2014 and the anti-national education protest in 2012 – seem to be very different. In 2012, the demonstrators rejected an educational bill and two years later they aimed at true democracy. However, both protests are closely interrelated. Talking to the supporters and activists of the Umbrella Movement elucidates that this movement called for true electoral democracy but aimed at more: self-determination. When I refer to the term self-determination I do not refer to it as a legal concept of international law. In other words, I do not equate "self-determination" with the call for independence and a separate Hong Kong sovereign entity. Instead, I refer to it as a desire to determine Hong Kong's future with more autonomy from China which leads some but only parts of the movement to call for independence.

This broader desire for more autonomy and self-determination was missed by most press reports and academic writings which shaped the image of the Umbrella Movement during the protests and shortly after (Chan, 2015; Wong, 2015; Cheng, 2016). Later on reports increased in number which focused on radical anti-Chinese actions as well as rhetoric thereby shifting the focus onto Hong Kong's changing identity politics (Kwan, 2016; Bridges, 2016; Rühlig, 2015a; Chan, 2014; Chen and Szeto, 2015). This is accompanied by some analysis that has pointed out the socio-economic foundation of these developments. This includes not only the alliance between the Chinese Communist Party in Beijing and

Hong Kong's local capitalist elite but Chinese risk capital being invested in Hong Kong (Hui and Lau, 2015; Dirlik, 2016; Ip, 2015; Ma, 2015). In addition, the clash of different value systems between Mainland Chinese immigrants and native Hong Kong citizens has become subject of analysis (Wong *et al.*, 2016; Lui, 2015; Rajadhyaksha, 2015).

In this paper, in turn, I aim to provide a better understanding of the plurality of the movement in two respects. First, I try to contextualize the Umbrella Movement activists' desire in the broader agenda for self-determination which ties in with the literature on Hong Kong's changing identity and the role of the political economy. Second, I aim to give a first impression of the plurality of voices and perspectives within the Umbrella Movement. I do so by mainly relying on interviews with protesters from very different factions of the movement interviewed during three field trips in 2015 and 2016. In this sense, this paper is an attempt to give a voice to the Umbrella Movement and complement existing reports from activists (Cheng, 2016; Ng, 2016; Chung, 2015) as well as to provide some understanding of the protest culture (Rühlig, 2016).

I do neither claim that the perception of the Umbrella Movement as a pro-democracy protest is wrong nor that identity politics and economic grievances are not an issue. To the contrary, my interview quotations reveal their relevance and demonstrate that we better understand them as part of a broader agenda for self-determination which plays out in four dimensions: democratic self-determination and the reform of the Chief Executive elections; social and economic self-determination; self-determination in terms of Hong Kong's unique identity; and institutional and political self-determination aiming at a far-reaching autonomy of the city if not independence.

This paper is largely built upon field research in Hong Kong in 2015 and 2016 including in-depth interviews with activists, journalists,

politicians, members of think tanks and social scientists. While cannot claim representativeness, it is intended to demonstrate a great variety of perspectives and unfold a spectrum of the Umbrella Movement. Selectively, these interviews are contextualized with media reports and the existing social scientific literature. In order to reason my account of the Umbrella Movement as a protest desiring Hong Kong's self-determination, I present some background on Hong Kong's electoral law and the development of the movement in paragraph 2. I then turn to my core argument characterizing the Umbrella Movement in terms of self-determination reasoning my account by presenting the movement's claims in four dimensions of self-determination (electoral democracy; social issues; identity; institutional self-determination). I take into account the diversity of the movement containing moderates, radicals and many protesters holding hybrid perspectives in-between these two camps. While different protesters' claims in the four dimensions of self-determination vary, all of them aim at some form of self-determination (paragraph 3). While it is widely believed that the Umbrella Movement has been an outright failure, I argue in paragraph 4 that the results are mixed if we assess the achievements in all four dimensions of self-determination. Valuating the results and predicting the foreseeable future, I argue that the movement was partly successful in terms of electoral democracy and social issues. It failed with regards to institutional self-determination while questions of identity remain completely open to this day.

2. Background

There is not much that the Umbrella Movement activists and the HKSAR government agree upon. But the fact that the selection method of Hong Kong's Chief Executive is in need of reform is not only the goal

of thousands of pro-democracy activists but is also in accordance with §45 of the city's mini-constitution, the Basic Law, which defines universal suffrage as the ultimate goal:

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.

(HKSAR Government, 1997: §45)

Ever since the PRC's Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (SCNPC) decided in 2007 "that the election of the fifth Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in the year 2017 may be implemented by the method of universal suffrage" (HKSAR Government, 2013: 44) pro-democratic activists hoped that a reform of Hong Kong's polity would be made in the not too-distant future. Indeed, Hong Kong's Chief Executive CY Leung (梁振英) started a reform process in October 2013 announcing that the reform process would contain two rounds of public consultations. However, only two months later, the government published a "Consultation Paper" which was intended to provide a basis for public consultation but indicated that the scope of reforms would be limited (HKSAR Government, 2013). In order to assess the reform proposal I shortly summarize the method of selecting the Chief Executive prior to the reform.

The last selection of Hong Kong's Chief Executive took place in 2012 and was carried out by an "Election Committee" which consists of 1,200 members. These members are not voted upon by all 3.5 million registered voters of Hong Kong which has 7 million inhabitants but by only about 250,000 voters being members of four "functional constituencies", namely political, commercial, professions and a fourth

one containing labor, social services, arts and religion. Each of these four functional constituencies is represented by 300 members in the Election Committee (Chen, 2012). It is beyond the scope of this paper to go into the details. But three important consequences of this procedure that characterize the Election Committee need to be mentioned.

Firstly, only 7% of Hong Kong's registered voters possess voting rights for the Election Committee leaving 93% of them without representation during the election process of the city's Chief Executive. Hence, the selection of the Chief Executive can be hardly called democratic.

Secondly, even these 7% of the citizens are not equally represented in the Election Committee: While all four functional constituencies possess 300 representatives within the Election Committee providing all four of them with 25% of the vote in the Committee, the numbers of voters in the four constituencies vary greatly. The 300 representatives of the political sector are elected by only 700 voters constituting less than 0.3% of all citizens possessing the right to vote for the Election Committee. In contrast to this, 204,399 from the professions sector constituting almost 82% of voters electing the Election Committee equally select only 300 representatives for the Election Committee. The commercials sector has 26,828 and the labor/social services and religions sector 17,572 registered voters respectively each selecting another 300 representatives though representing only 10.75% and 7% of the total number of citizens possessing the right to select the Election Committee members.

Thirdly, these selection mechanisms are to the systematic advantage of pro-Beijing officials (mainly in the political sector) and businesses with close ties to the mainland which largely depend on the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the central government in Beijing. In other words, the described selection mechanism allows Beijing to control the

Election Committee and who becomes Hong Kong's Chief Executive.

The electoral reform process started in the latter half of 2013 and was set up to fundamentally change the process of selecting Hong Kong's Chief Executive and introduce general elections carried out by universal suffrage. However, the HKSAR government made it clear that a Nomination Committee would decide who could run as candidate in the general elections. Though not officially stated it was widely believed that the existing Election Committee should function in the future as Nomination Committee. This belief rests upon the 31 August decision of the SCNPC that reads as follows:

The provisions for the number of members, composition and formation method of the nominating committee shall be made in accordance with the number of members, composition and formation method of the Election Committee.⁶

In other words, while not selecting the Chief Executive itself anymore the Election Committee would choose candidates that are able to run in the general elections granting decisive competences to the Beijing-controlled committee.

Advocators of democracy in Hong Kong call this a "fake democracy" since they predict that the Nomination Committee would not allow any opposition candidate to run in the general elections fearing that the next Chief Executive would not be affiliated with the CCP and the Beijing central government. Instead of granting these far-reaching competences to the Nomination Committee, pro-democratic activists who supported the Umbrella Movement in autumn 2014 favor civil nomination. The process of civil nomination requires every candidate to collect a given number of signatures from registered Hong Kong voters to run for the post as Chief Executive. Hence, civil nomination would

not grant Beijing control over who is running for Hong Kong's Chief Executive; consequently the CCP and its allies in the HKSAR reject the proposal. They argue that civil nomination does not conform to the Basic Law which explicitly states that the nomination has to be done "by a broadly representative nominating committee" (HKSAR Government 1997: §45). Civil nomination was never seriously considered by the HKSAR government and was not mentioned in the final report released after the first round of public consultations on 29 July 2014.⁷ Attempts of moderate pro-democratic actors to propose compromise solutions have failed.

Even more importantly than the HKSAR government's report, the SCNPC published a decision on 31 August 2014 which made clear that the central government was not willing to accept anybody as Chief Executive who does not *love the country [China] and Hong Kong* and that the Chief Executive remains accountable to the CCP-led central government.⁸ This was in line with previous statements by Beijing leaders stating that the Chief Executive cannot oppose the central government.⁹ The SCNPC's decision emphasized two important implications for the reform process in Hong Kong.

Firstly, the democratization of the selection of Hong Kong's Chief Executive was limited to the pre-condition that only pro-Beijing candidates could run for the post in general elections. This questions not only the democratic nature of such elections but clarifies that Beijing is not ready to limit its control over the city.

Secondly, the government in Beijing interprets the "one country, two systems" principle very differently from the pro-democratic actors in Hong Kong. Ever since its handover from British colonial rule to be under the sovereignty of the PRC in 1997, Hong Kong is governed under the principle of "one country, two systems" which stipulates that Hong Kong remains under the authority and sovereignty of the PRC but retains

a high degree of autonomy (HKSAR Government, 1984). Only issues related to foreign affairs and security are subject to the jurisdiction of the central government in China. However, the Basic Law does not specify what “foreign affairs” and “security” entail and especially what China considers to be a matter of “national security” that has changed over the years.¹⁰ To clarify its interpretation of “one country, two systems” the PRC government published a White Paper in June 2014 which made clear once more that it is China and not the local political actors which will determine the Special Administrative Region’s future (State Council of the People’s Republic of China, 2014).

Hence, from the outset the struggle for democratizing Hong Kong’s polity in general and the nomination procedure of the Chief Executive elections in particular directly addresses the question of how autonomous Hong Kong should be.

In reaction to the reform process that – in the eyes of pro-democracy actors – offers only “fake democracy” and reinforces Beijing’s control over the city, an associate professor at the Department of Law at the Hong Kong University (HKU), Benny Tai Yiu-ting (戴耀廷), published in January 2013 an article entitled “Civil Disobedience’s Deadliest Weapon” (公民抗命的最大殺傷力武器) in the *Hong Kong Economic Journal* (信報財經新聞) calling for an occupation of Hong Kong’s Central (中環) district in order to shut down the city.¹¹ The article went viral in Hong Kong and with the help of a minister of Chai Wan Baptist Church (柴灣浸信會), Reverend Chu Yiu-ming (朱耀明), who is also the chairman of the Hong Kong Democracy Development Network, and Chan Kin-man (陳健民), an associate professor of sociology at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Tai announced the foundation of the *Occupy Central with Love and Peace* (OCLP) movement (March 2013). Up until autumn 2014, these three people, often referred to as the “Occupy Trio” (佔中三子), successfully built up OCLP organizing

several events, gatherings and meetings discussing the democratization of Hong Kong's polity and preparing the occupation of the city's business district, Central, on China's national day, 1 October 2014. At the core of these preparations were three "deliberation days" when every citizen of Hong Kong was invited to propose and discuss different ways of democratizing the Chief Executive selection. The results of the third deliberation day were three different proposals¹² which were sent to an unofficial referendum that took place 20-29 June 2014 with 800,000 out of the 3.5 million registered voters casting their ballot¹³. The final result showed support for a three-chain proposal offering candidates three ways to be nominated for the elections which should be held by universal suffrage: firstly, nomination by the Nomination Committee after the democratization of its composition; secondly, party nomination allowing the political parties in Hong Kong's Legislative Council to nominate; thirdly, civil nomination which provides the citizens a direct opportunity to nominate their candidate(s).¹⁴

Although the referendum showed a high turnout, the government did not fulfill the demand of OCLP to implement its result. Therefore, the Occupy movement decided to hit the streets on 1 October 2014 as planned and occupy the streets. The leadership of OCLP hoped that 10,000 people would join to occupy Central district completely peacefully as an act of civil disobedience and expected to get arrested after only a few days if not hours. Although Hong Kong was occupied for several months by up to 1.2 million occupiers (estimations vary)¹⁵, the protests turned out to be very different from what OCLP had expected. At least four significant differences can be identified.

Firstly, the occupation started already a few days prior to 1 October 2014 and was mainly carried out not by OCLP but two student organizations, Scholarism and the Hong Kong Federation of Students (HKFS) (see introduction)¹⁶.

Secondly, the local public's outcry over police violence turned the whole movement from an organized one led by the "Occupy Trio" into a spontaneous protest which was largely shaped by Hong Kong's youth. Social media reports about police violence massively helped to mobilize spontaneously the city's young people who had never taken part in the deliberation days or participated in one of OCLP's trainings in civil disobedience.¹⁷

Thirdly, the protest tactics varied not fundamentally but markedly: while both the students and OCLP lobbied for and carried out peaceful protests, the students rejected OCLP's appeal to wait until getting arrested by the police. The continued call for their original strategy made many students reject the leadership of OCLP. A moderate student activist who had been sympathetic to OCLP initially told me, for example:

At first, when Benny Tai proposed Occupy Central, I was supportive and I really think that civil disobedience can make a difference. But when you are in the movement, you don't think the same way because the use of violence is all out of charge. When I was pepper sprayed, I couldn't control my consciousness, I was full of hatred, full of aggressive minds. No way. I think 90% of students think the same way as I do.¹⁸

Fourth and finally, the "Umbrella Movement" never occupied Central as it was planned by OCLP but three other districts of Hong Kong¹⁹: Admiralty, Mong Kok (旺角) and Causeway Bay (銅鑼灣). Admiralty bordering the business district of Central consists of public administration buildings, consulates, luxury shops and restaurants as well as financial businesses. Protesters in Admiralty gathered in front of government buildings and the Legislative Council and blocked main roads for the traffic on Hong Kong Island connecting Wan Chai (灣仔)

and Causeway Bay in the east with Central and Sheung Wan (上環) in the west. Protests at Admiralty gained the most attention from international media and counted the most occupants. It was the most organized and well-structured protests coordinated by the Hong Kong Federation of Students, Scholarship as well as to a lesser extent OCLP and other civil society organizations.

In contrast to Admiralty, Mong Kok is a working class district on the Kowloon (九龍) Peninsula with many low-priced shops and traditional cookshops. People living here are much poorer and the neighborhood is dirtier. Protests attracted occupants with more radical perspectives compared to Admiralty which included the call for grassroots democracy within the protest movement itself. Mong Kok developed into the most unique protest area and protest leaders never gained control over Mong Kok which was mainly grassroots-driven.²⁰ In Mong Kok, the movement occupied two major roads of the Kowloon Peninsula including Nathan Road (彌敦道) which caused enormous obstacles to the traffic in Kowloon.

The protest site in Causeway Bay is geographically not too far away from Admiralty. On the one hand, Causeway Bay is a business district with many high-price shopping opportunities and full of shopping malls. One would not assume to find much support for the protesters here. On the other hand, there is some tradition for political protest in Causeway Bay and every day people distribute political leaflets in the streets. The protesters at Causeway Bay were less outspoken than their counterparts in Mong Kok and Admiralty and gained the least attention. Instead, my interviewees characterized it as a place of classes, seminars and discussions.²¹

The plurality as well as the differences of these three protest sites point to an important characteristic of the movement: its diversity (Chung, 2015). While most of the protesters came out “individually” in

reaction to the media and social media coverage of the occupation and police violence, the diversity of the movement was also represented by the organizations which supported the movement. This included moderate civil society organizations such as OCLP, the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China or the People's Human Rights Front, think tanks of the pan-democratic political establishment (e.g. Hong Kong 2020) as well as pan-democratic parties both moderate (e.g. Democratic Party, Civic Party) and more radical ones (League of Social Democrats, People Power). Furthermore, radical civil society organizations joined the movement as well such as Civic Passion (熱血公民). And finally, the student organizations HKFS and Scholarism were of crucial importance. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to describe all these actors in more detail, what is crucial is the fact that the demonstrators came from very different backgrounds and held very different political visions.

Overall the protests of the Umbrella Movement remained peaceful and very well ordered. Violent clashes erupted only sporadically²² with the police (though human rights organizations reported human rights violations by Hong Kong's police)²³ and on a minor scale mainly in Mong Kok with counter-demonstrators supporting the HKSAR and central Chinese governments. It has been reported that some of these counter-demonstrators have been paid by the PRC (Liu, 2014) but this should not mislead one to overlook that Hong Kong remained a divided city with only little bit more than half of it being in support of the pro-democratic reform agenda²⁴.

The young protesters demanded talks on political reform with the HKSAR government and negotiations were scheduled several times but only one official meeting broadcasted live in local TV took place.²⁵

Over time, it became clear that the HKSAR and central Chinese governments' tactic was to sit out the occupation and tried to avoid both

political reform as well as violent crackdown of the movement. Indeed, tensions over goals and tactics arose within the activists and the fact that nothing changed exhausted many young occupiers. Moreover, the support of the general public in Hong Kong decreased due to the fact that the occupation caused some though limited inconveniences for the everyday life. This led the “Occupy Trio” who had joined the movement in the first days to decide to withdraw their support on 3 December handing themselves into the police but they were set free without being charged.²⁶

On 25 November 2014, the police cleared the Mong Kok protest area with some but not excessive resistance by the demonstrators. Admiralty and Causeway Bay were cleared on 11 December and 15 December 2014 respectively without violence ending 2.5 months of the Umbrella Movement occupying important parts of Hong Kong.²⁷

3. Aiming at Self-determination: The Goals of the Umbrella Movement

In autumn 2014, the world watched Hong Kong. Students had occupied the streets and demanded a fair and democratic election of the city’s Chief Executive. But we better understand the movement when we perceive it in terms of the occupiers’ desire for self-determination in a broader sense.

Obviously, self-determination and democracy are closely interrelated. Hence, neither do I deny that the demonstrators’ call for electoral democracy was honest and earnest nor do I argue that the Umbrella Movement was not a pro-democratic one. However, by placing the term *self-determination* at the core I want to widen the perspective of the readers to other than electoral demands of the demonstrators and point out the overall framework of these desires.

One might argue that democracy is essentially about self-determination. I agree. Democracy in its literal sense is about the rule of the people themselves.²⁸ In almost the same manner, this is the essence of collective self-determination. Both concepts share the idea that power is executed by the subjects of rule effectively overcoming the division of the rulers and the ruled. However, there is one marked difference in the evolution of the terms “democracy” and “self-determination”: While the former refers to a specific form of rule domestically, self-determination as a *political* concept²⁹ rose in prominence as a by-product of nationalism highlighting the collective self-determination of people externally. Literally, democracy and collective self-determination are closely interlinked but both carry a different politic-historical connotation.

Although I agree that the Umbrella Movement was a pro-democratic one I place the term “self-determination” at the center of my considerations because of two reasons. Firstly, I claim that a central concern of the Umbrella Movement has been Hong Kong’s relationship to China addressing questions of what collective self-determination means. This touches upon the formation of the nation, national solidarity and the constitution of a collective that rightly claims its right to self-determination. Hence, the Umbrella Movement was not only about the city’s domestic polity but addressed issues of collective self-determination in a broader sense. Secondly, the dominant discourse both within the movement itself and in the local and international media, narrows “democracy” in Hong Kong down to the electoral reform of selecting the Chief Executive neglecting other aspects of democracy. In order to terminologically distinguish my perspective from this narrow focus, I prefer to place the term *self-determination* at the core of my argument.

When I refer to the Umbrella Movement aiming at self-determination, I do not equate this with the call for independence. Instead, I include a full range of demands for more autonomy to the agenda for self-determination. Clearly, many of such calls are compatible with the “one country, two systems” framework and the Basic Law but demand a different interpretation of them.

The Umbrella Movement’s aim for self-determination was not limited to electoral democracy. Instead, I clearly identify four dimensions of self-determination that the movement was aiming at. These four dimensions are electoral democracy, social welfare, identity and institutions.

All of these four dimensions carry their own core questions: How democratic should Hong Kong be in order to guarantee enough self-determination of its citizens? What is the best way to social security and a free and self-determined life of Hong Kong’s poor people? What describes Hong Kong’s identity best (Hong Kong Chinese, autonomous Hong Kong identity, or anti-Chinese Hong Kong identity)? Which political institutions serve Hong Kong’s interests best?

The answers to these questions within the movement are very different. They all revolve around the question what exactly “one country, two systems” means in these four fields or whether Hong Kong should strive for complete independence. This does not mean that all demonstrators agree on these issues. Instead, the diversity of the movement (see paragraph 2) resulted in different demands in all four dimensions which all call for more self-determination though to different degrees. I differentiate between moderates and radicals (as do many of the demonstrators as well).

In the following, I shortly summarize the spectrum of opinions and demands voiced by the Umbrella Movement in each of the four dimensions before I turn to them in more detail in the following sub-

paragraphs.

With regard to electoral democracy (referring within the Umbrella Movement only to the selection method of the Chief Executive), the debate within the movement focused on the question of the candidates' nomination. Moderates aimed at changes in the composition of the Nomination Committee, for example by broadening the scope of committee members to include directly elected representatives from District Councils and/or the Legislative Council into it. Others opt for a greater say of different political parties and/or organizations which requires pro-democratic and pro-Beijing forces to find compromise candidates.³⁰ This would turn Hong Kong into some sort of a concordance democracy. Radicals instead insist on the possibility of civil nomination without Chinese interference. While both moderates and radicals perceive civil nomination without any interference of the PRC as the best way, moderates are willing to compromise while radicals follow an all-or-none approach.

In terms of economic and social welfare issues, moderates aim to fight poverty, housing shortages and high rental fees by all means if necessary alongside China. This includes that they accept increased economic cooperation and the influx of Chinese tourists if they serve the Hong Kong economy and help to reduce poverty. Others instead emphasize more the self-expression of Hong Kong's poor people as a part of grassroots democratic self-determination of the Hong Kong people. Consequently, Chinese interferences are perceived with more skepticism and local solutions that place the needs of the poor people first are preferred. Finally, radicals even call for economic independence from China because they believe that the close ties with the mainland undermine the social welfare institutions of Hong Kong.

As of identity, moderates perceive themselves as "Hong Kong-Chinese" that merges Chinese cultural traditions with the international

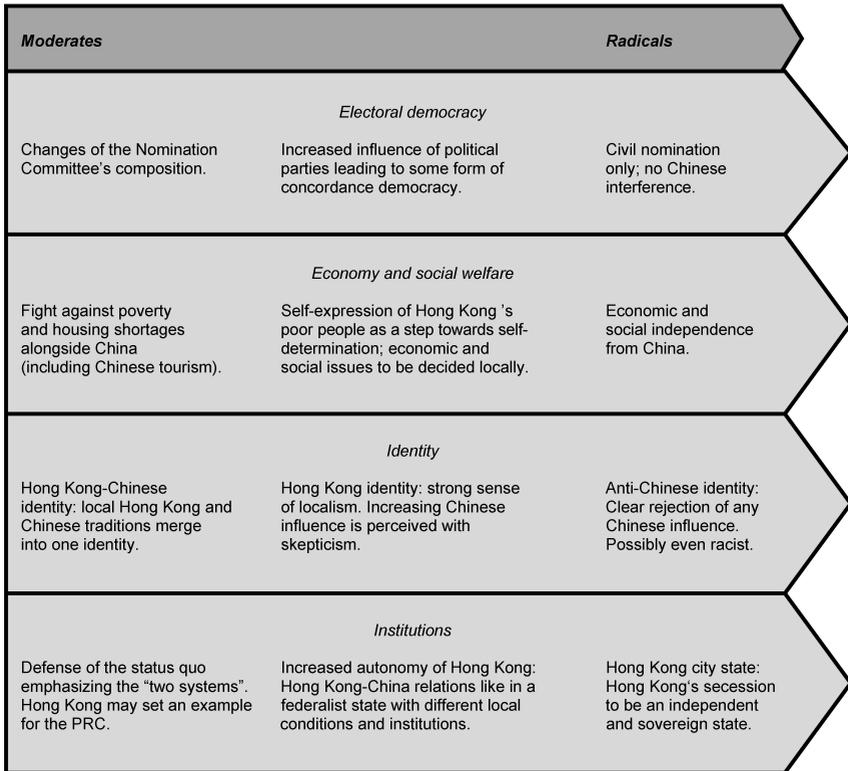
and the multicultural legacy of Hong Kong which is still somehow shaped by British colonial rule. The claim to be “Hong Kong-Chinese” represents something unique and distinguishable from the mainland Chinese identity though not neglecting Chinese influences. Others view themselves solely as “Hong Kongers” with a strong sense of localism. Mainland Chinese influences though not completely rejected are perceived with some skepticism either because China is only a minor source of Hong Kong’s own identity or because the PRC is seen as not preserving the “true” Chinese traditional culture anymore (e.g. because they have simplified the Chinese characters and do not write the “language of Confucius” anymore). Finally, radicals clearly reject any Chinese influences on the local Hong Kong identity. This does not mean that they deny Chinese impacts on Hong Kong’s past. However, their local Hong Kong identity is constructed in contrast to the mainland Chinese one and is sometimes even infiltrated by anti-Chinese racist opinions.

Politically, all this bears the question of adequate institutions. Moderates defend the status quo of “one country, two systems” emphasizing the “two systems” part of the principle. China’s increased emphasis of the “one country” norm, e.g. within the White Paper issued in June 2014, worries them. For this group, Hong Kong is and should remain part of China. In their eyes, Hong Kong’s example could trigger political reform in the PRC as a whole. This is where others disagree aiming at a higher degree of autonomy like in a federalist state searching for local institutional solutions without setting any prototype for other localities. While the PRC may prefer this perspective over the first one, it is more radical insofar as it does not relate the city of Hong Kong to the Chinese motherland. More autonomy compared to the existing “one country, two systems” principle is demanded which would make Hong Kong highly autonomous from the central government. Radicals, finally,

go a step further calling for complete independence of Hong Kong as a city state with its own full sovereignty.

The graphic in Figure 1 summarizes the different factions' perspectives on the four mentioned dimensions.

Figure 1 Spectrum of Opinions and Demands Voiced by the Umbrella Movement



Note that the three positions in all the four dimensions are ideal types on a continuum; hybrid positions are not only plenty but most

widespread. Advocates of a radical or moderate position in one dimension do not need to be on the radical or moderate side in another one respectively. However, an activist who aims at an independent and sovereign Hong Kong most likely is not satisfied with minor changes in the Nomination Committee when it comes to questions of democratization. Similarly, a moderate who wants to fight poverty together with China cannot hold completely anti-Chinese racist perspectives. However, mixtures of middle positions within one field are often perfectly well compatible with completely moderate or radical positions in another dimension. This demonstrates that all four dimensions are interrelated. Especially the identity dimension seems to be decisive for the positions held in the other dimensions.

Apart from all this diversity, what unites the Umbrella Movement is the call for a (more) autonomous Hong Kong. What this exactly means is, however, contested. Interestingly, over the course of the demonstrations a radicalization was clearly identifiable.³¹ However, while the radical demands increasingly dominated the public debate, their actual support remained limited as can be seen not only in results of the Legislative Council Elections in September 2016 but also with only low numbers of protesters showing up when radical groups call for protests (like the protest in front of the Chinese Liaison Office in the evening of 1 July 2016).

In the following sub-paragraphs I present the Umbrella Movement's positions in the four dimensions, namely electoral democracy, economy and social self-determination, Hong Kong's identity, and institutional demands, in more detail.

3.1. Electoral Democracy

The most well-known and most clearly pronounced demand of the Umbrella Movement was the democratization of Hong Kong's political

system in general and the nomination process of the Chief Executive elections in particular.

During the electoral reform period of 2013-2015, *civil nomination* emerged as the main controversial issue. The Beijing government and the pro-Beijing actors in Hong Kong reject civil nomination with reference to §45 of the Basic Law. The whole pro-democratic camp, instead, embraces civil nomination as the best method of nominating candidates for the elections of the Chief Executive. However, moderates and radicals among the pro-democrats disagree on how essential civil nomination is and whether any other methods of nomination could be acceptable as a compromise with Beijing. A senior member of the moderate Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China told me in an interview:

The major discussion was always whether to include civil nomination or not. Civil nomination is all about the fact that a certain amount of voters can propose a candidate running for the Chief Executive elections. All the radicals thought this is the best. We also think it is the best. But the moderates know that it is impossible under China and the Basic Law.

Even up to this day, there are discussions within the movement whether we should demand only things that conform to the Basic Law or object the Basic Law itself and ask for more. We want freedom and democracy.

When it comes to civil nomination, we want it too but since it is impossible we preferred to vote for a proposal that is possibly acceptable to Beijing and does not violate the Basic Law. This can still be a good democracy. But the radicals wanted nothing but the best.³²

Hence, within the pro-democratic camp radicals demanded that civil nomination should be the only way of nomination to run for the post as Chief Executive. While there is hardly any compromise thinkable between Beijing's interpretation and insistence of the Basic Law with the radical protesters' call for civil nomination, moderates have tried to search for common ground.

Although these differences sound rather limited, the frictions between radicals and moderates within the movement are deep. The question whether the pro-democratic camps should be willing to compromise on electoral democracy is a crucial one which seriously divides the movement. While radicals accuse the moderates of betraying the people of Hong Kong, moderates lament that radicals make no compromise and improvements get impossible with their hard-line stance. Interestingly though, the movement was largely successful in temporarily neglecting these differences during the Occupation itself. This was not a sign of compromise or agreement within the movement. Instead, concrete proposals and plans of how to implement the demand for "true (electoral) democracy" were not extensively debated anymore.³³ Instead, every faction of the movement continued to aim at its goals without discussing it at length anymore. Hence, the existing differences remained within the movement and consequently the controversies reemerged soon after the end of the Umbrella Movement. During the preparatory stage especially at OCLP's deliberation days the different positions had already been obvious. While campaigning during OCLP's deliberation days and in the context of the referendum, the differences were very clear.

The two leading student organizations, Scholarism and the HKFS, introduced a proposal which allowed only civil nomination. In order to run for the post as Chief Executive, every candidate has to gain support

by 1% of the 3.5 million registered voters in Hong Kong. A very similar proposal was tabled by the radical pan-democratic party “People Power”.

A less radical proposal was introduced by the Alliance for True Democracy allowing for three alternative “tracks” of nomination: nomination by the Nomination Committee; party nomination; and civil nomination. This proposal finally succeeded in the unofficial referendum carried out by OCLP (see above).

While all these three proposals contain civil nomination, others did not. The moderate think tank “Hong Kong 2020”, for example, suggested to firstly enlarge the Nomination Committee, uphold the four functional constituencies but democratize especially the political sector including direct elections of some of its representatives and introduce a threshold of only 10% that every candidate has to secure within the Nomination Committee in order to run for the post as Chief Executive.³⁴ The “Hong Kong 2020” proposal explicitly tried to conform to the Basic Law and democratize the existing system supported by Beijing.

Another example is a proposal put forward by several scholars who suggested a nomination procedure of two stages. In a first stage of civil nomination, every candidate had to secure approximately 3% of the voters’ support. All candidates would have to secure 10% of the votes within the Nomination Committee in a second round providing all members of the Committee only with one vote.³⁵

Finally to name one more suggestion, Eric Lam Lap Chi (林立志) proposed that the Nomination Committee should be composed according to the same proportion of the political parties’ success in the geographical constituency during the Legislative Council General Elections in 2016. Any political party representative nominated by no less than one-eighth and no more than one-sixth of the Nominating Committee members would qualify as candidate running for the post as

Chief Executive according to this proposal which placed all its hope for democratization upon political parties.³⁶

These are only six out of fifteen official proposals voted upon during the third deliberation day of OCLP. Other compromise suggestions emerged after the end of the Umbrella Movement.³⁷

Apart from these different proposals, all pro-democratic forces in Hong Kong are united in their call for a nomination procedure which ensures that the candidates running for the post as Chief Executive cannot be hand-picked by China. All agree that civil nomination would be the best way of nomination but are divided on whether to compromise or not since it is highly unlikely that Beijing will accept this demand. In other words, while radicals call for complete non-interference of the PRC into the nomination process, moderates seek ways to limit China's influence and protect as much local autonomy as possible. Both, moderates and radicals, aim to preserve or even increase Hong Kong's degree of self-determination. Pro-Beijing forces, instead, argued that §45 of the Basic Law ruled out the possibility of civil nomination at all and ensured that all candidates serve the country which is best ruled by the CCP.

3.2. Economic and Social Self-determination

At the core of the public's attention were the well-educated middle-class students protesting at Admiralty for political and not economic reasons (Yang and Liu, 2015). This perspective, however, overlooks two aspects of the movement. Firstly, poor people did participate as well though most of them in Mong Kok and not Admiralty. Secondly, both the well-educated middle-class as well as poor protesters were partly driven by economic and social concerns too.

Although polls show that the city's poor were less supportive of OCLP as an organization and democratization of Hong Kong's polity,

other surveys representing the protesters on the streets (Yuen and Cheng, 2015) confirm that especially in Mong Kok many non-academic, poor working-class demonstrators could be found. This also corresponds to the subjective impressions of all my interviewees.³⁸ The protests in Mong Kok offered the marginalized the opportunity to speak out and provided a platform for the everyday challenges of Hong Kong's poor. However, while the protests in Mong Kok provided a voice for the social concerns of the unheard, it has not resulted in clear-cut social demands raised by the Umbrella Movement because the protests in Mong Kok remained largely leaderless and the low degree of organization at this protest site prevented the emergence of an explicit social agenda raised by the Umbrella Movement.³⁹

The agenda of the Umbrella Movement remained shaped by its demand for democracy. This rather abstract goal is distant to the poor people's lives which are characterized by poverty, hardships and basic everyday needs. Consequently, many poor people of Hong Kong remained somewhat skeptical of the Admiralty protests, its intellectual leaders and demands. Hence, the Umbrella Movement as a whole did not succeed to win the poor people's general support. The protests in Mong Kok preserved a high degree of uniqueness focusing on social affairs though many middle-class protesters in Admiralty were partly motivated by fears of social decline as a result of intensified competitive pressure. However, the middle-class protesters were only partly successful in uniting with the unsatisfied lower classes occupying Mong Kok. This is somehow surprising for two reasons. Firstly, prior to the protests the HKSAR government had largely failed to address the social concerns of the citizens. The government's mindset is well captured by one of the rare interviews of CY Leung during the protests when he told the press discussing possible consequences of democratization:

You look at the meaning of the words ‘broadly representative,’ it’s not numeric representation. You have to take care of all the sectors in Hong Kong as much as you can, and if it’s entirely a numbers game and numeric representation, then obviously you would be talking to half of the people in Hong Kong who earn less than \$1,800 a month. Then you would end up with that kind of politics and policies.⁴⁰

In other words, CY Leung argued against democratic accountability of the Chief Executive to the people of Hong Kong because this would end up in policies that address the social concerns of the city’s poor. This statement not only demonstrates CY Leung’s lack of democratic sense of serving the people but also that he ignores the immense social problems of Hong Kong.

Secondly, the social concerns voiced in Mong Kok correspond to the direful living conditions of many Hong Kong citizens both from the lower and well-educated middle classes:

The most obvious challenge is housing (Wong *et al.*, 2004). Incredibly high rental fees leave thousands of people in very small and dirty rooms and shared apartments. Given these huge problems, it is no wonder that a moderate student activist called in an interview the housing problem “*one of the factors that caused many people to go to the streets*” and protest.⁴¹ This, however, is not even the worst: around 130,000 people in Hong Kong live in small cages. The owners of apartments pile up several cages upon each other and rent them out for approximately 500-600 Euro in Mong Kok.⁴² These cages often do not provide enough space for a grown person to sleep outstretched.⁴³ The incredibly high rental fees correspond to a lowering of the actual wages in Hong Kong (Lai *et al.*, 2013: 21). Apart from that, 320,000 migrant domestic workers live in Hong Kong under terrible living and working

conditions making up almost 5% of the city's population (Rühlig, 2015b).

While poverty generally affects all generations in Hong Kong, poverty among the elderly is of particular importance politically. In part, this is the result of the privatization of Hong Kong's welfare state in the last decades (Lee and Haque, 2006; Lee, 2012; Lee and Haque, 2008). Most importantly for the Umbrella Movement, poverty among the elderly also massively affects the young generation. According to a poll of the Hong Kong Transition Project at the Baptist University of the city, 23% of the young people regularly support their parents with up to 20% of their income while another 17% even spend between 20-60% to help them (Hong Kong Transition Project, 2013: 34). Most of the young people helping their parents are members of the middle class. Consequently, poverty among the elderly has significant effects on the young middle-class' income and prospects. Young people in Hong Kong who support their parents financially show higher degrees of dissatisfaction with both the HKSAR and the central government in Beijing (Hong Kong Transition Project, 2013: 71, 80, 85) and should be more likely to demonstrate and support the Umbrella Movement.

This situation has resulted in social claims raised by both moderates as well as radicals within the Umbrella Movement. Crucial in the context of this paper, all these demands call for Hong Kong's social self-determination though to different degrees. Not rejecting to cooperate with China in order to address social issues in the city, moderates claim that mainland influences have caused the existing problems. One example is the claim of a moderate young lecturer working at the Chinese University of Hong Kong:

The fear of the future matters a lot for the movement in Hong Kong especially with regard to rents. Hong Kong has been rated at the top

of the property prices; it is really crazy. Most of my friends worry about it.

*These problems have been discussed a lot on TV during the demonstrations. Compared to six or seven years ago the economy used to be more stable and the property prices weren't that high; the size of protest wasn't that great either. **But five years ago when the control mechanisms for Chinese money coming in became more relaxed, a lot of speculation grew regarding whether this money has brought up the prices of property increasing the costs of living.***⁴⁴

Furthermore, many moderates, mostly young, well-educated members of the middle class, fear the increasing competition with mainlanders for both jobs and educational positions. On a more aggregate level, the enormous economic growth of many mainland cities, especially the economic success of China's financial hub Shanghai, questions the role of Hong Kong as an Asian economic and financial powerhouse.

More radical Umbrella Movement activists do not limit their criticism to the influence of Chinese state intervention and competition but to the mainland people as well. One example is the accusation of mainlanders smuggling basic needs like milk powder and drugs from Hong Kong to the mainland:

*At the border is a lot of illegal trading of milk powder and drugs as well as daily necessities. This is very disrespectful to the people living [close to the border] in the northern district of Hong Kong. [...] This is an extremely remote area but with ten pharmacies on one road. There are many mainland people almost as many as in Mong Kok. It was unthinkable a few years ago. But now it is reality.*⁴⁵

Although not *all* mainlanders are criticized, activists do not only limit their accusations to illegal smugglers but to tourists as well. Many in Hong Kong believe that mainland tourists come to the city in order to buy food because of the better quality in Hong Kong compared to the mainland. Most importantly, they believe that all this has resulted in an increase in prices of basic everyday needs for the local population. These beliefs have caused radical activists to even attack tourists from the mainland, mostly in Mong Kok which is a popular tourist hot spot where many mainland tourists like to shop (Ip, 2015).⁴⁶

This goes along with the radicals rejecting any impact and influx from the mainland to Hong Kong. One major criticism is the “one-way permit” which allows 150 mainland citizens every day to settle permanently in the city. Radical critics argue that mainly poor mainlanders make use of the “one-way permit” exploiting and seriously harming Hong Kong’s social security system:

*These “new Hong Kongers” rob our resources. They say that they come to the city for the reunion of their families because some have relatives here. But this is not the case. [...] Since they are poor they don’t need to pay taxes but enjoy the welfare system of Hong Kong paid by Hong Kong’s taxpayers. [...] Many of them are not working; they are lazy and wait only for the government to give them money every month. [...] The Hong Kong government cannot defend us because China decides on all these issues.*⁴⁷

In sum, social issues played a very important role for the Umbrella Movement. Though moderates and radicals hold different views on whether and to what extent the PRC has generated social and economic challenges for the city, all seem to agree that China and mainlanders are causing social problems. Consequently, all hope for more economic and

social self-determination while the degrees to which activists are willing to cooperate with the PRC vary: moderates hope for help while radicals call for economic and social independence from the mainland.

3.3. Hong Kong's Identity

The Umbrella Movement's call for self-determination in the previously mentioned two dimensions goes along with the desire to preserve the city's unique culture, identity and characteristics in terms of its political and judicial system. This is a reaction to the general trend of a "mainlandization" in the city: statistical analysis demonstrates an overall though volatile trend changing the identities of the citizens of Hong Kong towards feeling more "Chinese" (Hong Kong Transition Project, 2013: 20; 2014: 16). This goes along with my interviewees' subjective perception of a creeping "mainlandization".⁴⁸

However, the overall trend contrasts with the fact that mainly young citizens hold a particular "Hong Kong identity". Hence, while older generations in particular turn more and more "Chinese", young people share a high sense of a "local Hong Kong identity". Significantly, the Umbrella Movement was shaped and dominated by young people forming the great majority of protesters.⁴⁹ In an interview an expert on civil society and protests told me:

I think after 1997 and especially increasingly after the Umbrella Movement, a heightened sense of "localism" is visible, especially among the younger generation. In fact, the question about political identity has been asked in many opinion polls. I think the majority of people, especially the ones who were born and have grown up in Hong Kong, do not consider themselves Chinese but Hong Kongese or Hong Kong-Chinese. [...] I think that Beijing's very heavy-handed measure and its increasing interventionism as well as the loss of the

*fight for democracy have actually pushed the people – especially the younger generation and the better educated – towards some form of localism. They say: “We don't want to have anything to do with this country, we don't identify anymore with this country.”*⁵⁰

Overall, Hong Kong's identity is complex but two main components are central. Firstly, Hong Kong people hold a high sense of fundamental human rights – especially the right to freedom of expression and speech, freedom of press, and the freedom of assembly and demonstrations – which were introduced (though not always respected) by the British. Many activists of the Umbrella Movement fear that a further “mainlandization” of Hong Kong would endanger this characteristic legacy of the city.⁵¹ This fear applies also to the city's judiciary independence and to the effective public bureaucracy which is believed to be largely clean of corruption.⁵²

Secondly, Hong Kong's identity is based on the city's language, Cantonese, in contrast to Mandarin. Cantonese is not just a southern Chinese dialect; being very different from Mandarin it is also written in traditional characters instead of the simplified Mandarin characters. This leads some Hong Kong activists to argue that Cantonese preserves the old Chinese culture much better than the mainland's Mandarin. This is often accompanied by the accusation that mainlanders have lost a sense of the Chinese heritage during the Cultural Revolution. Hence, Hong Kong's identity merges both the protection of fundamental human rights and democracy as well as the preservation of China's old traditional culture.⁵³

Although the Umbrella Movement as a whole holds the belief in a distinct and unique Hong Kong identity, differences with regard to its relation with the mainland is clearly visible between moderates and radicals.

Moderates feel that they are both Chinese and Hong Kongese. However, being Chinese is not equal to being a Hong Kong person and both parts – the Chinese and the Hong Kong one – need to be mentioned. Both components are compatible and interrelated but do not merge into one and the same:

I think I am Chinese too because I can be Chinese and a Hong Konger.⁵⁴

A middle position agrees that the Hong Kong identity is related to China but is explicitly critical of the mainland distinguishing Hong Kong from the rest of the PRC. While it does not reject Chinese influences on Hong Kong's identity it is skeptical towards the PRC and its citizens. This leads them to question whether Hong Kong would benefit from a democratization of China:

A few years ago, the situation was very different. We thought that if China is going to democratize, Hong Kong will profit from it as well. Therefore, Hong Kong supported the Chinese fighters and China's democratization. But now the people doubt whether changes in China will benefit Hong Kong as well. Why? In recent years the atmosphere among the mainland and the Hong Kong people became very tense. Therefore, many Hong Kong people believe that the democratization of China would provide the mainlanders with even more possibilities to voice their hatred against the city and would question Hong Kong's future and semi-autonomy.⁵⁵

However, the concerns over identity are most clearly visible when it comes to educational reform and language issues. Currently, new

teaching materials have become the subject of controversy in Hong Kong.⁵⁶ Even more importantly, two other protest movements directly engage with educational issues, namely the protest against the “national education” reform in 2012 that had to be withdrawn by the government after student protests and the plan to establish Mandarin as the medium of instruction in Hong Kong’s primary schools. On an individual level, many protesters of the Umbrella Movement support these two protest movements as well. A moderate student activist told me about the protests on “national education”:

This issue is extremely important. In 2012, the Hong Kong government tried to introduce the national education program. But the people were very reactive to this because they rejected the idea that students have to minister the rise of the national flag and that the students should express their emotions in their face. The government wanted them to feel very touched; therefore they released a guideline for students about how to behave and show their emotions. Many parents and students found it very hard to follow. [...] This is when I started my “protest career” too ...⁵⁷

In 2012, the student protests were successful and the “national education” reform was withdrawn. In the foreseeable future, the introduction of Mandarin as a medium of instruction in Hong Kong’s primary schools is expected to cause massive protests and might become the major “battlefield” in the city. Many Umbrella Movement activists care about the issue and fear that Mandarin might replace Cantonese in the whole city when it turns into the medium of instruction in schools. They worry about the cultural identity of their city which is closely related to Cantonese.⁵⁸

Finally, radicals not only agree to these skeptical perceptions of mainland Chinese influences but hold a purely Hong Kong identity which defines itself in contrast to China.⁵⁹ This leads a small though significant portion of activists to voice racist anti-Chinese sentiments:

The Hong Kong people worked very hard to build up this wonderful city and we need now to be the guard to preserve it. We should guard the core values, the rule of law and the language etc. We should be proud of Hong Kong. But there are many mainlanders who use the single way permit. China sends 150 people from the mainland every day to Hong Kong. I have to use a rude word here: they pollute the Hong Kong population. [...] A friend of mine lives in the north and told me that the mainlanders carrying their suitcases do not apologize when they step on somebody's feet because they are not respecting our rules and values.⁶⁰

While such racist perspectives voiced by a radical secondary school student who is still very young most likely do not represent the views of the majority of protesters, all protest factions seem to agree that the local Hong Kong identity is very important and that the city should be protected from too much Chinese interference into the local affairs. This is apparent especially with regard to educational and language issues. Also the emergence of nativist political parties signals the existence of this racist faction within the movement.⁶¹

Hence, the protest in its totality was to some extent an anti-CCP protest and in part also an anti-Chinese protest more generally. This includes daily discrimination of mainlanders living in Hong Kong.⁶² Different factions of the movement, though, hold different identities which reject the mainland to different degrees.

3.4. Hong Kong's Polity

The nativist or localist identity has also caused a number of calls for political and institutional autonomy from China. While some activists limit their demands to the implementation of the “one country, two systems” principle with an emphasis of the “two systems” part, others are in favor of complete independence.

All wings of the movement share dissatisfaction with the HKSAR government not serving the city's interests. Additionally, radicals argue that the Chinese government lacks legitimacy in general ever since 1949 when the People's Republic was founded. All this leads them to draw the most far-reaching conclusions openly favoring Hong Kong's independence from China:

Only after the 1960s, the mainland started to send a lot of cheap agricultural products to Hong Kong and then all the farms disappeared because of the low prices. All this is very sad. Now the food, the vegetables and the water are imported from the mainland. But we could rely on ourselves on these issues. [...] China wants us to depend on the mainland. Therefore they stopped plans to purify sea water into drinking water. China exports now a lot to Hong Kong to damage the local economy. This is the reason we fight for independence.⁶³

This opinion gained momentum in the public debate due to a book written by Chin Wan, a scholar from Lingnan University of Hong Kong. The book entitled “Hong Kong City State”⁶⁴ is well-known and available in all bookshops in the city (Chin, 2015).

Others do not voice such a clear vision for Hong Kong's future but make it clear that they perceive China as a colonizer which clearly implies that they do not accept the legitimacy of China's claim to sovereignty over the city either:

*China is like Britain, it is a colonizer, the only difference is Britain was definitely a kinder and a more civilized colonizer than China is today.*⁶⁵

Finally, moderates are unsatisfied with the HKSAR government as well and claim that the HKSAR government has turned into a sole information passer for Beijing instead of striving for Hong Kong's benefits, its autonomous rights guaranteed in the Basic Law and democratic self-determination.⁶⁶ However, moderates argue that the call for secession is unrealistic and worthless to be discussed. This does not imply a clear rejection of the idea of Hong Kong sovereignty:

*I think everything else is a phantasy. Right now, the people of Hong Kong are not ready of independence. Basically, independence is too imaginative to reach. I think for the moment I am happy to see Hong Kong developing under Chinese sovereignty with a very high degree of autonomy with most of the affairs being controlled by the people of Hong Kong rather than seeing our own jurisdiction being influenced by the Chinese government.*⁶⁷

In sum, while all supporters of the Umbrella Movement seem to agree that a higher degree of autonomy and self-determination in institutional terms is desirable, radicals call for independence while moderates emphasize the serious and precise implementation of the “one country, two systems” principle.

4. Assessment and Prediction

For most protesters, the Umbrella Movement has failed. In their eyes, the occupiers left the streets without concessions from the government

and the general public's sympathy for the movement faded because the protests lasted too long.⁶⁸ Moreover, many activists believe that the protests demonstrated the marginality of their bargaining leverage because the final decisions are not made in Hong Kong but in Beijing.

Although it is true that the government refused to make any concessions⁶⁹ the results of the Umbrella Movement are much more mixed and ambivalent as to call them a failure. I argue that this holds true in two regards. Firstly, one needs to consider the development in all four dimensions of self-determination that the protesters have aimed at. Secondly, even in the area of electoral reform where the demonstrators believe they failed, the outcome of the Umbrella Movement is better than one might believe in the first place.

4.1. A Democratic Future for Hong Kong?

Neither upon the end of the Umbrella Movement in December 2014 nor until the final voting of the Legislative Council on the reform bill on 18 June 2015 was a compromise reached.⁷⁰ For coming into effect the bill would have needed a two-thirds majority in the Legislative Council. However, since pan-democratic legislators possess a blocking minority the reform package failed as expected prior to the voting.⁷¹ The final result even turned into a disaster for the pro-Beijing parties because out of confusion many of the pro-Beijing lawmakers left the plenary prior to the voting hoping that the quorum needed for a legally valid decision would be missed and the ballot repeated.⁷² However, due to a lack of coordination the quorum was met and the reform bill did not only miss a two-thirds majority as expected but a bare majority with 8 in favor of Beijing's reform proposal and 28 against it.⁷³ The Umbrella Movement's core request, namely to prevent the bill and with it "fake democracy", was achieved months after the occupiers had left the streets.

While most protesters did not celebrate this as their victory some recognize that at least the unity of the pan-democratic members of parliament can be perceived as a result of the Umbrella Movement because many feared to lose their voters' support if they "betrayed" the Umbrella Movement:

I think it is a victory in the history of China because a local government has rejected a major bill proposed by the central government. This is a success in Chinese history but not for me. [...] The students suffered a lot during the revolution: they got pepper sprayed and beaten up. The [pan-democratic] legislators just could not vote in favor of the bill now. It is impossible. At least we can force our lawmakers to do something.⁷⁴

There are three reasons why many demonstrators do not see the result in the Legislative Council as their success. Firstly, the voting took place months after the end of the Umbrella Movement. They left the streets without an immediate result which has caused their feeling of failure (Ng, 2016). Secondly, most protesters do not feel closely associated with the pan-democratic parties. Hence, what the parties achieve in "high politics" is not recognized as a result of the Umbrella Movement. Thirdly, while the government's bill was prevented, the existing law stays in place: the next Chief Executive is voted upon by the Election Committee. Hence, while "fake democracy" was prevented, the protesters did not receive "true democracy" but the previous non-democratic procedure stays in place:

Of course, the voting in the Legislative Council was a pleasure for the opposition. However, after a few days they realized that they did not

*achieve anything. They refused the electoral reform and Beijing's proposal has failed once and for all. This is no concrete step towards the democratization of Hong Kong.*⁷⁵

The crucial question now is whether there will be another reform process in the not too distant future. One scenario would be that the Beijing and the HKSAR governments do not offer any other reform package to the pro-democratic camp (Hui, 2014). At first glance this might be realistic since both want to prevent real democracy in Hong Kong.⁷⁶ Furthermore, this would be consistent with what they said prior to the Legislative Council voting.⁷⁷

However, there are four reasons that make me consider this scenario rather unlikely.

Firstly, the Hong Kong people have voiced their protest over and over again (Cheng, 2011). The PRC obviously tried to avoid a crackdown of the movement. But it should be fully aware that the next protest is only a matter of time. Hence, Beijing is well-advised if it prepares a new reform proposal to reach compromise with the Hong Kong people, especially its youth.

Secondly, China has repeatedly promised a process of democratization. By starting the last reform process it has acknowledged the need of change. Given the obvious dissatisfaction of the Hong Kong citizens with the status quo it is unlikely that the PRC can completely retract from the recognition of the need for political reform. In late July 2016, a leading CCP official on Hong Kong and Macau affairs for the first time announced further political reform though he did not indicate any timetable or what kind of reforms the CCP intended to offer. Furthermore, the Basic Law clearly states that the election of the Chief Executive by universal suffrage is the ultimate goal. Though not setting any timetable, Beijing would harm the future of the city if it breaks the

Basic Law because trust in Hong Kong's effective rule of law has always remained a locational advantage.⁷⁸

Thirdly, not only pan-democrats but also the pro-Beijing parties are rather fragmented. As a result, CY Leung received only 689 out of the 1,200 votes in the last Chief Executive elections in 2012. In 2017, the pro-democratic camp has gained a record number of seats (326) within the Election Committee. Since the pro-Beijing camp nominated with Carrie Lam (林鄭月娥) and John Tsang (曾俊華) two candidates with realistic chances to become Chief Executive, the pro-democratic votes, constituting more than a quarter of the total committee, had become relevant. Indeed, John Tsang actively lobbied for the pro-democratic votes and offered a "more local" political agenda. Already before, CY Leung announced that he would not seek reelection. It is very likely that the Chinese central government signaled to him that he was too controversial in Hong Kong to get Beijing's continued support. All this shows the increased political leverage of the pro-democratic forces in Hong Kong.

Fourthly, there is still enough room for compromise. A number of partly rather complex compromise proposals have been tabled prior and after the Umbrella Movement. Although they have not been successful in the past, their existence has clearly mapped out space for compromise. Additionally, there will be new suggestions in the future. One possible compromise may be found in a concordance democratic approach which sets up a framework that requires both pro-Beijing and pan-democratic parties to agree upon a list of candidates running for the post as Chief Executive in general elections held by universal suffrage (Ng *et al.*, 2015). The democratization and enlargement of the Nomination Committee would be another option to solve the crisis of reform (see above).

Hence, by contributing to the rejection of Beijing's reform proposal and highlighting the Hong Kong people's demand for democratization, the Umbrella Movement might have indeed achieved a partial success in the medium term with regard to electoral democratic reform.

However, the Umbrella Movement's call for civil nomination is very unlikely to be met. Hence, moderates have much more to expect from the coming reforms. It is very likely that the radicals will remain unsatisfied. Furthermore, if moderates compromise with Beijing on electoral reform, the political forces supporting the Umbrella Movement might split seriously weakening the pro-democratic camp in the long run.

4.2. Social Justice for Hong Kong?

Since the Umbrella Movement has not formulated any explicit goal with regard to social issues and welfare policies, it is difficult to exactly find out what the movement might have achieved or will achieve in the near future. However, there is good reason to believe that the Umbrella Movement has caused a heightened awareness among the city's political elite for the concerns and challenges of the young, the poor and the middle classes fearing socioeconomic decline:

The students have spoken about the concerns of many people who used to have no voice in Hong Kong politics, especially with regard to social issues. All of a sudden, these issues were debated much more among the city's public and that has not changed ever since.

The perception of Hong Kong's challenges has changed among many but not all politicians. This holds true for both the pro-Beijing and pan-democratic lawmakers.

After the electoral reform had failed, the Chief Executive announced that this was regrettable but now the government has to and will focus

*on social and economic issues. One might argue that this is populist and that he tried to weaken the opposition with this announcement. However, nobody can deny that the city faces many social and economic challenges which a government has to address. The opposition agrees to this as well and admits that it has a certain responsibility given its blocking minority too. After the voting in the Legislative Council, I talked to an opposition leader and she told me: "If the Chief Executive will claim successes on economic and social issues for the government, we will agree. Most important is that we start to seriously address these problems." I think we will see cooperation between the government and the opposition on these issues and I am very optimistic that this will lead to positive results for Hong Kong.*⁷⁹

Hence, the Umbrella Movement most likely had a significant impact on future social policies in Hong Kong. However, there is only hope but no certainty for fundamental policy change because while the central government seems to support a changed welfare policy, it is closely allied with Hong Kong's capitalist business elite which has a strong interest in a weak welfare state.⁸⁰ Beijing has shown flexibility both in China and in Hong Kong when it comes to economic reforms in the past. When Hong Kong suffered from the Asian Financial Crisis and the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), a demonstration of 500,000 people shocked Beijing in 2003.⁸¹ It reacted by increasing economic ties between Hong Kong and the mainland that favored mainly the city's economy. However, while Beijing's last attempt was successful economically, many supporters of the Umbrella Movement reject an increasing economic dependence on the PRC. Hence, if China's economic engagement becomes too obvious, the central government may risk further anti-Chinese protests.

In essence, while there is at least hope to see social concerns addressed in the coming years, Hong Kong's economic and social dependence on China will rise. While the first is a success of the Umbrella Movement, the latter contradicts what many demonstrators are hoping for.

4.3. Hong Kong's Identity – Chinese or Not?

Throughout the Umbrella protests, Hong Kong has remained a divided city. This holds true for the identity issue as well. The protesters' sense of localism has been strengthened but there is no reason to believe that supporters of the pro-Beijing camp have changed their affiliation. All in all, the Umbrella Movement has both boosted the young people's sense of localism and at the same time polarized the city as a whole.⁸²

Since mostly young people support the Umbrella Movement and hold a "local" identity, the CCP's goal to establish a patriotic Chinese identity seems even more unlikely to achieve than ever before. The "mainlandization" of the city will go on because economic ties with the PRC increase and more and more people from the mainland move to Hong Kong. However, this "mainlandization" seems to cause a polarization of the city and since Hong Kong will remain unique for quite some time to come, the full cultural and ideational integration of the city into the PRC is not foreseeable (yet). This situation leaves the people of Hong Kong in a dilemma:

Culturally, the citizens of Hong Kong don't want to admit that China is superior because we still have some kind of embedded cultural gap between Hong Kong and China. We think that some of China's behavior is not as civilized as Hong Kong's. When you realize that China becomes more and more popular, you try to set up barriers and

impede this trend. This is one reason why nativism is getting more popular these days.

But we realize that we can't push away China economically anymore because China brings a lot of opportunities to us. Hong Kong is somehow trapped in this mindset now. We rely too much on China. More and more nativist scholars argue that Hong Kong has traditionally been a port. We should make use of these strategic advantages to connect with different parts of the world rather than embracing China. I am not saying we should not embrace China but apart from that we could encounter other countries as well. Sadly, Hong Kong lost this momentum after the hand-over.⁸³

All in all, the city's economic dependence contrasts with its cultural desire for self-determination and autonomy. More conflicts including protests are very likely to emerge in the near future. The question whether Mandarin should replace Cantonese as the medium of instruction in primary schools will become the next battlefield between young protesters with Scholarism at its core and the HKSAR and central governments. Beyond the language issue many incidents are now framed in terms of the divide between the mainland and Hong Kong (e.g. the appointment of new professors in Hong Kong's universities).⁸⁴

The Umbrella Movement is over but part of its legacy is the further polarization of the city and an increased awareness of localism that will lead to more protests in the coming years. In this respect, the Umbrella Movement is rather the continuation of a struggle for Hong Kong's identity which includes both progressive movements which engage with the city's past and do not define themselves as anti-Chinese and those who aim at only distinguishing themselves from the mainlanders (Chan, 2015; Chen and Szeto, 2015; Hui and Lau, 2015; Ip, 2015). How the city develops in terms of its collective identity and cultural distinctiveness

remains completely open. The Umbrella Movement has demonstrated the frictions but has pointed out neither any solutions nor how Beijing will handle the issue in the future.

4.4. Hong Kong – Politically Autonomous?

Institutionally, the Umbrella Movement has not achieved anything and it is very unlikely to succeed in the foreseeable future. The central government in Beijing fears that providing Hong Kong with more autonomous rights could encourage other unsatisfied people in other regions of the People's Republic to intensify their efforts. Hence, China is not only concerned about the city but of setting an example for conflicts with minorities in Tibet and Xinjiang or even local protests in other provinces, most importantly the demonstrations in the southern province of Guangdong.⁸⁵

Consequently, the central leadership in Beijing is concerned about the situation in Hong Kong and its possible impacts on the rest of the country. Not only is secession of the city unthinkable but also more autonomous rights would contradict the governance style of the CCP. Back in 2003 when 500,000 people hit the streets, China reacted with a double strategy. Firstly, it provided economic assistance to Hong Kong in order to help it overcome its economic difficulties, for example by easing the influx of mainland tourists who have visited Hong Kong ever since in order to shop⁸⁶ or concluding the free trade agreement CEPA (Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement) which is widely perceived as mostly serving the economic interests of Hong Kong instead of the mainland (Antkiewicz and Whalley, 2011). This has driven Hong Kong closer to the mainland and demonstrates the great economic potential of cooperation for Hong Kong (Jacques, 2014), but many young Hong Kong Umbrella Movement activists reject it.

Secondly, China tightened its control over the city basically reinterpreting the “one country, two systems” principle.⁸⁷ It would be a major surprise if the PRC would react with a loosening of control over Hong Kong after the Umbrella Movement. On the contrary, a loss of political autonomy will most likely be the result of the Umbrella Movement because Beijing’s concerns have grown.

All in all, with regard to the political autonomy of the city, the Umbrella Movement has been an outright failure. As long as the CCP stays in power and the PRC is not in serious troubles, independence of Hong Kong is beyond reach. Moreover, the anti-Chinese protests in the city have made more autonomy under the “one country, two systems” principle less likely.

In sum, the Umbrella Movement has not been a complete failure measured by the results and developments that are most likely about to emerge in the near future. Compromise on electoral reform is possible and may satisfy the moderates of the Umbrella Movement. A heightened awareness of social issues might lead the HKSAR and central governments to address the issues. However, this may result in an increased economic dependence on the mainland which is rejected by many protesters. In terms of the city’s identity, the Umbrella Movement has neither failed nor been successful but has polarized Hong Kong. Only in terms of political autonomy, the Umbrella Movement has resulted in a complete failure since it has made an increase of Hong Kong’s autonomy less likely.

4.5. The Future of the Umbrella Movement

The Umbrella Movement has been the most important pro-democracy demonstration on Chinese soil ever since the crackdown of Tiananmen in June 1989. In all these years, no major protests against the central government and demand for changing the political system have been

seen in the mainland. The CCP's violent crackdown of the student protests in 1989 is only one reason for the absence of protests in the mainland: scientific analysis has demonstrated that the people in the PRC are rather satisfied with their government (Gilley, 2006). Will China succeed in appeasing the city of Hong Kong like it did in the last 25 years with the whole country?

Probably not. Hong Kong's political and societal systems are more open and China will not be able to carry out repressive means as it did in the mainland. But more importantly, the city of Hong Kong is in relative decline. In contrast to the PRC which has witnessed not only a rise of its international importance but also an unprecedented increase of prosperity and the people's welfare, Hong Kong will most likely not experience such a "golden era" in the next decade (Lagerkvist and Rühlig, 2016).

Hong Kong remains culturally, economically, politically and socially very different from the rest of the PRC. This is, however, also a reason to worry because given limited knowledge of the local situation in Hong Kong both policy-makers and their advisors may take decisions in Beijing on questionable grounds.⁸⁸ The local HKSAR government, in turn, largely depends on the decisions made in Beijing. Hence, it is questionable whether the CCP's decisions on Hong Kong meet the conditions on the ground as adequately as they have in the mainland throughout the last two and a half decades.

Hong Kong's challenges are not solved. While frustration is visible throughout the Umbrella Movement protesters now, more demonstrators are very likely to emerge in the future. This might not be a matter of months but a few years. The Umbrella Movement protesters are young and they will hit the streets again. One moderate student activist who claims to be very frustrated about the movement's failure told me for example:

I would definitely join a new protest movement. Expressing my attitude and doing something impossible to make it possible is important. Moreover, I think that the Hong Kong people don't really deserve democracy yet. I think if you want democracy you really have to deserve it by means of ideological struggles and revolution.⁸⁹

Apart from the perception of failure, many in the city believe that the Umbrella Movement has been a “formative” event for the city’s youth (Dapiran, 2014). A foreign journalist living in Hong Kong for many years told me:

It gave me a lot of respect for Hong Kong's young people. I think a lot of people underestimated them. They can be very passive and interested in shopping and video games and then they don't do anything else. Not for the small group of activists but for the average young person, they really changed everyone's attitude about who they are and what they are interested in and that gave them a bit of an identity as well. It feels very Hong Kong now. [...] They are born after the British left Hong Kong, they don't feel Chinese, and they didn't know who they are. Until the Umbrella Movement, they did not care too much about it. Now they started to feel that they are Hong Kong.⁹⁰

Furthermore, the young protesters have experienced their potential of mobilization and that they are not alone being unsatisfied with the situation of Hong Kong.

However, the movement has laid open a generational gap. While the majority of Hong Kong’s older generation did not support the movement, most young people did (Lagerkvist and Rühlig, 2016). This resulted in major distrust between the generations, often dividing families.⁹¹

The movement is highly diverse and contains many different factions and organizations which agree on neither protest tactics nor goals. Furthermore, the pan-democratic parties and well-established pro-democratic civil society organizations have existed for many years, known each other personally very well but are disunited over the last decade.

Surprisingly, though, the Legislative Council elections in September 2016 as well as the coordination for the Chief Executive elections in 2017 demonstrate a remarkable degree of cooperation among the different factions of the pro-democracy movement regardless of all rhetorical distancing and divisions.⁹² Most striking was the successful coordination of votes in the Legislative Council elections on the basis of online deliberation facilitated by Benny Tai.⁹³

At the same time, the Umbrella Movement lacked a clear structure and leadership. Pan-democratic lawmakers as well as the “Occupy Trio” including Benny Tai had only very little influence on students and are not perceived as representing the movement. More important were the student leaders themselves, most prominently Joshua Wong and Alex Chow (周永康). However, both are not unchallenged leaders either: Joshua Wong’s organization Scholarism faces the accusation of not being democratic internally.⁹⁴ The Hong Kong Federation of Students, headed during the Umbrella Movement by Alex Chow, is about to fall apart.⁹⁵ The lack of widely accepted leadership has been a problem during the movement and it will continue to be in the future. The first Umbrella Movement activists have become politicians and were elected into Hong Kong’s parliament in September 2016 (e.g. Demosistō’s Nathan Law⁹⁶). It remains to be seen whether they can sustain political support of the electorate.

Clearly, with the recent gain of influence of the pro-democratic forces with the Legislative Council elections and the Chief Executive Election Committee, the movement faces a new challenge. As long as they were completely marginalized they agreed upon what they aimed to prevent from happening. The more political leeway they have the more they need to agree upon how to positively shape Hong Kong and how much to compromise with moderate pro-Beijing forces. Therefore, as remarkable as the current unity is, it remains endangered.

Finally, Hong Kong's economic dependence on China is rising. In this situation, the economic elite of the city is most likely to continue its support for the pro-Beijing forces which seriously limits any prospects for major reform in Hong Kong.⁹⁷

From the perspective of Beijing, the short-term handling of the protests was rather successful. The HKSAR and central governments avoided a violent crackdown similar to 1989 but waited without offering compromise until the protesters got frustrated and exhausted of staying on the streets. However, the challenges have not been solved and Beijing is well-advised to offer compromises especially with regard to electoral reform and the nomination of the city's Chief Executive. This would address parts of the protests' root causes and satisfy moderates at least partly.

Apart from these Hong Kong-related considerations, the future of the city largely depends on domestic developments in the whole of China. The PRC is most likely to face economic problems in the coming years questioning the output legitimacy of CCP-rule. There are clear signs that the administration of Xi Jinping (习近平) will make use of nationalism to replace output legitimacy to an increasing extent compared to previous decades (Lam, 2015). Nationalist rhetoric and emphasis of the "one China" principle could include a tougher stance towards all regions which seem to challenge CCP rule or even the unity

of the country including Tibet, Xinjiang and Hong Kong. Consequently, Hong Kong's future may be influenced by developments in these other regions as well. Furthermore, Xi Jinping's leadership style, portraying himself as a strong and uncompromising leader (*ibid.*), as well as the skeptical societal perception of Hong Kong in the mainland may worsen the city's hopes for a more self-determined future:

What is honestly worrisome is the lack of trust on the people's level. We know from international relations that the governments of China and the United States don't trust each other a lot. But at the lower level, the Chinese and the American people treat each other very friendly. We may see a lot of arguments among ordinary citizens as well, especially online. But if Chinese travel to the United States they are warmly welcomed and Americans going to China will receive the great Chinese hospitality. This is completely different with the mainland and Hong Kong. Even the ordinary people distrust each other.⁹⁸

Notes

- + This paper is based on a previous version published with the Swedish Institute of International Affairs.
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 79. Author’s interview with a leading European diplomat, Hong Kong, 17 July 2015 (translation: T.R.).
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90. Author's interview with an international journalist based for many years in Hong Kong, Hong Kong, 15 July 2015.
91. Author's interviews with a young Mong Kok activist, Hong Kong, 15 July 2015, a moderate HKU student activist, Hong Kong, 23 July 2015, and a radical secondary school student, Hong Kong, 19 July 2015.

92. Many interviews carried out with many protesters in 2015 and 2016 reveal this. Furthermore, it has been an explicit subject of an interview with Alex Chow, Hong Kong, 8 September 2016.
93. Author's interview with Benny Tai, Hong Kong, 7 September 2016, but also interviews with other protestors who based their voting decision on the online deliberation, Hong Kong, September 2016.
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