

In these challenging times, labour researcher Loong-yu Au thinks that frank conversations and the search for consensus are crucial for rebuilding Hong Kong's future democratic movement.

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Five years after the 2019 Anti-Extradition Bill Movement, hundreds of thousands of Hong Kongers left the city, while others chose to stay. The movement sparked a political awakening and had a profound impact on millions of people in Hong Kong. This collective movement holds significant implications for the city's future democratic endeavours.

Loong-yu Au, a labour researcher who has been interested in social movements since a young age, was involved in the 1970s Baodiao movement and the Hong Kong Federation of Students. He has always committed to writing, discussing Hong Kong's future during Sino-British negotiations, and exploring topics such as China's economic rise and labour rights issues. Witnessing Hong Kongers' political awakenings during the 2014 Umbrella Movement and the 2019 Anti-Extradition Bill Movement, he focused on writing about the city's democratic development. His most recent book, *Hong Kong in Revolt - The Protest Movement and the Future of China*, critically examines the transnational aspects, decentralised decision-making, and post-materialism implications of the 2019 movement. This book has been translated into French, German, Japanese, and other languages. Au describes the 2014 Umbrella Movement and the 2019 Anti-extradition Bill protests as ongoing democratic movements marked by the Hong Kong people's resistance. The 2019 movement had a different approach from the democratic movements headed by pan-democrats in the 1980s, which aimed to negotiate a more democratic electoral arrangement with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). He further explained that although pan-democrats later demanded universal suffrage, the pan-democrats did so within the framework of the Basic Law. In 2010, the Hong Kong government proposed an election plan that distorted the international standard of universal suffrage and failed to provide a timetable for universal suffrage. Faced with dashed hopes of achieving universal suffrage, some pan-democrats were still willing to compromise.

Au also reminded that during the anti-extradition movement, the pan-democrats refused to give in to the pressure from the CCP. Instead, many participated openly and discreetly, some even paying the price for their freedom later. This is something worth remembering.

The 2014 and 2019 democratic movements were led by the post-1997 generation, who were unsatisfied with the pan-democrats' moderate approach throughout the past two decades. These movements, particularly the 2019 Anti-extradition Bill protests, boldly called for the "revolution of our times", demonstrating the younger generation's assertive resistance.

"Even compared to the 2014 Umbrella Movement, the 2019 protests in Hong Kong are far more intense. At that time, in addition to the ordinary citizens' genuine and simple pursuit of democracy, the most significant feeling was the anger of the youth. Their rage was justified, like the child in 'The Emperor's New Clothes' who fearlessly exposed the brutal truth of authoritarian rule by the CCP,

even when adults were afraid to speak out about the situation in Hong Kong,” he said. As Hong Kong’s situation deteriorated quickly, Au, like many other Hong Kongers, fled the city where he had dedicated his efforts. In 2021, he relocated to the UK and continued actively engaging in discussions about the city’s future among the Hong Kong community. He hopes that the Hong Kong community in the UK can establish a public platform for ongoing discussions and seek consensus on the city’s future development.

He asked, “Why did two million people unite in protest in 2019? The answer lies in the five fundamental demands originally serving as common goals. However, with the turmoil of recent events, consensus has waned. In these difficult times, candid discussions and the search for consensus are crucial for rebuilding Hong Kong’s democratic movement in the future.”

He recounted how Benny Tai, who is currently imprisoned, initiated a city-wide discussion about occupying Central in 2013. During the discussion, three universal suffrage proposals were formulated and put to a referendum on June 22nd. This historical event saw nearly 800,000 Hong Kong citizens vote, representing major development in the people’s movement. Au went on, “Such deliberations and decisions, which combine consensus and differences, allowing for unity amidst diversity, is a hallmark of Hong Kong’s democratic discourse.”

“Why don’t we start a democratic dialogue to shape Hong Kong’s future political path and strengthen our capacity for self-government?” he asked.

He asked, “When you say, ‘revolution of our times,’ what do you exactly mean? Revolutions can take numerous forms, including ‘dynastic change’ and ‘democratic revolution.’ Is it merely a cyclical revolution that repeats China’s past, overthrowing everything except building a democratic system? Is there a foundational manifesto that supports independence?”

He highlighted that achieving democracy is not a one-generation endeavour; in many cases, it takes multiple generations to drive democratic progress. While the 2014 Umbrella Movement and the 2019 Anti-Extradition Bill protests look to have been unsuccessful, they awakened people of all ages in Hong Kong. He believes everyone would carry this knowledge forward, building on the lessons learnt during these movements. By engaging in democratic discussions, we can seek a common ground for Hong Kong’s future political path. He believes that the CCP’s authoritarian regime cannot forever dominate historical development and that change will eventually come—as long as we remain on the right side of history.

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