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Epilogue: Conscientization in the aftermath of the Umbrella Movement

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The essays in this volume have demonstrated that the Umbrella Movement brought about a new theological moment in Hong Kong. As discussed in the introduction, theological actors in Hong Kong can be described as having followed the see-judge-act process of liberation theology. Indeed, the seeing and judging of Hong Kong's situation that began with Occupy Central with Love and Peace (OCLP) in 2013 culminated unexpectedly with the action of the 2014 protests, transcending the wildest imaginations of the seers and the judges. In turn, the authors of this book have seen the 2014 protests and have also judged them theologically. Before action is taken again, we must take stock of what we have seen and judged, even and especially if some readers are not from Hong Kong. Not only is this task important for reflecting in solidarity with Hong Kong people who have to deal with the aftermath of the 2014 events, but also it more importantly points to the ways that these experiences in Hong Kong contribute to the theological understanding of the protest movements that have emerged over the past few years around the world. While I will contend that the chapters have shown that the Umbrella Movement in fact produced a depoliticized faith in Hong Kong, I shall ultimately argue that this new emphasis on contemplative spirituality, orthodox theological teaching, and the rejection of ideological subjectification is fully consonant with the deep origins of liberation theology in the term "conscientization" (Portuguese, *conscientização*) as coined by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire in his 1970 text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

DEPOLITICIZED FAITH IN A POLITICIZED THEOLOGICAL SITUATION: THEOLOGY AS CONTEMPLATION

While one would have expected the Umbrella Movement to produce a politicized spirituality in Hong Kong, the authors in this book have advanced the possibility that the development of a political consciousness among Hong Kong people simultaneously led to the purification of their spirituality. Indeed, the chapters' foci, while recounting the same events, have been diverse. Lap Yan Kung wrote on how the Umbrella Movement emblemizes the viability of kairoic time generated by humans that in turn elicits a divine response. Sam Tsang critiqued exegetical approaches to liberation among Hong Kong theologians and their white Western interlocutors. Mary Yuen offered a Catholic reflection on solidarity among Hong Kong citizens and a playful suggestion that dialogue with the government would have to take place in an interreligious key. Rose Wu declared that a new Pentecost of a radical inclusivity characterized by "interstitial integrity" had come to town. Diverse as these theological orientations and substantive foci may be, they converge on the relationship between the political and the theological. Instead of injecting the protesters with a new ideological vision for Hong Kong, the demonstrators came to see clearly that the ideologues were those who had adjusted their theological convictions to justify the maintenance of the SAR establishment and its collusions with Beijing, tycoons, and the criminal underworld. In other words, it would be a stretch to say that those who participated in the Umbrella Movement generated a new theology of liberation. Instead, it would be

more accurate to argue that they realized that they needed to be liberated from those who had already politicized their faith.

This argument is significant because of the historical place of theology in the construction of Hong Kong as a colony and then as an SAR handed over to the PRC in 1997. Each of the contributors stress that the doing of theology in the Umbrella Movement must be examined because many of the participants were Christian; as Kung noted, the Christian element was even more important than, say, Buddhism, for while traditional Chinese religionists set up shrines to Southern Chinese hero-deities in the occupations, the Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian religious associations called on their adherents to capitulate to the authorities. For Wu, the participation of conservative Christians was in fact key to the emergence of a new Pentecost, one in which theologies shifted in a more universal direction so that even those with traditional views on family and sexuality began to shift their attention to the ways that sexual minorities had historically been persecuted and how gendered violence was occurring at the hands of the police. As political scientists, Beatrice Leung and Shun-Hing Chan have shown the consistent 10 % of the Hong Kong population that has identified as Christian does not account for how Christian churches were historically arms of the colonial establishment before moving into a more prophetic stance to critique the elites' undemocratic practices.¹ Indeed, in further articles, Shun-Hing Chan and his religious studies colleague Chan Sze-chi have observed that both the mainline Protestant denominational bodies associated with the Hong Kong Christian Council and evangelical family values activists reinforce the power of the political establishment by celebrating the SAR government during prayer meetings and focusing on bourgeois "moral" issues like gambling and homosexuality at the expense of democracy and opposition to the formation of a security state.² In our volume, Sam Tsang's critique of Archbishop Paul Kwong rests on how Kwong manages to twist the prescriptions of a Euro-American theologian with roots in liberation theology, Miroslav Volf, to create harmony with the post-handover establishment and the Beijing regime, precisely mirroring the PRC's twenty-first century ideology of the "harmonious society." Such state-enforced harmony is not the same as Mary Yuen's call for a Catholic dialogue with the government, which treats the state as an extra-religious other to the protesters' de facto performance of Catholic social teaching rooted in solidarity. As I showed in my primer detailing the relationship between post-handover politics and theology, the very operation of the political apparatus in Hong Kong has long been the source for much practical theological reflection in Hong Kong that came to a climax in the Umbrella Movement. In other words, the practice of Christian theology—not to mention the teaching of non-Christian Chinese religions—has always already been politicized throughout Hong Kong's colonial and post-handover history. What the Umbrella Movement did was to bring this politicization to a point of crisis, resulting in an ironic depoliticization in the practice of theology.

What this means is that the performance of depoliticized theologies with more rigorous spiritual practices in the Umbrella Movement will be perceived by the ideological establishment as a politicization of theology. In a study of the nonliberal Islamic women's mosque movement in Cairo, anthropologist Saba Mahmood observed that insofar "as the secular-liberal project is aimed at the moral reconstruction of public and private life, it is not surprising that the Egyptian state has found a contentious rival in the piety movement, whose authority is grounded in sources that often elude and confound the state."³ So too, lay Christian activist Chan Do observed that the street sanctuary St. Francis' Chapel on the Street produced a greater awareness of the *sanctorum communio*, generating a contemplative, depoliticized faith that he had not experienced except for at the ecumenical community at Taizé, France. ⁴ Contemplative as Chan's reflections may be, though, the site of his reflection was the Mong Kok occupied territory, which led his depoliticized reflections to be perceived as political. Of course, as Kung suggests in our volume, the Umbrella Movement should be understood as a "political movement" because the entire movement from Occupy Central with Love and Peace (OCLP) in 2013 to the Umbrella Movement in 2014 was, in the words of OCLP founder Benny Tai, a process of "conscientization" in which participants in the movements developed a new political consciousness. But as Tsang points out in his analysis of Kung, that Kung uses American neo-Anabaptist theologian Stanley Hauerwas to call for communal character formation in ecclesial communities mitigates against the ideologization of theology during the process of mental liberation.

Political ideologies, in other words, have always been around; conscientization is the process by which Hong Kong citizens became aware that they are being oppressed by them.

THE PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED IN HONG KONG: THEOLOGY AS CONSCIENTIZATION

Tai's usage of "conscientization" takes us back into the deep history of liberation theology—indeed, back to Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, where the term was developed and which came to influence the development of theologies of liberation.⁵ As Sam Rocha has suggested, reading Freire in Portuguese and Spanish yields a sense that the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is a theological text, explaining its significant impact on liberation theologians—even bishops—who worked with grassroots movements to challenge socially unjust regimes in Latin America.⁶ However, Freire's work is also typically cited in the work of liberation in the Asia-Pacific. As historian Namhee Lee emphasizes, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was a central text in the 1970s *minjung* movement in the Republic of Korea, discussed in university small groups and workers' night schools and banned by the government until 1983.⁷ So too, the centrality of textual reading in OCLP and the Umbrella Movement, which was especially highlighted by a documentary predating the protests regarding two youth protest leaders Wan Ke Ma and Joshua Wong,⁸ should indicate little surprise that a Freirian word like "conscientization" has been bandied around during democratic deliberations in Hong Kong. Indeed, the frequent sight of students reading during the protests, especially at the study stations at the Admiralty occupation, suggests that the development of a pedagogy of the oppressed in Hong Kong was a living reality during the Umbrella Movement.

The English-language translators of the Portuguese text leave the word "conscientization" in its untranslated form *conscientização*. "*Conscientização*," Freire writes, "is the deepening of the attitude of awareness characteristic of all emergence," the realization that the oppressed can emerge from a situation of oppression because of the complementary process of humanization, *humanização*.⁹ It turns out that *humanização* is precisely the process of solidarity and interreligious dialogue that Yuen discusses in her chapter, for (as Freire writes) "the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed" is "to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well," allowing both to discover their common humanity as agents unbound by situations of "dehumanization," processes designed to strip human agents of their agency.¹⁰ For Freire, a situation of oppression oppresses both the oppressed and the oppressor because they both are dehumanized in the process. We see a process of emergence in our volume as well: Yuen insists from a Catholic perspective that dialogue with the government is necessary, and Kung and Wu both point out that the occupations deeply inconvenienced people who had to get to work and medical appointments. These self-critical remarks indicate that the complex human experience is more important than any political ideology, even one as noble as gaining true universal suffrage in Hong Kong. Once again, conscientization in the political movement called the Umbrella Movement is not a process of ideologization; quite the opposite, it is a spiritual journey toward de-ideologization while seeking the common humanity of the other in an attempt to build solidarity through dialogue.

IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE UMBRELLA MOVEMENT: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION AS CONSCIENTIZATION

A return to Freire's conception of conscientization will be necessary in order to mitigate views that the failure of the Umbrella Movement to produce concrete change in Hong Kong will require precisely the ideologization that Freire implicitly condemns. All four theologians in this volume pointed out that the aftermath of the Umbrella Movement brought about the "anti-parallel trading protests" of the early months in 2015, resulting in the tightening of the apparatus of the security state in Hong Kong. From January to April 2015, new and existing radical democratic groups such as Civic Passion, Hong Kong Indigenous, and Frontline turned their attention against tourists from the PRC mainland who were shopping in Hong Kong districts such as Tuen Mun, Sheung Shui, Tai Po, Sha

Tin, and Yuen Long. The real target of their ire was the multiple entry visa policy in which visitors from the mainland could easily make their way into Hong Kong for daytime shopping trips, a policy tool they alleged that the central PRC government was using to promote the economic integration—or as the protesters saw it, colonization—of Hong Kong. Alleging that such shopping tourism was leading to an astronomical rise in prices for food, pharmaceutical products, and property, the radical democrats led protests to brand-name pharmacies and shopping centers where they verbally berated and at times even physically assaulted mainland tourists. These increasingly violent protests have been accompanied by the rise of non-Christian ideologies, some of which have roots in Cantonese martial traditions associated with hero-deities, but all of which call for a stronger sense of Hongkonger identity as an ideology. Indeed, this has come to a head in the 2016 “Fishball Revolution,” a violent set of confrontations between the police on one side and radical activists and street vendors on the other, both sides vociferously advancing ideologies of what Hong Kong should be. Gone is the theological sense of solidarity for the humanity of the other that came from the non-violent conscientization of OCLP and the Umbrella Movement, replaced now with a viciously protective sense that Hong Kong is an ideological territory that must be fortified from the Beijing central government and its citizen-agents.

The government’s response has been to tighten the reins of the security state, cracking down even further on what it sees as illegal assemblies and randomly detaining persons they think have the potential to protest. Such actions have led to what some have decried as a slippery slope returning to Stalinist and Maoist styles of terrorizing governance. In one instance, a young woman caught up in one of these protests was arrested, charged for assaulting the police with her breasts, and successfully convicted in a court of law. If the Umbrella Movement resulted in a sort of theological conscientization seeking to depoliticize faith from its usage by the political establishment, the aftermath of the protests have arguably re-established an oppressive situation in 2015 that is worse than before. Indeed, the present situation results in dehumanization for an increasing number of persons: Hong Kong citizens, the police, PRC mainland tourists, street vendors, the government—indeed, the ordinary person in Hong Kong.

And yet, like the other new protest movements around the world that have been deemed failures with sometimes violent outcomes, the Umbrella Movement remains a theological case study that still can be mined for insight. Indeed, the lack of finality even after the occupations were finally cleared on December 15, 2014, indicates that the protests are not yet over. Moreover, similar devolutions toward disorganized violence can be seen in the aftermath of protests from other parts of the globe. Despite the high hopes of the Arab Spring for establishing democratic governments in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Syria, the most recent result has been the emergence of one Syrian rebel group popularly known as the self-proclaimed “Islamic State” that has wreaked havoc with its ideology of a restored caliphate in the Middle East, resulting in a massive refugee crisis now at the shores of the European Union and the Americas. The result in these places has not been democracy; it has been a maddening choice between the dictatorial status quo and the uncertain chaos facing down the self-styled Islamic restorationists. So too, the 2014 Euromaidan protests in Ukraine promised much by way of the removal of the corrupt regime of Viktor Yanukovich, but they were soon overtaken by a Russian invasion of Ukraine in the supposedly disputed Crimean territory. In the USA, #OccupyWallStreet has dissipated into fomenting economic discontent in the USA while the #BlackLivesMatter movement advances and retreats by fits and starts since the police brutality publicized in Ferguson, Missouri, disrupting daily life, politicians’ speeches, and social media feeds with messages that have elicited the ire of closet white supremacists, some of whom have retaliated in force. Such devolution, of which the Umbrella Movement is a part, begs a value (if not a moral) judgment on these protests as a whole. Indeed, one of the most common objections to the Umbrella Movement was that a provocation toward the PRC central government would result in a show of force by the People’s Liberation Army—a prophecy that has thankfully been left unfulfilled—turning the responsibility of the responding violence onto the protesters themselves.

Here is where the conscientization of theology matters deeply. While Americans are perhaps used to thinking that only theologically progressive clergy engage in such protests—supporting clergy and theologians at Occupy Oakland and Ferguson, for example, have often been those most vocal about

radical equality in the church—the recent protest cultures throughout the globe signal the possible emergence of doctrinally orthodox Christian practice as a force for resistance. For example, the presence of Coptic Orthodox Christians in Tahrir Square protecting Muslims during their times of prayer (the favor has also been returned by the Muslims) speaks to the larger efforts made for peace by the Coptic Orthodox hierarchs such as the late Pope Shenouda and the present Pope Tawadros II with the Copts’ Muslim neighbors and the dictatorial government. In Syria, the Eastern Catholic and Orthodox patriarchs of the historic church in Antioch have been outspoken about the culpability of the West in producing the atrocities of the Islamic State because it was Western ideologues who first suggested that Christians are a foreign minority religion in the Middle East. As for the examples in the USA, critical theorist Slavoj Žižek has been calling for quite some time for a return to the Christian patrimony of Europe to resist the onslaught of ‘totalitarian capitalism’—precisely the objective of the #Occupy movement—a theme that has found unique promise among some intellectuals in the USA calling for support for Pope Francis and Bernie Sanders as purveyors of a Catholic social teaching that says “no to an economic system that kills” by “channelling wealth to the millionaire and billionaire class.” At the same time, it has been revealed that some of the more vocal #BlackLivesMatter activists, including the ones who disrupted Sanders’s campaign in Seattle, are evangelical Protestants calling for a conversion of hearts and minds toward a respect of black bodies in America.

Similarly, our volume has noted that the prevailing theologies in the Umbrella Movement have been dogmatically Christian and doctrinally orthodox, if not also downright conservative. On one hand, this phenomenon could be due, as Tsang suggests, to the overplaying of the liberation card in biblical exegesis, sometimes even by using liberation to establish linkages with the political establishment. The overdetermination of “liberation” is a detriment to those who are actually undertaking the work of liberation in Freirian terms: undergoing conscientization, developing a pedagogy of the oppressed that sees-judges-acts, and working for the humanization of both the oppressed and the oppressors. But on the other hand, this suggests that there is something about doctrinal orthodoxy that is inherently mobilizing. If there is ever a statement of obedience to official ecclesial dogma, Yuen’s contribution to our volume draws heavily from the Roman Catholic magisterium to examine the production of solidarities and dialogue in the Umbrella Movement. Even in the more progressive registers in which Kung and Wu write, they note the ubiquitous presence of conservative interlocutors, some of whom are participants and others who are critics. That Kung has to address the question of how to appropriately interpret the Umbrella Movement as *kairos* bespeaks an orthodox urge to liberation theologians to interpret the supernatural; that Wu tells the story of evangelicals who come to respect the bodies of sexual minorities indicates that the audience for queer theology is in fact conservative Christians. The mobilization of the doctrinally conservative underscores a fundamental point made by radically orthodox theologian John Milbank about the motivations of his magnum opus, *Theology and Social Theory*, that “a theological vision alone could challenge the emerging hegemony of neo-liberalism.”¹¹ It should be no surprise, then, that the core of the radically democratic political party, People Power, is a church known as Narrow Church that gave their critical support to OCLP and participated heavily in the occupation of Mong Kok during the Umbrella Movement. On the one hand, they espouse what might be called the progressive positions of pro-democracy and rights for sexual minorities; the open secret is that the bulk of their membership is composed of graduates of the Chung Chi Divinity School in Hong Kong, where they themselves acknowledged Kung and Wu’s mentorship. However, the origins of Narrow Church—and arguably, People Power—lies in a movement they started called the Alliance for the Return to the Christian Spirit, a movement to critique the ideologization of establishmentarian Christianity in an attempt to return the church to a form of depoliticized doctrinal orthodoxy.

Put in these terms, the Umbrella Movement can hardly be considered a failure. Despite the ineffectiveness of the protests to effect policy changes and the recent emergence of disturbingly violent ideologies of Hongkonger identity, few have sufficiently observed that the impact of the Umbrella Movement has been theological. If, as Žižek provocatively suggests, “Christianity and Marxism should fight on the same side of the barricade against the onslaught of new spiritualisms” that create the ideological conditions for totalitarian capitalism, ¹² then the gift of the Umbrella Movement alongside the other cognate protest movements in the world today is the empirical verification of a theological paradigm shift. Freire taught us long ago that if we want to have a truly free

and democratic the oppressed and the oppressor. In the same way, as the protest occupations were being cleared out in mid-December 2014, the protesters made crafts and wrote on street pavement and walls, indicating in no uncertain terms, “We will be back.” The Umbrella Movement is not over because the pedagogy of the oppressed is not yet finished. Indeed, by theologically reflecting on the Umbrella Movement, we have only seen and judged. The action has yet to take place.

Notes

1. Beatrice Leung and Shun-Hing Chan, *Changing Church-State Relations in Hong Kong, 1950–2000* (Hong Kong University Press, 2003). Archbishop Paul Kwong cites Leung and Chan’s models of the church shifting from a ‘contractual’ collaboration with the state to a ‘prophetic’ witness against the establishment in his account of Hong Kong churchstate relations in *Identity in Community: Toward a Theological Agenda for the Hong Kong SAR* (Zürich and Berlin: Verlag LIT, 2011).
2. Shun-Hing Chan, “Nationalism and Religious Protest: The Case of the National Day Celebration Service Controversy of the Hong Kong Protestant Churches,” *Religion, State, and Society* 28, no. 4 (2000): 359–383; “Nominating Protestant Representatives for the Election Committee: Church-State Relations in Hong Kong after 1997,” *Hong Kong Journal of Sociology* 4, 155–183; Chan Sze-chi, “Church-State Relations in Post-1997 Hong Kong,” *Asia-Pacific Perspectives* 5, no. 1: 38–44.
3. Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 75.
4. Chan Do, “The Communion of Saints, Priceless,” *The Writings of an Inglorious Pastor*, October 20, 2014 (accessed October 25, 2014, from <http://chandoremi.wordpress.com/2014/10/20/1-773/>).
5. See Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, rev. ed., trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 202, no. 49. I am grateful to Sam Rocha for pointing out to me that Gutiérrez’s footnote chronicles the genealogy of Freire’s concept of *conscientização* in Latin America. It turns out that the usage of *conscientização* predates *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in shorter articles and was developed in dialogue with other theorists of education and revolution in Latin America, such as Luis Alberto Gomes de Souza, Hiber Conteris, Julio Barreiro, Julio de Santa Ana, Ricardo Cetrulo, Vincent Gilbert, and Ernani Fiori.
6. Sam Rocha, “Phenomenology and Critical Pedagogy,” Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, April 16–20, 2015, Chicago, IL. I am thankful to Rocha for allowing me access to his unpublished insights, which undoubtedly will soon appear in print.
7. Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 225–226, 232–234.
8. Matthew Torne (dir.), *Lessons in Dissent [DVD]* (Oxon, UK and Kowloon, Hong Kong: Torne Films, 2014).
9. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th Anniversary ed., trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2000), 109.
10. *Ibid.*, 44.
11. John Milbank, “Preface to the Second Edition: Between Liberalism and Positivism,” in *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), xi.
12. Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute—Or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London: Verso, 2000), 2. By “Marxism,” Žižek refers to the tradition of materialist critique of capital in Karl Marx’s work. Elsewhere in his work, he terms the PRC “totalitarian capitalists” because he views them as playing into an ideology of capital instead of critiquing it. See Slavoj Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (London: Verso, 2009), 131–138.