



*Social Conflicts in Hong Kong,  
1975-1986*

*Trends and Implications*

Anthony Bing-leung Cheung  
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Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies

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## Social Conflicts in Hong Kong, 1975 - 1986: Trends and Implications

### Abstract

This study aims to research into social conflicts in Hong Kong since the mid-1970s when the territory began to undergo significant economic, social and, eventually, political changes. Such changes have affected the political culture of local Chinese and the way they perceive the role of government as the provider for their needs and the solver of their problems. The study is premised on the assumption that any transformation in the political values and attitudes of the people would have been reflected in their behaviours and actions, and attempts to capture such changing behaviours and actions through an observation of the pattern of social conflicts that occurred during the period of change.

The study has revealed that in general, people have become more willing to agitate, by way of conflict, for an improvement in the quality of life and in their political and civil rights. Most of the social conflicts identified are sectoral or localized ones, indicating that sectional and local interests have increasingly been articulated within the social arena, requiring responses or interventions by the public authorities. More issues are likely than in the past to be susceptible to articulation in the form of a social conflict targetted at the polity, reflecting a changing interface between society and polity that carries with it changing demands and expectations.

THE present study is the first attempt of its kind to research into social conflicts in Hong Kong and is aimed at enriching academic studies on Hong Kong which were grossly under-developed until the 1970s when impressive economic and social development began to take shape, rendering Hong Kong a more worthy area for any serious systematic study.

Rapid economic growth and related social changes in Hong Kong since the 1970s have unavoidably brought about a profound impact on the pattern of social and political interactions, including such aspects as people's attitude towards government, their conception of interests and rights, as well as the means whereby interests may be articulated and advanced, and rights safeguarded and furthered.

Until the 1970s, it had been a general belief that Hong Kong Chinese, who formed the bulk of the local population, were politically apathetic and tended to deal with their problems within the confines of the family. In his description of Chinese society in Hong Kong, Lau suggested that the Chinese community was characterized more by its relative homogeneity than its internal diversity (Lau, 1982, p.67). His theoretical construct of “utilitarianistic familism” depicts the primacy of familial interest above any other kind of social interests among Hong Kong Chinese who used the local socio-political environment “as a setting wherein individuals and their familial group actively pursue their own best interests. *Passive adaptation to the existing institutional structure is the norm, and efforts to transform the social order are frowned upon*, particularly if they lead to the disruption of social stability. Conflicts or trouble with outsiders are to be avoided as far as possible, even at the cost of some loss for the family” (*ibid*, p.74. Emphasis ours). Lau considered such normative traits of utilitarianistic familism as forming the dominant cultural code of the Chinese. This has successfully adapted to the particular set of structural conditions imposed by the urban-industrial setting of Hong Kong and has, together with the paternalistic bureaucratic polity, in turn helped to maintain political stability. In what Lau then described as a minimally-integrated social-political system, it would be difficult for social issues to be converted into political issues, for lack of the necessary conversion mechanisms, as the unorganized nature of an atomistic society naturally immunizes itself from any large-scale and sustained political mobilization (*ibid*, p.185).

Lau did recognize, however, that “there seems to be a continuous, slow and inexorable process of erosion of utilitarianistic familism, engendered by the modernization of Hong Kong.” He anticipated the familial ethos to lose influence, particularly among the younger generation (*ibid*, p.187).

Examining Hong Kong’s unique political institutions from another perspective, King conceptualized Hong Kong politics as a process of “administrative absorption of politics,” whereby in the absence of democratic participation, established or emerging socio-economic elites were being coopted into the polity through appointments to government councils and boards, thus creating an elite-consensual community that helps to

sustain legitimacy and integration (King, 1981). Following the riots in the late 1960s, such absorption was extended to the grassroots level, first through the setting up of City District Offices and from 1981, through the District Administration Scheme, in order to bridge the mass-elite gap. King suggested that it was through this practice of administrative absorption that Hong Kong’s political system was able to cope with the problem of stability and the crisis of political integration resulting from rapid urbanization in recent decades, which in third world countries have led to undue social mobilization, participation explosion and, eventually, political instability.

While the observations of Lau and King may have held true for the local situation until the 1970s, the Hong Kong polity and society have certainly undergone significant changes in the following decade due to a combination of emerging factors — like the impact of rapid economic development and urbanization, social structural and demographic changes, the rise of an increasingly articulate and demanding middle class, and perhaps more crucially, the 1997 question which has since triggered off much political anxiety as well as demands for political participation.

Based on surveys conducted in 1985, Lau and Kuan were able to say that “unconditional abhorrence and a fear of politics has abated among the Hong Kong Chinese” (Lau & Kuan, 1988, pp.70-71). They surmised that unlike the moralistic conception of politics in conventional political doctrines, the attitude towards politics of the Hong Kong Chinese was primarily instrumental, as the majority of the survey’s respondents related political participation to the enhancement of private interests. If such observation stands, then a higher degree of political activism since the early 1980s can be predicted as the prospect of change of sovereignty and government in 1997 serves to unsettle existing patterns of power and influence, posing threat to individual interests and wants.

The role of the colonial government and her interface with the governed have also undergone considerable adjustments in the aftermath of the 1967 riots. As the government tried to get closer to the people and to provide more material benefits and welfare to them in exchange for an implicit conferment of legitimacy (Cheung, 1988), public attitudes towards government also changed. According to Lau and Kuan on the

changing political culture of Hong Kong Chinese (Lau & Kuan, 1986), the increasing perceptions of government as the benefactor and the primary solver of social and even private problems are critical in the formation of an instrumental orientation towards politics. "A growing sense of dependence on the government for a variety of things related to daily living makes it well-nigh impossible for people to avoid politics" (Lau & Kuan, 1988, p.72).

A closer integration of society with government (the polity) appears to have come about which may imply a new set of role perceptions and behavioural patterns, with the government becoming increasingly a target for social demands and being cast into an expected role of social solver of people's conflicts and problems.

Lau and Kuan formed their latest observations on Hong Kong Chinese's political ethos largely on the basis of findings from attitudinal surveys. The present study started with the assumption that any transformation in people's political values and attitudes would have been reflected in their behaviours and actions, and that this should be borne out in the pattern of social conflicts during an era of change.

The study therefore aims to clarify the various dimensions and magnitudes of the changes which have occurred since the 1970s from a different perspective. Through an extensive examination of the social conflicts, it is hoped that the research can help to:

- (a) identify a configuration of social conflicts in Hong Kong, with regard to their nature, frequency of occurrence, the participants and organizations involved in them, and the modes of articulation and action;
- (b) trace how the government and representative institutions (which together form the polity) react to and cope with these conflicts, and ascertain whether the pattern of such reactions has changed over time, and if so, in what manner;
- (c) account for the observable changes in the patterns of conflicts and the modes adopted for conflict resolution, and provide insight into an evaluation of the overall impact these have on social and political development.

## Methodology and Limitations

The methodology employed in the research was primarily an archival one. Raw data come from the scanning of two local daily newspapers, one English (*South China Morning Post*) and one Chinese (*Ming Pao* 《明報》), so as to ensure a balanced coverage of news reports.<sup>1</sup> Information obtained from these reports were then used to reconstruct the "issues."<sup>2</sup>

When determining the period of study, the following considerations were taken into account:

- (a) the period chosen should be relatively long so that general trends and patterns of social conflicts can be recaptured;
- (b) the period should be a significant one in terms of economic and social development so that its impact on social conflicts and their resolution can be ascertained;
- (c) the period should be one within which public attitudes and demands have shifted noticeably and in which government institutions have considerably evolved to cope with any emerging demands.

Based on these, a 12-year period from 1975 to 1986 was chosen. The year 1975 was used as a starting date as the mid-1970s marked the beginning of major social and economic changes in Hong Kong as well as a more expansionist government role under the aegis of the MacLehose Administration. The ending date of 1986 enables observation to be made of changes influenced by the agreement reached on Hong Kong's future between the British and Chinese governments in 1984.

The research work then consisted of scanning the above-mentioned two newspapers in order to collect raw information, following which coding was undertaken to facilitate computer analysis. As the initial information obtained from newspaper scanning was recorded in a descriptive manner, to turn this (particularly in the case of more complex social issues like the "Daya Bay Nuclear Plant" issue) into "codable" or "quantifiable" data proved to be a rather complicated and time-consuming exercise. To have a well designed framework comprising clearly defined rubrics under which raw information can be classified and aggregated is very important. The framework that we used will be presented in

the following paragraphs. Also of equal importance is the careful interpretation of the information recorded.

For the purpose of the research, a “social conflict” is identified as an incident in which three criteria are complied with, namely:

- (a) *group action is involved*: “Action” must be explicit, so that any latent action such as letters to the editor of newspaper is excluded. The “group” criterion also excludes family conflict or action taken for individual interest;
- (b) *concrete and identifiable claims or demands must have been articulated*: Hence spontaneous conflicts without recognizable claims, such as conflicts arising from the arrest of illegal street hawkers, are excluded unless these have since led to more organized action with explicit demands;
- (c) *the incident must be recorded in the newspaper*: It is assumed that unreported incidents did not carry such importance or significance as to warrant public attention. Letters-to-editor type complaints are automatically excluded because they are not “reported” by the newspaper.<sup>3</sup>

For each case of “social conflict” identified from newspaper reports, the following aspects are recorded to form the basis for subsequent analysis:

- (a) *Nature*: Conflicts are firstly allocated to one of the 12 main “fields” of issues (housing, labour, education, politics, transport, public utilities, social welfare, urban development, health development, environment, culture and communication, economics),<sup>4</sup> and then within each field, further identified with reference to an “issue” area, subject to a maximum of three such areas to which the conflict, by its nature, is most related.<sup>5</sup> Should a conflict appear to belong to more than one field of issues, then the predominant field is determined judging from the overall essence of the conflict demands and participant background.<sup>6</sup>
- (b) *Scope*: The scope of a conflict is established both in broad terms (territory-wide, local or sectoral) and in more detailed terms with reference to the degree of localness or the specific sector involved

in the conflict. The scope of a conflict is determined by the consideration of whom would be affected by the issue in question and not who actually took part or were involved in the conflict.

- (c) *Demands*: Specific demands of individual conflicts are grouped under major demand categories ranging from immediate provision/prevention/compensation to legislative or administrative modification.<sup>7</sup> Since participants in a social conflict may sometimes advance more than one category of demand, the demands spelt out in the conflict may be classified into several relevant categories.
- (d) *Organizations involved*: The form in which participants in a conflict is organized may vary from a loose group of individuals to a joint committee of groups and organizations. Sometimes, several forms of organizations may be identified in one conflict.
- (e) *Background of participants*: Participants are also identified with reference to their occupational or social background.<sup>8</sup> The research allows a maximum of four categories of participants to be coded for analysis.
- (f) *Involvement of members of representative institutions*: Four types of representative institutions exist in Hong Kong, namely the Legislative Council (Legco), Urban Council (UC), Regional Council (RC) and District Board (DB). A maximum of three such categories are coded for each conflict for analysis.
- (g) *Mode of action*: Actions taken by conflict participants to articulate their demands are classified into 14 main categories ranging from petition to government, protest and mass rally, to signature campaign or press conference. As each conflict may entail more than one mode of action, the research allows for a maximum of six prevalent action categories to be coded for each conflict.
- (h) *Institutional responses*: Demands in a social conflict are directed to authorities in the polity. Hence institutional response is an important aspect for any study of social conflicts. This may range, in the context of Hong Kong, from departmental administrative response or intervention to a debate or questions in the Legco. Sometimes, more than one form of institutional response are generated. Thus a maximum of five types of institutional response can be coded for

each conflict in this research.

- (i) *Outcome*: The outcome of a conflict may range from demand being fully met to demand being totally rejected, or take the form of other policy and/or institutional changes as a result of the conflict. A maximum of four types of outcome are coded for each conflict in this research.

The duration of conflict, number of participants involved, as well as the number of editorial commentaries generated by each conflict are also recorded. However, due to the sketchy and, very often, incomplete nature of the information obtained, these aspects are not subject to further analysis in the study.

A detailed list of variables coded under each of the above aspects is given in the appendix.

A few limitations of the research methodology should be recognized at the outset, so that the findings of the research and the degree of their validity can be evaluated in a proper perspective.

Firstly, as always with research, the strengths of our approach are also the source of its main weakness. The research relies on newspaper reports to establish the relative significance or “publicness” of conflicts which occurred from time to time. However, to that extent, we are subject to any editorial bias or oversight in reporting by the newspapers that we used for information. Very often, newspapers may have reported the outbreak of a conflict but may have failed to follow it through to give sufficient clue as to the actual outcome of the conflict. Also, details pertinent to the analysis of the conflict, such as background of participants or institutional responses, may not have been fully reported. This is a major handicap that any research of an archival nature would have to endure with.

Secondly, social conflicts which were prolonged in nature and spanned several years or occurred repeatedly have been identified as one “conflict” irrespective of frequency of occurrence. Hence the total number of social conflicts does not give the full picture of conflict frequency.

Thirdly, the seriousness or intensity of each social conflict cannot be accurately captured in the research. Possible indicators which might be used for this purpose, for example the number of participants or the

duration of conflict, have proved to be difficult to establish from the newspaper reportage as mentioned above. Notwithstanding this, an indirect and, perhaps, partial insight to the degree of seriousness can be obtained by reference to the mode of action taken as well as to the level of institutional response obtained.

Despite these limitations, newspaper scanning in this research has still managed to generate a considerable volume of valuable information on social conflicts that captured public attention in some way over the period of study. While the conflicts thus identified may not represent the totality of social conflicts (but this again depends on how we operationalize the concept of social conflict), we are of the opinion that they form a sufficiently large data base for the purpose of analysis and interpretation as regards the general pattern of social conflicts in Hong Kong during the period.

## Number and Nature of Social Conflicts

Altogether 882 cases of social conflict were recorded during the period 1975 to 1986. This means that an average of some 80 social conflicts occurred every year, or more than six conflicts every month. In fact, the number of social conflicts has tended to increase from year to year during the period under study, as Table 1 shows.

Within this general trend of increase in social conflicts, only three years (1979, 1982 and 1983) show a slight drop in the number of cases recorded.

The reason why the number of social conflicts increases quite steadily on the whole may be two-fold. On the one hand, it may be due to the quality of reporting in the newspapers that we have scanned, that is, social conflicts occurring in the earlier period might not have been fully reported. On the other hand, more social conflicts had actually occurred as time progressed. The methodology of our research does not allow us to determine the relative importance of these two factors. However, it is logical to ponder that social conflicts occur more frequently as the economic and social situations become more complicated over time, giving rise to more multifarious interests and demands. This is to some

**Table 1** Number of Social Conflicts per year, 1975-1986

Year	'75	'76	'77	'78	'79	'80	'81	'82	'83	'84	'85	'86
No. of social conflicts	35	54	53	76	52	68	102	87	67	70	80	136

extent borne out by the fact that the annual average of conflicts in the 1980s (1981-86) was 90 compared with only 56 in the latter part of the 1970s (1975-80). Even if there were under-reporting in newspapers in the earlier period, the discrepancy would not have been so significant.

If the overall volume of social conflicts increases during this period, then how is this general increase distributed among the 12 major "fields" of issues? Table 2 provides a basic description.

If we further analyse the above figures and trends, then three observations can be advanced.

Firstly, five areas of social conflicts experienced either a steady or impressive increase during the period under study, namely housing, politics, transport, environment and education. Since housing has always been a major preoccupation in the daily life of Hong Kong residents, the increase of conflict in this area does not appear to be a surprise. Regarding conflicts of political, transport, educational and environmental nature, their increase may be related to the higher degree of social awareness of the people and their desire to have a better quality of life.

Secondly, urban development conflicts experienced a higher occurrence rate in the late 1970s than in 1980s. This is related, to a certain extent, to the construction of the Mass Transit Railway System in the late 1970s which generated complaints and protests over land resumption and compensation.

**Table 2** General Trend of Social Conflicts, 1975-1986

Year	'75	'76	'77	'78	'79	'80	'81	'82	'83	'84	'85	'86	
Housing	No. 1	13	14	13	12	21	17	18	9	14	16	21	General trend: steady increase but a sudden drop in 1983
Labour	No. 5	16	7	26	23	16	34	23	16	13	14	37	General trend: fluctuating
Education	No. 7	4	6	4	1	6	4	6	6	3	12	16	General trend: quite stable, with a sudden increase since 1985
Politics	No. 2	3	1	1	4	5	5	5	4	11	11	12	General trend: steady increase
Transport	No. 2	3	1	6	2	6	9	7	8	15	6	16	General trend: steady increase except for a sudden drop in 1985
Public utilities	No. 2	0	0	2	0	1	6	3	1	1	2	2	General trend: quite stable, except for a sudden increase in 1981
Social welfare	No. 0	1	1	3	1	3	2	4	1	0	1	11	General trend: quite stable, with a sudden increase in 1986
Urban development	No. 5	8	11	12	5	6	9	9	1	3	4	4	General trend: greater number of conflict in the late 1970s, then an obvious decrease since 1983
Health development	No. 2	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	2	1	4	3	General trend: stable with a slight increase
Environment	No. 5	3	5	4	2	3	7	5	10	7	8	6	General trend: impressive increase since the 1980s
Culture and communication	No. 1	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	0	0	2	4	General trend: stable, not an important field of social conflict
Economics	No. 2	1	0	2	0	0	6	2	4	1	0	2	General trend: stable

Note: No. = Number of cases.

Thirdly, the number of social conflicts in three areas appears to be rather stagnant over the period: public utilities, social welfare and health



development. Since these three areas are directly related to the more basic needs in the daily life of local residents, which had largely been met since the government's initial expansion of social programmes in the 1960s, it may be reasonable to speculate that the immediate improvement of basic material living no longer constitutes a major force for social action since the mid-1970s.

Therefore, judging from the trends analysed above, it is perhaps worth noting, especially for the policy makers, that, along with labour conflicts which are likely to be an important source of social conflicts in most industrial societies, housing, politics, education, transport and environmental problems represent the vigorous areas in which conflicts will arise more frequently in the coming years.

After examining the ups and downs in every area of social conflict during this period, we now turn to the actual number of each kind of social conflict as well as its relative importance in the overall configuration.

From Table 3, one can observe that social conflicts relating to the labour question make up the highest number. An average of 22 cases occurred each year. The total of 230 conflicts can be further analysed in terms of the various issues that each conflict may have involved. Table 4 indicates the distribution of those issues involved in the 230 conflicts of labour nature of which the ones relating to wages and labour benefits were understandably the most numerous.<sup>9</sup>

**Table 3** Distribution of Social Conflicts according to Area

Nature	Number of cases	Percentage
Housing	169	19.2
Labour	230	26.1
Education	75	8.5
Politics	67	7.6
Transport	81	9.2
Public utilities	20	2.3
Social welfare	28	3.2
Urban development	77	8.7
Health development	18	2.0
Environment	65	7.4
Culture and communication	13	1.5
Economics	20	2.3
Unclassified	19	2.2
Total	882	100.0

**Table 4** Distribution of Conflicts of Labour Nature according to Issue

Issue	Number of cases
Wages	126
Labour benefits	96
Health hazards	14
Employment opportunity	35
Union rights	2

Conflicts relating to housing problem form the second largest group during 1975 to 1986. Altogether 169 cases occurred. A further breakdown of the issues involved is given below.

**Table 5** Distribution of Conflicts of Housing Nature according to Issue

Issue	Number of cases
Public housing provision	34
Public housing allocation	29
Public housing rent	36
Public housing management	29
Public housing structural defects	9
Squatter control and management	12
Private housing rent control	2
Private housing management	7
Private housing structural defects	6

From the above table, one can easily tell that questions concerning the provision, allocation, management as well as the rent of public housing are the major sources of conflict in this area.

Besides labour and housing, the other areas which are relatively important in terms of the number of conflicts occurring during this period are transport, urban development, education, politics and environment. Among these five areas, it should be noted that urban development conflicts experienced a steady decrease in the 1980s. Therefore, transport, education, politics and environment remain the essential and vigorous fields where conflicts arose. Special attention perhaps should be paid to politics and environment because, regarding the first, it is a traditional belief that Hong Kong residents are generally apolitical and, regarding the second, popular concern about environmental problems has generally been regarded as rather low.

Let us first examine the breakdown of the issues in the field of politics.

**Table 6** Distribution of Conflicts of Political Nature according to Issue

Issue	Number of cases
Constitutional matters	22
Government performance	5
Political and civil rights	40
Judicial system	8
Law and order	22
Police power	5
Immigration	8

Among the above issues, it is particularly interesting to note that conflicts relating to constitutional matters and political and civil rights figure very prominently in terms of the number of cases involved. In fact, these two categories of conflict showed a trend of steady increase during this period, especially since the 1980s, as the following table indicates.

**Table 7** Trend of Conflicts involving Constitutional Matters and Political and Civil Rights, 1975-1986

Year	'75	'76	'77	'78	'79	'80	'81	'82	'83	'84	'85	'86
Constitutional matters	0	1	1	0	0	2	0	0	2	7	5	4
Political & civil rights	0	1	4	1	3	5	0	3	1	6	7	9

The breakdown of the issues in the field of environment is as follows:

**Table 8** Distribution of Conflicts of Environmental Nature according to Issue

Issue	Number of cases
Pollution	13
Hawker control	22
Neighbourhood quality	35

From the above general analysis, a preliminary conclusion could be drawn. Labour, housing, education, politics, transport and environment are the major areas in which social conflicts occurred. The trends during 1975 to 1986 also show that these six areas should remain vigorous fields generating social conflicts in the future. However, one point should be noted. The five fields identified here are the fields in which conflicts may arise most frequently and easily. It does not necessarily mean that conflicts emerging in these fields are the most serious ones. Since labour conflicts and housing conflicts seem to have acquired an increasingly routine nature, the seriousness of each conflict would normally tend to be attenuated. The present research could only help us identify the number of conflicts in each area as well as the frequency of their occurrence, but not the exact degree of seriousness of conflicts concerned.

### Scopes of Conflict

If the degree of seriousness cannot be determined, one has to rely on the scope of the conflicts to gain an insight into their impact. "Scope" denotes the extent of effect that a social conflict may have on the population, and this is judged mainly by the demands advanced. Therefore, the scope of a conflict is assessed not by the number nor the distribution of the participants in that particular conflict but by what they demand. In other words, it is judged by an assessment about who will benefit or be affected if the demand(s) is/are met. In this regard, it is found that among the 882 cases of conflicts, those with sectoral effect form the majority, followed by those with a local effect, whereas conflicts with a territory-wide scope

represent only 13.3 per cent of the total number.

**Table 9** Distribution of Conflicts according to Scope

Major scope of conflict	Number of cases	Percentage
Territory-wide	117	13.3
Local	318	36.0
Sectoral	447	50.7
Total	882	100.0

However, although conflicts with territory-wide scope constituted the smallest number during the period under study, the trend that such conflicts had occurred more frequently since the 1980s is quite obvious, hinting an increasing degree of social mobilization (see Table 10).

**Table 10** Trend of Conflicts with Territory-wide Scope, 1975-1986

Year	'75	'76	'77	'78	'79	'80	'81	'82	'83	'84	'85	'86
Number of cases	5	3	4	0	2	13	6	22	15	12	21	14

Another aspect which merits our attention is the number of social conflicts with territory-wide scope within each field. The following table shows the distribution.

**Table 11** Distribution of Conflicts with Territory-wide Scope according to Area

Area of conflict	Number of cases
Housing	9
Labour	1
Education	10
Politics	44
Public utilities	9
Social welfare	2
Urban development	1
Health development	4
Environment	4
Culture and communication	8
Economics	8
Unclassified	7

It is of particular interest to note that conflicts of political nature rank first in the list. This means that the majority of the conflicts in this area are territory-wide in scope. On the contrary, conflicts in the labour area, although they are the most numerous overall, only contains one case of such scope.

Having examined the overall picture of social conflicts between 1975 and 1986, we now turn to study some specific aspects of those conflicts.

### **Demands and Their Articulation**

All social actions aim to achieve some goals. Social conflicts are no exception. What the participants in a social conflict seek to achieve is defined in this research as “demand” or “demands.” Such are usually spelt out publicly by the participants.

Each social conflict may have its own specific demands advanced by the participants concerned. However, a comparative study of the

demands reveals that these can in fact be grouped into several categories. In this research, we started to group these demands according to a classification scheme devised by logical categorization. This scheme was then refined in the course of the research. All the demands are grouped this way into nine categories. The following table shows the number of demands under each category. One conflict may entail more than one category of demand.

**Table 12** Distribution of Demands according to Category

Category of demand	Number of cases
Immediate provision	511
Immediate prevention	241
Immediate compensation	99
Disclosure of information	93
Participation and consultation	86
Implementation and enforcement	92
Policy modification	161
Legislative modification	79
Administrative or implementational modification	278

It is quite natural that among all the demands, those seeking immediate provision (of either material benefit or service) are the most numerous. However, it is quite astonishing to find that demands seeking to modify the administrative organization of government bodies or to modify the implementation of government policies come second. This may suggest that participants dared to challenge the authority of the government in order to have their demands satisfied. The other common forms of demands are those seeking to obtain more information on the problem concerned, those seeking to participate in the decision-making process or be consulted, and those seeking legislative modification. All these demands reflect a greater assertion of their civil and political rights on the part of the participants. Therefore, although material benefit

Table 13 Trend of Demands, 1975-1986

Year	'75	'76	'77	'78	'79	'80	'81	'82	'83	'84	'85	'86
Immediate provision	16	28	34	37	32	30	76	59	44	33	47	75
Immediate prevention	16	15	20	21	10	15	21	25	21	23	25	29
Immediate compensation	9	6	3	23	10	11	5	4	6	6	5	11
Disclosure of information	3	3	5	7	5	11	5	5	10	15	12	12
Participation and consultation	3	2	0	2	1	11	9	6	9	14	16	13
Implementation and enforcement	1	3	3	9	8	9	11	8	5	11	11	13
Policy modification	8	11	5	19	2	19	16	7	14	13	21	26
Legislative modification	2	1	1	6	6	8	10	7	5	5	9	19
Administrative or implementational modification	15	25	19	8	18	30	31	25	16	32	36	23

remained, naturally, the most important target in the social conflicts identified, it is also evident that more profound and ambitious institutional changes as well as rights of a non-material nature were also actively sought by the participants.

When we further examine how each category of the demands has evolved during this period, we find that some categories show a trend of steady increase whereas the others show considerable stagnancy (see Table 13).

Of the nine categories, three appear to be stagnant or stagnant with some fluctuation: immediate compensation, implementation and enforcement, and policy modification. The other six all show a trend of increase. It is particularly significant to note that the demands regarding the disclosure of information and those requesting participation and consultation increase steadily during this period. This may serve to indicate the rising awareness of citizen rights among the participants in particular and Hong Kong residents in general.

The mode of action used by the participants of a social conflict for articulating their demands is a related and important aspect. In any social conflict, it is natural that the participants may have to employ more than one mode of action. Usually, they have to inform the authority concerned and/or the public of their demands, exert pressure and rally support. More than one mode of action are therefore needed to achieve the various objectives.

In this research, we have identified 12 major modes of action. Their distribution is shown in the Table 14.<sup>10</sup>

Of all the modes of action, "press conference" is the most extensively used one. In the 882 conflicts we have recorded, more than half have resorted to this means. The second most extensively used means is "petition to the government," while the third one is "petition to the major decision-making bodies" of the political system (Office of the Members of the Executive and Legislative Councils, or OMELCO, Legco, or Exco). If we add the numbers of the latter two kinds of petitions together, they will become the most frequently used means (602 cases). This shows that people did not hesitate to bring their grievances and demands to the highest level of the polity. It also serves to support the observation made earlier that the public has become more conscious of its citizen rights.

**Table 14** Distribution of Modes of Action

Mode of action	Number of occurrences
Close door meeting	113
Petition to the government (i.e. the Governor or the administration in general)	338
Petition to OMELCO, Legco or Exco	264
Petition to DB, UC or RC	10
Petition to New China News Agency	13
Petition to authorities outside Hong Kong	5
Protest and mass rally	120
Industrial action	84
Signature campaign	44
Press conference	444
Opinion survey	12
Violent confrontation	14

On the contrary, the number of “petitions to the DB, UC and RC” is curiously small. This is partly due to the fact that DBs and the RC were established only in the 1980s. But more importantly, this may be because these representative bodies have only very limited statutory responsibilities and powers. Therefore, they failed to become the major target of petition unless the conflict in question had a direct relationship with the business of these bodies. Allowance must, however, be made for possible under-reporting of such petitions because of their lesser news value compared with petitions to OMELCO or to the government. Also, representations made to DBs by constituents through their individual Board members may have escaped reporting as a petition.

“Protest and mass rally” is also a major means of action. An average of ten such protests or mass rallies occurred each year in the period. It is a good indicator showing that people are not so afraid of joining public and relatively more aggressive actions in order to get their demands met.

Altogether 14 cases of “violent confrontation” are recorded, which means more than one case every year on average. The number, though

still small, is nevertheless of some significance in Hong Kong where her population has traditionally been depicted as apathetic. Those 14 cases of violent confrontation are distributed as follows:

**Table 15** Distribution of Violent Confrontations

Housing	3
Education	1
Politics	1
Transport	1
Urban development	6
Environment	2

It is significant to note that conflicts of housing, urban development and environmental nature together represent by far the absolute majority of the cases involving violent confrontation. However, since the number of cases is on the whole very small, it is not possible to make any firm observation at this stage although the above table may seem to imply that when the direct livelihood of the residents is affected, violent confrontation may be more likely to be resorted to.

With a total number of 113 incidents during the period under study, “close door meeting,” either with officials from government department(s) or between parties in a conflict, is another important mode of action. However, this mode of action does not merit any particular concern or further examination because it is but logical that such kind of meeting would have to be held to provide an appropriate opportunity to resolve a conflict, especially in less serious ones.

With its total number of 84 incidents, “industrial action” can be considered a means used not too frequently, when this is compared with the large number of labour conflicts during the period (230 cases, being the largest category of social conflicts). Roughly, one out of every three conflicts in the labour field had to resort to industrial action in order to press for results.

“Petition to the New China News Agency (Hong Kong Branch)”

(NCNA) represents quite an exceptional means of action. While caution should be taken not to read too much out of the statistics recorded, these do reflect China's increasing influence over Hong Kong's internal affairs. Of the 13 cases recorded, seven have to do with issues in which China is partly involved: over the future of Hong Kong, the Daya Bay Nuclear Plant, the future Basic Law of the post-1997 Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, release of a political detainee who is a Hong Kong Chinese, and granting of residence to the "boat brides" and illegal child immigrants. The rest are mainly concerned with demands for compensation in local disputes.<sup>11</sup>

Similar to petitions to NCNA, "petitions to authorities outside Hong Kong" were also very rare (only five cases recorded) but their significance, though still very limited, should not be casually discarded. All of the petitions in the cases identified were directed to the British Parliament or individual Members of Parliament, and interestingly they were concerned with essentially issues of a non-political nature, like demands for land compensation and resettlement.<sup>12</sup>

Generally speaking, petitions to NCNA and petitions to authorities outside Hong Kong were mainly intended to express opinion and to exert pressure in an indirect way because it is not probable that either NCNA or authorities outside Hong Kong would intervene in the internal affairs of Hong Kong. The insignificant number of such petitions points to the relatively high degree of autonomy enjoyed by the local polity over domestic affairs. In terms of the results, three out of 13 cases involving petition to NCNA are recorded as fruitful, while four of five cases involving petition to authorities outside Hong Kong are fruitful.<sup>13</sup> However, in all of the fruitful cases, other modes of action had also been taken, such as petitions to the government and OMELCO, and protest and mass rally. Hence, it would be over-simplistic to point to the success of issues involving petitions to NCNA or authorities outside Hong Kong as an indication of the effectiveness of such petitions, as other variables present in the conflict might have been responsible for the outcome. On balance, it would be prudent to say that experience thus far had not proved the effectiveness of such modes of action.

"Signature campaigns" and "opinion surveys" are means to rally support (from the participants in a conflict as well as from outsiders), to

**Table 16** Distribution of Signature Campaigns and Opinion Surveys among Various Fields of Conflict

	Signature campaign	Opinion survey
Housing	8	4
Labour	4	3
Education	3	1
Politics	3	1
Transport	9	1
Public utilities	4	0
Social welfare	4	1
Urban development	0	0
Health development	1	0
Environment	4	1
Cultural and communication	1	0
Economics	1	0

provide stronger arguments in favour of the participants, to publicize the conflict as well as to exert pressure. They were used in most categories of conflicts, though on the whole rather infrequently (see Table 16).

Having identified the various modes of action and their frequency, we now examine the trend of each of these modes during the period under study (see Table 17).

Close door meeting appears to be a stable mode of action, only with a sudden drop in number in 1984 and 1985.

The number of petitions to the government in general shows a trend of gradual increase. From 1980 to 1983, such petitions appeared to be particularly numerous. In 1985, the number dropped to a slightly lower level. The reason for this cannot be clearly ascertained, but the growing political importance of a partially elected Legco since 1985 might have attracted more public petitions some of which would have otherwise been directed to the government.

Petitions to OMELCO, Legco and Exco showed an outstanding trend of increase. The number has grown tremendously since 1984. One

Table 17 Trend of Modes of Action, 1975-1986

Mode of action	'75	'76	'77	'78	'79	'80	'81	'82	'83	'84	'85	'86
Close door meeting	10	11	8	10	14	7	13	13	8	5	4	10
Petition to the Government	20	23	26	33	20	41	33	36	31	27	21	27
Petition to OMELCO, Legco or Exco	6	6	7	7	8	19	26	12	23	37	38	75
Petition to DB, UC or RC	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3	1	0	2	1
Petition to NCNA	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	2	5	2	2
Petition to authorities outside H.K.	0	0	1	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protest and mass rally	9	14	13	14	7	7	15	9	6	7	11	8
Industrial action	3	10	3	18	15	6	12	4	3	4	3	3
Signature campaign	2	2	2	1	0	3	7	8	2	3	6	8
Press conference	17	24	29	38	23	38	54	50	41	24	42	64
Opinion survey	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	0	2	1	2
Violent confrontation	2	0	1	3	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	0

Table 18 Number of Petitions to the Government, OMELCO, Legco and Exco, 1975-1986

	'75	'76	'77	'78	'79	'80	'81	'82	'83	'84	'85	'86
No. of conflict	35	54	53	76	52	68	102	87	67	70	80	136
No. of petitions to Government and/or OMELCO, Legco, Exco	26	29	33	40	28	60	59	48	54	64	59	102

does not hesitate to infer that this was related to the development of representative government in Hong Kong after the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984, which has assigned a more important role to these institutions. The population seemed to respond positively to such development, by directing more and more petitions to these representative institutions of the highest level. In fact, if we add the petitions to the government and those to OMELCO, Legco and Exco together, then we can notice their exceptionally frequent occurrence in the conflicts, especially since 1980. Table 18 shows the situation.

Such a development seems to suggest that the participants in social conflicts increasingly tended to hold the government institutions responsible for their grievances and did not hesitate to bring their case directly to the government. This is in fact a remarkable deviation from the traditional ethos of the Hong Kong Chinese who used to rely on themselves and their family to solve their problems.

Petitions to DB, UC and RC appeared to be a recognizable mode of action only after 1980. The number per year had however remained to be very small, even if under-reporting of such petitions is taken into consideration. This seems to suggest that municipal councils and district boards have largely failed (compared to the Legco) to emerge as major institutions for conflict resolution, probably due to their limited statutory powers. However, what is particularly astonishing is the disproportionately small number of petitions directed to DB, UC and RC as compared to that to OMELCO, Legco and Exco. One has to take into account that, in quite a large number of conflicts, the immediate daily life of the residents was involved and thus the problems should have been relevant to the responsibility and power of DB, UC and RC. However, people tended to bring their cases to the highest level of government institutions although the latter appear to be more remote from the ordinary people. This could imply that people are no longer afraid of government authorities or officials and dare to speak up and employ the means of the highest available level to advance their interests.

Petition to NCNA has become a recognizable mode of action only since 1983, probably a result of the upgraded profile of the NCNA in Hong Kong following Mr. Xu Jia-tun's arrival as director. Since the time frame is too short, it is not possible at present to detect the pattern and



foresee what might be the future development. However, judging from the fact that China's influence in the internal affairs of Hong Kong will certainly grow, it, therefore, would not be a surprise if more petitions would be directed to NCNA in the coming years.

Regarding petitions to authorities outside Hong Kong, no particular pattern has been observed. It seems that this mode of action can only be considered a very uncommon one and its usage depends purely on the special objectives of a social conflict.

Protests and mass rallies, although quite large in numbers, showed no particular trend. Industrial actions experienced the same situation. Therefore, it may be concluded that these modes of action *per se*, given their debatable effectiveness, did not carry any special attraction that could induce an effect of contamination to the participants of other social conflicts. Whether or not to resort to these modes depends mainly, if not solely, on the necessity, which could only be assessed according to the nature and objectives of the conflicts concerned. Therefore, no special pattern can be detected over a given time frame.

On the contrary, signature campaigns and press conferences showed a trend of steady increase in number. Press conferences have certainly become a well-established mode of action for all kinds of social conflict. Among the 12 modes of action identified here, it is the most extensively used one. A press conference is in fact a handy and the least costly means to arouse public attention, to put forward demands and to exert pressure on the authorities concerned. A press conference as a mode of action *per se* is also applicable to almost all kinds of conflicts. Signature campaigns have also been used more and more frequently and in an increasingly larger variety of conflicts. However, to organize a signature campaign involves a certain degree of mobilization and a certain amount of resources. Therefore, only conflicts with relatively larger scope or involving larger number of participants can afford to resort to this mode of action. Thus, unlike the press conference, a signature campaign cannot be easily popularized as a mode of action although its effectiveness matches or even surpasses that of a press conference.

Regarding opinion surveys, their number have remained less significant during the period. This may be related to the fact that to conduct an opinion survey is technically more complicated and, resource-wise, more

**Table 19** Distribution of Conflicts according to Fields and Modes of Action

	Housing	Labour	Educat.	Politics	Trans.	Public Utilities	Social Welfare	Urban Devel.	Health Devel.	Envir.	Culture & Econ. Commun.
Close door meeting	12	61	8	3	5	5	0	7	0	7	2
Petition to gov't	83	95	25	15	20	5	10	40	4	28	5
Petition to OMELCO, Legco or Exco	45	48	26	22	47	7	10	19	7	15	5
Petition to DB, UC, RC	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	3	0	2	1
Petition to NCNA	2	1	0	5	0	1	0	2	0	1	0
Petition to authorities outside HK	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Protest & mass rally	29	25	7	9	5	5	2	17	1	10	1
Industrial action	1	70	2	0	8	0	0	0	0	1	0
Signature campaign	8	4	3	3	9	4	4	0	1	4	1
Press conference	87	98	41	45	34	12	17	37	13	32	7
Opinion survey	4	3	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0
Violent confrontation	3	0	1	1	1	0	0	6	0	2	0

demanding than other forms of action. However, to design and carry out an opinion survey in order to extract data and arguments in favour of certain demands is also a sophisticated and innovative mode of action. Its usage reflects on the one hand a higher degree of maturity of the participants concerned and, on the other hand, the complexity of the problems in question. The opinion survey will therefore remain a distinctive and distinguished mode of action and its increase or decrease in number in the coming years may serve to reveal to a certain extent the trend of development of social conflicts.

Finally, the number of violent confrontations has remained quite stable, ranging normally from one to three cases every year. This situation is understandable because violent confrontation is a serious action and would only be resorted to in more extreme circumstances.

The last aspect that we should study concerning the modes of action is their relationship with the various kinds of social conflicts. Here, we seek to ascertain what modes of action participants would tend to take in a particular kind of social conflict. Table 19 sheds light on this.

Press conference, petition to government, and petition to OMELCO, Legco or Exco are the major modes of action in virtually all kinds of social conflicts. Apart from these three modes, each kind of social conflict shows its own preference regarding the modes of action of the second order: in housing conflicts, protest and mass rally; in labour, industrial action, close door meeting and protest and mass rally; in education, close door meeting; in political conflicts, protest and mass rally as well as petition to NCNA; in transport, signature campaign and industrial action; in public utilities, close door meeting and protest and mass rally; in urban development, protest and mass rally; in environment, protest and mass rally.

After examining the various aspects of the demands advanced by the participants in social conflicts and the modes of action they employed to put forward such demands, it seems that three preliminary concluding remarks can be made at this stage. Firstly, people do not hesitate to challenge the authority of the government and bring their grievances directly to the highest level of the polity. Petitioning the government bodies or the OMELCO, Legco and Exco has almost become a routine act for the participants in social conflict. Secondly, a greater assertion of

the civil and political rights on the part of the participants in social conflict can be clearly observed. Demands of a higher order and a more abstract nature, such as disclosure of information, participation and consultation, play an increasingly prominent role among the aims of the participants. Thirdly, people are no longer so afraid of joining public and relatively more aggressive actions in social conflicts. Petitions to government and to OMELCO, Legco and Exco, signature campaign, press conference and even protest and mass rally are well established means to have their demands met. All these seem to suggest a rather radical change from the traditional ethos which put emphasis on self-reliance, avoiding contact with government officials and respect of the existing authorities and order (Leung, 1986).

## The Participants

Who participates in the social conflict is of course a very important question in any study of social conflicts.

In this research, 11 major groups of participants have been identified. These groups, as well as the number of social conflicts in which each group had been involved, are listed in Table 20.

From the table, it can easily be observed that three groups stand out as the most actively involved in social conflicts, namely workers/unionists, residents, and community activists. Since labour and housing conflicts are the most numerous, it comes as no surprise that the presence of workers/unionists and residents are so outstanding. Regarding community activists, who are defined as social workers or voluntary workers assisting in community development and in organizing local residents, the high frequency of their participation merits a closer examination since they were not clearly identified with any special field of conflict.

**Table 20** Distribution of Participation Groups in Social Conflict

Groups	Number of social conflicts
Workers/Unionists	250
Residents	210
Public employees	70
Professionals	140
Consumers	2
Proprietors	133
Students	80
Hawkers	31
Political activists	19
Community activists	152
Church groups	30

Professionals and proprietors are the other two groups with a very strong presence. "Professionals" consisted mainly of school principals and teachers, medical doctors and nurses, medical graduates of non-Commonwealth countries and unlicensed medical practitioners, hospital staff, pharmacists, air traffic controllers, foreign lawyers, barristers, social workers and accountants whereas "proprietors" were owners of shops and restaurants located mainly in the public housing estates, of small factories, taxis, trucks and mini-buses and of residential premises as well as public works contractor.

Students' participation is also quite impressive, though not astonishing. Their major terrains of participation remain to be determined as their areas of involvement during the period appeared to be rather diversified.

Public employees, including civil servants and employees of public corporations, form another active group. This is mainly related to the large number of labour conflicts, including wage disputes, which occurred during this period.

The presence of hawkers in social conflicts is of no surprise to those who are familiar with the widespread hawking activities in Hong Kong.

**Table 21** Trend of Participation of Various Groups, 1975-1986

Participant background	'75	'76	'77	'78	'79	'80	'81	'82	'83	'84	'85	'86
Workers/Unionists	4	17	5	20	18	21	30	24	23	28	20	40
Residents	11	21	20	18	8	19	21	17	11	20	19	25
Public employees	3	3	9	9	6	4	9	5	4	5	4	9
Professional	4	8	7	5	3	11	10	13	16	12	24	27
Consumers	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Proprietors	9	13	10	13	10	10	15	12	10	12	11	8
Students	6	2	6	5	5	9	3	9	10	10	9	6
Hawkers	4	3	2	4	1	1	5	0	5	2	2	2
Political activists	1	2	1	1	0	2	0	0	1	0	4	7
Community activists	1	2	4	5	8	11	11	12	11	24	24	39
Church groups	0	0	0	1	2	2	2	2	4	8	6	3

On the contrary, the participation of church groups in social conflicts, which is by no means negligible (30 cases), should warrant closer examination. Similarly, the 19 cases in which political activists were involved should also be studied in some detail even though the number is not outstanding. Finally, with only two cases of conflict, consumers, who remain essentially a disorganized grouping in Hong Kong, do not pose as an important social force to be reckoned with.

From the above discussion, two points merit to be noted. The first is the diversified background of participants. Although we regroup them into 11 major categories, they in fact include people from many walks of life. This implies that conflict could arise from a large spectrum of social strata or sectors. Secondly, the presence of the participants who are generally regarded as belonging to a middle class background, such as teachers, civil servants and owners of small premises, is quite noticeable. This could be a consequence of the socio-economic development of Hong Kong during this period. What remains to be seen is how these various groups were involved in social conflicts, and this is the focus of the following paragraphs.

Regarding the trend of participation of the various participant groups during this period, it is instructive to know whether the participation of a particular group began at a certain time, whether some groups were relatively more active in some years than others, and whether their participation tended to grow or to diminish in scale over time. Table 21 sheds light on this situation.

The trends of participation of the above-mentioned 11 groups can be classified into four types.

- (a) *Stable or stagnant participation*: The presence of proprietors and consumers tended to be stable, or stagnant, without any significant variation during the whole period.
- (b) *Fluctuating participation*: Three groups, namely residents, public employees and hawkers, were involved in social conflicts in a rather unstable pattern. Very active in some years, they became very inactive in other years. Therefore, no recognizable trend can be established.
- (c) *Increasing participation mixed with fluctuation*: This is the case of

the workers/unionists. Their presence in social conflicts tended to increase on the whole, but with obvious fluctuation, which renders it difficult to tell whether they will be more active or not in the coming years.

- (d) *Increasing participation*: The participation of five groups tended to increase steadily, namely professionals, students, political activists, community activists, and church groups. The increase of the presence of the students is quite slight while that of the other four groups is considered more impressive. Political activists appeared to be particularly active since 1985 and this should be related to the development of representative government in Hong Kong and specially to the introduction of elections to the Legco. The church groups, with their first involvement in 1978, had also become very active since the 1980s.

Next, we turn to study the fields of activity in which each group was involved (see Table 22).

Workers/unionists were, understandably, most active in conflicts of labour nature (155 cases). In addition, their presence in transport and political conflicts was also impressive during this period (respectively 49 and 11 cases). In fact, the only field in which they had no participation at all was social welfare.

Public employees were again most active in labour conflicts (56 cases), especially those concerning wages. However, their presence in political conflicts (6 cases), though quite moderate, should not go unnoticed.

Residents were involved intensively in housing conflicts (107 cases), which is quite logical. They were also very active in urban development conflicts (36 cases), environmental conflicts (29 cases), transport conflicts (16 cases) and political conflicts (6 cases). There was in fact only one field in which they were not involved (labour).

Professionals were more active in educational conflicts (41 cases) and this is probably because of the inclusion of teachers in this group. Their presence in labour conflicts (23 cases), political conflicts (22 cases) and social welfare conflicts (11 cases, concerning mainly social workers) was also quite impressive. What is particularly remarkable is the fact that

**Table 22** Involvement of the Participant Groups in Various Fields of Conflicts

Participant background	Housing	Labour	Educat.	Politics	Trans.	Public Utilities	Social Welfare	Urban Devel.	Health Devel.	Envir.	Culture & Econ. Commun.
Workers/Unionists	3	155	3	11	49	7	0	4	1	6	3
Residents	107	0	2	6	16	4	3	36	3	29	1
Public employees	0	56	1	6	2	0	0	0	2	0	1
Professionals	7	23	41	22	3	6	11	1	9	6	6
Consumers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Proprietors	28	2	0	5	37	6	0	38	2	6	0
Students	10	9	30	13	5	2	2	1	1	1	1
Hawkers	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	0	20	1
Political activists	1	1	1	11	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Community activists	39	21	15	23	16	6	13	3	3	7	4
Church groups	7	2	1	6	4	3	0	2	1	1	2
Unknown	1	0	0	3	2	0	0	1	0	1	0

professionals were involved in all of the 12 fields of conflict identified in this study. Such a situation is due to the heterogeneous nature of this group but it also shows that increasingly in Hong Kong, no category of social conflict can escape from the involvement in some way of professionals.

Proprietors participated more actively in urban development conflicts (38 cases), housing conflicts (28 cases) and transport conflicts (27 cases). This can be explained by the fact that owners of small premises and maxicab/mini-buses constituted the major components of the group of proprietors.

Students were most active in educational conflicts (30 cases). The other major fields capturing their presence were politics (13 cases), housing (10 cases) and labour (9 cases). In fact, students (mainly college students) participated in every field of conflict identified, although the number of cases in which they participated within each field was generally rather small. This is understandable because student organizations are characterised by their general alertness to social problems that surround them as well as by their willingness to take part and to challenge the establishment.

On the contrary, the presence of hawkers was largely restricted to conflicts of environmental nature (20 out of 31 cases) which has the greatest effect on their business (in hawker control cases). Their participation in other social conflicts was either non-existent or negligible.

The same situation also applies to the case of the political activists. Their activity centered on conflicts of political nature (11 out of 19 cases).

Community activists were present in every field of conflict. Their participation in the following five fields was particularly impressive: housing (39 cases), politics (23 cases), labour (21 cases), transport (16 cases) and education (15 cases). Their involvement in other fields was less remarkable but by no means insignificant. Community activists, together with professionals and students, constitute the three omnipresent groups in social conflicts.

Finally, it is worth noting that church groups were involved in all the identified fields of social conflict, except that of social welfare. Their participation was also quite evenly distributed among the various fields. This, while suggesting that local church groups had become gradually

more socially involved, also indicates that they were not aligned to any particular sector of interest in society.

When we look at the configuration of conflict participation by various groups, two trends stand out. In the first place, each group, with the exception of hawkers and consumers, participates in quite a large variety of fields. This seems to imply an increasing degree of general social alertness and consciousness among the people of different walks of life. Their focus of concern has been enlarged and diversified and no longer concentrates strictly on the field directly related to their profession or daily business. In the second place, political conflicts constitute an important or, at least, a non-negligible field of participation to all the groups except hawkers and consumers. Such a situation, combined with the steady increase of political conflicts during this period as highlighted in the previous paragraphs, indicates an evident tendency of politicization of society. Involvement in political issues has become an increasingly prominent feature for all major groups in Hong Kong.

Before we go further on the question of participants in social conflict, it is important to highlight three aspects considered so far. The first is the diversified background of the participant groups. The increasingly active role of the participants with a middle class background is particularly noticeable. Secondly, we also observe the emergence of several groups which are, on the one hand, quite active in almost all kinds of social conflict, and, on the other hand, are not related *à priori* to any special field of social or economic activity. They included students, church groups and community activists. These groups could play the role of agitator or promoter in social conflicts. Their presence during this period tended to increase steadily. Thirdly, we can also notice a phenomenon of "cross participation" which means that most of the participant groups identified tended to take part in quite a large spectrum of social conflicts. This reflects a higher degree of general social awareness of the population.

Another important question to be addressed is how the participants of social conflicts had organized themselves. In this study, six forms of organization have been identified and sometimes more than one form of organization appeared in a single conflict. These six forms of organization as well as their respective number of occurrence are as follows:

**Table 23** Distribution of Forms of Organization

Form of organization	Number of cases
Loose group of individuals	462
Spontaneously formed organizations	89
Single issue standing groups	193
Comprehensive organizations	48
Community groups	321
Joint groups and organizations	81

Among these six forms, the first one can hardly be regarded as a proper form of organization. It denotes in fact a non-organized and spontaneous way of reacting to a conflict on the part of the participants concerned. It may also imply that the conflict in question is generally regarded by the participants as not very serious and/or can be solved in a short time so that no organization of a relatively long duration is needed. The number of cases in which loose groups of individuals are involved, which is the highest among the six (462), should not surprise us because conflicts of a minor nature or of a shorter duration are much more numerous than the others. The second form, spontaneously formed organizations, also conveys a certain sense of passivity and transiency. It is in fact a form of organization of a lower level. The third, fourth and fifth forms could be regarded as being of a higher order because organizations of a permanent nature which have existed before the outbreak of the conflict are involved. These organizations play either a leading or a supportive role in the conflicts. Their presence thus may imply a higher degree of complexity of the conflict at issue. Together, these three forms occupy an extremely prominent position in terms of the number of cases involved. The sixth form is of equal importance but in a slightly different sense. It indicates the extensiveness rather than the permanence of the organizations concerned. A preliminary interpretation one can make of the above pattern is that participants are in general well organized when they are involved in social conflicts. In the majority of cases, participants are grouped in some form of organization. The intervention of pre-

**Table 24** Trend of the Forms of Organization, 1975-1986

Form of organization	'75	'76	'77	'78	'79	'80	'81	'82	'83	'84	'85	'86
Loose group of individuals	24	38	32	47	35	37	59	46	26	32	33	53
Spontaneously formed organizations	6	3	8	3	4	10	4	8	6	10	8	19
Single issue standing groups	11	3	0	5	13	28	16	20	19	24	18	36
Comprehensive organizations	1	1	1	2	1	2	2	0	0	6	12	20
Community groups	7	21	31	26	12	14	37	33	33	22	39	46
Joint groups & organizations	1	1	2	2	2	3	8	7	11	15	13	16

existing organizations is also a distinct feature.

The second aspect to be studied regarding the problem of organization is the trend of evolution during this period. Here, we are interested to know whether the participants are getting more organized or otherwise. Table 24 sheds light on this question and gives rise to two observations.

Firstly, the number of cases in which loose groups of individuals were involved appeared to be quite stable from year to year, although there was some fluctuation in 1981 and 1986.

Secondly, the number of cases in the other five forms of organization had on the whole increased during this period. The increase in the cases involving spontaneously formed organizations (i.e. those formed specially for the cause) was not as substantial as that in the other forms of organization. The category of comprehensive organizations (namely, organizations which are concerned with a variety of social and political issues) has experienced a particularly impressive increase since 1984.

From the above analysis, it seems reasonable to conclude that participants were getting more and more organized when involved in social conflicts. Creating a more solid organization and/or the involvement of the preexisting social organizations in social conflicts have become a common feature of conflict articulation.

On this general question of participation and organization, a related dimension is the involvement of members of representative institutions. Such an involvement can be regarded as quite significant because there is a multitude of assistance that those members can provide, such as advice on the course of action, relaying demands to relevant government departments, exerting formal pressure and/or sanction on the authorities, and enhancing the importance of the conflict concerned in the eyes of the public and the mass media. Hence, their involvement in conflicts is usually much valued by the participants although sometimes they only acted as conciliators rather than as plain supporters.

During the period under study, members of representative institutions were recorded to have been present in only a very small proportion of conflicts (80 out of 882 conflicts or less than 10%). The following table shows the distribution.

**Table 25** Presence of Members of Representative Institutions in Social Conflicts

Presence of	Number of social conflicts*
Legislative Councillors	5
Urban Councillors	38
Regional Councillors	1
Members of District Boards	49

\* Some conflicts involved the participation of members of more than one representative institution.

It is curious to note that all the five cases involving Legislative Councillors were recorded in 1986. This was probably due to the introduction of elected members to the Legco in 1985, some of whom had close links with community organizations. Although the Legco (along with OMELCO and Exco) formed the target of a large number of petitions every year, its members hardly took part in social conflicts.

The situation concerning the members of the UC and the DBs is quite the opposite. Although these two institutions received every year only a small number of petitions, their members played quite an active role in social conflicts. The presence of the members of UC is particularly impressive in conflicts of housing, political and urban development nature. Members of the DBs were more active in conflicts of housing, political, environment and transport nature. The participants from the UC and DBs were mostly elected members rather than appointed members and usually had a strong grassroots background. By taking part in social conflicts, they were also playing up their role as champions of social and political rights in the eyes of their electorate.

The contrast of the position of the Legco in social conflicts as opposed to the UC/RC and DBs can be seen in two aspects.

Firstly, the UC/RC and DBs had clearly failed to catch up with Legco, particularly after the introduction of elected seats in the latter in 1985, as targets of petitions during social conflicts. This may be due to their limited powers and political influence, which had rendered them not too effective as institutions for conflict resolution in the eyes of the

public.

Secondly, UC/RC and DB members were in general much more actively involved as participants in social conflicts than their Legco counterparts. This may be partly due to their stronger grassroots links as explained above, and partly due to Legco members viewing their roles more as problem solvers and arbitrators in social conflicts, hence being reluctant to get involved as conflict participants for fear of compromising their preferred roles.

## Responses and Outcomes

Before discussion of the outcomes of social conflicts surveyed in this study, it is necessary to reemphasize the limitations of the methodology which were pointed out earlier. Since the data are solely derived from newspaper reports, it is possible that those responses to the conflicts which were not reported in the newspapers are missed out, and it seems that this is the situation for a considerable number of social conflicts. This may be because responses were not given in a public manner and hence not reported. It may also be due to the fact that responses came so long after the conflict had taken place that these no longer retained news value. Therefore, the volume of responses that constitutes the basis of analysis in this research may be only a portion of the actual volume. Of course, additional data can be collected from other sources in order to establish a more complete picture. However, such undertaking would weaken our criterion of relying on newspaper reporting as indicator of the importance or "publicness" of the conflicts. Therefore, we shall make the following analysis by using the same set of data as in the preceding paragraphs.

The first, and also the most impressive, finding regarding responses, is that the majority of the conflicts (around 68%) did not receive any publicly known response. Also, the percentage of such conflicts without known response remains considerably stable during the whole period under study, ranging from 55 per cent to 77 per cent. Of this large proportion of conflicts without responses being recorded, we can surmise that some actually did receive no responses at all while others had their responses missed out by the newspapers for one reason or another. Our



methodology does not allow us to distinguish between these two kinds of conflict without known responses.

With regard to those conflicts with known responses, they can be grouped under six categories: response or intervention from government departments or equivalent administrative bodies, debate or question in UC or RC, debate or question in the Legco, public response from the central administration, setting up of public enquiry commission or working party, and response or intervention from authorities outside Hong Kong. These categories will be examined one by one below in order to ascertain their relative weight as well as their variation during the period.

- (a) *Response or intervention from government departments*: This is the most extensive form of response. Altogether 217 such responses or interventions have been recorded in the period. The yearly number shows no particular pattern of distribution. In terms of the fields in which this form of responses is observed, six stand out very prominently: labour conflicts (72 responses), housing conflicts (49 responses), urban development conflicts (27 responses), environment conflicts (18 responses), transport conflicts (15 responses) and education conflicts (11 responses). The number of responses in other fields is constantly less than ten. Judging from its nature and comparing it to other forms of response, response from government departments can be considered as the response of the lowest possible level. Various government departments all have their well-defined scope of responsibility, and conflicts that fall within its scope are first tackled by the relevant department concerned. It is only when a conflict exceeds a departmental scope, or when the solution to a conflict exceeds the power perimeter of the department, that other forms of response or intervention become necessary. Therefore, it is perfectly understandable that the number of responses from government departments far exceeds the number of the other forms of responses combined. Regarding the six fields with the largest number of responses from government departments, we should note that, in the first place, five out of these six are exactly the fields where social conflicts had occurred most frequently (except urban development). Secondly, there is a well-established government de-

partment in each of these fields. Hence, it is of no surprise that responses from government departments turned out to be the most extensively used form of response in general, as well as the most frequently used form of response in the more conflict-ridden fields in particular.

- (b) *Debate or question in UC and RC*: Only two such debates or questions are recorded during this period, respectively in 1975 and 1978. They both concerned the environmental problem, which falls within the scope of responsibility of the UC (the RC was not yet established then). As pointed out previously when analysing the modes of action in social conflicts, the UC and RC both played only a very minor role as the targets to which the participants would address their demands. Therefore, it is not surprising that they also needed to respond only rarely. By the 1980s the Legco had clearly become a much more important institution of public debate.
- (c) *Debate or question in the Legco*: Altogether 40 such debates/questions or similar interventions are recorded during the period, the second largest number after that of responses from government departments.<sup>14</sup> The yearly variation shows that there is a steady increase in the 1980s. Every field of social conflict except environment had received some response of this form and the following three are the most prominent ones in terms of number: labour (11 debates or questions), politics (7 debates or questions), housing (6 debates or questions). What should particularly be noted here is the fact that political conflicts received disproportionately more attention in the Legco than the conflicts of another nature. The reason for this may be two-fold. On the one hand, Legislative Councillors may be more alert to such conflicts. On the other hand, political conflicts may not be easily tackled by the existing government departments.
- (d) *Public response from central administration*: This form of response is accorded to conflicts of such seriousness or importance that the government decides it should react directly and publicly, usually by way of top level reply or intervention. Altogether 16 such cases

were recorded during the period. The very uneven distribution of these 16 cases over the years indicates that this is an unusual way of response which will be employed only when particularly necessary. Also, it is mainly applied to conflicts of political nature (7 out of 16 responses).

- (e) *Setting up public enquiry body*: This is in fact a form of response to more complicated conflicts. It may also be used as a tactic to cool down public emotions over controversial issues. During this period, only three cases involving the setting up of some form of public enquiry body were recorded, two in connection with civil service pay dispute (1976 and 1977) and the third over the "Precious Blood Golden Jubilee School" issue (1977).
- (f) *Response or intervention from authorities outside Hong Kong*: Six such responses are recorded during this period, two in 1977 and one each in 1980, 1982, 1983 and 1986. These concentrate in three kinds of conflict: politics (4), urban development (2) and education (1). Of the six responses, one came from the authorities in China. The rest were either in the form of questions in the British Parliament or a formal response from the British government.

From the above pattern of responses in conflicts, four concluding remarks can be drawn:

- (a) If the government is willing to react to a social conflict, the usual way is to respond through its various departments.
- (b) Debates, questions or other similar forms of intervention by the Legco in relation to social conflicts seem to have gained importance. Conflicts of a political nature figure prominently in this kind of response.
- (c) Besides the above two forms of response, all other forms can only be regarded as irregular or exceptional which will be employed only when grave or special conditions prevail.
- (d) Conflicts of a political nature seem to have received more special treatment from political authorities of one kind or another than other kinds of conflict: seven debates or questions in the Legco, seven public responses from the central administration, and four in-

terventions from authorities outside Hong Kong.

Having examined the responses and interventions, we now turn to study the outcomes of the social conflicts during this period. Here, three categories of outcome can be identified:

- (a) *Unknown*: The outcome of a social conflict is classified as "unknown" if no relevant information is found in the newspapers. This is in fact the situation for the majority of social conflicts. During the period, 73 per cent of all the social conflicts have an unknown outcome. This does not necessarily mean that these conflicts had no outcome at all. It is possible that some did have tangible outcomes although those outcomes did not interest or did not reach the newspapers, and as a result were not reported. It is therefore necessary to admit that if a more complete picture of conflict outcomes is to be established, other sources of information should be searched, but this was beyond the scope and the purpose of the present research. The unknown cases recorded are thus disproportionately more numerous than they should actually have been.
- (b) *Non-fruitful*: If the demand(s) in a social conflict is/are totally rejected, then this conflict is regarded as "non-fruitful." The overall known non-fruitful rate is 9.6 per cent, ranging from 18.3 per cent in housing conflicts (the highest) to 3.6 per cent in social welfare disputes. As a large number of cases with unknown outcome has been recorded, some of those may have in fact been non-fruitful cases.
- (c) *Fruitful*: If the demand(s) in a social conflict is/are partially or wholly met and/or has led to policy, legislative or institutional changes, then this conflict is considered as "fruitful." The percentage of fruitful conflicts recorded is generally quite low, ranging from 5.6 per cent (in health development) to at the most 30 per cent (in public utilities) of the total number of conflicts in each field. The following table gives an overall picture. The average fruitful rate across all fields is 17.6 per cent.

**Table 26** Distribution of Conflicts with Fruitful Outcome

Nature of conflict	Total number	No. of fruitful cases	Percentage
Housing	169	15	8.9
Labour	230	62	26.9
Education	75	10	13.3
Politics	67	6	8.9
Transport	81	12	14.8
Public utilities	20	6	30.0
Social welfare	28	2	7.1
Urban development	77	20	25.9
Health development	18	1	5.6
Environment	65	12	18.5
Culture and communication	13	2	15.4
Economics	20	4	20.0
Unclassified	19	3	15.8

From the above data, several points can be observed.

In the first place, three kinds of social conflict enjoy a relatively higher rate of known fruitful outcome. They are respectively public utilities conflicts, labour conflicts, and urban development conflicts. Upon going further into the details, it is found that the nature of the conflict plays quite an important role in determining the outcome. For example, among the six fruitful conflicts concerning public utilities, four are about the charges (fares) of public utilities. Among the 62 fruitful conflicts about labour, 37 concern wages, and 30 concern labour benefits (a few of those conflicts involved multiple issues). Among the 20 fruitful cases in urban development, all concern land resumption and redevelopment. This seems to suggest that if a social conflict generates demands of a more material or practical nature, of more concern to the daily living of the participants, then it has a greater chance to have some fruitful result.

Secondly, housing conflicts have the highest rate of known non-fruitful outcome. Most of the non-fruitful cases concerned public housing

provision and allocation and public housing rent (together constituting 19 cases or 76% of the total number of known non-fruitful housing cases). This may indicate that disputes over policies with wider implications tended to find it more difficult in obtaining positive outcome from the government authorities.

Thirdly, political conflicts, although they received more attention from the administration, did not enjoy a high rate of fruitful outcome. Only six conflicts out of a total of 67 (9%) had fruitful results. Further details show that within this kind of conflict, issues concerning constitutional matters, government performance, police power and immigration simply failed to draw any known fruitful outcome at all. This may imply that demands which are more abstract in nature or demands which directly challenge the authority of the government are not so susceptible to positive results.

Finally, the recorded statistics indicate that the percentage of social conflicts which had fruitful results throughout the period tends to be rather low, only 155 conflicts out of 882, or 17.6 per cent. This means that on average not even one conflict out of five can expect to obtain some positive outcome. Even if the element of under-reporting by newspapers has been taken into account, the fruitful rate is still expected to be on the low side.

## Concluding Remarks

The discussion in the previous sections has highlighted the major dimensions of the pattern of social conflicts in Hong Kong during the period 1975-1986. Several general interpretations can thus be drawn.

### *(a) Configuration of social conflicts in Hong Kong*

The main areas of social conflict in Hong Kong during the period 1975 to 1986 are labour, housing, transport, education, politics and environment. Labour conflicts, although an important form of social conflict in any industrial society, have not registered any significant upward trend. The same with housing conflicts, which emerged as a hot area in the mid-1970s, but have since been rather stable in terms of occurrence level. In

other words, these two areas have not become more “conflictual” over the years. On the other hand, a significant increase in the number of social conflicts is seen in the transport, education, environmental and political fields. The fact that these have emerged as potential conflict areas may serve to indicate that issues apart from basic material welfare have gradually gained importance in terms of social conflict. As Lau and Kuan have found out, while people in Hong Kong favour the government’s economic philosophy of “positive non-intervention,” they are nonetheless eager to see a more active role played by the government in the social arena and in the provision of public services (Lau & Kuan, 1989).

That people have become more willing to agitate, by way of conflict, for an improvement in the quality of life and in their political and civil rights, also points to the rising degree of social awareness and sense of political competence of the population. This growing social activism is further borne out by a much higher rate of incidence in social conflicts in the 1980s compared with the previous decade (by over 60%).

Most of the social conflicts studied are sectoral or localized ones, indicating that sectional and local interests have increasingly been articulated within the social arena, requiring responses or interventions by public authorities. The number of territory-wide conflicts is on the rise, implying an increasing trend of social mobilization.

In short, more issues are likely than in the past to be susceptible to articulation in the form of a social conflict targetted at the polity. Matters which were previously considered as belonging to the “private” or “family” domain (e.g. in education and transport) are now regarded as a proper “public” concern and being articulated in such a context. This change of issue definition and, as a result, social demands, would have important implications on the role of government as perceived by the public, as well as on its responsibilities and the political challenge it faces.

As regards the demands in social conflicts, while those seeking short-term benefits and remedies (like immediate provision, immediate prevention and immediate compensation) still constitute the majority of demands (851 cases), those related to longer-term rectification (including policy, administrative and legislative modifications) are also gaining in importance (518 cases). Of particular significance is the fact that the latter types of demands have been on the rise in the 1980s, in conjunction with

those demands for consultation and participation, and for the right to information. As participants look to longer term institutional changes and non-material rights, they are also more likely to be “assertive” *vis-à-vis* the government authorities in recognition and furtherance of their civil and political rights.

Press conferences and open petitions to government and representative institutions are the most commonly used forms of demand articulation, showing that conflict participants are quite prepared to “open up” to the public in the conduct of conflict. Nevertheless, among the various modes of action taken, those of a peaceful and conciliatory nature (such as petitions) are still predominant, whereas those of an aggressive or confrontational character play only a minor role. There is also no sign that the latter types of actions are on the increase. It is also of significance that only one out of three labour conflicts had resulted in industrial action. On the whole, it can be said that while people in Hong Kong have become more prepared to bring issues into the open as social conflicts, they do not necessarily choose confrontational means for conflict articulation.

While workers/unionists, residents, professionals and proprietors are the major groups of participants in social conflicts for good reasons (since most social conflicts like labour and housing conflicts are concerned with sectional and local interests), it is important to note that another significant group is that of community activists who are not clearly identified with a specific field of conflict. Of equal importance is the increasing trend of participation by students, political activists, community activists and church groups, all of whom can be generally regarded as not-for-self-interest groups. Their willingness to take part in social conflicts on others’ causes may point to the growing, though only gradual, sense of social right and justice being recognized in social conflicts. This is certainly a sign of social awareness.

It is also remarkable that participants in social conflicts are getting more and more organized. While loose groups of individuals remain a common form of organization, they have given way, in terms of overall significance, to the form that involves some kind of more permanent or established groupings. Indeed, community groups and single issue standing groups have featured rather prominently in the social conflicts studied

*(b) Reaction by the government and representative institutions*

Because of under-reporting of responses and outcomes in social conflicts by newspapers from which data for this study are derived, it is not possible to gain a very accurate and comprehensive picture of the pattern of responses by those in the polity to demands in social conflicts. However, available findings reveal that the Legco has emerged as an important institution for public debate or questioning on issues of conflict. Though Legco responses cannot be compared with departmental responses which are by far the most common form of response from the public authorities, there is a tendency for conflicts of a political nature to result either in a Legco debate or question, or alternatively, in a formal response from the central administration.

In this connection, it is also observed from the study that both the municipal councils and the district boards have largely failed to emerge as important institutions for the resolution of social conflicts, probably due to their limited statutory powers. Their function in essence rests mainly with relaying complaints or demands to government departments concerned and this can in no way satisfy the conflict participants. Once Legco has attained some degree of representation in 1985, it is but natural that it would outshine the regional and district bodies as the representative institution that counts. The latter's political importance is only realized in the form of some of their elected members being actively involved in social conflicts as participants and organizers rather than as solvers.

In the social conflicts for which responses and outcomes can be ascertained, it appears that those conflicts articulating demands of a more material or practical nature are more likely to bring about a fruitful outcome, whether in terms of fully or partially met demands. Cases concerning political issues or matters that directly challenge government authority or government policies with wider implications tended to attract a low fruitful rate. This may be due to either the government not prepared as yet to concede to the people on matters over powers and rights or major policies, or the issue being so complicated that even the government by itself is unable to provide a suitable solution even if it had wanted to (e.g. over the Daya Bay Nuclear Plant issue which involved a government authority outside Hong Kong's jurisdiction, i.e. the People's Republic of China).

*(c) Overall impact*

The observable pattern of social conflicts in Hong Kong during the period 1975 to 1986 has definitely pointed to an increasing trend of social conflicts which have extended to issues relating to quality of life and civil and political rights. More social conflicts are resorted to for the articulation of sectoral and local interests, with the demands increasingly aiming at longer-term institutional changes and non-material rights. Means used for articulation are peaceful and conciliatory, but also predominantly "public" in nature, hence reinforcing the socialness of the issues in conflict. Besides, participants are getting more and better organized. The presence of more permanent groups of one form or another is becoming a significant feature of social conflicts.

All these developments may serve to redefine the evolving interface between the polity and society, with more and more problems being moved from the non-public domain into the public arena, posing as social issues demanding government action and accommodation. Such a shift in government—people relationship has certainly involved and further instigated a change of values, expectations and behaviours on both sides. While this may lead to a growing sense of dependence on government policies and actions, it may also result in greater expectations and demands being imposed on those in government. Hence any deficit in government output in response to people's input may become a cause of conflict in itself. The fact that people look to government for problem solution also means that people will of necessity get involved in "politics."

The present study has found that people in Hong Kong are becoming relatively more socially aware, rights-conscious and increasingly susceptible to organized articulation of their wants and demands. But as available data show, the government's response has not been sufficiently accommodating. The discrepancy is particularly evident in political conflicts over constitutional matters and civil and political rights. This state of affairs is likely to be a potential area of social conflict and political instability in the years to come. Indeed, as people engage politically in social actions seeking government attention and solution, they are bound at the same time to be seeking to redefine government authority *vis-à-vis* their own, and this unavoidably would lead to changes, both in the

political infrastructure which captures that relationship as well as in the substantive policies giving effect to the expression of that relationship.

This present study stops at the year 1986. Hence observations made may have been only transitory, subject to further developments since then. The study on the pattern of social conflicts in Hong Kong may be rendered more meaningful and comprehensive if regular follow-up studies, say at five-year intervals, are conducted to enable longer-term trends to be established and analysed.

## Notes

1. In the original plan, the number of daily newspapers to be scanned was three. Besides *South China Morning Post* and *Ming Pao* whose readership comprises mainly the well-off and middle class and the intellectuals, it was planned to include a third one which appeals basically to the lower and working class. *Sing Pao* (《成報》) was thus selected. However, collection of this newspaper could not be found in any library and the publisher of *Sing Pao* refused to let us read and scan its own collection. Since no substitute to *Sing Pao* could be found, it was finally decided that only two newspapers would be scanned. In fact, the choice of newspapers for the present study was quite limited because not many newspapers maintained a regular presence throughout the period under study and among those which appeared without interruption, only a handful could be considered as providing less biased and sufficient information.
2. Relying on newspaper reports to collect the raw data for the study of social conflicts is a commonly used method. For example, Lui and Kung employed a similar approach in their study of conflicts involving urban inhabitants in Hong Kong, although their method was less elaborate and the scope of their study was much smaller than ours (Lui & Kung, 1985).
3. These criteria basically meet the requirements of the well established definitions of “social conflict” (Oberschall, 1978).
4. Conflicts which could not be classified into any of the 12 fields

were put into the category “unclassified” but there were altogether only 19 such unclassified conflicts during this period, representing 2.2 per cent of the total number of conflicts. Therefore, the overall analysis would not be affected by the exclusion of such unclassified conflicts.

5. For details of these “issue” areas, please see the appendix.
6. The classification scheme of the “nature” of social conflicts plays an extremely important role in this study because it serves as the underlying variable to be used to analyse the other aspects, as we shall see in the following paragraphs. Our scheme was based, in the beginning, on a logical classification of the major activity areas of our society. This preliminary scheme then was improved and enriched during the process of newspaper reports scanning. The 12 “fields” thus established are mutually exclusive on the whole and can accommodate most of the social conflicts recorded. As a comparison, we can perhaps match our scheme with the one Zhang uses in a similar study on Taiwan. Zhang classifies Taiwan’s social conflicts and movements into eight categories: consumers, labourers, peasants, environment, indigenous inhabitants, women, students, teachers (Zhang, 1989, pp.11-18). Zhang’s scheme is a mixture of activity areas and participants. It may reflect Taiwan’s situation but is certainly not suitable for the Hong Kong context.
7. Nine demand categories were identified: immediate provision, immediate prevention, immediate compensation, disclosure of information, participation and consultation, implementation and enforcement, policy modification, legislative modification, administrative or implementational modification.
8. For details, please see the appendix.
9. It should be noted that the methodology used in this study allows each conflict to involve more than one issue within each field.
10. In the study of social conflicts, modes of action, or forms of collective action, constitute a very important sphere of investigation. In fact, as time goes, there would be a metamorphosis of modes of ac-

tion (Tilly, 1981, pp.19-23). The 12 modes of action that we have identified here are mainly broad categories. Each category could be further divided into sub-modes if a more detailed study is required.

11. These 13 cases are:

- former Choi Lee construction workers pleading for severance pay;
- Kowloon Bay transit camp inhabitants refusing to move to Tai Po;
- student and political groups petitioning on the future of Hong Kong;
- Yuen Long food stall operators demanding compensation;
- taxi drivers striking over sharp increase of licence fees;
- student and various pressure groups petitioning on the Basic Law;
- Tin Shui Wai villagers demanding higher compensation rate for land resumption;
- student and political groups petitioning on the future of Hong Kong;
- public plea for early release of Lau Shan Ching, a Hong Kong Chinese detained in Mainland China;
- the 14 "boat brides" issue;
- parents of illegal child immigrants pleading for amnesty;
- Daya Bay nuclear power plant controversy;
- Tsimshatsui four streets redevelopment plan.

12. These five cases are:

- Precious Blood Golden Jubilee students sit-in protest;
- Sailaukok residents against land resumption;
- compulsory retirement of corrupt policemen;
- reopening of Lutheran primary school;
- Tai Wor Ping resite area workshop owners demanding resettlement.

13. The fruitful cases are:

- taxi drivers striking over sharp increase of licence fees;
- Daya Bay nuclear power plant controversy;
- Tsimshatsui four streets redevelopment plan;
- Precious Blood Golden Jubilee students sit-in protest;
- Sailaukok residents against land resumption;
- reopening of Lutheran primary school;
- Tai Wor Ping resite area workshop owners demanding resettlement.

14. For the sake of broad categorization, in-house investigation conducted by Legco members has also been included in this category.

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## Appendix:

### Coding Manual of Social Conflict in Hong Kong: 1975-86

#### 1. Basic Information

Reference year/ Case number/ Matching year and case number

#### 2. Nature

Nature of Issue (max: 1)		Issue (max: 3)	
Housing	01	Public housing provision	01
		Public housing allocation (incl. location)	02
		Public housing rent	03
		Public housing management (incl. compensation)	04
		Public housing structural safety	05
		Squatter control and maintenance	06
		Private housing rent control	07
		Private housing management	08
		Private housing structural safety	09
Labour	02	Wage	10
		Labour benefit	11
		Health hazard	12
		Employment opportunity	13
		Union rights	14
Education	03	Education provision	15
		Education standard and curriculum	16
		Education examination	17
		Education subvention	18
		Education fee and charge	19
		Teacher	20



**2. Nature (continued)**

Nature of Issue (max: 1)		Issue (max: 3)	
Politics	04	Constitutional matter (incl. basic law, govt. structure)	21
		Government performance	22
		Political and civil/human rights	23
		Judicial system	24
		Law and order	25
		Police power	26
		Immigration	27
		Transport	05
		Public transport service standard	29
		Public transport fee and charge	30
		Government regulation on public transport	31
		Transport control and safety	32
Public utilities other than public transport (water, power, postal)	06	Public utilities provision	33
		Public utilities service standard	34
		Public utilities charge	35
		Government regulation on public utilities	36
		Public utilities safety	37
Social welfare	07	Public assistance	38
		Welfare service other than public assistance	39
		Welfare service standard	40
		Welfare personnel	41
		Welfare subvention	42
		Welfare fee and charge	43
Urban development	08	Land resumption and redevelopment	44
Health development	09	Health care service provision	45
		Health care service standard	46
		Health care personnel	47

**2. Nature (continued)**

Nature of Issue (max: 1)		Issue (max: 3)	
Environment	10	Health care subvention	48
		Health care fee and charge	49
		Pollution	50
		Hawker control	51
		Neighbourhood quality	52
Cultural and communication	11	Film and TV programme censorship	53
		Publication control	54
Economics	12	Taxation	55
		Consumer protection	56
Unclassified	13	Others (specifications needed)	99

**3. Scope**

Major Scope of Issue (max: 1)		Detail Scope of Issue (max: 3)	
Territory-wide	1		
		Local	2
Sectoral	3	Regional	01
		District	02
		Vicinity	03
		Workers	04
		Residents	05
		Public employees	06
		Professionals	07
		Consumers	08
		Proprietors	09
		Students	10
		Hawkers	11
Other social groups (specifications needed)	99		

#### 4. Demand

##### Demand Formulated (max: 9)

Immediate provision (incl. salary adjustment)	1
Immediate prevention (e.g. freeze action)	2
Immediate compensation	3
Disclosure of information	4
Participation and consultation	5
Implementation and enforcement	6
Policy modification	7
Legislative modification	8
Administrative or implementational modification	9

#### 5. Duration

##### Duration (max: 1)

Brief (less than 1 week)	1
Medium (1 week to 1 month)	2
Long (1 month to 6 months)	3
Prolonged (over 6 months)	4
Unknown	u

#### 6. Organization

##### Organization Involved (max: 5)

Loose group of individuals for the cause	1
Spontaneously formed organization for the cause	2
Single issue standing group	3
Comprehensive organization	4
Community group	5
Joint committee of groups and organizations	6

#### 7. Participant

##### A. Number (max: 1)

Less than 10	1
10 to 50	2
51 to 100	3
101 to 500	4
501 to 1,000	5
Over 1,000	6
Unknown	u

##### B. Background (max: 4)

Workers/Unionists	01
Residents	02
Public employees	03
Professionals	04
Consumers	05
Proprietors	06
Students	07
Hawkers	08
Political activists	09
Community activists	10
Church groups	11
Others (specifications needed)	99
Unknown	u

#### 8. Representative

##### Involvement of Members of Representative Institutions (max: 3)

Nil	0
Legislative Council	1
Urban Council	2
Regional Council	3
District Board	4

## 9. Action

### Mode of Action (max: 6)

Close door meeting	01
Petition to Government (incl. Governor)	02
Petition to OMELCO, Legco, Exco	03
Petition to District Board/Urban Council/Regional Council	04
Petition to New China News Agency	05
Petition to authority outside Hong Kong (e.g. China, Britain)	06
Protest and mass rally (incl. banner display)	07
Industrial action	08
Signature campaign	09
Press conference	10
Opinion survey	11
Violent confrontation	12
Paid advertisement	13
Others (specifications needed)	99

## 10. Editorial

### Number of Editorial Comment (actual count)

Nil	00
1	01
2	02
.	.
.	.
.	.
18	18
19	19

## 11. Response

### Institutional Response (max: 5)

Departmental administrative response/intervention	1
Debate/Question in District Board	2
Debate/Question in Urban Council/Regional Council	3
Debate/Question in Legislative Council/OMELCO	4
Public response from central administration (incl. Governor)	5
Formal public enquiry	6
Response/intervention from authority outside Hong Kong	7
Unknown	u

## 12. Outcome

### Outcome of Issue (max: 4)

Demand partially met	1
Demand fully met	2
Demand totally rejected	3
Policy change	4
Legislative change	5
Institutional change (e.g. reorganization, reshuffling of personnel, absorption into institution, setting up new institution)	6
Unknown	u

# 1975至1986年香港的社會衝突： 趨勢與含意

張炳良 雷競旋著  
(中文摘要)

本研究旨在探討自七十年代中期以來在經濟、社會以至最後在政治上都經歷重大轉變的香港在社會衝突方面的情況。這些轉變對本地華人的政治文化造成衝擊，並對他們對於將政府作為他們各種需要之提供者及問題之解決者的看法有所影響。本研究從下述的假設出發，即人們的政治價值觀和態度的轉變，會反映到他們的行為和行動之上，故此，通過對此轉變期間所發生之社會衝突之模式進行觀察，本研究嘗試弄清楚這些變化中的行為與行動。

本研究顯示：總體而言，香港市民變得更趨向以衝突的方法，為改善其生活質素及他們的政治與公民權利而訴諸行動。大部份我們所記錄得的社會衝突都屬於行業或地方性質，顯示行業性或地方性利益在社會事務中愈來愈突出，公共權力需要對此作出回應或干預。較諸過去，愈來愈多的事件會以一種社會衝突的形式來向政治體制表達，反映了社會與政治體制之間的一種轉變着的疊合關係，以及由此而帶動的不同期望與要求。