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CHAPTER 32

YOUTH ACTIVISM

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The East Asian Youth Movement Resurgence of 2014 and 2015

Youth activism has been a major mode of social and political change in East Asia. Young activists have driven a number of the most significant reforms and revolutions in the region, including modernization campaigns, environmental protection, democratization, and anti-militarization advocacy. Such activism has not only affected government policy and structure, but has also cultivated new generations of political and intellectual leaders.

In general, youth-led movements have made greater impact when they are able to draw support from a wide swath of civil society. This observation presents an epistemological and methodological question for any account of such activism—although a number of well-known movements have been led by youth, because many of them positioned themselves as part of broader-based movements, it is not immediately obvious which movements may qualify specifically as “youth activism.” For the sake of temporal, regional, and analytical coherence, this chapter focuses specifically on the 2014 Taiwan Sunflower Movement, the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement, and Japan’s SEALDs. These examples were chosen not only because they

were nominally youth or student-led, but also due to their regional proximity, mutual awareness and even collaboration, and continued contemporary relevance.

These movements followed the “Arab Spring” of major uprisings and regime change that swept the Middle East in 2011, prompting some observers to speculate that the region may be undergoing its own kind of “Asian Spring.” While such speculation turned out to be premature, the Sunflower Movement transformed Taiwan’s society and politics, the Umbrella Movement riveted Hong Kong and captured global attention, and SEALDs renewed the vigor and spontaneity of student organizations in Japan. Together, these movements demonstrate the key role played by youth in coordinating civil society groups and driving social and political change in East Asia.

Taiwan Sunflower Movement

What started as a youth-led protest against the near passage of a trade deal between Taiwan and China ultimately led to a 24-day occupation of Taiwan’s parliament and the biggest pro-democracy protest rally in the island’s history. Taiwan’s Sunflower Movement reset discussion about the island’s political and social trajectory, precipitated the electoral defeat of the ruling party, prompted the creation of a new political party that won several national seats, and revitalized Taiwan’s civil society.

While Taiwan has a history of youth-led movements that have driven major democratic reform, such as the 1990 Wild Lily Movement (Ho 2010; Wright 1999), the Sunflower Movement’s more recent roots were a series of protests against the 2008 visit of Chinese representative Chen Yunlin and the attempted buyout of major media assets by a conglomerate with close ties to the irredentist Beijing leadership (Cole 2015; Harrison 2012; Ho 2014b). These

movements were driven by and cultivated student activists, such as Lin Fei-fan and Chen Weiting, and connected youth activist and civil society groups, such as Black Island Nation Youth and the Defend Democracy Platform, that would go on to play key roles in the Sunflower Movement.

The Sunflower Movement was nominally a response to the botched near-passage of a trade deal negotiated in secret by representatives from Taiwan and China. Critics alleged that the Cross Strait Services Trade Agreement (CSSTA), championed by Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou and submitted for passage in the Legislative Yuan, would threaten Taiwan's sovereignty by opening up sensitive sectors, including media, health care, and tourism. Activists argued that Taiwan's free press would be threatened by collusion between oligarchs on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, and that other industries would be co-opted by state-owned investors from China, a hostile power that threatens military invasion should Taiwan declare *de jure* independence.

To assuage such concerns, the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), which then held both Taiwan's presidency and a legislative majority, had promised a line-by-line review of the controversial agreement. However, on March 17, 2014, the committee convener declared that the review period was over after only 30 seconds and that the bill would be sent to a plenary session for a vote, where it almost certainly would have been approved. Claiming that the refusal to conduct the promised review was an affront to legislative due process, an *ad hoc* group led by the "Black Island Nation Youth," an amorphous youth-led activist group, stormed the back of the Legislative Yuan while their allies staged a decoy incursion at the front gate. After entering the building, they carried out the few police officers who were guarding the Assembly Hall, barricaded the doors with rope, and repelled subsequent attempts to remove them.

Sympathetic opposition legislators, many of them past activists themselves, arrived on the scene to serve as human shields against possible state violence. An executive order to send in riot police was ignored by Wang Jin-pyng, the long-serving speaker of the Legislative Yuan, who was at the time facing expulsion from the KMT due to a dispute with President Ma Ying-jeou. Wang, the man legally responsible for daily operation of the Legislative Yuan, ignored Ma's call for an emergency meeting and promised the protesters that they would not be removed by force.

The movement found its moniker after a local florist donated a case of fresh sunflowers to the front lines of the protest, meant metaphorically to cast light on the opaque "black box" trade deal negotiations. Some activists welcomed the flower symbolism, which recalled the "Wild Lily Movement" of 1990, a six-day movement that ultimately led to direct presidential elections. Others found the Sunflower imagery a bit too twee, but were forced to go along with it as soon as the mass media picked up on the name (Rowen 2015).

Activists continued entering the building through windows and ladders before developing an ID system with serialized badges to bring in trusted people at the door, which was guarded by legislators, who had the legal right to admit aides or guests, and followed directions from activists. Occupiers formed increasingly cohesive work units with an emergent division of labor, including teams for security, information and technical support, media and translation, and even curating for the proliferating political poster art adorning the walls of the chamber. These teams ultimately reported to a council of nine decision makers (Beckershoff 2017), five students and four NGO representatives. These included prominent activists such as Lin Fei-fan and Chen Wei-ting, graduate students who had gained wide exposure during the Wild Strawberry and anti-Media Monopoly Movement. In heated strategy sessions, Lin Fei-fan advocated for the inclusion

of representatives NGOs and other civil society groups, such as the Taiwan Association of Human Rights, the Taiwan Professors Association, and others. While some radical students disputed this apparent cession of authority to non-students, this tactic helped consolidate wider support and build logistical capacity for what turned into a surprisingly lengthy occupation of the government building and its surrounding streets.

As the Legislative Yuan became an administrative center with an evolving division of labor, so too did the growing tent city outside subdivide into zones and districts with distinct characters and organizing bodies, including university student groups, NGOs, and ad hoc collectives. Support for these temporary communities was provided by expanding security, supply, and waste disposal teams who maintained uneven and occasionally strained communications and coordination with each other and with their counterparts inside the Legislative Yuan, who were insulated behind rows of police and volunteer security teams.

Emboldened by growing popular support and joined by scholars and civil activists, occupation leaders soon expanded their demands. With legal scholar Huang Kuo-chang and representatives from NGOs taking increasingly assertive strategic and logistical roles, the demand for a review of the CSSTA instead became a demand for the government to create an oversight body for the review of cross-strait agreements. Huang argued that because existing law, based on the Republic of China constitution adopted in 1949, still treated the “Mainland Area” and “Taiwan Area” as separate jurisdictions within the same country, there was no proper legal procedure for a review of an agreement like the CSSTA. Supporters argued that short of drafting a new constitution—no easy task—an oversight body would at least increase public input into the drafting and passage of cross-strait agreements.

Students demanded a public meeting with the President, which was rebuffed, leading to an increasingly desperate mood within the occupied chamber. On Sunday night, March 23, a group of students and activists stormed the Executive Yuan, Taiwan's cabinet building. Their connection to the occupation's core leadership was unclear even to people on the front lines of the campaign. As with the initial occupation, the participants joined in an ad hoc fashion, loosely coordinated via online platforms and hasty face-to-face meetings. The premier ordered riot police to remove the protesters, and the televised state violence elevated the movement to a national crisis. Over 150 activists were injured and many hospitalized. Despite the failure to hold the building, vivid images of bloodied students appeared on TV and in newspapers, raising public attention and protestor passions.

To build wider support, Sunflower leaders announced there would be a rally in front of the Presidential Office on March 30. An estimated 350,000 to 500,000 people joined the throngs, making it the largest non-partisan rally in Taiwan's history. Still, with the President and activists unwilling to compromise, no end was in sight until April 6 when Legislative Speaker Wang entered the assembly hall with several other legislators and promised that the CSSTA would not be passed before the establishment of a supervisory mechanism for cross-Strait agreements. Sunflower leaders decided in secret that this was a sufficient concession, and declared that they would retreat on April 10. The announcement took many activists by surprise, but they had little choice and few resources to continue an indefinite occupation with broader goals. In the next few days, activists cleaned up the building and the surrounding streets, assessed property damages and promised to pay them back in full, and exited as promised on April 10 in a choreographed march carrying real-life sunflowers and culminating in a stage show of tearful speeches and public recollections.

Although the controversial trade deal was placed on ice, Taipei continued to be rocked by protests for weeks after the occupation ended. Activists, still mobilized, quickly turned to the unsettled issue of Taiwan's fourth nuclear power plant, a KMT-driven project that had been under construction for decades. After Japan's 2011 Fukushima disaster, Taiwanese public opinion turned against the opening of the reactor—regular protest events had in fact preceded and helped provide social capacity for the Sunflower Movement itself

Seizing the momentum, senior democracy activist and past DPP co-founder Lin Yi-hsiung announced an indefinite hunger strike against the plant, starting on April 22. In solidarity with Lin, young activists occupied the street in front of the Taipei Train Station on the night of April 27. Echoing the state violence of several weeks prior at the Executive Yuan, protesters were dispersed by water cannons and riot police on the order of Taipei Mayor Hau Lung-Bin. However, the following day, the Ma administration capitulated and announced a temporary halt to construction. Lin soon ended his hunger strike.

While direct action seems to have quickly achieved the initial objectives of both the Sunflowers and the overlapping anti-nuclear movement, the centralization and unity of purpose maintained inside the Legislative Yuan occupation and outside during the anti-nuclear street occupation proved difficult to maintain. The broad base splintered into several groups, including Taiwan March, led by the most visible Sunflower activists like Lin Fei-fan and Huang Kuo-chang, and advocating primarily to lower the voting thresholds for national referendums. Not long after that, Huang Kuo-chang announced the establishment of the New Power Party, a pro-independence, generally left-wing party that would both collaborate with and pressure the DPP in the upcoming elections. Other spinoff groups included Democracy Tautin, which focused on wider grassroots action, and Democracy Kuroshio, a student alliance. Strikingly, none of these

groups chose to maintain the “Sunflower” moniker, despite the symbol’s wide appeal and high profile.

Although the integration of the Sunflower activists proved difficult to maintain, the movement handily demonstrated its alignment with the electorate when the KMT lost key mayorships in the midterm local elections on November 2014. Smaller Sunflower-affiliated parties, including the Green Party of Taiwan and the Tree Party, also won their first local seats. This gave the DPP and Huang’s New Power Party considerable momentum for the 2016 presidential and legislative elections, which proved even more devastating for the KMT, which lost not only the presidency but also, for the first time, a legislative majority.

The geopolitical impact of the Sunflower Movement is significant. Following wide public support for the movement and the electoral collapse of the KMT, any prospect of Taiwan and China’s “peaceful unification” appears to have vanished. Especially in light of later unrest in Hong Kong, the showcase of the supposedly successful “One Country, Two Systems” scheme originally designed for Taiwan by China’s leadership, Taiwan and its youth activists appear set to pursue greater international space and autonomy.

Hong Kong Umbrella Movement

Hong Kong’s Umbrella Movement began as a call for “genuine universal suffrage,” meaning the right to freely choose and directly elect the territory’s Chief Executive. Like the Sunflower Movement, Hong Kong’s Umbrella Movement was propelled by seasoned youth activists, accelerated in unpredictable ways and received a name not of its choosing. Unlike the Sunflower Movement, it began as a protest not against an opaque trade deal, but against the deferral of democratic elections. While the Chinese leadership was implicated in both this case and the

Sunflower Movement, their role was different, as Hong Kong is administered as a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the People's Republic of China and Taiwan is a de facto independent contested state with limited international recognition. While the scale, duration, and activation of Hong Kong civil society astonished even the movement's most ardent supporters, it ended without any concrete policy achievements. It did, however consolidate a new generation of activists, several of whom won elected office in the following years.

Hong Kong's capacity for youth activism had rapidly accelerated over the years prior to 2014, most notably in the movement against the Moral and National Education (MNE) compulsory curriculum. Part of a "nation-building program" (Morris and Vickers 2015: 305) to inculcate Chinese national identities, the Moral and National Education curriculum was announced in 2010 and withdrawn in 2012 after a movement led by high school students, including Joshua Wong, successfully rallied public sentiment and cultivated a new generation of youth activists.

As Morris and Vickers write:

"The MNE controversy was significant in that it: dominated public discourse for nearly 18 months; involved numerous marches, public protests and strikes; prompted the creation of over 24 civic groups dedicated to opposing the new subject; witnessed the emergence of secondary school students as leaders of the opposition movement; severely challenged the legitimacy of the government; and contributed significantly to the subsequent pro-democracy 'Occupy Central/Umbrella Movement' of 2014" (2015: 306).

Hong Kong's path to democracy has been partly determined by the Beijing leadership's interpretation of the Basic Law, a mini-constitution drafted in the 1980s by Chinese and Hong Kong elites to govern the territory following the 1997 handover from the United Kingdom to the People's Republic of China. Article 45 of the Basic Law states that "The ultimate aim is the selection of the Chief Executive by universal suffrage, upon nomination by a broadly representative nominating committee in accordance with democratic procedures." Based on this, Hong Kong's pan-democratic political and social activist camps pushed for years for a gradual move toward formal procedural direct democracy. In response, China's National People's Congress Standing Committee (NPC-SC) issued a decision in 2007 promising universal suffrage by 2017.

During subsequent consultations between Hong Kong and Beijing agencies, Hong Kong's pan-democratic lawmakers pushed for "civil nominations" open to a wide variety of possible candidates. A civil society group called "Occupy Central with Peace and Love" (OCLP), formed by two professors, Benny Tai and Chan Kin-Man, and the Reverend Chu Yiu-ming, held unofficial referendums in which a majority of participants indicated support for civil nominations (K. Chan 2016). However, on August 31, 2014, the NPC-SC issued a legal decision that although candidates could be submitted through civil nominations, the two or three candidates who would be permitted to stand in the general election must be approved in advance by half of the 1200 members of an elite elections committee (J. Chan 2014). It was a vote of 689 members of a similar committee that had brought Chief Executive C.Y. Leung, the target of much activist ire, to power in 2012.

Democracy activists denounced this move as a form of non-genuine "universal suffrage." However, they were clearly unsurprised, having laid the groundwork for a public demonstration

well in advance of its announcement. OCLP had prepared a plan to occupy the central business district as early as 2013. Following the NPC-SC decision, they indicated it would begin on October 1, 2014, the Chinese national holiday, and held advance promotional and training meetings.

Student activists, while generally supportive of OCLP's goals, had different ideas about tactics and representation. Scholarism, a high school student group led by Joshua Wong, and Hong Kong Federation of Students (HKFS), a university group, announced class boycotts to begin on September 22 and a sit-in on September 26 at Civic Square, the public space in front of the Legislative Council that had been blocked off due to government security concerns. Joshua Wong and several fellow students were arrested that day for entering the square, leading to the arrival of more protesters. OCLP leaders noted that the students were already well ahead of their own October 1 start date, and urged their supporters to begin the campaign early and join the students. By September 28, the police reacted to the swelling crowds by firing 87 rounds of tear gas, a heavy-handed miscalculation that shocked the public and provoked tens of thousands of Hong Kongers to flood the streets in support of demonstrators. The crowds ended up spilling over to Causeway Bay, a shopping district, and ill-considered police-implemented mass transit shutdowns led protestors to cross into Mong Kok, a working class district across Victoria Bay in Kowloon.

The three different occupation sites quickly developed different characters. Civic Square in Admiralty, adjoining Hong Kong's Government and the People's Liberation Army offices, was the closest thing to the movement's spatial center. The first-aid station of that initial protest site, later dispersed by a now-notorious police attack, was since reclaimed to sport a makeshift Umbrella Shrine. This center, unlike Sunflower Movement's Legislative Yuan, however, was not

an occupied building that could be held as a bargaining chip. Counter-intuitively for a student encampment, the mood, while inspired and idealistic, was generally more severe, reflecting the higher strategic stakes of the site as well as the memory of recent violence. The Mong Kok site, while smaller than the island-side encampment, immediately drew a wider range of ages and social classes and featured a more expressive, even chaotic atmosphere. By October 3, waves of blue ribbon-wearing counter-demonstrators began flooding into the area and verbally and even physically attacking student demonstrators. Demonstrators and supportive legislators complained about a slow and passive police response that further polarized society (Branigan and Batty 2014). Still, the protestors defied the “blue ribbons” and stayed until forcible police clearance over two months later. The Causeway Bay encampment was the most compact and smoothly managed of all—a veritable civil society showcase, said some activists, in part meant as a display for the many Chinese tourists who frequented the busy shopping district (Rowen 2016). Coordination proved extremely difficult not only between the different occupation sites, but within them, due to leadership struggles and philosophical differences about the nature of democracy and collective decision-making (Liu and Lin 2016).

Slogans with uncanny parallels to those of Taiwan Sunflower proliferated in the sprawling on and offline spaces. “We are all Hong Kong People,” “Save your own Hong Kong.” After seeing the now-iconic photo of protestor holding up an umbrella in the face of tear gas, a British Twitter user dubbed the uprising the “Umbrella Movement.” The name was quickly picked up by the protesters themselves, who began using it to withstand not only tear gas but also the sweltering sun and pounding rain. International media extensively covered the early weeks of the movement, and Joshua Wong even appeared on the cover of TIME Magazine

Public support was strongest during the early weeks of the movement, with HKFS briefly becoming the most popular political group in all of Hong Kong, according to the University of Hong Kong public opinion research center. The possibility of a breakthrough appeared briefly with a televised live debate between government leaders (excluding C.Y. Leung) and representatives from Scholarism and HKFS, who performed confidently but were still unable to win any concessions (Veg 2015). After several weeks of traffic disruptions and no compromise in sight, public support gradually eroded. By early December, based on civil court injunctions, the government ordered clearances of all of the occupation zones. Prominent pan-democratic lawmakers joined the sit-in and were removed and arrested along with other activists.

In the following months, student activists such as Joshua Wong and Nathan Law defended themselves in court while simultaneously forming Demosisto, a new political party. Other “localist,” or Hong Kong-centric groups, including Youngspiration and Civic Passion, also ran their own candidates in the 2016 Legislative Council elections. Several, including Nathan Law, won seats, only to be challenged in court by the central government, based on the elected candidates’ reading of the oath of office, which was accused of being insufficiently patriotic. Despite these setbacks, opposition parties won enough seats to maintain veto power over the government’s constitutional reform proposals. Further electoral fallout from Hong Kong’s largest-ever protest movement included C.Y. Leung’s decision to not seek re-election, making him the first Chief Executive to step down after one term.

SEALDs and Contemporary Japanese Youth Anti-war Activism

Students’ Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy (SEALDs) was a student-led movement against Japan Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s proposed security laws. Abe championed legal

amendments and constitutional reinterpretations that would allow Japan to participate in international military campaigns in the name of “collective self-defense.” Youth activists criticized such maneuvers as not only a violation of constitutional due process, but also a potentially fascist turn that threatened to derail Japan’s future as a democratic and peaceful nation. Although SEALDs only functioned for over a year, having been established on May 3, 2015 and disbanded on August 15, 2016, it provided an important gathering point for a variety of Japanese activists of all generations.

SEALDs, while nominally a response to militarization, was the most significant recent revitalization of Japanese youth activism, which had been relatively stagnant under the long shadow of the sometimes-violent 1960s-era opposition movement to the Anpo US base treaty. The past ideological stances and militant tactics of past movements had grown unappealing to contemporary students (Slater et al. 2015). Explicitly recognizing the need for a new approach, SEALDs’ savvy use of social media and ideological self-presentation as “regular” and non-radical attracted a new generation of participants, while also garnering the support of more senior activists.

SEALDs itself was formed by the core members of an earlier group, Students Against the Secret Protection Law (SASPL), including Aki Okuda, who had gathered to protest this Abe-led (and US-supported) bill that criminalized public reporting of vaguely defined, mostly military-related “state secrets.” Although activists suffered a major setback after the smooth passage of the Secrecy Law in 2015, they quickly reconstituted as SEALDs to drive the next iteration of a broader campaign. They were helped along by the renewed anti-nuclear movement, which had picked up steam and staged regular protests following the March 11, 2011 disaster at Fukushima. This momentum “paved the way” for SEALDs, which had broader ambitions and more

international inclinations, as demonstrated by the choice of a name resembling the English word, “shields” (Slater et al. 2015).

Abe’s push to amend Article 9 of Japan’s constitution, which guaranteed Japan’s legal obligations as a peaceful nation, was, as he explained in an address to the US Congress, intended to “make the cooperation between the US military and Japan’s SDF [Self-defense forces] even stronger, and the alliance still more solid, providing credible deterrence for peace in the region” (Japanese Cabinet Office 2015). Although Abe’s moves came in part as a response to the changed security environment brought by China’s rise, student activists argued that Abe’s policies risked a return to the militarism of the past and posed an existential threat to a “free and democratic Japan.” They argued that Abe’s tactics, which included passing the bills through cabinet review instead of full parliamentary deliberation, were autocratic and in violation of democratic due process. By framing themselves as defenders of the constitutional order, SEALDs presented their position as one of moderation rather than as a radical challenge to the national order.

While anti-nuclear activists had been protesting weekly outside the Prime Minister’s office since 2011, SEALDs and affiliated groups chose instead to protest in front of the Diet, Japan’s parliament, every Friday evening starting June 5, 2015. Popular chants included “Kenpō Mamore” [Defend the Constitution], “Abe wa yamero!” [Let’s get rid of Abe], and “Tell me what democracy looks like, this is what democracy looks like!” Although they received limited coverage from mainstream news outlets, their persistence and carefully calibrated online presence earned them a crowd of approximately 120,000 at their peak on August 30, 2015, placing them among Japan’s largest-ever protest movements (Kingston 2015). Satellite

demonstrations also took place in other cities including Sapporo, Fukushima, Kyoto, Osaka, and Nagasaki.

Despite this up-swell of support, SEALDs was ultimately unable to block the security bills and disbanded on August 15, 2016. Although Okuda, the most visible face of the movement, said, “We have to admit that we did lose” (Kikuchi 2016), SEALDs has secured its legacy not only by reinvigorating Japanese youth and civil society, but provoking cooperation between opposition parties with the formation of Shimin Rengō (Civil Alliance for Peace and Constitutionalism), an alliance between the Democratic Party of Japan, the Japan Innovation Party, the Social Democratic Party, and the Japanese Communist Party, which won 11 seats, nine more than were won in the last such election in 2013. While Abe’s Liberal Democratic Party maintained the executive branch and a two-thirds parliamentary majority, at least SEALDs showed the potency of new cultural and technological forms for future Japanese activism.

Continuity, Contrast, and Inspirational Relationships

All three of these movements had been preceded by years of capacity building among a diverse and often fractious set of constituencies from a wide variety of civil society groups. They spatially targeted centers of legislative power. They also positioned themselves as unaffiliated with any pre-existing political parties, or even traditional left or right-wing ideology, even if they informally communicated or collaborated with opposition parties and ultimately helped sway later elections.

Comparisons between the Sunflower and Umbrella Movements were common not only among protesters, but also among prominent government figures in both Taiwan and Hong Kong. In Taiwan, Ma Ying-jeou simultaneously praised Hong Kong Umbrella and criticized Taiwan

Sunflowers as “violent” (Bradsher and Ramzy 2014). Given Ma’s questionable logical consistency, such a statement was perhaps intended to score the KMT some political points in advance of elections. In Hong Kong, pro-government legislator Regina Ip, who had championed the failed passage of an “anti-subversion” bill ten years prior to the movement, which ultimately triggered the national patriotic education debate, reflected on the “inspirational relationship” between the Sunflowers and the Umbrellas in a newspaper editorial about how best to “counter pernicious external influences” (Ip 2014). Such “pernicious influences” included not only the Taiwanese activists and academics who visited the occupation sites in Hong Kong, but also the very idea of public nomination, which is “much harder to eradicate.” Ip’s article reflected the government’s broader efforts to paint the protests as the product of “foreign forces” and thereby disclaim responsibility for listening to the demands of its own well-educated youth.

Although the US has frequently been accused by Chinese leaders of domestic meddling or fomenting “color revolutions” in Central and Eastern Europe via the National Endowment for Democracy and other state and quasi-state organs, activists in all three polities in fact expressed distress about being geopolitically trapped between self-interested superpowers. While Sunflower and Umbrella gave voice to fears about China’s economic and political influence on Taiwan and Hong Kong, SEALDs was driven more by Japan’s changing military alliance with the US. All three movements generally espoused self-determination and advocated adherence to legal, democratic processes.

Other civil society groups, particularly labor and environmental, shared affiliation and support with these movements. While the Hong Kong movement did not directly address environmental issues, the Sunflowers and SEALDs share a synergistic relationship with anti-nuclear movements. Both of them were enabled and in turn re-energized nuclear movements in

both polities. Moreover, inasmuch as the Sunflowers inspired the Umbrellas, the Taiwan anti-nuclear movement gained new focus after the Fukushima nuclear disaster (Ho 2014a).

Media, both on and offline, and domestic and international, played important roles in these movements. Both the Taiwan Sunflower and Hong Kong Umbrella Movements earned their monikers externally, either from mass or social media, while SEALDS at least was self-chosen. SEALDs received little media attention and the Sunflower Movement received perhaps even less international attention, especially compared to coverage of the Umbrella Movement. Loathe to miss the largest protest on Chinese soil since the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989, foreign correspondents arrived in droves to cover the story. Reporters could also easily utilize Hong Kong's relatively proficient English-language resources.

Although movement names and other forms of representation often proliferated beyond central control, all three movements deliberately used art and other creative techniques to shape and transmit their messages. Although the following observation was made about Japan, it could have been applied to all three of the movements: "For SEALDs, the cultural coding is not to demonstrate subversiveness but normality, that being involved in politics is neither dark and dangerous, but neither are their members odd and out of step with the mainstream" (O'Day 2015: 4). As Beckershoff, following Bourdieu's concept of "synchronization," wrote of the Sunflower Movement's "integration" rather than simple "addition" of protest groups (2017), all three movements provided public platforms for other issues beyond the immediate targets of discontent. In so doing, they brought together a variety of groups to shared and often festive protest spaces, and built capacity for new forms of collaboration.

Conclusion: Not Quite an Asian Spring, but at Least Not an Asian Winter

Questions of success and failure have dogged all three of these movements, among both activists and outside commentators. The Taiwan Sunflower Movement's blockage of the disputed services trade deal and the decision by its leaders to retreat at a time and on terms of their choosing makes it probably the most successful of these movements, if the metric is policy achievements. Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement did not fold by choice and, unlike the Sunflowers, they achieved no short-term political concessions. It would be misleading to pin this entirely on the activists themselves. Up against a more intransigent opponent in the form of the Chinese Communist Party and the Hong Kong administration than the Sunflowers were in the form of an internally divided KMT, the movement performed far above expectations. It augured a cultural shift that Beijing may find difficult to contain, and led to the formation of several new political parties that won seats in subsequent elections. As for SEALDs, although they failed to prevent Abe's security bills, they awoke a long-dormant segment of Japanese civil society and likely influenced subsequent elections.

Maintaining and widening their circles, youth activists have since set up regional associations, including the Network of Young Democratic Asians, led by Lin Fei-fan, who held a 2016 meeting in Manila that was joined by Umbrella leaders Alex Chow and Nathan Law, SEALDs leaders Aki Okuda and Chiharu Takano, Taiwan Black Island Youth Front's Fi Tseng, as well as activists from Myanmar and Thailand. Follow-up meetings are planned for Korea and other regional centers. Another follow-up event was a December 2016 forum between Taiwan's New Power Party and pro-democracy Hong Kong activists and politicians, which earned even more press attention after being targeted by pro-Beijing groups with underworld ties, who attacked the guests upon arrival in Taipei and targeted Nathan Law in particular on his return at the Hong Kong airport.

Given their scale, logistical extent, and use of communication tools, the 2014 Asian protests were among the most sophisticated social movements the world has ever seen. Yet, even at their peaks of mobilization and public support, youth activists and sympathetic civil society groups were too savvy and reserved to call for regime change or other radical measures that, even in the unlikely event of success, may have allowed military or religious groups to fill a power vacuum, or lead to civil war, as in Egypt or Libya. They were, in the words of Sebastian Veg, simultaneously “legalistic” and “utopian” (Veg 2015). While 2014 will not be remembered as the beginning of an “Asian Spring” or new wave of “Color Revolutions,” at least it did not prompt an “Asian Winter,” and laid new groundwork for social movements yet to come.

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