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HONG KONG'S PATH OF DEMOCRATIZATION

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In the past two decades, the world was convulsed by the "third wave" of global democratic transformation. Since 1974, more than thirty countries in southern Europe, Latin America, East Asia and Eastern Europe have shifted from authoritarian to democratic systems of government. As of now, an unprecedentedly large number of countries in the world can be described as democratic in one way or another. Though recently some countries have experienced reversals of democracy as well, still the magnitude of the impact of the "third wave" democratization is unsurpassed in human history.[1]

Since the early 1980s, Hong Kong has also undergone a democratization process. Nevertheless, though it takes place during the period of global democratization, Hong Kong's democratization is by and large an isolated phenomenon. This is in spite of the fact that Hong Kong as an international economic center is highly susceptible to outside influences. As will be explained later, Hong Kong's democratization process is activated by a unique combination of causes which are not found elsewhere. The fact that it took place during the "third wave" global democratization does not mean that it is an integral part of that worldwide

1 A huge literature on the "third wave" democratization has been accumulated in the past two decades. See for example Larry DIAMOND and Marc F. PLATTNER, (Eds.), *The Global Resurgence of Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Samuel P. HUNTINGTON, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); Guillermo O'DONNELL, Philippe C. SCHMITTER and Laurence WHITEHEAD, (Eds.), *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Prospects for Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); Larry DIAMOND, Seymour M. LIPSET and Juan J. LINZ, "Building and Sustaining Democratic Government in Developing Countries: Some Tentative Findings," *World Affairs*, Vol. 150, No. 1, (Summer 1987), pp. 5-19; Robert A. PASTER, (Ed.), *Democracy in the Americas: Stopping the Pendulum* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1989); Thomas W. ROBINSON, (Ed.), *Democracy and Development in East Asia* (Washington, D.C.: The AEI Press, 1991); Nancy BERMEO, (Ed.), *Liberalization and Democratization: Change in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); and Gilbert ROZMAN, (Ed.), *Dismantling Communism: Common Causes and Regional Variations* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

phenomenon, nor is it the outcome of international demonstration effects.[2] In essence, Hong Kong's path of democratization is unique, independent and self-contained. Therefore, not only is the trajectory of democratization in Hong Kong unparalleled, but its consequences are also different from what has transpired elsewhere.

The Causes of Democratization

Samuel P. Huntington has provided an inventory of causes to account for the timing and occurrence of the third-wave transitions to democracy. They are: (1) the deepening legitimacy problems of authoritarian regimes in a world where democratic values were widely accepted, the consequent dependence of these regimes on successful performance, and their inability to maintain "performance legitimacy" due to economic (and sometimes military) failure; (2) the unprecedented global economic growth of the 1960s, which raised living standards, increased education, and greatly expanded the urban middle class in many countries ; (3) a striking shift in the doctrine and activities of the Catholic Church and the transformation of national Catholic churches from defenders of the status quo to opponents of authoritarianism; (4) changes in the policies of external actors, most notably the European Community, the United States and the Soviet Union; (5) "snowballing," or the demonstration effect of transitions earlier in the third wave in stimulating and providing models for subsequent efforts at democratization.[3]

Larry Diamond, while largely concurring with Huntington's explanation, nevertheless suggests two additional causes, which are the divisions within the departing authoritarian regimes and changes in the development, organization, consciousness, and mobilization of civil society.[4]

2 In this connection, it is interesting to note that while the world was shaken by anti-colonial movements in the 1950s and 1960s, Hong Kong remained a haven of unruffled colonial rule. Hong Kong's immunity from international movements is thus not without historical precedents.

3 Samuel P. HUNTINGTON, "Democracy's Third Wave," in Larry DIAMOND and Marc F. PLATTNER, (Eds.), *The Global Resurgence of Democracy*, p. 4.

4 Larry DIAMOND, "The Globalization of Democracy," in Robert O. SLATER, et al., (Eds.), *Global Transformation and the Third World*, pp. 43-49.

These causal factors together might suffice to explain the onset of democratic changes in most of the nations in the third-wave democratization. However, they do not provide satisfactory explanation for the inauguration of Hong Kong democratic reforms. In the first place, international diffusion of democracy has only marginal impact on the people of the territory, save for a few westernized elites. The small-scale democratic movement in Hong Kong does not appear to be a local response to the international trend. Secondly, external actors have played only a very limited role in fostering Hong Kong's democratic process. The role assumed by the chief protagonist of democracy — the U.S.A. — in the territory's democratization process is basically insignificant. Other countries' involvement is negligible.

Thirdly, though a colonial regime, the Hong Kong government and the political system wherein it is embedded have not suffered from any "legitimacy crisis." On the contrary, the colonial regime can boast of an outstanding track record of economic and administrative performance. As a result, on the eve of democratic changes in the early 1980s, the Hong Kong government still enjoyed admirable popular support.[5] Fourthly, divisions within the ruling elites are hardly detectable and cannot be a plausible explanation of Hong Kong's democratization. Fifthly, Hong Kong had become an economically developed society well before the initiation of democratic reforms in the early 1980s. As a result of the colonial government's practices of laissez-faire and social non-interventionism, Hong Kong's civil society has all along been highly developed. As a beneficiary of the non-democratic order, the political proclivity of Hong Kong's middle class is largely moderate to conservative, and its demand for democracy has so far been pretty mild. If social and economic factors are crucial to the onset of democratic changes in Hong Kong, the territory's democratization process should have taken place a long time ago. These factors hence cannot be the causes of Hong Kong's democratization, though they certainly feature as favorable contextual factors.[6] Lastly, the part played by the Catholic Church and other religious

5 See LAU Siu-kai, *Society and Politics in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1982), pp. 102-118.

6 See LAU Siu-kai, "The Unfinished Political Reforms of the Hong Kong Government," in John W. LANGFORD and K. Lorne BROWNSEY, (Eds.), *The Changing Shape of Government in the Asia-Pacific Region* (Victoria: The Institute for Research on Public Policy, 1988), pp. 43-82.

organizations in Hong Kong's democratization is not conspicuous. In fact, Hong Kong's religious bodies have never been militant political actors.

Consequently, the timing and occurrence of democratic changes in Hong Kong can only be explained by factors specific to Hong Kong. It is precisely the exceptional constellation of these factors that account for its unique path of democratization. Nevertheless, at the same time, these factors also impose constraints on the territory's democratic progress and cast shadows on its democratic future. I shall briefly describe these factors and their implications for Hong Kong's democratization.

Indisputably the impetus that propels democratization in Hong Kong is the scheduled resumption by China of sovereignty over the territory and the concomitant change of regime in 1997. Unlike decolonization elsewhere, political independence is not an option for Hong Kong. As soon as Hong Kong's political future was sealed by the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984, its political situation underwent a fundamental transformation. As the authority and legitimacy of a departing regime are bound to decline in the run-up to 1997, the British feel it imperative to introduce some democratic reforms to appease the governed so as to sustain colonial rule. Moreover, British suspicions of Chinese intentions after 1997 and a sense of political "guilt-feeling" toward its acquiescent subjects in the historically most successful British colony might also have driven Britain to transfer a portion of power against Chinese opposition to Hong Kong people.[7]

China's policies to resolve the Hong Kong problem, in view of Hong Kong people's resistance to the Chinese takeover, are the preservation of Hong Kong's capitalist system under the "one country, two systems" formula and the promise of "Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong." The latter promise apparently hints at, or at least it is so understood by many Hong Kong people, a more democratic Hong Kong after 1997. China certainly would also like to alleviate the people's fears and anxieties by agreeing to some democratic reforms in the territory. In view of the fact that Britain is going to initiate democratic reforms anyway, China has perforce to accommodate itself to a more democratic and hence less "controllable" Hong Kong after it becomes part of China.

Notwithstanding the fact that democratic demands in Hong Kong were weak before the advent of the 1997 issue, some fragmented demands for a

7 LAU Siu-kai and KUAN Hsin-chi, "Hong Kong After the Sino-British Agreement," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 59, No. 2, (Summer 1986), pp. 214-236.

more open government and widened opportunities for political participation could still be heard, notably from the community and civic groups formed and led by the better educated in society. The appearance of the 1997 issue provides a more favorable milieu for these groups to operate. Many of them have converted themselves into political groups with the aspirations to gain power in the democratization process. Their ability to appeal to the public is strengthened, as the people are to a certain extent convinced that a more democratic Hong Kong would leave them with more political clout to resist Chinese interference in local affairs after the change of Hong Kong's sovereign.

Hong Kong's democratization is primarily triggered off by a particular event the incidence of which is ironically dictated by history. However, despite all those favorable circumstances mentioned before, there are serious constraints on Hong Kong's democratization. On the part of Britain, the fact that Hong Kong is to be returned to a sovereign state instead of becoming independent presents a novel situation where past decolonization experiences are essentially irrelevant, though it appears that Britain has difficulty appreciating this simple fact. In previous decolonization exercises, the colonial government would in a step-by-step fashion hand over power to the elected representatives of the colonial people who have been prepared for independence by it.[8] "Decolonization" in Hong Kong however involves different considerations. In the first place, power is to be transferred from Britain to China — the future sovereign of Hong Kong — if it is to take place at all. Any transfer of power to the people of Hong Kong without the blessing of China will definitely be opposed by it and is bound to be short-lived. This severely inhibits Britain's ability to unilaterally introduce democratic changes in the territory.

Moreover, under the Sino-British Joint Declaration, Britain is solely responsible for the administration of Hong Kong before 1997, and in doing so it is to be supported by China. China is opposed to Britain sharing its rule with the people of Hong Kong, particularly those adopting a hostile posture toward China. In contrast to many former British colonies, the

8 See for example John D. HARGREAVES, *Decolonization in Africa* (London: Longman, 1988); John DARWIN, *Britain and Decolonisation* (London: Macmillan, 1988); Brian LAPPING, *End of Empire* (London: Paladin Grafton Books, 1985); and D. A. LOW, *Eclipse of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

colonial government's legitimacy among the people remains decent, and there is no strong pressure from below for democratization. Therefore, in contrast with other former British colonies, there is no urgent political need to transfer power downward in Hong Kong. On the contrary, Britain ranks the maintenance of governmental authority and effective rule in Hong Kong before the changeover as its paramount goal. Achieving this goal involves two tasks: withstanding Chinese encroachments upon British prerogatives on the one hand and minimizing public challenge to colonial rule on the other. These two tasks are naturally interrelated. If Britain is to become a "lame duck" government because of its failure to turn back Chinese interference, given the people's revulsion against China, public pressure on the colonial government will intensify. On the other hand, increasing public challenge to the colonial government is bound to invite more Chinese intervention and hence reduce its autonomy. Besides, as a consequence of the lack of effort on the part of Britain to prepare Hong Kong for the end of colonial rule in the past, there are no legitimate inheritors of colonial power available to transfer power to in the first place.

Therefore, Britain has to ensure that the maximum amount of political power is still in its own hands so that neither China nor the people of Hong Kong can use the power transferred out of the colonial regime against it. In a certain sense, Britain is also apprehensive about Hong Kong people using the power thus obtained against China before 1997, thus straining Sino-British relationship. What is more is that as Britain has to make sure that its interests in Hong Kong will be well taken care of before and after 1997, and since it as an alien ruler is naturally suspicious of the allegiance of the people of Hong Kong to itself, any transfer of power is bound to be limited, cautious, and half-hearted.

Consequently, the scope and degree of democratization envisaged by Britain are in practice limited. The political reform proposed by the new Governor of Hong Kong, Chris Patten, with a lot of fanfare are basically only limited reform initiatives on the part of a departing regime.

For obvious reasons, China also contemplates limited democratic changes in Hong Kong. For one thing, as the majority of Hong Kong people are resistant to the Chinese takeover, China is afraid that democratization would lead to the appearance of anti-China movements and the rise of political groups which are against the resumption of Chinese sovereignty over Hong Kong. Secondly, there is deep-seated Chinese suspicion of British intentions to transfer power to Hong Kong people (particularly the anti-communist elements), thus posing obstacles to the effective exercise of sovereignty by China after 1997. Thirdly, China is

seriously concerned about the adverse effects of democratization on the free-wheeling capitalist economy of Hong Kong and on the confidence of local and foreign investors. With such reservations about democratization in mind, the China factor inevitably becomes the most important constraint on the pace and scope of democratic changes in Hong Kong.

In Hong Kong, the mild democratic demands of the people, the limited involvement of the expanding middle class in the demand for democracy, the political weakness of the laboring classes and the opposition to democratization by the business sector and conservative political forces together set limit on democratic reform in Hong Kong. Public acceptance of the existing non-democratic system and ubiquitous desire for its continuation even after the departure of the British, continued public support for the colonial regime, widespread satisfaction with the social and economic status quo, and people worrying about the destabilizing effects of democratic changes on society also weaken public democratic aspirations and hinder the rise of a strong democratic movement in Hong Kong. Moreover, people are diffident about the effectiveness of democratic reform in preventing Chinese intervention in local affairs. Consequently, on the whole Hong Kong people can only play second fiddle to Britain and China in shaping the democratic future of Hong Kong once the political fate of the territory has been determined.[9]

In view of the above factors, democratization in Hong Kong takes place in a political context which has enormous implications for the process and results of democratization. This political context has a number of salient features.

First and foremost, unlike other third-wave democracies, democratization in Hong Kong involves not just a government and the people under its rule. From the outset, three governments — the colonial government, the British government and the Chinese government — are

9 See LAU Siu-kai and KUAN Hsin-chi, *The Ethos of the Hong Kong Chinese* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1988); LAU Siu-kai and KUAN Hsin-chi, "Public Attitude toward Laissez Faire in Hong Kong," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 30, No. 8, (August 1990), pp. 766-781; LAU Siu-kai, "Institutions Without Leaders: Hong Kong Chinese View of Political Leadership," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 63, No. 2, (Summer 1990), pp. 191-209; KUAN Hsin-chi and LAU Siu-kai, "The Partial Vision of Democracy in Hong Kong," *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* (in press); and LAU Siu-kai, "Public Attitudes Toward Political Authorities and Colonial Legitimacy in Hong Kong," *The Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* (in press).

entangled in the process. Given the subordinate status of the colonial government, it is the two "external" governments — the British and Chinese governments — which have little to do with Hong Kong's governance in the past now playing the most important role in shaping Hong Kong's democratic future. The political weakness of Hong Kong people and their leaders renders the disparity in power between the three governments and the governed even more glaring. As a result, Britain and China are the dominant political actors in a democratization game involving several actors. It is their political priorities which set the overall political agenda for the democratization process. Given the conflicts in their priorities throughout the transitional period, the democratization process in Hong Kong is inevitably steered by the political struggle between the two sovereign nations.

Second, democratization in Hong Kong is basically a top-down process where the people play only a small part in its initiation. The absence of serious social and economic grievances there sets Hong Kong apart from the majority of nations in "third wave" democratization. As the impetus for democratization comes from above as a reaction to the 1997 issue and not from political demands below, the relevance of the Hong Kong people to the ultimate results of democratization is further reduced.

Third, as a result of the primacy of the political future of Hong Kong as the causal factor in initiating the democratization process and the insignificance of social and economic discontent in its origin, mass involvement in the process is minimal, and the issues of social and economic reform do not occupy a conspicuous place in the process. Accordingly, Hong Kong's democratization is a "purely" political matter, involving essentially the allocation of political power among Britain, China and the local political forces. The negligible importance of social and economic issues in its democratization thus sets Hong Kong apart from both the democratization-cum-decolonization processes in other former colonies and from most of the nations involved in the third-wave democratization.

Four, democratization as a "pure" political matter with limited mass involvement in effect means that within Hong Kong the process entails the intense struggle for power among local political elites. The scheduled termination colonial rule in 1997 has changed the distribution of power among political elites in Hong Kong. The change however does not entail a fundamental and complete displacement of the old political elites by new political elites, or the replacement of the former "insiders" in the power center by the erstwhile "outsiders." Instead, the change is messy and

incomplete. Admittedly the elites closely associated with colonial rule have suffered from a decline in political status, are facing an uncertain future, and are politically disoriented.[10] Nevertheless, for several reasons they are not destined for political extinction, even though they have no hope of maintaining the dominant position they used to occupy. Among other things, they still enjoy a decent level of support from the masses as a result of the past performance of Hong Kong's governance in the social and economic spheres. And their services and support are still needed by both China and Britain because of the commonality of interests among them and the desire of the two governments to ward off the threat from the emerging anti-establishment forces.[11] Moreover, in its attempt to maintain the capitalist system of Hong Kong, China has perforce to court the favor of these elites who occupy strategical positions in the economy.

The advent of the 1997 issue, public anxieties about the political future of Hong Kong, and the political reforms introduced by the departing colonial regime have also created political space for the mushrooming of a large number of political groups. Most of these groups are born of the pressure groups and community groups active in the 1970s. Their membership is small and predominantly middle-class in background, and they represent a variety of political and social viewpoints. Out of both political ideals and the desire for political influence, they want to change the political system to admit themselves into the power structure. In particular, they want to wrench as much power as possible from both China and Britain through democratic reforms. Even though these new political forces are intent to mobilize mass support to enhance their political power, largely via anti-communist appeals, in the end the efforts are less than satisfactory. The absence of burning social and economic issues has deprived the political groups of strong support from the masses, thus leaving them weak and isolated. Consequently, the struggle for power both before and after 1997 within Hong Kong remains an elitist phenomenon, with the masses playing largely the role of the spectator.

10 See LEE Ming-kwan, "Politicians," in Richard Y.C. WONG and Joseph Y.S. CHENG, (Eds.), *The Other Hong Kong Report 1990* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1990), pp. 113-130.

11 See LAU Siu-kai, "Public Attitudes Toward Political Leadership in Hong Kong: The Formation of Political Leaders," *Asian Survey*, Vol.34, No.3 (March 1994), pp. 243-257.

To summarize, the impetus for democratization in Hong Kong is generated by the termination of colonial rule in 1997. The advent of the 1997 issue has at the same time fundamentally transformed the political situation in the territory in the sense that two powerful "external" political actors — Britain and China — enter into the political arena, which has also been expanded to include the emergent local political forces. The increase in the number of political actors — three governments and a number of local political forces — has created a complicated and messy political game. Political conflict among the political actors however is largely an elitist phenomenon, with limited involvement by the masses. At stake in this multiple-actor conflict is the political system — particularly the electoral arrangements — for pre-1997 and post-colonial Hong Kong, which has enormous implications for the balance of power among political actors concerned. The struggle for power among the political actors is a "purely" political matter, with limited social and economic ramifications.

The Process of Democratization

The process of democratization in Hong Kong throughout the transitional period entails perennial conflicts among China, Britain, the colonial regime, and the congeries of local political groups. Even though the colonial government owes its allegiance to Britain, the two of them do not always act in unison on the issue of democratic reform. As the conflicts unfold and as the external and internal political situations change, realignments of the political actors would take place. Shifting alliances among the political actors are frequent enough to make the general public perpetually puzzled and disgusted. The process of multiple-actor conflict has indeed produced some democratic progress, but the democratic reforms are largely partial in scope and fragmented in nature. More importantly, a final settlement among the political actors with respect to the rules of the political game in post-colonial Hong Kong has yet to be attained. In the transitional period, a number of temporary truces among the political actors have been produced, but as soon as the political situation changes, new conflicts would flare up. Some political actors would raise new demands for democratic reform, engaging other actors in a new round of political conflicts. It is very likely that no final agreement on the political system of Hong Kong can be reached among the significant political actors before the transfer of sovereignty in 1997.

As mentioned above, the multiple-actor game is dominated by two powerful external political actors — China and Britain. The dominance of

these two actors has not only overshadowed the colonial government, but also eroded its autonomy and diminished its role in shaping the democratic reforms in Hong Kong. The dominance of two external governments clearly sets Hong Kong apart from other nations in the third-wave democratization where democratic change is basically a matter between the ruling stratum and the people within the same society. The presence of two dominant actors creates an ironical situation in Hong Kong. If the essence of democratization is the downward shift of the center of political gravity in society so that the ordinary people are given more power to influence public decisions, the case of Hong Kong is such that even though democratic reforms are introduced, the center of political gravity has instead moved both upward and outside of Hong Kong as the most important decisions on democratic reform are made by the two superior governments, thus to a certain extent negating the spirit of democratization. In Hong Kong, not only is the influence of local elites on China and Britain limited, but the political clout that can be exercised by the colonial government — which used to enjoy a high degree of autonomy — is also circumscribed. The minimal mobilization of the people of Hong Kong exacerbates the power disparity between the two superior governments and local political actors. Local political actors can gain a larger measure of political influence only when the two superiors try to manipulate them as a weapon against each other.

Even though both Britain and China envisage limited democratic changes in Hong Kong, their differences are nevertheless large enough to create intense animosities between them. On the whole, Britain prefers a larger measure of democratic reform in Hong Kong to pacify a public who are jittery about their future. Britain also tends to see democratic reform as part and parcel of its honorable and glorious departure from its last and most successful colony. China's concern is more with the problem of political stability and the prevention of anti-China mass actions after the return of Hong Kong to China, hence it is less enthusiastic about democratization. Thus, China and Britain, as the two dominant actors in the political game, do not constitute a monolithic center imposing its unified will on Hong Kong. However, as they between themselves almost monopolize decision-making with respect to democratic reform, their inclinations and calculations are of crucial importance to Hong Kong.

China and Britain thus form a dominant, albeit disunited, center of gravity in Hong Kong's new and more inclusionary political arena. By and large, their interaction determines the agenda of democratization in Hong Kong. The result is a pattern of centripetal and upward political dynamics.

To borrow the terms from Henderson — a student of Korean politics — the politics of democratization in Hong Kong represents "the politics of the vortex." The physics of Hong Kong political dynamics appears to resemble a strong vortex tending to sweep all local political elites upward toward central power. "Weak horizontal structure and strong vertical pressure complement each other. Vertical pressures cannot be countered because local or independent aggregations do not exist to impede their formation or to check the resulting vortex once formed. More striking still, intermediary groupings find it difficult to achieve aggregation. Vertiginous updraft tends to suck all components from each other before they cohere on lower levels and tends to propel them in atomized form toward the power apex."[12]

In a context of top-down democratization with low mass participation, the political elites in Hong Kong are driven to concentrate largely on China, Britain, or both as the targets of their lobbying efforts. The weak mass support they can muster means that they are in a politically dependent relationship to the two superior governments. Inevitably, as they are led by the political agenda set by the two governments or embroiled in their conflicts, they become severely constrained in their ability to shape Hong Kong's democratization process or to provide autonomous leadership to the people. In effect, they have become passive and subordinate political actors.

In third-wave democratization, a majority of the successful cases are made via negotiations, compromises, and agreements among political elites. The critical importance of political leadership in the process is underlined by Huntington, who says that "[c]ompromise, elections, and nonviolence were the third wave democratization syndrome. In varying degrees they characterized most of the transformations, replacements, and transplacements of that wave."[13] As a matter of fact, embedded in the process of third-wave democratization are the critical processes of elite transformation from disunity to consensual unity, which constitute the integral features of these new democracies.[14]

12 Gregory HENDERSON, Korea: *The Politics of the Vortex* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 5.

13 Samuel P. HUNTINGTON, *The Third Wave*, p. 165.

14 See John HIGLEY and Richard GUNTHER, "Introduction," in John HIGLEY and Richard GUNTHER, (Eds.), *Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 1-37; Juan J. LINZ and Alfred STEPAN, "Political Crafting of Democratic Consolidation

In Hong Kong, given the dominance of China and Britain in the multi-actor democratization game, local political elites are bound to play only a secondary role. However, if the local elites are united in their position on democratic reforms, both Britain and China should find it difficult not to accede to at least part of their demands. Moreover, in view of the intense competition of Britain and China for elite support, a united local political elite could play one government against the other and speed up democratic changes in Hong Kong.

On the face of it, many factors in Hong Kong should have facilitated some form of elite consensus. Hong Kong is not riven by serious ethnic, cultural, religious, regional, class or ideological cleavages. In fact, in comparison with most new democracies, Hong Kong's political elites are not far apart in their positions on political, social and economic issues. Politically, Hong Kong people are not mobilized, nor are they seriously divided. They as a result cannot inhibit the elites from bargaining and making deals with one another. There is no history of intense strife between the elites which makes cooperation impossible. Moreover, as a majority of the elites share a common fear of and resistance to China's resumption of sovereignty over Hong Kong in 1997, there should be a strong impetus for them to unite to take on the future sovereign.

Nevertheless, things have turned out differently. Hong Kong's political elites have so far failed to agree upon a set of democratic procedures for the territory. Because of elite dissensus, the issue of democratization has yet to be settled among the elites. Undoubtedly, the inexorable divisions among the political elites feature prominently in the democratization process in Hong Kong. And they to a considerable extent contribute to Hong Kong's limited achievements in democratization.

The context of democratization in Hong Kong contains a number of factors which are conducive to elite fragmentation. In the first place, as pointed out before, the politics of the vortex has "pulled" the political elites toward the center comprising China and Britain and away from the masses. The weak linkage between the elites and the masses, which has been poorly developed prior to the advent of the democratization, renders the elites powerless in front of China and Britain, thus seriously limiting their

or Destruction: European and South American Comparisons," in PASTER, (Ed.), *Democracy in the Americas*, pp. 41-61; and Giuseppe DI PALMA, *To Craft Democracies: An Essay on Democratic Transitions* (Berkeley and L.A.: University of California Press, 1990); Guillermo O'DONNELL and Philippe C. SCHMITTER, "Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies," in O'DONNELL, et al. (Eds.), *Transition from Authoritarian Rule*, Part IV, pp. 37-47.

influence on the process. What is most devastating to elite unity are the intense contest among the elites for favors and patronage from the two superior governments, and the serious divisive effects of Sino-British rivalries on the elites. The result is a fragmented and weak political leadership. What is more is that both China and Britain take an instrumental and manipulative attitude toward the local elites, selectively using them as pawns against each other, thus exacerbating elite disunities.[15]

Secondly, in a multi-actor political game dominated by two opposing actors, all of the local elites are not sure about their future political prospects. The liberals are not sure about their future after 1997 as their relationship with China is an antagonistic one. The pro-China forces are plagued by their low political standing in the eyes of the Hong Kong people. The establishment forces on the one hand are worried about being tagged as "pro-British" by the future sovereign and hence displaced from their current advantaged political status, on the other hand they feel severely threatened by the rise of populist politics consequent upon the broadening of popular elections. Accordingly, in an atmosphere of pervasive political insecurity, all local political forces are preoccupied with gaining as much ground as possible during the transitional period so that they would be in a stronger bargaining position by 1997. This sense of urgency is understandably felt particularly keenly by the opposition liberals. This strong tendency of all political elites to squeeze more political space for themselves at the expense of others is naturally not conducive to producing political accord among them.

Thirdly, as a mirror reflection of the second factor, all the political elites also tend to cast doubt on the others as viable political contenders in post-colonial Hong Kong. They would thus be less prepared to compromise with competitors whose political future is uncertain or even dismal. Hence an unrelenting process of struggle for whatever positions or influence are available is hard to avoid.

Fourthly, there is no political force in Hong Kong which can play the mediating role to moderate the conflict among the power contenders or to facilitate cooperation among them. Neither China nor Britain can play that role effectively, for they themselves are partisans in this new political

15 See LAU Siu-kai, "Colonial Rule, Transfer of Sovereignty and the Problem of Political Leaders in Hong Kong," *Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 2, (July 1992), pp. 223-242.

game. On the contrary, by playing the "divide and rule" tactics on the local elites, they have shown no intention to adopt such a role. The colonial government, which used to claim political neutrality and transcendence, has been rapidly "partisanized" and are even widely seen as one of the several contesting political actors *tout court*, catering mainly to its own interests.[16] Thus, it has lost its moral legitimacy to serve as a respected mediator. Furthermore, the people of Hong Kong are too politically indifferent and disorganized to assume the moderating function, nor do they have the means to do so even if they want to. Consequently, in an "anarchic" political situation, with no reliable and trusted authoritative arbiter of disputes among contenders, activities on the part of political elites which are aimed at independently ensuring one's political future are understandable. In the mind of the elites, relative gains for individual political actors override considerations of absolute gains available to all through cooperation.

Fifthly, the decline of the political influence of the old political elites and the sudden expansion of the local political arena as the result of the entry of new political elites have to a considerable extent undermined the old rules of the political game. Yet at the same time the new rules of the game have not been established. As far as elite conflict is concerned, Hong Kong is now in a chaotic situation. In the absence of generally accepted political norms and mannerisms, the conflict among elites cannot be accommodated or contained in a stable institutional framework.

Lastly, there is no universally accepted mechanism in Hong Kong to determine conclusively and authoritatively the winners and losers among the political elites. The limited function of popular election in Hong Kong undeniably restricts its value as a major mechanism to allocate political power. The easy conversion of social status and wealth into political influence also enables the elites to maintain political status even if they do not enter into popular election or acquire formal political positions. Moreover, patronage from China or Britain is also a much coveted source of political power for the elites. Consequently, different political elites are entrenched in different bases of power. Therefore, they can remain intransigent toward others as they would not be dislodged by their opponents.

16 See LAU Siu-kai, "Decline of Governmental Authority, Political Cynicism and Political Inefficacy in Hong Kong," *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, (Summer 1992), pp. 3-20; and LAU and KUAN, "The Partial Vision."

Consequences of Democratization

As a result of the perpetual Sino-British differences over democratic reform and the intense jockeying for political power by the local political elites, one prominent feature of the democratization process in Hong Kong is the predominance of "pure" political issues in the political controversies and the relative insignificance of social and economic issues. The political issues center upon the formulation of the rules of the political game for the present and for the future. As the rules of the political game determine access to power and influence for China, Britain and the various political forces in Hong Kong, it is no wonder that all the parties concerned are obsessed with establishing rules which would work to their own advantage. The conflicts over the rules of the game are made more intense by the continuous erosion of the old political rules, the insecure status of the new rules and Hong Kong people's mistrust of China. Moreover, the introduction of rule changes will in turn trigger off further attempts at rule change as its natural consequences. And the inability of China, Britain and local political elites to arrive at a final agreement on the form and pace of democratization for Hong Kong means that throughout the transitional period the "pure" political issues will top the public agenda.[17]

Since the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984, public disputes are largely propelled by political issues such as the pace of political reform, electoral arrangements for the Legislative Council, the mode of selection of the future chief executive, the relationship between the executive and the legislature, the need for and the role of political parties, the powers and functions of the Legislative Council, the future role and functions of the civil service, the division of power between the future Hong Kong government and the Chinese government, the legislation on human rights and the establishment of the court of final appeal. The vociferous political disputes among the contending parties ignited by Chris Patten's reform initiative since late 1992 not only pushes these disputes to a new level of intensity, but also ensures that the dominance of political

17 See LAU Siu-kai and KUAN Hsin-chi, "Hong Kong After the Sino-British Agreement," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 59, No. 2, (Summer 1986), pp. 214-236; and KUAN Hsin-chi and LAU Siu-kai, "Hong Kong's Search for a Consensus: Barriers and Prospects," in Hungdah CHIU, Y.C. JAO and Yuan-li WU, (Eds.), *The Future of Hong Kong: Toward 1997 and Beyond* (New York: Quorum Books, 1987), pp. 95-114.

issues in Hong Kong in the last years of the transition will increase instead of fading.

Not surprisingly, in terms of democratic progress, all these bitter and prolonged political struggles among China, Britain, and local political elites have achieved only a modicum of achievements. In a way the results are predictable given both China and Britain's wariness about democratization, the weakness of the pro-democratic forces, the opposition of the business sector and established interests, and the lukewarm reception of the people to democracy. At the time of sovereignty transfer in 1997, it is very likely that Hong Kong will have an executive-centered political system, just as I have predicted in 1985.[18] The chief executive, endowed with enormous constitutional powers, will be chosen by Hong Kong's elites. The legislature will perform basically the functions of representing various interests and overseeing the executive, relying upon the veto powers at its disposal. The legislature is devoid of powers to bring down the government or to influence the appointment of top administrators. Legislators are elected by a combination of direct and indirect (functional constituencies and the electoral committee) elections, with the directly elected members comprising less than half of the membership. In short, since 1984, Hong Kong has only achieved a level of democracy which is below that of most of the nations in third-wave democratization.

What is of great importance to Hong Kong's long-term democratic development is the fact that a final and binding agreement on the form and pace of democratization for Hong Kong among the contending parties has not yet been reached. Political actors dissatisfied with the existing arrangements might not abide by them willingly and might even challenge them in the future if opportunities arise. As compared with many third-wave democracies, the level of consolidation of Hong Kong's partial democracy is not high enough to dispel anxieties about its operational effectiveness and survivability. If the democratically reformed political system does not function successfully to the satisfaction of all the major political forces concerned, changes in the system are likely to ensue. Therefore, a degree of political uncertainty thus always clouds the democratic future of Hong Kong.

18 LAU Siu-kai, "Political Reform and Political Development in Hong Kong: Dilemma and Choices," in Y.C. YAO, et al. (Eds.), *Hong Kong and 1997: Strategies for the Future* (Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong, 1985), pp. 23-49.

Because Hong Kong's partially democratic system is basically a result of the conflicts and compromises among different political actors and not that of comprehensive constitutional design, embedded in it are potential strains among its components. For example, the independent selection of the legislature and the chief executive and their separate functions perennially threaten deadlocks between the two branches of government. If anything, the possibility of conflict between the legislature and the executive will be exacerbated by the conflict between the Chinese government and the Hong Kong people on the one hand, and the emerging class conflict in Hong Kong on the other. Another source of conflict originates from the multiple modes of election of legislators representing conflicting social, political and economic interests. As these interests are guaranteed representation in the legislature, their willingness to compromise with others is correspondingly weakened, thus aggravating the magnitude of interest conflict in that body. In the foreseeable future, it is difficult to find respected and authoritative arbiters to mediate between the parties in conflict. Hence it might not be impossible that China would be forced or even invited to intervene and impose order on local politicians. If this happened, it would be a major setback in Hong Kong's democratic development.[19]

Another distinctive outcome of democratization in Hong Kong is the process's limited contribution to the emergence of a strong, united and popular political leadership. The intense conflicts among political elites in Hong Kong, the divisive effects of Sino-British rivalry, the dependence of many leaders on patronage from China and Britain, and the existence of multiple and considerably non-overlapping modes of political recruitment all work to produce a fragmented political leadership. The elites are preoccupied with political issues to the neglect of the social and economic issues which pertain to people's livelihood on the one hand, and the practical problems associated with smooth transition on the other. As the non-political issues are ranked as far more important by the public, the disparity between the priorities of the elites and the people has to a certain

19 LAU Siu-kai, *The Basic Law and the New Political Order of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Centre for Hong Kong Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1988). Theoretically speaking, a system with a strong executive independent of the legislature and multiple parties has difficulty functioning smoothly. See Scott MAINWARING, "Presidentialism, Multipartism, and Democracy: The Difficult Combination," *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2, (July 1993), pp. 198-228.

extent alienated the former from the latter, whose trust and confidence in their leaders have been low from the very beginning.[20] Incessant bickerings among the political elites have led to their "mutual delegitimation" and further erosion of their already limited support base. One of the political victims of low mass support for the leaders is the weakness of political parties in Hong Kong, which after almost a decade of democratic development remain small and poorly organized organizations with minimal mass appeal. In many third-wave democracies, strong political parties have played an indispensable role in promoting democratic change, fostering elite cooperation, channeling mass participation in politics, and stabilizing and consolidating the new democratic order. The inability of Hong Kong's political parties to produce these salutary effects on behalf of the emerging democracy in the territory seriously hampers the process of democratization.

In many third-wave democracies, the process of democratization has expanded political involvement and political participation of the people. In fact, mass movements have played a no small part in bringing about democratic changes. In Hong Kong, by comparison, democratization has only limited effects on mass participation in politics. The attraction of local political elites to the Sino-British center of political gravity has detached them from the masses. The elitist nature of Hong Kong's democratic game renders the need to appeal to the masses superfluous to many political elites. The dominance of China and Britain in the democratization process reinforces the sense of political powerlessness among the people and stifle their political aspirations. In any case, the partial character of Hong Kong's democratization does not provide abundant opportunities for political participation to the people even if they are not politically passive.

Thus, instead of incorporating more people into the political process, democratization in Hong Kong might even have the reverse effect of engendering even more political alienation. According to various studies, the people of Hong Kong have become less optimistic about the territory's democratic prospects and more politically cynical toward political

20 See LAU Siu-kai, "Institutions Without Leaders;" and LAU Siu-kai, "Social Irrelevance of Politics: Hong Kong Chinese Attitudes Toward Political Leadership," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 65, No. 2, (Summer 1992), pp. 225-246.

authorities in general.[21] The long term trend seems to be further political alienation in society. This development is definitely detrimental to Hong Kong's political future.

Conclusion

In this paper I have outlined Hong Kong's democratization and compared it with the experiences of other third-wave democracies. I have argued that the unique historical and objective context where democratization takes place in Hong Kong have produced a process of democratic development largely shaped by powerful external political actors. Consequently, instead of elite cooperation propelling democratic change, Hong Kong has witnessed elite fragmentation resulting from and in turn hampering democratic development. Instead of mass mobilization and mass involvement in the democratic process, Hong Kong is still saddled with many political passive people who might even have begun to withdraw further from politics. And instead of fostering a more solidary society, democratization has tremendously divided the people of Hong Kong.

21 See LAU Siu-kai, KUAN Hsin-chi and WAN Po-san, "Political Attitudes," in LAU Siu-kai, et al. (Eds.), *Indicators of Political Development: Hong Kong 1988* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1991), 173-206; LAU Siu-kai, "Political Attitudes," in LAU Siu-kai, et al. (Eds.), *Indicators of Social Development: Hong Kong 1990* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1992), pp. 129-157; and LAU Siu-kai, "Public Attitudes Toward Political Authorities."