

Christian Activism and Political Participation in Hong Kong's Occupy Movement

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Abstract

This article examines the role of Christian activism in facilitating political participation in the Occupy Movement from March 2013 to September 2014. Using Doug McAdam, John McCarthy, and Mayer Zald's integrated model of social movement theory, this article argues that the political opportunity for constitutional reform, the framing of civil disobedience for the Occupy Central with Love and Peace Movement, and the social mobilization efforts generated by two organizing committees of the movement, together with the support of a number of formal and informal Christian groups, partially accounted for Christians' political participation and the emergence of collective action. The case of the Occupy Movement shows that Christian culture is a valuable resource in promoting social progress in East Asian society.

Key words: Christian activism, Occupy Movement, Occupy Central with Love and Peace, Umbrella Movement, Hong Kong

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Introduction

At 10 p.m. on September 26, 2014, the five-day class boycott campaign came to an end, and a crowd was holding an assembly outside the Central Government Office at Admiralty. The class boycott was a protest against the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPCSC) exerting restrictions on the nomination system for the selection of Chief Executive in 2017. Two student organizations, the Hong Kong Federation of Students and Scholarism, suddenly called for the crowd to occupy Civic Square, where there was a roundabout outside the Central Government Office. Hundreds of students climbed over fences, tore down barriers, and occupied Civic Square. The police arrested the students and took them to the Hong Kong Police College at Wong Chuk Hang. The next day, in the morning, riot police were deployed to the Legislative Council Complex and were ready to take further action. The three initiators of the Occupy Central with Love and Peace (OCLP) Movement went to the site in support of the students at 10 a.m. The police cleared Civic Square and arrested the remaining students in the afternoon at half past one. A total of 74 students were taken to the Hong Kong Police College. At 8 p.m., the two student unions organized another assembly at Tim Mei Avenue at Admiralty, demanding that the police release all of the arrested students. Many citizens flooded into Admiralty and surrounded the police from outside. On September 28 at 1:40 a.m., Benny Tai declared the launch of OCLP, taking over the Central Government Complex to begin the Occupy campaign.

The Occupy Movement was one of the largest collective actions in the history of Hong Kong, through which Hong Kong people urged the Chinese and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR)

Governments to implement universal suffrage in Hong Kong (Cai 2017; Cheng 2016; Cheng and Chan 2017; Kan 2013; Lo 2015; Ortmann 2015). As stated in the Hong Kong Basic Law, Hong Kong people had the right to universal suffrage, but the Chinese Government increasingly exercised its control over Hong Kong after 1997. The Occupy Movement was a campaign that attempted to claim the rights of universal suffrage (Davis 2015; Hui 2015; Lam 2014; Lim and Ping 2015; Rühlig 2015; Veg 2016). Those who participated in the campaign requested that the Chinese Government abide by its promise to Hong Kong people and allow them to select their own Chief Executive in 2017 and elect the Legislative Council in 2020. According to the findings of the "Public Opinion and Political Development Studies" conducted by the Centre for Communication and Public Opinion Survey at the School of Journalism and Communication at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, more than 20% of the population (1.2 million people) participated in action at the occupied areas.¹⁾

While Christians were one of the many social factions that participated in the campaign, they were a unique group in the Occupy Movement (Bosco 2016; Chan, SH 2015, 2017; Kwok 2015; Tse 2015; Tse and Tan 2016). Three OCLP initiators were Protestants, and a majority of members in the OCLP's organizing committee for Occupy Central were Christians.²⁾ The Catholic Church and the Protestant community provided material and cultural resources for a variety of activities organized by OCLP. This article examines the relationship between Christian activism and the emergence of the Occupy Movement from the perspective of social movement theory. The research question of this article is: How did Christian activists frame the Occupy Movement and provide support for mobilization efforts, thus facilitating political participation in the movement? In this article, Christian activism refers to those Christian actions that strive for constitutional reform via the Occupy Movement. Two levels of Christian actions were identified: (1) the Christians who

worked inside the OCLP's organizing committees, particularly those who offered their ideas and strategies, and coordinated mobilization efforts; and (2) the Christians who provided support to OCLP from outside. Many Christians engaged in OCLP as individuals, groups, and organizations. They also helped facilitate their fellow Christians to participate in the campaign, which greatly strengthened the movement.

This article investigated OCLP during the period from March 27, 2013 to September 27, 2014, focusing on how the Christian initiators framed the movement, as well as how Christian activists facilitated the Christian community in supporting the movement. Three related terms regarding the Occupy Movement need to be explained. The Occupy Movement is a general term that can refer to both the Occupy Central Movement and the Umbrella Movement during the period of March 27, 2013 to December 15, 2014.

The Occupy Central Movement refers to the Occupy Central with Love and Peace Movement, which advocated occupying the business and financial area Central in Hong Kong. However, protesters occupied three other regions after September 28, 2014, including Admiralty, Mong Kok, and Causeway Bay, due to a series of confrontations between the protesters and the police at Admiralty.

The Umbrella Movement was the name given to the Occupy Movement by international correspondents who captured the moment when protesters used umbrellas to shield themselves from pepper spray deployed by the police. The collective action during the period of September 28 to December 15, 2014, can be called the Umbrella Movement. Many protesters who occupied three different zones denied the leadership of the two student unions and the three OCLP initiators. Benny Tai once lamented that OCLP had been replaced by the Umbrella Movement because the two movements were different in concept.³⁾

The Occupy Movement provides a significant case through which to observe and study the relationship between Christian culture and social

progress in Hong Kong. The movement began with a few Protestants who wanted to make changes in the political system by introducing Martin Luther King, Jr.'s model of civil disobedience to Hong Kong, and it evolved into a socially transforming movement that strive for democracy in the city. The case of the Occupy Movement shows that Christian culture is a valuable resource in promoting social progress in East Asian society.

Theoretical Framework: An Integrated Model of Social Movement

This article uses an integrated model of social movements to examine the Occupy Movement in Hong Kong. Formulated by Doug McAdam, John McCarthy, and Mayer Zald, the integrated model consists of three related variables— political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes—that account for the emergence and development of social movements (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 2008: 1-20).

Political opportunities refer to the structure of political opportunities and constraints confronting a movement, with a focus on the basis of changes in institutional structures or the informal power relations of a given national political system. McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald proposed four dimensions of a political opportunity structure for researchers in their study on social movements after considering different conceptions laid out by Charles Brockett, Hanspeter Kriesi, Dieter Rucht, and Sidney Tarrow (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 2008: 10):

1. The relative openness or closure of an institutionalized political system;
2. The stability of the broad set of elite alignments that typically

- undergird a polity;
- 3. The presence of elite allies; and
- 4. The state's capacity and propensity for repression.

Mobilizing structures refer to the collective vehicles, formal as well as informal, through which people mobilize and engage in collective action, with a focus on meso-level groups, organizations, and informal networks. Different theoretical traditions have been identified in researching the organizational dynamics of collective action. The resource mobilization theory formulated by McCarthy and Zald focuses on the formal organizational manifestations of mobilization processes, suggesting that social movement organizations (SMOs) are a force for social change, whereas the political process model formulated by McAdam emphasizes the critical role of grassroots settings in facilitating and structuring collective action, particularly informal groups in work places and neighborhoods. These two discrepant theoretical traditions will be examined through the case of the Occupy Movement in this article.

Framing processes emphasize the shared meanings and definitions that people bring to their situation. Following David Snow's original conception, McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald defined framing processes as "the conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action." (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 2008: 6) Zald proposed six topics in a study on framing, social movements, and the larger society (Zald 1996: 261-62):

1. The cultural construction of repertoires of contentions and frames;
2. The contribution of cultural contradiction and historical events in providing opportunities for framing;
3. Framing as a strategic activity;
4. The competitive process that represent the context in which frames

are selected and come to dominate;

5. Frames that are transmitted and reframed in the mass media; and
6. Shaping the outcomes of framing competing through the intersection of political opportunity and mobilization.

This article focuses on the third topic suggested by Zald, framing as a strategic activity, in the context of how the OCLP initiators used cultural and religious resources to strategically frame the Occupy Movement.

McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald stressed that the effects of these three variables are interactive rather than independent. Most political movements are set in motion by social changes that render the established political order more vulnerable or receptive to challenge. However, in the absence of sufficient organization, such opportunities are not likely to be seized. Mediating between the structural requirement of opportunities and organization are the emergent meanings and definitions—or frames—shared by the adherents of the burgeoning movement.

The three researchers further highlighted two critical interactive relationships among the three variables. The first is the relationship between framing processes and the kinds of “objective” political changes that are thought to facilitate a movement’s emergence. Such changes encourage mobilization not only through the “objective” effects they have on power relations, but also by setting in motion framing processes that further undermine the legitimacy of the system or its perceived mutability. The second is the relationship between organization and framing processes. Framing processes encourage mobilization, as people seek to organize and act on their growing awareness of the system’s illegitimacy and vulnerability. At the same time, the potential for the kind of system for critical framing processes is conditioned by the population’s access to various mobilizing structures.

Background: Constitutional Reform In Hong Kong

The Occupy Movement in 2013-2014 was an episode of continuous social movements striving for democratization in Hong Kong. In 1984, the Sino-British Joint Declaration announced that Hong Kong would revert to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, rather than extend its lease as a colony of the United Kingdom. The Hong Kong Basic Law adopted in 1990 stated that Hong Kong could select its Chief Executive and elect the Legislative Council by universal suffrage according to Article 45 and Article 68, respectively. In 2007, the NPCSC endorsed Hong Kong's selection of its Chief Executive and the Legislative Council by universal suffrage after 2017.

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

protest against the Chinese Government's endorsement of controlled elections.

OCLP was officially launched at Kowloon Union Church on March 27, 2013, where the three initiators, Benny Tai, Chan Kin-man, and Reverend Chu Yiu-ming, presented their Manifesto at a press conference. They proclaimed that the movement would employ civil disobedience as a means to exert pressure on the Chinese and the HKSAR Governments to implement universal suffrage. On April 28, 2013, the OCLP secretariat was established and it introduced 10 staunch supporters to the press. Among the three initiators, Tai was a devoted Protestant, Chu was a pastor in the Baptist Church, and Chan claimed that he was a non-institutional Christian.⁴⁾ Five out of the 10 staunch supporters were Protestants.

From the very beginning, the initiators presented OCLP with rich Christian language and imagery.⁵⁾ Tai told the media in an interview, "This is not a political activity. For me, this is a religious activity in which I am preaching therein."⁶⁾ Chan Kin-man added the words "love" and "peace" to the Occupy Movement, expressing the idea of sacrifice, which is a core value in the Christian faith.⁷⁾ The venue of the press conference, Kowloon Union Church, was a plain and unadorned adaptation of an English church. In many photos released by the press, there was a huge brown cross behind the three initiators. These people, their language, and the religious symbols displayed a social movement imbued with Christian messages, which was instrumental in granting religious legitimacy to the campaign and mobilizing the emotions of Christians in Hong Kong.

Data and Research Methods

The data for this article were collected from field research, newspapers, articles on the Internet, and in-depth interviews. The author conducted field research in the occupied zones at Admiralty and Mong Kok during the period of the Occupy Movement. Newspaper reports, particularly articles published by *Christian Times Weekly* in both print and online versions, *Kung Kao Po*, the *Sunday Examiner*, and the *Union of Catholic Asian News*, were important sources of reference. In-depth interviews were conducted with ten informants, including four members of the Organizing Committee of OCLP, one member of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese (HKJP), one member of the Hong Kong Christian Institute, two clergymen from mainline Protestant churches, a member of the Clergy Station for Spiritual Support in Admiralty, and a member of St. Francis Chapel on the Street in Mong Kok.

CHRISTIAN ACTIVISM AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN OCLP

This section discusses the relationship between Christian activism and political participation through political opportunities, framing processes, and mobilizing structures, which partially accounted for the emergence of OCLP.

Political Opportunity for Constitutional Reform

In December 2013, the HKSAR Government commenced a five-month public consultation on the methods for selecting the Chief Executive in 2017 by universal suffrage and for forming the Legislative Council in 2016. The major issues surrounding the method for selecting the Chief Executive included the size and composition of the Nominating Committee

(NC), the electorate base of the NC, and the method for forming the NC. The issues related to the method for forming the Legislative Council were the number of seats and the composition of the Legislative Council, the composition and electorate base of functional constituencies, and the number of geographical constituencies and number of seats in each geographical constituency.

Hong Kong people have been striving for universal suffrage since the 1980s, expecting that a democratic system and election would be realized in Hong Kong. On numerous occasions, social activists and democrats expressed their demands to the HKSAR Government, in particular the implementation of dual elections. The NPCSC's endorsement of Hong Kong's right to universal suffrage after 2017 was meant to show the relative openness of the institutionalized political system, and many people thought that the year 2017 would offer them a political opportunity to strive for universal suffrage. Although the Hong Kong Basic Law stated that Hong Kong people would be allowed to select their Chief Executive, Hong Kong people came to doubt that the Chinese Government would keep its promise and abide by the Basic Law in view of the government's authoritarian rule in Mainland China.

For Hong Kong people, the urgent issue has been the selection of the Chief Executive by universal suffrage in 2017. In December 2013, the Alliance for True Democracy, a group made up of 26 pan-democrat lawmakers, suggested introducing a three-track system. This proposal aimed at allowing Hong Kong people and political parties to nominate candidates for the selection of Chief Executive and avoid the political pre-screening maneuvered by the Chinese Government.

In the same social milieu, Benny Tai proposed the idea of "Occupy Central" in the *Hong Kong Economic Journal* on January 16, 2013. In his article titled "The Most Destructive Weapon of Civil Disobedience," Tai suggested employing civil disobedience to exert pressure on the

Chinese Government to abide by its promise and allow Hong Kong people to select their own Chief Executive. Tai clearly expressed his motivation for wanting to grasp this political opportunity in this article: “Looking from the present situation, the chance is minimal in asking the Chinese Government to give Hong Kong people true elections. Then, for Hong Kong people, pan-democrats and the civil society who want the realization of true elections, what can they do?” (Tai 2013a: 32) Tai pointed out that pan-democrats had tried a variety of methods in protesting against the Chinese Government, including large-scale rallies, a de facto referendum by means of resignation of five geographical constituencies, and hunger strikes. He asserted that Hong Kong people needed to employ a more powerful weapon in striving for true elections, that is, to occupy Central. Tai suggested that to urge the Chinese Government to abide by the Basic Law, protesters would need to illegally occupy the financial area in Central for a long period of time. One important factor in Tai’s proposal of civil disobedience was that the HKSAR Government was unlikely to repress social protests in Hong Kong, which was very different from the situation in Mainland China. Tai’s article rapidly attracted the attention of social activists, and OCLP materialized in two months.

Framing Civil Disobedience

Benny Tai, Chan Kin-man, and Reverend Chu Yiu-ming launched OCLP and presented its Manifesto at a press conference on March 27, 2013. The Manifesto included three fundamental convictions:

1. The electoral system of Hong Kong must satisfy international standards in relation to universal suffrage. They consist of political rights to an equal number of votes, equal weight for each vote, and no unreasonable restrictions on the right to stand for election.

2. The concrete proposal of the electoral system of Hong Kong should be decided by means of a democratic process, which should consist of deliberation and authorization by citizens.
3. Any act of civil disobedience, which aims to fight for realizing a democratic universal and equal suffrage in Hong Kong through illegal actions, has to be absolutely non-violent.

It was suggested that the campaign consist of four basic steps: signing a covenant, deliberation day, citizen authorization, and civil disobedience. If the Chinese and HKSAR Governments continued to ignore the demands of Hong Kong people and introduce an election method that violated international standards, they would carry out acts of civil disobedience, including "Occupy Central".⁸⁾

"Civil disobedience," with its spirit of sacrifice, was the frame of OCLP and this was fully expressed in the Manifesto. In the official webpage of OCLP, an article discussed Henry D. Thoreau's idea of civil disobedience, along with the stories of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., who put the idea into practice in their respective societies. Benny Tai was inspired more by King's model of civil disobedience than the Gandhian model.⁹⁾ Tai discussed King's model in the context of Hong Kong in his book *Occupy Central: The Psychological Warfare Room for Peaceful Protest* (Tai 2013a: 110-118), and an abridged version of King's *Letter from Birmingham Jail* was listed in the appendices of the book.

The frame of civil disobedience in OCLP had both secular and religious elements, which attracted social activists and Christians, respectively. During that time, the democratic movement was in a stalemate of fragmentation, with the pan-democrats splitting into moderate and radical democrats, and political parties and social organizations in conflict with each other. In facing the selection of the Chief Executive in

2017, there was no political platform on which the fragmented democrats and social activists could make concerted efforts in striving for universal suffrage. When Benny Tai proposed the idea of Occupy Central, the moral vision rapidly attracted democrats and social activists who responded positively to the idea. They considered that the OCLP initiators were not taking advantage of the movement. OCLP created a new political platform for the fragmented democrats and social activists, who were willing to work together for the common goal of constitutional reform.

The religious element of civil disobedience in OCLP attracted the attention of Christian community. This can be explained by the framing strategy that was in consonance with the values of the Christian faith. The virtues of “love and peace” and the spirit of sacrifice embedded in civil disobedience are central doctrines of Christianity. Tai wrote a number of articles explaining the relationships between King’s model of civil disobedience, the civil rights movement, and the Christian faith.¹⁰ He also explained to Christians in person the relevance of OCLP with the Christian faith in seminaries and hundreds of churches before the occupation took place. On these occasions, he used Christian language to communicate with his fellow Christians, persuading church leaders and lay Christians to support OCLP. This explained why so many Christians, particularly Protestants, were mobilized to the movement. The Christian community is an integral part of Hong Kong society. With the support of Christian elites and the masses, OCLP was able to secure its social base in Hong Kong.

The Catholic Church and the Protestant community generally expressed their understanding and support of OCLP. The Hong Kong Catholic Diocese issued a Chinese and English public statement titled “An Urgent Call for Earnest Dialogue and Responsible Action: Regarding the Universal Suffrage and Civil Disobedience Statement from the Catholic Diocese in Hong Kong” in *Ming Pao* and the *South China Morning Post*

on July 26, 2013, respectively, and later in *Kung Kao Po* and the *Sunday Examiner* on July 28, 2013, respectively, which stated that the Catholic Church supported OCLP with certain conditions.¹¹⁾ In other words, the Catholic Church endorsed the idea of civil disobedience, and the Catholic Diocese would not object to the act of occupying Central if it satisfied all the conditions stipulated in the statement.

For the Protestant community, Reverend Po Kam-cheong, the General Secretary of the Hong Kong Christian Council (HKCC), highly regarded OCLP. HKCC is an ecumenical organization that represents mainline churches in Hong Kong. As a church leader, Po pointed out in an article that the vision of OCLP was not occupying Central per se, but a movement encouraging Hong Kong people to discuss the public affairs around them, and to make decisions for the future of Hong Kong. He said, "We have to thank the OCLP initiators who put aside their career, fame and personal interest to sacrifice themselves for Hong Kong. They put their faith and passion into the movement, a kind of love, sacrifice and the spirit of service."¹²⁾ This article, to a large extent, reflected the emotions of Christians who were sympathetic to OCLP.

Social Mobilization

The OCLP Movement's organization consisted of a secretariat and two organizing committees, one for Deliberation Days (D-Days) and the other for Occupy Central. In the secretariat, there were approximately seven members, most of whom were volunteers. The organizing committee for D-Days had approximately 30 members, most of whom came from political parties and social organizations. Many of the volunteers who served as consultants in small groups during D-Days were graduates and students from the Department of Law at the University of Hong Kong. The organizing committee for Occupy Central consisted of more than 10 members who were also representatives of political parties and social

organizations. A majority of the members were Christians who could communicate with leaders in churches and Christian organizations. Outside the organizing committee of Occupy Central, a number of formal and informal Christian groups actively assisted in mobilization work, which was instrumental in recruiting supporters to the movement. The pattern of OCLP organization and its mobilization structures fell between the model of social movement organization suggested by McCarthy and Zald and the model of informal groups in work places suggested by McAdam.

Deliberation Days: D-Days aimed at encouraging citizens to discuss constitutional reform, and at the same time mobilize Hong Kong people to take part in OCLP (Chan, KM 2015). There was a total of three D-Days. In the first D-Day, approximately 700 people attended the activity, including 603 OCLP supporters and 95 invited citizens through sampling. Most of the supporters came from the networks of the OCLP initiators, particularly social activists who had known Reverend Chu Yiu-ming for a long period of time. The first D-Day was able to consolidate the support of democrats and social activists.¹³⁾

The second D-Day invited people from a variety of social sectors to discuss different proposals for selecting the Chief Executive. In collaboration with around 20 social organizations, the OCLP committee organized more than 30 sessions with approximately 3,000 people in attendance. Among these sessions, three were arranged for Christians, including “D-Day for Protestants in Support of Constitutional Reform” (October 19, 2013), “D-Day for Catholics Regarding Universal Suffrage” (December 1, 2013), and “D-Day for Christians in Tertiary Education Regarding Constitutional Reform” (January 26, 2014).¹⁴⁾

Taking the “D-Day for Protestants in Support of Constitutional Reform” as an example, this session discussed three different issues: the significance of democracy and universal suffrage for Christians, how to

differentiate proposals for selecting the Chief Executive, and how to understand the act of occupying Central. The four-hour activities consisted of two sessions. The first session invited two speakers to address the issues, and the second session was a group discussion, during which participants were divided into 14 small groups to discuss all the proposals for selecting the Chief Executive. Facilitators were arranged to assist in the discussions in each group. Benny Tai was one of the speakers who addressed the issues. A total of 160 Protestants from 80 different denominations or independent churches attended the activity.¹⁵⁾

Both Catholic and Protestant churches provided material resources in supporting the D-Days. For example, four out of five sites for the third D-Day were church premises, including the Catholic Holy Family Parish in Choi Hung, the North Point and the Tseung Kwan O Methodist Church, and the Xi Lin Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Yuen Long.

Walk for Universal Suffrage: OCLP organized the “Walk for Universal Suffrage” on June 14-20, 2014, calling on citizens to cast their votes for the Civil Referendum. A total of 38 political parties and social and religious organizations co-organized this activity, in which 15 were churches and Christian organizations.¹⁶⁾ Cardinal Joseph Zen, Martin Lee, the founding leader of the Democratic Party, and Audrey Eu, the founding leader of the Civic Party, led the walk in different districts. During that time, the 82-year-old Cardinal Zen walked 12 hours a day around Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, and the New Territories.¹⁷⁾ The 70-year-old Reverend Chu Yiu-ming and members of the Protestants in Support of Constitutional Reform also took part in the activity. The Catholic parishes in Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, and the New Territories were opened as stations for the teams to take a rest in their journey.¹⁸⁾

Civil Referendum: OCLP organized a Civil Referendum held on June 20-29, 2014, calling on citizens to express their will for true elections by

casting votes on three proposals for nominating the Chief Executive, which would be submitted to the HKSAR Government. Cardinal Zen called on Catholics to take part in the Civil Referendum in the Catholic newspaper *Kung Kao Po* on June 22, 2014. He said, "Use this vote to strive for true elections...More people casting their votes would make a strong voice for true elections."¹⁹⁾ Later, Cardinal John Tong also encouraged Catholics to express their concern about Hong Kong's constitutional development in *Kung Kao Po* on May 30, 2014. He reminded Catholics that the Civil Referendum was an opportunity for citizens to express their will on elections, through which Christians should "cast their votes according to their conscience."²⁰⁾

Protestant groups also organized activities to call on Protestants to support the Civil Referendum. The Christian Concern Social Network's Facebook page urged their members to cast their votes in the referendum. The Protestants in Support of Constitutional Reform organized a seminar to urge Protestants to support the referendum. More than 160 people attended the seminar titled "How is Voting on June 22 Related to Christians?" held in Kowloon Union Church on June 13, 2014. The three speakers were the well-known democrat and political scientist, Joseph Cheng, the student leader of Scholarism, Joshua Wong, and a senior pastor, Reverend Kwok Nai-wang.²¹⁾

Christian churches provided material support for the Civil Referendum. There were three voting channels for the Civil Referendum: mobile applications, a website, and physical polling stations. Voters could choose electronic voting or paper ballots at physical polling stations. Nine out of the 21 polling stations were church premises, Christian organizations, and Christian schools. A total of 792,808 people cast their votes for the Civil Referendum, equivalent to a fifth of the registered electorate in the overall population in Hong Kong (Ma, Lee, and Chung 2014).

July 1 Prayer Meeting and July 1 March: Other mobilization activities

were the July 1 prayer meeting and the July 1 march held on July 1, 2014. Five Christian organizations co-organized the July 1 prayer meeting titled "Practice Justice without Fearing the Darkness, Build a New Hong Kong with Universal Suffrage." These organizations included the Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese, the Hong Kong Christian Institute, and Christians for Hong Kong Society. In previous years, the number of attendees was around 300. In 2014, approximately 1,000 Christians attended the activity, including Cardinal Joseph Zen and Martin Lee. Bishop Joseph Ha and Reverend Ralph Lee delivered messages at the prayer meeting representing the Catholic and Protestant Church, respectively.²²⁾ After the activity, all of the participants followed the leaders of the Hong Kong Federation of Catholic Students in joining the July 1 march organized by the Civil Human Rights Front.

The Protestants in Support of Constitutional Reform also participated in the July 1 march. It called for Protestants to meet at a site near the Hong Kong Central Library via its networks. Around 300 Protestants answered the call and took part in the activity. Among the participants, more than 10 clergy came from different denominations and independent churches. They read biblical passages, prayed, and sang hymns together, and then they joined the July 1 march. It was estimated that approximately 510,000 people participated in the July 1 march that year.²³⁾

Rehearsal for Occupying Central: On the evening of July 1, 2014, the Hong Kong Federation of Students called on citizens to stay behind and rehearse occupying Central at Chater Road at Central after the march. The police arrested 511 citizens. The *Apple Daily* reported a list of names of the arrested persons. Four names appeared under the religious sector category: Reverend Lau Chi-hung, Reverend Wong Siu-yung, preacher Fung Kwok-keung, and seminarian Ho Ka-ming. Jacky Hung and Yip Po-lam of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese were also arrested under the category of social

Ming Bao reported the story of Reverend Wong Siu-yung, who was dressed in a black clergy shirt and was holding a big Bible in his hand. Wong conveyed the following message to Hong Kong people in the story: The Bible asks Christians to seek justice. He might have broken the law, but he had not committed a sin in rehearsing occupying Central.²⁵⁾ The news attracted the attention of Hong Kong people, including the Christian community. Later, *Christian Times Weekly* positively reported the story of the three clergy in full, which was featured on its front page.²⁶⁾ The arrested clergy became role models for the Christian community.

The Divinity School of Chung Chi College at the Chinese University of Hong Kong issued a public statement in support of its students and alumni who were also arrested in the incident. The statement held that taking part in the peaceful assembly at Central was an act of faith seeking social justice. The Hong Kong Christian Institute and the Protestants in Support of Constitutional Reform condemned the police for using excessive force in the process of arresting protesters, which was an infringement of human rights.²⁷⁾ The incident fueled the mobilization efforts of OCLP, urging more Christians to take part in the movement.

Protest against the NPCSC's Decision: On August 31, 2014, the NPCSC announced its decision to select the Chief Executive by universal suffrage in 2017, with three very stringent regulations. Hong Kong people were disappointed with this decision. Both OCLP and a number of formal and informal Christian groups organized different activities to protest the NPCSC's decision.

On the evening of August 31, OCLP organized an assembly at Tamar Park, expressing its disappointment in the Chinese Government's restrictions on universal suffrage. Reverend Fung Chi-wood, a member of

the Confession of Christians Watching over Hong Kong, spoke on stage, representing Christians in support of OCLP. The confession was initiated by 206 Protestants and Catholics on August 29, 2014. It criticized the ill practices of those who sided with the Chinese Government, including “labeling peaceful civil disobedience campaigns as violent protests, and camouflaging the one-person, one-vote election through political pre-screening as universal suffrage.” It called on Christians “to confront the ill practices that distort truth and suppress freedom.”²⁸⁾ This group received more than 4,600 names in support of the confession on the Internet in a short period of time.²⁹⁾

A group of around 50 Protestants organized their gathering at Tamar Park before the OCLP assembly. They read out a pledge together: “In this critical moment, we should stand up and carry our crosses; we should take our responsibility to defend our land and city no matter what price we should pay.” Reverend Chu Yiu-ming encouraged them at the site. This pledge was spoken to all Protestants in Hong Kong, persuading them to join their action. *Christian Times Weekly* delivered this message to the Protestant community by reporting their story.³⁰⁾ Another ad hoc action group named Alliance for Christian Action organized its prayer meeting and march in Hong Kong Island on September 14, 2014, protesting against the NPCSC's decision. More than 70 Catholics and Protestants joined this activity.³¹⁾

During that time, some Christian activities became forums to discuss issues surrounding constitutional reform and OCLP, although these activities initially were religious in nature. On August 31, 2014, the Fellowships of Evangelical Students in Hong Kong organized a Bible Conference named “Thy Kingdom? My UniverCity!” The target group was Christian students in universities in Hong Kong. Benny Tai was the first speaker to address the issue of civil disobedience from a Christian perspective. He asserted that Jesus was the greatest proponent of civil disobedience because he disobeyed the Jewish law and chose the path of

crucifixion. More than 120 university students attended this activity.³²⁾

On September 16-17, 2014, the Divinity School of Chung Chi College organized the seminar “Pastoral Care under Changing Political Ecology.” Among the three speakers, two were well-known democrats and political scientists in the city, Joseph Cheng and Ivan Choi. Cardinal Joseph Zen expounded the social responsibility of the Church and encouraged Christians to express concern over political issues in Hong Kong by presenting the Vatican document “Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World.” More than 260 clergy attended the seminar.³³⁾

Preparing to Occupy Central: In facing the tough attitude of the Chinese Government, Benny Tai implicitly conveyed the message that the action of occupying Central would take place on October 1 in an article published by *Apple Daily* on September 23, 2014. Tai made the announcement in the style of Ecclesiastes: “A time for birth and a time for death; a time for planting and a time for uprooting.” He declared, “In Hong Kong, we are also ‘A time for hosting a banquet, and a time to go to a banquet; a time for taking part in civil disobedience, and a time for occupying Central’”³⁴⁾ (Tai 2014). October 1 is the National Day of the People’s Republic of China. Choosing October 1 as the day to begin occupying Central was a symbolic act of protest against the state in both time and space. The style in which Tai conveyed the message added religious energy to the protest. Democrats and social activists from different sectors prepared to take action after Tai’s announcement.

Protestant and Catholic action groups began to discuss how to prepare themselves for occupying Central. The Hong Kong Christian Institute organized two different meetings. On September 9, 2014, 50 people attended the “Preparing to Occupy Central: A Workshop for Christians Exercising Non-violent Protest,” during which the organization explained to the participants the idea of non-violent protest, the knowledge of legal protection and human rights, and how to practice the spiritual exercise of

protest. The participants were divided into six groups to discuss concrete issues regarding occupying action. On September 25, 2014, 40 people attended the "Tea Reception for Joining the Banquet." This meeting divided the participants into different groups and assigned duties to them. Some would take part in the central area of occupying Central, and were prepared to be arrested by the police, whereas others would stay outside and provide assistance to those who were arrested.³⁵⁾

On September 19, 2014, seven Catholic and Protestant organizations organized a seminar titled "Do Not Fear the Darkness, and Refuse the Lie," which was attended by 200 people. Four speakers addressed the issues of the NPCSC's decision and urged attendees to refuse the framework of the NPCSC. Among the speakers, two represented the Catholic and Protestant Church, respectively. Brother William Ng of the Franciscan Order shared his message from the Book of Exodus, the Book of Deuteronomy, and the Book of Psalms, encouraging attendees to be peaceful in facing political turbulence. Reverend Ray Wong, a clergyman from the Church of Christ in China, highlighted four Christian virtues, namely, love, faithfulness, righteousness, and peace, from the biblical passage 85:10 in the Book of Psalms. He also encouraged the attendees by telling them that although the journey of striving for democracy would be lonely, God kept safe seven thousand who had not bent to Baal, using the story of Elijah the prophet in the biblical passage 19:18 in the Book of 1 Kings. The organizer also reminded those who had decided to take part in Occupy Central to well-prepare themselves for action.³⁶⁾

On September 22, 2014, the Protestants in Support of Constitutional Reform also organized its meeting "Well-equipped and Get Moving," which was attended by approximately 100 people. In the meeting, a lawyer explained to the attendees the legal knowledge involved in occupying Central, and Reverend Wu Chi-wai announced their plan in the action. A new action group named Clergy Care with more than 50 clergy and seminarians, would go to Central to provide pastoral care to

protesters, police, and bystanders on October 1. They were divided into three different groups: the inner, middle, and outer circles. Those who worked in the inner circle were prepared to be arrested by the police; those who worked in the middle circle might be arrested; and those who worked in the outer circle would provide assistance to members working in the inner and middle circles. Before going to Central, they would take part in a prayer meeting held at the Congregational Church of the Church of Christ in China in Sheung Wan. Then, they would carry an 8-foot high wooden cross and walk to take part in OCLP together.³⁷⁾

At the same time, two student organizations, the Hong Kong Federation of Students and Scholarism, called for a five-day class boycott campaign, demanding that the NPCSC take back its decision and introduce civil nominations in the selection of Chief Executive. University students began the class boycott on September 22, and secondary school students joined the action on the last day on September 26.³⁸⁾ The two student organizations suddenly called for students who attended the class boycott to occupy Civic Square near the Central Government Office on September 26 at 10:00 p.m., and then continue on to the Umbrella Movement at Admiralty thereafter.

Conclusion

This article has examined the role of Christian activism in the Occupy Movement from the perspective of social movements. Three factors were identified in explaining how Christian activism contributed to the emergence of OCLP. The selection of Chief Executive in 2017 and the consultation on constitutional reform in 2013 provided the political opportunity for democrats and social activists to seek change in the political system. It was in this political setting that Benny Tai proposed

his idea of Occupy Central, and later the idea became OCLP. The movement's frame was "civil disobedience" expressed in the spirit of sacrifice, which was adopted from Martin Luther King, Jr. The mobilization structures consisted of the OCLP's two organizing committees, supported by a number of formal and informal Christian groups actively working outside the movement. These Christian groups provided a variety of resources for OCLP. These three factors partially accounted for Christians' political participation and the emergence of the Occupy Movement in 2013-2014.

The Occupy Movement manifested a unique quality of a religious campaign, which made it different from other previous social movements in Hong Kong. The Occupy Movement upheld the idea of non-violence when the OCLP initiators and their supporters surrendered themselves to the police after 79 days of occupation. In many previous movements, social activists were in conflict with each other because of political interests. The Occupy Movement embraced the values of peace and non-violence, and its proponents led a peaceful protest in the occupied zones of Admiralty, Mong Kok, and Causeway Bay. Although some radical protesters acted violently, in some incidents charging the police cordon line, other protesters made efforts to stop them from further violent action. The Occupy Movement did not cause mass casualties, which can be explained by the fact that the majority of protesters embraced the values of peace and non-violence. The Occupy Movement might not be able to change the political system in 2014, it established a new model of social movements in Hong Kong. After the Occupy Movement, a radical nativist movement emerged and violently confronted the police on the street in the Lunar New Year of 2015. The deteriorated political situation affirms that the spirit of civil disobedience and the value of non-violence is a valuable asset in striving for democratization in Hong Kong.

Note

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Asian Journal of Religion and Society
Vol 5 (No.2, 2017)

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