

Handout 3

Why Hong Kong's #OccupyCentral Used Nonviolent Action as Tactic

(From *Huffington Post*: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-shank/why-hong-kongs-occupycent_b_5906184.html)

Led by Benny Tai, Professor Chan Kin-man and Reverend Chu Yiu-ming, OC has a diverse coordinating committee and, according to Tai, major decisions will be made by the participation of every person. The final decision regarding the occupation of the business district, according to OC, will be determined by a popular vote, not by the leadership.

The plan to occupy is the last resort in the OC Hong Kong strategy. They're first seeking a dialogue with the government in an effort to reach a settlement before a call to direct action. The condition for civil disobedience, according to Tai, is that you have to exhaust all legal channels. If negotiation and bargaining with Beijing fails, then they will occupy, suggesting that the whole city may have to be closed down.

OC's aims are not solely short-term or suffrage-based. A large component of OC is to educate Hong Kong residents on the benefits of nonviolent resistance and prepare them to use civil disobedience as a means to place limits on the power of leaders they see as illegitimate, empowering Hong Kong to deal not only with this threat but with future threats as well. The movement's commitment to nonviolent resistance was visible on New Year's Day, when thousands of Hong Kong citizens marched for political reform. Participants used the march as an occasion to learn and practice nonviolent action techniques, forming human chains and protecting themselves from possible police violence.

The idea that a society can successfully develop and apply a defense policy based on nonviolent struggle is not new. OC, like many movements before it, is attempting to produce a defense capacity that is strong enough and organized enough to convince a potential attacker – in this case, China – not to aggress because the consequences of an aggressive action could be unacceptably costly and ultimately unsuccessful.

By announcing in advance its plans to nonviolently disrupt economic activity in central Hong Kong, OC is keen to increase the cost of Beijing's potential decision to not grant Hong Kong universal suffrage. The nonviolent strategy here is to make life very difficult for Hong Kong – and, consequently, China – if Beijing does not honor its promise. OC is transparent and open about its demands and strategy because its members understand that nonviolent action operates differently than violent struggle. Secrecy in a nonviolent movement does little to prevent government surveillance or otherwise protect groups from any well-organized police or security forces. Rather, it closes the movement off from potential support. Nonviolent struggle ... requires openness in order to be effective.

Questions for Discussion

- What does Tai say about how decisions are made by the protesters?
- What does the article say about the tactic of occupation? What other methods do the protesters have available to them that they'd prefer using?
- What does the article say about the use of transparency in nonviolent resistance? Why is it important?