Chapter 11

Democracy Movement and Alternative Knowledge in Hong Kong

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Introduction: Trial and Alternative Knowledge

I was supposed to write this book chapter in the fall of 2018 after attending the Heidelberg Seminar. The writing plan was disrupted by a trial in which I stood as the second defendant together with eight activists identified by the prosecutor as the leaders of the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong in 2014. We were accused of committing crimes related to conspiracy and incitement to cause public nuisance. After several rounds of pretrial hearings, the formal trial took place in December 2018 and lasted for three weeks. The “event” attracted enormous attentions from local and international media. Hundreds of citizens went to the court to hear the trial and chant slogans of support outside the courthouse. The trial’s highlights were my testimony, the submission by the first defendant who was a law professor, and the mitigation speech by the third defendant who was a retired pastor. There were tears and laughter among the audience. At the end, the first defendant and I were sentenced to 16 months of imprisonment and the other two sentenced to eight months. I was unable to write this book chapter until I was released in the spring of 2020.

During the trial, I found that the courtroom became a public space to contest for different interpretations of history. The prosecutor believed that the prolonged blockage of some major avenues during the 79-day occupation was caused by the defendants’ provocative speeches, whereas the defendants argued that it was Beijing’s denial of *universal suffrage* that triggered the whole saga. The defense lawyers also summoned a respectable professor to prove that the unnecessary use of tear gas against peaceful demonstrators was a more prominent factor in bringing hundreds of thousands of citizens to the protest, according to the polls his team conducted. A documentary film was also shown in the court for the first time, revealing how young protesters made their own decisions to occupy while refusing to

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identify some of the senior defendants as their leaders. The court debates, broadcast through news and social media, aroused unprecedented reflections on the movement. People accused the government of scapegoating the defendants and reiterated their free will in joining the protest. Compared to the extremely depressing mood in the movement's aftermath, the trial uplifted the movement's spirits by once again making the issues of democracy and civil disobedience the focus of public agenda. Alternative knowledge, that is, facts and interpretations of social reality beyond official prescriptions, such as polls conducted by independent scholars and documentaries made by independent directors, was disseminated through the court as a contested space. This is why the judicial process is deemed a part of the struggle in civil disobedience, as it provides a stage for the participants to explain their causes to the public. In the historical trials of Gandhi and Mandela, the court provided a most dramatized context that critiques the status quo and in which alternative visions of society are effectively communicated to the people when their emotions are provoked.

My aim in this chapter is then to discuss the production and dissemination of alternative knowledge by social actions, using the mobilization of the Umbrella Movement from March 2013 to September 2014 as an example. I focus my discussion on the *deliberation days* and the civil referendum conducted by the organizing team of the Occupy Central with Love and Peace (OCLP) movement led by the Occupy Trio, two professors and one retired pastor who later became the first three defendants in the Umbrella Movement Trial. Readers need to be forewarned that the author of this chapter is also a key player in this case. Although the involvement provided insider information and sympathetic understanding of the movement actors, constant reflections and cross references of alternative interpretations are needed to maintain scientific integrity.

Production and Dissemination of Knowledge in Social Movement

Civil society as a structure of self-organization plays a critical role in holding the state accountable to the will of the people. In order to do so, civil society members need to control state policies from the viewpoint of their consistency with the "socially constitutive value systems" (Frentzel-Zagorska, 1990, p. 760). They must also exercise self-defense in cases when this consistency is violated. But how does a society develop its socially constitutive values systems? Frentzel-Zagorska argued that it is initially through the elaboration of these normative structures that group identities and interest are defined. For example, workers could develop a sense of belonging to a certain industry and understand the importance of labor rights through joining a trade union. Upon this social base, an encompassing collective identity will develop to provide definition of its traditions, its hierarchy, and norms of social behavior.

Adopting this analytical schema assumes a certain degree of free communication within and across social groups. Unofficial or alternative information and perspectives are also available for civil society to check state policies' consistency with the socially constitutive value systems. In a more mature and responsible civil society, social groups will also propose alternative policies. In view of this, production and dissemination of alternative knowledge through civil society is an issue deserving scholarly attentions. Authors of the scanty studies in this area have found that unlike Frentzel-Zagorska's schematic development, the relationship between knowledge formation and self-defense is more complex. Very often, people only pay attention to social issues when their emotions are duly aroused. Intuition or elusive moral sense plays a significant role in making initial response to an emergent controversy in society. Acquisition of information and reflections on personal values will become more intense only after people are drawn into the social movement.

In his classic study of learning in informal education, Griff Foley (1999) found that "some of the most powerful learning occurs as people struggle against oppression, as they struggle to make sense of what is happening to them and to work out ways of doing something about it" (pp. 1–2). From a Gramscian perspective, Foley maintained that the unlearning of "dominant discourses" and the learning of "resistant discourses" is central to this learning. For Foucault, discourses are about "what can be said and thought, but also about who can speak, when, and with what authority" (Ball, 1990, p. 2 as cited in Foley, 1999, p. 15). In view of this, Foley's task of "unlearning" comprises the debunking of ideology justifying the existing arrangements of the distributions of power and resources. The "learning" thus refers to the acquisition of alternative or *counter-knowledge* (against the status quo) produced and disseminated through social actions.

With his case study (1999), Foley revealed that these unlearning and learning processes could be very painful. Those experiencing them were often disillusioned about expertise when professionals could offer no technical solutions (see also Heifetz, 1994). They also found that state officials did not always act to protect public interest. When they were finally fed up with the bureaucracy's idiosyncratic mode of tackling public issues, they decided to take things in their own hands. This awakening enabled people "to make sense of, and act on, their environment, and to come to understand themselves as knowledge-creating, acting beings" (Foley, 1999, p. 64). But this is only the beginning of another painful journey of working with fellow citizens without standard procedures and absolute authority. In response, social movement organizations and leadership attempt to give a more durable and predictable order to the definition of the situation and formulation of actions (Melucci, 1988).

Following this vein of argument, Donatella della Porta and Elena Pavan (2017) suggested that social movement provides "repertoires of knowledge practices" (p. 300), meaning the set of organizational practices that foster the coordination of disconnected, local, and highly personal experiences and rationalities within a *shared cognitive system* from which movements and their supporters can draw a common orientation for making claims and acting collectively to produce political and cultural change. Della Porta and Pavan named this cognitive system an

“alternative epistemology” that produces “counter-knowledge” (p. 298). Citing Gramsci (1971), they called this “good sense” (p. 298), in other words, knowledge derived from “the popular practice” (p. 298) in everyday life, in contrast to “common sense” (p. 298) that crystallized the hegemonic system of social relationship.

In past studies of social movement, scholars either paid too much attention to resources and organization (old social movements such as labor movements) or value and identity (new social movements such as environmental and feminine movements) while neglecting that it is also a process of knowledge creation, through which “alternative political imaginaries and theories about how to actualize these imagined possibilities” (Chesters, 2012, p. 147) are collectively identified. But in their study about framing, David Snow and Robert Benford (1988) already pointed out the importance of the alignment between the frame and social reality. They define framing as assigning meaning to and interpreting relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists. One of the core framing tasks is diagnostic framing, in other words, the identification of a problem and the attribution of blame or causality. In order to effectively perform this framing, movement organizers must take into account its empirical credibility, meaning the fit between the framing and events in the world, such as giving evidence when claiming that we are in the midst of the global wave of democracy. Snow and Benford also discussed the idea of experiential commensurability, that is, whether the solutions the movement suggests really harmonize with the ways those affected have experienced the situations. For example, it would be foolish to treat democracy as a panacea to economic crisis when many Western democracies have been struggling with austerity since the 2008 financial crisis. Those engaging in these discussions demonstrated that social movement organizations need to produce a set of creditable knowledge with which one could identify the problematic situation, the cause of injustice, and the possibility of change. This set of knowledge will be challenged by experts and authorities from the establishment as well as critics in public sphere.

Due to the lack of resources, the alternative knowledge produced by social movement is often represented in the forms of testimony and storytelling rather than with systematized data (Esteves, 2008 cited by della Porta & Pavan, 2017). Their strength is to provide a thick description of counter examples to challenge the domination discourses or common sense. This knowledge is spatially and temporally grounded and is also an expression of actors’ reflexivity and accountable to the places they aim to affect (Eyerma & Jamison, 1991, p. 52). In some cases, however, movement activists would engage with existing scientific knowledge with different degrees of criticism, addressing controversies in different academic fields or creating professional counter-expertise that becomes a resource for academic and political debates. In the latter situation, academic and professionals play a significant role in altering the power imbalance in the production of knowledge by bridging the gap between activists and experts in the field (della Porta & Pavan, 2017).

One of the most outstanding cases of the production of counter-expertise is the campaign against global warming. Political elites such as Al Gore and experts in academia and industry are also involved. They need to debate with experts from the

traditional energy sector as well as with political figures and parties supporting the firms and workers in this sector. Actors have conducted research to uncover the hidden injuries of nature and people due to flood and drought originated from global warming. They have held international forums and signed treaties to raise consciousness and reach agreement on reducing carbon emission. Although some activists criticize that the campaign actors have aimed at the development of green business while neglecting fundamental changes in economic development and lifestyle, these actors have demonstrated the possibility of social movement to produce alternative knowledge on a global scale and make climate change knowledge a field of contention (Jamison, 2010).

In this chapter, I will discuss the mobilization process of the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong as a case to show how social movement produces and disseminates alternative knowledge. In particular, I will analyze how the movement impacted public agenda setting, contested the interpretation of constitution and initiated an alternative reform proposal. Klandermans (1992) argues that an issue can spark protest only if interested actors gain access to public discourse. Although public attention is a scarce resource, how to mobilize public attention to the concerned issue is the first task a social movement needs to consider. The Umbrella Movement was successful in changing the public agenda through numerous creative actions, including organizing a series of deliberation days. The movement used social media to compete with mainstream news media to disseminate alternative interpretations of the Basic Law, the mini constitution of Hong Kong, particularly regarding the meaning of universal suffrage. It also used deliberation days and the civil referendum to mobilize a popular initiative in submitting constitutional reform proposals. Besides massive mobilization, scholars and professionals were involved in debating with progovernment experts and facilitating online and offline platforms to develop alternative knowledge and policy proposals. Though movement organizers struggled to handle tensions coming from both external and internal divisions, they appreciated the liberating experience of subjectivity through producing alternatives in the face of hegemonic discourse.

Agenda Setting and Alternative Interpretations of the Constitution

The Umbrella Movement was a prodemocracy protest in a form of occupying some main streets in the central business district (CBD) of Hong Kong. It lasted from September 28 to December 15, 2014, following a student strike in late September 2014 due to Beijing's decision to impose severe restrictions on the election of the Chief Executive (CE) of Hong Kong. However, preparations for the demonstration had been in the works since March 2013 by OCLP, a movement led by law professor Benny Tai, retired pastor Yiu-ming Chu, and myself, the author of this chapter, who the media collectively dubbed the Occupy Trio. Under the Occupy Trio, an

organizing committee was established with representatives from different oppositional parties and civil society organizations. Various functional groups for matters related to media and communication, fund-raising, social actions, deliberation days, and the civil referendum were formed. Hundreds of volunteers were involved, including scholars, IT experts, mediators, media experts, and film makers, among others.

The movement's aim was to fight for universal suffrage for the election of the CE of Hong Kong. Beijing had already promised to implement universal suffrage according to Article 45 of the Basic Law, the mini constitution of Hong Kong, in 2017. Any constitutional reform proposal, however, must be initiated by the CE and approved by Beijing before it can be submitted to the Legislative Council of Hong Kong for approval by two thirds of the council members. The approved bill will be then vetted by the CE and Beijing before becoming law. As the reform will fundamentally change the political system of Hong Kong and involve complex legislative processes, OCLP suggested that the government should conduct a public consultation as soon as possible so that a reform proposal could be submitted to Beijing for vetting in 2014 and for further approval by different authorities in 2015.

As Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz (1962) have argued, agenda setting is a hidden face of power that the dominant groups exercise to preempt policy suggestions with potential threat to the status quo. In other words, the regime reduces the visibility of certain policy issues by avoidance and inaction. On the contrary, public attentions will be stirred up when issues are placed on the public agenda, such as being mentioned in presidential policy addresses, discussed in government cabinet or parliamentary committees, or debated in public hearings, and so forth. In view of this, a regime's responsiveness is always selective and biased. Unless civil society is able to contest with the dominant groups in terms of agenda setting, the regime tends to set policy priority according to the preferences of its keen supporters, if not its own organizational interests. Social movement, however, could impact on public agenda setting by creating "repertoires of knowledge practices" (della Porta & Pavan, 2017, p. 300) to mobilize public attentions. OCLP was the set of organizational practices whose utilizers foster the coordination of disconnected views within a shared cognitive framework. Its use also provided a common orientation for making claims and acting collectively to produce political change.

The OCLP held its first press conference in a small but elegant church on March 27, 2013. The set was deliberately chosen, as the serene atmosphere helped send the message of "love and peace." The Occupy Trio's professional backgrounds as scholar and clergyman, widely respected in the community, also helped build the integrity of the movement as nonpartisan and public serving. Against this backdrop, the trio made a polemic claim that any election method of the CE election should be open and fair and that the word universal suffrage stipulated in the Basic Law must be interpreted according to *international standards*. If the government refused to abide by these standards, the movement would resort to civil disobedience, that is, occupying the CBD.

C.Y. Leung, then CE of the Hong Kong government, rejected OCLP's suggestion of holding public consultation on constitutional reform, as he believed that

livelihood issues such as housing should be given top priority in the public agenda. This avoidance strategy did not work, as a retired senior Chinese official responsible for Hong Kong and Macau affairs decided to respond. He maintained that only “patriotic” persons should be allowed to run the CE election and also named two major opposition leaders as examples of unqualified candidates. He then argued that the meaning of universal suffrage should be understood in the context of the Basic Law instead of any international standards. Ironically, these exchanges of words immediately sparked public debates on the urgency of constitutional reforms and the meanings of universal suffrage. The media extensively covered the controversial idea of civil obedience, that is, peaceful but unlawful protest, proposed by these seemingly moderate figures including a law professor. Vowing that they were prepared to shoulder the legal consequences including imprisonment, the Trio successfully mobilized public attentions by dramatizing the urgency of constitutional reforms. They were also able to attract incessant media coverage by holding varying types of innovative events.

Regardless of the government’s refusal to hold public consultation, OCLP immediately organized a series of deliberation days (D-Day) to gather people’s views on the coming constitutional reform. Deeply influenced by Jürgen Habermas’s theory of the public sphere and deliberative democracy, as well as the idea of deliberation day advocated by Bruce Ackerman and James S. Fishkin (2004), OCLP’s D-Day encouraged citizens to discuss matters related to constitutional reform in a fair and rational manner. The subjects discussed included the importance of democracy to Hong Kong, movement strategies, and a specific reform proposal.

The first deliberation day (D-Day 1) was held in Hong Kong University on June 9, 2013 with around 700 participants coming from different opposition parties and civil society organizations. Before attending D-Day, they were advised to visit a website to view articles expressing contending views concerning OCLP’s demand for an election method that met the international standards of universal suffrage. According to OCLP’s understanding of these standards, not only should the election be as inclusive as possible in terms of one-person-one-vote, it should also be sufficiently competitive. No unreasonable restrictions should be imposed to block people from different political backgrounds from standing for election. This discussion of what constitutes genuine universal suffrage was pertinent because the Basic Law stipulates the establishment of a *nominating committee* to screen candidates for CE elections. OCLP argued that unless the constitution of the nominating committee was truly broadly representative as stipulated in the Basic Law or the threshold for nomination was sufficiently low, the committee would become an obstacle to free elections. Pro-Beijing people, however, opinioned that the nominating committee is a gatekeeper to safeguard national security by screening out disloyal candidates.

D-Day 1 began with an open session, allowing participants to express their views. It was followed by a breakout session in which randomly formed groups of a dozen or more participants met, led by a moderator responsible for maintaining fair discussion procedures. All group members, regardless of position, were given equal time to express their views. The breakout session’s results were then reported during a closing session. Given my sociological training, I was assigned to summarize the

views expressed in different breakout sessions. I observed that participants were very excited to join this form of *town meeting*. They particularly appreciated the equal opportunity for expressing views and the sense of solidarity created by meeting democracy supporters face-to-face. The D-Day's smooth rundown and the involvement of a large number of well-trained volunteers also boosted people's confidence towards the movement. The event was widely covered by both mainstream and social media.

Despite the positive responses, many participants reminded the organizers to bridge the idea of democracy with the concerns of different sectors in the community. Social worker participants expressed that their clients with working class backgrounds found the academic setting of the university too intimidating and the rundown of the discussion too rigid. A more casual chat in a familiar setting would be crucial if the organizers wanted people to fully express their views and emotions. In view of this, OCLP decided to change D-Day 2 into a series of discussions held in different communities, such as cafes for investment bankers, churches for Christians, community centers for women and laborers, public space under footbridges for homeless people, and so forth. D-Day 2 lasted for four months until January 2014, resulting in the number of participants growing to 3000.

At the same time, the Occupy Trio was frequently invited to give speeches in different communities and debate with progovernment antagonists. The public was then exposed to alternative views regarding the constitutional reform. Unlike other social movements, OCLP was not supposed to produce counter-expertise because they were experts themselves. Among the trio, Benny Tai is a constitutional law professor. Kin-man Chan is a political sociologist studying civil society and democracy and was also a leader of a scholars' group encompassing many prodemocracy political scientists. In order to counteract the movement, a group of progovernment scholars and businessmen then established Silent Majority to mobilize support for the regime. Whereas OCLP advocated the idea of genuine universal suffrage as crucial to good governance in a modern society like Hong Kong, Silent Majority emphasized the importance of stability in maintaining prosperity. Instead of adopting Beijing's xenophobic discourse, such as accusing Western democracy of posing a threat to national security, the group mainly targeted the Hong Kong middle class, who found the idea of civil disobedience too radical and occupying CBD detrimental to the economy. One of the economists in Silent Majority warned that the stock market would lose billions of Hong Kong dollars in a few days of occupation. They also released a consultancy report predicting that traffic across the city would be crippled should one area of the CBD get blocked.

Although none of this ultimately happened, these warnings were effective in creating fears not just among well-off people but working class people who were constantly worried about losing their jobs. Notwithstanding these worries, Radio Hong Kong Television conducted a survey and found that people in the lower-middle class and with a higher education level were most supportive of radical actions. Age was also significant in determining one's attitude towards these debates. The Chinese University of Hong Kong conducted a survey and found that although the community held divided views of the movement (38% in support and 36%

opposed), among respondents aged 15–24, some 62% were in support, 30% were neutral, and only 7.7% opposed (Chan & Vitrierat, 2017).

The intervening factor for these relationships can be attributed to the medium of information. Working class and elderly people relied heavily on television and newspapers to receive information about matters related to the constitutional reform. These mainstream media, except *Apply Daily*, had already been criticized for practicing self-censorship due to their business connections with China. In view of this, OCLP relied mainly on social media such as Facebook and other internet news platforms such as *House News* (renamed as *Stand News* later) to deliver its messages. Young and more educated people were more receptive to these media than many of their counterparts. The information gap then led to political diversion. The controversies over the implementation of a free election and the means to strive for it brought Hong Kong into unprecedented splits in different domains of life. In churches, people debated whether democracy is central to their faith and whether committing an unlawful act is against Christian teaching. In families, husbands and wives quarreled over their political stances, and parents pressured their children not to participate in the demonstration.

Formation of a Policy Proposal and Internal Split of the Movement

By April 2014, the deliberation days had already lasted for 10 months. The movement then employed D-Day 3 and the civil referendum to draw up a reform proposal to be submitted to the government. D-Day 3 was held in five different locations simultaneously on May 6, 2014. Before it was held, the School of Law of Hong Kong University invited a group of international experts on constitutional laws to vet all the proposals made by the political parties and groups from different backgrounds during that period of time. The criteria these experts adopted to scrutinize whether the proposals could guarantee fairness and sufficient competition in the election indirectly proved the existence of international standards of universal suffrage. Ultimately, 15 proposals, including one from a member of Silent Majority, were tabled for selection by 2500 participants of D-Day 3. They were asked to select three proposals to be considered by the public in the upcoming civil referendum.

The selection process was controversial, with some of the more radical opposition parties such as People's Power mobilizing participants to select only those proposals with a provision for "public nomination," in other words, those specifying that a certain number of registered voters could nominate candidates. Moderate democrats criticized this provision as a violation of the Basic Law and a measure that would be difficult for Beijing to accept. They also complained that the OCLP movement had been hijacked by radicals and that the selection process on D-Day 3 was exactly the kind of political screening that people opposed. At the end, three

proposals with a public nomination provision were selected but the democracy movement was split.

The moderates, particularly Hongkong 2020 led by former senior government official Mrs. Anson Chan, were dissatisfied with the results. Mrs. Chan doubted whether the upcoming civil referendum could offer people a genuine choice if proposals without a provision for public nomination were excluded. Students and radicals counterattacked, accusing her of being out of touch with the masses who had no trust at all in the nominating committee specified in the Basic Law. When the movement was on the verge of collapse, Cardinal Joseph Zen played a critical role in rebuilding solidarity. He urged both sides to stop attacking the other. In order to encourage moderate supporters to vote in the referendum, OCLP added an additional motion to represent the baseline of the movement's goal: "The Legislative Council should veto any proposed election method violating international standards of universal suffrage that fails to provide voters genuine choice" (SCMP, 2014).

To urge people to take the referendum seriously, the Occupy Trio pledged to step down from the movement's leadership if they failed to draw 100,000 votes. Led by Cardinal Zen, a Democracy March was organized to promote the referendum for seven consecutive days and nights across Hong Kong. The march was successful in conveying a strong image of solidarity, with opposition leaders from different wings urging people to vote while marching through various communities. Right before the referendum, however, Beijing issued a white paper on the implementation of *One Country, Two Systems*, proclaiming China's "overall jurisdiction" over Hong Kong (SCMP, n.d.). In Chinese, the term was written as "overall administrative power," and was understood as a move undermining Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy. Furthermore, because the white paper's authors also referred to judges in Hong Kong as "administrators," a number of lawyers joined a *silent march* to express their worries over the judiciary's continued independence.

The referendum is described as "civil" because it was purely a civil society initiative without official status. OCLP commissioned the Public Opinion Program at Hong Kong University to operate the referendum. All Hong Kong citizens aged 18 or above were eligible to vote via an electronic platform or at one of the polling stations set up in churches, schools, or temporary shelters in various communities. In order to avoid duplicate voting, besides checking ID numbers, a unique code would be sent to the voter's mobile phone. Despite the public enthusiasm, the Hong Kong government accused the referendum of "having no legal basis," (Kahon, 2014) even though OCLP had never made such a claim.

Before the civil referendum was held from June 20th to 22nd, 2014, the electronic voting system suffered unprecedented attacks by hackers. The scale of these attacks was so large that local network security maintenance companies decided to withdraw from the project, claiming that they lacked the capacity to handle such large-scale attacks. At the same time, however, the attacks sparked overwhelming reactions from the community, because it was widely believed that the hackers had been hired by Beijing to deprive the Hong Kong people of their right to free expression. Fortunately, US-based CloudFlare was determined to defend the voting system. Working day and night, the CloudFlare team finally managed to fix the system.

In the first few minutes after the referendum started, thousands of citizens scrambled to vote. Hearing this exciting news, many people burst into tears while they were finishing the last leg of the Democracy March. On June 22nd, citizens who did not use the internet lined up in front of the polling stations, creating an impressive scene of citizen participation (Chan, 2015).

In the end, around 800,000 voters turned up to the referendum. The proposal of a *three-track system* (nomination from the public, political parties, and the nominating committee), made by the Alliance for True Democracy, received the most votes. Some 88% of voters also agreed that the legislature should veto any government proposal that did not meet international standards of universal suffrage. The massive turnout for the referendum brought the movement to a satisfying climax, as people felt that they had overcome tremendous obstacles to make their voices heard. On July 1, around 500,000 people joined the annual rally organized by the Civil Human Rights Front to demand genuine universal suffrage. More than 500 college students and other citizens stayed behind after the rally to “trial-run” the occupation by sitting down peacefully on a main road in the Central district of Hong Kong and were arrested.

To stop the movement’s momentum from accelerating further, the government first denied the referendum’s representativeness by releasing a report on the public consultation of constitutional reform, depicting the demand for public nomination as a view held by “some people” and progovernment views as “mainstream” (Hong Kong Government of the Special Administrative Region, 2014). The then Chief Secretary Carrie Lam, senior official leading the government’s constitutional reform task force, met the Occupy Trio a month after the referendum. She was extremely arrogant during the meeting and showed no intention whatever to continue the dialogue with the movement. On August 31, 2014, the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress in Beijing made a decision (known as the “831 decision”) with which it basically ruled out the implementation of free elections in Hong Kong. With this decision, it laid down three significant hurdles to democracy: The nominating committee’s constitution would be modeled on the existing election committee, in other words, comprise 1200 representatives from four sectors of society; support from 50% of nominating committee members would be required for a candidate to qualify for election; and the number of candidates would be restricted to two to three persons. As Beijing has been able to control the results of past CE elections, its stipulation that the CE nomination system be modeled on the existing election committee naturally led to the conclusion that the proposed election would be a restricted one that could not meet the international standards of universal suffrage.

Because the 831 decision was more conservative than any proposals made by pro-China political groups in Hong Kong, people were completely shocked and enraged. More protests flared up. Secondary and college students joined forces to launch class boycotts. By the end of the boycotts, some students decided to storm the government headquarters and occupy the civic square in front of it. Police responded with pepper spray and arrests. Tens of thousands of citizens besieged the spot to support the students and shielded themselves from pepper spray by using

umbrellas (why the media later dubbed the movement the Umbrella Movement). The confrontation triggered the Occupy Trio to kick-start the occupation on the spot, although it was neither the time nor the venue they had planned. Police attempted to disperse the crowd with tear gas, but this drew even more people to join. The rest is history.

Discussion

I have documented the above to show that social movements can produce and disseminate alternative knowledge, as in the case of the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong. The controversy's crux in Hong Kong's 2013–2014 constitutional reform was to define the problematic situation, to reach consensus on whether democratic reform is a solution, and to determine the form of universal suffrage that could meet both the constitutional prescriptions and the people's expectations.

The definition of a problematic situation is related to public agenda setting. CY Leung, then CE of Hong Kong, believed that the housing and inequality issues were caused by the insufficient supply of land resulting from previous administrations' lack of vision and determination. Although the movement did not disagree with this argument, it looked for a more systemic solution to ensure a more responsive government. The movement attacked CE's existing election method, identifying the 1200-strong Election Committee as the root cause of insufficient accountability, as its voting members are mainly from business and pro-Beijing sectors. Apparently, OCLP was able to affect the agenda setting by mobilizing public attentions to focus on constitutional reform. This was made possible by creating a sense of urgency through introducing the idea of civil disobedience and the trio's determination to pay their personal price, including risking imprisonment.

The selection of a reform proposal meeting both the Basic Law and international standards was a more painstaking issue. The regime interpreted the provision of the nominating committee in Article 45 of the Basic Law as a way to protect China's national security by screening out "unpatriotic" candidates in the CE election. In the regime's eyes, there is no such thing as international standards of universal suffrage. The word universal suffrage is subjected to Beijing's interpretation. The business community also believed that screening of candidates is a way to protect Hong Kong's sound economic system from any fundamental changes. In contrast, the most active participants in the deliberation days were more concerned with removing unnecessary obstacles to a free and open election regardless of the provision of the nominating committee prescribed in the Basic Law. They believed that the governance problem's crux lay in the government's lack of accountability to the people. They subscribed to the idea of public nomination, a system practiced in Taiwan and some other democracies, and could not care less about the issue of national security. They did not trust Beijing and were annoyed by the business community's pragmatic and pro-Beijing stances.

This antiestablishment tendency also led to internal strife in the movement, as the moderate factions had attempted to seek solutions to resolve the conflicting expectations of Beijing and the Hong Kong people. For example, a scholars' group suggested that the public nomination could be incorporated into the initial stage of the nominating processes as "public submission" to be vetted by the nominating committee in the second stage. These innovative options, however, were ruled out in D-Day 3 when the more radical groups successfully mobilized attendants to select only proposals with public nomination. Building consensus within the movement was more difficult than the Occupy Trio first expected. In the beginning, they envisioned that participants would become more accommodating if they consulted divergent viewpoints before joining the deliberation. Instead, people's stances became more rigid. One of the reasons is that the participants were the most active members of the opposition parties and civil society organizations, who did not represent the whole spectrum of political stances in the society-at-large. As a result, the venue became an echo chamber for the activists to consolidate their more idealistic thinking. Only in the referendum, which involved a huge number of people, did participants select a comparatively more accommodating proposal.

This chapter is not a venue to decide on the validity of different claims and the merits of different proposals. The above discussion is to demonstrate that definition of situation and interpretation of law could be contested, and alternative knowledge could be produced by a social movement in the process. In this particular case, the original intent of certain provisions in the drafting of the Basic Law was debated. The words uttered by some former senior Chinese leaders were cited to support respective interpretations. Choudry (2010) argues that texts are sites of real struggles. The regime will organize knowledge in particular directions and from particular standpoints, which often include the containment of social movement (Choudry, 2010; Kinsman, 1997). Sometimes, the containment is so overwhelming that creating a vision beyond the official frame is already a difficult task to be recognized as a movement's achievement (Kelley, 2002). Kinsman (1997) suggests that how the media, different publics, governments, NGOs, and social movements read and use those texts in particular contexts and moments is critical to the development of counterhegemonic politics.

Though laymen could also produce powerful counter-expertise knowledge by testimony and storytelling grounded in their everyday lives, involvement of professionals in the movement could directly challenge the evidence base of the dominant discourses. In the present case, both sides of the struggle involved experts in the field. Though OCLP produced counter-knowledge, it was not in a form of counter-expertise, as the movement claimed that they were expert themselves. These experts, including scholars, pollsters, IT professionals, and so forth, played a significant role in altering the power imbalance in the production of knowledge by bridging the gap between activists and experts in the field as well as challenging the scientific base of the dominant discourses. The downside of expert involvement is to gear public debates into technical if not idiosyncratic arguments discouraging popular involvements. OCLP attempted to bridge this gap by cocreating alternative knowledge through deliberation days and the civil referendum. They also extensively employed

social media to disseminate alternative views to the public, although with limited success among workers and less educated people. Some housewives expressed that they joined the occupation because of the police's unreasonable use of tear gas and pepper spray. They believed that it was unjust to harm peaceful protesters, particularly students, and their "mother's instinct" urged them to protect these young protesters. They were not aware of the previous discussions about international standards but would support democracy just to make the government accountable to the people (Wong, 2016). It seems that testimonies and storytelling of this kind are equally as powerful as theories and statistics provided by a movement's experts.

This case supports Foley's (1999) argument that some of the most powerful learning occurs when people struggle against oppression, to make sense of what is happening to them and to work out ways of doing something about it (pp. 1–2). OCLP's role during the Umbrella Movement's mobilization period (March 2013–September 2014) was to provide "repertoires of knowledge practices" (della Porta & Pavan, 2017, p. 300), in other words, the set of organizational practices with which one can foster the coordination of disconnected experiences and rationalities within a shared cognitive system that can be used to provide a common orientation for making claims and acting collectively to produce change. The cognitive system here comprises the understandings of the international standards of universal suffrage and the honorable tradition of civil disobedience as a strategy for fighting for justice. It is a shared system because the understandings were cocreated through deliberation days and the civil referendum. Even though the movement was unable to change the political system as people wished, the movement itself demonstrated the capacity of human beings to produce alternative worldviews, interpretations of reality, and policy proposals. The experience of this "subjectivity" is both psychologically and politically liberating. Thus, the most prominent slogan printed on the backdrop of the stage in the Umbrella Movement was "self-determination," a sign of moral autonomy.

Prologue

As I am writing this chapter in the summer of 2019, Hong Kong is under a reign of terror after China imposed the National Security Law to crack down on subversion, secession, terrorism, and collusion with foreign forces regardless of whether violence is involved. Provoking hatred towards the Chinese or Hong Kong government in relation to collusion with foreign forces (under a very broad definition) could be a crime. A special court has been established with judges appointed by the Chief Executive. No jury will be set up in the trial and media attendance could be denied. Serious cases could be extradited to China for interrogation and trial. The penalty is up to life imprisonment. The community was once again shocked by this blatant violation of the One Country, Two Systems policy, in particular the damage caused to the common law system.

Using COVID-19 as an excuse, the authorities have permitted no rallies to express people's objections to the law. They have arrested activists for alleged subversion or secession just for expressing views condemning the regime or supporting Hong Kong independence. Hundreds of policemen raided the office of Apple Daily, the only prodemocracy newspaper in town, and arrested its founder Jimmy Lai and senior management staff for alleged collusion with foreign forces and other financial crimes. Prof. Benny Tai, the cofounder of OCLP, was sacked by Hong Kong University regardless of his tenure appointment. The university gave no explanation to the community except that Arthur Li, the Chair of the University Council, told the media that a "criminal" should not be allowed to teach in the university (Chan, 2020). Later on, Benny Tai was arrested and detained by the authority for his alleged violation of the National Security Law by organizing a primary election among prodemocracy candidates. Back in May 2020, the government lashed out at Hong Kong's examination authorities for "seriously hurting the feelings" of Chinese people who had suffered under Japanese occupation by asking history paper candidates if they agreed that Japan did more good than harm to China in the first half of the last century. In fact, the question covered the period from 1900 to 1945, a time when Sino-Japanese relations was more complicated than just the war. Although more than 5000 students had answered this question in the concerned public examination, the examination authorities were forced to cancel the question just to demonstrate their "political correctness."

These recent crackdowns on independent newspapers and liberal scholars, and tightening control over schools and curricula, are moves to block the production and dissemination of alternative knowledge in Hong Kong. Social movements as repertoires of knowledge practices are also barred under the national security law or the emergency laws due to the pandemic. The regime is determined to back up the hegemonic discourse with white terror. How people unlearn dominant discourses and produce counter-knowledge under such a repressive regime will be an interesting topic to study, but more importantly a vital task to preserve people's sense of moral autonomy and will to change.

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