

Radicalisation, Exhaustion, and Networked Movement in Abeyance: Hong Kong University Students' Localist Identification after the Umbrella Movement

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ABSTRACT: Between the Umbrella Movement in 2014 and the unprecedented mass protests in 2019, Hong Kong experienced a period of movement abeyance during which localism became a prominent political identification, notably among young people. Localism, defined as a reactive form of radicalism, was one pathway after a cycle of contention, alongside persistence with moderate claims and exhaustion, an affective process of detachment from contentious politics after mobilisation. However, the existing literature seldom explores individual attributes to these pathways during movement abeyance. Using survey data gathered from five local universities (N = 1,365), this study seeks to examine how cognitive appraisal of previous protest events, political emotions, and media use during abeyance predict radical and moderate political identifications among university students in Hong Kong. Youths with stronger devotion to the Umbrella Movement and negative emotions after it were more likely to identify as localists. However, youths with these attributes who perceived negative consequences of the Umbrella Movement showed a lower likelihood of being localists or pan-democrats. These results can elucidate the trajectories for radicalisation and exhaustion during post-Umbrella Movement abeyance.

KEYWORDS: movement abeyance, networked movement, radicalisation, exhaustion, post-Umbrella Movement Hong Kong, localism.

Beginning in mid-2019, the Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement (Anti-ELAB Movement) in Hong Kong reignited a new cycle of contention after the abeyance period following the 2014 Umbrella Movement (UM). Despite the significant level of tactical radicalisation and a high degree of solidarity during the movement, "social mobilisation was weak and young people were apparently uninterested in politics in the years before the Anti-ELAB movement" (Lee, Chan, and Chen 2020). Rather than transforming rapidly, such a seemingly dramatic shift of contentious repertoire and committed involvement emerged incrementally from a specific political context characterised by the development of localism in post-colonial Hong Kong (Chung 2020).

Localism has attracted much scholastic and popular attention, as it has become a critical fraction in both electoral and contentious politics during and after Umbrella Movement. Framed as a radical orientation in contrast to conventional agenda-supported pan-democrats, localism was examined in the existing literature mainly from structural approaches (Yuen and Chung 2018) but seldom

explores how individuals identify themselves with this political orientation. Given that the localist agenda became more prominent in the latest wave of contention, it is imperative to look backward with a focus on the period between two cycles of protest.

During abeyance, social movement can undergo radicalisation as well as exhaustion, whereas individuals can persist in participation with or without passing through radicalisation and disengage permanently or temporarily. Few empirical studies, however, explore the micro-dynamics of these pathways during movement abeyance at the individual level through quantitative analysis (Santoro and Fitzpatrick 2015).

Using original data gathered from a questionnaire survey, this study looks for the individual attributes of political identifications among university students in Hong Kong. In particular, we examine how perceptions of movement outcome, emotions towards politics, and media use patterns predict youth localist identification alongside pan-democrat identification, the binary pair representing radical and moderate flanks in Hong Kong politics after the

Umbrella Movement. Our theoretical argument is that, compared with organisational factors, cultural factors are more dominant in constructing abeyance structures in networked protest and media environments. Furthermore, this study is situated in the context of the Hong Kong pro-democracy movement in abeyance when localism, passing through the Umbrella Movement and subsequent disqualification of the elected, was being further repressed by authorities. Similar to many contemporary social movements, the Umbrella Movement in 2014 and the recent Anti-ELAB protests were largely facilitated by extensive use of digital and social media, illustrating what scholars termed the logic of connective action and networked movements (Bennett and Segerberg 2012; Castells 2015). Whereas existing studies largely ignore how media use matters in contemporary movement abeyance, with a few exceptions (Rohman 2019; Lee, Chan, and Chen 2020), this study seeks to fill this void by taking both traditional and social media use into account.

In the next section, therefore, we will first address the theoretical issues of movement abeyance, radicalisation, and exhaustion in the context of contemporary networked protests. We argue that the cognitive appraisal of previous protests and affective orientation towards politics during abeyance periods are critical cultural elements in constructing abeyance structures embedded in hybrid media environments (Caren, Andrews, and Lu 2020). How these ideational and affective factors interplay with media use may result in diverse pathways after the contention cycle, illustrated by radicalisation or exhaustion at the individual level. Then, we will delineate the context of localism during movement abeyance and formulate hypotheses and research questions to guide the empirical analysis, followed by an elaboration on methodology. Major findings and implications will be presented before the concluding discussion.

Networked movement in abeyance

Social movements encounter ebbs and flows over time in which mass mobilisation is unavoidably followed by demobilisation (Tarrow 2011). Between two cycles of contention is a period that scholars have termed “movement abeyance,” which refers to a process whereby social movements are maintained in a hostile, unreceptive political and cultural environment for mass mobilisation, thereby allowing continuity from one stage of mobilisation to new rounds (Taylor and Crossley 2013). Movement abeyance is a “holding pattern” wherein activists merely reproduce the ideology and core organisations of a movement with the principal goal of maintaining the culture of movement based on the construction of a collective identity rather than challenging and transforming the wider society (Taylor and Whittier 1997; Bagguley 2002; Taylor and Crossley 2013). In addition to external factors such as limited political opportunities and authority repression, Taylor (1989) further identified internal factors contributing to the formation of what she called an “abeyance structure” that enables the connections between two waves of mobilisation, including *temporality* of attachment to movement organisations, *purposive commitment* to movement goals and tactics, membership *exclusiveness*, *centralisation* to ensure organisational stability in a hostile environment, and finally, *movement culture* that promotes

solidarity, oppositional consciousness, and continued involvement.

A key contribution of abeyance thesis is that it urges students of social movement not only to take serious account of organisational and ideological connections between phases of visible mobilisation but also to examine movement outcome and continuity beyond short-term gains (Taylor and Crossley 2013). However, the original thesis of abeyance presumes the central role of formal social movement organisations (SMOs) and is limited to explaining movement persistence where political opportunities are scarce. This leaves an underexamined puzzle of how individuals’ beliefs, feelings, and interpretations of broader political environments constitute the formation of abeyance structures during unreceptive periods. As Holland and Cable (2002) highlighted, many empirical studies on movement abeyance gave imbalanced attention to external conditions but downplayed the internal factors. In their empirical analysis of a US local grassroots organisation, Holland and Cable (2002) found that the two ideational factors – movement culture and purposive commitment – are more important than the other three structural factors in contributing to movement maintenance during abeyance.

In contemporary networked protests, the extensive use of digital and social media has somehow diluted the traditional role of formal SMOs in coordinating and organising social movement (Castells 2015). Social media, as an emotional, informative, and communicative hub, allows people to share protest-related information, express opinions regarding politics, and circulate political emotions during social mobilisation (Chen, Ping, and Chen 2015; Gan, Lee, and Li 2017). Although a vast body of literature has examined the role of social media use in social mobilisation, only a few recent studies have paid attention to its role during movement abeyance. For example, social media as a communicative and coordinating platform could facilitate movement continuity in a less costly way (Leong et al. 2019; Rohman 2019). Lee, Chan, and Chen (2020) even discovered that social media could lead people to accept radicalism more easily during a movement abeyance. Despite the enhanced centrality of new media and communication technology, contemporary social movements are both shaped and unshaped by a hybrid media environment constituted by extensive use of both traditional and new media (Caren, Andrews, and Lu 2020). Therefore, a nuanced investigation of networked movement in abeyance cannot overlook how media use – both traditional and new media – contributes to the maintenance of the movement, particularly in relation to ideational factors of abeyance structure.

Radicalism and exhaustion during movement abeyance

Another presumption underlying the original abeyance thesis is the homogeneity of movement internal dynamics during the abeyance period, as shown by the construction of unified collective identity and solidaristic movement culture. Extant literature on the protest cycle has already highlighted the tendencies of radicalisation and institutionalisation when social movements decline, whereas these opposing processes are often linked and appear simultaneously (Tarrow 2011). Santoro and Fitzpatrick

(2015) noticed that existing studies that have addressed why many movements simultaneously shift in moderate and militant directions in the aftermath of the protest cycle have a macrolevel focus (Koopmans 1993; Tarrow 2011), leaving the role of activist preferences in these undertheorised processes. Recent scholarship has attempted to fill this void by examining the post-protest trajectories and the respective motivating factors at the individual level. Using a nationally representative panel dataset that follows Americans from 1965 until 1997, Corrigan-Brown (2012) proposed three ideal-type trajectories after mass protest: *persistence* in contentious politics over time, permanent *disengagement*, and *individual abeyance*, an intermediary trajectory when a person temporarily leaves contentious politics but returns to participation later in life. Similarly, Gade (2019) examined individual-level continuity pathways after state repression in a nondemocratic context based on her study of Sunni networks in Lebanon. She argued that movement fragmentation can happen when some activists are co-opted or look forward to arena shift of struggle, in addition to disengagement and contracted continuity (Gade 2019).

Building on these works, we argue that during abeyance, multiple collective identities can be constructed after a mass protest, together with heterogeneous, if not conflicting, movement goals, tactics, and cultures that sustain the movement. Rather than solely reproducing the previous movement, activists can reorient the movement agenda, reconstruct collective agency, and renew the repertoire of contention in periods of latency and reduced visibility (Jacobsson and Sörbom 2015). Hence, individuals can choose to (1) retain the previous movement agenda, (2) become radicalised, or (3) become exhausted and disengage from contentious politics after the peak of the protest cycle. The existing literature focuses on the first situation, leaving radicalisation and exhaustion during abeyance underexamined. In this light, this study seeks to deepen our understanding of radicalisation and exhaustion at the individual level.

In this study, we conceptualise “radicalisation” as ideological and tactical shifts towards the extremes and more disruptive forms of contention (Tarrow 2011: 207). As a relational process, radicalisation is usually connected to dissatisfaction with movement outcomes (Santoro and Fitzpatrick 2015) and results from interactions among movement groups and authorities (Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou 2012; della Porta 2018). As an affective process, “exhaustion” can refer not only to simple weariness of street contention but also to irritation and the strains of collective life in a movement (Tarrow 2011), resulting in individuals’ disengagement and retreat from the movement. Both radicalisation and exhaustion involve emotional responses and cognitive appraisal of movement outcomes as well as a broader political environment. However, the central role of individuals’ cognitive and affective assessment of such political progress has still been under-investigated using quantitative approaches in the study of movement abeyance (Santoro and Fitzpatrick 2015).

Previous studies have extensively investigated how biographical and sociopolitical orientations, resources, and civil society membership influence individual preferences for different trajectories after the peak of mobilisation (Corrigan-Brown 2012). In addition, these works stressed that activists’ choices to disengage

or radicalise depended on their feelings and interpretation of the state’s repression. Repression could also lead some activists to become radicalised because of anger and grievances (Leenders 2013). On the other hand, continuous movement failures because of the state’s repression could create feelings of despair and drive people to become cynical or apathetic about the prospects of engaging in the movement (Aminzade and McAdam 2001). Recent literature has explored how feelings of disappointment towards political progress after a nonviolent movement can push a segment of activists to support violent contention (Santoro and Fitzpatrick 2015), as well as the effect of positive evaluation of movement outcome on persistence in subsequent protest participation.

Regarding the context of Hong Kong, localist identification among youth after the UM provides an entry point to gain a deeper understanding of the movement dynamics during abeyance in a networked environment. In this research, we contend that the actual involvement in and judgement of the Umbrella Movement influences how Hong Kong youth identify themselves as localists due to the “critical event” nature of the Umbrella Movement, which fundamentally transforms the public’s perception of social reality (Tang and Cheng 2021). On the other hand, the variations in media use and emotion towards political events contribute to different patterns of purposive commitment and movement culture, thereby resulting in different political identifications in times of abeyance. In the next section, we seek to ground the hypotheses and research questions in the context of localism in post-colonial Hong Kong.

Localism during post-Umbrella Movement abeyance in Hong Kong

The birth of localism marked a paradigm shift in the pro-democracy movement of Hong Kong. Discourses around localism emerged during the urban movements in the mid-2000s, followed by a rightist turn of localism to struggle against Beijing’s incorporation strategies (Ip and Yick 2014; Chen and Szeto 2015; Fong 2017). Since 2011, discourses around localism and localists have taken a central position in the public sphere, whereas their importance surged after the Umbrella Movement (Tang and Yuen 2016),¹ illustrated by the formation of localist political groups such as Hong Kong Indigenous (*bentu minzhu qianxian* 本土民主前線) and Youngspiration (*qingnian xinzheng* 青年新政). In the by-election of the legislative council in 2016, the candidates representing the localists obtained 29% of votes among the electorate that did not support the pro-establishment candidates. Due to this impressive result, the rise of localism represented an internal cleavage within the pro-democracy camp, parallel to that between the pro-democracy and pro-establishment camps.

The localist camp (*bentu pai* 本土派) and pan-democrat camp (*fanmin* 泛民) therefore represented two major political identifications at the oppositional front in post-UM Hong Kong. Inside the localist camp, some people highlighted themselves to be

1. According to Tang and Yuen (2016: 479), the frequencies of the phrase “the localist” appearing in the major Hong Kong newspapers were 22, 19, 497, 586, 2,036 and 1,460 in 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, and the first quarter of 2016, respectively.

pro-self-determination (*zijue* 自決) or pro-independence (*gangdu* 港獨). The latter group aimed at creating a Hong Kong nation, and advocated separating Hong Kong from the People's Republic of China. The self-determinists advocated the right to a civil referendum regarding the future of Hong Kong and One Country Two Systems, without necessarily excluding independence as one of the options in the referendum they suggested. In contrast, pan-democrats rigidly rejected any possibility of Hong Kong being independent of China (Cheng 2019).

Although there were different “brands” of localists, localism, being part of the public discourse and the master frame for mobilisation, was widely adopted as an umbrella identification. People who were not as extreme as the self-determinist and the pro-independence factions, but supported a more radical stance than the pan-democrats, felt comfortable identifying themselves as localists (Lam 2017). Many scholars followed this differentiation to examine the essences of the localist camp. Broadly defined, the localist camp refers to the radical flank, whereas the pan-democrat camp is understood as the moderate faction. Of course, identifying as a localist does not mean that one must engage in radical or violent action during a protest. The critical difference between the two camps hinges on whether the supporters follow or deviate from the conventional political agenda in post-colonial Hong Kong with respect to Mainland-Hong Kong relations, the constitutional framework of One Country Two Systems, national identification, and strategies of political struggle (So 2016; Chan 2017; Veg 2017). Previous works have highlighted the heterogeneity of Hong Kong localism based on the mode of identification (Veg 2017), as well as political advocacies and resistance tactics (Kwong 2016). Despite the internal diversity within localist camps, Ng and Kennedy (2020) claimed that localist groups can be defined as “groups that share a combination of three core ideological features: regionalism, radicalism, and populism, and an origin in centre-peripheral conflicts between mainland China and Hong Kong.” To suppress this nascent radicalism, Hong Kong and Beijing authorities adopted hard-line repression via legal and political means in demobilising and delegitimising localist leaders and activists (Cheng 2016; Yuen and Chung 2018).

Existing studies have suggested that individuals are more affiliated with localist identification due to declining trust in the Beijing government (Steinhardt, Li, and Jiang 2018), cohort experience and periodic effects brought by the Chinese tourist influx (Wong, Zheng, and Wan 2021), home ownership and the degree of supporting status quo (Wong and Wan 2018). As Yuen and Chung argued, the dominant explanations tend to consider localism as “a structural product that results reactively from socio-economic and political changes,” paying less attention to the role of agency (2018: 20). In this light, exploring how individuals interpret and feel about contentious politics in a repressive political environment can shed light on why they identify with a localist agenda. From a relational perspective, state repression and policing of protests are particularly influential in fostering the development towards radicalism (della Porta 2018). Kaeding (2017) argued that the rise of localism after the Umbrella Movement was due in part to the perceived failure of this occupation protest, yet this argument has not been empirically proven. Indeed, this argument is consistent with previous literature

on the impact of perceived movement consequences on subsequent political participation (Suh 2004, 2014) and on the radicalisation of the civil rights movement in the United States (Santoro and Fitzpatrick 2015). Positing the Umbrella Movement as a watershed of Hong Kong localism, we formulate the first set of hypotheses.

H1: People with stronger devotion to the UM are more likely to be localists.

H2: People with stronger perceptions of the positive consequences of the UM are less likely to be localists.

H3: People with stronger perceptions of the negative consequences of the UM are more likely to be localists.

The UM, similar to many contemporary networked protests, illustrated the mixed logics of media and protest embedded in a hybrid media environment that circulates action-stimulating emotions, ideas about tactics, and the construction of collective identities (Lee and Chan 2018; Caren, Andrews, and Lu 2020). In this light, it is analytically helpful to contrast the use of mainstream media with social media use due to distinct logics of content production. Communication scholars have reminded us that mass media organisations tend to maintain the status quo by disparaging social movements via news framing (Gitlin 1980), whereas the internet provides spaces for alternative, if not radical, ideas (Atton 2002). Given that mainstream media in Hong Kong are frequently co-opted by the government (Tang 2019), it is believed that such a difference would be much sharper. Hence, the portrayal of localism should be less appealing, if not demonised, in mainstream media discourse. On the other hand, frequent social media users were found to be more active in the Umbrella Movement (Lee, So, and Leung 2015), whereas young people were more likely to support radical means if they consumed news via social media during post-Umbrella Movement abeyance (Lee, Chan, and Chen 2020). Therefore, two hypotheses are proposed:

H4: People with more frequent news consumption on mainstream media are less likely to be localists.

H5: People with more political use of social media are more likely to be localists.

Political emotion is always constitutive of social movement, ranging from being a deeply rooted source of unrest (Gurr 1970; Castells 2015) to its energising role in mobilising and sustaining protest action (Jasper 2011; van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2013). Political psychologists generally approach the structure of political emotion through two complementary conceptions: discrete and valence models.² Discrete approaches tend to “identify a set of reliably identifiable emotional responses to unique circumstances without much attention to their interconnection or dimensionality” (Neuman et al. 2007: 10). By contrast, valence models “focus on a single positive-negative dimension on which emotional states can be arrayed” (Neuman et al. 2007: 10). In this study, we follow the valence approach because previous research on both explicit and implicit political attitudes demonstrated the validity and reliability

2. Some researchers further extend and reinterpret the valence model into a multi-dimensional structure, sometimes identified as a circumplex. See the discussion in Huddy, Sears, and Levy (2013).

of a self-reported, single dimension of political emotion, particularly for studying fundamental behaviours of approach and avoidance tendencies (Marcus 1988; Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2015; Kim and Kim 2019). Engaging either with or without radicalism or disengaging from politics essentially involves the tendencies of approach and avoidance. The differentiation between positive and negative emotions can help us interpret the radicalisation tendency in an effective way.

Localism as a form of tactical and ideological radicalism in Hong Kong is often associated with public sentiment against the Chinese for abusing public utilities and social welfare, which are supposed to belong to Hong Kong citizens (Tang and Yuen 2016). Regarding how mass mobilisation emerged in the early stage of the Umbrella Movement, the improper use of tear gas by police was the critical incident that aroused major grievances among the public (Tang 2015). On the one hand, Ng and Chan (2017) found that joyous resistance has long been an organising strategy for radical groups in Hong Kong by providing emotional, intangible resources that lower the cost of participation compared with confrontational tactics. On the other hand, empirical studies have also shown the impact of negative emotion on radicalisation during movement abeyance (Leenders 2013; Santoro and Fitzpatrick 2015). Hence, two hypotheses are proposed:

H6: People with stronger positive emotions are less likely to be localists.

H7: People with stronger negative emotions are more likely to be localists.

Exhaustion refers to emotional detachment that stimulates disengagement caused by accumulated stress associated with activism after the peak of mobilisation. However, individual attributes to this emotional process have seldom been covered in research on the cycle of contention. Recent studies of activist burnout and the biographical consequences of activism may shed light on this strand of movement abeyance research. Activist burnout is defined as the occurrence when people once deeply embedded in movements are forced to disengage due to the stress impacts of participation, ranging from physical or emotional health to a sense of disconnectedness from their movements (Gorski, Lopresti-Goodman, and Rising 2019). Previous studies have generally synthesised three categories of causes for activist burnout: (1) *internal causes* related to individuals' intrinsic motivational and psychological factors, (2) *external causes* related to hostile political environments and retaliation for activism, and (3) *within-movement causes* related to toxic movement cultures and personal interactions among activists (Chen and Gorski 2015). On the other hand, research on the biographical outcomes of activism highlights individuals' experiential processes of previous activism (Passy and Monsch 2019). For example, McAdam and Brandt (2009) show that a disappointing experience while participating in volunteering alters an activist's future commitments. Bringing the insights from these related studies, we contend that whether and how an individual feels exhausted is highly related to her or his actual involvement in the previous movement, perception of movement outcome, and feelings about politics in this study. Exhaustion may come from the combined effect of repression and radicalisation of some fringes of

the movement (Guzmán-Concha 2012). In the Hong Kong context, Leung (2018) found that some UM participants tended to avoid exposure to news after the Umbrella Movement. Hence, people who are heavily exposed to the factors of radicalisation may feel tired of the movement instead of further radicalised. Considering the stimulating effect of negative emotions in such a relationship (Huskinson and Haddock 2004; Seitz, Lord, and Taylor 2007), we propose the following research question to explore the tendency of exhaustion:

RQ: What are the respective effects of devotion to the UM, the perceived negative consequences of the UM, and the political use of social media on the identification of localists and pan-democrats among people with stronger negative emotions after the UM?

Conceptualisation and measurement of key variables

Political identification. The respondents were asked to choose the political identification that best described them. The available options included "pan-democrat," "pro-establishment," "localist," "supporter of the self-determination of Hong Kong," "supporter of the independence of Hong Kong," "centrist," "other," and "no political orientation." In the results, 17.7% of the respondents identified as pan-democrats; this is an umbrella term that includes different types of moderate democrats. Furthermore, 12.4%, 5.4%, and 3.0% of the respondents identified as localists, supporters of the self-determination of Hong Kong, and supporters of the independence of Hong Kong, respectively. For analytical purposes and meaningful interpretation in our study, it is therefore reasonable to categorise these three labels into localist identification, which refers to radical flanks in Hong Kong politics after the Umbrella Movement.

Devotion to the Umbrella Movement. Devotion is a mixture of the frequency of participation and the degree of subjective commitment. Devotion to the Umbrella Movement was conceptualised by four dimensions with the following operationalisation:

- (a) **Frequency of visiting the occupied sites.** The respondents were asked the number of days they visited any occupied sites. The answers ranged from "never attended" = 1 to "more than 14 days" = 5 ($M = 2.03, S.D. = 1.18$).
- (b) **Attention to news about the Umbrella Movement.** The respondents were asked how much attention they paid to the UM. The answers ranged from "paying no attention" = 1 to "paying considerable attention" = 5 ($M = 3.88, S.D. = 0.88$).
- (c) **Invitation for participation.** The respondents were asked about the frequency with which they "invited other people to go to the occupied sites together" and "called for the other people to go to the occupied sites." The answers ranged from "never" = 1 to "always" = 5. The variable was obtained by averaging the two items ($r = 0.80, a = 0.89, M = 1.92, S.D. = 1.12$).
- (d) **Sense of obligation.** The respondents were asked whether they agreed with the statements: "During the Umbrella Movement, did you think it was an obligation for you to participate in the movement?" and "During the Umbrella Movement, did you think it was an obligation for Hong Kong citizens to participate

in the movement?" The answers were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" = 1 to "strongly agree" = 5. The variable was obtained by averaging the two statements ($r = 0.73$, $\alpha = 0.84$, $M = 3.38$, $S.D. = 0.80$).

The variable "devotion to the UM" was obtained by averaging the scores of the four dimensions ($\alpha = 0.79$, $M = 2.80$, $S.D. = 0.78$).

Perceived positive consequences. The respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed with certain statements; the answers were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" = 1 to "strongly agree" = 5. The statements included: "Many Hongkongers were no longer politically apathetic after the Umbrella Movement," "The Umbrella Movement represents the political enlightenment of many Hongkongers," "The Umbrella Movement strengthened the cohesion of Hongkongers," and "The Umbrella Movement strengthened the unity of Hongkongers." The variable was constructed by averaging the score of the four statements ($\alpha = 0.79$, $M = 3.79$, $S.D. = 0.75$).

Perceived negative consequences. The respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed with certain statements; the answers were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" = 1 to "strongly agree" = 5. The statements included: "The internal conflicts within Hong Kong society became more serious because of the Umbrella Movement," "Hong Kong society became more polarised because of the Umbrella Movement," "The tension between China and Hong Kong intensified because of the Umbrella Movement," and "The Central Government exerted stronger control over Hong Kong because of the Umbrella Movement." The variable was constructed by averaging the score of the four statements ($\alpha = 0.74$, $M = 3.63$, $S.D. = 0.62$).

News consumption from the mainstream media. The respondents were asked how frequently they consumed news from "newspapers or magazines" and from "radio and television." The answers were measured from "none" = 1 to "very much" = 5. The variable was obtained by the mean score of the two items ($r = 0.495$, $\alpha = 0.66$, $M = 3.22$, $S.D. = 0.78$).

The political use of social media. The respondents were asked how often they were exposed to information concerning public affairs and how often they had discussions about public affairs with other people on social media. Given that many youths use more than one social media platform, the above questions were asked about the two social media platforms they most frequently used. The variable was then constructed by averaging the scores for the four answers ($\alpha = 0.74$, $M = 2.83$, $S.D. = 0.80$).

Emotions. As mentioned previously, we followed the valence approach to measure positive and negative emotions due to its consistent validity and subtle interpretation of the affective effect on political behaviour and attitude. Specifically, in previous studies anger and positive emotions are considered approach emotions that are most likely to drive protest action (Lerner and Tiedens 2006; Huddy, Stanley, and Erin 2007). Hopeful anticipation of an impact is perhaps the greatest spur to action (Gupta 2009), whereas joyful feelings may foster more radical action due to the minimising effect on participation cost (Ng and Chan 2017). In prior works,

sadness was identified as the main driver and inhibitor of protest action (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2000; Ahmed, Jaidka, and Cho 2017). Although anxiety and fear are often treated as negative emotions that lead to avoiding politics, the experience of fear and anxiety, as Eyerman argued, "can be a strong force in creating a sense of collectivity and be an attractive force in collective actions" (2005: 43). Building on these insights, this study includes these six emotions as proxies of political emotions.

(1) **Positive emotions.** The respondents were asked to what extent they felt joyful and hopeful after witnessing the various political incidents after the UM. The respondents were asked about four types of positive emotion, and the answers were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "no feeling at all" = 1 to "very strong" = 5. The positive emotions included "happy," "joyous," "optimistic," and "hopeful." The variable was obtained by averaging the score of the four types of positive emotions ($\alpha = 0.85$, $M = 1.50$, $S.D. = 0.64$).

(2) **Negative emotions.** The negative emotions in this study included feeling sad, angry, anxious, and fearful. The respondents were asked how they felt after witnessing the various political incidents after the UM. They were asked about eight types of negative emotions, and the answers were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "no feeling at all" = 1 to "very strong" = 5. The negative emotions included "angry," "enraged," "fearful," "scared," "worried," "anxious," "sorrowful," and "sad." The variable was obtained by averaging the score of the eight types of negative emotions ($\alpha = 0.94$, $M = 2.52$, $S.D. = 0.93$).

In addition to demographics, political attitudes were included as control variables in the analysis. These were "internal efficacy," "collective efficacy," "political party efficacy," "external efficacy," and "political distrust." Each variable was operationalised by two statements with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" = 1 to "strongly agree" = 5. Each variable was constructed by averaging the two measurements.

Research method

To justify our sampling strategy, we need to first highlight the critical role of university students in the recent waves of the Hong Kong social movement alongside many contemporary social movements across the globe. McAdam (1986) pointed out that young people were likely the main participants in many progressive movements due to biographical availability and youthful idealism, so that they were drawn into social movement relatively easily. Returning to the context of this research, the Umbrella Movement was the mass protest in which youths were the main body of the protesters. Nearly half (47.8%) of the protesters were aged 25 or below (Tang 2015). The Hong Kong Federation of Students (*Xianggang zhuan Shang xuesheng lianhui* 香港專上學生聯會), the leading student organisation being active in social protests, was thought to be the legitimate leader of the Umbrella Movement by most of the protesters (Cheng and Chan 2017). Youths, especially university students, formed a vital part of the UM. Their prominent role was also recognised by other scholars looking into post-UM

abeyance (Lee, Chan, and Chen 2020). This study seeks to examine how young people feel and think about politics during movement abeyance, an area of inquiry that has been underexplored.

The data were obtained from a survey conducted from 19 March 2018 to 23 March 2018 at five universities in Hong Kong. Four of them were public universities, and the last one was a private university at which most of the students were majoring in disciplines related to business and management. Among the four public universities, one was a comprehensive university that included students from a variety of disciplines. Two of them focused on science and engineering. The last university was a teaching-oriented university with a strong emphasis on liberal arts. The selection of the clusters was to ensure the diversity of the sample's background.

There were two ways to collect samples from university students. The first one was to distribute questionnaires at the classes that students from diverse backgrounds would attend, such as courses of general education. In that case, the selection of classes would depend on the implementation of general education in each university, and the consistency in controlling the diversity of the samples across different institutes could not be guaranteed. The second method was to collect samples at the major public areas in each university, in which a diversity of students might appear. Using this method, the consistency in the sampling procedure could be managed. The potential sampling bias would be managed by adopting an on-site systematic sampling. This data collection procedure was adopted from other research that also targeted university students (Tang and Lee 2013; Lee 2014). We identified two public areas in each university. Each day, two timeslots (one in the afternoon and one in the evening) were assigned. Over five days, the research assistants distributed 30 questionnaires during each timeslot in a specific area of each university. The assistants were instructed to walk along a predetermined path and invite every tenth student to be a respondent to minimise the selection bias of the interviewers. With this arrangement, a sample size of 1,500 students, or 300 students from each university, was expected. In total, 1,365 questionnaires were completed.

In the results, 54.7% of the respondents were female. Moreover, 76.0% of the respondents were aged between 17 and 21 years ($M = 20.42$, $S.D. = 1.20$). Of the respondents, 80.5% were undergraduate students. The students of non-degree programmes, such as associate degree programmes, constituted 13.8% of the respondents (1 = non-degree tertiary education, 4 = graduate school programme, $M = 1.96$, $S.D. = 0.55$). The percentages of respondents with a family income below HK\$30,000 and between HK\$30,000 and HK\$59,999 were 52.8% and 28.7%, respectively (1 = HK\$9,999 or below, 13 = HK\$80,000 or above, $M = 5.79$, $S.D. = 3.53$). Finally, 85.2% of the participants were born in Hong Kong.

Findings

Table 1 shows the demographic distribution of the localists, the democrats, and other political identifications. Because this research targeted college students, age group and education level were not included in this table. Localists included a significantly larger proportion of males than females, mainly due to militant

protests, which embodied an image of masculinity under the flag of localism. This finding was also consistent with the observations of Choi, Lai, and Pang (2020) that, as a rightist discourse, localism would easily be associated with a movement framing that was male-dominated. The family incomes of both localists and pan-democrats were significantly higher than those of the other groups. This finding reflects the general effect of socioeconomic status on the tendency to support democracy, which has been addressed in democratisation theories (Huntington 1991). Comparing the localists and pan-democrats, the latter were slightly wealthier, a finding that differs from the observations of Wong and Wan (2018). The discrepancy could be due to two factors. First, their research asked about the selection between localist candidates and pan-democratic candidates as a vote choice, whereas the present research asked about political identification in general; thus, the difference may reflect people's strategic calculation in voting. Second, because this research mainly covered university students, the different findings may also imply the influence of education level on the relationship between household income and political identification. A greater proportion of the localists were born in Hong Kong, which is consistent with the background of the rise of localism, a movement framing a series of protests that aimed to preserve the interests of locally born Hong Kong citizens (Yuen and Chung 2018).

Table 1. Gender, household income, and birthplace among localists, pan-democrats, and other political identifications

	Localists (%)	Pan-democrats (%)	Other (%)
Gender ($X^2 = 47.40^{***}$)			
Female	37.9	51.1	61.4
Male	62.1	48.9	38.6
Household income ($X^2 = 22.18^{***}$)			
HK\$29,999 or below	45.4	45.9	57.3
HK\$30,000 to 59,999	44.6	38.3	33.5
HK\$60,000 or above	10.0	15.8	9.2
Birthplace ($X^2 = 12.35^{**}$)			
Hong Kong	91.9	85.8	83.3
Outside Hong Kong	8.1	14.2	16.7

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Source: authors.

Table 2 shows the logistic regressions used to test the hypotheses. The dependent variables of Models 1 to 3 are binary variables. In Models 1 and 2, the respondents who did not identify as localists or pan-democrats were assigned a value of 0. Model 3 serves to highlight the factors that distinguish the identification between localists and pan-democrats. Only the respondents who identified as localists or pan-democrats were included in Model 3. In this model, pan-democrats were assigned a value of 0, and localists were counted as 1. Therefore, for Model 3, a larger coefficient means a greater likelihood of being localists than pan-democrats.

The model fit for Models 1 and 2 was optimal, with the *p* value of the Hosmer and Lemeshow test above 0.05. The model fit of Model 3 was not satisfactory. This was because the differences between the localists and the pan-democrats were relatively mild compared to Models 1 and 2, which included the whole sample. The relative homogeneity of the samples affected the model fit of Model 3. However, it was still a valuable reference to highlight the factors that could differentiate the identification between localists and pan-democrats.

Models 1 and 2 could explain 37.7% and 9.7% of the variance, respectively. This reflected the fact that the proposed factors were able to explain the youths' identification as localists, whereas their overall association with the identification as pan-democrats was limited. This difference could preliminarily support the rationale of proposing hypotheses aimed at examining the rise of localists during movement abeyance. The detailed results are interpreted in the following paragraphs.

The control variables are examined first. Consistent with the description in Table 2, male respondents and youths born in Hong Kong were more likely to be localists, whereas youths from wealthier families were more likely to be pan-democrats. The associations between political attitudes and localist identification were also strong, as localism was a new stream of political identification, whereas being a pan-democrat was a conventional political identification without a strong essence to be highlighted. The people who identified as localists, therefore, had a stronger sense of why they had such a political identification. That stronger sense was exhibited by the respondents' higher internal efficacy and lower external efficacy, which reflected their capability of understanding politics and the government's responsiveness to public opinion. Collective efficacy was positively related to localist identification because this political identification was established along with localist protests. Youths with a lower belief in the efficacy of the political parties were more likely to be localists. This finding is consistent with some public discourses that view politicians in the legislature as too incompetent to fight for democracy and improve social wellbeing. Following this argument, the negative relationship between political distrust and identifying as a pan-democrat is not surprising. In comparing the respective effects of political attitudes on identifying as a localist or as a pan-democrat, it is obvious that identifying as a localist represents a stronger belief in the power of collective actions because localists are cynical towards institutional politicians.

Devotion to the Umbrella Movement was positively related to identifying as both localist and pan-democrat, but the association was significantly stronger for localists. This finding supports *H1*. The perceived consequences of the Umbrella Movement were not significantly related to identifying as a localist, but youths who had a stronger belief in the positive consequences of the Umbrella Movement were more likely to be pan-democrats. It means that the youths' tendency to be moderates during movement abeyance was partially supported by the belief in the positive interpretation of the movement's outcome. This result is partially consistent with *H2*. The perceived negative consequences of the Umbrella Movement had no effect on the identification of either the localists or the pan-democrats. *H3* is not supported.

Table 2. Logistic regression for identifying as localists and pan-democrats

	Localists (1)	Pan-democrats (2)	Democrats/ localists (3)
Control variables			
Gender (F = 0)	0.580*** (0.175)	0.069 (0.164)	-0.537* (0.223)
Age	-0.018 (0.047)	0.018 (0.043)	-0.033 (0.056)
Education level	-0.158 (0.189)	0.099 (0.158)	-0.166 (0.232)
Household income	-0.035 (0.025)	0.065** (0.022)	-0.050^ (0.029)
Birthplace (Not HK = 0)	0.613* (0.291)	-0.288 (0.230)	0.657^ (0.353)
Internal efficacy	0.326** (0.125)	0.098 (0.119)	0.184 (0.164)
Collective efficacy	0.395*** (0.121)	-0.050 (0.120)	0.299^ (0.161)
Political party efficacy	-0.256* (0.107)	0.306** (0.108)	-0.425** (0.147)
External efficacy	-0.375*** (0.114)	0.040 (0.103)	-0.296* (0.132)
Political distrust	-0.004 (0.121)	-0.315** (0.112)	0.347* (0.148)
Umbrella Movement			
Devotion to the Umbrella Movement	0.969*** (0.131)	0.463*** (0.124)	0.464** (0.168)
Perceived positive consequences	-0.047 (0.127)	0.254* (0.254)	-0.155 (0.172)
Perceived negative consequences	-0.084 (0.137)	0.019 (0.019)	-0.079 (0.174)
Use of the media			
News consumption on mainstream media	-0.026 (0.116)	0.106 (0.109)	-0.140 (0.147)
Political use of social media	0.260* (0.120)	-0.148 (0.110)	0.276^ (0.153)
Political emotion			
Positive emotions	-0.159 (0.144)	0.237* (0.125)	-0.304^ (0.169)
Negative emotions	0.407*** (0.102)	0.199* (0.100)	0.190 (0.134)
Constant	-5.141** (1.331)	-5.379*** (1.191)	-0.448 (1.576)
N	1273	1273	479
Hosmer and Lemeshow test (p value)	0.390	0.404	0.031
X ²	350.260***	76.277***	112.380***
Nagelkerke R ²	37.7%	9.7%	28.0%

Note: ^p < 0.10, *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001. Standard errors are in parentheses. Source: authors.

Youths who more frequently used social media for political purposes were more likely to be localists, but this independent variable was not related to pan-democrat identification. Thus, *H5* is supported. However, the consumption of mainstream news had no relation to identifying as a localist or as a pan-democrat. The role of political emotion was also clear. Youths with stronger negative political emotions towards the political incidents that took place after the Umbrella Movement were more likely to be localists. This finding supports the idea that the radicalisation of political identification was partially driven by negative emotions. Comparatively, identifying as a pan-democrat embodied a mixture of both positive and negative political emotions to a similar degree. Among the youths who supported the opposition, positive emotion led them to identify themselves as pan-democrats instead of localists. Therefore, for the effect of political emotions, *H6* is supported, whereas *H7* is partially supported.

Table 3 reveals the findings addressing *RQ1*. Three sets of moderation terms – that is, “negative emotion x devotion to the UM,” “negative emotion x perceived negative consequences,” and “negative emotion x political use of social media” – were run separately, with the independent variables in Table 3 as the control variables. The result extends our understanding of exhaustion as affective detachment that leads to disengagement driven by accumulative strains associated with previous movement participation. Among the youths with stronger negative emotions after the Umbrella Movement, more devotion to the Umbrella Movement and stronger perceived negative consequences both led to a lower likelihood of identifying as localists or pan-democrats. Because the previous analysis demonstrated that Umbrella Movement devotion, perceived negative consequences, and negative emotion all constituted a larger likelihood for youths to identify themselves as localists, the negative effects of the interaction terms could offer a promising clue that exhaustion after a protest cycle happens when a devoted protest participant feels overwhelmed by the factors for radicalisation when they accumulate. This clue urges us to rethink the emotional linkage between exhaustion and radicalisation at the individual level.

Table 3. Moderation effects of negative emotion on devotion to the Umbrella Movement, perceived negative consequences, and political use of social media

	Localists	Pan-democrats
Negative emotion x devotion to the Umbrella Movement	−0.125* (0.049)	−0.174** (0.064)
Negative emotion x perceived negative consequences	−0.111* (0.054)	−0.102^ (0.060)
Negative emotion x political use of social media	−0.083 (0.069)	−0.072 (0.073)

Note: The three moderation terms were run separately. The independent variables in Table 3 were controlled variables in the examination of each moderation term.

^*p* < 0.10, **p* < 0.05, ***p* < 0.01, ****p* < 0.001. Standard errors are in parentheses.

Source: authors.

Concluding discussion

In the second half of 2019, the Anti-ELAB Movement took place after a five-year movement abeyance. The unprecedented movement quickly escalated and radicalised due to repression from the government. Among the protesters, 31.6% and 37.5% were identified as “localists” and “moderate democrats,” respectively (Lee et al. 2019). This mass mobilisation attracted some scholars to investigate Hong Kong people’s political attitudes during movement abeyance and their implications for understanding radical protests in 2019 (Lee, Chan, and Chen 2020). By examining the individual attributes of localist and pan-democrat identifications, this research can provide clues to understanding how some people became radicalised or reached the point of exhaustion during movement abeyance.

Our analysis showed that the devotion to and perceived outcomes of the Umbrella Movement, together with the political use of social media and negative emotions about politics, are important predictors of localist identification among Hong Kong youth before the 2019 mass protests. The findings align with extant literature on movement continuity and radicalisation during abeyance. Complementary to previous qualitative observations, our empirical evidence supports the claim that individuals’ affiliations as localists are associated with the extent of their Umbrella Movement participation and how they evaluated its movement outcomes (Kaeding 2017; Lowe and Tsang 2018). The youths who were more devoted to the UM and had stronger negative perceptions of the Umbrella Movement were more likely to be localists, as the realisation of protest failure after a protest cycle could lead to radicalisation (Santoro and Fitzpatrick 2015). An interesting highlight is that young people with stronger positive perceptions of the consequences of the Umbrella Movement were more likely to identify themselves as pan-democrat, a moderate flank of the Hong Kong pro-democracy movement. This is further evidence to support the importance of the perceived outcome of a mass protest in effecting one’s decision to be part of the radicals or the moderates during a movement abeyance.

Like other recent studies of the post-UM context in Hong Kong (Lee, Chan, and Chen 2020), our findings also uncover the central role of social media use in movement radicalisation in Hong Kong. As a communicative hub, social and digital media not only help maintain movement momentum in a networked environment during abeyance by lowering the cost of coordination (Leong et al. 2019; Rohman 2019) but also facilitate the circulation of radical thoughts, beliefs, and values through the construction of online counterpublics (Leung and Lee 2014). During a networked movement in abeyance, the construction of online counterpublics may facilitate radicalisation of movement culture, which belongs to the ideational dimension of movement abeyance structure (Taylor and Crossley 2013). Unfortunately, this research did not examine what media content the respondents were exposed to via traditional media outlets and social media platforms, thereby leaving unresolved the critical puzzle of how ideological radicalisation relates to media exposure. Future studies on media use during movement abeyance should explore this aspect, particularly through computational content analysis.

In addition, the relationship between political efficacy and localist identification among Hong Kong youth reveals some core features of Hong Kong localism in a protest-oriented context. Political efficacy generally refers to an individual's perceived ability to influence political processes (Abramson 1983). Among our localist respondents, a stronger collective efficacy, weaker efficacy of the political parties, weaker external efficacy, and stronger political distrust were identified as their individual attributes compared to their pan-democrat counterparts. Specifically, youths' localist identification was significantly associated with a sense of collective efficacy, together with distrust towards institutional politicians. Lee (2006: 297) defines collective political efficacy as "a citizen's belief in the capabilities of the public as a collective actor to achieve social and political outcomes." Contemporary networked movement was characterised by horizontal and spontaneous mobilisations, squashing the centrality of hierarchical organisation and elite-initiated action framework. Back to the Umbrella Movement, the role of political parties and major organisations was questioned by radical protesters, who were inspired by spontaneous and improvised mobilisation (Cheng and Chan 2017). The Anti-ELAB Movement was also characterised as a leaderless movement with spontaneous mobilisation and improvised tactics (Lee 2020). After the movement was forced to be suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, the extent to which some supporters of the movement would be radicalised under the same pattern of political efficacy needs to be investigated.

The impact of socioeconomic status on political identification should also be noted. Of course, it has been widely acknowledged that lower classes are more willing to accept radical change, whereas those from the middle and upper classes tend to maintain the status quo. However, in this study, family income was found to be a significant predictor of localist identification. The extent to which socioeconomic status affects one's tendency to choose a pathway during a movement abeyance has rarely been studied, and further research could be conducted on this topic.

Furthermore, the interaction terms were another important finding. They gave us useful hints to make inferences about who would be more likely to disengage after a mass protest. Negative emotion was found to be a significant moderator for youth who were more devoted to the Umbrella Movement and had stronger perception of negative consequences; they were less likely to identify as either localists or pan-democrats. Radicalisation and exhaustion were the results of the same background. However, when the condition of negative emotion was met, strong devotion to the UM and perceived negative consequences of the movement could lead people to feel exhausted instead of radicalised. Of course, this is an interpretive inference driven by the quantitative findings, but it can still be a meaningful clue for us to investigate how people are directed towards different pathways during a movement abeyance. In the context of Hong Kong, this hint is especially useful for scholars to forecast how Hong Kong's social movement will emerge since the COVID-19 pandemic and simultaneous repression from the government forced the Anti-ELAB Movement to be suspended. As the anti-ELAB movement was more novel and more emotionally stimulating than the Umbrella Movement, how many people were vulnerable to negative emotions and how negative

emotions lead to radicalisation and exhaustion should be explored.

Finally, this research encountered two major limitations that should be noted in this concluding paragraph. The first limitation came from the insufficiency in dissecting the impact of age and educational attainment on radicalisation, as our survey targeted local university and college students only. Of course, as a new political faction, localism was more appealing for young people; thus, the limitation of the narrow range of age was not clear. However, because family income was found to be a significant factor for the identification of localism and family income was commonly found to be associated with the school achievement of youths, a study that covered youths from a wider range of education levels could be more insightful. Second, as addressed by the analysis of the eventful approach (Yuen and Chung 2018), the conception of localism was developed and consolidated along with different political events. The idea of localism is flexible, not static. Therefore, the factors that differentiate the political identification of localists and pan-democrats can also change. The factors that distinguished the youths identifying as localists and pan-democrats could transform after the Anti-ELAB Movement, which was another critical event after the Umbrella Movement. As the Anti-ELAB Movement was forced to be suspended, rather than being announced as dismissed by activists as in the case of the UM, people's perception of the movement outcome could be more diverse than for the UM. A follow-up study would be useful to re-examine to what extent the factors for political identification during post-UM abeyance could be replicated to understand political identification during abeyance after the Anti-ELAB Movement.

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