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Mobilizing resources in networked social movements: cases in Hong Kong and Taiwan

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Mobilizing Resources in Networked Social Movements

- Cases in Hong Kong and Taiwan

WANG Jieying

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Principal Supervisor: Dr. LEE Alice Y.L.

Hong Kong Baptist University

August 2015

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis represents my own work which has been done after registration for the degree of PhD at Hong Kong Baptist University, and has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation submitted to this or other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualification.

Signature:

Date: August, 2015

ABSTRACT

The study examines social movement resource mobilization in the age of the network society. In the traditional model of Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT), material and human resources, as well as the legitimacy gained for a movement from the mass media, play crucial roles in mobilization. In the contemporary epoch of informationalism and network society, a large variety of instant communication technologies penetrate everyday life, bringing a lifestyle characterized by the intensive integration between technologies and social life. By studying the cases of two recent social movements, which witnessed the networking of different organizations/individuals and their wide use of new technologies, this research tries to identify what sorts of movement resources are employed in the mobilization process, and what the resource mobilization process is like in the paradigm of informationalism and network society.

Regarding the traditional RMT, scholars identified the missing link between the movement side and the general public in terms of empathy arousal. Despite that political opportunity process theorists largely added contextual elements, they concentrated on mainstream political institutional change, but still neglecting the role of historical and social culture, and people's role as active agency. In this study, the author also integrates the cultural aspects as a type of immaterial resource to produce a broader look into movement resources.

The two cases investigated are: the anti-moral-and-national-education movement (anti-M&N) in Hong Kong and the anti-media-monopoly movement (anti-monopoly) in Taiwan. This research was conducted using a qualitative approach, employing in-depth interviews and archive study as the major methods.

Results show that the traditional resources, such as resource-rich movement organizations, professionals and those possessing fruitful movement experiences are still indispensable. However, it is noteworthy that technologically adept activists have gained an increasingly important position. Their tech-savvy capabilities make them at once information archivist, movement message translator and disseminator. In addition, their heavy use of online platforms has facilitated groups which lack resources to "out-source" the provision of resources to a rhizomatic movement network. In this sense, with networking taking place between those who possess resources and the tech-savvy activists, between the core and the rhizomatic participants, a networked alliance has been formed as an important resource to today's social movements. In traditional resource mobilization theory, the mass media was regarded as an important source to legitimize the movement. In these cases, besides the legitimacy gained from certain types of mass media, the activists also presented the movement's messages strategically, by bridging the movements with social expectation and embedding in the historical context. By this means, the activists drew wider attention to anxieties about identity. In the light of the fact that Hong Kong and Taiwan are in the eye of the storm against the backdrop of China's rising power, the issue of identity anxiety in these two societies may provide a direction for further research.

Keywords: resource mobilization, network society, Hong Kong, Taiwan

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When I started writing this thesis, the Sunflower Movement broke out in Taiwan. The brave actions and the slogans that were chanted around the whole occupation site greatly touched my heart. My memory was drawn back to quite a few years ago when I attended a camp in National Chengchi University. During my two-week stay in Taiwan, I had several chances to visit NGOs. It was the first time I received a vivid picture of Taiwan's civil society, which is more colorful than the tourist sights. Thanks to those NGO friends, I was able to get in touch with those involved in the anti-media-monopoly movement. My gratitude is owing to those who shared with me their precious movement experiences during the interviews. Their words not only provided me with the inspiration to keep improving my research, but also encouraged me to fight for my goal.

In the course of writing this thesis, the Umbrella Movement brought a flame to the whole of Hong Kong society. Armed with tech-savvy capabilities, the knowledge acquired from various channels to tackle various political and social questions, as well as the paramount passion to fight for Hong Kong's democratic future, numerous movement participants stood firm on the streets. What I had been contemplating in my research was suddenly vividly revealed in front of my eyes. Among the huge number of Umbrella movement participants, some of them were actually "enlightened" inthe anti-M&N movement. When I was listening to and transcribing what they told me during the interviews, I got a strange feeling of "time travel". It seems that what they perceived and learned from the anti-M&N movement continued to be actualized in the Umbrella Movement. Their interviews and the current movement scene vividly unfolded a new picture of social movements, which helped me to re-examine some of my understandings and clarify my thoughts.

In my six years' studying in Hong Kong Baptist University, I owe my greatest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Alice LEE, who has offered me lots of caring and guidance. She has always reminded me to bear in mind "theoretically-driven thinking", that is, to perceive the theoretical significance of a research project. Her bright ideas always gave me inspiration when I got stuck in the research, and good communication between us kept me away from any disorder or panic. My greatest thanks also go to Professor Colin Sparks, for his generous guidance whenever I encountered a bottleneck in my theoretical explorations. His insightful thoughts always give me illumination to drag me from wandering. His humble and humorous attitude has taught me to remember that I am standing on the shoulders of giants.

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