

# Social Conflicts in Hong Kong under British Colonialism, 1980 to 1991

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Based upon the content analysis of newspaper reportage and the authors' networking of social activists in Hong Kong, this research examines social conflicts during the last phase of British colonialism. Our findings show that social conflicts, with small scale, informal or non-institutionalized, demonstrative-protests, have been prevailing in the city colonial state. Hence, the politics of administrative absorption has not been successful in coping with the emergence of social protests and challenges to the governmental institutions - all these have been shaping the formation of civil society in the mid-and-late 1990s, before and after 1997.

**Key Words :** British Colonialism, Chinese Society, Hong Kong, Protests, Social Conflicts.

## 1. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

### 1.1 Introduction

The socio-polity of Hong Kong is a configuration of different socio, economic and political (internally driven yet externally derived) forces, which is difficult, if not completely impossible, to be explained by one or few conceptual constructs, say, the "utilitarian familism" as insightfully coined by S.K.Lau (1982), the "administrative state" (with some consultations) used by Peter Harris (1982). See also Miners 1986), or the "[colonial] administrative absorption of politics" thesis of Ambrose King (1975). In short, in spite of their relevance in pin-pointing or explaining certain salient features of the interface between the colonial state governance and the functioning of the Chinese community, these conceptual understandings on the specificity of Hong Kong take the socio-political conflict articulations in the public arena, e.g. demonstrations, petitions, strikes, etc. too lightly, or methodologically, they follow either functionalist or "administrative science" lines of argumentation.<sup>2</sup>

These conceptual accounts are more in doubts when, in the 1980s, the political contours of Hong Kong are shaped by two different yet inter-related developments within and beyond its territories, namely, the struggles for more civic power in the allocation of urban resources - as a continuation of the 70s' urban social protests (in Castellsian sense, Castells 1983; Lui 1984, Wong 1989) on the one hand, and issues and controversies over the future of Hong Kong - ways through which to preserve its uniqueness (cf. Cheng ed.1986; Cheng 1987; Lai 1989).

Furthermore, it should be stressed that the above named conceptual accounts in the case of Hong Kong are less focused on the actual social conflicts in the public arena. Hence, for developing a better account on the case of Hong Kong governance and the socio-political articulations in conflict arena, this study attempts, at least, to provide a descriptive account on what issues are conflictual and how they are becoming the sources of socio-political articulations, in most cases, against the colonial state within a given period.

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2 These conceptions on the socio-polity of Hong Kong are less plausible in explaining social protests in the 1980s, e.g., Daya Bay Nuclear Plant (cf. Yee & Wong 1987), the over 1 Million people's involvement in the June-Fourth Incident. For critical assessment on these conceptions, see Wong & Lui (1992, 1993).

Accordingly, the choice for research on this period (1980-1991) is justified on three grounds. First, Lord MacLehose, the former Governor of Hong Kong, apparently knew about the People's Republic of China's position on the future of Hong Kong after his visit to China in 1979 and, more importantly, his administration began to prepare the new administrative structure of District Administration in 1980. It is clear that, from the socio-political point of view, the colonial administration has changed its mode of governance since 1980.

Secondly, in relation to the controversies over the future of Hong Kong - issues on 1997, the period 1980-1991 marks the conjunctural epoch of socio-political articulations in Hong Kong (and, to a certain extent, beyond), for a participatory mode of colonial governance, if not a democracy movement, which is juxtaposing various ramifications and restructuring processes of the Open Door Policy (since 1978) of the PRC. Yet, the socio-political articulations are more or less "forced" to settle when the Basic Law is promulgated in April, 1990.

Lastly, this study is in line with two recently completed studies on social conflicts in Hong Kong (Cheung & Louie 1990; Chui & Chan 1994) which take the time-frame 1975-to-1986 and 1967-to-1974, respectively, with the aim to develop more in-depth studies on the colonial governance mode and pattern of social conflicts in Hong Kong.

### **1.2 Objectives of The Study**

This study attempts to highlight the contextual specificity of social conflicts developed in this decade (1980-1991), in terms of nature and scope of conflicts (refer to section 3.5 in this study), via an archival study of newspaper contents, and the method has been adopted in other studies with different time frames (cf. Cheung & Louie 1990, Chui & Chan 1994). More specific objectives are:

- 1) to identify the pattern of social conflicts in Hong Kong, with special focus upon the nature and scope of the issues, the mode and frequency of actions taken, the number and types of participants (organizations and people) involved.
- 2) to identify the pattern of response and thereby the results achieved by such actions from government and bodies concerned.
- 3) to identify the patterns of relationship between mobilization processes and results

in the designated period.

- 4) to form an integral part of a systematic documentation of urban social conflicts in Hong Kong.

## **2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 The Social Conflicts Nexus**

Social conflicts mostly arise out of changing socio-economic conditions, interactively, which in turn bring social change and form one of the major societal forces in making history -- a *structuration process* which involves both social agencies and a historically given social structure (Giddens 1984, Wood & Jackson 1982). Hence, studies on social conflicts can directly shed light on the specific changing relationships between social actors and social structure, the governors and the governed, ideologies and interest articulations of socio-political groups, as well as the change in cultural arena (cf. Dalton & Kuechler ed.1990). Yet, this general conceptual concern, for us, is to be specified via a contextualization of the social conflicts and events concerned in our study.

More specifically, this contextualization exercise is to explore the process of how the nexus of social conflicts and (the trajectory of) social change is developed across a specific temporal span. In other words, the conflicts arise in public arena, and more specific, one form of their manifestations, say, social protests against (or asking help from) the ruling body (the government), can be interpreted as the instrumental forces of social change in our society. Accordingly, many scholars note this particular role of social protests or social movements:

They see them as "one of the chief ways through which modern societies are remade" (Blumer 1951: 154); "creators of social change" (Killian 1964: 426); "historical actors" (Touraine 1977: 298); "transforming agents of political life" or "carriers of historical projects" (Eyerman & Jamison 1991: 26). Some authors go so far to claim that "mass-based movements and the conflict they generate are primary agents of social change" (Adamson & Borgos 1984: 12), (cited: Sztompka 1993: 275).

Yet, it should be remembered that, social protests and movements are one of the many possible responsive manifestations in the given socio-economic change, other spontaneous collective

responses, ranging from retreat-back-to-home or anti-social riots on the activity spectrum, are available to be opted for. Here, both the perceived and existing opportunity structure and the associated pull and push forces available will likely shape individuals' response in a given situation - in conceptual terms, Albert Hirschman (1969) insightfully notes the *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* opportunity structure existing in most socio-economic behavioural encounters. To recapitulate, the requirement for social conflicts to be transformed into social protests, social movements in longer temporal span, is contingent upon certain socio-economic set-up.

### **2.2 Analytical Accounts on Social Protests & Social Movements**

According to Sztompka (1993: 275-6), social movements can be defined as social processes which comprise the following constitutive components:

- 1) A collectivity of people acting together.
- 2) The shared goal of collective action is some change in their society, defined by participants in similar ways.
- 3) The collectivity is relatively diffuse with a low level of formal organization.
- 4) The actions have a relatively high degree of spontaneity, taking non-institutionalized, unconventional forms.

In addition, one of the valid generalizations on social protests and collective mobilization is that "social movements arise only when aggrieved groups cannot work through established channels to communicate new claims into the political process of authoritative decision making." (Kitschelt 1993: 14). More important is the theoretical-cum-hypothetical distinction (or competition) between two sets of explanation on the relationship between established political structure and the praxis of social movements, namely, the cyclical model vis-a-vis the structural differentiation one.

The cyclical model views social protests as the challenge to representative democracy which are in fact a recurring expressions of dissatisfaction with the political structure. Whilst, the structural differentiation thesis argues that the practice of social movements extends the political horizon and its capacity which in turn engenders a pluralization of political decision mode (Kitschelt 1993). Here, it should be remembered, however, that each of the models has certain explanatory advantage on respective types of social movements. For instance,

the cyclic model could provide a longitudinal perspective within a given and stable socio-polity, whilst, the structural differentiation thesis highlights the self-transformation of social movements in a changing polity.

The typology of social movements is quite obviously affected by (i) how their internal organization (objectives, strategies employed, and involving members) of the protests, and (ii) in what ways the concerned community and political structure accommodate such challenge. In the first arena, the academic focus is more the process of political mobilization. For instance, McCarthy & Zald (1977) theorized social protests in terms of the mode of "resource mobilization", Austin (1972) discussed resident mobilization and in the same vein, Aiken (1969) highlights the community-based social movements, whereas Nettl (1967) put forward the idea of "interest articulation" to argue the very basis of social protests.

Theses which position social movements in wider societal context are attempted by: Rokkan & Eisenstadt (1966) in terms of nation and ethnic identity building, Binder (1958), Deutsch (1961) and Pye (1966) also the inclusive, if not total integration, function of social movements in the formation of society. In short, social movements involve not just opposing actors, issues, selective and counter-movement strategies, they are also embedded and will develop various dynamics internal and external to social movements.

Conceptions on social movements, after 30 years of intellectual debates, have been more fruitful than before. Yet, the new orientation for further research on this theme is more subtle, differentiated and fine-tuned than previously and more importantly, the structural (organizational) bias of the fashionable resources mobilization theory of social movements is weighted against the individual, social-psychological dimension. And it is quite clear that a reconciliation process to integrating both theses is underway (Sztompka 1993: Ch.19) and hence, social movements should be studied via the contextualization of the issues, actors and strategies involved which necessarily requires a dialectic analytical framework to assess the statist mode of governance and societal responses in social movements.

To recapitulate, the contingency role of a given socio-economic set up which (we examine in this study) fosters the formation of social protests /social

movements should be stressed here, in spite of different theoretical emphasis on the psychological, socio-psychological and socio-structural domains of (New) Social Movements.<sup>3</sup> In other words, the “grand theories” on social movements developed in the 70s and early 80s have difficulties in explaining the complicated protests/ movements articulation process in the 80s and beyond, particularly on the emergence of a different set of protest appeals and organization strategies.<sup>4</sup> Methodologically, what is more relevant for research on social protests/movements is to focus “on the specific issues which are real driving forces underlying individual social movement” (Chui & Chan 1994: 3).<sup>5</sup>

### **2.3 The Hong Kong Socio-Polity Reconsidered**

With reference to the occurrence of social protests in Hong Kong from 1967 to 1986, recent studies (cf. Cheung & Louie 1990; Chui & Chan 1994) have indicated an emerging (alternative) explanatory paradigm on the specificity of societal functioning in this Chinese community under British colonial rule, namely, social movements in Hong Kong are in fact one of the most important dynamics which confront, if not challenge, the decision-making of the colonial governance, particularly in those arenas where collective consumption, quality of life and civil rights issues emerged as social issues. In other words, those analytical accounts which hold the view that, under British colonial governance, the Chinese community is less politically charged - so as to ensure a stable and static mode of policy process characterized by people’s “passive - acceptance” - should be questioned.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, this reconsideration on societal functioning of Hong Kong - as a civil society - should not be characterized as if social protests from 1967 to 1986 have changed significantly the political agenda-setting and the processing of them. In actuality, the social protests in concern are much shaped by the internal dynamics (say, mobilization power of activists, vis-a-vis colonial state power) and

the external control (say, influences derived from political left and right wings of Chinese politics).

For instance, the influences of Chinese party politics (KMT versus CCP) upon social movements in general, labour movements in particular, have set the limits of the conflict arena where social (dis)mobilizations take place. Here, this can be substantiated by a benchmark study on industrial strike and labour movements occurring from 1946-1989 (Leung & Chiu 1991), which succinctly highlights the trajectory of development that the form of conflict manifestations in production sector is much constrained by the politically charged unionism, yet this specific configuration of union movement is apathetic for most Chinese here. Paradoxically, without much improvement in labour welfare nor any increase of collective bargaining power of workers - gross social inequality, industrial strikes are far less employed in conflict situations after 1982, in fact, industrial strikes are the least one in the period 1946-1989.

Before going on to elaborate our understanding, via this archival study, we would like to address the Neo-colonial rule in Hong Kong in the 1980s in the following section.

### **2.4 The Context of Neo-Colonial Rule in Hong Kong - 1980s**

Over five million of Hong Kong’s total population in the 1980s would agree that the return of (colonial-capitalist) Hong Kong to (and under) the socialist rule of China in 1997 poses more problems for them than the Sino-British Joint Declaration (1984) solves. The historical questions between British and Chinese governments, as controversies and social protests, namely, the (non-institutional) democracy movements in Hong Kong: the mobilization of large number of citizens in an collective way for democracy, are often articulated, juxtaposing the formulation of the Basic Law, including the (institutional) drafting by the Basic

3 For a brief overview on the characterization of social movements, see Sztompka (1993: Ch.19), and reviews on various theses on (New) Social Movements, see Dalton (Ed., 1993, with Kuechler Eds.1990) and the International Social Movements Series Klandermans (Ed., since 1988), published by the JAI Press (CT: Greenwich).

4 This can be seen in the manifestation of the New Social Movements which have different organizational and ideological strategies than traditional social movements. For a comparison, see Dalton & Kuechler (Eds. 1990), Eyerman & Jamison (1991), Special Issue of the *Social Research* (Winter/52[4], 1985).

5 This method which emphasizes the historical contingency is much in line with recent state theorists and social historians’ approach to contextualize the social processes (cf. Jessop 1990: 1-11; Skocpol 1992).

6 For a critical assessment on theses on the Hong Kong politics, see Wong & Lui (1992,1993). According to a territory-wide survey, over 20% of the population have participated in social actions in the period 1991-94 (Lai 1994).

Law Drafting Committee (BLDC) and Basic Law Consultative Committee (BLCC).

Hong Kong is a British colony. To prologize our discussion, some of the studies on local politics and administration is here noted. Harris (1983) and Miners (1986) have highlighted the specific features in the colony, namely, an administrative colonial state with (widening) consultation. While Lau (1982) noted the functional aspects of a “Minimally - Integrated Social Political System”, the “[colonial] administrative absorption of politics” is offered (King 1975) to explain their interaction. But these analyses, if not challenged, might be questioned, with other studies which highlight the fact that social protest movements, since the 1970s, are flowering (cf. Leung 1978, HKFS 1983, SoCO 1982. Lui 1984), on the one hand; and the top-down approach of the colonial government for a “representative [colonial] government” (cf. HKG 1984a, 1984b) is questionable. Seemingly, the theoretical unit to be examined, namely, the citizens protests, is more promising to give us a perspective on the state-society relationship that in turn can analyze the changing polity in the 1980s.<sup>7</sup>

Before looking into the actual case of social movements’ mobilization and protests articulation, four elucidations should be briefly noted. First, the structural tension between the central (PRC: Maoist or Dengist?) state and the local (Hong Kong: colonial-capitalist) state, derived from the concepts developed by Saunders (1984) and with Cawson (1983), resembling the dualist distinction in state policy formulation under the capitalist system. It should be acknowledged that the distinction on state(s) and division of state’s policy (or intervention arena) are subject to criticism; in this case by Dunnican and Goodwin (1982, 1988) and Harrington (1983). In response, as defended rightly by Saunders (with Cawson 1983; 1986: Ch.8) that the distinctions or the analytical constructs resemble the Weberian ideal type formulation which has conceptual significance, but not necessarily (means that all could) be found in a particular case.

Secondly, to illustrate the conflicts and in analyzing the case of the macro planning and

democracy protest, it is necessary to take into account at least two dimensions, namely the spatial-judicial sphere of the central and local state(s): PRC vs. Hong Kong, and the binding of the Joint Declaration on the PRC and British governments. More important is the Basic Law, which will govern the relationship between: the economic growth -(versus)-welfare, production (versus) - collective consumption, corporatist (versus)- social interests, respectively. Saunders and Cawson’s analytical framework(s) (Saunders 1979, 1984, 1985, 1986; and with Cawson 1983) thus rightly offers us (with reference to) the dichotomized but related dimensions for our analyses. Furthermore, Hong Kong (as a colony) is viewed as a local state under British government (Smart 1989:185-186). Or is the status of the colonial state (vis-a-vis China’s sovereignty) only de facto recognized within the political charter of the PRC (cf. Joint Declaration and Draft of Basic Law).<sup>8</sup>

In other words, the local state of Hong Kong has a colonial nature, but constrained by the “Dragon” nearby (apart from the Foreign Office of the British Government influences). In this instance, follows the thesis by Krasner (1978) (discussed in Skocpol 1985:19), the (local) state’s (Hong Kong) as well as the society’s capacity to manoeuvre, “lie not only in features of states themselves, [in our case: colonial - capitalist rule of Britain] but also in the balance of state’s resources and situational advantages compared with those of nonstate actors” [i.e. the PRC as well as the pro-democracy groups].

Thirdly, this study treats Hong Kong as a relatively well developed socio-economic capitalist society, yet with a neo-colonial polity. And the differences between Hong Kong and China are obvious and tend to be polarized (Bonavia 1985; Lo 1988; Cheng 1987; Yee and Wong 1987). In short, as argued by Castells the clash of values and social interests are conditioned by history, and the dynamics associated in turn contribute towards the formation of social movements (cf. Castells 1983: 331-335).

Lastly, the parameter of this study or the manifested phenomenon to be examined is borrowed from Castells’ formulation (1983) [for critique

7 The changes in the transition period (1984 onwards) refer to Cheng (ed.1986, 1987). See also, Bonavia (1985), Burn (1987), Chan (1986), Yee & Wong (1987). Before 1982 refer to Lau (1982) on socio-polity, Wong (1985) on production, Lee and King (et.al. 1982) on socio-cultural aspects, its economy (with the PRC) Youngson (1983). Recent work on middle class in the 1997 issue (Cheung & Lui et.al.1988).

8 It should be noted that the “colony” status of Hong Kong is (to its maximum) de facto recognized by the PRC government, but considered as de jure by the British government. About 98% of the Hong Kong population is Chinese but socio-culturally:- a mix of east and west. Over 1/4 of the population “vote with their feet” from communist China to Hong Kong in the last few decades, and another half of population locally born.

on it, see Lowe 1986, McKeown 1987: Ch.6], and thus limited in three spheres: (1) Collective Consumption of public goods in the colony, housing in particular. (2) Cultural Identity as manifested by the (westernized, vis-a-vis PRC's) ideological sphere: ideas of and demand for human rights. (3) Political Mobilization for local autonomy, self-administration: democracy. These three components of the protest movements are examined in the study period, which

developed along two lines: (1) Within Hong Kong: the collective consumption issues, the legislature functioning and the debates on the political development of representative government. (2) Between Hong Kong and the PRC: the Basic Law Drafting (BLDC, BLCC) under the PRC's direction, versus the mobilization of Democracy Movements. For illustration sake, here Diagram 1 provides the typical presentation.

**Diagram 1: SOCIAL ISSUES & PROTEST MOVEMENT IN HONG KONG 1980-1991**

TYPE	ISSUES	TARGET		YEAR
		HK	PRC	
<b>COLLECTIVE CONSUMPTION: Housing</b>				
	1) Housing Policy Restructuring	×		85-87
	2) Sub-Standard Housing Redevelopment	×		85-86
	3) Asbestos Problem in Housing Blocks	×		88
<b>IDEOLOGY: LEGISLATION</b>				
	1) LegCo Power & Privileges Bill	×	×	85
	2) Public Order [Amendment] Bill	×	×	87
	3) Film Censorship Bill	×	×	87
	4) Daya - Bay Issue	×	×	86
<b>POLITICAL: DEVELOPMENT &amp; BASIC LAW</b>				
	1) "CONVERGENCE" Issue	×	×	84-88
	2) 1988 Direct Election [Green Paper 1987]	×	×	87
	3) Basic Law: 1st Draft - Consultation		×	88
	4) Proposal on SAR Government		×	88-89

(Source: Lai 1989).

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Historical Analysis of Archival Data

The nature of the present study is essentially a historical analysis of past events in a designated period. Thus, the methodology of archival study is called forth. Archival studies rely basically upon the retrieval of data from existing records. The content of these records therefore constitute the raw data for such studies. According to Babbie (1979, 1991) and Judd et al. (1992), content analysis and analysis of existing data are best for historical research. The specific strengths of archival studies lie in their large coverage of immense populations or units of analysis.

#### 3.2 Content Analysis from Newspaper

There can be various sources of historical data from which archival studies can extract for

analysis. However, no single source of historical data can be regarded as a comprehensive and exhaustive documentation of past events. Amongst the various sources, the newspaper excels in having a day-to-day coverage of events. It is further credited as covering a wide range of events of varying in nature, as compared to other documentations with specific scope or focus. Thus, it warrants the use of newspaper retrieval as a viable means of archival study. With specific reference to our present study which focuses on the occurrence of social conflict issues in Hong Kong in the eighties, it justifies the use of the newspaper as the medium from which such issues of various natures and scopes can be retrieved and analyzed.

As mentioned about, any single source of historical data can be flawed in some aspects. Although local newspapers can provide data on social events happening in a society, they have

some inherent limitations in terms of both validity and reliability. In terms of validity of information contained in newspapers, the specific standpoint of the editorial board, the reporters, and even the main stake-holder of the newspaper company, can possibly interfere in the objectivity of the events reported. Although there should presumably be objectivity and impartiality as per code of ethics governing journalistic reporting, there can still be doubts whether such codes are strictly observed in the local context. Attention is specifically drawn to the fact that in the specific period under study, i.e. the 1980s, there were vigorous political movements and antagonisms amongst the various parties which involved the British-Hong Kong Government, the Chinese Government, the local political groups and leaders, and not least the local citizens.

There was also much controversy over various kinds of issues, ranging from diplomatic relations between Britain and China, political entanglements between the Hong Kong administration and the Chinese Government, local social policy issues, and the like. The various contending forces had put forward multi-faceted versions of interpretation of the “social facts” happening in society. Journalists and editors alike are also subjected to such contending and even conflicting claims of truth in the selection of raw material in their reporting. For instance, some might deliberately adopt a “grassroots” outlook to appeal to the low-income readers. Furthermore, it should also be noted that local newspapers in Hong Kong are characterized by having affiliation with the traditional leftist or rightist factions of Chinese politics. There could obviously be conflicting interpretations and documentation on the social events occurring in the period under study.

On the other hand, in terms of reliability of data reported by local newspapers, there can also be doubts; since it is often found that there exists very inconsistent data on say, number of casualties in accidents among different newspapers. It has been warned by academics and professionals in journalism that the quality and practice of local reporters be called into question.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, it has been pointed out that there exists a malpractice of exchange of report materials amongst reporters. Thus, there can be imprecision and accumulated distortion across different newspapers.

Nonetheless, though the newspaper as a source of data is subject to a variety of limitations, it still warrants the venture into retrieving the rich data contained in newspapers in a historical analysis. It is especially prudent as there appears to be no comparable substitute rendering the required information.

Based upon past experience in using the same methodology (Cheung & Louie 1990, Chui & Chan 1994), and having acknowledged the various limitations inherent in newspaper data quality, the researchers have tried to complement this with other sources of data in reporting the incidents of social conflict issues. Thus, such other documentaries as special issues on major controversies, like the June-fourth Incident in 1989, the 1991 Direct Elections at the three levels, and others, were referred to when appropriate.

### 3.3 Selection of Newspaper

Since the present study relies primarily upon raw data of social conflict events as reported in local newspapers, it is imperative to select the most reliable newspaper as the source of such data. In the local context, there are a wide variety of local newspapers, ranging from ordinary daily newspaper to those with specific focus, like entertainment, horse-racing, economic news, etc. Furthermore, as Hong Kong is a cosmopolitan city, there are newspapers imported from Japan, China, Taiwan, and the like. Nonetheless, since “local newspaper” here is restricted to locally produced ones catering for the local population, the other “imported” ones are simply omitted from the selection. In addition, only Chinese newspapers are included in the present study for the sake of convenience in raw data retrieval. Notwithstanding the fact that there might possibly be biases or omissions in one single newspaper, the present study merely resorted to one local Chinese newspaper (*Ming Pao Daily*) due to limited resources available. Thus, in terms of sampling or selection of newspapers, it can be said that out of the entire frame of all local (Chinese and English) newspapers, a “purposive sampling” of one single newspaper is taken, with due consideration to the quality of the report and the reputation of the standard of journalism found in the chosen newspaper.

Taken into account the possible incidence of

<sup>9</sup> Such critique against local newspaper reporters can be seen occasionally in local journals. Reference can be made to Cheng, K.H. (1994) “The role of mass media in the year 1994” in *Pai Shing Semi-Monthly* (Chinese) Vol.38, Mar.94:12-3.

interpretative biases or editorial stand in affecting the objectivity of the report of social events, the content of the newspaper is still taken to be a relatively objective account of social issues. Such accounts constitute the “manifest” content (Babbie, 1979) of the document (i.e. the newspaper) which are taken as the raw material for analysis. There is no deliberate effort to trace the possible incidence of “latent” content, if any, of the reports found in the newspaper.

### **3.4 Operational Definition of Social Conflict**

As the present research constitutes one of the continuous efforts of similar studies on local social conflicts in post-war Hong Kong (2-3), it warrants the adoption of similar, if not totally identical, conceptual as well as operational definitions of the domains of the study. Thus, it is justified to refer to the operational definition of Chui & Chan’s (1994) in conceiving social conflict in the present study:

Incidents reported in the local newspapers involving group(s) of Hong Kong citizens taking overt collective action(s) in the territory against specific government policy(ies) and/or practice(s); or specific private institutions; which involves conflict of interests between the contending parties within the designated period.

Similar to the previous study, more elaborated clarification on the several terms should be in place.

- 1) By “**local newspapers**”, it refers to newspapers registered in the Newspaper Registration Unit of the Television & Entertainment Licensing Authority, and published locally in Hong Kong. One Chinese newspaper -- the Ming Pao -- was chosen in the present study.
- 2) The notion “**group(s) of Hong Kong citizens**” refers to any collectivities of local people. However, such collectivities should not include such natural groupings as families, but be constituted by people who come together for a specific cause.
- 3) “**Overt collective action(s) in the territory**” refers to those manifested activities staged by the group(s) of people, and which were reported in the chosen newspaper. Understandably, this would have omitted a considerable number of actions taken by citizens which were not reported in the chosen newspaper, but perhaps had been reported by others, like another newspaper or

even the electronic media.

- 4) “**Against government policy(ies) and/or practice(s)**” refers to the nature of the actions which are essentially addressed to an adversarial position against existing institutional structure, legislation, and prevalent government policy(ies) and/or practice(s).
- 5) The notion “[**against**] **specific private institutions**” refers to the nature of the incidents which involves actions directed against such targets as private companies or organizations. However, there can be cases where originally the private sector was targeted but eventually evolved as one directed against government [non] intervention.
- 6) By “**conflict of interests between the contending parties,**” it points to the nature of the incidents whereby differences in views or contradiction in vested interests are at stake.
- 7) The present study chooses the **period of 1980-1991**. It is based upon the fact that the period witnessed spectacular politicization of the Hong Kong community, as discussed in the Introductory Chapter. The ending year of 1991 recorded the first direct election of the legislature, which warrants special attention.

### **3.5 Nature of Data**

As mentioned earlier, there is a deliberate effort to arrive at consistency in research methodology between the present and previous similar studies. Thus, the various categories of data collected from newspapers in depicting the social conflict issues are basically the same as the other studies. They include the following:

- 1) **NATURE** of social conflict: the policy domain concerned, e.g. education, welfare, medical & health, housing, labour;
- 2) **SCOPE** of conflict: whether local, sectorial, or territory-wide issues;
- 3) **SECTORS** of people, or the interest of whom being directly affected;
- 4) **DEMANDS** of such actions: the specific demands of the participating agents towards the relevant agents (including government departments, and/or representative institutions; and private sector);
- 5) **PARTICIPANTS** taking part in the overt actions staged against the target -- including



- their socio-economic background and numbers;
- 6) **ORGANIZATIONS** involved: including their nature and numbers;
  - 7) **ACTION**: the modes strategies and tactics used by participants and number of actions staged in pursuit of their demands;
  - 8) **DURATION** of the conflicts as defined operationally by the period between the first date of report found in the newspaper and that reporting the final result (if reported);
  - 9) involvement of **REPRESENTATIVE INSTITUTIONS** which include the Executive and Legislative Councils, the policy advisory committees, the Municipal Councils and the District Boards; and
  - 10) **INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE and RESULTS** achieved from the relevant action targets: the actual response from relevant government departments and/or representative institutions; or private institutions.

### 3.6 Statistical Analysis

There are a wide variety of categories of data obtained from the exercise of newspaper retrieval. It warrants multiple approaches in analyzing the various types of data. In the first place, such features as frequencies, central tendency, and dispersion of the various variables are examined by means of univariate analyses. These provide illustrative information on the basic configuration of the patterns of social conflicts. Furthermore, bivariate analysis have been performed to examine the possible association or correlation between pairs of variables. It is imperative to resort to multivariate analysis to examine the control, conjoint, and relative effects among the variables. As the data is mostly of binary categorical nature, the statistical method of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Logistic Regression was employed to analyze possible relationships amongst the numerous variables.

### 3.7 Limitations

There exist a variety of limitations in terms of employing content analysis on newspaper. In the first instance, there can be a concern from the hermeneutics point of view on the objectivity in reporting and interpreting social events. Any social event is a constellation of various factors involving specific conjuncture of time, place, and involving some particular actors. The newspaper reporter

or journalist is the one who enters into the process of interpreting the event at the first stage. His/her subjective understanding of the event constitutes a first level bias. Subsequently, the editor of the newspaper in selecting and screening off some particular section of the report might further introduce another incidence of bias. Finally, the researchers and the assistants, in the process of selecting the relevant social issues with reference to their predetermined operational definitions, might possibly further aggravate the extent of subjectivity in interpreting the social events.

The process of quantification of historical events can possibly incur some arbitrary elements. Quantification may constitute suppression of data into neatly defined categories, which thereby reduce the fine details of the raw data. Furthermore, any single datum of say, the number of organizations involved in a social conflict issue, might not necessarily indicate the severity of the issues, if the nature of the groups is not examined simultaneously. Hence, quantitative or statistical analyses based upon such arbitrarily delineated data might result in inappropriate inferences. In short, the data quality of the newspaper in general and the chosen one in particular, might also be called into question: there is an obvious problem of insufficient follow-through of reporting by journalists on individual cases. There is apparently not a usual nor established practice in local newspapers in having documentary reports comparable to electronic media. Thus, an individual incident reported in the newspaper might not have its subsequent development reported afterwards. This has rendered a serious problem in the completeness of data available for analysis, especially in the attempt to examine the relationship between the "input" (e.g. number and variety of participants and organizations) and the "through-put" (the actions taken and involvement of political representatives) and also the "output" (the actual outcome or achievement obtained).

## 4. FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

A total of 1719 cases have been identified over the span of 12 years in the period under study. A preliminary note is warranted in the designation of cases in this study. Some cases actually extend over several years, as in the case of the Daya Bay Nuclear Plant Issue or Campaign for Direct Election in the Legislative Council. However, as the present study takes a yearly basis in analysis, such cases are treated as separate cases in each year over which they span.

This might perhaps invite the criticism of “double-” or even “multiple-counting” of the same cases. However, such a choice is still justified in the attempt to record the actual incidence of such cases in each particular year. Nonetheless, caution is maintained throughout the study in this regard.

#### **4.1 Distribution of Cases across The Years**

We found that the number of cases increases substantially in the latter part of the period. This can be attributed to the fact that the Hong Kong society has been subjected to more controversial issues in the society at large. Spectacularly, the year 1986 witnessed a leap from 76 cases in 1985 to 125 cases in 1986. Here it should be highlighted that the Legislative Council had its first batch of indirectly elected Councilors in 1985. The local polity has since been subjected to more open debates and controversies within and without the institution. On the other hand, it should also be noted that the local newspapers have been gradually expanding their coverage. More specifically, more columns have been dedicated to report local news and receive complaints or enquiries from the citizens. The total volume of newspapers, in terms of pages and sheets, has been substantially increased over the years. This also accounts for the increase in number of cases identified in the present study.

#### **4.2 Nature of Issues**

Labour issues have dominated over the study period as the most frequent type of cases. Political issues follow closely as the second major category of conflict issues. Housing issues come third in the list of various issues. In fact the three types of issues constitute more than half of all the cases. However, transport, education and environment issues also become significant social issues in the study period, which is similar to the two previous studies conducted by Chui & Chan (1994) and Cheung & Louie (1990).

A closer examination of the detailed nature of the three major types of issues can be found. It is found that “constitutional” issues are the most frequent type in the political category. It should be remarked that the Sino-British settlement on the future of Hong Kong, the 1985 Legislative Council reform, the 1988 Direct Election movement, and the 1991 Direct Election of the Legislature; are all significant political events in the period, hence the weight of such cases in the political domain. “Immigration” issues are in

fact cases concerned specifically with the Vietnamese boat people: their expatriation, their settlement in camps, the sporadic chaos aroused in the camps, and the like. The third major group of issues in the political domain concern those pertaining to “Hong Kong-China relations”. These are issues related to the pro-democracy movement in 1989 and onwards, Chinese intervention in local affairs, viz, drafting of Basic Law, and the like. Civic right and police power issues are also quite prominent in the period. Such a pattern is to be contrasted to the two similar studies: in Chui & Chan’s study of 1967-74, the three major political issues were not so prominent; in Cheung & Louie’s study of 1975-86, political and civic rights, constitutional and law & order issues were the three most frequent types (Appendix 1 gives a detailed breakdown of the various nature of issues across the twelve years).

#### **4.3 Scope of Issues**

In terms of scope, “sectoral” issues are the most prominent. This is attributable to the predominance of labour issues which concerned specific sectors of the labour force, like the manual workers affected in factory close-down, civil servants in wage disputes. “Local” issues come second in frequency. This is accounted for by the fact that many issues were concerned with, for instance, public housing provision and allocation, private housing management, pollution, education and transport problems in specific communities. Finally the “territory-wide” issues are essentially those concerned with political problems.

#### **4.4 Sectors Affected in Issues**

Residents predominate as the most frequently affected sector in the conflict issues. This can be accounted for by the fact that housing issues rank third in numbers in all the cases. Furthermore, residents are also affected in local issues like transport provision, pollution, and even political issues which concern the entire population. Manual workers are the second most frequent sector being affected, which is attributed to the dominance of labour issues, and similarly political issues which have cross-sectors effect. Proprietors, which include hawkers and minibus/taxi drivers (as categorized in the present study), are also frequently affected in transport, municipal, and even housing issues since some hawkers are affected by public housing redevelopment or rent adjustments.

With simple computation,<sup>10</sup> it is found that the majority of the cases (73.6%) affected merely one single sector. About one-tenth of the cases involved two sectors. There are still nearly 30 cases which cut across the interests of more than three sectors. For instance, the Central Provident Fund Issue in 1987, the appeal for increase of income tax allowance in 1988 involved five and six sectors respectively. The 261 cases which have 10 sectors involved are actually those “territory-wide” conflict issues.

#### **4.5 Number of People Affected in Issues**

In the first instance, it should be noted that due to the incomplete report of the newspapers, there is a substantial number of cases which are without the data on number of people affected. Among the 821 known cases, a significant portion (31.9%) affects the interest of the “whole population”, which are essentially cases of territory-wide scope. The next is the group of cases having affected the interests of 51 to 500 people (154 cases, 18.8%). Indeed those cases affecting 500 people or less are basically local or sectoral issues, like public housing management, squatter clearance, factory close-down, pollution, etc. As illustrated, there exists a significant relationship between the scope of the issues and the number of people affected:  $\gamma$  0.816,  $\lambda$  (with frequency of people affected dependent) 0.392.

#### **4.6 Types of Participants Involved in Issues**

The two most frequent type of action participants are the pressure group leaders and the residents: 28.2% and 25.2% of all the cases. It is obvious that those pressure group leaders, who include politicians as categorized in the present study; have been actively involved in staging conflict issues. On the part of the residents, they are mostly involved in community level housing issues like public/private housing management, squatter clearance, transport and education provision, and even environmental pollution. The union leaders and professionals are also active participants given the predominance of labour issues in both the private and public sectors. In the latter case, doctors, nurses, teachers and social workers are likely candidates in participating in salary structure issues.

From the same analysis, it is known that half

of the cases are having only one single type of participants. Apart from this, about one-third of the cases have two types of participants. Nevertheless, there is still a considerable number of cases (154, 9.0%) which have three different types of participants. More spectacularly, a few cases have involved nine or more types of participants, which might indicate their significant social impact. For instance, the Anti-Bus Fare Increase issue in 1980, the Basic Law issue in 1984, the Public Order (Amendment) Bill issue and Further Development of Representative Government in 1987, etc. are such cases.

#### **4.7 Frequency of Participants in Actions**

Unfortunately, one-third of the cases are devoid of data in number of participants. Amongst the known cases, a large proportion (44.6%) have ten or less participants. This might indicate that most of the cases are not having a mass base of participants. As revealed in Table 13, irrespective of the scope of the issue, most cases cluster in the category of ten or less participants, thus giving a zero lambda, and yield a very low gamma value of 0.049. However, there are still a considerable number of cases which have large numbers of participants. Yet, it should be noted that in the present study, the number of signatures or letters collected in an action is also taken as the number of participants, hence giving a somewhat inflated impression of action participants. Yet, it deserves greater attention to the negative relationship ( $\gamma$  -0.237) between number of people affected and number of participants. It seems to illustrate that even if the nature of the case is of wide social concern, there are still only limited numbers of participants in the overt actions related to the cause. It might invite speculation on the capacity of mobilization of action organizers, and the reiteration of apathy of local people in overt political actions.

#### **4.8 Types of Organizations Involved in Issues**

As majority of the cases are local or sectoral in scope, and the nature of the cases are predominantly labour and housing issues, it is logical to see that community or sectoral groups prevail in more than half of the cases. Indeed in the present study, such sectoral groups include the trade unions, while community groups include the resident organizations

<sup>10</sup> Throughout this study, a simplified method of computation of aggregate scores has been used to derive new composite variables for analysis. The researchers fully acknowledge the limitations of such a method. Different modes of action, for instance, might carry different “weights” in a composite variable. The simple addition of different variable scores might have suppressed such differences.

or district concern groups. Loose groups of people directly affected by the issue are usually involved in staging direct actions against their respective targets. On the other hand, it is to be noted that with the advance of democratic development in the local polity, the emergence of territory-wide political and/or interest groups make their presence evident by actively participating in social conflict issues: 17.7% or 304 cases. However, the strategy of forming confederations of coalitions, in view of enlarging the mass base and escalating the pressure on the target; seems to be relatively scantily utilized: only 8.7% or 150 cases have involved confederations in the actions.

#### **4.9 Number of Groups Involved in Issues**

The majority of the cases (1,118, 65.0%) have only one group involved in the actions. This might indicate the relative simplicity of the issues in terms of scope and people affected. However, there are still a considerable number of cases which have involved two to ten groups. Furthermore, there are 25 cases which record a spectacular number of more than 50 groups. In addition, it is found that there exist significant, though of varied strength, relationships between the number of groups involved and firstly, scope of issue, secondly, number of people affected, and thirdly, number of participants.

#### **4.10 Variety of Groups Involved in Issues**

The majority of cases (1,279 cases, 74.4%) involve only one single type of group. Another 17.0% or 292 cases involve two different types of groups. The rest of the cases involved groups of three to six different in nature. The six cases which involve all the various types of groups identified in the present study indeed deserve greater examination, namely Public Housing Subsidy Issue in 1984, the Anti-First Asylum (for Vietnamese) Issue in 1989, the June-Fourth Incident in 1989 and its appertained issue of Appeal for Release of Pro-democratic Students in China in 1990, and Anti-Legco Motion of Sharing the Gulf War Expenses in 1991.

#### **4.11 Demands Sought in Issues**

A considerable proportion of the cases are targeted towards obtaining immediate tangible provisions, like allocation of public housing in squatter clearance issues, compensation of unpaid wages in labour disputes, and the like. Immediate prevention of particular action, like suspension or

dismissal of workers, abolition of bus fare increase, refraining from building a boat people camp, etc.; comes second as the most frequent type of demand. Modification of legislation, particularly those of labour ordinances protecting workers' rights and safety; is also frequently sought after. Appendices 14-16 depict the detailed distribution of various demands across years, scope and nature of issues.

Another point needs to be highlighted that half of the cases involve only one single type of demand, whereas about one-third of the cases seek two different types of demands. More spectacularly, participant in a number of cases even put forward a wide variety of demand, ranging from five to ten types. For instance, participants of the Anti-Public Housing Rent Increase issue in 1984, the Asbestos Public Housing issue in 1988, and lastly the June-Fourth Incident in 1989, and the Bank of Credit and Commerce Bankruptcy Issue in 1991 demanded various types of remedies.

#### **4.12 Action Modes Utilized in Issues**

The most frequently used tactic of action mode is the press conference: 31.0%, 533 cases, which is followed closely by the action of petition to the Executive and/or Legislative Council or the Office of the Members of Executive and Legislative Council (OMELCO): 30.3%, 521 cases. The popularity of staging press conferences can be seen in light of the relative cost-effectiveness of such a means in publicizing the issue and the demands of the action participants. We can also speculate on the significant role played by the media in promulgating social conflict issues. On the other hand, such a non-institutional means of action is coupled by an institutional counterpart, that of petitioning to the uppermost echelon of the government machinery, the EXCO and LEGCO. Such a pattern is to be conceived in view of the institutional mechanism of the Hong Kong Government. The EXCO is vested with the authority to decide over broad social policy orientations, as well as specific orders (like the permission to raise public transport fare). The LEGCO is essentially the local legislature in passing laws, which have direct implications on, say, labour issues demanding for legislative modification. The OMELCO (which, after the direct election in the LEGCO in 1991, has been changed to be an independent administrative arm of the Legislative Council, breaking away from the EXCO members) has long been regarded as the viable mechanism of redressing citizens' grievances against the administration.

The third major type of action mode utilized is the issuing of press statements, or sending complaint letters to the news editor. Admittedly, this pattern is somewhat determined by the present methodology of data retrieval from newspaper. The expansion of the newspaper column on “letters to the editor”, or “social service” as it is sometimes called; helps to escalate the popular utilization of such a means to make oneself heard. It is also found that the administration has gradually been more prone and ready to respond to such letters via the same column, thus making a responsive image of the concerned departments.

The use of other means, such as petitioning to the government departments, mass demonstrations, meeting with relevant personnel (of government officials and/or management in private sector), and petitioning to the Governor, are also popular tactics used in the study period, all of which have been used in more than 10% of all the cases.

Yet, the majority of the issues involved merely one single type of action: 61.9% 1,064 cases. Another 21.4% have two types of actions utilized. However, those cases resorting to a wide variety of actions (ranging from 7 to 10 modes) deserve greater attention, given their special feature of using multivariate strategy. For instance, the Anti-Bus Fare Increase issue in 1980, the Basic Law issue in 1984, and Rich Tenant issue in 1986 all resorted to ten different types of actions.

For a simple picture of distribution of cases using formal or informal channels; in the former case, such actions involving petition or contact with the institutions or related personnel are regarded as working through “formal” channels. On the other hand, those actions like mass protest, signature campaign, press conference, industrial action, civic disobedience and violent confrontations, etc. are regarded as using “informal” channels of redressing grievance.

#### **4.13 Involvement of Member of Representative Institutions**

With reference to the Resource Mobilization perspective, the utilization of various means of resources can be crucial in the configuration of social movements. In the present study, though the conflict issues can yet be regarded as constituting a coherent social movement, the resort to mobilizing members of the representative institutions, or grossly defined “politicians” in the local context; is also of significance, apart from the utilization of various

action modes. It is found that these politicians or political elites have seldom participated in the conflict issues. Suffice to say, in the present study, “involvement” of the politicians is conceived as the active participation of these figures in staging the event in support of the cause. Thus, when they act their role as the receiver of complaints in the capacity of duty officers in the OMELCO, they are not regarded as having been involved.

Amongst the four different types of members, the District Board members have been most frequently involved. This can be understood in the context of the predominance of local, community-based issues like housing, transport, pollution, education provision, and the like. The low incidence of Advisory Board members reflect the fact that these people are essentially appointed by the administration, which therefore render their low profile in mobilizing mass activity in search of specific social cause. However, the low involvement of Municipal Councilors might perhaps reflect the relative limitation in their mandate in overseeing municipal affairs, which is in contrast to the more proximate figures of the District Board members who can have better access to a smaller constituency and a less restricted scope of concern. Lastly, the involvement of the LEGCO members are mostly those cases of political nature and of territory-wide scope, such as the drafting of the Basic Law, Future of Hong Kong, constitutional development, Daya Bay Nuclear Plant issue, and the like. All in all, the participation of these politicians, with the exception of the Advisory Board members, can be seen as a move of these political elites in reaching their constituencies, establishing a viable elite relationship, or “top-down” mobilization.

#### **4.14 Number of Actions Used in Issues**

Roughly 60% of the cases have one single episode of action. Another one-fifth have two action events. Issues involving three actions have 134 cases or 7.8%. There is also a substantial portion of the cases (10.5%, 180 cases) which involve a range of four to ten actions. More spectacularly, there are cases which have utilized numerous actions: 30, 33, 45 actions each having two cases; one case having 79 actions. These cases deserve investigations in more detail. For instance, such incidents as the Anti-“Rich Tenant” Policy in Public Housing in 1986 (30 actions), the “26-Sub-standard Public Housing Block” issue in 1985 and Public Order (Amendment) Bill issue in 1987 (both 45 actions), the June-Fourth

Incident in 1989 (79 actions) are spectacular in the number of actions staged.

Our finding illustrates that there exists a significant and modest relationship (gamma 0.544, lambda-symmetric 0.130) between the number of participants and number of actions. This shows that more participants have been involved or accommodated in greater number and even wider variety of action modes.

#### **4.15 Duration of Issues**

A great majority of the cases last merely a week or less: 72.9% 1,253 cases. This might indicate the short span of persistence of the action participants. However, this can also be seen in light of the limited follow-through report of local newspapers in tracing the development of the issues. In the present study, if a case is not fully documented about its development and consequences, it is coded in the lowest category which denotes the duration of less than one week, hence giving the prominence of short-span issues. Nonetheless, there are still a considerable number of cases which last over a span of one week to a month (8.2%, 141 cases) or even a longer period of three months (10.5%, 180 cases). Furthermore, there are 58 cases which last for nearly a year, and two cases which persist over a year. A note is given here that, as mentioned previously, there are indeed cases which last over several years (as in the cases of the Daya Bay Nuclear Plant issue, Basic Law Drafting issue, Development of Representative Government, Future of Hong Kong, etc.). Yet due to the treatment of the present study in recording such cases in each particular year, it renders a low incidence of issues extending over a year.

On the other hand, the duration of issue has varied strength of association with several aspects, namely scope of issue (a low gamma of 0.05,  $p > 0.05$  insignificant), number of people affected (a low gamma of 0.137,  $p < 0.005$ ), number of participants (a modest gamma 0.448,  $p < 0.001$ ), and most spectacularly a strong relationship between number of actions and duration (a strong gamma of 0.920,  $p < 0.001$ ).

#### **4.16 Institutional Response to Issues**

The viability of a democratic system is reflected, amongst others, by the responsiveness of the administration to citizen grievances or challenges. Thus, in the present study, it is hoped to reveal the

Hong Kong Government's performance in this regard (though the question of whether Hong Kong qualifies to be a democracy still begs further debates). However, due to limited reports available in the newspaper, a substantial portion of the cases have been missing data in this aspect, rendering analysis difficult.

From amongst the 415 known cases, departmental response or intervention comes as the most frequent type of institutional response to conflict issues. Such a response might include, say, the arbitration of the Labour Department in labour disputes, meeting between the Housing Department officials and petitioners, reply from a government department in the letters to editor column, etc. Of much interest, debates in the territory's uppermost political decision-making body, the Legislative Council; record the second most frequent type of institutional response. This can be comprehended against the background of the introduction of indirectly elected Legislative Councilors from 1985 onwards and directly elected ones in 1991 eventually, which provides the arena for more visible articulation by the citizens' representatives in the government machinery.

On the other hand, a majority of the cases can merely obtain one single type of response from the target system. Another group of cases (3.5%, 61 cases) succeeded in having two different types of response. Amongst them, the 26-Sub-standard Public Housing issue in 1985, the Illegal Mothers issue in 1988, and the Bank of Credit & Commerce issue in 1991, are all successful cases in obtaining four to five types of responses, ranging from special investigations, immediate provision or remedy, departmental and/or central administration responses.

#### **4.17 Results Achieved in Issues**

The elicitation of institutional response does not necessarily mean remarkable accomplishments. Derived from the detailed distribution of various results obtained across the years, different scopes and nature of issues, a total of 96 cases have achieved "success" in their respective demands. Nonetheless, the same limitation of incomplete information obtained through the newspaper render such a poor result. Notwithstanding this, as revealed in Table 37, only a small portion of the cases have achieved success with respect to their demand. The high ratio of "success" relative to the total cases is merely given

by the small base number of known cases.

#### **4.18 A Brief Summary**

Given the longer span of the study period, and the more dynamic development of the Hong Kong society in socio-economic and political respects, further sufficed by the expansion of media coverage, all contribute to the proliferation of social conflict issues recorded in the present study. The general profile of the conflict incidents appears to be more varied, more numerous per year, involving larger numbers of participants and organizations, taking multiple action tactics, and lasting for longer periods of time. The most prominent domains were labour, political and housing. This can be interpreted as the manifestation of the primary contradiction between capital and labour on the first hand, and collective consumption conflicts on the other. Furthermore the ideological conflict between Hong Kong and Communist China, which is crystallized in the development of a more democratic government structure in the transitional period and the laying down of the future SAR foundation (the Basic Law and future government structure), constitutes the third major arena of conflict. Such a general pattern aptly echoes our Castellsian framework of focusing on (1) collective consumption, (2) cultural identity, and (3) political mobilization for local autonomy.

### **5. THE UNFINISHED PROJECT: AN INTERIM CONTEXTUAL REMARK**

From what we have found in our study on the patterns and modes of social conflicts in Hong Kong in the period 1980-1991, there are several important observations which could serve as an interim conclusive remark on the problematic -- the one embedded in the changing state and society relation that was subject to the restructuring dynamics in Hong Kong under various socio-,economic and political factors. In the section below, we shall highlight some of these observations, necessarily, the conclusive remarks should be tested against the context where some (and why not others) conflicts arose.

#### **5.1 More Conflictual Incidents Are Visible and Seen**

From 1980 to 1991, it is quite obvious that, in spite of the opening up of the governmental channels in coping/dealing with the complaints and grievances, more conflictual issues (than the previous decade -1970s) were put in the societal sphere via

different modes of social actions which were readily channeled to the mass media which in turn was directed to the society at large. The keywords for this phase of societal development in the conflictual arena are "visible", "seen", "communicable" and hence "exerting pressure for state's intervention", which are conditional upon (or the requirement for) the "reporting" of mass media.

In this case, mass media's rapid development and the internal organization of this development, say, a new generation of media personnel: their socio-economic background and their views on social issues, are important domain to be explored for the specification of when and how social conflicts are communicable to the society at large and the correspondent responses of the involving parties, the governmental responses (in policy terms) in particular.

With reference to Lipsky's (1968) formulation on the logic of social actions, it is imperative for the social actionist(s) to stage effective appeal to some "third party" support or sympathy, to confront the target of his/their actions. This is particularly prudent when the actionists are largely in a relatively disadvantageous power position vis-a-vis their target, i.e the establishment, the authority, etc. In the age of telecommunication, the role of mass media is obviously critical in aiding and/or frustrating the effective channeling of such pressure from the actionists to the target system(s).

In the local context, the mass media have undergone the stage of consolidation in the study period, after their initial take-off in the previous decade. The total number of newspapers, news magazines, television and radio broadcast channels have all grown substantially. This has resulted in intense inter- and intra-media competition. This provides the impetus for enlarged coverage of news reporting and the improved quality of journalism. As found in the present study, the volume of newspapers and the length of individual news reports have expanded considerably as compared to those found in the previous study by Chui and Chan (1994).

Apart from the sheer expansion of newspaper reporting, the role of news personnel is equally, if not more, critical in making the social action incidents more visible. Increased professionalization of the news personnel; grounded upon better training locally and keener competition from abroad, has rendered improved quality of news reporting.

More specifically, these personnel are more prone to the liberal aspirations of say, free journalism, public scrutiny of public policies, and even more progressive orientations of heralding social justice. These grossly conceived “middle class” ideological aspirations /orientations have “elective affinity” with the logic of social action, in which social protesters address to issues of social injustice, government maladministration, and gross human sufferings. Simply put, the journalist profession has come to its stage of maturity in positioning itself in the socio-polity of Hong Kong in the study period, given the intense stimulations derived from the social context, as well as the gradual fruition of the organization of the media personnel in their process of unionization. More specifically, the socio-economic background of these media personnel share, to a considerable extent, with the actionists who are largely adversaries of government policies. As evidenced in this and the previous studies, students, social workers and pressure group leaders have been active participants -- being main actors or organizers -- in social conflict issues.

## **5.2 The State's Policy Process Is The Conflictual Arena**

As represented in other studies, it is also found here that the state's policy process was also the arena where conflicts had arisen, namely housing and land development, constitutional and political development, transport, and education. In actuality, in most of our surveyed conflictual incidents, those involving social actors had demanded (or at least expected) certain forms of state intervention or assistance when the issue was becoming conflictual. In short, state (including both the British colonial and their counterpart, China's) policy process and its configuration, within a relatively closed, elitist and colonial governance structure, are bound to have challenges derived from societal process, when and if, social actors are having grievances which are readily shared by the media personnel, a point exemplified in the previous section.

More importantly, this mode of conflict articulation via social mobilization, in search for the conflict resolution, is not just adhered to the collective consumption arena, but also on those issues pertaining to ideological struggles upon the distribution and control of power and privileges of political actors (including citizens) in question; and both governments in Hong Kong and Beijing were subjected to this challenge when they needed certain notion of legitimacy (which they never had from the

people of Hong Kong) for ruling.

As far as the State's role is concerned, it warrants detailed excursion into the duality of the British-Hong Kong (city)state and the Chinese Communist state. Since the early 1980s, when the Sino-British negotiations began to take shape, such a duality has become increasingly apparent in the local political arena, which strikes a new cord in the state-society interface in Hong Kong's context.

### **5.2.1 The British-Hong Kong Colonial State**

With respect to the British-Hong Kong (colonial) state, this is particularly prudent when we recognize the increasingly active role of the Hong Kong Government in social intervention in view of gaining public legitimation on the one hand (in counteracting the Chinese Government's challenges on its colonial legitimacy), and in response to the escalating social demand kindled by the public in general and the social activists in particular.

On the other hand, it should be pointed out that the colonial state's ideological appeals, in terms of certain participatory (consultative) mode of administration found in the District Administration Scheme and those democratic (yet never realized) offerings found in the two Green Papers: On the Further Development of Representative Government (1984 and 1987), had backfired in its claim of administrative excellence and induced certain social actors to take more actions challenging, if not against, the colonial policy formulation processes. The climax of such endeavors for democratic re-structuring of the government machinery has come with the 1988 Campaign for Direct Election. It symbolized the public's (or part of it) quest for greater participation in policy making. Nonetheless, its eventual failure and the aftermath remedial arrangement of partial direct election in 1991 have only disillusioned local liberal protagonists further in their attempt to foster more open government in the transitional period, if not beyond.

Similar to but more apparent than the 1970s, the Hong Kong Government has been subjected to social protests concerned with the collective consumption domain. Firstly, the assumption of Neo-Conservative, Thatcherist social policy orientation of grossly conceived “privatization” in the 1980s had aroused intense grassroots mobilizations. Social provisions since the 1970s have, so to speak, induced social demand for government provision in housing,



education, medical & health, and welfare services. The in-(never-)sufficient supply of and inefficient management of such social services have laid the foundation for Castellsian secondary conflicts to sprout. The reversion to more market-oriented model of provision (which include cost-covering charges in hospital services, private sector-led provision of housing, etc.) has further fueled widespread social discontent. The restructuring of the Housing Authority in 1988, which accrues to less direct government subsidy; the “Rich Tenant Policy”, the sub-standard housing redevelopment in 1985-86, etc. are all pertinent examples within this domain.

In other respects, the colonial state’s policy on land development has recurrently aroused social discontent of the aggrieved -- those evicted by public works projects, affected by private development backed by the Government, and the like. The present study has identified numerous cases whereby victims of such urban (re)development projects had gone onto the streets to stage their protests and demanded government compensation and/or resettlement. It is especially apparent as Hong Kong has been a fast growing urban society and its estates development has constantly fueled the economy as well as the government revenue.

### **5.2.2 The Chinese Communist State**

The Chinese government, on the other hand, has also become an increasingly visible political agent in the local polity in the 1980s. The initialization of the Sino-British Agreement on the Future of Hong Kong has aptly signified the ascendancy of the Chinese Government in the local political arena. In sequel, Beijing officials as well as their local Hong Kong associates have gradually stepped on the local political stage gaining public visibility and recognition in preparation for their eventual public acceptance. This has also procured the de facto, though not de jure shadow government or the so-called “second power centre” on a par with the British colonial Government.

The logic of “back fire”, which aptly characterized the British colonial Government’s attempt of bringing about more democracy in the colony, had also certain validity when the Basic Law was drafted under (a contradictory) notion of “Hong Kong People Rule Hong Kong”, and in the socio-political mobilization for democracy and liberty in the context of Basic Law drafting and that, to a large extent, in the June Fourth Incident and its

aftermath.

In preparation for the eventual transfer of sovereignty and laying the foundation for the future Special Administrative Region (SAR) government -- both structurally and in terms of personnel, the Chinese regime has staged the drafting of the mini-constitution. The very test of the compatibility of a socialist (Communist) with a capitalistic social order was crystallized in the formalistic documentation of the Basic Law which in turn embodies the “One - country - Two - Systems” pledge. However, the strain of the possible (in)compatibility has charged the local people in general and the liberal social activists in particular, to (over)react to the drafting process in view of forestalling a proper distance away from the Chinese regime. Thus, findings of the present study aptly reflect such a psychological strain as well as the ideological divide by presenting numerous social protest activities in relation to the Basic Law drafting process.

Apart from the domain of political concerns of future SAR governance, the local people are also increasingly aware of safeguarding their immediate interests vis-a-vis the Chinese Government. The construction of the Daya Bay Nuclear Plant in the vicinity of the territory has alarmed the local people of possible nuclear hazard. This incident also critically reveals several sensitive issues. In the first instance, the Chinese Government has been put to test on its sincerity in attending to Hong Kong people’s concerns, in their choice of plant site. Secondly, it is also put on trial on its receptivity to Hong Kong people’s redress of their grievance which amounts to a conflict of national versus local interests. Thirdly, the incident also exposes the ambivalent position of the British colonial Government in striking a balance between protecting local people and maintaining friendly relationships with China. All these direct to the (colonial and Chinese) state-society interface which has become increasingly intensified throughout the 1980s.

The 1989 Beijing Tian-an-men Incident has also opened another front for local people in striving for their relative position to the Beijing Government. The mixed messages of (pro)democratic aspirations, coupled with nationalistic concerns for warding off a brutal regime, further fueled by a psychological threat of eventual transfer of allegiance to the Chinese; have made the 1989 Pro-Democratic Movement of Hong Kong a unique historical incident

distinct from other similar movements so aroused elsewhere in the World. The aversion to the military crack-down, the outcry for fair trial and release of pro-democratic students/Beijing citizens, and in corollary, the advocacy of a more open, clean and humanistic government are all deliberate attempts (though futile) of local Hong Kong people in striking a more viable relationship with the Chinese Government.

However, though the Chinese Government has increasingly been subjected to challenge in the local political sphere, its state proper is lying outside Hong Kong. Thus, the local New China News Agency plays the role of a “symbolic state form” and acts as the vanguard to challenge the British-Hong Kong Government on policy issues, as well as the target of social protests staged by local social actionists.

### **5.3 Learning from The 1970s or Embracing 1997?**

The 1980s have certain specificity in the socio-political history of Hong Kong, as this is the period when agenda of social protests (and protestors) and grievances in collective consumption and production sectors, for various socio-political structural change, can be put on the quasi-political body’s agenda, say District Boards or Legislative Council, for discussion. On the other hand, futuristic issues pertaining to the coming of 1997 and the search for “Hong Kong People Rule Hong Kong”, has also offered ample opportunities for young social activists to move to the (partly) elected bodies with certain “on-going” social protests.

Hence, both involving and articulating social protests were in fact becoming an important asset for a political career, for individuals; and they are also important for the collective bodies, say, political parties, to build up their respective identity and the class, regional and sectoral identity of the (quasi-)political agency. Here, the politicization process took place in a mode which is characterized by an integration of both the elected bodies’ acceptance of social protests and the social activists or their political bodies, for their identity and political mobilization, to sustain and support many arenas of social protests. Suffice to add, the 1980s have given chance to former (1970s) social activists of a formal platform (i.e. through the election to the District Boards, Municipal Councils, and Legislative Council) to amplify their say. The reciprocal relationship between those within and without the establishment, or to quote Chui’s (1993) coinage

of using “double-barreled” strategies, have further characterized a unique feature of the conflict issues in the 1980s. This pertains to the ascendancy of a group of movement elites and organizations in leading the future direction of social movements in the local context. Nonetheless, their career, individual and collective alike, hinges upon the tolerance of the future SAR regime. Or to borrow a commonly used catchword of Hong Kong people, the “mutual understanding and mutual accommodation” between the future ruling and non-ruling elites is pivotal in this respect.

To recapitulate the characteristics of social mobilization in the form of social protests in the 1980s, two particular points should be made. First, the society and state relations and the very nature of these protests were not much different from their previous period (i.e. before 1980s) as presented by a colonial state’s governance with no people’s mandate (i.e. no legitimacy in any sense) in almost all policy areas; and the occurrence of social protests was much contingent upon a set of conditions whereby the state had lessened the control (say, mass media and social protests organizers from a new breed of educated deviants). The latter point was particularly prudent when we take full cognizance of the liberalizing effect of the dialectical development between protests and government surveillance measures as well as public acceptance. Each and successive currents of social protests seem to push the Government’s threshold of tolerating such overt activities still further. Public reaction to such activities also seems to reflect greater general acceptance of non-conventional modes of redress of grievance. The million mass rally of 1989 June-Fourth Incident has virtually released any remaining reservations against open provocation for specific causes.

Second and perhaps, the most important aspect of social protests in the 1980s is the uncertainty juxtaposing the 1997 issues and the maturation of social protests logistics and the external supports (including the rapid development of the media industry) they can have. In short, and as represented in our study, the colonial ruling of Hong Kong in the 1980s and the correspondent societal responses are much more conflictual, paradoxical, contradictory and disorganized in terms of the state and society relations; and this form of state-society relations is quite different from some scholars’ prescriptions on the functional integration between the state and society in Hong Kong.

The impetus given by the 1997 issue pertains to repercussions which can qualify to be conceived as “The 1997 Syndrome” in the local context. It gives rise to, and adds fuel to the emergence and increased activity of political groupings and/or parties and their attendant political figures. These figures, suffice to add, are largely social activists nurtured in the 1970s. The critical conjuncture of pressing an out-going colonial government for swift and timely socio-political structural changes on the one hand, and forestalling the encroachment of an in-coming government on the other, has rendered the juxtaposition of political protests throughout the 1980s: the political reforms on representative government, the Daya Bay Incident, the Basic Law Drafting Issue, the Pro-Democratic Movement, and the like. The protestors, the reporting media personnel, as well as the general public alike; all share the similar fate of living in this “here and now” situation of the transitional period. The “State” -- both the colonial and the Chinese -- has become increasingly shaken on its basis. The outgoing one’s legitimacy has been challenged and its civil service morale watered down. The incoming one’s credibility of being a benevolent regime is also interrogated, given its disreputable track record uncovered in recent years.

Perhaps the most central theme derived from the present study is that of gathering the momentum of social protests in the 1970s, which boils down to the emergence of a civil society in preparation for striving at a more balanced relationship with the state, be it the present, transient colonial state or the future communist/socialist Chinese state. The Hong Kong case provides a unique archetype for conceiving the possible nurturance of a civil society in the absence of an independent state, but under the auspice of a (diminishing) colonial and a (encroaching) central regime with the passage of time.

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