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Francis L. F. Lee and Joseph M. Chan. *Media, Social Mobilization, and Mass Protests in Post-Colonial Hong Kong: The Power of a Critical Event*. New York: Routledge. 2011.

In their book *Media, Social Mobilization, and Mass Protests in Post-Colonial Hong Kong*, Francis L. F. Lee and Joseph M. Chan seek to understand the emergence and development of a series of large-scale protests that have formed the core of the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong since 2003. The book focuses on the social and organizational bases of the protest movement, the roles of media and public discourses in the protests' formation and mobilization, and the perceptions of the protest participants of both their own actions and the political environment.

The authors deem the July 1, 2003 protest¹ to have been a watershed event in Hong Kong's political development. The protest was understood to be a collective action to oppose the then impending national security legislation at a time when the Hong Kong government seemed to be determined to get the law passed despite public controversies. To the surprise of both the organizers and the Hong Kong government, about 500,000 people turned up for the protest, in response to which, the Hong Kong government indefinitely tabled the legislation in question. The magnitude of the rally came as a shock given the widely perceived political apathy of Hong Kong citizens. Although at the time of organization, the protest was aimed at thwarting the implementation of unpopular legislation (and not necessarily intended to serve as a call to democratization), it was retrospectively linked to the development of democracy.

In their attempt to explain why the pro-democracy movement emerged in Hong Kong at a specific historical juncture, the authors rightly do not limit themselves to a specific theory of social movement emergence to identify the causes. In this way, they are able to account for the development of the movement in terms of the interplay among different factors and actors. Central to the theoretical orientation of the book are the concepts of "critical events" and "ritualistic protests." Following Staffenborg (1991),² the authors explain a "redefining critical event" as any "contextually dramatic happening that leads to important shifts in public and elite perceptions of reality" (p. 9). The 2003 protest is a redefining critical event because its unexpected massive scale changed the Beijing government's perceptions of Hong Kong's political climate, the local public's perception of the power of collective action in bringing about political change, and the political elite's perceptions of the need to be answerable to public opinion. Related to critical events is the concept of "energized public opinion," put forward by the authors to explain how common people who are not active in public affairs in their everyday lives may nonetheless engage in collective action when impelled to do so. In turn, when a political opinion is "energized" and expressed in different levels of emotional energy by the public, political entities are compelled to respond in various ways: "They may attempt to de-energize public opinion, appropriate [it] as resources, further energize [it], or direct [it] into

¹ On this date, 500,000 people marched to protest the rush to legislate the Chinese-backed Hong Kong Basic Law Article 23, which stipulated that the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region would enact laws to "protect national security" by "[prohibiting] any act of treason, secession, sedition, or subversion" against the Central People's Government—the chief administrative authority of the People's Republic of China, to which sovereignty over Hong Kong had been transferred from the British in 1997. Protest over Article 23 had to do with stipulations within it that (1) any branch of an organization that was part of an organization banned by the central government of the PRC could also be banned in Hong Kong, (2) any speech deemed as instigative could be regarded as illegal and grounds for imprisonment, and (3) police would be allowed to enter residential buildings without court warrants.

² Staffenborg, Suzanne (1991). "Critical events and the mobilization of the pro-choice movement." *Research in Political Sociology*, 6, 319-345.

new directions” (p. 11). The concept of “energized public opinion” is a useful tool in analyzing the involvement of the general public who may otherwise not participate in politics.

Another key concept employed in theoretical analysis is that of ritualistic protests. The authors suggest that both the protest events and people’s participation in them become “ritualistic,” meaning that the collective actions themselves come to be perceived as relatively “regularized” (i.e. continuing in a steady form) and that such actions are often repeated or re-performed, irrespective of contextual changes. On the one hand, the ritualized nature of the performance may weaken the protest message. On the other hand, routinized ritualistic protests provide a stable platform for long-term collective actions to sustain an oppositional cause. This notion of ritualistic protests represents a departure from the more common concept of a “protest cycle” (Tarrow 1989),³ which suggests that patterns of behaviors (including protests) simply rise and fall. The concept of ritualistic protests is also helpful in highlighting the unique annual, recurrent characteristic of the protests.

Based on these two concepts of critical event and ritualistic protests, the book is divided into two main parts. Part I discusses the July 1, 2003 protest as a critical event. It first gives an account of the socioeconomic and political contexts that contributed to the protest. It then analyzes the “self-mobilization processes” of participants in the absence of strong movement organizations, and the way the processes were facilitated by the flow of information through the mass and new media. The last two chapters of Part I, chapters 4 and 5, examine post-protest media discourses. Chapter 4 traces how discourses in mainstream newspapers converged to construct a peaceful and rational representation of the protest, portraying the people of Hong Kong as being of high civic quality. This media portrayal helped to legitimize protests in the mind of the public as a peaceful and orderly channel for the demonstration of public opinion. Chapter 5 discusses the discursive constructions of new vocabularies pertaining to the historic 2003 protest, articulated as the “July 1 effect.” For instance, the “July 1 effect” was widely adopted to explain the loss of the major pro-China party in Hong Kong in the 2003 District Council election, although it was not clear what the term exactly meant.

Part II turns to investigate how collective actions became ritualistic. It begins with an analysis of the contextual changes in the city’s socioeconomic conditions and the strategic responses from different political actors regarding those changes. This chapter rejects a simplistic explanation of the de-energizing of public opinion as a result of an improving economy after 2003. Instead, it carefully analyzes the strategic responses of the Chinese and Hong Kong governments, which include further intervention from China in Hong Kong affairs, the closing off of political opportunities for democratization in Hong Kong, and the subsequent “normalizing” of pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong, which might have the undesired effect of desensitizing many political actors to both the protests themselves and the messages of the protestors. The Chinese authorities normalized the protests by recognizing them as nothing more than a normal feature of the politics of public opinion in Hong Kong, and by appropriating them as a sign of Hong Kong’s “high degree of autonomy.” The authors convincingly argue that all these developments undermined the efficacy of the protests. Added to this was the government’s changing approach to democratization by directing public attention from an ideological discussion of democratization to a less meaningful debate over the technicalities of a gradual democratization. The increased political pressure on the media scene additionally weakened voices that were critical of the government. The subsequent

³ Tarrow, Sidney (1989). *Democracy and Disorder: Protest and Politics in Italy, 1965-1975*. New York: Oxford University Press.

chapter discusses the constraints of the pro-democracy movement, including a lack of resources, the absence of formal organizational structure, and other internal conflicts. Given such conditions, it is puzzling why the protests continued for years on a massive scale. Chapter 8 depicts how participation in protests was indeed sustained by individuals' past participation, interpersonal communications with other protesters, and the development of politically supportive social networks, all despite weak movement organizations and the weakening role of the media in mobilizing protest participation. Chapter 9 discusses the subjective meanings made by participants that contributed to their continual engagement. The subsequent chapter turns to explore how the July 1 protest can be linked to the annual June 4 commemoration rally,⁴ which has a much longer history, by examining the symbolic power of June 4 in awakening participants' political awareness, and the way June 4 provided a model of collective action. The concluding chapter provides a helpful discussion of the implications of research findings on the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong.

In essence, this book traces how a single protest led to a series of protests to form the core of the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong. The authors argue that the 2003 protest sparked new political dynamics between the political elites, the media, movement activists, and general public. Although these conclusions are significant, the text would benefit from further analysis of the internal organization and conflicts of the main organizing body of the protests, on which the book only lightly touches. This is important not only because the organizing body was, in fact, composed of a wide array of political actors who did not necessarily share common political beliefs but also because the protests entailed the negotiation and contestation of the definition of democracy.

The pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong is still in the making. Thus, this book provides a timely account of the formation and development of Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement that helps us to understand its current stage of development. It should be noted that the present pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong seems to be taking a new direction, or at least an additional direction, from one of peaceful and rational rallying to one of a more confrontational and potentially illegal nature that includes the occupation of city centers. (A group of academics, intellectuals, and social elites initiated the Occupy Central campaign to take over Central, the economic and financial center of Hong Kong, in July 2014, with a goal to pressure the Chinese state to make good on its long standing promise for universal suffrage in the 2017 Hong Kong Chief Executive election.) This occupy movement is fundamentally different from an annual rally in both organization and nature. It would be highly informative for future research to link the occupy movement to the evolving of the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong discussed in this book. In short, this book sheds light on the political culture of Hong Kong in its struggle for democracy and makes a significant contribution to the literature of media politics and social movements. What is particularly valuable is the rich longitudinal data collected from 2003 to 2008 through population and protest onsite surveys, media content analysis, and in-depth interviews with activists, politicians, and protestors. Scholars of social movements will find this book both inspiring and informative.

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⁴ The annual June 4 rally commemorates the 1989 Tiananmen Square movement, which was suppressed by Chinese authorities.