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The Protestant community and the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong

Shun-hing Chan

Abstract *This paper examines Protestants' participation in the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong through Richard Wood's theory of faith-based community organizing. Protestants were an integral proportion of the protesters in the movement. Despite many church leaders expressing reservations and opposition, the Protestant community displayed a high degree of participation in the Umbrella Movement, far exceeding any previous collective action. The author argues that the Protestant's participation can be explained by the theory of faith-based community organizing, in which organizers of action groups used biblical stories, ideas, images, and symbols to create meaning and to build an internal political culture, leading to the Protestants' spectacular involvement in and commitment to the Umbrella Movement.*

Keywords: Umbrella Movement, Occupation Movement, faith-based community organizing, cultural work, Protestant community, Hong Kong

Introduction

In Mong Kok, the Taoist god of war, Guan Yu, sits in an impressive makeshift temple within the protest site, sharing spiritual space with a chapel where Christians can pray and a place where Buddhist chants are played through a speaker. ... In Admiralty, Pastor Wu Chi-wai has led prayer meetings at 7 pm every day since the movement started. Dozens of people also come to the tent set up for counseling and prayer, sometimes just to chat. (South China Morning Post, October 27, 2014)

The quote above, describing scenes of religion in the occupied zones in Mong Kok and Admiralty, was extracted from an article entitled "Religion on the Occupy Central Front Line Puts Faith into Practice."

The relationship between religion and the Umbrella Movement is an intriguing topic, attracting many reporters and researchers (Chow and Lee 2014, 2015; Kung 2014a; Tsang 2014; Tse 2014, 2015; Wu 2014). The role of Protestantism in the Umbrella Movement is even more spectacular, given the fact that the earlier Occupy Central with Love and Peace (OCLP) Movement was full of Christian images and messages. This paper examines the Protestants' participation in the Umbrella

Movement using religious stories, ideas, images, and symbols through Richard Wood's theory of faith-based community organizing. The research question in this paper is as follows: how did the organizers of Protestant action groups use religious resources to create meaning and to build an internal political culture, facilitating the Protestants' participation in the Umbrella Movement?

The data for this paper were collected from field research, newspapers, articles on the Internet, and in-depth interviews. The author conducted field research in the occupied zones in Admiralty and Mong Kok during the period of the Occupation Movement. Newspaper reports, particularly articles published by the *Christian Times Weekly* in both print and online versions, were important sources of reference. In-depth interviews were conducted with five informants, including Benny Tai, two clergymen from mainline 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.

The first section of this paper will introduce the main themes of this paper and the research question, followed by an explication of Richard Wood's theory of faith-based community organizing in the second section. The third section will explain the background of constitutional reform and the Occupation Movement. The three sections that follow will make up the main body of this paper, investigating the question of how Protestants reacted to the issue of constitutional reform, the OCLP, and the Umbrella Movement, respectively. The final section will provide a summary of the research findings and discuss how Wood's theory advances our understanding of the Protestants' participation in the Umbrella Movement.

Theoretical framework: faith-based community organizing

This paper examines how Protestants in Hong Kong used religious stories, ideas, images, and symbols in response to the issue of constitutional reform and the Umbrella Movement through Richard Wood's theory of faith-based community organizing. This section will explain the theory and discuss how it was applied to the situation in Hong Kong.

Wood has stated that politics is a cultural enterprise because it creates meaning. People engage in political action and talk about politics based on the meanings they attach to the world around them. The theory of faith-based community organizing focuses on meaning that leads to a contingent and temporary quality of political commitment (Wood 2002, 153). Wood believes that people join a political

organization and take part in a political action because they have personal ties with the participants in the same organization, but mostly they are attracted by the cultural meaning created by the political organizers in the organization.

Political organizers make an effort to construct shared meaning for participants, and such meaning defines an organizational culture that binds members together. They also strive to motivate a large number of people and persuade them to take part in a coordinated political action. Wood calls this kind of organizational culture an “internal political culture” (Wood 2002, 154). The term “internal political culture” refers to a set of shared assumptions, perceptions of the world, symbols, and concepts shared by the constituents of an organization, from which members interpret meaning and act in the political world accordingly. Wood uses the term “political culture” in a more bounded sense, narrowly referring to the organizational culture of a group of people pursuing broad political purposes.

Wood has posited that organizers of political organizations build their political culture by drawing on the prior cultural experience of supporters who were involved in a political action. They also rely on a cultural strategy, that is, a conscious decision to construct an organizational political culture by drawing on cultural elements from a particular segment of their potential participants’ social terrain. This area of concern becomes an organization's cultural base for its work in building a political culture (Wood 2002, 155).

Wood holds that the best community organizers engage in cultural work by intentionally importing cultural meanings from the organization's wider environment and reworking these cultural meanings within the organization. These leaders also develop a rich set of cultural tools through the explicit cultural work on the cultural elements themselves. Moreover, community organizers draw on the cultural orientations that the participants bring into the organization, as well as the symbols, stories, images, and ideas that are relevant to them, and rework them. Further, they guide the participants through the received cultural elements, emphasizing some elements, critiquing others, and reinterpreting yet others, by fostering a critical appropriation of these elements (Wood 2002, 156–157).

Following Stephen Hart (2001), Wood has argued that, compared with liberal or progressive movements, conservative political movements in the United States have been much more adept at doing “cultural work” to link their priorities to religious traditions. These religious traditions are powerful instruments that shape the moral

commitment of Americans. In fact, there are many resources in the religious traditions of American life that liberal organizers can draw on to support progressive political movements. For example, the Pacific Institute for Community Organization (PICO) is a progressive organization that has successfully engaged in cultural work (Wood 2003, 395).

Wood's theory of faith-based community organizing is a useful conceptual framework that can be employed to understand how Protestants engage in cultural work in response to the issue of constitutional reform and the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong. However, Wood has primarily focused on the situation of faith-based community organizing in the United States, but the situation in Hong Kong is different from the United States in many aspects. Therefore, critical appropriation is needed when applying this framework to Hong Kong.

Strictly speaking, there is no faith-based community organization in Hong Kong such as the PICO in the United States. However, there are progressive para-church organizations that have been engaged in social and political issues in Hong Kong in the last three decades, and many Christian action groups participated in the contestation of constitutional reform and the Umbrella Movement before or during the occupation period in 2014. These para-church organizations and action groups expressed their views and political positions using biblical stories, ideas, images, and symbols, which is similar to what Wood has described in his theory on faith-based community organizing.

There are conservative Protestant figures, groups, and organizations in Hong Kong that support the government or the establishment and they have also engaged in cultural work, using religious resources to support the government's proposal of constitutional reform and to engage in countermovement mobilization against democratic movements that demand universal suffrage. These conservative forces are comparable to the conservative political organizations drawing on the religious resources of Christian traditions in the United States mentioned by Wood, but such conservative forces are different in both form and content from those in Hong Kong, which is a special administrative region of China. Although Wood emphasized progressive faith-based community organizing, his theory can be used to include those conservative forces producing adverse effects on the collective actions striving for universal suffrage.

Background: constitutional reform and the Occupation Movement

Constitutional reform and the Occupation Movement are two sides of the same coin. The purpose of constitutional reform is to make changes in the political institution, particularly the elections of the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and members of the Legislative Council in 2017 and 2020. The Occupation Movement is a campaign to pressure the Chinese government to implement constitutional reform by means of a social movement (Hui 2015; Ortmann 2015).

The “Occupy Central Movement,” the “Occupation Movement,” and the “Umbrella Movement” refer to different periods of a continuing movement from March 2013 to December 2014. The Occupy Central Movement refers to the Occupy Central with Love and Peace Movement initiated by Benny Tai in the *Hong Kong Economic Journal* on 16 January 2013, which promoted the occupation of the business and financial area Central in Hong Kong. However, the movement left Central and spread to three different regions, including Admiralty, Mong Kok, and Causeway Bay, from 28 September to 15 December 2014, due to a series of unexpected developments in the movement's dynamics. The Umbrella Movement was the name given to the Occupation Movement by international correspondents who captured the moment when protesters used umbrellas to shield themselves from the pepper spray used by the police.

Protestants in Hong Kong have reacted to both constitutional reform and the Occupation Movement. For constitutional reform, Protestants expressed their views in the form of open letters or public statements during the consultation period. For the Occupation Movement, Protestants either acted individually or organized themselves into different action groups. The Protestant action groups expressed their views through a variety of religious gatherings, including prayer meetings, services, and religious assemblies. Most of the Protestants who were involved in the Occupation Movement, including church leaders of different denominations or para-church organizations, emphasized that they represented only themselves in supporting or opposing the movement. Many young Protestants participated in the Occupation Movement, and some openly criticized the church leaders who aligned themselves with the pro-establishment camp. However, many churches' congregants were deeply divided over the decision to support or oppose the Occupation Movement.

Protestants in response to constitutional reform

The first four-month consultation period for constitutional reform in Hong Kong commenced on 4 December 2013. A number of Protestant organizations and action groups issued public statements in response to the consultation document. These public statements conveyed their message either to the general public or to the Protestant community, or both.

On 10 April 2014, an open letter entitled “Concern over the Chief Executive Election in 2017,” led by Philemon Choi Yuen-wan,¹ the Honorary General Secretary of the Breakthrough, and 395 others, was featured in a full-page advertisement in *Ming Bao*. The letter called on “the central government, the Hong Kong SAR government, the Legislative Council, all political parties, and people of all sectors to sincerely, humbly, and rationally engage in dialogue,” and demanded that the “silent majority” in Hong Kong “speak out and take action to achieve the Chief Executive Election in 2017.”² The letter proposed some changes to the election, such as increasing the number of members in the Nomination Committee to expand the base of registered electors and maintaining the nomination number to one-eighth of the Nominating Committee.³

Putting this letter in the context of Hong Kong, several questions are raised. First, can the suggestions in this letter prevent the Beijing government from screening out candidates for election? This letter did not address the issue of screening out candidates, which is the democrats’ basic demand for constitutional reform. At this point, there is no common ground for dialogue between the government and the democrats. Second, the issue at stake is that if the powerful regime denies the powerless Hong Kong people the rights of universal suffrage, then who should be sincere, humble, and rational to engage in dialogue? It is unlikely that the letter will change the attitude of the central government. However, it is also unjust to ask the powerless people in Hong Kong to behave sincerely, humbly, and rationally while their demand for universal suffrage is denied by the government. Third, who are the “silent majority” in Hong Kong? Generally, members of the silent majority are those who care more about their livelihood than political issues; they also prefer social order over chaos. As democrats regularly stage their protests on the streets, protests that appear to be chaotic rather than orderly, this will likely mobilize the silent majority in Hong Kong to oppose the OCLP advocated by the democrats. Perhaps not coincidentally, the name of the pro-Beijing alliance that opposes the OCLP is the Silent Majority for Hong Kong.⁴

The Hong Kong Christian Council (HKCC) and the Hong Kong Methodist Church (Methodist Church) issued public statements on their official web pages and submitted them to the Hong Kong SAR government. On 17 April 2014, the Executive Committee of the HKCC issued a statement entitled “Our Response to the Consultation Document on the Methods for Selecting the Chief Executive in 2017 and for Forming the Legislative Council in 2016.” The first paragraph explicated its faith and values: “The Council believes that God created human beings equally in nature and gave us the rights and duties to manage the earth well so as to build a benevolent, just, peaceful, and sustainable society.” For constitutional reform, the HKCC urged the government to

implement universal suffrage of the Chief Executive and all members of the Legislative Council and abolish every kind of functional constituencies as soon as possible, so that a more democratic Hong Kong governed by Hong Kong people can be established.⁵

The statement provided detailed suggestions for selecting the Chief Executive in 2017 and the seats of the Legislative Council.

The Methodist Church issued a similar public statement entitled “Our Opinions on the Consultation Document on the Methods for Selecting the Chief Executive in 2017 and Forming the Legislative Council in 2016” in April 2014. In the first paragraph, the statement directly addressed the issue of constitutional reform, urging the government to implement general elections for the Chief Executive and members of the Legislative Council.⁶ The Methodist Church, which supports democracy and universal suffrage, is the most progressive denomination in Hong Kong. The political implication of these statements is that the HKCC and the Methodist Church have sided with pan-democrats in demanding that the government implement constitutional reform leading to democratization.

Other public statements were specifically targeted at Protestants, rather than the general public. Early in September 2013, led by Reverend Wu Chi-wai of the Hong Kong Church Renewal Movement, an action group named Protestants in Support of Constitutional Reform issued a mission statement expressing their position on standing with the OCLP and the use of civil disobedience to pressure the government on universal suffrage, urging Protestants in Hong Kong to support constitutional reform. Jointly signed by 250 Protestants, this mission statement was published in the

newspapers *Christian Times* and *Ming Bao* on 22 and 23 September 2013, respectively. Members of this action group were a combination of Protestants from evangelical and mainline churches.⁷

The action group issued another public statement in April 2014, which stated four suggestions in response to the government's consultation document. One of the suggestions was to employ the method of civil nomination in selecting the Chief Executive in 2017, which was a basic demand put forth by the democrats.⁸ This statement was jointly signed by 446 Protestants from 25 denominations, including Joshua Wong of Scholarism, a student activist who played a key role in the Umbrella Movement. After issuing two statements and organizing some activities, this action group attracted more and more Protestants to join its campaign. The next section will further explain its activities in the occupied zone in Admiralty from September to December 2014.

The Protestant community and the OCLP

On 27 March 2013, Benny Tai, Chan Kin-man, and Chu Yiu-ming officially announced the launch of the OCLP and presented its Manifesto at a press conference held at the Kowloon Union Church, stating that the movement would employ civil disobedience to pressure the government to implement universal suffrage (Tai 2013, 32–59). On 28 April 2013, the OCLP secretariat was established and it introduced ten staunch supporters to the press.

From the beginning, the OCLP has been imbued with Christian elements.⁹ Among the three initiators, Tai is a devoted Protestant and Chu is a pastor of the Baptist Church, while Chan attended church when he was young. 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” (*Common Wealth Magazine*, 20 August 2013). The key words “love” and “peace” in the OCLP reflect the core values of Christianity. The venue of the press conference, the 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. Among the ten staunch supporters, at least five were Protestants, including Reverend Kwok Nai-wang, solicitor Herman Tang, investment manager Edward Chin, customer manager Tsui Siu-wa, and writer Chan Wai. These people, their language, and the religious symbols conveyed rich Christian messages to the general public, displaying a unique style of a campaign that is different from other social movements in the past. In other words,

Christians could easily read the meanings behind the movement.

After the three initiators announced their Manifesto at the press conference, Protestants debated with each other in talks and seminars organized by churches and para-church organizations, and in the newspapers the *Christian Times Weekly* (Tai et al. 2013; Kung 2014b; Law 2015; Wu 2015). Some disputed the ideas of the movement, particularly employing an illegal act of civil disobedience to achieve a just goal of universal suffrage. Benny Tai addressed the issues in person at many of these activities, persuading Protestants to support the OCLP.¹⁰

Protestants who opposed the OCLP

Reverend Daniel Ng of the Kong Fok Church, the Evangelical Free Church of China, was a controversial figure who openly opposed the OCLP. On 6 April 2013, he distributed his article “How Should Christians Understand Civil Disobedience?” during Sunday service in church. In the article, he described the act of civil disobedience as anti-social behavior and proposed two principles for using civil disobedience, referring to biblical stories:

Only when the right of religion (and not the right of choosing a political institution) and the right to survive (the right to ‘save heads’ rather than ‘count heads’) are threatened by the government can one engage in the contingent act of civil disobedience, which is permissible by the Bible.¹¹

The article concluded that Christians should pray for authority, respect the governor, and assist the government or the ruling party in achieving the designated goals. Through the article, Ng attempted to use biblical stories to persuade Protestants in his church to dissociate themselves from the OCLP and support the Chinese government's institutional arrangement.

The Archbishop Paul Kwong and the Provincial Secretary-General Reverend Peter Douglas Koon Ho-ming of the Hong Kong Anglican Church also rejected the OCLP, although they claimed that their comments were their personal views, rather than speaking for the church. Kwong was also a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in Mainland China. In September 2013, Kwong criticized the OCLP in an interview published by *The Provincial Echo*, an official publication of the Hong Kong Anglican Church. In the article “Universal Suffrage Is Not a Panacea,” he stated that universal suffrage was not a panacea to solving the

problem of the livelihood of the people and other political and economic issues; the year 2014 was not the last chance for universal suffrage, so one should not use civil disobedience to pressure the government on universal suffrage; and the people of Hong Kong have a right to an election, but they also have a duty to solve problems in society (*The Provincial Echo*, 2 September 2013).

Kwong went further in his Sunday sermon, criticizing social activists for protesting and speaking out too much, which caused a political uproar in the city (*South China Morning Post*, 8 July 2014). On 6 July 2014, he delivered a sermon at St. Paul's Church, during which he used the story of Jesus who remained silent in the face of Pilate, like a lamb awaiting slaughter, to convey a message to his congregants that “silence is better than saying anything.”¹² The implication of this incident was that the archbishop of the Anglican Church persuaded his congregants to keep silent about social and political issues by invoking the crucifixion of Jesus in the Bible.

Koon's comments on the OCLP also stirred up controversies. Interviewed by a reporter for the newspaper *Wenweibao*, he expressed his view in an article entitled “The Anglican Church: A Consensus from the Religious Sector to Oppose the Occupy Central Movement,” in which he asserted that people from the religious sector should not encourage illegal behavior that was equal to “telling people that it was alright to run a red light” (*Wenweibao*, 1 April 2014). This comment was targeted at the idea of civil disobedience advocated by the OCLP. As a state-owned newspaper in Hong Kong, controlled by the Liaison Office of the Central Government, Koon's comments on the OCLP in *Wenweibao* should not be interpreted as his personal view; instead, they revealed a kind of working relationship between the Anglican Church and the Chinese government.

Kwong's sermon was met with strong criticism from the Protestant community. A group of evangelical Protestants issued a public statement entitled “The Words of Archbishop Paul Kwong Do Not Speak for Us” in the newspaper *Christian Times Weekly* (20 July 2014). A group of alumni from Anglican schools urged Kwong to take back his words in a public statement that used the biblical story of David and Goliath as an analogy, referring to the Hong Kong people as David and the Chinese government as Goliath. They criticized Kwong for helping the giant Goliath, which was tantamount to helping the tyrant victimize his subjects. The statement concluded that “if we have faith to rely on God and for the glory of God, we will fight for the cause; we can defeat the giant and strive for a more just society” (*Christian Times Weekly*, 20 July 2014). This use of a biblical story as an analogy made a powerful

religious-moral judgement in the controversial issue of constitutional reform: the Hong Kong people's fight for universal suffrage is a just war, and the Anglican archbishop helping the Chinese government is an offense against God. This analogy was used again later by Protestants in support of the OCLP.

A group of young Anglicans from different churches issued a public statement entitled “Searching for Reconciliation: A Public Statement and Charter of Young People of the Hong Kong Anglican Church Concerned Over the Opinions of Clergy and the Situation of Hong Kong” in April 2014 (*Christian Times Weekly*, 27 April 2014). They urged Koon to clarify his comments on civil disobedience, and called on young Anglicans to become engaged in issues concerning social justice in Hong Kong and to realize the fourth mark of the church mission “to transform the unjust structure of society, to challenge violence of every kind, and to pursue peace and reconciliation,” referring to the “Five Marks of Mission” advocated by the Anglican Communion.¹³ This call for social justice used values embedded in the Anglican tradition to criticize the two Anglican Church leaders who were ignoring social justice in Hong Kong.

Another group of young people in the Anglican Church organized St. Francis Action, and they expressed their discontent with the words of Kwong by organizing a silent protest, gazing at the Celtic cross in the garden of St. John's Cathedral (*Christian Times Weekly*, 24 August 2014). The term “St. Francis” refers to St. Francis of Assisi (1182–1226), who was a Christian model of holistic spiritual living. These young people invoked the saint as a sacred icon to protest against Anglican clergy leaning toward the government.¹⁴

In addition to the Evangelical Free Church of China and the Hong Kong Anglican Church, the Jireh Fund and the churches of the Assemblies of God also organized prayer meetings to mobilize Protestants to dissociate themselves from the OCLP (*Christian Times Weekly*, 19 October 2014). These examples fully explain how a number of church leaders from different denominations, churches, and para-church organizations in Hong Kong echoed the Chinese government in opposing the OCLP.

Protestants who supported the OCLP

The “Occupy Central with Peace: Theological Seminar” organized by the Chung Chi Divinity School at The Chinese University of Hong Kong held on 4–5 November 2013, was an extraordinary activity that focused on the ideas of the OCLP from a theological perspective. The two-day seminar was attended by 200 people each day.

Those who presented papers were mainly professors from the Chung Chi Divinity School. Supporters and opponents of the OCLP, including Benny Tai, Chan Kin-man, Reverend Chu Yiu-ming, Reverend Daniel Ng, and Maria Tam Wai-chu were invited to debate the issues. In the final session, the organizer arranged for a group of pastors, including Reverend Chu Yiu-ming and Reverend Daniel Ng, to assist in the administration of an Ecumenical Holy Communion. Although the speakers did not come to a conclusion on the OCLP, the themes “Christians should obey God” and “Christians should protest against unjust rulers” were outstanding in the two-day seminar. These themes were consistent with the ideas of the OCLP, which also indirectly refuted the arguments stated by Reverend Daniel Ng in his article regarding the two principles of civil disobedience. *Christian Times Weekly* reported on the seminar in full, which was featured on its front page (*Christian Times Weekly*, 10 November 2013). This report to the Protestant community conveyed the message that professors of theology endorsed the ideas of the OCLP; hence, Protestants had a religious ground to participate in the movement.

A few church leaders openly defended the OCLP. One example is the General Secretary of the Hong Kong Christian Council, Reverend Po Kam-cheong. In his article “Serve the People: The Occupy Central Movement and the Church,” Po praised the three initiators of the OCLP for sacrificing themselves for Hong Kong and explained to the Protestant community the relevance of the movement to the mission of the church (*Christian Times Weekly*, 24 August 2014). He pointed out that, in addition to providing social services, the church should “strive for justice, speak for the vulnerable, reform society, and even protest against political institutions,” citing the document “Theological Perspective on Diakonia in the Twenty-first Century” published by the World Council of Churches in 2012.¹⁵ He reminded Protestants that the church had a role to play in the OCLP:

The church not only can organize meetings to pray for the future of Hong Kong, but also can participate in reflection and education in the congregation. ... At the same time, the church needs to be prepared for what may happen soon and provide pastoral services and support to those people who need care and help.

The article concluded that

Hong Kong is facing a critical moment. Which direction is our society heading toward? Democratic or more autocratic? Just or more unequal? Ascending or descending? Full of spirit or hopelessness? The future is in the hands of each of

us, and in the grace and promise of God.

This article was noteworthy in several aspects. Appealing to his prestigious position and the authority of the World Council of Churches, this church leader attempted to confer religious legitimacy to the OCLP. The article could also be understood as a response to Kwong's message in his interview "Universal Suffrage Is Not a Panacea," in which Kwong emphasized solving the problem of people's livelihood and downplayed universal suffrage. Clergy and lay leaders from the Protestant community, particularly those who are affiliated with the mainline churches and the ecumenical movement, should have been able to read the meanings behind the paragraphs. The article's call for the church to play a role in providing care and help for the OCLP movement's participants eventually came to fruition. On 28 September 2014, some churches located near Admiralty became shelters for the protesters who suffered from the canisters of tear gas fired by the police. During the time of the occupation movement, an action group named Clergy Station for Spiritual Support was established to provide counseling services for protesters in the occupied zone in Admiralty. These events will be discussed further in a subsequent section.

In the second half of 2014, many organizations from the pro-establishment camp launched fierce verbal attacks against the OCLP. On 29 August, a group of Protestants and Catholics issued the "Confession of Christians Watching over Hong Kong."¹⁶ Initiated by 206 Christians, this confession received support from more than 4600 people on the Internet in a short period of time. Reverend Ray Wong, a clergyman from the Church of Christ in China, explained the ideas of the confession at a press conference held at the Methodist Church in Wan Chai and called on Christians to uphold the fundamental principles of the Bible.

The confession criticized the "recent emergence of ill practices" in Hong Kong, including "labeling peaceful civil disobedience campaigns as violent protests, and camouflaging the one-person, one-vote election through political pre-screening as 'universal suffrage'." The confession stressed that although Protestants should respect and be tolerant of one another, that "does not mean we should evade the truth. Imagine: If we had reluctantly remained neutral or advocated conciliation in the confrontation between David and Goliath, we would have abetted the tyrannical deeds of the oppressor." The confession outlined three major ill practices in Hong Kong during that time: deception and distortion of the facts; using threats and bait to elicit political allegiance and suppress dissenting voices; and using all kinds of means to limit Hong Kong people's exercise of democratic rights. The confession urged

Christians “to rely on God to stand against the corrupting power ... and to confront the ill practices that distort truth and suppress freedom.”

The media widely reported the confession with a photo, showing a group of Christians standing behind Wong. The confession attracted the media's attention because the clergy rarely appeared as spokespersons addressing social or political issues in Hong Kong. On 31 August, Reverend Fung Chi-wood of the Anglican Church gave a speech at the Occupy Central rally held at Tamar Park, representing the presence of the action group Christians Watching over Hong Kong. The action group also organized a prayer meeting on 12 September, which was attended by approximately 300 Christians. At the prayer meeting, Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kium of the Catholic Church was one of the speakers who addressed the issue with two Protestant speakers representing mainline and evangelical churches.

The confession was a joint effort uniting Protestants and Catholics in reaction to the pro-establishment camp's counter-mobilization in defaming the OCLP. The confession used the biblical story of David and Goliath again to illuminate the political situation in Hong Kong: David as the Hong Kong people and Goliath as the Chinese government. It conveyed the following message: This is a war between the powerless and the powerful, as well as a war between truth and the ill-practices of corrupting power; those who remain neutral or advocate conciliation are abetting the oppressor. Some Protestant individuals and action groups did choose to remain neutral and advocate conciliation. One example is the open letter “Concern over the Chief Executive Election in 2017” led by Philemon Choi Yuen-wan. The use of the biblical story of David and Goliath conferred a sacred meaning to the OCLP and the effort of striving for constitutional reform: this is a just war, and Hong Kong people will triumph in the end.

After the three initiators of the OCLP launched the movement in March 2013, Protestants enthusiastically took part and debated among themselves in prayer meetings, talks, and seminars. After deliberating for over 16 months, they were ready to take action in the movement's next stage.

The Protestant community and the Umbrella Movement

Many Protestant individuals and action groups were involved in the Umbrella Movement during the occupation period from 28 September to 15 December 2014. This section will focus on the following three episodes: churches serving as shelters

for protesters who suffered from tear-gas canisters; a group of clergy who organized a station to provide spiritual care in Admiralty; and a group of young Protestants who organized services and protests through St. Francis Chapel on the Street in Mong Kok.

The church as a shelter for protesters

One of the critical moments in which Christianity was closely related to the Umbrella Movement was when churches opened for protesters after the police fired 87 tear-gas canisters at the crowds in Admiralty on 28 September 2014. That evening, the Methodist Church in Wan Chai became a resting place for the victims who suffered from tear-gas inhalation. The church was also used for a press conference to call on the police to exercise restraint in handling the demonstration. An evening service was held surrounding the issue of constitutional reform and the OCLP. The clergyman used the story of Jesus and the 14 Stations of the Cross to comfort the congregants, referring to their long journey of striving for democracy (*Christian Times Weekly*, 5 October 2014). Other churches located near the occupied zones in Causeway Bay and Mong Kok also opened for protesters at a later time.

The Methodist Church was soon attacked by a Legislative Council member from the pro-establishment camp. On 30 September, Ip Kwok-him, a member from the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong, called for an investigation into the churches providing shelter for the protesters, referring to “sources” who claimed that local churches were being contacted by sister congregations in the United States and were receiving materials supporting the protesters. This accusation implied that “foreign forces” were attempting to trigger a color revolution in Hong Kong, and the church was an instrument of such “foreign forces,” referring to the government of the United States (*China Daily*, 31 October 2014).

The next day, Reverend Yuen Tin-yau of the Methodist Church issued a retort at Ip for making an accusation without evidence. In his widely circulated pastoral letter “A Church at the Crossroads,” he stated, “We do this not because we support ‘Occupy Central’ but because of our position as a Church in Wan Chai ... Our church is becoming a church without barriers, welcoming people to pray, rest, enjoy their lunch, and use the toilet.”¹⁷ Yuen might have given this explanation to avoid the accusation that the church was involved in illegal or political activity. This confrontation resulted in the church becoming a symbol supporting the Umbrella Movement, even though

the clergy had no intention of doing so. The attack from the pro-establishment camp strengthened the impression that the church was an ally of the movement.

Clergy station for spiritual support in Admiralty

During the period from 28 September to 15 December 2014, members of the action group Protestants in Support of Constitutional Reform organized another group, named Clergy Care, which provided spiritual support to protesters in three occupied zones—Admiralty, Causeway Bay, and Mong Kok. This group delivered messages of peace and hope to the protesters by praying, singing hymns, and reading scriptures. Initially, they walked around the zones to pray and to sing hymns for protesters. Later, they concentrated on their work in Admiralty and set up the Clergy Station for Spiritual Support. The clergy station was decorated with religious symbols and a big wooden cross, including the slogans such as “Take up the cross, defend our city.” There was a duty list for the clergy and a regular timetable for hymn singing and praying. According to reports, this station provided counseling for a number of protesters who were frustrated and felt lost during the occupation period.¹⁸ Clergy Care also conducted Sunday service in the occupied zone. On 5 October 2014, more than 30 clergy members from different denominations and churches celebrated World Communion Sunday in Admiralty, and approximately 500 Christians took part in Holy Communion (*Christian Times Weekly*, 12 October 2014).

Several questions should be examined regarding the relationship between this action group and the Umbrella Movement. Who received the counseling services and what kinds of services were they offered? Those who received counseling services were protesters with or without Christian faith, but the majority of the protestors were Protestants from different churches.¹⁹ Group members listened to their questions and prayed for them. Some protesters came from churches that opposed the Occupation Movement, and group members affirmed their participation in the movement and encouraged them spiritually.²⁰

How did the counseling services relate to the goals of the Umbrella Movement? In the interview with interviewee 4, who was a member of Clergy Care, the following question was raised: the term “care” is ambiguous; does it relate to the goals of the Umbrella Movement? Her reply was that in the group there were clergy who supported or opposed the Umbrella Movement. They cared for the people in the movement, not the movement per se.²¹ Reverend Wu Chi-wai, the organizer of the Clergy Station for Spiritual Support, made a similar remark in his article: ““Clergy

Care' was established in response to the OCLP. The aim of the group goes beyond political stances, attempting to bring the presence of Christ into the occupied zone."²² The data that was collected showed that group members had different motivations for taking part in the work of the counseling services. Some embraced the goals of the OCLP, while others wanted to bring the presence of Christianity into the movement.²³ Some even tried to preach the gospel to protesters.²⁴

Finally, to what extent did this activity affect the Umbrella Movement? Although there were many Christians who took part in the movement, the majority of protesters were not Christians. The media paid more attention to St. Francis Chapel on the Street in the occupied zone in Mong Kok and their reports focused more on the chapel than on the clergy station in Admiralty. *Christian Times Weekly* reported stories on the clergy station both in its print and online versions, but its readers were overwhelmingly Protestant. There was little discussion about the clergy station on the Internet, which showed that non-Christian protesters were not interested in it. To make a prudent assessment of the effect of the clergy station on the movement, it may be concluded that it was instrumental in building a Christian base in support of the Umbrella Movement with its symbols, rituals, and services at a time when many churches or para-church organizations expressed their reservations or opposition to the movement, despite the multiple motivations among members of the action group. The counseling services encouraged Christian protesters to uphold their faith and boosted their morale, which indirectly provided support in sustaining the movement.

St. Francis Chapel on the Street in Mong Kok

There was a small tent chapel named St. Francis Chapel on the Street in the occupied zone in Mong Kok that conducted masses and services during the occupation. The establishment of the chapel was a reflection of the makeshift temple of the Chinese deity Guan Yu built by protesters in Mong Kok in early October 2014. Guan Yu is a symbol of justice, expressing the morality of Chinese popular religion. The temple inspired some Christians to build their own chapel on the street.

The chapel first appeared at Nathan Road near Shan Tung Street on 8 October. It was managed by three groups of young Christians who were from the Anglican Church, the Catholic Church, and the Slow Church in the evangelical tradition. A small working group named Brothers of the Chapel was stationed at the chapel and carried out routine duties. The group was assisted in the chapel's management by more than ten Christians. They held meetings and discussed matters surrounding the

chapel on a weekly basis. The Protestants of the Slow Church joined the chapel at a later stage, and they also used it to conduct services. Generally, the services were attended by 20 to 30 people, ages 20 to 40 years old; some were university students. The police removed the temple and the chapel on 18 October. However, Brothers of the Chapel set up the altar again on 19 October and the chapel was fully erected a few days later. The Sunday service on 19 October was attended by more than 50 people.²⁵

The political orientation of these young Christians in St. Francis Chapel on the Street was different from the Protestants in Clergy Station for Spiritual Support. This action group represented the thoughts and behaviors of young Christians who were born after the 1980s. One member of the Slow Church was interviewed in an attempt to understand this group of young Christians. More concretely, his story focused more on the evangelical Protestants affiliated with the Slow Church, rather than on the Anglicans and Catholics.²⁶

Interviewee 2 took part in the work at St. Francis Chapel on the Street because he held that Christians should have a voice in the Umbrella Movement. He asserted that the chapel's action group was a “body of Christ” and a church in the city, reflecting the double identities of a Hongkonger and a Protestant. However, he was disappointed with the church in Hong Kong. Using a continuum to explain what he perceived as the political stances of Protestants in Hong Kong, he held that on one end of the line there were conservative Protestants who belonged to the pro-establishment camp, and on the other end there were progressive Protestants who were ready to fight for democracy. In between the two ends there were Protestants who lacked political consciousness but the OCLP woke up some of these Protestants.

He and his fellow Protestants were frustrated about the political predicament in Hong Kong, hoping that they could do something for society. The Umbrella Movement aroused their deep-seated passion, so they took part in the work of the chapel and conducted services on the street. He stated that there were two kinds of Protestants in the Umbrella Movement, those who were affiliated with Benny Tai and chose a moderate position, and those who chose a progressive position. The former were Protestants who organized the Clergy Station for Spiritual Support in Admiralty, and the latter were members of the Slow Church who actively took part in the work at St. Francis Chapel on the Street in Mong Kok. These young Christians were ready to fight the police on the front line. The motto of their faith was the “spirit of sacrifice; God with his people; and God is the judge of the world.” They believed that protests with force could change society. Interviewee 2 was also a member of Civic Passion, a

populist political group in Hong Kong advocating the views of local people.

To what extent did the activities of these Protestants from St. Francis Chapel on the Street relate to the Umbrella Movement? The action group proclaimed that Jesus was a protester on the streets. One of the main themes in the services was “moral judgement,” that Jesus condemned unjust deeds in society and would exercise judgment. This shows that these Protestants attempted to construct religious meanings for the Umbrella Movement and conferred legitimacy to their progressive action. St. Francis Chapel on the Street provided an opportunity for these young Protestants to connect their faith with social activism.

This action group took part in a number of protests that attempted to put their faith into action. Interviewee 2 related the following story, which illustrates the progressive character of these Protestants. There was an occasion when interviewee 2 was delivering a sermon in a service attended by approximately 20 Protestants. He told them that he had heard that Li Siyan, one of the figures in the anti-occupation movement, and her group was approaching Mong Kok. They suspended their service immediately and went to stage their protest against Li. Later, they returned to the chapel and continued their service.²⁷ This story vividly shows that protesting was an expression of their faith. These Protestants were an integral part of the progressive group in the Umbrella Movement. After the occupation in Mong Kok, some Protestants became members of the Slow Church, while others connected with the church through Facebook. These Protestants endeavored to continue their faith and action together. As such, they represent a rising new generation of young progressive Protestants in Hong Kong who have committed themselves to democratization and social change in the years to come.

Discussion and conclusion

This paper has examined how Protestants used religious resources to express their views on constitutional reform and to participate in the Umbrella Movement. Such cultural works shaped the internal political culture in the Protestant community in general and in their action groups or churches in particular. During the Umbrella Movement, many action groups organized different kinds of religious activities in reaction to the issues promoted by the Umbrella Movement. Protestants in Support of Constitutional Reform, Christians Watching over Hong Kong, and St. Francis Chapel on the Street are three illustrative examples of these action groups.

Church leaders who expressed their views on the Umbrella Movement in the congregation can also be seen as engaging in community organizing work, that is, to organize collective action among congregants in the church. Examples include Reverend Yuen Tin-yau of the Methodist Church, who opened his church to shelter protesters and issued his pastoral letter “A Church at the Crossroads”; Reverend Daniel Ng of the Kong Fok Church, who distributed his article “How Should Christians Understand Civil Disobedience?” in his church; and Archbishop Paul Kwong of the Anglican Church, who delivered a sermon at St. Paul's Church on why “silence is better than saying anything.”

This work of community organizing was faith-based in nature because the organizers of the action groups or church leaders from different denominations used religious resources to express their political views and positions. For example, Protestants in Support of Constitutional Reform issued a mission statement, established the working group Clergy Care, and set up the Clergy Station for Spiritual Support in Admiralty, which was decorated with religious symbols and slogans; the confession issued by Christians Watching over Hong Kong urged Christians to rely on God in fighting against ill practices and corrupt power in society; and St. Francis Chapel on the Street held services in Mong Kok, attempting to connect Christian faith with the goals of the Umbrella Movement.

These organizers and church leaders were doing cultural work using religious resources in their campaigns. In response to a particular issue in the political context of Hong Kong, they expressed their views by presenting specific biblical stories, religious images, and symbols. These responses created meaning, which was instrumental in shaping a particular internal political culture in their action group or in the Protestant community. For example, the mission statement of Protestants in Support of Constitutional Reform used Christian language to persuade Protestants to support the OCLP Movement; the counseling services provided by the Clergy Station for Spiritual Support was embedded with political messages, encouraging Protestant protesters in the occupied zone in Admiralty to adhere to the principles and values of the OCLP; the confession issued by Christians Watching over Hong Kong condemned the ill practices of the pro-establishment camp using the biblical story of David and Goliath to define the relationship between Hong Kong people and the Chinese government and to affirm the acts of Hong Kong people in striving for universal suffrage; and members of the Slow Church in St. Francis Chapel on the Street presented Jesus as a protester, connecting Christian faith with social activism and promoting a progressive local political culture among young Protestants.

Church leaders who used Christian language to express their political stands in the Umbrella Movement were also doing cultural work, nurturing a particular internal political culture within the church. Reverend Yuen Tin-yau of the Methodist Church opened his church to shelter protesters in Admiralty, which reflects a liberal political culture within the Methodist Church. On the contrary, in the context of constitutional reform and the Umbrella Movement, Reverend Daniel Ng of the Kong Fok Church asked his congregants to assist the government in achieving its designated goals, which indicates the organization of a conservative political culture aligned with the pro-establishment camp, supporting the Chinese government in limiting Hong Kong people's right of universal suffrage. Equally, Archbishop Paul Kwong of the Anglican Church delivered a sermon to his congregants in which he instructed them to learn from Jesus, who remained silent in the face of Pilate. In doing so, Kwong was organizing a passive political culture in his church, in which the congregants were asked to remain mute in the debate on constitutional reform and the goal of the Umbrella Movement—universal suffrage in Hong Kong.

Notes

1. Note on spelling: including the author's name, all the East Asian names in the text are presented in the original order: last name first.
2. All translations are the author's, unless otherwise indicated.
3. "Concern over the Chief Executive Election in 2017." Accessed 28 April 2015.
<https://docs-google-com.lib-ezproxy.hkbu.edu.hk/forms/d/1dloqZfDRlj9T-OxtBP401LRdK2vme21qnaUu86EGNQg/viewform>
4. The Chinese name for the Silent Majority for Hong Kong is *Banggang Chusheng* 幫港出聲, literally meaning "help Hong Kong to speak out."
5. See Hong Kong Christian Council's "Our Response to the Consultation Document on the Methods for Selecting the Chief Executive in 2017 and for Forming the Legislative Council in 2016." Accessed 28 April 2015.
<http://www.hkcc.org.hk/acms/content.asp?site=hkcc&op=showbyid&id=25463>
6. See The Ministerial Session of the Hong Kong Methodist Church's "Our Opinions on the Consultation Document on the Methods for Selecting the Chief Executive in 2017 and for Forming the Legislative Council in 2016." Accessed 28 April 2015.
<http://www.methodist.org.hk/media/filehotlink/2014/04/15/OurResponse-March2014.pdf>
7. The Facebook page of "Protestants in Support of Constitutional Reform."

- Accessed 28 April 2015. <https://www.facebook.com/events/42842836394035>
8. "A Joint Public Statement of Christians' Concerns over Institutional Reform." Accessed 28 April 2015.
<https://www.facebook.com/178296575697806/photos/a.178300255697438.1073741825.178296575697806/229159447278185/?type=1&theater>
 9. This remark is made by interviewee 1, 9 April 2015. Interviewee 1 is a senior clergyman in a mainline church.
 10. Author's interview with Benny Tai, 23 September 2015.
 11. See Daniel Ng's "How Should Christians Understand Civil Disobedience?" Accessed 28 April 2015.
<http://www.howtindog.com/33775201542594526371228553625937636/30>
 12. The original audio of the sermon is in Cantonese. Accessed 28 April 2015.
<http://dhk.hkskh.org/stpaul/sermon2.aspx?id=3225>
 13. The public statement can be found in the following web page (accessed 28 April 2015):
https://docs-google-com.lib-ezproxy.hkbu.edu.hk/forms/d/1lPFpiA9beYuv_Dsd_rnTnR0TwOiD9WKhd7kOlyIMwzQ/viewform
 14. See St. Francis Action's magazine *The Voices*. Accessed 28 April 2015.
http://issuu.com/stfrancisaction/docs/sfa_voices_1_201501
 15. See World Council of Churches' "Theological Perspective on Diakonia in the Twenty-first Century." Accessed 29 April 2015.
<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/unity-mission-evangelism-and-spirituality/just-and-inclusive-communities/theological-perspectives-on-diakonia-in-21st-century>
 16. "Confession of Christians Watching over Hong Kong." Accessed 28 April 2015.
https://sites-google-com.lib-ezproxy.hkbu.edu.hk/site/keepwatchhk/confession_eng
 17. "Pastoral Letter from the President, Revd Tin Yau Yuen, to the Methodist Congregations of Hong Kong." 4 October 2014. Accessed 28 April 2015.
http://www.methodist.org.hk/media/filehotlink/2014/10/06/Pastoral_Letter_to_MCHK_congregationsEng.pdf
 18. Read Reverend Choi Yeung-mee's five articles in "Notes on the Occupied Zone by Clergy," in which she recorded in detail what she saw and felt in the occupied zones in Admiralty (*Christian Times Weekly*, from 19 October to 23 November 2014).
 19. Interviewee 4, 17 April 2015. See also Choi Yeung-mee's five articles.
 20. See Wu Chi-wai's "The Care in Person in the Occupied Zone" (*The Church in Hong Kong*, 17 October).

- <http://www.hkchurch.org/GenericStyles/Content.asp?ID=11542&PaperID=0010>).
21. Interviewee 4, 17 April 2015.
 22. See Wu Chi-wai's "The Care in Person in the Occupied Zone" (*The Church in Hong Kong*, 17 October).
 23. Interviewee 3, 17 April 2015, and the remark of Reverend Wu Chi-wai.
 24. Interviewee 2, first interview, 13 April 2015.
 25. See the Facebook page of St. Francis Chapel on the Street. Accessed 28 April 2015. <https://www.facebook.com/stfrancisonthestreet>
 26. Interviewee 2, first interview, 13 April 2015.
 27. Interviewee 2, second interview, 13 May 2015.

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Special terms

Banggang Chusheng 幫港出聲

Confession of Christians Watching over Hong Kong 基督徒守望香港宣言

Clergy Care 教牧關懷團

Clergy Station for Spiritual Support 教牧心靈支援站

Protestants in Support of Constitutional Reform 基督徒支持政改

Take up the cross, defend our city 背起十架，守護我城

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