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Collective Identity, Organization, and Public Reaction in Protests: A Qualitative Case Study of Hong Kong and Taiwan

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Received: 24 August 2017; Accepted: 14 December 2017; Published: 15 December 2017

Abstract: Mainstream structuralist and new social movement theoretical approaches to studying social movements in Western sociological traditions fail to explain why the Sunflower movement fostered solidarity among the Taiwanese while Occupy Central caused public division in Hong Kong. In response, I argue that the successes and failures of both were a function of the consolidation and division of collective identity. Using a qualitative case study, this article analyzes the discursive constructions of collective identity as they intersect with protest spaces, drawing out the events in their protest cycles and identifying the mechanisms within them that constructed and deconstructed collective identity. In doing so, I illustrate three phases of collective identity construction: the creation of collective claims, recruitment strategies, and expressive decision-making. Ultimately, this explicates the movements' differing outcomes, and how their decline both narrowed and broadened identity in ways that provide a repertoire of ideological narratives usable as recruitment strategies in future mobilizations.

Keywords: social movements; collective identity; solidarity; recruitment; Chinese societies; political sociology

1. Introduction

Just months apart in 2014, tens of thousands of citizens took to the streets of Hong Kong and Taiwan to protest for democracy in what were the largest mobilizations in the Chinese vassals' histories. The sovereignty of the two societies, denied by the People's Republic of China as provinces of the mainland, has fueled contentions among their peoples concerning their political status.

Public opinion polls in Taiwan indicate collective attitudes are increasingly supportive of Taiwanese independence rather than unification (Sobel et al. 2010; Wang 2013; Taipei Times 2014), reflecting the endorsement of a distinct Taiwanese identity (Chang 2004) and growing ambivalence about sharing a single identity with China (Sobel et al. 2010). In Hong Kong, counter to the policy of "one country, two systems", public opinion polls have recorded an all-time high identification with a strictly "Hong Kong" identity, in lieu of "Hong Kong Chinese" or "Chinese Hong Kongers" (Mackinnon 2012).

Anti-Chinese sentiments have crystallized with China's recent attempts to moderate Hong Kong and Taiwanese government and economic affairs. A Cross Strait Services Trade Agreement (CSSTA) that proposed closer economic ties between China and Taiwan was passed behind closed doors in 2013, triggering uproar among the Democratic Progressive Party and the public, who would later be involved in the 2014 Sunflower movement. In 2012, the National People's Congress's (NPC) decision for election of the Hong Kong Chief Executive in 2017 by universal suffrage was postponed for a third time (previously in 2004, 2007), and revised to preserve a nominating committee for Chief Executive candidates, who would be filtered according to support for Beijing and Hong Kong interests.

Attempts to oppose this modification from the pan-democracy camp and independent actors in schools culminated in the Occupy Central movement in 2015.

Yet in spite of the apparent growth of anti-China sentiments in both societies, the movements' shared ability to attract global attention and support, and the similarity of their goals, their results varied considerably. Whereas the Sunflower movement fostered unity among the Taiwanese public, and ultimately postponed the legislation of the CSSTA, Occupy Central failed to alter the policies governing the Chief Executive nominating committee, even causing division among the Hong Kong population.

Why did the Sunflower movement generate popular support among the public, while the Occupy Central movement incited antagonism instead? I assert that the Sunflower movement managed to frame a collective identity congruent with the values of the public, even those belonging to cohorts and occupations different than those of their members. By contrast, Occupy Central constructed a radical collective identity that, although maintained internal solidarity among its young membership, largely ran counter to the orientations of older cohorts.

The ability of a social movement to procure popular support depends on the characteristics of the collective identity that its leaders frame. Collective identity is, defined by [Polletta and Jasper \(2001\)](#), "an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with broader community, category, practice, or institution" as applied to both imagined and concrete communities. Expressed in cultural materials (names, symbols, etc.), it involves the perception and construction of bonds, interests, and boundaries. It is "fluid and relational, emerging out of interactions with a number of audiences (bystanders, allies, opponents, news media, state authorities) enabling some claims and deeds, but delegitimizing others. It provides categories by which individuals divide up and make sense of the social world".

Collective identities are defined by three elements: salience of a shared characteristic, group consciousness of the same problem, and opposition to dominant order ([Chouh 2008](#)), which are conjoined within a collective action frame. I will implicitly illustrate these three elements throughout this paper, but engendered in a framework that adopts a different explicit focus: the discursive constructions of collective identity as they intersect with protest spaces. I argue that the successes and failures of the Sunflower and Occupy Central movements were a function of the consolidation and division of collective identity, drawing out the events in their protest cycles and identifying the mechanisms within them that constructed and deconstructed collective identity. To this end, this paper illustrates three phases of collective identity construction, which constitute the major sections that I examine through the paper.

First, *the creation of collective claims*. Here, I examine the potency of different spaces and legal identities in the creation of collective identity. Particularly, I examine the evolution of symbols within protest sites and cyberspace, as an area for recruitment, from generating solidarity to introducing radicalism to the Hong Kong movement. Protest spaces themselves are, after all, milieus saturated with symbols and cultural norms that come to shape organizational strategies within them, both online and offline ([Au 2016, 2017](#)).

Second, *the design of recruitment strategies*, in which I flesh out the impact of an exclusively framed collective identity on recruitment, and examine the conditions that anticipate exclusiveness in the identity construction process. Scholars identify exclusiveness as a strategy for retaining commitment beyond the end of a protest cycle ([Gitlin 1995](#)), in spite of its discouragement of coalition. However, this hampering effect extends to influence recruitment, ignored by scholars who traditionally focus on coalition. In Taiwan, this effect was diminished through the ideological continuity of Taiwanization represented by recent movements and the Sunflower movement, the alignment of the movement's democratic themes with its historical national identity, and legitimation from elite allies. Where these resources were absent in the case of Hong Kong, this study examines how exclusiveness antagonized its broader, non-protesting public, and divided the population between radical support and opposition.

Finally, *expressive decision-making*, in which I examine the underexamined consequences of movements after their conclusion. I focus on the disorganization and transience of post-protest movements, manifest in spontaneous, localized demonstrations, and the radicalization in online spaces speaks to the third major contribution of this study: as movements decline and transition from strategic choices to prefiguration post-protest, narrowing and broadening tendencies occur at the same time.

The implications of this study are important for understanding the cultural principles at work that determine collective identity formation and evaluating the efficacy of a collective identity framework as a tool for studying social movements. In doing so, this study better maps the political conditions that shape the protest cycles of contemporary Chinese social movements, and their institutional consequences that bear on future mobilizations.

2. Theoretical Context: The Sociology of Social Movements

How do social movement theories in the Western sociological convention explain, or fail to explain, the Sunflower and Occupy Central movements? Two camps occupy mainstream theory in this literature: Tillyan thought that circulates around his polity model, or a structuralist interpretation, and new social movement theories, which emerged out of resource mobilization theory. The Tillyan polity model depicts social movements as challengers to the polity embodied in the government, whose members possess access to institutional resources (Tilly 1978). Challenges mounted by social movements are deemed effective by this model when internal constituencies are oriented toward shared interests, and when external conditions encourage facilitation over repression (ibid.). This conception of opportunity and threat developed into a political opportunity structure (POS) model that consists of state-related variables that encourage or discourage social movements (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, p. 57), such as openness of regime, inclination for repression, or state capacity (McAdam 1982; Meyer 1990; Tarrow 1989); social movements are predicted to arise when the POS opens, and decline when the POS contracts.

However, Ho (2015) analysis of the Sunflower movement reveals that adverse conditions actually encouraged its mobilization. Condemnation from the Taiwanese Kuomintang (KMT) toward the illegal occupation of government buildings suggested impending police violence. While this falls under a contraction of the POS, and thus predicts a decline in protest mobilization, it produced a surge in movement activity and conflagration among the public who rose to support it. Polls discovered that 70% of respondents agreed with the demands of the movement, and 48% supported the occupation while 40% opposed it (Ho 2015). The reason, Ho (2015) asserts in agreement with other critics of the POS model, was twofold: first, that POS creates opportunities only insofar as they are perceived by the protesters; second, that threat, while traditionally defined as the cost of action, can also be defined as the cost of inaction by operating as a wake-up call for latent protesters (Moodie 2002; Rucht 1996).

In Hong Kong, by contrast, threat failed to stimulate action or paralysis among the majority of the population in spite of police crackdowns. In fact, public opinion polls revealed general opposition to Occupy Central, with an average of 45% expressing disapproval, predominantly among older adults, and 49.5% supporting proposals from Beijing instead of the pan-democratic camp (Lam 2015). The asymmetry of reactions in these two societies warrants an exploration of other variables that might explain movement strategy. However, where Ho (2015) and critics of the POS recognize that opportunity depends on its perception by protesters, they remain focused on state-related political opportunities, neglecting variables that center on the movement's organization instead. The Tillyan model thus fails to make sense of why individuals participate in protests and how recruitment and identity are used as a strategy.

New social movement theories have directed the attention of sociologists to the study of these identity-construction processes, claiming that "efforts to define, celebrate, enact, and deconstruct identity are more important in recent movements than they have been in the past" (Buechler 1995). Rooted in European traditions of social theory (Castells 1997; Cohen 1985; Klandermans 1991; Melucci 1985; Touraine 1981, 1985), they emerge out of the failure of resource mobilization theory to

make sense of movements and constituencies organized around issues or identities (Buechler 1993), and as a response to the classical Marxist reductionism of activists to their economic class and their motivations to strictly economic logics. Thus, these theories share the qualities of an emphasis on the socially constructed nature of ideology and identity (identity-based movements), the recognition of postmaterialist values as criteria for unity and mobilization (issue-based movements), and the affinity between a fluid middle-class in transformation and new social movements (Buechler 1995). Implicated in their inherent transition from economic to cultural logics is the growth of social movements organized around the importance of collective identity as the grounds for gathering in a social movement. However, new social movement theories are restricted by their European historical grounding, and can appear to be better at raising new questions than answering them, wherein new social movements are “both evidence and consequences of a new social formation” (Polletta and Jasper 2001; also (Touraine 1981; Cohen 1985)). Moreover, following the structuralist camp, they fail to articulate a framework by which the individual processes of motivation and recruitment are generated in mobilizations. Thus, the shortcomings of both structuralist approaches—the neglect of protester organization—and new social movement theories—tautology and the failure to operationalize identity—point to the need for a flexible framework of collective identity as a tradition for analyzing social movements.

Collective identity helps explain certain circumstances of protest mobilization that structuralist models, such as resource mobilization theory and political process, fail to. The two movements, where insurgents successfully secured resources during their occupations despite their student status and that recruitment occurred in the absence of material incentives violates the structuralist prediction of self-interest as motivation. Individuals may be motivated to join as free riders (Olson 1965) or based on agreement with the identity framed by a movement. These observations give credence to identity as a sociological explanation for how interests emerge in the strategic contexts. As individuals create and join movements solely on the grounds of identity, strategies themselves carry intrinsic value to a movement’s identity.

3. Methods

To evaluate the recruitment strategies, the networks of resource and support sharing, and institutional consequences of the movements’ rise and fall in both online and physical contexts, this study uses a comparative qualitative case study. A qualitative case study requires that the researcher choose the materials and length of a case study in accordance with their own judgment (Creswell 1998), and building on comparison with similar cases in attempts to establish generalizable patterns explored through similarities and differences. To this end, this study analyzed news and media reports, social media forums, posts, pages, and messages (Facebook, Twitter, Weibo, Instagram), and grey literature—non-commercial publications, such as government reports and policy statements—concerning the protests from 28 September 2014 to 10 June 2015, guided by the keywords “Hong Kong protests, Occupy Central, Umbrella Revolution, Sunflower movement, Taiwanese protests, Scholarism, Benny Tai, Chan Kin-Man, *Taiyanghua xueyun* [Sunflower movement], *Zhanzhong* [Occupy Central—abbreviated], *Zhanling zhongwan* [Occupy Central]” with the following research foci in inspecting the Hong Kong and Taiwanese cases: (i) sociopolitical context, including the use of social media technology and elite dynamics; (ii) physical and online settings and resources, including protester interactions, and recruitment and identity formation strategies within these sites; and (iii) an inspection of (i) and (ii) as the characteristics of the Taiwanese case are recognized in those of the Hong Kong case.

To evaluate the fragmented forms and institutional consequences of the movements following the occupations, an ethnographic investigation was conducted in the areas of Central, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and new protest recruitment and demonstration sites in Tuen Mun and Sheung Wan throughout May and June 2015. The short duration of ethnographic observation reflected the disorganization and transience of the movements after their conclusion. Demonstrations became localized, spontaneous, and significantly smaller in scope compared to the original occupation.

In Hong Kong, the district location of recruitment booths and the identities of working members varied considerably on a daily basis, even completely absent on weeks at random.

4. The Creation of Collective Claims: Exclusiveness and Division

4.1. Legal Identities and “Free Spaces”

What are the conditions under which a collective identity emerges? In both movements, collective identity was principally generated through shared legal identities, common positions in networks, and institutional contexts removed from the power that acted as “free spaces” for the development of insurgency. Although these circumstances created collective identity across the two vassals, those in Taiwan gave rise to a universally accessible identity, while Hong Kong saw about the establishment of an exclusionist identity that suffered stratification within itself.

Legal identities provide common traits for individuals to bond through, as well as a target for protest mobilizations to change. For Occupy Central, this gains its motivation from Articles 45 and 68 in Basic Law (Hong Kong constitution), which stipulate “the ultimate aim is the selection of the Chief Executive by universal suffrage upon nomination by a broadly representative nominating committee in accordance with democratic procedures”, and “the ultimate aim is the election of all the members of the Legislative Council by universal suffrage”, respectively. The absence of a timeline for such ambiguous developments has percolated into a perpetual clash between pan-democracy groups, who champion for immediate changes, and the pro-establishment (pro-Beijing) faction, whose joint efforts with the domineering National People’s Congress (NPC) in Beijing have repeatedly delayed the move toward universal suffrage. The NPC decided in April 2004 that neither the election of the third Chief Executive to be held in 2007 nor the fourth election of Legislative Council members in 2008 would be through means of universal suffrage. The NPC then decided in 2007 that amendments could be made to the fourth Chief Executive election in 2012, and the election for the fifth Chief Executive in 2017 could allow for universal suffrage, which they again chose to postpone. Their 2005 and 2008 reform packages were consistently vetoed by the pan-democrats, who expressed discontent at their apparent lack of representation in the Chief Executive Election Committee and the Legislative Council. However, the conceived identity was soon made exclusive to students by adopting radical worldviews that arose from the symbols and spaces integral to its development.

For the students in the Umbrella Revolution, the school offered a “free space” (Evans and Boyte 1986) or an institution located outside the control of those in power (Morris 1984; Scott 1990) that allowed for the creation of new, insurgent identities. I assert, however, that the characteristics of the locations designated as “free spaces” also impinge on those of the identity being formed. Student leaders of Scholarism and other student pro-democracy groups congregated at the outdoor graduation ceremony space at the Chinese University of Hong Kong to discuss strategic decisions, the ideological significance of democracy, and to demonstrate and attract support for Occupy Central from fellow students. Slogans painted on large banners were draped from nearby buildings that read “don’t forget six-four¹” (*muwang liusi*). Becoming a base for the movement’s leadership, its location at a foremost university in Hong Kong transformed it into an important symbol for democracy by associating the notion of political liberty with higher education. While this assisted in fostering solidarity among students, it crystallized a conception of the movement as a strictly student-based one. This image, and the evocative parallel with Tiananmen incident, was further substantiated with international media depictions of the movement that focused on students (BBC News 2014a; Kaiman 2014).

Yet, the epithet “echo of Tiananmen” created division. Comparisons with Tiananmen were an attempt at both identity creation—that of powerless, but determined martyrs—and recruitment, by invoking sympathy from older cohorts who were once ensconced in a general, pre-handover distrust

¹ Six-four (*liusi*) refers to Beijing’s lethal crackdown on student protesters at Tiananmen Square in 1989.

in China inspired by horrors of Tiananmen (Fung 2004). However, as aforementioned, public opinion polls reveal a general disapproval toward Occupy Central, with 45% disapproval, and 35% support (Lam 2015); a generation gap in attitudes toward the movement (ibid.): among youth aged 15–24, 67% supported the movement and only 21% believed protesters should return home; among those aged 40 and over, by contrast, only 27% supported the movement and 83% believed protesters should leave (ibid.). The parallel—rested on police brutality inflicted on peaceful student dissenters—and the movement itself, failed to appeal to older cohorts.

Key sociopolitical features of Hong Kong speak to this distinction. First, the pre-handover opposition they hoped to evoke among older cohorts was eventually remedied. When once the Hong Kong media constructed mainland Chinese as uncivil outsiders (Fung 2004) to justify the need for and purported superiority of their own identity (Chan 2000), this depiction evaporated in the years following the handover, replaced by attempts to reinvent the Chinese identity in a more favorable light to facilitate the transition of sovereignty (Chan 1998). The shift in attitude heralded the decline of opposition and the growing acceptance of a dual Hong Kong-China identity, a hybridized conception of local and national identities, in the years after 1997 (Fung 2004). Second, coercive methods employed at Tiananmen were conducted by the Chinese military, not police authorities; the image prevails that police are legitimate extensions of the law. Although Hong Kong local identity has been associated with economic and Western values (Kaeding 2011), analyses indicate it is also strongly represented by core civic values that include (respect for) the rule of law and government (Cheung 2005; Kaeding 2011). Third, students at Tiananmen were killed, not simply injured as they were in Hong Kong. The absence of such extreme consequences at Occupy Central attenuates the legitimacy of the parallel, construing the protesters as irrational and wrongfully working against the rule of law. Fourth, international—particularly Western—media attention devoted to sensationalizing the parallel fuelled accusations of the movement's being a tool manipulated for championing subversive Western interests in Hong Kong (Lau et al. 2014). Such accusations gained credence when the US State Department admitted financing the Occupy Central in a statement that also confirmed their role in funding, training, and equipping mob leaders and terrorists in the Arab Spring (Cartalucci 2014). It follows that despite residents' popular shift to identifying as "purely Hong Kongers", in lieu of a dual identity ("Hong Kong Chinese" or "Chinese Hong Kongers"), the Hong Kong identity that the movement claimed to define was dissonant with the older cohort's conception of what it meant to be Hong Konger.

Intriguingly, the Sunflower movement also defined its collective identity in terms of a legal identity defined by a history of conflict. However, why did the people rally toward the movement in Taiwan, when division erupted in Hong Kong? Public support on March 21 began at 48%, with 40% disapproval, which later became 65% support with 27% disapproval on March 23, and 70% support with 20% disapproval by March 25 (Ho 2015). Underlying the Sunflower movement's protest against the CSSTA and the domineering power of mainland China over local politics was loyalty to the conception of a distinct Taiwanese identity. Thus, it was grounded in the tradition of Taiwanization, the long-standing movement in Taiwanese history comprised of efforts to distinguish Taiwanese culture and national identity.

Taiwanization emerged as an ideological and cultural reaction to the infliction of resinicization on Taiwan by Chiang Kai-Shek—a forced attempt to socialize the Taiwanese into elements of Chinese culture and identity—that caused controversy and outrage, such as rewriting history textbooks to adopt China-centered worldviews (Myers and Lin 2008) and banning the expression of local culture (Dreyer 2003). As democratizing institutions became the only way of resisting the Kuomintang's oppressive resinicization, the Taiwanese identity interwove with the themes of democratic development and geographical and political separation from China (Cabestan 2005; Schubert 2004). This revolutionary spirit became entrenched in the vision of an independent state among the people. Independence was removed from the Hong Kong identity, by contrast, having never been in control of this matter as a century-old colony (Kaeding 2011). Thus, independence,

democracy, and revolution, detached from the Hong Kong identity, predict the rejection of movements undergirded by such themes.

Identity construction and strategy in the Sunflower movement was located in a public space, unlike those in Occupy Central. The site of the Taiwanese occupation itself—national legislature—became the base for the movement’s leadership, where they gathered to discuss strategies, announce decisions, and organize their leadership in assemblies (Ho 2015). The site was converted into a command center: security teams guarded each entrance, an information team was responsible for control of the site, a medical station housed rotating crews of psychologists, physicians, nurses, translators and journalists from the NTU Law School, an outreach team for communicating with overseas Taiwanese students (Rowen 2015). However, because it was a neutral space, the movement was associated with transparency, being better received among the public, and circumvented interference with people’s daily lives. Occupy Central, however, closed traffic in the busiest areas of Hong Kong—Admiralty, Central, Causeway Bay—and obstructed transportation to work and customers to businesses. Thus, the characteristics of free spaces are actively absorbed into the same collective identity it creates, in which the Sunflower movement alone successfully appealed to the public.

4.2. Symbols, Imagery, and the Online Space

Symbolism and imagery are significant determinants of recruitment. For example, Betts (2006) argues that imagery was central for softening and neutralizing the political content of the Woman’s Suffrage Movement by presenting women as capable of providing much needed social reform, rather than violently dismantling the existing order. Suffrage colors—purple and white—were adopted in protesting women’s attire (ibid.). Slogans were paraded on banners and pins in public demonstrations (ibid.). These uses of imagery bolstered recruitment in physical networks by appealing to women and shaping popular conception of what the movement stood for.

Analyses indicate that imagery and symbolism similarly facilitated recruitment and unity within cyberspace domains and online networks in the Sunflower and Occupy Central movements. The Sunflower movement’s title originates from the donation of sunflowers by a local florist in support of the movement’s cause, since becoming its identifying symbol (BBC News 2014b). Adopted as an expression of hope (ibid.), it proliferated across social media platforms. For Occupy Central, the pink ribbon was assimilated into the movement online as a yellow ribbon against a black backdrop. Social media users publicly displayed these symbols on their personal profiles, demonstrating their support for the movement; symbolism thus functioned as a convenient marker for users to identify and connect with fellow protesters, as well as to exhibit and perceive solidarity, in the online space. Developments in cyberspace also carried implications for the physical: the umbrella (particularly yellow-colored) became the popular symbol of resistance (Reuters 2015), based on its suggested use as a defense against tear gas.

The internet and social media also provided a widely accessed site for gathering, generating, and spreading messages of insurgency in both movements, free from state monitoring. Facebook groups and pages, Twitter pages, Wechat profiles were created in support of Occupy Central and the Sunflower movement. Both popular Facebook groups “Occupy Central with Love and Peace” (almost a hundred thousand subscribers) and “the Sunflower Movement 太陽花學運” (over sixty-two thousand followers) originally dispensed information about the movement, but expanded to include political discussions, news on local government corruption or failures, and international political opinions on Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Members—predominantly young activists—used this space to discuss, and unite against police brutality and the misdeeds of Chief Executive Leung Chun-Ying and President Ma Ying-Jeou. Similar patterns can be observed on the Facebook pages of leaders, such as “黃之鋒 Joshua Wong”, which has gained over 260,000 followers, “Scholarism (學民思潮)” with over 300,000 followers, “陳為廷 (Chen Wei Ting)” with 240,000 followers. Pages and hashtags were also used as means to disseminate

information and strategies for protesters, including press releases, what to do when arrested, locations of medical stations for injuries, where to donate and pick up sleeping bags, tents, mats, among other resources (SunflowerMvmt 2014).

5. Recruitment into Protests

5.1. Continuity of Ideological Struggles for Elite and Public-Protest Unity

Why did individuals join these movements? The Sunflower movement was preceded by a surge of new dissident groups across major colleges over a wide range of issues, forming alliances between student activist groups. Protests against free speech infringements, of which the CSSTA is a part, were spearheaded by the same cohort of student activists. In 2008, the Wild Strawberry movement rose in response to KMT's move to eliminate symbols of Taiwanese national identity to receive Chinese representative Chen Yunlin in November 2008. Free speech rights were contested in a fight against the perceived oppression by a mainland overlord. The ideological struggle was then succeeded by the Anti-Media Monopoly campaign in 2012, who also included the Strawberry activists, organized to prevent Want Want China Times'—mainland food and media conglomerate with pro-China perspectives—purchase of Apple Daily and Next Media, two of the few media outlets openly critical of China. The merits of the succession of leaders and ideologies are made clear in the success with which the 2012 movement expanded its base of support and in ultimately thwarting the event (Harrison 2012).

For the Sunflower movement, the gathering of past student activist leaders, including those from the Wild Strawberry movement (Ho 2014), effectively framed it as a succession of the ideological struggle for free speech. Also joined by the Black Island Youth (BIY), tactics and resources were shared to facilitate the provision of supplies during the occupation of national legislature. The affective connection members possess with each other, built in mobilizations preceding the Sunflower movement, prompted a sense of obligation and reciprocity that bolsters recruitment and solidarity. As with the Russian revolution (Bonnell 1983) and the French commune (Gould 1995), preexisting solidarities cannot be underestimated as a means to usher large-scale recruitment. Since independence and democracy are elements in the Taiwanese identity (Kaeding 2011), non-students were drawn to the movement for its representation of these sentiments (BBC News 2014b).

The movement gleaned legitimization from endorsement by the Democratic Political Party (DPP), in their shared opposition against the ruling Kuomintang (KMT). 72% of DPP members voted on reparations for movement damages being paid for by the government, while 81% of KMT voted on reparations paid for by the students (TVBS Poll Center 2015). DPP lawmakers and chairpersons joined student protesters in the sit-in protest of the Legislative Yuan on 18–19 March 2014. On 21 March, the DPP mobilized their members nationwide, calling for support for the movement and its demands (Ho 2015). The party publicly warned the KMT government not to employ coercive measures on the students, which primed a critical, public eye on the police, and stimulated angry support for the movement when police violence descended on protesters in the forms of baton beatings, water cannons, and barbed-wire barriers (Hioe 2015).

Given Occupy Central's absence of alliances and its isolated status from any recent, comparable ideological struggle, reasons for joining drew away from an inflicted sense of obligation with other members. Individuals joined Occupy Central out of anger toward police brutality, or the desire to be part of a revolution (Young Post 2014), but these reactions lacked the endorsement of a legitimate political elite. The pan-democratic camp in Hong Kong, what would have been its elite ally with access to institutional resources, was paralyzed by division. Different groups championed different proposals for the public nomination of the Chief Executive: on 6 May, the third Occupy Central deliberation day, the best proposals among fifteen were voted on by 2500 members of Occupy Central. Here, the top three were put forward by the Alliance for True Democracy (452 votes), a joint proposal from Scholarism and the Federation of Students (1142 votes), and People Power (708 votes), while the other twelve proposals shared 10% of the remaining vote. The stratification of votes were divided

along lines of radicalism, where the most radical proposals (the top three), asserting that the next Chief Executive be directly voted into power through universal suffrage, received the highest votes, and the moderate ones (the remainder), that worked with the existence of a nominating committee, were rebuked. Alignments became polarized and the rift between radical and moderate factions within the pan-democratic camp soon deepened, with radicals left with greater say in the direction of the movement.

This would come to bear on public sympathy adversely when public sentiments expressed greater affinity with moderate views, counter to radicalism. An unofficial referendum was held during 20–29 June with 787,767 voters (30% of registered voters in Hong Kong) revisiting the top three proposals from the third Occupy Central deliberation day. Unlike the deliberation day, greatest support was demonstrated for the most moderate proposal among the three, from the Alliance for True Democracy (42.1%), followed by Scholarism-Federation of Students (38.4%), and People Power (10.4%) (Cheung et al. 2014). Judging the dissonance between the two referendums, it emerges that the aims of Occupy Central were too radicalized from the outset and without elite legitimation, creating another rift between the larger Hong Kong public oriented toward moderate views. As such, police crackdowns did not stimulate older cohorts into joining the movement, remaining a motivation largely confined among students and young netizens.

5.2. Publicized Defeats and Stalemates: Declining Support

Support from within the protesters across both movements declined. Survey data from the TVBS Poll Center reveals that even the Sunflower movement, as popular as it was compared to Occupy Central, suffered a debilitating loss of support in under a week just prior to its conclusion, from 70% on 25 March, to 26% by 3 April (Ho 2015). Polletta and Jasper (2001) assert that a primary cause of a movement's decline is when collective identity stops lining up with the people. That is, people stop believing the movement represents them (expressively and strategically), or begin to see their interests represented by conventional politics. Applied to the Taiwanese and Hong Kong cases, such a decline occurred as a function of two political scenarios: a publicized "defeat" (when a goal is not obtained), and a protracted, unyielding stalemate. In both cases, they spurred loss of faith in the movements and reversion to conventional politics.

Consistent failures eroded public support for the Sunflower movement. On March 27, the movement's leaders proposed a signature campaign appealing to KMT lawmakers to prioritize passing the Cross-Strait Agreement Supervision bill (that would put the CSSTA into a clause-by-clause review), stipulating that their occupation of the national legislature would end provided at least half of the lawmakers signed. Its demand was vocalized by a large protest rally on 30 March, along with three other demands: to withdraw the CSSTA from legislature, to enact the CSAS bill and legislate it before the legal review of the CSSTA, and to convene a citizens' constitutional conference. Although 500,000 people attended, the campaign went unsigned, and no visible change appeared. Support withered following this apparent devastating failure that exacerbated exhaustion and drained public tolerance for the occupation. Between 26 March and 31 March, support dropped from 63% to 48%, and disapproval nearly doubled from 20% to 38% (Ho 2015).

Occupy Central was also defined by an extended stalemate. Despite over 100,000 people joining the protests (Li 2014), the movement achieved little political gain, and divisions among the protesters were deepened by the stagnation. The movement originally began from Benny Tai's Occupy Central, which was later joined by or allied with—not officially, but assumed—the student-based protest led by the Hong Kong Federation of Students and Scholarism. Over time, the paralysis taxed coordination between these parties, and their distinction grew strikingly clear. On 3 December, just hours after Scholarism's Joshua Wong called for supporters to regroup, Occupy's Benny Tai, Chan Kin-Man, and Chu Yiu-Ming surrendered to the police and issued a statement to students to retreat from protest sites entirely (Reuters 2014). The latter claimed that the escalation of police violence, with the use of water cannons, pepper spray, and baton charges, posed a serious threat to students that warranted

retreat (Sala and Kaiman 2014). Scholarism disagreed, holding that the occupation merely required further strategic deliberation, pressing forward with hunger strikes until the government reopens dialogue with students (Kaiman 2014). Even still, some students broke from either perspective and chose to continue the occupation in Causeway Bay and makeshift villages in Admiralty until forcefully evicted by police (Reuters 2014; Staff Reporters 2014).

From Ferree and Roth (1998) study of the organizationally diverse German day-care worker strike, we learn that coalitions fall apart when partnered organizations are defined by illiberality—day-care workers were isolated by unions and grassroots feminists on grounds of being “difficult and different”, rather than being seen as potential allies. However, the Occupy Central movement demonstrates that liberality among partners does not safeguard against decline. More than corroborating the precariousness of alliances in active mobilizations, it speaks to the need for a central leadership that holds command and unilaterally issues directives, holding the recognized ability to suppress dissent and guide the movement.

Although broad identities—fighting for universal suffrage—are capable of linking diverse organizations into alliances, the absence of central leadership risks splitting a collective identity, wherein followers of fragmented factions diverge on differing visions of social change. The core of the Sunflower movement ultimately retained their collectivity, even when public support wore away, by means of having such a leadership. Though both movements consisted of alliances—for the Taiwanese, the BIY and Strawberry protesters—their distinction is anchored in how the Taiwanese agreed on unanimous leadership, to the effect of drafting consistent, practical demands. On March 25, the Sunflower movement reorganized its leadership with a thirty-person representative assembly (twenty students, ten NGO-activists) and a nine-person decision making group (five students, three professors, one lawyer), prior to proposing their four demands with the signature campaign rally on 30 March, all of which were defined by concrete, practical aims that drew protesters into a single, united vision for change.

6. Expressive Strategic Decision Making: Transitioning to Radicalism

6.1. Narrowing Identities

Dwindling support in movements signals the conclusion of protest cycles. Organizers commonly respond to this period by re-orienting their strategies toward the goal of retaining commitment, in lieu of ascertaining public sympathy. To this end, lack of membership and broad appeal is compensated by narrowing an identity’s definition, rejecting alliances in a shift to exclusiveness that hopefully preserves commitment of the remainder (Gitlin 1995; Tarrow 1998). In discouraging coalition, exclusionary identities preclude linkages within a “multiorganizational field” constituted of other movements, authorities, and media (Klandersman 1997). In the Occupy Central and Sunflower movements, however, both narrowing and broadening tendencies were present during and after their declines.

After the protests of Occupy Central ended, the movement evolved within online spaces to adopt a staunchly anti-China identity. Their Twitter and Facebook pages veered toward external accounts of politics in China, centering on the instability and inhumanity of its system. Similar anti-China sentiments were reiterated even by leaders, citing their oppression. Occupy Central leader Chan Kin-Man boldly urged for Hong Kongers to “unfriend China” (Chan 2015) if they were to “retrieve themselves”. Spontaneous groups followed suit in furthering this sentiment into messages criticizing a generalized image of mainland Chinese culture, expanding their attacks on the government and directed at the Chinese people. Iconographs were widely shared that contrasted mainland Chinese and Hong Kong behaviors, which vilified the former with accusations of poor hygiene practices, limited or Sino-centric worldviews, mindless complacency to authority, and subjection to Communism and controlled stock markets (Local Studio HK 2015). Hong Kongers were depicted as paragons possessed of qualities irreconcilably opposite to those of the mainland Chinese identity. The proliferation of such

extreme views legitimized this ideological, cultural—and ultimately offensive—stance as the new face of the movement.

A corollary of the anti-China identity was the development of colonial sympathy. Particularly in online spaces, protesters expressed desire to return to colonial rule under Britain. Claims centered on how pre-1997 Hong Kong was blessed with freedom across all spheres and economic progress, better aligned with democratic principles, otherwise alien to its time under mainland Chinese rule. Online users supported and circulated images of the Hong Kong colonial flag within campaigns championing its reunification with Britain, on pages such as the popular “香港歸英運動 Hong Kong-UK Reunification Campaign” and “Hong Kong and China NOT the SAME 中港大不同”. These sentiments gained legitimation from visible politicians in their earlier appeals to Britain, including former governor Chris Patten and former Chief Secretary Anson Chan, who held that “Britain has a legal and moral responsibility towards Hong Kong and we have a perfect right to expect Britain to act in an honourable way” ([Huffington Post 2014](#)), amid what appears now to be a growing political motion urging British intervention in favor of Hong Kong’s separation from China ([Wall Street Journal 2014](#)). Yet, these figures, not in power during the protests, failed to elicit strong support from non-protesters, and could not serve as elite allies for the movement. Thus, it appears that, while individuals identified with a Hong Kong identity in polls ([Mackinnon 2012](#)), the predication of this identity on anti-China and pro-colonial sentiments was an overly radical move that alienated non-protesters outside the movement. While it strengthened solidarity among the radical remainder of protesters, retaining loyalty and preventing further decline, it further alienated the broader, non-protesting public, primarily moderately aligned older cohorts apathetic toward political independence.

6.2. *Shifting to Prefigurative Politics*

Occupy Central and the Sunflower movement, particularly in online spaces, demonstrate a growing tendency for discussing abstractions on what it means to be Hong Konger or Taiwanese. In the process of narrowing their identities, democracy was treated as an a priori virtue pursued for its own sake. More than a strategy for preserving solidarity, it resembled an expressive action that transformed the type of politics they engage in, bearing on prospects for future mobilizations.

According to Gramsci, actions are “political” not by being reactions to political events nor by expressing a political message, but when they engage with power in broader society and its adherent structures ([Gramsci 1991](#), p. 147). By confining their activity to deliberations—online and physical—about values and opinions on the characteristics of national identities in abstract, the movements have redefined the parameters of their struggle to resemble utopianism. More than retaining an ideal vision, utopianism, according to Gramsci, ultimately eschews strategy needed to translate it to reality (*ibid.*, p. 175). Implicated is a shift in the nature of their politics, from strategic choice—which informs vision with the tactics required to realize it—to prefigurative politics. Prefigurative politics conflates self-expression with content, where actions are not tactics but simply expressions or prefigurations of an actor’s vision, celebrating “acts for their own sakes” (*ibid.*, p. 147). As [Smucker \(2014\)](#) observed in Zuccotti Park during the original Occupy Wall Street movement, prefigurative politics fixates on an imbalance between internal life and political goals, wherein “a group’s internal life becomes a more important motivator than *what the group accomplishes* as a vehicle for change” (*ibid.*).

In addition to the online space, the activist study room built during the occupation of Central was recreated for students and passersby to gather, discuss, and relive the feeling of material and emotional support ([Steger 2015](#)), in addition to tents and paintings at Admiralty. However, the discourse surrounding their stay has transitioned from strategies of incurring political change to simply “that people don’t forget . . . they can be reminded of what happened . . . ” (*ibid.*). A heightened sense of integration, constituting the form of solidarity sought by Occupy Central and Sunflower movement organizers, is cultivated in these prefigurative political spaces.

That the deviant values promulgated within these spaces are expressive speaks to a potential value-shift tied to national modernization, wherein the appreciation for self-expression follows the satisfaction of material needs, evinced by the association of economic growth with liberalism found in the West and in Asia (Inglehart and Baker 2000; Inglehart and Carballo 1997; Park and Shin 2006). The shift is a corollary of the replacement of older generations, borne in periods of economic deprivation, by youth raised in prosperity (Inglehart and Rabier 1986). In a similar vein, this value disparity materializes in social movements when younger cohorts, unlike older ones, express greater concern for the character of a group than its political contributions (Riesman 1950). Complementing Inglehart's thesis with an understanding of the prefigurative political space unravels the reasons behind its perpetuation in the two movements today: more than a strategy, it becomes a private project of emancipation, satisfying the need for self-expression that has overshadowed the need for strategic, political gain. However, where Smucker (2014) identifies marginal differentiation in his conception of the Occupy Wall Street prefigurative political space, we witness a broadening (of identities) across the Occupy Central and Sunflower movements.

6.3. Broadening Identities: Changing Organizational Forms

Group pride and identity discussion change the way movements are received by members. More than building solidarity, they also change relationships beyond the movement (Epstein 1991; Lichterman 1999). Within the utopian space of narrowed identities, the contours of what it means to be a participating activist changes. Irrespective of physical participation at the protest sites, the biography of an activist is reduced to a positive affinity for democracy. Feminism exemplifies this development where being a feminist now requires association with feminist ideals more than membership in feminist organizations (Mansbridge 1995). Thus, as the prefigurative political space's actions continue to center on discussions of group pride and identity, the criteria for the identity of "activist" liberalizes, becoming a more abstract, ideological, inclusive position. In this way, the prefigurative politics tendency emerges in the attempt to narrow identity, but to the effect of broadening identity simultaneously.

A third identity emerged when the two movements' broadened identities entered an informal alliance, merging to form an even broader biography. Proceeding from a loose collaboration through the exchange of information and tactics earlier in 2014 (Laskai 2014), they reshaped their identities to better align with one another. The Sunflower movement adopted a second name called "Occupy Parliament" (Associated Press 2015) in an apparent bid to deepen its ties with the Occupy Central movement. Discursive attacks against Chinese imperialism from both groups is now compounded with mutual recognition and support for each other, where "young protesters of Hong Kong and Taiwan are fighting to defend the institutions that have made their societies among the most prosperous, pluralistic and civilised on earth" (Garnaut 2014). The Sunflower movement, for example, has criticized the silence in Taiwanese media toward the Occupy Central movement on its Facebook page, echoed by Taiwanese academics (Sunflower movement 太陽花學運 2014). It follows that their shared status as Chinese vassals actually facilitates their ideological enjoyment, as protesters from both movements unite under a rebranded, single struggle against a Chinese hegemony.

By preserving itself in cultural materials and intangible spaces, a broadened identity becomes a resource for subsequent protests. In June 2015, a protest demonstration in an outdoor stadium at Sheung Wan pressing for the release of Gao Yu—a Chinese journalist arrested for leaking state secrets to American news outlets—hoisted banners that read "redress six-four" (*pingfan liusi*). By invoking discourse from the Occupy Central movement, the protest attracted considerable attention from passersby, who crowded the arena. Thus, the broadened "Occupy Central-Parliament" identity nurtured within the reformed alliance provides a frame by which future movements can identify as its ideological successors, proffering a reservoir for strategies and tools for encouraging recruitment.

7. Discussion and Conclusions

The Occupy Central movement created a radical identity that was dissonant with moderate orientations of the Hong Kong public, while the political conditions and history of Taiwan made the public adaptable to the collective identity of the Sunflower movement, even in moments of radicalism. This restrictive creation of claims within public spaces—physical and online—and legal identities in Occupy Central substantiated its perception as a strictly student movement. In a similar vein, its attempts to elicit sympathy through parallels with Tiananmen, a strategy of identity creation (as an “echo of Tiananmen”), antagonized the moderate older cohorts, without the legitimation from elite allies that the Sunflower movement enjoyed, to the effect of dividing the Hong Kong public. Moreover, democratic ideals were embedded in the Taiwanese national identity, culminated from the long-standing movement of Taiwanization. Framed as a continuation of this long-standing fight for democracy through alliance with previous movements (Strawberry movement, Anti-Media Monopoly), the Sunflower movement successfully attracted public sympathy and popular support.

Elite disunity in the Hong Kong pan-democratic camp among government and movement elites, bifurcated between radicals and moderates where radicals had greater say, doomed prospects for public sympathy by producing radical demands in appeal to a largely moderate Hong Kong public. Nearing the end of their protest cycles, the political circumstances that initiated their declines—protracted stalemates and publicized defeats—revealed this weakness when the Umbrella Revolution fragmented into different factions, each acting on their own without a collective consciousness. That the Sunflower movement ultimately retained some collectivity after its decline speaks to the importance of a central leadership in holding together a collective identity within alliance-based movements.

However, where movements normally narrow their identities in decline, both narrowing and broadening tendencies could be identified in Occupy Central and the Sunflower movement. This evinces a shift to prefigurative politics in an attempt to narrow identity, but to the effect of broadening identity simultaneously; their identities narrow in their development of radical sentiments—anti-China and colonial sympathy—but in doing so, they allowed for an informal alliance to be established between the two movements, and a third, overarching identity to arise.

It may be noted, on this score, that the inspirations for such transformations in collective identity can be understood using self-categorization theory (Turner and Reynolds 2011), wherein the construction of in-group and out-group categories is done in relation to superordinate categories. Both Occupy Central and the Sunflower Movement began with separate, yet related superordinate groups: strictly Taiwanese and Hong Kong identities. Yet, as mainland China’s efforts to shape economies and political processes in both regions began to rise, the two identities emphasized the Chinese Vassal characteristic of their superordinate identities to band together into a common one. The broadening and narrowing strategies for their collective identity revealed attempts to expand into a new support base while cementing an existing one, consistent with schemas and strategies for solidarity characteristic of in-group collectives (see also (Brewer 1996)).

Thus, this study contributes to the literature upon which I draw in the following ways. First, this study has explored the implications of preserving collective identity, centering on its use as a recruitment strategy for subsequent mobilizations that frame themselves as ideological continuations of this struggle. However, while this usage has been corroborated in subsequent protests in Hong Kong, the conceptions of ideological continuation within lineages of political movements should be examined in other cultural contexts to understand the scope of these findings and the potential role of cultural specificity. Second, this study demonstrates that collective identity theory can be applied systematically to discern the stages and development of a social movement in Chinese societies, but with limitations. The congruence of a movement’s collective identity with the public not only hinges on immediate political actors—elite allies and alliances—but also is complicated by the divergent characteristics of national identity in these societies. That is, the histories of colonization in the two vassals have cultivated very distinct standpoints on democracy, where its appreciation is an integral part of Taiwanese identity at the same time it is considered secondary or even a threat to the

political stability that is prioritized in Hong Kong identity. Third, it opens dialogue on the connections between psychological and sociological concepts, such as social identity and collective identity.

This calls into attention the role of culture, wherein future mobilizations that draw on the third, pan-Chinese vassal identity (i.e., “Occupy Central-Parliament”) will be confronted with these rifts in national identities. In searching for a way to reconcile these cultural differences, it may emerge that participation in these mobilizations once more becomes stratified by age. However, generation gaps, as my examination of the case of Hong Kong has demonstrated, are detrimental to the vitality and success of a social movement, given the fact that these societies are consisted largely of older cohorts. This raises the question, not addressed here, of the long-term impact of such general polarizations on stable perceptions and conflict. Future studies should thus investigate the longevity of the negative perceptions between older and younger cohorts following the social movement, and other areas of social life where this tension may spill over and transform into conflict.

Acknowledgments: I express my thanks to Ya-Wen Lei for her insightful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. I would also like to thank two anonymous referees and the editors for their suggestions.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares there are no conflicts of interest.

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