

Hong Kong: Other Voices from the Anti-Extradition Movement

Saturday 13 July 2019, by [Chuang, Correspondent\(s\)](#) (Date first published: 17 July 2019).

The events of Hong Kong's movement against the extradition bill have already been widely reported in English, with more details and personal accounts coming out every day. (For highlights follow our Twitter feed [1].) Here we'd just like to share two short pieces that we translated in order to provide a window into some perspectives from the movement that might be more difficult to ascertain from mainstream media accounts.

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The first is an interview with three precariously employed participants who were in the tenth grade during the 2014 Umbrella Movement. Although they nominally participated in 2014, as high school students, this merely took the form of sitting in a classroom "on strike," half-listening to teachers talk about the struggle for "universal suffrage." Now they've become more politicized and are taking days off from work to protest "so that in the future we'll have work to go to." How would the extradition bill affect their jobs, the independent left-leaning journalist asks? The young men mumble something about Hong Kong's international image and foreigners no longer coming to invest—ideas that have featured prominently in the movement's messaging, especially from right-wing "localist" groups, although their logical connection with the legislation's actual content seems to be a stretch at best.

The second piece, written by a local contact, explores just such political limitations. The author notes that these sort of vague positions based on confused presumptions pervade the movement, and discusses these in relation to the author's own completely different motivations for participating: concern for how the bill might enhance Beijing's ability to repress mainland labor activism and the development of cross-border left-wing networks.

As for our own analysis of the movement, we think it's important not to rush into judgement and instead take time and do the work to process what is really going on. At this point, though, our assessment is less dismissive than that conveyed in the second piece. The author seems overly focused on the explicit ideologies of participants and goals of the movement, whereas we would redirect attention to the radical possibilities opened up whenever hundreds of thousands of ordinary people disrupt the everyday socioeconomic order and try to take matters into their own hands. Some of us observed this first hand in 2014, [2] all of us have observed similar phenomena in mass movements elsewhere, and by multiple accounts, the anti-extradition bill movement has already gone further in opening up such possibilities than anything Hong Kong has witnessed in years if not decades. [3]

We do agree, however, that the explicit and implicit political orientation of most participants and the movement as a whole are important problems. Our hope stems partly from the knowledge that at

least a few participants like the author are trying to push things in a leftward direction, rather than either just swimming along with the tide or giving up hope entirely—as many leftists and anarchists ended up doing in 2014. [4]

History isn't made by a handful of activists with the correct ideology, but through the unpredictable actions of countless proletarians learning to fight together against what they perceive (however inaccurately) to threaten their future. They come into these struggles with contradictory ideas, and these are only worked through in the material process of sustaining such movements and pushing them forward.

Last Friday, June 14th, Hong Kong's Chief Executive Carrie Lam declared the extradition bill would be suspended indefinitely, citing the need for further "consultation," but the move failed to stem popular outrage. On Saturday a 35-year-old man surnamed Leung scaled a window ledge in Admiralty, donning a yellow rain suit and a banner demanding the full suspension of the bill. After five hours poised on the ledge, he ventured out onto the scaffolding, dangling above the street, and slipped from the grasp of firefighters who tried to pull him back up. He fell to his death. As we write this on Sunday night, an estimated two million people have taken to the streets in black demanding Lam's resignation, protesting police brutality, and mourning the death of Leung. Lam has apologized to the people of Hong Kong, but the struggle is far from over.

Chuang translators & editors

People of the Anti-Extradition Movement: Five Years after Occupy Central, the Youth of Harcourt Road are Growing Up, or...?

Author: Cezai (陈在)

Original title: 香港反送中运动五周年了.....

Source: Grassroots Media (草根 [5]), 13 June 2019

When the government announced that the "Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation (Amendment) Bill" would resume its reading on the morning of June 12th, protestors again occupied the streets surrounding the government headquarters on three sides. Around noon, Harcourt Road was still calm as my conversation with three participants aged 19 and 20 was drawing to an end, when suddenly the rain started pouring. I opened my umbrella and extended it to Kelvin (who hadn't brought one), and asked: "Considering that you didn't participate in [2014] Occupy Central and this is your first time to experience this sort of thing, how do you feel?" "Like a chicken that fell into a pot of soup," he said, eyes narrowing above the facemask.

Precarious Youth in the University of Society

Noticing their young appearance, I asked whether they were in high school or college, but all three just sort of mumbled in response. A boy with bleached hair named Eric broke the awkward silence: "We're students in the university of society." The three friends had known each other for just over a year. Recently out of high school, now they were each working separate part-time jobs in logistics and food services. I asked if they had asked for leave today, but all three said their jobs were flexible

and they chose when they wanted to work. "I'd rather sit here than work today." In what sounded like a rather proud tone, Eric explained that he still didn't have to worry much about economic pressures.

When they had arrived at Harcourt Road around 10:45, the horizon had already become a sea of heads. They had decided to meet here the previous night, after reading posts on Facebook, Instagram and Telegram. Like me, they lived in Western New Territories, so it took a while to get down here. They got off the bus early at Sheung Wan, took the MTR to Central and then walked over.

A Hong Kong without Freedom or a Sense of Security

During the big demonstration on June 9th, they all had to work the night shift so they didn't participate. "Would you have come if you didn't have to work?" All three nodded their heads. "We're afraid that in the future we won't have jobs to go to," Dicky, who hadn't said much before, took the lead in answering. "And today we're not going to work so that in the future we'll have work to go to." Still pondering what this meant, I asked "Why?" He thought for a moment and said, "Because no one would come and invest anymore." Although his employer was not foreign-invested, he was nevertheless worried about future prospects.

Kelvin said that he and his coworkers had discussed that, if the extradition bill passed, it would be paramount to Hong Kong reuniting with mainland China prematurely and losing its freedom. Although he had seen friends posting about the bill in the past, he never really paid attention until two or three weeks ago, when he started searching online for details, including through introductory videos on YouTube. "How do you think the amendment will affect you the most?" "I think Hong Kong is safe, but if it passes, I'll lose that sense of security. There'll be a lot of restrictions." He and friends often visited the forums on Lihkg, and although they rarely post comments, they're worried that their freedom of speech will be infringed upon, so they'll "need to be careful about anything they say on the internet."

Eric, on the other hand, had been following the extradition bill ever since the Chan Tong-kai incident, his biggest concern being Hong Kong's international image should the bill be passed. He thinks that if it passes, many people would no longer dare come to Hong Kong. After listening to a series of comments about the SAR's "prosperity" as "the pearl of the Orient," I asked whether he felt a deep sense of attachment to this place. He hesitated for a moment, as if no one had ever asked this before, gazing at the horizon and then looking back again: "Yes, of course, it's my home." I then asked whether he supported militant methods of resistance, like the storming of the Legislative Council (LegCo) on the morning of June 9th. He seemed a bit conflicted over this question: "Sometimes it's not necessary to be so militant, but without them [those who take militant action], Hong Kongers wouldn't be as determined as they are today." If it "came down to it" (□□□□□□), he added, [such actions] might be necessary. What would that mean, I asked? Again he thought for a moment before replying: "That might be next Thursday." (Note: Andrew Leung, President of the LegCo, had announced that the extradition bill would be settled by next Thursday, June 20th, at the latest.)

The Seeds of "Occupy Central"

They were the ones who brought up the Umbrella Movement. I had asked why they decided to come today, and Eric replied, "We didn't make it to Occupy Central so we had to come today." In 2014 they were in the tenth grade. They had participated in the student strike on September 26th, but that was the first and last time they had set foot upon the streets. What did he think of the Umbrella Movement? Eric explained that "universal suffrage" (□□) concerned the voting rights of every Hong

Kong citizen, as they had learned in civics class (□□□). Kelvin added that he was not at all a zealot, and that “the government” (i.e. the Basic Law) had promised that Hong Kong’s Chief Executive would be elected according to the principle of one citizen one vote, but that the National People’s Congress decision of August 31st had reaffirmed the principle of “internal selection,” with the candidates all “working for the mainland rather than for Hong Kongers.”

Eric said that he hadn’t participated in the Umbrella Movement because he was young at the time and didn’t dare to come out. He had discussed it with classmates but nothing had come of it. Kelvin’s experience had been similar, asking a few friends, but everyone had felt it was too dangerous. But he mentioned that their school had arranged a classroom for students to go and “strike,” with teachers leading discussion, but the boys couldn’t remember what they had discussed.

Today, five years later, we’re sitting on the pedestrian bridge over Harcourt Road. Do you have any hopes for this movement? Kelvin shook his head: A million people marched and the government acted as if they were invisible. The cops attacked and then everyone just left. From the Umbrella Movement to the present, “it’s the same thing again and again.”

Later the four of us opened our umbrellas and just stood in the middle of the bridge waiting for the rain to end, not saying a word.

Looking for the Left in the Anti-Extradition Movement

Author: Jin

Written for Chuang on June 13th, Chinese original below

If you want to understand the rationale behind Hong Kong’s anti-extradition bill protests and the mindset of participants, there are simple answers and more complex ones. Mainstream media has been describing this as a simple case of Hong Kongers fighting for freedom. While such an explanation is not entirely wrong, it is imprecise, skipping over some important details and historical background.

The Bill Itself

The contested “Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation (Amendment) Bill 2019” aims to amend two ordinances. According to the existing version of the Fugitive Offenders Ordinance (Cap. 503), criminal suspects may be extradited to certain locales such as the United States, but not including China. In the name of “closing loopholes,” the government thus proposes removing the geographical restrictions on this ordinance so that suspects can be extradited to Macau, Taiwan and mainland China.

The second ordinance that this bill aims to amend has attracted less attention, the Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Ordinance (Cap. 525). This ordinance allows Hong Kong authorities to assist other states in gathering evidence about suspects in Hong Kong, including the freezing or confiscation of the suspects’ assets. Likewise, the existing version does not include China and the bill aims to add that.

Analysis

In reality, the timing of this bill's proposal is closely bound up with the Sino-American trade war. Documents attached to the bill make clear that suspects can be extradited only in cases meeting two requirements: that the charge is a crime according to the legal systems of both Hong Kong and the state in question, and the sentence would be at least seven years in prison. Moreover, suspects are not to be extradited in cases of political or religious charges, or charges for which the suspect "would face the death penalty." A primary target of the bill, then, consists of mainland Chinese capitalists fleeing to Hong Kong with vast sums of wealth under pressure from the trade war. The addition of the power to freeze assets of mainlanders seems to make clear who this bill is aimed at.

Although at present the bill's main target is capitalists fleeing to Hong Kong, as a leftist who supports mainland labor struggles, my own concerns about the bill are for completely different reasons. Since the 2017 unveiling of China's "Overseas NGO Law," the central government has been consciously trying to reign in the spaces for civil society and proletarian resistance that are dependent on NGOs. Hong Kong has long provided various mainland social movements with funding, personnel and geographical convenience. Whenever there's a crackdown, mainland activists facing the risk of arrest flee to Hong Kong, where they continue to support struggles on the mainland beyond the reach of Beijing. If the extradition bill is passed, it is likely to pave the way for cross-border arrests in the future, forcing activists to return to the mainland for prosecution.

Although Beijing has stated that suspects of political crimes will not be subject to extradition, we have all seen cases of mainland authorities fabricating charges. Ai Weiwei being charged with tax evasion is only the most well-known example. As soon as the bill is passed, the floodgates will open for the cross-border persecution of activists. Although the Hong Kong government is supposed to be the gatekeeper for extradition applications, local courts have little actual power in the gatekeeping process: as soon as executive officials nod their heads, the suspects will be handed over. In Hong Kong, these officials are not selected through popular vote but are responsible to Beijing, so they are particularly unreliable gatekeepers. So even if you don't see the matter from the capitalists' perspective, there are legitimate reasons for labor NGO personnel, activists and workers to oppose the bill out of concern for struggles on the mainland. The method of extraditing capitalists who flee to Hong Kong, on the other hand, can be replaced with one-off extradition.

However, most of the people who have taken part in the protests have done so neither out of concern for such capitalists nor out of concern for mainland social movements.

Participants

In order to understand the affect and rationale behind most people who have participated in the protests, it is necessary to talk about Hong Kong history.

The last similarly large-scale demonstration took place during the 2003 mobilization against the Basic Law Article 23. Article 23 concerned national security: treason, separatist activities, inciting the subversion of state power, subversion of state power, theft of state secrets—charges that existed in mainland China but not Hong Kong. The demonstration became something that Hong Kongers took pride in, with 500,000 participants from a total population of six million at the time. You can imagine the scale of the marches. Article 23 has remained a bottom line protecting the "freedoms" that Hong Kongers pride themselves for: freedom of speech, assembly, religion, publishing, and of course also the freedom to practice capitalism.

What the extradition bill has touched upon is the fear of a revival of Article 23. What many protestors fear is that as soon as the bill is passed, somehow Article 23 will go into effect and we

freedom-loving Hong Kongers will be seized and thrown into the mainland court system. This sort of affect is something shared by most of the protestors. It makes sense, although it is not necessarily true.

Most participants in the demonstrations haven't been brought onto the streets by an accurate understanding of the bill. For example, many fear that if they say bad things about China and the Communist Party they will be extradited. During one demonstration, a friend told me with tears in her eyes that if the bill was passed she could no longer send nude photos to her partner on the mainland, and that they could no longer talk shit about the CCP via WeChat. Even though I spent a whole morning explaining that nude photos don't meet the minimum requirement (that the charge carry a seven-year prison sentence), and that the "crime" wouldn't be committed on the mainland, so she would be safe, she continued to cry and accused me of being too cold. Similarly, at a diner this morning a table of seven second-generation migrant teenagers were yelling about getting ready to go protest, saying that if the bill were passed they would be arrested for marching in Hong Kong. Even though this obviously has nothing to do with the bill (they're not protesting in mainland China!), it was this sort of reasoning that mobilized them.

Under this sort of mobilization through fear, one disturbing tendency is for participants to regard anyone who's against China as their allies. Friends in a Whatsapp group have repeatedly sent links about going to the US to protest and seek out support. Several left-wing friends signed a petition asking the US to put pressure on China. In the trade war, many Hong Kong protestors hope that the US will defeat China in order to save Hong Kong from losing its freedom. Amidst the demonstrations, one protestor dressed up as Kim Jong-un and carried a placard with the words "Oppose extradition to communist countries," eliciting many a thumbs-up from passersby. Other protestors waved the British flag, apparently yearning for the former colonial ruler to return and save them. Ironically, today's headlines on RT read: "British Home Secretary signs extradition order to send Julian Assange to US."

Be that as it may, the liberal Pan-Democrats managed to mobilize a million people to come out onto the streets on June 9th, making it the largest-scale demonstration in Hong Kong since 2003 and giving rise to the "riot" of June 12th. This mobilization through fear is no doubt powerful, but it is also dangerous. The participants have fallen into an immense sense of powerlessness, depression and rage: they have inflated the bill into something terrifying, as if the moment they post a comment on 4chan they will be swept up and Hong Kong will fall into the hands of the enemy. On June 12th we witnessed many radicalized young people, but below the surface lies an enormous sense of desperation and panic. This fits with the historical affect of Hong Kong. It is understandable, but it is not something that should make us feel comfortable.

The Awkward Position of the Left

I feel that I've been trapped in an awkward position.

On the one hand I'm happy that everyone can go out on the streets together, but on the other I wish so many people weren't motivated by misunderstanding and unwarranted panic. Everyone is saying that as soon as the bill passes then Hong Kong's social movements will come to an end, but I'm concerned about movements both here and in mainland China. If the bill passes, it's not only Hong Kong that will be affected but also China and the US. In the context of the trade war, it seems impossible for Hong Kong to [escape] the fate of becoming a bargaining chip. The anti-extradition bill movement, which set out from the noble intention of fighting for self-determination, may turn out to be merely a play on the bargaining table. The only thing that might be capable of overcoming this situation would be to develop an internationalist left-wing discourse [within the movement]. Only when the labor movements of China, Hong Kong and the world see how interconnected we all are

might it become possible to escape from the plight of Sino-American competition and turn this movement into its own bargaining chip. Or maybe these words might be merely a last ineffective act of resistance, since we haven't seen even a single clearly left-wing banner in this movement.

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P.S.

• chuang | Jun 17, 2019 | Blog |:
<http://chuangcn.org/2019/06/anti-extradition-translations/>

Footnotes

[1] <https://twitter.com/chuangcn>

[2] See our account published on Ultra before Chuang was established as a website.:
<http://www.ultra-com.org/project/black-versus-yellow/>

[3] See, for example, “Hong Kong protests against extradition bill may look like Occupy - but young, leaderless demonstrators have learned lessons from the past” by Jeffie Lam, **South China Morning Post**, 13 June 2019:
<https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3014260/hong-kongs-young-protesters-have-learned-lessons-past-they>

[4] Radicals elsewhere have been discussing how to engage with broad movements arising outside the standard rubrics of left or anarchist politics. In particular, the issue of whether or how to engage with the Yellow Vest movement in France has been the subject of useful analysis, as radicals try to struggle against both the French state and right-wing elements within the movement. For example, see “Memes with force: lessons from the Yellow Vests” by Paul Torino & Adrian Wohlleben, Mute, 26 February 2019:
<http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/memes-force---lessons-yellow-vests>

[5] <https://grassmediation.wordpress.com/2019/06/13/aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa/>