

A Tale of Two Societies: Fragments of an Ethnography on Umbrella Revolution

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October 28, 2014. 16:28. In a guerrilla organic farm, Tim Mei Avenue, Admiralty

"Why the farming?"

"To explore new possibilities to live; our community can sustain itself with farming, our city can sustain itself with farming. (Giggling) Well it is still experimental, still really far away from that."

November 25, 2014. 03:00. Defending Mong Kok against the police, Shantung St., Mong Kok

"Why do you never ask?"

"Because we are in Mong Kok." he replied, smoking a Marlboro BLAST ICE in front of the police. "Because in Mong Kok, nothing has to be asked or answered. We all are here only to defend something important."

"Asking questions only makes you a *ghost*."

Herein I started this paper with two extracts from my fieldnotes to illustrate the difference in mentality of the occupiers in Admiralty and Mong Kok. One strange thing about most researches on the Umbrella Revolution or Umbrella Movement is that the authors often build up their analysis on a presumption that Occupy Mong Kok and Occupy Admiralty are of the same Occupy Movement. In terms of composition of class, beliefs, ideologies and imaginations of direct actions, they are not. But let's start with a primary understanding on what occupiers are looking for in this social movement: The Umbrella Revolution is about a collective pursuit on the betterment on the voting system, against the increasing restrictions on civil rights by Hong Kong government (or the Chinese Central Government). One popular slogan to quote, "*I want REAL universal suffrage* (我要真普選)", illustrates the discontent of Hong Kong citizens on the "FAKE universal suffrage" proposed by the Hong Kong government.

Nonetheless, this movement, like most social movements worldwide, stems from the everyday economy: the ridiculously high prices of housing, ruthless privatization of public space, fear and fury against further invasion of Chinese capitalists under globalization and deprivation of economic rights to attain man's desired living. The collective belief of having universal suffrage would have helped them strike back against landlords and win their lives back has long ago destined this unavoidable outbreak of public rage — an emancipatory struggle from economic and political oppression. This outrage is transformed into practices of a series of direct actions, which

empower the collective of the excluded, marginalized and oppressed to challenge the dominant power and ideologies (Batiliwala & Brown 2006).

Class shapes cultural and political consciousness (Wilk & Cliggett 2007:95). Although occupiers have aggregated for political reforms, their economic statuses and historical senses largely shape their mentality, perception and imaginations on direct actions. This fundamental difference gives rise to the discrepancy between the two occupied areas. From my observation, there is no applicable universal description on the occupiers; nor would occupiers in Mong Kok or Admiralty agree they were the same as the others.

This ethnography is rather fragmentary. Most of my findings are based on informal conversations, improvised focus group discussion and random chat with occupiers whom I might never meet again. There are also no geographical perimeters drawn to distinguish fieldwork areas. Nonetheless, as an anthropology student / direct activist, I still find it important to conduct this ethnography to record the neglected insides of this movement. This paper aims to study how different cultural identities are formed, make sense of the conformity and conflicts between Occupy Mong Kok and Occupy Admiralty, and offer a vision of post-Occupy Hong Kong.

Grounds: A Neoliberal City with No Riots

Hong Kong is often described as one of the best cities in the world. Yet it being safe, prosperous and stable is nothing more than an illusion. Beneath the "security, prosperity and stability", it is the unaffordable housing prices, insane inflation and the increasing control of public space from the government. According to the continuing research conducted by the *United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT)*, Hong Kong has a huge income inequality indicated by a high Gini Coefficient of about 0.55. Be that as it may, Hong Kong seldom has social movements, except a few massive demonstrations per year. One may ask, "How is that possible? Wouldn't people stand against this wealth inequality?"

It makes a lot of sense to many middle-aged Hong Kong citizens: everyone should "*work harder, earn more, buy yourself an apartment, make your own prosperity.*" The discussion of good/bad citizens has been dominating the arguments between occupiers and anti-occupiers:

September 28, 2014. 17:45. Conflict Area of Harcourt Rd (Before Occupy Admiralty)

Chin (A 52-year-old parent finding his son): I think this is totally chaotic, irrational and destructive ... but still it is better to see youngsters here than rotting and playing online games at home like scums. I admire y'all as y'all are the knowledgeable—students! But please don't be naive! There's no democracy, just a game manipulated by the politicians.

Chin: Therefore universal suffrage is not important, nor democracy, nor politics; y'all just need a government which takes the responsibility for everything, so that everyone can work in harmony and build the collective prosperity in our society.

This response explores us a small piece of the ethos where the Umbrella Revolution takes place. Many middle-aged who have lived their career lives from the 1980s up until nowadays would regard most direct activists as trouble-makers who do not contribute, but disrupters to social stability and radicals who are incapable of reasoning. It is not important to have universal suffrage, nor democracy, as much of it is "a fake creation from the game of politics" which is not worth their attention. In cope with the economic struggles, "harmony and solidarity" which contribute to collective prosperity are what they seek nowadays. They stick to the belief that only through the hard work, patience and unity can one succeed in Hong Kong.

Though many historians would argue it was the history — a series of depoliticizing colonial policies from former British colonial government — that contributes to this aforementioned political apathy, I still find this not a thorough explanation of the phenomenon; in addition to this, neoliberalism would be a useful analytical tool to make sense of their mentality. Neoliberalism strengthens the post British-colonial effect in practice in two ways:

1) *The apparent amorality and its facilitation on conservative moral agenda* (Cheng 2013); the emergence of market principles as primary concerns amoralyzes social relationships and rationalizes every utility maximization. On one hand, this legitimates every profit-oriented decision, on the other hand, it also legitimates the current moral agenda, in which stabilizing this unequal environment is crucial in order to ensure profits. This ushers no progressive social changes and suggests constitutional improvements to solve social risks instead of initializing direct actions.

2) *The de-politicization of social risks and reduction of social responsibility* (Cheng 2013); the emergence of self-management and risk-taking justifies every lost as an irrational miscalculation of economics, neglecting the political economy which provokes the innately unequal economic game. The clear separation of the economy from politics in the public discourses reduces the casualty of collective deficits to an individual level so that the government needs not to take any social responsibility for losers of the game. One should not judge the unfairness of the political economy, "*because in an economic game, losers are inevitable*".

In addition, it is crucial to point out there are anxieties that direct actions among the public. The negative impression of direct actions stems from their memories of *Hong Kong 1967 Leftist Riots* and *Tiananmen Square protests of 1989*: in the former, they witnessed or heard that "*in a riot, thugs would place Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) which brought severe casualties*", while in the latter, they witnessed forcible suppression from the government. These traumatic

experiences echo their current social lives and amplifies the terror of potential consequences of initiating direct actions.

Timeline and Incidents: Outbreak of Umbrella Revolution

Discontented by the restrictions made by the *Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPCSC)* of China on the nomination system of the Chief Executive election in 2016 and 2017 Hong Kong Political Reform on August 31, A series of demonstrations and student strikes were initiated under the call of the student coalition — the *Hong Kong Federation of Students (HKFS)* and *Scholarism*. Protesters gathered in Tim Mei Avenue and Tamar Park. On September 26, a group of around 100 protestors led by Joshua Wong, one of the student leaders from *Scholarism*, clambered over the fence of Civic Square to reclaim and liberate the Square from the privatization of government. About 60 police soon surrounded these protestors, then restrained and removed them one by one. The other protestors mobilized to encircle the police until the next day, when the police blocked nearly all roads and bridges entering Tim Mei Avenue; the police tried to disperse the crowd with pepper spray but failed.

Out of worries for the safety of students, thousands of protestors went to Admiralty in the morning and later on walked onto the highway into Harcourt Rd. Tensions soon accumulated in several conflict areas owing to the frequent use of pepper spray by the police against the unarmed peaceful civilians. At 17:58, the police fired shots of tear canisters to disperse the unarmed crowd on Harcourt Rd. This backfired on the riot police and eventually drew widespread public outrage. More citizens went to Admiralty to encircle the police, while rumors of police preparing to use rubber bullets or real bullets against the unarmed crowd started to spread on *Facebook*, *Whatsapp* groups and other platforms.

Despite the fact that the occupy being "an inevitable pushback of police brutality" (Chromsky, 2013: 14), what's more is that all these scenes, plots and rumors are historically symbolic; the actions and reactions between the public and the authority resembled the horror of forcible suppression in 1989, which most middle-aged had experienced and most youngsters had learnt from history. This outspread of fear was largely amplified through local online platforms and it drew a second wave of direct actions: Through three main local online forums: HKG (Hong Kong Golden "香港高登"), HKDiscuss (香港討論區) and BabyKingdom (親子王國), netizens voluntarily initiated Occupy Mong Kok and Occupy Causeway Bay, attempting to distract and diverge the police so as to protect the protestors in Admiralty. Up to this stage, the student movement had escalated into a massive street occupation and early occupied territories were mapped.

Occupy Admiralty

Occupy Admiralty is an escalation of previous demonstrations and encirclement, to defend against the intermittent raids initiated by the police. The center of Occupy Admiralty was located at the middle of *Harcourt Rd*, under the bridge connecting *Admiralty Centre* and Tamar Park, where citizens mobilized their first blockade on September 28th. I find it hard to draw the geographical perimeters for Occupy Admiralty. One of the key for an occupied territory to exist is to define boundaries — with declarations, blockades and actual human power to maintain a border in both physical context and external representation between the occupied and the unoccupied territories. The heyday of Occupy Admiralty once expanded its territory eastward reaching *Gloucester Rd*, westward reaching *Connaught Road*, with medium guerrilla supply station set up providing water, food, masks, gloves and safety goggles. However, the territory later shrank eastward to the junction of *Harcourt Rd* and *Cotton Tree Drive*, westward to the junction of *Harcourt Rd* and *Arsenal Rd*. The size of the occupied territory fluctuated in direct proportion to the number of occupiers.

"*Admiralty is the first battlefield.*" — the first impression held by most occupiers of Admiralty was it was the place where the civilians were "*aroused to stand against the injustice*" — to realize the nature of the authority being an unjust yet legitimate power over the public with surveillance, restrictive city ordinance and ironhanded police control. The retaliation by the public was to take back the future of Hong Kong, as another popular slogan goes, "*Save Hong Kong with Your Own Hands*".

September 29, 2014. 14:20 Conflict Area of Harcourt Rd (Before Occupy Admiralty)

Man (a year 3 Journalism student from Hong Kong Baptist University): I am here to support the student movement, as well as to protect my little sister. We were on Tim Mei Avenue that day (September 28th), at the very front. It is so ridiculous; we the people were just with umbrellas and 90% of us only were defending ourselves and escaping — and that is what they (the Hong Kong Government) called "mobs"? That is so heartbreaking.

Interviewer: So how do you think the government should behave?

Man: At least, someone should take the responsibility for all injuries, and the teargas canisters.

October 2, 2014. 10:20 Tamar Park

Chan (a 78-year-old man): I am here to support and protect students (Interviewer: Protect students?) Yes. We (the elderly) came from the Mainland and hence we know the cruelty of Communist China. Though I can read little (He meant he was illiterate), I have to stay here to protect you.

These conversations show how early protestors viewed Admiralty: a place where student movements were suppressed by police brutality and the battlefield site where adults bear the moral responsibility to protect students.

The foundation of the Occupy Admiralty consists chiefly of the coalition of student unions — the *Hong Kong Federation of Students (HKFS)* and *Scholarism*, supported by the donations from the general public and the preparations made for the proposed civil disobedience campaign — *Occupy Central with Love and Peace* by sociologist *Chan Kin-man*, law school professor *Tai Yiu-ting* and Reverend *Chu Yiu-ming*. The coalition was represented by *Umbrella Plaza* built under the bridge connecting *Admiralty Centre* and *Tamar Park*, surrounded by the camps of different pan-democratic political parties, followed by the camps of the public.

Villagers and Patrols

Occupiers in Admiralty called themselves "*villagers*" and the occupied territory as "*Harcourt Village*". They recognized themselves as living in a self-sustaining real community *outside* of the Hong Kong capitalist imagined community. *Villagers* consisted mainly of four types: 1) transformed protestors who have been participating in the movement before the initiation of Occupy Admiralty, 2) traditional social activists and politicians, 3) middle-class white-collars working in the central business district on Hong Kong Island and 4) citizens living on Hong Kong Island. Speaking of their objectives, they would always start with "to support and protect students, and fight for democracy"—This missionary thought transcended over the whole territory despite their differences in class or mentality, and forged *villagers* to follow the motto offered by the student coalition — that a protestor had to be "peaceful, rational and non-violent". The idea resembled *Occupy Wallstreet* in 2011, in which "an evolving public insurgency with openness, democracy and non-violent direct actions became its most powerful primary weapons against forcible suppression" (Chromsky, 2012:15).

Although it was claimed that there were no leaders, most villagers did follow the orders from an authority named the *Stage*, which was led by the student coalition, traditional social activists and politicians. The *Stage* served to 1) collect and redistribute resources donated by the public, 2) verify rumors and make declarations, 3) implement discipline to construct non-egalitarian power relations and 4) mobilize direct actions. Though not all villagers would admit or agree to the existence of this authority, the influence of the *Stage* successfully flowed around the village in forms of *Patrols*. The *Patrols* was a self-organized group of occupiers who wanted to "*protect the movement* — to prevent any unwanted violence that would be constructed as an excuse for the police to initiate intermittent clearance and rout the occupied territory. The *Patrols* was the embodied form of power; the *Stage* could impose no restrictions on any activists or actions; but

the *Patrols* could. The idea of disciplinary control innately reflected non-egalitarian power relation in Occupy Admiralty.

Redefining Life Space and Economic Space

Harcourt Village was to be an experimental self-sustaining community. *Villagers* came to empower themselves to challenge the long existing structured life space and economic space; I mean, how many opportunities would you have in your lifetime to actually walk on a highway with a speed limit of 70 kilometres per hour? Occupy Admiralty was a huge conflict area, but as soon as it was transformed into an occupied area, *villagers* started to settle down. The process of redefining life space and economic space was an intermediate democratic process of consensual, egalitarian and direct-participatory self governance. Through this process, new life space and economic space were discovered.

First, it was the setups of *guerrilla supply stations*. Before the occupy was initiated, protestors voluntarily brought different resources to *Harcourt Rd* and took away what they needed. The adaption of generalized reciprocity inspired citizens to realize another way of material exchange, which did not fit into the Hong Kong economic model. The occupiers recalled that they felt it was amazing because it felt like they *had sacrificed something without a feeling of loss*. Generalized reciprocity explored villagers another form of economy that could sustain their living outside of the marketing economy in Hong Kong. Second, it was the setups of *educational institutes* — the classrooms, libraries and students study rooms. The liberation of knowledge to the public counteracts against the stereotypical categorization of commodified knowledge, which has long existed in Hong Kong. The creation of these educational institutes rebutted the definition of commodified education, that knowledge from the first hand should be freely accessible to the public despite their class, age and profession.

In particular, what colored the occupied territory most was the *guerrilla organic farm*; one that was transformed from a trampled garden. In this garden, crops like tomatoes, corns and a several spices were grown. The idea of the guerilla organic farm was in protest of the industrialized and capitalized food production and the clear separation of urban life and farming:

"We are here to explore new possibilities. We can sustain ourselves through farming. This project (farmland transformation) has been conducted in the other two places (Mong Kok and Causeway Bay) as well."

Although, it was just on an experimental level, it was crucially symbolic to *villagers*. They referred to the farmland as their *little garden*, the symbol of their autonomy, self-sufficiency and independence from the capitalist society.

Occupy Mong Kok

"You talkin' about the bastards in Admiralty? Suck on their purity, (Rationality, peace and non-violence—the motto of Occupy Admiralty) it ain't gonna bring us anything. They wanna be the bastards, let'em; we are the villains"

It is important to mention Occupy Admiralty before mentioning Occupy Mong Kok, because Occupy Mong Kok was made to contrast Occupy Admiralty; the makings of different names not only implies a geographical difference of the two territories, but also highlights the innate differences in media representation. Mong Kok was dangerous in contrast with Admiralty being peaceful. Mong Kok was chaotic; Admiralty, systematic; Mong Kok was a place of violence while Admiralty, a place of discipline.

Unlike Occupy Admiralty, Occupy Mong Kok had definite borders drawn: northward reaching the junction of *Nathan Rd* and *Argyle St*, southward reaching the junction of *Nathan Rd* and *Dundas St*, with fixed organizations of people taking up the role of the daily defense of the barricades. *Nathan Rd* is one of the long axes of Kowloon. Together with *Cheung Sha Wan Rd*, it connects *Lai Chi Kok*, *Cheung Sha Wan*, *Sham Shui Po*, *Prince Edward*, *Mong Kok*, *Yau Ma Tei*, *Jordan* and finally *Tsim Sha Tsui*. Residents who lived in *Kowloon Urban* could actually walk to the occupied territory within 30 minutes. So here comes an economic calculation: If one goes from *Kowloon Urban* or *the New Territories* to Admiralty, it would cost him \$13.5 for a one-way trip, in contrast to almost no cost for going to Mong Kok. Consequently, why wouldn't one choose Mong Kok as his occupied territory? Therefore, Mong Kok is symbolic. For Admiralty being an occupied territory for the middle-class, Mong Kok was for grassroots; the geographical location of Mong Kok favors most proletarians living in *Kowloon Urban* and *the New Territories*.

Occupy Mong Kok faced much more raids initiated from anti-occupiers, paid triad members and the police over the whole Occupy Period than Occupy Admiralty did. All the empirical experiences accumulated catalyzed the divergence between the two occupied territories. Quoting a John-Doe in Mong Kok — " Whatever non-Admiralty belongs to Mong Kok. Welcome."

Localism and Direct Activists

The ethnos of Occupy Mong Kok is unique from Occupy Admiralty: more intense, more police officers, more of the feelings of being in a war zone. At first, I stayed in public camps, but soon I moved to my *localist* friends' camps, near to the altar of *Emperor Guan*.

The naming of occupiers in Mong Kok being *localists* by the mass media is actually not quite accurate; they called themselves *anti-Communist-China facists*. They saw the quick merge

of China and Hong Kong as a recolonialization by Communist China and that to fight against nationalistic control was the duty of the civilized. Most *localists* celebrated Hong Kong culture as the original Chinese culture, and modern Chinese culture existed as a low-end cultural invasion of the uncivilized Chinese. To defend Hong Kong against incivility, there had to be a revolution for things to change. That is why on the naming of the occupy, *localists* referred to it as a revolution instead of a movement, because the phrase "movement" would downgrade its historical significance.

Occupiers in Mong Kok were often appreciated as *valiants*, because they were brave enough to defend Mong Kok against the frequent raids by anti-occupiers and the police. All these violent encounters usually ended up in wounds and blood. But even when injured they would just go to *Kwong Wah Hospital* nearby, to get patched up so that they could return to the occupied territory quickly. To many, they were like true warriors.

The notion of warrior also implies that they were more involved in direct confrontations, and this was a mannerism in which they differentiated themselves from Occupy Admiralty:

October 20, 2014. 02:10 Emperor Guan Temple, Shan Tung St, Occupy Mong Kok

Eric: *We do not clap, we do not sing. For how many times we have been doing these and achieving what they (the traditional social activists) "periodical victory"? Nothing has changed! Non-violence? Rationality? Wipe my ass, the most rational thing to do is to organize direct actions and fight!*

They loathed at the traditional way to protest: marches and rallies, clapping, singing — all those "*symbolic yet useless ways that are not cutting the balls of the power*". The belief in what is a valid and useful way to confront the authority marks the first split-up in the occupy movement. In fact, quite a number of occupiers in Mong Kok were those expelled by the motto offered by the student coalition and the traditional politicians. Simply being peaceful and rational saves no one, in turn it even makes one an accomplice not to do anything against police brutality.

Villagers, Leftards & Ghost

There were mainly three types of the unwelcomed in Mong Kok: *villagers*, *leftards* and *ghosts*. The self-identification of *villagers* has previously been discussed in the article "*Villagers and Patrols*" and it was proud and honorable for one to be a villager in Occupy Admiralty, but never in Occupy Mong Kok. In Mong Kok, *Villagers* were the "*not awakened individuals who failed to position themselves in Mong Kok*" One remarkable incident which best illustrated the condemnation of *villagers* in Mong Kok occurred on the 19th of November, when direct activists in Admiralty smashed the glass doors of the Legislative Council complex:

November 19th, 2015. 01:20 The North Front. Junction of Nathan Road & Mong Kok Rd

Occupier A: Villants in Admiralty has taken action! The time to escalate has come!

Occupier B: Again? Come on, we have to sleep. Many of us have slept. Don't bother.

Occupier A: What the hell are you saying? You came here simply to sleep?

Occupier B: I say, we all have slept, there's not enough people (to escalate), so let's not start up any conflicts. (walked back to her tent)

We came to define Occupier B as a *villager*: a *villager* here, in Occupy Mong Kok, is one who forgot the "strategic reason" of the occupation — that is, "to wait for chances for escalations of direct actions, meanwhile being a bargaining chip for the government." Whenever an individual thought he came to live in Occupy Mong Kok, he would be labeled as a *villager*. Occupiers regarded themselves as stay-put forces that were always ready for direct action, and that *villagers* were those who forgot their duties. Therefore, one can see the naming of *villagers* is a direct action oriented construction; it embodies the discontent for direct action presented by *villagers* in Occupy Admiralty.

Meanwhile it is a lot harder to define "*leftards*" — in fact I have thought to create a new phrase to define them, but my second thought was to expand the content of *leftards*. *Leftards* in Hong Kong, refers to those who upheld universal humanitarianism and took a leftist approach in a social movement, which from a localist point of view "failed to target at the actual oppressed local grassroots" in the economic and cultural struggle between the northern capitalists from the Mainland and Hong Kong. As a result, a *leftard* would sell local interests out to the Mainland immigrants. I once challenged the *localists* on this statement, on the blind spot of localist failing to target the Mainland immigrants as another group of the invisibly exploited in our society, and they came to agree, but still to them *leftards* failed to prioritize the oppressed local over all the oppressed.

Leftards usually took *leftist* approaches that were not "*strategically relevant*" in localists' eyes:

October 20, 2014. 02:43 Emperor Guan Temple, Shan Tung St.

Me: What is leftard? Music?

Ken: Leftard talk.

Me: Arts?

Ken: Leftard talk.

Me: Reading?

Wilson (broke into our conversation, with a disdain on me): Leftards are all incurable. Com' on! We are in the middle of a war! You see the cops there? You never know when they will attack! And you still read, or take out your guitar, or play? Prepare to gear up!

Wilson: Leftards only split people into small group discussions and disperse the people's power. After that they claim "we have achieved periodical victory." You understand now?
(Funny though, he was reading a comic)

I believe that what they were referring to as the secondary characteristics of a *leftard*, is more of a matter of strategic effectiveness. Music, Books and street-parties existed as a festive protest to embody the daily resistance and self-autonomy against the existing social order; the element of pleasure in such a "carnival against capitalism (Graeber, 2009: 381)" is to blur the boundaries and normalize everyday direct actions. Nonetheless, these protests would not pose any strategic benefits to the physical confrontation against the police. All these new forms of subtle protest appeared to be elusive ideas that were hard to comprehend by other occupiers in Mong Kok. *Leftists* in Hong Kong also failed to connect street parties to daily life resistance and explain to the occupiers. Thus the ideas of street parties in Hong Kong existed as a distorted form of disruption to the occupation, which to the *localists'* *softened the people's power, dispersed the crowd and threatened the whole movement.*"

A third characteristic to add is, in my observation, that those who were stigmatized as *leftards* often came to agree with the traditional way to protest - they would mobilize people to have mass demonstrations, rallies and discussions, and seldom one would see a continuum in these forms of protests. The idea of *leftard* alluded to the dominant ideology in Occupy Admiralty, that one should be "*peaceful, rational and non-violent*". The differentiation of whether one was a *leftard* necessarily tied to his modes of direct actions: one is a leftist if he engages in more aggressive direct actions, while a *leftard* sticks to the traditional agenda. Therefore, one could also use the dichotomy of conservatists and radicals to better understand the idea of *leftards*; *leftards* were not necessarily left, but more likely defined in accordance to his stance on more radical direct actions. The definition of *leftards* undoubtedly is a term derived from the history of Hong Kong's social movement, a complex of revolutionary vanguardism in social movements. But I have to admit that I still have not grasped the whole picture of what *leftard* is in a diachronic sense.

The aforementioned two, were the unwelcomed yet recognized within the occupied territory. But *ghosts*, were the underlying threat in the occupied territory. *Ghosts* were those who sold direct activists out, provoked confrontations or dispersed people, dissolved frontlines or removed barricades. There were essentially two types of *Ghosts*: the first type, apparently, is the agent provocateurs who have infiltrated the occupied territory. They were usually in squads of two to three, pretending to be tourists or pedestrians. It was easy for these agents to blend in the

occupiers because everyone was free to walk across the borders of the occupied territories (in fact no one could legitimately stop anyone from entering the territory, so even a squad of patrol sub units with tidy police suits could enter the territory quite casually). These agents would ask around and take photos, poking their nose into everything. As anything they retrieved from the territory could have been the reasons for the police to detain direct activists, occupiers were very careful about this. All photo-takings and writings were suspicious to them, even I was once suspected.

October 18, 2014. 12:30 Emperor Guan Temple, Shan Tung St.

(An occupier came by and saw me jotting fieldnotes describing the occupied territory)

An occupier: Who are you? Where do you come from? What are you writing?

Interviewer: I am with the localists

An occupier: Who is your friend?

Interviewer: Tommy?

An occupier: Never heard of any Tommy.

Interviewer (kind of nervous): Wilson?

An occupier: Oh (with a smile) A friend of Wilson ... Sorry, I thought you were a ghost, jotting notes around.

We did come up with anti-spy strategies. In early times, *ghosts* wore headphones, but as soon as occupiers were so concerned about it, agent provocateurs no longer wore headphones; they moved in a squad of two to three and communicated through hand signals.

Another type of *ghosts* was those who tipped off the direct activists to the police. This violated the public consensus to protect every direct activist even though one might not agree with the modes of actions. The above provides narrow definitions of *villagers*, *leftards* and *ghosts*, but the practical usage of these terms in a borderer sense essentially drew antagonistic boundaries to classify occupiers in Mong Kok into different syndicates, among which conflicts and hostility were built due to the discrepancy of political beliefs and imaginations on direct actions.

Power and Status

The power relation in Occupy Admiralty was uncentered to the student leaders and politicians, but in Occupy Mong Kok, there was never such a power hierarchy. In Occupy Mong Kok, one was empowered not by his reputation, political stance or identity, but by how long he had been staying and how much he has been contributing to the community. There was never a leading figure representing the occupiers, and one could never bend the others' to his will with force; they would have to discuss like mature adults and come up with consensus. Collective

consensus meant a lot in here. That also explained why when the *villagers* suggested sleeping, the others would not initiate direct actions. Such a mutual respect ensured people floors to speak.

Accessibility was granted in the process of empowerment. The trust rooted in what the occupier had gone through together with the territory, no matter whether was defending Occupy Mong Kok against raids from anti-occupiers or paid triad members, or helping with the constructions in the territory. A trusted occupier could enter any big camps he/she wanted despite his/her political stance. As long as one was involved in the community, he/she would hear these renowned names: Ms Turkey (火雞姐), a tough forthright middle-aged female named after her hotheaded personality; The Artist, a 6.5 feet tall man well known for his bravery; Captain America, a man well known for his round shield

Religion and Romance in Mong Kok

"Justice is on our side"

Two of the most famous landmarks in Occupy Mong Kok were the *Emperor Guan Temple* and *St. Francis Church*. I came to examine what religion meant to the occupiers. But in my observation, most occupiers did not go there frequently and it was uncommon to be spoken of. The only comments I had heard about these figures were that they believed they were righteous under the protections of *Emperor Guan* and *Jesus Christ*. I thought these were merely religious places for believers in the occupied territory, but soon I came to realize it meant more than that. On November 26th, the police initiated another clearance on us; occupiers went to the temple or the church, made a quick prayer, and walked to the front of Shan Tung Street.

Looking closer to this, people walked to the nearest temple or church they found and performed the corresponding rites. While an individual lit up three incenses sticks in front of the drawing of the *Emperor Kuan* and bowed three times, another person beside him lined up his fingers and made a Christian prayer. Some of them did both. I did not have the time to ask because confrontations between the police and the occupiers had started on different fronts. But in my understanding, these prayers to different Gods served to protect the occupiers. I have come to this interpretation because in normal times, believers of *Emperor Kuan* would pray for themselves and their comrades in Occupy Mong Kok against the hostility from anti-occupiers, gangsters or the police.

These prayers also legitimized the up-coming direct actions. Both *Jesus Christ* and *Emperor Kuan* were gods of justice in the cultural context of Occupy Mong Kok. These rites of passage empowered people to "*do the righteous*", because after the prayers people came to think of the two Gods being on their side. This created a dichotomy of the righteous direct activists / the devious police officers among occupiers, and such a morally driven courage strengthened the defenses against the police brutality. When this courage reached its high, everyone at the front, no

matter men or women, young or old, was in combat positions, no longer afraid of the batons in front of them and willing to sacrifice himself or herself to protect their comrades.

We called it the "*The Romance in Mong Kok*". In Mong Kok, everyone was connected. There was nothing to be asked nor orders to be followed. Just as a freeman, one would stand for his comrades. If the police tried to pull someone out of the frontline and detain him/her, people around him/her would hold him/her back to prevent his/her detainment, as "*no one should be wasted in this war*". This instant commitment transcended everyone and built up trust quickly among the occupiers, even if they did not know each other. The effect was so strong that even after the confrontation, those who had been through this would still emanate their spirits. Therefore, one way to differentiate whether one was an insider or not, was to observe whether he asked a lot.

On Cultural Identities: Conformity and Conflicts

In the previous parts we have gone through the internal descriptions of Occupy Admiralty and Occupy Mong Kok, and they were structurally different from each other in terms of participants, power relations and modes of direct actions. Nevertheless, it will be a terrible mistake to separate the discussion of Occupy Admiralty and Occupy Mong Kok because these two communities were not isolated. Instead, they were often intertwined with each other. People would migrate from one place to the other, while a fair portion of occupiers had spent time in both occupied territories. In early times, the power structure and participants of the two occupations were alike: Early occupiers in both territories initiated different reciprocal projects and reconstructions of social institutes, while citizens nearby voluntarily contributed to these constructions, which ultimately developed in different directions. The later divergence of the two societies cannot be explained by an over-generalized political discrepancy between the coalition (student leaders and traditional politicians) and the *localists*, nor by the difference in economic class.

So what marks the confluence point of the occupation? To begin with, it was the differential treatment by the Hong Kong government. I have been staying in both territories and the way the police dispersed the crowd was totally different in level of cruelty. In Admiralty, some police would advance at a speed that people could have sufficient time to fall back, but in Mong Kok, all the police advance with their batons in hands hitting everyone really hard. They batted unarmed people at the front and used massive amount of pepper spray "*as if there was unlimited ammo*".

Villagers in Occupy Admiralty seldom faced violent encounters by the police, anti-occupiers or gangsters along its development. But for Occupy Mong Kok, the situation was more severe. On one hand, what occupiers were facing was daily encounters: unsuccessful arsons, sexual harassments, assaults and quarrels that one might encountered without notice. On the other hand, from the occupiers' point of view, the policemen were operating in an incredibly slow way to fight

these actual crimes that potentially brought casualties and loss. Consequently, occupiers in Mong Kok came to suspect that the police in Mong Kok meant to allow all these happened.

In later times, *Patrols* actually cooperated with the police to get rid of certain direct activists, "for the sake of the movement". This apparently was a tip-off to direct activists, a dominant power of blind peacefulness over conflicts. Such an act of *ghosts* brought mutual suspicion between the two societies. From this one can observe two phenomena: first, this tip-off embodied the ideological conflicts between the two place. Second, this "tip-off" unveiled the difference in level of trust to the police. The differential treatment by the Hong Kong government created an empirical difference on participants in the two territories, and marked the first split-up.

A point that marked the second split-up was the foundation of power structure. The power relation between the *Stage* and *villagers* was a top-down power hierarchy. It was a society built on core-periphery relations, which inevitably led to the rise of leadership as "the power necessary to protect against any oppression (Schutz & Sandy 2011:214)". In Occupy Mong Kok, the power relations were much more egalitarian owing to the non-existence of leading figures. The foundation of it was a second mobilization of netizens. In that period, time was in essence, different political parties and self-organizing syndicates did not consider too much but to cooperate in reciprocal and voluntary sense. As a result, no particular party has enough power to bend the remaining ones to its will and thus everyone would have to make public consensus before they acted, just like what they had been doing in the early times of Occupy Mong Kok. Occupiers in Mong Kok had kept this way to generate public consent.

Therefore, the reemergence of the two split-up movements into one, initiated by the student coalition and traditional politicians, faced strong opposition from occupiers in Mong Kok. On one hand, occupiers in Mong Kok believed in no leaders but themselves, and that everyone had the individual agency to do what he wanted. On the other hand, *villagers* in Admiralty tended to believe they were supporting the *Stage* to create a self-autonomy society in the shell of the existing capitalist society, instead of being individual agents exercising their power in a socially decontextualized area.

The empirical and structural difference attributed to a split in the secondary targets of the occupiers in both territories. The Umbrella Revolution/Movement was to achieve REAL universal suffrage, a representative democracy that embodied the principles of universal egalitarianism. The primary target was the Chinese Central Government, one that essentially holds the power to enact universal suffrage. Nevertheless, to occupiers this target was unreachable. Therefore, they needed a secondary target: a powerful individual or group that occupiers could get leverage from. To *villagers*, Occupy Admiralty pressurized the Chinese Central Government by *showing its leading position in progressive democracy at this particular time, when China is facing a social and economic break down*. Occupy Admiralty therefore existed as a signifier of failed governance by

the Hong Kong government and a testament of civil disobedience for the peoples of China. To maximize its influences, the best way was to maintain its existence; "*the longer it existed, the more threatening it would be*". The secondary target to occupiers in Mong Kok was the agents who were stigmatized for intentionally bringing extra economic oppression to the locals. From a *localists* point of view, the northern capitalists and mainland smugglers, even the whole nation exists as an all-around exploitation on local resources. As a result, the secondary targets of Occupy Mong Kok were both anti-nationalistic and xenophobic. On one hand, the occupy existed to construct a symbolic border of sovereignty between Hong Kong Independence and Communist China. To participate in the movement was to defend Hong Kong against the *recolonialization by China*. At the same time, the occupation existed to construct a culturally antagonistic boundary to differentiate people into "*the civilized Hong Kongers and the barbarian Chinese*". The strategic goal of Occupy Mong Kok was to disprove Chinese nationalistic control over Hong Kong.

On conformity and conflicts: the two ideologies, leading to two different power structures, and ultimately two societies, inevitably clashed on whether one tried to emerge them. Nonetheless, that did not mean people from different societies would not help each other out. In fact, one could always find individuals from Occupy Mong Kok in Admiralty, and the vice versa. They did not mutually exclude each other. How these ideologies affected the movement was rather tacit as they were rarely spoken of. But often the conformity and conflicts in the movement would embody these elements, especially on the conflicts of modes of direct actions and the makings of cultural identity, one that challenged who *real Hong Kongers* were.

Shadows of Anarchist Occupy

How does an occupy movement embody anarchists principles? Public anthropologist David Graeber (2011, 144-145) once discussed four principles that Occupy Wall Street embodied. First, its refusal to recognize the legitimacy of existing political institutions: an occupy being an ultimate defiant insistence to the existing dominant power denies the legitimacy of the authority. Second, its refusal to accept the legitimacy of the existing legal order: the ignorance of unlawful assembly in public order ordinance, though being a very minor civil disobedience, embodies that our social commitment should answer to a moral order, not a legal one. Third, its refusal to create an internal hierarchy and the decision instead to create a form of consensus-based direct democracy: it ensures no formal non-egalitarian power hierarchy and no majority can bend a minority to its will. Forth, its embraces of prefigurative politics: the occupy redefines life spaces by remaking the institutions and constructs a new society in the existing old society.

It would be meaningless only to examine the anarchist roots of an occupation by checking points by points on its anarchist features. Occupy Admiralty being a morally driven direct action also remade life space and economic space. But if one looked deeply into the power relationships

between occupiers in Occupy Admiralty, he would see no anarchist roots: the empowered *Patrols*, the non-egalitarian decision-makings, the centralized leadership formed by the student coalition and conservative pan-democratic politicians, and the obedience — All four of these mirrored Hong Kong society by reconstructing the existing structure. What about Occupy Mong Kok? In my observation, the power structure reached its well-balanced equilibrium mainly because of a random incident in history. Occupiers on one hand did not believe in leading figures, on the other hand they did not believe in self-autonomy either.

But we did come to a time when Hong Kong citizens refused to recognize China's nationalistic control and deny the power of the authority, a time when politicians in Hong Kong openly abandoned public interest and drove people in this small city to take back their power in form of direct democracy. The Umbrella Revolution did not provoke new social relationships alternative to the existing commodified intimacy that was derived from the emergence of neoliberalism. However, I think the essence of this revolution, is how it has made everyone recognize themselves as social beings in this community again, and that humans can be a lot closer to each other without knowing each other. All social movements have its tasks of bridging individuals to their socio-culture by blending collective identities to part of their selves (Gamson 1991:41). For once, people have experienced the way society would work with no disciplinary control, and it worked totally fine with mutual respects.

Post-Occupy Hong Kong

The 79-day occupation ended in several successful clearances on both sites. In a strategic sense, Umbrella Revolution was a failure more than a success. It did not stop the Hong Kong government from launching its hypocritical political reform, or the capitalists from its endless economic exploitation on the grassroots. The whole Occupy Movement has also failed to connect economic justice to political justice. At the end of the day, occupiers did not see themselves triumph in any wars of social justice. What left in our bodies were the wounds and bruises caused by police batons. We never wanted to glorify our pain as a sacred sacrifice because in fact we did not get a reward from it. I believe most direct activists who have fought hard at the front will agree not to see this as any sort of victory.

The crackdown of the two occupations had forged *localists* and *villagers* to return to the old shell of Hong Kong society and certainly, there had been some social transformations. One of the changes is the representations of the police. Citizens in Hong Kong started to dehumanize police as the illegitimated state control by the Communist China rather than an ordinary public servant that police had used to be in their eyes. Police as a profession has become a low-end demoralized abomination among all occupations, as occupiers stigmatized them as "*the shitty watch-dogs that works for the Communist China*", "*inhumane dirty cops*" and "*brainless betrayers*

to Hong Kong". The post-occupy effect here on one hand reconstructed police being the Hong Kong Government itself rather than a repressive state apparatus, on the other hand it generated public refusals to every restriction on individual agency by the police. The combined effects here redirected part of the public discontent to the police rather to the Hong Kong government (or the State). There has been a reformation of images of police being the legitimate thugs walking around the city.

A second transformation was shown by a series of political mobilizations, those that embodied a further evolved Hong Kong indigenous sense. The rallies in *Sheung Shui*, *Tuen Mun* and *Yuen Long* submissively embodied a more radically xenophobic attitude toward the Mainland visitors by demonizing them as the exploiters. Contrary to these direct actions, Occupy Admiralty provoked new political parties that aimed to retake the Legislative Council from the authoritarians' hands and adopt a collection of local prior policies. What transcended in both direct actions and participations in representative democracy was the idea of local-priority.

"The transformative potential of a movement is only as present as the presence or strength or voice of the most marginalized", as Emi Kane marked (Sahasranaman 2013). Nonetheless, it has come to my worries that such a rich collection of all the marginalized power is now shifting to be a more xenophobic cultural racism in Hong Kong. It is understandable for local citizens to view every mainlander as the agent of economic oppression to Hong Kong, and that expelling these groups of people will "*restore Hong Kong's prosperity*", because the mainland capitalists are the visible agents who *localists* can target on. However, what in deep caused all the economic oppressions is the invisible structural violence that deprives man's economic rights. The most devious point of populism is its oversimplification and depoliticalization on politics to merely a matter of antagonism. By constructing outsiders as intruders, a huge portion of discontent is therefore displaced and that forges people to believe eliminating certain groups of people will restore economic and social justice. In fact it will not. What the end of the Occupy Movement has marked is the new era of Hong Kong populism.

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