

## MASTER'S THESIS

# Organizing an "Unorganized" Movement: Support and Logistics in the Anti-ELAB Movement of Hong Kong

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**Master of Philosophy**

**THESIS ACCEPTANCE**

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**Organizing an "Unorganized" Movement:**

**Support and Logistics in the Anti-ELAB Movement of Hong Kong**

**Wong Hon Tung**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements**

**for the degree of**

**Master of Philosophy**

**Principal Supervisor:**

**Prof. Chu Yin Wah (Hong Kong Baptist University)**

**Jul 2021**

## DECLARATION

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

I have read the University's current research ethics guidelines, and accept responsibility for the conduct of the procedures in accordance with the University's Research Ethic Committee (REC). I have attempted to identify all the risks related to this research that may arise in conducting this research, obtained the relevant ethical and/or safety approval (where applicable), and acknowledged my obligations and the rights of the participants.

Signature: 

Date: Jul 2021

## **Abstract**

The Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement (Anti-ELAB Movement) in Hong Kong is widely characterized as leaderless and horizontal, rejecting recognized leaders and formal organizations. However, it paradoxically shows high organizational capacity in the sense of sophisticated coordination and management of abundant resources. Following the changing theoretical focus from "organizations" to "organizing" in the literature, this research explores alternative organizing mechanisms that, in place of formal organizations, provide structured coordination in the Anti-ELAB Movement. Instead of the frontline combatants, I study the protesters with supportive and logistical roles.

Based on 24 in-depth interviews and first-hand observation, I offer an alternative account of the high organizational capacity of this movement against the claim of foreign intervention. The analysis consists of two parts. The first part of analysis discusses the formation of informal networks through “connective work” and the transformation of these networks into more organized entities through “partial

organizing”. I found that the protesters actively integrate themselves in dense informal ties, and part of the ties is structured by a generational role identity, namely "quasi-parenthood." In response to the challenges in high-risk activism, some ties gradually evolve beyond pure informal networks to partially organized entities by incorporating bureaucratic elements. Unlike horizontalism in foreign contexts, the protesters can tolerate certain power inequality in their organizing due to their priority of "task-orientedness" over prefiguration. The second part of analysis focuses on spatial and temporal dimensions of organizing. I suggest that the protesters develop a “guerrilla spatial strategy” that, different from occupy movements, shows city-wide mobility but also taps into sub-local resources. The organizing of protesters evolve into more sophisticated forms over time with a series of informal and circumstantial learning processes during the current movement and from the experiences of previous movements.

My analysis emphasizes the influences of high-risk context and avoids technological reductionism by examining both online and offline realms. All in all, it provides an integrated and context-sensitive framework to understand the organizing dynamics of comparable movements.

Keywords: leaderless movement, informal ties, partial organizing, space, social  
movement learning

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I began to explore the current research topic in an ethnography course taught by Prof. Lee Ching-kwan. This course really improved my understanding of not just ethnography, but "what is research" in general. I am grateful for her suggestions and the feedback from my classmates that gave me a direction when I was distressed by the social changes and the difficulties in the previous project.

Joining the Department of Sociology at Hong Kong Baptist University as an MPhil student is a choice I will never regret. I want to thank all members of my department who listened to my presentations twice and still gave me constructive advice. I am grateful to Dr. Li Yao-tai, who jotted notes during my presentation and sent me afterward. I also want to thank my peer, Ranran, who is good at listening to my troubles.

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I come from a working-class family. The more I have a sense of sociology; the more I know how valuable the support from my parents is. They try their best to give me resources and freedom to do whatever I like. Without their love and care, I can hardly achieve what I have achieved in my life, including the completion of this thesis.

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

What is the most impressive scene in the Hong Kong protest during 2019-20? For many people, it is when the Hong Kong protesters made way for an ambulance to pass through during a massive protest march. Others may think of the scenes when protesters confronted police on the streets and even in the universities, setting the night of the city in tear gas and fire. For a keen observer of social movements, the look of the frontline protesters may be the first thing visually catching his/her attention. The frontline protesters were mostly in black bloc (a tactic usually associated with anarchism). Even though mask covered their faces, it is still difficult to hide the youthfulness in their eyes. These young protesters wore similar items of protective gear, including goggles, helmets, and gas masks. Some items, for example, the 3M full-mask respirators, looked professional and expensive. No wonder Ip Kwok-him, a pro-establishment politician, described the protesters as very "organized" given that their "gear is comparable to the riot police" (Commercial

Radio, 2019). The gear is only one sign, among others, showing an exceptional organizational capacity of the movement. However, the Hong Kong protest is also widely characterized as horizontal, leaderless, and spontaneous, rejecting the leadership by any established political organizations and politicians, represented by its slogan of "no main stage" (無大台). These qualities, in everyday language, are usually the characteristics of being "unorganized." How can the two sides be reconciled?

A paragraph written in my fieldnotes, recorded during one of the campus occupations, provides a better description of what I mean by exceptional organizational capacity.

At that time, I followed a protester to wander around a supply station:

"I followed protester X, who came to the campus individually. He dressed casually and looked like a hiker and did not bring any gears, as he explained, to avoid being intercepted by police when he came to the campus. He asked me where the supply station was so that he could collect a set of gear. [...]

Huge cardboard boxes were neatly organized and marked in detailed categories, covering respirators, filters, helmets, goggles, gloves, iced sleeves, energy bars, belt bags, instruments (such as hammers), etc. X wandered around the supply station, and he asked the people who looked responsible for

the supply station for the locations of different items. [...] He got a set of standard gear of a frontline protester."

Other than the few campus occupations in November 2019, most protests in 2019 took the form of demonstrations, assemblies, and "flash mobs." While the scales were smaller, supply stations could be easily found in these different protests, often in a mobile form that the protesters moved the supplies according to the change of confrontational zones. Who provided the supplies? Who managed the supplies in the protest sites? In the case of protester X, the expectation of sufficient on-site supplies allowed X to choose a less risky strategy to enter the protest site, coming almost empty-handedly. It can hardly happen without a high level of coordination and mutual trust.

For the pro-establishment camp in Hong Kong, such phenomena simply mean that the protest is not really leaderless. As early as in August 2019, Ip Lau Suk-yea has already claimed that "there must be an invisible, very sophisticated 'brain' to command the movement" (Commercial Radio, 2019). After a year, the former chief executive of Hong Kong, Leung Chun-ying (2020, my translation), compared the Hong Kong protest to the Black Lives Matter protest in the United States in a Facebook post:

"In the last few days, we saw the riots in America so clearly. The rioters and

protesters had no helmets, no respirators, no radiocommunications equipment, no Octopus Cards, no petrol bomb workshops, no cash transfer in the protest sites, no amateur 'reporters,' no umbrella teams, no first aid teams, no 612 fund. If you believed that the riots in Hong Kong in the last year had no 'black hand' behind, no 'main stage,' no financiers, do you still believe it today?"

From this standpoint, the resources, coordination, and division of labor of the Hong Kong protesters all point to the existence of a secret leader, supposedly the "foreign force". Without being supported by concrete evidence, this claim is intuitively appealing. If there is no state-level agency to design the plot, how can these protest activities take place? Or, in a common phrase from the pro-establishment camp, where does their money come from?

An alternative account of the organizational capacity of this movement, usually from the sympathetic media and observers, emphasizes the role of technology. It is common to see titles of reports and articles like "How apps power Hong Kong's 'leaderless' protests" (Vincent, 2019), "Hong Kong protesters use technology to their advantage" (Dujmovic, 2019), or "The new battle in Hong Kong isn't on the streets; it's in the apps" (Haas, 2019). These observers were amazed by the extensive use of technologies in the protest, such as using Telegram and encrypted chat to keep

anonymity, LIHKG (a Reddit-like discussion forum) to collect and discuss ideas, and real-time maps and live streams to spread information. The technology issue also attracts scholarly attention. In a sketch of the nature of the Hong Kong protest, Ting (2020) borrowed the term "smart mob" from Rheingold (2002, as cited in Ting, 2020) to describe the movement, defined as "digitally savvy citizens engage with each other in largely ad hoc and networked forms of pop-up protests." (Ting, 2020, p. 1). Technology, and its influence on the form of protests (ad hoc, networked, pop-up), stands out in his understanding of this movement (also see Kow, Nardi, & Cheng, 2020). For the last global wave of protest in 2011-14, technology is a crucial topic of scholarly debate. For example, Gunning and Baron (2014, p. 302) argued against calling the Egyptian uprising in 2011 a "Facebook revolution" because "hundreds of thousands were mobilized offline and those who were online needed additional triggers to translate their online support into offline participation in street protests." This finding leads us to cautiously analyze the role of technology in the Hong Kong protest. If we consider the neatly arranged supply station that served protester X, can we explain this phenomenon simply by the smart usage of technologies?

In short, there are two mainstream narratives to explain the organizational capacity of this movement. I argue that the pro-establishment narrative is a conspiracy theory

without concrete evidence and the technology narrative is a reductionist account without noticing important aspects other than technology. Instead, based on in-depth interviews and observation, this research offers a deeper understanding of the organizational practices and dynamics of this protest, underneath its seemingly confusing and contradictory appearance. Following Parkinson (2013), I study a significant component of rebellion, namely the support and logistics, which is often neglected because the frontline combatants usually receive the majority of attention. The support and logistics in the Anti-ELAB Movement is a fascinating case to the latest research agenda in social movement studies that moves the focus from "organizations" to "organizing," that is, exploring the alternative mechanisms that provide structured coordination even in the absence or partial presence of organizational elements (Bakker, den Hond, & Laamanen, 2017; della Porta & Diani, 2020). In dialogue with this literature, I argue that the protesters in the Anti-ELAB Movement actively integrated themselves into informal networks through "connective work," and then, some networks were "partially organized" in response to the challenges of high-risk activism. I also discuss the spatial and temporal dimensions of organizing in this movement: its guerrilla spatial configuration and its evolution as collective learning processes. The analysis provides a comprehensive picture of how this seemingly "unorganized" movement organizes itself.

### What is "No Main Stage"?

The controversy of the Anti-ELAB Movement centers around its "leaderlessness."

Before getting into the analysis, it is convenient for the readers to have contextual

information about its leaderless slogan: "no main stage." "Main stage" means the

speech stage built up by the organizers of assemblies and demonstrations. In the

political context of Hong Kong, it refers to leading organizations or activists. "No

main stage," therefore, represents a refusal of leadership by established political

organizations or prominent figures. Basically, it is the Hong Kong version of

"horizontalism" (Sitrin, 2012). The history of this term started from the Umbrella

Movement in 2014 when the radical and localist protesters attacked the leadership of

relatively mild student organizations and mainstream pro-democracy activists. At that

time, this concept was expressed as "no assembly, only masses" (沒有大會 , 只有群

眾) or "break the main stage" (拆大台). The Umbrella Movement was already largely

"spontaneous," given that the leadership was weak and many participants were not

reported to be mobilized by the recognized "leaders" (Cheng & Chan, 2017). However,

the Anti-ELAB Movement seems to go further than the Umbrella Movement. While

the government could initiate formal bargaining with a few representatives from a

student organization in 2014, it cannot find any recognized leaders for bargaining in

the Anti-ELAB Movement.

The pre-existing political parties, organizations, and activists did not disappear in the new movement, yet it seems that they took relatively marginalized or specialized roles.

Compared to the Umbrella Movement when the two student organizations were the most recognized leaders, the student organizations were marginalized in 2019. An

interviewee, who experienced one of the campus occupations in the Anti-ELAB Movement, told me that the student union refused to provide coordination due to legal

risk. The student organizations also failed to mobilize any sustaining class boycott.

Other organizations participated in critical but only certain specialized roles. Civil

Human Rights Front, the major coalition of the pan-democratic camp, focused on applying legal demonstrations and assemblies for police approval, but it did not

dominate the assembly application. 612 Humanitarian Relief Fund, the protest fund

consisted of experienced activists from pan-democratic groups, collected donations

from the public, and provided legal and other financial aid to the protesters. Spark

Alliance, the localist fund established after the 2016 Mong Kok civil unrest, also

performed a similar function. The famous activist Joshua Wong and other members of

Demosistō participated in international lobbying. While these specialized roles are

important, it shows no sign that these organizations and individuals dominate, for

example, making strategic decisions or articulating vision and ideology in this protest (see the conceptualization of "leading tasks" by Earl, 2007). Finally, in my own data, most interviewees have no linkage to these established political organizations. These observations above show that the Anti-ELAB Movement is not led by these established political organizations. However, these observations are not comprehensive. Rather than affirming the overall nature of the movement, the analysis of this thesis aims to demonstrate the existence of alternative organizing mechanisms other than centralized leadership offered by formal organizations.

### Data and Method

I use in-depth interviews and observation to study the organizing practices in this movement. For the in-depth interviews, I recruited 24 protesters covering a wide range of support and logistical roles (see the table below). The interviews were semi-structured, focusing on their roles and related organizing practices in the Anti-ELAB Movement, and including questions on their previous political participation experience and their motivations to join the current movement. The interview time ranged from 1 hour to 3 hours (I interviewed two pairs of interviewees together), providing rich details on their work and thoughts. The interviews were arranged from January to May 2020. The height of violent confrontation ended in November 2019,

then the momentum of the movement gradually reduced. The interviewees might not have the best memory of the timeline of their participation, but the period of relative peace also gave them ample time for reflection. The interviewees were recruited through my personal networks and snowballing. Due to the characteristics of my own social networks, the interviewees are likely to be younger than the general protesters taking similar roles. I conducted some interviews with another researcher whose project shares a similar interest with my thesis but does not aim for academic publication. Interviews are transcribed verbatim selectively. Given the sensitivity of this topic, I took the following procedures to protect my interviewees. I did not provide consent forms to avoid leaving written records of interviewees. At the beginning of the interviews, I introduced my project orally and reminded them about the possible risk. Before any recording, I asked about their roles in the movement briefly and discussed the sensitivity issue with the interviewees so that they could be conscious about what should be disclosed and what should not. Then, I asked them whether they accepted tape recording or preferred notes taking. All interviewee agreed to tape recording. The recordings were edited later to remove data that might lead to identity disclosure.

I complement in-depth interviews with observation on the protest sites and other

movement activities. I wrote fieldnotes in October and November 2019 in several protest sites and free martial arts classes provided by the protesters to other protesters. Also, I joined a small "parent" group that provided financial support for daily life and education expenses to several young protesters. The observation allows me to collect data by observing the practice and interaction of protesters, instead of simply relying on their own narratives in the interviews. However, given the difficulty of conducting on-site observation in high-risk activism, I do not collect much data through this method, which becomes a complementary source of data in this thesis. Particularly, my fieldnotes are useful for describing the learning mechanisms in Chapter 4. Also, the observation gave me contextualized knowledge that improved my in-depth interview. To protect the research subjects, in the fieldnotes, I did not record the exact name, time, location, and salient physical characteristics of individuals. I could not ask for informed consent in public protest sites, but I did so in the martial arts classes and the parent group.

All informants are anonymous, but I give pseudonyms to those if I quote them repeatedly. Finally, the data will be destroyed within three months upon the completion of this project. To provide a preliminary idea of the 24 informants, the following presents a summary of their roles in the protest and selected background

information:

**Table 1** Selected Background of Informants

Number	Roles	Background	Time	Pseudonyms
1	Shelter manager	Female, 20s	Jan 2020	
2	Voluntary driver	Male, 60s	Jan 2020	
3	First aider, voluntary driver, gear provider	Male, late 20s	Jan 2020	
4	Sentry, safe house provider	Male, 30s	Feb 2020	
5	Information channel admin, safe house provider	Female, 30s	Feb 2020	
6	Voluntary Chinese doctor	Male, late 20s	Feb 2020	
7	Parent	Female, 30s	Feb 2020	Helen
8	Parent	Female, 40s	Feb 2020	Betty
9	Voluntary driver, voluntary tutor	Female, 20s	Feb 2020	
10	Voluntary tutor, sentry	Female, 20s	Feb 2020	
11	Information channel admin	Female, late 20s	Mar 2020	
12	First aider	Male, 20s	Mar 2020	
13	Information channel admin	Male, late 20s	Mar 2020	
14	Sentry, supply broker	Male, 20s	Mar 2020	Johnny
15	Designer, supply station	Female, late 20s	Mar 2020	
16	Parent	Male, late 20s	Mar 2020	

17	Lennon Wall team	Male, 40s	Mar 2020	Rock
18	Gear provider	Female, 30s	Mar 2020	
19	First aider	Male, 40s	Apr 2020	
20	Parent	Female, 20s	Apr 2020	Shirley
21	Street corner organizer	Male, 20s	Apr 2020	
22	Parent	Female, 20s	May 2020	
23	Parent	Male, 20s	May 2020	
24	Job search channel admin	Male, late 20s	May 2020	

### Chapter Plan

This thesis consists of seven chapters altogether. Chapter 2 is a review of literature on social movement studies, focusing on the discussion of organizations and organizing.

In the literature review, I also raise two general themes in this thesis: overcoming technological reductionism and reconsidering high-risk activism. The literature review covers different aspects of organizing that are examined in the next four chapters. Chapter 3 analyzes the emergence, challenge, and content of informal ties in this movement. Following that, Chapter 4 discusses partial organizing of these networks in response to high-risk environment and how protesters manage the tension of incorporating bureaucratic elements. Then, shifting the focus to the spatial and

temporal dimensions of organizing, Chapter 5 compares the Anti-ELAB Movement to the Umbrella Movement to conceptualize its distinctive spatial strategy; Chapter 6 explores the learning processes that contribute to the organizational evolution in this movement. Chapter 7 is a conclusion that summarizes the findings in relation to the literature reviewed.

## Chapter Two

### Literature Review

#### From Organizations to Organizing

The assumption behind the pro-establishment conspiracy theory is: without a secret, formal organization providing centralized leadership, it is impossible for the movement to be highly coordinated and resourceful. Such an assumption resembles the view of the classic paradigm of social movement studies that dominated in the 1970s and 80s: resource mobilization. The resource mobilization theory formulated by McCarthy and Zald (1977) emphasized the importance for social movements to acquire resources, such as money, labor, and facilities, from not only the presumed beneficiaries but the external supporters. According to this perspective, to mobilize resources, it requires social movement organization (SMO), defined as "*complex, or formal, organization* which identifies its goals with the preferences of a social movement or a countermovement and attempts to implement those goals" (McCarthy & Zald, 1977, p. 1218, my emphasis; also see McCarthy & Zald, 1987). This

definition reflects an influential trend in the early studies focusing on how formal organizations coordinate tangible resources, against the previous works that viewed social movements as unorganized and irrational behaviors (see the review in Edwards & Kane, 2014). However, in the 1990s, the social movement scholars were increasingly interested in alternative forms of organization other than formal organizations. Some early studies looked at less formal SMOs (e.g., Staggenborg, 1988, 1989; Clemens, 1993; Minkoff, 1994, 1999), and others viewed social movements as informal networks (e.g., Buechler, 1990; Melucci, 1996). The latter point was summarized by Diani (1992, p. 13), who defined social movement as "*a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity*" (my emphasis).

The interest in alternative organizational forms kept increasing in the social movement scholarship, as Soule (2013, p. 108) described: "many movement scholars have become interested in loosely structured networks of social movement participants that deliberately eschew formal organizations," resulting in disconnection to organizational studies. In the past decade, this tendency achieved a new height with the wave of occupy protests during 2011-14, including Arab Spring, 15-M Movement

in Spain, Occupy Movements in the United States, and many other cases. Some scholars went so far as to argue that these protests could be categorized as a new form of social movement. Castells (2012) called these protests "networked movements." Bennett and Segerberg (2012) constructed a concept, namely "connective action," referring to those self-organizing networks in contrast to the traditional "collective action" coordinated by formal organizations. Two characteristics were commonly raised in the discussion of these recent protests, significant for this research. First, they were characterized by a political culture that praises equal and autonomous participation, rejecting formal organizations and leadership, often termed as horizontalism (Sitrin, 2012). Second, the protesters widely used new communication technologies, especially social media, to the extent that some protests were called "Facebook/Twitter revolutions" in the media. The Anti-ELAB Movement in Hong Kong seems to be a new case that not only represents these trends but even pushes them to the extreme. If the Umbrella Movement five years ago was already largely "spontaneous" (Cheng & Chan, 2017), the new movement was even more "leaderless" that the government could not find any recognized "leaders" for bargaining. The use of social media also seems to be more pervasive and innovative, involving a discussion forum (LIHKG), Telegram, and other social media.

Despite the aforementioned advancements, the analyses of recent social movements were often weakened by dichotomous or reductionist thinking. Snow and Moss (2014), in their conceptualization of "spontaneity," said that:

"Binary juxtapositions are prevalent in movement theorizing and analysis [...]

Some of the more common oppositions include rationality versus irrationality and emotion; solidarity versus breakdown; disorganization versus organization; and spontaneity versus organization. [...] spontaneity and organization are neither dichotomous nor oppositional, but are instead often highly interactive."

(pp. 1125-1126)

Piven, the pioneering advocate of decentralized disruptive actions against top-down bureaucratic organizations with mass membership (Piven & Cloward, 1977), also said:

"I agree with the claim that there is no such thing as a structureless group that persists for any length of time. There is also no such thing as a protest movement that masters the basic tasks of communication and coordination, and that is nevertheless literally unorganized. So, finally, let us put these canards aside, and then maybe we can go on to consider the advantages and disadvantages to the movement of different kinds of structure or organization."

(Piven, 2013, p. 191)

To clarify the discussion, the scholars distinguished the meanings between "organizations" and "organizing" (Bakker, den Hond, & Laamanen, 2017; della Porta & Diani, 2020), which helps us to look beyond the dichotomy of disorganization and organization. "Organizations" refer to the formal organizations that have five elements: membership, hierarchy, rules, monitor, and sanctions (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011; Ahrne, Brunsson, & Seidl, 2016). While organizations are entities that are sets of actors within boundaries, "organizing" refers to a general process that involves mechanisms to provide coordination even in the partial absence of the organizational elements. Following this conceptual distinction, it is simplistic to describe the Anti-ELAB Movement as either "organized" or "unorganized". Even though formal organizations played limited and specialized roles in the Anti-ELAB Movement, "organizing" was ubiquitous in the protest.

The new research agenda of "organizing" helps to reconnect the social movement studies and organizational studies in search of alternative organizing mechanisms, and I suggest the Anti-ELAB Movement is a fascinating case to contribute to this research direction. As I mentioned, many recent studies were interested in social movements that were loosely structured and used social media extensively. Instead of organization and organizing, they focused on communication and mobilization, analyzing how the

protesters produce and spread information through the social media and mobilize others to participate in the movement (Castells, 2012; Bennett, Segerberg, & Walker, 2014; Anduiza, Cristancho, & Sabucedo, 2014; Tsatsou, 2018; Donovan, 2018). While some of these studies claimed to discuss the “organization” issue (Bennett, Segerberg, & Walker, 2014; Tsatsou, 2018), they actually meant the structure of communication, which is only one aspect of organizing. Relatively few studies went deep into the issue of organization and organizing (for some exceptions, see Caraway, 2016; Weinryb, Gullberg, & Turunen, 2019). What is lacking in the literature is a conceptual and comprehensive analysis of how these movements could manage complicated logistical tasks without formal organizations. It may be quite imaginable that the protesters can spread messages to initiate assemblies or attract global attention by decentralized participation and social media, but how about equipping thousands of frontline protesters in professional gears to confront a well-trained police force? For three reasons, the latter is much more demanding for organizational capacity than the former: 1) it requires an enormous input of money, labor, and other resources; 2) it is more administratively complicated; 3) it is more distanced from the experience of normal citizens. It is why the support and logistics in the Anti-ELAB Movement is both puzzling and theoretical important. How can this movement achieve such mysterious organizational capacity without a strong engagement of formal

organizations?

Before answering this question by looking at four different aspects of organizing in this movement (corresponding to four substantial chapters in this thesis), I will raise two main themes across the whole thesis. I argue that the existing studies of comparable movements have sometimes been undermined by technological reductionism and have not paid sufficient attention to high-risk activism.

### Overcoming Technological Reductionism

In the past decade, there was an active debate on the role of social media in social movement, especially over the case of the Arab Spring, and two oppositional views emerged. Some commentators asserted that social media facilitated or even allowed the rise of the Arab Spring (Castells, 2012; Julie & Wiest, 2011; Zhuo, Wellman, & Yu, 2011; Howard & Hussain, 2013). This techno-utopian view can also be found in the early media reports about the current movement in Hong Kong, as I mentioned in the introduction. Other commentators were sceptical to such views, arguing that the social media were likely to only sympathetic onlookers with only feeble commitment to the movement (Gladwell, 2010) and the authorities could use the Internet for surveillance, repression, and spreading propaganda (Lynch, 2011; Morozov, 2011). Yet, the two

oppositional views are both partial and simplistic. It is more productive to explore the circumstances under which online activism may be effective/ineffective and specify which kinds of technology we are talking about (Earl, Hunt, & Garrett, 2014).

A more recent review on the scholarship on social media and movement by Foust and Hoyt (2018) also noticed the dichotomous views as one of the problems in the literature. Moreover, they identified two reductionist tendencies in the existing studies that this research aims to avoid. The first reductionist tendency is technological determinism, related to the techno-utopian view, that often described the protests as originated from social media, "as though the Web 2.0 platforms themselves do the work of organizing" (ibid, p. 46). The second reductionist tendency is isolationism:

"Perhaps owing to more positivist, instrumental approaches to new media, some scholarship reduces this complexity by taking one technology, or one facet of technology, in isolation." (ibid, pp. 44-45)

The review criticized the theory of "connective action" proposed by Bennett and Segerberg (2012) for "ignoring or downplaying interactions between communication on- and offline" (Foust & Hoyt, 2018, p. 45). In an empirical study of the 2011–2012 US Occupy movement, Bennett, Segerberg, and Walker (2014, p. 232) asked: "How are crowd-enabled networks activated, structured, and maintained in the absence of

recognized leaders, common goals, or conventional organization, issue framing, and action coordination?" However, their study only used the Twitter data to answer this question without considering the face-to-face interaction on the streets and other physical places. While it is nothing wrong to focus on a particular facet of the movement in a single study, it is partial and even potentially misleading to entirely neglect the on- and offline interplay.

This research will overcome these reductionist tendencies by the following adjustments. First, different social media and different effects produced by them should be analyzed separately. The new communication technologies are commonly characterized anonymity, costless channels to a wide public, and one-off interaction. These elements can be easily observed in this movement (see Lee, Liang, Cheng, Tang, & Yuen, 2021 for their analysis of the central role of LIHKG platform in this movement). However, a protester in this movement can also use Facebook to collect funding from his/her own pre-existing network for purchasing gears, which is based on non-anonymous, private, and enduring ties. In the latter case, the technology simply provides a convenient instrument of communication. Therefore, I avoid blanketing various kinds of social media and their usages together. Second, the protesters are conscious of these multiple options. They choose one over the others or

combine different options according to tactical consideration, particularly the safety issue in this high-risk movement, and use these different tools to establish and maintain connections. In other words, my analysis will highlight the agency of technology users: it is not just about the infrastructure itself, but how protesters use it. Finally, organizing in this movement involves much face-to-face interaction and bodily action, which inevitably happen in physical space (that will be discussed in detail later). What happened in the physical space is no less important than what happened in the virtual space, and the interplay between the two realms is frequent. The idea of treating technology in a non-reductionist way will be presented in the chapters throughout this thesis.

### Reconsidering High-risk Activism

Another general theme of this thesis is reconsidering high-risk activism, which is a key feature of the Anti-ELAB Movement. In the history of Hong Kong, it needs to go back half a century ago to find a comparable case. Even at the beginning of the movement in June 2019, it was still difficult to imagine that any protesters in Hong Kong would throw petrol bombs and be tolerated by a significant proportion of the population. The police repression was brutal to an unprecedented level. How does

high-risk activism affect the organizing of this movement?<sup>1</sup> The existing literature does not provide systematic guidance for answering this question. Large-scale mass movements with this level of violent confrontation do not happen frequently. Since the 1980s, many protests have tended to implement non-violent tactics (della Porta, 2008, p. 223). In the last global wave of protests around 2011-14, the major cases such as the Occupy Movement in the US and the 15-M Movement in Spain were largely non-violent. While the Arab Spring was an exception, it emerged in authoritarian countries with a strong presence of armies and high death tolls, which is another context. Therefore, it is difficult to find a convenient framework from the literature, and the relevant theoretical findings are sporadic.

In his famous study on Freedom Summer, McAdam (1986) argued that it is significant to differentiate low- and high-risk activism. He asked, "Would anyone really want to argue that the same mix of factors that explains riot participation accounts for the signing of a nuclear freeze petition?" (ibid, p. 67) While he talked about movement participation, I apply this logic to the issue of organizing. Specifically, in many cases, as I will show in this research, the protesters organize exactly because they need to

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<sup>1</sup> It should be stated clearly that while high-risk activism is a key feature of this movement, the movement actually includes a variety of activities with different levels of risk. Therefore, the discussion here simply means to define the scope of this research and highlight a fundamental feature of this movement.

negotiate with the high-risk environment. The protesters must inevitably consider the risk of state repression, for example, policing strategies. In response, they might develop "covert social movement networks" (Crossley, Edwards, Harries & Stevenson, 2012) or "clandestine organizations" (della Porta, 2013). The goal to preserve secrecy might lead to certain organizing dynamics, such as increasing detachment from the larger society (della Porta, 2006, 2013). Another response is the flexibility of forms of organizing. In Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, Pilati, Acconcia, Suber, and Chennaoui (2019) found that interswitch or interconnection between formal organizations (e.g., political parties) and informal ties (e.g., neighborhood networks) is important for the protesters to survive under repressive contexts.

A high-risk mass movement can also have a different structure of role differentiation with low-risk activism. The study of the Palestinian guerrillas in 1980s Lebanon by Parkinson (2013) offered an insightful perspective. She pointed out:

"Not all rebels fight on the frontlines, but current theories ignore differences in how foot soldiers, public relations flaks, and smugglers join and participate in militant organization. [...] Problematizing the diverse roles that 'behind the scenes' actors play within rebel organizations challenges current scholarly understandings of participation in political violence by underscoring the

simple fact that sustained, violent rebellion requires some militants to keep their hands (or records) clean." (ibid, pp. 418-419)

Following this reasoning, Parkinson turned her attention to the "support and logistical apparatuses" and found that the female-dominated networks among the clandestine armed organizations provided everyday supplies, transferred money, and facilitated information exchange. While this is a study of armed rebellion, its insight helps us understand the violent protests. It is natural for the observers to be attracted by the young, often heroic frontline protesters in the Anti-ELAB Movement, but the role differentiation of combatant and non-combatant roles that enables the militant actions is no less important. The differentiation may or may not depend on the varying levels of risk acceptance, because some non-combatant roles are also risky (Parkinson, 2013). This kind of role differentiation is another feature of organizing in this protest that may be neglected if we do not consider its specialty as high-risk activism. For that reason, this research focuses on the roles of "back-end" supporters instead of the frontline fighters. In the new global wave of protests in 2019-20 that the Hong Kong protest plays one of the pioneers, many protests employ highly confrontational tactics, even in the advanced Western countries, such as the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States. Therefore, at this moment, it is essential to integrate the social movement studies with the studies of various forms of political violence (della Porta,

2008). The specialty of high-risk activism is another central theme throughout this thesis.

### Connecting through Informal Ties

Bearing the two themes (technological reductionism and high-risk activism) in mind, the research analyzes the organizing of this movement in four aspects: informal ties, partiality, space, and learning. I discuss the related literature of each chapter, respectively.

As I will show, many protesters in this movement were not linked through formal organizations. Their in-between relations could be broadly understood as "informal ties." The importance of informal ties in social movements has long been recognized, connecting social movement studies to social network analysis (e.g., McAdam & Paulsen, 1993; Gould, 1995; Diani, 1995). In dialogue with this vast literature, I highlight three points in my discussion of informal ties in this movement. First, the social network analysis in the social movement studies often emphasized types of ties and the strength of those ties but neglected how these types of tie form (Krinsky & Crossley, 2014, p. 3). How do the ties actually emerge? A good remedy to this problem comes from Macdonald, Nitsou, and Harris (2014), who suggested the

concept of "connective labor," meaning the human inputs and work processes in initiating connections. In their study of Occupy Movement in the United States, they developed this concept to capture the women's contribution to network building and discuss three roles in the movement, including the "Admin" (Social Media Administrator), the "Documentarian," and the "Connector." While this concept might be better termed as "connective work," given its distinction with "labor" under class relations, it leads us to consider the agency and micro-processes in the formation of ties.

Second, together with the relative neglect of network formation, the literature also overlooked the challenges or difficulties of networking. In this case study, I argue that police surveillance and infiltration creates a major threat to network formation in the movement. Although protesters kept forming ties with each other, given the abundant opportunities for interaction and the actual needs for connecting, policing limited the potential of networking by creating an atmosphere of fear and distrust. Also, when the protesters turned to create "covert social movement networks" (Crossley, Edwards, Harries, & Stevenson, 2012) to preserve secrecy, it may sacrifice the expansion or deepening of existing networks. The literature of policing protest focused more on different policing styles and the influence on movement outcomes (della Porta &

Reiter, 2013), rather than its influence on the organizing of protesters. However, it is an important issue if we consider the high-risk nature of the movement.

Finally, I study the cultural content of ties, instead of focusing on the form of ties, such as density and centrality. In their review of social network analysis in social movement studies, Krinsky and Crossley (2014, p. 3) suggested that "how a network 'works' and what effects it has depend in large part upon the content of the interactions (ties) of its members" and the scholars have "an increasing agreement" (ibid, p. 9) on it. They also suggested that to explore the content of ties, including issues of meaning and identity, requires a qualitative approach. Similarly, in their review of social media analysis in social movement studies, Foust and Hoyt (2018, p. 43) also noticed a reductionist trend: the "network theory's focus on form over content, and a redefinition of humans as simply nodes in the network." Avoiding reification, I take advantage of the qualitative approach of this research to analyze a unique phenomenon in this movement, namely "quasi-parenthood." Intriguingly, some supporters called themselves "parents" and the young protesters "sons and daughters." What is the relationship between this narrative and the actual organizing dynamics? Chapter 3 provides an account of the emergence, challenge, and content of the informal ties in this protest.

### From Networking to Partial Organizing

Following the distinction made by Ahrne and Brunsson (2011), the informal ties that connected protesters are “network”, not “organization”. According to their definitions, "network" is an "emerged social order" that happened spontaneously rather than being decided, but "organization" is a "decided social order" based on decisions "representing conscious choices about the way people should act or the distinction and classification they should make" (ibid, p. 3). “Organization” consists of five elements: membership, hierarchy, rules, monitor, and sanctions. When the protesters began to put themselves together through informal ties, they did not make decisions on others nor have any of these five organizational elements. However, in Chapter 4, I argue that these protesters gradually “organized” themselves by integrating some of these organizational elements. In other words, they became what Ahrne and Brunsson (2011) conceptualized as “partial organization”. I argue that this process of partial organizing is a significant factor contributing to the coordination capacity of the protesters.

“Partial organization” represents the latest theoretical breakthrough in organizational studies, seeking for reconnections to other fields by looking at organizing outside

formal organizations (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2019). This new approach can help social movement researchers to understand the protests beyond the dichotomy of "organization versus disorganization." In the literature, the dialogue between partial organization theory and social movement studies is growing in the past decade. Building on the work of Ahrne and Brunsson (2011), Haug (2013) conceptualized "meeting arena" as a form of partial organization in the social movement between organization, institution, and network. Using a slightly different term, "organizationality," Dobusch and Schoeneborn (2015) analyzed how a hacker collective could achieve organizational identity and actorhood even without clear membership. In response to partial organization theory, the two authors showed that the hacker collective could mobilize the five organizational elements in certain events situationally, suggesting the researchers to adopt a "processual" understanding of partial organization (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2019). Following their suggestions, this research highlights that the organizing in this movement is temporal and changing. Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 show the changes from simple informal networks to partially organized networks.

Applying the analysis of Ahrne and Brunsson (2011) to social movement studies, den Hond, Bakker, and Smith (2015, p. 291) stated the major direction of this research

agenda:

"[...] the amount of 'organization' may vary and that both the presence and absence of organizational elements may be associated with issues, problems, tensions, and conflict within social movement." (Also see Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011, p. 12)

Put it into questions, why people add or reduce organizational elements in their social relations? What are the costs and benefits? Given that this discussion is relatively new, there are still limited empirical responses to these questions. With similar research questions, Laamanen, Bor, and den Hond (2019) studied a timebanking movement<sup>2</sup> and Weinryb, Gullberg, and Turunen (2019) studied a Facebook page fundraising initiative for refugees. While both movements began and scaled up as relatively unstructured “emerged order”, both evolved and integrated certain organization elements into their movements, for a variety of reasons: logistical and administrative concerns, internal disagreements, and requirements from the government. Both studies showed that non-structured social movements are subject to the pressure of bureaucratization and partial organizing is a process full of tensions, especially conflicting with the ideal of horizontalism (Laamanen, Bor, & den Hond, 2019). As I

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<sup>2</sup> A movement that develops a local complementary currency to challenge the political-economic hegemony.

will show, the protesters in the Anti-ELAB Movement had many similarities with the movement participants in these two cases. However, the Anti-ELAB Movement is also very different from the existing literature. It is a large-scaled, high-risk mass movement with direct and intense confrontation with the state. The protesters have to respond to a distinctive situation, and the patterns or interactions between the organizers and the organized are also different, which is what this research tries to highlight (see Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011, p. 13). What are the considerations of the protesters in such high-risk context? What kinds of organizational problems could be solved by adding organizational elements into their networks? Did these elements conflict with some qualities of informal ties, such as flexibility, spontaneity, and secrecy (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011, p. 15)? Particularly, how can hierarchy and rules coexist with the spirit of "no main stage," a version of horizontalism that praises autonomy and rejects recognized leaders? Chapter 4 explains the reasons for partial organizing and how the protesters manage these potential tensions in this movement.

### Space and Organizing

After Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, the next two chapters look at the issue from another perspective: the spatial-temporal dimensions of organizing. As mentioned, to avoid technological reductionism, it is vital to situate the organizing in physical space and

observe the interplay between online and offline realms. Around the turn of the century, the social movement scholarship started to put "space" on the research agenda systematically (Routledge, 1993; Pile & Keith, 1997; Miller, 2000; Tilly, 2000; Sewell, 2001). Tilly (2000, p. 139) set up the research mission is "to examine confrontations of top-down and bottom-up power by identifying spatially bound and/or space-affecting mechanisms and processes." Sewell (2001, pp. 54-56) viewed space as a structure ("spatial structure") that places both constraints on and provides resources to human agency, which can negotiate with the structure and transform the structure by action ("spatial agency"). He proposed a list of components of spatial structure, including location, time-distance, scales, characteristics of the built environment, meaning of space, and spatial routine (the daily routines marked by specific locations). Important empirical works on the interaction between social movements and spatial structure included cases of the Paris uprisings (Gould, 1991, 1995), the Iranian resistance (Bayat, 1997), the Beijing student movement in 1989 (Zhao, 1998, 2001), the Chile strikes in 1960 (Stillerman, 2003), and the anti-U.S. protests in Beijing universities (Zhao, 2009). However, this existing literature focused primarily on mobilizing instead of organizing (i.e., focusing on participation and recruitment instead of internal coordination and communication). If anything social is inevitably spatial (Nicholls, 2009), organizing is not exceptional; it is a social process

that happen in specific spatial configurations.<sup>3</sup>

The organizing of the Anti-ELAB Movement is intriguing from a spatial perspective.

A key distinction between the Anti-ELAB Movement and the last global wave of protests in 2011-14 is that the new Hong Kong protest no longer uses occupation as the major tactic. The occupy tactic has been considered in the analyses of the previous movements in 2011-14 (for example, see Ho, 2019). In contrast, the Anti-ELAB Movement is highly mobile and flexible, represented by the "be water" slogan. The demonstrations, assemblies, and disruptive actions spread to all over the city repeatedly, but rarely maintained overnight. It became a huge logistical challenge to the supporters. How could it be overcome through their organizing? Beyond the city-wide flash mobs, I found that the sub-localized basis of organizing in this protest was widely neglected but no less significant for the movement. Focusing on the interplay between space, tactic, and organizing, Chapter 5 discusses how the mobile and sub-localized sides, seemingly oppositional, were organically integrated into this movement.

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<sup>3</sup> In a recent handbook of social movement studies, "Geography and Social Movements" was categorized under the session of "how movements organize", implying that space (geography) is a key issue in the organizing of social movements (Routledge, 2015).

## Learning and Organizing

If a social process is inevitably spatial, it is also inevitably temporal. Following the chapter on spatiality, I will also analyze another dimension of organizing: the temporal dimension. I look at the evolution of organizing in this movement, and from a particular angle: learning.

In the other three chapters, I show various mechanisms of organizing that often seem sophisticated. The supporters not only invested money and time in their partially organized networks but also skills and knowledge, to provide a wide range of services, such as medical support (that requires medical knowledge) and arrest support (that require legal knowledge). Where did the protesters learn how to organize and other kinds of struggle know-how? This puzzle brings us to the literature of "social movement learning" that views the social movements as an alternative form of learning beyond the top-down model in the classrooms (Foley, 1999; Kilgore, 1999; Choudry & Kapoor, 2010; Hall, Clover, Crowther, & Scandrett, 2011, 2012). This literature is not well-connected to the literature of organizing social movements. However, if we are interested in the development of coordinating capacity of the social movements, the production, diffusion, and accumulation of knowledge is a significant issue, similar to scholars who are interested in enterprise development are

also interested in organizational learning (e.g., Miner, Bassof, & Moorman, 2001). To clarify, this discussion involves two interrelated questions: how protesters learn to organize and how the learning processes in general are organized.

A radical, mass movement like the Anti-ELAB Movement can create an "abnormal" moment, highly distanced from daily routines. Therefore, while protesters can import non-protest knowledge from their own and other external sources (Foley, 1999), the knowledge must be processed to tailor for protest needs. More often, the protesters learn and create knowledge during their participation in activism, including both previous and current movements. Many scholars emphasized the historical influence on social movements. Fominaya (2015) criticized the mainstream narrative of Spain's Indignados movement overstated the novelty, neglecting the continuity of the deliberative democratic practices from previous movements. She explained that the protesters might intend to exaggerate the novelty as a strategic expression of autonomy, or they might be newcomers who were ignorant of the history of activism, so the researchers could not simply take their words as truth. In their study of the Egyptian uprising, Baron and Gunning (2014) showed that the movement was not really "spontaneous," in the sense that its timing and strategies were heavily influenced by a small group of activists who developed their networks in the past

decade. Both studies show that it is necessary to put the current movements under a historical perspective. Meanwhile, I still pay attention to learning in the current movement. It is particularly interesting how the protesters learn to execute violent tactics that probably require specific and sensitive knowledge and skills. Chapter 6 discusses these various dimensions of learning and organizing, arguing that learning is a key factor in understanding the organizing capability of social movement.<sup>4</sup> In short, the next four chapters offer a synthesized account of the organizing in this movement.

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<sup>4</sup> A latest research on this movement by Ho (2020) shared a similar idea with this analysis, but I will provide more micro-level details of learning processes on the streets and within small groups of protesters in this movement.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Informal Ties: Emergence, Challenge, and Content**

#### Introduction

If not formal organizations, what brings the protesters together? Indeed, the messages on social media can broadcast to a broad audience to initiate assemblies, demonstrations, or flash mobs, but it is only part of the connections between the protesters. Generally speaking, the protesters also get connected through "informal ties." The term "ties" implies certain stability, rather than one-off and face-to-face encounters in the assemblies, demonstrations, or flash mobs. However, there is no denial that informal ties can be generated from these encounters (see the discussion of "relation" and "interaction" in Diani & Mishe, 2015). In the case of support and logistics, the subject matter of this study, the supporters need to 1) connect to other supporters to aggregate resources and 2) find the targeted protesters that need their support. Both are not as simple as they sound. In this chapter, first, I explore how the informal ties actually emerge, which requires considerable inputs of time and effort

from the protesters that can be called "connective work" (Boler, Macdonald, Nitsou, & Harris, 2014). The processes of connecting are multiple and often dramatic. Second, I examine the challenges incurred in building informal ties and how the protesters tackled them. The major challenge that I identify in this chapter is the extensive fear and distrust created by police surveillance and infiltration. Although the protesters did eventually build up dense informal ties among themselves, I argue that the fear and distrust limited the potentials of network emergence, expansion, or deepening. Finally, I analyze a curious phenomenon in the movement. Some supporters are called "parents" (家長) and the young protesters are called "sons and daughters" (仔囡), which seems to be a unique culture of this movement. What are the meanings of this familial narrative, and how does it influence the actual dynamics in the informal ties? In dialogue with the social network and social movement scholarship, this chapter shows the emergence, challenge, and content in the informal ties of the Anti-ELAB Movement.

#### Emergence of Ties and Connective Work

How did the informal ties in the Anti-ELAB Movement emerge? Boler, Macdonald, Nitsou, and Harris (2014) constructed a concept namely "connective labor" to highlight the efforts to establish the connections, which is an excellent remedy to the

surprising lack of attention to the formation processes of ties in the literature (Krinsky & Crossley, 2014, p. 3). This concept is great in capturing the agency of connection. As I argued in the literature review, I prefer to use "connective work." Unlike the research of Occupy Movement of Boler et al. (2014) that discussed several roles in the movement involving connective work, in this chapter, I focus on the types of "intermediary condition" of connective work in this movement, that is, the condition that puts the protesters together and provides opportunities for the connective work to take place. I suggest five types of intermediary conditions, including physical co-presence, pre-existing ties, contingency, networking activities, and social media. Usually, the formation of an informal group or network involves multiple intermediary conditions. My analysis resonates with the emphasis on the "hybridity" of connective work in Boler et al. (2014) that covers both online and offline realms.

First, in the demonstrations, assemblies, and flash mobs, the "physical co-presence" creates opportunities for the protesters to connect with each other (see the discussion on the "logic of aggregation" in Juris, 2012). In my data, a first aider group of around 20 members was established on the streets. My interviewee of this group told me that he had a friend trapped in the Pacific Place on 612 by tear gas. This friend was very indignant at why the police attacked a peaceful protester like himself. He wanted to

contribute as a first aider but was afraid to go alone, so he called my interviewee to walk together. When my interviewee and his friend met other scattered first aiders on the streets (wearing the reflective vests), they invited others to join a WhatsApp (later Telegram) group. The group expanded to around 20 members in the first month of protest. One of the members knew a voluntary driver through Telegram. This driver was an owner of a drug store, who regularly provided free medical materials for this group of first aiders. Being in a group allows these members to partner with others and share resources. The first aiders have common tasks and clothes, so it is natural for them to form groups in the protest sites.

Second, as the case of my first aider interviewee shows, "pre-existing ties" play a role in the connective work. In his analysis of spontaneity in the black civil rights movement, Killian (1984) pointed out that the "emergent" combines new formation and reorganization of the pre-existing. The pre-existing ties involved in this movement were of a wide variety: classmates, colleagues, family members.... A gear provider who brought gears and distributed on the streets told me that he collected donations mainly from his friends and colleagues. Since he worked in the legal services sector, the donations from his colleagues were generous, allowing him to spend over HK\$100,000 in gear provision:

"Many friends may not be able to go to the frontlines, but they want to donate, then they can depend on me to buy and distribute. So the networking behind is actually big [...] I think at least 40-50 people. All of my friends in my company had donated to me. [...] A full-face respirator costs HK\$1,050. How many could you buy? Once I have brought dozens of full-face respirators, and I distribute them all immediately because nobody had."

The highly committed supporters can aggregate resources from the general supporters who donate at irregular intervals, which is a significant solution to the heavy financial burden of the protesters. An interesting point is worth noting. For those supporters who connect other supporters through pre-existing ties, the ties are not necessarily strong ties. Many informants mentioned that, during this movement, they got close to many "friends" on social media who were only acquaintances. For example, a "parent," Helen (who in reality is a young mother in her 30s), wanted to cook food and distribute meals to the young protesters on the streets, asking for helpers through a post on her Facebook page. Many people responded, but they were not close friends of Helen, including people she knew through her job and one who had joined the same society in the university with her many years ago. Therefore, the pre-existing ties did not merely extend to this movement but were reorganized during the protest, producing emergent networks.

In the discussion above, it covers how the supporters networked with each other. However, it is more difficult for the supporters to connect with the protesters in need, which requires much connective work. Helen described the difficulty of beginning the support:

"We want to do something, but we don't know how to start. We do not know the kids [young protesters], completely ignorant of the situation of the teen years. It's like we are out of touch with the times."

She and her teammates began distributing food and meal coupons on the streets during protests but soon felt targetless and lost. They gave materials to people whoever dressed in black-bloc, but many rejected, and some said they were adults and had no need for meal coupons. They tried other methods, but many methods seemed to be ineffective. Helen's spouse had a private car, so they joined voluntary driving, yet there were often "more cars than people." They booked an apartment as a safe house, yet it was left empty for a while. At this stage, their attempts to connect basically relied on physical co-presence, making use of the meeting opportunities from the aggregation at the protest sites, but it was not as easy as the first aiders forming teams with each other. Unlike the first aiders who played the same roles and wore similar clothes, other protesters might have found it more difficult to develop

trust. Also, the "parents" and the young protesters are divided by generations and thus different social circles. How did they overcome this social distance?

The first breakthrough achieved by Helen's team was based on "contingency." While encounters at the protest sites constitute a major opportunity for contingent meetings, there are contingent situations other than physical co-presence that provide opportunities for connective work. The contingency is often a combined quality in other types of intermediary conditions, but it should also be singled out as a particular condition. The case of Helen provided two examples to show my point. First, as a normal young mother, Helen did facial spa and chatted with a technician, who was surprisingly found to be a "deep yellow" (committed participant of the movement) who imported gears from her boyfriend overseas. Through the brokering of this technician, who knew some frontline protesters through her friends, Helen approached the first "son" of their team. This case can hardly be categorized as other types of intermediary condition. Second, another example of contingency began with one of her friends, a middle-aged man who tried to join the frontline. Other young frontline protesters soon noticed this "awkward uncle" and partnered with him. By the time they retreated, this man and one young protester temporarily used their safe house, who became their second son later. Therefore, this contingency happened together

with the condition of physical co-presence. The types of intermediary conditions I examine here can co-exist in a situation. It is also noteworthy that the importance of contingency reflects the difficulty of connective work. We can imagine that, unlike Helen, some supporters who intended to be "parents" might fail to establish ties with the targeted protesters; it requires certain luck. Those supporters who have no direct contact with the young protesters may choose to donate to the large platforms on social media, which I will discuss below.

Helen also partnered with another core member, Shirley, a woman in her 20s. Together, they used a luggage case to distribute gears on the streets. When handing out gears, they had opportunities to start the conversation, asking questions like "do you have enough food?" to collect contacts (another example of physical co-presence). Besides, they invented a little trick. One of the parents wanted to invite the sons and daughters to Disneyland for relaxation. It was not successful because nobody was in the mood to play at that time. This idea inspired them to invite the sons and daughters to bring their friends to join BBQ gatherings, creating a situation conducive to connective work. They invited people in the name of spreading gears (black raincoats for resisting water cannon vehicles, for instance). After all these efforts, the number of their sons and daughters snowballed to more than 20. I call the BBQ gathering a

"networking activity" as the fourth type of intermediary condition. In this case, the networking activity is crafted, as a deliberate attempt to expand the network, so creating the intermediary condition is part of the connective work. In other cases, some activities in the movement may not be designed for networking but are conducive for connective work in their nature. For example, Helen and Shirley have recruited another parent into their team, who knew each other in a woman self-defense class. Such free martial arts classes provided by the protesters to other protesters are good examples of non-intentional, contingent networking activities.

Finally, social media is the fifth crucial intermediary condition of connective work. The category contains variations. One variation is like how Helen activated her weak pre-existing ties through Facebook. Shirley offered another variation. Before partnering with Helen, Shirley had once seen a post on LIHKG (the major discussion forum used by the protesters) about the financial difficulties of young protesters, and then she left her Telegram user name in a comment so people in need could contact her. Soon, some young protesters contacted her. Then she sent meal coupons and gears to 6 young protesters. She said many of them were responsible for collecting resources for their own teams, so the estimated number of beneficiaries might be 70-80. Helen jokingly called them the "adulterine children" of Shirley. In this case, social

media provide channels for the protesters to contact strangers in the movement. It should be noted that the teams of frontline protesters also conducted connective work by themselves, so the connective work can be mutual instead of only one-directional.

Another substantial variation was the social media platforms (mostly on Telegram in this movement) that brokered the support providers and the protesters in need. It offered a brokering channel for the protesters to approach strangers in the movement.

The range of services is extensive and mostly voluntary, covering information, driving, financial aid, shelter, medical assistance, emotional support, and even job finding. For example, an informant was a manager of a shelter, whose friend offered an empty apartment. They received cases referred by a renowned supporting group on Telegram.

Protesters in need would contact the group admins, and they were responsible for verifying their identities to filter suspicious people. The verification included submission of identity proof (part of the ID card) and some dialogue, in which the admins would ask questions on the reasons and plans of shelter seekers. Then they would distribute the verified people to shelters according to different conditions. For example, the shelter of my informant preferred roomers of low to medium risk.

Another interviewee is an "admin" of a job-searching platform. Many protesters lost their jobs for various reasons related to the movement, such as being arrested. Many

supporters, who were employers, were willing to employ these protesters. My interviewee was a social worker and noticed this demand for jobs from protesters at the very early stage of the movement, and then he established a platform with his friends to connect the potential employers and the job seekers. After identity verification, the admins added the people to an internal Telegram group. They also build up a digital system later, operating like other job search websites but only open for the members in the inner group. According to my interviewee, they added more than 4000 job seekers into the internal group. The two cases show that the connective labor from the online platform admins provided efficient, brokering channels for other supporters to contact protesters in need (or vice versa).

To sum up, the informal protest networks did not emerge out of thin air. These networks were the products of "connective work" from the supporters to connect other supporters or the protesters in need. While the connection was deeply embedded in the digital infrastructure, it involved other types of intermediary conditions such as physical co-presence and pre-existing ties. I also suggest contingency as one type of intermediary condition, implying that the process of connective work can be largely unplanned and uncertain. The five types of intermediary conditions are summarized in the table below. In addition to the types of intermediary conditions, the connective

work can also vary in the level of inputs (some require more effort, and some require less) and the direction (one-directional or mutual).

**Table 2** Types of Intermediary Condition of Connective Work

Type	Variation	Example
Physical co-presence in protest aggregation		First aiders Young protesters and the 'awkward uncle'
Pre-existing ties	Strong ties	Helen's spouse who provided driving support
	Weak ties	The person working in the legal services sector who collected donations
Networking activities	Crafted	BBQ gatherings
	Non-intentional (i.e., contingent)	Woman self-defense class
Social media	Activate pre-existing ties	Helen's Facebook
	Meet strangers	Shirley's "adulterine children" linked via LIHKG
	Meet strangers through platform brokerage	Group admin on Telegram to verify ID, match resources (shelter, job search)
Contingency		Chatting while doing facial

### Challenge of Ties and Policing

The building of informal ties is by no means easy. In the case of Helen, they found it difficult to approach the young frontline protesters due to the lack of common basis and the generational division. Despite the abundant scholarly attention to informal ties/networks in social movements (e.g., Diani & McAdam, 2003; Krinsky & Crossley, 2014; Diani & Mische, 2015), the existing literature does not highlight the challenges to these informal ties. My question is: if the organizing of a movement heavily

depends on informal ties instead of formal organizations, what might be the major challenges or threats to such movement? Here, I propose that a major challenge to the informal ties of the Anti-ELAB Movement is the fear and distrust created by the police surveillance and infiltration. Why is it a major challenge to the emergence and development of informal ties? It is because trust is a significant pre-requisite of networking. Generally, in a mass movement, collective action and ideological affinity naturally create the condition of trust, encouraging the participants to cooperate and share with other participants. Without trust, it is hard for any connective work to succeed. However, police surveillance and infiltration pose a threat to this very pre-requisite. Given the risk of being exposed, the protesters inevitably become prudent towards networking and develop different methods and habits to cultivate secrecy. However necessary, the secrecy comes at the cost of network emergence, expansion, and deepening.

In the case of the Anti-ELAB Movement, the protesters noticed such risk at the very beginning of the movement, resulting in the general adoption of wearing facemasks and then "black-bloc." But in my observation, during the first two months of protest (June and July in 2019), the general wariness of protesters was relatively low, and many of the teams that I interviewed were established in this period. Then, probably

due to the rising legal risk involved in the protests and more information on the media showing the existence of police surveillance and infiltration, the wariness further increased. In August, the media reported that the undercover police infiltrated the protesters in black-bloc (Stubley, 2019), and later, the police were in a labor shortage and recruited retired police officers to view CCTV recordings (Leung, 2019). In response, the informal ties of protesters moved towards "covert social movement networks" in the literature. According to Crossley, Edwards, Harries, and Stevenson (2012, p. 635), there are two criteria of covert social movement networks: "(1) commit illegal acts whose details must be kept secret from the authorities prior to their commission; and who (2) seek to remain anonymous to all but a select few after their commission". How did the protesters make themselves "covert"? In the movement, it is common to hear the advice of "be quiet" (靜靜雞), suggesting the protesters not to disclose the details of "dreaming" (發夢, an argot means joining protests) and their identity, even to the supporters like voluntary drivers. For organizing practices, the formation of networks usually included some sort of filtering. The protesters might first approach each other through Telegram, then make an offline meeting and talk, filtering those who felt like "dogs" [police] and untrustworthy. This process is called "face check," a term from the famous video game League of Legends (LoL). A supposedly "clean" group after filtering is described as "face-checked."

However, the tendency to cultivate secrecy may constraint the potential of network formation and development. First, it can lead to the problem that many interactions remained one-off or shallow without generating stable ties. An interviewee from this street corner team, who was a long-term activist, observed that it was more difficult to talk with the volunteers in the current movement:

"Before the movement, making leaflets together was always a great chance to build up relations. We could sit down, have a meal, and not use mobile phones; everyone wanted to talk. But it did not work recently. Most people wanted to leave immediately [after the work was done]. It was very task-oriented [...] Obviously, the atmosphere was less tense before."

A voluntary driver reported a similar situation:

"Interviewer: Do you have any close sons and daughters?"

Interviewee: Er, no regular contacted sons and daughters. [...] Most of the time, being a voluntary driver is just as random as being a taxi driver. I try not to talk with them. It feels odd: both familiar and strange. We meet each other for the same reason, but we cannot communicate with each other."

Like many voluntary drivers in this movement, this interviewee received the passengers through the brokerage of online platforms and random encounters on the

streets. Both cases show that the protesters could be wary of talking with the strangers in the movement. Even though making leaflets together and voluntary driving consist of right intermediary conditions (that can be understood as networking activities and physical co-presence), no sustaining ties emerged in these two cases. This self-limiting of communication reflects the extensive atmosphere of fear and distrust.

Second, even if a network successfully emerges, it may avoid further expanding after it achieves a certain scale. The studies of covert social movement networks have already suggested that these networks are inclined to be static (i.e., little growth in the numbers of participant), because they tend to recruit members from their pre-existing networks only and minimize new recruitment (Crenshaw, 1992; della Porta, 2006; Erickson, 1981; Stevenson & Crossley, 2014). Similarly, the networks I observed in the Anti-ELAB Movement also took new recruitment cautiously. For example, the first aid team mentioned above soon stopped new recruitment after its establishment: “Since July we noticed the problem of “ghost” [undercover police], in the midst of July, we have closed the group and stopped recruiting new members.” Another interviewee told me that some supporters created first aid stations in the buildings of urban area, which were relatively well-equipped and able to treat severe patients. However, this kind of first aid station was only shared by a rigid number of first aid

teams, like ten teams for one station, to keep the locations confidential. Also, cooperation among supporters on a larger scale was often difficult to happen. A parent wanted to facilitate collaboration among parent networks but failed. He contacted some other parents and held a meeting with them, yet they did not make any further cooperation; the second meeting had never happened. He said,

“I wanted to build up an actual communication platform with other parents, but it was difficult. [...] Different parents had different resources. I expected the parents to share with each other through the platform, say, if one had no channel to approach medical services, others could provide. [...] People had already built up their own routines, like calling Spark Alliance or 612 Foundation, or certain medical hotlines, so they were not easy to collaborate. I think the people in this movement deal with their own tasks at hand in a scattered way, more than cooperation. [...] Because when you are exposed to external uncertainties, the risk is much larger.”

In this case, the attempt to establish a network of networks failed, probably because the protesters avoided further expand the networks once they built up the routines and achieved the necessary scales to handle tasks.

Third, another problem is not network expansion but network deepening. Regular

interactions did not necessarily create communication in depth. As part of the ethnography, I joined a small parent group that had provided regular financial assistance to several sons and daughters, usually including money and meal coupons every month. However, during months of assistance, the team members had never met any of them face-to-face. Inside the Telegram group, they called the sons and daughters in number (no.1, no. 2, etc.) rather than real names or nicknames. According to my interviewee, while he had invited the sons and daughters for meetings many times, they refused to meet “in avoidance of incriminating the supporters.” However, the absence of face-to-face interaction often made the relations alienated and brought frustration to the supporters. My interviewee has complained that one of the help seekers, who should be a male university student, only asked for money whenever he sent messages to the parents, without talking about anything else. Fortunately, there were two daughters (secondary school students) who were at least willing to share their daily troubles with the supporters (like how they were bullied by their “blue,” pro-establishment family members) and asked for advice. Their relations were relatively close, even without face-to-face interaction. In this case, while stable ties are created (monthly financial assistance), the consideration of risk can hinder network deepening, to the extent that led to alienation and frustration. It might reduce their motivation of the supporters because they could not receive lively feedback from

their participation.

Although the different methods or habits to maintain secrecy can be useful to counter state repression (i.e., police infiltration and surveillance), I argue that secrecy cultivation limits the network emergence, expansion, and deepening. In a movement that heavily relies on informal ties, this challenge can reduce the organizational capacity and sustainability of the movement. However, this is not an absolute outcome. In other cases, protesters can form new ties (especially in the first two months), then expand or deepen their ties successfully. In the cases of parents that I will discuss below, they developed close and affective bonding with the sons and daughters. In general, the ongoing protests kept generating intermediary conditions and actual demands for connections. Also, whether the protesters can develop sufficient trust depends on various contextual factors, such as meeting environment, perception of risk, and charisma. Therefore, the challenge of policing is at most limiting, rather than erasing, the potentials of network emergence, expansion, and deepening. It is a pair of tendency and countertendency of networking in a struggle.

Sometimes, the protesters managed to balance the need for secrecy and networking. I will end the discussion of this session with an interesting case of “broker.” Johnny is a

young man in his 20s but speaks more maturely than his age. Joining the protests as a frontline sentry in the beginning, he got a panic attack and other health issues; then he decided to step back. Due to his frontline participation, he knew many people in the movements. Having the contacts of drivers, parents, supply providers, and storage owners, he acted as what he called “broker” to manage the logistical issues among them. For example, after one of the campus occupations, many supplies were left and could be recycled. Johnny went to the campus and sent the supplies back to the “storages,” which could be an office, or a restaurant, owned by the supporters that provided space to store the supplies. The supplies varied in sensitivity, from water and clothes (low) to 3M respirators (medium) to crowbars and ingredients for making petrol bombs (high). The owners of storage also had different degrees of risk acceptance. For the non-sensitive supplies, Johnny called voluntary drivers through the “public oceans” (Telegram platforms), then transferred the supplies to the “clean” storages. He called the drivers whom he had direct contacts and trusted for the more sensitive supplies, then moved the supplies to the “dirty” storages. As a broker, Johnny provided a bridge between different parties so that they did not need to directly contact each other to reduce the risk of being exposed. He would keep himself as “clean” as possible, like removing all sensitive items from his home, so that even if police searched his home, they could find nothing. Johnny was in a

Telegram group with other “brokers,” around ten members, including “retired” frontline protesters and storage owners. All of them had good networks in the movement. The case of Johnny shows how the protesters can take advantage of organizing in informal ties, without too much exposure to risk.

### Content of Ties: The Case of Quasi-parenthood

After the discussion of emergence and challenge, I turn my attention to the content of ties, which is also an underexplored topic in the social network and social movement scholarship (Krinsky & Crossley, 2014; Foust & Hoyt, 2018). Readers may already be curious about why some supporters are called “parents,” and the young protesters are called “sons and daughters.” This is interesting because it seems to be unique and only exists in the Hong Kong protest. The protesters had never used such terms in the prior activism of Hong Kong; it only emerged around late July during the Anti-ELAB Movement. More than simply trendy words, I argue that the “quasi-parenthood” in this protest has real significance and deserves a specific treatment in this analysis. It shows why looking at the content of ties is no less important than the form of ties.

There is some ambiguity in the meaning of quasi-parenthood. Sometimes, “parents” refer to the voluntary drivers, and that involves a whole set of argots: the cars called

“school bus,” helping protesters to retreat called “picking-up at school,” and the gears called “stationery.” However, “parents” can also mean a great variety of support, such as financial assistance, gear logistics, shelter provision, and arrest support; many parents have multiple roles. In these cases, the quasi-parenthood seems to be sustaining, non-specific, and personal relationship with the young protesters. If one supporter only spread gears in the protest sites to anyone, he/she might not call himself/herself a parent. The managers of online platforms, open to the public, might prefer to call themselves “admins.” The supporters with (semi-)professional roles might prefer to call themselves according to their specific roles, such as first aiders and voluntary doctors. Therefore, “parent” is not a clear, technical role in the division of labor of the support and logistical networks, but a more general, ambiguous role.

How to conceptualize this interesting phenomenon? The quasi-parenthood can be understood as an identity, but it is different from the “collective identity” commonly discussed in the social movement literature. “Collective identity” is a “we-ness” that serves as the basis of mobilization and solidarity in collective action, such as gender, ethnicity, class, nationalism, and movement identities that generated from the activism (there are many reviews of this vast literature, for example, see Hunt, Benford, & Snow 1994; Polletta & Jasper 2001; Snow & Corrigall-Brown 2015; Flesher

Fominaya, 2018). In the Anti-ELAB Movement, the collective identity is likely to be the localist identity: “Hongkongers.” Instead, the quasi-parenthood is more a “role identity,” which means it is the self-concept or meaning that one attaches to the self in relation to social roles (Burke & Tully, 1977; Stryker, 1980). However, given that it is a role identity in the context of movement, it shares some characteristics of collective identity. The quasi-parenthood shares the features described by Melucci (1995, p. 45) on collective identity, which he defined as “a process refers thus to a network of active relationships between the actors, who interact, communicate, influence each other, negotiate, and make decisions” and also involves “emotional investment.” As a role identity in social movement, the quasi-parenthood is also relational, interactive, and affective.

Let me begin with the motivation of these parents. The motivation of parents may include similar reasons with the general participants, such as indignation against police brutality, but it may also contain particular logic. The youthfulness of protesters is a key factor. Many interviewees told me they were shocked by the ages of protesters at the beginning of the movement; for example, an interviewee described his memory on 612:

“[...] most people on the streets were students, very young. At that time, not

everyone wore masks, so you could see, they might not even have chosen their subjects [for high schools], younger than form 4. When I saw that, I could not bear to leave. [...] I do not think it is reasonable for the kids to bear so much risk. Of course, everyone has limited capacities to bear the risk. I have never beaten a dog [police]. It is likely that I can't go that far, but at least I try to do what I can do.”

Another interviewee said that she was shocked by a young protester whose helmet was larger than his head, who looked like a primary school student. Such youthfulness aroused a strong sympathy that the older participants not only felt sorry about the burden borne by these youngsters, but also the urge to protect them. Therefore, it motivates some older participants to commit more and stay with the young protesters, putting themselves in supportive roles. A parent named Betty reflected on the generational narrative in the movement:

“I think the major [motivation] is that I dislike how most media label the movement as a movement of the youth, putting all the responsibility on the younger generation. [...] I really dislike it! This issue is an issue for all Hongkongers. I think it is very unfair to put all responsibility on the new generation, and some young people really believe that. Do you understand? I talk with them, and I know they really feel that it is their own responsibility.

[...] It really makes me more sympathetic to the kids, and I feel I should stay with them. [...] If there are some adults, it makes them feel at ease because there are many issues they do not know how to deal with. We [the adults] may be more mature or calmer to find the solutions. And it makes them feel less alone because there are not only young people but also adults to walk with them and stay with them, no matter what position, be it fighting with them in the frontline, or bringing them home, caring for them. Even if you keep annoying them to report safety, it is sweet for them.”

Moreover, many young protesters were in real need of support. Since July, there were abundant reports in the media that the living expenses of some young protesters had been cut off by their conservative parents. For example, a report from the Apple Daily wrote that a student protester could not go back to home and often stayed overnight in McDonald’s, and even missed his admission to a program because his parents refused to pay the tuition (Poon, 2019). Information of this kind is indeed an emotional priming to many supporters, as Helen said:

“In late July, I heard that some kids had no money to pay for their meals. It is a big trigger point to me. (Interviewer: Why is it a trigger point to you?) They had no money to pay for their meals! In the beginning, my friend circle is a circle of mothers [mothers in reality]. We felt so heartbroken that the kids

were left in hunger.”

This is why she decided to cook with friends and distribute the food on the streets, starting a long journey of quasi-parenthood.

Parkinson (2013) argued that the female-dominated quotidian networks were significant in the support and logistics of the Palestinian rebellion in 1980s Lebanon.

The women transported money and materials and facilitated the circulation of information among the guerrilla organizations. If gender is a key social factor in the case of Parkinson, the factor of “generation” is significant in the support and logistical networks in the Anti-ELAB Movement, as we can see in the accounts of motivation from the parents. Many parents are middle-aged. Although some of the parents are young (around late-20s), they have working experience. In turn, many of the sons/daughters are students attending secondary schools or tertiary educational institutions. Sons/daughters who are older (20-something) sometimes play the role of big brothers/sisters of the younger members in the networks. The influence of generation includes two dimensions. Subjectively, sympathy towards the more youthful protesters, which often mixes with guilt and indignation, is a key motivation for the older protesters to take on the roles of quasi-parenthood or other back-end roles. Also, their participation is often a reaction to or a negotiation with the youth-

centered narrative of the movement. A similar example in this protest is the participation of the "silver-haired." There is a group of elderly protesters who joins the demonstrations and assemblies frequently with a slogan called "old but not useless" (老而不廢). The context is that the establishment supporters commonly derogate the young protesters as "useless youth" and, in return, the protesters attack the pro-establishment elderly as "useless elderly." The slogan of the silver-haired group aims to show that there are movement supporters, even in the older generation. Therefore, it is a collective phenomenon that participation in this movement often consciously interacts with the generational discourses about the movement.<sup>5</sup>

Objectively, the younger protesters have actual needs because of their social position. In the classic study of the Freedom Summer by McAdam (1988), he found that some students registered for the program did not show up at the end because of the objection from their parents. Therefore, young people have a particular type of "biographical unavailability" to join radical activism when they are still financially dependent on their parents.<sup>6</sup> It is exactly what happened in the Anti-ELAB Movement:

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<sup>5</sup> A similar example of generational discourse in politics from Taiwan is "If dads vote wrongly, sons will need to join revolution." (爸爸投錯票，兒子得革命)

<sup>6</sup> The definition of biographical availability is "the absence of personal constraints that may increase the costs and risks of movement participation, such as full-time employment, marriage, and family responsibilities" (McAdam, 1986, p. 70). It seems that younger people should have more biographical

some pro-establishment parents threatened to cut off the financial support for their children or expelled their children from their houses if they continued to participate in the movement. However, unlike the students in the case of McAdam who finally complied with their parents, the young protesters in the Anti-ELAB Movement have an alternative created by the quasi-parents and other supporters, who provided every basic item of living from food to shelter. Therefore, the quasi-parenthood can be seen as a measure within the movement community to counter biographical unavailability, partially similar to the protesters who provided childcare assistance to other members in the protest (Nepstad & Smith, 1999; Nepstad, 2004), but how to counter the biographical unavailability of the youth (i.e., parental control) is not covered in the literature. In short, in both subjective and objective dimensions, the quasi-parenthood is characterized by generational factors.

Parental control is not the single reason why some young protesters need support because they may simply lack some resources. Class plays a role, yet the social class composition of the protesters is complicated. According to the parents, some underprivileged sons/daughters come from grassroots or single-parent families, have dropped out of the study, or have blue-collar jobs. Betty reported that while she has

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availability, but it is not necessarily true.

more than ten sons/daughters, none are university students. Shirley observed:

“[For my sons and daughters,] it ranges from rich to poor. But for those on-the-job, they tend to be grassroots and poor and have jobs that require physical labor. (Interviewer: If they are rich, why do they need your assistance?) It depends. Well, for those I give them meal coupons, they are poor and face the economic ban from their families. Or they are younger, who need meal coupons and care. Other kids may not need money, but they like to exchange information with others and discuss strategies and gear. For gear, even if you have money, but you may have no channels to get the items if you do not know the channels. It is also a problem if you cannot buy an item in a large quantity.”

While money is important, the sons/daughters also need the care, knowledge, or social networks from the parents or simply need more teammates. It is not necessary for the parents to be very well-off, but they can still contribute time, labor, emotion, or other resources. In my data, some parents are only normal white collars, especially the younger parents, that can hardly be described as rich. Therefore, the class composition of both parents and sons/daughters are mixed to a certain extent. Of course, my qualitative data cannot provide a representative description of the actual distribution.

Finally, it appears that there are more “mothers” than “fathers” and more “sons” than

“daughters,” but I do not have conclusive evidence of how gender affects this phenomenon. As speculation, on one hand, the women are supposed to play the role of caregiver. On the other hand, maybe a large proportion of the young protesters in need of support are radical protesters, and a large proportion of the radical protesters is male because men are supposed to play the role of fighter.

The support items from parents are multiple. In the words of an interviewee, it covers “hard” support to “soft” support. “Hard” support is more logistical and administrative, such as gear provision. A parent who managed the gear provision of a large group described his work:

"Our respirators depend on Taiwan. The helmets are local; a local company of hiking gear sold helmets to us at cost prices. Eyewear is from Singapore, UK, and Germany. Part of them comes from online-shopping. Part of them from local people who send postal parcels to us. We buy the gear in amounts of 100, 200 each order. In the beginning, we buy the respirators in Hong Kong, but even the most basic respirators are soon out of stock."

It is not difficult to imagine that it is a heavy administrative burden, but this kind of support is only part of the work of parents. What distinguishes parents from other supporters is that many parents develop sustaining, non-specific, and personal

relations with their sons/daughters. The interaction is not one-off that allows the parents to grasp the needs of the sons/daughters, deriving various types of “soft” support. Shirley said:

“It is easy to notice that the sons/daughters have emotional problems. For example, the most common emotion is fear; they are always afraid of being tracked. After they ‘played’ [join the protest], they would come to our safe house, eat some food, and have a chat. They talked endlessly about what just happened, very emotional, and kept going on and on. It seems they were excited, but I actually felt that they were scared and really needed to share the feelings with others. Then we started to have meals with them privately; when we found that they had any family, study, or life planning problems, we helped them. [...] For the study, we found tutors for them. Some of them really fell behind because of the movement. For seeing doctors, most kids actually do not like to see doctors. In fact, not everyone is urgent to see doctors, but I want them to know somebody cares for them. Even though their family members do not care about them, we accompany them like a mother holding their hands [when seeing doctors].”

The parents used their own knowledge or social networks to provide these “soft” support for the young protesters, such as finding consultants for emotional therapy.

More importantly, the soft support is not just about the support in itself, but it shows the care for the sons/daughters from the parents, creating affective ties. After the phrase of violent confrontation of this movement ended in November and the overall momentum gradually cooled down, such “soft” support to deal with the damage caused by the violent confrontation, be it physical, mental, or social, has been more important. As Betty said:

“Now, my thought is to help my children to get back their lives. Get back to study, or if they lost their jobs because of the movement, I help them get new jobs. [...] Because I do many types of exercise, I bring them to do exercise. It is healthy, and it lets them know different things, so maybe they can be less depressed because there are still many things in their lives they can control themselves. The social movement is not the whole of your life, and should not be one thing to end your life.”

Although many online platforms and groups had already provided various “soft” services to the protesters, the protesters needed to approach them first. However, without the parents, the young protesters may not notice their issues or be motivated to seek help. The personal and sustaining ties cannot be replaced by anonymous, fluid, and digital interactions; they have different strengths and are complementary.

Finally, the quasi-parenthood is an active relationship in which the parents and the sons/daughters influence each other. While the sons/daughters received support from the parents, the parents also transformed themselves through their sustaining contact with their sons/daughters. Particularly, I observed that the parents' acceptance of violence was enlarged. Helen described that in her team:

“Interviewer: How do you view the use of violence in the protest? Do you accept or not accept?”

Interviewee: Well, we do not have much of a bottom line now [laughter]. Even the peaceful (和理非) parents ask: when don't the police die?”

For those parents, the frontline and young protesters were no longer just a spectacle on the media; their sacrifice was very real to the parents. As Shirley said:

“I imagine if this happened to my own children, like on remand for so many days, what would I feel? I believe many people share the same thought. Especially, I know some elderly friends, they may not be very political, sometimes they do not understand why the kids do that. But they ask why the kids got hurt?”

One interviewee, who had joined a gathering of parents and sons/daughters, told me that a main conversation topic among them was the sons showing off their scars left

from the protests and telling stories about that. It is not difficult to imagine that the parents heard tons of such stories, and they felt strongly about the police brutality. Also, many parents told me that they believed the forces of police and protesters were extremely unequal. As Helen said:

“We have kids in charge of rioting. A number of them are arrested. But they tell me clearly that throwing ‘fire magic’ [petrol bombs] is a gesture. They do not want to be beaten by the police, then throw something to defend themselves. I would say my sons and daughters are very good people. If one gives them a knife to kill somebody, they cannot do it, at least my group is like this. When you see how they are beaten, you feel it is fine no matter how they counter.”

Her judgment is based on a close relationship with the young protesters, which leads her to legitimate the use of violence by the reasons for the good intention of the young protesters and the unequal forces. However, the high acceptance of violence does not mean the parents support any violent action. They may set some boundaries, like only providing protection gears but not weapons, and objecting to some extreme attempts from the sons/daughters.

The quasi-parenthood is a key component of the content of ties in the movement. It is

a role identity in the context of contention that is affected by both subjective and objective generational factors. It is a sustaining, personal, affective, and mutually influential network of relationships between the older and younger protesters. If our analysis only focuses on the form of ties, such as density or the use of social media, we will overlook such a significant factor in the dynamics of support and logistical networks.

### Conclusion

This chapter discusses three aspects of the informal ties in the Anti-ELAB Movement. Unlike most social network analysis in social movement studies that use quantitative methods to analyze the form of ties, this research uses qualitative methods to analyze the emergence, challenge, and content of ties in the protest. I argue that the informal ties in the movement are the products of “connective work” by the protesters that happened via different types of “intermediary conditions.” Then, I argue that the policing and the responding cultivation of secrecy poses a significant challenge to network emergence, expansion, or deepening. Finally, I study a role identity in this movement, namely quasi-parenthood, which is a significant component of the content of ties and affects the relational dynamics. This analysis considers agency, inter-

subjectivity, and other micro-processes within the ties. All in all, “informal ties” is a fundamental component in the organizing of this movement. In my view, the most important consequence of these successful connections, despite the challenges posed by policing and other factors, is that the protesters in need (many of them young and radical) became well-embedded in larger support and logistical networks, rather than isolated from the society. The studies of violent protests showed that, in response to the hostile environment, the radical protesters might fall into isolation, then became increasingly extreme and brutal due to their closure and internal rivalry (della Porta, 2006, 2013). Judging by the development after one year of the movement, the radical protesters in Hong Kong, in general, do not fall into this vicious trap of militants. Their ties with the supporters probably contribute much to this development. The supporters help the radical protesters get back to normal life, accompany them to face legal procedures, deal with other damages caused by the movement, or assist them in escaping to other countries. Instead of isolation and closure, the young and radical protesters are still connected to the broader movement networks that offer them the routes of retreat.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Partial Organizing**

#### Introduction

I frequently heard the interviewees described themselves as belonging to “teams,” like a first aid team or a sentry team. Later, I realize that this is a hint that the supporters not only relate to each other by pure informal ties/networks, but also involve some elements of organization. Building on the work of Ahrne and Brunsson (2011), this chapter explores the “partially organized” networks of the protesters. In their language, “network” is a social order that emerges spontaneously (which I will add “through connective action”), but “organization” is a social order based on decisions (ibid, p. 3). Ahrne and Brunsson (2011) listed five fundamental elements of formal organization: membership, hierarchy, rules, monitor, and sanctions. When people selectively introduce organizational elements into their social relations, it is described as partially organized. This chapter applies this theory, but makes one adjustment: I do not only discuss the five basic organizational elements suggested by Ahrne and Brunsson

(2011), but also some “bureaucratic elements,” such as impersonality and specialized division of labor, which could be captured by the concept of bureaucracy (Weber, 1978). I view these bureaucratic elements as additional organizational elements. The major theoretical question is how and why people partially organize their networks.

In the Anti-ELAB Movement, there is a wide range of “partiality” within the protest networks, from very loose ties to relatively structured teams. Some of the teams are no less complicated than doing small businesses and start-ups. I argue that the partial introduction of organizational elements into the networks is a key factor of the high organizing capacity of this movement, and it is a response to the high-risk situation. I show that the partial presence of these organizational and bureaucratic elements was introduced to cultivate secrecy, improve efficiency, and counter common organizational problems (such as internal conflict and integration of new members, see Staggenborg, 1989). However, these elements potentially conflict with some qualities of informal ties (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011). Particularly, hierarchy and rules, inevitably associated with power inequality, can create tension with the ideal of horizontal organizing (Laamanen, Bor, & den Hond, 2019). In this case, I suggest that given a strong tendency of “task-orientedness,” the protesters can accept the power inequality for practical reasons if the operation does not make controversial

ideological decisions. Yet, the task-orientedness may off-set the “prefigurative” (Yates, 2015) potentials of the movement.

### Division of Labor and Procedures

Among the teams, some supporters developed regular operating models within their groups, which assigned specialized division of labor and established standard procedures to create the necessary efficiency and secrecy to handle specific, and often risky, tasks. This point can be illustrated by how parents teamed up with drivers to help young protesters evade the police and retreat to safety. Specifically, every time when action was about to end due to the clearance, it was a difficult period for the frontline protesters to escape from the siege of the police. The protesters needed to change their clothes, hide or abandon their gears, and find safe routes to avoid police interception (roadblocks and patrols). To minimize the risk of this process, since September, the parent team of Shirley and Helen has provided different resources to their sons and daughters. First, they booked an apartment on Airbnb to be a safe house, which they called “party room” in their code words. This safe house was not for long-term living, but only a transitory and safe spot during the retreat, to reduce the risk of being traced and located by the police. Second, they established their private driver team with around 30 cars. “All drivers are personal friends of the parents. [...] This is

the safest way. If you call drivers on Daai Siu Mat [a Telegram platform of voluntary driver], you do not know if they are ‘ghost drivers’ [undercover police],” Helen said.

The resources were arranged by standard operating procedures. During each action, the parents had a roster, at least two mothers, and one group admin were on duty in a shift. The parents required the sons and daughters to report their locations each hour in a standard format (name, Telegram ID, time, location). Before establishing this standard report system, different sons and daughters were familiar with different parents, so the communication was in disarray, and the information was not shared by the whole parent team. After the system was established, whoever was on duty could follow the locations of all sons and daughters easily. Helen described the development of this system:

“At the beginning, it was very casual. We had a board and then stuck memos, classified in several districts, with the locations of our sons. It was so difficult to read. And it was a bit dangerous. If we picked up any strangers to the safe house, and they saw it, we were afraid. Then we developed a [digital] system.

[...] The message was pinned in the Telegram group. [...] The table had a timestamp of the update, like 1454, which means it was updated at 1454. If the last report of one son were 12 noon, then we would worry whether he was

arrested, and tried to find him.”

The quote showed a process of improvement of this system. Also, the adoption of digital means was an essential part of this organizing practice, improving its clarity and efficiency.

Together with standard procedures, the parents assigned themselves regular, specialized roles in the division of labor, including group administration, pick-up, voluntary driving, cooking (as an occasional service), and safe house management (but that position was abandoned later for the lack of manpower). “Ms. stage” was the nickname in this team to call the group admin who overviewed the situation. The group admin needed to watch over 40 information channels at the same time, then disseminates the information to the mothers and drivers, suggesting which routes they should go to avoid police roadblocks and conflict zones. Not hard to imagine that this is an extremely demanding role, requiring sophisticated ability of information processing, therefore the parents in this team often joked that the member who took this role could be recruited by the FBI.

Another major role was the “pick-up mothers,” who followed the locations of sons and daughters, found them if they did not respond, and matched them with the drivers.

Sometimes they walked to pick up their sons and daughters in person. Helen described:

“A son might say, ‘Mum, I can’t escape, come to pick me up.’ Then we would go. Usually, when a woman accompanied a boy, the ‘dogs’ [police] would not bother you but let you go. Sometimes, we even walked hand in hand, like we were couples. I am okay with that.”

While the “Ms. stage” took the task of back-end information processing, the “pick-up mothers” took over the task of communicating with the sons/daughters and the drivers. The “pick-up mothers” also needed to be present at the protest sites, which required them to possess the ability to respond spontaneously to emergent situations. In this team, these two major roles were responsible for most administrative tasks, complemented by other supplementary roles.

The very objective of bureaucracy was to achieve efficiency (in terms of means-end relationship) by rational arrangement. If these parents did not establish a system like that, they could only rely on ad hoc and uncoordinated communication in this case of retreat assistance. If so, they would likely encounter many problems, such as lack of full and updated information or wasteful labor distribution. Therefore, I argue that their incorporation of bureaucratic elements (specialized division of labor and

standard procedures) improved their support efficiency. In the literature of “covert social movement network,” a topic is whether efficiency and secrecy are a trade-off (Crossley et al., 2012). Sometimes, like this case, the secrecy itself (not being noticed by the police) is the task in itself that needs to be done efficiently (ibid, p. 636). In this sense, secrecy and efficiency are compatible, and the latter can be improved by introducing some bureaucratic elements to their informal ties. Another case that demonstrates this point is a team on Lennon Wall. The details of this case will be elaborated in the next chapter that discusses spatiality. In short, this team developed a sentry system with a pre-assigned, specialized division of labor. They limited the time of sticking posters to be done within 5 minutes according to standardized operating procedures. Such decisions were also made to preserve the secrecy of the action.

In addition to the improvement of efficiency and secrecy, there are other benefits of standardizing operating procedures. First, in the parent team case, since their system was so mature, it allowed the parents to work remotely. Helen said that once she had left Hong Kong a few days, but she could still contribute to the rescue mission by her mobile phone. Except for picking up the sons and daughters in person, all tasks could be done online. An informant from a street corner team told me a similar experience that he had organized street corners from overseas. This street corner team also had

certain standardized operating procedures. In their core Telegram group, the members could propose to organize street corners somewhere for specific purposes. If others agreed, they would circulate a list of necessary items for street corners (e.g., microphones), then the members voluntarily filled in the list. While communicative technology makes such offshore organizing possible, it can hardly be actualized without established operating procedures. Second, facilitating the integration of new members is another advantage of standard operating procedures. According to Helen, they had recruited two new parents during the peak of confrontation, when the workloads were too heavy to handle. They did not have time to conduct a face-to-face meeting with all parents. By teaching them how the system worked via online conversation, the two new members quickly participated in the operation. In other words, standardizing procedures allowed the new members to be integrated efficiently, which is a key organizational challenge identified by Staggenborg (1989).

### Impersonality and the Enforcement of Rules

Impersonality is another important bureaucratic element in these partially organized networks. Although the quasi-parenthood relationship, as I discussed before, is largely personal, the parent team of Helen and Shirley consciously incorporated certain impersonality in their operation:

“If a son finds you and tells you something, we will report to others in a group of mothers. Like, I recently talked with a son, and I found that he had this and that issues, let’s pay attention together. Then everyone knows his current situation. [...] He is not your own case, and you should not take it personal.

Telling the situation to all members is helpful to adjust the distance.”

These parents developed a consensus to keep the distance in the relationship with their sons and daughters and make the support a collective issue inside the team. Why?

Helen explained:

“Only by doing so, the relations can be long-lasting. If I am too close with you and have a quarrel, then the chain will be broken. The whole thing does not work. And people of course favor someone more. However, if your favoritism is too strong, like, if you drive, and there are two sons, who do you choose to pick up? Do you choose by your favoritism or urgency?”

The parents intended to counter potential internal conflicts (another organizational challenge identified by Staggenborg, 1989) due to personal conflict or favoritism by having certain impersonality in operation, strengthening their organizational maintenance. It should be noted that different parents had different attitudes toward their relationship with their sons/daughters. As I heard from the informants, some parents chose to be more intimate with their sons/daughters. Yet, despite varying

degrees of intimacy, impersonality is a common feature that I have found in my cases.

A phenomenon that links to the impersonality is that some cases had formal or written rules in their operation, which is also a key feature of bureaucracy and formal organization. For example, the parent team of Helen and Shirley required that the sons and daughters must not contact the drivers privately because “you can’t find the drivers to do a task we don’t know. What if you let drivers carry a bomb? If it happens, and you two were arrested, our whole group would be exposed.” The rationale is to avoid “putting the whole family in a dangerous situation.” In the cases of supporters, the existence of rules mostly aims at reducing risk and preserving secrecy. This parent team has kicked out a son from the team once because he violated the rules many times (e.g., suddenly adding other people unknown to the parents into their Telegram group). However, the enforcement of rules is not easy. Consider another interviewee, a shelter manager who set a list of house rules including:

- must not come back wearing black clothes
- must not store gears in the safe house
- must not bring others to the safe house without the consent of the house manager

- avoid coming back to the apartment directly (for example, it is better to enter another a lower floor and climb up stair)
- clean the room every day
- etc.

The rules were mostly set for risk management, and some were set for co-living. She found a daughter who lived in the shelter to enforce the rules, reminding her roommates or reporting to the manager in the case of serious violation. This kind of “monitor” is also an organizational element identified by Ahrne and Brunsson (2011).

However, some residents might be reluctant to comply with the rules. For example, other roommates might refuse to clean the room with bad attitudes, like “I will clean it later. Why don’t you report it to the manager? I’m not afraid!” The most extreme case is that:

“[A boy] violated many rules that I set for the safety of everyone. He said I was annoying, and why he needed to follow my house rules [...] Our house rules include that they must not have sex in the shelter [...] He and his girlfriend [both were residents in the shelter] didn’t obey the rule and often had sex in the shelter when nobody was there, like it was a free hotel room. He even came with another girl --- yes, he cheated --- and had sex there. Strangers

must not enter our house without the consent of others. He did not care about this rule, he cheated, he broke up with his girlfriend. This was big trouble.”

In the end, the manager found an excuse to kick out this young protester. Such uncooperative behaviors, all reported by other informants, often deeply frustrated the supporters who had a romantic imagination about the young protesters.

The story shows that the back-end protesters may have weak authority to enforce rules. Most of the time, the only sanction (another organizational element identified by Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011) that they can make is to stop providing support, but they may not make this decision easily. Also, the young protesters may not necessarily be financially dependent on the back-end protesters, or they have multiple channels to access resources. Therefore, only the material incentive is not adequate to ensure compliance. The supporters can set rules but not rules well backed up by monitoring and sanctions, similar to what Laamanen, Bor, and den Hond (2019) found in their study of timebanking. Compliance to the rules, therefore, is a cooperation that usually involves other non-organizational relational mechanisms. For example, since the shelter manager did not live in the shelter, she had limited contact with the young protesters who lived in the shelter. On the contrary, the parents in the team of Helen and Shirley had spent more time talking with the sons/daughters, and on many

occasions, they faced risk together on the streets. Given such comradeship, they created a strong mutual trust and a culture of cooperation, so the sons/daughters were more willing to comply with the rules. Helen mentioned that after a long-term of “training,” her sons and daughters all became used to reporting safety even when they were not doing very sensitive tasks, such as sticking posters on Lennon Walls. The problem of rule enforcement shows the complexity of the process of partial organizing. While some organizational elements are introduced to the networks selectively for specific purposes, it may follow with problems due to the absence of other organizational elements, which need non-organizational or informal mechanisms to complement. In this case, the relatively successful group (the parent team) ensured compliance by mutual trust based on the shared experience of struggle.

### Hierarchy

The final bureaucratic and organizational element I discuss here is hierarchy. Sociologists usually construct “network” as an alternative organizational form distinguished from “market” and “hierarchy” in the level of ideal type (Powell, 1990). In reality, the organizational forms are likely to be mixed (ibid). Hierarchies are not rare in the support and logistical groups in the Anti-ELAB Movement. First, many groups were internally divided into “core group” and “others.” This is highly similar

to the findings of other studies of partial organizing in social movements. Both Laamanen, Bor, and den Hond (2019) and Weinryb, Gullberg, and Turunen (2019) found core groups emerged within the movement, who were usually the most committed participants and took administrative roles. In my case, I find that these two factors (individual commitment and administrative pressure) are major reasons of the formation of core groups too, but another factor is no less significant and specific to this context: safety against policing.

A neighborhood Lennon Wall team is a great example. It had around 60 members in total. However, the members were separated into two groups on the Telegram: more than 20 “core members” and a larger group that included others. To counter police infiltration, the establishment of this Lennon Wall team had gone through a process of “filtering.” According to my interviewee, the filtering began with several members in their team, who decided to test other members individually by false information. After a private discussion, each of them was assigned to test several members in the larger group. The actual process was:

“It is like I say, I will be somewhere, we will have a large-scale action at that time. Actually, I only told you. But on that day, there were many policemen.”

If it happened, they would know this member was suspicious. By this method of

filtering, they excluded 5-6 members out of the group.

Then they further formed a core group within the larger group, only including those who were strongly believed to be “clean.” I asked my informant how he evaluated the trustworthiness of the members, in addition to the filtering conversation. The criteria he gave were somehow arbitrary. He said he trusted those members who stayed in the team from the very beginning or initiated many activities, or he knew them participating in risky action in the movement (he had “picked up” a member during the action day so he knew this member was a frontline protester). In other words, the members earned trust from others, basically by showing their commitment to the movement. Such criteria, as well as the filtering, were no guarantee to counter infiltration. For example, if a spy stayed in the group from the very beginning, it is difficult to identify him/her.

Nevertheless, the filtering process and the formation of the core group were measures to preserve secrecy, resulting in a hierarchical structure. However simple and preliminary, this is indeed a hierarchy, in which the upper layer had larger authority in decision-making and access to key information. Several team members “decided” (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011) to create this hierarchy by classifying the groups on social

media. The creation of this hierarchy through “filtering” is primarily based on individual and subjective judgement with vague trustworthiness criteria. Again, like the case of rule enforcement, it shows the hybridity of formality in partial organizing. Here, the process of introducing a formal-organizational element to the network is very informal. The simple hierarchy of core members and other members can also be found in other cases. For example, the street corner team that I interviewed was also stratified into a core group and a larger group on Telegram.

If the support and logistical networks were not wholly horizontal, a related question was whether they were completely leaderless. I argue that they were not. One of my interviewees was a “founder” of a job-searching online platform in the movement, which is the most “structured” organization in the cases I approached. This founder was a social worker. In 2016, he had already noticed the risk of losing jobs for protest when there were protesters charged for rioting in Mongkok. In the new movement, he knew a 17-year-old man arrested for rioting who lost his job. This young protester was remanded for 48 hours, and his employer could not contact him, so the employer fired him for absenteeism. This case inspired him to start the project, and then he found some friends (also social workers) to work on it together. Due to good media exposure, the platform attracted many protesters, both job seekers and potential

employers. The team also grew from a handful of admins to around 20-30 members through snowballing of the personal networks of members. The members were separated into several sub-teams, including fact-check, job posting, job training, business development, and information technology. They have a “job training” team because some employers complained about the lack of discipline (e.g., frequent late attendance) and the poor presentation in interviews and CVs, so they offered job training talks by themselves and also invited the employers for sharing. It is more curious that they have a “business development” team. According to the informant, he was the only person in the team who resigned from his previous job and participated in the team operation as a full-time commitment. He thought:

“I am the founder and I resign to operate the platform to make it mature and systematic, then I begin to think how long we can maintain it with only volunteers? [...] Why need to earn money and be sustainable? If some ‘arms and legs’ [comrades] go through their legal process after a year [...] but after a year, there is no one to support them, ‘sorry we are no longer operating,’ that is something we definitely do not want to say.”

Therefore, the business development team was responsible for exploring income sources, including providing paid services to the employers, writing proposals to apply for funding, or selling stuff.

Each sub-team has a team leader, and these team leaders have regular meetings with the founder. Sometimes, if any sub-team had lost momentum, he needed to fill in the gap. However, when the daily operation and division of labor became more mature, he could focus on doing media interviews and developing new projects, or in his words, “more prospective stuff.” He said:

“There are so many administrative tasks, so we need a system. I know some other teams have only 2-3 members, or even one member, to ‘chur’ [work extremely hard]. But this does not work, and it is not a good leader, leaving no room for your team to think more about the future.”

As I discussed above, they developed a specialized division of labor and standard procedures to manage the routine administration. On top of that, he recognized himself as a leader to build up this system. In turn, this system allowed him to focus on “innovating and entrepreneurial activity” (a leading task identified by Earl, 2007) for the development of the platform. This form of organizing resembles some start-up firms in the capitalist market nowadays, in which a participative leadership exists within a relatively flat hierarchy, encouraging participation of all but still providing vision and direction (Gronn, 2011). The founders or core admins in other platforms also offered similar leadership. For example, a Telegram platform of voluntary

Chinese medicine services was led by a few admins who initiated many innovative projects, such as producing herbal tea bags for tear gas symptoms. If we consider these cases, the informal ties in the movement are neither completely “horizontal” nor “leaderless.”

### Task-orientedness over Prefiguration

The above discussion points to a curious question: why did the protesters accept rules, hierarchies, and leaders, that inevitably associate with power inequality? Particularly, how did these organizing arrangements reconcile with the horizontal, leaderless spirit of “no main stage”? I argue that the protesters can accept these “unequal” organizing arrangements due to their “task-oriented” tendency over “prefiguration.” Despite the similarity between “no main stage” and the description of “horizontalism” in foreign contexts, they have a fundamental distinction. Sitrin (2012) described that the horizontalism in the last wave of occupy movements in the United States, Spain, and other places, was “a tool to create more participatory and freer spaces for all—a process of awakening and empowerment.” The protesters wanted to actualize equal deliberation and direct democracy inside the organizing of struggles through assemblies or other forms. Broadly speaking, horizontalism is a form of “prefigurative politics,” which “refers to scenarios where protesters express the political ‘ends’ of

their actions through their ‘means,’ or where they create experimental or ‘alternative’ social arrangements or institutions” (Yates, 2015, p. 1). However, while the protesters in Hong Kong shared the anger against established political parties, organizations, and figures with horizontalism, the protesters did not aim to express direct democracy through alternative social arrangements during the movements. When we compare the cases in this research with the leaderless grassroots groups in the literature, it is clear. Sutherland, Land, and Böhm (2014) found that the activists in anarchist groups developed mechanisms to encourage everyone to take up parts in the leadership, such as leader rotation or distributed leadership roles. These groups were “leaderless” but had collective “leadership.” However, in my cases in the Anti-ELAB Movement, I found no similar attempt to develop mechanisms of sharing leadership.

According to my observation, the protesters in the Anti-ELAB Movement can accept the existence of leaders and other hierarchical arrangements when such arrangements have practical functions, and the tasks do not involve ideological controversy. My informant from the street corner team said, “Even if there were any debates [within the team], the debates were very, very minor, like whether this method is efficient. It is not any ‘philosophical’ debate.” I found a similar tendency in other cases. The protesters seldom discussed ideologically controversial issues within these networks

and teams, like whether Hong Kong should be independent or keep the “one country, two systems” principle. Also, the leaders or the core members may perform some “leading tasks” such as organizing specific actions and innovating, but not articulating ideology and framing the movement and its issues (Earl, 2007). Although the leaders and core members had more decision-making power, they did not represent other members to articulate ideology. Overall, the support networks and teams in this movement focused themselves narrowly on administrative and relational issues. Even if there are any internal conflicts, the conflicts are probably centered around administrative or interpersonal problems.

I think this tendency of Hong Kong protesters can be best described as “task-orientedness,” which is inspired by the classic article *The Tyranny of Structurelessness* (Freeman, 2013[1972]). Freeman argued that there are no real “structureless” organizations. Even if the groups have no formal structures, they still have informal structures. She further argued that those groups with basically informal structures only work with specific conditions. One of the conditions is:

“Its function is very narrow and very specific, like putting on a conference or putting out a newspaper. It is the task that basically structures the group. The task determines what needs to be done and when it needs to be done. It

provides a guide by which people can judge their actions and make plans for future activity.” (Freeman, 2013[1972], p. 239)

This quote is very appropriate to describe the teams in the Anti-ELAB Movement. To a large extent, these teams were structured by the tasks that were narrow and specific.

I add that these tasks were also administrative or relational, so the participants could assume their consensus on the general framing of the movement and avoid ideological controversy. For the Hong Kong protesters, the partial incorporation of organizational elements into the networks is a task-oriented, rather than value-oriented, judgment.

On one hand, such a practical attitude might contribute to their efficiency and solidarity for avoiding ideological conflicts within groups. On the other hand, they might not create prefigurative arrangements that could benefit their long-term development. For example, encouraging everyone to take leadership tasks could increase the commitment of members, and the group could maintain even in the absence of individual core members.

The consequences of “task-orientedness” over “prefiguration” on the movement, and the reasons behind this tendency, require another research to study, which needs to begin with the earlier debates on prefigurative experiments in Hong Kong. To my knowledge, there was a debate on small group discussion during assemblies in the

protest against the HKTV license refusal by the government in 2013. In the Anti-ELAB Movement, some conditions may be unfavorable to prefigurative experiments, such as its lack of stable, public “free space” (Yates, 2015) and high-risk environment. It is also possible to argue that the Anti-ELAB Movement showed its prefigurative politics in other spheres, like the building of “yellow economic circle.” Nevertheless, identifying the task-oriented tendency in this movement paves the way for future analysis.

### Conclusion

In this chapter, I argue that the supporters partially organize their networks by incorporating organizational and bureaucratic elements that help them improve efficiency, preserve secrecy, and counter organizational problems such as integrating new members and internal conflicts. It is a response to the escalated, high-risk situation. “Partial organizing” is a key factor to explain the secret of high organizational capacity of this movement. This is theoretically important because it captures the hybrid organizing of the movement in a subtle and contextualized way, beyond the general and dichotomous categories like “network versus organization” or “organization versus disorganization.” Following this perspective, we can differentiate various organizational elements and discuss their partial presence and absence

individually, looking at the processes, functions, and tensions of each element. The combination of formal and informal, or organizational and non-organizational mechanisms, like how protesters enforce rules by mutual trust in the absence of efficient monitor and sanctions, is significant in the organizing dynamics. Finally, I argue that, despite their “no main stage” spirit, the protesters can accept organizing arrangements associated with unequal power due to their task-orientedness over prefiguration. This discussion leads us to consider organizing not as an isolated and technical issue, but closely related to the general movement ideology and the “means-end” analysis by the protesters.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Guerrilla Spatiality**

#### Introduction

Chapters 3 and 4 discuss the formation of informal ties to the partial organizing of these ties. In this and next chapter, I shift the focus to the spatial and temporal dimensions of organizing, delineating a more comprehensive picture of the Anti-ELAB Movement. The Anti-ELAB Movement shows distinctive spatial characteristics in its tactics and organizing. In the past decade, many mass movements adopted occupation as the core tactic, such as the Arab Spring, the Spanish Indignados movement, and the anti-austerity protests like the Occupy Wall Street in the United States. The Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong in 2014 was no exception. In the occupy movements, the occupied area symbolizes the movement, where protesters aggregate, live, and confront the police. Unlike the occupy movements, the Anti-ELAB Movement did not stick to any specific space. The demonstrations and assemblies spread all over the city. Several attempts to occupy the legislative council

and university campuses all ended shortly. Disruptions could happen in multiple points in a single day but rarely maintained overnight. The protesters borrowed the famous quote “be water” from Bruce Lee to express their principle of flexibility, which is very apt to describe their mobile spatial practice.

But how is “be water” actually organized? In dialogue with the literature of spatiality in social movement, in this section, I discuss the spatial dimension of organizing in this movement, focusing on logistics and support. I begin with a description of the spatial mobility of the movement and highlight its difference with occupy movement by a short comparison with the Umbrella Movement. Then, I argue that if we only look at the flexible and city-wide action of the movement, we will neglect its sub-localized and fixed foundation in the neighborhoods. This spatial strategy is similar to guerrilla: flexible hit-and-run is coupled with a robust organizational basis in local villages (in this case, the sub-local neighborhoods in a well-developed city). This “guerrilla spatiality,” combining the two opposite styles of spatial strategy in dual scales of struggle ongoing simultaneously, is a key element of organizing this movement.

My analysis examines the relationship between organizing, tactics, and spatiality. Part

of the research findings of Stillerman (2003) is guiding here. In his study of 1960 metalworkers' and coal miners' strikes in Chile, Stillerman described how strikers tactically made use of the characteristics of the built environment and the spatial routines of the neighborhood. The worker housing and the union hall were proximate to the factory, which gave a safe space to the strikers to take refuge when the police attacked them. Given their familiarity with the area, they developed strategies to block the entry of scabs into factories by attacking them and the police in specific locations. In response to the strengthened repression from the police, they made use of the spatial routines of the wives of the workers, who appeared to be just women walking along the streets and buying daily goods. The women had bags of flour and threw them on the backs of the strikebreakers, allowing the workers to identify them. Although Stillerman did not focus on organizing, he documented the organizing practice in relation to their spatial tactics, such as the formation of "hit teams" to beat scabs at the factory gates and how they coordinated through code words changed weekly. Stillerman showed how to analyze the organizing practice and struggle tactic from a spatial angle, which inspires the analytical approach in this chapter.

### Organizing Logistics with Spatial Mobility

Let me begin with a background description of the highly mobile street tactics of this

movement. In general, radical protesters set roadblocks to hinder the traffic after major demonstrations or assemblies. Then the police would come to disperse the mass and arrest the protesters. Radical protesters would confront the police, forming the “frontline” that could move during the see-saw battle between protesters and police. However, most of the time, the police successfully pushed their line of defense and dispersed the mass, then the protesters might disaggregate and re-aggregate to other sites. This was the major pattern of confrontation in this movement. The protesters and the police confronted each other in their respective defense lines, which could happen in multiple spots over the city. The protesters loved to call it "blossom everywhere” (遍地開花). In addition to this major pattern, there were scattered vandalism that small groups of protesters destroyed shops owned by the Chinese capital and the pro-establishment camp and MTR (Mass Transit Railway) and government buildings. Protesters called this tactic, jokingly, “renovation” (裝修). Small groups of protesters might also throw items to block the roads and leave before the police come and clear the roads, then protesters would wait for the next timing to repeat the action. Protesters called this tactic “flash mob” (快閃).

Geographically, in June, all the major events happened on Hong Kong Island, which was the conventional place of protests in Hong Kong. It included the two million-

scale demonstrations and the 612 protest that started off the momentum of the Anti-ELAB Movement. The Kowloon demonstration on 7 July was the first significant demonstration that went beyond Hong Kong Island. Then, the Shatin demonstration on 14 July and Yuen Long demonstration on 27 July happened in the New Territories. On 5 August, the first general strike called by the protesters, there were assemblies in seven districts, and all followed with forceful confrontation. There are various reasons why protesters chose different locales. The first Kowloon demonstration at Tsim Sha Tsui aimed to express the views of protesters on the mainland tourists. Later, the netizens on LIHKG often called for protests in Kowloon, instead of Hong Kong Island, because the landscape in Kowloon allowed the radical protesters to retreat more easily. Both examples show strategic consideration. However, the decision to demonstrate at Yuen Long on 27 July was not due to strategic consideration, but a reaction to the 721 event (police inaction in the face of triad members' attack of citizens on streets in Yuen Long). For whatever reasons, the result is that, within a short time, the movement spread to many districts in Hong Kong, where large-scale mass movement never happened.

To make this mobility possible, transportation is a necessary element. In the beginning, the protesters were heavily dependent on the existing infrastructure of the city: public

transport. Hong Kong is a compact city with a high population density connected by an efficient public transport system. Compared with cities of similar sizes, fewer people rely on private cars (Research Office of Legislative Council Secretariat, 2019). In the early stage, there were scenes where masses of black-bloc protesters retreated or transited through MTR. Yet, the government countered this tactic by closing MTR stations nearby the protest sites, and the police stayed at MTR stations to arrest protesters. After the 831 event, MTR became a target of vandalism by protesters and no longer a viable or safe means of transport. Therefore, voluntary driving became a component of the logistics and support so significant for the movement. Apart from the transition of protesters, voluntary driving was also important for the transportation of materials. In the introduction, I have mentioned the gigantic material stations in the short-term campus occupation. Helen, the “mother” I have mentioned in the previous chapter, transferred some materials to the campus by private car:

“I transferred some gears to the campus. [...] In the beginning, people said the campus had enough gears. But many were rubbish, very messy. They used floating plates as shields, which was crazy. Then we brought some fiberglass boards to the campus. [...] I had several sons on the campus. When I left, I picked them up and drove them to their homes.”

During the occupation, long lines of cars and motorbikes transported supplies to the

campus and drove protesters to leave. Behind these voluntary drivers, there were supply providers, storage owners, and brokers who managed a big logistical network covering the whole city. This example shows a fantastic capacity of “mobilizing resources across space” (Nicholls, 2009, p. 88) that concentrated city-wide resources at particular points within a short time.

However, the private cars or motorbikes of supporters might not be safe because the police could penetrate as spies (“ghost cars,” that is why the parent team of Shirley and Helen created a private driver team). Another policing tactic was to set roadblocks in major tunnels or highways and search the private cars, buses, and mini-buses, which was reported and updated by many Telegram protest channels. In other words, longer trips followed with higher risk. Therefore, protesters would set “safe houses” nearby the protest sites, where they could start off the action or retreat with a shorter time-distance (that was what Shirley and Helen had prepared too). The safe houses were an interesting case of “safe space,” which is an important spatial element of contention (Tilly, 2000, pp. 144-146; Sewell, 2001, pp. 69-70). Given that most urban spaces had mixed land uses in Hong Kong and the locational variety in this movement, the safe space could be anywhere and highly scattered. In short, this “tactical interaction” (McAdam, 1983) over transportation showed the influence of what Tilly

(2000, pp. 142-144) called the “geography of policing” on the organization of protesters. A considerable part of the logistical work of supporters was a tactical response to the policing strategy that controlled the public transport infrastructure.

### Comparison with the Umbrella Movement

All of these are very different from organizing the logistics of the Umbrella Movement, which is an occupy movement in fixed occupied areas. Many informants have participated in the Umbrella Movement, so I asked them to describe their lives in occupied areas. In the Umbrella Movement, most materials were daily supplies like water, food, or toothpaste. One informant, who lived in the occupied area for a long time, told me that he and his friend refilled a bucket with drinking water from a park nearby regularly, and a hotel manager secretly gave them unsold high-class bread for free every morning. Another informant, a member of a student organization during the Umbrella Movement, participated in managing material stations and first aid support in Admiralty. According to him, there were “stations” in the occupied area belonging to different organizations and groups. In the stations of student organizations, he categorized the materials, checked the storage, and filled the inadequate items through their student networks. His student organization brought materials to the station by their organizational funding and raised donations on the campus. The occupiers,

nicknamed “villagers,” had relatively fixed spatial attachment. For example, my informant mentioned one of his friends, who “always stayed overnight. It felt like he became a district councilor. Many neighbors knew him and said, ‘This fat boy manages material stations. Give him if you have any materials, he will bring to the stations.’” Also, there were nine ambulance stations in Admiralty where first aiders could stay and provide support (Choi, 2014). My informant received patients in these stations and helped them with simple treatment. Overall, the occupied area in the Umbrella Movement can be described as a relatively stable “ecology,” in both spatial and social sense (Zhang & Zhao, 2018).

The logistics of the Anti-ELAB Movement was another story. In the protest site, the protesters used their manpower, human chain, and a set of intuitive hand signals to transfer the materials. Under the rapidly changing confrontation on the streets, the material stations were temporary and subject to move, to stay away from the frontlines. In other words, the on-site logistics had no fixed spatial attachment, which was far more mobile than the occupied area in the Umbrella Movement. I use first aid as an example. Compared to the first aiders in the Umbrella Movement who could stay in ambulance stations, the first aiders in the Anti-ELAB Movement had to move with the masses. The abovementioned informant in a student organization became a

first aider again in the movement five years later. In the new movement, he joined a first aid team of around 20 members. He told me how they adapted to the increasing mobility of movement. First, they might separate into smaller teams for action. “Our experience is that two to three people in a team is more flexible. If we have ten people, then we may separate into three teams. Each team has someone with medical expertise, coupled with others like me who move and lift.” Rather than following planned routes, they simply distributed at different points and moved according to the situation. Second, they connected to a driver team. “If there were potential protests in Tin Shui Wai, East New Territories, and Hong Kong Island in one day, we would appoint two cars in the driver team and tell them we would have ten first aiders on that day.” The drivers could serve as sentries to report information. “If many protesters were going to Sheung Shui, and they found that the first aiders in Sheung Shui were inadequate, they would ask us whether we wanted to go there.” The groups of the first aider, drivers, and sentries could connect, coordinate, and overlap with each other; someone might have multiple roles.

Another first aid team had an interesting idea to meet mobility requirements: a wooden trolley with cardboard written “first aid car.” In a fluid mass with no regular supply/ambulance stations, the wooden trolley served as an alternative, mobile collect

point of medical materials that attracted the general supporters to put down their materials. Unfortunately, even a wooden trolley was too inconvenient in the later stage of the movement, when the confrontation escalated and became even more mobile. They stopped using this in early August.

Finally, besides teams, there were also first aiders to join the action as individuals. A first aider, who was also a material provider and a voluntary driver, explained why he preferred to join without a team:

“I don’t need to match others, when and where, responsible for which part. [...]

Being a first aider, you can go to the front or behind, if I go to the front, sometimes I stand in very front, or a bit front location. [...] Last year, my schedule also included my job. It was really difficult to match with someone with similar schedules, so I did everything myself. Really, I did not overthink about whether I should group with others. Let’s say, being a first aider, when you need to lift someone, there must be others to help, I do not worry.”

The difficulty of coordinating with others in such mobile situations was why he joined as an individual. In short, to adapt to the high spatial mobility on the streets, the organizing of logistics and support in the Anti-ELAB Movement deeply internalized the principles of mobility and flexibility. The protesters developed various

organizational forms and practices to counter the spatial strategy of policing and solve the problems of lacking in fixed spatial attachment.

### Organizational Basis in Neighborhoods

Although the “be water” mobility was indeed a key tactical and organizational element of this movement that distinguished it from occupy movements, it was only half of the picture. In fact, the movement also had a strong organizational basis in the neighborhoods that were relatively fixed and stable ecologies. The movement made use of the pre-existing social connections and spatial configurations in the neighborhoods, which could be understood as “ecology-dependent strategies” similar to how the 1989 student movement in Beijing made use of the student networks and campus environment (Zhao, 1998, 2001). The ecology-dependent strategies of this movement not only complemented mobile street tactics like traffic hindrance and vandalism. In the communities, the protesters created Lennon Wall, formed human chains, and shouted slogans at night to influence more people. The “root” in the neighborhoods is widely overlooked by accounts of the movement, which overemphasized mobility and flexibility. The involvement of neighborhoods is surprising because Hong Kong is generally seen as a cosmopolitan city with atomized citizens and weak communities. In the end, I argue that the organization of this

movement consists of both city-wide mobility and sub-local neighborhoods, showing a similarity with guerrilla in terms of spatiality.

As mentioned, the demonstrations and flash mobs spread all over the urban area of Hong Kong to many districts, creating the need for information from different districts. On Telegram, all 18 districts of Hong Kong had groups and channels. Some of the channels functioned as sentry platforms. These district-based sentry platforms operated in the same way as the city-wide sentry platforms in that they might have their own sentry teams, but also received reports from the general public. However, for the district-based sentry platforms, the teammates and reports were likely to come from the neighborhoods. A sentry informant said that he preferred to participate in the action at the district where he was born because he was more familiar with the landscape of his community. The district-based huge Telegram groups (“public oceans”) allowed discussion and information updates of both general and community political issues. Many of them had several tens of thousands of members. Another informant told me how she was being recruited to a one-off sentry team through a district-based public ocean, in an innovative way. Before that recruitment, as a non-violent protester, she had only participated in peaceful demonstrations and been a voluntary tutor to two young protesters (through another Telegram platform). Until

the peak of confrontation when flash mobs disrupted multiple spots in the city, she decided to take more risks to support the action.

She noticed a message in a district-based public ocean that someone would stay somewhere in the district for one hour, inviting the neighbors to contact him in person to form a small, closed Telegram group. The informant explained,

“There must be ‘ghosts’ [police] monitoring the posts.....so he wanted to meet you face-to-face, to ensure that you were not ghosts, then he would add you into the group. Even though a public ocean group has tens of thousands of members, there might only be 40-50 people who read the messages [and came to join], so the team could be confidential.”

After a while, the initiator of this team called the members for action. Not everyone responded; only 7-8 protesters came, including several militants and several non-violent protesters. The militants told the non-violent protesters to stay at different points and report the police, police cars, or people who looked like plainclothes police. Then the militants started to hinder traffic using the flash mob tactic. My informant said,

“I chatted with other sentries and found that it was the first time for all of us to be sentries. We were all afraid and timid. [...] I stood for a while and felt that I

looked suspicious because I had to stay in the same position for around 3 hours. I had some neighbors nearby and called them to have a chat on the street, which made me look less suspicious.”

The case had several interesting points. First, the sentries were strangers. In other words, they did not connect by pre-existing social relations, but only spatial relations based on a constructed scale, namely “district,” and a digital platform based on this spatial construct. The initiator made use of these spatial and virtual connections and organized them. Second, the sentries were amateurs. They were likely to be attracted by the relatively low threshold of participation. The action was not so risky and also proximate to where they lived. Yet, it allowed them to contribute more and apply their sub-local knowledge (i.e., familiarity with the community). Third, my informant took advantage of her pre-existing social relations, the neighborhood networks, to reduce her risk. In short, the sub-local labor, knowledge, and networks were used to support the mobile street action.

The above case shows how mobile street tactics were integrated with neighborhoods organically. After that, I move to discuss another front of the movement beyond traffic hindrance: Lennon Wall. The Umbrella Movement localized the idea of the Lennon Wall as sticking memos and posters on public space. In the Anti-ELAB Movement,

protesters built up Lennon Walls in the communities all over Hong Kong without fixed occupied areas. While this form of protest sounds extremely peaceful, the involvement in the maintenance of Lennon Walls was no less dangerous than joining assemblies or demonstrations. As it became a symbol of the movement, it was targeted by the police and pro-establishment neighbors or even gangsters. Only in the first two months, there were 57 cases related to Lennon Wall (“47 held”, 2019). In Tai Po and Tseung Kwan O, protesters were attacked with knives that caused severe injuries. To minimize risk, it requires the protesters to act with cautious organizing.

My informant, Rock, was a middle-aged man that belonged to a Lennon Wall team. Apart from limited participation in the Umbrella Movement, he had little political participation, even did not read much news. He also did not pay much attention to the Anti-ELAB Movement in June, although the two million-level demonstration and the rapid escalation shocked the whole city. His attitude changed with the surfacing of the 721 incident during which he witnessed police inactivity towards gangster violence. Being a muscular martial artist, he decided to stay with the protesters in case of physical confrontation.

“Once, I walked in my community, seeing someone sticking posters, I stood nearby, watching them. [...] Because I heard that there might be unknown

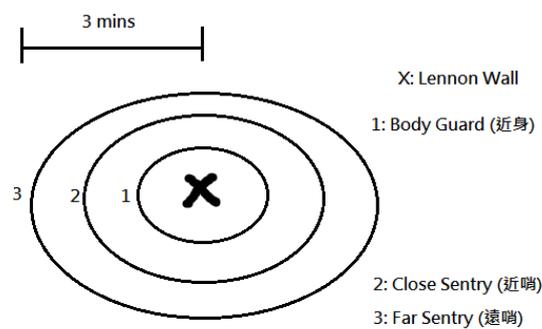
people making trouble when you stick posters. [...] In the beginning, they were afraid, because I did not look nice. [Laughter] Suddenly a guy was standing there, being silent and unknown. [...] I stood a long time until one of them came to probe me. Then I told him, do not be afraid, I just want to be a lookout of yours. [...] Then I bought a dozen cans of beer, and we had a chat, okay.”

He exchanged Telegram contact with the people, then became their teammate. The whole Telegram group had around 60 members. Most of them were residents in this community, aged from 20 to 70, most of them around 30. This story shows how Lennon Walls, mostly located in a public area nearby a bus terminus where many commuters passed by day and night, function as a “contact point” (Sennett, 1971, as cited in Nicholls, 2008, pp. 84-85) created by the protesters that allows interactions and network-building among strangers in the neighborhoods.

The procedure went in this way. Someone would ask in the group, “We serve the dishes tomorrow. Who will come to eat?” If the number of participants was enough, they discussed the action timing, usually at midnight. The posters (they called the hard copies “fish balls”) came from Telegram design groups, and they usually printed them in the offices of somebody. Given the risk, they preferred to finish the action as

far as possible, within 5 minutes. In the later phase of the protest, the government did not allow the posters to stay for days, so the posters would usually be cleaned the next day immediately. The goal of the team was simply to influence the crowd of morning commuters. To make the whole process safe, they developed a sentry system. They organized the division of labor based on distance (see the graph below). The sentries were assigned to watch over fixed points, such as a crossroad or a turning point of street, with equipment like walkie-talkies (later replaced by Zello) and telescopes. The “bodyguards,” like Rock, were ready to deal with body conflicts with pro-establishment neighbors. Like the sentries of the flash mob, they also made use of their pre-existing neighborhood networks to reduce risk. Their friends who lived close to the district police station would report how many police cars set out on that day, for the teammates to consider whether they went out to action.

**Graph 1** Structure of Sentry System of a Lennon Wall Team



## Synthesis

The Anti-ELAB Movement is famous in its upholding of the “be water” spirit, and indeed, the mobility and flexibility were internalized by the protesters as key organizing principles. This distinguished the movement from many occupy movements in recent years. However, if we only focus on this difference, we will overemphasize it and neglect the sub-local and fixed foundation of the movement.

This foundation allowed the movement to penetrate the neighborhoods of this cosmopolitan city, organizing political amateurs effectively by lower participation thresholds. The sub-local labor, knowledge, and pre-existing networks were mobilized to be the organizational resources of the movement, supporting the highly mobile street protests and other fronts of the movement such as the Lennon Wall. I call this organic combination of mobility and neighborhoods “guerrilla spatiality,” for its apparent similarity with the guerrilla. It is different from what might be termed “occupy spatiality.” In his discussion of spatiality in contention, Sewell (2001) mentioned guerrilla twice. First, he said the guerrilla movements were “always based on a strategy of minimizing the length of guerrilla supply lines (guerrillas live off the local peasants) and stretching government supply lines to the breaking point.” (Sewell, 2001, p. 61) Second, he used it as an example of downward “scale jumping,” “with

national-scale forces seeking refuge from the unequal struggle by retreating to a more local scale where their chances are much better.” (Sewell, 2001, p. 68) While the two descriptions can be applied to some aspects of the Anti-ELAB Movement, I would like to offer another formulation of the guerrilla strategy: guerrilla strategy is an organic and complementary combination of mobility and fixed foundation in two different scales of struggle. I argue that the conception of “guerrilla spatiality” provides a comprehensive characterization of the movement.

Three factors may account for this spatial form of the movement. The first factor is the tactical choice. The protesters did not choose occupation as the core strategy, but hit-and-runs and multiple Lennon Walls that created tasks for the supporters and the need for both city-wide and neighborhood organizations. This choice might be partly conscious and partly accidental. For example, if the early occupation in the legislative council succeeded and sustained, the movement might follow a path similar to the Sunflower movement in Taiwan. The second factor is the characteristics of the urban landscape in Hong Kong. Without the crowded residential areas connected by dense transportation networks, it was difficult for the movement to act flexibly and root in the communities. Using a term from the literature, the movement frequently interacts with the existing “spatial structure” (Sewell, 2001). Third, the lesson and

consequences of the Umbrella Movement may contribute to this spatial form, which I will elaborate in the next chapter. At the end of this chapter, I suggest that the analysis of this chapter contributes to the literature of spatiality in social movement by conceptualizing a type of spatial strategy. This opens possibilities for comparative studies among or within types of spatial strategy, for example, comparing the Anti-ELAB Movement with historical cases of guerrilla or other cases of occupy movement.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Learning and Organizing**

#### Introduction

After the chapter on the spatial dimension of organizing, this chapter looks at the temporal dimension of organizing. With all these sophisticated details I have shown in the last three chapters, readers may naturally have a question: Where did the protesters acquire the knowledge of organizing and other kinds of struggle know-how? Indeed, what the protesters did seem to go beyond the common knowledge of the average citizens. The pro-establishment politician Ip Kwok-him has used an example of protesters learning combat collectively in a community center to support his claim that the protesters were being organized by a third party (Commercial Radio, 2019). Integrating this analysis of organizing with the literature of “social movement learning” (Foley, 1999; Kilgore, 1999; Choudry & Kapoor, 2010; Hall, Clover, Crowther, & Scandrett, 2011, 2012), this chapter explores the learning processes in the Anti-ELAB Movement, which is a good entry point to understand how organizing

in this movement succeeds previous experiences and evolves over time. The first half of this chapter focuses on the historical influences of how protesters learned from prior movements. I found that some of the organizing principles and the support items in this movement developed before the movement. The experienced protesters who had accumulated “activist human capital” (Van Dyke & Dixon, 2013) in prior movements played a significant role in the succession of knowledge and other resources.

The second half of this chapter turns to the learning in the current movement to face new challenges. Beyond the experience of past activism, the rapidly changing situation in the Anti-ELAB Movement created new challenges that required the supporters to handle with the incorporation and production of new knowledge and skills. Particularly, I examine the content of the knowledge and skills in a high-risk context, including the response to policing and the execution of violent tactics, and show the learning sources. In this chapter, I argue that the Anti-ELAB Movement is both a continuation of and departure from prior movements, and social movement learning is a key factor in explaining the high organizing capacity of this movement.

#### Influences of Prior Movements (1): Organizing Principles

The narratives on comparable protests often over-emphasized the novelty and spontaneity of these protests, showing their disregard for historical antecedents (Fominaya, 2015; Baron & Gunning, 2014). While the Anti-ELAB Movement is a breakthrough of Hong Kong activism in many aspects, it still shows the influences from prior movements, especially the last large-scale mass movement, the Umbrella Movement in 2014. I begin with the organizing principles the protesters have learnt from the prior movements.

The “no main stage” (無大台) is a central organizing principle in this movement. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, this slogan was developed since the Umbrella Movement, when the radical and localist protesters refused the leadership of relatively mild student organizations and mainstream pro-democracy figures. The tension between non-violent and radical views extended beyond the Umbrella Movement and reached its height in 2016. The Fishball Protest in 2016 was a wildcat protest that involved burning things on the streets and attacking the police with bricks. Some pro-democratic supporters, raising the “peaceful, rational, and non-violent” (和理非) principle, decided to keep a distance with those radical participants of the Fishball Protest, or even suspected them to be “spies” (鬼) to discredit the democracy movement in Hong Kong. These internal conflicts weakened the solidarity of the

democracy movement and partially accounted for the failure of the Umbrella Movement and the low tide of post-umbrella years. Learning from this lesson, the protesters in the Anti-ELAB Movement invented slogans like “no differentiation between peaceful and militant protesters” (和勇不分) and “brothers climb the mountain together, but by their own ways” (兄弟爬山 各自努力) to advocate an inclusive attitude towards different tactics. In the previous chapters, we can see that the back-end protesters, who might not participate in violent action, support or at least highly tolerate the violent tactics due to the indignation against police brutality and the comradeship with the frontline protesters. The inclusive attitude towards tactics also contributes to the tendency of “task-orientedness” analyzed in Chapter 4.

In the last chapter, I propose to describe the organic combination of city-wide mobility and district-level localization as “guerrilla spatiality,” distinguished from “occupy spatiality.” This concept captures another major organizing principle of this movement. The emergence of guerrilla spatiality in the current movement also owed much to the Umbrella Movement and its consequences. In the Umbrella Movement, soon after the occupation site in Mong Kok was cleared by the police, some protesters self-organized through social media to walk in groups in the name of “shopping.” This highly mobile action was a response to the unsustainability of long-term

occupation. In other words, “be water,” in terms of mobile street tactic in the Anti-ELAB Movement, was a continuation of this lesson learned from the failure of the Umbrella Movement (Ting, 2020). Apart from the Umbrella Movement, in the waves of protests against parallel traders, protesters took the pop-up, “flash-mob” tactic and spread over various districts, which might also contribute to the guerrilla spatiality in the current movement.

The prior movements influenced both the flexible side and the localized side of the Anti-ELAB Movement. After the end of the Umbrella Movement, the remaining political momentum transformed to the emergence of “post-umbrella organizations.” Many of these post-umbrella organizations participated in district-level politics, what they called “umbrellas falling on the communities” (傘落社區). The seats of district councils were generated by direct election. A majority of the seats were occupied by the pro-establishment camp at that time, offering an institutional channel for the post-umbrella organizations to compete for resources and organize the communities. In other words, after the failure of the city-wide, non-institutional struggle, these former protesters turned to district-level, institutional political participation temporarily. This strategy of politicizing the communities arguably inspired the localization of the Anti-ELAB Movement, in which the protesters quickly developed their roots in the

communities. The adoption of this tactic allows the movement to extend its influence to the communities, even the grass-root neighborhoods distanced away from the geographical center of politics in Hong Kong (i.e., Central and Western District). The members of these post-umbrella organizations also participated in localizing the Anti-ELAB Movement. For example, my interviewee from the street corner team was a member of one post-umbrella organization, and the street corners in the districts were an important force of localization. These people played an important role in the landslide victory of the latest district council election in November 2019, after the tragic failure in the PolyU, sustaining the momentum of the Anti-ELAB Movement. In short, several major organizing principles in the anti-ELAB were based on the experience and lessons learned from prior movements, influencing its organizing characteristics such as leaderlessness, task-orientedness, solidarity (between non-violent and radical protesters), and spatial flexibility.

#### Influences of Prior Movements (2): Support Items and Experienced Protesters

The historical influence not only exists in the organizing principles. In the Anti-ELAB Movement, the range of services provided by the supporters is strikingly wide. The protesters learned some of the support items from prior movements, such as information channels, arrest support, and supply station. Also, experienced protesters,

who accumulated “activist human capital” (Van Dyke & Dixon, 2013) from past activism experience, contributed to this succession. Based on their case study of a student internship program organized by unions, Van Dyke and Dixon (2013) coined the concept “activist human capital” to refer to the combination of activist-related social capital and cultural capital, including the networks, knowledge, and skills. These are interrelated because the networks facilitate the accumulation and circulation of knowledge (Van Dyke & Dixon, 2013, p. 208). This concept highlights the importance of learning as knowledge accumulation (implied by the metaphor of “capital”) of individual activists, laying down the foundation for examining the micro-processes of historical influence on this movement. This section shows how these experienced protesters learned activist skills and knowledge from past participation and how other protesters in the current movement learned from them.

An important support item in this movement is the “information channel,” which sorts out updated information and performs “fact-check” for the information circulating on the Internet, based on comparing credible information sources and reports of sentries. The protesters need accurate information to grasp the dramatic development of confrontation happening in multiple sites. In terms of support and logistics, the parents and the voluntary drivers need precise information to rescue frontline

protesters and avoid police interception. This kind of information channel on social media is not novel but was invented in the Umbrella Movement. One of my informants was a pioneer of this practice in the Umbrella Movement. My informant and her friends realized that there were many rumors and fake information during the Umbrella Movement; for example, a fake voice-message pretending to be Joshua Wong on social media called for a retreat. They created a Facebook page for fact-checking that finally attracted more than 100,000 likes. According to my informant, the format to report information and the operation of the new information channels in the Anti-ELAB Movement were similar to the page she created in the Umbrella Movement. The difference was that the platform of social media changed to Telegram. She observed that these new Telegram channels still reported much false information at the beginning but were getting more and more accurate. The scale, number of audiences, and speed of updating these new channels quickly exceeded the Facebook information pages in the Umbrella Movement.

Another major support item is arrest support. One of my informants was a parent who spent considerable time in arrest support. He was a member of a key student organization and a keen participant in the Umbrella Movement but left the organization around 2017 due to burnout. With the outbreak of the Anti-ELAB

Movement, he joined the movement again. The road to a supportive position began with two of his sisters joining the protests. He decided to apply his experience and resources in the current movement, as he explained:

“As an experienced person, I was worried about those without experience to participate in the protests. I did not know what would happen and whether they could handle it. Support is very important. If you were used to participating [in protests], you would know even if you walked alone, if there were others to do the backup, you would have much freedom to act. Normal people have no resources and experience; they do not know how to handle it.”

The student organization that he previously participated in had already developed a system of arrest support in prior movements. In the social media group, they marked the personal information of those who joined in the protests, updated their situations regularly, and contacted lawyers when they disappeared (likely to be arrested). He applied the same system in the current movement and put people into a social media group through snowballing, beginning from his networks. He contacted the same lawyer for arrest support, whom he knew when he was still in the student organization. He was particularly aware of arrest support because he had the experience of being arrested without any help before the Anti-ELAB Movement:

“I had a deep memory of the first time being arrested when nobody knew what happened to me. In the end, I had no lawyer, nothing, stayed overnight alone, bailed myself, walked to the occupied area, and borrowed a mobile phone. [...]

As someone who has been arrested, I know what arrestees are going to face. I know the legal procedures and the situation in court. I have friends who were in court and sent to prison, so I know the operation generally. *If I don't know, I can find somebody to ask. I can ask lawyers. So at that time, I became a resource provider, who people asked for advice.*” (my emphasis)

Not only did he have an awareness of the significance of arrest support, but he also had the knowledge and networks to handle it. It shows that knowledge and networks are integrated, as implied by the concept of “activist human capital.” Moreover, he actively shared his knowledge with other people, as the emphasis above showed. Other less experienced supporters who needed to manage arrest issues could access his knowledge and networks.

It is also important for the experienced protesters to teach and support the very young, inexperienced protesters. An informant, who had joined student movements and was a keen participant in the Umbrella Movement, told me a funny story when she was in a messy material station in June, where she met some very young protesters wearing

school uniforms:

“I taught them how to sort out things, what are first aid materials, and what are less urgent. [...] It was exhausting. Someone put fever pastes into the first aid bags. A boy put bread in the first aid bag! They did not know the function of shampoo.<sup>7</sup> [...] I felt that they were kind and innocent. They just thought you felt dizzy too if you were hungry, so they put bread in the bags.”

This story shows us the inexperience of the young protesters and the messy side of the logistics. Without the assistance of an experienced protester like my informant, the work could be very inefficient. Moreover, this informant was a designer. After that day, she realized that many participants were so inexperienced and needed more information. She decided to make graphics teaching the peaceful protesters to prepare materials for demonstrations and then post the graphics on social media. Such infographics spreading protest knowledge were common means of collective learning in the movement, covering various topics from supplies preparation to body training. The active sharing from experienced protesters in the Anti-ELAB Movement, via both face-to-face and digital channels, is a crucial process of its knowledge succession from prior movements.

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<sup>7</sup> Diluted baby shampoo can be used to wash eyes and skins for tear gas and pepper sprays.

The historical influence of prior movements on the Anti-ELAB Movement affected not only its organizing principles. In support and logistics, several support items were developed before the Anti-ELAB Movement. Some experienced protesters accumulated the activist human capital in previous participation; then they could execute these support items in the current movement. Due to their active sharing, other protesters could learn from them and access their resources. Without a historical perspective, it is difficult to fully explain the formation of sophisticated support and logistical system and its high organizing capacity, within a very short time, in the Anti-ELAB Movement.

### Learning to Face New Challenges

While the Anti-ELAB Movement inherited organizing principles and knowledge of support and logistics from prior movements, it is nevertheless a surprising breakthrough from the old patterns. The protesters needed to apply or acquire new knowledge and skills that went beyond the experience of prior movements. Even if some support items existed before the Anti-ELAB Movement, they must be further developed to handle the new challenges in the current movement. An interviewee, who joined the Umbrella Movement as a first aider, described his work as no more than washing eyes and minor cuts. However, when he became a first aider again in the

Anti-ELAB Movement, he realized that the task was much more complicated:

“I began with washing others’ eyes [because of exposure to teargas and pepper spray], later I needed to prepare for fracture, bandages for severe fracture and bleeding. It must be quick because you did not have much time. Later, there were many gunshot injury cases [from rubber bullets] and bruises, so I needed ice bags. Now my first aid gear was quite comprehensive. I prepared a respirator, then a lift bed, in case of a coma caused by shooting or beating. [...] I brought everything from Amazon, which was fucking expensive. I bought Israel bandages for severe bleeding. Actually, it is made for real bullets. One bandage costs more than \$100hkd. I even got the advanced first aid cert[ification], enough for working on the ambulance.”

Within a few months, he not only upgraded the equipment but acquired advanced knowledge to handle more severe injuries. In many ways, being a supporter of the Anti-ELAB Movement is more challenging than being a supporter of the prior movements in Hong Kong. They must be more capable and well-prepared.

Another case also shows this kind of rapid growth during the movement. The broker, Johnny, whom I mentioned in Chapter 3, was a member of a sentry team before he got a panic attack and decided to step back. He shared his experience of organizing sentry

in the protest sites to me, showing how protesters learned through recurring actions. Sometimes, his team did not have enough manpower. He gradually learned to solve this problem by absorbing scattered sentries or idle protesters on the streets, then integrating them into a one-off Zello group (a walkie-talkie App): “I find those who look young, or don’t look like ‘dogs.’ Maybe someone looked unlikely to run fast, or two girls. I may ask them to give me student ID cards. Student ID card is a good verification.” It shows how he “screened” the potential members by stereotypes and simple verification procedures against the possible penetration of undercover police. Following the analysis of informal ties in Chapter 3, Johnny built up the capacity to initiate connective work with strangers via the physical co-presence in protest sites and the awareness to preserve secrecy.

In November, Johnny joined one of the campus occupations as an individual sentry. He soon observed many weaknesses in the sentry system, which failed to report important information. “I stayed on a rooftop for two hours, and then I realized that there was another sentry. It was a waste of resources. I walked around the campus and found some spots to have no sentry at all. People could enter easily. No one was watching.” He argued with the student union that they needed a sentry system, but the student union rejected it. According to him, the student union did not intend to lead

the occupation and even disappeared later (which showed marginalized formal organizations in the movement). Johnny decided to gather the protesters by himself, visiting the possible spots that required sentries and recruited the people. Finally, he created a Zello group that included more than 100 sentries and distributed the labor effectively. The formation of such a vast team is an amazing result that requires an ensemble of judgment on situations, communication skills, and organizing knowledge. Johnny was young, and his participation in the Umbrella Movement was limited. He only developed his capacity of on-site connective work during the current movement, accumulating experience from the recurring street actions with his sentry team.

Protesters might also import knowledge or expertise to the movement from outside the movement, mostly from their occupations. However, the acquisition and development of knowledge or expertise might not necessarily be a one-way influence but an interactive process. An informant was a doctor of traditional Chinese medicine, who belonged to a Chinese medicine doctor team. He said that the skin diseases, basically caused by tear gas, were one of the most difficult issues to handle:

“Because skin problems are the most chronic issue. They may not be cured after one or two visits or a few bags of Chinese medicine. The conditions can fluctuate. [...] (Interviewer: There was no tear gas in ancient society. How do

you find the cure method?) It depends on my teammates. If they find whatever works, they will share their experience with others. Like, if someone's skin is red due to pepper spray, and they find the best method, they will tell others. [...] If you are not sure about something, you can ask others in the online group. The senior members will advise on how to treat this problem. It actually improves my medical skills.”

Unlike the last two cases, this quote shows a process of collective learning. These Chinese medicine doctors learned as a group by discussion and sharing of knowledge. Furthermore, this case shows that even the protesters who imported knowledge and expertise from external sources needed to adapt to and negotiate with the unique and abnormal situation of the movement. They improved themselves during the movement, showing the highly dynamic and creative nature of the social movement learning. In the difficult and even hostile environment of the Anti-ELAB Movement, the committed protesters must learn and grow to face the new challenges.

#### Knowledge and Skills in High-risk Context

The environment of the Anti-ELAB Movement is more challenging than prior movements in Hong Kong because it involves higher risk. I argue that this distinction makes a wide range of the knowledge and skills required by this movement

qualitatively different from low-risk protests, which is something not covered by the literature of social movement learning (e.g., Choudry & Kapoor, 2010; Hall, Clover, Crowther, & Scandrett, 2012). On one hand, the protesters needed to counter the hard repression and the police surveillance and infiltration. On the other hand, the protesters needed to execute violent tactics, or at least know how to face a violent situation.

I begin with the issue of countering repression and policing. To characterize the qualities of knowledge and skills in the movement, it is surprisingly useful to adopt the concepts developed by the ethnographic findings of policing on minorities. Stuart (2016) found that the residents in a black community widely developed “cop wisdom” to reduce unwanted interaction with the police, that is, an interpretative schema to read and predict the behaviors of police officers, then acting accordingly to keep themselves safe. Similarly, the protesters acted in cop-wise ways. They had various criteria to screen potential cooperators in response to the frequent penetration of undercover police. They had different tips to avoid being intercepted by the police, like pretending to be couples or riding motorbikes instead of private cars. For state surveillance, they developed various protest routines to “cultivate secrecy” (Goffman, 2009), such as using unregistered SIM cards and not using Octopus cards. Indeed,

many protesters in the Anti-ELAB Movement were in illegal or semi-legal statuses as the poor black people on the run studied by Goffman (2009). As Stuart (2016) said, cop wisdom is often ambiguous and hard to be proved, but it is a key element of how protesters try to mitigate risk or improve their confidence. The cop wisdom formed the knowledge basis of the “covert social movement networks” in the Anti-ELAB Movement.

Another aspect is that the protesters learned to execute violent tactics or to face a violent situation, which is unusual in Hong Kong society due to its low crime rate. Interestingly, violent conflicts stimulated an extensive atmosphere of training martial arts and physical fitness. In the peak period, you could find dozens of courses in a single week on the Telegram platforms, covering various types of martial arts and physical fitness. The connective work of these platform admins allowed the volunteer coaches to share their knowledge and the students to register for the courses for free, or only for the venue and transportation fees. This is another case of importing knowledge from external sources. The students were not only radical protesters who were ready to join disruptive action. The protesters who only engaged in support and logistical roles might also want to learn martial arts or train their bodies because they faced the risk of physical confrontation too. I participated in one martial arts class and

wrote this paragraph in my fieldnotes, describing the training process:

“The first move is a simple neck warm-up. ‘Every warm-up in this class is related to a technique. When your hands are tied or taking something, you may need to attack with your head,’ the coach said. He told a student near him, ‘get ready,’ then he headbutted the student on his chest with a smooth movement. I was a bit shocked because that strike really had some power, and the student, obviously not ready, stepped back a few steps and looked painful, putting his hands on his chest. ‘Everyone needs to feel,’ he said. [...] After the demonstration, every student headbutted other students like what the coach did. But many students were polite and put very little power into the strike. A student took a backstep to create a distance for acceleration, but he dragged back the force before the attack actually landed. I could not do a full power headbutt too. I chose to target the pectoral muscle instead of the bone in the middle of the chest, which could be a buffer. However, whenever a student hit too lightly, the teaching assistant dragged the student back and let him/her hit again, encouraging them to go for full power. He said, ‘*The purpose is to let you feel how to hit and be hit with power. This is the only way for you to get a sense of real street confrontation.*’” (my emphasis)

For the average citizens who mostly had rare body conflict experience, it is difficult

for them even to hit another person with full power. The training is a process that the students learned to familiarize themselves with physical violence by forcing them actually to hit others or be hit by others.

More than pure body violence, the protesters had to use or encounter violence with weapons. My fieldnotes recorded a group of young protesters making the most important weapon of the frontline protesters: petrol bombs.

“6-7 people sit on the ground, making Molotov cocktails. All of them looked young and like students. Everyone wore masks, and most of them were in black, casual clothes. They talked with each other, so I guessed they were friends. The atmosphere was normal, similar to a society in university, working on handbills to advertise activities. On the ground, there were various sizes and colors of glass bottles (of mostly beer or other sparkling drinks, but also soy sauce, rice wine, etc.). There were large-sized cans of different liquid fuels, from which I identified naphtha and diesel and other unknown cans. There were towels, scissors, funnels, bags of white sugar, and flour. [...] One asked, ‘How much sugar and flour should I put?’ Another answered, ‘I put that much (showing her).’ The amounts were very casual.”

“A young male protester tried to test a petrol bomb on an empty space. He

threw. However, although he burnt the fuse, the bottle simply broke on the ground without fire. ‘Yiiiiiiiiiii---’ Everybody sounds disappointed. A young female protester had a pointed observation, “I saw the fuse go out in the air before landing.” They tried to figure out the failure. They tested another type of liquid fuel. They burnt a strip of cloth, and it was a big fire. One stepped on it to put out the fire, unsuccessfully, the strip of cloth stuck to her shoe. We were panicking, and I put down my bag and took a bottle of water. Fortunately, with a few steps, the fire had already gone off. One of her friends said, ‘It’s scary! Are you okay?’ The girl was fine, and they turned back to the experiments. Testing all liquid fuels at hand, they concluded it did not work if only diesel was used. Therefore, they could only pour out half of the mixed liquid from the made petrol bombs to the ditches and put another half of naphtha. It took a lot of time.”

Like the young protesters who did not know how to prepare first aid bags, we can see how they were unprepared to make petrol bombs. The protesters began with only vague knowledge of producing petrol bombs, probably knowing from other protesters or via the Internet. By engaging in production, they acquired more practical knowledge from their experiments and failures. Allowing multiple trials and errors is a key characteristic of networked movement (Gerlach & Hine, 1970), which is a

major source of learning in social action. Again, it shows that it requires a process for protesters to learn to be violent. The classic article by Becker (1953) showed that becoming a marihuana user was a process of learning. Using violence is no less a learning process (Collins, 2008). Protesters learned to acquire body capacity, mental preparation, and technical knowledge, to become violent protesters or join violent protests.

Finally, the messy side of logistical action showed that many protesters were young and inexperienced. They were not organized forces, unlike the police or army. However, if you only look at information from online sources, you might view the protest as more organized than it actually is. For example, there was online information on making petrol bombs in the Telegram channels. A Telegram post summarized 66 methods of making weapons, including multiple chemical formulas of “advanced fire magic.” However, according to my ethnographic data, the reality is much more chaotic and immature. I argue that, no matter how digital the movement sounds like, it requires a synthesis of data from online and offline sources to get a comprehensive understanding of the protest.

## Conclusion

I argue that social movement learning is a significant component to understand the organizing of movement. This chapter shows the historical influences from prior movements on the organizing principles and the support items in the Anti-ELAB Movement and the importance of experienced protesters. Then, I show how protesters learned to face new challenges, especially the challenges from a high-risk context, that required them to learn to counter repression and policing and learn to use or face violence.

The relationship between learning and organizing can be understood from two perspectives. On one hand, the protesters “learned to organize” like succeeding the organizing principles from previous movements, and how Johnny learned to initiate connective work on the streets. They also produced the struggle know-hows, like the support items and the knowledge and skills for high-risk context, that can be seen as resources to be mobilized in the organizing. This is significant for building up the organizing capacity in this movement. On the other hand, the protesters “organized to learn.” Throughout this chapter, I found various learning sources in this movement, including active sharing of knowledge within the movement community, importing knowledge and expertise from external sources, and developing skills and experience from repetitive actions and trial-and-errors. These learning processes happened in a

highly informal, decentralized, and circumstantial manner. Yet, they were not wholly structureless, such as the Telegram platforms of martial arts and fitness classes that allowed the coaches to publicize their classes and the students to register. Although social movement learning was a form of informal learning in general, in contrast to the top-down educational model that happened in the classroom (Foley, 1999), it could be more informal or less informal. The learning of protesters may occur in a more informal way during the action and in response to the needs generated by the action, or in a less informal way as a result of the intentional educational activities organized by other protesters (Clover & Hall, 2005). The learning in the Anti-ELAB Movement mostly belongs to the more informal category, probably because the movement is not led by formal organizations, which tend to organize formal and structured learning activities, like the young people recruited in Freedom Summer Project joined a training program before they went to Mississippi (McAdam, 1988). What are the consequences of different levels of formality in social movement learning? For example, would it affect the relationship between learning and the development of long-term commitment (Van Dyke & Dixon, 2013; Perez, 2018)? Future research could analyze the impacts of different models of social movement learning on movement tactics, outcomes, or biographical impacts.

At the end of this chapter, it is a suitable place to recall readers for the several general themes of this thesis. First, although the organizing of the Anti-ELAB Movement seems to be complicated, it does not necessarily require a centralized leadership of a formal organization to make it happen. Unlike what Ip Kwok-him implied, learning combat skills in a community center can be done through Telegram platforms, without foreign intervention. Second, while social media is significant in the Anti-ELAB Movement, it is partial or even misleading if we only focus on what happens on the Internet. The making of petrol bombs is a great example to strengthen my point against technological reductionism. Finally, I propose to consider the high-risk context. The high-risk context created challenges for the protesters, who needed to learn new knowledge and skills to respond. Without considering the high-risk context, we may overlook the distinctive quality of the necessary knowledge and skills in the Anti-ELAB Movement.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Conclusion**

Building on the theoretical distinction between “organizations” and “organizing,” I explore the alternative mechanisms that, in place of formal movement organizations, provide structured coordination in the Anti-ELAB Movement. I focus on the supporters rather than front-line protesters and put forth a four-part argument. First, I find that the protesters and supporters establish informal ties through their “connective work,” that is, their agency in initiating connections. Despite the fear and distrust generated by policing, many supporters still connected with each other and the protesters in need successfully. Some of the supportive ties in this movement are structured by the role identity of “quasi-parenthood,” producing unique qualities and dynamics in the ties. Second, while the protesters connected themselves through informal networks at the beginning, some of these networks evolved beyond pure networks. In response to a high-risk situation, the supporters “partially organized” their networks by incorporating organizational and bureaucratic elements, such as

specialized division of labor, rules, impersonality, and hierarchy, into the operation of their teams to improve efficiency or preserve secrecy. Although it is a self-proclaimed “horizontal” movement, the protesters can allow certain power inequality in these bureaucratic elements due to their strong task-orientedness. While this task-oriented tendency is practical and beneficial to solidarity, it may also sacrifice the potential of prefiguration in the movement. Third, on the spatial dimension of organizing, the protesters also make use of the sub-local labor, knowledge, and pre-existing networks. This sub-local foundation, organically integrated with the city-wide mobility, consists of what I call “guerrilla spatiality.” Fourth and final, on the temporal dimension of organizing, the evolution of organizing capacity is based on learning. On one hand, protesters learn to organize from the lessons, repertoires, and experienced activists accumulated from previous movements, and the new actions and trial-and-errors in the current movement. On the other hand, the learning of struggle know-hows is organized in a highly informal way, particularly for learning to execute violent tactics.

I aim to provide an empirically grounded and theoretically integrated perspective to make sense of the movement incidents that show exceptional organizational capacity, often mysterious to outside observers. In the introduction, I have mentioned protester X, who came to the protest site empty-handed and got equipped in a neatly arranged

supply station. It happened because of hundreds, or maybe thousands, of parents, gear providers, and voluntary drivers behind the scenes, who connected through informal ties or even formed into teams. The drivers and stores scattered in the territory allowed them to mobilize resources at any point in the city quickly. Also, many protesters had already learned how to manage supply stations in previous protests. Communication technology might also play a role in updating the information of that protest site to the public and facilitating inter-communication among the supporters. But only through the combination of all these real and virtual factors could the supply station be established, hence mitigating the risk faced by protester X. I argue that this account is more convincing than explaining anything by the advancement of technology or by a conspiracy theory that lacks empirical evidence. In place of a formal movement organization with centralized leadership, a combination of various alternative organizing mechanisms, which include informal ties, partial organizing of ties, spatial strategy, and informal learning, was able to establish the supply station and provide other forms of support. The four mechanisms are part of the recipe for organizing a seemingly “unorganized” movement.

The scope of this research covers the most contentious period of the Anti-ELAB Movement from June to November in 2019. After that, the violent protests almost

disappear, but the organizing basis and mechanisms that I describe in this research still matter for later social development. Interestingly, some of the informal ties of supporters survive and play a role in the anti-epidemic movement during COVID-19. In Hong Kong, the epidemic issue is politicized as a self-help movement of pro-democratic civil society against the government irresponsibility. The parent group of Helen and Shirley brought anti-epidemic materials and distributed them to their sons/daughters and other supporters, at free or cost prices. Since there were gears left unused, they sold the stored gears through an e-commerce platform, then used the money to buy anti-epidemic items. Helen said:

“Now, the epidemic is so severe. Everybody is anxious, but you feel you are not alone because everyone supports everyone else. When we buy face masks, we ask the parents who have donated money to us, or the voluntary drivers, whether they need the face masks. [...] We buy the face mask for several ten thousand dollars. If you do not have such a network, you do not dare to do so because you are unsure whether the materials can go [to cover the cost]. At the very beginning, the parents and drivers give a safety net to our sons and daughters. Now we want the safety net also to include ourselves. As I said, even if something fails and does not achieve the target, these things will not simply disappear. It still concentrates our power and can help us in other

moments.”

The Lennon Wall team of Rock also becomes a long-term network that circulated epidemic prevention items, such as masks and alcohol sanitizers. Since the teammates in the Lennon Wall team are neighbors, they meet each other easily. As Rock said, “Sometimes I wait for the bus nearby my house, then I meet a brother, we talk, then we meet another guy. It happens frequently.” The spatial proximity contributes to their network maintenance. The two cases show the sustainability and adaptability of the protest networks that emerged from the first half-year of the Anti-ELAB Movement. These protest networks are essential for the resilience of civil society in an increasingly repressive context (Peterson, 2001).

I will conclude the discussion by a dialogue with two classic works on alternative organizing of social movements. Half a century ago, Gerlach and Hine (1970) in their book *People, Power, Change: Movements of Social Transformation* pioneered the view that analyzes social movement as a “segmentary, polycentric, and integrated network” (also see Gerlach, 1971, 2001). They identified the strengths of these structural characteristics and their bearings on the social movements, such as preventing effective suppression from the authority, promoting innovation, and multi-penetration (that allows the movement to recruit people from a wide range of

backgrounds), that can be applied well to the Anti-ELAB Movement. Using the “multi-penetration” as an example, the Anti-ELAB Movement is able to recruit people from different generations (shown in the discussion of quasi-parenthood) and living in different districts (shown in the discussion of guerrilla spatiality). Their description of the Black Power movement is reminiscent of many “surprising” incidents in the Anti-ELAB Movement:

- “Two black and two white housewives met and started to recruit others in an attempt to start cross-racial communications
- One group was organized to collect clothing, food, and supplies for participants in the Poor’s People March from their area
- One couple volunteered their home as a collection center for whites who believed all guns should be returned in as a demonstration of commitment to white non-violence
- Several groups organized to provide shelter and collect food, clothing, household equipment, and medical supplies for blacks who were hurt or homeless after their riots
- Groups of white university students organized to support blacks in their demands for black studies programs
- Several lawyers organized to provide voluntary legal aid for blacks

- One group had “stamp out racism” buttons made and sold them. They also put “white racism must go” signs up in their yards and recruited others who were willing to do likewise
- One individual started a very successful “buy black” campaign
- One young couple who had formerly owned an import business helped a black couple set up channels for importing African items, and turned over to them all their address lists and similar business information”

(Gerlach & Hine 1970, p. 31, quoted selectively)

From this list of descriptions, we can see ordinary people from various backgrounds doing the “connective work,” providing a wide range of support and logistics to the radical protesters, and sharing and learning new knowledge. Although this research does not discuss the “yellow economic circle” in the Anti-ELAB Movement, we can see similar economic struggle practices in this description. Everything exists far before the extensive use of new communication technologies. Therefore, some “surprising” qualities of the Anti-ELAB Movement, instead of representing a new form of protest, may only show the essence of the mass movement. The energy stems from successfully engaging a significant proportion of the population that politicizes these ordinary people and arouses their spontaneity. To say that is not to deny the

existence of any new trends. For example, many of the “decentralized cells” in the discussion of Gerlach and Hine (1970) were still local branches of larger formal organizations. In this comparison, my cases in the Anti-ELAB Movement are more informal and networked. My point is that discussing any “new” trends must ground in a comparative and historical perspective, rather than constructing a false dichotomy between the past and the present.

After a few years of the publication of Gerlach and Hine (1970), Piven and Cloward (1979[1977]) published their seminal work *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail*. This book is also very relevant to this research because Piven and Cloward imposed an early theoretical challenge to the mass-membership, formal organizations of movements. In response to the critics of this book, they summarized their arguments as below:

“First, it was not formal organizations but mass defiance that won what was won in the 1930s and 1960s: industrial workers, for example, forced concessions from industry and government as a result of the disruptive effects of large-scale strikes; defiant blacks forced concessions as a result of the disruptive effects of mass civil disobedience. Second, because they were acutely vulnerable to internal oligarchy and stasis and to external integration

with elites, the bureaucratic organizations that were developed within these movements tended to blunt the militancy that was the fundamental source of such influence as the movements exerted. And finally, for the most part, the formal organizations collapsed as the movements subsided.” (Piven & Cloward, 1979[1977], pp. xv-xvi)

Therefore, they argued that the activists, who wrongly over-stated the importance of formal organizations, put their effort in the wrong direction. In the “moment of madness,” the activists wasted their time in collecting dues cards, forming committees, and drafting constitutions, without trying to escalate the momentum and maximize the disruptive power of protests (Piven & Cloward, 1979[1977], p. xxii).

Their arguments are inspiring and worthy to be reconsidered. After almost half a century, the Anti-ELAB Movement case both confirms and challenges their views in a stimulating way. The Anti-ELAB Movement meets nearly every condition of the ideal situation suggested by Piven and Cloward (1979[1977]), probably exceeding their imagination at that time. The Hong Kong protest has a strong tendency of rejecting the leadership from mass-membership, formal organizations, but relies mostly on self-organized, decentralized, and disruptive resistance. At the beginning of the movement, some politicians tried to control the militancy of protesters but failed. The pre-existing

activists and formal organizations joined the movement by taking specialized roles, such as managing funds for legal support. In the first half-year of this protest, most of the effort of participants was indeed devoted to escalating the momentum of protests, generating a disruptive power beyond any analysts of Hong Kong could expect. However, despite the unprecedented disruptive power, the Hong Kong protesters still faced a tragic failure in the encirclement of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University in November 2019. It shows that even the protesters are relatively resourceful due to the organizing effort of cross-class participants and the high level of affluence in the society, they can hardly defeat a well-organized police force backed by a robust state. Interestingly, after the failure, the protesters turn to more normal and institutional forms of politics, including participating in elections and forming new trade unions. How do we understand this trajectory?

The trend of forming new trade unions (i.e., building mass-membership, formal organizations) seems to contradict the previous practices of the movement, yet it is a logical consequence of its trajectory. The Anti-ELAB Movement, even in its height of momentum, fails to mobilize any sustaining general strikes, and even class boycotts. If we adopt the term developed by Piven (2008, 2014) recently, the Hong Kong protesters fail to fully execute their “interdependent power,” that is, the sociological

basis of their disruptive power, which is generated by the potential withdrawal of cooperation from the institutions of an increasingly interdependent society. The Anti-ELAB Movement slogan, “burn together” (攪炒), grasps the spirit of this concept vividly. Both the general strike and class boycott are classic tactics of the execution of interdependent power. In the Anti-ELAB Movement, the radical protesters chose to paralyze the economy by occupying roads and campuses in November, precisely after a series of failures in calling for general strikes, ending in a huge sacrifice. From this vantage point, the rejection of formal organizations may account for part of the deficiency of the Anti-ELAB Movement, and the burgeoning new trade unions are a remedial response from the protesters to this problem. It follows with questions that can be tackled by future research: Are these new trade unions instrumental in continuing the momentum of the protests, or will they collapse or abandon militancy as the movements subside, as Piven and Cloward (1979[1977]) argued?

As Piven (2013) admitted, and this research argues, the “organizational question” is not a dichotomous issue, but a matter of variety and degree. Due to their origins and interactions with the general movement, it is likely that the new trade unions may develop different organizational qualities from the top-down bureaucratic trade unions.

Furthermore, the protesters are not confined to choosing only one option. In a large-

scale mass movement, the different forms of organizing can possibly co-exist with others, with potential chemistry or tension. It points to a more sophisticated future research direction in addition to the search for alternative organizing mechanisms. Not only can we discuss the advantages and disadvantages of these alternative organizing mechanisms, but we should also look at the combinations or conflicts among different organizing mechanisms in a single movement, then their impacts on movement outcomes. All in all, moving beyond the dichotomous conceptions like “organized versus unorganized,” the researchers can start to fully capture the complexity and vitality of the new wave of mass protests in the world.

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