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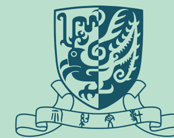

From One Brand of Politics to One Brand of Political Culture

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From One Brand of Politics to One Brand of Political Culture

Abstract

The discussion of politics and political stability in Hong Kong has been broached in a number of ways. This paper delineated three such attempts, which, taken together, represent stages of the trajectory of the discourse in the post-war period. All three attempts are found to be unsatisfactory; in particular, the absence of a rigorous understanding of social structure, and the concomitant failure to acknowledge and elucidate the embeddedness of the political dimension in that structure, have resulted in either normative explanations or declamatory remarks, neither of which could fully grasp the nature of political action or political stability and their attendant contingencies. This paper argues for the need to restore the structural context of political orientation and action, by first describing the Hong Kong class structure, and then producing findings which suggest a typology of such orientations, conceptualized in terms of both interests and resources, and germane to different domains of social life. The paper concludes by drawing out the implications of the proposed approach for the understanding of not just stability but also the emergent political mobilization and possible changes unsettling the existing political order.

Introduction

If there is a singular feature to the studies of politics and political stability in Hong Kong, it is the concern with the apparently paradoxical co-existence of a colonial, undemocratic or 'anachronistic' state, on the one hand, and socio-economic stability and prosperity on the other. In his seminal essay, 'One Brand of Politics' (1971), John Rear started with the statement that 'Hong Kong is not a democracy,' and went on to ask, as befitting a Fabian social critic: is the current brand of politics in Hong Kong superior? For S.K. Lau, the issue of 'one brand of politics' must be approached more broadly. While Rear is not unaware of the

detrimental effects, especially in the long-run, of the undemocratic and authoritarian polity, and its growing inability to govern an increasingly complex society, Lau has given the latter point a clear societal footing. For him, the problem is posed in this way: '[G]iven the limited economic and political capacity and adaptability characteristic of a colonial regime, how can it maintain political stability ... in face of all these potentially disintegrative factors which can rapidly politicize society and mobilize people into political action?' (1982:4). Lau has taken on the task of examining not just the 'art and politics of governance,' but also the nature of the society that made stability and prosperity possible. However, the threat posed by changes in the society to that stability and prosperity is ever present.[1] More recently, Ian Scott (1989) has addressed the issue of political stability from the thesis of legitimacy crisis. His entry point into the problem is this general question: 'How states acquire, maintain and lose legitimacy, how their governments justify their right to rule, and whether their populations accept these justifications.' For him, the key to political stability in Hong Kong (that is, until the Sino-British Agreement ushered in a different and more serious crisis) lies in the largely successful efforts of the colonial state, in its beleaguered history, to maintain its legitimacy. While Rear tries to debunk the ideology of 'government by consultation and consent,' Scott sees substance, or even value, in this style of governance, which, in his view, resulted from the efforts of the colonial state to maintain or regain legitimacy, and which marked the transition from old colonialism to new colonialism.

The aim of this paper is to examine critically these three modes of analyses. More specifically, we want to argue that all three of them are deficient on both conceptual and empirical counts, and that their answer to the question of politics and political stability is partial and unsatisfactory. The common deficiency of these analyses lies in their non-structural approach to 'social structure.' 'Society,' or better, the 'Hong Kong Chinese society,' is, on the one hand, perceived as some amorphous entity grappling with the problems generated by industrialization (Rear, Lau), the 'capitalist economy' (Scott), or modernization (Lau). On the other hand, it could be, as the case of Lau clearly shows, conceptualized as consisting of a large number of familial groups, with overlapping membership, colliding with one another, but with these more or less individuated units or groups never relating to one another meaningfully. The absence of intermediate organizations between this myriad of 'family microcosms' and the polity underlies Lau's argument of a 'minimally integrated sociopolity.' 'Structure,' in the sense of more or less constant and persistent parameters constraining and affecting relationships and the typical conduct and beliefs evinced by these relationships, is starkly missing in these three approaches. It is our intention to bring back the problematic of class into the discussion of the politics and political stability of Hong Kong society, precisely for the reason that this is one way (in our view, the most important one) to provide an objective, structural basis upon which the relations between 'society' and 'polity' could be addressed.

The Three Modes of Analyses Examined

John Rear's discussion of Hong Kong's 'one brand of politics' took on the nature of an *exposé*. His main aim is to demonstrate the fallibility of the ideology of 'government by consultation and consent,' as this ideology is annunciated by the colonial governors or the liberals. For him, consultation, either on the plank of the unofficials or on that of the advisory committees, falls far short of what true consultation would normally mean or require. And certainly, he continued, the system could not be regarded as some form of democracy. But the more serious question Rear posed, and to which he gave, in our view, a judicious and considered response is: 'Is this the best system for Hong Kong?' To this question, Rear gave a (greatly) qualified 'yes.' The system, he agreed, though with much caution, 'works' to a certain extent, especially if one compares Hong Kong with other developing

Asian societies. However, there is no cause for complacency. The gap between the rich and the poor, the dismal labour laws, the glaring inadequacy of social welfare, corruption – these are just some of the grave social problems, which, together with the defects in the political system, constituted the 'less healthy' side of this largely functional system. Writing in the late 60s, Rear argued that these problems (ranging from recruitment policy of the civil service to rampant corruption in society) could not be resolved by simply instituting changes at the level of local government; what was needed, to him, was changes in the central machinery. 'Humanizing the bureaucracy,' say, through the City District Officer scheme, was not sufficient; what was more urgent was to make the change to a more representative government, bringing in electoral politics, and professionalizing the politicians.

Rear's survey of the possible objections to these political changes, when read today, cannot fail to give a feeling of *déjà vu*. There is also much political guesswork in Rear's treatment of the position of Communist China (at that time), as well as that of the British government (the 'wait and see' policy). It is clear, however, that Rear regarded the possible opposition from the Chinese government as over-exaggerated, and somewhat unwarranted (1971:114-5). What is more noteworthy is his judgment on the oft-alleged threat brought in train by mass electoral politics to law and order. Again, he saw the threat as overplayed. As long as the majority of the official members was maintained, an expanded and reconstituted Legislative Council would bring more people from a more diverse social spectrum into positions of influence and not necessarily into vicious power politics.

For our purpose, Rear's treatment of the problem of political stability and politics in general needs to be examined in greater depth. It is clear that, from his Fabian (or 'ethical' socialist, to use Goldthorpe's term) position, the political stability of Hong Kong is a much more complex, and in certain aspects, much more delicate, phenomenon. Even if the government, and the resultant stability, is not one of 'coercion,' such government by 'expediency' or 'natural identity of interests' has yet to grapple with what Rear called his central concerns:

> the imbalance of power and influence as between the different classes ..., [at] the unequal distribution of wealth within it which that imbalance has created, and at the inherent instability of a community in which the channels for the peaceful expression of dissent are inadequate and in which the majority of the population are excluded from any direct participation in the management of its affairs. (1971:57)

The system 'works,' not because of 'consultative democracy' (of which Rear has provided a debunking account), but in spite of the inequalities in society and the defects in the political machinery.[2] So what accounted for the stability? Rear did not give a clear answer; he only believed that it was necessary for the stable future of Hong Kong to 'remedy, in some way, the principal defects of the present state of government' (*ibid*). Rear, however, did hint at some answers, or at least, some approaches to address that question. Having provided some evidence to the real, and valuable, autonomy Hong Kong enjoyed from the British government, he went on to make a point which subsequent studies of the society and politics of Hong Kong took up and more or less made into their focal concern:

> Nevertheless, ultimate control does in law lie with the British Government and it would be surprising if this did not produce among the Chinese population a feeling of powerlessness, a general acceptance that they have no real influence on affairs. Elsewhere in Britain's colonial territories this very lack of independence has been a spur to political activity. If there is an acceptance of the inevitable necessity of British rule, this factor is, however, more likely to be just one of those tending to produce the reverse effect, political apathy. Whether this feeling of powerlessness is justified or not is from this point of view immaterial. (1971:60)

What is immaterial – whether the feeling of powerlessness is extant and justified – from Rear's concerns becomes a focal area, and a key substantive argument in S.K. Lau's approach. In his

equally seminal work on utilitarian familism, one finds a most succinct statement of Lau's theoretical concerns *and* 'methodological strategy':

> ... [A]ny inquiry into the basis of political stability in Hong Kong must be based on a meticulous analysis of the normative and behavioural patterns characteristic of the majority of the Chinese people, and the interactional and organizational structure which can be inferred from them. (1981a:201)

It is quite clear from this passage that what concerns Lau is not so much the 'whence and whither' of 'consultative democracy,' or the 'immanent crisis' of the government and its institutions (as Scott, in his theory of legitimation crisis, would argue). Rather, he is interested in the issue of political inactivity: why is it that Hong Kong's modernity is achieved without the clamours and claims associated with mass mobilizational politics, without, in short, the often unsettling and destabilizing impact of societal impingement on the state. Indeed, taking Huntington's theory of political modernization to task, Lau asked: why is it, in contrast to many developing societies, Hong Kong's successful development is spared the turbulence and instability that characterize the others?

What Lau has advanced beyond Rear is to put politics, its orientations and behaviour, onto a broader, societal footing. This does not mean that Lau is not concerned with the problems of the 'political;' in fact, both in the general systematic accounts (e.g. *Society and Politics*), or in the treatment of specific topics (e.g. *The Ethos of the Hong Kong Chinese*), one finds quite detailed, updating, attempts to discourse on the nature and problems of the colonial bureaucratic institutions. But he is against the 'political explanation.' For instance, one finds him arguing against the thesis of 'administrative absorption of politics,' the idea that politics, in Hong Kong's particular 'art and government of politics,' is turned into administrative problems. While subscribing to the importance of the long colonial tradition of co-opting the Chinese elite into the formal government and its 'advisory committees,' and

thus, by extension, the 'elite-support' or 'synarchy' theory of government, which is a grass-tops approach to political consent, Lau is adamant that political stability could not be accounted by 'administrative absorption' alone. His thesis of 'social accommodation of politics,' arguing that there are mechanisms ('resource networks') in the society meeting the needs of the lower strata, and thus preventing the grievances and claims from becoming political demands, is in this sense a critique of the 'administrative absorption' theory: the government had been unable either to anticipate or to meet the needs of the people. If the 'potentially salient political issues' are 'safely nipped in the bud,' this is due to the accommodative, or 'containing', 'workings' of society (Lau and Ho, 1982:175, and *passim*).[3]

Though we have great reservations – to which we shall return later – about Lau's thesis of 'social accommodation of politics,' and the other stabilizing factors enlisted in his framework, we have to agree that his attempt to 'bring society back in' is both welcome and significant, at least with regard to its analytical orientations. In Lau's 'minimally-integrated socio-political system,' the polity (colonial, bureaucratic and non-interventionist) and the society (changing, modernizing with tenacious traditional Chinese elements) have few linkages; there is little mobilization and participation characteristic of what Bendix called the 'incorporation into a larger political community' in the developing, modernizing nation-states (Bendix, 1966). What little that ties the two entities together is mainly confined to the consultative, information-gathering para-political channels, and, perhaps more importantly, the co-optation of the Chinese elite into the governmental machinery. The keywords in Lau's studies are 'depoliticization,' 'boundary consciousness,' with 'society' and 'polity' each very much keeping to its own bounds. Political stability is thus seen as hinging upon the 'mutual adjustment work' of society and polity.

This set-up, however, is a result of some specific historical and

structural factors. The historical imprint of 'refugee society,'[4] the 'borrowed time, borrowed place' mentality,[5] the *a priori* nature of colonial authority, the self-select character of the early refugees – all these historical factors add to the 'givenness' of the polity,[6] making the secluded nature of the polity, viz. the minimal state, both possible and viable. The same historical factors also laid down the parameters of the nature of the Chinese society. The uncertainties and sense of powerlessness associated with the experience of settling in a colonial society are conducive to a pervasive self-help ethos, which centred on and utilized the numerous familial groups for resources and collective advancement or survival. The 'social structure' in Lau's 'minimally-integrated socio-political system' then consisted of a myriad of 'family microcosms,' which, though with overlapping membership, is ultimately a collection of individuated units, with 'each largely preoccupied with the pursuit of its own interests and suspicious of other social groups' (1981a:211).[7] The cultural or normative syndrome which developed in the historical context of Hong Kong's development, and which has as its basis the structural arrangements outlined above, Lau called 'utilitarian familism.' This is an ideal-typical concept that abstracted from the '*mélange* of normative and behavioural traits ... a coherent set of normative and behavioural tendencies which can be used for explanatory purposes' (1981a:201). The ethos of utilitarian familism is a broad rubric under which various normative and behavioural components are subsumed. These components ranged from the core orientations stressing materialistic needs and their satisfaction, and social stability, to those professing political powerlessness and political inactivity. In sum, the aspects of utilitarian familism which are conducive to political stability are those emphasizing social stability, perceiving family interests as over-riding other broader, societal ones, regarding and actually utilizing the family as a resource network, and the strong feeling of political powerlessness.[8] Society is perceived as just so many family-cum-competing-units; with this ethos, 'society is considered to be largely insignificant, and the family is to 'exploit' society for its own utilitarian purposes' (*ibid*:202). Here the structural and the cultural factors in Lau's arguments come together: the cultural factors of utilitarian familism 'work through' the myriad of 'family microcosms' or 'family-centric resource networks' (term used in Lau and Ho, 1982), just as the structural set-up is conducive to the emergence of utilitarian familism. And just as the structural arrangements are inimical to mass mobilization,[9] so the cultural ethos hamper mobilizational politics. When such nature of 'society' is further linked up with the non-interventionist, minimal 'state,' where the co-opted elite shared similar interests in preserving the *status quo*, and by extension, averring mass mobilizational strategies, the outcome is political stability. The *modus operandi* in Lau's framework could be schematically represented by Diagram 1.

We would argue that, even in his more recent writings, Lau has held fast to this framework and its *modus operandi*. The imagery of a society consisting of a large number of individual familial groups engrossed in their utilitarian aims of making good in a relentlessly competitive environment, where there is not much in the wider society they could count on, and where 'society' itself does not possess the valued symbols to which these familial groups would orient themselves – this line of argument is obviously continuous with the more recent argument about the relatively low level of respect for the rights of others or the relative absence of a decent level of tolerance, despite the 'modest level of social trust evinced' (Lau & Kuan 1988:52 and *passim*). Similarly, an ethos placing a premium on individual efforts, accompanied by a weak sense of personal efficacy (especially with regard to social and political matters), is unsurprising in a society demanding adaptive ability and where there is a caste-like rule of the administration.

It is true, however, that, in his more recent studies, Lau (and his co-authors) have reiterated the point that the self-help norms,

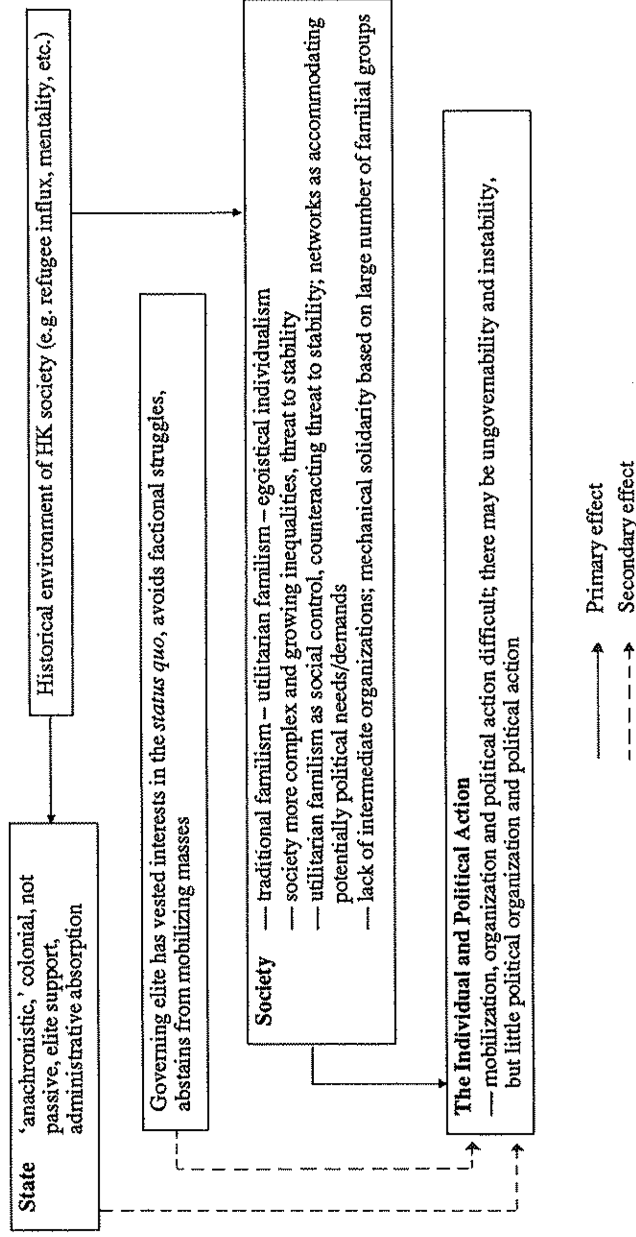

Diagram 1. Political Stability: The '*Modus Operandi*' in Lau

the ethos of utilitarian familism and the demands placed on the government have all undergone changes. The self-help norms are said to be 'fading fast' (Lau & Kuan 1988:85), and as the family institution is 'weakening,' so the core ethos of the Hong Kong people is changed from 'utilitarian familism' to 'egoistical individualism' (*ibid*:54). Social development, as well as a relatively settled and educated population, mean that the scope of public interests has expanded, and that the government is expected to play a more active role in meeting and regulating those public interests. So, there is a *prima facie* case for saying that Lau has brought in social tension that straddles 'polity' and 'society,' the public and the private realm. But the basic parameters that Lau adumbrated in his 'minimally-integrated socio-political system,' and which he employed so skillfully to account for political stability in Hong Kong, are left intact. The reason is that those public interests, and the clamours for them, are upheld more for preserving and sustaining the scope and primacy of private, instrumental interests. The paramount task of the government in this perspective is to maintain order and stability for the society, so that private interests could be pursued freely and competitively. Similarly, 'egalitarian ethos is not translated into distributive and redistributive demands,' and 'there is no evidence that these demands will concretize into more political calls for income redistribution in the society.'[10] The polity and the society could still keep each other 'at bay,' the *modus operandi*, or perhaps, *deus ex machina*, still kicking away.

Given the fact that Lau still holds fast to this framework, it is perfectly understandable the way he approached the political changes in the context of the political reforms and the 1997 question. For Lau, there is now a crisis of 'ungovernability.' But this 'ungovernability crisis' is due to the fact that, for various reasons, some of which are beyond the control of the government, the government has been unable to, so to say, deliver the goods; in other words, failing to honour the 'social contract' between the 'minimally-integrated' polity and society, failing to stick to the

quid pro quo principle that has existed for so long and that has been the basis of Hong Kong's stability. 'Ungovernability,' to Lau, has little to do with mass mobilization and class politics, or even with the issue of 'legitimacy.'[11] Just as the key to Hong Kong's political stability lies in the 'working relation' between 'polity' and 'society,' so destabilizing changes are to be accounted for in terms of disturbances to this relation. Such 'disturbances,' however, are exogenously-sourced; one can hardly find Lau 'updating' his discussion of the organizational and interactional contexts characteristic of the earlier utilitarian familistic ethos. In other words, in his recent political analyses, Lau has adhered to the 'minimally-integrated socio-political system' framework, without really examining the possible changes in either the 'polity' or, especially, the nature of the Chinese 'society.'[12] Whereas the earlier studies on utilitarian familism and the 'family-centric resource networks' still asked: 'Given the ethos ... what is likely to be the typical social organization of Hong Kong society?' (1981a:209), the recent works on ethos and social indicators have been concerned with normative orientations and their cultural sources. New concepts ('situational morality,' instrumental 'individualism,' etc.) have been coined in an attempt to make sense of survey findings; traditional and modern, Chinese and Hong Kong, values and orientations are grasped as a complex whole, explaining the often multi-faceted and sometimes contradictory perceptions of the Hong Kong Chinese on social, economic and political matters.[13] The general drift in Lau's arguments is thus towards a normative functionalist position. The problem of social or political order is then tackled primarily through a delineation of the complexities of the Hong Kong people's political culture, here taken in a broad sense.[14]

The problems of Lau's 'minimally-integrated' framework, and its more specific 'supportive' theses (such as social accommodation of politics), could be in our view tackled at three levels. At the broadest level, there are two issues. To address the more technical issue first, one cannot help but note the loose way in which Lau often pursues his arguments. Often, there is inconsistent and 'protean' use of key concepts, such as 'boundary consciousness,' 'non-interventionist,' etc. The term 'non-interventionism' is often used figuratively, not historically or substantively. In one instance, it is used in a strong sense; but in other instances, it is suggested as a passive situation. The 'non-interventionist' polity is still adhered to, despite admission of important social and economic interventions. By using the term loosely or figuratively, Lau could often have the cake and eat it too. In the discussion of the bureaucratic polity (1982:64-5), it is argued that the 'ingrained structural and normative features' of the bureaucracy inhibit its penetrative and adaptive capability, specifically, its control over social changes.[15] Thus, on the one hand, one is told that non-interventionism is something consciously sought after, as the art and government of politics, and yet, on the other hand, one is told that it is something forced upon the government, that, even if it wills to control society or institute changes, its ingrained features will mean it has little capability to do so.

The second problem is more worrying. The relations between state and society are not conceptualized in structural terms. Rather, both are formulated in relation to the central, one may say, *a priori* vision or *idée fixe*, viz. Hong Kong is stable and prosperous precisely because it proves to be an exceptional case to the political modernization scenario laid down by political modernization theorists such as Huntington. Hong Kong succeeds, according to this perspective, because there is a gap between polity and society (again whether this is something by design or by accident is a befuddled issue for methodological or stylistic reasons). From this point onwards, studies on utilitarian familism, social accommodation of politics, or the ethos of the Hong Kong Chinese are carried out, and their findings are cited to support or confirm the lack of penetration, the mutually guarded attitudes of state and society, and so on. In our view, these studies in themselves provide much insight, but they do not, *in toto*, add up to the Hong Kong social structure. The reason is simple: instead of starting from a struc-

tural investigation of society, Lau pursues different lines of enquiry touching on separate areas of social relationships. In these enquiries, there is no attempt to link up the evinced attitudes/normative orientations, or occasionally, the processes making for stability (such as the depoliticizing, accommodative power of resource networks), with the structural locations the Hong Kong people find themselves in. In other words, whether it is 'utilitarian familism' expressing the adjustment of traditional self-help to modern, capitalist Hong Kong, or 'cynicism' capturing the socio-political ethos of the Hong Kong Chinese for whom voting with their feet has been their past practice to reconcile uncertainties and the sense of powerlessness – these normative orientations remain 'disembodied,' 'desocialized' norms and processes. One keeps looking for some objective, structural basis on which one could interpret and evaluate those attitudes and processes, but one's efforts are in vain. Instead, what one finds is a resort in Lau to 'structural' factors such as the nature of refugee society, the persistence and adaptive change of the traditional Chinese institutions and values, and so on; in other words, a resort to the other 'building blocks' of Lau's *idée fixe*. These other building blocks are in need of structural and historical explanations, but Lau seems to have taken them as unproblematic, and indeed to have gone on and used them as 'structural' factors used, as he sees fit, to explain some particular point or argument. Even if some of Lau's insights sound intuitively right (e.g. Hong Kong's brand of cynicism), yet one still has to ask: if these traits are found generally among the Hong Kong people, how are we to account for them concretely? More importantly if it is imperative in sociological inquiries that some structural axis be postulated (be it the class system or some socio-economic scale with differentiated and graduated incomes and activities) as the basic generator determining life-chances *and* the associated normative orientations, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Lau's opus is flawed in one important aspect of sociological inquiries.

The absence of 'structure' is even more damaging in Ian

Scott's approach to the question of political stability. Scott's main concern is with what he calls the 'last sad chapter of British colonialism.' His interest in the life and times of Hong Kong's form of political rule is in a sense a direct throwback to Rear. However, it is clear that Scott is much more ambitious. In attempting to describe the apocalyptic end of British colonialism in Hong Kong, Scott also puts forth his legitimacy theory of political stability. While Rear was interested in the more specific problems inherent in a non-democracy (or in Scott's term, the 'epistemocratic structure') as it faced an increasingly complex industrial society, and in debunking the ideology of the *ideologues* of this particular form of political rule, Scott is more interested in demonstrating the viability (that is, before the current legitimacy crisis brought about by the 1997 question) of the system as being based on its success in tackling the legitimacy issue.

In one sense, 'political stability' is not Scott's major interest; the trajectory covered by the Hong Kong government since the 19th century in maintaining and regaining its legitimacy of rule constitutes the greater part of the book, but it serves mainly as a springboard for Scott to launch his argument on the current legitimacy crisis, which, for him, is unprecedented and which signalled the doomed end of colonial rule. Hong Kong's political history has been punctuated by many crises, the riots in 1966 and 1967 being perhaps the more momentous blows. These 'pre-negotiations' crises, however, were crises over consent; the colonial government's claim to the right to rule was questioned. The legitimacy at stake was regained by generally following a corporatist strategy. Thus Scott argued that the crisis generated by the 1966-67 riots and disturbances (fuelled by adverse social conditions, high-handed and corrupt government practices, etc.) was resolved by a 'new' form or approach to legitimation, viz. one based on 'consultation':

> Consent meant the consent of the peoples of Hong Kong, China and Britain; consultation meant the process by which the government, through advisory committees rather than

> democratic votes, arrived at a consensus on which it based its often pre-determined decisions. (1989:126)

Here one could note two problems with this line of argument: first, is legitimacy really the crux of the matter, the key to Hong Kong's political stability? One could well, following Lethbridge or Lau, say that the Hong Kong people care little for the legitimacy of their government; as Lau put it, there is already an *a priori* givenness of the colonial polity, an uncontrollable situation which most acknowledge but seldom pay much attention to.[16] Or, to cite Lethbridge, to government and people alike, the business of Hong Kong is to do business. That Scott often failed to provide evidence of the importance of legitimacy amongst the ruled people cannot but give the impression that the notion is more like an artifact, difficult to be empirically substantiated. The second problem with Scott's theory is that there is very little 'society' in his scenario. True, there are references to the social conditions in the various historical periods in the survey of the, as it were, life and times of the legitimacy of this brand of colonialism. But here Scott is following the conventional views and often, one finds him using the data with little discriminatory rigour. This problem is perhaps better clarified if we turn to his arguments on the current crisis, and the role and predicament of the middle class in it.

The current, viz. post Sino-British negotiations, crisis is of a different order: it is a crisis generated first and foremost by loss of autonomy. With the Joint Declaration, the Hong Kong government found its autonomy quickly and seriously undermined. And autonomy is something more than a *fait accompli* based on past political habituation; it is not simply a matter of efficiently delivering the goods to the public. The legitimacy associated with autonomy has a moral dimension: the breach of promises, the 're-interpretations' of the terms of the agreement, the dubious and distorted use of public views to stall the moves towards a more representative government, all these instil a strong moral alienation from the government amongst the people, especially among the middle class (1989:327-8, and *passim*). To Scott, the moral basis of authority has been lost. The crisis in autonomy has been followed, and exacerbated, by a crisis of consent. The government has failed to follow the long-tried ways of resolving consent crises:

> [T]he middle class could easily have been incorporated into the political system by extending the franchise. There would have been no threat to bureaucratic dominance, for the legislature's powers would have remained weak. Traditional methods of cooptations would probably have meant a resolution of the problem of consent through symbolic representation. (1989:326)

Failing this, the Hong Kong government has lost support among the critical groups, i.e. the middle class, the young and educated. And 'whilst traditionally, apathy can be interpreted as a sign of confidence, people believing in the capability of the government to deliver the goods, without meddling with their own lives, now apathy is a sign of political disillusionment' (*ibid*: 328-9). One may wonder if Scott has put too much weight on 'confidence' and 'disillusionment,' and their underlying sources in the political culture of the Hong Kong people. But what comes out clearly in this discourse is that such arguments are mostly based on assertions. There is, unlike Lau, no empirical grounding of 'apathy,' either as a sign of confidence, or of political disillusionment. There is no reference to the possible normative and organizational bases of these political sentiments. As we have argued earlier, there is little 'society' in Scott's scenario.

The more damaging flaw of the absence of 'society' in Scott is related to the way the middle class is treated in the present crisis. In a way, the predicament and reaction of the middle class in this latest stage of a 'society-in-flux' provide Scott with a means to clinch his case that, in a sense, the present crisis is unprecedented (which is true), and that the political future is doomed. But what is this disaffected middle class, except that they are those who benefited most from the decade of economic growth and political stability? Scott referred to the emigration of the middle class as the

'most damning possible indictment of Sino-British policies and of the corporatist strategies of the government' (*ibid*: 320). But just as the middle class is conceived of vaguely and non-stucturally, so its responses to the situation are accepted often in broad, anecdotal terms.[17] One is only given undocumented 'evidence' of the political sentiments of this class; there is little light put on the development and changes of the ethos and political orientations of this class as it emerged in the 70s, the decade on which Scott placed much significance. The reference to 'class' is, as in the most recent writings of Lau, made in an *ad hoc* fashion, devoid of any structural underpinnings, and thus, of objective significance.[18]

An Alternative Conceptual Framework

If there is a common deficiency in the otherwise divergent approaches of Lau and Scott, it is the way 'social structure' is handled in their respective framework. In the case of Scott, we have argued that the lack of empirical evidence on the way 'legitimacy' is being 'socially constructed' by the ruled population (instead of being an artifact imposed by the researcher so as to clinch a case of political programme or political prognosis) or on the nature and political predicament of the middle class has made the argument of legitimacy crisis more like an indictment of the 'sad end of British colonialism' than a theory of political stability and its changes. With regard to Lau, we have seen that, despite his attempt to 'bring society back in' (as an advancement over Rear, and also as a part-critique of the 'administrative absorption of politics' thesis), his argument still falls short of a structural understanding of 'society.' There are, in our view, three levels in Lau's 'structural approach.' At the broadest level, Lau is arguing that political passivity, apathy, etc., could not be understood without locating them in a broader, structural setting characterized by both history and, more immediately, the relations between state and society. At the second level, the relations between state and society are of a structural kind, for they are the persistent 'working plan,' guiding the behavioural and normative aspects of the Hong Kong people. At the third level, one which is most pertinent to our concerns, Lau argued that the ethos or normative orientations of the Hong Kong people are tied to some specific structural (organizational and interactional) arrangements in the polity, but especially, in the society. The 'resource networks' in his 'social accommodation of politics' thesis are an example of these arrangements, but so is the adaptive and changing family structure (generating utilitarian familism). It is at this third level that Lau conceives the Hong Kong society as so many relatively isolated familial groups, generating the core ethos and providing the nucleus of resource networks. With the ethos and the accommodating functions of the resource networks, any need or grievance among the subordinate majority could be met, contained or accommodated. Potentially political, and thus divisive, destabilizing, issues are thus nipped in their bud. This is a case of the depoliticizing effect of a minimally-integrated socio-political system (with the secluded polity or minimal state as one of the 'building blocks') writ small. There are two problems in this conception of 'structure,' and its relation to 'politics.' Firstly, there is in fact no 'structure' if by this term one means specific constraining and conditioning factors of social relationships. One cannot derive any sense of the material and ideational context in which the participants in the 'resource networks' operate, and from which they express their subscription to the value or primacy of these networks. Loose and indiscriminate use of amorphous terms, such as 'lower strata,' obfuscates the issue more than clarifies it. Even if one could bring oneself to agree, in broad outlines, Lau's argument that:

> Compared to other modes of depoliticisation of the lower strata, which are largely political in nature, the social accommodation of politics hinges upon the coexistence of a relatively 'underdeveloped' polity and a relatively 'overdeveloped' society. (Lau and Ho, 1982:185)

one could not help noting Lau's 'underdeveloped' conception of

social structure. Once we have a more differentiated conception of social structure, we could then ask *who* used the resource mechanisms and how these mechanisms are actually used.

Secondly, and relatedly, Lau's conception of 'politics' is, in our view, flawed. Basically, his concern is with political activity or inactivity as an either-or matter. It seems that, once he has demonstrated to his own satisfaction that the 'overdeveloped' society, with its family-centric resource networks, has successfully kept issues and needs in society from being 'transferred from the social sector to the polity for resolution' (Lau & Ho, 1982:186), he would call an end to the matter. One is left with the impression that Lau is trying too hard to use this thesis to corroborate his *idée fixe*, his scheme of things, to fit another, lower-level, block to his minimally-integrated socio-political system. In order to vindicate the case that the developmental experience of Hong Kong is a mirror image of other developing societies, that Hong Kong succeeds precisely because of the gap between polity and society, the *modus operandi* encapsulated by 'overdeveloped' society and 'underdeveloped' polity is only natural. But in such architectonics, the more nuanced meaning of 'politics' or political action, and the relation between politics and social structure, get lost. Lau seems bent on demonstrating political inactivity and its sociological reasons, and once this is achieved (and once his system gets another corroborative 'block'), he is no longer interested in the meaning of political action, or in the question of who are those people who professed making use of the resource networks. To us, 'politics' is not an either-or, all-or-nothing phenomenon; to treat the question of politics as simply an action/inaction issue is vastly unsatisfactory. Neither is 'politics' exhausted by collective political action; making claims on government or urging governmental action is also 'political' in nature. But Lau seems to have 'over-politicized' the socially-accommodative power of resource network and the entailed coping strategy. While we agree that every single issue in our everday life can be politicized (say, as a result of state reaction), we also hold that many of these

issues are not immediately political, either in the eyes of the people involved, or in the way these issues are handled. The implication, then, is that we have to attend to different domains of life and tease out their differential political relevance to the Hong Kong people. To the extent that politics could be read off from actions/responses (about which we have great reservation), the latter must be related more specifically to the different domains of life and their respectively involved issues. But, ironically, Lau has also 'underpoliticized' social accommodation. The implication of Lau's argument is that once issues and needs are accommodated through resource networks, they are thence immediately depoliticized. We find this argument simplistic, and it has added nothing but a simple subscription to a simple conception of 'social structure.' In the following section, we would argue that if there are accommodative resource networks, they are certainly not uniformly 'functional,' or even relevant to all classes. Not only do different classes have different coping strategies, but the political and social embeddedness of these strategies also differ. To assert that there exist social mechanisms which can depoliticize social issues does not explain how – and whether – politics has been accommodated.

We are thus proposing an alternative framework of study on the question of politics and society, and more specifically on the issue of political stability. In this framework, we start off with the assumption that any explanation of Hong Kong's political stability – be it couched in terms of legitimacy or ethos – must be empirically grounded onto a social structural understanding of the society. By social structure, we specifically refer to a set of basic, more or less constant, determinants of social relationships and their attendant differential life-chance situations.[19] In our study, we have focussed on the class system as our entry point, and our vantage point, to Hong Kong's social structure. With systematic knowledge of the immediate and concrete environment of the subject (work and market situation, mobility experience), we can arrive at a more judicious and rigorous

interpretation of survey data on subjective orientations and attitudes. We will argue that it is only on the basis of this class-differentiated structure and its 'typical conduct and beliefs' that the specific issue of political behaviour and political culture can be addressed and resolved.[20] Thus, whereas Lau has 'brought back society,' in his own way, into the discussion of politics and political stability, we have tried to bring back social structure.[21]

Our second consideration relates to the need to distinguish different domains of life as they bear on people's political perceptions and propensity for action. Lau, in his framework, repeatedly made reference to the relative autonomy of the public and the private spheres as they were evaluated and perceived by his respondents; and in stressing the social accommodation of potentially political needs and issues, he also treated the distinction as if it also amounted to an 'underdeveloped public – overdeveloped private' relationship. Yet, we would argue that the private-public distinction is often blurred: to anticipate our arguments, the coping mechanisms of different classes display a much less clear-cut dichotomy. Just as the more overt and collective 'public' action does not necessarily mean activism and undermine stability, so any resort to private (families, immediate circles of relatives and friends, etc.) resources does not signify depoliticisation and political quietude. In addition to normative orientations and propensities for action, one must consider opportunities for participation and organizational resources. That is why we have opted for a multi-faceted conception of political orientations and political action. Questions are posed under the various domains of life, and the responses to these questions are interpreted in tandem with the structural locations of the respondents, with regard to their political meaning and implications.[22]

Class, Mobility and Political Stability

In our recent study of social mobility of Hong Kong, we have attempted generally to redress the inadequacy of structural and

diachronic studies of the society, and particularly, to address the question of politics and political stability. Instead of being enamoured of political *exposé* in the tradition of Rear, or, as in the case of Scott, political predicament (or was it political pedagogy?), we approach our subject matter with modest aims. We have tried to provide a class map of the society, and on that basis, examine the patterns of social mobility, as well as the normative orientations and propensities for action associated with class locations and mobility experience. Our class map is constructed on the assumption that occupation, in its ability to distribute benefits and generate identity, is still a pivotal axis in our society. Occupation, with its twin components of market situation and work situation, thus forms the cornerstone of our structural understanding of Hong Kong society.[23] The class map we derived after interviewing a randomly-sampled population of 1,000 male household heads is in Table 1.

We present our findings in two parts. In the first part, we shall discuss generally the evinced patterns of class identification, social imageries and the more overt political 'leanings.' We shall see that not only is 'class' (*jieji*) – leaving aside the question of the connotations of the term or the deep reality of the concept – a much more pertinent 'reality' to our respondents than most other Hong Kong studies would acknowledge, there are also important class differences in regard to specific socio-political attitudes. It would be churlish to say that the relevance of class in our respondents' experience of social life or their perceptions of class conflict is tantamount to the existence of some conflictual great-divide, and that, therefore, the primacy of class is vindicated. Nonetheless, our findings reveal a much more variegated pattern of socio-political orientations, which are structurally based on the objective parameters of class, and which in our view could not be easily accommodated by a simple theory of political passivity.

Table 1: The Hong Kong Class Structure*

Class	Brief Description	N	%	
I	Higher-grade professionals, administrators and officials, managers in large establishments, large proprietors	81	8.6	Service
II	Lower-grade professionals, administrators, higher-grade technicians, managers in small business and industrial establishments, supervisors of nonmanual employees	107	11.3	
III	Routine nonmanual employees in commerce and administration, personal service workers and shop sales personnel	90	9.6	Inter-mediate
IV	Small proprietors, artisans, contractors, with or without employees	132	14.0	
V	Lower-grade technicians, supervisors of manual workers	150	15.9	
VI	Skilled manual workers	149	15.8	Working
VII	Semi-skilled and unskilled workers, agricultural workers	234	24.8	
	Total	943	100.0	

* This is the result of a Hong Kong-wide survey conducted in 1989. The basic occupational scheme, and the individual occupational titles (totalling more than 400), are based on the *Classification of Occupations 1980*, of the British Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. The class position is determined by the combination of a specific occupational title and its employment status (which the latter is a 7-category scheme). The groundplan of occupations is also used by the British mobility researchers, such as Goldthorpe, Marshall, *et al.* In view of the possible differences in Hong Kong (e.g. the Chinese herbal doctors, the more pervasive presence of apprentices, or the absence of agricultural workers among our respondents), we have introduced some minor changes to the occupational list. In arriving at our master occupational list, and the eventual class positions of our respondents, we have also consulted widely different occupational coding schemes, including that of the Hong Kong census. The technical details can be found in our forthcoming paper, reporting on the class structure and the pattern of social mobility.

In the second part, we shall specifically take to task Lau's argument of resource network, and by extension, the thesis of social accommodation of politics. Our respondents are asked questions pertaining to different domains of life, all of which, however, focus on the need, and the choice, of resources to cope with significant everyday life problems. As we have tried to be open about the political relevance of these issues or problems to our respondents, we asked questions ranging from childcare to living environment. We believe this is the right way to avoid 'overpoliticizing' – to which we argued Lau is susceptible – needs and issues. The different coping mechanisms of our seven classes then provide us with the data to examine the accommodativeness of 'society,' if any, as far as potentially political needs and issues are concerned. We would argue that political action, or its propensity, is not only class-related, but that it is actually embedded in different configurations of class-derived resources and social mobility experience. Instead of treating politics as simply an action/inaction matter, we have interpreted the different types of coping mechanisms as so many different approaches to political action and its propensity. It is obvious, we might add, that this will have important implications for the question of political stability. In this part, we also examine if the choice of coping mechanisms is related to the social imageries and political leanings we discussed in the earlier section; for instance, whether the choice of a 'market' coping mechanism will predispose someone to a conservative socio-political orientation. The overall patterns of such correlations suggest that not only does the 'social accommodation of politics' thesis fail to accommodate the diverse coping mechanisms; more crucially, it fails to see that what on the surface is political passivity is actually underlaid by different class-based 'strategies,' or ways of making do with the available resources of one's structural location. Even if all these 'strategies' operate within the 'society,' and thus do not make claims on, or pose threat to the government (which is what Lau's inaction, as opposed to action, amounts to), their very nature as class-based – and thus constrained – responses bespeaks their political relevance: how and whether politics has been accommodated is, we believe, an issue which cannot be captured, or at last exhausted, by a simple verdict of 'inaction.' Further, that not all of

these strategies are 'private' in nature is clear from our findings. But it is, in a sense, misleading to use the term 'private' at all. If the coping mechanisms are based on class locations and social mobility experience, one could hardly regard them as belonging to the private sphere, absorbed within some 'overdeveloped' society (viz. family-centric resource networks) and largely unaffected by public, structural changes in the wider society.

Part I: Class and the Reality of Socio-political Orientations

When asked if they feel themselves belonging to a class, 79% of our respondents said 'yes;' 19% said 'no,' and only 2% answered 'don't know' (Table 2). The class distribution of the responses is fairly even, with more than 70% in all classes as affirming their identification with class membership. When we crosstabulate the subjective class membership with the objective class position, we find a fairly 'congruent' picture: half of the 'service' classes (class I and II) perceived themselves as belonging to the middle class, while for the routine non-manual (class III) and the petty bourgeoisie (class IV), only about one-quarter of them saw themselves as belonging to the same category. For the labouring classes (class VI and VII), virtually all of them identified themselves with the working class (Table 3). Even if one discounts the considerable congruence between the objective position and the subjective self-perception, these findings still cast serious doubt on statements such as the following:

> The feeble sense of class division and class conflict might have produced an image of class structure which encapsulates a majoriy of people in a single 'class,' *since people fail to see much difference in their life-situations*. (Lau and Kuan, 1988:66; emphasis added)

The divergent ways our respondents placed themselves in social categories are as extant and significant as the objective differentials that separate them.[24]

Table 2: Class Awareness by Class (%; N=924)

Class	Yes	No
I	76	24
II	76	24
III	73	27
IV	73	27
V	84	16
VI	85	15
VII	86	14

(Question: 'Some people would say they belong to the working class, the middle class or the capitalist class. Do you feel yourself as belonging to any class at all?')

Table 3: Self-Assigned Class Membership by Class (%, N=741)

Class	Capitalist	Middle	Working
I	7	55	38
II	0	49	51
III	0	24	76
IV	7	22	71
V	0	4	96
VI	1	1	98
VII	1	1	98

(Question: 'If you feel you are belonging to a class, which class is it?')

The ways our respondents perceived the society are equally noteworthy, the findings again cautioning against opprobrium

about 'the feeble sense of class division and class conflict.' First, regardless of class position, an overwhelming proportion regarded conflicts between classes as inevitable (Table 4). This pattern has already been discussed in other studies on social perceptions.[25] We interpret this 'conflictual' imagery not as some fertile ground of revolutionary class consciousness (the impossibility of which in the Hong Kong context seems to be particularly beloved by scholars, who then ruled 'class' and class analysis out of court as the most arresting and important questions in any historical and sociological interpretation of the Hong Kong experience), but more as a hard-headed, realistic appraisal of a competitive and complex society; social advancement and competition, notwithstanding opportunities and the belief in personal efforts, is ultimately a zero-sum game, and the conflict between the rich and the poor is unavoidable. This kind of appraisal is further evinced in our respondents' judgment on the power of the large businesses in Hong Kong: nine out of ten, regardless of class position, see their influence on the society as too great (Table 4, 2nd panel).

With the question of 'exploitation' and 'fair share,' class differences are more marked. When asked if they would agree to the view that where an employer wants to make profits, he has to exploit the workers, working class respondents were more inclined to accept that view, while for the non-manual classes, in particular class I and II, a sizable proportion disagrees or strongly disagrees (Table 4, 3rd panel). Similarly, it is the working classes who tended to regard the ordinary wage-worker as receiving less than what he exerted in his efforts. The reverse tendency is found with the 'service' classes (Table 4, 4th panel). These four questions (as laid out in the tables) no doubt tapped quite different aspects of our respondents' 'social imagery.' Partly because of this, the findings do not, in our view, point to any simple (radical, deferential, submissive ...) characterization, nor do they lend themselves easily to normative explanations of political passivity (whether the invoked normative orientations are called utilitarian familism

or egoistical individualism is immaterial here). Indeed, and we will amplify on this point in the following sections, we will argue that any characterization of the ethos of the Hong Kong people as 'depoliticized' or 'passive' simply fails to capture the multifaceted nature of socio-political orientations or social imageries. And to conclude, on the basis of these oft-alleged passive and non-political orientations, that class as a structural force has lost its analytical and explanatory efficacy,[26] is to pile theoretical mistake onto empirical misinterpretation, and to leave a gaping hole in our understanding of the society.

Table 4: Perceptions of Society by Class (%)

Statement	Class	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
'Class conflict': Some people say there are bound to be conflicts between classes. (N=724)	I	14	49	5	28	4
	II	13	48	14	22	3
	III	15	58	6	21	0
	IV	15	52	8	21	4
	V	23	56	4	13	4
	VI	18	50	9	20	3
	VII	16	52	10	20	2
'Business power': Some people say that the influence of the big corporations on HK is too great. (N=898)	I	22	64	8	5	1
	II	22	63	7	7	1
	III	24	69	3	4	0
	IV	20	68	4	8	0
	V	21	69	5	5	0
	VI	20	66	7	7	0
	VII	20	70	4	5	1
'Exploitation': Some people say that if employers are to make profits, they have to exploit workers. (N=917)	I	3	12	6	65	14
	II	2	17	17	51	13
	III	6	32	12	42	8
	IV	2	15	10	63	10
	V	6	26	16	47	5
	VI	11	34	14	32	9
	VII	8	31	21	34	6
'Fair share': Some people say that the average wage-earner receives less than he contributes. (N=904)	I	5	23	21	45	6
	II	2	38	18	36	6
	III	7	46	27	18	2
	IV	5	31	12	44	8
	V	9	42	12	36	1
	VI	11	50	11	26	2
	VII	8	48	17	25	2

Part II: Domains of Life and the Embeddedness of Political Action

One of the questions we asked in our survey relates to an important domestic goal to which much of what Salaff (1980) called 'centripetal family norms' and efforts are devoted, and which certainly reveals the way the family wage economy facilitates social mobility in the post-war development of Hong Kong: home-ownership. In this sense, our question is a good test-case of the self-help ethos, and the viability of the resource networks centred upon flexible familial groups. We asked the respondents: 'Suppose you don't have enough money to pay for the downpayment on a flat, what would you do?' The majority (60%, N=859) said they would postpone the plan, while trying to save some more (Table 5a). In a way, this suggests a resort to individual/familial efforts. But what is noteworthy is that getting resources from 'private' (or Lau's 'social') networks, apart from being fairly even among the classes, is distinctly low in priority: less than 20%, in all classes, opted for borrowing from family members, relatives or friends. In comparison, the use of market resources is more extensive. Here, however, one finds significant class differences. The 'service' class (comprising class I and II) respondents are more ready to apply for bank loans than the working classes (our class VI and VII). Nearly twice as many class I professionals will resort to market resources as the unskilled labouring workers. Finally, it is perhaps not surprising to find that on this issue there is not one single case registering complaint, or taking the matter to the public, showing protest or grave discontent. One could say that in one sense, this vindicates Lau's analysis. Yet, our findings have, we believe, unequivocally shown that, if Lau is right, this is not at all due to the ability of resource networks to meet our respondents' needs. Networks pale in significance, when compared with the market coping mechanism. The individualistic coping mechanism of 'postponement' can be interpreted either as a strategy or as an indication of some

resigned, fatalistic acceptance of an incontrovertible situation. But in either case, this coping mechanism is a far cry from the accommodative channels bred from self-help ethos.

Table 5a: Coping Mechanisms by Class (%, N=859)

Class	Network (borrow from family, relatives, or friends)	Market (borrow from bank, finance company)	Public (complain, criticize government)	Individual (save, and postpone plan)
I	18	32	0	50
II	18	28	0	54
III	14	36	0	50
IV	11	21	0	68
V	15	31	0	54
VI	12	26	0	62
VII	15	16	1	68

(Question: 'If you encounter the problem of not having enough money to pay for the downpayment for a flat, what would you do?')

Next, we asked this of our respondents: 'Suppose you have difficulty in finding a job, what would you do?' In fact, here we are touching on an issue Lau held to be important in his formulation of the 'social accommodation' thesis. Again, our findings show important differences. Roughly equal proportion of respondents opts for 'network' (41%) (turning to family members, relatives or friends for assistance) and for 'individual' mechanism (45%) (relying on own efforts) (Table 5b). Class differences, however, are marked: the white-collar classes predominantly relied on their own individual efforts, with more than half of class I, II and III respondents opting for this strategy, while the majority of the working classes turned to networks for help. In a way, the different labour market conditions of the white-collar and blue-collar jobs could explain these class differences, with the white-collar

jobs perhaps concentrated more in the formal sector and accessible through more formal channels. This, we might add, has little to do with social accommodation effects, nor does it require one to invoke some inward-turning ethos (familism or fatalism) to explain the different choices. Finally, the 'public' options are scarcely taken up: only 1% of our respondents answered that they would seek help from unions, and this applies to all classes; 'applying to the Labour Department' fares better, with class III, VI and VII showing greater propensity. But the prevailing responses remain the 'individual' and 'network' coping mechanisms.

Table 5b: Coping Mechanisms by Class (%, N=911)

Class	Network (seek help from family, relatives or friends)	Public (register with Labour office, seek help from trade union)	Individual (rely on own efforts)
I	28	9	63
II	21	16	63
III	31	20	49
IV	47	7	46
V	46	14	40
VI	49	19	32
VII	45	16	39

(Question: 'If you have difficulties in finding a job, what would you do?')

Thirdly, we turn to child care. Again, we see this question as close to the heart of the familistic-cum-network-accommodation argument in Lau. On the surface, there is support for this argument: more than half of the respondents turned to their families, relatives or friends when they have difficulties in looking after their children. In contrast, only 18% utilized market resources in the form of either private nurseries or Filipino maid. What is surprising, to us anyway, is that on this particular issue, the

'network' option is not taken up by more people. Moreover, we could also see that a sizable proportion of the lower classes (29% and 31% for class VI and VII respectively) said they have no other means but to make arrangements among themselves (Table 5c). The service classes, however, are much more able, and ready, to employ maids to do the job for them: whilst 1% of class VII couples have Filipino maids to assist them, about one quarter of class I families utilized the market to solve their problem. Another noteworthy finding is the fact that, with regard to the 'network' mechanism, the lower classes do not exhibit a greater, and more collectivistic, resource capability than the upper classes. The implication is perhaps that with child care, an issue which one traditionally would associate with network assistance among lower classes, the ability to provide network resources is an empirical question, and that it certainly is largely dependent on specific class-based strategic considerations rather than on some uniform and encompassing accommodative channels and ethos.

Table 5c: Coping Mechanisms by Class (%, N=878)

Class	Network (seek help from family, relatives or friends)	Market (engage maid or nurseries)	Public (group petition to government)	Individual (make arrangement with spouse)
I	51	26	3	20
II	62	20	3	15
III	61	12	8	19
IV	57	11	5	27
V	55	13	4	28
VI	53	8	10	29
VII	54	7	8	31

(Question: 'If you have difficulties in finding childcare, what would you do?')

Lastly, we posed a question more societal in nature: 'Suppose the environment of the place you live in gets worse, what would you do?' It is perhaps not surprising to find that on this issue, the 'network' mechanism is insignificant. What is surprising is that 40% of our respondents took the matter to the 'public' realm: complaints to the government or negotiation with the 'culprit.' And 31% said they would move to other areas, amounting to what we would interpret as utilizing the market channel. The 'individual' (or 'fatalistic') solution of adjusting to the poor environment is taken up by 25% of our sample population. Further, we can note that the upper classes are more likely to choose the 'market' mechanism, while the lower classes (especially class VI) are more prone to 'public' action (Table 5d). What our findings suggest then is that the more social the issue, the more politicized it is, and the more public or political the response will be.[27] And the less significant will be the network accommodative power.

Table 5d: Coping Mechanisms by Class (%, N=912)

Class	Network (seek help from relatives and friends to either move or adjust)	Market (move)	Public (complain to government)	Individual (try to adjust)
I	2	58	32	8
II	4	47	39	10
III	2	41	41	16
IV	5	34	35	26
V	5	28	43	24
VI	5	19	45	31
VII	4	18	40	38

(Question: 'Suppose the environment of where you live gets worse, what would you do?')

One might ask if there are relations between social imageries (which we discussed in Part I) and the domains of action: could it be that some specific perceptions of society will predispose one to a 'public' rather than a 'market' domain of action? Tables 6a-6d and 7a-7d respectively show the crosstabulations results of the responses to the child care question and the poor living environment question, and the four questions on social imagery. It is interesting to note that, for both the child care and the poor living environment question, those who tend to take up the 'market' coping mechanisms (and this means, in most cases, the middle classes of class I and II) also perceive the society in less conflictual terms than the other classes. This is the case with regard to the 'exploitation' and 'fair share' questions (Table 6c, 6d, 7c, 7d): thus, for instance, more than 60% of those hiring a maid to solve their child care problem disagree/strongly disagree with the statement that bosses if they are to make profits must exploit workers. A similar tendency is found in the 'fair share' question. Earlier, we have argued that it is precisely on these two questions that the middle classes show a noteworthy divergence from the other classes. Thus, in a way, we have come full circle. The class locations of the middle classes, and their 'professed' practice in solving their daily-life problems, converged to form a fairly distinct pattern of socio-political orientations. And whereas class differences are more marked in regard to the issue of exploitation and fair share, all are much hard-headed in relation to class conflicts and business power. But in both types of cases, one would be hard pressed to say that it is simply a matter of inaction or passivity.

Table 6a: Coping with Child Care* by Perceptions of Class Conflict† (%)

Domains	Strongly Agree or Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree or Disagree
Network	69	8	23
Market	79	5	16
Public	75	25	0
Individual	57	10	33

* For definition of the coping mechanisms, or the domains of action, see Table 5c.

† Question: 'Some say that there are bound to be conflicts between classes. Do you agree?'

Table 6b: Coping with Child Care by Perception of Business Power† (%)

Domains	Strongly Agree or Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree or Disagree
Network	88	5	7
Market	89	4	7
Public	86	14	0
Individual	90	5	5

† Question: 'Some say that the influence of the big corporations on HK is too great. Do you agree?'

Table 6c: Coping with Child Care by Perception of Exploitation† (%)

Domains	Strongly Agree or Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree or Disagree
Network	32	14	54
Market	30	9	61
Public	50	0	50
Individual	31	21	48

† Question: 'Some say that if employers are to make profits, they have to exploit workers. Do you agree?'

Table 6d: Coping with Child Care by Perception of Fair Share† (%)

Domains	Strongly Agree or Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree or Disagree
Network	48	17	35
Market	42	13	45
Public	71	0	29
Individual	50	18	32

† Question: 'Some say that the average wage-earner receives less than he contributes. Do you agree?'

Table 7a: Coping with Poor Environment* by Perception of Class Conflict† (%)

Domains	Strongly Agree or Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree or Disagree
Network	57	25	18
Market	65	6	29
Public	71	7	22
Individual	72	7	21

* For definition of the coping mechanism, or domains of action, see Table 5d.
† Question: 'Some say that there are bound to be conflicts between classes. Do you agree?'

Table 7b: Coping with Poor Environment by Perception of Business Power† (%)

Domains	Strongly Agree or Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree or Disagree
Network	86	11	3
Market	87	5	8
Public	91	4	5
Individual	90	5	5

† Question: 'Some say that the influence of the big corporations on HK is too great. Do you agree?'

Table 7c: Coping with Poor Environment by Perception of Exploitation† (%)

Domains	Strongly Agree or Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree or Disagree
Network	28	26	46
Market	25	12	63
Public	30	16	54
Individual	42	18	40

† Question: 'Some say that if employers are to make profits, they have to exploit workers. Do you agree?'

Table 7d: Coping with Poor Environment by Perception of Fair Share† (%)

Domains	Strongly Agree or Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree or Disagree
Network	57	9	24
Market	42	17	41
Public	50	16	34
Individual	51	16	33

† Question: 'Some say that the average wage-earner receives less than he contributes. Do you agree?'

We believe that the above four questions touching on various domains of life have managed to tap a broader range of needs and issues than have been tackled so far. Our questions have covered domestic, immediate matters as well as larger, more societal issues. To this extent, they serve the purpose of establishing some multi-level, multi-faceted data for one to adjudge their differential primacy for politics and the differentiated nature of political quietude or acquiescence. A sociological explanation of political stability that ultimately rests on political passivity must go beyond the structureless or disembodied 'normative and organizational context,' and focus upon the coping mechanisms in the context of class and domains of life. We would further hold

that only in this way could the problem of potential of mobilization be meaningfully tackled. We have tried to argue that it is more truthful to reality, and more fruitful theoretically, to see that, instead of having a uniform, cross-the-board accommodative mechanism, familistic-network in character, depoliticizing in effect, there are in fact different class-based (or at least class-related) mechanisms at work, with some mechanisms being more conducive and adaptive to particular domains of life and its issues, and with different types of resources involved. These coping mechanisms (as we have been calling them all along) are not tied to, or sustained by, some unclarified tenacity of the ('overdeveloped') 'Chinese society,' nor is their diversity accounted for by a simple dichotomy of 'private – public' action. As we have seen, the lower classes are more prone to 'public' (and collective) action on *some* specific issues (deteriorating environment); but in other domains of life, the 'private' processes of 'network' or 'individual' are more potent in their effect.

This conception of politics or political behaviour as embedded in different domains of action ('individual,' 'market,' 'network' ...) and as involving different types of resources (which of course, in our framework, are mainly derived from the class location) will not fail to have important implications for the question of political stability. For, at once, political stability becomes something both more tenacious and delicate. More tenacious, because the differentiated class situations are not likely to change in the short-term. More delicate, because it is obvious from our findings that for some specific domains of life, the resort to action of a more 'public' or collective nature is not something foreclosed. Moreover, the more extensive engagement of the middle classes in the 'market' domain of action means that they have to bear the brunt of any adverse effect brought by the vicissitudes of market forces. We do not, of course, imply that this will then politicize the middle classes. But it does mean that the potential of the middle classes being mobilized collectively and politically – and this presupposes the organization of class – turns on a different 'tune' or domain of action from other classes.

Conclusion

The discourse on political stability in Hong Kong begins with democracy, or its absence, and ends with autonomy, and its loss. It begins, we believe, with Rear's genuine concerns with the defects of the colonial administration and its purblind agents, with inequalities and unfair arrangements; and Rear proffers somewhat dark forebodings for the future. The question is then addressed by a sociology of Hong Kong society. In Lau's framework, the political question is solved by a distinct 'structural' arrangement between society and polity. In this grandiose construction, there is, alas, little room for the nitty gritty of inequalities and forebodings. Sadly, the discourse ends with a political programme and more than a trace of political demagoguery. We would not have any qualms if Scott simply had a cynical eye for the disgraceful end of British colonialism in Hong Kong. We, however, would be worried if his theory of legitimacy is used to explain Hong Kong's political stability and its latest crisis. If we are harsh towards Lau's sociology, it is because he did try to conceptualize and understand the nature of Hong Kong society. In Scott, and one is left in discomfiture, there is no 'society' for a similar debate.[28]

In a way, our research has been to go back to where the discourse started, back to the concern with inequalities, and the bearing those inequalities have for political action and stability. We have conceptualized inequalities in class terms. Classes are regarded as structural forces which then act as more or less permanent constraints on action, and as the basis of identity and orientations.[29] We have offered a class schema, and our findings suggest that not only are class differences in socio-political orientations immanent and important, the emergent social imageries themselves also constitute a more complex and multi-faceted reality. Further, we have argued that, to the extent that a sociologi-

cal understanding of political orientation requires a rigorous study of the social structure, there is no simple and uniform social basis of political acquiescence. There are different domains of action (labelled as 'individual,' 'network,' 'public' and 'market' domains), corresponding to different issues and needs, and having different implications for political action and mobilization. Viewed in this light, the question of political stability, and the propensities for political action and change, becomes more tightly linked to findings on the social structure and its vicissitudes. A comprehensive treatise on political stability and the Hong Kong development will no doubt need to see stability not as some congealed outcome of depoliticization (whether taken in a strong or weak sense is of little consequence here), but rather as a more delicate, on-going phenomenon poised on the reality of divergent domains of action underlaid by class differentials and social imageries. We believe that such an approach can also better incorporate and explain political mobilization and changes unsettling the existing order.[30]

Notes

1. Even in his earlier treatise on the Hong Kong 'utilitarian familism,' and its inevitable decline, Lau is far from complacent. Cf. Lau, 1981b.
2. Davies, in picking up where Rear had left, published his 'One Brand of Politics Rekindled' in *The Hong Kong Law Journal*, 1977, and has provided a sharper edge against such defects by looking at the elite structure of the political machinery. That we have intended to follow, and to contribute to, that tradition should be obvious.
3. It should be noted that Lau is not only against the 'elite-support' or 'synarchy' theory of political stability; he also disagrees with the simplistic 'political apathy' theory. The latter sees political quietism as inherent in the normative make-up of the Hong Kong people. Such alleged apathy, however, implies using the term 'apathy' indiscriminately and unconditionally and 'tends to stretch the meaning of the concept so far that it can explain almost everything but ... becomes useless in any specific case.' What concerns Lau is 'the problem of the mobilization potential of the subordinate Chinese majority, the analysis of which is contingent upon a cultural and structural study of the social organization of this large group' (1981a:200). Thus even though Lau is, *contra* Rear, interested in the problem of political inactivity, he is not examining political apathy in isolation. The 'social,' or 'the cultural and structural,' context is imperative in his framework.
4. This is discussed in various places in *Society and Politics*, *Ethos*, or the paper on 'utilitarian familism.'
5. Cf. *Ethos*, p.40, and *passim*.
6. It is common for Lau to adduce characteristics of the traditional Chinese political culture to buttress his arguments; in this case, the traditional submissiveness or aversion to authority made the 'transition' from Chinese political authority in the mainland to colonial authority that much easier.
7. See Lau, 1981a:211-12 for a detailed account.
8. We find Lau's use and interpretation of his data somewhat problematic. For instance, in pressing the point about the primacy of family interests, Lau has actually combined the percentages (discussed first in Lau 1978) of *both* 'family more important' (35%), and 'family and society as of equal importance' (51%) in arriving at the impressive conclusion that the significance of the family is clearly evident as 85.6% of the respondents rated either 'the family more important' or 'both family and society equally important,' as against 13.5% of them who considered 'society more important' (Lau, 1982:204). His interpretation would surely have been

different if he had focussed on the 51% for the equal importance of family and society. Or, to take another example, one would think that in a materialistic society like Hong Kong, it is truly noteworthy and interesting that 40% of Lau's respondents were definite in *not* using salary as the only criterion for the acceptance of a given job (Lau, 1981a:203). But Lau seems to be oblivious to the import of this finding, and has chosen to emphasize the materialistic orientation of the Hong Kong ethos. Conversely, it is not at all surprising, though Lau thought otherwise, that nearly 60% of the respondents still expressed yearnings for more money, even if they were already well-fed and well-clothed (*ibid*). This is not just a matter of quibbling over numbers; the underlying issue is that the data marshalled by Lau did not always provide a convincing case for his theoretical argument or predilection. A more rigorous look at his data not just suggests that there is more than one way to skin a cat, but it also raises a thornier question: in attending to his data in a slapdash, inconsistent and sometimes oblivious manner, is Lau actually imposing his own preconceived views as to the nature of the normative orientations of the Hong Kong people?

9. Lau put it unequivocally, and anticipated much of his more recent political analyses, that 'the relative social isolation of the familial groups and the lack of intermediate level organizations prohibit the mobilization of the Chinese majority on a familial basis, as the inclusion of a large number of individual familial groups into a relatively *long term organizational structure* which is geared to the pursuit of some political objectives (objectives related to changes in the political system) is too formidable a task for the potential leaders' (1981a:212; original emphasis).

10. To anticipate our argument, the following can be noted as an example of the way 'class' or 'structure' is being used as part of some 'sociologically-informed social commentary,' common in the existing framework of Hong Kong studies: 'social egalitarianism is prevented from conversion into *class* antagonism, and unease about income inequality is not translated into demand for redistributive political actions' (Lau & Kuan, 1988:68; emphasis added). Social ethos are linked, in a carefree fashion, with structural possibilities, and 'class' is invoked only to have its significance and meaning shunned. Political action is regarded as a clear-cut, 'all or nothing,' phenomenon.

11. Given the utilitarian and materialistic orientations of the Hong Kong people – and Lau has made it clear that 'egoistical/acquisitive individualism' is as utilitarian and materialistic as 'utilitarian familism' – the sacrosanct values are those related to material success, and, by implications, free competition. The values and symbols pertaining to the wider society and to the polity are not their concerns.

12. It is interesting to note that in his earlier works, Lau has very much anticipated his recent political prognoses. For instance, he 'predicted' that 'the inevitable decline of utilitarianistic familism in the future does not mean that the Hong Kong Chinese can be politically organized, it simply means some of the more activist and aggressive tendencies in Chinese culture will be more difficult to suppress – and the society is likely to become much less stable' (1981a:216). The 'ungovernability' crisis is precisely exacerbated by fragmentation among the budding political elites and their general inability to mobilize the masses. But of course, one is then led to query what those 'activist and aggressive tendencies' are, and what structural forms they might assume.

13. In *The Ethos of the Hong Kong Chinese*, Lau has, firstly, emphasized the 'residual,' 'lingering' importance of traditional Chinese values (e.g. putting social and political interests above economic interests, p.93; or the 'ideological dissonance' between the social and the individual, or the

traditional and the modern: 'When society was ranked all-important and when social harmony was determined to be the primordial social interest, authoritarian control of private individuals was the inescapable outcome. This traditional view stands in sharp contrast to utilitarian familism and egoistical individualism,' p.55). Secondly, he argued that the ready availability of the traditional views and values meant that there is 'no hard and fast rule on moral choice;' the Hong Kong Chinese simply shifted back and forth between the traditional and the modern outlook, and this was facilitated by their 'situational morality' (*ibid*). Without going deeper into the interpretive and empirical problems of this line of argument, we would simply say that it is frustrating, to say the least, to find 'the inevitable decline of utilitarian familism' to be 'still in progress,' or that there is still a 'lingering support for the free capitalist economy,' despite a support for government intervention in general economic issues (Lau, Kuan & Wan, 1991:193), or more generally that traditional beliefs and norms could, will-of-the-wisp fashion, turn in and claim their significance.

14. To be fair, we should also add that in his recent works, Lau drifted towards a normative functionalist position along with a greater emphasis on the role of the 'strategic elites.' This is, in part, a response to the changing political environment wherein the China factor looms larger and larger and where political issues are increasingly tackled at the level of Sino-British relations. But what intrigues us is Lau's mode of explanation. The drift towards a normative functionalist position allows, as it were, Lau to downplay the pertinence of the interaction of structural and normative elements (which he still emphasized, for better or worse, in *Society and Politics*) and to put institutional constraints and political agents as key political variables which are constituted as autonomous from society (or the Chinese community).

15. These 'ingrained' features of course refer to the 'pure administration,' 'conservative character,' 'top-heavy machinery with overcentralization,' etc.
16. Cf. Lau (1981a:211), where he clearly stated that: 'Political integration in Hong Kong is based neither on the granting of full legitimacy to the dominant group by the subordinate group, nor on the congruence in cultural ethos between the two, nor on the submissiveness of the subordinate group before an apparatus of coercion controlled by the dominant group, but is a result mainly of reciprocal goal definition which, implicitly and explicitly, delineate the proper political obligations and rights for the two parties.'
17. A more sympathetic reader of Scott may find him observant, and is satisfied with his observations on the Hong Kong middle class. But observations are no substitute for evidence. At any rate, his observations are not adequate to support a book-length research on the crisis of legitimacy where the *coup de grâce* is perhaps the withdrawal of support from the middle class. Fastidious readers that we are, we rummaged through the index, and found immediately that the evidence supporting Scott's picture of a politically aspiring middle class is rather flimsy, if, indeed, there are reliable sources of information at all. Most of the time, Scott's arguments run undocumented. A very typical way he proceeds is this: 'A second casualty of the agreement was the political aspirations of the middle class. Had there not been an agreement or the problem of the expiry of the lease, it is possible that the middle class would have eventually been incorporated into the decision-making system in much the way that traditional and business elites had been brought with the system in the nineteenth century.... This was not the principal reason why many middle-class people chose to emigrate in the post-agreement period – broader concerns about the consequences of communist rule were the main cause – but the

perceived inability to shape their future may have contributed to their decision to leave.' What is striking is not the way Scott hedges his argument, but that the entire paragraph runs undocumented. It looks as if Scott really knows what the middle class thinks and why they are frustrated, and since this picture comes so close to our common sense or daily observation (yet another warring god in Weber's disenchanted world), one does not need to give evidences to support the case. At the end of this paragraph, Scott asked the reader to consult Chapter 6 where it is supposed to give an account of the rise of the middle class. But apparently Scott has forgotten that repeating the familiar story of the changing economy of Hong Kong is not really an explanation of the middle class, nor would such an account be adequate to explain the political formation (if this is the case) of the middle class. Who are, in Scott's mind, the middle class anyway?

18. If it is agreed that both Lau and Scott bring in classes in an *ad hoc* manner, at least Lau was able to relate them to the 'society,' in particular, the organizational, leadership and political contraints involved in building class-based politics in Hong Kong.
19. That we consciously adopt a Weberian approach to the question of social relationships and class is perhaps better explained in the following sections.
20. Our approach to class and class analysis thus resembles the multi-level nomenclature as outlined by Katznelson and his associates. See Katznelson & Zolberg (1986:Introduction); also see Wong 1988, especially the diagram on p.154. Similar approaches to the relations between class and politics are also discussed in Birnbaum 1988 and Tilly 1978.
21. For a fuller treatment of this point, see Wong and Lui, 'Reinstating Class,' forthcoming.
22. Thus, for example, a question about environmental (residential) deterioration taps a different social frame of reference – and its political implications – from one about union membership, or the welfare role of the government.

23. The details of our class schema can be found in Wong and Lui, 'Reinstating Class,' forthcoming.
24. For a discussion of this point on another data set, see Wong 1991.
25. See Wong 1991.
26. Cf. Lau (1988:66f).
27. We are not unaware of the possibility that the linkages described here are far from automatic or necessary. For a schematic, and more sophisticated, treatment, see Schlozman & Verba (1979:Introduction). Though we do not directly follow their framework – our 'domains of action' are arrived at independently – there is a striking resemblance in the way we grappled with the problem of society, politics and mobilization.
28. Perhaps there is no need for disconcertment. The more we read Scott's monograph, the more convinced we become that his book has struck some very important sympathetic, but ideological, chords in the society. The clamouring for democracy in the lead-up to 1997, the frustration and anguish created by an ailing government, and the like have alerted ears and generated a social atmosphere conducive to ideological lashings and to the aggrandizement of the new middle class mission.
29. It should be clear that we in no way adhere to a rigid position on this issue. See Wong 1988; Wong and Lui, forthcoming; Lui in *Wide Angle*, for a discussion on the relations between class position, identity and class formation.
30. Lau's recent attempts to incorporate 'class' and conflict into his political analyses have remained at the normative, or orientations, level. See Lau 1991 (recent *Wide Angle* article).

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從一種政治到一種政治文化

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（中文摘要）

香港的政治及政治穩定性問題，曾經在不同的角度下被提出來討論。對於其中三個不同的討論角度，本文作出描繪，而這三個觀點正好代表了戰後有關香港政治問題論述的發展。這些論述其實都並未能對問題作出令人滿意的分析。在對社會結構缺乏深入瞭解，同時又未能掌握到政治活動基本上都是在特定社會環境之中進行此一特點的情況下，這些論述結果都流於成為規範指向的解釋或演辯式的陳述，都未能充份掌握政治行動或政治穩定性的特質，以及這些問題的臨時多變性格。本文認為有需要重新考慮政治取向及行動的處境因素。在對香港社會的階級結構作出勾劃之後，本文根據「香港社會流動調查：1989」的部份資料，建立一套政治取向的分類法，此分類法在概念上以利益及資源作為準則，對不同領域的社會生活都適合。本文結論指出：這個突現社會結構及處境因素的觀點，不但有助於理解政治穩定的問題，而且可以幫助我們認真地考察冒現中的政治動員以及動搖現有政治秩序的各種可能變化。