

Puckish Protesting in the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement

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Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement has been marked by the civility of the protestors and this has tended to dominate international press headlines. Rather less known because of its more local nature are the more playful and witty dimensions to the protests. Humour has always been a familiar and febrile strand in Hong Kong protest culture: puns are immensely popular, as are parodies and moments of surreal comic juxtapositions and appropriations that then take a life of its own. This paper will examine a few examples of madcap levity in the recent Umbrella Movement including the use of the 'Happy Birthday' song to counter vocal on-site critics and the recent shift to the Shopping Revolution, with its play on the Mandarin phrase, 購物 gòu wù (to go shopping).'

I argue that these expressions of wit are not merely amusing but a means to keep the spirit of protest and a distinctive sense of Hong Kong identity alive. If 'every joke is a tiny revolution' as George Orwell has noted, then each instance of humour in the Hong Kong protests is a micro derailment of an official script and ideology and the creation of a pocket of freedom.