

Charting a new course for Hong Kong's struggle

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Introduction

Five years have passed since Hong Kong's mass movement of 2019. Despite the regime's repression and white terror, the embers of resistance still smoulder in the hearts of every Hongkonger, unquenchable. The regime's censorship, repression, and rewriting of history will not succeed in erasing the memory and the truth of 2019, or the righteousness of our democratic cause.

Under the shadow of the National Security Law, Hong Kong has entered a "post-movement" era. Hong Kong's struggle for democracy and self-determination is at the lowest point in its history. This essay is an attempt to understand Hong Kong's current political situation, reflect on the experience of the mass movement of 2019, and chart a new course for the future of the Hong Kong people's struggle for democracy and self-determination.

Why was the 2019 uprising defeated? We can attempt to understand why by reflecting on three ideas that strongly influenced the democracy movement's strategy at the time: Benny Tai's "Ten Steps to Mutual Destruction", the doctrine of "burnism" (燒) in itself, and the framing of Hong Kong's struggle as a "revolution in one city".

I hope that my tentative ideas will ignite discussions among fellow Hongkongers in the democracy movement who are still fighting today.

Part 1: Mutual Destruction and "Ten Steps"

The doctrine of threatening mutual destruction, also known as "laam chau" or "burnism" (燒), which emerged during the 2019 uprising, has failed. It is a doctrine of defeatism, and a strategic, programmatic, and ideological dead end.

The beginning of the endgame

By 2020, the street movement had run out of steam. After the battles of CUHK and PolyU, frontline protesters were already worn down by mass exhaustion, injuries, and arrests from months of fighting the police. The decentralised months-long campaign to make Hong Kong ungovernable during the period of "Flowering Everywhere" (遍地開花) through widespread and sustained disruption of

transport and infrastructure was ultimately suppressed. The “Triple Strike” on August 5, 2019, which was supposed to be a citywide general strike, failed to gain traction and ended the next day. The regime refused to make any further concessions. Fear and anxiety over COVID-19, as well as the government’s exploitation of the pandemic to crack down on public gatherings, had a demoralising and demobilising effect on Hongkongers.

Had an uprising of the size and scope of 2019 happened elsewhere, it might have been sufficient to overthrow the regime, or at least to force concessions and win reforms. However, Hong Kong is not a sovereign polity but instead exists in a quasi-colonial, vassal-suzerain relationship with the People’s Republic of China. The Hong Kong SAR government did not hold the power to meet the demands of the democracy movement. It was the SAR government that bore the brunt of the pressure from the protest movement, but the actual power to grant the concessions demanded by the democracy movement lay with the Chinese central government.

The 2019 uprising was highly sophisticated, militant, and tenacious. The movement attracted widespread international attention, but was effectively confined to Hong Kong. It failed to spread to mainland China. Nor was there any mainland Chinese democracy movement or social unrest to distract or put additional pressure on the Chinese regime. Although it was a thorn in the side of the CCP, the 2019 uprising in Hong Kong failed to pose a sufficiently significant threat to the CCP’s rule over China. After a year of intense and bruising struggle, time was running out for the democracy movement.

The nature of Hong Kong’s political system

The 2020 LegCo election presented an opportunity for the pro-democratic leadership to take the movement down a new avenue of struggle. They sought to reinvigorate the struggle for democracy by returning to the electoral and legislative arena. This was despite recognising that even a pro-democratic majority in the LegCo would not necessarily translate to actual law-making or policy-making power, due to the inbuilt constitutional constraints of the LegCo under CCP rule.

A pro-democratic majority in the LegCo would not by itself be able to grant the “Five Demands”. This is because real decision-making power lies with the executive, not the legislature, under Hong Kong’s “executive-led” and undemocratic political system.

Related to this was also the fact that the appointment and dismissal of the Chief Executive and their principal officials is not something over which the people of Hong Kong—or, as it turned out, the Chief Executive herself—have any power. The final say rested with Beijing.

The “Ten Steps” to “Mutual Destruction”

A way out was found in the doctrine of “laam chau”. The proponents of “laam chau” in the leadership of the democracy movement believed that they could leverage Hong Kong’s status as an international financial centre and China’s interface with the West against the CCP. They believed that the CCP would be unwilling to sacrifice the “golden goose” without which its meteoric rise and continued status as an economic superpower would not be possible. They believed that the CCP would not resort to overly draconian repression that would undermine Hong Kong’s liberal institutions and rule of law, on which its reputation as a safe haven for foreign investment into China was seen to depend. If the CCP had to resort to such draconian repression, this would both kill off the “golden goose” of Hong Kong and turn the CCP into an international pariah.

As a result, Benny Tai came up with the [**“Ten Steps to Real Mutual Destruction”**](#), combining “laam chau” with the opportunity presented by the 2020 LegCo elections, as the way forward for the

democracy movement. The starting point was for the pro-democracy camp to win a “35+” majority of seats in the 2020 LegCo elections. After that, the opposition-controlled LegCo would exert pressure on the regime by vetoing all government bills, including the annual budget, to paralyse the government and trigger the resignation of the Chief Executive, in accordance with the Basic Law.

According to the “Ten Steps”, the Chinese central government would then be forced to intervene by declaring a state of emergency over Hong Kong, replacing the leaders of the Hong Kong government, and conducting mass arrests of pro-democracy leaders. This would lead to the escalation of the uprising and necessitate a bloody crackdown. Finally, China would be sanctioned by the West.

One way to understand the “Ten Steps” is as a bet against the resolve and ability of the regime to defeat an opposition-controlled LegCo highly committed to resistance, up to and including the use of metaphorical “scorched earth” tactics. In other words, the “Ten Steps” was a political gamble in the form of a bluff.

The “Ten Steps” envisioned that the only way the CCP could overcome the resistance of the opposition-controlled LegCo was through increasingly draconian and norm-violating measures, culminating in the deployment of the People’s Liberation Army into Hong Kong to carry out a bloody crackdown reminiscent of the Tiananmen Square Massacre. The ensuing fallout would result in the “mutual destruction” of both the CCP and Hong Kong. The political calculation was that the cost of “restoring order” to Hong Kong would be so high that the CCP would rather back down.

The pro-democratic leadership acted on this calculus by organising primary elections for the pro-democracy camp in July 2020 to achieve a “35+” majority. In a declaration entitled “Inked Without Regret”, a majority of primary candidates pledged, if they were elected, to use the LegCo’s veto powers under the Basic Law to force the Chief Executive to grant the “Five Demands”. For this, they were jailed for conspiracy to commit subversion under the NSL in the “Hong Kong 47” case.

The “Ten Steps” can thus be understood as a radical bargaining tactic based on the threat posed by an opposition-controlled LegCo with the will to resist until “mutual destruction” to force the regime to the negotiating table.

The alternative interpretation is to take the “Ten Steps” at face value and assume that it really did seek the “mutual destruction” of the democracy movement and the regime as an end in itself, and that its ultimate goal was really to provoke a bloody crackdown by the CCP. This would supposedly lead not only to sanctions from the West, but also to the severing of ties and the ostracization of China as a barbaric dictatorship by the international community. The idea was that such a defeat would at least cost the CCP dearly.

In this case, the “Ten Steps” can only be seen as a doctrine of defeatism. It is silent on the question of what happens to Hong Kong’s struggle for democracy and self-determination after “mutual destruction” is achieved. It had already preordained the tragic defeat of Hong Kong’s struggle for democracy and self-determination and offered no way out for Hong Kong’s democracy movement. It had already conceded defeat and was merely trying to take the regime down with it.

A fatal miscalculation

Either way, the pro-democratic leadership’s “way out” in 2020 was to fall back on the pan-democrats’ old tactic of filibustering in the LegCo. Their escalation of the struggle for democracy did not seek a rupture with the legal and constitutional framework, but to push it to its limits until the CCP backed down or there was “mutual destruction”.

However, such a strategy was based on the fatal assumption that the CCP would stand by and allow the pro-democracy camp to win a majority of seats in the 2020 LegCo elections in the first place.

On July 31, 2020, two weeks after the July primaries, the Hong Kong government, no doubt under orders from Beijing, resorted to the simple expedient of postponing the 2020 LegCo elections through the colonial-era Emergency Regulations Ordinance, cynically justified on public health grounds in the face of the looming COVID-19 pandemic.

Of course, this was a blatant political manoeuvre intended as a preemptive strike against “35+”. The momentum of the 2019 uprising was such that a pro-democracy victory in the LegCo elections was highly likely. The goal of a “35+” pro-democratic majority in the LegCo was certainly within reach. This was confirmed firstly by the pro-democratic landslide in the 2019 District Council elections, and secondly by the massive public turnout of more than 600,000 voters for the historic pro-democracy primary elections in July 2020. This was a very impressive result, especially since the primaries were repeatedly condemned by the regime and subjected to repressive state interference.

But by postponing the elections, the regime pulled the rug out from under the pan-democrats and regained the initiative for its counteroffensive.

The LegCo elections were postponed by a year until December 2021. In the meantime, the National Security Law was used to detain most of the leading activists, legislators, and election candidates of the democracy movement. The Chinese Communist Party intervened directly through the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress (NPCSC) to impose “reforms” in 2021 to Hong Kong’s electoral system, reducing the amount of directly elected LegCo seats to twenty out of ninety and requiring candidates to be vetted by the Committee for Safeguarding National Security and the National Security Department of the Hong Kong Police.

The CCP did not need to deploy the PLA or People’s Armed Police into Hong Kong to defeat the 2019 uprising. The Hong Kong government’s exercise of colonial-era emergency powers to postpone the 2020 LegCo election, and the Chinese central government’s intervention through the NPCSC to impose the National Security Law and the 2021 electoral “reforms”, were sufficient.

This required the CCP to violate “One Country, Two Systems”, but as we shall see, this was not that big of a deal. It did not lead to “mutual destruction”.

Even if the COVID-19 pandemic had not occurred, the regime would never have allowed the formation of an opposition-led LegCo. It would have easily found other means to prevent the “35+” plan from coming to fruition. This includes the electoral “reforms” and the mass disqualification or incarceration of all pro-democracy candidates and legislators, which the regime ended up doing anyway, after postponing the elections, by jailing the “Hong Kong 47”.

The master’s tools will not dismantle the master’s house

The pro-democratic leadership’s attempt to escalate the struggle within the boundaries of the legal and constitutional framework failed. It was based on a fatal miscalculation of the balance of power between the democracy movement and the CCP within Hong Kong’s non-sovereign political structure.

It assumed that the regime would somehow allow the formation of an opposition-controlled LegCo that sought a regime change and would pose an existential threat to its rule not only over Hong Kong, but all of China by extension.

When push comes to shove, the constitution is just a piece of paper, and democratic norms and

customs might as well only exist as a figment of the pan-democrats' imagination. The pro-democratic leadership overestimated their own ability to escalate the struggle within the legal and constitutional framework—terrain on which the regime has every advantage due to Hong Kong's "executive-led" system. They underestimated the speed, ease, and ruthlessness with which the regime could preemptively neutralise such a threat. Finally, their inherent ideological conservatism prevented them from imagining a rupture with the regime's legal and constitutional framework.

The lesson to be learned from the failure of the "Ten Steps" is that if the Hong Kong people are to successfully carry out a democratic revolution in the future, they must have their own sources of political power that cannot be unilaterally annulled by the regime, as the prospect of an opposition-controlled LegCo was by Carrie Lam's emergency decree.

For the people to overthrow the regime, they cannot rely on the laws and loopholes of the regime's own political system. It does not make sense to play by the rules when the regime can change the rules at a moment's notice. After the NSL, Article 23, and the regime's electoral "reforms", the electoral front no longer exists, but it was never viable as a route to revolution in the first place. Even if we manage to seize hold of the master's tools, they will never dismantle the master's house. We must not fall into the trap of playing the regime's institutional games.

Instead, Hongkongers must draw on their own collective power as the people. During the 2019 uprising, the whole of Hong Kong society was mobilised to take part in the struggle. The mass movement of the Hong Kong people proved that they have the will and the power to fight not only against the Extradition Law and police brutality, not only for democracy and to uphold "One Country, Two Systems" and the rule of law, but also for the right to determine their own destiny. This is the power of the million-strong marches of 2019, including the "2 Million+1" march on 16 June; the storming of the LegCo on July 1; the attempted "Triple Strike" on August 5; the "Hong Kong Way" on August 23; "Hong Kong's Dunkirk" on September 1; the period of "Flowering Everywhere", when the mass movement spread to the neighbourhoods of Kowloon and the New Territories; the militant occupations of the Baptist, City, Chinese, and Polytechnic

Universities in November; the New Union Movement; the five-day health workers' strike in February 2020; and the Lennon Walls, mutual aid networks, volunteer medical teams, citizen journalists, self-organised protest groups, "parent cars", nightly neighbourhood rallies, street battles, and barricades throughout 2019.

The 2019 uprising gave us a glimpse of what we could accomplish by our own power, but the mass movement, lacking sufficiently visionary leadership or consciousness, did not react quickly enough or go far enough. A later section in this essay will discuss how the power that is latent within us, the people, can be channelled towards the seizure of power from below when the next great social eruption or crisis occurs.

Part 2: Destruction Not Mutual

According to "laam chau", the consolation prize if the democracy movement and the struggle of 2019 were defeated would be the escalation of the New Cold War between China and the West. This would be bought at the grievous cost of the crushing of Hong Kong's freedom and autonomy and the demise of Hong Kong's democracy movement.

The 2019 uprising was defeated, and Hong Kong's democracy movement was subsequently crushed. But as it transpired, the CCP was able to "have its cake and eat it too".

The catastrophic breakdown of relations between China and the West envisaged by the proponents of “laam chau” did not materialise. What few sanctions the West has imposed on the CCP have been limited and ineffective, failing even to inconvenience the targeted Chinese and Hong Kong officials, let alone to persuade the CCP to end the crackdown and restore democracy, the rule of law and “1C2S” in Hong Kong. In fact, to be sanctioned by the West has become a point of pride for Hong Kong and Chinese officials today.

Although Western governments have offered lifeboat schemes to attract Hongkonger immigrants as a boost to their own economies and labour markets and have condemned the regime’s crackdown on the democracy movement, they have refrained from doing anything substantial that would meaningfully disrupt their relations and trade with China. If the embattled Chinese economy implodes, it will be under the weight of its own contradictions, not because of the disjointed Western sanctions enacted to “avenge” the demise of Hong Kong’s democracy movement.

The new political order that the regime has imposed through repression has spooked Western investors and businesses, prompting an exodus of foreign capital, talent and business from Hong Kong. But having withdrawn from Hong Kong, Western corporations have very little stake left in the city’s political situation. The demise of Hong Kong’s status and relevance as an international financial centre will not lead to “laam chau”, as the CCP regime can survive without Hong Kong, but will instead hasten Western government’s abandonment of the Hong Kong people and their democratic struggle.

The mirage of “mutual destruction”

Since 2020, Hong Kong’s democracy movement, student movement and labour movement have all been crushed by the regime. All the progress towards democratisation since the Handover has been undone. Whatever limited electoral democracy and political freedom existed in Hong Kong before, no longer exists. The lifting of the “zero-COVID” policy in Hong Kong did not lead to a political thaw, but to the normalisation of white terror without any pretence of pandemic control. The Chinese government has even explicitly repudiated the Sino-British Joint Declaration, saying it is a “historical document” that “no longer has any practical significance”.

“One Country, Two Systems” was destroyed along with Hong Kong’s democracy movement, but this destruction did not cost the CCP all that much. It certainly was not mutual. International attention did not stay the CCP’s hand.

The failure of the “Ten Steps” to achieve “mutual destruction” should not be surprising, given that the CCP was the regime which perpetrated the June 4th Tiananmen Square Massacre. Nevertheless, the same regime soon after achieved massive success in its economic wooing of Western investors, corporations and governments, paving the way for its emergence as a superpower in the 21st century.

Similarly, Western governments stood by during the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 as the Hungarian revolutionaries were massacred by the Soviet army, and during the Prague Spring of 1968 as the Warsaw Pact invaded and placed Czechoslovakia under military occupation.

As it was in the past, so it is today. The governments of the West have short memories and other priorities. The June 4th Tiananmen Square Massacre did not stop the British government from handing Hong Kong over to the CCP on schedule come 1997. Regardless of whether it is because Western governments lack the will or the ability (or both) to “Free Hong Kong”, the reality is that we cannot expect our salvation to come from these quarters.

Hongkongers are not pawns

Following the defeat of the 2019 uprising and the subsequent crackdown, many Hongkongers emigrated overseas, where they regrouped to form a diasporic Hong Kong democracy movement. Elements of this diasporic democracy movement place the focus of the struggle on lobbying Western governments to sanction, divest, and decouple from China, framed in terms of resisting the CCP (中国共产党) on the “international front” (国际战线).

Resisting the CCP is important, but it must not hijack our struggle. The CCP is the obstacle that stands in the way of our right to democracy and self-determination. How to overthrow the CCP is of paramount importance, but it is still only a means to an end. The endgame of our struggle is not just the negative goal of taking down the CCP, but the positive goal of achieving democracy and self-determination. The “international front” is only one front among many. Our struggle should not be reduced to seeking revenge by convincing the West to punish the CCP.

Such a view robs Hongkongers of their agency. It leads to seeing Hongkongers as merely expendable pawns of the West in its geopolitical rivalry with China.

Who are the agents of the revolution?

Democracy cannot be subcontracted, and neither can self-determination. Nor is the right to democracy and self-determination something that is bestowed (赐予) on people by states or governments. Democracy and self-determination can only be fought for and won (争取) by the Hong Kong people themselves, just like how the “Revolution of Our Times” can only be carried out by the Hong Kong people. Our destiny is in our own hands. After the revolution, it will be the Hong Kong people who build and participate in their own democracy, who decide their own destiny, and who write their own history.

It is a utopian fantasy to sit idly by and wish for the collapse of the Chinese Communist Party regime, hoping that whatever regime comes after will grant the Hong Kong people democracy and self-determination. Instead, the Hong Kong people must fight to achieve democracy and self-determination by themselves, on their own terms, regardless of whether whoever rules over China is willing to grant them these demands.

Revolution is the only way out

A democratic revolution is the only way out in the post-NSL and “post-movement” era. This means the overthrow of CCP rule over Hong Kong and the seizure of power by the Hong Kong people. Such is the only way to achieve our democratic aspirations. This does not just mean the resignation of the Chief Executive and their principal officials. Instead, the Hong Kong people must realise their own demands by forming their own organs of grassroots political power (in other words, a self-constituted revolutionary government over Hong Kong) through which to exercise their right to democratic self-government and self-determination. A later section in this essay will discuss how this can be achieved.

This moment of revolution is the culmination of a revolutionary struggle that may take decades, carried out by a revolutionary democratic movement that must operate underground in Hong Kong with support from the Hongkonger diaspora. Thus, there must not only be an “international front” but an “underground front” as well. The task of building this revolutionary democratic movement both in diaspora and on the ground in Hong Kong should be our main priority today, with Hongkongers being both the subjects and the agents of this work.

The Hong Kong people have never had to wage such a struggle before. But the experience of the Hong Kong people's struggle over the past three decades cannot be so easily forgotten or repressed. Although the 2019 uprising was defeated, its experience has been etched indelibly into the collective memory of the Hong Kong people and the history of Hong Kong. The experience of the 2019 uprising, in which the Hong Kong people took part in their millions, is their greatest asset in the struggle.

Part 3: Revolution in One City?

The question of Hong Kong independence

The slogan of Hong Kong independence emerged as a response to the failure of the democracy movement to achieve its ultimate goal of democracy and self-determination for the Hong Kong people within the pan-democrats' framework of "democratic reunification". It was also a response to the CCP's systematic erosion of Hong Kong's autonomy that violated the spirit, if not necessarily the letter, of "1C2S". Finally, it was posed as a solution to the "China factor" blocking the progress of Hong Kong's struggle.

However, we must not confuse the failure of the democracy movement to achieve tangible gains with the traditional pan-democratic emphasis on the role of Hong Kong's democracy movement in building a democratic China. We cannot reject the notion of solidarity or a common struggle between the Hong Kong and Chinese democracy movements. It is wrong to view Hong Kong's struggle for democracy as separate and divorced from the struggle for democracy in mainland China.

The fantasy of a "revolution in one city" is simply not possible. Hong Kong is not Taiwan, and even Taiwan has to contend with the Chinese behemoth across the strait. Even if there is a successful revolution that overthrows CCP rule over Hong Kong, it is certain that the CCP will intervene militarily against it if it remains in power in the rest of China. If such a military intervention occurs, it would certainly be successful. No Western power will intervene militarily to save Hong Kong from a PLA invasion, not least because it would trigger World War III.

Only the people of mainland China can overthrow the CCP, and to this end, the Hong Kong democracy movement must support the growth and development of a mainland Chinese democracy movement.

The lesson of the Prague Spring and the Hungarian Revolution

With the exception of Romania, the democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe in 1989 were carried out by mass protest movements using civil resistance to pressure their national ruling classes to implement democratising reforms and cede power through a democratic transition.

The victory of these relatively bloodless democratic revolutions was only possible because the suzerain power—the Soviet Union—was unable and/or unwilling to intervene to prop up the Communist regimes in their satellite states. After the withdrawal of Soviet support and protection, the demoralised Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, facing economic collapse and lacking popular legitimacy, realised the futility of clinging on to power and gave in to the popular uprisings.

The counterpoint to the revolutions of 1989 is the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and the Prague Spring of 1968. The Hungarian Revolution was a bottom-up armed revolution of the Hungarian masses, led by students and workers, against Soviet rule. The Prague Spring was a top-down process

of democratisation and liberalisation initiated by reformists in the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. But neither the popular revolution that had successfully seized power from below in Hungary nor the reformist regime in Czechoslovakia were able to resist the Soviet Union and its war machine on their own. The Hungarian people had organised revolutionary militias to defend themselves against the Soviet invasion of Hungary, but their armed resistance was crushed by Soviet tanks. Western governments stood by as the Hungarian revolutionaries were massacred by the Soviet army and as the Warsaw Pact invaded and placed Czechoslovakia under military occupation. The domination of the suzerain power was temporarily overthrown, but because the suzerain regime remained in power across the rest of its empire, it was able to reimpose its domination through military force.

The parallel is clear. As the Brezhnev Doctrine was for the Eastern European countries struggling to free themselves from Moscow's yoke, so is the "China factor" for Hong Kong's struggle for democracy and self-determination. As the national uprisings against Soviet rule in Hungary and Czechoslovakia were crushed piecemeal, so too will a "revolution in one city" confined to Hong Kong be crushed by the CCP. Any revolution that takes place in Hong Kong alone, even if it succeeds in overthrowing the Hong Kong government, seizing power, and bringing about democracy, will not survive unless the CCP is overthrown across all of China as well.

This task cannot be entrusted to Western governments who will readily abandon our cause as soon as it no longer serves, or conflicts with, their interests. It can only be carried out by the Chinese masses fighting alongside the people of Hong Kong, East Turkestan, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia, for whom this is not just a common cause but a matter of life and death.

The post-revolutionary political order

One contemporary nativist vision for the fate of mainland China is that of a "Shina-explosion" (中国大分裂), which envisages a balkanised China that would pose no threat to an independent Hong Kong. This is their way of removing the "China factor" from the equation of Hong Kong's struggle.

This is unprincipled and erroneous. A violent breakup of China after the fall of the CCP, possibly leading to a second Warlord Era, will benefit no one, cause immense human suffering, and threaten the very existence of Hong Kong. The catastrophe of the Yugoslav Wars or the civil wars in Libya and Syria (among other such tragedies) must not be repeated.

The survival of a free and democratic Hong Kong depends not only on the overthrow of the CCP across all of mainland China, East Turkestan, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia. It also crucially depends on the establishment of a free, democratic, and stable post-revolutionary political order in China out of the power vacuum left by the overthrow of the CCP. As principled democrats, this is what we must stand for.

Why we must support the Chinese democracy movement and struggle

The call for the Hong Kong democracy movement to support and unite with the mainland Chinese democracy movement has nothing to do with Chinese patriotism, nor is it merely a subjective moral obligation. It is objectively necessary for the success and survival of our democratic revolution.

A sceptic could argue that no mainland Chinese democracy movement has existed since the crushing of the 1989 democracy movement. The White Paper movement of 2022 and its politicisation of an entire generation of Chinese youth and citizens has disproven this. While there is no organised mass movement or civil society, tens of thousands of spontaneous protests still occur in China each year. At this point in time there is in fact more active struggle ongoing in China than in Hong Kong.

But even at the nadir of our struggle, Hong Kong's democracy movement still has a lot to offer to the struggle against the CCP. Hong Kong's democracy movement embodies an unbroken historical continuity of struggle, which encompasses the collective memory, experience, knowhow, and social networks of each generation of Hong Kong dissidents and activists since Hong Kong society's first political mass mobilisation in 1989. These are intangible resources that have survived the smashing of the democracy movement in Hong Kong, and the dissolution of its institutions and organisations.

Outside of Hong Kong, the continuity of this struggle is assured by the newest generation of the Hong Kong diaspora, who, within a short span of a few years, has reincarnated Hong Kong's democracy movement abroad. It is not just a thin layer of exiled activists who have fled abroad either, but hundreds of thousands of Hongkongers with firsthand experience of the past three decades of struggle. They constitute a mass base for the continuation of the democracy movement in diaspora.

Hongkongers must understand that their struggle does not exist in a vacuum, isolated to the territory of Hong Kong or the Hongkonger diaspora, but is part of a larger China-wide struggle against the CCP for democracy and self-determination.

Instead, Hongkongers must realise their historical potential to play a leading role in the formation and growth of a new Chinese democracy movement, and by extension, to shape the nature of the post-revolutionary democratic political order in China.

The formation of a Chinese democracy movement will be a lengthy and arduous process, but one in which we as Hongkongers, with our long and storied history of resistance against the CCP, can play a vital role and make an important contribution. We must dare to invert the defeatist slogans of 2019—"China Today will be Hong Kong Tomorrow" or "Today Hong Kong, Tomorrow Taiwan"—and say instead "Today we take Hong Kong, Tomorrow we take China".

Part 4: What next for Hong Kong?

Our blueprint for revolution is one which casts Hongkongers as the agents of the democratic revolution. The Chinese Communist Party regime will be overthrown not through foreign military intervention but by a revolution of its own subjects.

We believe that an opportunity for revolution will come in the future, because the current political order is not only illegitimate, but dysfunctional, and prone to crisis and chaos. It is in these moments of crisis that social eruptions can occur, and opportunities for revolution emerge, and we must be ready to seize these opportunities. The work of preparation begins today.

The new political order in Hong Kong

The underlying social, economic, and political contradictions that led to the 2019 uprising have not been resolved in the slightest. These contradictions, and the hardships they cause, will be exacerbated by the autocratic and bureaucratic rule of the Hong Kong government. This new era of repression will also be an era of regression.

The Hong Kong people cannot expect a quid pro quo of authoritarian rule in return for stable governance, economic growth, material prosperity, and a high standard of living.

After the 1967 riots, the British colonial government in Hong Kong enacted sweeping reforms to public education, social welfare and services, and poverty alleviation; built enough public housing to

house more than half of Hong Kong's population; and established the Independent Commission Against Corruption to purge the police force and civil service of institutionalised corruption. Although the British Hong Kong government did not concede to popular demands for decolonisation and democratisation, and responded to social upheaval with open repression, it was still able to legitimise its rule by reducing deprivation and by providing social stability and economic development.

The crushing of the 1989 democracy movement in mainland China was soon followed by the Chinese economic miracle of the 1990s and 2000s. In lieu of democratisation and liberalisation, the CCP was able to re-found its right to rule on the basis of delivering "common prosperity". But this alternative source of legitimacy is drying up as China is beset by a myriad of structural economic and demographic crises that the Xi regime is unable to resolve.

Likewise, the Hong Kong government will not be able to rebound from its rock-bottom legitimacy (see the 2023 District Council elections turnout) through such a quid pro quo today. Hong Kong's social and economic development had long since reached its peak as an international financial centre servicing capital and investment flows between the West and China. The government's past and present efforts to diversify Hong Kong's economy (Hong Kong Science Park, Cyberport) and revive economic growth (the ridiculous "Night Vibes" and "Happy Hong Kong" campaigns) have not borne fruit.

Hong Kong's value as an international financial centre is for the regime to lose. This cherished status is already beginning to crumble in the ever-tightening grip of the National Security Law and as a result of the exodus of foreign and domestic capital and talent away from Hong Kong that the regime's imposition of its new order has precipitated. The obituaries in the international media (and Xiaohongshu) for Hong Kong's status as an international financial centre are not hyperbole.

The regime has gleefully celebrated its pivot to autocracy as the beginning of a new age of opposition-free, business-friendly, and "patriots only" governance, unfettered by institutional checks and balances. Rampant state-capital collusion and socioeconomic inequality under Hong Kong's system of crony capitalism will become even more severe. The housing crisis in the world's most expensive residential property market will continue to fester. The government will continue to sacrifice the needs and interests of the common Hong Kong people to satiate the greed of Hong Kong's business elite, who make up the regime's power base.

For example: the Hong Kong government is today facing a structural budget deficit, which it cannot easily solve due to its non-sovereign status. It will be ordinary Hongkongers who will bear the brunt of the government's efforts to cut its operating costs by slashing public spending on education, healthcare, and social welfare. Land or market reform is out of the question, because this would shake up Hong Kong's economic structure that is designed for the benefit of the regime's power base: the big corporations, including the real estate developers, and the tycoons. Instead, the regime will continue to plough taxpayer money into environmentally ruinous white elephant projects to create an illusion of growth and progress.

Things will get worse

The fundamental contradiction at the heart of Hong Kong's existence is the regime's denial of the Hong Kong people's right to democracy and self-determination. This fundamental contradiction is the cause of Hong Kong's democracy movement, and it is also the source of Hong Kong's myriad socio-economic ("livelihood") problems and injustices.

Even the mitigation of this fundamental contradiction is beyond the regime's capability. The new

political order that it has imposed has hollowed out its capacity for self-correction.

The regime insists on total unanimity of support and loyalty from the political establishment as a prerequisite for political participation. Its recent priorities included the disciplining of its ornamental lawmakers in the rubber-stamp LegCo to ensure that bills are passed unanimously with “all yes votes”—meaning that there are not only no votes against, but no blank votes or abstentions either. It has already shown that it will not tolerate even loyal opposition from the pro-Beijing ranks (see Paul Tse). It denounces all critical or opposing voices in society as “soft resistance” or “foreign pawns”, and constantly invokes the bogeyman of the “black-clad violence” and “Hong Kong’s version of a colour revolution” in 2019.

This is a sign of the regime’s own insecurity. It knows that its legitimacy is paper-thin and cannot withstand meaningful criticism or scrutiny, even when such criticism or scrutiny is necessary for course-correction and thus survival. Its ongoing campaign of repression against imaginary threats to national security reflects its own paranoia and fear of the Hong Kong people, whose uprising in 2019 thoroughly terrified the regime. It knows that until Hong Kong’s fundamental contradiction is resolved—and it cannot resolve it—the potential for another 2019 can only be suppressed, but never extinguished, thus necessitating a permanent and normalised state of high-pressure repression.

But this permanent state of repression is like a fever. It protects the regime from the people by repressing society and suppressing dissent, but harms the entire body politic of Hong Kong. Hong Kong’s continuing downward economic spiral post-NSL, amid the withering away of its status as an international financial centre, is proof of this, as is the emigration wave. This is the double-bind in which the regime finds itself, and which will be its undoing.

The Hong Kong government’s bungled response to the COVID-19 pandemic is just a taste of things to come under the regime’s new style of governance. Its draconian “zero-COVID” policy was motivated neither by scientific rationality nor by the needs of the Hong Kong people, but by a slavish desire to imitate “zero-COVID” in mainland China to demonstrate its fealty to the Chinese Communist Party regime and to Xi Jinping. Even the interests of Hong Kong’s business elite, who are the regime’s power base, were sacrificed on the altar of “zero-COVID”.

The Xi regime’s pandemic control policies were so excessively oppressive that they directly led to the White Paper protests of 2022, despite decades of depoliticization and social atomisation following the crushing of the 1989 democracy movement. The same kind of unlimited bureaucratic absolutism, corruption, nepotism, normlessness, misrule, and deprivation that is characteristic of life under Chinese Communist Party rule is what is in store for the Hong Kong people.

But this also means that another social eruption like the 2019 uprising or the White Paper protests may happen in the future. After all, there is a limit to the amount of suffering that people will tolerate before they are forced to revolt (造反). Deprivation and desperation caused by unchecked bureaucratic misrule and economic exploitation pushes Hong Kong and Chinese people closer to their breaking point every day.

What we can learn from the White Paper movement

The White Paper movement illustrates how the root cause of social eruptions is the accumulation of contradictions past the breaking point of a dysfunctional political order. The potential for social eruption can never be extinguished by state repression, surveillance, or censorship. No matter how sophisticated or brutal these measures are, they can only suppress the symptoms but cannot treat the root causes of dysfunction.

In fact, the less open a regime is, the more likely it is to be blindsided by a future social eruption. Since there are no longer any pressure valves for the expression of discontent or dissent under the current severe repression, such discontent will continue to accumulate under the surface of society until it erupts all at once with little or no warning. The Chinese Communist Party's vast "stability maintenance" apparatus failed to predict or prevent the White Paper movement.

Spark and kindling

The event that sparked the White Paper movement was the Ürümqi apartment fire on 24 November 2022. The wave of protests that ensued across China was a spontaneous response to the tragedy of the fire, but also an explosion of all the pent-up anger and frustration over the deprivation and suffering caused by the CCP's pursuit of "zero-COVID". A single spark can set the prairie ablaze. But a spark will lead to nothing if there is no combustible material—kindling—already present.

What would such kindling be? On an objective level there must be severe dysfunction in the economic and political order that the regime is unable or unwilling to address. Its credibility and legitimacy must be seriously undermined. There must be deprivation and suffering so that the dysfunction is a pressing and urgent problem that directly affects people's personal lives. It must be obvious that the system is dysfunctional and in peril.

But there is also the consciousness of the people to consider. This is the subjective component of the kindling without which it cannot be set alight.

The Sitong Bridge protest

The importance of the Sitong Bridge protest to the White Paper movement cannot be understated. Peng Zaizhou's one-man protest on 13 October 2022 put forward demands explicitly linking the deprivation and suffering under "zero-COVID" to Xi Jinping's dictatorship and the totalitarianism of CCP rule. His protest linked the symptoms of dysfunction to their root causes. It also articulated solutions to the dysfunction—not only an end to "zero-COVID" but an end to censorship, dictatorship, oppression, and one-party rule, the overthrow of Xi Jinping, and freedom, democracy, citizenship, and the rule of law for the Chinese people. Finally, it stated how these demands could be achieved—by going on strike at school and at work. Despite intense censorship, these slogans and demands were widely disseminated across the Chinese internet.

It was these demands first articulated by Peng Zaizhou at Sitong Bridge that one month later were being echoed in the streets of cities across China during the White Paper protests.

Peng Zaizhou's ideas prefigured the demands and outlook of the White Paper movement. They gave the Chinese protesters not only the language but also the ideological framework to express their discontent and opposition in clear anti-authoritarian and pro-democracy terms. If the Sitong Bridge protest had not happened, it is likely that the White Paper movement would not have had its explicit, unprecedented, and subversive political content. It is possible that without its core pillar of political demands, the White Paper protests would not have been able to coalesce into a nationwide movement at all.

Sowing ideological seeds

Peng Zaizhou's ideas were seeds sown by his act of protest. But seeds can only sprout if the conditions are right for them to germinate.

These conditions include not only the composition and chemistry of the soil, but also the climate and the availability of water, oxygen and sunlight. These ideological seeds lay dormant until the Ürümqi

fire exposed them to the right conditions.

One such condition would be the failure of Chinese censors to prevent news of the fire, the high death toll, and comments blaming strict containment measures from spreading across the Chinese internet. The censors had also failed to stop the viral spread of images and videos of the massive Foxconn riot in Henan just a few days before the Ürümqi fire. The scenes of hundreds of workers battling with Chinese police and successfully breaking out of lockdown had galvanised viewers and primed them to take action. Chinese urban society at the height of “zero-COVID” proved fertile ground for these ideas to take root and sprout. Protests bloomed like flowers across China. These were not just anti-lockdown protests, but echoed the political demands of the Sitong Bridge protest.

Hongkongers can learn from the experience of the White Paper movement to inform our blueprint for Hong Kong’s struggle. The task at hand today is twofold: to sow the ideological seeds of the democratic revolution, and to make sure that the soil is sufficiently fertile and suitable for these seeds to take root and sprout under the right conditions (□□□□□□□□□□).

To forge a revolutionary democratic movement, we must not only spread ideas through agitation, propaganda and political education, but also organise and build networks. We must support and participate in social and economic struggles—clandestinely when necessary, but, where possible without attracting state repression, on the front lines.

The aim is to build the revolutionary consciousness, capability, and confidence of the Hong Kong people, who are the agents of the revolution. This must go beyond coming up with abstract slogans or aphorisms. We must continue to “gather warmth around the fire” (□□□□) and, as Václav Havel suggested, to resist social atomisation and build community by “living in truth”, but this alone is not enough if we want to win. Those who are overseas must continue to attend pro-democracy rallies and gatherings and keep the faith, but that is not enough either. Nor is it enough to merely say that “We’ll be back”. We must be able not only to resist tyranny (□□□□), but also to overthrow the regime and then seize power when the opportunity emerges.

To turn an uprising into a revolution, we must not only have the right ideas and goals, but also have the means and the ability to put these ideas into practice and carry out the democratic revolution.

Before the next social eruption happens, we must build a revolutionary organisation or party of hardcore activists and cadres that will apply this blueprint to its pursuit of the democratic revolution. It will be this organisation or party that will carry out the agitation, propaganda, political education, and organising and activist work to build the revolutionary consciousness, capability, and confidence of the Hong Kong people in preparation for the moment of revolution. It must act as the institutional memory of Hong Kong’s struggle for democracy and self-determination, passing on the hard-won lessons and experience of past struggles to future generations of Hongkongers. To guide its actions, it must have its own political programme for the kind of democratic and sovereign post-revolutionary Hong Kong that it wants to build.

The slogan that defined the 2019 uprising—“Liberate Hong Kong, Revolution of Our Times”—was first used by Edward Leung in 2016 after the defeat of the Umbrella Movement. Despite the regime’s incarceration of Edward Leung and the failure of his localist electoral project, this slogan was not forgotten. Having incubated in people’s subconscious in the intervening years, it resurfaced in 2019, embodying the unprecedented radical spirit of the uprising and the mass movement. But the slogan’s greatest strength—its near-universal appeal—was also its greatest weakness. Everyone had different or even contradictory interpretations of what it really meant, and so it ultimately represented nothing. There was no concrete political programme or demand behind it. What would a real “Revolution of Our Times” mean, and what would it look like?

Our blueprint for revolution

Our ultimate goal is still to achieve democracy and self-determination for the Hong Kong people, but it can no longer be framed through the reformist lens of demanding dual genuine universal suffrage within the defunct framework of “One Country, Two Systems”. Nor should we seek to restore “One Country, Two Systems”, which was fundamentally flawed and undemocratic.

The only way out for Hong Kong and Hongkongers is a democratic revolution. This means the overthrow of CCP rule over Hong Kong and the seizure of power from below by the Hong Kong people through a self-constituted revolutionary government.

How does a democratic revolution happen? One answer is that an uprising can become a revolution if the conditions are right.

No one could have prophesied the 2019 uprising or the White Paper protests. We don’t know what the tipping point that causes the next great social eruption or crisis will be.

At the same time, we can believe in the possibility of such a social eruption or crisis in the future. This possibility will always be present as long as contradictions remain unresolved, and continue to accumulate, under the regime’s unsound and illegitimate political order.

Brutal repression and oppression does not automatically rule out the possibility of a social eruption happening. This is proven by the uprisings against the repressive regimes of Myanmar, Sudan, Iran, Belarus, Tunisia, Egypt, and the other countries of the Arab Spring. It is in the moment of these eruptions that revolutionary opportunities emerge.

The crisis that leads to a social eruption will inevitably be a polycrisis, arising from the accumulation of political, geopolitical, social, economic, demographic, environmental and ecological contradictions under CCP rule. An unforeseen catastrophe such as a natural disaster, a man-made accident, or a pandemic like COVID-19 could be the straw that breaks the camel’s back. Attacks by the regime on people’s livelihood, way of life, or cultural heritage, such as the Hong Kong government’s Star Ferry fare increase in 1966 or its decision to demolish the Queen’s Pier in 2007, may provoke struggles that could spark a social eruption.

But even if the objective conditions for a revolution are present, the occurrence of such a catastrophe will not automatically lead to a democratic revolution and the overthrow of CCP rule if the subjective conditions are not sufficient. The 2019 uprising was the culmination of a sophisticated and mature democracy movement that was born in 1989 and grew and developed over more than thirty years of continuous and persistent struggle since then. This movement was smashed after its defeat in 2019, and must be rebuilt in a new form.

History has already proved that a revolution from the top-down, along the lines of “35+” and the “Ten Steps”, is not possible in the context of Hong Kong’s non-sovereign political structure. And there can be no revolution from the bottom-up unless the agents of such a revolution—the people—are sufficiently prepared and organised to seize the opportunity when it emerges.

Xi Jinping could die suddenly without a successor, plunging the CCP into a succession crisis. Infighting within a divided ruling class can weaken and expose the regime and embolden the people to challenge its power. A clear example of this was the rift between Zhao Ziyang and Deng Xiaoping in 1989, which provided an opening for the Chinese democracy movement at the time to rise up. Another example is the indecision and inaction of Carrie Lam’s government, and the [apparent disunity](#) between the Chief Executive and the Executive Council, in 2019. This allowed the uprising

to continue to grow and gain momentum until Beijing stepped in to take control of the situation. But power vacuums are temporary by nature. If there is no revolutionary democratic movement of the people that is capable of taking power after the regime collapses or is overthrown, then someone else will eventually step in to take control—like the military dictatorships or reactionary Islamist forces that rose to power in the aftermath of the Arab Spring.

As the saying goes, “opportune timing is important, environmental conditions even more so, but most critical of all is the human element” (時勢造英雄). We may not have control over the objective conditions for a democratic revolution, but the subjective conditions are certainly within our grasp. The point, then, is not to fantasise about how or when the “Shina-explosion” will happen, but to work out what we will do if or when such an opportunity presents itself and to prepare accordingly so that we will be ready.

How does an uprising become a revolution?

An uprising becomes a revolution when the people seize power. Not only must they storm the government (like the storming and short-lived occupation of the LegCo on July 1, 2019) to overthrow the regime, they must also form organs of grassroots political power.

It is true that most uprisings do not have revolutionary demands or aspirations from the beginning. The 2019 uprising had begun as a mass protest movement without revolutionary demands or aspirations. But an uprising can develop into a revolutionary situation, as the masses rapidly become politicised, the status quo is shattered, and the regime discredits itself by resorting to naked violence to stay in power. During an uprising, the task of the revolutionary party is to be the catalyst that brings the uprising to a revolutionary ferment.

The revolutionary party must intervene at every level of the uprising and the mass movement to make the case for a revolutionary seizure of power from below, where the people form their own organs of grassroots political power.

What might this look like? It has never been tried in Hong Kong. Let’s try to imagine how resistance can be developed into revolution by drawing on the experience of the 2019 uprising.

At the height of the 2019 uprising, weekly (and even nightly) mass gatherings took place at local shopping malls, public squares and plazas, and MTR stations, which were usually where the neighbourhood’s Lennon Wall was located. They often took the form of “Sing With You” and “Shop With You” rallies. These spontaneous mass gatherings of citizens in local public spaces must be transformed into permanent and structured forums for democratic discussion, decision-making, and the exercise of collective power at the local level.

How can this happen? If a bunch of self-styled revolutionaries turn up at a mass gathering and proclaim the formation of a revolutionary assembly with the aim of “seizing power” in the abstract, no one will take them seriously. Instead, the revolutionary party must organise and empower the citizens present at these gatherings. The party’s activists must motivate the gathered citizens to go beyond the mere chanting of slogans, which too often was all that happened at these gatherings, and towards organising themselves to achieve immediate goals in response to present circumstances.

For example: in response to the Yuen Long triad attack on July 21, 2019, local citizens’ or residents’ self-defence committees could be formed out of these mass gatherings. These popular self-defence committees could bring together frontline protesters, non-violent *woleifei* protesters, and local *kaifong* to defend their community from the regime’s gangsters and maintain public order and security in the absence of the police.

In addition, local strike support committees could be formed out of these mass gatherings to organise and coordinate community support for the “Triple Strike”. These strike support committees could raise money for a strike fund and coordinate actions such as sit-ins, boycotts, blockades and marches to complement the “Triple Strike”.

Throughout the 2019 uprising, these semi-regular local mass gatherings have also acted as semi-permanent supply hubs where frontline protesters could pick up gear and supplies donated by pro-democracy citizens. The logical next step would be to transform these supply hubs into local command centres for coordinating frontline militant action; for example, to coordinate citywide efforts by protesters to break the police siege of the Polytechnic University in November 2019, or to plan the defence and expansion of “liberated zones” at the Chinese, Baptist, and City Universities, where student protesters had occupied campuses and erected barricades in the same month.

In addition to organising and empowering citizens at the neighbourhood level, the revolutionary party must also organise and empower workers in the workplace to seize power not only at the community level but also at the economic level. Pro-democracy citizens, students, protesters, and *kaifong* can all play a supporting role, but it is the workers who are the ones to go on strike.

Therefore, strike committees composed of elected worker representatives must be formed in workplaces to organise and coordinate strike action, with the ultimate goal of bringing about a citywide and sustained “Triple Strike” that can paralyse the economy and overthrow the regime. These strike committees could be formed out of spontaneous mass gatherings by workers at workplaces. They could also be formed out of preexisting trade union bodies, although this is now unlikely given the regime’s smashing of Hong Kong’s labour movement and its ongoing repression of trade union activity since the National Security Law. We can draw on the experience of *Solidarność* in Poland and the South Korean labour movement, among others, to learn how workers can be organised and empowered despite repressive conditions to participate in struggles, build their revolutionary consciousness, capability, and confidence, and ultimately seize power at the economic level at the moment of revolution.

It is from such ad hoc forums, formed to achieve immediate goals in response to present circumstances, that local organs of grassroots political power can emerge organically. They could then consolidate into more permanent and structured bodies. At the community level, they could take the form of Neighbourhood Assemblies. At the economic level, they could take the form of Workplace Assemblies. It would then be these Neighbourhood and Workplace Assemblies, operating on the basis of direct democracy, that would take over the running of society and the economy from the regime.

The revolutionary seizure of power from below requires seizing control of key infrastructure from the regime, including the airport, port, MTR, telecommunications network, transportation, public utilities, and hospitals, and bringing them under democratic control. This can only be done by workers themselves through Workplace Assemblies, because only workers know how to run their workplaces, although the local community and external stakeholders, including consumers and service users, must also be given a say. In education, Campus Assemblies could be formed out of campus occupations to bring schools and universities under the joint democratic control of students and faculty.

The Neighbourhood and Workplace Assemblies that emerge can be the building blocks for a citywide revolutionary government, which could take the form of a Hongkongers’ Democratic Assembly. It would be an independent and self-constituted organ of political power claiming sovereignty over the entire territory of Hong Kong, composed of elected representatives. Acting through the Neighbourhood and Workplace Assemblies, the Hong Kong people themselves will be the executors

of the will of this Hongkongers' Democratic Assembly.

The revolutionary seizure of power from below also requires the physical dispersal of the regime. In 2019, LegCo was stormed and many government offices and buildings were attacked. These institutions should be occupied and taken over. If this is not possible, the facilities should be wrecked to prevent the regime from using them. During the period of "Flowering Everywhere", local *kaifong*, outraged by police brutality and the indiscriminate tear-gassing of residential neighbourhoods, protested outside district police stations on a near-nightly basis. The logical next step would be to storm these district police stations and either occupy and take them over or wreck them. During the George Floyd protests in the United States in 2020, protesters besieged the Minneapolis Police Department's Third Precinct police station for about twelve hours. When the exhausted police inside ran out of supplies, they were forced to abandon the police station, allowing the protesters to storm it and burn it down. For the next few days, this part of Minneapolis was a police-free zone.

However, the existing CCP regime is unlikely to collapse immediately. For a period of time, two governments will exist simultaneously in Hong Kong. There will be an unstable situation of "dual power" between the regime and the people. The Hong Kong people must be able to resolve this situation of "dual power" in their favour.

This is what a real "Revolution of Our Times", a real "Occupy", and real "Hong Kong independence" would truly look like. This is also what real "laam chau" would look like. The regime can only resolve this situation of "dual power" in its favour by suppressing the revolutionary government through force of arms.

Could the 2019 uprising have turned into a revolution?

When Carrie Lam postponed the 2020 LegCo elections, this obvious ploy to preemptively prevent the formation of an opposition-controlled LegCo destroyed the regime's credibility and legitimacy. The Hong Kong government was revealed to be a puppet of Beijing. The imposition of the National Security Law a month prior killed off any remaining prospect of winning the "Five Demands" in the short term, and achieving democratisation via gradual reform in the long term.

At this point in time, it would have made sense to put forward the slogan of a "self-constituted Hongkongers' Democratic Assembly". Not only would it replace the LegCo that the Hong Kong people had lost, but it would finally allow the Hong Kong people to seize control of their own destiny and exercise democratic self-government over society. It would be the logical conclusion of the democracy movement's long-standing demand, restated as part of the 2019 uprising's "Five Demands", for the implementation of dual genuine universal suffrage. The "Revolution of Our Times" would no longer be an abstraction devoid of meaningful political content, but a genuine political revolution within the grasp of the Hong Kong people.

If this slogan had managed to gain widespread popular recognition, the struggle would have undergone a qualitative shift, changing from a pro-democracy protest movement to a revolutionary democratic movement.

But this would not have been possible in 2019, because it would be to completely "switch tracks" from the preexisting reformist premise and outlook of the democracy movement, which was all the Hong Kong people had ever known. To begin to talk about overthrowing, rather than protecting, "One Country, Two Systems" and the rule of law in Hong Kong, would already be a significant ideological and rhetorical challenge because it would be a complete about-face from the framework of the democracy movement up until this point.

If the pro-democratic leadership had not limited themselves to loud protestations and resigning en masse from the LegCo, and had called for the formation of a Hongkongers' Democratic Assembly following the postponement of the LegCo elections, they would be faced with the difficult task of explaining to the Hong Kong people why they were now calling for a revolution to seize power from below when only yesterday they had been talking about Western sanctions against China, "burnism", and the "Ten Steps to Mutual Destruction".

Even if there had been an organised revolutionary party to put forward such a slogan, it would have been extremely difficult to redirect the momentum built up by the hitherto entirely reformist course of the democracy movement over the past three decades towards uncharted revolutionary ends.

Such inertia could not have been overcome, at least not in the extremely narrow and rapidly closing window of opportunity before the regime's imminent counteroffensive.

On a broader level, the subjective conditions for a democratic revolution were insufficient. The Hong Kong people demonstrated an unprecedented level of sophistication, militancy, tenacity, and courage in their struggle during the 2019 uprising. But the revolutionary consciousness, capability, and confidence of the mass movement, and of Hong Kong workers in particular, still fell short of what was needed for the uprising to ripen into a revolution. This reality was summed up by a slogan popular among frontline protesters around the time of the failed "Triple Strike" on August 5: "If the adults are willing to go on strike, the kids wouldn't have to lead the charge" (小朋友唔使出動). In "Dawn Actions" during the period of "Flowering Everywhere", frontline protesters blocked roads, disrupted traffic, and sabotaged infrastructure across the city during the morning rush hour to prevent commuters from going to work.

This was a substitutive attempt by the vanguard of the mass movement to paralyse the economy in the absence of a genuine workers' strike. This strategy culminated in the militant occupations of the Chinese and Polytechnic Universities that aimed to cut off the Tolo Highway and the Cross-Harbour Tunnel respectively. Not only was this strategy unsuccessful owing to the inherent power imbalance between the police and frontline protesters, but it led to more frontline protesters being brutalised and arrested by the police, inflicting unsustainable losses on the mass movement.

Finally, even if everything went right in Hong Kong, there is still the "China factor" to consider. The Xi regime was in the ascendant in 2019. Mainland Chinese civil society and activist networks had been smashed by state repression. There was no mainland Chinese democracy movement, let alone one capable of overthrowing the CCP. The 2019 uprising failed to spread to mainland China. Any revolutionary democratic movement that emerged in Hong Kong would be isolated and crushed, suffering the same fate as the Paris Commune in 1871.

Conclusions

In the moment of a social eruption, it is the preexisting ideas in people's minds that become their frame of reference for determining their demands, their vision for the post-revolutionary future, and their tactics and strategy for achieving their goals. A social eruption is like a thunderstorm after a long drought. Ideas that had laid dormant in people's subconscious for many years sprout and blossom overnight. What kind of ideological seeds are already present in the soil at the time of the social eruption, and how widespread these seeds are, determine the level and substance of people's consciousness.

The presence or absence of these seeds determine whether an uprising can turn into a revolution, or fails to adapt to the situation and is crushed or perverted by other actors with ulterior motives.

We cannot wait until the moment of the next social eruption to come up with our revolutionary programme and long-term vision. Nor can we wait until then to begin organising and building our forces. By then it will be too late. The task of planting the seeds and laying the groundwork for the democratic revolution must begin today.

Our ultimate goal is a free, democratic, and sovereign Hong Kong where the Hong Kong people can fully exercise their right to democratic self-government and self-determination. This can be achieved through a democratic revolution carried out by a revolutionary democratic movement of the Hong Kong people. For this to happen, there must be a revolutionary party to forge the revolutionary democratic movement by building the revolutionary consciousness, capability, and confidence of the Hong Kong people.

Part 5: The Hongkonger Community of Struggle

What is a “Hongkonger”?

Hongkongers are the agents of Hong Kong’s struggle for democracy and self-determination and the “Revolution of Our Times”. What constitutes this Hongkonger identity and community? What is its history and its future?

The regime does not recognise the concept of a “Hongkonger” or “Hong Kong citizen” or “Hong Kong national”, but only “Hong Kong Permanent Residents”. This is a depoliticised and decontextualised definition that casts the residents of Hong Kong as a servile population—as objects of colonial rule—but not a people.

The Chinese Communist Party refers to the Hong Kong people as “our Hong Kong Chinese compatriots”. Chinese nationality law claims that all residents of Hong Kong of Chinese ancestry are Chinese nationals.

Such totalising logic conflates ethnicity with nationality. It defines the residents of Hong Kong, of whom a vast majority are of Chinese ancestry, as a subcategory of Chinese nationals. By claiming ownership over the Hong Kong people as a subcategory of Chinese people, the Chinese Communist Party justifies both its rule and Chinese sovereignty over Hong Kong, and the denial of the right to self-determination for the Hong Kong people.

Being a “Hong Kong Permanent Resident” or having a Hong Kong Special Administrative Region passport has little to do with being a “Hongkonger”. Nor does it have anything to do with being Chinese.

“Hong Kong people” vs. “Chinese people”

For 156 years since 1842, Hong Kong was under British colonial rule, which only ended with the Handover in 1997. Though geographically located in China (unlike Taiwan, which is an island), Hong Kong existed as a distinct but not sovereign polity separate from Qing, Kuomintang, and Communist rule over the rest of China.

The trajectory of Hong Kong’s modern historical development was distinct and divergent from that of mainland China. It was a period of immense development at breakneck pace. Under British rule, Hong Kong grew from a scattering of small fishing villages into a sprawling world-class metropolis of 7.5 million people. Hong Kong’s role in the global economy also followed its own unique historical trajectory—first as a British military supply hub and springboard for further ventures inland, then as

an entrepôt, then as a major export-oriented manufacturing hub, and finally as an international financial centre.

As a separate polity with its own territory and population, Hong Kong developed its own system of government, institutions, borders and immigration policy, economic, legal, and educational systems, society, culture (including cuisine), and language. “One Country, Two Systems” promised the retention of these unique features after the Handover.

Hong Kong people have their own way of life that culturally and psychologically differentiates them from Chinese people. This distinct way of life includes Hong Kong’s separate political and economic structure, but also the worldview, cultural referents, collective memory, language, religion, and social customs, norms, and values of the Hong Kong people.

All this was recognised and institutionalised by the CCP under the Sino-British Joint Declaration and “1C2S”, which guaranteed that “the previous capitalist system and way of life shall remain unchanged for fifty years”, according to the principle of “Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong” with “a high degree of self-government”.

This distinction is historically constructed. It emerges from Hong Kong’s distinct and divergent trajectory of modern historical development, not from the existence of a prehistoric indigenous Hongkonger nation, race, ethnicity, or ancestry.

However, this historical distinction between “Hong Kong people” and “Chinese people” as recognised by the CCP is only sufficient to justify, at most, internal self-government, but not external self-determination, for Hong Kong. “One Country, Two Systems” explicitly precludes self-determination for the Hong Kong people or a sovereign Hong Kong polity. Today, “1C2S” has been torn up by the CCP.

The historical distinction between “Hong Kong people” and “Chinese people” is necessary but not sufficient for the constitution of the Hongkonger community of struggle. A person can be a born and bred “Hong Kong person” who might even have a strong sense of belonging and civic pride with regard to Hong Kong, and at the same time identify as a patriotic “Chinese” and be loyal to CCP rule over Hong Kong. Many former loyalists of British colonial rule have become the most staunch supporters of the current regime, including former Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam and opportunists like Maria Tam.

There is also the fact that a significant minority of Hong Kong people are “blue ribbons” who still vote for pro-Beijing political parties in the sham elections. The opposition-free 2023 District Council elections had the lowest voter turnout in all of Hong Kong’s history, with a total of 1.19 million votes cast. In the 2019 District Council elections, which the pro-democracy camp won by a landslide with 1.67 million votes, 1.23 million people still voted for the pro-Beijing camp. What makes us Hongkongers different from these “Hong Kong people”?

The Hong Kong people’s struggle and search for identity

Key to Hong Kong’s democracy movement since the Handover has been the struggle to preserve Hong Kong’s distinct culture, heritage, language, and way of life. Major episodes include the anti-Article 23 movement, the campaigns against the demolition of Lei Tung Street, Edinburgh Place Ferry Pier, and Queen’s Pier, the anti-Hong Kong Express Rail Link movement, and the anti-Moral and National Education movement.

This was a protracted political struggle: on one side were a significant section of the Hong Kong people, and on the other side was the Hong Kong government, acting as a proxy for Beijing’s drive to

assimilate Hong Kong people into the Chinese nation and thus consolidate the Chinese Communist Party's ownership over Hong Kong.

By participating in this struggle, the Hong Kong people were confronted with the question of what it meant to be a "Hong Kong person", and what Hong Kong meant to them as their home. The political resistance of the Hong Kong people inspired, and in turn was inspired by, a cultural and artistic movement that promoted a local Hong Kong identity and collective memory.

This movement sought not only to preserve Hong Kong's heritage and preserve Hong Kong's way of life, but also to define and deepen the identity of a "Hong Kong person" to which many now felt attached. It also sought to develop alternative ways of understanding and connecting with Hong Kong's history and heritage that differed from the regime's narrative of "patriotic reunification". This was an important step towards the constitution of the Hongkonger community of struggle.

The political struggle of the Hong Kong people was not framed only in negative terms but also in positive terms. Since the Handover, the Hong Kong people have fought for the realisation of democracy, in the form of dual genuine universal suffrage, within the framework of "1C2S" and in accordance with the promises made by Articles 45 and 68 of the Basic Law.

This was a progressive struggle to realise a specifically democratic vision for Hong Kong's future. It was explicitly a struggle for greater and genuine democratic self-government, for democratic and liberal values, and for the right to self-determination, not merely to defend Hong Kong's unique identity or "Hong Kong's interests".

The political struggle of the Hong Kong people both shaped and was shaped by the emergent Hongkonger community of struggle. It has imbued that political community with a collective heritage, culture and ethos of struggle.

A Community of Struggle

The collective experience of the Hong Kong people, not only of oppression and suffering, but also of resistance and empowerment, created a strong sense of solidarity and comradeship in the course of the struggle. This was another important step towards building the Hongkonger community of struggle.

For example, it was the excessive and unprecedented use of tear gas against student protesters on 24 September 2014 that launched the Umbrella Movement and gave a new generation of politicised youth a baptism by fire. Similarly, it was the sheer brutality of the police response to a protest against the Extradition Law on 12 June 2019, televised live on the news, that outraged the Hong Kong public and sparked the popular uprising against the regime. Popular anger at unfettered and indiscriminate police brutality sustained the mass movement throughout 2019 and 2020.

Since Hong Kong society's first political mass mobilisation in 1989, the Hongkonger community of struggle has grown and developed in step with Hong Kong's democracy movement, maturing in the course of the struggle for democracy and self-determination. It was while chanting "Hongkongers, Add Oil" that the Hong Kong masses stood their ground, braving the police tear gas not as atomised individuals but as members of a community of struggle. United against the regime, it was in the crucible of the 2019 uprising that the Hong Kong people were forged and tempered into a community of struggle. The Hongkonger community of struggle came of age in the mass movement of 2019. It was their finest hour.

On a broader level, it was the broken promise of gradual democratisation under "One Country, Two Systems", and the continuing encroachment on Hong Kong's autonomy and the Hong Kong people's

way of life, civil liberties, and political freedoms, that bound them together in their search for a political alternative to the crumbling status quo. Out of the collective disillusionment with Hong Kong's handing-over to China, which turned out to just be a continuation of undemocratic external rule, there emerged a newfound desire not only for autonomy but for democracy and self-determination and even independence.

This collective experience of struggle, the shared dream of a free and democratic Hong Kong, and a sense of a collective destiny belonging to the Hong Kong people alone, was the central pillar around which the Hongkonger community of struggle coalesced.

Democracy and Self-Determination

The Hong Kong people are being oppressed by an external power, the CCP regime, in which they have no representation or participation and over which they have no control. The Hong Kong people have also experienced a significantly different trajectory of historical development, and are therefore distinct, from the main body of this regime's subjects (i.e. the Chinese people, excluding Taiwanese, Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Mongolians). These factors give the Hong Kong people the right to self-determination up to and including independence, including by way of referendum or revolution.

Hong Kong was handed over by the British to the Chinese with the Hong Kong people having had no say in the matter whatsoever. The British government had presented the Sino-British Joint Declaration as a *fait accompli* to the Hong Kong people. From one suzerain to another, the Hong Kong people have had neither democratic self-government or self-determination. Their struggle to achieve these aspirations has always been suppressed by their rulers, be they British or Chinese. Hong Kong's first democratically-elected Legislative Council, elected in 1995 just prior to the Handover, was unilaterally dissolved by Beijing upon its assumption of sovereignty over Hong Kong.

The exclusive right of the Hong Kong people alone to decide, as a sovereign polity, on their future and the nature of Hong Kong's relationship to China, up to and including independence, is the only recompense for this historical injustice.

A Community of Collective Destiny

The desire for democracy and self-determination is not shared by all Hong Kong people. It is that section of the Hong Kong people who assert for themselves a separate identity and destiny apart from the Chinese people, and who fight for their right to determine this destiny by themselves alone, who constitute the Hongkonger community of struggle. This is a community forged in struggle, to which the struggle is a necessary but not sufficient component of its identity.

And it is this struggle for democracy and self-determination that sets this community of Hongkongers, who constitute a self-conscious community "for itself", apart from previous generations of Hong Kong people, who are merely a community "in itself".

In the run-up to the Handover, large swathes of Hong Kong's population chose to emigrate to escape the imminent transfer of sovereignty to CCP-ruled China. Only a privileged minority had the means to escape. However, the majority of Hong Kong people chose to remain in Hong Kong. To them, Hong Kong was not a "borrowed place living on borrowed time", but a place and community which they had come to call home. A significant portion of them and their children went on to fight in the rising tide of struggle since the Handover, spurning Beijing's insistence at the time for Hong Kong to remain an "economic city" and not become a "political city".

In doing so, this section of the Hong Kong people gained an awareness of themselves not merely as a "Hong Kong resident", and beyond a culturally-constituted but politically-ambiguous identity of a

“Hong Kong person”. After all, do “blue ribbons” or “Kong pigs” (豬豬) not speak Hong Kong Cantonese, dine at *cha chaan tengs*, and consume Hong Kong culture too?

In an evolutionary step up from the self-interested, apolitical, and atomised “Homo Economicus”, this section of the Hong Kong people identified with the higher cause of democracy and self-determination and fought and sacrificed to realise this aspiration. They became aware of themselves as members of the Hongkonger community of struggle: someone who asserts the separate and collective destiny of that community, who shares in its collective destiny, and who fights for the right of their community to decide its collective destiny.

A “Hongkonger”, in other words, can be defined as a member of the Hongkonger community of struggle. The Hongkonger identity and community is one that is intrinsically political, and we must not forget our roots. A “Hongkonger” is someone who fights for the right of the Hong Kong people to democracy and self-determination—to decide their collective destiny and the future of their home by themselves. It is the struggle to realise this dream that defines us. Without this dream or this struggle, we would all just be “Hong Kong Chinese” or “Kong pigs”.

Different people will have different visions for which path our collective destiny should take. This includes for example the question of whether a post-revolutionary Hong Kong should be its own country, independent from mainland China, and the question of Hong Kong’s post-revolutionary relationship with mainland China more generally. Our revolutionary movement must be one which is pluralistic and capable of resolving these differences fairly and democratically without recourse to violence or coercion.

The struggle may have been suppressed for the time being, but the Hongkonger community of struggle endures. The Hong Kong people have not given up. The wave of emigration following the defeat of the 2019 uprising is different from previous waves of emigration in that those who left would have directly experienced and participated in the highly sophisticated and militant struggle for democracy over the past twenty years. Most of them would identify not only as “Hong Kong people” but members of the Hongkonger community of struggle. In exile, this latest and newest generation of the Hong Kong diaspora has already regrouped to continue the fight for democracy and against the CCP.

The Community of Struggle and the democratic revolution

The Hongkonger community of struggle is one that, like all communities, remains constantly changing and in flux. It was forged in the struggle for democracy in Hong Kong, and it has evolved and matured with the struggle over the past thirty years. Now that this phase of the struggle has passed into history, what is the future of the community of struggle?

This community of struggle is an inherently political construct, inseparable from the struggle for democracy and self-determination. The successful achievement of democracy and self-determination for the Hong Kong people is the necessary precondition for the next step in the evolution of this community of struggle. This is when, at long last, “Hong Kong Permanent Residents” become citizens in a Hong Kong Democratic Commonwealth, and when the Hong Kong people, hitherto objects of colonial rule, becomes a Hong Kong *demos*. This is the beginning of the collective destiny that the Hongkonger community of struggle seeks to realise.

After the defeat of the 2019 uprising, the only way to realise this collective destiny is through a democratic revolution.

Victory in this struggle is the precondition for the Hongkonger community of struggle to achieve its

self-realisation as a *demos*. Our victory in this struggle will not only mean the preservation of our identity, history, collective memory, and way of life. Victory will also mean the full flowering of post-revolutionary Hongkonger identity, society, and culture as that belonging to a sovereign and independent community in full control of its own destiny.

This creative endeavour in the post-revolutionary era will be one in which the whole Hong Kong people can participate freely, openly, joyously, and with pride, without fear of repression and retribution.

A Hong Kong nation?

The concept of a “nation” is inherently ambiguous and subjective. Fortunately, it is a moot point. The right of the Hong Kong people to democracy and self-determination and to decide their own destiny, up to and including independence, and the legitimacy of our demand for that right, does not depend on the prior or current existence of a Hong Kong nation. And regardless of how a “nation” is defined and whether Hongkongers meet this definition, the existence of the Hongkonger community of struggle and its collective destiny is already an undeniable fact.

Nations are formed through the passage of time but also by historical processes, including political struggle. The American and French Revolutions marked the beginning of the modern American and French nations. It was through these revolutions, which were revolutions for democracy and self-determination, that these nations were born.

I do not think that a Hong Kong nation exists yet, because the Hong Kong people have never been in control of their own destiny. I think that for a nation to exist, it must be a community which possesses historical agency and sovereignty. The Hongkonger community of struggle can thus be seen either as a proto-Hong Kong nation, or as the vanguard of an emergent and unfinished Hong Kong nation. It is the future Hong Kong *demos* in embryonic form.

Our history—the history of the Hong Kong people—lies in our struggle for democracy and self-determination. It is our heritage and our legacy. It is something over which we can claim authorship and ownership. It is in this struggle that Hongkongers become historical agents who carve their own path through history, rather than history being something that happens to us as objects of colonial rule.

If there is to exist a future free and sovereign Hong Kong nation in full control of its destiny, this must be something that the Hong Kong people fight for and create for themselves. And the only way to do that is through a democratic revolution.

Mainlandisation

In the Hongkonger diaspora today, there is deep anxiety about how the Hongkonger identity can be passed on to children born in exile to Hongkongers, and fear that the current generation of Hongkongers will be the last.

The regime’s efforts to promote “patriotic reunification” will now go unopposed with the suppression of the democratic struggle in Hong Kong. These efforts include the replacement of Liberal Studies with patriotic education in Hong Kong schools, the suppression of civil society groups promoting Cantonese and local Hong Kong culture, and the erasure of Hong Kong’s distinct heritage.

There is also deep anxiety among diasporic Hongkongers about the irrevocable change to Hong Kong’s demographic make-up through the increased immigration and settlement of mainland Chinese in Hong Kong, articulated through the metaphor of a “blood transfusion” (输血) where

mainland Chinese immigrants take the place of Hongkonger emigrants.

But Hong Kong has always been an immigrant society. And for all of Hong Kong's history, the overwhelming majority of immigrants have been from mainland China. Hong Kong's population is 92% ethnic Chinese. Mainland Chinese immigrants to Hong Kong do not displace the local population as settler-colonists, or segregate into their own parallel society, but for the most part assimilate and integrate into Hong Kong society. Edward Leung was born in mainland China before his family settled in Hong Kong. Jimmy Lai came to Hong Kong as an illegal immigrant at the age of twelve. Nathan Law was born in Shenzhen and moved to Hong Kong at the age of six.

There is also the fact that almost the entire leadership of the puppet Hong Kong government are born and bred "Hong Kong people". And if we determine who is and is not a "real" Hongkonger according to their ancestry or bloodline, the logical conclusion of such an approach would be that the original "real" Hongkongers are in fact the clannish, thuggish, and stalwartly pro-Beijing "Indigenous Villagers" of the New Territories—who enjoy special privileges granted by the British and retained after the Handover, and who because of their privilege are the staunchest supporters of those currently in power (be they British or Chinese)—to the exclusion of all subsequent immigrants to Hong Kong and their descendants.

As the struggle for democracy and self-determination made "Hongkongers" out of "Hong Kong residents", so too can participation in and identification with this struggle make "Hongkongers" out of mainland Chinese immigrants through membership in the Hongkonger community of struggle.

One important caveat must be made. The emerging social strata of "Hong Kong drifters" (*gangpiao*, "漂漂") differs from previous generations of mainland Chinese immigrants to Hong Kong, many of whom were refugees, in that the *gangpiao* do not necessarily want to settle in Hong Kong or assimilate into local Hong Kong society. As mostly well-educated and high-earning professionals seeking to work but not to settle in Hong Kong, the *gangpiao* are less so immigrants and more so expatriates. A parallel can be drawn between the *gangpiao* and Hong Kong's British expatriate community. The *gangpiao* have formed their own pro-Beijing political parties, which have gained entry into the Legislative and District Councils following the regime's purge of Hong Kong's political opposition. The current HKSARG Secretary for Innovation, Technology and Industry, Dong Sun, who communicates in Putonghua rather than Cantonese, embodies the *gangpiao*.

The *gangpiao* do not yet constitute a minority colonial ruling elite. The upper echelons of Hong Kong's government and civil service, once occupied exclusively by rotating British colonial administrators, have not yet become positions reserved for mainland Chinese. With the exception of the PLA Hong Kong Garrison and the Chinese central government's Office for Safeguarding National Security in Hong Kong, mainland Chinese in Hong Kong are still subject to Hong Kong law, not above it. The regime does not favour mainland Chinese in Hong Kong by granting them exclusive rights or privileges that local Hongkongers do not have. Hongkongers are not yet second-class citizens in their own home, and indeed look down on the mainland Chinese immigrants swelling the ranks of the city's working class. But if any of the above comes to pass in the future, then China's relationship to Hong Kong will become one that is explicitly colonial in nature. Thus, Hong Kong's struggle for democracy and self-determination will also become one against Chinese colonialism as well.

Continuing the struggle

Members of the Hongkonger community of struggle must not forget that their identity and community are rooted not only in cultural and historical differences, but also in the struggle for democracy and self-determination and against tyranny and injustice over the past three decades.

Membership in this community of struggle has nothing to do with blood ties, ancestry, place of birth, immigration status, or genetic make-up.

It is this struggle that has driven the emergence of the Hongkonger community of struggle and Hong Kong people's identification with it. Where there is tyranny, there will be resistance. And where there is struggle, there Hongkongers will be.

Keeping the Hongkonger identity and community alive means continuing the struggle, not only against the CCP and its attempts to erase our identity and collective memory and atomise our community, but above all for our right to democracy and self-determination.

The First Generation or the Last Generation

Faced with the prospect of passing into history as the last generation of the Hongkonger community of struggle, the need for a democratic revolution becomes crystal clear. The choice we face today is whether to be the last generation of the Hongkonger community of struggle or the first generation of Hong Kong revolutionaries who will bring about the "Revolution of Our Times".

If we are to be this first generation of Hongkonger revolutionaries, we must possess a sense of historicity in understanding our own struggle. We must remember that future generations of Hongkongers will be looking back through time to judge and learn from our actions today, which will constitute the history of the Hongkonger community and the future Hong Kong *demos*.

How we conduct our struggle, the values we hold high and which we fight for, who we choose to ally ourselves with—each of these choices that we make will together define the nature of the post-revolutionary Hongkonger polity and *demos*.

The defeat of the 2019 uprising need not be the end of Hong Kong's struggle for democracy and self-determination. Our present and future actions have the potential to recontextualise and revalue past events. A victorious democratic revolution in the future can transform the significance of the 2019 uprising from a tragic defeat to a preparatory dress rehearsal for the "real deal".

The mass movement of 2019 was not initiated by "foreign forces" but by the Hong Kong people themselves. It was not to serve the agenda of "foreign forces" that the Hong Kong people fought, but because of their own desire for democracy and self-determination. Will we be pawns in the geopolitical rivalry between China and the West, or free agents of history fighting to determine our own destiny?

Zi-yuet
