

RGC Ref. No.: UGC/FDS16/H04/14 <hr/> (please insert ref. above)
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**RESEARCH GRANTS COUNCIL  
COMPETITIVE RESEARCH FUNDING SCHEMES FOR  
THE LOCAL SELF-FINANCING DEGREE SECTOR**

**FACULTY DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (FDS)**

**Completion Report**  
(for completed projects only)

<p><b><u>Submission Deadlines:</u></b> 1. The unspent balance, if applicable, and auditor's report: within <b>six</b> months of the approved project completion date. 2. Completion report: within <b>twelve</b> months of the approved project completion date.</p>
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**Part A: The Project and Investigator(s)**

**1. Project Title**

The Dynamics of Activism in Postcolonial Hong Kong: An Interactive Approach

**2. Investigator(s) and Academic Department/Units Involved**

Research Team	Name / Post	Unit / Department / Institution	Contact Information
Principal Investigator	CHENG Wai /Lecturer	School of Arts and Social Sciences, Open University of Hong Kong	<a href="mailto:ewcheng@ouhk.edu.hk">ewcheng@ouhk.edu.hk</a> (By 31 Dec 2015) <a href="mailto:ewcheng@hkbu.edu.hk">ewcheng@hkbu.edu.hk</a> (From 1 Jan 2016)
Co-investigator(s)			
Others			

**3. Project Duration**

	Original	Revised	Date of RGC / Institution Approval ( must be quoted)
Project Start Date	1 October 2014	N.A.	N.A.
Project Completion Date	30 September 2016	31 December 2015	11 December 2015
Duration (in month)	24 months	15 months	11 December 2015
Deadline for Submission of Completion Report	30 September 2017	31 December 2016	11 December 2015



events. The data also enabled us to examine the strategies of claim making and mass mobilisation from the participants' point of view. In this regard, objectives 3 and 4 have also been achieved.

Third, the PI designed and led an onsite survey (n=1,681) in the occupied areas of Admiralty, Mongkok and Causeway Bay between 20 and 26 October 2014. Another onsite survey (n=600) was carried on 4 June 2015 at Victoria Park during the annual vigil. Fifteen trained volunteers were respectively deployed to randomly pick samples after walking a fixed number of steps in assigned route. These surveys gathered rich, rigorous and first-hand data to examine and contrast the repertoires and claims between a spontaneous occupation and an organised rally. Apart from achieving the five objectives aforementioned, these survey data are particularly useful to examine and analyse the transformative effects of spontaneous, decentred and participatory form of activism during democratic transition, i.e. objective 6.

In the course of this research study, the PI presented his findings in workshops and conferences locally and internationally. On 10 October 2014, the PI was invited to present a paper entitled "How Feedback Matters? The Diffusion of Activism in Post-colonial Hong Kong" at the Boundaries of Democracy Workshop organised by the French Centre for Research on Contemporary China and the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Hong Kong in Hong Kong. On 21 November 2014, the PI was invited to present a paper "The Umbrella Movement and its Impact on Hong Kong's Civil Society" at the Hong Kong's Social Transformation Workshop organised by the Institute of Sociology of the Academia Sinica in Taipei. On 24-27 June 2015, the PI presented a paper "Reinventing Civic Pride: Rationality and Utopianism in the Umbrella Movement" at the Association of Asian Studies-in-Asia Conference jointly organised by the Association of Asian Studies and the Academia Sinica in Taipei. These conference papers reported the preliminary findings and allowed the PI to discuss the research objectives with overseas and local academics. Taking into account of their comments, these conference papers were submitted in 2015 to three refereed journals for considerations of publication, all of which have been accepted by July 2016.

#### 5.4 Summary of objectives addressed to date

Objectives (as per 5.1/5.2 above)	Addressed (please tick)	Percentage achieved (please estimate)
1. To use an interactive approach to trace and analyse the repertoire of perpetual and transgressive contention in post-2006 Hong Kong;	√	100%
2. To systematically describe the changes in the scale, style, and language of contention between 1997 and 2005 and between 2006 and 2015;	√	100%
3. To assess any recurring combinations that account for the diffusion or escalation of a series of salient events, by which some claims are politicized and some local or isolated issues are evolved into popular events, whereas others are not;	√	100%
4. To examine the exchanges and interactions among different groups of contentious participants in terms of claim making and mass mobilization;	√	100%
5. To evaluate how feedback from previous events shapes the performance or framing of subsequent events; and	√	100%
6. To analyse the effects of spontaneous activism or participatory decision-making field on the course of democratic transition.	√	100%

## 6. Research Outcome

### 6.1 Major findings and research outcome

*(Maximum 1 page; please make reference to Part C where necessary)*

This research has produced new evidence on the diffusion of political activism in Hong Kong and has contributed to the theoretical debates concerning the determinants, dynamics and impacts of contentious politics in general. First, it reveals the relationships between Hong Kong's hybrid regime and its ordering of organised protests, proposing that both the establishment and opposition are conducive to the creation of a nascent movement society. Second, it traces the diffusion mechanisms through the critical events of 2003 through 2015. This time series analysis shows how grievances are collectively recognised and political opportunities are steadily explored in the course of regime reconfiguration and the public staging of activism from below. Third, it surveys why the regime adapted a hybridity of de-mobilization and counter-mobilization tactics leading to and unfolding from the Umbrella Movement in 2014. Fourth, it results in two onsite surveys (n=1681; n=600) at the occupied areas in 2014 and June 4 Rally in 2015 to collect the demographic and behavioural data of the protesters and to examine the structural and contingent causes of the unprecedented occupation and organised rally.

These findings have led to two sets of empirical and theoretical implications. On the one hand, this study assesses the relationships between regimes and repertoires. First, it reveals how high mobilisation capacity, lack of organisational sophistication, nonviolent repertoires have enabled a temporal cluster of protest events in recent years. This process tracing also explains why despite the expansion of protest spaces, certain configurations of the hybrid regime have continued to draw the boundaries of contention and to neutralise the ruptures created by the new and young activists. Second, while regimes structure repertoires, the relationships between regime openness and protest scale are non-linear. At the peak of the protest cycle, increased regime control and reduced opportunities often failed to demobilise collective action but provoke its radicalization. Direct actions, participatory practices and decentred protest structure tend to empower citizens rather than divide them. Third, this research reveals that hybrid regimes adapt multiple strategies to protesters' reactions rather than adhering to a single response. Toleration, other than ignoring protests, actually entails proactive tactics that we call "attrition". This new conceptual distinction captures regime adaptiveness in counteracting protests and broadens the typology of regime protest responses. In this light, enduring instability without democratisation seems to be an increasingly common trend in hybrid regimes encountering mass protests.

On the other hand, this study evaluates the intertwined relationships between political opportunities structure and transformative events. First, it revisits the concept of spontaneity in the study of social movements through a case study of Hong Kong's Occupy Protests in 2014. Without a strong leadership, this spontaneous and massive occupation was unexpectedly resilient. Second, the PI examines two contingent events that generated pre-emptive mobilisation, emotional shock and backlash. Spontaneity is thus indispensable for capturing protest dynamics under conditions of highly connected protest spaces, the widespread use of social media and a non-hierarchical protest structure. Third, it analyses the spatial, temporal and emotional contexts in forgoing solidarities and identities among protestors. We thus argue that transformative events are both products and producers of political opportunities.

As far as the research outputs are concerned, they have far exceeded those stated in the funding proposal. A single-authored article entitled "Street Politics in a Hybrid Regime: The Diffusion of Political Activism in Postcolonial Hong Kong" has been published in *The China Quarterly*, the premier journal in China studies. Another co-authored article "Explaining Spontaneous Occupation: Antecedents, Contingencies and Spaces in the Umbrella Movement" has been published in *Social Movement Studies*, one of the two leading speciality journals in social movement studies. The third co-authored article "Neither Repression nor Concession? A Regime's Attrition against Massive Protests" has been accepted by *Political Studies*, a leading disciplinary journal in political science and the official journal of the Political Studies Association. These journals are indexed in SSCI and have a high impact factor.

## 6.2 Potential for further development of the research and the proposed course of action (Maximum half a page)

Two potential research projects have emerged from this study. One of them concerns similar subject matters related to social movement outcomes and political polarisation. The other deals with social/political trust and its institutional foundation. Concerning the first project, the PI and his research assistants have collected the contacts of social activists and ordinary protestors who participated in the Umbrella Movement and the annual rallies and vigils. We will trace and monitor their political activism to examine in what ways would their involvement in a transformative event change their future individual orientations and political participation. We will also seek new funding to conduct intensive focus groups with these protestors and to conduct control studies with the population who did not participate in the occupation.

Concerning the second project, the PI and his colleagues from the Chinese University of Hong Kong and Hong Kong Polytechnic University have received in July 2016 a General Research Fund from the Research Grants Council and a Public Policy Research Fund from the Central Policy Unit, respectively, for an amount of HKD 2 million to conduct a research project on social and political trust through World Values Survey. In light of the widening socio-political polarisation following the 2014 Occupy Movement, this project situates the issue of trust in Hong Kong via the WVS – the world’s largest cross-national and time-series investigator of human beliefs and values. It will also produce longitudinal data and practical insights to policymakers to assess the extent of social polarisation and cohesion as well as to formulate policies for trust building and repairing.

## 7. Layman’s Summary

(Describe in layman’s language the nature, significance and value of the research project, in no more than 200 words)

This study examines the diffusion of political activism in post-handover Hong Kong. First, it uncovers the institutional foundations that created a nascent movement society. Using in-depth interviews and large-scale onsite surveys, it examines how critical events and contingencies have rallied new protest actors and expanded the protest space leading to the Occupy Movement in 2014. This finding indicates that critical events are both products and producers of political opportunities.

Moreover, this study analyses the interplay between regimes and repertoires. It reveals that mobilisation is not only exclusive to dissents, regimes also demobilise and counter-mobilize in the face of challenges. It suggests that other than ignoring protests, hybrid regimes apply multiple strategies to protesters’ reactions. This conceptual distinction of attrition captures regime adaptiveness in counteracting protests and broadens the typology of regime protest responses.

More importantly, this study produces rich empirical data and practical insights for policymakers to capture the changes in the scale, claims and repertoires of contention in Hong Kong. It also situates bottom-up activism in the theoretical debates concerning the evolving pattern of protests against resilient authoritarianism in the course of global democratic recession and the intertwined relationships between political opportunities structure and contingency in social movement studies.

**Part C: Research Output****8. Peer-reviewed journal publication(s) arising directly from this research project**

(Please attach a copy of the publication and/or the letter of acceptance if not yet submitted in the previous progress report(s). All listed publications must acknowledge RGC's funding support by quoting the specific grant reference.)

The Latest Status of Publications				Author(s) (denote the corresponding author with an asterisk*)	Title and Journal/Book (with the volume, pages and other necessary publishing details specified)	Submitted to RGC (indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)	Attached to this report (Yes or No)	Acknowledged the support of RGC (Yes or No)	Accessible from the institutional repository (Yes or No)
Year of publication	Year of Acceptance (For paper accepted but not yet published)	Under Review	Under Preparation (optional)						
2016				CHENG, Edmund W.*	“Street politics in a hybrid regime: The diffusion of political activism in post-colonial Hong Kong.” <i>The China Quarterly</i> 226, 383-406.	2016	Yes	Yes	Yes
	2016			CHENG, Edmund W.* and CHAN, Wai-Yin	“Explaining spontaneous occupation: antecedents, contingencies and spaces in the Umbrella Movement.” <i>Social Movement Studies</i>	2016	Yes	Yes	Yes
	2016			CHENG, Edmund W. and YUEN, Samson*	“Neither repression nor concession? A regime’s attrition against massive protests.” <i>Political Studies</i> .	2016	Yes	Yes	Yes

**9. Recognized international conference(s) in which paper(s) related to this research project was / were delivered** (*Please attach a copy of each conference abstract*)

Month / Year / Place	Title	Conference Name	Submitted to RGC ( <i>indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report</i> )	Attached to this report ( <i>Yes or No</i> )	Acknowledged the support of RGC ( <i>Yes or No</i> )	Accessible from the institutional repository ( <i>Yes or No</i> )
Oct 2014/ University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong	How Feedback Matters? The Diffusion of Activism in Postcolonial Hong Kong	Workshop on the Boundaries of Democracy	2016	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nov 2014/ Academia Sinica, Taipei	The Umbrella Movement and its Impact on Hong Kong's Civil Society	Workshop on Hong Kong's Social Transformation	2016	Yes	Yes	Yes
Jun 2015/ Academia Sinica, Taipei	Reinventing Civic Pride: Rationality and Utopianism in the Umbrella Movement	The Second Association-in-Asi a Conference	2016	Yes	Yes	Yes

**10. Whether research experience and new knowledge has transferred /contributed to teaching and learning** (*Please elaborate.*)

The PI has integrated the research findings and outputs from this project with his courses on comparative politics, Hong Kong politics and social movements. In addition, a total of 15 undergraduate students were trained participated in the two onsite surveys aforementioned, which allowed them to apply their methodological skills learnt in class and to experience the challenges in the context of real-world research.

**11. Student(s) trained** (*Please attach a copy of the title page of the thesis*)

N.A.

Name	Degree registered for	Date of registration	Date of thesis submission / graduation

**12. Other impact**

(e.g. award of patents or prizes, collaboration with other research institutions, technology transfer, teaching enhancement, etc.)

A number of research collaborations have emerged from this project. First, the PI is co-editing two books on the trajectory of Hong Kong's political activism and the dynamics of the Umbrella Movement, which are respectively under review in the Chinese University Press and Amsterdam University Press. Second, he has been invited to contribute two book chapters on Hong Kong politics and contentious politics. The proposals of these book projects have been accepted by Stanford University Press and Routledge.

**13. Public access of completion report**

*(Please specify the information, if any, that cannot be provided for public access and give the reasons.)*

N.A.

Information that cannot be provided for public access	Reasons

Note: Principal Investigators of projects approved in 2010/2011 onwards are required to release the completion reports to the public through the RGC website. Completion reports containing information such as abstracts in non-technical terms, objectives, research output including the list of conference papers / publications / journals and research findings and contact information of PIs should be open to public access.