

# The umbrella revolution in hong kong

[History](#), [Revolution](#)



## The Umbrella Revolution

It seemed like everything just happened so quickly. One day I was going to school like it was a regular day, and then the next two days, no car could get through the streets of Hong Kong. I turned on the local news and there it was, the Umbrella Revolution. Thousands of Hong Kongers flood the streets of Central, disrupting traffic, and protesting. It felt so surreal to me. Hong Kong never finds themselves in big protests, or even political arguments like this before. It happened so quickly I never even knew what the problem was. Some days I heard shots, screams, and banging on metal objects. I couldn't even leave the house. I was too scared at the time to go out to the city and explore what was going on. Even my parents thought it was unsafe to leave at some points. One of the most popular intersections of Hong Kong was completely blocked off, and nothing was getting through. If you wanted to get through it, you just had to be a part of the protests. I had to understand what was happening. In the 14 years of my life, I never heard anything like this happening in Hong Kong. I asked my parents what happened and why was everything blocked off. Why were the police gassing the protesters and arresting students from the streets? I shortly found out the reasons why all of this was happening.

The name " Umbrella Revolution" came from the use of umbrellas during the protest to protect citizens from tear gas. The reason for all this, however, was because of Hong Kong's political arguments with mainland China. In January of 2013, democracy activist, Benny Tai, was angry with the Chinese government's reluctance to allow to Hong Kong have the political independence it had been promised. He called on Hong Kong's citizens to

<https://assignbuster.com/the-umbrella-revolution-in-hong-kong/>

help cause a “civil disobedience” in the heart of the city. (Volsky, 2014)

China had promised a “one country, two systems” rule that allowed Hong Kong to develop its own government without interference from the mainland. The Chinese government, however, has reinterpreted the agreement. In July of 2013, China released a White Paper contract reiterating its “complete jurisdiction” over Hong Kong, saying that “the high degree of autonomy of [Hong Kong] is not an inherent power, but one that comes solely from the authorization by the central leadership.” (SCMP, 2014) In August of 2013 Beijing announced that “while citizens would be allowed to vote for the chief executive, the candidates for the election would have to be approved by a special committee just like the pro-Beijing committee that currently appoints the chief executive.” (SCMP) This enraged the local Hong Kong community. They were stripped of their rights to vote for leaders that they wanted and instead, had to pick from a group that were not chosen by them.

A group of Hong Kong university students led a peaceful demonstration against China’s election plan. They demanded an apology to the Hong Kong people for restricting the election rules for Hong Kong citizens. On October 1<sup>st</sup>, the demonstration started in Central, and the Occupy Central movement officially started. (Kaiman, 2014) For the first half of the day, it just seemed like an ordinary protest. The streets were blocked so both students and adults could not get to their school or jobs. This stirred up a lot of hate towards the Umbrella Movement from the more conservative adults. They wanted to get to work and continue their day as planned, however, many liberal adults joined the movement as they too wanted to see a change in the Hong Kong government. In the evening, to everyone’s surprise, the

police started to exert force on the protesters. Police never usually intervene in Hong Kong, so this was a huge shock to everyone. The police started to shoot tear gas into the crowd, and rubber bullets at aggressive protesters. The protesters covered themselves in plastic, wore goggles, and surgical masks to protect themselves from the poisonous gas. Then, the police force took it further with pepper spray, and that is when the umbrellas came out to deflect it. Since then, the umbrella became the “ movement’s most visible symbol.” (Volsky, 2014)

The responses from China, and the Hong Kong government seemed to almost dehumanize the protesters of Hong Kong. Beijing is called the protests illegal and had endorsed the police’s response. “ The unlawful assembly being held outside the Central Government Offices on Tim Mei Avenue in Central is affecting public safety, public order and traffic nearby,” authorities said in a press release. (Press Release, 2014)

This statement from Beijing completely disregards Hong Kong’s effort to stay in their “ one country, two systems” rule. In Hong Kong’s efforts to stay independent, the protests lasted for another eight days. (Sevastopulo, 2014) Along with the citizens of Hong Kong, the legislators were doing their part too. Pro-democracy legislators in Hong Kong walked out of a council meeting in China to protest the Chinese government’s intention to change their initial proposal to allow Hong Kong to select their own Chief Executives. Chief Secretary Carrie Lam, addressed China’s faulty Legislative Council. Lawmakers in favor of the pro-democracy movement, immediately protested by raising yellow umbrellas, symbols of the protest, and walked out of the

meeting. (Associated Press, 2014) This action became viral at an international scale, and the democratic citizens in Hong Kong started to become more faithful in their movement, and began believing that the government will keep their “two systems, one country” rule. On October 12<sup>th</sup>, however, the Umbrella Revolution came to a stop, and the dreams of becoming a more individual government ended.

At five in the morning of October 12<sup>th</sup>, the police force started an operation to remove unmanned barricades in Harcourt Road. (Wong, 2014) Hundreds of police officers wore surgical masks and carried crowbars and cutting tools to removing barricades at various sites and antagonized the protesters. Police made attempts to separate the groups at first, however, the protesters repaired and reinforced their barricades using bamboo and concrete. Police made three arrests for assault. Although the police warned the protesters about reinforcing the obstacles or setting up new barriers to enlarge their occupied area, the protesters still reinstated the obstacles overnight. As days went on, police started to take down the barricades, and opened the roads for vehicles to finally come through. On October 17<sup>th</sup>, 26 people were arrested for their continuation of occupying space in the city, including a photojournalist. (Lamar, 2014) The next day 37 protesters were arrested and nearly 70 were injured.

At the end of all this, Hong Kong did not get what they were promised. They were dehumanized, and robbed of their own choice to vote for their Chief Executive. China wants to keep Hong Kong tied up in order to maintain their political control. Hong Kong is one of the world's most widely international

cities in the world. (United Nations Development Program, 2015) China did not want Hong Kong to be able to even have the chance to vote for an anti-communist Chief Executive. China realized that Hong Kong became more westernized overtime, and did not want to lose them as an asset to their economy. (Iyengar, 2014)

While this movement was commendable, and I really appreciated the courage that the protesters had, I think something else could have been done better. There gave a lot of incentive for China to think about keeping their original system, but I think as time went on, business was declining due to the streets being blocked. For example, the Hang Seng Index dropped 1.9% immediately after the protests started happening on October 1<sup>st</sup>. Then, travel agents reported a 30% decrease in Chinese tour groups around China due to the movement. (Kitchen, 2014) The drop in both stock markets and business gave China the decision to influence Hong Kong's police force into antagonizing the protesters, and to stop it immediately. Hong Kong's economy plays a big role into China's market, and they did not want to lose any more business.

I've seen the extremes being taken to cause a revolution, but it did not work. Hong Kong has lost hope over the past couple years, but I believe we should change that. I think a method like the theater of the oppressed by Boal could start a conversation again with the Hong Kong government, and might be a healthier way of communicating this issue. Instead of occupying physical space in Hong Kong with barriers, I believe that holding a theatrical performance could look less aggressive, and would be more accessible to

Hong Kong's citizens. When the movement went on, some were afraid to go out or even help protest because of the fear that they would get in trouble with the police, or get affected from the tear gas that was in the area. By having the opportunity to do Boal's theater of the oppressed, I think it would invite strangers to have their input about the current government system. There are always protests that happen in Hong Kong, but it almost seems useless as it is the same every time, however, this change could spark new interest in the topic again, and maybe cause a revolution. It is always difficult to empathize with a group when they are either protesting, or the high-powered government. By having this artistic approach, it will allow Hong Kong, and China to see a different perspective of the protesters. I believe that having this performance will reintroduce the Umbrella Revolution into a new light that is respected by both China's government, and the conservatives in Hong Kong.

#### Bibliography:

- Associated Press. " Hong Kong Legislators Stage Yellow Umbrella Walkout | CBC News." *CBCnews* , CBC/Radio Canada, 7 Jan. 2015, [www.cbc.ca/news/world/hong-kong-legislators-stage-yellow-umbrella-walkout-1.2892123](http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/hong-kong-legislators-stage-yellow-umbrella-walkout-1.2892123).
- Iyengar, Rishi. " 6 Questions You Might Have About Hong Kong's Umbrella Revolution." *Time* , Time, 11 Oct. 2014, [time.com/3471366/hong-kong-umbrella-revolution-occupy-central-democracy-explainer-6-questions/](http://time.com/3471366/hong-kong-umbrella-revolution-occupy-central-democracy-explainer-6-questions/)).

- Kaiman, Jonathan. “ Hong Kong’s Umbrella Revolution – the Guardian Briefing.” *The Guardian* , Guardian News and Media, 30 Sept. 2014, [www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/30/-sp-hong-kong-umbrella-revolution-pro-democracy-protests](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/30/-sp-hong-kong-umbrella-revolution-pro-democracy-protests).
- Kitchen, Michael. “ Hong Kong’s ‘ Umbrella Revolution’ Carries Economic Threat.” *MarketWatch* , 30 Sept. 2014, [www.marketwatch.com/story/hong-kongs-umbrella-revolution-carries-economic-threat-2014-09-29](http://www.marketwatch.com/story/hong-kongs-umbrella-revolution-carries-economic-threat-2014-09-29).
- Lamar, Mia, and Chester Yung. “ Hong Kong Government, Protesters Set to Meet.” *The Wall Street Journal* , Dow Jones & Company, 18 Oct. 2014, [www.wsj.com/articles/hong-kong-protesters-reclaim-mongkok-district-1413609015](http://www.wsj.com/articles/hong-kong-protesters-reclaim-mongkok-district-1413609015).
- Press Release, Government. “ Lockdown Imposed to Ensure Public Safety.” *Lockdown Imposed to Ensure Public Safety* , 28 Sept. 2014, [www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201409/28/P201409281053.htm](http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201409/28/P201409281053.htm).
- SCMP. “ Full Text: Chinese State Council White Paper on ‘ One Country, Two Systems’ Policy in Hong Kong.” *South China Morning Post* , 10 June 2014, [www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1529167/full-text-practice-one-country-two-systems-policy-hong-kong-special](http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1529167/full-text-practice-one-country-two-systems-policy-hong-kong-special).
- Sevastopulo, Demetri. “ Civil Disobedience Movement Kicks off in Hong Kong.” *CNBC* , CNBC, 27 Sept. 2014, [www.cnb.com/2014/09/27/hong-kong-protests.html#](http://www.cnb.com/2014/09/27/hong-kong-protests.html#).
- United Nations Development Program. “ Human Development Report 2015.” *Work for Human Development* , 2015, Human Development Report 2015.



- Volsky, Igor. “ Everything You Need To Know About Hong Kong’s Umbrella Revolution.” *ThinkProgress* , thinkprogress. org/everything-you-need-to-know-about-hong-kongs-umbrella-revolution-4caf300296c8/.
- Wong, Michael Forsythe and Alan. “ Police Move on Barricades; Hong Kong Leader Rejects Protesters’ Appeal.” *The New York Times* , The New York Times, 19 Jan. 2018, www. nytimes. com/2014/10/13/world/asia/hong-kong-protesters-appeal-to-xi-jinping-in-open-letter. html? \_r= 0.