Protests in Hong Kong
from Confucianism to Levinas's Substitution

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Abstract
2019 was a tumultuous year for Hong Kong. Protests began in June, sparked by concerns about the extradition bill, but with time, larger demands have emerged: the withdrawal of the extradition bill, for officers to step down, an inquiry into police brutality, amnesty for arrested protesters, and free elections. The call for Hong Kong independence has also increased, supported by activist Edward Leung, who was sentenced to six years in prison for charges of social unrest in 2016 and who continues to be prominent a role model for protesters. This paper focuses on protests from 2014 to 2019 in Hong Kong, which obtained the most international newspaper coverage since 1997, when the transfer of sovereignty over Hong Kong from Great Britain was reverted to The People's Republic of China. To understand the development of these protests, this research will use phenomenological methodology to analyse how Confucianism and Levinas's substitution influence Hong Kong Chinese protestors, the majority of which are millennials and post-millenials from Generations Y and Z. Since Generations Y and Z grew up with the Internet and their lives have been deeply influenced by digital culture, empirical evidence will be provided in this paper in order to show how Confucianism functions as the social-culture background of young protesters while Levinas's substitution functions as the motivation for the movement's continuity.

Keywords: Post-colonialism, Levinas, Substitution, Confucianism, Protests in Hong Kong

Introduction

Hong Kong is a Chinese society, which was under British colonial rule for 155 years (Carroll, 2007). In 2014, the Umbrella Movement broke out and it was the first time that the Central Business District in Hong Kong was blocked by protesters after the transfer of sovereignty over Hong Kong in 1997. It was triggered by the White Paper on 'One Country, Two Systems' policy issued by The Information Office of the State Council in Beijing on 31 August 2014, which suggested that universal suffrage is not fully democratic, as candidates of the chief executive were to be pre-selected by Beijing (Lahiri, 2019). Five years later, another series of large-scale protests occurred in reaction to the introduction of the extradition bill. In addition to the longer duration of these protests, violence used by police and protesters also escalated, which had previously been unacceptable among most Hongkongers in 2014, regardless of the actors.

To understand the development of the protests from 2014 to 2019, this research will use phenomenological methodology to analyse front-line Hong Kong Chinese protestors, who are mostly from Generations Y and Z, grew up with the Internet and whose lives have been deeply shaped by digital culture. This Paper will study how Confucianism functions as the social-culture background of young protesters while Levinas's substitution functions as the motivation for the movement's continuity with empirical evidences.

Chinese philosophies have been practised in most Hong Kong Chinese families, even during the colonial period. Confucianism was among all the most popular since it was used by the government as an ideology to rule. After the transfer of sovereignty, the influence of Confucianism even increased, as the first chief executive of Hong Kong Tung Chi Wah mentioned that his ideal government is based on a Confucian practising paternalistic rule (Lau, 2002). Moreover, the concept of hierarchy and Mandate of Heaven in Confucianism are being emphasized in Chinese related subjects in Hong Kong education as well as by governmental authorities, which could reveal how Confucianism has been manipulated as a sociocultural factor to condemn protesters' behaviour.

To articulate ways of being ethical during protests, protesters re-contextualized Confucianism after 2016 as front-line protesters faced increasing risks of injuries, imprisonment, and even death and were especially impacted by the imprisonment of pro-Hong Kong independence activist Edward Leung. In this particular moments of the protests, the concept of substitution by Levinas can be applied to explain and describe the attitude of most protesters from Generations Y and Z, as well as the continuity of the movement itself.

Confucianism in Hong Kong before 2014

Historically, Confucianism has been transformed from ethics to political ideology since the Han Dynasty. Hence, the colonial government and the current government keep this ideology and have been using it to stress the importance of certain elements of Confucianism, which are hierarchical relationships and the Mandate of Heaven, so as to maintain social stability. These concepts are not only being found in the vocabulary of authorities, but also in Hong Kong's education system.

According to Confucianism, there are five primary human relationships (五倫)—ruler to subject, father to son, elder brother to younger brother, husband to wife and friend to friend. This concept has been advocated to enforce the hierarchical relationships in society since the mid-Tang Dynasty in Chinese imperial examinations, which was organised by the State for people who wanted to work in the state bureaucracy (Lam & Phillipson, 2013). As a result, people who could pass the examination would also be those who supported the regime. Such an examination system was adopted in education and Chinese related subjects, which included Chinese Languages in HKCEE (Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination), Chinese Language and Culture in HKALE (Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination), Chinese History and Chinese Literature in both HKCEE and HKALE, and blended well with the British examination system. Even after the reform of the examination system in 2012, combining HKCEE and HKALE to HKDSE (Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination), there are still three readings on Confucianism out of twelve compulsory readings starting in 2015 (Membership of the Curriculum Development Council Committee on Chinese Language Education, 2015).

In the context of the five relationships in Confucianism, the structure is very important and the concept of family structure is often used in official political discourse. In light of Chinese tradition, it is a national taboo to address the name of the sovereign directly, while 'grandfather' is regarded as the person who has the absolute authority in the family. For these reasons, since the change of sovereignty on 1 July 1997, pro-China media have been using 'grandfather' to describe China and 'being held in our ancestors' arms' when it comes to the topic of the handover of sovereignty. Kinship was also emphasised in the 2014 White Paper's description of the transfer of sovereignty as a 'return to the motherland' (South China Morning Post, 2014).

To further legitimize the authority of the government, governors are often seen as 'parental officials' (Fumu Guan 父母官) and people governed by officials as 'children-people' (zimin 子民) respectively under Confucianism and the patriarchal system (Cao, 2018). The current chief executive of Hong Kong Carrie Lam still uses this concept, such as in a TV interview shortly after the outbreak of the anti-extradition bill protests, in which she likened Hong Kong protesters to her two sons and said she, as a 'mother', could not give in to her 'wayward children' (Sham-Shackleton, 2019). Terms related to kinship have been used in China for over the last two thousand years, but it is no longer acceptable in Hong Kong since people should have the power to elect their own government representatives.

Moreover, kinship has also been used to raise the sense of belonging of Hongkongers to China as, since 2004, the Hong Kong government has started a video campaign in Cantonese, with the national anthem as background music. The first video stressed the importance of bonding among individuals, family, and the state (Information Services Department of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, 2004), and videos from this campaign were played daily on all TV channels before the news report, mainly in the evening around 6:30 pm to 7 pm (Information Services Department of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, 2005), which has the highest viewership, according to the local, social practice.

In addition to the five relationships, the Mandate of Heaven (Tianming 天命) is another very important element in Confucianism being used in political discourse to legitimize the single authority in China, as defines the relation between human and heaven (Baogang, 2003), which means the destiny of oneself is closely combined with heaven and one accesses the Mandate of Heaven or improves their destiny through a moral or ethical act. The emperor, or government, is usually regarded as the ambassador sent by heaven that people have to obey. Despite her Catholic background, Carrie Lam still also evoke this interpretation of Confucianism, such as when she tried to persuade members of the Election Committee to vote for her in the 5th chief executive election in 2017 by claiming that she was urged by God in a dream to run for election campaign (Apple Daily, 2017).

Strong belief in destiny and the Mandate of Heaven stigmatized social movements to a certain extent, because when a social movement gets radical, the government could easily name it a revolution to give grounds to suppress it. 'Revolution' in Chinese is formed by two characters: to change (革) and fate (命), which violate the concept of the Mandate of Heaven, as revolution is regarded as an action to overthrow the regime. However, Mencius (孟子) also pointed out that the will of people defines the Mandate of Heaven, which means that the head of the government could be changed or overthrown over time. Yet, it is difficult for people to determine when the government is losing its legitimacy, losing its Mandate of Heaven.

Umbrella Movement in 2014

The Umbrella Movement was triggered by the White Paper issued on 31 August 2014 in Beijing and it started with student strikes that began on 22 September 2014 with a banner stating 'self-determination' (命運自主) on the main stage of the student strike (Figure 1), located next to the government building. The phrase 'self-determination' was condemned by the Chinese government, which accused the protesters that they were not only advocating Hong Kong independence, but also trying to violate the Mandate of Heaven as well as destroy the close 'family ties' between Hong Kong and China. A week later, riot police attempted to clear the demonstration area by throwing tear gas and using pepper spray, which in return drew more demonstrators to the protest (McCarthy, 2014).

Figure 1: Main stage of the Umbrella Movement, photo from Internet

The movement lasted for 79 days, which included one official meeting between student leaders and officials held on 21 October. Lester Shum, one of the student representatives who was 21 years old at that time, described the generation of protesters, which was awakened by tear gas on 28 September 2014, as being chosen by time to safeguard their freedom and rights, just like Carrie Lam and other previous government officials (South China Morning Post, 2019). Here we can especially see that the Mandate of Heaven also has a certain level of influence on Generation Y.

Nevertheless, the influences of Confucianism on the Umbrella Movement did not play a significant role in comparison with other previous social movements, especially like the annual 4 June candlelight vigil or the annual 1 July demonstration. In my opinion, it is because the movement was led by student leaders from Generation Y, who grew up with the Internet and received the highest education since the colonial period. With the Internet, they could easily access information about other social movements from other countries, for example like the Sunflower Movement in Taiwan earlier the same year as the Umbrella Movement, during which the Taiwanese parliament was occupied by students from Generation Y for days.

In addition, three months before the Umbrella Movement, funding for the controversial Northeast Development Plan was granted by the Finance Committee, which exposed structural violation of the democratic system in Hong Kong since the funding was granted before local town planners had vetted the development plan (Cheung & Chong, 2014). Moreover, the chairperson of the committee, who was elected automatically in the functional constituency without receiving any votes, used his power to limit the duration of debate surrounding the bill itself. Following the discontent of demonstrators, student leaders of the Umbrella Movement decided to form an external force to stop the proposed universal suffrage bill that the chief executive candidates have to be nominated by a nominating committee, composed of 1,200 members.

Confucianism after the Umbrella Movement

While many considered the Umbrella Movement ended without any success, despite the fact that the bill was not passed, views on Confucianism have since been changed in two ways.

Since the bill did not pass because the pro-establishment parties did not enter the voting hall on time and many felt that it was pure luck that led to the withdrawal of the bill rather than any actual actions taken by the pan-democratic parties, young people were especially disappointed with the established pan-democratic parties and experienced politicians, which led to the rise of a variety of new political organisations. The political party Hong Kong Indigenous was among the most radical of this new political direction and was in the spotlight for introducing 'localism' into the mainstream, which also had a great influence on the protests in 2019. More to this point, localist parties also deconstructed the manipulated hierarchical discourse of the government by stating that the People's Republic of China was founded later than the establishment of Hong Kong. As a result, they refused to use 'grandfather', 'motherland', or other vocabulary referring to kinship when they addressed the Chinese regime.

During the Umbrella Movement, several civic education courses and workshops took place in the occupied area, but they focused mainly on Western political theories and philosophies while Chinese philosophies were absent, since most people considered them corrupt. On account of that, localists started to re-contextualize Confucianism after the Umbrella Movement. 'I have never heard of putting a sovereign to death' (未聞弒君也)[1] (Mencius) is being more frequently used by localists to legitimize social movements, which the Chinese and Hong Kong government regarded as seditious by the government. Thereafter, there are also increasing numbers of scholars using Confucianism to justify protesters or reactions of protesters. Prof. Chung-yi Cheng used Confucianism and Taoism to interpret 'water' as a metaphor of the protests in 2019. On one hand since water means flexibility according to Taoism, it could then be used to describe the flexibility of protesters, whereas in Confucianism, water can be used to describe the one's virtuousness and resilience in the face of difficulties (陳, 李, 吳, & 薛, 2019).

'I,' responsibility and 'the other' according to Levinas

Levinas's works lie between philosophical traditions and Judaism, which to him is the understanding of being rather than a religion. According to Levinas, human beings as social animals will inevitably have interactions with one and other, which indicates 'the other' important for transcendence. There are various levels of transcendence, as stated by Levinas, in accordance with different levels of social engagement. The bonding of oneself with the other begins with eye contact whereas the facial expression of the other forms the first transcendence, as the will to account for oneself is interrupted. The next transcendence takes place when one talks with the other and dialogue begins.

At the same time, 'I', for example, discover my responsibility to the others at the moment of encounter, according to Levinas, and taking responsibility in this context means doing things that 'I' did not intend to do, as it is against 'my'own will, the will for 'myself'(Levinas, 1983). Levinas argued that this responsibility is infinite, which in an expanded view implies one would die for the other instead of killing the other, using one's life to substitute the other. To Levinas, we do not choose to be responsible, but we become responsible when we think of the others, for the 'I' accounts for the other.

Edward Leung and Levinas's substitution

Edward Leung, a member of Hong Kong Indigenous, became the first localist who ran for office in the Legislative Council (LegCo) election after the Umbrella Movement, even though it was just a by-election. During his election campaign, a conflict between the police and civilians who wanted to buy street food from hawkers, which is a custom during the Lunar New Year in Hong Kong, took place on the second day of Lunar New Year in Mongkok. Even though Leung tried to de-escalate

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1 This phrase points out that regicide does not exist when the sovereign is not ruling with kindness (仁), such that he shall be considered as ruffian rather than sovereign.

the situation by separating the crowd and the police in the first place, the situation became uncontrollable. The crowd started to throw bricks at the police and a police officer shot in the air. Later that the night, Leung was arrested, accused of taking part in a riot and for assaulting a police officer.

A few months after the conflict, he lost the by-election with the third highest amount of votes, which indicated that over 60,000 people wanted change by voting for a candidate outside of the conventional political spectrum. After the election, he claimed that he would not go away as he had voters who agreed with his political thinking (Standnews, 2016). Three months later, Leung was banned from running for office in the next LegCo Election due to his pro-Hong Kong independence view. Nonetheless, he gave his endorsement to another candidate, who shared a similar view, to run for election (Sataline, 2016). Given the charges after the conflict with police in Mongkok, he knew that the maximum sentence would be ten years of imprisonment. After the election, he left for Harvard University for a research position, where some of his supporters expected him to seek political asylum, since his charges were based on Public Order Ordinance in Hong Kong, which is a copy of the Public Order Act 1986 in Great Britain, an act considered as unjust by Glanville Williams because of its unclear definitions as well as its heavy sentences and excessive punishment measures.

Leung however returned to Hong Kong for his trial and was sentenced to six years in jail for taking part in a 'riot' (Cheung K., 2018). According to his testimony, the moment he decided to stay in Mongkok despite the intense atmosphere was because it reminded him of his responsibility to people who support his political thinking (Cheung K., 2018).

Even though Levinas did not specify which responsibility he was referring to, there are two different types of responsibilities in a society bound by a social contract. The first one related to social movements would be civic responsibility, which includes involvement in volunteerism and community service and interests in politics, in order to promote moral and civic renewal, so that we can move toward a more cohesive and humane society (Ehrlich, 200). The second one would be legal responsibility: to face and to accept the court's judgement and sentences when one breaks the law.

According to *Citizen News* in 2019, there were 91 persons arrested, among them 26 persons were released after investigation, while 3 skipped bail and sought political asylum from different countries. Although Edward Leung did not die for anyone specifically, his act of returning to Hong Kong from the US to face trial with an expected long sentence fulfils the requirements of Levinas's substitution, as, following his arrest, many other protesters in the incident were not arrested. It is also a popular belief that Leung is substituting the future of Hong Kong with his own, as his imprisonment may encourage more people to participate in future protests in the face of injustice, so as to postpone the time of Hong Kong becoming an authoritarian city.

Protest against the extradition bill since June 2019

The imprisonment of Leung indeed had a great impact on Hong Kong, for Leung was seen by some as a young person with lofty ideas but turned out to suffer for

generation Y and Z. Some of his supporters even suggested that 'Hong Kong does not deserve Edward Leung' before the social movement against the controversial extradition bill in June, allowing extradition to China, which violate the promised 'one country, two systems' stated in the Sino-British Declaration by damaging the independent judicial law system in Hong Kong. Ever since the protests started in June 2019, Leung has been seen as a spiritual leader, with his campaign slogan in the election being 'Liberate Hong Kong, Revolution of Our Time'. He also wrote an open letter from prison to encourage protesters to continue to fight, asking them to try to not to be dominated by their hatred despite their anger about the current social situation (Leung, 2019).

The idea of using one's individual future to substitute for a different social collective future has been widespread. A significant example occurred on 1 July 2019 on during that year's Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Establishment Day. A massive demonstration took place on that day, while the Hong Kong officials were dressed up to celebrate at the official cocktail party. Later that night, demonstrators stormed into the legislative council to issue a manifesto, raising 5 demands to the government: a complete withdrawal of the extradition bill; retraction of the characterisation of protest as 'rioting'; the release of arrested protesters; an investigation of police brutality; and the stepping down of chief executive Carrie Lam (Westcott, Yeung, Griffiths, Hollingsworth, George, & Marsh, 2019). A few hours after entering LegCo, there were rumours about police forcibly clearing the building by midnight and that protestors who occupied the site might be charged with participating in a riot. Brian Leung, who published 'Hong Kong Nationalism' in the Hong Kong University student union journal *The Undergrad* in 2014, who is now as a PhD candidate at the University of Washington, took off his mask and gave a speech urging other protesters to stay, so as to prevent lawmakers from entering the hall and taking a vote on the extradition bill the next day. In his speech, he said, 'if we lose in this movement, the upcoming ten years will be the darkest time of Hong Kong.' Although he mentioned the future of Hong Kong, he was referring to the future of Hongkongers in this sense.

As the time was getting closer to midnight, confusing information was spread via the Internet. Local News agencies including *Apple Daily* and *Standnews* reported that the last four remaining protesters in the LegCo building wrote their wills and were ready to sacrifice themselves. One reporter said that a protester was willing to sacrifice his future in order to give a better one to his children (Apple Daily, 2019). However, a few minutes before midnight, some of the protesters who had remained outside of the LegCo ran inside and carried those last four protesters out. In a live interview broadcasted by *Standnews*, one protester said they were risking their own safety in order to protect those remaining protesters because they had begun to worry about their safety while watching live streaming news on their fellow protesters' channel on Telegram (Standnews, 2019).

Resonating with Levinas's writing that the experience with the other will influence the 'I', Levinas's substitution is specifying the moment of decision-making, with a third person or the other in sight. Not surprisingly, thanks to the Internet, the other is no longer limited to who we met in person, because we can see the others' facial expressions or know the thoughts of the others by watching videos or photos online. Judith Butler mentioned in her presentation 'A Politics of the Street' for the Spring

2012 Wall Exchange lectures that the body could be the site of a transmitted history without physically experiencing what the other had experienced. As a result, the widespread distribution of photos and videos on the Internet also became the drive forcing behind protesters continuing to protest as well as the reasons for them to escalate the very way of protesting itself, so long as the protesters' demands are not met (Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 2: Police used violence against unarmed citizens in a shopping mall on 14 July 2019. Conflicts between police and protesters occurred after a demonstration, when police tried to arrest protesters who had gone to New Town Plaza, a nearby shopping mall. Due to the excessive use of violence, many protesters as well as people who had not attended the protest were injured, discussion on police brutality increased after this day. Photo from the Internet

Figure 3: Gangsters attacked travellers in a railway station on 21 July 2019 in the evening. Police stations were closed and emergency calls to the police stations were rejected, resulting in excessive violence and many unarmed travellers being severely beaten in the station. Mistrust of Hong Kong Police Force has intensified thereafter. Photo from the Internet

Conclusion

Social movements, protests, and demonstrations are about civic renewal, to make our society a more cohesive and humane one. After the Umbrella Movement in 2014, Hongkongers' mistrust of the government grew and there was rapid change in society—the deconstruction of the hierarchical relationship in Confucianism used by the government; as well as the re-contextualisation of Confucianism and the introduction of Levinas's substitution in the wake of Edward Leung's imprisonment.

Thanks to digital technology, there is a higher circulation of information, which has without a doubt facilitated deconstructing the Hong Kong government's manipulation of Confucianism, which was executed in education and political discourse since the colonial time. On account of the imprisonment of Edward Leung in 2018, digital technology also has assisted in increasing the occurrence of substitution, becoming a popular idea among protesters since 2019. Risking ten years of imprisonment in exchange for ten years for the social collective became an example of substitution, such that individuals sacrifice their own liberties so that others can further enjoy freedom and rights. Substitution and the desire for a democratic system explain the escalation of the protests. However, the proposed National Security Law in June 2020 and the increased authority of the police force increase the risks that protesters face in Hong Kong, such as life imprisonment or extradition to China, and add uncertainties to the future of Hong Kong. Yet, I believe the resistance will not dwindle in a short period of time, due to the increased number of hearings of arrested protesters and the spread of protesters' testimonies, as Levinas mentioned in *Alterity and Transcendence* 'the very relationship with the other is the relationship with the future.'

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