

Media Exaggerated: Coverage of Violence in Hong Kong

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ABSTRACT

Over a quarter of the Hong Kong population took to the streets on 16th June 2019. Many felt oppressed from the Chinese government's attempt to slowly take control of Hong Kong via the Extradition Bill - a policy which would allow Chinese officers to enter Hong Kong to track down criminals. The policy itself, however, does not matter. Rather, it is the idea of China's attempt to control Hong Kong despite promising autonomy as a self-governing region until 2047. These movements popularized quite quickly due to the dramatization of media covering such events, as well as censorship and fear spreading across the Hong Kong populace. Even the 1956 riots under British colonial rule, to the more recent 2014 Umbrella Movement under Chinese rule have had their fair share of violence, which have always been portrayed negatively in the media. This essay will investigate whether media coverage of violent riots shape the public perception of these events by looking at news coverage of the 1956 riots and 2014 Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong. This will be done by analyzing in a social and political lens, such as newspaper outlets covering violent instances. Topics such as censorship, factors involved with spreading of popular ideals, and evolution of media towards dramatization will all be investigated.

Introduction

On 16th June 2019, millions marched the streets of Hong Kong. In the crowd, Black flags in hand, gas masks on faces, and makeshift weapons can be seen amongst all.¹ Over a quarter of the population engaged in a long campaign against governmental oppression. Due to the unfortunate timing of Covid-19, lockdown regulations were imposed, and many extreme advocates have left the region instead. As of now, the movement has almost completely died down. Media played a large part in the movement's spread, so dramatization and its coverage on violence will be investigated, in both the 1956 riots and the 2014 Umbrella Movement.

Hong Kong is a small, highly populated Chinese region that was colonized by the British from 1842 to 1997. Thereafter, the Chinese government agreed for Hong Kong to retain autonomy after 1997 for 50 years, leaving the city beyond the purview of the Chinese government. As such, Hong Kong residents can use social media platforms popular in more western countries, differing from mainland Chinese residents, who are not allowed to use such platforms. This policy is known as "One Country, Two Systems," and for most of recent history the lines of such an agreement have been blurred and confused. Such historical circumstances allow a comparison between how the British and Chinese governments handled social movements and the ways in which media outlets impacted public opinion.² This essay focuses on the 1956 riots (under British control) and the recent Umbrella movement of 2014 (under Chinese control).

The 1956 riots were a short campaign lasting from October 10th to October 12th. Despite the fact that it resulted in no policy change, it heavily shifted public perception of the government. Furthermore, many citizens started

¹ This description is a firsthand perspective of the march on June 16th which the author attended.

² "The Joint Declaration." CMAB. Accessed September 21, 2023. <https://www.cmab.gov.hk/en/issues/jd3.htm#con>.

involving themselves in politics that supported the movement. The movement itself was a result of tension building up between the supporters of the Kuomintang (KMT) and Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The KMT are the current political party in Taiwan, while the CCP rules China. During the riots, protesters grew violent, and many global news outlets reflected Hong Kong as a “disobedient colony.” Alternatively, the more recent Umbrella Movement exhibited a fight for independence against the Chinese government. The movement was caused by a decision from the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress of the People’s Republic of China (NPCSC) to select candidates for Hong Kong’s position of Chief Executive. This decision ordered that all candidates had to have pro- Chinese views and allowed China to further impose power over Hong Kong. These completely different events demonstrate the dramatization of media and illuminate the lasting effects of media on public opinions of the government of Hong Kong.³

Historiography

Known for its mix of culture and traditions, Hong Kong is full of differing political views. Compared to the freedom of political thought in the west, China is rather authoritarian, giving way to harsher police and policies against protests and other such campaigns. This interesting dynamic has been thoroughly researched throughout the years, for example, “The Evolution of Protest Policing in a Hybrid Regime” by Peng Wang, Paul Joosse and Lok Lee Cho.⁴ This essay presents the hardship of police, from their role as an extension of the government, to a citizen of the public. This dynamic further enforces violence already present in protests, however, is also heavily dramatized by the media.

Many historians focus on the causes or methods of smoothing over the situation. However, they seldom discuss the cause of the movement’s popularity, and whether it is truly due to mistreatment of the public, or newer ideologies spread amongst the youth. With the current state of social media, news, and word of mouth, it is easier than ever to spread a social movement. Protests are important, acting as representation of issues faced by the public, calling for reforms from the government; the size of protests also points to how severe an issue is.

Nevertheless, these situations are not unique to Hong Kong; most of modern societies which have police brutality cases on the rise. Historians such as Edward Lawson Jr. and Nicholas S. Bolduc both research the rise of police brutality cases in modern societies, from the intermingling of the military and police branches to risk theory in the modern world. Ultimately, they find that these correlations are the reasons for increasing police altercations.⁵ Furthermore, Lawson suggests a psychological shift in the police when they share equipment with the military, which he argues detaches the police from the public. In addition, Lawson presents potential solutions, such as “rethinking the process of training officers.” Sonny Shui-Hing Lo discusses this topic further in “The Changing Context and Content of Policing in China and Hong Kong: Policy Transfer and Modernization,” by comparing Chinese police officers to Hong Kong officers.⁶ Lo however, mainly focuses on the shortcomings of the Chinese police while

³ “Fifty Years On: The Riots That Shook Hong Kong in 1967,” The Foreign Correspondents’ Club, Hong Kong, accessed August 30, 2023, <https://www.fcchk.org/correspondent/fifty-years-on-the-riots-that-shook-hong-kong-in-1967/>.

⁴ Peng Wang, Paul Joosse, and Lok Lee Cho, “*The Evolution of Protest Policing in a Hybrid Regime*,” The British Journal of Criminology 60, no.6 (2020): 1523-1546, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azaa040>.

⁵ Edward Lawson, Jr. “TRENDS: Police Militarization and the Use of Lethal Force,” *Political Research Quarterly* Vol. 72, No. 1 (March 2019): 178-186; Nicholas S. Bolduc, “Global Insecurity: How Risk Theory Gave Rise to Global Police Militarization,” *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* vol. 23, no. 1 (Winter 2016): 267-292, <https://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/ijgls/vol23/iss1/12>.

⁶ Sonny Shui-Hing Lo, “*The Changing Context and Content of Policing in China and Hong Kong: Policy Transfer and Modernisation*,” *Policing and Society* 22, no. 2 (2012): 185–203, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2011.605129>.

highlighting the positives of the Hong Kong police. Lo concludes that Chinese police officers tend to be not as efficient and more corrupt when compared to Hong Kong officers. This is due to many reasons, such as how “cross-district liaison work remains easier, smooth[er]” and overall, simpler. Moreover, Lo argues “the police are generally respectable in the minds of the majority of the citizens” in Hong Kong, while “many mainland citizens tend to cast a suspicious eye on the authority of police officers.”

Other scholars, however, have found that the distrust in the police is not only determined by geographic factors. Michael Adorjan and Maggy Lee’s public assessment of Hong Kong police, states that as the public’s age goes down their perception of the police force seems to be more negative. This is seen through the fact that “Older participants were generally more positive about police actions in public order policing than younger participants, with those aged between 20 and 29 years of age” being “particularly critical of the police motives and actions.” Using both qualitative and quantitative evidence, with many statistics backed up by surveys and other experiments, the authors argue that this phenomenon is likely due to shifting cultures of the youth, from Chinese traditions to more foreign inspiration found online.⁷ This shifting identity is discussed quite often in many essays, especially when analyzing the history of colonial Hong Kong, such as with Mee Ling Lai. She finds that Hong Kong residents feel their national identity is better defined as “Hong Konger” rather than “Chinese.” Furthermore, many “of those identifying themselves as ‘Chinese’ have dropped significantly,” due to factors such as how the “emotional impact of the Beijing Olympics has subsided.” This demonstrates a divide between mainland culture and Hong Kong culture, which contributes to why younger generations feel their thoughts are not well received by the ruling Chinese government.⁸

Moving beyond generalizations, some scholars look specifically at case studies, such as the 1956 riots and the Umbrella movement. Chu Wai Li finds that during the 1956 period not only were British and Chinese relations strained, but also relations were tenuous between Chinese activists in Hong Kong, such as those who support the Kuomintang or People’s Republic of China.⁹ These factions argued about many issues, from Chinese refugees entering Hong Kong to basic societal ideals, such as communism versus capitalism, as mentioned by Chi-Kwan Mark.¹⁰ In fact, in another essay, Chi-Kwan Mark shows that the British were heavily considering leaving its crown colony, as it was too costly to maintain a colony so far away, especially one with so many arising issues.¹¹ This allows the reader to compare the British and Chinese as governing bodies, with Hong Kong being a unique place mixed with aspects of both regions.¹² Mark then presents his idea that the British were corrupt as colonizers. Not only did they leave top positions for themselves, they also “treat[ed] Chinese nationals the same way as foreign immigrants.” This drastically differed from the popular misconception that the British were great colonizers in Hong Kong who advanced society

⁷ Michael Adorjan and Maggy Lee, “Public Assessments of the Police and Policing in Hong Kong,” *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 50, no. 4 (2016): 510–28, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0004865816656721>.

⁸ Mee Ling Lai, “Cultural Identity and Language Attitudes – into the Second Decade of Postcolonial Hong Kong,” *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 32, no. 3 (2011): 249–64, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2010.539692>.

⁹ Chu Wai Li, “More than a Potential Threat: The PRC’s Intervention During the Double Tenth Incident,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch*, (2016): 1–32

¹⁰ CHI-KWAN MARK, “The ‘Problem of People’: British Colonials, Cold War Powers, and the Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong, 1949–62,” *Modern Asian Studies* 41, no. 6 (2007): 1145–81, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0026749x06002666>.

¹¹ Chi-Kwan Mark, “Defence or Decolonisation? Britain, the United States, and the Hong Kong Question in 1957,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 33, no. 1 (2005): 51–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0308653042000329012>.

¹² Ray Yep, “A Historical Perspective on Hong Kong Autonomy: Traditions of British Imperialism, Maritime Enclave and Contending Views of British Interest,” in *Hong Kong 20 Years after the Handover*, ed. Brian H.C. Fong and Tai-Lok Lui (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), 231–54.

and built infrastructure.¹³ Generally contributed to the economic explosion which occurred when the British came to Hong Kong, this misconception, however, was actually due to the new ideology of capitalism in previously unexplored Asia. Furthermore, police brutality during the 1956 riots was seen as rampant, with many locals claiming the police were like bullies, which was one of the many reasons for civil unrest.¹⁴

The more recent Umbrella Movement, in comparison, opposed the authoritarian structure of the Chinese government. The movement itself was quickly shut down with minimal changes made by the government; however, the ideals presented by the movement live on in Hong Kong to this day. Researchers such as John P. Burns found that due to the large control by the Chinese government in everyday life through corporate entities and other organizations, the public ultimately did not have enough leverage to sway the government's actions.¹⁵ Conversely, Ye Wang and Stan Hok-Wui Wong found that the "protest proximity is significantly positively correlated with the rise of anti-opposition sentiment." From this study, it is clear geographical proximity plays a large role in an individual's political stance, similar to social media and news coverage.¹⁶ However, media priming and other forms of public influence through exaggerated news outlets make many scholars wonder if public opinion is too heavily swayed by news coverage, especially when readers are uninvolved with events occurring.¹⁷ Francis L.F. Lee found that social media not only encouraged protest campaigns but also helped with organization.¹⁸ This likely led to the public having a growing connection to demonstrators.

Methodology

Police Brutality and other forms of violence ignited from the protesters are heavily spread throughout the media in times of political unrest. Furthermore, understanding the effect of the media on public awareness of social movements can illuminate the reasons for public support or disapproval. Using local and international newspaper outlets to conduct a social and political analysis, this connection between the media and public opinion becomes clearer. These articles reflect local and global perspectives and how journalists can, and how the situation might be misportrayed abroad, influence current social movements. Media coverage of violent riots shape the public perception of these events which can be seen through news coverage of the 1956 riots and 2014 Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong. Dramatization of media in a censored country seems to be rare, however is evident due to the unique circumstances of Hong Kong having autonomy.

¹³ Ming K. Chan, "The Legacy of the British Administration of Hong Kong: A View from Hong Kong," *The China Quarterly* 151 (1997): 567–82, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0305741000046828>.

¹⁴ Ian Scott, "Bridging the Gap: Hong Kong Senior Civil Servants and the 1966 Riots," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 45, no. 1 (2016): 131–48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2016.1227030>.

¹⁵ John P. Burns, "The Structure of Communist Party Control in Hong Kong," *Asian Survey* 30, no. 8 (1990): 748–65, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2644496>.

¹⁶ Ye Wang and Stan Hok-Wui Wong, "Electoral Impacts of a Failed Uprising: Evidence from Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement," *Electoral Studies* 71 (2021): 102336, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2021.102336>.

¹⁷ Lars Willnat and Jian-Hua Zhu, "Newspaper Coverage and Public Opinion in Hong Kong: A Time-series Analysis of Media Priming," *Political Communication* 13, no. 2 (1996): 231–46, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.1996.9963109>.

¹⁸ Francis L.F. Lee, Hsuan-Ting Chen, and Michael Chan, "Social Media Use and University Students' Participation in a Large-Scale Protest Campaign: The Case of Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement," *Telematics and Informatics* 34, no. 2 (2017): 457–69, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2016.08.005>.

The 1956 Riots

The 1956 riots started due to escalating tensions between the Kuomintang Party (KMT) supporters and the Chinese Communist Party supporters (CCP). On Double Ten Day, Taiwan's national holiday, a national flag was erected and thereafter taken down. This was an issue because many CCP supporters did not recognize Taiwan as a country and instead thought of them as just another Chinese party. Afterwards, violence filled the streets for three days, until the government introduced a lockdown. Some CCP supporters were likely refugees coming from the mainland since this was a time of increased immigration. Subsequently, the refugee office was destroyed. Many other government buildings were also destroyed in the chaos, and both Asians and Europeans were victimized in the attack. The 1956 riots lasted for three long days, from October 10th to October 12th.¹⁹

Media coverage of demonstrations can often be exaggerated, whether it is to increase business or inherent political biases. Furthermore, when violence or police brutality is exaggerated in the media, it may suggest corrupt or poorly trained officers. In addition, journalists often portray a situation that is worse than reality, overshadowing the true cause of these unfortunate circumstances. During the 1956 riots, new media shaped the public perception of the government as either being too tyrannical or not controlling enough, especially in Hong Kong.

For example, the Jamaican Pagoda Magazine portrays an anti-communist bias. In the editor's note about the 1956 riots in the magazine's November 3rd issue, the editor questions why "there is no celebration of this important day to rejoice this historic event of the Chinese people gaining freedom from the tyrannic, barbaric and dictatorship of the Manchus to join the democratic world by the father of our nation, the late Dr. Sun Yat Sen."²⁰ This publication then titled the section that further discussed the events "Riots, Fear, and Sudden Death in Hong Kong."²¹ This portrays an image of chaos and a lack of control by the government when in reality these riots only lasted three days. Furthermore, the author also blames Chinese secret societies for the riots. They state that the "well-disciplined movements and anti-foreigner manifestation" was similar to "classic communist tactics."²² It is important to note this publication costs nine pence and acts as a fortnightly publication riddled with advertisements. Therefore, such dramatization would clearly give more entertainment to the reader by presenting the Hong Kong government as unruly and the communist Chinese as out of control. As an effect of this dramatization, misinformation spread, changing the perception of the Hong Kong government for the magazine's subscribers

The British publication *The Sphere* was created to inform other crown colonies of global news. As such, *The Sphere* tends to have a patriotic stance, supporting the British empire and their colonies and featuring many photographs that support this mission. In an article about the riots, the author mentioned a rejected theory about Hong Kong's government planning such a riot to lower the KMT's power in the region.²³ Many photos are shown, with most featuring soldiers and other riot police having complete dominance over the protesters and control of the situation. One particular picture shows many protestors complying and lining up for their fingerprint to be taken at the police station, while another photo shows hundreds of suspects sitting down and carefully listening to authorities after being detained outside a refugee house built for the communist Chinese.²⁴ The large nature of the riots is also highlighted in some photos with streets filled with people, but in all of these images they always portray the soldiers and

¹⁹ 【多圖：懶人包】50至60年代港兩度暴動一次騷動 共造成111人死亡 港曾宵禁戒嚴 (22:15) - 20160215 - 港聞." 明報新聞網 - 即時新聞 instant news. Accessed September 28, 2023.

<https://news.mingpao.com/ins/%E6%B8%AF%E8%81%9E/article/20160215/s00001/1455537870116/>

²⁰ Leslie R. Chin, *Pagoda Magazine*, Kingston, Jamaica, November 3, 1956, Vol. 17 edition, No. 22, "https://dloc.com/AA00061413/00052/pdf

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ "British Periodicals: Riots in Kowloon," *The Sphere*, pg 155-156, October 27, 1956.

<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001861/19561027/036/0021>.

²⁴ Ibid.

British government in control.²⁵ Violence is also never shown, likely to enforce government strength, despite the fact that the text describes the utter violence which took place. Still, the publication emphasizes how the riots only lasted three days and described the government as authoritative and quick.²⁶ Even across the world in the *Los Angeles Times*, the title of the column covering the riots was “British Soldiers Donate Blood to Victims of Riots.” This headline illuminates the generosity of the British rather than focusing on presenting the facts or the impact of the riots.²⁷ From these global sources, not much of a Chinese perspective is articulated, much less one of someone who participated in the riots. Instead, these publications explain the lack of focus amongst the rioters and on the tensions between the KMT and CCP supporters. Even today, the dramatization of media severely changes perspectives on who is right and wrong in a situation, especially when there are inherent biases in the news outlet itself. Perceptions of the government and those in power will often shift because of media coverage and have major changes in how the public perceives these events.

When police brutality incidents occur, the public often feel pity towards protesters. Whether protesters are peaceful or desperately fighting for a cause, observers might feel that they received undeserving and unplanned consequences as a result of trying to better the region. Stories of individuals also support the public’s attachment to those involved on a more personal level by treating the protesters as average individuals, with friends, family, and an active life in society. Sometimes, victims of violent incidents are portrayed in the news, making anti-protest sentiment arise, which also shapes perception of the government and their inability to control the situation. In the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Chinese officials claimed that “riots in which 51 persons were killed in Hong Kong could be traced to the policy of the British of keeping large numbers of anti-communist elements in Hong Kong.”²⁸ Instantly, a sympathetic attitude towards Chinese Nationalist protesters is prioritized by blaming policy makers and their neglect towards rising tensions. Even though this specific article was published in Chicago, other publications which achieve the same effect might make individuals feel more negative about the Hong Kong government and their regulations, especially since foreigners do not have the benefit of first-hand experience with the matter.²⁹

In *The New York Times*’ an article was published about the riots titled “Clashes of Red and Nationalist Mobs in Hong Kong Leave 44 Dead.”³⁰ Such categorization automatically enforces a biased view. For Chinese immigrants who are innocent and not participating in the riots, they would likely feel attached to the CCP and be upset by the brutal aftermath of the riots while also feeling like the protestors were justified in their actions. Regardless of if the public supports the CCP or the nationalist, in these articles the common enemy who tries to resolve the situation with violence tends to be the police - an extension of the government. In addition, individuals such as the well-known Fritz Ernst, a Swiss Vice Consul, and his wife create an understanding of the events from a personal level. In the article, the author explains that Mrs. Fritz suffered burns which covered “over 97 percent of her body and was not expected to live.”³¹ Such statements evoke sympathy to the average, non-involved reader who was harmed, and many could wonder what would have happened if they roamed the streets in Hong Kong that day. The easy relatability of these

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ “British Soldiers Donate Blood to Victims of Riot”, *Los Angeles Times*, October 15, 1956. https://www-proquest-com.proxy.library.cornell.edu/cv_1703402/docview/167029035/310BFCD34C43473BPQ/77?accountid=10267.

²⁸ “China Calls for Riots’ End at Hong Kong: It ‘Cannot Tolerate’ Disorder at Door,” *Chicago Daily Tribunal*, pg. 5, October 16, 1956. https://www-proquest-com.proxy.library.cornell.edu/cv_1703402/docview/179955471/310BFCD34C43473BPQ/12?accountid=10267.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Greg MacGregor, “Clashes of Red and Nationalist Mobs in Hong Kong Leave 44 Dead,” *New York Times*, pg. 1, October 12, 1956. https://www-proquest-com.proxy.library.cornell.edu/cv_1703402/docview/113722511/310BFCD34C43473BPQ/2?accountid=10267.

³¹ Ibid.

articles is what gives the reader a sense of insecurity and danger, while also providing a view of the government as neglectful and inept..³²

During the 1956 riots, many immigrants were moving from mainland China to Hong Kong in search of opportunities. In this neutral westernized zone, both KMT and CCP supporters were able to live freely, which provided the circumstances for increasing tension and disdain. Many inhabitants of Hong Kong were still debating on which society order was preferred, communism or capitalism, and Hong Kong was at the intersection of the two. A government's ability to control the peace might reflect the best way to truly run a society. For instance, in such a tension-filled region, if a capitalist, non-interventionist government was able to control the population while retaining economic prosperity, that would sway more in favor of capitalism and its ability to run a society. In a discussion recorded after the riots in the parliament of the colonies, one of the first issues to be raised was whether "all the people who made this shocking trouble are citizens of Hong Kong, in the sense that they are people who are domiciled there and entitled to remain there."³³ Further, "If any of them are not so entitled," would the government use its "full power, and not hesitate to deport them to whatever place they really belong?"³⁴ Parliament also debated whether the protesters had personal ties to the KMT or CCP. If they did, perhaps immigration might cause more political unrest and violence, worsening the perception of the Hong Kong government as a whole and its ability to control the populace.³⁵

Changing political climates and the overall view of the public is a major factor in whether or not protests occur as well as how the public perceives them once they do. Due to the immense pressure from local and global newspapers, the Hong Kong government was forced to reconcile its attitude towards immigrants or risk discontent from citizens. Perspectives or biases by the media, therefore, heavily affected how the reader perceived choices made by the government. For the 1956 riots, many global news outlets did not fully articulate the perspectives of protesters, and instead merely reported on the violence which occurred and how the government had stopped such a movement. This created a lack of understanding globally about what the movement was truly about, therefore made it seem merely like a chaotic spark of violence

The Umbrella Movement of 2014

The Umbrella Movement of 2014 is infamous for the yellow umbrellas protesters used to block tear gas and other dispersing techniques employed by the riot police of Hong Kong. This movement started as a result of the NPCSC's (Standing Committee of the National People's Congress) proposal for Hong Kong political reform in the selection process for Chief Executive. This 79-day movement included the occupation of territories by protestors to advocate for change, with many university students joining the movement to spread awareness. Over seventy-five percent of individuals involved were between the ages of 18 and 39, which explains the popular image of youth fighting for the political environment of their future.³⁶ During the movement, protestors occupied many business centers and slowed the flow of business in order to attract attention, despite it being deemed illegal by the government. Advocates not only took to the streets but also went on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube to show oppression and their perspective on the seemingly unbudging Chinese government. Ultimately, however, the protests ended without any changes being made by the Chinese government, and the upcoming election ended with the approval of a government-approved candidate being chosen.

³² Ibid.

³³ House of Commons Debate, 24 October 1956, *Hansard 1803- 2005*, vol 199, cc989-92.
<https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1956/oct/24/hong-kong>.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ "Umbrella Movement - Academic Accelerator," Academic Accelerator, accessed August 31, 2023,
<https://academic-accelerator.com/encyclopedia/umbrella-movement>.

Similar to 1956, dramatization of events by the media influenced public perception of the government, especially with increased access to digital newsletters. The development and popularization of social media platforms allowed for the average person to easily present their thoughts for public consumption. For example, even before large amounts of violence occurred, The Guardian published an article two days after the movement first began and stated that there were “echoes of Tiananmen,” a reference to a protest in China in 1989 which resulted in hundreds or thousands dead with many details unknown due to censorship by the Chinese government.³⁷

Comparisons such as this instill fear in the public before the full scale and purpose of the events can be known.³⁸ It is also important to note that censorship is also prevalent in Hong Kong, and many news outlets are owned or funded by the Chinese government. This makes the actions of riot police easier to hide, but not impossible to find. With the emergence of social media platforms and more radical news outlets devoted to liberty and activist journalism, protests during the Umbrella Movement uploaded videos onto platforms such as YouTube. A video by Euronews shows police “beating a handcuffed protester.”³⁹ Such police brutality may not be extremely common; however, the ease of sharing media nowadays plays a role in negative perceptions of the government. Protesters have posted many such videos on the internet, making it appear like the government was out of control. This is especially true when compared to the past, where newspapers would select certain events to portray. With self-expression so easily disseminated nowadays, governments might start to fear the power of communication given to the public. Censorship might also give false meaning to what users tried to convey, with overreliance on such technology giving governments power by controlling what the public sees.

Most of the participants of the Umbrella Movement were university students. As such, much of the public treated protestors like prominent figures or celebrities, viewing their actions as exceedingly inspirational due to their passion and age. Consequently, the public gets attached to not only the protestor themselves, but also their personalities. When a particular figure gets captured or ill-treated, most of the public would rally behind them and fight for their freedom. For example, Joshua initiated many of the riots and even proposed plans and equipment for the masses—like a strategic leader. As a result, Joshua Wong was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize due to the support and sympathy he received from the public. Ultimately, with the influx of media access it is incredibly easy for the public to get attached to prominent figures of social movements. International media also worked to justify the movement, making support even stronger locally and encouraging more to join. In a documentary titled “Joshua: Teenager vs. Superpower,” about Joshua Wong, Joshua states “Scholarism (the protest group) insists on being peaceful, rational and nonviolent.”⁴⁰ Therefore, he “hope[s] the police can also be peaceful, rational, and nonviolent.”⁴¹ Such a statement sets an expectation for the public of how riot police should act, and if violence does occur the public will most likely blame the government. Since Joshua publicly explained the plan and goals for the movement, the public would likely think the police did not attack out of self-defense but rather that they were attacking to intimidate or take control of the situation. Seeing Joshua’s character and desire for peace would make it seem unlikely that he would start the violence against police officers, at least in the eyes of the public. With a large figurehead fighting for change, it is easier for the public to be swayed to support the movement, even if they have a more conservative view.

Much of Hong Kong already feels the heavy influence of the Chinese government, so when violence is put into the mix fear spreads. Hong Kong citizens are held by regulation, all knowing eventually the city will lose its autonomy in 2047, as per The Sino-British Joint Declaration. However, an increase in violence shows a more fearful

³⁷ Jonathan Kaiman, “Hong Kong’s Umbrella Revolution - the Guardian Briefing,” *The Guardian*, September 30, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/30/-sp-hong-kong-umbrella-revolution-pro-democracy-protests>.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ “Fresh Clashes Erupt in Hong Kong’s ‘Umbrella Movement,’” Euronews, video, October 17, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P7BQRV438KY&ab_channel=euronews.

⁴⁰ Joe Piscatella, director, *Joshua: Teenager vs. Superpower*, Watch *Joshua: Teenager vs. Superpower*, June Pictures, 2017, 1hr., 18 min., <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80169348?source=35>.

⁴¹ Ibid.

and authoritarian side of China. From recent events and media perception, it can look like China is taking Hong Kong by force, with British influence slowly trickling away. In fact, over 144,000 Hong Kong citizens have immigrated to the United Kingdom in the past two years, which equates to almost 2 percent of the population.⁴² Hong Kong citizens now fear that with each policy change, China inches closer to cutting off autonomy early and taking complete control of Hong Kong. In a statement by OCLPHK (username of the official account: Occupy Central with Love and Peace Hong Kong) on social media platform X, the author wrote “despite the cold and heartless way the government has dealt with the Occupy Movement, it has continued for more than two months. This reflects the steadfastness of occupiers’ democratic aspirations.”⁴³ This shows the public’s determination to fight against oppression, fueled by the fear of Chinese control and their comfortability with commanding violence. Hong Kong citizens recognize that the Chinese government will eventually gain complete control of Hong Kong; however, they still want to retain autonomy like promised in the Sino-British Joint Declaration. With these recent violent instances, many fear what will occur after the Chinese gain power, and what they will do in order to achieve their goals. Even now, as China attempts to slowly take back control quicker than promised, many fear their use of violence and carefree policy implementations.

Comparisons and Conclusions

The 1956 riots differed from the Umbrella Movement for a variety of reasons. First, the 1956 riots featured the CCP and KMT fighting against each other, with the government, under British rule, left to deal with the mess and keep the political parties in line. The Umbrella movement on the other hand, featured British influenced individuals fighting for their autonomy against the CCP that rules over mainland China. The Umbrella Movement also featured extensive censorship of media in both Hong Kong and China. In spite of growing censorship, the movement made many global headlines. Similarly, on October 10, 1956, the British government had many local reports and global news outlets showing what happened. In comparison, however, the Umbrella Movement was more peaceful because the protesters went into the movement with a peaceful mindset and tried to negotiate for change. Due to the increase of media, the riot police were also more disciplined, both for fear of public outcry as well as increased control by the government in an attempt to de-escalate the situation. The 1956 riots were instead chaotic and uncontrolled, more like a gang fight than protest, with the government ultimately using policies such as curfews to regulate the city. Despite how influential both movements were, neither lasted very long. Nor did movement result in any political change. Ultimately, the 1956 riots were notorious for violence when protests demanded immediate action by the government, while the Umbrella Movement inspired more protests against Chinese oppression, such as the 2019 riots. In the end, these movements both originated due to underlying issues unaddressed by the government, demonstrating these flaws to the entire world. Hopefully with newfound attention, pressure will be placed upon the Chinese government to enact change for the people in the future. In conclusion, the public was heavily influenced by violence during these democratic movements, finding numerous ways that they could relate to the demonstrators. Furthermore, the media proved extremely influential. The perception of the government was also heavily swayed by the political scene, with protests illuminating flaws in society. Violence in such protests just emphasizes the issues. Media is extremely influential, and even now, views can easily be expressed on public, global platforms. Despite the increase of opinions available, individuals should strive to make their own judgment, rather than following popular ideologies. In addition, censorship by the government restricts these expressions of freedom, further emphasizing the need to self-educate. As technology evolves, different

⁴² Peter Lee, “Over 144,000 Hongkongers Move to UK in 2 Years since Launch of BNO Visa Scheme,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, February 1, 2023, <https://hongkongfp.com/2023/02/01/over-144000-hongkongers-move-to-uk-in-2-years-since-launch-of-bno-visa-scheme/>.

⁴³ Occupy Central 和平佔中, “OCLP Urges Police to Be Restrained, Calm & Professional in Admiralty Clearance & for Gov Response to Ppl’s Demands,” X (blog), December 10, 2014, <https://twitter.com/OCLPHK/status/542507247692042242>.

mediums of news will continue to emerge, and it is only up to the reader to notice and dismiss biases, making a decision that is ultimately based on what they think is right.

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