

The Religious Dimension of Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement

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[The Umbrella Revolution] is a movement without a clear leader, one in which crowds of largely young people are organizing themselves and acting on their own, overtaking months of planning by veterans of the city's pro-democracy camp.¹

The party-state is concerned by the fact that Protestants draw their moral compass from a transnationalized source outside its control. Prominent Christian involvement in Hong Kong's 2014 Umbrella Movement, just across the border from the mainland, serves to exacerbate this sense of nervousness.²

The preceding statements by Chris Buckley and Austin Ramzy and by Phil Entwistle are indicative of the highly diverging viewpoints about the organizational nature of Hong Kong's Occupy

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1. Chris Buckley and Austin Ramzy, "Hong Kong Protests are Leaderless but Orderly," *New York Times*, September 30, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/01/world/asia/in-hong-kong-clean-and-polite-but-a-protest-nonetheless.html?_r=0.
 2. Phil Entwistle, "Bypassing the Party-State? The Implications of Urban Protestant Growth in China," *China Monitor* 30 (2015): 7, www.merics.org/en/redirect/pdf-china-monitor-nummer-30-en.html.

Journal of Church and State, Vol. 00, No. 0, pages 1-21 doi:10.1093/jcs/csx053

Advance Access Publication Date: 26 July 2017

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Central with Love and Peace (OCLP) civil disobedience campaign, also known as the Umbrella Movement (UM). While Buckley and Ramzy described the OCLP/UM as secular and leaderless, Entwistle has pointed out that Christian leaders actually played a significant role in it. We agree that the aims of the movement were indeed secular, for its key demands included both universal suffrage for electing Hong Kong's chief executive and constitutional reform aimed at making the territory's parliament, the Legislative Council (LegCo), more representative. At the same time, the OCLP/UM's most important leaders were religious people whose justifications for direct political action had religious origins. Despite differences among the various competing Christian religious groups—Catholic, Protestant, and Methodist—a significant ecumenical alliance of Hong Kong Christians supported the OCLP/UM. The movement thus had a religious dimension that needs to be acknowledged.

The OCLP was the brainchild of a Christian professor of law at Hong Kong University, Benny Tai Yiu-ting. On January 16, 2013, Tai wrote an article in the *Hong Kong Economic Journal* titled "The Most Destructive Weapon of Civil Disobedience,"³ making the case that the Hong Kong government should be pressured to allow the free and fair election of Hong Kong's chief executive in 2017. He declared that an "era of civil disobedience" had begun and called on the people of Hong Kong to occupy the financial hub, Central, for three days during the public holidays from October 1-3, 2014. During this period, Tai suggested to block all the main roads leading to Central, to disrupt and paralyze the flow of traffic, and to demand genuine universal suffrage from Beijing. Tai's original plan was thwarted when Joshua Wong, another young Christian activist-cum-protest-leader, led 1,200 students to join a rally on September 26, 2014, and to occupy the Hong Kong LegCo compound.⁴ This was the Hong Kong students' way to protest the August 31, 2014, ruling by the Chinese government's National People's Congress Standing Committee to allow only candidates with pro-Beijing views to stand for the 2017 election of the chief executive. Wong and other student leaders were arrested, but numerous others remained. Anxious about their well-being, several OCLP leaders and tens of thousands of people wishing to express their solidarity with the

3. B. Tai, "The Most Destructive Weapon of Civil Disobedience: Occupy Central with Love and Peace," *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, January 16, 2013, <http://www1.hkej.com//dailynews/article/id/654855/公民抗命的最大殺傷力武器>.

4. Anonymous, "Christians Fight against Communism as Hong Kong Protests Continue," *Catholic Online*, September 29, 2014, <http://www.catholic.org/news/international/asia/story.php?id=57074>.

students joined the movement either as spectators or participants. This led Tai to declare his support for the student protesters and to launch the OCLP earlier than originally planned. The police responded to the sudden swell of people by firing tear gas and pepper spray on them, even though they were demonstrating peacefully. Fearing a repeat of the 1989 crackdown in Tiananmen Square, the protesters wore facemasks and brought umbrellas with which to fend off the police's tear gas and pepper spray. The OCLP thus evolved into the seventy-nine-day UM, which lasted from September 26 to December 15, 2014. Edmund W. Cheng and Wai-yin Chan have described the OCLP as a "pro-democracy civil disobedience campaign lacking a social base," a "staged, temporary civil disobedience action [which] was substituted by a spontaneous, resilient occupation" by the UM.⁵ Attempting to establish whether or not the OCLP/UM had a religious dimension is the conundrum at the heart of this essay. More specifically, our question is whether or not the OCLP/UM lacked the "ability to articulate the reasons for the demonstrations"⁶ and thus had only "the power of its own efforts to sustain it?"⁷ To solve this riddle, we examine the roles of the church in Hong Kong in general and of Christian leaders in particular. There was a strong presence of Protestant leaders in the Hong Kong movement, including Benny Tai, Joshua Wong, and the Reverend Chu Yiu Ming, the minister of the Chai Wan Baptist Church. Catholic firebrands such as Cardinal Zen, who is an outspoken critic of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), joined these Protestant leaders. Other Catholic OCLP/UM supporters included Martin Lee, founder of the Hong Kong Democratic Party; Anson Chan, former chief secretary in the British colonial government; and Jimmy Lai, the well-known pro-democracy activist and owner of the media organization Next Digital. Even the state-run mainland Chinese newspapers acknowledged these Catholic figures and dubbed them the "four troublesome gangsters of Hong Kong."⁸ In addition, many pastors, leaders, and Christians of other denominations made their churches available for prayer and for use as sites for the provision of food,

5. Edmund W. Cheng and Wai-Yin Chan, "Explaining Spontaneous Occupation: Antecedents, Contingencies and Spaces in the Umbrella Movement," *Social Movement Studies* 16, no. 2 (2017): 222-39.

6. Byron Williams, "Leaderless Movements are Impossible to Maintain," *HuffPost*, December 11, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/byron-williams/leaderless-movements-are_b_6308064.html.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Catholic Online, 2014. "Christians Fight against Communism as Hong Kong Protest Continues by Catholic Online (News Consortium)."

water, and rest. One of the most notable non-Christian OCLP co-founders, Professor Chan Kin Man, has been credited with adding to the political manifesto the faith-inspired terms *love* and *peace*, which Shun-hing Chan has described as “core values of Christianity.”⁹

We believe that there is a gap in the literature on the subject of changing state-church relations in Hong Kong, which our research fills. To complete our investigation, we traveled in the spring of 2015 to Hong Kong, where we interviewed pastors and Christian leaders who had taken part in the OCLP/UM, and met legislators, professors, students, and locals who had either supported or opposed the OCLP/UM.

In our study of the role of Christians in the OCLP/UM, we used empirical sources, including interviews, news reports, and archival materials, in the hope that they would cast light on why Christian leaders were at the forefront of the movement. Our portrayals of OCLP/UM leaders are informed by in-depth interviews with two Christian leaders in particular, Cardinal Zen and Benny Tai. We also relied on publicly available secondary sources, such as published interviews with a third protagonist, Joshua Wong, as well as media reports and academic publications on OCLP/UM.

We situated the OCLP/UM in the global context of Christian-led social and political movements. We then analyzed state-church relations in Hong Kong since the end of the Second World War. Thereafter, we reviewed patterns of political participation among Hong Kong Christians during three historical phases: 1945 to 1984, 1984 to 1997, and 1997 to 2017. This historical review reveals an evolution in Christian political activism in Hong Kong from what we call “institutional channeling” prior to the Hong Kong handover to China, to “political participation” and “direct political action” since 1997. We examine the specific roles, theological justifications, and strategies of three different generations of influential Christian leaders in the OCLP/UM represented, in turn, by Cardinal Zen, Benny Tai, and Joshua Wong. We conclude the study with our reflections on the historical significance of OCLP/UM in Hong Kong’s ongoing struggle for democratic self-government.

The Role of Religion in Social Movements

Christianity has been at the heart of many social movements, including the African-American Civil Rights Movement in the United States, South Africa’s Anti-Apartheid Movement, Solidarity in

9. Shun-hing Chan, “The Protestant Community and the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 16, no. 3 (2015): 385.

Poland, and Cardinal Sin's ousting of the corrupt president of the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos, in the 1980s. The liberating role of the Catholic Church in acting against perceived social ills, economic disparities, and poverty fueled parts of the third wave of democratization in several Latin American and Southeast Asian countries. The church has played an important role in raising civic consciousness and encouraging political participation by providing physical space and moral support to democracy movements. A case in point is the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, which supported the opposition Dangwai Movement in the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁰

Christian Smith has lamented that "religion's important contributions to social movements remain conspicuously under-explored—arguably virtually ignored—in the academic literature on social movements."¹¹ This tendency to neglect the power of faith has something to do with the historical development of the disciplines of social and political science. As the twentieth century progressed, secularization theory came to the fore because of the influences of figures such as Karl Marx and Auguste Comte, who predicted the decline and eventual disappearance of religion. Sociologists such as Bryan Wilson,¹² Peter Berger,¹³ and David Martin¹⁴ all subscribed to this view. In the early 1990s, more and more scholars began to see the need to account for "cultural, expressive ideological, emotional and symbolic aspects of collective actions"¹⁵ rather than merely to identify the rational, political, and instrumental aspects of social movements. Durkheimian theory nonetheless acknowledges the role of religion in reminding people of their shared identity, in strengthening interpersonal relationships, and in contributing to group solidarity and a unified moral community of purpose.¹⁶ Bert Klandermans and Sidney Tarrow argue that there may be too much stress placed on what they call the four "core" movements of peace, women's rights, students, and environment, which have taken precedence

10. Dafydd Fell, *Government and Politics in Taiwan*, Routledge Research on Taiwan Series (London: Routledge, 2012), 175-76.

11. Christian Smith, *Disruptive Religion: The Force of Faith in Social-Movement Activism* (London: Routledge, 1996), 2.

12. Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1996).

13. Peter Berger, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

14. David Martin, "Notes for a General Theory of Secularisation," *European Journal of Sociology* 10, no. 2 (1969): 192-201.

15. A. D. Morris and C. McClurg Mueller, eds., *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992).

16. Kenneth J. Neubeck and Davita Silfen Glasberg, *Sociology: Diversity, Conflict, and Change* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005).

over all other social movements worth mentioning, including religion.¹⁷ Tomás Mac Sheoin's review of social movement journals supports this finding by confirming that religious movements have indeed been under-researched.¹⁸

Recent scholarship by Cheng and Chan is a case in point.¹⁹ In their discussion of the historical antecedents of the OCLP/UM, they do not address the movement's religious dimension and focus instead on the protesters' experiences of post-colonial Hong Kong. In terms of social movement leaders, Cheng and Chan singled out Joshua Wong and the student activist group he led, called Scholarism, as a crucial driving force behind the UM. A key finding of their research is that once the UM was under way, "leaders ... considered negotiating with local government and finding ways to retreat, but they lacked the legitimacy and capacity to call protesters off the streets."²⁰ We concur with Cheng and Chan that leading participants in the OCLP/UM were unable to steer its course and could not control its outcome. What appears to be missing from their analysis, however, is a more historically informed discussion of the historical precursors and individual motivations among high-profile leaders to start the movement in the first place. This research thus fills a gap in scholarship on the OCLP/UM by examining how changing church-state relations set the stage for the movement in 2014. It reveals why and how Christian leaders in particular helped trigger the social movement.

Cooptation of Christian Churches through Institutional Channeling: 1945 to 1982

Hong Kong's OCLP/UM might be considered a prime example of a social movement in which various Christian leaders and their congregations promoted the democratic process through civil disobedience. To understand the particular case of Hong Kong's OCLP/UM better, state-church relations need to be examined from a historical perspective, since in Hong Kong they followed neither the separation model of Western democratic countries nor the state-dominated model of the Soviet Union and other totalitarian

17. Bert Klendermans and Sidney Tarrow, "Mobilization into Social Movements: Synthesizing European and American Approaches," in *From Structure to Action: Comparing Social Movement Research*, ed. B. Klendermans, H. Kriesi, and S. Tarrow (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1988), 17-23.

18. Tomás Mac Sheoin, "The World According to Social Movement Journals: A Preliminary Mapping," *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements* 8, no. 1 (2016): 189-90.

19. Cheng and Chan, "Explaining Spontaneous Occupation."

20. *Ibid.*, 14.

countries. Until 1997, Hong Kong was a British colony. In the late 1980s, the British government introduced limited democracy. Due to strong interventions from Beijing, it stopped short of introducing universal suffrage prior to the handover in 1997. British colonial rule gradually improved the political opportunity structures for Christian leaders by allowing them to move from institutional channeling to political participation and eventually to direct political action. Understanding this historical development is crucial to any critical analysis of the reach and significance of the OCLP/UM.

During the colonial period, particularly after the Second World War, the church played a subordinate political role in what John D. McCarthy, David W. Britt, and Mark Wolfson refer to as "institutional channeling."²¹ Throughout this period, the colonial government used the church as a political tool to curb the infiltration of communists, British colonial administrators were convinced that only Christianity could resist the subversive elements of Communism, whereas non-religious or secular primary education would produce an atheistic proletariat.²² The colonial government thus favored Christian churches as agents that might curb the activities of communists and resist communist infiltration by having the Roman Catholic Church enlarge its schoolwork; this was unanimously accepted. This indirect approach took the form of a contractual system.²³

As a client of the colonial government, the Roman Catholic Church became an indirect opponent of the CCP. Through institutional channeling, it was given authority and funding to provide education and social services.²⁴ In 1966, Christian political activism led to the establishment of a Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee to tackle labor issues. The HCIC aimed to replace the labor unions established by pro-China organizations. An emphasis on limited social welfare provisions, mostly provided by Other denominational organizations, such as the Methodist Committee for Overseas Relief and the Presbyterian Mandarin Casework Center, worked on behalf of the colonial government and helped pacify the workforce by providing limited social welfare. Christian churches also provided food and clothing and, eventually,

21. John D. McCarthy, David W. Britt, and Mark Wolfson, "The Institutional Channeling of Social Movements by the State in the United States," *Research in Social Movements, Conflict and Change* 14 (1991): 45-76.

22. Steve Tsang, ed., *A Documentary History of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1995), 85.

23. Beatrice Leung and Shun-hing Chan, *Changing Church and State Relations in Hong Kong, 1950-2000* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003), 26-28.

24. Beatrice Leung, "Church-State Relations in the Decolonisation Period: Hong Kong and Macau," *Religion, State and Society* 26, no. 1 (1998): 17-30.

counseling services, legal aid, social welfare, and family guidance.²⁵ The Catholic and Anglican churches were the main bodies involved in offering education and social services. Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer have pointed out that “by 1996, Christian churches operated half of Hong Kong’s 1,354 primary and secondary schools.”²⁶ The British colonial government contracted out 25 percent of Hong Kong’s social services to Christian churches²⁷ and, by the 1990s, a quarter of all Hong Kong students were being educated in Catholic schools. Wah Yan College, for instance, produced many elites, including the former chief executive Donald Tsang Yam Kuen. The former chief secretary Anson Chan, Martin Lee, and many other prominent figures were also graduates of Catholic schools.²⁸

From Institutional Channeling to Political Participation, 1984–1997

Institutional channeling also meant that as a client of the colonial government, the church partly lost its power to criticize the government when things went wrong. This dependency on the colonial government started to change once it became evident that after 1997 Hong Kong would come under China’s sovereignty. The subsequent period of political transition after 1997 gradually allowed Catholic churches to expand their organizational autonomy. Former governor Chris Patten observed that “at the heart of the life of this very Chinese city, the Catholic Church—missionaries and locals, with so many Chinese priests and nuns today—contributes to public life and social service out of all proportion to its numbers.”²⁹ The Protestant and evangelical churches, on the other hand, were less integrated into the colonial system. The evangelical churches generally steered clear of building rapport with the colonial government, instead focusing solely on their own evangelistic programs. In terms of their stance towards civil

25. Ibid., 40-43.

26. Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 350.

27. Johannes M. M. Chan, “Human Rights: From One Era to Another,” in *The Other Hong Kong Report 1997*, ed. Joseph Y. S. Cheng (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1997), 137-67.

28. Beatrice Leung, “The Catholic Church in Post-1997 Hong Kong: Dilemma in Church-State Relations,” in *China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future*, ed. Stephen Uhalley Jr. and Xiaoxin Wu (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2001), 286.

29. Christopher Patten, *East and West: China, Power, and the Future of Asia* (New York: Random House, 1998), 136.

disobedience, not all churches formally agreed with the goals and activities of the OCLP/UM. L. Y. Kung has argued,

[the] scene is more complicated in Protestant churches. Before the police used tear gas on September 28, most Protestant churches in Hong Kong were quiet on the issue of universal suffrage, except for the Methodist Church and a few indigenous churches. Even though some Protestant churches have issued pastoral letters in response to Occupy Central, their main concern was to call for the respect of the differences on Occupy Central among believers; they did not address the core concern of Occupy Central, which was universal suffrage. After September 28 and the opening of the Umbrella Movement, more Protestant churches condemned the excessive use of force by the police, and urged the government to have an honest dialogue with the protesters in order to solve the existing political predicament. Moreover, a few Protestant churches opened their premises as shelter for protesters during the period of occupation. Despite this, churches making such kinds of public statements are still in the minority.³⁰

Some conservative Protestant groups, such as the Evangelical Free Church of China and the Hong Kong Anglican Church, opposed the movement. Other progressive Protestant groups, such as the Hong Kong Christian Council, the Hong Kong Methodist Church, and the Hong Kong Renewal Movement/Protestants in Support of Constitutional Reform, led by Rev. Wu Chi-wai, came out in support.³¹ Despite these formal divisions, Reverend Wu has “estimated that more than half of the roughly 1,400 Protestant churches in Hong Kong organized ad hoc groups to help the movement.”³² Protestant churches therefore played an important informal role in facilitating the OCLP/UM.

Prior to the 1997 handover, Gov. Chris Patten gradually expanded the LegCo's power to give the people of Hong Kong a pro-democratic voice. The Catholic Church took this as encouragement to train leaders for the political careers. And middle-class professionals, who were mainly Catholics and Protestants, endorsed this teaching initiative. The Catholic Church saw training Christian leaders as a priority, so it set up the Catholic Institute for Religion and Society, which aimed to prepare people for socio-

30. Lap Yan Kung, “The Umbrella Movement and *Kairos*: The Church's Theological Encounter with a Political Movement,” in *Theological Reflections on the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement*, ed. Justin K. H. Tse and Jonathan Y. Tan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 113.

31. Shun-hing Chan, “The Protestant Community and the Umbrella Movement,” 380-95.

32. Rose Wu, “Radical Inclusion in the Umbrella Movement: Interstitial Integrity and the New Pentecostal Rebirth of Hong Kong,” in *Theological Reflections on the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement*, ed. Justin K. H. Tse and Jonathan Y. Tan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 94.

political participation.³³ As a result, Catholic political participation surged during Legislative Council elections, with a large majority of Catholics voting in support of democracy at a ratio of 86.6 (Catholic votes) to 39.1 (public votes) in 1991.³⁴ By gradually liberalizing Hong Kong's political institutions, the British colonial government had opened up new venues for political participation and political contestation. As the 1997 return of Hong Kong drew near, many Christians became either directly involved as political party members, such as the pro-democrats, or independent non-party affiliated members of the LegCo. J. K. H. Tse has argued that "the participation of individual Catholics and Protestants may have only occurred at the personal (as opposed to institutional) level."³⁵ Since legislators are not required to disclose their religious affiliations, it is difficult to ascertain the exact percentage of Christian LegCo members at any given point in time. During the 2016 oath-taking ceremony, however, nineteen out of seventy LegCo members referred to the New Testament (Webb-site Reports 2016). Even assuming that only a quarter of the LegCo members are Christians (and the fraction may be considerably larger), Christian representation on the council is disproportionate to the Christian population of Hong Kong. Official accounts suggest that 10 percent of Hong Kong's citizens identify as Christians, whereas academic studies have suggested that up to 20 percent of Hong Kong's citizens may identify as Christians.³⁶ Such findings suggest that politicians of Christian faith are well represented in Hong Kong's current legislature.

The Christian Churches' Political Involvement from 1997 Onwards

During the period of Hong Kong's decolonization after 1997, Christian churches, especially the Catholic Church, saw the CCP's ideology of dialectic materialism as a threat to religious freedom in Hong Kong. The Catholic Church found itself in a politically

33. Leung, "Church-State Relations," 20.

34. Beatrice Leung, "Political Participation of the Catholic Church in Hong Kong SAR," in *New Trends of Political Participation in Hong Kong*, ed. Joseph Y. S. Cheng (Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong Press, 2014), 305.

35. Justin K. H. Tse, "Epilogue: Conscientization in the Aftermath of Occupying Hong Kong," in *Theological Reflections on the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement*, ed. Justin K. H. Tse and Jonathan Y. Tan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 37.

36. June Cheng, "How Many Christians Live in Hong Kong?," *WORLD*, October 30, 2014, https://world.wng.org/2014/10/how_many_christians_live_in_hong_kong.

awkward position. It had to balance its allegiances to its Hong Kong constituents while at the same time manage an increasingly difficult relationship with the CCP. In the words of Leung, “the Hong Kong Catholic Church had a dual role to play: the bridge-building church for the revival of the Chinese Church, a mission given to them by the Vatican, and the role of a local church to deal with the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government.”³⁷ Again and again, Beijing reminded Hong Kong citizens that, after the handover in 1997, they should cooperate with the HKSAR government and refrain from building alliances with Catholics residing in mainland China.³⁸ The Catholic Church had greatly benefitted from the contractual system under colonial rule, but that system had become “a system of elite consultation and political absorption of the masses.”³⁹ From the point of view of policymakers in Beijing, Christianity was and is a remnant of the historical past of humiliation at the hands of the British and thus an aspect of cultural imperialism that needs to be expunged.⁴⁰

Christian civil-society actors started to feel the pinch of decolonization after the handover in 1997. The introduction of the Education (Amendment) Ordinance by the HKSAR government in 2004 required all schools to establish an Incorporated Management Committee (IMC), with 40 percent of the board members from a non-sponsoring body, by 2010. Cardinal Joseph Zen, who headed the Diocese of Hong Kong and who oversaw Hong Kong Catholic-run schools, fiercely opposed the reform. He wrote long letters and went on a hunger strike for days on end. Eventually the reform was rejected, but only temporarily. If the ordinance had passed at that time, it would have significantly reduced the influence of faith-based groups in the management of Hong Kong's schools.

Such encroachments on the privileges of Christian civil-society actors coincided with the Chinese central government's attempt to introduce an anti-subversion law in 2003 by invoking Article 23 of Hong Kong's Basic Law. Because this proposed anti-subversion law would have rendered any criticism of either the Hong Kong or

37. Leung, “The Catholic Church in Post-1997 Hong Kong,” 254.

38. Beatrice Leung, Camoes Tam, and Marcus Chu, “The Catholic Role in Hong Kong SAR's Governance: Past and Present,” in *The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in its First Decade*, ed. Joseph Y. S. Cheng (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong Press, 2009), 864-65.

39. L. Butenhoff, *Social Movements and Political Reform in Hong Kong* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), 1, 83-86.

40. Leung and Chan, *Changing Church and State Relations*.

central government tantamount to undermining the power and authority of the Chinese party-state, it served to unite the different Christian camps. A prime example of this unification was the ecumenical prayer meeting led by Cardinal Zen and Reverend Chu Yiu Ming prior to the historic demonstration of 500,000 people against the National Security (Legislative Provisions) Bill based on Article 23 of the Basic Law on July 1, 2003. Zen and Chu feared that, once Article 23's anti-subversion law was passed, religious liberty would be constrained. They defended their actions by stating that legislation would undermine the "one country two systems" policy and lead to the erosion of human rights.⁴¹ Catholic and progressive Protestant groups then formed a new alliance, the Civil Human Rights Front, and started to organize collective action further, notably through holding prayer meetings and by lending support to local social movements. Recurring conflicts with the HKSAR government since 1997 have politicized the role of the Catholic Church and turned it from an indirect to a direct opponent of the CCP.

Roles and Strategies of Influential Christian Leaders in the OCLP/UM

Two of the three protagonists in this study played an important political role prior to the OCLP/UM when, in response to the government's plan to introduce a "National Patriotic Curriculum" in 2010,⁴² Cardinal Zen petitioned the court and sued the government. The proposed new curriculum was widely perceived as an attempt to brainwash young people in Hong Kong to love their mother country China and, more importantly, to support the CCP. In fact, it caused such controversy that students and parents protested against it. Joshua Wong, with his now disbanded student group, Scholarism, and the Hong Kong Students' Federation scored a huge victory by mobilizing tens of thousands of students and citizens in defiance of the new law, which forced the HKSAR government to abandon its plans.

In hindsight, one could see the successful student-led protest movement of 2010 as a rehearsal for the Umbrella Movement of 2014. Carsten Vala believed that the two Christian leaders subsequently became involved in the OCLP/UM because they feared increasing marginalization: "The pushback here is [partly] the fear that what happens in China will someday happen in Hong Kong

41. Leung, "Political Participation of the Catholic Church," 294-95.

42. *Ibid.*, 296-97.

unless people speak out.”⁴³ He argued that Christians were at the forefront of leading the OCLP/UM because of the sensitive role Christianity plays in Hong Kong society. In the words of Christian Smith, “religion can help to keep everything in its place. But it can also turn the world upside down.”⁴⁴ We shall now look at the Christian leaders’ theological justification for attempting to turn the “world upside down” during the OCLP/UM.

Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-Kiun

One of the most senior protagonists during the OCLP/UM was Cardinal Joseph Zen. Born in Shanghai to Catholic parents in 1932, he and his family fled to Hong Kong in 1948 where he received a Salesian education and eventually graduated with a doctorate in theology and philosophy from the Salesian Pontifical University in Rome.⁴⁵ Between 1973 and 1983, he worked for a few years as a teacher, was promoted to principal, and later became Provincial Superior of the entire Salesian order. He then worked in China as a seminary lecturer until 1996. In the run-up to Hong Kong’s hand-over to China, he was busy training Christian leaders in Shanghai. It was only after 1996 that he returned to Hong Kong to resume his appointment as coadjutor bishop of Hong Kong.⁴⁶ When appointed bishop on September 23, 2002, he began to adopt a more outspoken approach to political issues. During the controversy around the proposed anti-subversion laws in 2003, Zen led the members of his diocese to voice their disagreement with the proposed law, which in his view would violate civil rights.⁴⁷

Zen believed that Hong Kong could truly live under the promised “one country two systems” of the Basic Law. Zen’s hope was that China would honor its promise to grant universal suffrage and democracy within a certain time. This is also why he chose to support Tai’s idea of demanding universal suffrage through civil disobedience. With genuine universal suffrage, the Catholic Church would be able to continue to play an important role in education and social services. In his interview, Cardinal Zen reminisced about

43. Quoted in Jack Jenkins, “Why Christians are Helping Lead Hong Kong’s Pro-Democracy Movement,” *ThinkProgress*, October 12, 2014, <http://www.notey.com/external/4493387/why-christians-are-helping-lead-hong-kong-s-pro-democracy-movement-politics-national-security-terrorism-osama-bin-laden-isis-us-politics-counterterrorism.html>.

44. Smith, *Disruptive Religion*.

45. Joseph Zen Ze-Kiun Zen, Interview with Nancy Ng, March 31, 2015.

46. Annie Lam, “Cardinal Joseph Zen: ‘I am Just a Conscientious Teacher’- Life after Turning 80,” *Tripod* 32 no. 166 (2012): 64-72, http://www.hsstudyc.org.hk/en/tripod_en/en_tripod_166_09.html.

47. *Ibid.*

institutional channeling during the colonial period and lamented the strict government controls over the Catholic management of schools in post-1997 Hong Kong. According to Zen:

After the 1997 handover, many things happened to Hong Kong, which were damaging to the city. With the colonial regime we could not expect to have democracy, but we enjoyed many freedoms. The UK is a democratic country and also, because it has a Christian tradition, as Catholics we were OK—no problem with the government. Then, after the handover, the problems started very soon.⁴⁸

Though Tai was the originator of the OCLP, credit must also be given to Zen, who was highly respected in the Catholic Church, as well as by political parties and civic society groups. J. K. H. Tse has pointed out that Cardinal Zen “has been a visible and critical presence among the students.”⁴⁹ Cardinal Zen strongly supported the civic referendum organized by OCLP in June 2014 to gauge public support for a direct election of Hong Kong’s chief executive. Cardinal Zen’s ultimate goal was thus to ensure that independent candidates, who did not have to be vetted by Beijing, could stand for the 2017 chief executive election. In our interview he expressed his disappointment that the “Beijing White Paper [had] told Hong Kong ‘Don’t ever think you have the power, we will only give you what we want to give.’”⁵⁰

Following the failure of OCLP/UM to achieve its ultimate goals, Cardinal Zen reflected on the need to achieve greater unity and to uphold the principle of non-violence:

I believe that without the Chinese government being willing to do something we have no chance, but at this moment we have to do something and I can foresee people may use violence.... But I think we have to remind the people that they made mistakes, but the purpose is important, we did all these for a democratic society. If we don’t do something we will become slaves of the dictatorial society. We have to rectify our mistake, which I think is disunion.⁵¹

Benny Tai Yiu Ting

As the initiator of OCLP, Benny Tai Yiu Ting played a leading role in the Umbrella Movement. Born in 1964, he became a Christian at

48. Zen, “OCLP 2014 in HK.”

49. Tse, “The Umbrella Movement and Theology,” <https://syndicate.network/symposia/theology/the-umbrella-movement-and-theology/>.

50. *Ibid.*

51. Zen, “OCLP 2014 in HK.”

the age of twenty-three. He received his professional education at Hong Kong University Law School. During his time at the university, Tai was the assistant of Martin Lee, another Christian and founding chairman of the Democratic Party.⁵² Tai went on to become an associate professor of law at the University of Hong Kong. In the interview, Tai acknowledged that he was inspired by Martin Luther King Jr. When working with U.S. social scientists Bruce Ackerman and James Fishkin, who advocated deliberative democracy, Tai realized that he could put his faith into action by lobbying for a pluralist Hong Kong.⁵³ He was conscious of the role that the Christian church has played in other democratizing countries.

Tai maintained that political activism does not have to be limited to the political arena and that churches must play an active part in Hong Kong's democratization. Chan quotes Tai as stating in a media interview, "This is not a political activity. For me, this is a religious activity in which I am preaching therein."⁵⁴ Tai envisioned changing the conservative Christians' view and actively engaging both Christians and non-Christians in dialogue and political participation. In his Chinese-language book, *Occupy Central with Love and Peace*, Tai presented the OCLP as a "final push, or campaign of the last resort, for universal suffrage," and argued that this final push entails deliberative elements and acts of disobedience that directly challenge the Beijing government.⁵⁵ In Heidi Wang's review of Tai's monograph, she explains that Tai sees five possible pathways towards achieving democracy. One is via the traditional route of demonstrations and debates with LegCo. The second, which is represented by the 2010 resignation of pan-democratic lawmakers in five constituencies and the resulting by-elections, is to have quasi referendums. The third and fourth strategies are non-violent and violent civil disobedience, respectively. The fifth and final one is to design a way to Hong Kong's desire for universal suffrage and Beijing's unwillingness to copy the

52. T. Chong, "Academic Benny Tai Proves He Is Not All Talk and No Action," *South China Morning Post*, May 19, 2014, <http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1515056/academic-benny-tai-proves-he-not-all-talk-and-no-action>.

53. Alex Lo, "Benny Tai Is Not Evil, Just Misguided," *South China Morning Post*, August 14, 2013, <http://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/1296519/benny-tai-not-evil-just-misguided?page=all&edition=international>.

54. Chan, "The Protestant Community and the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong," 385.

55. Tai Yiu Ting, *Zhanling Zhonghuan: Heping Kangzheng Xinzhanshi* [Occupy Central with Love and Peace] (Hong Kong: Enrich Publishing, 2013), 183.

Western model to coexist, and thus allow the establishment to remain in power.⁵⁶

According to Wang, Tai justified his acts of civil disobedience as legitimate on the grounds that people had exhausted all other legal means and agreed with Martin Luther King Jr. that “justice too long delayed is justice denied.”⁵⁷ He also shared Gene Sharp’s view that the function of negotiation is limited and even dangerous in the process of democratic transition.⁵⁸ To achieve his political vision and share his views and opinions, Tai is a frequent contributor to Christian magazines and newspaper columns. His idea of civil disobedience captured the public mood, for it entailed putting deliberative democracy into action. Tai formed a task force in order to organize the movement to implement electoral reform, which the central government had promised in 2012. After gathering positive responses from pan-democratic groups, and with the support of Baptist pastor Rev. Chu Yiu Ming and sociologist Chan Kin Man, Tai officially launched his OCLP platform at a press conference at Kowloon Union Church on March 27, 2013.⁵⁹ Holding the press conference at a church sent out a coded message to potential Christian supporters that civil disobedience was not just politically possible, but also theologically permissible. Press photos showed the three OCLP initiators standing in front of a highly visible cross.⁶⁰ He subsequently organized an open-to-all deliberative meeting for political parties and civic-society organizations in June 2013. Some seven hundred participants attended to set the agenda and engaged in deliberations with specific groups, churches, social workers, students, and many others. In May 2014, 2,500 people attended the third planned meeting to consider all the proposals, of which three were chosen to be included in the civil referendum. Tai’s intention was to engage all levels of civil society to vote on one of the three proposals. Of the 792,808 votes cast, the proposal by the Alliance for True Democracy received 331,427 (42.1%), the proposal by Scholarism and the Hong Kong Federation of Students 302,567

56. H. N. K. Wang, Book Review, *Zhanling Zhonghuan: Heping Kangzheng Xinzhanishi* [Occupancy Central with Love and Peace], by Tai Yiu Ting (Hong Kong: Enrich Publishing, 2013) in: *Taiwan in Comparative Perspective* 5 (July 2014): 168-72.

57. *Ibid.*, 170.

58. *Ibid.*

59. Jermain T. M. Lam, “The Occupy Central Movement and Political Reform in Hong Kong,” in *New Trends of Political Participation in Hong Kong*, ed. Joseph Y. S. Cheng (Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong Press, 2014), 454.

60. Joshua But, “Occupy Central Hong Kong Supporters Ready to Block Traffic and Go to Jail for Democracy,” *South China Morning Post*, March 28, 2013, <http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1201371/occupy-central-supporters-ready-block-traffic-and-go-jail-democracy>.

(38.4%), and the People Power's proposal 81,558 (10.4%).⁶¹ During this deliberative process, Tai went to more than one hundred churches (including some with congregations of several thousand) to explain the principles and practices of a civil disobedience movement to leaders, pastors, and laity. His aim was to involve all the different communities by engaging them in political discussions about universal values such as democracy, equality, justice, and righteousness, and to prepare them for real democracy through participation in social movements. Tai also gave very clear guidelines on how to be non-violent in the event of police intervention during protests. Surprisingly, Tai was not upset about the non-conclusive results of the OCLP/UM. He maintained that the struggle for universal suffrage should not be thought of as a singular event, but as a series of strategic efforts to accumulate pressure on the HKSAR and the Beijing government.

Joshua Wong Chi Fung

The third and final protagonist in this study is Joshua Wong Chi Fung. This post-1997 progressive Christian is one of the youngest political activists in Hong Kong. Called an "extremist" by China's state-run media, he was nominated as *The Times* Young Person of the Year 2014, was tenth among the world's fifty greatest leaders in the *Fortune* 2015 list, and ranked among the ten most influential people by Agence France-Presse in 2014. Born in October 1996, he was only ten months old when Hong Kong was handed back to China in 1997. At that point, Wong's parents chose to remain in Hong Kong rather than emigrate. They raised Wong as a Christian with strict Lutheran principles and, from an early age, taught him to love and care for his neighbors. From his parents he learned to oppose anti-gay and anti-discrimination laws.⁶²

A typical Hong Kong teenager who has grown up in the social media age, Wong is a knowledgeable activist who often contributes to opinion-editorials to international news outlets ranging from *Huffington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *Time*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post*. He also has his own blog. He and his now-defunct Scholarism group gained prominence in 2012 when he organized a 120,000-strong protest

61. Ma, Jazz, Frank Lee, and Robert Chung, Electronic Voting and Civil Referendums in Hong Kong, 2014, <https://www.hkupop.hku.hk/english/columns/columns156.html>.

62. Malcolm Moore, "Portrait of Hong Kong's 18-year-old protest leader," *The Telegraph*, December 11, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/hongkong/11139904/Portrait-of-Hong-Kongs-17-year-old-protest-leader.html>.

against the Beijing proposal to implement the National Patriotic Curriculum. His new student movement was more radical than any movement before it and could employ different tools and means to raise awareness, such as digital media, YouTube, and street lectures. It also operated an online newspaper webpage. This first protest attracted students, professors, and lecturers, and provoked mass hunger strikes, which finally broke the resolve of the HKSAR, causing it to shelve the curriculum and give schools the freedom to adopt any teaching guides and teaching resources they deemed suitable.⁶³

Wong belongs to the so-called Generation Y, which no longer relies solely on being physically present at protests. Through digital activism, the “concept of digital democracy enables like-minded people to connect with one another.”⁶⁴ In fact, these young people are now in a league of their own and can join in any social movements, whether they are “democracy movements, cultural heritage strikes for social justice, protection campaigns, [or] local farming and reclamation community projects.”⁶⁵ The more China attempts to hold Hong Kong in a tight embrace, the more suffocated the young people of Hong Kong feel, and so they try to break free.⁶⁶ Instead of accepting their future, they have preferred to take a confrontational route. Their successful defeat of the projected National Patriotic Curriculum in 2012 told Joshua Wong that he and his supporters had a strong voice in Hong Kong politics.

In June 2014, Wong and his Scholarism group submitted a draft for the reform of Hong Kong’s electoral procedures, which one-third of the voters in the referendum accepted. In July, the group staged a mass sit-in, at which 511 people were arrested. Then, in September, Scholarism and the Hong Kong Students’ Federation persuaded thirteen thousand people to boycott classes, and Hong Kong’s largest teachers’ union circulated a petition that fully supported the students’ action. An announcement that student leaders and the government had agreed on formal talks brought hope to demonstrators that a resolution could be near. However, the government made it known that the protesters’ core demands (full universal suffrage for Hong Kong and the resignation of the chief executive) would not be discussed.

63. Leung, “Political Participation of the Catholic Church,” 272-73.

64. S. C. F. Hung, “Political Participation of Students in Hong Kong: A Historical Account of Transformation,” in *New Trends of Political Participation in Hong Kong*, ed. Joseph Y. S. Cheng (Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong Press, 2014), 280-81.

65. *Ibid.*, 281.

66. C. P. Yew and K. M. Kwong, “Hong Kong Identity on the Rise,” *Asian Survey* 54, no. 6 (2014): 1088-1112.

Wong wanted to ignite a wave of civil disobedience among Hong Kong students that built upon years of pent-up frustration. He told CNN, "I don't think our battle is going to be very long.... If you have the mentality that striving for democracy is a long, drawn-out war and you take it slowly, you will never achieve it. You have to see every battle as possibly the final battle—only then will you have the determination to fight."⁶⁷

Wong's motivation comes from his Christian faith, but he believes that besides bringing the gospel of salvation to the people, he has a responsibility to care for the poor, the weak, and the needy. His vision of democracy spreading from Hong Kong to mainland China has predisposed many young people to join the cause. Besides fighting for freedom, he also stands firm in his identity as a Christian and as a Hongkonger resisting to be treated just like any other citizen of the People's Republic of China (PRC). This charismatic young leader and political activist, who was certainly throwing all his energies into the Umbrella Movement, is a sign that this will be a continuous fight. At one point he declared that "time is on my side," for he was only seventeen years old at the time of the OCLP/UM.

Conclusion

While OCLP/UM had all the hallmarks of a secular social movement aimed at political liberalization and democratization, this research has shown that many of its key initiators were convinced that progress towards democracy in Hong Kong would be the best way of protecting religious freedom and a democratic way of life. Since the OCLP/UM failed to force Chief Executive Leung Chun Ying to step down and also did not achieve universal suffrage for all Hong Kong citizens by the year 2017, the research question raised in the introduction still needs to be answered. Did the movement lack the "ability to articulate the reasons for the demonstrations"⁶⁸ and thus have only "the power of its own efforts to sustain it?"⁶⁹

The answer to the first part of the question is that the three leaders (Cardinal Zen, Benny Tai, and Joshua Wong) drew heavily on their Christian faith when making the case for public protests and civil disobedience. Their visions and missions were the same in all but strategy. Wong, in particular, may seem to have gone

67. Wilfred Chan and Yuli Yang, "Echoing Tiananmen, 17-year-old Hong Kong student prepares for democracy battle," CNN, September 21, 2014, <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/09/21/world/asia/hong-kong-joshua-wong-democracy-protest/>.

68. Williams, "Leaderless Movements are Impossible to Maintain."

69. *Ibid.*

along with the OCLP leaders' principle of non-violence, but he actually "hijacked"⁷⁰ the entire undertaking by frequently escalating the process without the consensus of the core team, which is perhaps the main reason why OCLP/UM became polarized and fragmented. Wong believed that students should be on the frontline because, unlike adults, who like to talk about political facts and the broader context, they would refuse to compromise before achieving their goal. For him, the present was the time to succeed, whereas Zen and Tai saw the OCLP as a stepping-stone towards further engagement in the future. Zen and Tai agreed that they should learn how to guide this group of young activists properly, but behind them was the figure of Martin Lee, who greatly encouraged the students' growing radicalism. During Nancy Ng's interview, Zen spoke of Lee's involvement with the student leaders and his advice that they adopt a more confrontational approach. Perhaps Lee indirectly helped to catapult Wong into eminence and groom him into the fearless, charismatic leader who now advances the cause of democracy in Hong Kong.

To answer the second part of the question, it can be argued that OCLP/UM indeed only had the power of its own efforts to sustain its actions. The broader context is that the three protagonists Zen, Tai, and Wong attempted the impossible: Knowing that Beijing would never budge, and despite all the difficulties they faced, they have retained their conviction that what they were doing is for the common good, not merely for the Christians but for the whole of Hong Kong. Notwithstanding the consequences, retributions, and blame they received for causing so much social upheaval, they remained convinced of their long-term vision of a democratic future for Hong Kong. OCLP leader Chan Kin Man has commented that "many people think we want to paralyze Central, but all we want is self-sacrifice"—that is, the offering of oneself up for arrest during acts of non-violent civil disobedience for the greater good.⁷¹

In this essay, we have shown that through the processes of institutional channeling and political participation, Christianity has exerted a deep influence over the citizens of Hong Kong. While the handover in 1997 effectively brought the privileged church-state relationship to an end, the Catholic Church more generally and to a lesser extent the Protestant churches have time and again spoken out in defense of Hong Kong's social and political values.

Thus, Christianity still has a role to play in Hong Kong's political sphere. In the words of Goossaert and Palmer, "[J]ust as

70. Zen, "OCLP 2014 in HK."

71. Lam, "The Occupy Central Movement," 456.

Christians lost their privileged position, some began to advocate taking a more 'prophetic' public role, moving from executor to critic of government policy."⁷² While Victoria Hui is correct in stating that OCLP/UM was not in and of itself a Christian movement,⁷³ this essay provides ample evidence that high-profile movement leaders of the Christian faith played a central role during OCLP/UM. We concur with J. K. H. Tse that "the Umbrella Movement can hardly be considered a failure" and that "the gift of the Umbrella Movement alongside the other cognate protest movements in the world today is the empirical verification of a theological paradigm shift. Freire taught us long ago that if we want to have a truly free and democratic world, the cycle of violence must give way to the humanization of both the oppressed and the oppressor."⁷⁴ Tse concludes that "[the] Umbrella Movement is not over because the pedagogy of the oppressed is not yet finished ... [the] action has yet to take place."⁷⁵ How relevant the moderating influence of Christian leaders on the movement was becomes clearer when seen in comparison with the far more militant post-OCLP/UM skirmishes between protesters and the Hong Kong police. Daniel Lee has called the political violence of the so-called Fishball Revolution of February 8-9, 2016, "a dramatic paradigm shift from social activism rooted in civic values to one that discards them."⁷⁶ In stark contrast it can be said that the church has joined the chorus of increasingly vocal civic groups and has also helped broaden public participation by involving both Catholics and Protestants in social movements. Ecumenical initiatives, such as the 2014 joint declaration of Protestants and Catholics titled "Confessions of Christians Watching over Hong Kong,"⁷⁷ are indicative of the willingness and ability of different Christian denominations to join the same battle line in defense of democracy and freedom of religion. These findings suggest that future research on Hong Kong's multi-faceted social and political movements will also need to take the religious dimension into account.

72. Goossaert and Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China*, 353.

73. Victoria Hui, "Not a Christian Movement," *Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement and Beyond*, October 1, 2015, <https://victoriathui.wordpress.com/2015/10/01/not-a-christian-movement>.

74. Tse, "Epilogue: Conscientization in the Aftermath of Occupying Hong Kong," 171-72.

75. *Ibid.*, 172.

76. Daniel Lee, "A Paradigm Shift in Civil Society: From the Umbrella to the Fishball Revolution," *Hong Kong Free Press*, March 18, 2016, <https://www.hongkongfp.com/2016/03/18/a-paradigm-shift-in-civil-society-from-the-umbrella-to-the-fishball-revolution/>.

77. Chan, "The Protestant Community and the Umbrella Movement," 388.