Securitization of Hong Kong Politics:

debate on electoral reform and civil disobedience of 2014.

Abstract

Hong Kong society has long been known as an outstanding example of a law abiding community, proud of its rule of law and generally displaying considerable lack of interest in politics. How is it possible then that first time in the history of HKSAR major streets were blocked for so long by so many ordinary citizens? How could this usually benign and politically apathetic society be galvanized to such an extent around abstract political ideas that do not exactly correspond with traditional Confucius values? How should we account for the reaction of HKSAR government and central government?

This paper attempts to address the above questions by invoking the social constructivist paradigm of securitatization of politics. It is the hypothesis of the author that major issues concerning public policy making in Hong Kong, and especially its political reform and the opposition of large part of citizenry towards it known as Occupy Central, have been framed by central government in Beijing as national security issue. It is also claimed that Hong Kong politics have effectively fallen a victim to ‘China Dream’ as a litmus test of the President Xi Jinping’s effectiveness as a state leader.
Introduction

On 26th September 2014 Hong Kong Federation of Students\(^1\) and members of Scholarism\(^2\) commenced a sit-in protest outside the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government headquarters. The protest took seventy nine days and eventually centered in three different locations around the city\(^3\). It was unprecedented in its scale and involvement of people from all walks of life. At its peak, media reported one hundred thousand protesters occupying the major streets of the city. Local mainstream, English newspaper South China Morning Post reported every thirty to sixty minutes on major developments of the protest swiftly calling it an umbrella movement or even an umbrella revolution and dedicating a special section (occupy central) on its homepage\(^4\).

Hong Kong society has long been known as an outstanding example of a law abiding community, proud of its rule of law and generally displaying considerable lack of interest in politics. As long as taxes were low and most citizens had a chance of prospering through hard work, Hong Kong Chinese seemed to be indifferent to peculiarities of political system in the city. How is it possible then that first time in the history of HKSAR major streets were blocked for so long by so many ordinary citizens? How could this usually benign and politically apathetic society be galvanized to such an extent around abstract political ideas that do not exactly correspond with traditional Confucius values? Consequently, what is the outlook for Hong Kong political future under “one country, two systems principle”?

This paper attempts to address the above questions by invoking the social constructivist paradigm of securitisation of politics. It is the hypothesis of the author that major issues concerning public policy making in Hong Kong, and especially its political reform and the

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\(^1\) As of June 2015 The Hong Kong Federation of Students is formed by the student unions of 4 institutions: Chinese University Students’ Union, Lingnan University Students’ Union, Hong Kong Shue Yan University Students’ Union and Hong Kong University of Science and Technology Students’ Union. Recently Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong Baptist University and City University Students’ Unions left the Federation due to internal conflicts over the participation in the Umbrella Movement 2014. See more at: \url{https://www.hkfs.org.hk/about-hkfs/} accessed 11 June 2015.

\(^2\) Originally formed as "Scholarism – The Alliance Against Moral & National Education", Scholarism was the first student pressure group to protest against the pro-Communist "Moral and National Education" school curriculum put forward by the Hong Kong Government in 2012. See more at: \url{http://scholarism.com/} accessed 11 June 2015.

\(^3\) After initially focusing on the HKSAR Government headquarters site in Admiralty, more and more protesters decided to join in Central and Causeway Bay of HK Island. Kowloon peninsula also had its share with protesters occupying streets in the commercial areas of Mong Kok.

opposition of large part of citizenry towards it known as Occupy Central, have been framed by central government in Beijing as national security issue. It is also claimed that Hong Kong politics have effectively fallen a victim to ‘China Dream’ as a litmus test of the President Xi Jinping’s effectiveness as a state leader. Thirdly, we cannot but notice the relevance of Hong Kong future to the Taiwan issue.

The paper starts with a brief account of peculiarity of Hong Kong political system which sets background for the explanation of the electoral reform. The second part looks at the civil disobedience movement in terms of process, actors and objectives. The third part of the paper applies the notion of securitization of politics to Hong Kong case. Specifically, it looks at facilitating conditions and securitization moves as prepared and carried out by central government in Beijing and HKSAR government.

The paper ends with a conclusion that securitization of HK politics should be seen as a process that has neither finished, nor has it been particularly successful so far. It is also claimed that probably in the final analysis Hong Kong politics have effectively fallen a victim to ‘Chinese Dream’ as a litmus test of the President Xi Jinping’s effectiveness as a state leader.

**Peculiarities of Hong Kong Political System**

It is a cliché to open this paragraph with a statement that HK (Hong Kong) political system is a remnant of British colonial empire. Nonetheless, it were the British that ultimately shaped the Hong Kong political environment before the handover in 1997. Consequently, as scholars who specialize in HK affairs admit, these are the British who are co-responsible for contemporary crisis.

Before 1997 British governor, appointed by the British crown and representing it, practically ruled over the territory without much input from the local population. The 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration stipulated that by 1 July 1997 Hong Kong would return to the People’s Republic of China. Most importantly for HK citizens and the rest of the capitalist world, it was guaranteed in the Declaration that the after 1997, HK would remain autonomous except for its foreign and defense affairs and continue to enjoy the status of an international

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financial hub and a free port for a period of fifty years from the date of handover – 1 July 1997. As for political system, the Declaration explicitly stated that:

a) The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region will be composed of local inhabitants. The chief executive will be appointed by the Central People's Government on the basis of the results of elections or consultations to be held locally. Principal officials will be nominated by the chief executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region for appointment by the Central People's Government;

b) (...) basic policies of the People's Republic of China regarding Hong Kong (...) will be stipulated, in a Basic Law [underlined by K.S] of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, by the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, and they will remain unchanged for 50 years6.

Consequently Basic Law (HK constitutional framework) remains to this day the primary source of law in HK regarding political matters of the city. Without much description and citing of yet another document, full of legal vernacular, one should pay special attention to Chapter IV of Basic Law that lays the institutional framework.

As for the legislature, all registered voters (residents above 18 years of age) can vote for their representatives in the territory’s Legislative Council (Legco). The elected members of Legco (which is unicameral) then serve their geographical constituencies and can be re-elected at subsequent elections. Separately, but still sitting within the legislative council, and matching the numbers of representatives of the geographical constituencies at 35:35 (regards fifth term for 2012-2016) are the “functional” constituencies’ representatives7. These are elected by interest groups in the business community8. Business community in HK is mostly interested in stability of the city and therefore logically any real or perceived challenge to political status

6 Ibidem.
*quo* that lets them prosper is automatically comprehended in terms of threats. “The devil lies in details” as the saying goes and so is the case as regards the passage of laws through the legislature. Bills introduced by the government require a simple majority vote of the members of the Legislative Council present\(^9\). The passage of motions, bills or amendments to government bills introduced by individual members requires however a simple majority vote of each of the two groups of members present: members returned by functional constituencies and those returned by geographical constituencies\(^10\).

As for the Executive, above the Legislative Council sits the Executive Council (Exco) – made up of members invited or ‘appointed” by the Chief Executive\(^11\). The Chief Executive (CE) himself is elected by the Election Committee of 1,200 electors from a shortlist of candidates they themselves have selected\(^12\). The 1,200 electors are recruited across four broad sectors\(^13\). Here too one notices a strong representation of establishment.

This system leaves lots of room for improvement in terms of democratization process. The existing framework favours interests of big business over the interests of society at large. In fact one could venture an opinion that HK ‘froze in time’ and roughly emulates Lockean ideas of government that protects the rich (rational) from the poor (irrational). The Chief Executive actually recently admitted it in his interview with foreign media\(^14\) This is in fact the core of the problem which will be elaborated later on in this paper.

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\(^9\) Article 75 of the Basic Law stipulates that the quorum for the meeting of the Legislative Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall be not less than one half of all its members. Source: *Ibidem.*


\(^13\) From industrial, commercial and financial sectors through professions, through labour, social services and religious sectors to members of Legco, representatives of district-based organizations and representatives of Hong Kong members of the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference. *Ibidem.*

\(^14\) “If it’s entirely a numbers game – numeric representation – then obviously you’d be talking to half the people in Hong Kong [that] earn less than US$1,800 a month (…) you would end up with that kind of politics and
Article 45 of the Basic Law explicitly 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”\(^{15}\). The decision of the National People’s Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC) (which is vested with final interpretation of HK Basic Law) opened the possibility of selecting the Chief Executive via universal suffrage in the 2017 Chief Executive election\(^{16}\). At the same time it turned out that NPCSC imposed some conditions that practically, according to many HK citizens, renders the universal suffrage principle mingles. Namely, the NPCSC marshalled that "the Chief Executive shall be a person who loves the country [the refers to People’s Republic of China – K.S.] and loves Hong Kong." It further stipulates that "the method for selecting the Chief Executive by universal suffrage must provide corresponding institutional safeguards for this purpose" which in practice translated into a nominating committee, mirroring the present 1200-member Election Committee. Moreover the Election Committee will be supposed to nominate only two to three candidates, each of whom must receive the support of more than half of the members of the nominating committee\(^{17}\).

The electoral reform regarding the 2017 Chief Executive election and 2016 Legislative Council election as proposed by the Exco was rejected on 18 June 2015. This means in practice that the next elections, according to Basic Law, will be carried out according to existing rules\(^{18}\). Consequently, the pan-democrats and pro-democracy activists have achieved nothing in terms of democratization of Hong Kong political system, at least for the time being. Let us then, turn


\(^{17}\) Ibidem.

our attention to the civil disobedience movement and analyse it in terms of its goals, major actors, and their achievements.

Civil disobedience – ‘umbrella revolution’

An umbrella quickly became the symbol of opposition against the HKSAR government after the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF), on request of the government, decided to use tear gas against thousands of demonstrators. As it happens, due to weather conditions (both rain and sun) HK citizens usually carry umbrellas with them for protection. No one imagined however that umbrellas could also be used as very effective protection against tear gas and pepper spray.

- Goals

The philosophical grounds of the movement, which has not expired to this day, are rooted in the principles of non-violent civil disobedience and the willingness to face legal consequences arising from such. Scholar Benny Tai (Tai Yiu-ting), an associate professor of Law at the University of Hong Kong, one of the cofounders of Occupy Central with Love and Peace (OCLP), defined the goal behind Occupy Central as (…) “to get arrested. We want to cause disorder to the extent that we will be arrested after the police has exerted violence. Now that’s civil disobedience. We are not just organizing something that is nonviolent, we are organizing civil disobedience which is to create social-order disturbance in order to generate sympathy so as to awaken more people to a just cause”.

It is fair to say that that the initial, short-term goal behind Occupy Central seems to have been fulfilled. The political awakening of the HK citizenry is an undisputed fact, admittedly

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19 It is worth noting that umbrellas were just one of the symbols of the grassroots protests against HKSAR Government during the seventy nine days of the upheaval. Other symbols included: yellow ribbons (an emblem of suffrage movements internationally), a song titled: "Do you hear the people sing" from Les Misérables musical based on Victor Hugo’s novel, and a number of Chinese characters referring to various aspects of political reality. Among them the most visible one was number ‘689’, which represents the number of votes C.Y. Leung received from the Election Committee back in 2012. See More at: T. Hume and M. Park, Understanding the symbols of Hong Kong’s ‘Umbrella Revolution’, CNN, http://edition.cnn.com/2014/09/30/world/asia/objects-hong-kong-protest/ accessed 22 June 2015.

20 J. W. HSU and C. Yeung, Hong Kong Pro-Democracy Protest Leader: ‘We Want to Get Arrested’, The Wall Street Journal, China, http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2014/09/09/hong-kong-pro-democracy-protest-leader-we-want-to-get-arrested/ accessed 22 June 2015. Also refer to B. Tai’s original article in Hong Kong Economic Journal at: B. Tai, The Largest civil disobedience. Weapons of mass destruction, The Hong Kong Economic Journal, http://www1.hkej.com/dailynews/article/id/654855%5E5%5E85%AC%5E6%5E0%91%5E6%5E8%5E97%5E5%5E91%BD%5E7%5E9A%5E4%5E6%5E9C%5E80%5E5%5E4%5E7%5E6%5EAB%5E2%5E7%5E5%5E8%5E9%5E9%5E6%5E5%5E99%5E8 accessed 22 June 2015.
not always exactly according to the wishes of the founders of OCLP\(^\text{21}\). Nonetheless, since July 2003, when many HK citizens protested against the implementation of article 23 of Basic Law, Hong Kong hasn’t seen greater political fervour\(^\text{22}\). At its peak, the streets of HK saw above one hundred thousand protesters at any given time, many of whom actually lived on the streets in improvised tent towns. Traffic was blocked for most of the time in three different locations: Admiralty, Causeway Bay on HK Island and Mong Kong on Kowloon peninsula. People from all walks of life participated, but especially visible were college and university students\(^\text{23}\). The young, usually much less compromising, dared to declare much bolder goals. Students generally put forward two basic demands: 1). for the Chief Executive C.Y. Leung to step down and 2). for the NPCSC to revoke its interpretation of the method for the Selection of the Chief Executive\(^\text{24}\). The leaders of the movement also demanded the HKSAR Government to start a dialog with the representatives of the students. Ideas regarding reforms of the Legco functional constituencies were also put forward by various groups within the umbrella camp\(^\text{25}\).

It is worth noting that the organizers of OCLP (Benny Tie, Reverend Chu Yiu-ming and Mr. Chan Kin-man) had similar goals in mind, their approach was however more realistic. Focusing on the more imminent goal of rising political awareness of the HK citizenry, they did in fact make it clear that the long term, strategic goal was to exert pressure on Beijing to allow

\(^{21}\) Refer to conclusion

\(^{22}\) Article 23 of Basic Law is otherwise referred to as ‘anti-subversion law’. It reads: “The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall enact laws on its own to prohibit any act of treason, secession, sedition, subversion against the Central People's Government, or theft of state secrets, to prohibit foreign political organizations or bodies from conducting political activities in the Region, and to prohibit political organizations or bodies of the Region from establishing ties with foreign political organizations or bodies”. Given the practice in PRC, many in HK are concerned that the implementation of this article will be tantamount to the end of political and civil freedoms in the city. See more: articles 23, Chapter II : Relationship between the Central Authorities and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, \textit{The Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region} \ldots , \url{http://www.basiclaw.gov.hk/en/basiclawtext/chapter_2.html} accessed 24 June 2015.

\(^{23}\) This in particular took the author of this paper by surprise. When I came to HK and started teaching political science I had a sense that youth is rather disinterested in politics. Most students tended to focus more on facebook, shopping and eating out, treating political science just as another tedious academic discipline that does not bare much relevance to their everyday lives. How surprised I was in the autumn of 2014 when after seven years of living here I could see with my own eyes the superficiality of my primary impression.


HK citizens to elect their Chief Executives based on internationally established standards of universal suffrage, meaning both active and passive election rights\textsuperscript{26}.

- Actors

Umbrella movement was not in fact uniform. This was to some extent used by both HKSAR Government and central government against various actors engaged in the sit-in protests. Occupy Central with Love and Peace (initially just Occupy Central) was preceded by three deliberations that took place from June 2013 to May 2014 and a civic referendum on the voting system to be used for the election of the Chief Executive\textsuperscript{27}. The commencement of Occupy Central (drawing on the Occupy Wall Street in 2011) was planned on 1 October 2014 (National Day of the PRC) and designed to take only three days. As it happened, much to the surprise of many commentators, younger people spontaneously took to the streets themselves and snatched the initiative from OCLP.

Hong Kong Federation of Students (HKFS) and Scholarism started their own actions on 28 September with what was initially to be a week-long class boycott. HKFS is an organisation that back in 2014 included students from seven tertiary education institutions in HK\textsuperscript{28}. Dating back to 1958, HKFS was one of the most important actors in the Umbrella Movement by the virtue of its representation. Initially pro-communist, the Organisation took a U-turn and became pro-democratic after 1984 and even more so after Tiananmen Massacre 1989.

Scholarism is much younger, as it started in 2011. It was originally built around the protest against Moral and National education (MNE). Initially its full name was therefore: Scholarism – The Alliance Against Moral & National Education\textsuperscript{29}. MNE, one should note, was a school curriculum proposed by the Education Bureau of HK. The controversy surrounding MNE, according to its critics, stands from praising communist and nationalist


\textsuperscript{27} Basic Law does not allow any referenda to be organized in the city, therefore the civic referendum organized by OCLP was tantamount to public opinion poll.

\textsuperscript{28} Recently representatives of three of those institutions withdrew from HKFS over the outcome of the engagement in Umbrella Movement. See more: http://www.hkfs.org.hk/about-hkfs/ accessed 25 June 2015.

ideology of PRC government. In effect, as the critics claim, if implemented, new curriculum would brain-wash pupils and further minimise prospects for democratization of HK politics\textsuperscript{30}.

Admittedly, HK pan-democratic political parties that are represented in Legco, seemed to have lost the momentum. Their internal divisions did not help the spontaneous social movement. Ultimately, the protesters in the streets lost their confidence in pan-democrats, whose major mode of operation turned out to be filibustering in the Legislative Council (by which they have also lost support of the part of the citizenry. Especially these members of the middle class who work as civil servants and whose salary adjustments and various other benefits could not be delivered due to blocking financial proposals of the government)\textsuperscript{31}. Numerous media outlets, especially pro-Beijing ones, played this card heavily against pan-democrats during the sit-in protests and in the months followed Occupy Central.

To address questions posed in the introduction of this paper one must also look at the state of economic affairs in Hong Kong.

**Social inequality – human security problem**

Hong Kong government likes to boast about the macroeconomic indexes that supposedly support its governance philosophy, based on public-private partnership. Indeed, when one looks at GDP per capita (55,200 USD – 2014), its GDP purchasing power parity (400.6 billion USD – 2014), its GDP growth (3 per cent – 2014), its unemployment (3.1 per cent – 2014) and its inflation rate of 3.7 per cent, one would be entitled to jealousy, especially from the perspective of crises-ridden Eurozone or American economy\textsuperscript{32}. But that is not all, for 2013/2014 the budget stands at around 1.94 billion USD surplus. Public debt was estimated at


\textsuperscript{31} Hong Kong pan-democrats is a name that refers to those political parties in HK, who oppose Central Government and its interpretation of „one country, two systems“ principle. They include among others: Democratic Party, Civic Party, Labour Party, People Power, Professional Commons, League of Social Democrats, Hong Kong Association for Democracy and People’s Livelihoods, Neighbourhood and Worker’s Service Centre and Neo Democrats. See more at: CIA World Factbook, Hong Kong at: [https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/hk.html](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/hk.html) accessed 26 June 2015.

reasonable 37 per cent of GDP for 2014 and importantly has been diminishing. Finally, Human Development Index for 2014 was 15th highest in the world\textsuperscript{33}.

This admittedly impressive economic performance is just a surface and it tells only a small part of the story. Socio-economic realities in HK have another, much uglier face. A quick look at microeconomic indexes reveals a different picture altogether. To start with, social inequalities (income inequalities) in Hong Kong are one of the biggest in the world. Widely accepted Gini Coefficient (overall) for 2011 according to Census and Statistics Department of HKSAR, reached a staggering value of 0.537\textsuperscript{34}. Newly created crony-capitalism index places HK on top of the world and way ahead of the next contender in that category, a country that is notoriously criticised for its political and economic ills – Russia\textsuperscript{35}. In terms of relative poverty only in 2012 HK government finally defined HK poverty line as 50 per cent of median monthly household income before tax and welfare transfers\textsuperscript{36}. It appears that 1.3 million of Hong Kong residents (out of 7, 112,688) actually live under poverty line (that is almost 20 per cent). The situation is exceptionally challenging for the young. The median salary in the age group of 25 to 34 is 15,500 HK dollars (around 2,000 US dollars)\textsuperscript{37}. That might seem a lot converted to US dollars, nonetheless the prices of properties have been rising so sharply in the past years that most people now have to wait till late thirties or even early forties to get their first flat\textsuperscript{38}. If that


\textsuperscript{38} Hong Kong now has one of the highest housing prices among the world’s financial hubs. According to the Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey, the median housing price was HK $4,024,000 (about $520,000), almost 30% higher than that in New York ($405,400) in 2013. The ratio of median home prices divided by median household income has reached 14.9, more than three times more than that in Tokyo, one of the most expensive cities in the world. See more: 11th Annual Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey: 2015 Ratings for Metropolitan Markets, \url{http://www.demographia.com/dhi.pdf} accessed 29 June 2015.
is not bad enough, their first flat is likely to be miniature of less than 40 square meters\textsuperscript{39}. This obviously places a heavy financial burden on families who therefore tend to postpone their decision regarding first and often only child. Speaking of which, HK has one of the lowest birth rates in the world of only 1.235 which is well below the reproduction ratio\textsuperscript{40}.

This is just a proverbial tip of an iceberg. To understand a drop of life satisfaction of HK residents one would also have to take into consideration: poor air-quality\textsuperscript{41}, poor standard of public education\textsuperscript{42}, increasingly expensive education offered by international schools\textsuperscript{43}, tertiary education in general crisis\textsuperscript{44}, competitive mode of education which forces many parents to start the education of their children at the age of 18 months (sic!), constant lack of qualified

\textsuperscript{39} One of the HK developers recently angered many by offering flats of 180 square feet (16.72 square meters) for 1.47 million HK dollars (189,623 US dollars). Interestingly enough, the site is far away from prime locations and still most of the flats were sold pretty quickly. See more: A. Nip, Hong Kong's 'tiniest flats ever' go on sale for HK$2 million, “South China Morning Post”, Hong Kong and China, http://www.scmp.com/property/hong-kong-china/article/1661820/modest-reception-tiny-new-flats?page=all accessed 29 June 2015. To make it even more tragic, the law in HK allows developers to include parts of lobbies, stair cases, lifts and even balconies into declared leaving space. In reality therefore, depending on the developer and the building, one has to take into account the so-called 'efficiency ratio’. This usually being around eighty or sometimes even only 75 per cent, would reduce the declared 180 square feet flat (16.72 square meters ) down to 135 square feet (12.54 square meters). Hence the phenomenon of subdivided flats, were one finds many families/individuals renting only a tiny space/part of the room and sharing basic necessities like bathrooms and kitchens. Latest government study of 2013 estimates the number of people living in such conditions at around 170.000. See more: Report on Survey on Subdivided Units in Hong Kong, p. 5, http://www.thb.gov.hk/eng/policy/housing/policy/lths/sdurpt2013.pdf accessed 30 June 2015.


\textsuperscript{43} As of writing of this paper, all international schools in HK are about to raise their tuition fees. Some by as much as by 30 per cent. This makes HK international schools one of the most expensive international schools in the world with and average annual tuition fee at secondary level at around 150.000 HK dollars (around 20.000 US dollars). See more: S. Zhao, International and private schools in Hong Kong seek to raise fees by up to 30pc, “South China Morning Post” 24 June 2015, http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/education-community/article/1825446/international-and-private-schools-hong-kong-seek accessed 30 June 2015. On top of that many private and international schools demand a payment of 'debenture’ – a one off fee that is returned to parents after the graduation of their kids (given the inflation one is bound to lose depending on the length of school attendance). Debentures are not regulated as such so it is not rare to hear that one has to pay 250.000 HK dollars (around 32.000 US dollars) up-front before their kids can even start attending a school.

\textsuperscript{44} Especially pressing seems to be the problem of social immobility linked to under-supported and underfunded higher education. See more at: Hong Kong’s growing shortage of university places, Time Out Hong Kong, 27 August 2013, http://www.timeout.com.hk/big-smog/features/60578/hong-kongs-growing-shortage-of-university-places.html accessed 6 July 2015.
doctors, low quality of public health care, under-supply of public housing, long working hours and practically non-existing public retirement schemes. These and many others, according to Chinese University of Hong Kong study of 2013 have caused a steady fall in the quality of life.

Now, all this might seem pretty typical for our times, but one needs to realise the context. Generally speaking after WW II Hong Kong has been doing exceptionally well in economic terms. Its citizens have been enjoying rising standard of leaving from one generation to another. Focus on hard work accompanied by low-key position of government in economics allowed most people to prosper and meet their existential/developmental goals. An unspoken social contract seemed to have been based on the understanding that the citizens did not engage in politics. In return, the government did not regulate economic activity above the minimum but provided a level-playing field in the form of the rule-of-law. Sadly, recent years have shown that the contract is clearly not working, which would definitely provide the answers to first questions posed in this paper – the origins of the Occupy Central that led to massive sit-ins protests. The problems above also, at least partly, explain the reasons for massive ‘politicization’ of HK society. ‘Politicization’ which, it is worth noting, mirrors ‘western’ governance ideas of a social contract based not poorly on formal grounds but rather on the merit and contents. As one of the internet users commented: “All we need is a government who is accountable to the people and not to Beijing and who risks being voted out of office.

45 HK labour law does not specify minimum working hours per week. Reality is that HK people work one of the longest hours in the world. In 2011, the average median weekly total working hours for all employees were estimated at 47 hours. See more: Labour Department, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Policy Study on Standard Working Hours, Executive Summary of the Report of the Policy on Standard Working Hours, p. 9, http://www.labour.gov.hk/eng/plan/pdf/swh/swh_executive_summary.pdf accessed 30 June 2015. Also, there is question of minimum salary. In 2011 HK government for the first time implemented its first minimum hourly wage of 28 hk dollars (3.61 US dollars) much to the criticism of business community. As of writing of this paper, the minimum hourly wage stands at 32.5 HK dollars (4.19 US dollars). See more at: Labour Department, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Statutory Minimum Wage, http://www.labour.gov.hk/eng/news/mwo.htm accessed 2 July 2015.

46 This last feature of life in HK presents young people with particular challenge. It is widely expected of young people in HK to share their salaries with parents, regardless of their parents’ economic conditions. Typically a young person, who earns around 15,000 HK dollars (around 2,000 US dollars) would be expected to part with around 30 per cent of that – 5,000 HK dollars (around 650 US dollars) to support other members of their families – parents, grand-parents or younger brothers and sisters.

should they fail. Only under the current system can unqualified and self-interested people hold office and remain in power despite repeated failures as all aspects of Hong Kong degrade."
Hong Kong Transition Project confirms these assertions and backs it up with quantitative data. According to its latest report ‘Constitutional Reform: Confrontation looms as Hong Kong consults’ especially those under the age of 40 show very strong dissatisfaction with life quality in HK. They also largely do not trust either HKSAR Government or Central Government. Crucially, of highest concern to the HK citizenry seem to be competence of CE, competence of civil servants, fair judiciary, autonomy of HK, freedom of press, demonstration and travel and political stability.

The above analysis has shown basic social problems that have been unsettling HK society. Together with the first chapter that describes HK political systems they allow us to answer initial research questions posed at the beginning of this paper. Now, that we have established the major causes of social unrest in HK known as occupy central let us turn our attention to the reaction of HGSAR Government and Central Government (Beijing).

Securitization of HK politics

This part of the paper will attempt to show how both HKSAR and Central Government tried to securitize Occupy Central. Specifically it will look at ‘facilitating conditions’ of securitization such as ‘speech acts’. It will also employ cultural context of which in case of Chinese politics is largely shaped by the philosophy of Confucianism.

Before we proceed however, it is vital to define the notion of securitization, which will serve as an analytical tool in this part of the paper. The concept of securitization of politics was first outlined by Ole Wæver in 1995. It refers to the discursive construction of threat. According to Wæver, securitization can be defined as a process in which an actor declares a particular issue, dynamic or actor to be an ‘existential threat’ to a particular referent object. If

55 This seems to be in line with global trends. As Joseph Stiglitz puts it in his book: “That the young would rise up against the dictatorships of Tunisia and Egypt was understandable. The youth were tired of aging, sclerotic leaders who protected their own interests at the expense of the rest of society. (…) But years after the breaking of the bubble, it became clear that our political system had failed, just as it had failed to prevent the crisis, to check the growing inequality, to protect those at the bottom, to prevent the corporate abuses. It was only then that protesters turned to the streets. See more: J.E. Stiglitz (2012). The Price of Inequality… Loc. 452 of 9830 and 608 of 9830.
56 O. Wæver, Politics, security, theory, ”Security Dialog” 2011, 42 (4-5), 471.
accepted as such by relevant audience, this enables the suspension of normal politics and the use of emergency measures in responding to that perceived crisis.

Security in that sense is a site of negotiation between speakers and audiences, albeit one conditioned significantly by the extent to which the speaker enjoys a position of authority within particular group. As such securitization is context related so it involves articulation of the threat only from specific place, in an institutional voice, by elites.\(^{57}\)

One of the basic concepts within the theorem of securitization, refers to ‘facilitating conditions’. Facilitating conditions are understood as particular context that enables the acceptance of a particular securitizing move by the relevant audience. This particular context includes a number of phenomena and naturally differs from case to case. Analysing Hong Kong politics from this perspective should take into account the structure of political system (explained at large in the first part of this paper), historical and cultural contexts as well as political dynamics in PRC.

Historically speaking, Hong Kong has never been free. It has been first, a British Crown Colony, then British Dependent Territory later British Overseas Territory and now Special Administrative Region of People’s Republic of China. Its citizens have always enjoyed certain rights the scope of which has usually been far greater than in Mainland China but much narrower than in the United Kingdom. According to Freedom House, Hong Kong rating stands as partly free for 2015\(^{58}\) (overall 3.5 – civil liberties 2, political rights 5).

Consequently, many in HK believe that the situation is only getting worse. Especially in the realm of mass media, one sees examples of leading English speaking broadsheet newspaper – South China Morning Post and its staff being ‘let go’ or liberal Apple Daily being hacked and its reporters being physically abused. Television Broadcast Limited (TBV), first wireless commercial station in HK, has been perceived as pro-establishment since 2009 when it limited coverage of the 20\(^{th}\) anniversary of 4 June Incident\(^{59}\). During the 2012 CE election

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\(^{57}\) Ibidem. 473


\(^{59}\) Every year Hong Kong people pay tribute to those who lost their lives during the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989. Many stay overnight for the vigil in Victoria Park on HK Island. See more: J. Ng, S. Lau, J. Lam and T. Cheung, *Victoria Park lit up at June 4 vigil as ‘localist’ groups stage alternative rallies*, "South China
Central Government’s Liaison Office interfered a number of times on media coverage of the candidates running for the office. Finally problems with extending licences for Commercial Radio Hong Kong due to its critical reporting on Chief Executive CY Leung and worst of all, a case of Kevin Lau, chief editor of the liberal Ming Pao, who was brutally stabbed on 26 February 2014. It is commonly believed that even though he was attacked by Triad members, this was orchestrated by political elites as an act of vengeance for Lau’s contribution to International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) report on the offshore assets of PRC leaders.

Culturally speaking, Confucianism seems to be enjoying its revival in China. Even Chinese Communist Party has recently embarked on the revitalization of this ethical and philosophical system as a cornerstone of a post-Maoist normative basis. Daniel Bell of Tsinghua University even suggests that perhaps one day Chinese Communist Party might actually become Chinese Confucian Party. Allegedly it goes back to 2005 when the then President Hu Jintao cited Confucius in his speech aimed at the cadres of the Communist Party whereby he urged the building of a ‘harmonious society’

Political culture as Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba have demonstrated is a potent variable influencing policy making and the governance systems of political communities. Arguably, in both HK and China traditional Confucian values still hold eminent position within its respective societies, perhaps more so even in case of HK, which did not go through Cultural Revolution. There is a lot to be elaborated on Confucianism and its values, admittedly as many philosophical systems Confucianism is inherently contradictory at times, but few features seem

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to stand out. Firstly, Confucianism tends to promote hierarchy. As Baogang He argues, Confucianism represents “a political order in which the rule of the gentleman prevails, where duty is central, political inequality taken for granted, moral concern overrides political bargaining process, and harmony prevails over conflict”\(^65\). Consequently, this “conflicts with a democratic order in which the rule of law prevails, rights are central, political equality is taken for granted, the political bargaining overrides moral consensus, and conflict is seen as necessarily normal condition of political life”\(^66\). Unlike PRC, HK political system does exhibit a mixture of these values. On the one hand, the rule of law does prevail and some rights are central. On the other hand, the catalogue of citizens’ rights is limited, at least compared to fully democratic systems, there is no political equality and social harmony is highly regarded. The last point is especially relevant in the context of Occupy Central. In Confucian culture the government tends to proceed on the basis of an assumption that the lack of social harmony will automatically bring chaos (the Warring States’ period is often invoked by Chinese as historical proof), an assumption similar to the one of Thomas Hobbes or Machiavelli. Logically therefore, for Chinese, suppression of dissidence seems to be the surest mode of providing social harmony\(^67\). Dissidence is seen as emanation of conflict and irresponsibility on the part of individuals who value themselves more than the community (which is more or less compatible with western civic-republican application of citizenship). This has two very important consequences: Firstly, most individuals very seldom oppose the rulers or the majority, simply ‘going with the flow’ in order not to disrupt the harmony. Secondly, any whistle-blowers are usually seen as troublemakers rather than responsible citizens who care about the community. This was obvious during the 79 days of OC and long afterwards.

The concept of harmonious society is therefore a very useful tool in the hands of both CCP and HK SAR Government. For the sake of social harmony Occupy Central protesters were framed as peace disturbers, who were harming HK stability and prosperity\(^68\).


\(^66\) *Ibidem*, p. 21.


Securitization scholars consider the position of the speaker as an important facilitating condition. Arguably it also played an important role during the OC. To start with, the protesters were not just any regular citizens. A large and most vocal amongst them were secondary school and university students. Their demands might have been unrealistic (so typical of the young to be rebellious) but they were treated by HK SAR Government and Central Government as just spoiled kids, not worthy even of a dialog. The Government officials (both HK SAR and Central Government) continually played the cards of immaturity of protesters referring to their young age and inexperience in politics.

This is typical of HK political culture as in Confucianism political leaders are highly regarded and the subjects are intellectually and often morally inferior. This by itself guarantees that in Confucian societies the leaders automatically enjoy a position of authority. As Hall and Ames point out in Confucianism, good government must be paternalistic therefore “the relationship between the ruler and the masses is repeatedly cast as analogous to that of parents and their children”. This propensity can explain popular attachment to paternalism in both Mainland China and to some extent in HK especially among older generations. Police Commissioner Andy Tsang was quoted widely by HK media when he commented on the behaviour of female police officers during the scuffles in Mong Kok on 3rd of October 2014 referring to them as “caring mothers protecting kids”.

National Security


69 Indeed, the HK SAR Government Chief Secretary for Administration Office Carrie Lam Yuet-ngor never treated the protesters seriously. After many days of protests amid a standoff between the Government and the protesters who demanded dialog, Carrie Lam offered to meet. There was only one meeting which proved meaningless. The next scheduled meeting did not take place however as the government called it off in the last moment. See more: Thousands return to streets in protest at government’s decision to cancel talks with students, “South China Morning Post”, 11 October 2014, http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1614085/thousands-return-streets-protest-governments-decision-cancel-talks?page=all accessed 16 July 2015.


Once that we have identified the facilitating conditions of securitization of Hong Kong Politics it is time to look at particular examples that validate the hypothesis put forward at the beginning of this paper, namely that major issues concerning public policy making in Hong Kong, and especially its political reform and the opposition of large part of citizenry towards it known as Occupy Central, have been framed by central government in Beijing as national security issue.

In August 2014, Zhang Xiaoming Director of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in Hong Kong SAR repeatedly asserted that “Hong Kong SAR is being exploited, under the pretext of democracy, as an anti-China base by foreign forces. Therefore universal suffrage in Hong Kong must be viewed with national security in mind” 73.

CY Leung, Chief Executive, in his first on-the-record joint interview with international media (The Financial Times, the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal) on 20 October 2014 was quoted as saying: “There is a thin line between what we do in Hong Kong and what Beijing think or might think they have to do. (…) I didn’t overhear it in a teahouse. It’s something that concerns us. It’s something we need to deal with [Leung made it clear that foreign intervention is a genuine worry for his administration – K.S.]” 74.

Ten days later, Michael Tien Puk-sun, Deputy Chairman of New People’s Party, Hong Kong delegate to the National People’s Congress (NPC) of PRC, had this to say on Occupy Central: "Because China has declared there are foreign forces and political influence behind Occupy Central, it has been elevated to a national security issue” 75.

Xi Jinping, President of PRC, during a joint press conference with US President Barack Obama in APEC Beijing on 12 November 2014 affirmed that: “Hong Kong is

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74 J. Noble, J. Zhu, Hong Kong ‘lucky’ China has not stopped protests, says CY Leung, “Ft.com”, world, asia-pacific, China, 20 October 2014, [http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/3f6f1c74-584b-11e4-a31b-00144feab7de.html#axzz35PnsS211g](http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/3f6f1c74-584b-11e4-a31b-00144feab7de.html#axzz35PnsS211g) accessed 20 July 2015.

75 The comment came a day after his brother James Tien Pei-chun was expelled from the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) after he urged CY Leung to step down as CE. See more: C. Baldwin, Hong Kong protests a ‘national security issue’ for China, “Reuters”, World, 30 October 2014, [http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/10/30/us-hongkong-china-brother-idUSKBN0JJ1AD20141030](http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/10/30/us-hongkong-china-brother-idUSKBN0JJ1AD20141030) accessed 20 July 2015.
exclusively an internal matter for China and foreign countries should not interfere in any form or fashion.\textsuperscript{76}

Finally, General Sun Jianguo, Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of PRC on 2\textsuperscript{nd} of March 2015, during an interview with Oriental Outlook [A newsweekly magazine affiliated with Xinhua – K.S.] made these remarks: “Hostile forces have always attempted to make Hong Kong the bridgehead for subverting and infiltrating mainland China. The illegal Occupy Central activities in 2014 came as minority radical groups in Hong Kong, under the instigation and support of external forces (…) orchestrated a Hong Kong version of a colour revolution.”\textsuperscript{77}

In his recent analysis, Gen. Qiao Liang, in charge of the education curriculum of the officers studying at the prestige University of Defence (PRC’s top military school) throws additional light on the Chinese official understanding of OC. Referring to US monetary strategy Gen. Liang puts forward an idea that united States created the Ukrainian Crisis, territorial disputes between PRC and Japan as well as PRC and the Philippines along with OC crisis in its approach to challenge the rising power of China and undermine its national security.\textsuperscript{78}

Last but not least one cannot but notice the most resent iteration of Chinese National Security Strategy, adopted by the Politburo of the Communist Party of China on 23\textsuperscript{rd} of January 2015. The new strategy is vast enough to include all “unpredictable” and “unprecedented” dangers facing China at home and abroad and sees further consolidation of power under the unified command of Xi Jinping.\textsuperscript{79} According to Chinese media, around the same time National People’s Congress deputy Stanley Ng asserted that the Mainland’s state security legislation should be applied to Hong Kong, in the absence of local national security

\textsuperscript{76} This was Xi’s first public comment on the Occupy Central after the clearance. See more at: The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, \textit{Remarks by President Obama and President Xi Jinping in Joint Press Conference, \textsuperscript{77}Admiral Sun Jianguo: China has been invaded by dangerous struggle to seek win-win China – US, \textit{“Oriental Outlook”}, 2 March 2015, \url{http://news.ifeng.com/a/20150302/43248982_1.shtml} accessed 20 July 2015. Also: n. Gan, S. Lau, \textquote{Hong Kong’s Occupy protest ‘was an attempt at colour revolution’: PLA general, \textquote{“South China Morning Post”, 3 March 2015, \url{http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1728027/occupy-central-was-attempt-colour-revolution-pla-general} page=all accessed 20 July 2015.}


legislation. As Alvin Y.H. Cheung rightly observes: “(…) Ng’s proposal may represent merely the opening gambit in Beijing’s continuing crackdown on dissent in Hong Kong following the Umbrella Movement. Pro-Beijing politicians and pundits are now advocating a revival of Article 23 national security legislation, pitching it as preferable to the imposition of Mainland legislation.”

Conclusion

The theoretical framework applied in this paper has been the one of securitization. As Copenhagen school of security studies posits, firstly, once issues are moved to security realm, there tends to be suspension of the normal rules of the game and enabling of the emergency measures. This consequently brings, quite unfortunate from a democratic standpoint, tendency to deal with perceived threats to security in urgency and secrecy, with few actors being able to contribute to political debate. Secondly, securitization requires that the referent objects of such accept the moving of certain issues to the security realm and also consequent suspension of normal rules of the game.

In case of Occupy Central both conditions have not been fully met. As OC and its aftermath have demonstrated a large part of the HK citizenry have not accepted the notion forced by Beijing that HK politics and its institutions are ultimately to be shaped by Beijing, neither have they accepted the securitization narrative as regards OC.

Certainly, as this paper has proved, there has been a considerable effort on the part of Central government and HKSAR government to frame HK politics in general and OC in particular in terms of national security. It remains to be seen however how much these attempts have been successful. Further survey-based research is needed to establish weather Beijing and HKSAR governments have been successful in their attempts and if so, to what extent.

In the meantime, the immediate effects of the OC have been rather negative: one could definitely see that the prestige of Hong Kong Police Force (traditionally perceived as very

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professional and impartial) has suffered since the Force is no longer seen a trustworthy and neutral guardian of the rule of law. Secondly, both Beijing and HKSAR governments have been paying special attention to education sector. One can definitely expect the continuation of the national education debate, amid worsening academic freedoms and more control over liberal arts curriculum, in secondary schools. Thirdly, students have been polarizing as regards the future actions, which has resulted in the split and demise of Hong Kong University Student’s Union. Fourthly, there has been a considerable decrease in trust and support to HK democrats who proved totally unable to use the momentum created by the OC participants and missed the opportunity amid internal quarrels that manifested usually with filibustering in Legco, much to the irritation of most HK citizens, including those who supported OC. Finally, one can observe the polarization of political views among HK citizens, with a considerable increase of Chinese nationalism (pro-Beijing and consequently against the so-called ‘localists’).

It seems to be the case that Beijing, and especially, Xi Jinping could not afford the OC to spin out of control for a number of reasons. Predominantly, one could actually make the case for power analysis. As matters stand nowadays, there is an ongoing power struggle within CCP standing committee. Xi has embarked on a new and adventurous path referred to as “Chinese Dream”. As a multifaceted program, Chinese dream involves numerous ambitious initiatives among which some seem to stand out in particular from the perspective of this paper: tackling corruption in the state’s apparatus and the party and demonstration of Chinese assertiveness in the region. In both cases Xi has to be seen as a ‘strongman’ if he wants to succeed, let alone remain in power. Ultimately therefore, OC proved a particular challenge to him and the rest of

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84 Especially that the ethnic and cultural essence of HK population is changing rapidly. Every day 150 Chinese from the mainland are granted a right to enter and stay in HK on family reunification grounds. See more: [http://www.clic.org.hk/en/topics/immigration/for_non_residents/q1.shtml](http://www.clic.org.hk/en/topics/immigration/for_non_residents/q1.shtml), accessed 14 September 2015.

the Chinese leadership, which had to be won for their cause. At stake was in fact the stability and ‘social harmony’ of the whole Chinese society and preservation of the legitimacy of CCP.