

C & G interviewing Ray & Ms. M about Hong Kong's Harcourt Road

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The interview was conducted in Hong Kong Cantonese.

The following is the English translation of the transcript.

C: Clara Cheung, G: Gum Cheng, R: Ray Chow, M: Ms. M

C: [00:01] Today is October 6, 2024. We are at the Sheffield Block Projects Arts Gallery Space interviewing Mr. Ray Chow. Is it alright to address you as Ray Chow?

R: Yes, that's fine.

C: [00:14] I'm here with Gum, and we'd like to ask about your memories of Harcourt Road. Since we're all from Hong Kong, I imagine your memories of Hong Kong's Harcourt Road are more vivid than those of Sheffield's Harcourt Road?

R: [00:30] My memories of Harcourt Road are profound. During my youth in the 1980s, when I started working, I often passed through Admiralty—for job interviews, visits to consulates, business events, or other activities. However, I became more familiar with Harcourt Road after I got involved in social movements around 2000, especially after joining the Neighbourhood and Workers Service Centre (NWSC) [a Hong Kong pro-labour and pro-democracy political group].

I started engaging in district work there as a legislative council assistant and later became a district councillor. This gave me more opportunities to visit the Legislative Council (LegCo) in Admiralty. We usually took the MTR to Admiralty Station, walked across the Harcourt Road footbridge, and headed to LegCo. The first time I actually set foot on Harcourt Road itself was during the 2014 Umbrella Movement. Though it spanned merely three months, from September to December, it left an enduring impact on my political journey. The concerns, anxieties, and inspiration from seeing the creativity and active participation of citizens during the movement shaped many of my views.

Although the NWSC primarily focused on grassroots labour rights and maintained a relatively traditional or conservative political stance, the 2014 experience was a profound eye-opener for me. I realised social movements could integrate environmental and educational issues - in labour-right issues, there can also be an environmental dimension, and in industrial actions, we can incorporate some educational elements. making them more interactive. It brought new perspectives to me and many political newcomers.

C: [04:11] After becoming a district councillor, you mentioned frequent visits to the government headquarters near Harcourt Road. Could you elaborate on those connections?

R: [04:24] I began running for office in 2007, but initially, I went to Admiralty infrequently, maybe once a month or so. After being elected in 2011, I started visiting

regularly, often weekly. Sometimes, I'd bring community members or work with colleagues, other councillors, and staff to prepare position papers for submission to LegCo. The relocation of government headquarters to Admiralty in 2011 also increased our visits, as the new building provided more meeting rooms for public use.

C: Before 2011, did you go to the old LegCo building?

R: [05:23] Yes, in Central. But we visited less often because the space was so limited. After the new government headquarters opened, we could borrow meeting rooms more easily. This benefited grassroots groups without resources or offices. LegCo councillors like Leung Yiu-chung [The sole member representing the NWSC in the LegCo] often helped arrange meeting spaces, allowing us to participate in and observe various discussions.

C: Let's break this into two aspects. You mentioned bringing community members to LegCo meetings. How did those discussions differ from the 2014 Occupy Movement, where discussions happened directly on Harcourt Road?

R: [07:12] I'll start with my evolving approach during the movement. Initially, in 2014, protests against the National People's Congress Standing Committee's (NPCSC) decision on the restricting nomination procedure of the election of the Chief Executive of Hong Kong in 2014 led by Scholarism were intense. Although my colleagues and I opposed national education, we had reservations about some of Scholarism's tactics - I wouldn't call it radical—just a bit more proactive. However, we recognised their efforts as reasonable given their personal stakes as students.

By mid-September 2014, protests outside LegCo and class boycotts began expanding. These developments concerned us. Among LegCo members and district councillors, we debated how to respond to questions from the public about our stance. Our discussions reflected varied perspectives—unity wasn't always possible.

Initially, I feared the government's response would harden, given Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying's authoritarian tendencies. Surprisingly, the government's reaction to Wong's arrest was relatively mild, which shifted my views. On September 28, when Professor Benny Tai [A legal scholar who co-initiated 'Occupy Central with Love and Peace' in 2013, sparking the Occupy Movement in 2014. He remained involved in democratic efforts after the 2019 Anti-Extradition Bill Movement, notably co-organising the 2020 pro-democracy primaries] and others declared the formal start of the Occupy Central movement, I felt both concern and admiration for the citizens' enthusiasm.

When Joshua Wong climbed into the government headquarters on September 26, the situation escalated rapidly.

G: All right, we're back. Just now, Ms. M joined us as well. She'll also be interviewed to talk about some stories related to Harcourt Road. Now, let's get back to Mr. Chow Wai-hung to continue sharing some of these stories... so please go on with what we

were just discussing...

R: [10:22] So, I'll continue. In the early stages, I personally was worried about the situation deteriorating, and I approached things with a kind of traditional mindset about how events might unfold. But once Joshua Wong climbed into the government headquarters, everything accelerated rapidly, and I was concerned about what actions the government might take against him. Yet it was precisely because Joshua Wong climbed into the government headquarters—and the police immediately arrested him—that society across the board, including the LegCo, political parties, tertiary student organisations, and other students, all took further action to put pressure on the government to release him as quickly as possible. The government's second response was actually quite calm. I might even describe it as “gentle” in handling the situation; they didn't escalate the tension any further. That made me slowly change my perspective on the way things were going.

C: Where were you on September 28?

R: On September 28, Professor Benny Tai and the students from Scholarism, along with some other friends inside the LegCo, held a meeting and came out to announce the formal start of 'Occupy Central.' That was another moment that made me worry the situation would worsen. But on the scene, I saw that many citizens were extremely excited—the participants were thrilled about 'Occupy Central' being officially declared, feeling they could do a lot of things. At the same time, our group, the NWSC, and some other friends also had discussions—before Professor Tai formally announced Occupy—about our concerns that events might develop in a worse direction. But there was no choice; we had to watch how things unfolded... Fortunately, at that time...

[12:36] Well, let me go back a bit. While Professor Tai was in a meeting, we (some friends from the NWSC and some left-wing friends who were closer to us) were holding a meeting in lawmaker Leung Yiu-chung's office at the Legislative Council. When we heard that Scholarism and Professor Tai were about to announce Occupy, we went downstairs [from the LegCo office]. After that, we stood by the stage they had set up—along the outside wall of the LegCo. We were seated there, and I'm not sure if he was there or not, but I was chatting with some friends. While we were talking...

It was the night of September 27 going into the early hours of [September] 28—because Professor Tai announced it after midnight, which was already the 28th. So that was the next day. After the announcement, we were underneath [the LegCo building], hearing them shout about the official start. At that moment, I happened to be standing inside the barricades—the metal barriers set up to block off the road. Outside of them was a squad of riot police. Luckily, the police there were very calm and didn't plan to charge at us. I happen to know a few sergeants from the Police Public Relations Branch, and they expressed a desire to keep things calm, hoping everyone would stay peaceful. At that time, the atmosphere was that people *inside* who'd just heard 'Occupy Central' declared were very excited, while those *outside* were calm, with no plan to force a confrontation. In fact, a group of people saw the police and tried to move the barricades. My reaction, along with some others on the marshal team—people who specialise in crowd-control at rallies—was to hold them

back, telling them, 'If you don't push, the police won't come forward—and otherwise, you'll drag everyone else into trouble.'

C: Could you describe it in more detail? The police were standing outside on the roadway?

R: They were outside. That was the atmosphere at the time. Actually, looking back, the police remained calm, so I felt the danger level went down... I never expected it would drag on and on, all the way until December, when the situation deteriorated further.

C: During that whole process, were there any neighbours or members from your organisation who would go with you to the government headquarters or lawmaker offices for meetings?

R: [15:42] Let me explain. In the past, I would bring neighbourhood residents over to Admiralty to attend meetings...

M: One time, a bus took people out there—but which day was it? Remember?"

R: [16:03] That should be [20]19 [the social movement]

C: [16:08] We'll talk about [20]19 a bit later. Let's discuss it afterward.

R: Let me first talk about [20]14 [the Occupy Movement]. I used to bring neighbourhood residents over to the LegCo for meetings. Usually, they were middle-aged or older workers —those were the main folks we'd bring, because they had direct personal interests at stake. They would go to LegCo sessions to file petitions, meet with lawmaker Leung Yiu-chung to seek help resolving certain problems—mostly that sort of thing. Younger people seldom came along, unless it was a labour issue that directly involved them, so there weren't that many young folks following me back then.

During Occupy Central, though, when I stayed in Admiralty or joined various actions, I saw some of the younger residents from my district come up to talk to me. They'd say hello, shake hands, give me pats on the shoulder, and take selfies. That was when I realised there were actually quite a few young people in the area who really cared about social issues; they just hadn't previously taken part in community discussions or events. Over time, I started doing more—organising local discussions. In our district, there usually weren't many such discussions, but after 2014, I gained more young volunteers who helped with local projects. Sometimes they'd help plan what to do about certain issues. So in fact, during the 2014 Occupy Movement, it inspired a lot of people who hadn't been interested in activism or politics to start paying attention to their society. And I feel that's something that came out of the Occupy Movement, leading to other developments later on.

C: These younger residents, maybe you hadn't seen them in the district before...

R: [18:31] I had seen them. I set up street booths in my district very frequently—especially before I was elected. I would be at Leung Yiu-chung's [district] office for seven or eight hours a day, spending four or eight hours stationed at a booth in that location. So many residents had already seen me in passing, said hello, chatted a bit, but I never would have expected they'd get involved in social movements or political matters.

C: [18:57] So they went directly to Admiralty, to Harcourt Road in person?

R: [19:00] Yes, exactly.

G: [19:04] Well, let's ask Ms. M. Since our project is about Harcourt Road, could you tell us about your impressions of Harcourt Road, or your first impression? How did you first learn about that place?"

M: [19:22] I didn't really know the name. I think it was only in [20]14 when everyone started referring to the street name, so that made it clearer. But generally I'm quite poor with directions—I'm not great at telling roads apart. Still, that was what people called it at the time... Actually, before 2014, I still went to that general area because there were many protests and assemblies there. I believe the first time I went must have been [20]12, during the Anti-National Education movement. Yes, that's right. Ever since the government headquarters [in Tamar] opened, Hong Kong people have always gone there to express themselves—it's a place to voice demands.

G: [20:14] These three characters '夏慤道' (Harcourt Road) as Hongkongers say it—does it hold any particular meaning for you?

M: [20:30] Sleeping on the street (laughs)...

R: [20:36] We even put up something called 'Harcourt Mansion'...

C: [20:38] You mean a tent site named 'Harcourt Mansion'?

M: Yes, back in [20]14 on Harcourt Road, each tent had its own little name. One of them has put up a sign.

C: [20:53] That's really impressive!

M: [20:57] So yeah, certain images come to mind—like on September 28, which was... that night, or one night or two nights before that, there were all these rumours... Possibly the night before that, I remember hearing rumours they might

open fire or something [about how the police would clear the area]. A lot of different claims were floating around, like the police were carrying guns. We'd watch them—there were two public toilets, one at each end, and the police needed to use them. They'd go to the toilet, and when they did, we'd look to see what kind of gun they were carrying.

C: [21:47] People were on really high alert?

M: [21:49] At that time, we were still in this state where, for a while earlier, there had been a lot of protests and assemblies. The public could still engage the police in a closer way. Back then [around 2014], the police weren't yet that extreme. It was quite common for people to lecture the police, especially those elderly ladies and such.

R: Like you're telling off kids, pointing at them and scolding.

M: [22:19] So up until right before September 28... or before the police got too extreme, you could still get close and do those things. Even on September 28, before they started firing [tear gas canisters], you could still communicate somewhat with the police. I'm not sure how many people did, but that night, there were probably quite a few who directly asked the police, 'Are you going to open fire next?' and so on. That sort of scene... Then once they actually fired, people scattered and regrouped, scattered and regrouped. All of that, for me, happened on Harcourt Road. Later, it was like a dividing line—Chu River, Han Boundary—because there's that T-junction with the footbridge going across, and the highway perpendicular. Further out on the highway were the police trying to force their way in, while a group of people guarded it. Then they cleared the site eventually, I suppose.

G: [23:40] Let's talk about the process. You mentioned 'Harcourt Mansion'; you stayed there for a while. You must know what happened inside. Can you talk about it —

C: [23:55] About the relationships between people—how, for example, you and other 'neighbours' first planned to set up a camp, gather supplies, that kind of thing. Do you recall how that 'Harcourt Village' was built?"

M: [24:09] We ended up moving around to several spots—maybe three or four (laughs). My earliest memory is that I was with some friends, like-minded folks... Actually, on [September] 26, the night people charged out into the street, I remember... I was just telling him [R:] on the 10th anniversary of 928 that I recall there being three nights—I can't remember whether it was three or four—where I didn't go home at all. At least three nights.

C: [24:37] In a row?

M: [24:38] Yes, maybe [September] 26, 27, 28. It must have been the 26th, because that was the night they stormed Civic Square... He [R:] mentioned it just now. I think that on [September] 28, I didn't see him around as often. He mentioned his own story. But on the night of [September] 26, we, along with the NWSC folks, had our last briefing about what everyone should do if Occupy was declared. Once that meeting ended—because we didn't check our phones at all during the meeting—after it finished and I was heading home, I saw on the news that they were charging into Civic Square. Then I think he [R:] and I both went there to government headquarters. After that, we just happened to run into some other friends—maybe [we] slept on [Harcourt Road] for two nights.

[September] 26, 27—two nights sleeping in...

C: Outside Civic Square?

M: On the road. There's a gate in that area; security had always been tight, and there was just a small gap to let you in—that outer gate. The first night we slept there.

G: [26:01] Tim Mei Avenue?

M: [26:02] Yes, that's right—there's a bit that juts in where vehicles can drive up in a circular area... That night, I ran into friends there and slept together. Then—

C: [26:17] You had no equipment?

G: You just slept directly on the pavement?

M: No, nothing [like a tent or sleeping bag]. Maybe we had cling film? I have this impression of cling film... (laughs). I'm not sure why I remember cling film."

R: [26:34] Hearing that, it reminds me of something: after Joshua Wong got in on [September] 26—after climbing into government headquarters—originally, legislator Cyd Ho was planning to bring in some sound equipment to set up a main stage of sorts, a control point, so that it wouldn't spiral out of control. The point was to keep a steady rhythm and avoid chaos. But the government was pressuring the audio suppliers. Essentially, if they came in, they'd be arrested, and their vehicle would be clamped. So, even though we'd already paid a deposit for audio equipment, the suppliers didn't dare drive in. Even the Democratic Party's truck—whenever it showed up at a protest—would be instantly stopped by the government, told to leave, or else they'd clamp its wheels.

So after we heard that, I immediately went back to the office to grab two big speakers. By the time I got back to Admiralty, the place was packed with people. The riot police had set up barricades and weren't letting anyone through. I clearly

remember some people wanted to rush out onto the road, etc., but the riot police were there. I specifically remember telling them to stand firm and ignore me. I grabbed a couple of items and asked, 'Anyone thinking of charging forward?' I said, 'If anyone wants to charge, come upstairs with me to talk first.' So I took about ten people upstairs to the McDonald's... or wait, not McDonald's, but the back stairwell near the McDonald's—maybe a staircase belonging to a local association.

I said to them, 'The police outside won't let us use the escalators or any normal route to get into Admiralty, the LegCo, or the government headquarters area. There's only one scenario: we dash down there. But be aware, I expect we'll get arrested. I'm warning you in advance that I'm expecting to be arrested. So if you're not psychologically prepared for that, you can go. Those who don't mind the risk, let's talk it through.' In the end, two people left immediately, so eight were left plus me, and we discussed how to split into teams. In the end, we decided on three routes: one group would charge in at the exit near Admiralty Station/Harcourt Road, another would go up the Red Cotton Road footbridge, then loop around from above..."

C: [29:24] So which day are you referring to—September 28?

M: [29:27] That's why I said it was completely unrelated to me. (Laughs)

R: [29:29] There was also another group heading toward the front, somewhere near, like, Lippo Centre... crossing at that side. After the discussion, we split into three teams. I led one team...

C: Actually, how many people were in each team?

R: [29:47] Just a few each. Some couldn't manage it, so we had to go down to the main street using your [the other participants'] method. Because at that point, it was packed with people—basically impossible to walk in; you'd have to squeeze your way in. So everyone would go down there, combine with other people on-site, and break through together. The three teams charged. My group took the Cotton Tree Drive footbridge, and there were no police at all up there—because the police never expected people to climb up that bridge. It's a bridge a bit higher than the road; we climbed on, got over the railing, walked onto the footbridge roadway, and moved down.

G: [30:35] Weren't there a lot of people there already?

R: [30:36] Actually, it wasn't too crowded over there. The MTR exit side was jammed with young people, while the riot police were lined up by the roadway because there were so many people over there. So the police were fully concentrated on that side.

M: [30:53] You figure there were a few hundred people?

R: [30:54] Probably hundreds. The area near the McDonald's was already packed. When I went toward the Red Cotton Road footbridge, there wasn't a single police officer there. So I turned back and shouted, 'I'm District Councillor Chow Wai-hung from Kwai Tsing. Do you all want to break through the police line? Look, over here is completely impassable because they're heavily deployed. If you want to rush, it won't work this way. But I see an opening on the Red Cotton Road footbridge. Anyone want to come with me to charge in from there?' Immediately, a group of people followed. I distinctly remember I was dragging a large speaker (laughs), pulling it along while we charged together. Because we made that breakthrough—once we got onto that bridge, others followed us, climbing up onto the bridge. By going over that spot, we caused the police line below to collapse. People started climbing and pushing from all directions. After that, we walked down the road... I remember thinking if I'd been arrested afterward... I was lucky it was [20]14.

M: [32:24] That time, there were several places where people forced their way in, blocking the road with cars so traffic stopped and people could flood in. Did that happen where you were?

R: [32:35] Not exactly that location. But yes, there were still cars using that road. Once we climbed up, the cars basically all stopped, letting us pass. Then as soon as we got in, we actually halted all traffic altogether.

M: By comparison, on September 28, I was on the inside, near the government headquarters. From what I recall... not sure if it was 28th or not, but anyway tear gas

R: [33:17] That came after.

C: The day they fired tear gas was September 28, for over ten hours. Maybe you're talking about just a few hours apart—afternoon, evening?

M: [33:34] Yes, yes. After they fired it, I was inside, and my impression was that it felt peaceful there. The chaos was outside...

R: [33:43] Outside was chaotic. It was like two different worlds.

M: [33:48] I think around 11 p.m., nothing was really happening yet. Once they started firing [tear gas]... If some of our memories of the dates or times are off—

G: Once the whole area was occupied—Harcourt Road and beyond—let's focus on Harcourt, you mentioned 'Harcourt Mansion.' How did you transport supplies, decide on a location, and interact with people there?"

R: [34:35] We were quite early, you could say. We set it up not long after things

began. Then our tent got stolen because I had to go up to the office, and she [M:] had to go to work (laughs). We had actually bought a tent. At the very beginning, not many people were buying tents to pitch. Later, more people did.

M: At first, not many at all.

R: Then it got more common.

M: At some point, tents were side by side—very dense. But that also happened pretty early on.

R: [35:01] At first we placed ours on the grassy area...

M: [35:04] No, not on the grass. The earliest was the footbridge.

R: [35:07] Right, the footbridge initially... The second phase was[on the grass]

C: Under the footbridge or on top of it?

M: On top of the footbridge. I remember earlier I mentioned some friends...

R: [35:19] A sort of pedestrian bridge—beneath it is the road. It's maybe 100 meters long or so.

M: [35:24] Right. Benny and Ah Chiu, did they pitch tents too? Belle... Early on, they did.

R: They did, but they tore them down later.

M: [35:42] Yeah, eventually they left... I recall once we moved to a spot in front of the 'Civic Forum'—do you remember? You folks from the NWSC had a space, and in front of that, there were all kinds of different people. Because there was a supply station nearby, and also some activity going on. I remember some events happening there.

R: [36:11]

Many different parties set up their own stands, each expressing their ideas.

M: [36:19] There were also maybe one or two stalls related to leather-craft or art—somewhere around that spot...

C: [G:] describe that bridge out loud for us.

G: [36:36]

It's... Harcourt Road has a split-off section, a footbridge turning onto Cotton Tree Drive—yes, the spot you cross the bridge—like looking out from Fairwood [a fast-food chain in Hong Kong].

M: Then the Civic Forum...

R: [36:56] After we rushed down, we made the police line collapse... I was thinking how lucky I was, because at that time, if the police had arrested me, I'd have been finished.

M: [37:12] That day, I think multiple spots were busted through like that—totally unexpected by the police.

R: Or maybe I was lucky because I led people right away, but I was slowed down by dragging this big speaker, so others charged ahead, and I guess I wasn't in the front to get tackled. (Laughs)

M: [37:33] After that, for a short while we were on the grassy area...

C: You mean Tamar Park? Is that what you call the 'grass'?

M: [37:43] Yes. Then after a few nights, we had one or two evenings of chatting with friends...

G: [37:55] So you had a tent set up there—did you stay on the spot?

M: Yes, basically sleeping there. We'd spend most nights there.

R: Many nights we literally slept there. Then in the morning, we'd head over to... the spot under the Peak Tram station, where there's a sports ground. We'd shower there around 7 a.m.

M: Yes, for brushing teeth and washing our faces, we'd use the big public restroom... it was really clean—amazing (laughs).

R: And then we'd use the toilet at the government headquarters... we'd brush our teeth and wash up in the bathroom near Civic Square. That's where we met "Sai Bo", who became the 'toilet manager' and kept it really clean.

M: [38:51] I'm not sure about the men's restroom, but in the women's restroom, we'd see someone constantly tidying up. Even while you were using it, you'd notice someone right there, cleaning.

C: Volunteers you ran into, presumably...

M: [39:05] Yes, young women as well. We lived at one end, and the restroom was at the other. On the way, especially at the LegCo Demonstration Area, there were a lot of activities going on, like environmental stuff."

C: Such as? Could you give examples?

M: [39:35] Recycling and so on.

C: Plastic bottles, for instance?

M: Yes...

C: Making cleaning agents, compost?

M: [39:40] Right... I'm not entirely sure; I wasn't heavily involved in that.

R: [39:43] Environmental enzymes...

M: [39:45] Yes, they'd write instructions showing people how to do it. And there was more than that—lots of people posted things or taught how to do all sorts of stuff. Or they shared messages. Along that road, you'd discover many people, because they were there for such a long time and wanted to express themselves. It wasn't the usual Hong Kong mindset. I guess the atmosphere was different—people were there for an ideal. Each day they were thinking about this stuff. There were also some young people, maybe the way they'd been educated made them good at visual arts. Their drawings were really beautiful—pasted or displayed. You'd see a lot of that along the way.

R: [40:56] I'd like to mention the public toilets. Because the one outside the LegCo or government headquarters—many people would use it when heading to LegCo. It's a newer toilet, quite clean and advanced. By 'advanced,' I mean it had good drainage, seemed neat and tidy. Then during Occupy, something interesting happened: many people knew others needed personal-hygiene items, toilet paper, even sanitary pads. So it was fully stocked. Volunteers helped by placing donated items there. People donated so many supplies—lots of toothbrushes, travel-size toothpaste, towels, and

big piles of toilet paper. The best part was that people regularly volunteered to clean it, so the LegCo or FEHD cleaning staff didn't have to do extra work. Even though everyone was opposing the government and its high-pressure approach to livelihood and political issues, the participants still felt, 'Well, we have our stance, but we don't want to make front-line workers suffer because of our demands.' So they tried to do their part to minimize the impact on others.

M: [42:44] Besides, for those occupying, this was basically their home. They wanted to keep it clean, not make a mess. In fact, I think it was even cleaner than usual, smelling nice in the toilets. I'm not sure what they put in there (laughs). Only thing was, now and then—maybe not super frequently—there would suddenly be no water, possibly because the government cut it off for no reason. Then people had to fetch water... I might be mixing up [experiences from 2014 and 2019]?not entirely sure.

G: [43:33] Back to the tent on the Harcourt Road footbridge. How did you communicate with people around you—did you actually talk, or not really?

M: [43:46] We did, just not a lot. But we recognised our neighbours. Aside from those living in tents, some folks were running other activities. I don't recall precisely... something like a leather-craft stall, I think a bit farther behind on the footbridge near an exit that had some stairs leading down into Admiralty. Around that area, there were three or four booths permanently doing something. One was leather-craft. They also had a monitoring patrol? What was it called at the time? Every zone had something like that...

C: A supply station?

M: [44:47] Yes, a supply station, and also some sort of security patrol—maybe not exactly 'patrol' by name. I'm not sure. They rode bicycles at night, right? Do you remember that? They had a name for themselves. They'd guard the entrances and exits. You'd see them, not necessarily stationed permanently, but keeping watch so the police couldn't suddenly charge in.

R: [45:25] There was a time one night everyone rushed out, someone shouted there was a 'dog' coming! (laughs)"

(Note: 'dog' colloquially means riot police by protestors.)

M: [45:35] Then over in Admiralty, there was a forum-type area. Just before you went inside, under the footbridge to one side, that was basically a spot you passed each night after work to get into the site, where lots of events took place. But, well, if you got off work and went straight to your own tent, and didn't look around, you wouldn't see much else.

R: [46:10] When I slept over, I didn't do it that often, but I would chat with some neighbours—people in nearby tents. I noticed some students were studying there, so I didn't really interrupt them. Often, I arrived after leaving my office, maybe 7 or 8 p.m. Many evenings there'd be a rally. We'd join that, and by the time it was over, we didn't have much time to socialise. Generally, everyone was hoping the government would respond positively so it could end sooner, but the government's attitude kept being whatever it was. In the end, you saw a certain turnover—some students stayed a while then went home because of family pressure, and others came in to replace them.

C: [47:17] Do you recall anything about the occupation's final stage? We're saying it lasted 79 days. By the end, you and your political allies or friends—how did you see the situation then? Any impressions of what it felt like at the end, when it seemed the government wasn't responding even though the demand (for genuine universal suffrage) was quite clear?

R: [47:47] Let me talk about myself and my colleagues at the NWSC—my fellow staffers in the councillor's office, including Leung Yiu-chung and some district councillors. We all figured that realistically, C.Y. Leung wouldn't simply yield. Even if he wanted to comply, wanted to let go, it wouldn't be that easy, because Beijing wasn't likely to let him make any promises. So clearing out the protest sites was a matter of time; the question was how they'd handle the aftermath of social movement afterward. We discussed that.

Eventually, in mid-December [2014], a group of legislative councillors and political party representatives sat in at Admiralty, basically waiting to be arrested and taken to the police station. I think that was the most peaceful way to bring it to a close. But as a result, many who took part in the movement felt disheartened or believed the movement had failed. That, in turn, fed into later developments like the localist or Hong Kong independence factions in [20]19, which was another step in the sequence.

I wouldn't dare say whether it was right or wrong—people simply chose their direction and methods. It's only natural that afterward, groups taking the traditional or more conservative path stuck with that, while whether they could collaborate or communicate with other factions was another question. The localists or independence supporters were disappointed, even scornful or hostile toward the traditional pan-democrats. I can understand that. But how to change that relationship? At the time, there were no answers. Then after [20]19 and the enactment of the National Security Law, they began to let go—well, not exactly let go, but *softened*—those prejudices and that anti-pan-democrats sentiment. Because now we've run out of options; even if you participate, it doesn't do much good. Looking to the future, might hostility turn into cooperation in pushing for changes in Hong Kong or China? We'll have to see. I think it's still unfolding—it's not finished yet.

C: [50:55] In 2024, that process is still unfolding?

R: Yes, it's still unfolding, not over yet. If China's power weakens further or if the international community pays more attention, there could be changes. I'm somewhat optimistic.

C: [51:13] All right, we've jumped ahead to [20]19. Do you recall anything from 2019 near Harcourt Road? That year's 'revolution,' so to speak, happened in many districts, with protests every weekend. But around Harcourt Road, in June there were large-scale demonstrations and even the LegCo storming in July. Were there any particularly strong memories of that period—of Harcourt Road in 2019?

R: [51:42] Actually, in 2019, regarding the events in Admiralty, I didn't really take part. I can't remember the exact reason, but for whatever reason, I just wasn't there.

C: People were scattered across different parts of Hong Kong?

R: [51:53] I simply wasn't there—how about you[M:]?

M: [51:56] No. Mostly, I would just join the initial marches, which would pass through there...

M: [52:03] Right. April, then it all blew up in June. The thing I remember most strongly is the 612 incident [an intense confrontation between anti-extradition bill protesters and the Hong Kong Police Force on 12 June 2019 outside the government headquarters. The peaceful protesters were faced with an onslaught of tear gas, rubber bullets, pepper spray, and baton charges-violence leveled by the police.

] ... was it 612?

R: [52:14] It was 612. You did go there on 612.

M: [52:16] Yes, early in the morning... The night before, no one really knew what would happen next. Then that morning... Maybe I deliberately woke up early to see what was going on, and I saw it (laugh).

R: [52:32] All hell broke loose.

M: [52:35] So I headed down. I recall we went quite early—before 9 a.m.—to check it out. It was already full of young people.

R: [52:51] I just remembered why I hardly went there at the time. The localist or independence side was calling for more people to take action near LegCo, but neither I nor my circle of friends—or the NWSC—were that keen on the more radical

approach. So we didn't join them. But we did take part in the big protests and marches. We even had a big banner with some Kwai Tsing residents, which you may recall—we'd bring this banner along. We actually got cloth from Sham Shui Po and had a neighbourhood resident stitch it together. It ended up being over 50 feet long—over 50 feet.

C: [53:35] What was written on it?

R: [53:51] I think it was something like 'Kwai Shing Residents Against Extradition.' We marched with it from Victoria Park to Admiralty. And we rented two tour buses twice—on the 12th and the 19th—to bring Kwai Shing residents to join the marches.

C: Where did the bus drop you off?

R: [54:21] Victoria Park, or nearby the Central Library. Then from there we'd walk the route. Some elderly folks joined, too, though they needed rest stops. Eventually, when more confrontations happened on the streets, I myself took on a coordinating role—because besides being a district councillor, I was also a member of the Kwai Tsing District Fight Crime Committee, so I tried to act as a buffer to reduce clashes between protesters and the police.

Early on, that helped somewhat—telling protesters to withdraw when the police arrived, so we could avoid anyone getting hurt. But by mid-October, that no longer worked. The police even intimidated me. Once in Tsuen Wan—on a day of a general strike, the day someone got shot in Tsuen Wan—I remember I was on Yeung Uk Road, with some protesters facing off against the police. After most of them left, riot officers rushed out. I grabbed a small loudspeaker, calling for calm, 'Let them go! No one needs to be hurt on either side!' Then one of the riot commanders came at me and shoved me against a wall, about to strike me with his baton. Fortunately, a superintendent from the Police Public Relations Branch of the headquarters, I think—used his loudspeaker to say 'Don't hit him! He can help!' So I got lucky and avoided that. But by late October... Each night I went out, I'd come home extremely drained, emotionally. I couldn't sleep for days. I realised I wasn't coping—I was beyond my mental limit. So I stopped going.

M: [57:15] In 2014, I remember you all had a 'community referendum' in May about whether to Occupy Central—inviting neighbours in Kwai Tsing to voice their opinions...

R: [57:37] Yes, we did a community referendum at several district councillor offices.

C: I see. During the 2014 Occupy Movement, you saw these younger residents on Harcourt Road, carried out a community referendum...After the clearance, these young residents stayed active in your neighbourhood. What was that like after 2014?

R: [58:10] They'd hold workshops and discussions on social concerns...

C: And you led that from your office?

R: Yes, from our office. For example, in Kwai Tsing or Kwai Chung Estate, there was another one run by Wong Yoon-tat. Over at Leung Yiu-chung's Kwai Fong office, we organised a group of new immigrant women—parents—who discussed their children's and their own rights. All of that stemmed from the post-[20]14 community work. I think the Occupy Movement got people to care about their role and power in society. After discussions, they'd take action, like writing position papers to LegCo or different parties, or organising neighbours to file complaints about neighbourhood issues. It made a difference.

C: So if you'd tried the same work before 2014, you wouldn't have had so many people participating?

R: [59:32] It would've been very difficult.

C: So the [2014 Occupy] Movement clearly changed [participation levels]?

R: [59:35] Yes, definitely.

C: [59:44] All right, let's finish up with two more questions...

G: During the Occupy Movement, while you were in the occupied area, what sort of role did you see yourself playing there—were you a participant, an occupier, a helper, or an organiser?

M: I think it was all of us pushing together for a single goal, hoping to achieve something. From start to finish—even though we all knew by the end that it probably wouldn't succeed (and that feeling existed for quite a while, maybe halfway through the three months)—none of us wanted to disperse. We said we'd wait until they cleared us. We wanted to push for the ultimate aim, but in the end, we couldn't... yeah.

R: [1:01:21] In 2014, the NWSC did think about doing some organizing on-site. We tried pulling up a couple of boards to build a small stage for people to discuss grassroots rights. But everyone at the time was focused on other social issues, so that didn't draw much interest. Eventually, we stopped pursuing labour or grassroots rights there. Instead, as an individual, I was participating. Separately, in my capacity as a district councillor, I had resources that helped—for example, calling for supply donations was easier, or collecting supplies at my office was more straightforward.

M: [1:02:35] You should talk about Kwai Shing East, especially...

R: [1:02:39] So basically, if there were any needs in the occupied zone, it was easier for us to gather supplies in the community and bring them in. So whether in terms of participation or resources, we could play that role.

M: You should mention the Kwai Shing East Lennon Wall. [Lennon Wall originally referred to the mosaic wall of post-it messages created during the Occupy Movement at the government headquarters. This form of free expression later spread throughout various locations across Hong Kong during the 2019 social movements.]

R: [1:03:00] That's something from after [20]19... right now we're discussing post-[20]14.

M: Ah, right.

G: [1:03:21] Let me ask both of you: if you could go back 10 years to 2014, would you do the same thing—would you participate in the same way, or would you do more, or maybe choose not to get involved? Any hypothetical regrets or different choices?

M: I think it would be the same. That night of September 26, rushing out—yeah, it was already late, maybe past midnight when I grabbed the bus. We saw something happening and within our capability, we just... tried to support everyone. We needed the numbers so people could see how many wanted that to happen. If you don't show up, you won't be counted. But in reality, there's only so much you can do... Then in 2019, people went further, but honestly, it was still limited.

R: [1:04:55] My perspective is that the events of 2014 happened as the social climate developed. Even if we look back and wonder if we'd do more or less, it's not really up to us. No political party drove it—no party *could* have driven it. It was all triggered by the government's moves, which made many young people, previously uninvolved, realise their needs and sparked broader concern. Then the political parties just aligned with the direction things were heading.

Could we have done more? It's not just a matter of wanting to. If public sentiment isn't there, you can't force it. But, for instance, what if after December [2014], all the political party representatives had held out longer? Would the public have continued supporting a longer occupation? And would that have made the government give in, maybe even Beijing? Really hard to say.

C: [1:06:30] By the way, have you been to Harcourt Road in Sheffield?

R: I've passed by...

M: I haven't.

C: [1:06:45] All right, that's about it. Do you have any final comments?

R: I just hope that now we're in the UK, we can share more about what happened in Hong Kong—whether 2014 or 2019—so that more people here will *genuinely* pay attention, not just be vaguely aware. I hope they'll grasp the blood and sweat Hongkongers have poured into this, and put more pressure on our government to focus on Hong Kong affairs, so that future developments can shift. Right now, plenty of people know *something* happened, but they don't really understand it. Will they help pressure the government? I haven't seen much active response. I hope that can change."

C: One final question: our project focuses on Harcourt Road but also the aspect of community organization. Now that we're looking at the UK's Hong Kong diaspora, do you see any potential for organising? You mentioned a wish for British people to pay attention and pressure the UK government. Do you have any vision for how Hongkongers here could organise themselves to advance that cause?

R: [01:08:43] It's difficult. Because the Hong Kong Communist regime enacted the National Security Law—this universal law—that's made many of the Hongkongers who've arrived here apprehensive, even fearful. Some still have relatives or friends in Hong Kong, or they're considering going back to visit or to live. Because of that, I've seen quite a few people choose silence or deliberately avoid issues related to Hong Kong. That's tricky. Unless the UK government steps up its approach to foreign agents—putting pressure on the Chinese Communist Party not to carry out infiltration or agent work here—I don't see it changing. That's the political angle. Another angle is that some people are simply fatigued by all they went through in 2019. They don't want to engage in politics anymore, maybe not even show up on voting day. Hopefully, over time, that resistance will ease. All we can do is keep communicating with them.

C: [1:10:34] All right, thanks, Ms. M, for joining us.

R: Thank you.