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The Umbrella Movement: the Bigger Picture Behind and its Broader Imaginations
Chow Pok-yin Adrian

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The Parallel Universe

“These protests – which are actually week-long marathons of intense education on global politics, late-night strategy sessions in six-way simultaneous translation, festivals of music and street theatre – are like stepping into a parallel universe. Overnight, the site is transformed into a kind of alternative global city where urgency replaces resignation, corporate logos need armed guards, people usurp cars, art is everywhere, strangers talk to each other, and the prospect of a radical change in political course does not
seem like an odd and anachronistic idea but the most logical thought in the world.”¹

These almost describe what went on in any of the Admiralty, Mongkok or Causeway Bay occupation sites during the “Umbrella Movement” (“the Movement”), only they were Naomi Klein’s recollections of her encountering while participating in counter-globalization summit protests around 2000². Her experience bears such stunning resemblance with mine in the 79-day Movement where parallel universes were found everywhere: business going on as usual in the numerous jewelry shops along Nathan Road while students / citizens were occupying the vehicle lanes outside, people circling around a piece of white cloth on which documentary films were shown in front of the HSBC Mongkok branch while 2 groups of middle-age people argued fiercely over the Movement about 10 meters away at the intersection of Nathan Road and Argyle Street, several anti-Movement people swearing and cursing the protestors while the latter sang birthday songs to the them, just to name a few examples. Of course countless seminars and forums about the democratic movement of Hong Kong (HK) were held during the Movement in which speakers brought their academic insights to the crowds while the audience, mostly strangers to each other, would take turn responding and sharing views at the end. I personally have attended and hosted a 3-night successive forums in the Mongkok site with different political groups discussing what they would do when the police and bailiffs enforce the injunctions against the Mongkok occupation³. Strategic meetings were also held almost every night among the student leaders (HKFS⁴ and Scholarism) and among the “frontier guards”⁵ (one of which I attended by mid-November sharing my thoughts about the Movement’s next step). Such other acts of the protestors as free

² Ibid, p.XXIV.
⁴ The Hong Kong Federation of Students.
⁵ They are volunteers stationing at the frontier of the occupation sites protecting the protestors from invasion by anti-Movement people.
sharing of supplies (food, beverages, tents, mats, books, masks, goggles, umbrella, raincoat, construction material (for building staircases and barricades) etc), and students volunteering to keep tidy the occupation sites as well as recycling garbage were found and captured by international media. All in all, these are scenes not usually found in HK. Parallel universes existed within the 3 occupation sites, and the occupation sites themselves existed just like a parallel universe alongside the highly capitalist society of HK.

The name “Umbrella Revolution” was coined by foreign media for the Movement, meaning the one that burst out roughly between the period of 26 September and 15 December 2014. It is commonly agreed that the immediate cause of the Movement was the “831 Decision” of the National People Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC) made on 31 August 2014, one that imposed various restrictions on the 2017 Chief Executive (CE) election, with important implications on, inter alia:

1. The number of members, composition and formation method of the nominating committee (1200 people elected from the very narrow based “4 constituencies” in accordance with that of the Election Committee for the Fourth CE);

2. The number of candidates allowed to run for the CE election (2 to 3 candidates);

3. The threshold of a candidate becoming a nominee at the initial voting of the nomination committee so that he/she is available for election at the “universal suffrage” (each candidate must have the endorsement of more than 50% of the committee members),

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7 There were student strikes starting on 22 September 2014 right before the series of events that triggered off the “official commencement” of the Movement, and there are still protestors residing in camp tents outside of the Government HQ at Tim Mei Road as of the date of this paper’s writing.
8 Full text of the “831 Decision” at: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-08/31/c_133609238.htm
rendering the CE general election a counterfeit, with candidates pre-selected for voters’ voting. Against this, students organized school strike from 22 to 26 September. At the last night of the strike, students stormed into the “Civic Square” arguing that citizens should have the right to reclaim the use of that space which had been unreasonably fenced off by the government in the summer. As the police besieged and arrested the occupying students, dispersed the supporting crowd outside of the Square by using pepper spray and long shield, and blocked the Square and its surrounding areas on 27 September trying to prevent people from entering those spaces, tens of thousands of people marched to the Admiralty area (where the HQ is situated) on 28 September voicing their fury. Somehow the mass poured into the vehicle lanes of Harcourt Road blocking both eastbound and westbound traffic. Police then deployed the usual pepper spray, what they later reported to be 87 cans of tear gas, and riot squad arming with AR15 and Remington shotguns (carrying probably rubber bullets) to try dispersing the crowd. Defending with umbrella and bravery, the mass survived the police crackdown and started to station at the Admiralty area, which became the first occupation site. Some people who ran away from the earlier police violence scattered to Causeway Bay and Mongkok, where they occupied the roadways and camped up the second and third occupation sites. The Movement then lasted for the next 79 days.

Details about what followed are spared here. In short, all that the people have been craving for during the Movement were “we want genuine universal suffrage (我要真普選)” and “self-determined destiny (命運自主)”. But why is “genuine” democracy so important to HK people? What is it that makes HK people feel their own destinies going out of hands? Truly, the 831 Decision is a blatant deviation from the promise of “General Election” under the Basic Law, and China (PRC) has definitely been exerting more and more influence over HK’s affairs since the 1997 handover. However, the miseries suffered by

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9 This is the circular driveway in front of the Government HQ where peaceful assemblies had been organized in previous occasions, such as the movement against “National Education” in 2012.
HK people in recent years may in fact have their roots in a larger and on going process, the process of globalization. What we really want to is to end those miseries, and the “genuine” democracy that we fought so hard in the Movement is just a system which guarantees accountability to guard against further miseries, a means to an end. What we really want is the ability to decide for ourselves, to choose among alternatives, not just among alternatives of CE candidates, but also alternative lifestyles. In this paper I shall try placing the Movement in the context of globalization and identifying what obstacles the Movement is really facing. Case references from Greece, Mexico and India will be provided to suggest what alternatives are imaginable and open to HK people under the present political economic circumstances.

**Les Misérables**

If you casually ask from what miseries HK people are suffering lately, anyone in the street may probably give you similar answers like:

1. the ever widening gap between the rich and the poor (the Gini Coefficient of HK as of 2011 is already 0.537, ranking 12 in the world just behind the likes of Brazil, Chile Colombia, Guatemala etc\(^\text{10}\));
2. the inability for any ordinary working or even middle class person to afford real properties (some studies shows that it takes 14 years for a working couple to save the down payment for a 40 sq meter flat)\(^\text{11}\);
3. social immobility caused largely by the lack of labor bargaining power under HK’s “industrial oligopoly” of financial / real estate speculation and tourism;
4. deteriorating living standard and increasing working hours;
5. lifestyle and public spaces being “invaded” by PRC tourists and parallel traders;

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6. social facilities catering overwhelmingly for PRC tourists than for local residents (like the displacement of local shops by cosmetic chain-stores);

7. growingly severe and blatant government corruption\(^\text{12}\);

8. decaying freedom of press and expression\(^\text{13}\);

9. stagnation of democratic development (as evidenced by the 831 Decision and the outburst of the Movement); and

10. the mounting sense of personal insecurity as a result of police’s abuse of power and their lack of accountability exposed during the Movement.

Basically it is inequality, injustice and local interest being eroded that irritate HK people. In fact, the concentration of wealth in HK worsened during the last 10 years: average annual economic growth has been 4.5% during the period, accumulating to about a 50% increment. Yet the median monthly wage decreased from HK$12,380 in 2001 to HK$12,000 in 2011, meaning a 2.9% decrement in a decade. More pathetically, that of youngsters aged between 15 and 24 remains at HK$8,000 from 2001 to 2011, while the CPI for the same period rose by 12%\(^\text{14}\). As for local interest, more and more protests directing at PRC tourists and parallel traders took place in recent years, with the ones occurring on 2 consecutive Sundays of February 2015 in Tuen Mun and Shatin respectively becoming more confrontational and violent (but mainly police violence when they deployed baton and pepper spray inside shopping malls to disperse protesters!!)\(^\text{15}\).

\(^{12}\) Cases include the conflict of interest of Paul Chan, the Secretary of Development Bureau over plots of farmland he owned which are at the same time within the areas of development under the “Northeast New Territories Development Projects”, the non-declaration of benefits received by the current CE C.Y. Leung of approximately HK$37 million from an Australian firm UGL, the corruption charge by ICAC of the former ICAC chief Timothy Tong, etc.

\(^{13}\) Like the chief editor of Mingpao was suddenly replaced by a pro-establishment a Malaysian press person in early 2014, the stabbing of that ex-chief editor Lau Chun-to in late February 2014, the various alleged cases that the government exerted influence on banks and real estate developers asking them to refrain from advertising in Apple Daily (the almost only media which criticizes the government) etc.


For Hui, however, he believes that these miseries and the resultant rise of “localism” in HK should be understood not just as identity politics basing on cultural and ethnical conflicts, but also as class conflict, being the result of the worsening polarization of global wealth and resources distribution during the last 30 years propelled by neo-liberalistic ideology and social policies. Neo-liberalism, being what David Harvey described as a process of the rich’s reclamation of their economic loss in the Keynesian and social democratic 70’s, rapidly spread during the past 30 years widening the gap of the rich and poor worldwide. Through such policies of the British and US governments in the 80s as enshrining the “market”, privatization, deregulation, tax break for multinational corporations, suppression of labor union, and cutting government’s public and welfare spending, social inequality has been aggravated to the pre-1929 crisis level. Extreme concentration of wealth in the hands of a few enhances their consumption power, political influence as well as cultural dominance, so that social policies, rural urban constructions, political systems, economic structure and daily practices have been more and more tailored to meet their needs, wishes and desires. Meanwhile, neo-liberalism rhetoric got heavily publicized via repeated and large scale utterance of the universities, think tanks and media, becoming the social hegemony that even left-wing communities have to adopt in their own discourses.

HK, being a British colony before 1997, could hardly escape the influence of neo-liberalism. Without the check of democracy, unjust system of wealth distribution breed with particular ease. In other words, one cannot help suspecting that the various miseries and social conflicts faced by HK had their roots in this project of neo-liberalistic “vengeance”, and social movements stressing “local interest” have in fact been catalyzed by the severe polarization of world’s wealth and the worsening erosion of local resources, culture and history by finance and property capitalism.

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18 Ibid, p. 2.
On the part of the establishment, they particularly welcome the people’s focus being shifted from class conflicts to ethnic conflicts. Facing with the southbound invasion of huge capital and political interference from PRC, working to middle class people who have already been adversely affected by the polarized distribution of wealth, time, space and knowledge resources, get hit head on. Street stalls being turned into chain shopping malls, public housing to private property estates, public transportation being almost monopolized by MTR and high-speed railroads, and privatization of health services are just a few examples of the majority’s choices and alternatives over lifestyle being pinched. However, to evade dealing with the fundamental problems, government officials and pro-establishment politicians would very much like to see these miseries turned into seeming symptoms of ethnic conflicts, one which is less threatening to the ruling class. Together with media hype and the recent permeation of populist atmosphere especially through the cyberspace, what has been the process of extruding ordinary people’s living space by class inequality is now being seen as the conflict of ethnic difference between HK and PRC people.

In fact, if we look further away from home, we would find out that these miseries are not unique to HK, and representative democracy is no absolute guarantee of social justice and equality. Take Britain for example. Hutton argues that a lack of basic fairness in economic system is driving inequality to levels that threaten democracy, capitalism and civil society. One dimension of such inequality is wage difference. The average pay for chief executives of Britain’s top 100 companies has quadrupled in a generation, claiming 3.2% of all Britain’s income in 1995, doubling to 6.5% in 2009, falling back to still 4.8% in 2011 as bonus fell during the recession. However, a study published by the National Institute for Economic and Social Research shows that real annual wages fell for typical worker by 8%, and the falls for young people up

19 Ibid, p. 3.
21 Ibid, p. 4.
to the age of 29 were even greater – 13% for 25 to 29-year-olds, 14% for 18 to 25-year-olds\textsuperscript{22}. Companies whose strategy is driven by shareholder-value maximization can quickly boost profits in the current era when trade unions are weak and union representation in much of the private sector has collapsed by downgrading employees’ terms of employment and working conditions, and reduce wages. Managements’ bargaining power has been further increased by the threat (and sometimes the reality) of moving work offshore. Over the last generation, the weakening of trade unions countervailing market power has seen around 5.5% of GDP being moved permanently from the workforce to shareholders. This wage discrepancy is compounded also by top “super managers” ensuring that whatever paltry gains are made go not to workers but to profits, which then inflates the share price and, via bonuses and incentives, those managers’ own remuneration\textsuperscript{23}.

Worse still, simply to own capital in a period when its return are rising faster than economic growth (wages and output) is to find oneself wealthier through no effort of one’s own. Anyone with the capacity to own capital will quickly become disproportionally and progressively richer. The incentive is not to be a risk-taker, but rather collect rents from the assets one holds. Corporations and the rich don’t need to back frontier innovation or even invest to produce; they just need to harvest their returns. Together with tax breaks, their wealth is well protected from taxation, while the burden of paying for public goods like education, health and housing is increasingly shouldered by taxpayers on average incomes. Wealth inequality thus becomes a recipe for slowing, innovation-averse economies, tougher working conditions and degraded public services. Meanwhile, the rich get ever richer and more detached from the societies of which they are part: not by merit or hard work, but simply because they are lucky enough to be in command of capital which over time receives higher return than wages\textsuperscript{24}. Struggling to maintain their living standards, workers resort to borrow extraordinary multiples of their income to make money in the other certain way – through the housing market, which in

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid, pp. 7-8.
turn fuels the demand for credit and helps create an extraordinary financial system biased to lend to property and not to enterprise. That said, poorer wage earners may not even be able to obtain such loans, and one’s chance of getting on the housing ladder early or later in life is after all closely determined by the wealth of his/her parents. The brute luck of birth thus becomes essential to future housing wealth.\(^{25}\)

This is the present day Britain, which has been evolving for the last 30 years under the discourse that the route to universal wellbeing is to abandon the expense of justice and equity and so allow the judgments of the market to go unobstructed.\(^{26}\) Neo-liberalism! Ever since Thatcher’s election in 1979, Britain’s elites have relegated concerns about inequality below the existential question of how to restore capitalist economy to economic health, a matter deemed to transcend all other considerations. The rhetoric of the socioeconomic landscape has been commanded by words like efficiency, productivity, wealth generation, aspiration, entrepreneur, pro-business and incentives.\(^{27}\) The inevitable consequence is a decline in public integrity and a new carelessness about others, a consequence which exemplifies itself in such guises as sky-high executive pay, lack of duty of care to workforces and customers alike, careless and indiscriminate sale of public and private assets, unwillingness to find ways of investing in homeland but over-eagerness to look to foreigners for reviving local industries and building infrastructure, and the new hostility to openness (the zeal to blame homemade problems on foreigners, immigrant workers and the EU).\(^{28}\)

Perhaps the similarities of HK and Britain are most succinctly summarized by the Czech students whom Klein met in September 2000 during the protests against the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) meeting in Prague and who had the direct experience with BOTH communism and capitalism: the 2 systems share something in common in that they both.

\(^{25}\) Ibid, p. 9.
\(^{26}\) Ibid, p. 1.
\(^{27}\) Ibid, p. 3.
\(^{28}\) Ibid, pp. 1-2.
centralize power in the hands of a few, and they both treat people as if they are less than full human; while the former saw people as potential producers, capitalism saw them as potential consumers; where communism starved their beautiful capital, capitalism has overfed it, turning Prague into a Velvet Revolution theme park!!  

**But How New is Neo?**

HK and Britain, despite their huge differences in political system (the former’s lack of democracy and the latter’s 300-year tradition of representative democracy) and social context (the former’s presence of PRC factors), they seem to share very similar social miseries, namely inequality and the majority’s inability to determine their own fate. They both seem to be a part of the neo-liberalistic process of global re-distribution of wealth and resources. But how new is this “neo”? If one goes further back in history and sees from the perspective of Latin America, one will find out that this process of wealth transfer from the poor mass to a handful of powerful few has been going on for centuries!  

To Galeano, Latin America is the region of open veins. Everything, including the soil, its fruits and its mineral-rich depths, the people and their capacity to work and consume, natural resources and human resources, from the 1492 discovery to the 1970’s, has always been transmuted to European – or later United States – capital, and as such has accumulated in distant centers of power. Production methods and class structure have been successively determined from outside for each area by meshing it into the universal gearbox of capitalism. To each area has been assigned a function, always for the benefit of the foreign metropolis of the moment, and the endless chain of dependency has been endlessly extended. All in all, the history of Latin America’s underdevelopment is an integral part of the history of world capitalism’s development. As of 1971, the US citizens’

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31 Ibid. p. 3.
average income is 7 times that of a Latin American and grows 10 times faster. According to United Nations, the amount shared by 6 million Latin Americans at the top of the social pyramid is the same as the amount shared by 140 million at the bottom.

The process started with Europeans landing on the Latin America in 1492, discovering the New World. With relative strength in technology and invention as a result of the Renaissance’s creative explosion, Europeans conquered the natives with ease.\textsuperscript{32} Then the Europeans found precious minerals such as gold, silver and diamonds, slaughtering huge number of natives (including children) who got in the way of their discovery and ownership of those resources.\textsuperscript{33} Riding on the hard life’s work of survived Indians who became silver miners for the Spaniards and putting the extracted silver to commercial use\textsuperscript{34}, Potosi (today’s Bolivia and some parts of Mexico), for instance, became one of the world’s biggest and richest cities by 1650, with magnificently decorated churches, gambling houses, dance academies, salons, and theaters built\textsuperscript{35} and days-long fiestas with bullfights being held from time to time. During then, silver was used to trade luxurious products from other parts of the world, like hats from Paris and London, diamonds from Ceylon, stockings from Naples, crystal from Venice, and carpets from Persia etc to satisfy the greed of the colonial ruling class (while the majority of population lived in contrasting poverty). Meanwhile, the metals taken from the new colonial dominions not only stimulated European’s economic development, but made it possible\textsuperscript{36}. This enormous mass of capital created a favorable climate of investment in Europe, stimulated the “spirit of enterprise”,

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid. pp. 15-17. The natives somehow believed that the invaders were the gods of their own myth, also explaining why some of them succumbed quite readily. Other factors leading to the European’s successful conquer include their tactics of winning the support from the natives’ ruling class, priests, officials, soldiers and Indian chiefs, bringing along with them horses (which some natives believed to be a sacred animal) and bacteria (more than half of the aboriginal population of America, Australia and Oceania died from the contamination of first contact with White men) (pp. 17-18).
\textsuperscript{33} Pedro de Alvarado and his men fell upon Guatemala and killed so many Indians that it made a river of blood which is called Olimtepeque (p. 19.)
\textsuperscript{34} The Inca knew of the silver and gold deposits, but they used them not commercially, but for the worship of god (p. 20).
\textsuperscript{35} Open Veins, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid. p. 23.
and directly financed the establishment of manufactures, which in turn gave strong thrust to the Industrial Revolution\textsuperscript{37}. Capitalism on a global scale featuring exploitation of colonial labor (by force and other tactics), plunder of the colonies’ natural resources, trading with the colonies with luxurious items, accumulating capital on the part of the colonial empires, and international division of labor (when each region of Latin America became identified with what it produced, and each produced what Europe want of it\textsuperscript{38}) began to take shape.

With Latin America economy’s primary function being servicing the capitalism developing in Europe, the colonies’ ruling class (merchants, mine owners, the Church) took no interest in diversifying the internal economies or in raising the technical and cultural level of the colonial population, thereby hampering the development of local industry, farming and an internal consumer market, nurturing also Latin America’s dependence on European imports\textsuperscript{39}. However, when these mining centers collapses (for reasons such as natural exhaustion of minerals, competitions from other products, better conditions in neighboring areas, fluctuation of international prices\textsuperscript{40}), they would be abandoned by the metropolis and shrink in stunning speed\textsuperscript{41}. This cycle occurred also with plantation economies in other regions, causing in addition serious environment damage. For example, Northeast Brazil concentrated in sugar planting until mid-17\textsuperscript{th} century\textsuperscript{42}. There the rich tropical forests were turned into a region of savannas. Fire was used to clear land for canefields, devastating the fauna along with the flora\textsuperscript{43}. All was sacrificed to give way to sugarcane monoculture. A place naturally fitted to produce food became one of hunger, with the latifundio leaving sterile rock, wasted-out soil and eroded lands. As the plantation masters grew no food, they just imported it, just as

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid. p. 28.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid. p. 29.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid. p. 30.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid. p. 61.
\textsuperscript{41} Like Potosi falling from its heydays with luxurious constructions and fiestas to the present day Bolivia filled with ruins of the past
\textsuperscript{42} For almost 3 centuries after the discovery of America, no agricultural product had more importance for European commerce than American sugar. (P. 59)
\textsuperscript{43} Deer, wild boar, tapir, rabbit, pacas, and armadillo disappeared. (P.62)
\end{footnotesize}
they imported luxurious articles from overseas. Their abundance and prosperity went hand in hand with chronic malnutrition and misery for most of the population\textsuperscript{44}. On speedy shrinking, when sugar price collapsed in 1857, Trinidad which once was a huge sugar planting center in the mid-18\textsuperscript{th} century with tobacco farmers all displaced, meat being imported, and luxurious palaces built, quickly declined to become the “city of the “had”\textsuperscript{45}. With the dependence on imports long nurtured, people’s ability of self-remedy has been castrated.

The above illustrates that international division of labor has never been an act of God, but a human design, a result of the world development of capitalism (nobody grew sugar in the West Indies before the conquest)\textsuperscript{46}. But this division of labor and world “trade” approached near perfection when it came to slave trade, which some argued to be the foundation stone on which the giant industrial capital of modern times was built\textsuperscript{47}. It was estimated that up to early 19\textsuperscript{th} century between 5 to 6 million African slaves arrived at Brazil alone\textsuperscript{48} (for working in the sugar plantation and, after 1700, the gold mines in Minas Gerais region). British’s slave trade operation started to prosper since around early 18\textsuperscript{th} century. While West African tribes fought among themselves to add war prisoners to their reserves of slaves, Britain shipped out weapons, cloth, gin and rum, bauble and colored glass to Africa in return for human merchandise. The African chiefs delivered the human cargos to slaver captains, then used the latest British weapons and products to continue their village manhunt. Meanwhile, with the ships filling with slaves and industrial products, the British sailed to Latin America, unloaded their goods for the plantations and mines there, and took sugar, coffee, cotton and cacao in return. In this process of triangular international trade, British being the middleman accumulated huge capital which financed the building of Britain’s Great Western railway and of industries, making also the invention of steam

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\textsuperscript{44} Open Veins, p. 62.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid. p. 69.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid. pp. 64-65.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid. p. 79.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid. p. 80.
\end{flushright}
engine possible. Other sectors such as banking and freight/slave insurance were also spin to strive\textsuperscript{49}.

After slavery came hunger wages, and the techniques of capitalists’ profits maximization continued to excel especially with the coffee business. By late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, coffee planters in Brazil (social elites) found out that it’s cheaper to pay subsistence wages than the purchase and maintenance of increasingly scarce slaves. They started to combine feudal serfdom and wage labor whereby workers were paid very low wage to work in coffee plantations in return for being allowed to grow some food (which was prohibited under monoculture) for themselves\textsuperscript{50}. With the development of oligarchy, planters were able to sell coffees at high price while paying very low wages. In the 60s, for instance, 6 US corporations controlled more than a third of coffee that left Brazil, and another 6 control more than a third of what enters the US. They dominated the business from both ends. Hence the US earned much more in importing coffee than Brazil producing it, with income / jobs created and substantial capital accumulated. Also, to ensure profit and maintain high selling price, these oligarchies controlled coffee supply via stocking them up in times of price downturn (like during the 1929 depression). When coffee deteriorated in the warehouse after prolonged storage, they just burned them all in bonfire. Price was stabilized, but at the expense of the coffee planters whose income got “burnt” with the rotted coffee, and of natural resources wastage\textsuperscript{51}.

Many of the Latin American countries went independent in the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century. The next stage of capitalist plunder evolved to become political pressure on local governments. A few out of countless cases include:

1. Guatemala dictator Jorge Ubico was overthrown in 1944. The subsequent administrations (led by Guzman) instituted a series of education, labor, trade union and agrarian reforms till 1952. While

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid. pp. 78-81.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid. p. 97.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid. pp. 100-101.
100,000 families were benefitted, the US fruit monopoly United Fruit’s interest was hurt. Negative international propaganda started to come from media. With the help of US military and CIA, a local colonel Castillo Armas invaded his own country in 1954 and “got rid of a communist government”. A CIA man then occupied a seat in United Fruit’s board, and all former reforms were undone, including returning the expropriated land back to United Fruit\(^{52}\).

2. In the 60’s British Guiana (now Guyana), a union leader threatened labor strike to deny electoral victory of the then socialist government. He later admitted that his union received financial aid from a CIA foundation. The new regime guaranteed the Aluminum Company of America that it could continued extracting bauxite there and selling it to itself at a much cheaper price as of almost 30 years ago\(^{53}\).

3. In Brazil, top officials of Hanna Mining (formed of US capital) also took governmental posts. When President Quadros signed a bill in 1961 to nationalize the Minas Gerais iron mines formerly extended to Hanna, the armed forces made him resign 4 days after the signing. Subsequent people’s rising frustrated the coup and put the Vice-president Goulart in power. When Goulart tried again to nationalize those mines, another coup aided by the US stroke him in 1964. Hanna then got not only a decree from the government allowing them to exploit the mines, but also to build a railroad to transport the iron to its own port 60 miles away from Rio de Janeiro\(^{54}\).

4. As for the petroleum business, its operation is one combing cartel (whereby a few US oil concerns control all the way from oil extraction, refinement, transportation and selling), pricing manipulation (to minimize costs of crude oil import from Latin America and maximize retail profit from US petroleum export), and local governments’

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\(^{52}\) Ibid. p. 113.

\(^{53}\) Ibid. p. 137.

\(^{54}\) Ibid. pp. 154-156.
interference (by coup, military / financial aids, propaganda, oil rating) par excellence\(^{55}\)

Playing with words (hence rhetoric) became an increasingly integral part of capitalism’s operation. Double standards on the part of powerful countries cannot be more blatant and disgusting when talking about “free trade and protectionism”. As mentioned above, with huge capital accumulated from extraction of Latin American natural resources\(^{56}\) and slave trade, British had become a strong industrial power by early 19\(^{th}\) century\(^{57}\). Together with the extreme weakness of Latin America’s local industries (because of poorly developed consumer markets, people’s poverty, low education and technological level), British’s textiles easily won over those markets. “Free trade” was essentially British’s chief export. However, nothing roused British anger as others’ protectionism. “Free trade” only applies to them, became revealed truth only after they were sure of being the strongest power, and after they had developed their own textile industry under the umbrella of Europe’s toughest protectionist legislations\(^{58}\). On a contrary, when the de Rosas administration of Argentina imposed in 1830 protectionist measures against cloth, clothing and other materials, which brought about prosperity for local shipbuilding, textile, shoemaking, cigar industries in the next 10 years, British and French warships arrived to open up the interior waterways that de Rosas had kept firmly closed. Blockade followed in the invasion\(^{59}\).

Another example of British’s suppression of other’s protectionism is the War of Triple Alliance from 1865 to 1870\(^{60}\). Between 1814 and 1840, dictator

\(^{55}\) Ibid. pp. 156-170.
\(^{56}\) Britain didn’t extract the Spanish colonies natural resources, but it controlled legal commerce between Spain and its colonies. (p.173)
\(^{57}\) The steam engine, mechanical loom, and the perfection of textile machinery had precipitously matured British Industrial Revolution. Factories and banks multiplied, the internal combustion engine modernized navigation and big ships sailed to the uttermost parts expending British industry. The British economy paid with cotton textiles for products from Latin America like sugar of Cuba, coffee of Brazil, copper of Chile. Throughout the 19th century industrial export, freightage, insurance, interest on loans, and profits on investment fed British prosperity. (p. 173)
\(^{58}\) Open Veins, p. 179.
\(^{59}\) Ibid. p. 185.
\(^{60}\) Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay (with British's loans) launching war on Paraguay. (p. 188)
Francia ruled Paraguay autocratically, expropriating foreign oligarchy and landowners, using prisons, persecutions, exiles expropriation against them, but fostering internal industrial development (thanks also to Paraguay isolated geographical position), making its economy autonomous and sustainable. The administration succeeding Francia continued his work, and by 1865, Paraguay was a very strong country with well-established infrastructure, steel industry, industrial surplus for foreign trade (but not controlled by the British or the like), agricultural surplus, zero national debt and strong currency. Paraguay also pursued very tough protectionist policies like closing internal waterways against British ships. It became a country developing without foreign investment, bank loans and free trade. In British’s eyes, Paraguay was setting a very dangerous example for its neighbors. So between 1864 and 1865, Britain facilitated and granted substantial loans (with high interest rate though) financing Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay to join force and launch war on Paraguay. Defeated with 5/6 population exterminated by 1870, Paraguay were installed puppet governments by the victorious trio, then “free trade” introduced and custom tariffs abolished. Loans were also made to Paraguay from Britain for post-war rebuilding. Cotton farming was abandoned and textile industry ruined61.

The US is good disciple of Britain in preaching “free trade” to others while practicing protectionism itself to attain the status of industrial giant. Before the 1776 independence, the 13 Northern colonies found themselves in lands with not much natural resources, but too large and far away to be monitored by the imperial British. The absence of such resources and hence international trade forced them to go for self-sufficiency, thereby developing their local industries. By the end of 18th century, the US had the world’s second merchant fleet. Textile, steel and machine industries all strived. The states invested in building infrastructure, public works and military expansion. Meanwhile, tough protectionist policy was inaugurated in the North. In 1890 the Congress voted the ultra-protectionist “Mckinley” tariff and in 1897 Dingley Act further hiked custom duties. Soon afterwards the developed countries of Europe felt

61 Open Veins, pp. 188-193.
obliged to erect custom barriers against the invasion of dangerously competitive US manufactures. The “invisible hand” of the market? Ironically, after WWII the US began to emulate Britain in exporting the doctrine of free trade and free competition, so that other people could consume. The IMF and World Bank emerged together to deny underdeveloped countries the right of protecting their national industries, and to discourage state actions in those countries.\(^62\)

Such rhetoric approached the post-modern state of art when de facto looting and intrigue are camouflaged as “aid” by the imperialist powers. In the above mentioned War of Triple Alliance, Britain “aided” Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay by granting loans at exorbitant interests rate. As the 3 countries themselves suffered heavy economic loss and went almost bankrupt by the end of the war, they depended more and more on Britain financially.\(^63\). For the US, the end of WWII saw its investments in “aiding” Latin America’s industrialization in full advance. By putting in these investments, the affiliates of the US giant corporations jumped over custom barriers (erected paradoxically against foreign competition) and took over Latin America’s internal industrialization process. These imperialist capital captured the local markets from within. While local enterprises continued in control of already established and less sophisticated industries and techniques, US’s private investment rapidly increased its participation in certain dynamic industries which require a relatively high technical level and are more important in determining the course of the place’s economic development. While advocating this process as “civilizing missions” and was a “blessing” to the countries being invested, the US was in fact satellitizing its own industries in Latin America. It didn’t make them more prosperous. Local workers were still paid in hunger wages in contrast with the crazy salaries of the US executives. The gap between the poor and the rich remained wide and social tension was aggravated. These export-oriented factories continued to wipe out the national industry and market. Profits drained OUT of Latin America to the US

\(^{62}\) Ibid. pp. 201-204.
\(^{63}\) Ibid. p. 193.
headquarters instead of staying within for local development. The result is the same for industrial investment as it is for the “traditional” kind\(^64\).

On rhetoric, how can one not mention the global operations of “financial aid” or “loan granting” via international organizations like the IMF? From end of 1950s, recession, monetary instability, credit drought, and decline in internal purchasing power all helped to capsize Latin America’s national industry, and put it at the mercy of international corps. With the “good” intention of “monetary stabilization”, IMF imposed on Latin America such policies so familiar today as liberalizing trade by banning direct exchanges & barter agreements, forcing the contraction of internal credits, freezing wages, discouraging state activity (cutting public expenses), asking local governments to devaluate their currencies which aimed apparently at stimulating export, but ended up accelerating internal concentration of capital in ruling class’ hands and facilitating absorption of national enterprises by foreigners at low costs, and hastening denationalization (privatization) of industries in the name of “free trade”, “free competition” and “freedom of movement of capital” (while blatantly ignoring the US’s enormous system of protectionism like tariffs, quotas and internal subsidies). Due to the overwhelming dominance of the US in the IMF and the hegemony of USD as international currency after WWII, the IMF was effectively created to institutionalize Wall Street financial dominion over the whole planet\(^65\).

These organizations made loans invariably on stringent conditions for the benefit of everyone except for the recipient. Another organization named Inter-America Development Bank (IDB) is under the Alliance for Progress in which the US is only member with veto power. It’s loans extending to Latin America carried such conditions as requiring the recipient to buy US merchandise and import them by using US freight. For the loan to Uruguay in 1963 helping its extension of water mains, the IDB insisted on deciding how much must be charged for water and fixing the taxes on water mains and housing. It also approved work plans, draft bidding terms, administered the

\(^{64}\) Ibid. pp. 205-208.

\(^{65}\) Ibid. pp. 220-221.
funds, and looked into how the job was done. A loan to a Bolivia university in 1966 saw the IDB prohibiting the university from modifying its law and statues without the IDB’s knowledge and imposing specific pedagogical, financial & administrative reforms. In another loan in 1968 to Uruguay, the government agreed not only to surrender control of its income and expenditure as well as policies on tariffs, wages and investment to the Agency for International Development (AID), but also to limit rice import in that year so that the country could receive flour, corn, and sorghum under the US agricultural surplus law. Other examples of countless versions of such loan conditions include forbidding the beneficiary from trading with US’s enemies like Cuba and North Vietnam, from building its own tin smelter so that crude tin continued journeying to Liverpool and from there, smelted, to New York. In short, there is never such a thing as international charity. The role of foreign aid is always domestic, for the benefit of the country granting the “aid”.

Trade “agreement” is the ultimate entrenchment of the principle of “comparative advantage”, as the game of rhetoric went on. Using the trade agreement of GATT (now WTO), the US imposed the free trade and free competition doctrine on Latin America, forcing the reduction of multiple exchanges, quotas, and import and export permits, and of tariffs and custom duties. But it in no way practices what it preaches. In the same way that it discourages state activity in other countries while protecting monopolies at home through a vast subsidy and privileged-price system, in its foreign trade the US practices an aggressive protectionism with high tariffs and severe restrictions. Like in 1969, the US government suspended import of Mexican tomato until the Florida tomato growers got the Mexicans to raise the price (retail price in USA) to avoid competition. Another example of Brazil saw such practice of protectionism reaching the extent of distorting the “natural comparative advantage” which in theory should determine the international division of labor. In 1967, Brazil, whose comparative advantage was in

67 Ibid. p. 230.
68 Ibid. p.233.
69 Ibid. p.228.
producing low costs soluble coffee, was accused of “unfair competition” and barred from exporting its own soluble coffee in the world market, in order to make way for those produced by USA and Europe who import coffee beans from Brazil. Such barring was done by way of Brazil “agreeing” to impose a huge internal tax on its soluble coffee before putting it out of running in the US market. European countries do the same thing in case of custom duties: they impose high import duties on goods from Latin America, using these tax income to subsidize their own products and export them back to Latin America at competitive price, voila 70!!

The Latin America Free Trade Agreement (LAFTA) may have its preamble stating to be for the “integration of Latin America” and the creation of a “common market”, but its gist is on what’s being left out: integration and common market “for the US”. By disarming the tariffs, multinational corporations which mostly are US owned are free to reorganize the production centers and markets in accordance with their best cost-benefit analysis. Ford could be exporting Brazilian manufactured cars to several countries in the LAFTA area, Union Carbide began showering electro-technical products on Latin American countries from its Mexican factory, availing itself of customs, tax and advance-deposit exemptions in the LAFTA area. The result is that the monopolies can move outward and consolidate a new division of labor on a regional scale by specializing their activities by countries and spheres of activity, fixing optimum sizes for their affiliated enterprises, reducing costs, eliminating competitors outside the area, and stabilizing markets 71. Without outside competition, those monopolies can sell at high price and increase profits, meaning Latin America countries having to buy products manufactured by Brazil, Mexico and Argentina at prices even more expensive than if they are imported from the US, Germany or Italy 72.

The lengthy account of Galeano illustrates his version of the Latin America story, a process in which several principles have been recycling over and over

70 Ibid. pp. 239-240.
71 Ibid. pp. 252-254.
72 Ibid. p. 256.
again by some oppressors for the last 500 years, creating and perpetuating social inequality and the impotence of the oppressed:

1. The law of the jungle dictates: be it genocide, plunder of resources, exploitation of slave or subsistence waged labor, political pressures on others’ governments, coup d'état, invasion of capital or granting loans on harsh conditions, this law of the jingle has always been applied without mercy. The party with relative strength always prevail over the weaker one without care. Capitalism emerged exactly out of this context and it exemplifies in the form of party A exploiting and oppressing party B for the purpose of capital accumulation. No wonder Galeano’s observed that “the existence of capitalist centers in our time cannot be explained without the existence of the poor and subjected outskirt”73. The strong and the weak make up the same capitalist system.

2. Castration of the oppressed: the stronger party is never satisfied with just defeating the weaker party. He has to ensure continuous victories by neutering the latter’s ability of rehabilitation, stripping him/her of the chance of ever recovering from such defeats. The European / US powers did so to the Latin American colonies by not letting them develop their local industry, form local markets, grow their food, better their education and technology, nationalize important industries, or erect tariffs against foreign imports, but forcing them to just follow whatever the colonists dictate, be it extraction of precious metals, growing of cash crops, minimal participation in primary industries or being sweatshops of the multinational corporations. Once the foundation of the oppressed is removed, its chance of reviving (thereby threatening the vested interest of the oppressor) is minimized.

3. Induced dependence on the oppressor: the oppressed must however be kept alive because as mentioned, the strong and the weak make up

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73 Ibid. p. 30.
the same capitalist system. The former cannot survive without the latter. Hence, the oppressor has to figure out ways to provide for the oppressed, inducing the latter’s dependence on the former, in such forms as the European powers supplying luxurious goods to the Latin American colonists, foodstuffs to the latifundios, the US helping eliminating political enemies for a Latin American country’s puppet government or providing loans. Of course, in each of these forms and process, the oppressor will still use its best endeavors to extract whatever surplus available (otherwise the practice of capitalist tactics cannot be regarded as a fine one). Once this dependence is induced, the oppressed has no alternative but to rely on the oppressor in perpetuity, like a drug addict relying on morphine\textsuperscript{74}.

4. Futility of resistance: with weak foundation and induced reliance, the ability of the oppressed to resist is handicapped. Throughout Galeano’s account, seldom does one see instances of successful uprising by the oppressed. Indeed, the kind of duties the Latin American Indians or slaves were subjected to perform did take away their physical strengthen from forming any possible resistance\textsuperscript{75}. Zapata’s 1911 uprising in Mexico was one of very few successful examples and he did manage to bring about radical agrarian reforms for the benefit of the Mexicans for some years\textsuperscript{76}. However a stratagem and betrayal ended Zapata’s life in 1919 (dying at the same age of Che Guevara). Despite his spirit was followed by President Cardenas (1934-1940) and agrarian reform again implemented, Mexican nationalism did not lead

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid. p. 198.
\textsuperscript{75} For example, the working conditions of the silver mines in Potosi were extremely harsh. Freezing outdoor temperatures alternated with infernal heat inside the mines. The Indians went into the depths and it’s common to bring them out dead or with broken heads and legs, and in the mills they are injured everyday. Also, they were only given candles to light up the inside tunnels of the mines. Getting injured was a virtue certainty. Furthermore, the process of using mercury to extract silver poisoned as many or more than did the toxic gases in the bowels of the earth. (p. 40)
\textsuperscript{76} The various measures of the Zapata agrarian reform at the end of 1914 included destroying unjust monopoly of land, restoring lands taken from original owners by previous laws, stipulating maximum limit on land holding size, expropriating latifundistas’ lands, setting up technical school, tool factories, and rural credit banks, nationalizing sugar-mills and distilleries, building system of local democracy, letting people elect leaders, courts and police, and requiring military leaders to submit to people’s needs. (p. 123)
to socialism and Mexico did not fully achieve its goals of economic independence and social justice. The capitalist development of Mexico under conditions imposed by subordination to imperialism proved too big an obstacles\textsuperscript{77}. All in all, through centuries of practices, capitalist giants have developed numerous tactics to crush resistance efforts and usage of force, infiltration, provoking dissension within opposition groups, lure of financial and/or political benefits, co-opting the enemies’ enemies (拉一派打一派) are just a few ones\textsuperscript{78}.

5. Shameless use of rhetoric as cover up: as mentioned, the oppressor has to keep the oppressed alive in order to keep the capitalist system running. Extensive use of rhetoric is an advanced version of this strategy, in order to achieve Gramscique hegemony. However, this cannot be done without all-encompassing promotion and propaganda. So, instead of (or on top of) investing in weapons, the oppressors will usually establish a huge web of media mechanism to market their sweet-talks (or lies). As in the Guatemala example abovementioned\textsuperscript{79}, international negative propaganda kicked off the campaign against Guzman’s reforms. Modern authorities will make use of various kinds of “think tanks” to conduct extensive researches, publish reports, organize seminars and education activities, influence policies, lobby politicians, set up media, produce radio and TV programs etc in order to promote political agenda.

So going back to this section’s question, how new is “neo”? Are the ideology and policies of neo-liberalism some inventions of the 80s? By now one should note that the typical traits of neo-liberalism can in fact be traced all over the last 500 years of capitalist practice in Latin America. Neo-liberalism can at most be described as the recent version and extension of such practice with the trendy brand of “Adam Smith”, or even less so a rhetoric in itself, fooling

\textsuperscript{77} Open Veins, pp.124-125.
\textsuperscript{78} For more recent tactics, Naomi Klein has provided detailed accounts of how different governments dealt with counter-globalization protestors. See Fences and Windows: Dispatches from the Front Lines of the Globalization Debate. New York: Picador, 2002, pp. 118-158.
\textsuperscript{79} P.11 of this paper.
people into believing it as something new and scientific, but is in fact some ancient capitalist cliché wrapped in fancy terminologies. It has nothing to do with “liberalism”, and it is nothing “new”. Its operation just continues to practice those capitalist principles and logic which have been practiced for centuries and almost inevitably lead to social inequality and people’s helplessness.

**You May Say I’m a Dreamer**

If Hui is saying that the miseries of HK root in the global epidemic of neoliberalism since the 80s, I would content that they even spring from the broader ideology and practice of capitalism developed since 500 some years ago. The enemy facing the Movement (which burst out in response to those miseries and sparked off as a result of the 831 Decision’s denial of a democratic system which to some extent can deal with those miseries) is not just the PRC, but also an 500-aged master of plunder and exploitation. It would be naïve if one expects the Movement to achieve fundamental changes all at once. That said, for the Movement to move on, one must identify what the ultimate aim is. Fighting for “genuine universal suffrage” may be a short-term means, a contingent plan, which is fair enough from a “gradual and orderly progress” (循序渐进) strategic point of view. However, the case of London aforementioned illustrates just that representative democracy is no guarantee in breaking through the chronically experimented logic of capitalist operation and in achieving social equality. To push to the extreme, even overthrowing the PRC doesn’t mean HK people can live happily ever after, as the PRC is only one of the members in the “capitalist elite club” (despite this may be another short-term aim). To truly put those miseries to rest, one must target the “club” and imagine beyond the boundaries of representative democracy. How can we dismantle this club? By revolution? By “Occupying XXX”? By everyone changing their daily practice? Or by not dismantling it, keeping it, but modifying the rules by which the club is run?

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The recent experience of the Greece and Syriza may shed some light on this topic. Greece hit fiscal cliff in 2010. Technically bankrupt, but without the ability to manipulate its own currency, Greece had no choice but to ask for international help. The US$240 billion bailout package from the Troika (including of course the IMF) came with and unprecedentedly harsh austerity program. As a result, 1.3 million people (26% of the workforce) got stripped of their jobs, wages down by 38% in 2009, pensions by 45%, GDP by a quarter, 18% of the country’s population unable to meet their food needs, 32% below poverty line, and 3.1 million people (33% of the population) without national health insurance. Ironically but not surprisingly, the Greek oligarchs who are shipping magnates, energy and construction groups and bosses of football clubs need not pay tax! They had no intention of paying taxes even the Troika began demanding Greece balance the books after 2010. Against this background rose the Syriza, the political party which took more than one quarter of votes in June 2013, won more than 26% of the vote in last year’s European elections, and became the ruling party after winning the 2015 election. They have pledged to ease the hardships that millions of Greek face, including the provision of free electricity to those whose supplies have been cut off, increase food stamps and health insurance for the needy and raise the minimum wage. The sudden emergence of Syriza is the testimony that young generation has had enough of the oligarchy, corruption and elite politics which stifle meritocracy. What lies beneath the rise of this radical left is the predominance of positive new values among a layer of young people much wider than Syriza’s natural support base. These are values of the

networked generation: self-reliance, creativity, the willingness to treat life as a social experiment, and a global outlook.\(^{85}\)

However, Greek citizens actually practiced self-help well before all these Syriza heroics. At the Peristeri Solidarity Clinic, a dozen medical practitioners volunteer to spend a day a week there to treat patients who are forced out of healthcare and insurance programs. Another group in Egalio consisting of ordinary people like housekeepers, packagers, primary school teachers collects food donations from shoppers outside supermarkets and deliver basic survival packages to 50 local families. They are part of a large and avowedly political movement of well over 400 citizen-run groups – food solidarity centers, social kitchens, cooperatives, “without middlemen” distribution networks for fresh produce, legal aid hubs, education classes etc. They emerged in response to the near-collapse of Greece’s welfare state, and has more than doubled in size in the past three years. As well as helping people in difficulty, Greece’s solidarity movement was fostering almost a different sense of what politics should be - a politics from the bottom up, that starts with real people’s needs. It’s a practical critique of the empty, top-down, representational politics that Greek’s traditional parties practice.\(^{86}\)

The Zapatista uprising on 1 January 1994 (“the Uprising”) and its communities of self-government within Mexico offers another reference. Before the Uprising, Mexico has been pushing neo-liberalist political and economic policies, and in particular its amendment of Article 27 of its constitution whereby land was to be privatized meant the expropriation and destruction of the land co-ownership system of the indigenous Maya communities.\(^{87}\) Coincidentally (or not), 1 January 1994 was the day the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to which Mexico was a signatory took effect. From Galeano’s account of Latin America’s torments above, one should know by now that such agreement about “free trade” and “common market” is nothing

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but institutionalized con game for multinational corporations to embark on lucrative and monopolized businesses conveniently at the expense of the mass Latin American local population. So on that very same day, around 3000 Zapatistas in worn out military outfit and armed with dated weapons (1/3 were holding fake wooden rifles) took surprised action and occupied the city halls, police HQ, prisons and radio stations in San Cristobal de las Casas and its surrounding 7 towns, fighting for indigenous rights, against neo-liberalism and against oblivion. Excellently equipped government army counter-attacked immediately and they fought for 7 days. Facing strong opposition from the civil society (large number of students, NGOs, social activists, middle-class professionals, and housewives marched into Chiapas and protested against the government crackdown), the government ceased fire on 12 January 1994. Peace talk with Zapatista commenced on 14 February. The peace treaty San Andres Accord was signed in February 1996 by the Mexican President with the Zapatista, recognizing the right to autonomy of the indigenous, but this has not been honored by the government or the Senate. National Action Party replacing the too-long-in-power Revolutionary Institutional Party in 2000 brought some vague hopes, the Zapatista launched a spectacular Caravan March in March-April 2001 across a dozen states and arriving at Mexico City with half a million people gathered in solidarity, and delivered a speech in the Congress reiterating the demand for respect of the San Andres Accord. Yet a month later a Bill on Indigenous Culture and Rights was passed which was quite the opposite of the provision of the Accord. Zapatista then severed all negotiations with the government. In August 2003 the Zapatistas announced that they would take the initiative into their own hands and the indigenous would organize their own self governance, their own autonomous caracoles of Good Government.

Two points are to be of note regarding their actions. Firstly, despite their “masked” outlook and weapons in possession, the Zapatistas basically advocated peaceful movement. Government casualties were of a few and

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88 Ibid, pp. 5-11.
89 Lau, Kin-Chi, Touching the Zapatistas 1, 2003, pp. 6-7.
theirs 150 in the 12-day battle after the Uprising. In their “leader” Subcommandate Marcos’ words, “we mask ourselves in order to get noticed, we arm ourselves in order to get listened to, we hide our names in order to be named”. The guns were more of a gesture for attention than for actual use. The war they engaged in is one more of discourse than physical force. In fact, they mobilized their supporters by organizing large scale international conferences. Like the one in June 1994, they invited the international community to the Lacandon Jungle to discuss the social problems and future of Mexico. In 28 days the Maya indigenous people designed and built a complex that could accommodate 8000 people and in August around 6000 people from the world attended the conference. Whenever the Zapatistas are besieged by the government armies, it is these conference participants and outsiders from the civil society who protect them by acting as human shields. The ones who have been using violent force are the government, armies and the pro-government paramilitary who called themselves “Peace and Justice”. This is very similar to the HK situation where the parties who use physical force against peaceful protestors are always the police and members from those pro-establishment organizations which name themselves almost invariably with the words “love” or “care”.

Secondly, Subcommandate Marcos understands very well when the authorities have evolved to play with rhetoric in their modern hegemony, the Zapatistas have to be even better in this respect. In this post-modern era of hermeneutics, he in fact is a master of rhetoric. He publicizes ideologies and communicates with the outside world by issuing numerous communiqués. He writes books (the Antonio Elderly Series and Little Beetle Durito Series) and even detective novel. He writes in poetic, humorous, paradoxical or even erotic styles to keep his readers hooked. He makes very good use of his image (the mask, the pipe, military outfit, his fluent Spanish, English and French with sexy accents) to attract media attention. The Zapatistas even

90 Ibid, p. 6.
93 Like the “Caring HK Power” (愛護香港力量 / 愛港力).
produce and distribute merchandize of him (and a female commandate) to make them a cult trend. He hangs out with celebrities (like the 1985 Mexican national hero “Super Mario” and director Oliver Stone). The Zapatistas even did a friendly football match with Inter Milan in 2004! Despite being a seemingly mysterious and leadership figure, Marcos always personally attends those conferences and engages in intimate talks with the participants. He listens to his indigenous communities and never claims to be their leader (that’s why he calls himself “sub-commandate”). He is also an expert on media platforms. Within the first week of the Uprising, he has already picked specific news agencies to be his partners and established close relationship with them. He strictly rejected interviews with Mexican official media and some particular journalists. He pioneered the use of internet to spread the Zapatistas’ words. His proficiency in symbols’ creation and circulation earned the Uprising the label of “Post-modern Revolution” by the New York Times.

On their political advocacies, the Other Campaign in 2006 is particularly revealing. After 6 consultations and a plenary meeting held in September 2005 attended by civil society and community groups in the Lancandon Jungle, Marcos went on a solo tour all over Mexico for dialogue on the fight against neo-liberalism and rescue of humanity. The resolution of the plenary meeting was to reject the electoral politics of all political parties, and come up with a people’s alternative for a world free of exploitation and suffering. Then during the year-long tour, numerous conferences and exchanges took place. The content of these discussions is of course important, but more significance lies in the background activities of networking, of community mobilization, or organizational activism. Thousands of people, especially young generation, have been involved in the tours. These show that the advocacy against representative democracy is not bluffing, but a genuine belief in bottom-up deliberation, organization, participation and perfection of these skills through actual drilling. This takes time and patience, and won’t be achievable via mere slogans’ yelling. This sheds light on HK when people attribute the “failure” of the Umbrella Movement largely to the Movement’s organizational looseness.

94 Ibid, pp. 11-41.
95 Lau, Kin-Chi, Touching the Zapatistas 4, 2006, pp. 1-6.
The Zapaistas’ community practice regarding the structure and operation of the caracole (snail, tiny village) is also worth noting. The autonomous government comprise 2 representatives from each of the 7 autonomous municipalities, altogether 14. They work on 3 shifts, with 4 to 5 members staying for a week in a village to relate to civil society, to coordinate work among the 7 municipalities, to work with the liberation army (EZLN) and to resolve problems. They are all volunteers and don’t get paid\(^{96}\). Local officials rotate to avoid accumulating power. Political parties have no role or presence. State and government programs are banned. Food is produced by the community, cooperatives will do the buying and marketing. Decisions are made collectively rather than being imposed top-down. Local health clinics are formed using natural medicines made by community cooperatives and there are special areas where trained midwives attend childbirth in those clinics. Schools with rudimentary equipment teach in the indigenous languages of the communities, focusing on understanding the world the children live in and basic concepts of freedom, equality and cooperation. In August 2013, La Escuelita (the Little School) was launched with thousands of supporters and students, mostly youth from Mexico and abroad attending. There students pair up with tutors from among movement members and are placed in families throughout Zapatista territory. Classes consist mostly of accompanying Zapatista families during their daily chores and long talks over beans and tortillas. This opens up the Zapatista experience to outsiders, who are encouraged to ask questions of their host families. It also enables the organization to see itself through the eyes of the students, reflect on the ground covered and get to know other communities\(^{97}\).

On possibilities of democracy, one final reference comes from the Kerlala State of India. In 1996 the government of Kerlala (led by the leftist party Left Democratic Front (LDF)) launched the People’s Plan Campaign (PPC) whereby 35% of the state development budget was devolved down from a

\(^{96}\) Lau, Kin-Chi, *Touching the Zapatistas 5*, 2006, p. 5.

centralized bureaucracy to local governments where local people could determine and implement their own development priorities. Before this however, the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (Kerala Science Literature Movement / “KSSP”) has been going on since 1962 in which people’s ability to participate in affairs on self-determination has been polished and developed. After the KSSP’s “Literacy” and “Resource Mapping” programs, Gram Panchayat (Village Development Councils) were set up in which representative from villages, political parties, government, and technical professionals formed their membership to discuss and approve the developing plans for the villages in the next 15 years. With this structure already in place, the LDF expanded its function in furthering the practice of the PPC. In 1996, a grand village assembly was held and 2 million people participated. During the assembly, people spoke out the needs of themselves and the villages and proposed different projects. Of course this kind of discussions cannot be fruitful without follow ups in smaller groups. So, within the 990 Gram Panchayat, about 200 villagers form sub-groups to explore local needs of each village, determine project priorities, supervise project execution and decide who the beneficiaries of budget allocation were. Each of these sub-groups again formed village representative boards to execute daily operation of village affairs like mediating disputes, organizing cultural activities and students’ extra-curricular activities, setting up clinics and saving committees. Under the PPS, 100,000 houses, 240,000 toilets, 50,000 wells, 17,000 public water taps, 8,000 plus km of roads were built during the 1997-99 period. Also 16,000 pools were cleaned up and 30,000 hectares of land modified into farms.

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99 Both programs involves engaging people in Kerlala to participate in determining their priorities. For example, the "Literacy" program encouraged the people to decide on what books to read and what workshops to conduct basing on their real life needs. "Resource Mapping" program encouraged people to gather information of natural resources in their villages so as to determine what kind of agricultural, production, and preservation priority they should pursue. See: 劉健芝, 喀拉拉系列之三: 印度的掃盲運動 - 農村貧困者自主力的開發 and 喀拉拉系列之四: 民眾科學運動的「資源譜圖」 - 心和身的參與.
100 See: 劉健芝, 喀拉拉系列之五: 「人民計劃運動」 - 自信和尊嚴滋長的土壤.
Given the different temporal and political context, these experiences of Greece, Mexican Zapatista and Kerlala may not be directly relevant to HK. However, they are enlightening in at least 5 aspects. Firstly, though representative democracy is no absolute solution to social inequality, it does exist to different extent in each of these examples. It seems that a basic democratic framework is still a crucial starting point before one goes on to talk about participatory democracy or bottom-up / collective decision making. Of course one can argue that for a place without such a framework (like HK), one should take an entirely fresh path and the system should be changed from bottom up by people actually practicing participatory democracy in their daily lives, so that in time the authorities must yield to an experienced and informed mass. Nonetheless, the quality of the people necessary for this kind of democratic practice (like mutual respect, empathy, altruism etc) is perhaps nurtured through lengthy experiment of representative democracy. These stances are highly debatable and have their merits. My contention is that given the colonial background of HK and the people’s near zero experience in democracy, HK people’s insistence on a genuine system of general election is in the right direction, only we have to remind ourselves that this is just the beginning, the ends behind the means are what really matters, and we still have a long way to go in our fight. Significant changes won’t take place just after one or more social movements.

Secondly, “valiant” (勇武)\textsuperscript{101} or not may not be that important an issue in social movement, but organization definitely is. The Zapatistas may look military and violent, but they restraint themselves from using physical force. Apart from Subcommandate Marco’s magic in discourse and media maneuver, their success seems to have built more on organization. Similarly, the PPC in Kerlala featured different tiers of organization, in which people can give and take in different levels. The Greek solidarity clinics are highly organized, only it’s the volunteers who organize themselves. To construct any kind of organization, however, takes time and practice. Kerlala has been running the KSSP for 34 years before the PPC can be smoothly implemented by riding on

\textsuperscript{101}To some recently emerged right-wing political organizations in HK, this is an important and necessary element in social movements. They despise peaceful and non-violent struggle.
the KSSP’s foundation. The Zapatista has been painstakingly practicing their self-autonomous governance for 20 years and they are still struggling. All these tell us that there is no short cut and quick fix.

Thirdly, as mentioned, rhetoric is the modern battlefield in class struggle. He/she who commands better rhetoric and media platform prevails over the others. The example of Marcos needs not be recapped. However, the problem always lies in the ridiculous discrepancy in relative strength between the ruling class and the dominated in this respect. The former always possesses much better resources and network. During the 79-day Movement, Chief Superintendent Mr. Steve Hui appears almost everyday on the most popular TV station, holding live press conference criticizing how the protestors “obstructed the roads” and “hindered others from making a livelihood”. All newspapers except one or two followed this line to take. The only platform that protestors can utter resistance was the internet media, the audience of which are however mostly confined to the youth and not the mass. How to tackle this very steep uphill rhetoric battle is a very critical question for HK people, especially those from the cultural sector.

Fourthly, solidarity. It is not sure how united the Greek, the Zapatistas and the Kerlala Indians really are, but they seem solidified. The KSSP especially, a project involving millions of Indians, and yet they could make things happen! And solidarity seems extremely crucial in all these 3 examples. Unfortunately, the nowadays HK society is a highly polarized one, not only between pro-establishment and pro-democratic bloc, but also between the left and right wing of the latter. In fact, not long before the occupation ended, participants of the Movement had become more and more divided on issues such as staying or leaving, action escalation strategies, and demolition of the “main stage”\textsuperscript{102}. An atmosphere of mistrust and even hatred hover around the occupation sites, street corners and cyberspace. And as mentioned much earlier in this paper,

\textsuperscript{102} It means the main stage of Admiralty occupation site, where participants of the Movement can express and share. Its construction and equipment were done and provided by the Occupy Central Office and student organizations. It was mostly hosted by representatives of the student organizations, but was criticized by some participants for being too reactive, un-responsive to changing circumstances and ideological too left and conservative.
the Government may be delighted to see and actually incite such divergence so that the fault of poor governance can become opaque. How to promote solidarity under this circumstances is a question which seems terribly cliché, but of utmost importance and urgency. It is also a huge problematic in the rhetoric battlefield.

Finally, it concerns the people’s belief and imagination. Out of desperation, the Greek people took their self-help initiatives and things did start to change. The Syriza eventually won the election. The Zapatista attempted the impossible, and a female commandate could eventually enter the Congress in Mexico city to deliver a speech in 2001. They can maintain their autonomous government as of today. Through the KSSP and PPC, millions of Kerlala Indians could attain literacy and self-government. These people all embarked on some actions, went through a process, and began to believe they could make things happen and effect change. They are empowered in the process. To kick start such a process requires courage and imagination. Sadly, present day HK people seem too indulged in cynicism, either an ironic one with which people don’t believe in the possibility of change and withdraw from political participation, or a sentimental one with which people overinvest their affect on issues they think matter and are convinced that something has been done via showing passionate attitude\textsuperscript{103}. While this cynical atmosphere is somehow understandable, especially when we are facing a strong and authoritative PRC, being too used to a routine of “making a living” and unimaginative are our fatal flaw. Imagination needs opening up and it is my sincere wish that the above examples can be of help (to readers and to myself). Subcommandate Maros has written the following in March 1994, and I hope HK people dare to make dreams and start our own march:

\textit{In our dreams we have seen another world, an honest world, a world decidedly more fair than the one in which we now live……Now we follow our path towards our true heart to ask what}

we must do. We will return to our mountains to speak in our own
tongue and in our own time\textsuperscript{104}.

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