CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

The case study of the HKSAR under the PRC’s sovereignty shows that the dynamics of peaceful and violent protests are shaped by several factors. The persistence of civil liberties in the HKSAR did contribute to the proliferation of peaceful protests. However, the main catalyst for a series of combined peaceful and violent protests in Hong Kong from June to December 2019 was the introduction of the extradition bill, which to many Hong Kong people constituted a real threat to their existing civil liberties and the rule of law. The extradition bill, as argued in Chap. 2, was attributable to not only the Taiwan murder case but also the desire of Beijing to pursue corrupt mainland businesspeople and officials who were laundering money, hiding and staying in Hong Kong. The decision of the Hong Kong government to push through the bill through the LegCo, a problem compounded by the absence of any opinion poll conducted by its think tank, propelled the HKSAR along the path of combined peaceful and violent protests from June to December 2019.

The miscalculation of PRC officials responsible for Hong Kong matters, notably Zhang Xiaoming of the HKMAO and Wang Zhimin of the Liaison Office, led to their hardline pressure on the HKSAR government led by Chief Executive Carrie Lam to push the bill through the legislature. John Lee as the Secretary for Security was politically insensitive to the complex political environment in which the local barristers, lawyers, youths, intellectuals and even civil servants rose up to oppose the extradition bill.
Compounding the local opposition to the bill was the outspoken way in which US officials and politicians expressed their deep concerns about Hong Kong’s civil liberties, especially after the Causeway Bay book publishers’ disappearance in late 2015. Rising up against the extradition bill was the rapid emergence and pent-up anger of the localists, who were politically frustrated in the 2014 Occupy Central Movement, explicitly suppressed in the 2016 Mongkok riot and then deprived of the chance of being legislators in November 2016 when the NPC Standing Committee interpreted the Basic Law’s stipulation on the oath-taking behavior of two legislators-elect. The localists were further politically alienated in June 2018 when their spiritual leader Edward Leung was imprisoned for six years for his involvement in the Mongkok riot, and in July 2018 when the Hong Kong National Party led by Andy Chan was banned. All these moves against the localist leaders in the HKSAR provided a fertile ground for the growing discontent of radical localists, who later made use of the opposition to the extradition bill as a cohesive glue that galvanized their like-minded supporters to oppose the HKSAR government and Beijing. The localists teamed up with the pan-democratic forces to organize a series of peaceful protests in June, trying to overturn the government’s decision of raling the extradition bill through the LegCo.

While LegCo as a representative body was supposed to tackle the bill through rational debate and political consensus, the reality was that the legislature in the HKSAR from May to December 2019 failed absolutely as a mechanism of resolving ideological disputes. The debate over the extradition bill was highly ideological because it pitted the two camps—pro-Beijing and pro-democracy—against each other. No concession could be made from either side, while the LegCo president failed to mediate as an effective arbitrator. As a result, the breakdown of LegCo’s deliberation led to the phenomenon that opponents of the extradition bill had to resort to a mix of peaceful and violent protests. While moderate localists and democrats opted for the path of using peaceful protests, the radical elements were determined to occupy the LegCo to surprise the ordinary people, the government, Beijing and the world.

Intentionally or unintentionally, the Hong Kong police did not deploy forces to disperse and evict the radical protesters outside the LegCo, but tolerantly allowed them to plunge into the LegCo and to commit vandalism. Although the radical protesters who plunged into LegCo committed strategic vandalism, ransacking the offices of pro-Beijing legislators and defacing the walls instead of stealing any antiques, the damage done to the
LegCo building was an explicit humiliation to the HKSAR government, Beijing and the “one country, two systems.” Some radical protesters who vandalized the LegCo building eventually escaped to Taiwan, while a prominent protester who pulled down his face mask eventually returned to the US for his study. The deeper ideology underlying the intention of radical protesters was that they hoped to spread the liberal values of the HKSAR into the PRC. The fierce opposition to the CCP could be seen in the words written down on the walls of the LegCo conference hall on July 1. The determination of radical protesters to occupy the LegCo was to send a strong message to Beijing, namely Hong Kong remained and will remain a bastion of civil liberties and any menace to the existing freedom had to be repelled.

Yet, the July 1 occupation of LegCo had ripple effects immediately on the dynamics of peaceful and violent protests in the HKSAR. The events on July 1 demonstrated a division of labor between peaceful and violent protesters, diverting the attention and stretching the manpower of the police. Failing to adapt to the flexible, unpredictable and guerilla-style strategies of protesters, who also used a variety of social media tools for their communication and mobilization, the Hong Kong police force failed to perform the task of defending the LegCo on July 1. Even worse, on the night of July 21, radical protesters were allowed to penetrate deep into the vicinity of the Liaison Office building, defacing the PRC emblem.

The weaknesses of the Hong Kong police on the night of July 21 were exposed in the triad attack of passengers in the Yuen Long MTR station, where police were virtually absent. Even though rumors were rife that the police command in Yuen Long had been tipped about an imminent attack by triads on protesters, curiously there was little preparation from the police force. While the occupation of LegCo on July 1 questioned whether there was a plot by the police to discredit radical protesters through the abandonment of the legislature’s defense, the July 21 incident sadly tarnished the image of the Hong Kong police in the history of the

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1 He was Brian Leung Kai-ping. See Alvin Lum and Christy Leung, “The only unmasked protestors at Hong Kong LegCo takeover has fled the city, but whereabouts not confirmed,” *South China Morning Post*, July 6, 2019, in https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3017530/only-unmasked-protestor-hong-kong-legco-takeover-has-fled, access date: April 11, 2020. He eventually went to continue his doctoral studies in the US. See Brian Leung Kai-ping, “Hong Kong can be a gateway to liberal values for China,” *The Economist*, September 10, 2019, in https://www.economist.com/open-future/2019/09/10/hong-kong-can-be-a-gateway-to-liberal-values-for-china, access date: April 11, 2020.
HKSAR. The absence of an independent commission of inquiry into the police performance and action deepened the crisis of performance legitimacy of the Hong Kong police. Even though the police arrested 37 people for their suspected involvement in the July 21 incident, many citizens found the tragic event as the failure of police to take swift action to protect Yuen Long MTR passengers from the attack of alleged triad members.\(^2\) The imbalanced performance of the Hong Kong police in various districts engulfed in the protests from June to November 2019 was disturbing to some ordinary citizens, including the usage of the San Uk Ling Holding Center for a short period of time, the apparently excessive use of tear gas canisters and the nervousness of some individual officers firing their pistols. Operationally, these actions were defensible from the policing perspective. But from the perspective of achieving the accountability of policing, all these actions were highly problematic. While protests influenced police operations, the ways in which the police managed protests shaped the degree of violence. A vicious cycle emerged in the dynamic interactions between protests and policing operations.

Exactly because of the problematic way in which the police operation was conducted, the anti-extradition movement gradually evolved into a mix of anti-police and anti-mainlandization campaign. The anti-mainlandization aspect of the movement was already deeply entrenched when the extradition bill was seen as a threat to the existing freedom and civil liberties enjoyed by the people of Hong Kong. Yet, the anti-police character of the anti-extradition movement began to take shape very prominently after the July 21 incident. The August 31 encounter between protesters and police inside the Prince Edward MTR station worsened and prolonged the anti-police nature of the political movement.

Hence, the snowballing effects of protests on their ensuing demonstrations could be seen in Hong Kong. The momentum of the peaceful and violent protests came from their previous developments, which were accumulated further into a series of continuous confrontations between protesters and police. The October 1 protest was another good example showing the fluidity and flexibility of protesters in their opposition to Beijing, the HKSAR government and the police. The enforcement of the anti-mask law in early October merely exacerbated their confrontations, because protesters perceived that the HKSAR was driven into an

\(^2\)On April 25, 2020, the police announced that 37 people were arrested after the July 21 incident. Cable TV news, April 25, 2020.
authoritarian system in which their rights and civil liberties would be curtailed further. Hence, on the night of October 4 and the morning of October 5, radical protesters engaged in oppositional activities, including vandalism, arson and violence.

Political violence in the HKSAR from June to December 2019 was unprecedented: violent protesters committed vandalism and arson, engaged in private brawls and traffic blockage, threw self-made petrol bombs at police and police stations, hurled bricks and stones at police, prepared weapons at arsenals and defaced the PRC national flag and emblem. All these acts were illegal and plunged the HKSAR into social disorder. The series of arrests made by police mean that the process of gathering evidence and prosecution is a long one, dragging on for some years and leaving the judiciary with the task of adjudicating various cases. An explosion of court cases related to political violence has increasingly indicated the deterioration of the entire political and social landscape of Hong Kong, where the wounds of the 2019 protests, like the 2014 Occupy Central Movement, cannot be easily healed.

The entire protests, both peaceful and violent, were also shaped by the perception of victimization. Radical localists have seen Hong Kong as a highly exploitative capitalist state in which the gap between the rich and poor was not addressed, the inadequacy of public housing units persisted and the tax system was biased in favor of the big capitalists. Young people, especially students, were seen as the victims of the anti-extradition and anti-police movement, for a number of them died mysteriously, like Alex Chow of HKUST, and two were injured by bullets fired at close range by police officers. This perception of the victimization of youths led to the determination of protesters to launch two battles with the police, one at the CUHK and the other at PolyU.

Nevertheless, these two battles had mixed results. The battle of CUHK led to a split within the protesters and their withdrawal, but the obstinacy of radical protesters to defend the indefensible PolyU led to their failure and massive arrests. The battle of PolyU could be seen as the battle of Waterloo for the protesters in the entire anti-extradition and anti-police

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3 One was shot and injured in Tsuen Wan on October 1, while the other was also shot and injured in Sai Wan Ho on November 12, 2019. See Chris Lau and Elizabeth Cheung, “Hong Kong protests: shot student remains in critical condition after surgery to remove right kidney, part of liver and bullet, as arguments raged over force used,” *South China Morning Post*, November 12, 2019, in [https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law-and-crime/article/3037265/hong-kong-protests-shot-student-remains-critical](https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law-and-crime/article/3037265/hong-kong-protests-shot-student-remains-critical), access date: April 25, 2020.
movement because of the massive arrests made by police, who surrounded the university campus with determination and with the inception of the new Police Commissioner Chris Tang. However, the battle of PolyU did have the unintended consequences of stimulating more voters supportive of democracy and protesters to cast their ballots on the November 24 District Council elections, leading to the landslide victory of pan-democrats and the utter defeat of pro-Beijing forces. Although protests lingered on occasionally during weekends from December 2019 to January 2020, the coming of Covid-19 in the PRC and Hong Kong in late January and February 2020 temporarily stemmed the tide of political protests.

On the other hand, the Hong Kong police have changed their tactics of policing protests since November, adopting a swift strategy of apprehending protesters and pre-empting their action of mobilizing other supporters. The critical role of the Hong Kong police in the “one country, two systems” is obvious. If they failed to control the protests, any PAP or PLA intervention would have constituted a failure of “one country, two systems.” If the police could cope with local protests, both peaceful and violent ones, then the image of “one country, two systems” can be at least defensible, even though the HKSAR in recent years has witnessed a rolling back of some civil liberties, notably the disappearance of the Causeway Bay book publishers and the continuous suppression of localists. In short, the police became the political sandwich between protesters and the HKSAR government on the one hand, and between protesters and Beijing on the other hand. Beijing must support the Hong Kong police to maintain law and order. As such, protesters saw the police as a representative agent of the central government. This explained why the protests became increasingly fierce and violent as the radicals believed that the police became an arm of not only the HKSAR regime but also the CCP. Objectively speaking, the police became a political victim as it could not solve the political disputes and problems for the HKSAR government, which was supposed to deal with these issues and engage the residents through meaningful dialogue and consultation. Sadly, the HKSAR government failed in the extradition bill controversy until it was too late to suspend the bill in early September, when the anti-extradition protests had already turned into the anti-police campaign.

Beijing saw the protests in the HKSAR as a national security threat. Its hardline officials responsible for Hong Kong matters, Zhang Xiaoming and Wang Zhimin, harped on the same theme of hoping the HKSAR government to curb and terminate violence. However, the PRC’s hardline
policy backfired in the first place. The crux of the problem was that once the extradition bill was put forward, it was criticized by not only local legal experts but also pro-democracy legislators and politicians. The pro-democracy politicians went to lobby the US government, expressing their opposition to the bill. Coincidentally, the US government, politicians and officials also raised their concerns about the bill. The convergence of opposition internally within Hong Kong and externally from the United States led the PRC to believe in a plot between some Hong Kong democrats and the United States to “subvert” the HKSAR government. This PRC perception was deep-rooted, especially when Beijing and Washington engaged in a trade war and technological competition. Under the circumstances of Sino-American rivalry economically and technologically, the debate over the Hong Kong extradition bill provided a golden opportunity for US Congressmen to put forward and support the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act, which was eventually passed by the two Houses and signed into law by President Trump. These actions again confirmed the PRC’s perception of the US attempt at utilizing the extradition controversy to exert pressure on Beijing, to tarnish the image of “one country, two systems” and to support pro-democracy protesters to “subvert” the HKSAR government.

Hence, Beijing had to make the necessary political gesture by deploying the PAP into the Shenzhen border. But it did not send the PAP openly into the HKSAR, although there were rumors saying that some PAP officers were sent into Hong Kong as “observers.” Beijing’s action of sending the PAP to Shenzhen was arguably a moderate move. The reason was that if the PAP were dispatched into the HKSAR openly, such a move would have incurred international criticisms, providing a golden opportunity for the anti-China elements to portray Hong Kong’s “one country, two systems” as an absolute failure. At most, only some PLA officers in the HKSAR were deployed to clean the debris on the streets of Hong Kong in mid-November 2019, signaling the restraint exercised by the central government on Hong Kong matters.4

After the debacle of the pro-Beijing forces in District Council elections in November 2019, President Xi Jinping and his advisers understood the failure of the PRC’s united front work in Hong Kong. If united front

4 “China’s military defends PLA clean-up of Hong Kong protest debris,” Hong Kong Free Press, November 18, 2019, in https://hongkongfp.com/2019/11/18/chinas-military-defends-pla-clean-hong-kong-protest-debris/, access date: April 11, 2020.
work was conducted successfully, the election result would not have seen the utter defeat of pro-Beijing forces. The electoral tsunami in the HKSAR prompted Beijing to remove the two top officials responsible for Hong Kong matters, namely Zhang Xiaoming and Wang Zhimin. Although Zhang remained as the deputy director of the HKMAO, he was substantially demoted, signaling the PRC-style of political accountability imposed on its officials dealing with Hong Kong matters. Such demotion was unprecedented in the history of the HKSAR and illustrated the seriousness of Beijing’s policy failure in the HKSAR.

However, Beijing’s hardliners responsible for Hong Kong matters do not perceive their policy as a failure. Instead, the mass arrests of Hong Kong democrats on April 18, 2020, proved that Beijing’s policy toward the HKSAR remains hardline and uncompromising. Even the moderate democrats like Martin Lee were all arrested. Obviously, the PRC and the HKSAR authorities collaborate to “terminate violence and stop chaos” in Hong Kong by arresting and prosecuting protest leaders, regardless of whether they were and are moderate or radical democrats. The crux of the problem is that once the PRC and the HKSAR authorities continue their hardline approach to dealing with the Hong Kong democrats, there can be political backlash. Many pro-democracy and liberal-minded Hong Kong people continue to be politically alienated. Moderate democrats may be driven to adopt a more radical line of resistance, whereas radical democrats may be determined to use violence to express their deep political discontent during those “anniversary dates” in the HKSAR, such as July 1, July 21, August 31, October 1 and the dates in November 2019 when the CUHK and PolyU were engulfed in the battles with the police.

The mass arrests on April 18, 2020, in the HKSAR were politically significant. The arrests demonstrated that while the PRC regime under President Xi Jinping is neo-totalitarian, the HKSAR regime has been propelled from “soft” authoritarianism to a harder one. The police under the new commissioner Chris Tang has apparently become an instrument of the central government in Beijing to control, curb and suppress the political dissidents in the HKSAR, for the local police has already been brought under the vertical accountability system in which it has to be loyal to the policy directives of the central government, especially the Minister of Public Security.

Yet, the beneficiary of Beijing’s policy failure was Taiwan’s political gains. The DPP presidential candidate, Tsai Ing-wen, won the presidential election comfortably on January 11, 2020. Ideologically, Taiwan shares
the values of democracy, human rights and civil liberties with the United States. It also shared the same values held by the protesters in the HKSAR. Taiwan also aided some Hong Kong protesters by providing a sanctuary for them after the occupation of LegCo on July 1. Its pro-democracy and pro-independence activists, such as some members of the Taiwan State-Building Party, did provide helmets and logistical support for the Hong Kong protesters. Such political assistance was seen by the PRC as “subversive,” but PRC officials refrained from criticizing Taiwan explicitly for fear of having negative impacts on their united front work on the island republic. The criticisms leveled on Taiwan’s interference with Hong Kong protests were made instead by the PRC’s agents in the HKSAR, the locally pro-Beijing mass media and activists.

**Performance Legitimacy, Procedural Legitimacy and “One Country, Two Systems”**

This book also argues that the China factor has to be considered when we study Hong Kong’s political development. The case of the anti-extradition movement in the latter half of 2019 proved that the late Huntington’s concepts of procedural and performance legitimacy are important for us to study Hong Kong’s “one country, two systems” and its interaction with the China factor. Because many pro-democracy and liberal-minded Hong Kong people believe that, although the performance legitimacy of the HKSAR government may be acceptable to them, its procedural legitimacy should be enhanced by having a faster pace and larger scope of electoral reform. That was the reason why protesters maintained their demand for universal suffrage, meaning that the LegCo should be fully directly elected and ordinary citizens should be empowered to vote for their Chief Executive through direct election. However, the China factor comes into play whenever the question of universal suffrage is raised. The introduction of the extradition bill plunged the Carrie Lam administration into an unprecedented legitimacy crisis, because many citizens, especially the protesters, firmly believed that the bill’s initiation represented a crisis of performance legitimacy. Without sufficient public consultation and pushing the bill hurriedly to the LegCo, the Lam administration opted for a recipe for political disaster. Yet, the entire process of introducing and propelling the extradition bill forward was fully supported by the China factor. As such, the entire image of “one country, two systems” was at stake during
the protests from June to December 2019. In particular, as long as the PRC officials responsible for Hong Kong remain dominated by hardliners, the prospects of “one country, two systems” in the HKSAR will continue to be conflict-ridden and controversial.

Diagram 8.1 shows that public confidence in the “one country, two systems” continued to decline from 43 percent in March 2019 to 33.8 percent in August, and then to 27 percent in February 2020. Even though the PRC government changed its directors of the HKMAO and Liaison Office, public confidence in the “one country, two systems” remained relatively low. Those ordinary people who were not confident of the “one country, two systems” continued to climb up from 55.3 percent in March 2019 to 61.5 percent in August and finally to 67.0 percent in February 2020. Hence, from a critical perspective, PRC leaders have to reflect upon the findings and assess whether a more softline policy toward the HKSAR would be the most appropriate one conducive to its united front work on Taiwan. If not, the Hong Kong model of “one country, two systems” will remain unattractive to Taiwan, while the HKSAR will continue to be inflicted with political squabbling, power struggle, social conflicts and protest violence.

On May 28, 2020, the Standing Committee of the PRC National People’s Congress passed a resolution for the introduction of a national security law for the HKSAR. It is crystal clear that the PRC officials and leaders responsible for Hong Kong matters remain very hardline, believing that the national security law will hopefully have maximal deterrence

![Diagram 8.1 Public confidence in “One Country, Two Systems.” (Source: “People’s Confidence in ‘One Country, Two Systems,’” in https://www.hkupop.hku.hk/pori_table_chart/Trust/K006_Conf_OCTS/K006_chart.html, access date: April 16, 2020)](image-url)
impacts on both peaceful and violent protesters. Although foreign powers, such as the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and the European Union, expressed their grave concerns about Hong Kong’s autonomy and civil liberties, the PRC’s neo-totalitarian regime has swept under the carpet all the foreign views and its diplomats and officials have been adopting a politically intransigent and assertively nationalistic attitude.\(^5\) While anti-foreignism has remained traditional and deep-rooted in contemporary Chinese history, especially in light of the foreign invasion and humiliation of China under the Qing dynasty, the PRC regime’s xenophobic sentiments can be clearly seen in how it has handled the aftermath of the 2019 Hong Kong protests, which constituted not only a challenge but also a humiliation to Beijing’s sovereignty and national security. Critics of the national security law have remarked that it is going to propel Hong Kong’s “one country, two systems” into “one country, one system.” Beijing set up the Office of the National Security Commission, while the HKSAR also established its Protection of National Security Commission with a national security adviser appointed by the central government. From the perspective of PRC leaders, Hong Kong remains “one country, two systems,” but their Marxist-Leninist ideology has made their struggle against the political opponents in the HKSAR persistent. It can be said that Hong Kong’s “one country, two systems” is gradually drifting toward “one country, two mixed systems” in which the political, economic, socio-cultural, and legal systems of the two places have demonstrated tensions and clashed with ceaseless arguments, political struggles, and social conflicts. Perhaps as long as China’s political system remains neo-totalitarian, any “thesis,” to adopt the Marxist terminology, of combining peaceful with violent protests in the HKSAR is destined to encounter the “anti-thesis” of unilaterally imposing the national security law on Hong Kong so that hopefully a “synthesis” of political, economic, and social harmony between the HKSAR and the mainland would be achieved. This Marxist ideology, however, is resisted by many people of Hong Kong, meaning that while some of them are determined to vote with their feet and migrate to other countries, another wave of protests would perhaps erupt when Hong Kong approaches 2047, which is regarded by many

\(^5\)Sonny Shiu-Hing Lo, “Assertive Chinese Nationalism: Implications for Hong Kong and ‘WolfWarrior’ Diplomacy,” *Macau Business*, June 14, 2020, in https://www.macaubusiness.com/opinion-assertive-chinese-nationalism-implications-for-hong-kong-and-wolf-warrior-diplomacy/, access date: June 26, 2020.
frustrated, angry, and radical localists as another “deadline” for them to resist and fight against not only the deeper mainlandization of Hong Kong but also Beijing’s gradual “emasculcation” of such core values as judicial independence, the rule of law, and the freedom of speech, of publications, of assembly, and of protests. Hong Kong represents a classic case of the “clash of civilizations,” as the late Samuel Huntington argued, between the Chinese civilization and the Western civilization.\(^6\)

**Revisiting Different Perspectives on Hong Kong’s Peaceful and Violent Protests**

The concept of legitimacy is useful for us to understand not only groups but also regimes and violence. The peaceful protest groups in Hong Kong from June to December 2019 gained their own legitimacy in the eyes of supporters. On the other hand, the HKSAR government was seen as a clientelist regime with a narrow political base, putting forward the deeply unpopular extradition bill. The HKSAR government suffered from a serious crisis of legitimacy, for it did not even consult public opinion properly and adequately on the content and desirability of the bill. Even worse, no principal official had to resign soon after a series of massive protests, pointing to the democratic deficit in the HKSAR and reaffirming to protesters that democratic reform along the path of achieving universal suffrage to select the Chief Executive was really necessary. Violent protests occurred in Hong Kong because of the legitimacy crisis emanated from a poorly designed extradition bill. The policy of initiating the bill, forcing it through the LegCo without adequate consultation and study, illustrated the failure of governance of the HKSAR. Such governance crisisloomed when Carrie Lam took over as the Chief Executive in March 2017, inheriting the hardline policy of the Leung Chun-ying administration toward the localists and pushing through the West Rail co-location arrangement without much public consultation.

Arguably, the seeds of misrule were already sowed prior to Carrie Lam’s election as the Chief Executive, but her problematic governance continued and reached an apex as the extradition bill was suddenly put forward.

\(^6\)Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Touchstone, 1996). For an early argument about Hong Kong as an example of “the clash of civilizations,” see Sonny Shiu-Hing Lo, *Governing Hong Kong: Legitimacy, Communication and Political Decay* (New York: Nova Science, 2001).
Her regime was seen by protesters as lacking both distributive and procedural fairness, for housing policy was lopsided in favor of the rich capitalist class and land developers. Procedurally, the extradition bill was pushed through a failing legislature where people’s representatives appeared to be dominated by the pro-government and pro-Beijing cronies. From a Marxist perspective, the Hong Kong capitalist state continued to be ruled by a pro-Beijing ruling class out of touch with the realities and predicament of the poor and the needy. Hong Kong’s political system as depicted by David Easton failed to achieve the outputs to the satisfaction of many ordinary people, while their inputs were not fed into the system. As the government stuck to its unpopular policy, like the extradition bill, opponents were arguably forced to resort to violence to make their voices heard. Hong Kong’s political system was perceived by many protesters as having the problems of social inequities and political favoritism, leading to the occurrence of street-level violence in which alienated citizens were determined to voice out their anger and grievances through arson, vandalism and confrontations with the police.

The Hong Kong case shows that regime violence and repression had counterproductive results. The suppression of localists from 2016 to 2018 laid the groundwork for political violence in the HKSAR; the extradition bill was arguably a catalyst. The police handling of the protests from June to August worsened the situation, generating an impression of a repressive post-colonial state without any political accountability. Some protesters and localists were determined to fight back with the help from global human rights groups and most importantly, the United States as an external factor that enacted the US Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act. By “internationalizing” domestic conflicts, the Hong Kong protesters provoked external actors’ intervention. Yet, the PRC’s sovereignty over the HKSAR was challenged. Christian Davenport observes that regimes tend to stick to their “culturally defined parameters of acceptable dissent” beyond which political repression is bound to be increased. The case of Hong Kong shows that while peaceful protests were tolerated, the police increasingly adopted hardline tactics to deal with violent protesters, combining the usage of tear gas canisters, rubber bullets, pepper pellets, sponge grenades, batons and water cannons. After the protests in 2019, the Hong Kong police in January 2020 considered the possibility of arming officers with stun guns—a move that signaled the likely increase in “political repression” if the “culturally defined parameters of acceptable
dissent” is ignored and crossed over by radical protesters. The HKSAR government also adopted “preventive repression” to “undermine the mobilization of political dissidents” by enacting the anti-mask law on October 4, a move that triggered immediate protests and riots on the same night and the following morning.

If organized crime violence represents an alliance between some state actors and criminal actors, this phenomenon could be seen in Hong Kong on July 21 as some mysterious state actors appeared to ally with the triads to attack protesters returning to Yuen Long from the MTR station. Unless the HKSAR government sets up an independent commission of inquiry with the support of Beijing to look into the police actions in the protests, some protesters and ordinary citizens would likely perceive a mysterious state-crime alliance on the night of July 21, 2019, when harmless and armless citizens were attacked by triad members. Although the Hong Kong police eventually arrested some suspected triad members after the tragedy, the public perception of suspected state-crime nexus persists. On the other hand, the Hong Kong protests from June to December 2019 were marked by some informal criminal groupings, such as hooligans, riot crowds or looters. These groupings were a far cry from the organized crime organizations that came out to attack passengers at the MTR station.

If urban vandalism stems from individual or group behavior that damages properties for the sake of expressing their personal freedom and political declaration, the Hong Kong protests in 2019 illustrated the validity of this statement, especially the painting of words and slogans in the vandalized areas. The Hong Kong protests carried a highly anti-CCP tone, for the slogan “Heaven eliminates the CCP” originated from the Falun Gong supporters, members of an exercise group which was banned by the PRC government in 1999. This slogan was often used by protesters on the streets and during the occupation of LegCo. Furthermore, “Liberate

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7 Christy Leung, “Hong Kong police consider arming officers with electroshock devices and net guns amid protests,” South China Morning Post, January 15, 2020, in https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law-and-crime/article/3046049/hong-kong-police-consider-arming-officers-electroshock, access date: April 11, 2020.
8 Emily Hencken Ritter, “Preventing and Responding to Dissent: The Observational Challenges of Explaining Strategic Repression,” American Political Science Review, Vol. 110, Issue. 1, (Feb 2016): pp. 85–99.
9 Nicholas Barnes, “Criminal Politics: An Integrated Approach to the Study of Organized Crime, Politics, and Violence,” Perspectives on Politics, vol. 15, no. 4 (2017), pp. 967–987.
10 Ibid., p. 973.
Hong Kong, revolution of our times” became the most favorite slogan used by protesters, both peaceful and violent ones. In a sense, protesters who painted all these slogans on the vandalized properties expressed their political hatred of the CCP regime in the mainland. These slogans became the political symbols of the anti-extradition and anti-mainlandization movement in the HKSAR.

Many radical protesters appeared to find their pleasure in committing vandalism. In addition, some vandalized acts were strategic. For example, the vandalized action of damaging MTR exits was strategic in the sense that protesters wanted to prevent the police, who were hiding inside MTR stations, from pursuing them easily. Hence, the literature on vandalism appeared to neglect its strategic aspect, which could be easily seen in Hong Kong’s protests in the latter half of 2019. Moreover, vandalism in the Hong Kong case could be retaliatory; protesters who were angered by the MTR Corporation’s collaboration with the police were determined to vandalize MTR stations. Similarly, the vandalism committed in some shopping malls, especially the Festival Walk, was an act in retaliation of the mall’s cooperation of the police to chase and arrest some protesters.

Street art, which refers to the drawing and painting on public or private properties, can be regarded as an expression of freedom and creativity.11 In the case of Hong Kong, street art can also be a kind of vandalism with the objective of using words, drawings and slogans to discredit and delegitimize any regime. The protests in Hong Kong from June to December 2019 fully illustrated the utilization of street art by some protesters to discredit, delegitimize and criticize the post-colonial government, including the police force. Other more peaceful way of street art was to paste stickers, posters and drawings on the Lennon Wall that proliferated on the pillars, walls of the buildings and inside various tunnels in the HKSAR.

Political violence in Hong Kong is “culture-dependent,”12 meaning that all forms of contentious politics may be called either terrorism or resistance “depending on the circumstances and who is doing the naming.”13 It is politics that decides whether the acts of political violence

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11 Yasmine El Rashidi, “Art of Vandalism?,” Index on Censorship, vol. 40, no. 3 (October 2011), pp. 78–88.
12 D. Rucht, “Movement Allies, Adversaries, and Third Parties” in D. A. Snow, S. A. Soule and H. Kriesi, eds., The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 369.
13 Patricia Steinhoff and Gilda Zwerman, “Introduction to the Special Issue on Political Violence.” Qualitative Sociology, vol. 31, no. 3 (2008), pp. 213–220.
are “terrorists” or “resistance.” The political leaders of Hong Kong and PRC officials controlled the naming of these acts. To them, political violence was committed by the local “terrorists.” Yet, there was a fierce power struggle between the ruling political elites in the HKSAR and the protesters. To the protesters, political violence represented their “resistance” movement.

It is important to note that Hong Kong’s protesters “not only shift back and forth between violent and non-violent forms of action, but also use them in various combinations.”\textsuperscript{14} The fact that peaceful protesters did not cut their relations with violent ones openly meant that some of their organizers did have a tactic consensus, namely they delineated their division of labor in which peaceful rallies attracted the moderate democrats while violent ones served as a magnet to lure the support of radicals and extremists. A hallmark of political violence is that the decision to adopt violent means is considered to be influenced by the fact that “groups are embedded in complex webs of contingent relationships and strategic interactions among a variety of actors—including state agents, rival groups, or counter-movements—all of whom shape the evolution of the conflict as they are linked by asymmetrical power balances.”\textsuperscript{15} These observations were accurate in the case of Hong Kong as protest groups planned their strategies through social media and they acted in response to how the police operated and reacted to their tactics. Political violence in Hong Kong was embedded in the wider process of the power struggle between radical protesters and the police, between protesters and triads, between protesters and pro-Beijing populist groups and between peaceful protesters and violent elements. Their interactions were complex and dynamic, depending on their own calculations and strategic moves.

The relations between democratization and violence in the HKSAR deserve our attention. Hong Kong as an undemocratic political system gave rise to the determination of radical protesters to use violence to make their demands heard. In turn, the conservative ruling elites were determined to suppress them, a move that sparked further violence from the radicals. As Hong Kong’s sovereignty belongs to a neo-totalitarian overlord, mainland China, the protesters’ violent action was bound to be met with state violence from the Hong Kong police. Beijing had to support

\textsuperscript{14} Lorenzo Bosi and Stefan Malthaner, “Political Violence,” in Porta & Diani, eds., \textit{The Oxford Handbook of Social Movements} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., pp. 441–442.
the Hong Kong police fully for the sake of protecting its national security interest in the HKSAR. As such, there was a vicious cycle in the Hong Kong protests. Radical protesters resorted to violence to push for democratization, but their tactics were met with post-colonial state violence and police arrests, which in turn stimulated more violence from the radical elements among protesters. The radical elements among protesters could be regarded as the hardliners, who believed that violence was the only means for them to achieve their political ends—a belief articulated by some localists who were politically persecuted, suppressed or imprisoned.

The identity of radical localists shaped political violence in Hong Kong. Protest groups perceived the HKSAR government, the police and Beijing as their enemies. They shared a very strong local identity, so strong that their localism became political extremism. These radical localists exchanged their views, plans and strategies in a variety of social media. They perceived that it was their political right to oppose the “oppressive” governments of the PRC and Hong Kong and their “bad” policies, such as the extradition bill. Hence, the Hong Kong protesters were imbued with the idea of resistant citizenship, which to them could use violence as a rightful means to achieve their political ends. Some protest groups, such as the Hong Kong Indigenous led by Ray Wong and Edward Leung, and the Hong Kong National Party led by Andy Chan, perceived themselves as being politically “victimized” and having the “legitimate right to exist,” but of course it was another matter for the HKSAR government and Beijing to reject and ban them.16

Some radical localists adopted a bottom-up version of nationalism. They possessed a distinct identity that, in their minds, should be recognized by the post-colonial state in Hong Kong and the central government in Beijing. Nevertheless, the HKSAR government is bound to be the loyal client of Beijing, which is ruled by the Hans-dominated CCP while suppressing some ethnic minorities to quest for self-determination in the mainland. Under the circumstances in which the PRC remained a neototalitarian state, the radical localists who wished to achieve “self-determination” in the local state of Hong Kong were naturally seen as the enemies of Beijing and must be suppressed. Many radical localists also believed that they had the right of “self-determination,” a right that was denied by both Britain and China in 1982–1984, when the Sino-British negotiations over Hong Kong took place, and when both countries

16 Ibid., pp. 88–89.
equated self-determination with independence. In fact, in the minds of many localists, self-determination refers to the ability of the people of Hong Kong to shape how their political system should be designed and democratized, instead of achieving “territorial independence.” A minority of radical protesters in the HKSAR believed that Hong Kong was their “nation,” but most protesters tended to be more pragmatic and to fight for other political rights, notably their right to elect their Chief Executive through universal suffrage and to achieve a fully directly elected LegCo—a political dream that can be regarded as “institutional independence.” “Territorial independence” remains a castle in the air, but “institutional independence” is arguable achievable in accordance with the Basic Law. This “achievable” dream of achieving “institutional independence” was what the protesters argued for during the anti-extradition and anti-mainlandization movement in Hong Kong from June to December 2019. Unfortunately, both the PRC regime and the HKSAR authorities appeared to view the term “independence” as a politically taboo subject, regardless of whether it was about “institutional” reform or not.

Collective violence is a common feature in social movements—a phenomenon that could be seen in the Hong Kong protests. Violence represents an “escalation of action repertoires within protest cycles.” Charles Tilly’s concept of “repertoires of action” entails a learning process from previous waves of protests so that forms of actions can be adapted across nations. There can be clusters of protest activities, which are called “protest cycles” with a sharp peak and then decline. The protest cycle in Hong Kong began in June and lasted until the battle of PolyU, after which there has been a steady decline in protest activities, especially after the November 2019 District Council elections and the outbreak of Covid-19 in early 2020.

From the perspective of political opportunity, the extradition bill and its related mishandling by the HKSAR government provided a golden opportunity for the oppositionists and protesters to organize themselves, to launch the social movement and to grasp far more directly elected seats in the November 2019 District Council elections. To put it in another

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17 Bosi and Malthaner, “Political Violence,” in The Oxford Handbook of Social Movements, p. 442.
18 Donatella della Porta, “Research on Social Movements and Political Violence,” Qualitative Sociology, vol. 31 (2008), pp. 221–230.
19 Ibid., p. 222.
way, both the Hong Kong government and PRC officials responsible for the HKSAR failed to depoliticize the territory and to reduce the political opportunities for collective action. Collective political violence was arguably an outcome of misrule and the mishandling by Hong Kong and PRC authorities of “one country, two systems” in the first place.

Organizationally, resource mobilization plays a key role in shaping the politics of social movement and violence. Underground organizations evolve among themselves and break away from the larger, non-violent, social movement organizations. These phenomena could be seen in Hong Kong as many underground protest groups evolved and broke away from all the pro-democracy political parties. Even the Civil Human Rights Front could only mobilize some but not all peaceful protesters. The violent protesters grouped themselves through the social media, having a distinct identity of utilizing vandalism to voice their grievances and vent their anger at the political enemies. In the social media, they developed their “explanatory consistency and emotional power through narratives or stories that connect the group’s collective past to their present situation.” The organizational dynamics of radical protesters were totally beyond the expectation and control of the ruling elites in Hong Kong, not to mention the police force which showed some difficulties in their adaptation to the flexible tactics of radicals and extremists.

Reed’s insights on the culture of social movements are applicable to the HKSAR not only in the 2014 Occupy Central Movement but also in the anti-extradition, anti-mainlandization and anti-police movement in the latter half of 2019. Numerous artworks were displayed on the Lennon Wall across the territory in 2019, while they had been restricted to the protest sites in Admiralty, Mongkok and Causeway Bay in late 2014. These artworks were composed of posters, drawings, political satires, poems and individual messages in stickers, showing the existence of the freedom of expression, of thought and of speech in the entire movement. These artworks developed into a new movement culture, stimulating the citizens and participants to think about political events critically and innovatively.

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20 Donatella Della Porta, “Research on Social Movements and Political Violence,” *Qualitative Sociology*, vol. 31 (2008), pp. 223–224.
21 Ibid., pp. 225–226.
22 Donatella Della Porta, “Research on Social Movements and Political Violence,” *Qualitative Sociology*, vol. 31 (2008), pp. 225–226.
23 T.V. Reed, The Art of Protest: Culture and Activism from the Civil Rights Movement to the Streets of Seattle (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. 296.
The Lennon Walls in various districts carried political messages and discourses that were unprecedented, educating the society of Hong Kong silently. Indeed, those ordinary citizens who were opposed to the anti-extradition activists hated the Lennon Walls, trying to remove and destroy the posters, drawings and stickers. If Reed has noted that the “diffusion of movement culture back into mainstream culture can at times be the most important impact a given movement may have,” then the case study of Hong Kong is prominent in illustrating this kind of diffusion.

What Reed might not have anticipated was that the Hong Kong case showed a new ideology that was anti-hegemonic. The emergence of the idea of creating a “yellow” economy was a good example showing this anti-hegemonic ideology. Of course, the government and business elites opposed the “yellow” economy in the name of protecting the existing laissez-faire system. But underlying the idea of “yellow” economy was a deep dissatisfaction with the dominance of the economy by the existing capitalist class. The Hong Kong economy appeared to be a laissez-faire system, but its tax system has been consistently biased in favor of the capitalists and the rich people. Without redistributive measures, like comprehensive social welfare reform and the introduction of a progressive tax system to increase the tax burden on the rich people, the idea of creating a “yellow” economy represents a castle in the air. Some democrats supportive of the protesters desired to change the capitalists-dominated economic system and to encourage the capitalists to be more politically liberal and democratic than ever before.

In a totalitarian political system, the ruling elites are characterized by the utilization of personality cult, the mobilization of public support through propaganda, the suppression of political dissent and the imposition of ideological control. Domestically, totalitarian dictators rely on the secret police as the sole organ of power, while the military forces are trained to “fight a foreign aggressor” and to become “a dubious instrument for civil-war purposes.” Some of these features of totalitarianism can be seen in the PRC under President Xi Jinping, whose regime tolerates the existence of a relatively marketized economy and yet suppresses political dissent swiftly. The PRC regime remains neo-totalitarian, partly because

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24 Ibid.
25 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Harcourt: Brace Jovanovich, 1973), p. 391.
26 Ibid., p. 420.
of the extensive use of technological surveillance on citizens, and partly due to the tight ideological control and indoctrination of ethnic minorities in Xinjiang.27 Indeed, the neo-totalitarian nature of the PRC regime has been seen in its mobilization capability to impose lockdown of cities affected by Covid-19 from January to April 2020. The most important instrument used by the neo-totalitarian state in the PRC to deal with the Hong Kong protests was the Hong Kong police force, whose performance was controversial and whose operations from June to December were outside the scope of police accountability. Regardless of whether an independent commission of inquiry was set up to investigate the protests from June to December 2019, police accountability in Hong Kong remains to be substantially improved. The existing IPCC is perceived as not autonomous enough and lacking sufficient members critical of the government, while the Ombudsman does not have the jurisdiction of investigating the police.28 Strictly speaking, the protest movement from June to December 2019 casts a shadow on the imbalanced performance and problematic operation of the Hong Kong police. In short, the China factor played a critical role in shaping how the HKSAR government and its police force to deal with the protests in 2019.

Objectively speaking, if the mass media can stimulate public fear, shape public agenda and influence the degree of public fear, the series of protests from June to July 1, 2019, did demonstrate how the media could mobilize ordinary people to oppose the extradition bill, which was portrayed as a great danger to the existing civil liberties and the rule of law. The politics of public fear in Hong Kong could be shaped by the political culture and values of ordinary citizens, who were determined to take to the streets to fight for their freedom and the rule of law. The protests by barristers and lawyers in late June 2019 galvanized the members of the public to oppose the extradition bill further. Hence, to some extent, the politics of public fear could be easily seen in the case of Hong Kong. The political

27 Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, “Exposed: China’s Operating Manuals for Mass Internment and Arrests by Algorithm,” November 24, 2019, in https://www.icij.org/investigations/china-cables/exposed-chinas-operating-manuals-for-mass-internment-and-arrest-by-algorithm/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMI8tmZ1LaD6QIVzdaWCh1IRwK1EAYASAAEg1u_fD_BwE, access date: April 25, 2020.

28 For the work of the IPCC, see https://www.ipcc.gov.hk/en/about_us/membership.html, access date: April 25, 2020. For the Ombudsman’s role and jurisdictions, https://www.ombudsman.hk/en-us/about_this_office/role_and_jurisdiction.html, access date: April 25, 2020.
opposition also used the term *sung zhong* (sending people back to China) as an effective appeal to mobilize the public to oppose the “bad” policy. Together with the proliferation and the full utilization of social media, anti-government protesters proved to be a formidable force to the HKSAR government and the police. Anti-government propaganda and publicity became effective through the extensive use of social media tools, plunging the HKSAR government into an unprecedented crisis of legitimacy.

While the term *sung zhong* represented a “bad government policy,” it was a political symbol skillfully used by the pan-democratic camp to oppose the extradition bill. Symbols exist independently of human beings and may “transmit meanings from person to person despite vast distances of space and time.” There are many symbols, ranging from public to private, religious to artistic, logical to linguistic and tangible to intangible. All these symbols are used to express, communicate and represent “logical relationships, intangible cosmic forces, and repressed drives and feelings.”

Other symbols of the protest movement in the HKSAR were numerous, including the slogan of “Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times.” This was arguably the most significant slogan used by protesters to symbolize the spirit of citizenship resistance, the determination of making the HKSAR genuinely autonomous and the dream of making Hong Kong a “nation” as mentioned by radical localist leaders like Edward Leung and Andy Chan.

Some radical protesters in the HKSAR were arguably anarchists, who saw violent actions as necessary to express themselves. Carlo Ruzza has alerted us to the fact that “uncivil” society groups include extremist organizations from both the left and the right. These “uncivil” society organizations can be seen as an alternative type of political participation, displaying the features of racism, nationalism, populism and territorial or cultural exclusionism. Those radical protesters who resorted to violence in Hong Kong were imbued with the idea of anarchism, trying to create an “uncivil society” intolerant of the mainlanders and those local people who conducted businesses with the mainlanders. Hence, this explained why many shops with mainland connections and investment became the

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29 Lowell Dittmer, “Political Culture and Political Symbolism: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis,” *World Politics*, vol. 29, no. 4 (July 1977), pp. 552–583.
30 Ibid.
31 Carlo Ruzza, “Populism and Euroscepticism: Towards uncivil society?,” *Policy and Society*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2009), pp. 87–98.
32 Ibid.
targets of political violence. Violent anarchists have traditionally been excluded from the mainstream civil society of Hong Kong. Some violent protesters were not necessarily anarchist, but they were localist extremist to the extent of seeing violence as an end in itself. They were also localist exclusionists trying to exclude the mainlanders from the society of Hong Kong. That was why the Hong Kong police referred to these anarchists and extremists as “home-grown terrorists.”

If insurgency is defined as an anti-government uprising launched by rebellious activists who are determined to delegitimize and even overthrow the existing leaders and regime, the Hong Kong protests from June to December 2019 did fit into the features of insurgency. This explained why both the HKSAR government and Beijing were deeply concerned about the protests, trying to clamp down political dissent with the necessary force. The police action against protesters intensified after Chris Tang was appointed as the new commissioner. He has been fully supported by the mainland security officials, notably the Minister of Public Security Zhao Kezhi. Therefore, counterinsurgency becomes the foremost task of the Hong Kong police, which is expected to maintain law and order effectively in the HKSAR and protect the PRC’s national security interest.

The literature on insurgency points to the phenomenon that its typical supporters are the young people who use violence and disorder to enrich themselves, who challenge the political system of the states where patron-client relations are serious, and who oppose public maladministration. Many young people believe that possessing weapons and supporting a local strongman can offer the chance for them to improve the socio-economic predicament. Youths who join the insurgency may have various grievances and they tend to see conflicts as inevitable and beneficial to their self-interests. They hate the regime and its political leaders, who in their minds are power-hungry and interested in personal gains. All these features could be found in the Hong Kong protests. Without social welfare reform and adequate supply of public housing units, the HKSAR government from July 1997 to mid-2019 was arguably characterized by public

33 Remarks made by the new Hong Kong Police Commissioner Chris Tang. See Christy Leung, “New Hong Kong police chief Chris Tang tells residents: the force cannot end the protests alone,” South China Morning Post, November 19, 2019, in https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law-and-crime/article/3038305/incoming-police-chief-chris-tang-tells-hongkongers, access date: March 15, 2020.

34 William Reno, “The Politics of Insurgency in Collapsing States,” Development and Change, vol. 33, no. 5 (2002), pp. 837–858.
maladministration. Social immobility, the rising gap between the rich and the poor, the influx of many mainlanders into Hong Kong and the failure of the government to consult public opinion on the extradition bill, all demonstrated the degree of public maladministration in the HKSAR. Under these circumstances, the young radicals used “selective violence” to oppose the HKSAR government, which they saw as the loyal client of the CCP, another target that they opposed. The use of petrol bombs, the defacement of PRC flags and emblem, the occupation of LegCo and the arson targeted at mainland banks and mainland-related shops were all evidence of insurgency operations aimed at toppling the HKSAR government. No wonder the PRC hardliners stood tough once the protesters engaged in violent activities. As PRC hardliners identified that some external actors, notably US politicians, were involved in opposing the extradition bill, their sensitivity to the insurgency in the HKSAR was heightened to the national security level.

If failed states are characterized by economic decline, uneven economic development, human rights violations and brain drain, Hong Kong in 2019 did not fit into these features, because its economy was in general sound until the outbreak of Covid-19 in early 2020. Human rights violations, however, loomed in the HKSAR because of the mysterious disappearance of the book publishers of the Causeway Bay Bookstore. Although their disappearance was not related directly to how the HKSAR government dealt with them but more about how PRC security agents tackled them, the local administration was expected to at least defend the rights of the Hong Kong residents. However, the disappearance of the publishers only resulted in an improved mechanism between the mainland police and Hong Kong counterpart in August 2016, namely each side informing the other within 14 days of cases where one or more of its residents would be detained. This improved mechanism, however, occurred after the disappearance of the publishers, failing to calm down those local people who were already frightened by the prospect of being “kidnapped” into the mainland for political reasons.

Although Hong Kong in 2019 was not a failed state, it could be seen as a weak state. Its autonomy vis-à-vis the PRC had declined because of the explicit intervention from the mainland. As mentioned above, the disappearance of book publishers was politically disturbing. They failed to have the freedom of publication and of press in the HKSAR, whose border with the PRC could be seen as increasingly porous. Mainland security agents
could go into Hong Kong easily, bringing back their targets, such as Lee Bo and businessman Xiao Jianhua, back to the PRC easily. Although the book publishers did publish books critical of China, most people of Hong Kong did not take their books seriously, except for those who were deeply interested in the inside politics of the PRC. In short, Hong Kong was a relatively weak state, in the minds of many Hong Kong people, in light of the disappearance of the book publishers in late 2015.

This public image of a weak state persisted from 2017 to 2019 when the Carrie Lam administration pushed through the West Rail co-location the LegCo without adequate public consultation in mid-2018. To many localists, this co-location arrangement meant that Hong Kong’s territorial jurisdiction was abandoned in favor of the PRC and the High-Speed Rail could have its terminal extending into West Kowloon where mainland custom officials could station and work there. The problem of the relatively weak post-colonial state in the HKSAR is due to the clientelist mentality of its Chief Executive and principal officials, who have since July 1, 1997, seen Beijing as the most powerful patron to whom they should be loyal and obedient.

Ideally, the operation of “one country, two systems” requires a batch of Chief Executive and principal officials who defend the interests of Hong Kong, who retain the uniqueness of the “two systems,” and who could and can strike a balance between the interests of Hong Kong and that of the PRC. Unfortunately, since 1997, all the Chief Executives, ranging from Tung Chee-hwa to Donald Tsang, from C. Y. Leung to Carrie Lam, have all been the loyal and obedient clients of Beijing. To many Hong Kong protesters, especially democrats and localists, the ruling elites in the HKSAR should protect the uniqueness of the “two systems.” Yet, the Carrie Lam administration in 2018 and 2019 was a weak one, failing to protect the interest of many Hong Kong people who had a very strong local identity. In short, Hong Kong in 2019 was not a failed state, but the relatively weak post-colonial state did stimulate both peaceful and violent protests.

Kimmy Chung, Shum Lok-kei, Ng Kang-chung and Alvin Lum, “Hong Kong’s controversial China rail checkpoint bill finally passed by lawmakers amid protests, delays and expulsions,” *South China Morning Post*, June 14, 2018, in https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/2150873/hong-kongs-controversial-china-rail-checkpoint-bill-finally, access date: April 25, 2020.
Chapter 1 has developed an analytical framework of understanding the relations between the state, society, protests and violence. During the Hong Kong protests in 2019, the central party-state in Beijing clearly had two major considerations in its policy toward the HKSAR: the protection of its territorial sovereignty and the consolidation of its national security. Legitimacy, in the minds of the central party-state in Beijing, was undermined by the Hong Kong protests, which could threaten its national security and sovereignty. The central state remained a powerful patron vis-à-vis the local state, which was like a political sandwich between the center and the Hong Kong society. During the 2019 protests, the Hong Kong society was composed of citizens and groups resistant to both the ruling regime at the central and local levels. Furthermore, social movements, such as populist and democracy movements, exerted tremendous pressure on the local state to stabilize the political system. Since the Hong Kong protests were shaped by external actors, including the United States and Taiwan, the PRC’s sensitivity to its national security was heightened. Compounded by public fear and anger over the extradition bill, the Hong Kong protest movement turned into violent confrontations with the police. Ironically, some triad members, who wished to maintain the status quo for their businesses, saw protests as undermining their self-interest and profits. As such, some of them went out to attack the protesters on the night of July 21. In short, organized crime groups share the political conservatism of the ruling elites, seeing any social disorder as detrimental to their business operations. The case of Hong Kong proves that political violence could grow out from some triads that shared common interests with the ruling elites.

Under the pressure from the neo-totalitarian central party-state, the local state in the HKSAR was hard-pressed to mobilize the police to adopt hardline tactics against protesters, who in turn resorted to violence. Alongside with the civil society of Hong Kong was the “uncivil” aspect in which violence was cherished by some radical and extremist groups. Hence, the case of Hong Kong corroborates that the political violence of protesters became both a means to an end and an end in itself. Most significantly, Hong Kong’s social movements, including populist and pro-democracy activities, were supported by external actors, including neighboring Taiwan and the superpower, the United States. Such support was moral, financial and logistical, as with how the people of Taiwan, including the Taiwan...
State-Building Party and religious activists, aided the Hong Kong protesters. The support from the United States was ideological, strategic and geopolitical. The US politicians shared the same values with the Hong Kong protesters, as argued in this book. At the same time, once the United States was dragged into the trade and technological war with the PRC, Washington used the Hong Kong protests as a means to push for its political agenda of supporting human rights and democracy in the HKSAR, thereby exerting pressure on Beijing to make possible concessions on the trade negotiations with the American negotiators. Geopolitically, Taiwan’s support of the Hong Kong protests was in conformity with both the ideology and strategic interest of the United States. From Beijing’s perspective, Washington continues to contain the PRC because the rise of China presents a threat to the United States politically, economically, technologically and militarily. Furthermore, Beijing was upset about the ways in which the United States supported Taiwan ideologically and militarily, seeing Washington as having a plot to work with Taiwan to “overthrow” Hong Kong’s political system. If perception is critical in shaping international politics, the case of Hong Kong from June to December 2019 fully demonstrated the perceptions of Beijing on both Washington and Taipei.

If the PRC perceives the existence of external support of the protest movement in the HKSAR, it naturally sees the Hong Kong protests as being a conspiracy orchestrated by some localists, democrats and foreign actors to “subvert” not only the HKSAR government but also the central government in Beijing. In other words, any external intervention in Hong Kong’s populist and democracy movement in 2019 challenged the legitimacy of the central party-state in Beijing, which perceived such interference as undermining its national security and territorial sovereignty. This perception became deep-rooted in the psyche of Beijing’s political leaders, leading to a relatively hardline policy toward Hong Kong.

Yet, the constraint on such hardline policy was ironically the international and regional image of “one country, two systems.” So long as “one country, two systems” remains the PRC’s policy toward the reunification of the ROC on Taiwan, Beijing did not want to send the PAP directly and openly into the HKSAR in August 2019. Its stationing of the PAP in Shenzhen was arguably a mild move, considering the negative international image on the Hong Kong model of “one country, two systems.”

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36 Robert Jarvis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Massachusetts: Centre for International Affairs, Harvard University, 1976).
The Politics of Populism: Hong Kong, France, Chile, Iraq and Lebanon

If populism has at least four perspectives, including Marxist, ideational, political-strategic and socio-cultural, each with its connections with protests, it can be applied to our deeper understanding of the Hong Kong protests. Marxists define populism in terms of class struggle, highlighting the significance of market conditions, economic production and social contradictions. Populism is defined by Marxists as a political movement that cultivates close mass-elite and class linkages to address the problem of socio-economic inequality. From an ideational perspective, populism is a discourse focusing on the people, democracy and sovereignty. The masses may take actions against the ruling elites through peaceful or violent protests to assert their popular sovereignty. Populists favor direct forms of democracy to replace the current political arrangements and see public opinion as of paramount importance in shaping government policies. Strategically, populism can be a tool for charismatic politicians to win the hearts and minds of the people, to obtain support during elections, to legitimize their actions in the legislature, to struggle against other factions and to oppose the ruling elites. Socio-culturally, populism can be a phenomenon shaped by social, cultural and historical factors. All these findings on populism could be seen in the case of Hong Kong.

The Marxist perspective helps us understand the Hong Kong protests from the vantage point of class exploitation and class dominance in the capitalistic society of Hong Kong. As mentioned above, Hong Kong was conceived by many radical protesters as an exploitative capitalist state that bowed to the pressure of both capitalists and PRC authorities. The rise of social democrats in Hong Kong’s electoral politics since 2012 has been accompanied by the rising gap between the rich and the poor. Unfortunately, the HKSAR government failed to address the wealth gap for so long that, once the extradition bill was put forward, it galvanized all those people dissatisfied with government performance. From the Marxist perspective, the anti-extradition, anti-police and anti-mainlandization movement from June to December 2019 signaled a populist movement that saw the post-colonial state of Hong Kong as highly exploitative and lopsided in favor of the rich capitalist class and land developers.

The ideational perspective on populism could be seen in the Hong Kong protests in 2019, when protesters, both peaceful and violent ones, saw not only the people as having their own sovereignty but also
democracy as absent in the HKSAR. Strategically, the populist movement that opposed the extradition bill, police and mainlandization of Hong Kong was utilized by some leaders and activists as a ploy to consolidate their popular support during the November 2019 District Council elections. Populist protesters strategized among themselves, using a mix of peaceful and violent protests to achieve their political objectives and ambitions. Exactly because of this phenomenon, pro-Beijing and pro-government elites and mass media saw them as those “troublemakers” who opposed both Hong Kong and mainland China. Socially and culturally, the protests in Hong Kong in 2019 can be regarded as populist movement reflecting the profound values in the society that has conflict-ridden interactions with the PRC. The pro-democracy Hong Kong people cherish the rule of law, existing civil liberties, Western-style democracy and police accountability. Nevertheless, the pro-Beijing and pro-government elites treasure the maintenance of the status quo, a more restrictive view of civil liberties, a gradualist approach to implementing democratic reform and minimal police accountability. Both sides had deep conflict-ridden values and divided identities.

Chapter 6 argues that populism in the HKSAR has several factions: the nationalistic populists who are pro-Beijing and pro-government; the democratic populists who are liberal-minded; the socialist populists who are more pro-welfare; and the localists who have a very strong local and exclusionist Hong Kong identity. All these factions or fractions shaped the ways in which the protests and confrontations in Hong Kong were played out. The anti-extradition, anti-police and anti-mainlandization movement in the HKSAR was complex, involving the interplay between the democratic populists, socialist populists and localists. Their common enemy was the nationalistic populists, who they saw were like PRC’s “puppets” supportive of the HKSAR government.

From the perspective of comparative populism (Table 8.1), the Hong Kong protests gained inspirations from the populist movement in France in 2018 and the early half of 2019, when the yellow vest protesters confronted the French government. As with the French case, the Hong Kong protests started with a single issue, namely the extradition bill versus the energy policy in France, and then snowballed into large-scale and continuous protests. This pattern of snowballing effects could also be found in Chile, where the issue of transport fares was the original target of public discontent. Unlike the single-issue trigger that occurred in Hong Kong, France and Chile, the protests in Lebanon and Iraq tended to focus on a
| Country | Details of the movement |
|---------|------------------------|
| **Chile** | 1. It began with a student-led demonstration against transport fares in October 2019.  
2. Other issues were raised as Chileans were frustrated with the increasing cost of living, low wages and pensions, a lack of education rights, a poor public health system and crippling inequality.  
3. The movement stimulated more people to come out to the streets while the police force in Chile attempted to stop the protesters with force.  
4. Most protesters were peaceful, with many banging spoons against cooking pots—a form of protest known as *cacerolazo*. However, some protesters adopted violent tactics targeting at metro stations, supermarkets and petrol stations.  
5. Petrol stations were burnt, and the riot led the president to declare a state of emergency and to suspend certain freedoms, including the people’s movement and assembly.  
6. There were frequent clashes between police and protesters. Police used tear gas, water cannon, rubber bullets and pellets, prompting the allegations of rights abuses.  
7. In response to the protests, President Sebastian Pinera replaced eight cabinet members, including the Minister of the Economy and Minister of Internal Affairs, Andres Chadwick, who was Pinera’s cousin.  
8. In the series of protests, 20 people died as a result of the unrest, including 11 who died in arson attempts, looting and rioting and 5 who were killed by military officers. |
| **France** | 1. Originally, the protests focused on the government’s energy policies in 2018. Then other concerns were raised, such as inequality and poor governance.  
2. The protests started in the French provinces but gradually spread to Paris, where demonstrations turned into riots over the weekend and scenes of violent civil unrest could be seen in the city’s famous Avenue des Champs Élysées.  
3. Most yellow vests at blockades around France were peaceful protesters. Violent protests erupted over the weekend in Paris, where rioters defaced the Arc de Triomphe and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, looted shops, vandalized buildings and attacked police.  
4. Their initial demand was to repeal the green tax on diesel. Other demands included an increase in the minimum wage, the dissolution of the National Assembly, the holding of new elections and the resignation of the president.  
5. The movement had apparently no official leadership and was organized initially through social media groups.  
6. Many people supported the movement; however, many of them opposed the violent tactics that protesters deployed.  
7. It began in November 2018 and continued throughout 2019. |

(continued)
variety of issues related to public maladministration. Hence, the snowballing effect of the French populist movement on the Hong Kong protests in 2019 existed, whereas the snowballing impacts of earlier protests on the ensuing ones could be found in all the populist movements in France, Hong Kong, Chile, Iraq and Lebanon.

Like France where President Macron stays in power safely without the need for resignation, Hong Kong’s Chief Executive Carrie Lam was perhaps fortunate. Rumors were rife that she wanted to resign in the early phase of the protests in 2019, but the central government in Beijing decided to keep her. Changing the Chief Executive at that critical juncture

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### Table 8.1 (continued)

| Country | Details of the movement |
|---------|-------------------------|
| Iraq    | 1. The protests began in October 2019 as protesters were unhappy with endemic corruption, high unemployment and dire public services.  
2. The protesters blocked roads, obstructed oil facilities and ports and clashed with security forces, which fired live ammunition in response.  
3. The Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi resigned in response, but some protesters wanted to sweep away the entire political establishment. |
| Lebanon | 1. The main demands of protesters in 2019 included the removal of the elite political class, an early election and an end to the sectarian power-sharing system that institutionalized clientelism and corruption in the country.  
2. Protesters were unhappy about the governing system that had routinely failed to deliver jobs, affordable health care and education.  
3. Major means of opposition tactics deployed by protesters included demonstrations, strikes, sit-ins, civil resistance, the construction of barricades and Internet activism.  
4. The protest did not have leaders. Non-centralized leadership allowed the protesters to express other issues that raised public concerns.  
5. The protesters fully utilized the social media as a means to keep the momentum of the protests.  
6. Clashes existed between police and protesters and police fired tear gas on demonstrators.  
7. Prime Minister Saad Hariri eventually resigned in October 2019. |

Sources: Charis McGowan, “Chile protests: What prompted the unrest?,” *Aljazeera*, October 31, 2019, in https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/chile-protests-prompted-unrest-191022160029869.html, access date: April 8, 2020; Anchal Vohra, “Lebanon Is Broken. So Are Its Protesters.,” *Foreign Policy*, February 18, 2020, in https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/02/18/lebanon-protests-politics-leadership/, access date: April 8, 2020; Jake Cigainero, “Who Are France’s Yellow Vest Protesters, And What Do They Want?,” in https://www.npr.org/2018/12/03/672862353/who-are-frances-yellow-vest-protesters-and-what-do-they-want, access date: April 8, 2020; “The Iraq protests explained in 100 and 500 words,” in https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-50595212, access date: April 8, 2020
would have created an image of a weak Beijing that yielded pressure from not only the protesters but also the external actors, notably US politicians and officials who expressed their deep concerns about the extradition bill. Carrie Lam’s predicament improved in early 2020 when Covid-19 broke out, and as the society of Hong Kong had to be more united than ever to combat the rapidly spreading contagious disease.

Unlike Chile whose President had to reshuffle the cabinet ministers, Carrie Lam did not do so from June to December 2019. The concept of the accountability of principal officials was introduced into the HKSAR in 2002 with the idea that ministers would shoulder the responsibility of policy errors and would then resign. Nevertheless, the controversy over the extradition bill did not witness any official to resign. Perhaps the central government in Beijing maintained a very hardline approach; resignation of any official would send a message to the outside world and to protesters that both the HKSAR government and the central authorities were weak. Unlike Lebanon and Iraq where the Prime Ministers resigned in the midst of protests, Carrie Lam persisted with the support of the PRC President Xi Jinping.37 In April 2020, the Carrie Lam administration reshuffled five principal officials, but none of them included the critical positions of the Secretary for Justice and the Secretary for Security. The 2019 protests in Hong Kong highlighted that, from Beijing’s perspective, three principal officials were particularly significant apart from the Chief Executive, namely the Police Commissioner, the Secretary for Justice and the Secretary for Security.

Tactically speaking, the Hong Kong protesters adopted similar tactics as with other countries, such as the construction of barricades, the practice of vandalism, the hit-and-run tactics against the police and the use of artworks to express themselves. The mix of peaceful and violent protests was a common feature cutting across all these protests. Moreover, protesters in all the five places fully utilized the advanced technology of the social media to strategize and mobilize themselves flexibly and effectively. A decentralized leadership pattern of all these protests made it difficult for the police to handle all these populist movements. The new method of using social media in the interest articulation, political discourse and protest planning of protesters meant that, on the surface, all these populist movements were leaderless, even though there might be many small leaders hiding

37 One reporter told the authors that President Xi was personally impressed by Carrie Lam. Discussion with the authors in December 2019.
behind the scene. In a sense, there was no single prominent leader in all these populist and protest movements. If there was any single prominent leader in organizing rallies and protests, just like Jimmy Sham and a few others, then they could become the easy target of attacks from mysterious organized crime groups. The Hong Kong experiences showed that if a few protest leaders were identified by their opponents, their personal safety could be at stake. Underlying the grievances of all these protests was the profound social and economic discontent. This phenomenon raised a critical issue of whether the capitalist states of Hong Kong, France, Chile and Lebanon, except for Iraq which has a mixed capitalist and socialist planning economy, have encountered a serious crisis in which the income gap between the rich and the poor remains unaddressed, public maladministration is not tackled effectively, and whether the political systems need to be reformed in such a way as to reduce the elite-mass gap in the society and polity.

In conclusion, the populist movement in Hong Kong from June to December 2019 had profound implications for our study of the dynamics of peaceful and violent protests. Inspired by the French populist movement and triggered by the highly controversial extradition bill, the protesters in Hong Kong combined peaceful with violent means, strategically utilizing the social media skillfully for their planning, execution and mobilization of protests against the HKSAR government, the police and Beijing. The anti-governmental, anti-police and anti-CCP nature of the Hong Kong populist movement was striking, raising the immediate alarm of the central government in the PRC. Complicating the entire populist movement was the involvement of external actors, notably the US politicians and Taiwan, whose activities heightened the sensitivity of Beijing to the national security level. This explained why the HKSAR government refused to suspend the extradition bill from mid-June to early September 2019. The action of Beijing was relatively mild, sending the PAP to the Shenzhen border rather than dispatching it or the PLA to crack down on the protesters. Any action of cracking down on the protesters from the PRC would constitute another Tiananmen incident in Hong Kong. Hence, a powerful constraint on the PRC’s action on Hong Kong protests was the regional and international perception of the “one country, two systems” in the HKSAR. If the mix of peaceful and violent protests in Hong Kong in the latter half of 2019 tested the responses of the central government in Beijing, the PRC’s political bottom line was clear, namely any political act in opposition to the HKSAR government must be
condemned and yet the punitive action was left to the local Hong Kong police and judiciary. However, the unskillful way in which the HKSAR government handled the extradition bill and the controversial way in which the police operated from June to December 2019 have already undermined the legitimacy of the local state in Hong Kong. If so, the politics of populist, pro-democracy, anti-police and anti-mainlandization movements in Hong Kong will persist and deserve our study in the coming years.

The entire protests from June to December 2019 proved to generate a lose-lose situation for all the stakeholders, except for the pro-independence Taiwan politicians and activists. The “one country, two systems” in Hong Kong was discredited and its image was undermined in the eyes of most Hong Kong people and foreign countries. Beijing’s attempt at utilizing the model of “one country, two systems” to appeal to Taiwan for reunification is destined to be unattractive to most Taiwan people. The “one country, two systems” was undermined by Hong Kong’s inept governance and Beijing’s relatively hardline policy toward the HKSAR. All the political players in Hong Kong failed to achieve political gains. Even worse, the Hong Kong police became a political victim and sandwich, losing its performance legitimacy in the eyes of many ordinary people. Although the PRC’s neo-totalitarian regime staunchly supports the Hong Kong police, the HKSAR political system is seen by many ordinary people as drifting toward politically intolerant authoritarianism. Unless PRC leaders responsible for Hong Kong matters reflect upon their hardline policy critically and unless the HKSAR’s ruling elites ponder the deeper meaning of autonomy, the development of “one country, two systems” does not bode well for not only Hong Kong internally but also Beijing’s attempt at reuniting Taipei in the coming decades.