

## An examination of the leadership profile of the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong using a dialectical framework on leadership

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### Abstract

*Despite the long history of research, the leadership study field is characterized by substantial diversity of ideas and leadership models. This paper formulated a dialectical framework on leadership to comprehend the diversity of leadership theories. The framework is then employed to examine the leadership profile of the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong. The paradoxical theme of “how to strengthen the leadership function of a leaderless Umbrella Movement” is studied in terms of the dialectical framework of leadership. The main argument is that the leadership profile of the Umbrella Movement can be usefully comprehended with the framework. The discussion in the paper is informed by a recent Facebook-based questionnaire survey carried out by the writer. In short, the paper offers a novel way to make sense of and evaluate both the leadership theories and the leadership profile of the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong.*

**Keywords:** Leadership; leaders; a dialectical framework on leadership; the Umbrella Movement; Facebook-based questionnaire survey; newspaper articles study

### Introduction

The subject of leadership has been experiencing a turbulent time, with the appearance of new thinking that challenges fundamentally the traditional leadership theories in response to novel problem-contexts. With this theoretical background in mind, the writer makes use of both conventional and unconventional leadership theories to examine the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong. The reason why the case study of the Umbrella Movement is considered a revealing case is that the Umbrella Movement possesses a quite unconventional and problematic leadership profile – a leaderless constellation in need of a strengthened leadership function. Such a leadership profile raises a number of leadership issues that can be readily examined by means of both conventional and unconventional leadership theories, which can be theoretically incompatible with each other, however. At the same time, an

intellectual examination of the Umbrella Movement is able to improve our understanding of both conventional and unconventional leadership theories but a new theoretical framework is required to resolve the contradictions among leadership theories. Other than that, such an examination is able to reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the Umbrella Movement leadership. To further inform the discussion, a Facebook-based questionnaire survey is conducted on the Umbrella Movement leadership to provide some empirical findings on the perceptions of the leadership of the Umbrella Movement.

### **An overall view of the conventional and unconventional theories in leadership that unravels their theoretical incompatibility**

To start with, Horne (2015) explains the origin of leadership as follows: “The most basic human relationship is with two individuals. Because of perceived differences, one may defer to the other in various areas, one, a critical one being competence and personality, among others. Once the deference occurs, there is hierarchy, or an establishment of levels. One person takes command or leadership..” Very often, a leader is described as possessing the ability “to engage and commit others to follow his(sic) vision and mission in a voluntary and non-coercive manner” (Sveningsson and Larsson, 2006). The study of leadership has a very long history both in the eastern and the western worlds. Leadership-central.com (2015) highlights some widespread leadership theories from 1840s to 1970s as Great Man Theories, Trait Theory, Behavioural Theories, Contingency Theories, and Transactional Leadership Theories and Transformational Leadership Theories. McCarthy (2012) identifies 10 essential leadership models, which are: Situational Leadership, Servant Leadership, Blake and Mouton’s Leadership Grid, Emotional Intelligence, Kouzes and Posner’s Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership, Jim’s Collin’s Level Five Leadership, The Diamond Model of Leadership, Six Leadership Passages, Authentic Leadership and the GROW model. Underlying the leadership models and theories, there are five basic ideas in the subject of leadership:

**Basic idea 1:** *Leadership* can be conceived as: (i) “the *ability* to influence a group toward the achievement of *goals*” (Robbins, 2013), (ii) “a *relationship* between people (*leaders* and *followers*) in which influence and power are unevenly distributed on a legitimate basis (contractual or consensual)” (Bowditch *et al.*, 2008) and (iii) “a *set of processes* that creates organizations or adapts them to significantly changing circumstances” (Kotter, 1996). In short, there are a number of different definitions on the idea of leadership.

**Basic idea 2:** A *leader* is a person who aims “to influence and guide others into pursuing particular objectives or visions of the future and to stimulate them into wanting to follow” (Brooks, 2006).

**Basic idea 3:** There is a *context* surrounding the relationship between leaders and followers (Bowditch *et al.*, 2008).

**Basic idea 4:** Given a specific, context, the leader-follower relationship creates certain *outcomes*, e.g., goal attainment and respect (Bowditch *et al.*, 2008), which can be comprehended in terms of the extent of leadership successfulness (Likierman, 2009).

**Basic idea 5:** *Leader development* is about the development of “leaders as individuals” while *leadership development* is about the “development of leadership processes in context”, plus leader development (Iles and Preece, 2006). Leadership development, however, has multiple meanings (Mabey, 2013), thus not a straightforward topic. For Schultz (2013), “Leadership requires mastery of a competency-based skill set that can be learned and practiced by anyone so inclined”. The expected outcome of leadership development is the gaining of leadership and leaders’ competence (Bolden and Gosling, 2006; Johansson *et al.*, 2014; Almonkari and Isotalus, 2012; Simpson and French, 2006) as well as the achievement of financial and non-financial goals via leader and leadership development (Archer, 2013).

These five basic ideas touch on eight key leadership-related notions, namely, (i) leadership, (ii) leaders, (iii) followers, (iv) the relationship between leaders and followers, (v) goals, (vi) context of the leader-follower relationship, (vii) leadership outcomes and the extent of leadership successfulness and (viii) leadership/leader development and leaders’/ leadership competence. These leadership-related notions have been much studied by leadership researchers, as evidenced in the published journal articles on them. The writer broadly discerns two types of leadership theories: the conventional and unconventional ones. The conventional theories on leadership are largely rooted in ancient thinking in the western world, notably from the ancient Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle (Taormina, 2005; Wilson, 2013; Grint, 2007). In general, the **conventional leadership theories** uphold the following four main viewpoints:

**Main viewpoint 1** is originated from Plato (Takala (1998), as cited by Taormina (2005).): “leadership is an inborn characteristic but that people born with this characteristic has to be trained in the behaviours needed to utilize this ability effectively”.

**Main viewpoint 2** is the “single-actor” or “hero leader” image, as pointed out by Kriger and Zhovtobryukh (2013).

**Main viewpoint 3** is the assumption originated from the Greek philosophers that “followers are ...inherently flawed and of limited capacity” (Wilson, 2013). How followers feel is expressed well in the song “I need a hero” sung by Bonnie Tyler in 1986: “I need a hero. I'm holding out for a hero 'til the end of the night. He's gotta be strong and he's gotta be fast.... And he's gotta be larger than life!..”.

**Main viewpoint 4** is the endorsement of the positivist approach to leadership “which privileges certain aspects such as objectivity, quantification and generalization” (Alvesson (1996) as cited by Lawler and Ashman (2012).).

In the academic literature, there are quite a number of leadership theories, some of which deviate somewhat from these four conventional leadership viewpoints to various extent. A quick way to have a broad understanding of those leadership theories that are roughly considered as conventional is to take a look at textbooks on organizational behavior, such as Robbins (2003: chapters 11 and 12) and Bowditch *et al.* (2008: chapter 7). However, the leadership literature from academic journals, e.g., *Leadership* (Sage), *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies* (Sage), and *The Leadership Quarterly* (Elsevier), etc., also offers some leadership theories and ideas which are fundamentally different from the four ideas underpinning conventional leadership theories. In this case, they can be considered as the **unconventional leadership theories**, which embrace the following four main viewpoints:

**Main viewpoint 1** holds that leadership is an emerging and linguistically co-constructed phenomenon with a distributed/ leaderless constellation (Choi and Schnurr, 2014).

**Main viewpoint 2** is that (i) people are “embedded in multiple, co-existing and evolving networks of leadership which constitute a valuable and difficult-to-imitate source of social capital” (Kriger and Zhovtobryukh, 2013) and (ii) “all the people in an organization are potential, if not actual, leaders at the right time and under the appropriate conditions” (Kriger and Zhovtobryukh, 2013).

**Main viewpoint 3** is that the relationship approach of leadership and followership are “interactive” rather than hierarchical (Howell and Costley (2006: 298) as cited by Crossman and Crossman (2011).) and the distribution of power between leaders and followers is not much uneven (Kellerman, 2013; Kellerman, 2013).

**Main viewpoint 4** is the endorsement of the non-positivist approach to leadership, such as Existentialism (Lawler and Ashman, 2012), Foucauldian thinking (Wilson, 2013) and discursive leadership approaches (Choi and Schnurr, 2014).

The unconventional leadership theories are developed more recently in response to the changing context of leadership practices. Specifically, (a) the competitive environment is getting more turbulent, (b) the internal organizational complexity is getting higher, and (c) leaders’ power have weakened in general (Kriger and Zhovtobryukh, 2013; Kellerman, 2013). In view of this, the star form of strategic leadership, more in line with the conventional leadership theories, is considered suitable when the internal organizational complexity is low and the competitive environment is placid, while dynamic leadership network form, which is more compatible with the unconventional leadership theories, is thought to be more appropriate when the internal organizational complexity is high and the competitive environment is turbulent (Kriger and Zhovtobryukh, 2013).

Making a similar effort on theory classification, Dansereau *et al.* (2013) offer a comprehensive list of leadership approaches, which are

categorized into traditional approaches (e.g., group-oriented leadership, development-based leadership, individual-based leadership) and contemporary approaches (e.g., vision-based leadership, outcome-based leadership, organizational leadership and non-leadership). Using the examples from their list of leadership approaches, path goal theory, transactional leadership theory, production oriented leadership type are related to the conventional leadership theories mentioned here, while shared leadership, transformational leadership and individualized leadership type are more associated with the unconventional leadership theories proposed in this paper. Nevertheless, the classification of Dansereau *et al.* (2013) does not map neatly into the classification of conventional and unconventional leadership theories adopted in this paper. For example, it can be argued that transformational leadership can be employed to support conventional and unconventional leadership thinking. Similarly, certain leadership concepts can be anchored in both the conventional leadership theories or the unconventional leadership theories, depending on the theorists' choice, see, for example, Lawler and Ashman (2012)'s discussion of leadership authenticity. As both the conventional and unconventional leadership theories are still being researched on in the academic community, they all undergo continuous theoretical development. Thus, it is not quite proper to label one set of leadership theories as conventional and another set as unconventional. Instead, the writer proposes a different way to examine leadership theories: a dialectical framework on leadership. It draws its inspiration from the dialectics of Hegel, which is considered as "the art of dialog and discussion" (Neto, 2014). The framework is based on the core idea that "the reason cannot understand anything unless it can be divided into two opposite poles", and the contradiction so exposed is then to be overcome (Neto, 2014). The dialogical process underlying the framework utilizes the inquiry system of conflict (Mitroff and Linstone, 1993: chapter 5) to produce what it considers to be valid knowledge. Conflict in this case takes the form of an intense debate between "two polar positions" so that the researcher is "in a stronger position to form his or her own position on a key issue" (Mitroff and Linstone, 1993). Based on Hegel's dialectics, the dialectical framework of leadership consists of three sets of leadership models, representing the thesis, antithesis and synthesis of a typical dialectical process, see Table 1. Specifically, the *thesis* is an affirmed thought which "on reflection proves itself unsatisfactory"; the *antithesis* a thought which "propels the affirmation of its negation" but is also inadequate itself, and the *synthesis* is an emerged higher rational unity" (Spencer and Krauze, 1996). So, instead of using the unwieldy classification of conventional and unconventional leadership theories, the paper constructs the Leadership Model (thesis), the Leadership Model (antithesis) and the Leadership Model (synthesis) within a dialectical framework on leadership. In this dialectical framework, ideas from the conventional and unconventional leadership theories are assimilated into it in a way to deliberately stress two polar positions, i.e., the Leadership Model (thesis) and the Leadership Model

(antithesis), while the Leadership Model (synthesis) results from an overrun of the contradiction between the thesis and antithesis models.

**Table 1: A dialectical framework on leadership**

<b>The Leadership Model (thesis) and its underlying thinking</b>	<b>The Leadership Model (antithesis) and its underlying thinking</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A strong and wise leader.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A leaderless team (i.e., no formally appointed leaders).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weak followers, who have to be led.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capable followers, who can be leaders, if required.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actors, e.g., leaders and followers, are important objects of analysis.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationships between actors and followers are important objects of analysis.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Power is mainly centralized in the leader.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Power is widely spread among networks of actors, who switch roles between leader and follower from time to time.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The external environment is relatively easy to comprehend.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The external environment is quite turbulent.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The internal organizational environment is relatively simple and stable.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The internal organizational environment is organic.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leader development and follower development are vital.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership development is vital.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership approach tends to be grounded on positivist research philosophy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership approach tends to be grounded on non-positivist research philosophies.</li> </ul>



<b>The Leadership Model (synthesis) and its underlying thinking</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A wise leader who is capable and interested in promoting distributed leadership and leaderless teams (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 2011).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The actors involved in leadership and the leadership function should adapt when the context and tasks alter. As a consequence, a follower may replace a leader to become the new leader or the leadership constellation may be reconfigured.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The focus of analysis is on both the actors (leaders and followers) and the leadership function.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership development, which includes leader and follower development, is a messy process.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leaders and followers have different strengths and weaknesses such that some types of power are centralized while other types of power are widely distributed. Also, power redistribution is an ongoing process.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The context of leadership includes internal and external environments with perceived connected simple and complex parts, though perceptions on them differ by individuals. In short, the context is inter-subjective, or even coercive.</li> </ul>

- Leadership approach tends to be grounded on pluralism-based research philosophy (Gregory, 1996; Midgley, 1992).

In this dialectical framework, each stage is made up of a specific leadership model with particular underlying thinking. Each stage, as represented by a particular leadership model is “partially untrue”, so the goal is totality which “preserves within it each of the ideas or stages that it has overcome...” (Spencer and Krauze, 1996). For Hegelian dialectics, the synthesis stage becomes a thesis, which will undergo another cycle of the dialectical process. However, this paper will not attempt to do so, and is contended to identify three stages with one cycle only. The framework is formulated as an intellectually creative exercise based on the writer’s literature review effort. In the next section, the leadership profile of the Umbrella Movement is reviewed using the dialectical framework of leadership as proposed here.

### **An examination of the leadership profile of the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong in terms of the main leadership-related notions**

The main leadership profile of the Umbrella Movement is portrayed using information from Internet search and newspaper/ journal articles study. Details on illustrative extracts are provided in Appendix 1 while the main findings are summarized here. These secondary data are grouped in seven categories, which are: (i) leaders, (ii) followers, (iii) goals, (iv) leadership and leader-follower relationship, (v) context, (vi) leadership outcomes, and (vii) leader development/ leadership development and leaders’/ leadership competence. These categories represent the main leadership-related notions, which have been discussed in the previous section of this paper. Based on the supportive extracts from the Internet, journals and a local newspaper, the main leadership profile of the Umbrella Movement can be described in terms of these notions as follows:

- (i) *Leaders*: There are a number of leaders, some experienced and mature while others young and idealistic (Kaiman, 2014). The Umbrella Movement leaders sometimes downplay their leadership role (Beech and Rauhala, 2014; Ng, 2014c). From time to time, certain followers would adopt the roles of leaders on their own initiatives to launch protest and promotion campaigns of various sorts, e.g., Woodhouse (2014). The Umbrella Movement leaders have limited informal influence over their own followers, who are quite autonomous and many of whom educated. Their profiles mostly match the Leadership Model (antithesis).
- (ii) *Followers*: Followers can be supporters and sympathizers of the Umbrella Movement. They come from all walks of life and from different age groups (Kuo and Timmons, 2014; Chen, 2014), though there are a substantial number of student-followers (Phillips, 2014). Followers sometimes take up self-organized initiatives to support the

- Umbrella Movement (e.g., Woodhouse, 2014); in this sense, they become leaders on small-scale protest campaigns. Their profiles appear to resemble the Leadership Model (antithesis).
- (iii) *Goals:* The overall vision of the Umbrella Movement is shared by all the Umbrella Movement supporters, which is to fight for universal suffrage in Hong Kong. Different cliques of the movement do have different tactical goals, some more radical than others (Tsang *et al.*, 2014). The profile on the Umbrella Movement goal formulation is compatible with both the Leadership Model (thesis) and the Leadership Model (antithesis) thinking.
- (iv) *Leadership and leader-follower relationship:* the ability of the leaders to lead followers is limited as followers are quite autonomous (e.g., Ng, 2014c). Nonetheless, the movement leaders have their own fans with their own Facebook fanpages. There are disagreements of various intensity between leaders, leaders and followers, and between cliques from time to time, which reflects an incoherent, dispersed leadership function of the Umbrella Movement (e.g., Tsang *et al.*, 2014; Cheung *et al.*, 2014; Convery, 2014). Student leaders, such as Joshua Wong, explicitly state that they are not prepared to be a leader and that the movement should not rely on a few leaders. Besides, many followers do not identify with any social movement organizations at all; thus, the Umbrella Movement is considered to be leaderless, autonomous and self-sustaining for many people (Kam, 2014). It appears to have a weak distributed leadership function. The leadership profile is more affiliated with the Leadership Model (antithesis).
- (v) *Context:* The society is quite divided on its attitude toward the Umbrella Movement (Lam, 2014; Wong, 2014). At the same time, the external environment facing the movement is turbulent and hostile. The Hong Kong government, the rulers in Beijing and certain Hong Kong citizens are quite against the Umbrella Movement (e.g., Phillips, 2014; Kaiman, 2014; Wong, 2014). The context profile is more compatible with the Leadership Model (antithesis); nevertheless, the Leadership Model (thesis) remains relevant for informing leadership practices with this context profile.
- (vi) *Leadership outcomes:* So far, the Umbrella Movement has gained wide support as well as hostility from the society, converting the city from an economic city to a political and divided city (Chugani, 2014; So, 2014). The main leadership outcome is that the movement is clearly a forceful movement by now (Ng, 2014b). Both the Leadership Model (thesis) and the Leadership Model (antithesis) can be applied to evaluate the leadership outcomes in this case, though they may pay attention to different aspects of the outcomes and have different assessment views on the movement's extent of leadership successfulness.

(vii) *Leader development/ leadership development and leaders'/ leadership competence:* Both leader development and leadership development have been conducted via vigorous learning by doing, especially throughout the last quarter of 2014 (Cheung, 2014). Still, there is a need to strengthen leaders' and leadership competence. The leader and leadership development process appears to be supported by advice and discussion delivered online and offline with wide participation from the community at large. In the writer's view, useful ideas are not restricted to those from the movement supporters; very often, the movement opponents also offer useful insights for leader and leadership development by challenging and criticizing the Umbrella Movement. This writer has come across articles with valuable advices written by politicians and academics in the local newspaper of the *South China Morning Post*. Overall, the Umbrella Movement leadership development/ leader development is in line with both the Leadership Model (antithesis) and the Leadership Model (thesis) thinking since equal evaluative attention by analysts in newspapers and the movement participants has been paid on both leadership development and leaders' development.

Taken as a whole, both the Leadership Model (thesis) and the Leadership Model (antithesis) are applicable to the study of leadership profile of the Umbrella Movement in terms of the main leadership-related notions, although the overall movement leadership profile resembles the Leadership Model (antithesis) more than the Leadership Model (thesis). Such a profile appears puzzling as the Leadership Model (thesis) and Leadership Model (antithesis) are opposed to each other. The next section draws on the Facebook-based survey findings to further inform the discussion on the leadership profile of the Umbrella Movement.

### **Findings and analysis of a Facebook-based questionnaire survey on perceptions of the leadership profile of the Umbrella Movement**

A Facebook-based survey on perceptions of the Umbrella Movement leadership was conducted from January 3 to 6, 2015 with the writer's Facebook friends. Most of these friends have been or are the writer's students. The survey questionnaire was constructed with the free-of-charge survey tool from KwikSurveys.com. The research method of Facebook-based questionnaire survey has been discussed by Ho (2014) so an evaluation of this research method is not provided here. Survey questions cover the respondents' profiles and their opinions on the leadership profile of the Umbrella Movement. There were 132 respondents to this survey and the primary survey statistics are provided in Appendix 2. Survey data has also been exported to Excel for further analysis with the data-filtering function. In total, fifteen main findings from the survey statistics are provided as follows:

Findings from the basic statistics (Findings 1 to 7)

*Finding 1:* (re: survey question 6) - Opinion is divided on whether the Umbrella Movement has been primarily led by students, with 61 (45.9%) respondents thinking so while 53 (39.8%) respondents not agreeing on that. There is a significant minority of 19 (14.3%) respondents who have no idea whether the movement has been led by students. The finding suggests that respondents are unclear whether the movement's leadership follows the Leadership Model (thesis) or the Leadership Model (antithesis).

*Finding 2:* (re: survey question 7) - There is a clear majority of 89 respondents (66.9%) who feel that the Umbrella Movement is leaderless. Also, there is a significant minority of 19 respondents (14.3%) who have no idea whether the movement is leaderless or not. It suggests that the movement is perceived more in terms of the Leadership Model (antithesis) than the thesis one.

*Finding 3:* (re: survey question 9) - The number of respondents who do not feel that the Umbrella Movement should be led by students in 2015 and beyond is 56 (42.1%), as compared with 30 respondents (22.6%) who are supportive of this idea. There is a significant minority of 33 respondents (24.8%) who have no idea on this topic. In this case, those who support the idea and those who have no idea are roughly equal as well as significant in percentage terms. The finding indicates that there is a substantial feeling that the leadership function should be strengthened, by endorsing the Leadership Model (thesis) or the Leadership Model (antithesis).

*Finding 4:* (re: survey question 10) - More than half of the respondents (70 respondents; 52.6%) feel that the student leaders of the movement should receive leadership training, while 32 respondents (24.1%) do not think so. There is also a small proportion of respondents (14 respondents; 10.5%) who have no idea on this topic. In general, respondents perceive more leader development for the student leaders should be made. This is compatible with the Leadership Model (thesis) thinking.

*Finding 5:* (re: survey question 11) - The majority of the respondents (84 respondents; 63.2%) feel that the Umbrella Movement should be led by a few wise and experienced leaders (not young students) in the near future. A small number of respondents (15 respondents; 11.3%) have no idea on this topic. This reflects a major perceived need to strengthen the leadership function in the Leadership Model (thesis)'s terms.

*Finding 6:* (re: survey question 12) - The largest group of respondents (61 respondents; 45.9%) feel that the Umbrella Movement should not be led by political parties in Hong Kong, as compared with 30 respondents (22.6%) who are supportive of this idea. In general, respondents do not have much

confidence in the political parties to lead the Umbrella Movement<sup>1</sup>. From the Leadership Model (antithesis) perspective, political parties remain important in the networks of actors of the Umbrella Movement.

*Finding 7:* (re: survey question 13) - The largest group of respondents (61 respondents; 45.9%) feel that the Umbrella Movement should not be leaderless in constellation in 2015, as compared with 25 respondents (18.8%) who are supportive of leadership constellation. This reflects a higher preference for the Leadership Model (antithesis) in 2015. There is also a significant minority of respondents (32 respondents; 26.3%) who have no idea on this topic. Overall, confusion lingers on over which Leadership Model, i.e., the thesis version or anti-thesis version, should be endorsed for the Umbrella Movement in 2015.

#### Findings via Excel-based querying (Findings 8 to 15)

*Finding 8:* (re: survey questions 5 and 8) - Out of the 20 respondents who are against the Umbrella Movement basically, five of them (25%) do not feel that the leadership function of the Umbrella Movement should be strengthened. This percentage is higher than the 19.7% for all 132 the respondents. Also 10 of these 20 respondents (50%) answer they do not care about it. For the 132 respondents, 21 respondents (15.9%) have expressed “do not care”. So, opponents of the Umbrella Movements tend not to care about this topic, which is understandable. This finding provides additional information on the context of the Umbrella Movement leadership.

*Finding 9:* (re: survey questions 3 and 5) - For the 18 respondents whose age group is 18-27, 14 of them (77.8%) are supportive of the Umbrella Movement, as compared with the corresponding figure of 53.4% for all the 132 respondents. This indicates that young people tend to be more supportive of the Umbrella Movement. Notwithstanding this finding, it is clear that the Umbrella Movement supporters and sympathizers possess a diversity of profiles (re: Appendix 1: Followers).

*Finding 10:* (re: survey questions 3 and 6) - For the 18 respondents whose age group is 18-27, 10 of them (56%) feel that the Umbrella Movement has been led by students, as compared with the corresponding figure of 45.9% for all the 132 respondents. This indicates that young people tend to more strongly feel that the Umbrella Movement has been primarily led by students. This finding sheds some light on the leader-follower relationship between young people and student-leaders.

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<sup>1</sup> Specifically, *confidence in leadership* is about followers' trust in a leader as well as confidence in a leader's capacity to cope with challenges (Zhu *et al.*, 2012).

*Finding 11:* (re: survey questions 3 and 9) - For the 18 respondents whose age group is 18-27, 3 of them (17%) feel the Umbrella Movement should be led by students in 2015 and beyond, as compared with the corresponding figure of 22.6% for all the 132 respondents. There is a slight tendency for younger people not to support students to lead the Umbrella Movement in 2015 and beyond. This finding illuminates the present leader-follower relationship between young people and student-leaders. As the sample size is very small, this finding has very low external validity.

*Finding 12:* (re: survey questions 3 and 13) - For the 18 respondents whose age group is 18-27, 2 of them (11.1%) feel that the Umbrella Movement should be leaderless in 2015, as compared with the corresponding figure of 18.8% for all the 132 respondents. There is a slight tendency for younger people not to support the leaderless constellation of the Umbrella Movement in 2015. This may reflect a higher preference on the young respondents' part for the Leadership Model (thesis) practice in 2015. As the sample size is very small, this finding has very low external validity.

*Finding 13:* (re: survey questions 8 and 10) - For the 68 respondents who feel that the Umbrella Movement leadership function should be strengthened, 51 respondents (75%) also feel that the student leaders should receive leadership training, as compared with the corresponding figure of 52.6% for all the 132 respondents. This means that respondents tend to feel that leader development is useful for strengthening the Umbrella Movement leadership function. Such feeling is compatible with both the Leadership Model (thesis) and the antithesis one.

*Finding 14:* (re: survey questions 8 and 11) - For the 68 respondents who feel that the Umbrella Movement leadership function should be strengthened, 51 respondents (75%) also feel that the Umbrella Movement needs to be led by a few wise and experienced leaders (not young students) in the near future. Such a feeling is more in line with the Leadership Model (thesis) than with the Leadership Model (antithesis). The finding also indicates that the movement followers in general are not satisfied with the leader competence of the student-leaders.

*Finding 15:* (re: survey questions 13 and 8) - For the 61 respondents who feel that the Umbrella Movement in 2015 should not be leaderless, 39 of them (63.9%) also feel that the Umbrella Movement leadership function should be strengthened, as compared with the corresponding figure of 51.5% for all the 132 respondents. Such a feeling from this group of respondents is more affiliated to the Leadership Model (thesis)'s version of leadership development.

Overall, the findings indicate diversity of opinions on the Umbrella Movement leadership, which can be contradictory (e.g., a significant minority

of respondents who are supportive of a leaderless constellation for the movement in 2015 vs the largest group of respondents who are not (re: survey question 13 finding). The opinions are also bewildering, indicated by the “no idea” choice adopted by a significant minority of survey respondents on many of the survey questions, which can be understood as cognitive confusion arising from the dialectical logic on leadership at work. From the leadership (thesis) perspective, the leadership profile of the Umbrella Movement is not satisfactory in the sense that the student leaders appear inexperienced; they even downplayed their roles as leaders<sup>2</sup> (Beech and Rauhala, 2014) and the leadership constellation is not sufficiently centralized. On the other hand, from the Leadership Model (antithesis) perspective, the Umbrella Movement leadership constellation can be considered as distributed in constellation, although this form becomes less preferable in 2015 (re: survey question 13 statistics in Appendix 2). Such a leadership constellation is basically appropriate in a situation where the organizational structure is complex and the external environmental level of turbulence is high (Kriger and Zhovtobryukh, 2013). The Umbrella Movement’s organizational structure and external environment do possess these organizational and environmental characteristics to a large extent. Besides, many of the Umbrella Movement supporters are themselves educated people who behave quite autonomously anyway. As a consequence, the power distance between leaders and followers are quite low. All these factors favor the Leadership Model (antithesis) practices (Kellerman, 2013). Such a leaderless (i.e., no formally appointed leaders with highly centralized power) Umbrella Movement is able to possess a strong and distributed leadership function (Choi and Schnurr, 2014), which is espoused by the Leadership Model (antithesis). Certain opinions in the survey indicate demand in 2015 for the Umbrella Movement to be led by experienced and wise leaders (re: survey question 11), which is affiliated with the Leadership Model (thesis) while other opinions remain supportive to the leaderless constellation of the movement (re: survey question 13), which is more in line with the Leadership Model (antithesis). Those who oppose the Umbrella Movement tend to reply with the “don’t care” response. Their opposition can be considered as a part of the context of the Umbrella Movement leadership.

To sum up, the survey reveals a diversity of opinions on the leadership profile of the Umbrella Movement which can be perceived as a phenomenon created by the underlying dialogical process of leadership models (re: Table 1). It is suggested that, the contradiction of viewpoints as exists in the leadership literature and in the Umbrella Movement survey can be partially overcome by adopting the Leadership Model (synthesis), which is

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<sup>2</sup> The phenomenon of downplaying the significance of the leader’s role is not unique to the Umbrella Movement; it is also spotted in other leadership studies, see French and Simpson (2006).

anchored on pluralism and which synthesizes useful ideas from both Leadership Model (thesis) and Leadership Model (antithesis). The rationale underlying the synthesis model is that pluralism is supportive of viewing an issue with multiple perspectives and multiple leadership theories. It serves as a synthesis of the Leadership Model (thesis) and the Leadership Model (antithesis) to come up with a more superior model - the Leadership Model (synthesis). This model is likely to support the idea that the informal leaders of the leaderless Umbrella Movement should receive leadership training based on pluralism so as to strengthen the Umbrella Movement's distributed leadership constellation (Choi and Schnurr, 2014; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 2011). In the writer's view, such a distributed leadership constellation could be also informed by relationship-managing organization notion which is anchored in pluralism (Ho, 2015). However, the paper is not going to examine further the Leadership Model (synthesis), although some thinking on it is suggested in Table 1. Furthermore, more empirical research needs to be carried out to validate the Leadership Model (synthesis) thinking. Finally, it should be reminded that the external validity of the survey findings, which informs the discussion, is low as the sample is non-probabilistic and the survey sample size is small.

### **Concluding remarks**

At first sight, the diversity of ideas and theories in the field of leadership study appears cognitively confusing. Likewise, the leaderless Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong makes the movement's leadership profile paradoxical. Both the Leadership Model (thesis) and the Leadership Model (antithesis) are applicable to study the Umbrella Movement, but their underlying thinking is opposed to each other. Also, the question of "how to strengthen the leadership function of the proclaimed leaderless Umbrella Movement?" sounds contradictory itself. When examined with the dialectical framework on leadership, the dialectical process underlying the paradoxical and messy picture of both the leadership literature and the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong is manifested. By comprehending leadership theories and leadership case study in dialectical terms, leadership researchers have an additional intellectual means to evaluate them; the paradoxical nature of the Umbrella Movement leadership profile becomes much less bewildering, thus more manageable by the movement's supporters. At the same time, researchers should be wary of the theoretical vagueness and limitations of the dialectical logic itself (see, for example, Mitroff and Linstone, 1993). For example, there is no guarantee that a synthesis (e.g., the establishment of the Leadership Model (synthesis).) can successfully take place in a dialectical process. And, in the leadership field, theoretical pluralism, which is endorsed by the Leadership Model (synthesis) (re: Table 1), has been a contentious topic (Glynn and Raffaelli, 2012).

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1: The main elements of the leadership profile of the Umbrella Movement and supportive information from journals and newspaper articles

Main leadership profile elements	Extracted information from journals and newspapers for illustrations
<i>Leaders</i>	Beech, H. and E. Rauhala. 2014. "World: Voice of a generation" <i>Time</i> October 20: 16-21.

	<p>“Wong is polite, prone to bringing his hands in a penitent clasp. He was raised in a Christian family..... Wong lacks physical presence.... “I don’t want to follow the games of adults,” he says, “... Political reform is not going to come from going to meetings.... We had to do radical action because our leaders did nothing.”..”.</p> <p>Kaiman, J. 2014. “Who guides Hong Kong’s ‘Umbrella Revolution’ pro-democracy movement?” <i>The Guardian</i>. September 30.</p> <p>“Hong Kong protesters come from a huge swath of society and have no single leader, but there is a group of figureheads... de facto spiritual guides. They can be divided into two camps. Leaders of... Occupy Central with Love and Peace – Benny Tai, Chan Kin-Man and Chu-Yiu Ming – are generally middle-aged, politically experienced, and self-restrained. .... students leaders, Joshua Wong and Alex Cho.. tend to be more idealistic, headstrong, and social media-savvy...”.</p>
<p><i>Followers</i></p>	<p>Kuo, L. and H. Timmons. 2014. “The Umbrella Movement marks a coming of age for Hong Kong’s “princess” generation” <i>Quartz</i> November 14.</p> <p>“...young women playing a greater role in Hong Kong’s pro-democracy protests than any other political events since the city’s return to China from British control in 1997.... These include stay-at-home mothers ferrying in supplies, secondary students spearheading art projects, environmentalists running the massive recycling efforts, medical students staffing the first aid tents, and goggles-wearing agitators...”.</p> <p>Woodhouse, A. 2014. “Occupy aftermath: Pro-democracy groups get crafty in new campaign” <i>South China Morning Post</i> December 21: 6.</p> <p>“Organisers of a craft market held yesterday in two small rooms in a Wan Chai tower block said they hoped to continue the message of the Occupy Central protests..... pro-democracy supporters are trying to keep the movement alive, including the “shopping” or <i>gau wu</i>, crowds in Mong Kok....”.</p> <p>Phillips, T. 2014. “Hong Kong’s Umbrella Movement spawns new generation of protester – but can they ever win?” <i>The Telegraph</i> December 13.</p> <p>“Within hours of the clearance an editorial in the People’s Daily, the Communist Party’s flagship newspaper, lashed out at the “obstinate students. “People of this age group are not mature enough, lack sound judgment, are easily influenced by the outside world and are very likely be used or hijacked by radicals,” it said.... those entreaties</p>

	<p>will fall on deaf ears..”.</p> <p>Chen, M. 2014. “The Future of the Umbrella Revolution” <i>Jacobin magazine</i> October.  “Students are at the forefront of the movement, but unions have also played an important role... Many people...are coming out to defend our core values, such as rule of law, human rights, and freedom of speech... ”.</p>
<p>Goals</p>	<p>Leung, J. 2014. “Insight: Ready to engage” <i>South China Morning Post</i> December 16: A13.  “For us [students], democracy seems to be answer to most of our concerns. It has the appeal of collective political participation and increases the legitimacy at all levels. With such a mechanism, we might have a society that caters more to our needs and better reflect public opinion...”.</p> <p>Davis, M.C. 2014. “Insight: For the people” <i>South China Morning Post</i> December 16: A13.  “..leading Occupy protesters should now focus on winning public support for their campaign, while putting pressure on officials to act in Hong Kong’s best interests...”.</p> <p>Ng, J. 2014a. “Politics: Occupy founders vow to push for veto on reforms” <i>South China Morning Post</i> December 19: C4.  “In wake of protests, three leaders insist battle for democracy is far from over and say they will urge lawmakers to block 2017 proposals... A finalised proposal – which is expected to reflect Beijing’s restrictive framework, virtually barring pro-democrats from running for the city’s top-job – is expected to face a Legislative Council vote in the middle of next year..”.</p> <p>Ng, J. 2014b. “Occupy did not end with a loss” <i>South China Morning Post</i> December 22: C1.  “Benny Tai says there has been ‘solid growth’ in support for movement which highlighted the need for change to democratic structure”.</p>
<p>Leadership and leader-follower relationship</p>	<p>So, P. 2015. “Group’s indirect route to Occupy hearts and minds” <i>South China Morning Post</i> January 11: 5.  Taking the democracy message into communities by helping residents improve the place they live could be a “third way” to keep the Occupy Central spirit alive, members of a new group say.....”.</p> <p>Beech, H. and E. Rauhala. 2014. “World: Voice of a generation” <i>Time</i> October 20: 16-21.  “.... Wong says he has no wish to serve as an icon ....To Wong, the leaderless nature of the territory’s democracy</p>

	<p>movement is a strength, not a weakness. “If Hong Kong just relies on me,” he says, “the movement will fail.”..”.</p> <p>Ng. J. 2014c. “Occupy Central: Protest leaders get back to studies” <i>South China Morning Post</i> December 27: A5.          “..”The Umbrella Movement has exposed the weak organizational ability of civil groups,” Shum [Lester] said. “We can’t just rely on the federation alone.”... While the protesters were committed, Shum noted, participating groups were unable to form a strong alliance to mobilize people efficiently...”.</p>
<p><i>Context</i></p>	<p>Kaiman, J. 2014. “Who guides Hong Kong’s ‘Umbrella Revolution’ pro-democracy movement?” <i>The Guardian</i>. September 30.          “As a testament to [Joshua Wong’s] influence, state media has attempted to discredit him by portraying him as an ‘extremist’ with shadowy ties to the US... Police arrested him... after a group of students scaled a fence to invade the government complex... ..[Benny Tai] has reportedly received death threats for his activism...”.</p> <p>Sin, S. 2014. “Insight: Silent no longer” <i>South China Morning Post</i> December 23: A11.          “..young people’s frustration and anger stem, above all, from the uncompromising attitudes of the older generation, and the fact youth have had no voice in society – until now... Politically, we are offered a “fake democracy”.... Socially, welfare is minimal... Economically, the “Pearl of the Orient”, once a city of energy and prosperity, now clings onto finance and trade with mainland China... ”.</p> <p>Feng, C.S. 2014. “Insight: Lead by example” <i>South China Morning Post</i> December 20: A13.          “..when mainland China has improved its governance, Hongkongers may be more willing to listen to it on political development...”.</p> <p>Wong, R. 2014. “The View - Back to business: Growing apart” <i>South China Morning Post</i> December 24: B12.          “Many reports describe the Occupy Movement as a conflict between two generations: an older generation that is more materialistic and willing to compromise and a younger generation that is more idealistic and confrontational...”.</p> <p>Lam, W.W. 2014. “From the experts: Keep family ties strong despite different opinions” <i>South China Morning Post</i>, October 27: C8.          “As tension mount, there have been a growing number of</p>

	<p>family problems. The Occupy Central Movement has divided society and impacted relationships within families and between friends...”</p> <p>Chen, M. 2014. “The Future of the Umbrella Revolution” <i>Jacobin magazine</i> October.          “..what we can see is the tendency of the Chinese government and the Hong Kong government to try to restrict the level of freedom that we enjoyed in the past in Hong Kong... the Hong Kong government has developed into a [system that is] keeping the balance in favor of capitalism and big enterprise...”.</p>
<p><i>Leadership outcomes</i></p>	<p>Chugani, M. 2014. “End of Act One” <i>South China Morning Post</i> December 13: A11.          “.. the end of Occupy has not doused the spirit of civil disobedience in HK, where the stage is now set for further action...”.</p> <p>So, P. 2014. “Public support for campaign grows, survey finds” <i>South China Morning Post</i> October 23: A4.          “Public support for the Occupy movement has grown since the campaign began, and it continues to divide residents, a Chinese University survey has found..”.</p>
<p><i>Leader/ leadership development and leaders’/ leadership competence</i></p>	<p>Tsang, E., T. Sung and S. Chan. 2014. “Occupy Central – Day 55: Split deepens among protesters” <i>South China Morning Post</i> November 22: cover page.          “The split among pro-democracy protesters deepened last night with radicals confronting the campaign leadership to demand an equal say on the movement..”.</p> <p>Cheung, T., P. Siu, E. Kao, T. Sung and K.C. Ng. 2014. “Occupy leaders pull plug on polls” <i>South China Morning Post</i> October 27: cover page.          “Occupy Central protesters and observers yesterday backed an 11-hour decision to scrap a poll on the way forward for the month-old sit-in, saying the move made it easier to enter into more talks with the government. Protest leaders announced the U-turn hours before the electronic ballot was to start at 7pm and apologised for not having sufficiently discussed with demonstrators the poll’s methodology and objectives..”.</p> <p>Cheung, R. 2014. “Insight: School councils can teach students how to be leaders” <i>South China Morning Post</i> October 27: C6.          “For the top student leaders involved, the learning seems more exponential than that of their peers; they are trying to show leadership in crisis situation; hold fast to their visions in times of threats and challenges and make decisions and solve problems during uncertainty, while</p>

	<p>those working for them learn how to coordinate efforts, distribute supplies and consolidate and also attract support...”.</p> <p>Convery, P. 2014. “How Hong Kong’s umbrella movement folded” Aljazeera.com December 1.          “Benny Tai, the charismatic law professor who cofounded the original Occupy Central movement, zipped himself into a tent at the main protest camp near the Hong Kong government complex and refused to talk even to his allies for days following the cancellation of talks between officials and student leaders in early October, claiming he “could not come up with solutions to some problems”. He has since returned to teaching..”.</p>
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**Appendix 2: The Facebook-based survey questions on the Umbrella Movement leadership and responses statistics**

<i>Survey questions</i>	<i>Survey statistics</i>
Question 1: What is your gender?	Male: 63 (47.7%) Female: 69 (52.3%)
Question 2: What is your marital status?	Single: 72 (54.5%) Married: 60 (45.5%)
Question 3: What is your age?	18 to 27: 18 (13.5%) 28 to 37: 55 (41.4%) 38 to 47: 48 (36.1%) 48 to 57: 12 (9.0%) 58 to 67: 0 (0 %) 68 or above: 0 (0.0%)
Question 4: What is your education background?	Not yet a degree-holder: 20 (15.0%) Finished University Undergraduate Degree study: 85 (63.9%) Finished Master Degree study: 26 (19.5%) Finished Ph.D. Degree study (or equivalent): 2 (1.5%)
Question 5: What is your position toward the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong?	No idea: 5 (3.8%) Neutral: 37 (27.8%) Against the movement basically: 20 (15.0%) Support the movement basically: 71 (53.4%)
Question 6: Do you feel that the Umbrella Movement has been primarily led by students?	No idea: 19 (14.3%) Basically yes: 61 (45.9%) Basically no: 53 (39.8%)
Question 7: Do you feel that the Umbrella Movement has been leaderless?	No idea: 19 (14.3%) Basically yes: 89 (66.9%) Basically no: 25 (18.8%)
Question 8: Do you feel that the leadership function of the Umbrella Movement should be strengthened?	No idea: 17 (12.9%) I don’t care: 21 (15.9%) Basically yes: 68 (51.5%) Basically no: 26 (19.7%)

Question 9: Do you feel that the Umbrella Movement should be led by students in 2015 and beyond?	No idea: 33 (24.8%) I don't care: 14 (10.5%) Basically yes: 30 (22.6%) Basically no: 56 (42.1%)
Question 10: Do you feel that the student leaders of the Umbrella Movement should receive leadership training?	No idea: 14 (10.5%) I don't care: 17 (12.8%) Basically yes: 70 (52.6%) Basically no: 32 (24.1%)
Question 11: Do you feel that the Umbrella Movement needs to be led by a few wise and experienced leaders (not young students) in the near future?	No idea: 15 (11.3%) I don't care: 14 (10.5%) Basically yes: 84 (63.2%) Basically no: 20 (15.0%)
Question 12: Do you feel that the Umbrella Movement should be led by political parties in Hong Kong?	No idea: 24 (18.0%) I don't care: 18 (13.5%) Basically yes: 30 (22.6%) Basically no: 61 (45.9%)
Question 13: Do you feel that the Umbrella Movement should be leaderless in 2015?	No idea: 35 (26.3%) I don't care: 12 (9.0%) Basically yes: 25 (18.8%) Basically no: 61 (45.9%)

**Appendix 3: Response statistics over time, from January 3 to 6, 2015**

