Article

Thai Youth in Protest: Transnational Inspiration and Local Adaptation in the Repertoires of Contention of the 2020 Bangkok Youth-led Democratization Movement

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Abstract

The leadership of young Thais in the recent Bangkok democratization movement questioning political authorities and traditions makes this cycle of contention different from previous mobilizations. Although Thailand has witnessed multiple shifts in political leadership and ideologies, this movement, with the youth as its leaders, expertise on social media activism, and networks with global democratization movements introduced a new face of social movement in Thai politics.

This paper explores how the repertoires of contention strategized by the Bangkok youth-led movement manifested transnational inspirations and local adaptations in asserting their advocacy against traditions and toward democracy. The presence of a horizontal communication network, similarities of youth composition, and threats to democratic values ushered transnational linkages from Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement to Bangkok. Repertoires such as the "be like water" philosophy, verbal and nonverbal signals, and dependence on social media for their leaderless and multisited actions were learned and appropriated by Thai activists in their actions. Although transnational activism inspires their repertoires, the movement also strategized these with respect to domestic politics. Their actions were informed by the long tradition of protests in

Thailand, their knowledge of social media and popular culture, and their interaction with the red- and yellow-shirt movements and policing authorities.

The result was a mix of repertoires influenced by transnational democratization movements but also nuanced to its domestic contexts. This active political engagement of young Thais and their resourcefulness and resilience in designing repertoires envision a new generation of activists—leaderless, social media–driven, multiplatformed, locally rooted, and globally networked.

Keywords:

democratization, repertoire of contention, youth activism, Bangkok, social movement

Bangkok's democratization movement: Old woes, new leaders

Social and political issues are often generational. They exist, albeit in a different form or opponent, across generations and have produced social movements in their midst. In the last decade, the faces of these movements were young people clamoring to resolve issues directly affecting them (e.g., repressive educational systems, decreasing social and economic mobility, and challenges to democratic values) (Benski, Langman, and Perugorria 2013). This active youth participation in political affairs contradicts perceptions of their declining engagement from public fora (Monticelli and Bassoli 2016). For this generation, activism is both a civic duty and a personal lifestyle (Lee, So, and Leung 2015). They embody these advocacies not only through their political decisions and consumer patterns but also in influencing their social networks (Lee, So, and Leung 2015). These characteristics distinguish them from previous generations of social movement activists.

What makes this personalized politics more interesting is their desire to mediatize activism—their propensity to influence their fellow youth goes beyond offline interpersonal relationships to include their online networks, making both of these spaces viable for mobilization (Lee and Ting 2015). Aside from these expansive networks, social media has been used by these activists to strategize more interactive

and creative repertoires of contention (Lee and Ting 2015). This hyperpersonal and hyperlinked nature of activism contributes to their political-as-personal lifestyle and extends the influence of social movements in the online arena and across the globe. Evidence of this character of activism is present in contemporary movements, such as the Bangkok youth-led democratization movement of 2020.

Since 1932, Thailand has witnessed countless mobilizations demanding for policy reforms on the political dynamics among the people, the monarchy, the army, and the government (Waiwitlikhit 2020). This almost century-long conflict has resulted in 19 coups and 20 constitutional changes and still impacts Thai politics today (Tejapira 2016). The current mobilization ensued after the dispute in the 2019 elections, five years after the military took over the government via a coup d'état against Yingluck Shinawatra, installing Prayut Chan-ocha as the interim leader. This election was won by Chan-ocha's allies, which led to his reelection as prime minister. In the same event, Future Forward, an emerging democratic political party heavily supported by the youth, became the third biggest party in parliament (BBC News 2020a). Months later, the Thai Constitutional Court dissolved the organization after cases were filed against its leaders. Related protests declined because of the COVID-19 pandemic but were reinvigorated when Wanchalearm Satsaksit, a pro-democracy Thai activist exiled in Cambodia, went missing (BBC News 2020a). Simultaneously, the pandemic affected the country's major economic drivers, trade and tourism, which further eroded trust in the government (Pandey 2020).

These protests were led by youth organizations, the Free Youth Movement, the United Front of Thammasat and Demonstration, Bad Student, and many young Thais, acting not only as supporters or allies as they voiced dissent against long-established institutions and rules, including the *lèse majesté* law that criminalizes criticism of the monarchy (Lertchoosakul 2021). They questioned the relationship between the army and the monarchy, proposed revision of the military-drafted constitution, and demanded the resignation of Chan-ocha. In addition, they highlighted the need for changes in their conservative education system, specifically its antiquated curriculum and strict uniform and gender conformity policies (Bellamy 2020). They started protesting on university grounds and from then on,

became the forefront of this movement (Lertchoosakul 2021). In the words of McCargo (2021, 182), these youth activists were "flirting with revolution while pressing and hoping for some kind of reform."

Contemporary waves of activism observe a "dramatic increase in terms of 'number, size, and professionalism, and the speed, density, and complexity of international linkages'" (Keck and Silkink 1998, 10 quoted in Wui 2010, 5). This is particularly true with Bangkok as their heavy reliance on new media also enabled interaction among movements bearing the same advocacy but located in different nations. Specifically, the Umbrella Movement's acquired international attention and its strategic use of social media became pathways of influence to budding democratization movements around the world. Many articles directly relate the Bangkok protests to their Hong Kong counterpart (Wasserstrom 2020) and were even affiliated with an online community called Milk Tea Alliance (MTA) together with Taiwan (Barron 2020). Patterns of similarities between the two youth-led democratization movements became apparent, and the Bangkok movement was vocal in this inspiration.

This youth involvement, utilizing their online networks, asserting wide-scale and controversial reforms, and networking with transnational movements, made the recent protest in Bangkok different from their precursors. Consequently, these youth activists enabled a disruption of protest traditions by reinventing old and introducing new repertoires of contention (McCargo 2021). This paper investigates: How did repertoires of contention strategized by Thai youth activists manifest transnational linkage to Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement and adaptation to its local politics? These repertoires reflect the claim-making strategies of the movement and the new political contexts where these actions were designed after (Shawki 2013). Repertoires also evidenced the movements' social and communicative networks anchored in transnational activism and adapted to local conflict and power dynamics. Thus, these actions are not only a reproduction from earlier protest movements but also manifestations of how advocacies of local movements are anchored on, informed by, and adapted to transnational and domestic politics (Quinsaat 2011).

The recent youth-led mobilizations in Bangkok exhibit what Tarrow calls a "scale shift"—the navigation of social movements to both transnational and local political spaces and opportunities (Quinsaat 2011). We examine the modularity of these repertoires as a reflection of interactions with other democratization movements in Asia and with the long tradition of resistance in Thailand. This navigation does not only evidence the impact of these spaces on repertoires but also how the youth movement produced new alliances, targets, and techniques. In examining the design of repertoires, we ask: how did the Thai youth serve as main agents of the transnational policy reform agenda and as a new generation of democratization activists not just in Thailand but also in the world?

History of Democratization Movements in Bangkok

The current Bangkok movement is a product of the shifts and turns of political power and ideologies in the last century. Waiwitlikhit (2020) listed down two significant democratization movements where young Thais actively participated. In 1932, when the call was to dissolve absolute monarchy, young students educated in western institutions coordinated with the military in staging the success of the Siamese Revolution (Waiwitlikhit 2020), thereafter establishing a constitutional monarchy.

Although there were mobilizations after 1932, the next evident participation of the youth was in the 1970s. The student-led movement of this decade was observed to be bigger and nonpartisan (Waiwitlikhit 2020) that ran against martial law and towards a democratic constitution. In particular, university students led one of the biggest mobilizations in October 1973, which witnessed more than 500,000 protesters gathering at the Victory Monument. The student movement became successful because of its networks and an open communication structure using traditional channels, such as leaflets and physical meetings (Waiwitlikhit 2020). These two movements revealed the conflicting relationship between the youth activists, and the government and the monarchy as gatekeepers of traditions.

In contemporary Thai politics, Thaksin Shinawatra's conflicting relationship with the monarchy was the beginning of the contentious period between his supporters and the advocates of the monarchy. Shinawatra became the first prime minister who was reelected using

democratic means (Jotikut 2016) and has become a symbol of people's power. His supporters came from rural areas that benefited from his economic policies (Chen 2014).

To contest his administration, the yellow-shirt movement materialized. Led by the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), this movement was born out of public outcry to oust Thaksin and call for a military takeover (Sombatpoonsiri 2017). Chen (2014) noted that their alliance with the royal army was important in understanding the nation's dynamics of political leadership and people power. To resist the military and monarchy rule, the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD), a pro-Thaksin movement, mobilized (Jotikut 2016). The red-shirt movement, being affiliated with rural poor activists, was against traditional elites and the army. They backed Shinawatra and his allies in various elections (Sombatpoonsiri 2017). These two movements often clashed, not just in terms of whom to support, but also in their rhetoric of democracy. Lertchoosakul (2021) noted that young Thais merely played a symbolic role in the conflict between these two movements.

This vicious cycle of politics reflects the power struggle and contention between and among the three most important political actors in Thailand: the King, the royal army, and the people (McCargo 2021). Tejapira (2016) explained that Thai politics can be described as a series of visibility and invisibility of conflict, radical transformations and setbacks, and armed and unarmed struggles that led to another constitution and another regime change. These dynamics affected public trust in government institutions and the perception of the effectiveness of civic participation through elections (Chen 2014). Further, this has caused the politicization of the monarchy and the decline of royal hegemony as a symbol of democracy (Tejapira 2016; Sombatpoonsiri 2017). To respond to this decline, there have also been readjustments to the military–monarchy partnership that required a more active intervention of the military (e.g., 2006, 2008, and 2014) to preserve social stability (Chen 2014). Although they have been active in quelling social unrest, military leadership did not harbor trust and led to even more conflict (Chen 2014).

These political alliances and shifts of power informed the protests that are happening recently in Bangkok that call to dissolve the military-led constitution and assert changes in the monarchy,

which have been taboo topics for a long time. McCargo (2021, 176) argued that since the 1970s, Thai politics has consisted of party and rally politics, but the 2020 Bangkok protests introduced a politics that disrupts protest traditions and is led by "idealistic and 'pure'" youth flirting with revolution while fighting for a policy reform.

Repertoires of contention: A movement's strategy

Although the repertoire of contention is one of the most traditional concepts in social movement studies, its significance in revealing movement networks and identities still remains. Repertoires, as defined by Charles Tilly in 1978, are "the collection of strategies and tactics a given contextually rooted social movement both knows how to do, and chooses to deploy at a moment in time" (McCurdy, Feigenbaum, and Frenzel 2016, 98). They include choices of attack, defense, timing, and messaging to respond to threats and maximize political opportunities in advancing their advocacies. These actions vary from peaceful means of engagement to violent protests and retaliation (Monticelli and Bassoli 2016). Moreover, repertoires contain a theatrical essence where actions are constrained in both time and space and movements improvise based on the political, cultural, and social situations they are located in (Della Porta 2013; Wada 2012).

Therefore, repertoires are "by-products of everyday experiences" (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 182) that can be transformed during a movement's interaction with its environment (McCurdy, Feigenbaum, and Frenzel 2016). Even generational characteristics impact the nature of actions as each generation designs them according to its tastes (Della Porta 2013; Zelinska 2020). Young activists prefer more playful, colorful, and spontaneous actions (Della Porta 2013) and bank on the virality of their online tactics (Spiegel 2016). Traditional repertoires are more parochial, local, and patronage-dependent (Della Porta and Diani 2006), and they are situated where the important policy-making happens, while contemporary forms of actions are more representative, national, and media-centric. The entry of new media, such as television, mobile phones, and the internet has given more credence, and in turn, influence to traditional repertoires of contention (Della Porta and Diani 2006). Using these networks, organizational, ideological, and cultural repertoires are spread throughout similar movements in the world (Shawki 2013). The success of a movement or

the similarity of political issues or opponents increases its likelihood of diffusion (Zelinska 2020).

Globalization introduces both threats and opportunities to social movements (Milani and Lianado 2007). Local movements realize that connective and collective action was necessary to challenge its global governance architecture (Zajak 2017)—wherein as the volume of goods, people, and information flows, the injustices it brings to local communities emerge. Ironically, it provides for more avenues for transnational collaboration because of the technological advances and common social dilemmas it introduced (Tarrow 2005). Tarrow argues that globalization "offers activists focal points for collective action, provides them with expanded resources and opportunities, and brings them together in transnational coalitions and campaigns" (2005, 5). Hence, social movements maximized this global interconnectedness by increasing convergences and solidarity with similar movements and proliferating transnational institutions, values, and actions (Wui 2010).

Further, because of these networks, the modularity of a movement's ideas and ideologies across nations and generations became unprecedented, hereafter producing transnational movements (della Porta and Diani 2006). This form of activism involves "people and groups who are rooted in specific national contexts, but who engage in contentious political activities that involve them in transnational networks and contacts" (Zajak 2017, 126). Transnational activism is led by networks of movements with the same values or collective identities (Dahlberg-Grundberg 2016) and is defined by how they diffuse their ideologies across geographical or even generational spaces (Tarrow 2005).

Diffusion is the process of spreading a movement's ideologies and often involves a channel consisting of either people, for more traditional movements, or media technology, for contemporary ones (Gumrukcu 2010). This process evidences the modularity of repertoires as these can be transferred and redesigned in order to adapt to the political and social space of its receiver. Grimm and Harders (2018) asserted that ideas that are successful and well-recognized tend to be borrowed by other institutions, but Dolowitz and Marsh (1996) noted that failed policies can also become learning points.

Traditional media (i.e., commercial and print) and forms of association (i.e., global conferences or transnational protests) have become highways for this spread of ideas (Shawki 2013). But in recent years, innovations in communication technology led to a macrostructural condition that facilitated a more expansive modularity of repertoires (Wada 2012). Media technologies, in particular, fueled a continuous and easier process of sharing information through different platforms that have resulted in horizontal networks of interaction among movements across the globe (Dahlberg-Grunberg 2016). Some were heavily dependent on how this free resource can help spread their cause and mobilize support (e.g., Occupy Wall Street, Me Too Movement, and Arab Spring). Social media has become a relevant resource in making these transnational interactions possible, especially for younger movements (Dahlberg-Grunberg 2016). Aside from being able to spread ideas, social media contributes to the discursive capabilities of the movement, allows archiving repertoires and stories, and becomes learning materials for its new members (Gleason 2013).

What makes transnational activism interesting is the connection between the local and the global; it blurs the line between domestic and transnational boundaries, making contexts and challenges cosmopolitan (Tarrow 2005). The local state becomes an active site of contention, and its political opportunity structure still shapes the direction of a transnational social movement (Wui 2010). Evans (2009) shared that borrowed repertoires could either be directly copied or hybridized, where movements combine elements found in different settings and appropriate them to their own context. When repertoires are spread, they are modified based on different factors, including cultural acceptance, symbolic interactionism in their local communities, or encounters with policing authorities (Della Porta and Diani 2006; Tarrow 2005). Dolowitz and Marsh (1996) explained that political actors can also draw lessons from political systems and institutions within their own country.

Ultimately, strategizing a repertoire is a "two-level game" (Oliveira and Pal 2018), wherein social movements may learn both from transnational movements and local institutions but are still being reproduced by combining elements and innovating them based on their own needs and experiences (Oliveira and Faria 2017). The resulting repertoires are not independent—they are products of the

traditions of resistance, alliances with local and international political actors, and everyday experiences of conflict (Spiegel 2016). As these repertoires travel, they are "revised, inflected, appropriated and bent into encounters of different kinds" (Oliveira and Pal 2018, 208). Hence, the current youth-led mobilization in Bangkok, with its transnational and domestic linkages, is a crucial site of contention for this analysis.

This paper utilized a protest event analysis in examining the repertoires employed by the Bangkok youth-led democratization movement. This type of analysis is used to "systematically assess the amount and features of protests throughout various geographical areas (from the local level up to the supranational level) and over time (from short periods of time up to several decades)" (Hutter 2014, 335). Protest events are collective actions by nongovernmental actors to make a visible claim for the interest of the public. These actions range from peaceful activities, such as signature collections or mass demonstrations, to more violent and confrontational ones, such as occupations and physical attacks (Hutter 2014).

We analyzed repertoires of contention as reflections of transnationalization and localization of repertoires in these protest events. Online newspaper articles that reported about the democratization movement from July to December 2020 were examined, extracting the actions they employed in these mobilizations. The global pandemic limited the paper's access to firsthand information, but as Hutter (2014) explained, mass media contents can still be primary sources of protest event analysis. To further validate the data set, the information was counter-checked using the Mob Data Thailand website. Developed by Amnesty International Thailand, the website serves as a repository of protest information in which the public is encouraged to report the location, purpose, nature, and actions of the protests around the country. Although democratization protests happened all over Thailand, this inquiry focused on Bangkok where most of these events happened. Ultimately, the analysis ventures on how the youth, as policy reform agents both in the transnational and local levels of politics, has strategized repertoires aiming to transcend and transform politics and assert its demands as a youth-led movement (Wui 2010).

Findings and Discussion

Transnational inspirations from Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement

When social movements garner public attention, their repertoires are diffused to different organizations across the globe through traditional and new communication networks (Tarrow 2005). Interestingly, social media was utilized not just to spread effective repertoires but also to archive them for posterity. Because of their strategic use of social media and chosen disruptive repertoires, the impact of the Umbrella Movement on public consciousness managed to collectively awaken other movements' desire to protect democratic values using the same methods. This section provides an analysis of the chosen repertoires of contention of the Bangkok youth-led democratization movement that were inspired by the Umbrella Movement and how these reflect the transnationalization of domestic coalitions, diffusion of values, and adoption of protest philosophies (Oliveira and Faria 2017).

In 2014, the Umbrella Movement became the resistance produced by the tumultuous political relationship between China and a new generation of activists in Hong Kong. This series of protests was a response to the proposed elections of their Chief Executive in 2017 which, according to protesters, lacked the true essence of democracy (Lee and Ting 2018). Two student organizations, Scholarism and the Hong Kong Federation of Students, called on their cohorts to boycott classes and occupy university grounds (Gillen et al. 2019). These groups called for the occupation of the space outside the Government Headquarters and attempted to take Civic Square, triggering the start of the Umbrella Movement. This movement has created an ecology of activists in three key areas in the city—Causeway Bay, Admiralty, and Mongkok (Chen and Chan 2017).

In 2019, another round of massive protests happened to denounce an extradition bill that will expose the city to the "flawed justice system of China" and will negatively impact its judicial independence (Li 2019). Although the 2014 Umbrella Movement garnered attention because of their long-term occupation of public spaces, the 2019 protest employed "guerilla tactics" and "cat-and-mouse games" that served as strategic responses to Hong Kong authorities (Arranz and Lam 2019). On June 9, 2019 one million protesters rallied, demanding the withdrawal of the bill, which eventually happened on the fourth of September.

Aside from the withdrawal, other demands include accountability in police brutality, amnesty for arrested protesters, and universal suffrage, which were the same demands of the 2014 movement. These sustained actions (79 days for the 2014 occupation and 118 days for the 2019 protests) and the massive mobilization of citizens were enough to garner the attention of the media and of democratization movements around the world, including that of Bangkok (Wasserstrom 2020).

Studies on social movements reveal that domestic repertoires can be related to global movements' strategies (Spiegel 2016). Thus, the identification of the Bangkok movement to Hong Kong's, specifically in its advocacy, democratic values, and youth composition, fueled transnational activism having the Bangkok movement on the receiving end of this diffusion (della Porta and Diani 2006). Although Hong Kong was against an external power and Bangkok disputed a domestic hierarchy, both movements have distinguished hierarchical, elite, and illiberal policies and institutions as enemies. Although focused on democracy, their calls also reflected anti-globalization sentiments on the incongruence of the demand of the 99% and the rule of the 1% (Lubin 2012). They also stood against economic policies that hinder their social mobility—a concern present in many youth-led movements. The use of horizontal communication networks and leaderless rhetoric was a direct response to the existing hierarchical system they oppose (Lubin 2012). Wui (2010) asserted that the propensity of these movements to recognize common grievances and collectively mobilize towards the same cause is a manifestation of a "globalization from below"—or asserting governance and policies from citizens and local communities.

Ghimire (2005) added that transnational movements are value-oriented. They pin importance on values like social justice to free the world from ineffective and unethical economic practices. Rhetorically, both cities protested against economic and moral corruption linked to "autocratic regimes, human rights violations and the lack of economic transparency" (Ghimire 2005, 5). Illiberal leadership and traditional hierarchy, as enemies of these values, were deemed as a connective frame for both Hong Kong and Bangkok protesters (Oliveira and Faria 2017). This transnational connection validates the existence of their allies and impact towards the same cause. This identification of each other's values fueled the diffusion of repertoires in transnational movements evidenced by statements from Bangkok protesters about the inspiration they got from their Hong Kong counterparts.

Transnational organizations also opt for persuasive and nonviolent repertoires (Ghimire 2005). The earlier Hong Kong occupation paralyzed important economic zones, but it also resulted in a rift between activists and citizens who need these spaces. The recent mobilization lasted longer and configured repertoires to avoid internal conflict among citizens. Hong Kong's spontaneous protest actions in 2019 inspired Bangkok protesters to abide by the "be water" philosophy of action influenced by Bruce Lee's "formless, shapeless, like water" mantra. Although older movements in Bangkok occupied symbolic spaces, such as relevant thoroughfares and transportation hubs that invited police action and violent altercations, the current movement practiced spontaneity (Thantong-Knight 2020). Protests in Bangkok employed "an amorphous protest movement that would flare up in one district only to die down and reemerge with intensity in another district a short while later" (Hale 2020). Flash mobs and unannounced gatherings were observed in the city's public spaces.

Learning from previous movements that announcing the movement's next action gives authorities time to respond, this generation announced their next move and meeting place using communication networks that spread information fast and with minimal surveillance. These unannounced but massive mobilizations were possible because of the use of communication platforms such as Facebook and Telegram, allowing for immediate information dissemination (Thantong-Knight 2020) and greater flexibility and autonomy (Wui 2010). This dependence on social media, specifically on announcing sudden changes in meeting place or actions, was a tactic learned from the Hong Kong movement. For both cities, this serves as a response to the increasing surveillance of the government on public spaces and traditional media (e.g., television and radio) and the negative repercussions of occupying public spaces on their fellow citizens (Kuo 2020).

Aside from spontaneity and heavy reliance on social media, Thai protesters also replicated other repertoires from Hong Kong, including verbal and nonverbal symbols like hand gestures, human chains, and use of umbrellas and helmets to protect themselves from water cannons and tear gas, proving that these movements experience the same treatment from their police (Regan 2020; Al Jazeera 2020c). One policing strategy in both cities is to arrest leaders to quell unrest; thus, protesters asserted a leaderless rhetoric. They

insisted that "Everyone is a leader!" (Prachatai 2020)—a practice that originated in Hong Kong. Protests that are dependent on leadership decline when the government arrests leaders, but a leaderless protest sustains a movement and also allows multisited mobilizations. Further, transnational movements prefer loose structures allowing them to adapt quickly to the changes of political repression and opportunities and encouraging more coalitions from outside their organizations (Quinsaat 2011).

Bangkok also adopted Hong Kong's communication tactics, exclusive language, and gestures. The secretive vocabulary of the Thai protest was used to trick the outsiders, usually the police, on the plans of the movement (Khaosod 2020). For instance, "kaeng te po," a reference to a curry dish, was used as a hidden signal to fool the police on the next strategy or the next place of protest. They also use secret codes for actors in the protest: "minions" for the yellow shirt protesters, "mocha" for the police, "smurfs" for the protesters dyed with blue water, "CIA" for the street food vendors, and "baby crystals" for the demonstrators (Khaosod 2020). Handley (2020) noted that Thai people are used to using secret codes because of the heavy surveillance that they have experienced ever since. Aside from verbal tirades, they also use hand signals to communicate with one another in big crowds: hands pointing on the head means they need umbrellas, hands held overhead means the requirement of a helmet, and hands crossed over chest signals enough supplies (Reuters 2020). These hand signals were borrowed from Hong Kong, but some were created solely for this movement. Della Porta (2013) underlined this theatrical characteristic of repertoires—activists improvise their actions based on their learnings from other movements and also to respond to their current situation.

Interestingly, the two movements introduced protest icons too. The Umbrella Movement's icon, the umbrella, became a symbol against tyranny and violence as protesters used it to protect themselves from water cannons and tear gas. The Bangkok protest popularized the three-finger salute, which was adapted from the film *The Hunger Games*. This gesture symbolized resistance against the military regime and the monarchy that limit their democratic rights (Regan 2020). Inflatable ducks became a symbol of resistance, reminiscent of the famous duck meme of the Umbrella Movement, to signify the situation of the protesters bombed by water cannons (Handley 2020). The color

yellow was also appropriated by the movement against the yellow-shirt movement that supports the monarchy (Handley 2020). As Oliveria and Pal (2018) suggested, when repertoires travel from one movement to another, they may change the meanings attributed to certain symbols based on their own encounters or toward the movement's aspirations (Milani and Laniado 2007). Appropriating these symbols to their own struggles manifests the active participation of these young protesters in meaning-making not just within their own circle but with the external public as well (Oliveira and Pal 2018).

Indeed, the transnational inspiration from Hong Kong came in many forms—protest philosophies, verbal and nonverbal signals, popular culture icons, dependence on social media as a network, and the "be water" strategy. But directionality of transnational policy diffusion is not linear but multilateral (Stone, Oliveira, and Pal 2020). Steuer (2018) noted how these repertoires can be traced back to previous democratization movements like the Arab Spring in 2011— horizontal networks, dependence on communication technologies, and assertion of values such as dignity, social justice, human rights, and democracy. The connection between Hong Kong and Bangkok's youth-led movements' repertoire of contention revealed how they created networks not just inside their nations but also, and possibly, a global democratization network represented in active social media reporting of protests in hashtags: #WhatsHappeninginThailand, #StandwithThailand, and #MilkTeaAlliance. Oliveira and Faria described this phenomenon as the transnationalization of domestic coalitions (2017). Through this online alliance, Hong Kong supported the Thailand movement by hosting solidarity rallies. Moreover, the Bangkok movement contributed its repertoires, specifically its three-finger salute, to Myanmar, which also experienced military repression. This externalization of repertoires (Schettler 2020) manifests the active engagement of Thai youth in stimulating an international alliance with other movements.

This transnationalization of a policy reform agenda is fueled by identification with democratic values and knowledge diffusion available on routes afforded by new communication platforms (Stone, Oliveira, and Pal 2020). It evidenced the growing connection of democratization movements who have started influencing not just their immediate environment but also the global fight for democracy. Transnational movements like that of Hong Kong's and arguably,

Bangkok's, reveal that these policy agents are active in looking for and in some situations, creating similarities in realities, issues, and responses that prove their connective action and involvement towards the same causes. As Kaldor et al. (2003) asserted, these "new forms of civic participation and involvement in a globalising world" and "located in some transnational arena not bound or limited by nation-states or local societies" are being interpreted as a distinct phenomenon of the emergence and consolidation of "global civil society" (quoted in Ghimire 2005, 1).

Local adaptation of repertoires: Young people, parties, and policing

Although movements engage in transnational spaces, their domestic contexts still prove to be an essential site of resistance in analyzing repertoires of contention (Wui 2010). Jelin (2003, 26) added that transnational networks coexist with "localization and reaffirmation of ancestral roots, manifested in a more precise and violent manner in ethno-cultural rivalries, in the cultural and symbolic self-referencing of many peoples" (Ghimire 2005, 1). Activists also learn from institutions in their domestic political systems (Dolowitz and Marsh 1996). Young activists in Bangkok fall under what Shawki (2013) defined as "translators" who are adept to local and global sites of activism and translate these discourses to local contexts for identification of the movement. This section examines how Thai youth strategized repertoires through learning from and adaptation to domestic politics, specifically its youth composition, party politics, and policing.

Scholars acknowledged that the current democratization movement in Bangkok is different from its predecessors because of having youth leaders (Handley 2020). Quoted in Rasheed (202), Chachavalpongpun, an exiled Thai academic, noted:

> The protesters are young; they are social media savvy. They use new and creative tactics in their protests. They have many different leaders. And most importantly, they have clear demands. This could be a new turning point in Thai politics.

Youth activist Sithijirawattankul shared that they do not want a revolution but a reform (ABC News 2020)—a rhetorical strategy to avoid legal sanctions and encourage more supporters. The movement's

composition included students who are in their middle school, high school, and university and are members of the Free Youth Movement, United Front of Thammasat and Demonstration, and Bad Student, among others (Reuters 2020). Sinpeng (2020) attributed nearly 500 protests to these organizations with an estimate of a hundred thousand participants.

People involved in the movement are educated and urban, and they assert that their strategies are more discreet, peaceful, and creative (Handley 2020). As members of the youth with experiences of exclusion from important public affairs, the movement vilified the exclusionary, elite, and hierarchical structure; thus, most of their repertoires were contingent in avoiding such systems. As a student-led movement, the Bangkok protests started by maximizing their own resources—boycotting classes and graduations. Students who identified with the cause boycotted their graduation wherein the King was the special guest—a special moment for Thai families. These students also defied bans on public gatherings and insisted that real education can be learned in the streets (Kuhakan 2020). Similar to many student-led movements around the world, Thai students mobilized their fellows in their universities and managed to invite more participants through their offline and online networks. The university, as a site of contention, is also reflective of what Stone, Oliveira, and Pal (2020) assigned these academic spaces to be: a distributor of knowledge and political ideologies. This makes the student movement a potent political force (Spiegel 2016) because of their immediate networks of influence that easily reach people with the same cause. In fact, the Free Youth Movement inspired other groups to mobilize, like the Free People, Free Chiang Rai, Free Monks, Free Taxi Drivers, and Parents of Free Youth (Sinpeng 2020).

These chosen repertoires were akin to those of the earlier student movements in 1932 and in the 1970s. Youth activists did not just perceive these issues as political but also personal and were not just focused on democratization but also on the economic situation, especially on inflation, housing shortages, and mobility, which often persuaded not just students but also different groups to support these democratization movements (Waiwitlikhit 2020). As student organizations, they argued that conservative policies are not just at the national level but also in their experiences as young Thais. Aside from the stated demands from the monarchy and the army, youth-led

organizations highlighted the need for educational equality in urban and rural areas, up-to-date curricula, and less strict gender roles inside academic institutions (Lertchoosakul 2021). The personalness of the concerns and the repertoires of Thai youth demonstrate what Monticelli and Bassoli (2016) observed in global student movements' choice of political participation—"individualized, personalized and micro." These youth activists disengaged from formal representative routes of participation and established their own communication network with political institutions by asserting their rights as citizens and inheritors of future generations. Although the youth identity remains prominent in the Bangkok movement, this paper does not discount that other identities actively exist within the movement. McCargo (2021) noted that several demonstrations engage with the issues of gendered communities, such as abortion and same-sex marriage—concerns that are human rights in nature.

This personalized politics, according to Della Porta, provides an explanation on why youth movements prefer spontaneous and more playful repertoires, such as the use of popular culture icons and references (i.e., songs, language, and icons) which manifested the youthful vibe of the movement (Kuo 2020). Aside from *The Hunger Games*, another film reference they appropriated is the *Harry Potter* film series, using the famous "He Who Must Not be Named" to signify how the lèse majesté law that protects the monarchy from criticism (Handley 2020). Young protesters, clad in dinosaur and meteorite costumes, also treated the streets as a stage for their performances. Dubbed as the "Bye Bye Dinosaur" protest, Bad Student activists noted that the parliament is as antiquated as dinosaurs and young people will act as the meteorite to introduce changes to society (Thai PBS World 2020). They poised themselves as the changemaker to the traditional structures and the outmoded rules in Thai society (Bellamy 2020).

Aside from making the spontaneity and the leaderless aspects of the movement possible, their unprecedented influence on and knowledge of online spaces successfully changed public perception by opening discourses on the monarchy and the government (Kuo 2020). All of these actions were in line with what Lee (2018) cited as possible online repertoires: (1) neutrality tactics—focusing on sharing facts and news; (2) artistic and cultural contention—using memes and photos; (3) hiding in plain sight—sarcastic materials; and (4) non-confrontational tactics—communicating with officials online. According to Lubin

(2012), these repertoires maintained multi-sited actions despite being leaderless. Social media has been transformed into a deliberative space where young activists shared pertinent information on the next location of protest, encouraged other activists to join, and inquired on what is the next step for action. Telegram has become a key application in spreading information, specifically on the next meet-up place for protests (Regan 2020). Facebook groups were also made to build an online community of supporters. This became a venue for users to deliberate on the next action, and share political content like memes, songs, and videos that mock Thai political actors (Ebbighausen 2020; Thanthong-Knight 2020). Live streaming and live tweeting during protests became a repertoire too.

They also occupied online spaces by trending Twitter hashtags like #RepublicofThailand, #15ตุลาไปราชประสงค์ (15 October, go to Ratchaprasong), #FreeYOUTH, #หยุดคุกคามประชาชน (Stop oppressing people), and #ขีดเส้นตายไล่เผด็จการ (Draw the line here. Junta has to go!) (Handagama 2020). The Free Youth hashtag (#เยาวชนปลดแอก) was the second–most tweeted hashtag in Thailand in 2020 (Sinpeng 2020). These hashtags invited people to join their cause and share their advocacy within and beyond Bangkok. On TikTok, content with #IWontGraduateWithTheMonarchy and #WhyDoWeNeedAKing trended. Twitter user, @BadStudent_, received tons of complaints against illiberal policies in schools and universities that trigger negative reactions from its followers. Even on Tinder, a dating app, online users posted messages like "no royalists here" and "freedom for Thailand." Online spaces have also become spaces for deliberative participation (South China Morning Post 2020) that may connect them to other networks of young people and also with international audiences and also escape from the government's online censorship (Impiombato and Beattie 2020).

The choice of using repertoires centered on social media and redesigning traditional protest repertoires online reflect not just the youth identity of the movement but also their adaptability to and recognition of the essence of horizontal networks and broader autonomy provided by these media platforms (Della Porta 2013). Della Porta added that repertoires follow a logic of action—influencing institutions demand a show of force in terms of numbers and impact (2013). Social media offered this logic through assemblage of individuals who support the same cause. Further, these platforms

helped activists to escape censorship but not abandon traditional repertoires like lobbying and public demonstrations. Waiwitlikhit (2020) compared social media to traditional political discussion groups in earlier Thai movements where political ideologies were spread and student discourse networks were sustained. These platforms were harder to regulate and have been maximized to diffuse not just the repertoires but also the rationale of the movement.

Their youth composition also provided an interesting contrast from the traditional movements that Thailand witnessed in the last two decades. This contrast also informed the collective identity of the movement. The new set of activists did not carry allegiances with the red-yellow faction (Handley 2020). The youth-led movement was conscious that old and traditional means to protest, specifically occupation, may not be as effective since they always invite violence and another turn in the cycle of Thai politics. The yellow-shirt movement occupied Suvarnabhumi International Airport and Don Mueang Airport in 2008. On the other hand, the red-shirt movement was famous for their village that occupied downtown Bangkok by building bamboo barricades but has resulted to violence and many casualties (Jotikut 2016). Although they tried to strategize peaceful protests to be different from previous movements' violent occupation, most repertoires of contention of the movement turned out to be responses to the brutality shown by the police in these public spaces.

These previous movements were also present in the 2020 protests and have affected the youth movement's actions. Specifically, these youth protesters did not only have to contest against the police but also with the yellow-shirt movement that protects the monarchy, which resulted in violent confrontations. Waiwitlikhit (2020) noted that questioning the authority of the monarchy further divided the public in supporting or questioning the youth movement. They were not able to persuade monarchists and conservatives into joining their cause. Although this new movement tries to venture away from the traditional political divide in the nation, their repertoires are still anchored on the learnings and political ideologies of previous movements (Dolowitz and Marsh 1996).

Part of a movement's repertoire is the strategic choice of public spaces to protest at (Endres and Senda-Cook 2011) because of its potential to hold significant meaning to the public. Throughout

history, the red- and yellow-shirt movements also relied on the existing meanings of places to assert their advocacy. Because of this challenge in finding venues to argue their rights, public spaces such as the Ratchadamnoen Avenue and the Democracy Monument in Bangkok have become symbolic spaces for contention. In previous years, both movements used these venues for their protests, transforming them into insurgent spaces (Unaldi 2014), appropriating the space to their own definition of democracies. Since the Democracy Monument acquired such ethos, the current youth-led movement also reinforced the meaning of the space as a guardian of democracy (Head 2020). In September, protesters ceremoniously laid into the ground a plaque near the Grand Palace stating that the nation belongs to its people. The plaque, containing a three-fingered salute that aims to call for reforms in the monarchy and in the parliament, was dug out by government authorities the day after (Al Jazeera 2020a).

One of the biggest gatherings was in Rajprasong, the capital's shopping district, which usually invites massive crowds on the weekend (Al Jazeera 2020b). Protesters also rallied in front of the Siam Commercial Bank, wherein the Crown Property Bureau is the largest shareholder. Recently, because the police have been stopping them from reaching the government house and the parliament, they marched to the police headquarters. These public spaces are essential to perform their repertoires of contention. In a performative manner, protesters waited for the King and Queen after they visited a newly opened train station, then turned their backs when the convoy passed them. They also staged a protest on Silom Road, a business district in Bangkok, staging a fashion show, titled "People's Runway," as a commentary on Princess Sirivannavari Nariratana's fashion business (Promchertchoo, 2020). In October 2020, protesters were called to occupy Bangkok Mass Transit System (BTS) station (Boyle 2020). These public spaces were chosen because of their relevance to the movement's advocacy, and because they offer a public stage wherein the public can view their protest. These public performances allowed the movement to show they have many supporters amidst their controversial demands. These activists can debate, strategize, spread their ideologies, and plan about their movements (Benski, Langman, and Perugorria 2013) or do daily activities, such as eating, listening to music, playing, or talking to one another (Lubin 2012). These spaces also validate the existence of the movement and the identification of its members to one another, thus strengthening its collective identity.

This battle of ownership of spaces signified how a place constitutes not just space but also meaning to the movements, and ownership of such becomes akin to ownership of these spaces as citizens.

Another important local political struggle that informed their repertoire is their contact with policing authorities. This mobilization-repression nexus—the interrelationship between the repertoire of contention and how policing authorities contained protests—was evident in the Bangkok movement as authorities, the bureaucrats of the streets, try to repress them towards social and political control of public spaces (Della Porta and Diani 2006). The deliberate choice of repertoires of contention reveals how social movements respond to policing. Earlier protests were more peaceful as they tried to evade policing strategies through the "be like water" spontaneous strategies that helped them assert their advocacy without altercation (Grimm and Harders 2018).

The police often used barricades to protect spaces essential to the movement, such as the Government House, the police headquarters, and the Siam Commercial Bank. Altercations between protesters and the police happened in these barricaded spots. This reflects what Sombatpoonsiri (2017) argued that the police has developed a negative perception of protesters as antagonists, which, in turn, is embodied in the performance of their control of these public spaces. The barricades in these public spaces act not just to intensify mutual antagonism (Sombatpoonsiri 2017) but also to limit the movement of protesters, which is ironic for these public spaces and offensive for the movement. This mobilization–repression nexus not only shaped the repertoires but also the discussion on the government's political legitimacy and the police as its representative in the streets.

In one instance during debates in parliament regarding constitutional change, the police used water cannons and tear gas solutions to stop the protesters from cutting the wires and entering the parliament. To respond, protesters threw smoke bombs and bags of paint at the police (BBC News 2020b; Al Jazeera 2020d). Because of this policing strategy and with records of violence, including some gunshot wounds, protesters also went to their headquarters throwing paint in their compound and chanting, "Slaves of tyranny!" and "Down with feudalism, down with dictatorship!" (Ratcliffe and Panyalimpanun 2020). Although the movement asserted that it is more peaceful, the

barricades in public spaces and use of violence (e.g., water cannon and tear gas), historically considered as illegitimate, discouraged peaceful mobilizations and promoted more radical actions from the protesters (Della Porta and Diani 2006). These violent clashes between the police and the protesters continued to erode the legitimacy of both the government and the police. Indeed, the youth-led movement has changed the way the public perceives these institutions, which has never been done before. This mobilization–repression nexus where they only respond to policing authorities by playing between conventional and disruptive tactics promotes persuasion through display of the state's control over them, which can get the public to identify with the movement (Schettler 2020).

Although successful tactics can spread from one nation to another (Zelinska 2020), we see how the youth-led movement in Bangkok adopted and adapted these global repertoires and made them local by reflecting their demands, using the youth's taste in popular cultural icons, and learning from their long history of conflict and protests. For Della Porta (2013), these repertoires revealed the taste of young people in their means to achieving their goals. Since repertoires are the tangible outcomes of a movement's collective identity, these sets of actions were designed after the political opportunities and threats and the cultural contexts that surround the movement (Lee 2018).

Conclusion

Thai youth in protest: Policy agents in a different time

The 2020 Bangkok democratization movement was informed by the long history of Thailand's political dynamics among its people, the monarchy, and the royal army. But what made it different was the leadership of Thai youth who brought with them online networks with other global democratization movements and learnings from previous mobilizations in Thailand. Analyzing the repertoires of contention of the current movement revealed how diffusion of repertoires of contention exists and is fueled by many political factors. Transnationalization of repertoires was enabled by social media and identification with values, philosophy, and a common enemy. Further, local political dynamics, such as the youth composition that relied heavily on social media and popular culture, learning from the

mobilization of older movements, and interaction with the policing authorities were significant influences to its repertoires of action. The youth-led movement hybridized existing repertoires and redesigned them to respond to their exercise of power and resistance proving that, indeed, these actions are byproducts of everyday experiences (Stone, Oliveira, and Pal 2020).

Its chosen repertoires of contention also reflect its flexible identities and multiple belongings and reveal the significant roles of Thai youth as active and rooted cosmopolitans—engaging both in domestic and transnational politics (Wui 2010). To begin with, the youth has no formal authority and only utilized intellectual, economic, and social resources, being nonstate actors (Baker, McCann, and Temenos 2020). Albeit such limitations, its hybridization of online and offline repertoires responded not just to the growing policing of authorities in Thailand but also to the need to adapt to new political and social systems, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the growing youth-led movements globally. Its recognition that diffusion of repertoires is not a linear process but a multilinear advocacy also allowed it to communicate with other global youth activists. This hybridity and social network were able to help it expand its bases locally and internationally (Fuentes 2019). Although the Thai youth's repertoires were already familiar, the novelty lies in how it synchronizes and strategizes its actions within its local, transnational, online, and offline spaces (Quinsaat 2011). Additionally, maximizing these spaces of contention allowed the That youth to create constellations of activism, which are multiplatformed, multisited, and multiled—the perfect response to its political situation (Fuentes 2019). As Zelinska (2020) noted, the continuing search and redesign for the best repertoire only proves the innovative, creative, and critical mindsets of these young leaders.

The active role of young activists in translating policies, repertoires, and values from one nation or generation to their own manifests their awareness of global and domestic politics. In fact, as Dolowitz and Marsh (1996) stated, young activitsts' involvement in the democratization movement did not just make them active citizens but also changed the political structure where they performed these repertoires. The Thai youth activists were not strategic allies or supporters anymore but potent political actors that continuously shape, shake, and structure this policy reform agenda.

They participated and changed the discourse on traditional elites and values in Thailand, including royal hegemony, gender roles, and even patriarchal and hierarchical family values (Lertchoosakul 2021). And although navigating such tricky advocacy, they were successful in strategizing the entanglement between offline, street protests and online, digital networks "as cocreators of insurgent collective actions" (Fuentes 2019). Thus, youth activists as policy agents and their repertoires reflect Fuentes's (2019, 2) statement below:

> assemblages between physical and digital sites, body-based and digitally mediated action, and synchronous and asynchronous cooperation redefine traditional repertoires of protest and activism in ways that are key to responding to contemporary systems of exploitation and subjection.

The 2020 Bangkok youth-led democratization protest allowed us to witness a new generation of activists learning and adapting to the growing networks of global movements, the development of more expansive horizontal networks through social media, and their continuous struggle to sustain the movement, their exposure, and their members' conviction with the changing political environment and opportunity structures.

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