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From Wall Street to Central: How OWS is seen in China

Written by **Clément Renaud** on November 9, 2011. Published in **OccupyWallstreet** on **Asia**.

Having followed the OWS movement since its beginnings, what I find really interesting is all the different ways of appropriation that people come up with. As Jay Sown said recently in **a video**: “[OWS] is just specific enough to capture the basic sentiment that so many people share, and just vague enough to let many different people come to it with many different shades of meaning”.

The **Occupy Central** movement in Hong Kong arose because people took the OWS model as an opportunity to express their own problems and ideas – from very local level concerns to the biggest globalized issues.

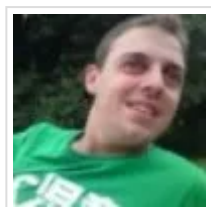
Mobilization in Hong Kong – the biggest marketplace in Asia – has been fuelled by many different layers of political and social concerns: from housing to racism etc. “*There are so many social problems in HK*” **said** a group of HK students in their letter to the *Occupy Central* movement. The direct links between Wall Street and its Asian sister, between Hong Kong’s biggest financial institution and the most critical social issues, have been articulated in the collective dynamics of *Occupy Central*.

On the mainland, Chinese academics and activists have also called for globalization of the movement from its very beginning, with a **letter of support** published on October 2nd and since signed by many people and activists in China. The **first protest** had been held in Zhenzhou 2 weeks previously yet with a slightly different agenda as it was essentially organized by old Maoists. Classic Maoist rhetoric has found a good opportunity for a revival in the OWS, with many new anti-capitalist topics appearing online. Competition between China and the US has also led to the public following of OWS by Chinese mainstream media. Tencent, one of the biggest Internet content providers in China, has opened **a dedicated page** for analysis of OWS, which explains that OWS is not evil but rather proof of US failure – i.e. when compared to China. Yet the many different voices that make up the debate on OWS in China don't really sound coherent and it's sometimes **difficult to understand** what it is all really about.

From my personal point of view, one important aspect that has led many Chinese to become interested in the OWS movement is directly related to nationalism. The idea that US citizens are rising up to protect and change their own country has been saluted and has led to many discussions about China's own future. Some of my friends have even compared OWS to the **May 4th** movement started in China in 1919 by a student uprising after Shandong Province was given to the Japanese by the Versailles Treaty. It led to massive protests throughout the whole country. Considered as a turning point in Chinese history, the May 4th movement turned dissent in China from a debate for the elite to a mass movement, and made the people a new factor of change in the politics of the country.

Even if the similarities between OWS and the May 4th movement are not immediately obvious, at least both movements share an ability to bring in many different social layers to express their issues together and bring the people back to the political game.

OWS and its emulators are today providing a worldwide platform for people everywhere to discuss their own problems in their own words on a global scale.



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Working between Europe and China, Clément Renaud investigates how online social practices are shaping a forthcoming economy of sharing. He has co-founded an independent research center with a community of Chinese bloggers and hackers named Sharism Lab. Clément Renaud write code, articles, courses and research papers about data visualization, social network analysis, education for journalists and urban culture.

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