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A Nonviolent Model of Liberation Theology in Hong Kong: A Dialogue with Maoism

LAI TSZ-HIM

Abstract

This paper aims to argue that Father Franco Mella, an Italian Catholic missionary in Hong Kong, is a forerunner of Hong Kong Christians who strive for a just society. First, Mella's thoughts on liberation theology, rooted in the teachings of Vatican II and the thoughts of Lorenzo Milani and Maoism, are introduced. Second, how his practice serves as a living example of Mao's struggle ethic and a preferential option for the poor is illustrated. Through the praxis of hunger strike, he transforms the violent ethics of revolution into a form of nonviolent resistance. To conclude, his fight against injustice is an exemplar of liberation theology for Hong Kong Christians in responding to injustice in the post-Umbrella Movement era.

SEEKING A THEOLOGY IN THE POST-UMBRELLA MOVEMENT ERA

Since Hong Kong returned to China in 1997, massive protests calling for democracy have become more and more frequent. The most famous

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protest, which lasted throughout the fall of 2014, is commonly known as the “Umbrella Movement.” This protest gained its name when protestors used their umbrellas as shields to protect themselves from pepper spray and tear gas used by the police. Although the Umbrella Movement was a social movement, outstandingly, Christians showed a high degree of participation. Christians from different denominations committed to the protest in various ways, such as advocating for nonviolent resistance, opening their churches as shelters, and resisting police face to face.¹ The Umbrella Movement inspired a group of theologians to reflect upon the relationship between Christianity and the Movement.² Their work offered a theological response to the role of Christians in seeking a democratic and just society in the post-Umbrella Movement era.

In this context, I suggest that the theology and praxis of Father Franco Mella (Fr. Mella) could serve as an archetype for Hong Kong Christians to further develop their liberation theology in the future protests for social justice.

FATHER FRANCO MELLA’S LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Fr. Mella, an Italian Catholic missionary of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (P.I.M.E., from the Latin *Pontificium Institutum Missionum Exterarum*), devoted his whole self to Hong Kong. Since his arrival in Hong Kong in the 1970s, Fr. Mella has been participating in social movements, helping the underprivileged fight for justice. Due to his hunger strikes for the rights of the Yau Ma Tei boat people and their undocumented wives in 1986, he has become a well-known public figure to the people of Hong Kong. To date, he has spent almost fifty years in Hong Kong. During this period, he has served a myriad of different underprivileged people. Most of these underprivileged people are living on the margins of the margin in Hong Kong, such as the female Chinese migrants, African prisoners, Vietnamese homeless, etc. Currently, he is still working to help them and improve their living situation. (A chronology of his work is presented in the Appendix.)

¹ Chan Shun-hing, “The Protestant Community and the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 16, no. 3 (July 3, 2015): 380–95.

² Justin K. H. Tse and Jonathan Y. Tan, eds., *Theological Reflections on the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

Before we analyze how his theology can be understood as a pioneer of Hong Kong liberation theology, the traditions that influence Fr. Mella are introduced.

THE BACKGROUND OF FATHER MELLA: VATICAN II, LORENZO MILANI, AND MAOISM

Fr. Mella grew up in Milan and joined P.I.M.E. in 1967 when he was nineteen years old. At that time, the Catholic Church was being reformed by a progressive spirit. During the period of Pope John XXII, he promulgated two encyclicals, namely, *Mater et Magistra* (Mother and Teacher) in 1961 and *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth) in 1963, to state the role of the church in promoting human dignity and world peace. Moreover, he convoked the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) in order to reform the church fundamentally. *Gaudium et Spes* (the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), one of the four constitutions announced in Vatican II, emphasizes that the Catholic Church should discern “the signs of the times,” open the church to the modern world and work for the common good. All these documents have become the foundation for Catholic social teaching and demand the church to get more involved in social justice.

P.I.M.E., as a missionary institution in Italy, was unquestionably influenced by these changes. When Fr. Mella was trained as a seminarian, his seminary was famous for its liberal training of students.³ Besides the general theological training, the seminary offered different subjects such as sociology, psychology, and philosophy for their students, and even permitted them to join social movements.⁴ The first time Fr. Mella marched and occupied for protest took place during his school life.⁵ The liberal learning environment encouraged Fr. Mella to understand society through engagement with a variety of people.

The teaching of Lorenzo Milani also influenced Fr. Mella as much as his seminary education. Lorenzo Milani (1923–1967) was an Italian Catholic priest. He is well known for his educational philosophy for

³ Jiang Qiongzhu 江瓊珠, *Cong Milan dao Zuanshishan: Ganzai gushi* 從米蘭到鑽石山——甘仔故事 [From Milan to Diamond Hill: The Story of Father Mella] (Hong Kong: Step Forward Multi Media, 1997), 10.

⁴ Ibid, 11.

⁵ Ibid, 15.

children in poverty.⁶ The Italian church did not appoint him to any important position because of his critique of the close relationship between the church and the government. However, his prophetic standpoint in teaching poor children and his defense for the right to refuse military service drew attention from priests throughout Italy. Milani established a school for all people and a pedagogy of social justice, which became an example for other priests to follow. Fr. Mella read all books by Milani, translated two of them into Chinese, and published them in Hong Kong.⁷ Lorenzo Milani is one of the sources from which Fr. Mella saw that the option for the poor should arise from faith.

Catholic teachings about social justice and Lorenzo Milani's solidarity with the poor led Fr. Mella to engage Marxism and Maoism. After World War II, the Italian Communist Party (PCI) remained one of the two largest and strongest parties in Italy.⁸ Different from the strategy of the Communist Party in Russia, the PCI was eager to take control of Italy by election instead of revolution. Thus, some Marxist activists were disappointed by the PCI's bureaucracy and wanted to seek another Marxist model. Eventually, they found Maoism. In early 1964, several Maoist activists united together and published their local newspaper *Nuova Unità* (New Unity) in Milan.⁹ After the Italian translation of *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* (also known as *Little Red Book*) was delivered to Italy, reading it and quoting some verses from it became a trendy thing in Italy. *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* and China's Red Guard student movement offered alternative ways for the youth to transform the society that was corrupted by American occupiers and Fascist sympathizers.¹⁰

It took a long time for Fr. Mella to engage with Maoists. Before he decided to be a priest, he did not know anything about Maoism. After he became a seminarian, he had more chances to understand the world. He was interested in Maoism because of a conversation with a Maoist youth in one night:

⁶ Federico Batini, Peter Mayo, and Alessio Surian, *Lorenzo Milani, The School of Barbiana and the Struggle for Social Justice* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2014).

⁷ Lorenzo Milani, *When Obedience Is No Longer a Virtue*, ed. Gianni Criveller, Jackie Hung, and Franco Mella (Hong Kong: Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese, 2007).

⁸ Robert J. Alexander, *Maoism in the Developed World* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), 105.

⁹ Dominique Kirchner Reill, "Partisan Legacies and Anti-imperialist Ambitions: The Little Red Book in Italy and Yugoslavia," in *Mao's Little Red Book: A Global History*, ed. Alexander C. Cook (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 190.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 197.

You and other priests always gather together, study the bible, meditate, and talk about a lot of good things; however, do you know the number of people who are oppressed in this neighborhood? They are living in a poor environment and do not have any working opportunities. You all should go outside the church, listen to their needs, and help them fight for basic needs.¹¹

After this conversation, Fr. Mella was eager to study Maoism. Not only did he join a Maoism reading group, he also participated in social protests with Maoists. He was even arrested by the police because he and other Maoists tried to occupy the government building to demand housing rights for the poor.¹² His social awareness of injustice was nurtured at the time by the Maoists in Milan. Before he became a missionary priest and came to Hong Kong, he had already been a Maoist.

P.I.M.E. is an institution of priests who dedicate their lives to overseas missions. Each priest in this institution must leave his homeland to serve in another country. Fr. Mella's experience with the Maoists in Milan urged him to start his missionary work in Hong Kong, a city next to Mainland China, where he could continue to study Maoism. Thus Fr. Mella arrived in Hong Kong in 1974.

LIBERATION THEOLOGY PLUS MAOISM: FATHER MELLA'S MAOISM IN HIS ACTIONS AND SONGS

When theologians begin to construct liberation theology, they may ask how such theology could respond to the oppressed people and their socio-political context. Liberation theology states a preferential option for the poor, emphasizes orthopraxis, sees the liberation movement as a part of salvation history, and criticizes the structural sin of the material world. Indeed, all these dimensions can be demonstrated by authentic pastoral experience. Gustavo Gutierrez, one of the founders of liberation

¹¹ Franco Mella, "Yuan ni de guo lailin: Gan shenfu moxiang Tianzhu jing" 願你的國來臨——甘神父默想天主經 [Your Kingdom Come: Father Mella Meditating the Lord's Prayer], *Kung Kao Po*, July 30, 2000, 18. Translation my own.

¹² Jiang, *Cong Milan dao Zuanshishan*, 13.

theology, emphasizes that liberation theology must be a theological rationale for doing pastoral work among the poor.¹³ He says:

Liberation theology is simply a theology that tries to convey the message of hope to the poor by saying that God loves them. For those who do not live these realities daily, liberation theology is an academic game!¹⁴

In the case of Fr. Mella, although he is not a scholar/writer of liberation theology, his pastoral works are pioneering for liberation theology in Hong Kong. Fr. Mella's liberation theology is not found in books, but in his actions, sermons, and composed songs.

Fr. Mella's praxis is a direct result of his integration of Christian faith with Maoism. His faith in Jesus Christ leads him to the Catholic priesthood, and his belief in Mao directs him to stand with the masses. The masses (*qunzhong* 群眾) is the core of Maoist political philosophy. Mao defines the masses as "all those who are oppressed, injured or fettered by imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat capitalism, namely workers, peasants, soldiers, intellectuals, businessmen and other patriots."¹⁵ The masses means all those who are oppressed by an exploitative system. The task of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is to liberate the masses. "Serving the people" (*wei renmin fuwu* 為人民服務) becomes the priority of the CCP. Mao sees the masses not only as the object that the CCP seeks to serve but also as the subject because the masses are the power that changes the world. Mao says, "The people and the people alone are the motive force in the making of world history."¹⁶ The duty of the CCP is to stand with the masses, take the ideas of the masses, and empower the masses to liberate themselves from the imperial and capitalist system.

Fr. Mella was profoundly influenced by Mao's interpretation of the masses. After he arrived in Hong Kong and learned a little Cantonese, he decided to live outside his missionary house. He thought his missionary house was too far away from the masses. The first place he lived was

¹³ Gustavo Gutierrez, *Gustavo Gutierrez: Essential Writings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 23–28.

¹⁴ Recorded by Carmelo E. Alvarez, "A Future for Latin American Liberation Theology," in *Contextual Theology for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Stephen B. Bevans and Katalina Tahaefe-Williams (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2012), 88.

¹⁵ Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. 4 (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2001), 207.

¹⁶ Mao Zedong, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*, new amplified ed. (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1967), 65.

a ghetto in Diamond Hill. Since then, he has never lived in the missionary house. He started to practice Cantonese with his neighbor, learned Chinese through memorizing quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong, and read the English newspaper to know more about Hong Kong.

Fr. Mella was a worker-priest in his first twelve years in Hong Kong. He worked in fourteen factories holding different kinds of jobs. Mella worked as a full-time worker because he believed that “Jesus was a carpenter before he started his missionary. Jesus was a worker before he was a teacher.”¹⁷ He did not only focus on the spiritual needs of factory workers but also organized a labor union. He united factory workers to demand higher salary and better working environment. His passion for organizing a labor union caused him to be fired multiple times.

In addition to standing with the masses, another crucial notion of Mao’s political thought is class struggle. Mao sees class struggle as the force of social progress. “Classes struggle. Some classes triumph. Others are eliminated. Such is history; such is the history of civilization for thousands of years.”¹⁸ To achieve a classless communist society, there is no other way but to carry out a continual class struggle and to defend against the invasion of capitalism and imperialism. In the continuation of class struggle, the society should identify the conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, between different political forces, and even between the old and the new culture. The function of class struggle is to explore the conflict and to supersede the old society by a new one. Maoists should recognize the enemies of the masses and classless society, and annihilate these enemies.

Mao’s praxis of class struggle highlights the conflicts in the society and the oppressor whom the communists should defeat. This notion provides Fr. Mella with a direction to participate in social movements. Class struggle urged Fr. Mella to unite the oppressed people to fight against the oppressor. In the context of Hong Kong, the government policy is usually the source of oppression. Thus, when Fr. Mella participated in the social movement in the 1970s, he preferred to unite other Marxist activists together to participate in the movement because they usually had more progressive and radical thoughts as well as actions compared to general citizens. Most of the Marxist activists at that time were influenced by the Trotskyists, who were exiled from China. They were active in different social issues such as the “Anti-corruption, Arrest Godber Movement” (protests against corruptions in the police

¹⁷ Jiang, *Cong Milan dao Zuanshishan*, 39.

¹⁸ Mao, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*, 5.

department), the “Yau Ma Tei Boat People Protest” (protests against the government resettlement policy of boat people), and the “Golden Jubilee Secondary School Incident” (protests against the school’s corruption and the colonial government’s response). In 1975, they even formed a party called the Revolutionary Marxist League to promote their thought. A current member of the Legislative Council, Leung Kwok-hung, known as “Long Hair,” is one of the founders. Fr. Mella was very close to them in all the aforementioned social protests. In the 1980s, one of the activists, Liu Shanqing, was imprisoned in China for ten years. Fr. Mella traveled to China several times in an attempt to rescue him.

In 1979, Fr. Mella began advocating for the right of boat dwellers at Yau Ma Tei Typhoon Shelter to live on land. He and another priest decided to live and sleep in a boat. It turned out that he spent ten years living on a boat. During that period, he developed Christian-based communities with the boat dwellers, became a babysitter, and taught children English and mathematics. He also joined social workers to organize numerous protests against the British colonial government. In one of the protests, he was arrested and accused of unlawful assembly. He was the first Catholic priest detained by the colonial government in Hong Kong. During that protest, he used verses of *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* to encourage the boat dwellers: “Imperialism and all reactionaries [such as British government] are paper tigers.”¹⁹

Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung is like a second bible for Fr. Mella. He has memorized many quotations and can recite them at any moment. In addition to using these quotations as protest slogans, he also uses them to compose songs. Fr. Mella has written more than sixty songs and published four CD albums. He loves to write songs to share the story of the poor and his vision of the world. Obviously, his vision is rooted in Christian faith and Maoism.

In his song “Belongs to the People” (lyrics originally in Chinese and can be found in Picture 1), he combines verses from the Bible and *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*, arguing that the meaning of life is to “serve the people.” At the beginning of this song, he repeatedly sings “*Dang Dang Dang*,” in which *Dang* 黨 is the Chinese pronunciation of “party.” In this song, *Dang* refers to the Communist Party of China. To continue, he cites the Book of Acts 4:32–35, “The Believers Share Their Possessions,” to suggest that communism belongs to everybody and is an ancient tradition in human history. Later, he writes “our knowledge, land, wealth and money, houses, time, power, intelligence,

¹⁹ Ibid., 39; Jiang, *Cong Milan dao Zuanshishan*, 53.

[illegible]

Picture 1. Song: “Belongs to the People”²¹

²⁰ Mao, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*, 13.

²¹ Franco Mella, *Ganzai geji* 甘仔歌集 [Father Mella's Song Book] (Hong Kong: Right of Abode University, 2008), 21.

“Belongs to the People” is not the only song illustrating Fr. Mella’s theology in Maoism. He also writes a song called “Permanent Revolution.” Mao saw “Permanent Revolution” as a crucial impulse in the development of Communism in China because he viewed his time as the time of socialism for China, far from the classless society of communism. Workers are not the primary force to lead the revolution. In the case of China, peasants are another important alliance. Maoists need to wake up different classes of society to participate in the revolution. This process would take a long time and move “two steps forward and one step backward” because the revisionists (*xiuzheng zhuyi zhe* 修正主義者) will intervene and damage their works. Thus, Chinese people still need to continue the class struggle to eliminate the revisionists. “Permanent Revolution” becomes a national ideology and reminder for people to pursue a better society in order to achieve the ideal classless society. Fr. Mella interprets “Permanent Revolution” as a vision to fight for a liberated society, a life-long goal that he will fight for as long as he lives. In his song “Permanent Revolution,” he writes that “any revolution cannot fail to be permanent” and then cites the first two sentences of the Mao-era famous song “The East is Red.” He then quotes a few good characters that Mao always mentions in his work, such as “self-criticism,” “conversion,” and “simplicity.” To echo the “Permanent Revolution,” Fr. Mella cites the chorus of the song “The Internationale”: “This is the final struggle, let us group together, and tomorrow, The Internationale will be the human race” at the end of the song.²² Here Fr. Mella shares his belief with Mao, “The people, and the people alone, are the motive force in the making of world history.” For Fr. Mella, the notion of “Permanent Revolution” is a way of his Christian faith. The ideal and just society is still far away from nowhere. Living in solidarity with the poor is the cross that Fr. Mella is called to carry, and the “Permanent Revolution” is the cause that Fr. Mella is called to achieve. “Permanent Revolution” has given impetus for Fr. Mella to participate in the social movement in Hong Kong for more than forty years.

²² Franco Mella, *Amour Eternal*, CD album (Hong Kong: Franco Mella, 2015).

HUNGER STRIKE AS A FORM OF NONVIOLENT LIBERATION THEOLOGY

The political philosophy of Mao is tightly interwoven with his revolutionary action and the political struggle between the Communist Party of China and the Nationalist Kuomintang (Guomindang) of China. Therefore, in Mao's theory of revolutionary action, violence is necessary because "the enemy will not perish of himself. Neither the Chinese reactionaries nor the aggressive forces of U.S. imperialism in China will step down from the stage of the history of their own accord."²³ The enemy can only be eliminated by the military. "Political power grows out of the barrel of the gun." Revolution, for Mao, "is not a dinner party" but "an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another."²⁴ Mao, as a revolutionary leader, indeed affirms the importance of violence. War is a necessary path for the Communist Party to take control of China.

Fr. Mella has an entirely different approach to the use of violence when he applies Maoism to his protests. Although he claims himself as a believer of Just War theory,²⁵ agreeing that there are some situations in which one could justify the use of force in seeking the common good, he never uses violence in protest. On the contrary, he engages in a hunger strike, using his body to resist injustice, rather than using force to physically hurt another person.

There are several explanations as to why Fr. Mella never uses violence. He admires the determination of Mao to change an unjust society. However, he does not consider the use of force as an efficient and radical way. Violence does not unite different classes of people. On the contrary, the use of violence by the underprivileged usually gives the government legitimacy to repress them with stronger violence.

During the 1970s, a group of communists armed themselves in Italy. They not only fought against the government with their weapons but also assimilated a people-elected president in 1976. The society condemned their behavior and questioned the contribution of the communist party to Italy. At that point, the communist party was no longer a symbol of the

²³ Mao, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*, 6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁵ Interview with Father Mella, March 18, 2016.

fight against oppression and the people ceased their support. The changing image of the communist activists in Italy makes Fr. Mella realize that the use of violence cannot unite people. Moreover, it expels people to follow the communist party.²⁶

The role model of Lorenzo Milani is another significant reason for Fr. Mella to consider nonviolent resistance. Lorenzo Milani was a pacifist. He wrote a public letter to show his objection to compulsory military service. Lorenzo Milani in his letter argues that a Christian believer should reject any form of patriotism because worshipping the homeland is idolatrous. Obedience is not a virtue that Christians should practice in front of nationalism.²⁷ Through his example, Lorenzo Milani teaches Fr. Mella how to be a nonconformist in the society without the use of violence.

As he sought to find an alternative to the use of violence, Fr. Mella looked to other activists. In the early 1900s, English and American women suffragists had already participated in high strikes to obtain “votes for women.”²⁸ But perhaps the most well-known hunger strike protest in contemporary history is the protest of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi practiced several hunger strikes in his life. His hunger strikes served as a political statement in the protest against caste separation and conflict between Hindus and Muslims. His belief of *Satyagraha*, a philosophy of nonviolent resistance, has become a powerful example for the world to follow. Martin Luther King, Jr., César Chávez, and Nelson Mandela were his successors and practiced hunger strikes in their context. All these examples persuade Fr. Mella to protest through hunger strikes.

Perhaps the use of a hunger strike is one of the most radical forms of protest and resistance towards political, ethical, and social conflicts. The practice of hunger strike entailed from the level of starvation to the point of death offers a powerful critique of the legitimacy of authority and rationality of punishment. Hunger strikers turn themselves to the moral high ground in order to inspire another.

Although Fr. Mella was not a pioneer in adopting hunger strike as protest in the history of Hong Kong,²⁹ he was the first priest to do so in

²⁶ Jeung Choi-wan (Zhang Caiyun 張彩雲), “Zhuisui ziji de liangxin: Ganzai yu Milani” 追隨自己的良心——甘仔與 Milani [Follow Your Own Conscience: Father Mella and Milani], *Ming Pao*, February 7, 2010, P03.

²⁷ Milani, *When Obedience Is No Longer a Virtue*, 19–43.

²⁸ Sandra Holton and June Purvis, eds., *Votes for Women* (London: Routledge, 2000).

²⁹ So Sau-chung, a 27-year-old young man who worked as a translator, was the first one to protest by the usage of hunger strike. In 1966, he started a hunger strike at the Star Ferry Terminal against fare increase of ferry. His protest triggered a larger protest.

the Catholic Church. Fr. Mella started hunger strikes in 1986. The first time he participated in a hunger strike was to request the right of abode in Hong Kong for the undocumented wives of Yau Ma Tei boat people. His hunger strike successfully drew media attention and forced the government to respond to their demand. Due to this hunger strike, Fr. Mella became famous. Not long after, he participated in more hunger strikes, namely, to rescue Lau San-ching between 1986 and 1990 and for the right of abode for asylum seekers in 2000.

For Fr. Mella, there are three dimensions to understand the purpose of hunger strike, namely, exposure to mass media, solidarity with the oppressed people, and finding meaning for himself.

The use of hunger strike is an effective means to draw the attention of mass media. When Fr. Mella used a hunger strike against the British colonial government, his identity as a foreign missionary was successful in gaining a response from the government. However, when he used it too often, the media lost interest.

The hunger strike provided a way for Fr. Mella to demonstrate his concern for the oppressed people. A hunger strike unquestionably injures the body. Fr. Mella suffered from not eating food. However, this suffering can be a channel to make the oppressed people aware that they are not the only one who suffers in the oppressed situation. Someone, at least Fr. Mella, is willing to share their pain. The hunger strike is akin to the crucifixion of Jesus, which expresses love to the oppressed people. For Fr. Mella, the logic of hunger strike is the logic of crucifixion and leads him into the heart of the suffering Christ. And the suffering Christ is present with those suffering from injustice and comforts the oppressed when Fr. Mella volunteers to harm his body through a hunger strike.

Fr. Mella considers the hunger strike as a gift from God because it creates a silent time for him to reflect and repent. As he says, “the body gives a chance to the spirit, a chance to look for our meaning of life,”³⁰ and “a chance to find yourself.”³¹ He explains that a hunger strike can help him find himself:

When you have a goal to do a hunger strike, your mind and spirit will support your body in not eating food. When you are tempted to eat something, you would re-value and re-think why you decide to fight

³⁰ Franco Mella, “Waili” 外力 [The External Force], *The Newspaper of Right of Abode University*, July 18, 2010, 3.

³¹ Franco Mella, “2010 nian 7 yue Ganzai jueshi riji” 2010 年 7 月廿仔絕食日記 [Diary of Father Mella during Hunger Strike, July 2010], *The Newspaper of Right of Abode University*, August 29, 2010, 5.

by opposing to eat food. The process of (re)thinking can help you to clarify what is the purpose of hunger strike and even your life.³²

A hunger strike is a religious fast for Fr. Mella as it is a means to reconnect himself with God. In his song “Luglio 96,” he describes the results of a recent hunger strike: “the spirit is limpid, the mind is free, there is joy in the heart, you will see, and there is light all around.”³³

It should be clear that a hunger strike is not just a personal fast. It has political and theological meaning in denouncing an unjust situation and in practicing liberation theology through self-sacrifice. A hunger strike imitates the crucifixion of Jesus to challenge the oppressor.

CONCLUSION: THE VOICE OF FATHER MELLA IN THE POST-UMBRELLA MOVEMENT ERA

On the Chinese New Year’s Eve of 2016, one and a half years after the Umbrella Movement, there was a bloody clash between Hong Kong activists and the police. People threw bricks, glass bottles, and trash bins at the police, and the police used pepper spray and batons to strike back. Ninety people were injured, and at least fifty four people were arrested. This clash shocked the society. It was the first time the police fired two gunshots into the sky to stop the attack from activists after Hong Kong’s handover to China. One of the reasons why people used violence was because they had lost faith in the use of nonviolent resistance after the Umbrella Movement.

In this context, it is significant to introduce Fr. Mella’s nonviolent model of liberation theology to Hong Kong Christians compared to the past.

Fr. Mella is not only an example of practicing liberation theology in the colonial and atheist-Maoist context, his philosophy of nonviolent resistance also provides an avenue for Hong Kong people to imitate in the future protests. It is true to say that a hunger strike may not be the best strategy to demand justice. The failure of using a hunger strike by student leaders such as Joshua Wong and other protesters in the

³² Interview with Father Mella, March 18, 2016.

³³ Mella, *Amour Eternal*.

Umbrella Movement has demonstrated its weakness. A hunger strike can be one of the means to protest, but not everyone can employ a hunger strike, especially in the timeframe of this social movement. However, the spirits of self-sacrifice and solidarity with the oppressed proposed by Fr. Mella in his hunger strikes are essential virtues in social movements in the long term.

Fr. Mella's liberation theology is one of the earlier liberation theologies in Hong Kong.³⁴ The uniqueness of his liberation theology lies in his adaptation of Maoism and nonviolent resistance in his liberative praxis. However, his view of Maoism is romanticized and idealized. He only sees the positive side of Mao Zedong's thought but is blind to the number of Chinese people who died during the regime of Mao. If we affirm liberation theology as a theology of affirming life instead of death, it would be difficult for Hong Kong Christians to construct a liberation theology with Maoism due to the brutal history of Modern China. However, an investigation of Fr. Mella's contribution to the model of nonviolent liberation theology should continue. Nonviolent resistance has proved itself more than twice as efficient as violent resistance in achieving social reform around the world.³⁵ Although the Umbrella Movement did not achieve any political goals in the short term, it has spread the seed of civil resistance among the people. Hong Kong Christians and theologians should continue the work of Fr. Mella in developing a nonviolent model of liberation theology.

³⁴ Another example is the Federation of Catholic Students who actively engaged in social movements and the practice of liberation theology in the 1960s.

³⁵ Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 69.

APPENDIX: CHRONOLOGY OF FR. MELLA

Date	Event
1948	Born in Milan, Italy
1962	Entered the seminary of the local Milan Diocese
1969	Joined the Pontificium Institutum Missionum Exter-arum (P.I.M.E.)
1971	Formed the Christian Base Community in Milan and participated in social movements with left-wing activists
1974	Became a missionary and arrived in Hong Kong
1975	Lived in Tai Hom Village, Diamond Hill; began to live in poverty
1976	Started to work in a garment factory (he worked in various factories for over twelve years)
1977	Entered Beijing for the first time with the Consulate General of Italy
1978	Participated actively in the “Yau Ma Tei Boat People Protest” and the “Golden Jubilee Secondary School Incident”; met Hong Kong activists such as Leung Kwok-hung and Lau San-ching
1979	Became the first Catholic priest who was arrested by the police because of his involvement in the “Yau Ma Tei Boat People Protest”; began to live on a boat with Fr. Franco Cumbo at Yau Ma Tei Typhoon Shelter (lasting over ten years)
1981	Served homeless people who were living in Yau Ma Tei
1986	Participated in a hunger strike for the first time to demand the right of abode for boat brides
1987	Fasted in demand for the rescue of Lau San-ching
1989	Became homeless as a means to serve homeless people; wrote a song to grieve the June 4th Tiananmen Massacre
1991	Worked as a missionary in Hong Kong

Date	Event
1999	Actively helping Hong Kong citizens fight for their children's "right of abode"; published his first music album to support the right-of-abode seekers
2000	Began a hunger strike in demand for the right of abode on January 1
2002	Established the grassroots organization "Right of Abode University" to gather and empower right-of-abode seekers
2004	Became an English teacher; began missionary work in Xuzhou, China
2005	Being awarded "Xuzhou's Top 10 Most Compassionate Volunteer" by the Xuzhou government
2010	Performed first music concert in Hong Kong; participated in "Occupy Central" and met African political refugees
2011	Banned from entering Mainland China due to his standpoint against self-consecration in China
2012	Mainly served African prisoners and asylum seekers; published his second music album
2014	Became the first priest to offer the Eucharist in the occupied area during the Umbrella Movement. Established "Yellow Umbrella Christian Base Community" to support political activists and provide pastoral care
2015	Published his third music album
2017	Published his fourth music album

A SHORT RESPONSE³⁶

To identify the nature of Hong Kong liberation theology and the role Fr. Mella plays within the spectrum of Hong Kong theology, I will discuss in two different parts.

Is Fr. Mella's liberation theology better understood as politicizing or depoliticizing Hong Kong theology? In the introduction to *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, Cavanaugh and Scott identify several perspectives used to understand the linkage between theology and politics. One of the viewpoints is that theology is embodied in the superstructure as a politico-economic material base. It can have two roles in the society, namely serving as a tool of the oppressor to justify their unjust political arrangement or acting as a voice of the oppressed to demand justice.³⁷

Justin K. H. Tse comments that Hong Kong theology has already been politicized by the British colonial government and the framework of "One Country, Two Systems."³⁸ The result of that process has turned Hong Kong theology to serve the political authority. Since the 1950s, the church has continually played the role of "contractor" and "deputy."³⁹

Some churches hold pro-government theology and have already participated in the regime of political power. The Anglican Archbishop Paul Kwong, who stood against the Umbrella Movement, continues to express this kind of theology. During the Umbrella Movement, Archbishop Kwong said: "silence is better than saying anything." He suggested that Christians should keep silent about social and political issues by invoking the crucifixion of Jesus in the Bible.⁴⁰ Using the language of the Kairos Document, the "state theology" probably would be an appropriate

³⁶ Thanks to the committee of the 2017 AAR Chinese Christianities Seminar which organized the section and to Stephanie Wong for a very constructive response.

³⁷ William T. Cavanaugh and Peter Scott, "Introduction," in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2004), 2.

³⁸ Justin K. H. Tse, "Epilogue: Conscientization in The Aftermath of Occupying Hong Kong," in *Theological Reflections on the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement*, 163–73.

³⁹ Beatrice Leung and Chan Shun-hing, *Changing Church and State Relations in Hong Kong, 1950–2000* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003), 5.

⁴⁰ Chan, "The Protestant Community and the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong," 386.

option to describe Archbishop Kwong and other churches' similar theology.⁴¹

Apparently, Fr. Mella's theology opposes "state theology." Given the work he has done in Hong Kong, his theology can be described as "prophetic theology." Tse argues that protestors in the Umbrella Movement have started to liberate their faith tradition from "state theology." Fr. Mella had already done that when he arrived in Hong Kong in the 1970s. From the beginning of his missionary work, the theology of Fr. Mella stood from the margins of the poor, not from the center of political power.

In 1987, Fr. Mella was interviewed by a local television reporter. In the interview, Fr. Mella shared his work as a prophetic voice to society:

Fr. Mella: I do not need to talk about Jesus all the time, and do not need to talk about issues of religion directly. It is because talking about Jesus all the time would make people feel offended. However, when you fight for a just and fair society, it is easier for people to accept you.

Reporter: Your final goal is to evangelize people, isn't it?

Fr. Mella: My final goal is fighting for a new heaven and a new earth and fighting for a new society. If you say this is a work of evangelization, it is reasonable.⁴²

In this conversation, Fr. Mella clearly showed his understanding of the mission. His kingdom theology is familiar to the traditions of the Social Gospel and liberation theology of Latin American. Both traditions consider that the core value of the kingdom of God is justice. To bring the kingdom of God into the context of the present means to seek justice within the society. He composes a song called "Left, Right!" to show his cry for a just society. "Left, Right" is expressed as a metaphor of people walking step by step, "left and right step," to a new heaven and a new earth (lyrics are originally in Chinese and can be found in Picture 2). In this ideal world, a nation should be without boundaries, prisons, death penalties, nuclear weapons, and enemies, and people should "fully support the emancipation of all the poor in the world."

⁴¹ Kairos Theologians, *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa*, rev. 2nd ed. (Braamfontein: Skotaville Publishers; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986).

⁴² Choi Gok-jeung (Cai Guozhang 蔡國章), produced, and Ip Ji-wai (Ye Zhiwei 葉志偉), directed, *Xingqi er dang'an: Shuishang shenfu* 星期二檔案——水上神父 [Tuesday Report: Father on the Boat], Television Broadcasts Limited, Hong Kong, May 12, 1987.

Fr. Mella's theology is political, regarding the unmasking of injustice within the unequal power relationship between the oppressors and the oppressed. Simultaneously, his theology and pastoral work prove Tse's argument: depoliticizing faith in a theologically politicized situation.⁴³ Tse observes that the uprising of a political consciousness during the Umbrella Movement has changed people's spiritual life. The temporary structure of St. Francis' Chapel in Mong Kok's occupation zone is a model demonstrating how people practiced their religious devotion in a politicized context. Participating in religious practice, such as prayer, meditation, and worship in the location of a social movement can help Hong Kong people dismantle the "state theology" of their denominations and reimagine how their religious practices can be a political manifestation of response to social injustice. Obviously, Fr. Mella has participated in a similar practice since the Umbrella Movement.

As I mentioned in the previous paragraphs, Fr. Mella was the first Catholic priest to extend the Eucharist outside the Central Government Complex during the Umbrella Movement. After that, Fr. Mella formed the "Yellow Umbrella Christian Base Community" with other Christians and started to organize a weekly Eucharist service. As of 2018, this movement is still going on. The purpose of this service is to remind people that the fight for democracy is a long battle, even though the Occupation Movement has come to an end. The service of the Holy Eucharist is used to form a community in order to support people who are under arrest by the government due to their participation in the social movement. The order of the Eucharist service is based on standard Catholic liturgy. Different from a regular Eucharist service in the parish, this service focuses on current social issues. The homily, conducted by Fr. Mella, usually relates to the liberating message of God. The prayer of the faithful emphasizes political issues and related activists. Perhaps some people would consider their gathering as politicizing Christian faith into a particular political ideology. However, they consider the gathering a religious practice rather than a political protest. They aim to provide an inclusive space for Christians to express their political belief through Christian worship tradition. They have successfully done what Tse argues in his thesis: liberating Christian faith from the "state theology."

⁴³ Tse, "Epilogue," 164.

A^{3/4} 左右

A C⁴ A

6.3 6.1 | 7 6.2 | 1 7. 6 | 1 - | - - |

我哋要一个无边界嘅国家
 ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ 无监狱 ~ ~ ~
 ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ 无死刑 ~ ~ ~
 ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ 无敌人 ~ ~ ~

D⁵ F⁶ G⁷ A

6.6 7.1 | 2.2 7.2 | 1 - | 1.1 7.1 | 6.5 4.5 | 1 - |

要我哋睇女我哋睇仔 一齐请我哋饮茶
 我哋睇太太我哋子女 一定需要见到爸爸
 要我哋邻居生活下去 俾佢机会变为新人
 要全力全心支持解放 世上所有贫富咁人

E⁵ D⁵ C⁴ A

3.3 7.1 | 7 2.1 | 2 7 2 | 1 - |

我哋要一个家庭式嘅生活
 ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ 真係公平嘅社会
 ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ 尊重生命嘅世界
 ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ 充满正义嘅世界

F⁶ E⁵ D⁵ C⁴ F⁶ G⁷

6.6 7.1 | 2.1 7 | 7 7.2 | 1.7 6.5 | 3 - | -

要全面关心照顾 咁屋企嘅老人家
 要全面关心照顾 有困难国内人家
 将来要批准犯人 番屋企见老人家
 要彼此相亲相爱 大家都支持大家!

F⁶ E⁵ D⁵ C⁴ F⁶ G⁷ A

3.3 | 6 2.1 | 2 7 6 | 3 - | - 6.1 | 7 6.5 | 6 - ||

我哋要家庭式嘅国家! 无边界嘅国家
 ~ ~ ~ 真係公平嘅 ~ ~ 无监狱 ~ ~ ~
 ~ ~ ~ 尊重生命嘅 ~ ~ 无死刑 ~ ~ ~
 ~ ~ ~ 充满正义嘅 ~ ~ 无敌人 ~ ~ ~

核能

.../left, right... 一, 二... 左, 右... uno, due... passo!

Picture 2: Song "Left, Right" in Chinese⁴⁴⁴⁴ Mella, *Ganzai geji*, 21.

To answer the wider question regarding the nature of Hong Kong liberation theology in light of the contribution of Fr. Mella, we need to learn about the development of liberation theology in Hong Kong first. Liberation theology was not a popular topic during British colonization and the handover. Few of Hong Kong's Christian leaders have discussed the topic. In the Catholic Church, Cardinal Joseph Zen, Francian Fr. Stephen Chan and Fr. Louis Ha have dedicated decades in the concern over the democratic progress of Hong Kong before and after the handover. In 2014, they published a public letter in the name of "Catholic Political Reform Concern Group" (天主教政改關注組) to express their opinion about universal suffrage. Priests from P.I.M.E. also have a long history of paying close attention to social problems. Fr. Adelio Lambertoni, Fr. Franco Cumbo, Fr. Piero Zamuner, and Fr. Francesco Frontini are some of the priests who have been actively involved in striving for justice in different social issues between the 1970s and 1980s.⁴⁵ In addition to ordained priests, the Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese and the Federation of Catholic Students are also active lay-led organizations which participate in social movements. They are typically on the frontlines of social movements, as members have been arrested by the police multiple times. In various Protestant churches, the situation is similar to the Catholic Church. There are only a small number of leaders who participate in exercising liberative theologies. Raymond Fung, a leader of the Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee in the 1970s, suggests the notion of "sinned against," emphasizing that the sinner is also the one who is exploited and oppressed by the sinful society.⁴⁶ Kwok Nai-wang, an ordained minister and founder of the Hong Kong Christian Institute (HKCI), is the first Christian who argues for the idea of re-colonization after the transaction of the handover.⁴⁷ In academia, Kung Lap-yan is the initial person who introduces Latin American liberation theology to Hong Kong. In his first book on liberation theology, *Jiefang shenxue yu Xianggang kunjing* 解放神學與香港困境 [Liberation Theology and Hong Kong's Predicament],⁴⁸ he criticizes

⁴⁵ Gianni Criveller, *From Milan to Hong Kong: 150 Years of Mission: Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions, 1858–2008* (Hong Kong: Vox Amica Press, 2008), 157.

⁴⁶ Raymond Fung (Feng Weiwen 馮煒文), *Chuan fuyin de zaisi* 傳福音的再思 [Evangelism Revisited] (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Christian Institute, 1994).

⁴⁷ Kwok Nai-wang (Guo Naihong 郭乃弘), *Zaizhihua bianyuan de Xianggang* 再殖化邊緣的香港 [Hong Kong on the Brink of Recolonization] (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Christian Institute, 1996).

⁴⁸ Kung Lap-yan (Gong Liren 龔立人), *Jiefang shenxue yu Xianggang kunjing* 解放神學與香港困境 [Liberation Theology and Hong Kong's Predicament] (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Christian Institute, 1999).

the role of the church as a contractor of social service only and advocates that the church should empower the poor in their fight for a better and just society. Rose Wu, another important Hong Kong liberation theologian, has been trying to decode the taboo of sexuality in the church and currently advocates for LGBTQIA Christians.

The people mentioned above have been working diligently in different social locations delivering liberative messages to their audiences. However, Hong Kong needs to have more voices of liberation theology in order to respond to the current political and social crisis. It is true that Hong Kong continues to be claimed as the world's freest economy, but the Gini index has increased to a historical high. Hong Kong has become the most economically unequal city in Asia.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, Hong Kong has also hit a new low on the global rankings for press freedom, moving from 18 in 2002 to 70 in 2015.⁵⁰ It is important to note that this dramatic drop has only occurred within thirteen years. The Umbrella Movement is perhaps the longest demonstration that occurred in a world city in modern-day history. The lack of progress in the democratization of Hong Kong's voting system marked it as a failure. In 2017, the government disqualified six pan-democracy lawmakers. Hong Kong citizens were outraged and felt hopeless about the future of Hong Kong.

In the current situation, the praxis of Fr. Mella provides four suggestions for Hong Kong people to construct their liberation theology:

1. As a Maoist, Fr. Mella believes in a people of power and is skeptical of the capitalist government. The power of the government is built upon the use of force, and its purpose is to maintain the accumulation of capital in society. He notes that there is conflict in the relationship between the government and the people. Fr. Mella affirms that human beings can actualize themselves without a ruler by the grace of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit. In his approach, his theology challenges the church to liberate their theology from state theology to prophetic theology. The church must reevaluate its relationship with the political authority and strengthen its prophetic vision by looking back on its Christian heritages.

⁴⁹ Cannix Yau and Viola Zhou, "Any Hope for the Poor? Hong Kong Wealth Gap at Record High," *South China Morning Post*, June 9, 2017, accessed March 30, 2018, <http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/economy/article/2097715/what-hope-poorest-hong-kong-wealth-gap-hits-record-high>.

⁵⁰ Ng Kang-chung, "Hong Kong Press Freedom Sinks to New Low in Global Index," *South China Morning Post*, February 13, 2015, accessed March 30, 2018, <http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1711311/hong-kong-press-freedom-sinks-new-low-global-index>.

2. Fr. Mella has served a wide variety of underprivileged people. Mostly, these underprivileged people are neglected by the social warfare system, such as the African refugees, Vietnamese homeless, non-Chinese speaking prisoners, etc. Fr. Mella's solidarity with the margins of the marginalized challenges the prominent Cantonese speaking church to reconsider who the crucified people are in Hong Kong. The church needs to put more effort into ministry for the minority groups.
3. Fr. Mella is good at using the personal stories of Hong Kong people to compose songs. His music serves as the voice of the oppressed. Hong Kong theologians may adopt Fr. Mella's way of doing theology, using the narrative of the poor as a dialogue partner to construct theology, instead of purely importing the thoughts of western theologians into Hong Kong. Black theology, Latin American liberation theology, feminist theology, and queer theology all emphasize the embodied experience of the oppressed in their contexts. The experience of locals in Hong Kong should be a starting point to do theology.
4. On Chinese New Year's Eve in 2016, there was a bloody clash between protesters and the police. The government referred to this clash as a "riot" and the people as a "mob." Some activists have been accused of rioting and assaulting the police. The lesson in this clash highlights the importance of Fr. Mella's idea of non-violent resistance in liberation theology. The development of Hong Kong liberation theology should continue the model of Fr. Mella and nurture the spirit of nonviolent resistance among Christians. Perhaps the urgent task is not to investigate the tactics of protest, which Hong Kong people have already studied prior to the Umbrella Movement, but to look back at the history of Christianity and succeed the tradition of nonviolent resistance by numerous Christians in different contexts of the world.