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## **Religious Competition and Creative Innovation among Protestant Groups in Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement**

Shun-hing Chan<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

The Umbrella Movement in 2014 was an important event in the history of democratic movements in Hong Kong. Christians were an integral part of the Occupy Central with Love and Peace Movement and the subsequent Umbrella Movement. Using the model of religious competition and creative innovation, this paper examines the innovative practices employed by Protestant groups competing for Christian representation and the language of social justice in response to church leaders who disputed the movement. The refutations by the Protestant groups were also acts of opposition in reaction to the Chinese Government's control of universal suffrage. The case of Protestant groups in the Umbrella Movement is a good example in exploring the new research direction of religious competition and creative innovation in the context of Asian cities and countries.

**Keywords:** Occupy Central with Love and Peace Movement, Umbrella Movement, civil disobedience, constitutional reform, universal suffrage, Hong Kong

### **I. Introduction**

On July 20, 2014, a group of clergy, preachers, and church members issued a public statement titled "The Speech of Archbishop Paul Kwong of the Anglican Church Does Not Represent Us" in *Christian Times Weekly* criticizing Archbishop Paul Kwong's use of biblical passage 11:29 in the Gospel of Matthew to ridicule protesters who occupied Chater Road in Central after the July 1 march. The group expressed "great indignation" at Kwong's sermon, which included the following

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statements: “Hong Kong is a free society, and the basic human rights of assembly should be respected. It is a lack of manner and integrity for a pastor to ridicule those who embrace a different political stance and the way of expression from oneself;” and, “As a church leader, he should be aware of how his views are representing the church; therefore, his sermon on the altar should have been more prudent so that he would not be regarded as an agent of political power in suppressing freedom of speech” (*Christian Times Weekly*, July 20, 2014). A total of 132 people contributed their names to the signature campaign. This public statement was a reaction to Kwong’s sermon at St. Paul’s Church on July 6, 2014, in which he held that protesters spoke out too much because they lacked peace in their hearts, and he ridiculed those who asked for food after their arrest by police, adding that they should have their Pilipino maids brought to them as well. This incident vividly illustrates that Protestants competed for Christian representation and the authority of biblical interpretation regarding civic engagement during the Occupy Central Movement. Their statement also hinted that Kwong was speaking for the Chinese Government and the suppression of the Occupy Central Movement.

The Umbrella Movement in 2014 was an important event in the history of democratic movements in Hong Kong. Christians were an integral part of the Occupy Central with Love and Peace (OCLP) Movement and the subsequent Umbrella Movement. The Umbrella Movement attracted the attention of many researchers, yet most of the works focused on the social and political aspects of the movement (Davis 2015; Hui 2015; Lee, So, and Leung 2015; Lim and Ping 2015; Lo 2015; Ortmann 2015; Rühlig 2015; Veg 2016), neglecting the factor of religion behind the protests. Some theologians have discussed different themes regarding the Umbrella Movement (Kwok 2015; Tse and Tan 2016), but a theological discussion is different from

analyzing the effect of religion on the emergence of the Umbrella Movement. Currently, only a few publications have related religion to the dynamics of the Umbrella Movement (Bosco 2016; Chan 2015; Tse 2015).

This paper examines the role of Protestants in the Umbrella Movement from the perspective of the sociology of religion. The research question of this paper is: How did Protestant groups use a variety of religious practices to facilitate Protestants' political participation in the Umbrella Movement? In the following sections, the model of religious competition and creative innovation will be explained, followed by a brief account of the background of the Umbrella Movement. Next, analyses of the Protestants' innovative practices in expressing their Christian representation and the language of social justice will be provided. The final section will summarize the research findings and discuss their implications.

## **II. Religious Competition and Creative Innovation**

This study adopted the model of religious competition and creative innovation formulated by the Center for Religion and Civic Culture at the University of Southern California (Centre for Religion and Civic Culture 2014). This model suggests that competition between religious groups can stimulate creative innovation and contribute to religious change and development. This model focuses on people and religious groups that practice religion in the context of particular communities, and the extent to which competition organizes and motivates their activities and strategic planning. The model also seeks to understand how individuals make decisions regarding their religious commitments and how congregational leaders creatively address the social and spiritual needs of their members.

Researchers of this model have identified two strategies that shape its interpretive theoretical framework. The first strategy focuses on a cultural analysis that takes seriously religious practice, agency, power, and interest, rather than an approach that emphasizes rational choice. The second strategy includes an analysis of the investigation of the importance of geographic context—or “place”—to understand how religious action, including competition, cooperation, and innovation, is either constrained or encouraged, both for religious organizations and individuals.

This model is consistent with the approach of cultural sociology in researching the relationship between culture and social action and the role of culture in social movements. The works of Ann Swidler and Hank Johnston are two illustrative examples. Swidler (1986) suggested that any action is necessarily integrated into larger assemblages in a cultural context, which can be called “strategies of action.” The term “strategy” is not used in the conventional sense of a plan consciously devised to attain a goal, but rather in a general way of organizing action that might allow the actor to reach several different life goals. Strategies of action incorporate, and thus depend on, habits, moods, sensibilities, and the views of the world. People construct chains of action beginning with prefabricated links. Culture influences action through the shape and organization of those links. Simply put, culture is a “tool kit” or repertoire for constructing “strategies of action” from which actors select different pieces to construct lines of action.

Swidler (1995) explained further how to employ this notion of culture in researching social movements. She suggested that researchers should focus on three sources of cultural power, namely, codes, contexts, and institutions. Codes refer to

semiotic codes, which represent deeply held, inescapable relationships of meaning that define the possibilities of utterance in a cultural universe, and many social movements have revolved around cultural recoding. Movement organizers can reshape the world more effectively by redefining its terms rather than rearranging its sanction in a given political environment.

Context refers to the immediate, fact-to-face situation in the first instance. For example, the dynamics of a meeting can give ideas a coherent, systematic influence, even when the individual participants are confused and ambivalent. Context can also mean the more general situation of conflict or accommodation, polarization, and alliance formation. In many contexts, social movements give culture a coherent organization and consistent influence that it normally lacks in the minds of most individuals. The contexts in which ideas operate can give them coherence and cultural power.

Institutions refer to well-established, stable sets of purposes and rules backed by sanctions, which often create obdurate structures that are both constraints and opportunities for individuals. Different regime types and different forms of repression generate different kinds of social movements with differing tactics and internal cultures. Social movements often develop their cultures to fit extant institutions. Furthermore, institutions can affect the formulation of social movement identities and objectives. For example, when the state enshrines “rights” as the crucial legal claim that trumps all others, both individuals and social movements will conceive of the claims they make as “rights.”

Johnston (2009) suggested three basic categories of cultural factors in the study of

social movements, namely, ideations, artifacts, and performances. Ideations are the traditional concepts of culture, referring to values, beliefs, mentalities, social representations, habitus, ideologies, or more specific norms of behavior, including normative forms of speech. Artifacts refer to cultural objects produced either individually or collectively, such as music, art, and literature, which stand alone in their materiality and are available to others after the initial behavior that produced them. Performances refer to actions that are symbolic because they are interpreted by those also present at the location where culture is accomplished.

In explaining the role of culture in social movements, Johnston held that the three categories of culture could occur in a complex and dense network of social action. He used the term “matrix” to capture the complexity, diversity, and sociality of these cultural elements. In the context of a social movement, the agent brings ideations to a performance or the creation of an artifact. It then includes all the other audiences in the situated performance, and the cultural knowledge they bring to make sense. Finally, it encompasses the interaction itself, whereby a network of people perceives and interprets the artifacts and performances, creating their own social representations of the world they live in, jointly within a structure of social encounters.

To summarize, by employing cultural approaches to religious competition, cooperation, and creative innovation, and by emphasizing the social context—place—in which religion is practiced, researchers of religious competition and creative innovation projects have developed new theoretical insights into how competition is related to creative innovation in religious beliefs, practices and organizations.

### **III. Background: Constitutional Reform in Hong Kong**

The OCLP Movement in 2014 was an episode of continuous social movements striving for democratization in Hong Kong. In 1984, the Sino-British Joint Declaration announced that Hong Kong would revert to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, rather than extend its lease as a colony of the United Kingdom. The Hong Kong Basic Law adopted in 1990 stated that Hong Kong could select its Chief Executive and elect the Legislative Council by universal suffrage according to Article 45 and Article 68, respectively. In 2007, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPCSC) endorsed Hong Kong's selection of its Chief Executive and the Legislative Council by universal suffrage after 2017. Hong Kong people have been demanding the dual elections by universal suffrage since the 1980s, but they also have doubted whether the Chinese Government would keep its promise and abide by the Basic Law. For example, the pan-democrats did not trust the government-controlled Election Committee, whose duties include nominating and selecting the Chief Executive, so they proposed a new mechanism—"civil nomination"—that would exist side by side with the Election Committee, allowing Hong Kong people to nominate and select their Chief Executive.

Benny Tai, one of the OCLP initiators, proposed the idea of occupying Central in the *Hong Kong Economic Journal* on January 16, 2013, which aimed to exert pressure on the Chinese Government to implement dual elections (Tai 2013: 32-34). Tai's proposal reflected, to a large extent, the concerns of Hong Kong people and it received tremendous support from various sectors in society. The idea of Occupy Central became OCLP at a later stage, and finally the unexpected Umbrella



Movement.

The Chinese Government has continued to deny Hong Kong people the rights of universal suffrage. On August 31, 2014, the NPCSC announced its decision to select the Chief Executive by universal suffrage in 2017: (1) only one nominating committee could nominate candidates for Chief Executive, and the number of members, composition, and formation method of the committee should be the same as the previous one; (2) each candidate must have the endorsement of more than half of all the members of the nominating committee; and (3) the nominating committee should nominate two to three candidates for the office of Chief Executive. Hong Kong people called this decision “shutting the three doors,” referring to the stringent regulations made by the government to control elections, rather than election by universal suffrage in accordance with the principles of universality and equality. Hong Kong people were disappointed with the NPCSC’s decision. Consequently, many joined the Occupy Movement to protest against the Chinese Government for maintaining controlled elections.

### ***Different Names for the Occupy Movement***

The “Occupy Movement,” the “Occupy Central Movement,” and the “Umbrella Movement” refer to different periods of a continuing movement from March 2013 to December 2014. The Occupy Movement is a general term that can refer to both the Occupy Central Movement and the Umbrella Movement. The Occupy Central Movement refers to OCLP, which advocated occupying the business and financial area Central in Hong Kong. However, protesters occupied three other regions, including Admiralty, Mong Kok, and Causeway Bay, from September 28 to December

15, 2014, due to a series of confrontations between the protesters and the police in Admiralty. The “Umbrella Movement” was the name given to the Occupy Movement by international correspondents who captured the moment when protesters used umbrellas to shield themselves from the pepper spray used by the police.

### ***The OCLP Movement***

On March 27, 2013, Benny Tai, Chan Kin-man, and Chu Yiu-ming officially announced the launch of OCLP and presented its Manifesto at a press conference held at Kowloon Union Church. They proclaimed that the movement would employ civil disobedience as a means to urge the Chinese and the Hong Kong Special Administration Region (HKSAR) Governments to implement universal suffrage. On April 28, 2013, the OCLP secretariat was established and it introduced 10 staunch supporters to the press. Among the three initiators, Tai was a devoted Protestant, Chu was a pastor in the Baptist Church, and Chan attended church when he was young. Five out of the 10 staunch supporters were Protestants.

From the very beginning, the initiators presented OCLP with rich Christian language and imagery (Interviewee 1, April 9, 2015). Tai told the media in an interview, “This is not a political activity. For me, this is a religious activity in which I am preaching therein” (Chen 2013). Chan Kin-man added the words “love” and “peace” to the Occupy Movement, expressing the idea of sacrifice, which is a core value in the Christian faith. The venue of the press conference, Kowloon Union Church, was a plain and unadorned adaptation of an English church. In many photos released by the press, there was a huge brown cross behind the three initiators. These people, their language, and the religious symbols displayed a social movement

imbued with Christian messages, which was instrumental in mobilizing the emotions of Christians in Hong Kong and granting religious legitimacy to the campaign. To use Johnston's terminology, Christian language and imagery were the "high cultural" artifacts that inspired and confirmed the protest themes of OCLP (Johnston 2009: 15-16).

### ***Responses from the Protestant Community***

Protestants in Hong Kong reacted to both constitutional reform and the Occupy Movement. For constitutional reform, only a few churches, church organizations, and Protestant groups expressed their views in the form of open letters and public statements in support of the dual elections, while the majority of churches remained silent on the issue. For OCLP, there were divergent views among Protestant churches and individuals. Many churches' congregants were deeply divided over the decision to support or oppose the Occupy Movement, and many denominations and churches kept their distance from the campaign. Protestant activists took part in OCLP individually or in action groups. They claimed that they only represented themselves or their groups, rather than represented their churches. Many Protestant activists advocated OCLP through a variety of innovative practices before and during the period of occupation.

## **IV. Data and Research Methods**

The data for this paper were collected from field research, newspapers, articles on the Internet, and in-depth interviews. The author conducted field research in the occupied zones in Admiralty and Mong Kok during the period of the Occupy

Movement. Newspaper reports, particularly articles published by *Christian Times Weekly* in both print and online versions, were important sources of reference.

In-depth interviews were conducted with seven informants, including three members in the Organizing Committee of OCLP, two clergymen from mainline churches, a member of the Clergy Station for Spiritual Support in Admiralty, and a member of St. Francis Chapel on the Street in Mong Kok.

## **V. Religious Competition and Creative Innovation among Protestant Groups**

### ***The Context of Religious Competition***

Although OCLP had become an urgent issue in society beginning in 2013, many Protestant churches were ambivalent about supporting or opposing the campaign. Some church leaders openly disputed the idea of civil disobedience and OCLP using biblical stories and their interpretation of the stories. Some churches made regulations forbidding the clergy or church members to use the name of the church in activities related to OCLP, so that the churches could avoid charges of incitement to law-breaking. Consequently, Protestants who supported OCLP could only work outside the church, as they contested the language, interpretation, and Christian identity of church leaders who disputed OCLP. This was an example of a situation where institutions create structures that are both constraints and opportunities for individuals. Similar to Swidler's quoted examples of Chartism, women's suffrage, and the civil rights movement, Hong Kong people who were denied the rights of universal suffrage organized legal, illegal, and extralegal protests to batter their way into the system, making claims for equal dignity and moral personhood (Swidler 1995: 37). In this context, there were two instances in particular of church leaders who

disputed OCLP, followed by Protestant activists who employed a variety of innovative practices to contest Christian representation in and support for the OCLP/Umbrella Movement.

Reverend Daniel Ng of Kong Fok Church, the Evangelical Free Church of China, openly disputed OCLP. On April 6, 2013, he distributed his article “How Should Christians Understand Civil Disobedience?” during Sunday service in his church. In the article, he described civil disobedience as anti-social behavior and proposed two principles for using civil disobedience, referring to different biblical stories: Only when the right of religion (and not the right of choosing a political institution) and the right to survive (the right to “save heads” rather than “count heads”) are threatened by the government can one engage in the contingent act of civil disobedience, which is permissible in the Bible. The article concluded that Christians should pray for authority, respect the governor, and assist the government or the ruling party in achieving the designated goals (Ng 2013).

On May 7, 2013, Reverend Ng told a reporter of *Ming Bao* that the registration of a church might be suspended by the government if the church was involved in political activity. The membership of a clergyperson or a church member could be disqualified if he or she broke the law, according to the regulations in the charter of the church. Likewise, a clergyperson should resign from the church, or the church should terminate the contract of his or her employment, if the clergyperson openly enticed church members to break the law. Church members should also be prudent in activity regarding OCLP, so that they will not break the law under the influence of a clergyperson (*Ming Bao*, May 7, 2013). In this stance, Ng was targeting Reverend Chu Yiu-ming, one of the OCLP initiators.

Archbishop Paul Kwong, a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in China, and Provincial Secretary-General Reverend Peter Douglas Koon Ho-ming of the Hong Kong Anglican Church also openly disputed OCLP. In September 2013, Kwong criticized OCLP in an article titled "Universal Suffrage Is Not a Panacea" published by *The Provincial Echo*, an official publication of the Hong Kong Anglican Church (*The Provincial Echo*, September 2, 2013). He held that universal suffrage was not a panacea to solving social problems, and universal suffrage was a system with many defects. He pointed out that in many countries, political and economic problems and issues of livelihood persisted even after those countries introduced universal suffrage. The year 2014 was not the last chance for universal suffrage, so he refused to endorse civil disobedience as a means to exert pressure on the government.

In his Sunday sermon, Kwong went further in criticizing social activists for protesting and speaking out too much. On July 6, 2014, he delivered a sermon at St. Paul's Church, during which he used the story of Jesus who remained silent in the face of Pilate, like a lamb awaiting slaughter, to convey the message to his congregants that "silence is better than saying anything" (*South China Morning Post*, July 8, 2014). The message of this sermon showed that the archbishop of the Anglican Church urged his congregants to stay away from OCLP by invoking the crucifixion of Jesus in the Bible.

Koon discredited OCLP on many occasions when interviewed by reporters. On April 1, 2014, he criticized OCLP in an article "The Anglican Church: A Consensus from the Religious Sector to Oppose the Occupy Central Movement" in the

newspaper *Wenweibao* (*Wenweibao*, April 1, 2014). He held that there was a consensus among religious representatives in Hong Kong who did not want to see the Occupy Central Movement materialize. He criticized the OCLP initiators, using the example of Martin Luther King Jr. to justify their idea of civil disobedience, which was irrelevant in the context of Hong Kong, because while African Americans continued to be oppressed during King's time in the United States, the Chinese Government had not oppressed people in Hong Kong. He also asserted that people from the religious sector should not encourage illegal behavior because it was tantamount to "telling people that it was alright to run a red light."

On April 2, 2014, Koon commented on OCLP again in *Wenweibao*: No religious representative in Hong Kong would encourage people to break the law, except people from evil cults (*Wenweibao*, April 2, 2014). He took back his words after receiving strong criticisms from society. As *Wenweibao* is a state-owned newspaper in Hong Kong controlled by the Liaison Office of the Central Government, Koon's comments on OCLP should not have been read as his personal views. Instead, this revealed a kind of working relationship between the Anglican Church and the Chinese Government. In October 2015, an article in *Global Times*, an official newspaper reflecting the views of the Chinese Government, criticized the OCLP supporters as "extreme oppositionists" during activities for the first anniversary of OCLP, suggesting that their words and deeds were similar to those of people from evil cults (*Global Times*, September 28, 2015).

It should be noted that the views of the church leaders discussed above reflected, to a large extent, the political ideology of the Chinese Government. Protestant activists who rebutted the views of the church leaders were also reacting to the

political ideology of the Chinese Government, which had tried to block OCLP from emerging.

### ***Innovative Practices during OCLP***

After the three initiators announced their Manifesto at the press conference, Protestants debated with each other on many occasions (Law 2015; Tai 2013; Tai, Chu, and Kung 2013). Benny Tai and Reverend Chu Yiu-ming addressed issues that arose from OCLP in person on many occasions, persuading Protestants to support OCLP (Interviewee 7, October 25, 2016). Protestants who supported OCLP employed a variety of innovative practices to advocate the campaign and refute criticisms from opponents.

The Divinity School of Chung Chi College at the Chinese University of Hong Kong organized the “Occupy Central with Peace: Theological Seminar” on November 4–5, 2013, expounding the ideas of OCLP from a theological perspective. The two-day seminar was attended by 200 people each day. Those who presented papers were professors from the Divinity School of Chung Chi College. Supporters and opponents of OCLP, including Benny Tai, Chan Kin-man, Reverend Chu Yiu-ming, Reverend Daniel Ng, and Maria Tam Wai-chu, were invited to debate the issues. In the final session, the organizer arranged for Reverend Chu Yiu-ming and Reverend Daniel Ng to assist in the administration of an Ecumenical Holy Communion, expressing Christian unity despite diversity. Although the speakers did not come to a conclusion on the relationship between the ideas of OCLP and Christian values, the themes “Christians should obey God” and “Christians should protest against unjust rulers” were prevalent in the two-day seminar (*Christian Times Weekly*, November 10,



2013). These themes supported the ideas of OCLP and indirectly refuted Ng's arguments regarding the "two principles of civil disobedience," and Christians should pray for authority, respect the governor, and assist the government or the ruling party. *Christian Times Weekly* reported on the seminar in full, which conveyed a strong message to the Protestant community that professors of theology endorsed the ideas of OCLP and that Protestants had a religious ground on which to participate in the movement. The church-state relations in Hong Kong have long been influenced by the teaching of "respect for authority" (The Book of Romans, Chapter 13), with language that is "deep, unspoken, and pervasive" (Swidler 1995: 32). The theological seminar reshaped the language of church-state relations by way of cultural recoding.

Different groups of Anglicans employed a variety of means to express their discontent with Kwong and Koon. In April 2014, 13 young Anglicans from different parishes issued a public statement titled "Searching for Reconciliation: A Public Statement and Charter of Young People of the Hong Kong Anglican Church Concerned about the Opinions of Clergy and the Situation in Hong Kong." The group urged Koon to clarify his criticisms on civil disobedience, and called on young Anglicans from different parishes to engage in issues concerning social justice in Hong Kong and to realize the fourth mark of the church's mission, namely, "to transform the unjust structure of society, to challenge violence of every kind, and to pursue peace and reconciliation," referring to the "Five Marks of Mission" formulated by the Anglican Communion. This call for returning to the Anglican tradition was an ingenious way to criticize church leaders who ignored social justice in Hong Kong. These young Anglicans collected 120 names in support of their public statement. As Swidler suggested, this was a situation where cultural ideologies emerged during an "unsettled" historical period and such coherent, systematic worldviews powerfully

influenced their adherents (Swidler 1986: 278-280; 1995: 34-35). In the context of OCLP, the Five Marks of Mission in the Anglican tradition gave social justice and the realization of it a coherence and cultural power. Young Anglicans acquired this power at a time when their church leaders had violated the principles of church tradition.

On July 4, 2014, the same group of young Anglicans organized the forum named “Understanding Civil Disobedience from an Anglican Perspective,” which invited two clergymen and two young Anglicans to discuss the issues of OCLP and its relevance to the Anglican spirit. On July 19, 2014, the same group of young Anglicans formed St. Francis Action, which aimed to learn the role of St. Francis of Assisi (1182–1226) and realized the fourth mark of the Anglican Mission in Hong Kong. The group organized a silent protest by gazing at the Celtic cross in the garden of St. John’s Cathedral, which was a symbolic act that expressed divergent views on social issues in the church. To use Johnston’s category of cultural factors in social movements, the silent protest gazing at the Celtic cross can be interpreted as a ritual performance, through which young Anglicans asserted their views and identity vis-à-vis those of church leaders under the hierarchy of the Anglican tradition (Johnston 2009: 8-15).

In July 2014, other Anglicans formed the group “Returning to the Anglican Spirit” on Facebook and initiated a signature campaign within the Anglican Church. The public statement criticized Kwong for using his sermon on the altar to sneer at OCLP supporters. They also refuted his interpretation of the biblical passages as out of context, violating the catholic tradition that demanded that preaching should closely follow biblical texts. This group of Anglicans collected approximately 100 names during its signature campaign.

In the same month, a group of alumni from Anglican schools also initiated a signature campaign on Facebook, urging Kwong to take back his words delivered in his sermon. The public statement borrowed the biblical story of David and Goliath as an analogy, referring to David as the Hong Kong people and Goliath as the Chinese Government. Their public statement criticized Kwong for helping the giant Goliath, which was tantamount to helping the tyrant victimize his subjects. They concluded that “if we have faith to rely on God and for the glory of God, we will fight for the cause; we can defeat the giant and strive for a more just society” (*Christian Times Weekly*, July 20, 2014). The analogy made a powerful religious-moral judgement in the controversial issue of constitutional reform: the fight of the Hong Kong people for universal suffrage is a just war, and the Anglican archbishop helping the Chinese Government was an offense against God. This group of Anglican alumni collected approximately 820 names in support of the signature campaign.

On August 29, 2014, a group of Protestants and Catholics issued “Confession of Christians Watching over Hong Kong” (*Christian Times Weekly*, September 7, 2014). Initiated by 206 Christians, this confession received support from more than 4,600 people on the Internet in a short period of time. Reverend Ray Wong, a clergyman from the Church of Christ in China, explained the confession to reporters at a press conference held at the Methodist Church and called on Christians to uphold the fundamental principles of the Bible. The confession criticized the “ill practices” that had arisen in Hong Kong during the movements, including labeling peaceful civil disobedience campaigns as violent protests and camouflaging the one-person, one-vote election with political pre-screening as “universal suffrage.” The confession stressed that Protestants should respect and be tolerant of one another, which did not mean that they should evade the truth. It state: “Imagine: If we had reluctantly

remained neutral or advocated conciliation in the confrontation between David and Goliath, we would have abetted the tyrannical deeds of the oppressor.” The confession outlined three major ill practices in Hong Kong during that time: deception and distortion of the facts; using threats and bait to elicit political allegiance and suppress dissenting voices; and using all kinds of means to limit Hong Kong people’s exercise of democratic rights. The confession urged Christians “to rely on God to stand against the corrupting power...and to confront the ill practices that distort truth and suppress freedom.”

The media widely reported the confession with a photo showing a group of Christians standing behind Reverend Wong, who was dressed in a black clerical shirt and collar. This confession was a joint effort uniting Protestants and Catholics in reaction to the counter-mobilization of the pro-establishment camp defaming OCLP. The confession explained the political situation to Hong Kong people using the biblical story of David and Goliath once again: David as the Hong Kong people and Goliath as the Chinese Government. It conveyed the following message: This is a war between the powerless and the powerful, as well as a war between truth and the ill-practices of corrupting power; those who remain neutral or advocate conciliation are abetting the oppressor. Some denominations chose to remain neutral and advocate conciliation when the Chinese Government denied the rights of universal suffrage to Hong Kong people. The use of the biblical story of David and Goliath conferred a sacred meaning to OCLP and the effort of striving for constitutional reform: this is a just war, and Hong Kong people will triumph in the end.

This group also organized a prayer meeting in the Methodist Church on September 12, 2014, which was attended by approximately 300 Christians. At the

prayer meeting, Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kium of the Catholic Church was one of the speakers who addressed the issue, with two Protestant speakers representing mainline and evangelical churches. This prayer meeting expressed Christian unity with ecumenical spirit in supporting OCLP and institutional reform (*Christian Times Weekly*, September 21, 2014).

To use Johnston's terminology of culture as ideation, the group "Returning to the Anglican Spirit," the alumni of Anglican schools, and the group that issued "Confession of Christians Watching over Hong Kong" were working on a new frame to express the relationship between Hong Kong people and the Chinese Government during a time of contestation for the legitimacy of OCLP (Johnston 2009: 21-26). In the framing processes, the biblical story of David and Goliath became a cultural schema that provided political meaning to Hong Kong people. This is also what Swidler suggested, that culture is a "tool kit" from which actors select pieces to construct lines of action (Swidler 1986: 277). Protestants in Hong Kong knew how to construct "strategies of action" using Christian resources in competing for the moral legitimacy of OCLP.

### ***Innovative Practices during the Umbrella Movement***

Benny Tai announced that the Occupy Movement would be launched at the Central Government Office in Admiralty on the morning of September 28, 2014. Many Protestants participated in the movement during the occupation period from September 28 to December 15, 2014. This section focuses on how individual Protestants and groups used innovative practices to connect Christian faith with the Umbrella Movement in two occupied zones.

On October 1, 2014, a group of clergy organized a 48-hour prayer meeting with a hunger strike in Admiralty, calling on the HKSAR Government to engage in dialogue with leaders of the Umbrella Movement. Lam Ka-yin, a preacher in the Praise Assembly, began the first phase of the hunger strike, followed by students from the Divinity School of Chung Chi College (*Christian Times Weekly*, October 1, 2014). Reverend Chu Yiu-ming visited Lam and prayed with him. Chu called on Protestants to express their concern over police violence, which included firing tear-gas canisters at the crowds in Admiralty on September 28, 2014, and asked them through *Christian Times Weekly* to join the movement. Some Protestants went to Admiralty in support of the hunger strike. They expressed frustration at their church for remaining silent on the issue. Other visitors told Lam that they were considering leaving the church because they were excluded by the church due to their supportive attitude towards OCLP. Lam prayed for them and asked them to stay in the church to encourage change.

A group of clergy and laity celebrated Sunday services in the occupied zone in Admiralty. The first Sunday service was held on October 5, 2014. More than 30 clergy who came from different denominations and churches celebrated World Communion Sunday together. The sermon focused on the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love. The preacher thanked the three OCLP initiators and the student leaders for bringing hope to Hong Kong. He called on protesters to not harbor hatred in their hearts, because hatred would only destroy them. Instead, Christians should carry the virtues of hope and love to everyone in society (Interviewee 3, April 17, 2015). The Sunday service welcomed all people who confessed their faith to join the Eucharist, no matter what denominations or churches they came from, and whether

they were baptized or not. Approximately 500 Christians joined the Holy Communion (*Christian Times Weekly*, October 12, 2014).

To use Johnston's category of cultural factors in social movements, the prayer meeting with hunger strikes and the Sunday services celebrated in the occupied zone can be understood as ritual performances, through which these prayer meetings and services created collective identity, collective memories, and organizing relationships (Johnston 2009: 13).

Another group of clergy and students from seminaries set up a Clergy Station for Spiritual Support in Admiralty. Decorated with many Christian symbols, this station erected a big wooden cross, together with religious slogans. The Hong Kong Christians' double identities were well-expressed by the slogan "Take up the cross, defend our city." These clergy and students delivered messages of peace and hope to the protesters by praying, reading scriptures, and singing hymns. There was a duty list and a regular timetable for hymn singing and praying. The station also provided counseling services for a number of protesters who felt lonely and depressed during the occupation. The clergy listened and prayed for them. Some frustrated protesters came from churches that disputed the OCLP/Umbrella Movement, and the clergy affirmed their participation and encouraged them spiritually (Interviewee 4, April 17, 2015).

As suggested by Johnston, music and texts are cultural artifacts that play a significant role in social movements (Johnston 2009: 15-21). This clergy station was instrumental in building a Christian base with its symbols, rituals, and services in the occupied zone at a time when many churches disapproved of the movement. Through

praying, reading scriptures, singing hymns, and counseling, the station encouraged protesters to uphold the values of “love and peace,” which indirectly provided support to the movement.

A group of young Christians erected the small makeshift St. Francis Chapel on the Street in the occupied zone in Mong Kok. They celebrated masses and held services at the chapel during the period of occupation. The chapel first appeared at Nathan Road near Shan Tung Street on October 8, 2014. It was managed by three groups of young Christians who came from the Anglican Church, the Catholic Church, and the Slow Church in the evangelical tradition. A small working group named Brothers of the Chapel were stationed at the chapel and carried out routine duties. The group was assisted by more than 10 Christians who discussed matters surrounding the chapel on a weekly basis.

The Protestants of the Slow Church joined the chapel at a later stage. Generally, the services of the Slow Church are attended by 20 to 30 people, ages 20 to 40 years old. Some participants are university students. A member of the Slow Church was interviewed in an attempt to understand the thoughts of these young Christians. More precisely, his story focused more on the evangelical Protestants affiliated with the Slow Church, rather than the Anglicans and Catholics. Interviewee 2 told me that he took part in the work at St. Francis Chapel on the Street because he held that Christians should have a voice in the Umbrella Movement. He asserted that the chapel’s action group was a “body of Christ” and a church in the city, reflecting the double identity of a Hongkonger and a Protestant (Interviewee 2, April 13, 2015).

Interviewee 2 was disappointed with the church in Hong Kong. Using a



continuum to explain what he perceived as the political stances of Protestants in Hong Kong, he held that on one end of the line there were conservative Protestants who aligned themselves with the pro-establishment camp, and on the other end there were progressive Protestants who were ready to fight for democracy. In between the two ends there were Protestants who lacked political consciousness but OCLP woke up some of these Protestants. He and his fellow Protestants were frustrated about the future of Hong Kong, hoping that they could do something for society. The Umbrella Movement aroused their deep-seated passion, so they joined the chapel and conducted services on the street.

These young Protestants were ready to fight the police on the front line. The motto of their faith was “The spirit of sacrifice; God with his people; and God is the judge of the world.” They believed that protests with force could change society. Interviewee 2 was also a member of Civic Passion, a populist political group in Hong Kong that advocates nativism. These young evangelical Protestants proclaimed that Jesus was a protester on the streets. One of the main themes in the services was “moral judgement,” that Jesus condemned unjust deeds in society and exercised judgment. This shows that these young Protestants attempted to construct religious meanings for the Umbrella Movement and conferred legitimacy to their progressive actions. St. Francis Chapel on the Street provided an opportunity for these young Protestants to connect their faith with social activism.

Similar to the Sunday services celebrated in Admiralty and the silent protest gazing at the Celtic cross in the garden of St. John’s Cathedral, the Christians in St. Francis Chapel on the Street were an action group that held ritual performances in Mong Kok, but the theme of confrontation in the group of evangelical Protestants was

stronger than the Sunday services and the silent protest, which can aptly be qualified as “oppositional performances” (Johnston 2009: 10-12). Furthermore, looking through the lens of “culture as ideation,” these evangelical Protestants displayed a clear cognitive schema by presenting their vision of the chapel and their motto of Christian faith, which guided their progressive action in the Umbrella Movement (Johnston 2009: 21-26).

## **VI. Conclusion**

Using the model of religious competition and creative innovation, this paper has examined how Protestant groups employed a variety of innovative practices to support the OCLP/Umbrella Movement under the context of competition, in which the conservative leaders disputed the idea of civil disobedience and the OCLP/Umbrella Movement. This paper also used Ann Swidler’s idea of culture as a “tool kit” and the function of codes, contexts, and institutions in social movements, as well as Hank Johnston’s proposed categories of culture as ideations, artifacts, and performances, in analyzing Christian activists’ creative appropriation of Christian resources in advocating the OCLP/Umbrella Movement.

These innovative practices included organizing a theological seminar to recode the language of “respect for authority,” a forum to clarify the Anglican perspective on civil obedience, and a prayer meeting with a hunger strike to urge the government to engage in dialogue with the movement’s leaders and protesters. Young Anglicans called on their church members to “return to the Anglican spirit,” invoked the “marks of the church mission” to uphold social justice, and organized a silent protest gazing at the Celtic cross in the garden of St. John’s Cathedral.

Issuing public statements was also a common practice among the Protestant groups. The alumni of Anglican schools used the biblical story of David and Goliath as an analogy to define the relationship between Hong Kong people and the Chinese Government. Other Christian groups issued a confession condemning the ill-practices of opponents who defamed OCLP and its support of universal suffrage. In the two occupied zones of Admiralty and Mong Kok, different Protestant groups erected a station and a chapel, respectively, celebrating Mass and holding Sunday services to express the presence of Christianity to protesters and to strive for democratization in Hong Kong.

The model of religious competition and creative innovation is useful in understanding how the context of constitutional reform in Hong Kong provided the impetus for Protestant groups to compete for Christian representation and the language of social justice, which gave rise to a variety of innovative religious practices in support of the OCLP/Umbrella Movement. The model has also provided a good conceptual framework to explore the role of religious culture in social movements. The OCLP/Umbrella Movement is a good empirical case that has rich research implications for examining the explanatory power of this model in the context of Asian cities and countries.

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