

STATE POWER, POLITICAL THEATRE
AND REINVENTION
OF THE PRO-DEMOCRACY
MOVEMENT IN HONG KONG

The March on 1 July 2003

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This chapter aims to study the interaction among state power, the pro-democracy movement and political theatre in post-handover Hong Kong. Most generally, the idea of performance bespeaks a distinctive understanding of political action as staged or dramaturgical practices involving an appeal to the audience (Alexander 2003; Turner 1974). Political theatre delineates a form of performance that, in contradistinction to ritual, gives greater play to the creative powers of actors or scriptwriters (Esherick & Wasserstrom 1992), though it may be used either to subvert or to buttress power relationships. It produces a creative moment, yet the effects are contingent upon its interplay with other institutional, political and symbolic forces. Hong Kong presents a very interesting case of changing state-civil society relations that involve different levels of performative politics within and above the local state. From the perspective of theatre politics, the notion of multiple audiences well sensitizes us to the question of multiple political/performative rationalities in Hong Kong in the nexus of local, national and international relations.

Historically, ideological cleavages had characterized the relationship between liberal-capitalist Hong Kong (a British colony) and socialist China. Since the 1980s, Hong Kong had entered into a conflict-ridden process of political negotiation and transition toward the handover in 1997. On 1 July 1997, Hong Kong was returned to China, and a Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) government was set up to mark the beginning of a new regime under the

'one country, two systems' principle. This means that the local government shall be granted political autonomy over its internal matters while being subject to the final jurisdiction of Chinese sovereignty. Whilst a domestic issue in principle, the question about Hong Kong's political autonomy has also come under vigilant international attention. This further strengthens the local anchor for resistance against any possible 'undue' interference from Beijing. After the handover, the whole question of legitimacy has become very delicate. Tensions are created between two kinds of political/performative rationality: one that is oriented to the local community and the other to the national state. The SAR government, under the leadership of a chief executive preordained by Beijing, is ensnared in a position wherein it constantly looks toward Beijing for patronage from above while being increasingly challenged by civil society from below over the issues of rights, democracy, autonomy and the rule of law.

The conflicts over the national security legislation in 2003 provide a most illuminating example. In the event, the SAR government presented a strong theatre of state power, as most distinctly dramatized in the style of power of the security chief. Presumably, it would make much political sense for the government to present a clear patriotic position on this issue to Beijing, given that the latter might be playing the role as a puppet-master over the former. The government was backed up by the pro-Beijing groups and the conservative elites. However, for the local community at large, the issue of civic freedom versus political control was much at stake while the performance of state power became too provocative and showed much dissonance with local sentiments. The discrepancy bespoke an uneasy tension between the two kinds of political/performative rationality, which reflected a clash of values – authoritarian elitism, statist patriotism, and liberal democracy – enmeshed in the process of democratic development.

On 1 July 2003, state-society conflicts finally reached a boiling point when an alleged 500,000 people joined in a march against the SAR government. It marked the largest demonstration since 1989. The rallying appeal by the movement organizer was opposition against the legislation of national security, with a subsidiary theme of democracy, whilst people also brought in other diverse agendas of their own. Although the march was planned some time earlier, partly as a strategic move to press for the agenda of democratic elections in the coming year,¹ the sizeable turnout as well as the orderly fashion of the procession achieved an unanticipated effect of political spectacle. The event presented a most powerful theatre of resistance which, through an emergent process of unfolding, became capable of generating new meanings, mobilizing audiences into participants and reshaping politics. In this chapter, taking the event as a case study, we venture to show the contingent interplay among the diverse theatrical and performative moments of power and mobilization by the state and civil society in the process of democratic struggle. We argue that the impetus for the mass mobilization on 1 July 2003 came more immediately, and negatively, from the SAR government's

performance of power rather than from the pro-democracy movement itself; yet the event put in place an expansive and participatory theatre of resistance that opened up the space for a reinvention of the movement. The movement, thus revived and empowered, in turn changed the political landscape regarding the relationships among Beijing, the SAR government and the local civil society.

Inventing a Tradition of Pro-Democracy Struggle

The pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong, predicated upon a pre-existing network of social activism in the previous decades, emerged in the context of the '1997' issue in the early 1980s. During the 1980s, the movement was only able to appeal to a small group of liberal-minded, middle-class people and was never very successful at mass mobilizations. Still, despite limited appeal, it helped invent a tradition of democratic struggle through a repertoire of aims, tactics, slogans, iconic figures, scripts, roles and ceremonial occasions. In retrospect, all these served to be a source of symbolic capital for the movement to perpetuate itself. Most notably, the rallies at the Ko Shan Theatre² in 1984 and 1986, organized in response to the government's reviews on political reform, laid two of the founding events of the movement.

In 1989, the thunderous Tiananmen Square incident in Beijing caused more than one million Hong Kong people to take to the street in support of the Chinese pro-democracy movement, which produced remarkable effects in local politics in favour of the democrats. Nevertheless, the effects of the demonstrations on the local pro-democracy movement itself remained quite limited. Moreover, given that the development of political reform had been circumscribed by the Basic Law,³ the democratic agenda would seem to become quite out of the question. Democrats tried to raise the agenda of political reform but their efforts were defeated. Outside the government, the movement appeared to lose steam further in the absence of a 'threatening other' under the restrained performance of the Chinese government. It was not until 2003 when another expansive theatre of resistance was produced that the movement came to rejuvenate and reinvent itself with new possibilities. What put into place this spectacular theatre of resistance? As we shall see below, amidst a declining pro-democracy movement, the strongest impetus came instead from what the people perceived as a rather inapt and over-acted performance of state power by the local government.

The Theatre of State Power after the Handover

After the handover, it was the authoritarian, unskilful and provocative performances of power by the Tung administration in numerous political blunders and fiascos that ironically helped open up the question of democratic reform in the public sphere again. In the first few years after the handover, the Chinese government for the most part managed to present a restrained performance of power and consigned itself to the back stage. It left to the local government to act as the

agent of political authoritarianism on the front stage who nonetheless performed with much less deftness. It reflected a mode of political/performative rationality that was shaped by the changing political culture and climate.

Political power is institutionally defined as much as contingent on the performances of power by the state actors in particular contexts or events. In Hong Kong, in the past, senior officials under the colonial government were adept at performing the institutionalised 'bureaucratic' ritual. That is, they withheld from showing their own personalities and instead kept repeating rhetoric in the guise of political neutrality and administrative rationality. The bureaucratic performance might not satisfy much, but neither would it provoke too quickly. Esherick and Wasserstrom (1992), drawing on Turner, point out that careful adherence to a prescribed format will ensure the efficacy of a ritual performance. Under the SAR regime, the Secretary for Security Regina Ip nonetheless departed from the conventional bureaucratic script and made herself a provocative political figure in a strong theatre of state power.

On the government's side, the security chief stood at the forefront to act out the role of a victorious defender of law and order. Her performance of power embodied a mixed set of old and new values in changing times: elitism, bureaucratism, quasi-public accountability and hard-line patriotism. As a member of a small privileged select group of administrative officers under the colonial regime by training, she carried an ethos of a loyal bureaucrat with an elitist flair. Yet, in a changing political climate, government officials and ministers were increasingly required to make themselves answerable to the public. The scenario was further complicated by a political system wherein the chief executive was ultimately accountable to the Chinese government. In the SAR regime, while some of the officials were clinging onto the old cast and others groping towards their role, the security chief, with her strong personality, changed the conventional script into an act of political show. As she herself put it, 'I think I would like to be remembered as somebody who was not afraid to speak out, even if that might affect my popularity' (*South China Morning Post* [SCMP], 17 July 2003). It is apparent that she knowingly presented a performance that could cost her much popularity with the local community.

Prior to the national security question, the security chief already showed her assertive style of power, which raised questions about a proper form of performing the democratic norm (Ku 2004). The government continued to perform its power in an increasingly high-handed manner until the controversy over Article 23 of the Basic Law sparked off a new wave of tensions and conflicts over the issue of civil rights in a much more intense way and on a much wider scope, both locally and internationally. The issue of national security has been very sensitive in Hong Kong all along. For Beijing, it is an indisputable matter about nationalism and sovereignty. Yet for the local democrats, depending on the details, the legislation could carry the danger of infringing upon the civil rights of the

people. The SAR government adopted a wait-and-see attitude in the first few years of Tung Chee-hwa's leadership. On 24 September 2002, it finally released a consultation document on the question, or what was referred as Article 23 of the Basic Law. During the three-month consultation period, the government launched a series of intensive public relations initiatives persuading the public of the need for such legislation.

However, to the pro-rights groups, the consultation launched by the government was just a *fake show*. The security chief as well as other officials displayed an uncompromising determination to complete the legislative process in July 2003. Its refusal to concede to the strong public demand for publishing a white paper on the details of the proposed law underscored a tinge of resolute authoritarianism that undermined the role of civil society in the political process. The idea of fake show was in fact not a novel claim unique about the SAR regime; previous governments under the colonial regime were also suspected of much political manipulation. Yet, the security chief increasingly cast herself as an unyielding and arrogant bureaucrat who finally turned the consultation into a theatre of *anti-consultation*.

A lack of sincerity was shown in a series of performances, especially with the security chief's dismissive remarks about the ordinary citizens. It was the symbolic effect of her words and her styles, in the context of the total verbal and non-verbal performance, which made the impact in the wider public sphere. Most remarkably, immediately following the release of the document, the security chief riled the public in a radio programme by saying that taxi drivers, housewives, McDonald's workers and students would not understand nor care about the provisions in the national security law. Despite criticisms, she remained unapologetic for her vocal style and refused the public demands for a white bill point blank and with derision. She kept a high public profile of herself in public occasions. She attended a number of students' forums in several universities where she made provocative speeches and engaged in fierce debates with the students. Her remarks could arouse jeers from the audience. In some occasions, she made ornate references to Chinese history and spoke highly of the Chinese communist revolution. All these self-styled theatrical presentations by the security chief could be evidence of her intended dramaturgical appeal toward Beijing. Such performance, stunning as it might be, nonetheless failed to strike resonance with the local public. For many Hong Kong people, the security chief personified a staunch, arrogant, authoritarian and yet outspoken bureaucrat who became a popular object of political caricature: she had a stiff look and a callous style; her facial expressions could show a tinge of contempt and smugness; her tone was hard, her words were intimidating, and her stance was never accommodating.

Apart from the security chief, insensitive remarks from the Justice Secretary Elsie Leung added to the symbolic effect of a strong state.⁴ As if all these were not enough, supporters from the pro-Beijing groups also joined in the show. For

instance, legislator Leung Fu-wah made slanderous remarks about the outspoken bishop, Joseph Zen Ze-kiun, of the Hong Kong Catholic Church. He ridiculed the latter as a 'pathological saint' in strenuously opposing Article 23. All these remarks from the senior government officials and their allies could backfire, as Szeto Wah from the pro-rights camp said in an ironic overtone: 'We should thank (Secretary for Security) Regina Ip Lau Suk-ye and (legislator) Leung Fu-wah, because their slanders towards the anti-Article 23 lobby have apparently angered so many people' (*SCMP*, 16 December 2002).

Street Theatre as Crystallizing Moments of Civil Society

After the handover, protests of various kinds were already on the rise ranging from livelihood to political and constitutional issues. The government nonetheless showed itself to be too adamant to respond to public sentiments, which antagonized the people more and more. Prior to the extraordinary mobilizations in the summer of 2003, a resistance movement against the national security legislation was already gathering strength during the three-month consultation period in 2002. It started with some disruptive scenes to parody state power and then developed into an enlarged theatre with a single agenda of opposing the legislation in December 2002. Then on 1 July 2003, the people subverted the official holiday and turned it into a truly expansive and participatory theatre of resistance that made itself a powerful political spectacle. As we shall see below, the resistance did not start as a movement for democracy but a crusade against un-freedom and injustice. Yet when it came to the momentous mobilizations in July 2003, a script of 'people power' was evoked which in turn reinvented the pro-democracy cause.

Creating Disruptive Scenes

During the consultation period, journalists, religious organizations, university students, academics, lawyers, artists, librarians, the democrats, human rights concern groups and other associations in civil society were putting together a common script of civic struggle for freedom vis-à-vis state power. A host of activities were organized, including protests, forums, seminars, workshops, press statements, signature campaigns, performing arts, and local as well as overseas petitions. Among the various sites, public forums organized by the students in the different universities, which made possible a face-to-face encounter with the security chief, provided a best occasion for political drama. On the one side, the security chief sparked jeers from the audience with her provocative persuasion about Chinese history, the Chinese communist revolution, Hitler and so on. She also made patronizing remarks about how the students' criticisms were too sensational and irrational, and how it might take the students some time before they could see the good she did for the society. On the other side, students either challenged her head-on in debates, or made use of a ceremonial moment

to parody power with certain props. For example, on 11 November, the students at the Chinese University of Hong Kong successfully upstaged a small rite at the end of the forum. In inviting the security chief to come to the stage for a token of thanks, the students presented to her a flag grafted with the words of '*Jing zhong bao guo*' (absolute loyalty and devotion to one's country) as a mockery of her unquestioned loyalty to the state. This was a stroke of creative resistance by the students that caused the security chief much embarrassment on the spot. This kind of tactic nonetheless could not be used often, for it was its unexpectedness that made possible the embarrassing scene. The performance nonetheless remained confined, as small disruptive tactics to embarrass power rather than assert itself at the centre of a theatre.

An Enlarging Theatre of Resistance: Crusades against Injustice and Un-freedom

On 15 December, local resistance as well as international concern⁵ was escalating leading to tens of thousands of citizens marching in opposition to the proposed law. For the first time, it crystallized and extended the numerous confined stages of small-scale resistance into a single enlarged theatre in the public. The march against the legislation in December was initiated by the Civil Human Rights Front (CHRF) as the highlight of a series of campaign before the end of the consultation period on 24 December. The CHRF, which was formed in September 2002, is a broad coalition of more than 40 non-governmental groups including religious, labour, social welfare, gay and feminist organizations as well as legislators from the more radical segments. Two days before the march, political momentum was gathering for the event through hunger strikes, signature campaigns, catchy advertisements in the major press, and direct appeals to their members by such groups as the Professional Teachers' Union.

On the day of the march, the protesters put on stage a somewhat deified crusade under different symbols of sanctity and justice. An hour before the march to the Central Government Offices, a prayer meeting was held in Victoria Park among more than 2,500 Catholics and Christians, all wearing purple ribbons to signify hope. One most prominent symbol was a big wooden cross that was blessed by the Pope in Rome as a charm against evil and to boost the faith of followers. Another eye-catching prop was a 3-meter high paper puppet of Kwan Kung, a Chinese god of war and justice, paraded by a group of cultural workers during the march. The idea was to use it to beat a mock-devil black puppet that had the words 'Article 23' inscribed on its forehead. Other props of a not-so-religious nature were also used to convey similar messages such as a mimic guillotine and the sword of Damocles that Justice Secretary Elsie Leung Oi-sie earlier referred to, both being symbols of power that undercut freedom. As legislator Lee Cheuk-yan from the Confederation of Trade Unions and The Frontier said at the end of the march at the Central Government Offices: 'Justice will triumph over evil, and the government can't win with this evil law' (*SCMP*, 16 December 2002).

The turnout was more than ten times higher than originally expected making it the biggest demonstration after 1989. The participants came from all walks of life including, most strikingly, elderly citizens leaning on walking sticks, disabled people in wheel-chairs, babies in prams, and children carried on parents' shoulders or walking on their own. As a legislator observed, 'there was a determination to go through with it' (Margaret Ng, *SCMP*, 18 December 2002). The rally was presented as a moral crusade against injustice, and new meanings also evolved out of it. It evoked a sense of unity and power among the people that touched their hearts; it bespoke a challenge to the myth of political apathy in the hegemonic narrative; it laid claim to the rationality of the people in the peaceful protest that aroused pride:

Hong Kong's famed apathy when it comes to matters political is often overplayed. Beneath its veneer of indifference, the SAR has an active civil society which dares to challenge the authorities ... It was a peaceful, sensible affair ... representing a broad cross-section of society (*SCMP*, editorial, 16 December 2002).

As we shall see later, this emergent script of people resisting in unity and in peace re-appeared in the mass demonstration on 1 July with much more spectacular effects. Yet at this juncture, the intriguing issue is, just as civil society demonstrated an unusual capacity for organizing mass resistance, the government could securely count on the pro-China forces to mobilize a demonstration of support for the legislation to the same theatrical effect.⁶ On 17 December, just two days after the anti-legislation march, the pro-government groups formed into the Hong Kong Coalition for National Security Legislation, which included the Democratic Association for the Betterment of Hong Kong (DAB), the Liberal Party, the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce, the 310,000-member Federation of Trade Unions, as well as more than 300 pro-Beijing groups. Then on 23 December, about 40,000 people rallied to back the national security law proposals in an outpouring of patriotism at Victoria Park. The debate over Article 23 was narrowed down to the single issue of love of one's country. The key slogan 'national security – everyone's responsibility' was echoed repeatedly throughout the 90-minute gathering. There were roars of approval as celebrities, war veteran and singers made patriotic speeches and broke out into nationalist songs on a video-walled stage covered in festive decorations and sound equipment.

The counter-mobilization presented a theatrical moment from within civil society that served to buttress state power while countering the effects of the resistance movement. For a while, this created an ironic setback on the latter. Thus instead of conceding, state authoritarianism reinforced itself. For instance, the security chief kept repeated that the public were being misled, and that religious and political leaders were to blame for creating a 'herd mentality' among the

people (*SCMP*, 15–16 January 2003). Radio phone-in programmes nonetheless were flooded with sharp criticism of her comments. Then on 28 January 2003, the publication of *Compendium of Submissions* by the government generated a series of debates and protests against the distortion of public opinion. Despite strong opposing voices, the government was determined to table the proposals to the Legislative Council in February and to finish the legislation in July. The government made some token concessions but left the core issues unchanged. In June, the government made two more concessions ahead of the mass rally scheduled for 1 July, but such efforts made no avail.⁷

Subverting the Official Commemoration on 1 July

The resistance movement could have lost steam with these setbacks and counter-mobilizations, but on the contrary, it was further emboldened into a 500,000-strong protest under the rallying appeal of opposition against Article 23 on 1 July 2003. As it unfolded, the significance of the event nonetheless went beyond the issue of Article 23.⁸ To begin with, the date of 1 July carries symbolic significance broader than the scope of any specific issues. It commemorates the return of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty, or the birth of the HKSAR. The government makes it a public holiday and officiates an annual handover celebration in the Convention and Exhibition Centre in the presence of top political leaders from Beijing, senior local officials, and socio-economic elites from society. In 2003, people nevertheless subverted the political meaning of the holiday and turned the occasion into a people's theatre by organizing protests and demonstrations on the day designed to honour the handover. As we shall see below, the mass demonstration on the first of July, as well as the subsequent mobilizations, at once put into place a political theatre encapsulated in a self-reinventing narrative about the struggle for democracy in Hong Kong. Through theatre, people were enacting a performance of participation in three senses: participation versus institutional power, participation versus apathy, and participation with diverse agendas in civil society. The people were not only performers of a script but agents acting in their own political stories.

Performing 'People Power': The Stage, the Props and the Theatre

The mass demonstration on 1 July was also organized by CHRF. CHRF consists in a loose and decentralized structure of coalition without strong leadership. In the march, it played the role as organizer rather than leader. The absence of clear leadership from a single centre underscored the genuinely participatory character of the theatre of resistance within a pluralistic civil society. Under the broad theme of opposition against Article 23 as well as a subsidiary theme of power to the people, participants wrote their own scripts with varied banners and slogans. No centralized symbol in the form of a statue or monument was erected at a specific location. The demonstration nonetheless created a monumental moment

of solidarity-in-resistance among the people through the setting, the props, the slogans, and the action.

First and foremost, the people shared a common theatre in a spirit of solidarity and empowerment in anticipation of and through the march. As the day of the march drew near, with a government that was insensitive to public opinion, an implicit idea that 'size is power' seemed to be circulating in society. Toward the end of June, numerous groups called on the public to join the march through radio phone-in programs, the press, and the internet. An unusual sense of solidarity was in the making, and the projected size of the demonstration seemed to be growing day by day. Even the government and the pro-Beijing groups could sense the immensity of the mobilization, but offensive comments from them further triggered public sentiments. The security chief said that people taking part in the huge 1 July rally would do so 'as a kind of activity because it's a holiday.' The chair of the DAB remarked that even if there were 100,000 or even 200,000 people, the legislation would go ahead. He added that the people were misled and the best solution was to pass the legislation and then prove to the people that they could still enjoy freedom under the law. With such remarks, a sentiment seemed to be shared in the public that if the number exceeded 100,000 or 200,000, the power of the people could no longer be under-estimated. That is, size made power.

Among the lawmakers, Lee Cheuk-yan moved a motion calling for all-community participation in the march: 'The July 1 protest is the ultimate battle between the community and the unrighteous government. You can make a difference. Let's take to the street and make history' (*SCMP*, 26 June 2003). Although the motion was scuttled by 31 votes to 19 under a united front of the Liberal Party, the DAB and independents, outside the legislature, direct appeals to the public came in from all directions. For example, newspaper headlines read some highly emotive and rousing statements such as 'Hong Kong people come united against Article 23. History will be made tomorrow' (*Apple Daily*, 30 June 2003).

The demonstration was planned as a march from the Victoria Park in Causeway Bay to the Central Government Offices in Central. In practical terms, the Park is the largest in Hong Kong and is often picked as a site for mass mobilizations and big shows. A distance of a two-hour walk to the Central Government Offices makes it a perfect starting point for a march against the government. Symbolically, the Park bears a distinct mark as a public space of the people. It is a spacious open park with a long history in the community; it is located in the hub of the city that is accessible to many; and it has been frequented by many people for all kinds of activities ranging from leisurely strolls to fiery speeches and debates in forums and rallies.

On the day of the demonstration, the heat, the hours of waiting, and the sheer scale all contributed to a collective experience of catharsis in a spirit of endurance as well as power. Probably as a tactic to make the size of the demonstration

look small on official record, the police announced that they would only count the number of participants appearing at the Victoria Park. The people could have, as usual, joined the march at any spot on the way, but they circumvented the trick of the police by showing solidarity in resistance – all the people kept flowing into the Park from all directions around the start time at 3pm. No one had anticipated such a big turnout. The police imposed a tidal flow control to manage the crowd, on the grounds that the government compound could only accommodate up to 5,000 people at any one time. It was a hot summer day, and the people braved the heat under the scorching sun to vent their anger against the government. Many people had to endure hours waiting in sweltering heat in the Victoria Park while many more kept pouring in. In waiting and in pouring in, the people at once showed their solidarity and power, first through the patient endurance over the spatial confinement and then through the transgression: the police were finally forced to open more thoroughfares for the protest as tens of thousands of people were still waiting to move out of the park late in the afternoon. It took more than 4 hours after the rally's 3pm kick-off to clear the starting point of all protesters.

The streets were immediately turned into a stage when the march was on. The people, dressed mostly in black, captured the public imagination as the most powerful piece of theatre of the people. Blackness, a colour designated by CHRF, symbolized strong feelings of rage and desolation over the poor performance of the government in the past six years. At the same time, it connoted the meanings

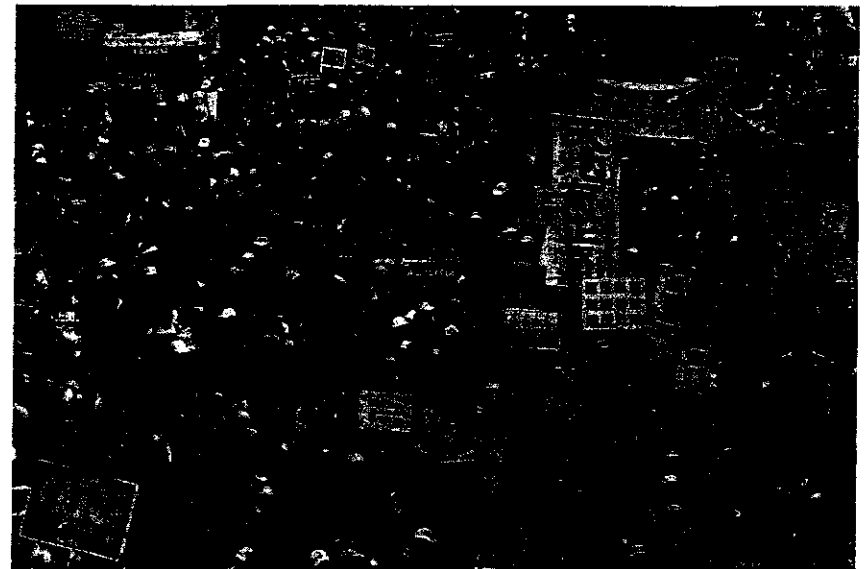


Figure 4: The march on 1 July 2003
(Photograph by Civil Human Rights Front with permission.)

of will, determination and resistance. The people together filled five kilometres of the six-lane highway between Central and Fortress Hill for six hours. The march, as repeatedly shown in the mass media, became the most spectacular icon in and of the event. The people looked upon themselves as agents who collectively made history through the march:

This is definitely an historic moment, as it is the first time Hong Kong people have fought for their freedom and rights. It is a day to be proud of (Tsoi Yiu-cheong of CHRE, *SCMP*, 2 July 2003).

The people of Hong Kong made history on Tuesday by showing they were willing to march for what they believe in and for demanding a future for their children. Many of the marchers took their families, including babies. They wanted to give their children a lesson in civic responsibility as they asserted the values that made Hong Kong what it is (S. Tsang, *SCMP*, 5 July 2003).

Within the wider community, the event evoked a tremendous sense of pride, hope and solidarity about the participation, the self-control as well as the struggle, which was history-making in itself regardless of the political outcome. With this new understanding, the hegemonic narrative of political apathy was being powerfully undermined under the new script of people power. The impact of empowerment, as we shall discuss later, could be seen most markedly in the subsequent mass mobilizations within civil society.

Second, as far as the stage props were concerned, the most prominent rallying or unifying symbols appeared to lie in the political leaders who embodied impotence, authoritarianism, and arrogance. Among the protesters, medical professionals, lawyers, religious groups, journalists, artists, academics, teachers, university and secondary school students, workers, women's groups, homosexual groups, civil servants, political groups and individual citizens held a variety of banners about Article 23, SARS, workers' livelihood issues, women's issues, sexual equality and so on. The people, whilst carrying diverse agendas, collectively showed their anger at what they perceived to be an inept government that had presided over a six-year decline of their fortunes since 1997. Puppets and cartoons bearing the images of Tung Chee-hwa and Regina Ip were a common sight; banners carrying calls for the Chief Executive to step down were waved: 'We've had enough. Step down, please' (The Frontier). In a most eye-catching way, the popular newspaper *Apple Daily* provided a ready prop for many people with its cover and inside pages posting such words (as well as a big picture of the Chief Executive slapped with a cake on his face): 'Article 23 doing harm to Hong Kong + 6 years of miserable days = We don't want Tung Chee-hwa.' People were shouting slogans such as 'Oppose Article 23, power to the people,' 'Down with

Tung Chee-hwa,' 'Down with Ip Lau Suk-ye,' 'We march for freedom, not for fun.' Along the route, marchers were greeted by passengers in buses and trams holding up the page from *Apple Daily*. The occasion became a genuinely participatory political theatre able to stir up mass emotions. Collectively, the people demonstrated power through their action, and they parodied the government's power with their props and slogans. Thus empowered, the demonstration made itself more than a one-off event. At the end of the march, a sense of perseverance of the resistance was conveyed as CHRF called on the people to protest outside the Legislative Council building on 9 July when the government tabled the legislation for second reading (and probably for the third and final reading as well).

Channelling the Impact on and through Institutional Politics

The mass demonstration created a looming political crisis that instantly held the legitimacy of the government in suspense. However, for days, the government made no official response and appeared to be too impotent to govern. While the demonstration was very successful as an expansive and participatory theatre of people power, its political effects in fact were contingent upon the interplay among the effect of the spectacle, institutional politics and further mobilizations. On 2 July, the pro-democracy legislators swiftly seized the opportunity to table the political agenda of a delay in the legislation on national security as well as a review on democratic development. They issued a joint statement to the Chief Executive, and called for an unscheduled debate in the Legco's sitting (but were rejected by the Council chair). And they threatened to mobilize people to besiege the Legco building on 9 July when the bill was put to a final vote if their call was not accepted. Despite the escalating tensions, the SAR government as well as the pro-government DAB showed no signs of concession, and the effects of the mass demonstration remained uncertain.

The most dramatic turn came when the chair of the Liberal Party (LP), James Tien, braved himself to turn the tide against the government within a short span of three days. All along, LP had been a business-oriented political party with a conservative and pragmatic political orientation. On many previous issues, it came close to the pro-government stance of DAB, although it did not carry the baggage of patriotism as heavily. Nevertheless, as a political party, it could ill afford to turn its back from the people when their message became so unmistakably clear. The voting intention of LP on an adjournment motion was most critical, for without their support the government would not muster enough votes in the Legco to push through the bill.⁹ On 4 July, after a brief visit to Beijing, Tien pronounced that LP favoured a delay in the legislation. Then swiftly on the next day, the Chief Executive made some major concessions on the bill¹⁰ but still rejected calls to delay the Legco vote. However, legislators from all factions were under enormous pressure from the community to defer enactment. Even the DAB chair finally made a public apology about his remarks of the people having been misled,

and conceded to the idea of a legislative delay. These moves nonetheless proved to be too late to rescue the government from the crisis. On 6 July, in a stunning turnaround, Tien resigned from the Executive Council after his calls to delay the bill. It was under this crisis situation that the government finally decided on 7 July to delay the legislation with an unspecified timetable.

The government finally appeared to go along with public opinion, but rather ironically, it had presented a performance of a weak and stubborn government being pushed to concede out of sheer practicality. Tien's resignation helped to defuse the looming crisis over the demonstration, but it further crippled the government's authority and undermined public confidence in the Tung team.

Re-inventing the Pro-Democracy Movement

The final concessions from the government, as mediated through party politics, signified a great victory of the people. The movement organizers and the democrats turned up the opportunity to organize further rallies to demand universal suffrage to elect their chief executive and legislature respectively in 2007 and 2008. In the process, the resistance movement was empowered and re-invented into a people's movement for democracy. On the evening of 9 July, tens of thousands of people rallied around the Legco building in Central. The event was originally planned as a siege of the building on the day of the second reading of the bill, but it was instead turned into an occasion for a celebration of people power and a longer-term struggle for freedom and democracy. This time, CHRF adopted the idea of 'power to the people' as the main appeal. It urged the people to be dressed in white, and provided yellow ribbons for the participants to be tied to their arms. It was not a holiday, and many of them came to join the rally after a long day of work. Regarding the choice of the colour of white, apart from practical considerations about convenience and temperature, it was also intended to convey a sense of idealism, brightness and hope. The occasion was a candle-lit vigil with a solemn mood, while people also waved torches and fluorescent light sticks. As compared to the march on 1 July, the occasion was more ritualistic and ceremonial in form with much less diversity or free play shown in the actions, agendas and slogans among the participants. Its effects were nonetheless theatrical which presented a strong and sustained effort to challenge the political order in the aftermath of the march of protest.

The speakers called on the people to fight on despite the government's concessions. In the rally, the participants shouted 'Tung Chee-hwa step down! Tung Chee-hwa step down!' In a declaration, the rally denounced the Article 23 legislation and vowed to block it until the chief executive and the legislature were democratically elected. 'We have made history. Had we not had the voices of 500,000 people in the 1 July protest, the Article 23 legislation would have probably been tabled for a second reading and passed today,' the declaration said. 'Article 23 is only deferred temporarily. We have to carry on with our strong

dissenting voice against it.' Legislator Emily Lau from The Frontier further called for Tung's immediate resignation and the election of the next chief executive via one person, one vote. The issue was no longer simply pinned down on the national security legislation. In this light, this post-victory rally served a strategic function in evidently directing the movement to a higher goal of political democracy in the public stage. Thus in another step to push for more democracy, the organizers called on the people to join a public gathering on 13 July to call for universal suffrage in the election of the chief executive and the legislature.

On 13 July, some 10–20,000 people took to the streets in Central in a rally demanding the speedy introduction of full democracy for Hong Kong. This time the event was not organized by CHRF but the newly formed Democratic Development Network that was led by a few veterans who also launched the campaign for direct elections in 1988 more than ten years ago. The crowd gathered in scorching heat in Central for three hours of songs, dramas, and speeches calling for greater democracy. Following the appeal of the organizing group, some participants wore bright orange. As in the previous rallies, the thematic colour was an ad hoc selection rather than carry a well-established symbolic meaning solidly connected to the movement's history. More intense than white, it signified the meanings of brightness, joy and hope which nonetheless evoked the ideas of victory and struggle in line with the changing mood. In an uplifting spirit, speakers demanded the government to come up with a reform timetable. Some called for Tung Chee-hwa to step down due to his failure to govern effectively, and some called for universal suffrage. In a most conscious attempt to reinvent the pro-democracy movement, the Reverend Chu Yiu-ming, chairman of rally organiser, proclaimed that the rally was an attempt to renew the spirit of the rallies held in the Ko Shan Theatre in the 1980s. Nearing the end, the speakers called on the people to register themselves as voters and look to the hope of effecting changes via the upcoming elections for the legislature in September.

In brief, the mass demonstration on 1 July presented a spectacular theatre of resistance by the people, which, in performing an emergent script of people power, provided a great symbolic capital for the pro-democracy movement to reinvent itself through subsequent mobilizations. The reinvention drew on a mixed set of elements including an invocation of past moments, invention of new meanings (as represented by the changing colours, the emerging themes, the new spectacle of people power and so on), creation of ceremonial occasions, and a renewed political agenda. Indeed the movement has come a long way from the small-scale campaigns in support of limited elections to the legislature in the 1980s to a more expansive theatre with an agenda of universal suffrage for both the chief executive and the legislature in 2007 today. In one sense, it is a much extended agenda. In another sense, the movement has inherited the agenda of representative democracy in a more or less analogous spirit over the past twenty years. Apparently, the course of democratic struggle in Hong Kong has taken neither a radical nor

a revolutionary path; it treads instead a path of convoluted development in the interstices between institutional and extra-institutional politics.

A Changing Political Landscape

The three mass demonstrations in the month of July together put on stage an irresistible performance of people power that not only revived the democratic agenda of elections and rejuvenated civil society. They also re-defined the parameters of institutional politics and changed the political landscape. On the one hand, the demonstrations effectively undermined the legitimacy and credibility of the SAR government, which changed the relationships among the government, Beijing, and the Hong Kong people in very delicate ways. Most conspicuously, two top ministers were brought to their immediate downfall including the Secretary for Security Regina Ip (the other being the Financial Secretary Anthony Leung who was involved in an earlier scandal), whose resignations were announced by the Chief Executive on 16 July. It was the first time that senior officials, under the quasi-ministerial system, resigned from their political office as a result of public pressure. These dramatic outcomes exposed the fragilities of the current undemocratic system, which threw the Tung administration into a deep governing impasse.

The Chief Executive himself might have come to his own immediate downfall but for the paramount back-up from the central state.¹¹ Leaders from Beijing performed a series of shows to pledge their all-out support for Tung. These included a high-profile reception by both President Hu Jintao and Vice-President Zeng Qinghong in the Great Hall of People on 19 July, and the moves taken to bolster his position by promising new incentives to boost Hong Kong's economy and defuse public discontent. Apparently, the central state was striving to counteract the destabilizing effects of the demonstrations by reinstating the hegemonic narrative of stability and prosperity. At that time, it did not look like that the Chief Executive himself would step down with the strong support from Beijing (though he finally did in March 2005, more than one and a half years later). Nor did it look hopeful that Beijing favoured the idea of universal suffrage in 2007. Once again, the local government, the central state, and the Hong Kong people would be in a tug of war over the issue of political reform.

On the other hand, civil society was so empowered that new forces made their appearance via varied kinds of political participation. For instance, secondary school students came to organize themselves into a federation; new political stars arose announcing intentions to run in the upcoming Legco elections. In November, the District Board elections saw the emergence of some new political faces from among the pro-democracy camp who even beat down some of the long-serving DAB members.¹² The pro-democracy candidates won a landslide victory, and this caused DAB chair Tsang Yuk-sing, teary-eyed, to announce his decision to resign from party leadership in some emotive scenes.

On 1 January 2004, riding on the success for the pro-democracy cause, CHRF

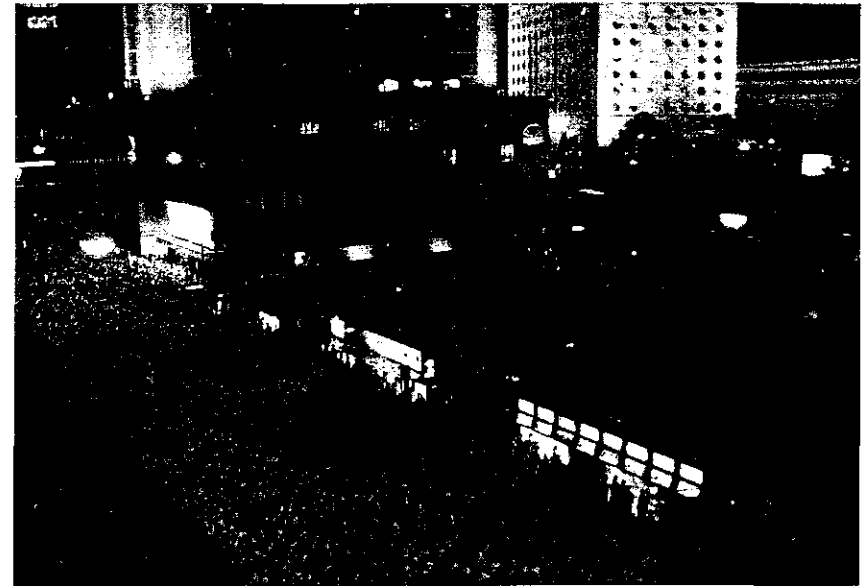


Figure 5: The evening rally on 9 July 2003
(Photograph by Civil Human Rights Front with permission.)

organized another demonstration to call for universal suffrage. The event drew tens of thousands of people under the rallying slogans of 'Power to the people; better livelihood.' Apart from the issue of universal suffrage, a wide range of concerns were also voiced on social policy issues including elderly welfare, labour and women's rights, and outsourcing of government services, making the occasion another truly participatory theatre with multiple agendas and voices by the people. From the organizer's point of view, the year of 2004 was crucial because of the Legco elections in September, which provided an opportune occasion to maximize the effects of the mass demonstrations through institutional politics. People joining the New Year demonstration were not necessarily driven by the same goal, but in participating, they helped move the agenda forward.

More specifically, the pro-democracy alliance (including activist groups, legislators and barristers) successfully moved the issue of electoral reform to the centre of the political debate. In January 2004, the Chief Executive promised to set up a taskforce to examine the question in his policy address. The Basic Law envisions the ultimate aim of electing all legislators and the chief executive by universal suffrage, and provides that the methods of electing both can be changed in 2007 'in the light of the actual situation.' Even under the restraints of the political structure, the pro-democracy groups appeared to stand a chance of securing enough seats to initiate a legislative process of political reform through the upcoming Legislative Council elections in November 2004.¹³ The alliance began

to launch a campaign urging people to register as voters as a strategy to push for changes from within the legislature, As Father Louis Ha of the Democratic Development Network said, 'With enough votes in Legco, we can make change happen' (*SCMP*, 27 January 2004).

However, the issue of universal suffrage touched on the nerve of the central state in Beijing. After more than six years of restrained performance of power, it finally turned to a more confrontational stance to counteract the demand for political reform. In a high profile manner, it moved to undertake a constitutional interpretation of the Basic Law by the Standing Committee of the National People's Republic of Congress to close off the possibility of universal suffrage in 2007. There then came the propagandistic talks of patriotism in a succession of high-level political shows by the senior officials from Beijing. Would Beijing's strong presentation of state power strengthen or weaken the impact of the theatre of mass resistance that was once so spectacularly performed by the people?

For many Hong Kong people, at stake were not only the issue of democracy but also the question of the rule of the law as well as political autonomy. Yet neither retreating from the pro-democracy cause nor challenging with the Chinese government head-on, the Hong Kong people would seem to be groping towards resilient but non-confrontational resistance. In 2004, tens of thousands of people continued to participate in the second 'first of July' mass demonstration under a broad and general appeal of 'power to the people.' It was less combative in spirit and carried less burning issues than the previous one, but it embodied far longer-term significance as a sustained movement for local democracy. Through the continued mass demonstrations, the pro-democracy movement has been re-counted with new meanings and new political possibilities. In a far broader and more significant sense, not only is there a revival and reinvention of a pro-democracy movement as has been conventionally defined. What is emerging is also an expansive and participatory civil space opened up by the people in and through the collective actions. It is only in seeing the event in this light that we will be able to look more closely at the cross-purposes, the differences, the tensions, and the diverse voices within the movement (Ku 2005). While the causes of extra-institutional politics require us to confront the limits of institutional politics in the modern state, whether authoritarian or democratic (Apter and Sawa 1984), the dramas of conflicts illuminate a range of possibilities and limitations in the repertoire of narratives, mobilizations and participation in civil society in the process of democratic struggle.

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Notes

- 1 The elections for the legislature in 2004 would be of strategic significance, for the Basic Law initially provided that the methods of electing the legislators and the chief executive could be changed in 2007, which means the political system should be reviewed by the newly elected legislature.
- 2 The Theatre back in those times was a newly built half-open amphitheatre for cultural activities that could seat about 1,000 people. It was a more economical alternative to the City Hall in Central, and was of a size deemed to be more appropriate for the embryonic movement than a very large park.
- 3 The Basic Law formula maintains an executive-led government with a slowly evolving legislature to be dominated at least until 2007 through a majority of indirectly elected representatives.
- 4 On 17 October, in a luncheon talk for the senior media members, she said, 'The knife has always been above your head.' She was referring to provisions in the Official Secrets Ordinance that prohibits, among other things, the theft of protected information.
- 5 The international community joining the chorus of the pro-rights groups included the business communities (banks and chambers of commerce), civic associations (journalists' alliance, teachers' union, and advocacy groups), legal experts, and state institutions (the consulates from Britain, Australia and Canada, European Parliament, European Union and the US State Department).
- 6 On 17 December 2002, the leftist newspaper *Wen Wei Po* declared in an editorial that all pro-China forces must be mobilized to urge the masses to attend a counter-rally to show mainstream opinion was behind the legislation.
- 7 The amended legislation still contained provisions that afforded the authorities a means of proscribing local organizations affiliated to mainland bodies that had been banned under the laws on the mainland.
- 8 An anti-state impetus found its way to challenge the legitimacy of the SAR government in several ways. Amongst others, the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome)

crisis in March and April of 2003 was a critical intervening factor that added fuel to public discontent against the government.

- 9 Under the split-voting mechanism, a majority must be achieved in each of constituency categories (the functional, the geographical, and the election committee constituency seats) before a motion can be achieved. This is a mechanism to ensure that the democrats cannot have their motions passed easily. Yet this time, in the face of the mass demonstration, lawmakers from the functional constituency category were mostly inclined to support a legislative delay.
- 10 The pro-rights groups had been concerned with several issues including the granting of government power to ban local groups whose mainland counterparts are outlawed for threatening national security; the granting of police powers to enter and search properties without court warrants; and the lack of a public-interest defence against the unlawful disclosure of official secrets. The government's latest amendments involved the deletion of the first two provisions and the insertion of a public-interest defence mechanism, but the pro-rights groups still saw some potential gaps and ambiguities in the hastily proposed amendments.
- 11 The Chief Executive finally resigned in March 2005.
- 12 For example, in Wanchai, a group of five candidates aligned into a new group called Civic Act-Up with such news agendas as community health, women, and racial and ethnic minorities. They were all novices in electoral politics but three of the five won the elections.
- 13 Under Annex I of the Basic Law, any changes in the way the chief executive is selected have to receive two-thirds support of the legislature and the approval of both the chief executive and the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress.

WATCHING THE WATCHERS

The Spectacle of Civil Society in the Philippines

Eva-Lotta E. Hedman

Through television cameras and newspapers, the whole world was watching. President Marcos could lie and cheat, but in the end he could not hide (Tom Brokaw, NBC Nightly News).¹

Where else in the world, now or ever, have a people demonstrated such a courageous and universal commitment to democratic self-expression? ... Across the Philippines on election day, the lame, the halt, the hungry and even the dying joined the healthy and well-nourished in long queues that entailed waits for up to two or three hours. NAMFREL, the civic volunteer force dedicated to protecting the honesty of the vote, deployed fully half a million sentinels on the front lines against skulduggery, with moral authority as their only weapon and with threats, assaults, even murder as their wages... Such spirit, such a widespread personal stake in the national destiny, ought to be the destiny of all Asia and indeed the world. Put another way, never have so many owed so much to themselves (*Asiaweek*).²

These contemporary comments in the international media capture something of the drama surrounding the National Movement for Free Election (NAMFREL)'s campaign for 'free and fair elections' in the Philippines in 1986. Indeed, while recruited largely through hierarchically structured civic, professional and religious associations, those who joined in this election-watch campaign, as well as its precursors of 1953 and 1969, also responded to a movement discourse that envisioned participation as spontaneous voluntarism and imagined participants as national citizens. This chapter reveals the significance and role of movement