

## ***Contentious Politics and its Repercussions in Asia***

### ***The Sharp End of Contentious Politics in China.***

#### ***Introduction***

Contentious politics is the use of disruptive techniques to make a political point or to change government policy. Examples of such techniques are actions that disturb the normal activities of society such as demonstrations, general strike action, riot, terrorism, civil disobedience, and even revolution or insurrection. Social movements often engage in contentious politics. The concept distinguishes these forms of contention from the everyday acts of resistance explored by James C. Scott, interstate warfare, and forms of contention employed entirely within institutional settings, such as elections or sports. Historical sociologist Charles Tilly defines contentious

politics as "interactions in which actors make claims bearing on someone else's interest, in which governments appear either as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties."(Tilly 2001)

Contentious politics has existed forever, but its form varies over time and space. For example, Tilly argues that the nature of contentious politics changed dramatically with the birth of social movements in 18th-century Europe.

The concept of contentious politics was developed throughout the 1990s and into the 21st century by its most prominent scholars in the United States: Sidney Tarrow, Charles Tilly, and Doug McAdam. Until its development, the study of contentious politics was divided among several traditions each of which were concerned with the description and explanation of different contentious political phenomena, especially the social movement, the strike, and revolution. One of the primary goals of these three authors was to advance the explanation of these phenomena and other contentious politics under a single research agenda [Tarrow et al. 2001]. There remains a significant plurality of agendas in addition to the one these three propose.

Contentious and disruptive political tactics may overlap with movements for social justice (Cai 2008). For example, the political theorist Clarissa Rile Hayward has argued that theories, in particular, that of Iris Marion Young, that situate the responsibility to correct large-scale injustices like institutional racism with the groups that benefit from oppressive institutions

overlook the fact that people will rarely challenge institutions that benefit them (Hayward 2010). She argues that in certain cases contentious politics are the only practical resolution.

Decades ago, political scientists often viewed such activity as a dangerous threat to political order (Huntington 1968). Protests are the most generic form of contentious politics by far, and regime-threatening violence was the aim to undermine the legitimacy of the CPC and project it as a draconian regime that suppresses freedom of expression. The protests strategy of sustained pressure was aimed at inducing political change and project CPC regime as an authoritarian dictatorship. Participants in protests sometimes commit an act of aggression and violence towards fellow citizens, disrupt public order and vandalise public properties. What drives these participants to throw a rock and commit acts that are perceived as illegal? The engagement of ordinary citizens in contentious politics raises the question of why they chose to participate and what are their reasons. It is usually politically motivated by foreign powers that endeavour to disrupt a country's economy and ultimately end-in a regime change. Exploiting the response of the regime through protests can determine whether the protests will continue or not.

Globalisation and the advent of internet-based communications and social media were highly visible in the umbrella movement. To enhance smooth information sharing, Hong Kongers have solely relied on messaging apps like Telegram and a live map that helps protesters instantly notice the location of the police. From street blockades to air traffic disruptions, Hong Kongers'

tactics have become "textbook examples" for protesters in other countries and was copied in the recent civil rights movements "Black Lives Matter" in the United States of America. Also, protesters in India and Indonesia reportedly learned lessons from Hong Kong demonstrators. In Hong Kong, anti-government protests have captured the world's attention. "Equipped with modern communication technologies, the demonstrators have focused their anger on the Hong Kong government, police and symbols of Beijing's rule"(Yang 2019).

The theme of this paper coincided with several contentious and disruptive politically motivated movements in Beirut, Minsk and most importantly Hong Kong Umbrella Movement.

To empirically assess contentious politics, the research proposal is limited to using the case study of Hong Kong and unravelling the repercussion of such movements on Asia. The research proposal raises the question and endeavours to answer; What is the underlying reason for the mobilisation of contentious movements in Hong Kong and its impact on China? I argue that the umbrella movement was aimed at creating a domino effect that would allow countries under the administration of the Communist Party of China (CPC) to gain political democracy and freedom, in turn, it would create a secessionist movement that will leave China vulnerable.

The concept of contentious politics coupled with soft power complement and highlight the underlying reasons behind the umbrella movement's demand for democracy projected by the United States propagation of soft power.

An emblem year for political protest occurred in 2019; the "umbrella movement" to protest against Communist party extradition law in Hong Kong, citizens everywhere seemed to mass in the streets demanding change and freedom. Although this protest was not successful, they gave new impetus to a long-standing area of interest in comparative politics, what most scholars refer to as "contentious politics." Contentious politics is a political activity that is at least in part beyond institutional bounds. Groups are formed to demand change; they may work through gathering vanguards who share their views, but in the case of umbrella movement was university students whose cries for freedom resonated all over the world garnering monumental support from the United Kingdom and the United States. The hallmark of contentious politics is extra-institutional activity: protests, riots, and violence.

Autocratic states may encounter grave uncertainties when dealing with popular resistance movements due to the unpredictable outcomes of making concessions or repressing opposition. However, a political system with multiple levels of authority can help reduce the uncertainties by granting conditional autonomy like in the case of Hong Kong. It is a special administrative region. Such a power structure prevents excessive repression and unconditional concessions when the priorities of diverse levels of authority do not match. Under this arrangement, if the administration of Hong Kong failed to take appropriate actions to quell the movement, then it can ask for the involvement of the central government. The umbrella movement revealed which factions within Hong Kong that supported and financed the protestors, allowing the Chinese

Central government to take appropriate actions against them. I attest that the Chinese are especially influenced by two major events the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the Arab-Spring. These two events have shaped the Chinese government mindset in handling the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement.

For example; the colour revolutions first affected Russia. The Chinese took notice but didn't react as strongly but the Arab spring seems to have had an effect consequently leading to chaos and civil war a notable example Syria and Libya. The Chinese seek stability, not chaos and US involvement rose suspicions.

Libya has turned out to be a war-torn country filled with separatist movements vying for power after US involvement, presumably this involvement aims at preserving influence. Using the case of China, this proposal proved that the communist party of China withstood the test of the protests and maintained its regime while successfully quelling the secession movement by introducing the national security law.

The contentious movement in Hong Kong aimed at undermining China's sovereignty. Beijing stands as a successful model of a rising economic communist superpower and despite numerous attempts to decouple China and create trouble for communist China. Beijing continues to become an indispensable nation to the world despite Western cries to isolate China for its human rights violations and suppression of freedom of speech. The nature of China's transition from an

intermediate regional actor to global force is already disrupting the existing system. (Ibid.19699). It is crucial to note that China's development is peaceful and cooperatively supported by the communist party. Evoking the national security strategy creates room for manoeuvring the pro-democracy party in Hong Kong while upholding the one country-two systems under the supervision of the communist party.

The world watched expectantly how China would deal with the umbrella movement in Hong Kong, the CPC strategic rationale and patience was evident in its resolve to bring the secessionist movement under control while showing determination never to compromise. The three evils of separatism, subversion, terrorism, and collusion with foreign countries were given greater attention in the national security law that ensures the sovereignty, territorial integrity and reflects the national core interests of China. The party-state upheld social stability amid copious instances of social unrest. Separatist groups seek to split from their nation-state and establish a democratic liberal government; assertive nationalism of the Chinese government exhibited strong resolve and determination to crush separatism and uphold the one country, two system model of governance.

### **Conclusion**

Serious repercussions of contentious movements calling for separatism in Asia can lead to separatism in India, Myanmar, Bhutan, Thailand, Bangladesh, and Azerbaijan. Beijing's failure to

maintain one country, two systems would ensue considerable damage to China's image and have extremely negative consequences for handling secession movements in Lhasa and Xinjian (Tian 2006 P: 2). Ethnic Chinese dilemmas are likely to worsen because they will also endorse secessionist forces, as in Lhasa and Ürümqi (Ross 2002 P: 55). Henceforth, a democratically sovereign Hong Kong could cause a significant divide in the mainland's territorial integrity and sovereignty. The basic political priorities of China are political stability, regime stability and territorial integrity (Ekman 2012).

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