Public Attitude toward Political Parties in Hong Kong

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Acknowledgement

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Abstract

Public attitute toward political parties in Hong Kong is one of ambivalence and does not furnish a hospitable environment for their development. In their approach to political parties, the people of Hong Kong are not guided by modern democratic precepts or by the need to introduce political, social and economic changes. In fact, political parties are expected to serve primarily the expressive function of venting people's discontent and frustration, especially against the Chinese government. As construed in the mind of the public, political parties are essentially an additional component in a partially democratized political order playing mainly an oppositional but still a secondary role vis-à-vis the government-that-be in Hong Kong.

UP till most recently, Hong Kong as a British Crown Colony had been ruled for about one and a half centuries by a "pure" bureaucratic government, which was headed by a governor with absolutist constitutional powers. As political power was monopolized by the colonial regime, no political space was available for the formation of political parties. And the colonial government itself did not see the need to create a "government" party as means to support its rule. Moreover, inasmuch as the option of political independence for Hong Kong was precluded, political parties could not emerge on the basis of anti-colonialism or an independence movement.

The new policy of Britain to "transfer" a portion of its political power to the Hong Kong people, spurred by the scheduled termination of colonial rule in 1997, has resulted in the introduction of both popular and functional elections into the legislature of the territory, which open up opportunities for party formation. Public anxieties about the future of Hong Kong and common fears of communism have also prompted some Hong Kong people into political action. As a result, since 1982 political

groups and civic groups have mushroomed. These groups differ in the level of their organization and cohesiveness. Their degree of participation in the direct and indirect elections also varies, so are their political goals and outlook. Even though some of them lay claim to political party status (the United Democrats of Hong Kong and the Liberal Democratic Federation, for example), and others have registered their intention to evolve into political parties, none of them however attach the party label to themselves. What is most extraordinary is that almost all of these political groups claim to represent the people of Hong Kong as a whole. These facts in themselves are a vivid reflection of the mixed feelings toward political parties of both the people and the politicians in Hong Kong.

The prospect of party development in Hong Kong is of critical importance to its political future. It goes without saying that, aside from the objective environment, the development of political parties is contingent upon the support they can obtain from the people. To assess the prospect of political parties in Hong Kong, an examination of the way the public approaches political parties is essential. The purpose of this paper is to explore the attitude of the Hong Kong people toward political parties as well as the factors underlying it. Specifically, the meanings which the Hong Kong public attributes to the term "political party" will be scrutinized. The main body of findings in this study comes from a questionnaire survey of a Hong Kong-wide sample of respondents.[1] The interviews based on a structured questionnaire were conducted in the summer and winter of 1990. In total 390 interviews were successfully completed.

Objective Constraints on Party Development

In recent years, the impetus that propelled the formation of political groups in Hong Kong was primarily political in nature. The introduction of elective seats in the Legislative Council of Hong Kong has made available a slice of "free-floating" political power for public contest. And this is particularly true with respect to the directly elective seats. Naturally, the direct election for the legislature held in September 1991 has been

a catalyst for the formation of political groups at least as electoral organizations. The numerical dominance of the elective (both geographical and functional constituencies) components in the Legislative Council since 1991 would unavoidably spawn "party" factions inside the body. Given the uncertainty of Hong Kong's political future, the proliferation of social and political conflicts, the growing involvement of the government in economic and welfare matters, the decline of authority suffered by the colonial regime and the incessant politicization of society, it is very likely that political groups will continue to proliferate, and they are expected to take the form of civic group, pressure group, advocacy organization, opinion group, interest group, or social movement.

The constitutional setup and the socio-political context of Hong Kong do leave room for the emergence of political groups which look like "cadre parties," that is, small organizations of political activists which do not have mass bases. Nevertheless, if political parties are understood as large-scale political formations having strong political leadership, coherent ideologies, powerful organization and dependable mass bases, then the future of political parties in Hong Kong will be anything but bright. Even though recent political reforms and changes in the political atmosphere have opened up some political space for party formation, objective constraints are such that opportunities for expansive party development will still be quite limited.[2]

For one thing, the constitutional powers that are made available for competition by political groups is so limited and fragmented that it would be a gargantuan task for any group to aggregate and consolidate political power. It would be a sisyphean undertaking to aggregate, horizontally and vertically, the divergent interests of a large number of political bodies and functional groups. Secondly, the limited constitutional powers of the legislature, the diversity of representative modes there, and its institutional separation from the executive will mean that the bureaucracy – the linchpin of the existing political system – will continue to be the main source of public policies and resources. Legislators will have to depend on the goodwill of the administrators in order to satisfy the demands of their constituents, thus detracting from their reliance on the political groups they belong to. Comparative evidence from elsewhere (such as Japan, Germany, France and other former colonies)

shows that the prior existence of a powerful bureaucracy impedes the formation of strong parties.

Thirdly, the semi-dependent character of Hong Kong's politicians weakens their political stature and softens their political clout, thus militating against the possibility of powerful political organizations among them. This political semi-dependency is grounded in two structural features of Hong Kong's political system. The first is the constitutionally subordinate status of Hong Kong as a British colony or as a future Special Administrative Region of China. This means that all political groups in Hong Kong are ultimately vulnerable to punitive sanctions by either the metropolitan or central government. The second is the limited role played by popular election in determining the allocation of political power. As the electoral channel is one among several channels of political ascendancy and as strong political parties can only thrive upon popular elections, the restricted role played by direct election in Hong Kong imposes serious impediments on the development of mass parties.[3]

Fourthly, the limited role of the government in social and economic affairs, and the still impressive performance of the economy, serve to dampen interest in a potentially risky political career among those who might otherwise harbor political aspirations. Particularly when the political arena will continue to be small and systemic demand for professional politicians is limited, it will be more difficult to build up a successful and long-term career in the political sector than a similar venture elsewhere.

Fifthly, as both the existent political system and the future one will be dominated by a powerful executive, there are and will be scanty public resources and public offices available for political patronage to attract both cadres and followers. Lastly, despite the large number of social and economic organizations in Hong Kong, they are in general not strong and coherent enough to form the basis of party building. The divisions within labor, the middle classes and the business sectors are conspicuous. The relative "autonomy" of society and the economy from the polity further inhibits rapid and extensive politicization of these groups. Moreover, the relative "autonomy" of the socio-economic groups and their direct incorporation into the political system through functional constituencies elections make them less dependent on politi-

cal parties as the political arm to advance their interests. Therefore, political parties in Hong Kong will be deprived of the necessary support rendered by socio-economic groups which are politically bound to them.

But that is not all. As will be seen below, the inhibitory effects produced by these objective constraints are compounded by the less than enthusiastic reception of political parties on the part of the Hong Kong people.

Ambivalence toward Political Parties

Generally speaking, the political culture of practically all traditional or pre-modern societies fails to provide hospitable milieus for the emergence of political parties, which smack of self-seekingness, harm to the common weal, factional strife and social disharmony. Even in a society as enchanted with freedom and democracy as the United States, it was only after a long period of political turbulence that the American people were able to come to terms with the idea of "opposition" and to experiment with its incarnation in a party system.[4]

The political cultural heritage of China places overriding emphasis on strong but benevolent authority, unity, harmony, and the supremacy of the collectivity. It is uncompromisingly hostile to the ideas of opposition and the political party. Therefore, not surprisingly, Chinese people have a tendency to look askance at political parties which are by definition representatives of sectional interests and which are destined to engage in political conflict. To further tarnish the public image of political parties is the fact that political parties in modern China have a battered and inglorious history. They have never become integral and supportive parts of a stable and effective modern democracy. Instead, they are either *de facto* political cliques embroiled in power struggle for self-serving purposes, or political-military colossuses (the Nationalist and Communist parties) dominating the political scene. Because of this sorry historical experience, the term "political party" inevitably carries negative connotations in the mind of the Hong Kong Chinese, who still look on them as the culprits for the abuse of political power and political turmoil in modern China.

Nonetheless, the impending takeover of sovereignty over Hong Kong by China and increasing public mistrust of the Hong Kong and British governments might lead the people to receive with more favor organized political forces which can to a certain extent operate to counterbalance the Chinese, British and Hong Kong governments and represent local interests. The growing importance of political groups in the direct elections might also make people more appreciative of the functions that can be performed by political parties in a political system undergoing democratization. The increasing incidence of social and political conflicts in Hong Kong might also alert the public to the inevitability of political parties as organized forces in the conflictual process. Moreover, in view of the openness of Hong Kong to western cultural influence, it is also likely that the ubiquity of political parties in Western societies would have impressed upon the public the indispensability of political parties in modern societies. Accordingly, public attitude toward political parties in Hong Kong is likely to have been molded by a variety of contradictory influences.

As gleaned from the survey findings, the people of Hong Kong in general tend to adopt an ambivalent stance toward political parties. Thus, while we found in 1985 that 34.8 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the view that the emergence of political parties would make the political system of Hong Kong better,[5] it was nevertheless also found in 1988 that 50.5 percent of respondents opposed the formation of political parties in Hong Kong.[6]

In the current survey, slightly more than half of the respondents (52 percent) were in favor of party formation in Hong Kong, while only 25.3 percent were against it. However, still a relatively substantial proportion of respondents (19 percent) were not sure about the matter. Compared with 1988, when 25 percent of respondents were in favor of party formation and 55.5 percent against it, the idea of formation of political parties had evidently been disseminated in society. Notwithstanding public support for party formation, the ambivalence of the people toward political parties lingers on. A plurality of respondents (39 percent) declared that they would not participate in or support the activities of political parties. Only 20 percent of them said they would do so and 28.5 percent stated that they would do so only under certain circumstances.

Nevertheless, those who supported the formation of political parties were also more inclined to support the activities of political parties.[7]

Moreover, the interviewees were fully aware of the adverse consequences of party competition. As many as 43.6 percent of them agreed or strongly agreed with the view that if political parties appeared in Hong Kong, the struggle for power among them would produce instability in society. A lower proportion (38.8 percent) of them disagreed or strongly disagreed. Naturally, those who did not support the formation of political parties were also more likely to agree with the view that political parties would destabilize society. What is most interesting is that the Hong Kong people still have difficulty in accepting the fact that political parties in modern democracies are "by nature" representatives of "partisan" or sectional interests, as an overwhelming majority of the respondents (74.9 percent) were of the opinion that political parties in Hong Kong should represent the interests of all the people. Only 13.1 percent would allow them to represent the interests of particular social strata. What this seems to imply is that the Hong Kong people would like political parties to serve the common good rather than behave as political "parties." Yet people's view as to whom political parties should represent did not affect their attitude toward party formation.

In all, the Hong Kong public recognizes the need for political parties in Hong Kong, but they are reluctant to take part in party activities. Furthermore, they would like the parties to behave in a "non-party-like" manner so as to simultaneously preserve social harmony on one side and serve public interests on the other. What the findings seem to disclose is that the people of Hong Kong are not sure about the function of political parties in their society and the role they should play in a political system undergoing democratization.

While the age, sex and income of the respondents make no difference to their attitudes toward political parties, education turned out to be a significant differentiating factor. Not surprisingly, the more educated were more supportive of party formation, more willing to participate in or support the activities of political parties, less likely to say that political parties would cause social instability, and less likely to say that political parties should represent collective interests rather than sectional interests. As the Hong Kong populace is increasingly educated,

it appears likely that the people of Hong Kong will be more positive about the value of political parties in their society. Nevertheless, it will be hard to dissipate public ambivalence toward political parties.

Factors Affecting Public Attitude toward Political Parties

In order to probe further into the meaning of political parties to the Hong Kong people, a comprehensive examination of the relationship between public attitude toward political parties and their attitude toward a set of political and social objects would provide the clues as to the social and political attitudes which condition the way political parties are perceived and evaluated by the Hong Kong people.

In line with the description in the previous section, public attitude toward political parties can be measured by four attitudinal items: support for the formation of parties, participation in party activities, conception of the interest representative function of the parties, and attitude toward parties as a source of instability.

The relationships between public attitude toward political parties and their attitude toward a set of political and social objects are briefly presented below.

(1) Confidence in Hong Kong's future has a positive relationship with attitude toward political parties. Even though this factor has no correlation with conception of interest representation of parties, its relationships with the other three attitudinal items are significant. Among those respondents with little confidence in the future of Hong Kong, 67.4 percent supported the formation of political parties, the figures for those with average confidence and with much confidence are 65.1 percent and 72.2 percent respectively. Thus, support for party formation is an expression of confidence in the future of one's society.

In the same vein, those respondents who were confident about the future of Hong Kong were more willing to participate in party activities than those who were not. Moreover, those with more confidence in Hong Kong's future were less likely to agree with the

view that political parties would cause instability in the territory.

(2) How one evaluates the existent political system of Hong Kong is moderately related to one's attitude toward political parties. This factor bears no relationship with support for party formation and participation in party activities. Nevertheless, those who evaluate the existent political system favorably (59 percent of the respondents) were more likely to say that political parties should represent all the people and to agree with the view that political parties engendered social instability. Hence, those who accept the existent political system do not find much room for political parties in Hong Kong.

(3) On the whole public definition of a democratic government bears no relationship with attitude toward political parties. A plurality of respondents (39.5 percent) understood democratic government as a government that consulted public opinion. The more "appropriate" definition of democratic government as elective government came only second in popularity (27.9 percent). What is surprising is that despite the "higher" level of political consciousness of those who selected elective government to define democratic government, these respondents were however more likely to say that political parties should represent "all the people of Hong Kong" rather than particular social strata.

(4) Public attitude toward political parties is not affected by the way people evaluate the probability of successful democratization in Hong Kong. Those respondents who were more optimistic about the establishment of democracy in their society (33.3 percent) were not more supportive of political parties. It might also mean that the significance of political parties in representative democracies is only weakly appreciated by the public.

(5) In general, people's attitude toward political reform in Hong Kong is weakly correlated with attitude toward political parties. Thus, the appearance of political parties is only vaguely seen as an integral part of the reform program or its logical outcome. Nonetheless, those respondents who were more supportive of political reform (38.5 percent) were more willing to participate in party activities.

(6) Opinion about the appropriate pace of political reform in Hong Kong is moderately related to attitude toward political parties. This factor has no relationship with participation in party activities and conception of the interest representative function of political parties. Nevertheless, those respondents who wanted a fast pace of political reform (6.2 percent) were more supportive of the formation of political parties. On the other hand, those who desired a slow pace of political reform (5.4 percent) were more likely to say that political parties would bring about social instability. Again, as in (5), political parties are not widely recognized as the natural derivative of political reform.

(7) Satisfaction with Hong Kong's political conditions does not make any difference in people's attitude toward political parties. Hong Kong people are divided on this matter. Hence, those who have a more favorable attitude toward political parties do so not because they are dissatisfied with the existent state of political affairs.

(8) Trust in the Hong Kong government is moderately correlated with attitude toward political parties. This factor has no relationship with participation in party activities and conception of the representative function of political parties. However, people who trusted the Hong Kong government(42.9 percent)were less supportive of formation of parties and were more in agreement with the view that political parties would lead to social instability. These findings seem to show that in the mind of the people political parties are needed whenever public trust in the Hong Kong government dwindles.

(9) Satisfaction with the performance of the Hong Kong government does not have any relationship with the four attitudinal items. As a result, people support political parties not out of the motive to improve governmental efficiency or effectiveness.

(10) The impact of trust in the British government is similar to that of trust in the Hong Kong government. Again, this factor is not correlated with participation in party activities and conception of the representative function of parties. On the other hand, trust in the British government means less support for party formation and concurrence with the view that parties will cause instability.

(11) Trust in the Chinese government is also moderately related to attitude toward political parties. This factor makes no difference in people's tendency to participate in party activities or in their conception of the representative function of parties. As in the case of trust in the Hong Kong government, those who trust the Chinese government are less likely to support the formation of political parties. And they are more in agreement with the view that political parties would bring about social instability. Once again, political parties seem to be seen as a corrective to a mistrusted government.

(12) It appears that one's attitude toward the Chinese government has some effects on how one perceives political parties. Whilst attitude toward confrontation with the Chinese government makes no difference to willingness to participate in party activities or to conception of the representative function of parties, this factor does affect attitude toward party formation and conception of the role of parties as a cause of social instability. On the one hand, people who supported a confrontational stance against the Chinese government (a minuscule 11.3 percent) were more supportive of party formation. On the other hand, somewhat surprisingly, these people were also slightly more likely to say that parties would cause social instability. It might be the case that these people considered social instability an inevitable outcome when political parties were locked in conflict with the Chinese government.

(13) Whether people see conflict of interests between Hong Kong and China, however, has no effect on public attitude toward political parties. Political parties hence are not conceived as organizational vehicles for the purpose of advancing local interests vis-à-vis China. In line with (12), it appears that most people are not prepared to face the destabilizing consequences of Hong Kong-China conflict in spite of their negative feelings toward the Chinese government.

(14) How one perceives the motive of politicians is weakly related to attitude toward political parties. This factor is not correlated with participation in party activities, conception of the representative function of parties and parties as a cause of social instability.

However, people who thought that the primary motive of politicians as to serve society (21.8 percent) were more supportive of party formation than those who saw the motive as catering to self-interests.

(15) People's attitude toward those leaders who are disliked by the Chinese government has a fair amount of correlation with their attitude toward political parties. Whilst this factor has no relationship with conception of the representative function of political parties and their impact on social stability, it has effects on the other two attitudinal elements. Those who were adamant that they would still support those leaders who were disliked by the Chinese government (30.8 percent) were also more supportive of formation of political parties and more willing to participate in party activities. These findings might mean that those who see parties as a sort of safeguard of Hong Kong's interests against China are more favorably disposed toward political parties.

(16) Whether people are optimistic or pessimistic about the appearance of trustworthy leaders before 1997 does make significant difference in their attitude toward political parties. Even though this factor has no relationship with conception of the representative function of political parties, it has significant correlation with the other three attitudinal items. Thus, people who were more optimistic about the rise of trustworthy political leaders before 1997 (22.8 percent) were more supportive of party formation and more willing to participate in party activities. Somewhat unexpectedly, they were also slightly more likely to say that parties would bring about social instability. These findings might be interpreted to mean that people probably see political parties as a channel for grooming trustworthy leaders, but they might also think that a certain degree of social instability would accompany the appearance of parties.

(17) People's attitude toward social and economic reforms is not correlated with any of the four attitudinal items with regard to political parties. This shows that the public does not see political parties as the organizational means to pursue social and economic changes, notwithstanding the fact that a substantial proportion of the respon-

dents (41.8 percent) deemed these reforms as necessary.

(18) Almost similarly, whether people perceive conflict of interests between social classes is weakly related to attitude toward political parties. There is no correlation between this factor and participation in party activities, conception of the representative function of parties and seeing parties as the cause of social instability. However, those who perceived conflict of interests between classes (69.7 percent) were more supportive of the formation of political parties. On the whole, political parties are only vaguely recognized by the public as organizational vehicles for class conflict by the disadvantaged.

(19) Whether people rate wealth distribution in Hong Kong as fair or not does not have any relationship with the four attitudinal items with respect to political parties. Just like (18), parties are not publicly seen as an appropriate political means to achieve a higher degree of economic equality.

It can be gathered from the above findings that when the people of Hong Kong show a favorable attitude toward political parties, they do so not because they are pessimistic about the future of their society or because they are alienated from the political system and the political authorities. By the same token, they do not envisage political parties as organizational agencies to produce socio-economic reforms or to conduct class warfare. Parties are also not perceived as indispensable elements in Hong Kong's democratization, whether as its propelling force or as its logical outcome. What does seem clear however is that people would like parties to play some role in protecting Hong Kong's interests vis-à-vis the Chinese government. They also expect parties to be the breeding ground of future leaders who would take collective interests close to heart.

Attitude toward Institutions, Political Leaders, and Political Groups and Support for Political Parties

Findings presented earlier seem to show that those people who are more positively oriented toward the political *status quo* are more likely to be favorably disposed toward political parties. To further explore this phenomenon, we have to analyze the relationship between attitude toward the institutions, political leaders and political groups of Hong Kong on the one hand, and support for party formation on the other.

Table 1 presents the findings on the relationship between trust in institutions and support for party formation. These institutions include those closely associated with the government and constitute integral parts of the political system (the governor, civil servants, Legislative Council [LegCo], appointed LegCo members, LegCo members elected by electoral colleges, LegCo members elected by functional constituencies, District Board members, the advisory committees appointed by the government and the courts), those who represent extra-governmental forces (pressure groups, democratic movement leaders, business leaders, labor union leaders, scholars, professionals, religious leaders and lawyers), the two bodies organized by China to draft the Basic Law for post-1997 Hong Kong (the Basic Law Drafting Committee and the Basic Law Consultative Committee), the representative of the Chinese government (the Hong Kong branch of the New China News Agency) and the pro-China leftist organizations.

By and large, there is a fairly strong correlation between the two factors, the direction of the significant correlations differs however with respect to different types of institutions. Trust in the LegCo, the indirectly elected legislators, the pressure groups, scholars, professionals, labor union leaders, religious leaders, the courts and the lawyers are "conducive" to support for the formation of political parties. Except for the pressure groups, they all belong to the "establishment" of Hong Kong. On the contrary, those who have low trust in the appointed legislators, the appointed advisory committees, the two committees involved in the drafting of the Basic Law, the democratic movement leaders and the New China News Agency (Hong Kong Branch) are more likely to support party formation. With the exception of democratic movement leaders, all the other institutions in this set are directly related to either the Hong Kong or the Chinese government. It appears that if the public is mistrustful of the Chinese government, or those political bodies and politicians who are considered to toe the line of either the Hong Kong or the Chinese government, they would be more supportive of the formation of political parties.

Generally speaking, agreement with the views of a heterogeneous collection of political leaders and support for party formation are positively correlated, as can be discerned in Table 2. These leaders are

Table 1   Trust in Institutions and Support for Party Formation

	Trust[†]		P
	Low	High	
1. Governor	76.5	65.0	0.3726
2. Civil servants	69.6	69.4	0.0592
3. Legislative Council	61.5	70.1	0.0000*
4. LegCo members: Appointed	76.2	64.7	0.0009*
5. LegCo members: Electoral College	65.5	70.9	0.0000*
6. LegCo members: Functional Constituencies	61.2	73.1	0.0000*
7. District Board members	66.2	66.7	0.0616
8. Appointed advisory committees	78.1	62.2	0.0000*
9. Basic Law Drafting Committee	78.0	64.0	0.0008*
10. Basic Law Consultative Committee	75.2	67.2	0.0006*
11. Democratic movement leaders	69.2	67.4	0.0001*
12. Pressure groups	62.9	74.6	0.0172*
13. Leftist organizations	72.2	58.3	0.1020
14. New China News Agency (HK Branch)	72.5	61.9	0.0000*
15. Business leaders	63.4	71.2	0.1421
16. Scholars	60.0	71.0	0.0000*
17. Professionals	57.8	71.2	0.0000*
18. Labor union leaders	59.8	72.0	0.0461*
19. Religious leaders	60.7	72.9	0.0000*
20. Courts	64.3	69.4	0.0000*
21. Lawyers	63.2	69.9	0.0136*

† % who supported the formation of parties.
* Chi-square statistic significant at 0.05 level.

Table 2 Agreement with the Views of Political Leaders and Support for Party Formation

	Disagreement[†]	Agreement[†]	P
1. Lydia Dunn	66.7	67.9	0.0420*
2. Allen Lee	61.9	70.9	0.0000*
3. Maria Tam	75.3	63.7	0.4811
4. Martin Lee	55.3	71.8	0.0000*
5. Lo Tak-shing	75.9	66.0	0.2985
6. Liu Yiu-chu	74.8	62.7	0.5466
7. Vincent Lo	82.0	65.3	0.0000*
8. Szeto Wah	62.5	70.2	0.0005*
9. Chung Sze-yuen	77.1	66.0	0.0005*
10. Elsie Tu	58.3	68.7	0.0248*
11. David Akers-Jones	60.9	69.5	0.0000*
12. Lau Chin-shek	60.0	75.2	0.0006*
13. Ho Sai-chu	75.8	68.9	0.2450

† % who supported the formation of political parties.
* Chi-square statistic significant at 0.05 level.

selected to represent a broad spectrum of political tendencies. Lady Lydia Dunn (appointed member of the Executive Council [ExCo]), Allen Lee (appointed member of the ExCo and LegCo), Maria Tam (appointed LegCo and ExCo member), Vincent Lo (politically active businessman), Sir Chung Sze-yuen (former appointed LegCo and ExCo member) and Sir David Akers-Jones (retired senior civil servant and once acting governor of Hong Kong) are establishment political figures par excellence. Martin Lee (indirectly elected LegCo member and democratic movement leader) and Szeto Wah (indirectly elected LegCo member and democratic movement leader) are typical "anti-establishment" democratic activists, both of whom have incurred the ire of both the Hong Kong and Chinese governments. Lo Tak-shing represents a formerly staunch establishment figure whose disillusionment with Britain has transformed him into a prominent pro-China politician. Liu Yiu-chu, on the contrary, is an anti-colonial pro-China patriot. Elsie Tu differs from all the others by her populist stance as the champion of the

rights of the underdog. Lau Chin-shek distinguishes himself by being a militant trade unionist. Lastly, Ho Sai-chu was at the time of interview largely perceived as a moderate pro-China businessman.[8]

As evidenced in Table 3, agreement with the views of the political groups and support for party formation are also positively correlated. A majority of these groups appeared after the advent of the 1997 issue and represented spinoffs from this momentous historical event. Many of them have taken advantage of the opening up of political space effected by partial democratization in Hong Kong. They have also established themselves by mobilizing public antipathy toward the Chinese government and channelizing public disapproval of the Hong Kong and British governments for mishandling Hong Kong's political future. Naturally, most of them have taken on "anti-establishment" colorations, only that here the "establishment" represents an odd "combination" of the Chinese, British and Hong Kong governments. Among the groups listed in Table 3, the Joint Committee to Promote Democratic Political System, the Meeting Point, the Hong Kong Affairs Society, the Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood, the United Democrats of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movement in China and the April-fifth Movement are of the "anti-establishment" genre, with the last two the most militant against China. The Reform Club, the Civic Association, the Hong Kong Democratic Foundation, the Association for a Better Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Foundation can broadly be described as elitist and moderate civic groups who advocate moderate political reforms. The New Hong Kong Alliance, the Progressive Hong Kong Society and the Liberal Democratic Federation are comparatively speaking more conservative politically and more sympathetic to the Chinese government.

It is absolutely normal for people who endorse the views of political groups to also take a favorable position toward the formation of political parties. What is however puzzling is that the political platforms of the groups concerned do not significantly affect the public's stance toward parties. The message from Table 3 seems to be that political parties are not envisaged by the public as organizational vehicles to be used against political authorities.

Table 3   Agreement with the Views of Political Groups and Support for Party Formation

	Disagreement[†]	Agreement[†]	P
1. New HK Alliance	81.0	73.6	0.2533
2. Joint Committee to Promote Democratic Political System	61.5	74.3	0.0021*
3. HK Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic· Movement in China	61.1	69.7	0.0000*
4. Reform Club	66.7	68.2	0.2966
5. Civic Association	63.6	66.1	0.0331*
6. Progressive HK Society	68.8	68.8	0.1137
7. Meeting Point	57.1	85.2	0.0579
8. HK Affairs Society	55.0	80.0	0.0023*
9. HK Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood	50.0	69.0	0.0001*
10. HK Foundation	64.7	55.3	0.0690
11. United Democrats of HK	50.0	73.3	0.0072*
12. Association for a Better HK	58.8	64.0	0.2266
13. April-fifth Movement	75.3	70.3	0.2437
14. HK Democratic Foundation	50.0	73.6	0.0000*
15. HK Liberal Democratic Association	43.7	68.3	0.0000*

† % who supported the formation of political parties.
* Chi-square statistic significant at 0.05 level.

Trust in Governments and Agreement with the Views of Political Groups

To further investigate the considerations underlying public attitude toward political parties, the relationship between trust in the Hong Kong, British and Chinese governments and agreement with the views of the political groups is analyzed. As these groups are selected because they represent a broad spectrum of political orientations, this sort of analysis would enable us to learn in a general manner of the considerations

underlying public attitude toward political parties. Table 4 shows the relationship between trust in the Hong Kong government and agreement with the views of the political groups.

Table 4   Trust in Hong Kong Government and Agreement with Views of Political Groups

	Trust in HK government[†]			
	Low	Medium	High	P
1. New HK Alliance	63.2	81.0	69.4	0.0173*
2. Joint Committee to Promote Democratic Political System	57.7	86.3	80.8	0.0000*
3. HK Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movement in China	59.5	76.3	65.5	0.0000*
4. Reform Club	33.3	75.0	60.6	0.0000*
5. Civic Association	83.3	81.8	83.3	0.0000*
6. Progressive HK Society	54.5	83.3	55.6	0.0000*
7. Meeting Point	71.4	82.7	60.0	0.0007*
8. HK Affairs Society	65.0	78.8	70.6	0.0000*
9. HK Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood	70.8	92.0	83.0	0.0000*
10. HK Foundation	62.5	72.2	77.4	0.0000*
11. United Democrats of HK	57.1	93.4	77.8	0.0003*
12. Association for a Better HK	40.0	68.8	56.3	0.0008*
13. April-fifth Movement	45.5	45.4	40.8	0.2075
14. HK Democratic Foundation	74.1	94.4	81.7	0.0000*
15. HK Liberal Democratic Association	72.2	94.1	59.0	0.0000*

† % who agreed or strongly agreed with the views of the political groups concerned.
* Chi-square statistic significant at 0.05 level.

As can be seen from Table 4, despite the fact that almost all these political groups consider their major functions as supervising the government, representing social interests and advocating democratic reforms, in

the majority of cases, trust in the Hong Kong government and agreement with their views move in the same direction. That is to say, if people mistrust the Hong Kong government, they in general are not likely to endorse the political groups either.[9]

The relationship between trust in the British government and agreement with the views of political groups is found in Table 5.

Table 5   Trust in British Government and Agreement with Views of Political Groups

| | Trust in British government[†] | | | |
	Low	Medium	High	P
1. New HK Alliance	64.9	72.7	81.3	0.8629
2. Joint Committee to Promote Democratic Political System	75.0	80.4	84.2	0.0855
3. HK Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movement in China	69.0	68.9	68.1	0.1651
4. Reform Club	51.6	72.4	50.0	0.1817
5. Civic Association	84.8	84.6	70.0	0.0082*
6. Progressive HK Society	72.7	67.9	33.3	0.0014*
7. Meeting Point	77.3	65.6	60.0	0.2588
8. HK Affairs Society	68.9	77.4	70.0	0.2560
9. HK Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood	82.5	87.5	80.0	0.0572
10. HK Foundation	71.4	68.2	76.9	0.0477*
11. United Democrats of HK	73.5	88.3	84.2	0.0068*
12. Association for a Better HK	55.6	61.1	50.0	0.0365*
13. April-fifth Movement	40.3	49.2	45.2	0.8509
14. HK Democratic Foundation	81.3	91.7	80.8	0.0591
15. HK Liberal Democratic Association	75.8	90.9	77.8	0.0140*

† % who agreed or strongly agreed with the views of the political groups concerned.
* Chi-square statistic significant at 0.05 level.

The overall relationship between the two variables is not strong. The few statistically significant relationships in the table are contradictory in meanings and do not present a coherent picture. Hence, it might be reasonable to conclude that whether the public trusts the British government or not does not make much difference in how it approaches the issue of party formation.

Table 6   Trust in Chinese Government and Agreement with Views of Political Groups

| | Trust in Chinese government[†] | | | |
	Low	Medium	High	P
1. New HK Alliance	66.7	86.7	75.0	0.7585
2. Joint Committee to Promote Democratic Political System	80.0	85.7	54.5	0.1465
3. HK Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movement in China	71.5	65.3	54.2	0.1074
4. Reform Club	51.0	81.3	60.0	0.2210
5. Civic Association	84.6	100.0	50.0	0.0491*
6. Progressive HK Society	71.1	72.7	25.0	0.0969
7. Meeting Point	75.8	66.6	42.9	0.3090
8. HK Affairs Society	71.0	91.7	40.0	0.0910
9. HK Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood	85.1	100.0	16.7	0.0003*
10. HK Foundation	72.9	81.8	40.0	0.1362
11. United Democrats of HK	80.2	94.4	50.0	0.0356*
12. Association for a Better HK	56.7	75.0	40.0	0.2884
13. April-fifth Movement	46.5	43.8	23.1	0.8652
14. HK Democratic Foundation	85.7	95.8	37.5	0.0029*
15. HK Liberal Democratic Association	84.1	92.9	28.6	0.0066*

† % who agreed or strongly agreed with the views of the political groups concerned.
* Chi-square statistic significant at 0.05 level.

As can be seen in Table 6, the relationship between trust in the Chinese government and agreement with the views of political groups is moderate.

The moderate relationship between the two variables notwithstanding, the general picture presented by Table 6 is noteworthy. In contrast with the case of trust in the Hong Kong government, where trust in it and agreement with the views of political groups are positively correlated, here the relationship between trust in the Chinese government and agreement with the views of political groups is negative. The obvious conclusion that can be drawn from the table seems to be that those who are mistrustful of the Chinese government are more favorably disposed toward political groups in particular and possibly toward political parties in general.

Discussion

Inconsistent public attitude toward political parties is a widespread phenomenon, even longstanding democracies such as the United States and Britain are no exceptions. In "new" democracies such as Japan and India, public ambivalence toward political parties is rife.[10] In fact, according to Eldersveld and Bashiruddin, "[i]n India as well as in Western democracies, large majorities are generally committed to the idea that political parties have a role to play, and large majorities also fear the consequences of party conflict. But a psychological attachment to party is not linked more strongly to a belief in party government and the party process."[11] What differentiate between these democracies are the nature, magnitude, content of the ambivalence as well as its origin.

Public attitude toward political parties in Hong Kong, where parties have yet to make their appearance, is not unexpectedly also one of ambivalence. Whilst the people of Hong Kong are increasingly receptive to the idea of forming political parties in their society, still they are worried about the negative consequences therefrom. As a result, public acceptance of political parties is at best lukewarm and does not furnish a hospitable environment for the rise of political parties.

The data at present available do not allow us to determine to what extent this ambivalence is conditioned by public perception and evaluation of the objective constraints on party development. Impressionistic evidence seems to show that the people of Hong Kong do have a somewhat exaggerated sense of the political inefficacy of the political leaders of Hong Kong and the impregnability of the "alien" British and Chinese governments. Public unfamiliarity with the political groups and their overall organizational weakness might also contribute to ambivalence. As the major political groups in Hong Kong are only of recent origin and hence cannot boast of an impressive record of performance, it is all but natural that they have no way to dispel public misgivings and inspire public confidence.

In any case, it appears that in their approach to political parties, the people of Hong Kong are not principally guided by modern democratic precepts, which legitimize political parties in representative political systems. In addition, they apparently do not feel any need to displace the incumbent government or drastically change the existing political system through the establishment of political parties in Hong Kong. Moreover, they do not appreciate the value of political parties as a vehicle of social and economic changes, as a political weapon to conduct class conflict, or as the means to redress social injustice. In short, the public does not envisage momentous political roles for the political parties. In the mind of the public, the emergence of political parties is not supposed to fundamentally alter the political and social *status quo* of Hong Kong.

From the previous findings, it seems more likely that it is primarily political desiderata that shape public attitude toward political parties. Public mistrust and antipathy against the Chinese government not only antedate the political groups, but also provide the stimulus for the rise of the latter which capitalize on the anti-China sentiments. As seen before, people who are more unfavorably disposed toward China are more positive about political parties. The people of Hong Kong are fully aware of the fact that they willy-nilly have to live with the Hong Kong, British and Chinese governments, all of which are now exercising varying degrees of governmental functions in the territory. While they recognize the futility of achieving complete political autonomy, the people of Hong Kong still consider it realistically possible that some local political forces can check and balance to a certain degree the political prerogatives of the

governments which are superimposed on them. At the very least, these political forces – of which political parties are the most politically significant – can serve the expressive role of venting people's discontent and frustration, especially against the Chinese government. As construed in the mind of the public, political parties are essentially an additional component in a partially democratized political order playing primarily an oppositional but still a secondary role vis-à-vis the government-that-be in Hong Kong. They are expected to perform a complementary yet constructive function in the political system with the purpose of making improvements in it. The notion of a party government has hardly entered the public awareness.

As of now, full-blown political parties with mass bases have yet to make their appearance on Hong Kong's political scene. The multitude of political groups in the territory have still a long way to go to win public trust. Notwithstanding the declining authority of the Hong Kong government and increasing public questioning of the viability of the existing political system, the people of Hong Kong are still basically satisfied with the existing political arrangements and the performance of the incumbent government. Under such circumstances, the subjective political space available for party development is quite constricted. More importantly, in view of public conception of political parties and their role in society, the nature and functions of the parties that would eventually emerge (if they emerge at all) in Hong Kong is likely to differ from their counterparts in the western democracies.

Notes

1   With the assistance of the Census and Statistics Department, a sample of addresses was selected by applying a two-stage cluster sampling design with probability proportional to size with replacement. The first-stage sampling units consisted of street blocks, and the second-stage sampling units were the addresses within the street blocks. After the addresses were selected, the selections of households and respondents were carried out by interviewers. Interviewers were required to call at each selected address and list all households who

used the same address. A household would then be selected according to a random selection table pre-attached to each address. For each household selected, the interviewer was required to list all those eligible for inclusion in the sample, that is, all persons aged 18 or over and residing at the selected household. A respondent would then be selected for interview according to a random selection grid (Kish grid). The original sample size was 800. After taking out those housing units which were vacant or demolished, nonresidential or without Chinese residents, the sample size was reduced to 740. Since a total of 187 addresses had not been used, thus the actual sample size was 613. In all, 390 interviews were successfully conducted, resulting in a response rate of 63.6 percent.

2   Lau Siu-kai, *Basic Law and the New Political Order of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Centre for Hong Kong Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1988), pp. 30-32.

3   Lau Siu-kai, *Decolonization Without Independence and the Poverty of Political Leaders in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1990), pp. 15-17.

4   See for example Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780-1840* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972); and William Nisbet Chambers and Walter Dean Burnham (eds.), *The American Party System* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

5   Lau Siu-kai and Kuan Hsin-chi, *The Ethos of the Hong Kong Chinese* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1988), p. 74.

6   Lau Siu-kai, "Institutions Without Leaders: The Hong Kong Chinese View of Political Leadership," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (Summer 1990), p. 205.

7   Throughout the paper the chi-square statistic is the measure of strength of relationship between two variables. Statistical significance in this study means a chi-square value significant at least at the 0.05 level.

8   The exceptions presented by the cases of Vincent Lo and Chung

Sze-yuen are inexplicable with available data and might be treated as statistical aberrations arising from a limited number of usable cases.

9   The only statistically significant exceptions to this generalization are the Meeting Point and the Hong Kong Liberal Democratic Association. As the former group is more liberally inclined and the latter one more conservative in orientation, it is difficult to make sense of the exceptional findings with the available data. A possible explanation might be that the respondents were not really familiar with the platforms of these two groups.

10 See Samuel J. Eldersveld and Bashiruddin, *Citizens and Politics: Mass Political Behavior in India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 94-96; Atul Kohli, *Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Ungovernability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Bradley M. Richardson, *The Political Culture of Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 118; and Gerald L. Curtis, *The Japanese Way of Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 228.

11 Eldersveld and Bashiruddin, op. cit., p. 96.

香港人對政黨的態度

劉兆佳著
（中文摘要）

　　香港人對政黨抱持矛盾的態度，而這種態度對政黨的發展不利。在處理政黨的問題時，香港人並非從民主的概念出發，也並非考慮到政治、社會與經濟變遷的需要。事實上，香港人期望政黨所扮演的主要角色，是負擔宣洩公眾的不滿與鬱悶的功能。在香港人的心目中，政黨主要是一個局部開放的政治秩序中的一個附加部份。它主要是扮演一個相對於當權者而言的反對者角色，而這個角色就整個政治體制來說卻只可能處於一個次要的政治位置。